4-1998

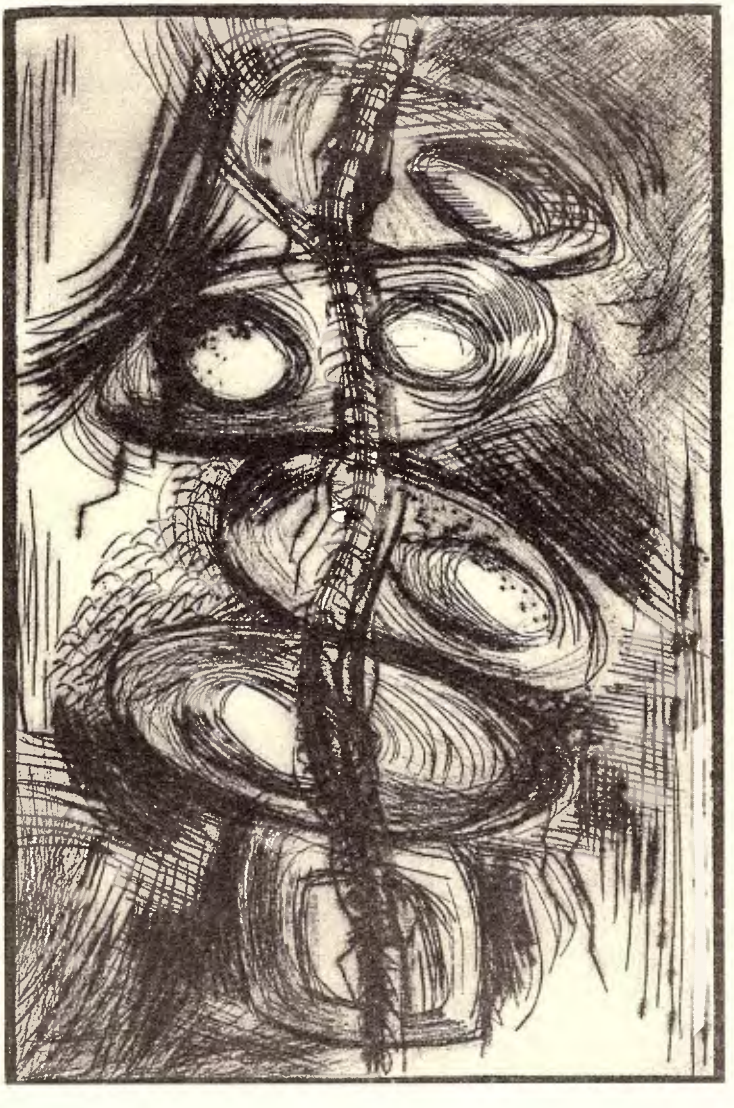
# 1998 Literary Review (no. 12)

Sigma Tau Delta

A SIGMA TAU DELTA PUBLICATION

# 1998 Literary Review

Number 12 April, 1998



A SIGMA TAU DELTA PUBLICATION

# 1998 Literary Review

NUMBER 12

APRIL, 1998

# Table of Contents

## Fiction



## Poetry

## Non-Fiction

## 1998 winners of the Freshman Writing Contest

# Introduction

The 1998 Literary Review attempts to bring together a variety of intellectual voices in one forum. In this attempt, it is only natural that this publication should find its home and its staff with Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honorary Society. Language, in some form, is the backbone of any intellectual discourse. It logically follows that those people who have made the study of language a sort of "obsession" should undertake the task of rewarding the outstanding academic endeavors of the Whittier College student community with publication in the Literary Review.

A student's time at Whittier is focused on sharing; ideas, thoughts, successes, failures, and perhaps most importantly, food. Yes, the Literary Review could not have happened without food. The Saturday morning selection process, the core of the creation of this publication, could not have occured without the generous provisions of food and home by Dr. Anne Kiley. For this and her constant advice and support, the members of Sigma Tau Delta would like to extend our thanks.

As you delve into the publication that is before you, remind yourself that these are your fellow students when the words that they write excite, anger, provoke and enlighten you. Enjoy it, and be delightfully reminded that you belong to a thriving community of scholars.

Thanks,
Brandy Quinn
1998 Editor-in-Chief

**1998 Literary Review Staff**

| | |
|---|---|
| Editor-in-Chief: | Brandy Quinn |
| Assistant Editor: | Raul Rios |
| Cover Art: | Erica Eyring, "Jelly Filled" |
| Devoted Staff: | Nathalie Yuen, Toni Panetta, Elizabeth Freudenthal, Emma Varesio, Damien Marienthal, Nicole Salim |

# Fiction

# Cherry Pink & Apple Blossom White

*by Dimas Diaz*

## The Top.

The hills overlooking our small town of Maligrew stood over the dancing lights of the night like God the Father looking over his creation on the seventh day. We lay like God's eyes on the top of the highest peak. Nothing was said. It was known. It was understood that we were there for a purpose. We were Adam and Eve alone with our mother Earth and her pure and true pleasures before man made them base and vile.

As if by a mutual understanding as to how this meeting at night would end we lifted ourselves from the damp patch of grass our bodies rested on and made our way to the open back seat door of my purple 58 Chevelle.

The scent in the air was a mix of dry autumn wood and dollar ninety-nine beer. There were bottles all over the back seat. I swept them out onto the cold, soft ground with a wave of my arm as I held up my precious damsel.

The run down but working radio played a crackly rendition of an old Latin jazz number. The saxophone moaned like a virgin in rapture.

The grey interior of the large back seat was moist from the mist in the air. We lay swimming in our own human fluids with our legs hanging halfway out of the open back door. Our clothes clung to our bodies like plastic wrapped around freshly washed vegetables. My hand danced up her prickly inner thigh. My mind floated up and out of my head swaying to the moaning of the rusty horns. I saw myself thrusting spurts of emotion all over her body. I saw her lying back trying to

control the chaos my body exerted. And there we lay. Man and Woman. The first and last. The beginning and the end.

## The Woman and her Pals.

Rachel and Mary sucked the sherbet from their black plastic spoons as they yapped amidst the pink walls and cherry scents that made the room an ice-cream world.

"You're such a nit-picker," said Mary as the sherbet she shoved in her mouth grazed her long nose.

"Go like that," Rachel said miming a nose wipe across her mousy mug.

"Oh. Anyway, what— so he *doesn't* have a butt, you're not gonna marry the guy."

"I know, but—"

"Let him take you out—spend money on you."

"Who?" Said Edna licking her snowball of Vanilla that was a perfect match for her hair.

Mary turns her brown eyes to the slender creature, Edna, settling herself in the extra chair.

Mary looks at Rachel. "Can I tell her?"

"Yeah."

"Rachel got asked out by this guy in her Chem class."

"Who?" Asks Edna.

"Robert Shapperhausen."

"The guy with no butt?"

"See, Mary?"

"Oh, Rachel, she didn't mean it in a bad way, did you Edna?"

"What are you talking about?" Asked Edna.

"Nothing," said Mary.

"Guess what?" Said Edna with sudden gusto.

Rachel and Mary look at each other.

Edna takes a definite lick of the sweet white sticky stuff, "Ricky is taking me to Maligrew Hill tonight."

"26 seconds." Said Mary.

"What?" Asked Edna.

Mary answers, "It took you twenty-six seconds into our conversation to mention Ricky."

"What? I just said he's taking me out."

Rachel the mouse looks on as Mary prods, "Where is he taking you?"

"Maligrew hill."

"Oh, Rachel, did you hear that? Maligrew hill. What a romantic spot."

Edna says, "Hey it's my first time going up there."

"And with such a stallion of a guy." Says Mary.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Says Edna.

"He's a heifer."

"He's chubby. I think it's cute," says Rachel.

"Thank you, Rachel."

"No need to get defensive, Edna. I'm just teasing."

"I better go before it gets too late. He told me to meet him at the top of the hill at dusk."

Mary can't help it. "Oh, not only is our Casanova taking you to the classiest spot in all of our lovely little town of Maligrew, but you have to meet him there?"

"He has a surprise for me at the top."

"Well, for your sake it better be worth the hike."

"Yeah, well I better go. Here, you can finish my cone," said Edna giving what is left of it to Mary.

"Bye Edna, have fun tonight." Says Rachel.

"Thank you Rachel. Ta-ta, Mary-the-bitter-wench."

"Bitch."

"I love you." Says Edna as she walks out of the door that reads 'The Ice-Cream Dream'.

Mary stares at her, following her until she shrinks out of vision. Producing the half eaten cone to Rachel, Mary says, "You want this?"

## The Lover under a tree in the hills of Maligrew.

What a night the dawn has surrendered to. The death of the sun has impregnated mother darkness. She is wise. She knows my thoughts. She can smell the half-cooked lust on my breath.

## The Boy at Home.

"What? That's not fair."

"It's very fair, Ricky. You don't get your shit done you don't go out. Simple as that."

Ricky's Mother begins to take clothes out of his drawers and tosses them scattering clothing all over his cluttered floor.

"You're treating me like a twelve year old."

"You're acting like one."

"I made a date."

"Yeah, well your gonna have to cancel."

"Mom, I told her to meet me—"

"I don't want to hear it. This room is a hell hole." Noticing cookie crumbs and a wrapper on the floor. "You've been eating those damned Oreo's again haven't you. Haven't

you?"

Tears rush to Ricky's eyes.

"Oh are you gonna cry? Fat bastard, I should starve you."

"I'm sorry, mom."

"Sorry won't take the fat off your ass and it sure as hell won't get this room clean. Now you stay here until this room is done. That girl can wait."

Running to Mother he plops his short arms around her thick waist. "I'm sorry."

"Don't smother me, Ricky. And stop your crying."

As Mother leaves, Ricky wipes his eyes and notices the rush of Autumn wind hurl it's bite through the open window.

## The Lover on a log in the hills of Maligrew.

Mother night, give me shelter. Give me shelter, Mother night. Lend me time to weep for the dying of the light.

The Lord has stolen the sun and has bid his children come along.

Mother night, give me shelter as I bid the day good night. No one's left to weep with me for the dying of the light.

## The Woman on the top of the hill.

Alright, Ricky, I'm here. Where the hell are you. It's freezing. He's probably getting stuff ready. A big bouquet of red roses and cider and music. I love that little roly-poly. Maybe he's on his way. Yeah, he's probably on his way. It's early.

## The Boy in his room.

I'm not a damned twelve year old. This is stupid, she just has a hair up her ass. Damned clothes. I hope Edna. Isn't waiting. Edna. Stupid Mom. They're just Oreos. She eats them too.

## The Lover on the hood of his 58 Chevelle.

As I lay in the hills I ponder...Where is my Eve? Where is my Eve? I must seek her amongst the hills. I must find her. She is mine and I hers in the hills of our Eden of Maligrew. I shall climb into my chariot and find her. She waits for me.

## The Top.

Edna sits and looks at the dancing lights. Ricky, oh, Ricky, where for art thou, Ricky. The bastard is down there dancing with the lights.

She sees her shadow suddenly on the patch of grass appear and shrink slowly into her. A smile spreads on her cold bitten face. My Ricky has come. She stays looking forward prolonging the surprise she anticipates. She hears soft crackling Jazz coming from the car.

"Jazz, Ricky?" Her eyes are fixed on the city as she wonders what will complement such a choice of music.

The car door is opened and our Casanova floats behind her. "Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone, the night shall find me not alone. Will she speak?"

Edna's head makes the movement of a merry-go-round coming to a slow stop. Her eyes float up to reveal a tower

dressed in a dirty olive green overcoat. The smell of urine makes her eyes water. His beard is a scraggly raven's nest. His sandy hands black with rot wander slowly down his coat.

"Will she speak? My Eve. Your Adam has come."

## A Story About What Happened to Jezebel Flatch

*by Nicole Coates Burton*

Oh, I know I'll leave this neighborhood some day. A school child or maybe a Mormon or somebody will come by to sell me whatever it is they're selling and next thing you know there's a bunch of cops carrying me out in a box. Oh yes, that's how I plan on moving out of this neighborhood. I bought this house brand new right after I got out of Europe. The army gave me the money for it. I carried my new bride right over that threshold. She was taken from me well over thirty years ago. She died trying to push out that baby she wanted so damned bad. I think we made the best of the years we had together, though.

See, every house here looked exactly the same. They built them from a kit, which is why they're so run down now. If you look closely you can imagine the way they used to look. A developer came through and bought all those lots there to put up an apartment building. Most of these houses are vacant. The rest have renters or squatters. The owners let them get run down when they can't sell them. I try to keep this place nice, but it's tiring.

That house there used to be the nicest on the block. Come to think of it, I guess it looks just like the others. I suppose I like

it best because I liked the lady who lived there. Jezebel Flatch was her name. Well, she had a family and they lived there, too, but it was really her house. Now no one lives there. Jack, the husband, lost control of it, couldn't maintain it. The two older boys decided that was their cue to leave home. Eventually Jack put the house on the market and moved to a smaller place with the younger boys.

Jezebel was home all the time. She had no job, no car, just a husband and a bunch of kids. Now, I don't want you to get me wrong, because Jezebel was as nice a lady you're ever likely to meet. I mean, she was the only one of my neighbors who took the care to call me by my whole name - and I know that Nikopopolas is a mouthful. Most people call me Mr. Nik and the kids just call me M'st'ren. I don't hold it against them, but it wouldn't have been right as far as Jezebel was concerned.

She was a nice lady alright, but she was also a fat lady - that fat lady, actually, because that is what people called her:

Look at that fat lady!
Did you see that fat lady?
Hey, it's that fat lady!

Most of the people here in Victorton knew her, though. She had lived here her whole life. She was a baby-boomer in a town that had no history before 1947. The way I heard it, when she was a child, all the kids had made fun of her for being fat. She still saw all the same people, in the park, at the store, at the PTA meetings, but now they were all fat, too. They pretended to be nice to her, but behind her back they still made fun of her for being fat first. Jezebel knew this and pretended it didn't bother her, but it did.

Jezebel had this face. It was shiny, stretched tight like a

balloon and always slick with perspiration. Her tiny eyes were little black olives, surrounded, protected even, by fleshy cheeks and brow. Her mouth was just a hole, like a punch mark in a bowl of bread dough. Her fat cheeks oppressed her little mouth, making every smile a battle. She was obese. She tried to think of herself as extra-female, like an ancient fertility fetish. Wherever she went she was followed by a whiff of the puffy baby powder that she used (in vain) to absorb her sweat.

I remember a day, it must have been about twenty-five or -six years ago. I answered the doorbell and there she was, panting from the effort of climbing the six steps up to my front door, trying to introduce herself as my new neighbor. She was just a child then, could not have been more than a month or two out of high school. She stood on this very porch, right where I'm standing now, with one hand pointing to her house, that house I showed you, and the other hand supporting the small of her back. Big as she was, I could still tell hers as the stance of a woman expecting, and well along, too. Only two or so months later, she had a son. Later she had three more children...sons, each just like their pop. The youngest is fourteen now, I believe.

I was retired then, as I still am, of course. I was here every day. She was there every day. We got to be good neighbors over the years. One day, not too many years ago, she came to me on the verge of tears. I still remember what she said to me:

> I have no skills, no hobbies, barely a high school diploma; I can't even drive. I have done nothing for the past twenty-three years but clean up after Jack and the boys...

then she paused and looked up at me:

Well, that's not entirely true...

You see, she was an amateur botanist. She said they would all make fun of her if they knew how she kept a tall thin volume of flowers under the mattress like pornography. Of course to find it they would have to make her bed for her and she knew that would never happen. She snuck floral themes into her life whenever she could: sunflower wallpaper, rose china, azalea sheets. On her daily walks around the neighborhood, she would recite the Latin names of the plants she saw like a mantra, to give her peace:

...Abies Concolor
Iridaceae Gladius
Aesculus Glabra
Ranunculus Acris
Ulmus Americana...

Her one desire was to see the Victorton Botanical Gardens and Theme Park off Highway 23, but no one else wanted to go, and no one would take her to go alone. I told her that if I drove I would take her that very day. Unfortunately, I don't.

She couldn't tell Jack about those things. He wouldn't understand. He didn't let her work (even if she had been able to find a job and a way to get to it) because he made plenty of money. He drove garbage trucks for Patterson/Underwood Waste and made a bundle doing it. After the deal they had made in the strike of '85, he was set. The house was almost paid for, they had enough to keep the kids in the right clothes. Who could want more?

Most of the time Jack simply ignored Jezebel. He did one thing, though, that she said drove her crazy. It was the only

thing that made her really mad. Despite the fact that they were able to live in North Victorton, Jack insisted on bringing his work home with him, literally. He had a small mountain of what he called "treasures" in the corner of the garage. Every day or so he managed to bring home a couple of treasures that some fool had thrown away. He threw them on the pile and forgot about them. Six months after they had purchased the house, Jezebel started to notice that the treasures didn't seem to be getting fixed, getting sold, or getting valuable. They just seemed to be getting bigger. Jezebel knew that Jack's garbage route was on the other side of town, so every trash day she would haul a can of treasures to the curb for her garbage man to inflict on his wife. Into the can went three dirty carnival teddy bears, a stroller with one wheel, and an eight-track player. A purpley-pink girl's bicycle was leaning against the burial mound, but when she had gone to take it to the curb, she changed her mind and left it on top of the pile. Clothes, magazines, hangers - they all got hauled away, treasure trove pillaged. After twenty-five years, Jack either didn't notice or didn't care.

I think I was the only person she really talked to. She was the kind of person who usually hid her feelings. When the ladies she had gone to school with passed her in the grocery store and snickered, she pretended not to hear them. When she was out working in the yard and the schoolchildren ran by singing "Misses-Flatch has a big-fat-snatch" she just went inside instead of spraying them down with the hose, like I said she should. Even her own boys mistreated her. In public, they would do their best to camouflage the fact that she was their mother. They would turn their backs on her or stand near another adult, but at home, she was housekeeper, cook, finder of misplaced ball caps. The

way I heard it, when things really got to her, she would go in the kitchen and pull her secret window box out from under the sink. It was made of wood and full of tiny plants and flowers: java moss, Sansevierias, and white button mushrooms, she told me, because they can grow in dim light. She kept it out of sight, because she didn't want to have to explain it to Jack. She figured he would probably say it was dirty or brought bugs in the house or some other excuse. She would look out the window, over the window box and say her flower names from A to Z. She would say each name in Latin, then follow it with the English common name:

...Campanula Medium, the Canterbury Bluebell
Chrysanthemum Morifolium, the Mum
Citrus Limon, the Lemon Blossom...

Each time she memorized and remembered more names. The first time she did it, she could only remember twenty minutes worth. By the end she could pass over three hours without faltering.

She carried on that way for twenty-five years. The way I heard it, one day she woke up at five as usual. She went to put on her chrysanthemum caftan, but changed her mind. The dress Jezebel Flatch selected that Thursday was one she had hidden in a shoe box with the red satin stilettos she had worn to her sister-in-law's wedding. The dress had a sunny orange and yellow floral print. It was not necessarily tight, but fitted and too short (for her at least: it was above the knee.) She made Jack's breakfast, as usual. It took him a good fifteen minutes to notice her dress, but when he did, he didn't say anything; he just laughed. Then he left for work. When she went out to the garage to get the broom, she noticed the bicycle again. She approached it cautiously. She

grabbed it by the seat and took it down off the pile. Still clutching the seat, she rolled it forward and backward, forward and backward, forward and backward, entranced by it. She pushed down on the seat as hard as she could and the springs let out a little peep. She reached and popped down the kickstand and rested the bike on it. Satisfied, she went back inside, checking once over her shoulder to make sure it was still okay, then shutting the door.

Her oldest son woke up at two. She made him breakfast. He ate it and went upstairs. He came back about an hour later, mumbling something about water conservation and went under the kitchen sink in search of the plunger. He pulled out a bucket, some Drano, Jezebel's window box, a bottle of Palmolive, before he found his quarry. He stood up and stepped absently, but firmly onto his mother's flowers, killing them and snapping the box in two.

Jezebel also snapped.

She called her twenty-five year old son all of the things she had previously only thought about him, and some things she had reserved exclusively for his father. She ran outside. She came back in. She passed her son, his stare blank, his jaw still slack from the shock he had received. She got her book from under the mattress and went out to the garage. She hit the garage door opener and sat on the bike, testing her weight on the seat intended for a child. When she sat, the dress formed flowered rolls around her middle. As she contemplated what she was about to do, she clenched and unclenched her left fist to feel the way her humid skin stuck together lightly between her fingers. She tossed the book into the flowered basket hanging from the handlebars. Clutching her skirt between her thighs, she pedaled a few

yards, then she coasted. She coasted down Chestnut, then turned south onto Main Street. Her waxy blonde hair flapped behind her like a flag in a hurricane. The downhill steepened and she picked up speed. Just then, her husband, on his way home from work, turned north from Victor Boulevard onto Main. He recognized her just as he passed her and swiftly ran into the nearest light pole. The way I heard it, Jezebel just kept going.

# Disclaimer

*by Salvador Plascencia*

PART 1

Sunkist® oranges (which include Navel, Valencia, and Moro oranges) and lemons, and the other citrus fruits not mentioned (i.e., limes, grapefruits, tangerines and pummelos ) are fine foods. They are tasty and provide more vitamin C than the USDA dietary guidelines recommend. Contrary to what the following stories suggest, There is no verifiable proof that Sunkist® oranges or orange peels breed those yucky white worms know as maggots. There is also no evidence that excess intake of lemons will rot your insides. Though unrelated to the stories, but an important disclaimer nonetheless, according to Sunkist® Growers' lawyers there is no palpable connection between the chemicals sprayed on the orange orchards and my grandfather's burned lungs. It is only a coincidence that my grandfather worked on Sunkist® orchards picking their tasty citrus fruits while airplanes hovered above the fields spraying "agricultural chemicals … necessary… to keep destructive insects under control." Sunkist ® is not responsible for any of my grandfathers injuries and hence is not liable to pay my grandfather's medical bills, instead the costs will be differed to the American tax payers.

Sunkist® Growers is the oldest and largest farmer cooperative in the world. The name Sunkist® is the 42nd most recognized name in advertising history. I in no way, shape, or form, mean to defame or blemish the fine Sunkist® name.

PART 2

The following stories were written by me (Salvador Plascencia). The First Story, "It's The Eskimo Blood In My Veins", is entitled after a line in a song by the legendary 80's band The Smiths. I give full credit to Mr. Morrissey and Mr. Marr for the line. I have not made any money from this story. If I ever do I will gladly pay any royalties that are due. If Mr. Marr or Mr. Morrissey want money up front please fell free to send any correspondence to: Salvador Plascencia at 5103 Cogswell Rd El Monte CA 91732. The story was written during my era of adolescent angst and later revised in my more stable college years . Oscar Wilde, who was imprisoned for sodomy , once said something that sounded sort of like this: a broken heart is absolutely necessary for literary success. A broken heart can run for many editions. I want to tell Mr. Wilde, and his green carnations, that I've done my quota of broken hearts, and I want my book deal.

Anyhow, the second Story, Sunkist® Days, is not really a short story it's a chapter from my novel in progress. If you're confused by who the narrator is it's because you should be, after all you haven't read the chapters that came before it. If you really want to know who the narrator is read the following sentence, if not don't. The narrator is Edward (named after my best Mormon friend in high school). He is a simple guy who doesn't eat meat but works at slaughterhouse knocking out steers with a concussions stunners. Edward is into Karen but never tells her. It's hard to describe. If you really want to know the rest of the details ask me and I'll let you read the previous chapters.

PART 3

The two part twology about how my grandpa's lungs were burned is being reviewed by the Sunkist® lawyers and I had to use my imagination to reveal the truth. The following two stories are about my grandpa and how the fruit industry rotted his insides and filled his house up with maggots. Read carefully. Watch out for those weird literary devices like metaphor, symbol, and allegory.

## "It's The Eskimo Blood In My Veins"

A plaid blanket covered the heap. Beneath the pile of electric blankets and duck feather comforter Jerry laid clinging to every scrap of warmth. The dripping sound from the sink had ceased. The last drop of water had frozen in mid-flight and crashed on to the thin layer of ice that lined the sink. Icicles hung from the wooden beams on the ceiling. "Icicles fall down on me," Jerry complained.

A knock at the door sent two icicles flying down shattering on Jerry's desk. "Who the hell could that be?" Jerry said. He crept from underneath the mountain of covers, foliating each layer as he escaped. He walked towards the door trembling, nearly slipping on the glaze of ice that carpeted the cheap linoleum floor. He opened the door, the door knob stuck to his hand, "Thank god I didn't use my tongue."

"Use your tongue for what?," asked the girl at the door. Her long summer dress dragged on the floor.

"Oh, nothing. Come right in, Jean, just watch out for the icicles." The sun shone through the cotton cloth of her dress, her bear feet, her small belly button and her boobs stood

expose. Jerry closed the door, only her arms remained naked.

"Jerry, it's so clean and tidy in here. It's really nice except that it smells so sterile. I covered my whole floor with orange peels, makes it smell orangey. Maybe you should do the same. Why don't you eat some oranges, throw the shells down on the floor, makes the room smell nice," Jean pulled out an orange from underneath her her dress.

"Are you going to throw the peels on my floor?"

"Do you mind?"

"No, not at all, I guess it would make this place smell nice."

Jean skinned the orange, dropping each flake onto a neat pile on the frozen floor. The pile began to crystallize into a glazier.

"Have you heard anything from Jessie?," asked Jean as she pulled another orange out and began to form another glacier.

"No, I haven't ."

"What about the police have they said anything."

"Yeah, they said 'give it up'. They said it was just a damn heater, they don't put much priority on peoples' appliances. You have to get your kid stolen to get any attention."

Jean Stood up and started wondering the room leaving a trail of frozen hills behind her.

"Jerry, I know it was cruel and all, but say she came back would you let her back in."

"I don't know ..." Jerry began but the ringing of the phone sent an icicle to the floor. The collision splintered the spike of ice into hundreds of nails. Jerry's left cheek caught a piece of the explosion, while Jean answered the phone.

"Hello... with Jean? This is Jean...No I didn't know that, I'll be there in five minuets," she hung up the phone and looked at Edward, "I have to go, there's some sort of insect problem. Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah. Don't worry, it's just a little blood."

"Okay, see you Jerry," Jean opened the door, the sun disrobed her as she stepped out.

Jerry put his hand to his face. The blood warmed his hand. His hands had not been warm in months, not since Jessie had stolen his heater. Now only the a copper pipe remained where the heater had been. The sawdust had been swept away and the hole on the wall had been patched up.

He could have stopped her, but what was he suppose to say "Hey, stop that's my heater." It just didn't sound right. The sound of a hand saw had waken him up in the middle of the night. He saw Jessie hacking away at the copper plumbing. The wood panels had been cut out and the snow had begun to ooze in. The red mittens clutched the saw as she pulled it towards her chest, then she pushed it forward spawning little flakes of fire as the steel blade scraped against the copper tube. But he said nothing. He watched as she lifted the heater and cradled it against her furry black coat and walked out of his room. He was tired from watching, from thinking, from wondering why she had left her pajamas in his bed, why didn't she take them? Snow flowed in through the new door covering the floors with layers of packed ice, but It didn't matter now. Jerry didn't care.

It was summer now but the snow had not melted. Jerry shivered, he put on a thick red jacket but it didn't help. He crept back into the pile of blankets and went back to sleep. When he awoke Jean was sitting on the couch in her long

summer dress, unaffected by the frost that surrounded her.

"I was going to wake you but you actually seemed warm for once."

"No, I am never warm ."

"Sorry I had to leave so sudden. How is your head feeling?"

"Oh, it's fine. Why did you have to leave?"

"You know those orange peels I tiled my floor with, they started to rot. There were worms all over the place, oozing out from underneath my door into the lobby. The whole floor was covered in worms. Little fuzzy white worms."

"Do you think I'll have that problem? I mean I like the way they smell but I don't like worms."

"No, it's too cold in here for worms, they could never survive."

"I guess that's one advantage."

"One advantage? You got plenty. Hell, you can turn your closet space into a meat locker, use your shelves to store the heads of dead rich people, and your bathtub can be an ice rink. Well maybe not, the bathtub is not big enough. You are living in a gold mine."

Jerry smiled and Jean kept talking, exploring the many enterprises of living in the arctic. Goose bumps protruded through Jerry's skin, while Jean's cheeks turned redder and redder with every mention of a new entrepreneurship.

"I had this dream Jerry. There was this crystal palace, an ice palace, just like this place, it was wonderful. Do you know what I mean?"

"No, not really ."

"It was all covered in ice, but it was warm just like your

room, it really was wonderful."

"You like this place?"

"Yes, always. Do you?"

"Sometimes."

"I don't see why Jessie would want to leave."

"It wasn't like this when she was here."

"Yes, I think it was much colder. Do you miss her Jerry?"

"I don't think of her."

He really didn't think of her anymore. He used her pajamas for his pillow but he had not thought about who they belonged to. The only time he ever thought of Jessie was when Jean spoke of her.

"Jean, Do you want some coffee?"

"No, not right now."

Jerry went into the kitchen. He took a block of ice from the counter and put it in a pot and placed it on the stove's flames. He pulled a drawer out searching for the ground coffee but two knocks at the door disturbed his search. Jerry turned upward, surveying the ceiling for falling ice, but no ice came down.

"Do you want me to get the door Jerry?" Jean asked.

"No, it's okay, I'll get it."

Jerry walked towards the door carefully looking at the ceiling. He opened the door with his sleeve, avoiding the cool knob.

Jessie stood in her big black fury coat, holding the heater. "Hello, Jerry."

"Hello."

"I brought it back. I'm sorry, I just wanted to be warm."

"I don't want it."

"You don't ?"

Jerry looked into the room to see what Jean was doing. She was sitting on the couch peeling an orange. Her summer dress conformed to the shape of the couch. She looked beautiful. She didn't mind that the ice had taken over the room, she really did liked it.

Jessie skin was pale, uncolored by the sun. She wore mittens and covered every part of her body with something fuzzy.

"You can keep the heater. I like living in a refrigerator it keeps the worms out."

As he closed the door Jerry said in a loud voice "Thank you, have a nice day."

"Who was that Jerry?" asked Jean.

"Oh, no one really. Just a Jehovah Witness."

"They are always nice, they are a lot better than those solar heater salesmen."

# Sunkist Days

*by Salvador Plascencia*

It's like one of those stupid riddles where the guy is sealed in a room with a stab wound and a puddle of water beside him. You're suppose to figure out that he stabbed himself with an icicle. Finding out what happened to Maricel was not as easy as that. We found her, well Karen found her, lying in the back yard, dead. No stab wounds. The back of her little yellow dress was stained with the green grass and the dew was still trapped underneath her. A tower of devoured lemons were beside her head. The lemon tree shaded the little corpse.

"I like sour things," Maricel would always say as Karen would try to pull the lemon away from her.

"They're rotting your teeth!"

But Maricel never cared. "If there's nothing wrong with orange juice, then there's nothing wrong with lemon juice."

The coroner saw it differently. Personally I don't even drink lemonade anymore but like they say "kids will be kids" and Maricel drank her lemon juice and ate her pile of lemons every day. Karen would try to stop her but she had her own problems to take care of. It's hard taking care of your little sister when you spend most of the day in your room reading psychology books and "erotica." And if she wasn't reading, Mr. Bickham was fucking the shit out of her. If you think about it it's pretty sad. Mr. Bickham fucking Karen on top of all her Freud books while little Maricel was two stories down eating lemons and rotting her little insides away. Karen said she looked out the window and there she was, just lying there.

Maricel is dead, and I feel sad about it, but I feel worse about Karen. Her pops left her, her mom died, and now Maricel. Everybody either died on Karen or turned sour on her. I'm the only one left and I'm a bit sour myself. Maybe she should of taken better care of her. She should take better care of herself. You can't live off porn and sex. Everything is not about sex, there is more than just fucking. There is also the little things. Like eating, like walking, like sitting around and chewing the fat but not for Karen. She just sits around in her room waiting in her summer dress for Mr. Bickham. We buried Maricel this morning and Karen is back in her room already.

"Citric poisoning. She just had too much lemon," The Coroner said, "It rotted her little insides. Nothing wrong with lemon but lots of it's bad. It may seem strange but it's quite common."

## Placental Pleasures

*by Krista Whyte*

Now I see—it's all about afterbirth—but I didn't begin collecting it intentionally. It was my volunteer position in the delivery ward at Jacob's Memorial Hospital that started it all. I was in my third year at Mt. Stromer's Community College when I applied for and got the position. I hoped it would look good on a resume.

My first day on the job I didn't want to have direct contact with the babies. I was afraid that, as nervous as I was, I

might drop one on it's soft little head and get in trouble. When I told Maggie, my supervisor, she said, "Well then, have I got the job for yopu!" and winked a brown eye at Jeannie, another full time nurse. I followed Maggie down the hall to a recently evacuated delivery room.

This is a delivery room, she explained. She told me that I was only to be in a delivery room after a birth for clean up. This one hadn't been cleaned yet so she told me to have a go at it. With no more warning than that I was abandoned. Actually, it's not difficult to figure your way around a dirty delivery room. You take the cloth off the table with the stirrups, then you wipe down the leather. You sweep the floor and run a mop over it making sure not to use too much ammonia water since there is sometimes a run on the rooms and slippery floor simply won't do. You take the tray of slimy, yes, red-goo slimy, instruments to the sanitizing station and deposit them there for a minimum of an hour. After that all that's left to handle is the afterbrth and on my first day I didn't know what to do with it.

"Why don't you take it home," Maggie suggested, slipping Jeannie another wink. I was beginning to think she had a tick. I nodded and returned to the nearly spotless room and out the mass in a ziplock storage bag which I then placed inside a brown paper bag. I took it to my locker.

When I got home I sat on my couch with the bag on my lap. What does one *do* with a bag od afterbirth? I began to wonder about the possibilities. Mostly I thouht about the umbilical cords. You could cut them off, tie them together and make a jump rope. You could make macrame plan holders, paper weights, or shoe laces.

For the first few weeks I brought home, on average, two sets of afterbirth a day. After that I began separating the cords from the uterine lining and taking only the former. Not only did it save me space in my fridge, but it became more useful.

Every two months we have a staff party. My first one included a gift exchange. Everyone Knew I had been taking home bags of birthing products but no one expected what was to come. We wrap our gifts and then put them in a pile which people draw from according to the number of hours they've worked. My gift was last to be chosen. Maggie, the employee with the most hours on the clock, winked at me before opening it.

I had woven the epidermis scarf threenights before usinf baby oil to keep it supple. She was speechless. I beamed and gave her a wink.

Jeannie was the first to yelp and begin what became known as "The Ovation." The walls of the small break room echoed with cheers and as it quieted down I was showered with questions.

How many umbilical cords did you use? Did it take long to make? Are there any special washing instructions? We spent the rest of the evening discussing some of my ideas which included making moisturizer, finger warmers, lint removers, and hair ties.

The next day "STREAMERS" was written on the staff chalk board. Someone had thought of a new use. We went on like that for a few weeks, one new idea per day. I was never allowed to submit ideas to the chalk, but I shared my expermants in other ways. I charmed the doctor's by taking

thier pulses with my psuedo-stethoscope, usinf my cupped palm in the place of their cold metal disks. I would walk around the ward with umbilical belts tied around my waist. Sloppy red shoelaces adorned my white tennies. I had created my own line of jewerly and even toyed with the idea of a placental g-string, but I never followed through with it.

One day as I sauntered past the nurses station on my way home I impressed the crowd with a short lasso performance. After a quick "Hi-Ho Silver!" I passed out of their view and gripped the cords in a loose bunvh that dangled from my fist at both ends. I whisted a light tune down the hall to the elevator.

There was no one else at the elevator when I arrived so I pushed the "DOWN" button and waited for it to come from Psychiatry, two floors up. I kept the warm red strands between my curled fingers, absentmindedly swinging them from side to side. Ding. The doors opened and IO stepped in. Then a man and a little girl turned the corner into the same elevator. They must have come from the restrooms because I hadn't seen them while I was waiting.

The man and I exchanged courteous nods, and the little girl, who looked to about 5 years old, rold me her name was Sandra and that she just got a little sistr. She said it that way, "I just got a little sister.: It made me smile, the way she referred to the baby like a birthday present. She looked at the red vines in my hand expectantly. It was as though I'd read her thoughts. Without hesitation I asked her did she want a bit and she did. She thinks it's licorice, I knew. I handed her the end of one and she bit off a portion. Then I bit some off, too, and started to

chewing. It was surprisingly good, in a metallic chewy kind of way.

It's true that little kids look to us adults to see how they're supposed to react.

## Play

*Adam Pava, 1-13-97*

One afternoon, Dennis Cohen noticed that his dead grandfather was on the treadmill next to his, and that's what finally tipped him off that something was up.

Dennis was always a bit apprehensive about using the real-life situations of his friends and family for the basis of his plays, but never thought the repercussions would be severe. Losing a girlfriend or college buddy he could handle - dead grandfathers and baseball batwielding men running towards him yelling "Die, you bastard!" are an entirely different matter altogether.

"Much Ado About Annoying Family" and its less-successful sequel "Much Ado About Ugly Ex-Lovers" weren't Shakespeare, granted, but both were moderate Off Broadway hits. They were mediocre, and Dennis knew it, but they put food on the table and let him live the New York lifestyle that he had dreamed of as a boy. Whether his shows received standing ovations or not wasn't the point - the audiences seemed to enjoy his quickly take on uncannily realistic day-to-day situations, and as long as he could pay rent and have some cash left for spending on his everchanging girlfriends, he was

content with his situation.

Physically, Dennis was a meatball, with arms protruding from his round body like a limp spaghetti, and a saucy little face to match. He knew that his laughably stereotypical Jewish body hair and pattern baldness weren't what enticed the chicks into his bedroom. The girls he dated were maggots in every sense, and Dennis was happy playing the dog poop for them. If they could put up with m=him, they were treated well, and given free meals and tickets to all the plays in town, which Dennis never used. Sometimes, when he found the right women, he would throw her out on the street and into his latest script. Usually little was embellished, because he seemed to bring out the worst in everybody.

This is how he got into trouble. It all began years ago with the play "Much Ado About Bunting," about his days on the Jersey City College baseball team. However, the show was a flop, and aside from establishing the trend of instantly-recognizable Dennis Cohen play titles, was seen by only a couple dozen people without comp tickets. Because of the low turnout, the show closed down mere days after previews. Still, one line was flubbed, and that's what started the strange state affairs.

*INT: A college dorm room, filled with baseball equipment, empty beer cans and old pizza boxes.*

**David:** C'mon, roomie, let's go to the Kappa party!

**Roger:** No way, man, I gotta go practice my curve. I'll meet you there later.

**David:** There is no later, Dave! It's now or never! I think Jessica's gonna be there!X She's so hot!

**Roger :** That old hound? Man, I'm over her. I'm hot for *you.*

But that wasn't the line. The line was "I'm hot for Jude" - Jude being a cute little coed Roger had met a few nights earlier in Act II, Scene III. However, one evening during a performance of the play, the actor playing Roger accidentally said "you," referring to David, the thinly-disguised fictional version of Dennis. It was no big deal at the time; the audience took it as sarcasm, the actors played it off, and the scene went on as planned. So you can't blame Dennis for not fully comprehending the amazing coincidence that happened on his way home that night.

He was new in the Big Apple, but he quickly learned to ignore the street crazies. Once, some loon dressed in full armor told him the world was ending at the millennium. Another time, a guy on a unicycle was juggling knives spouting some nonsense about Jesus. So Dennis didn't think anything particularly deferent this night he walked home, even though there was a guy dressed as a baseball player pointing at him with his glove hand yelling, "Hey! Hey you! Come back here, man!" Idiot, Dennis thought as he walked right along, not noticing that the man was his old college roommate.

The man with the glove followed Dennis to his loft and politely knocked when the door was slammed in his face. It wasn't until he yelled Dennis' name through the door did Dennis look through the peephole and recognized Roger. "Hey, come on in" he said, wrapping his arm around his old friend. "What the hell, man - I didn't recognize y—! Before he could finish, Roger had completed the hug and planted a juicy, open-mouth kiss on Dennis' lips.

It took Dennis a second to realize what was happening, but he eventually dismantled himself from Roger's lops. "The fuck?! Get off of me, you homo" After much convincing on Dennis' part that he was not gay, Roger left brokenhearted, destined to live his life without reciprocation from the man he would forever love.

Dennis wasn't the type to dwell on the past, and he quickly pushed the Roger Incident into the deep, hollow crevices of his mind like a man smashing down a garbage can full of trash. He told no one, and didn't think about it again. "Bunting" closed soon after, and not until "Much Ado About Annoying Family" was a cult success did he realize what was going on.

*INT: Family Sitting at a Dinner Table at Grandma's.*

**UNCLE NED:** (*interrupting Grandpa)* Sometimes I feel like the only normal person in this family.

**AUNT DEB:** Honey, not here.

**GRANDMA:** Your father doesn't mean that, Neddy.

**GRANDPA:** Yes I do! You're always contradicting me!

**UNCLE NED:** That's another thing! You two are always fighting! Can't we ever have a meal without it ending in a fight?

**GRANDPA:** Don't you talk to your mother and I like that!

**UNCLE NED:** Why don't you two end your misery and get a divorce already?

**GRANDPA:** Maybe we will!

**GRANDMA:** Fine!

**GRANDPA:** Fine!

*Blackout and curtain.*

Only it wasn't supposed to be a blackout - there was still one scene left where everybody made up in a happy, farcical manner. But the lighting tech person goofed, so the actors went with it (it was late, and they wanted to get home early anyway) and bowed when the curtain came up. The audience was a bit confused with the bleak ending, but Dennis wasn't much of a perfectionist. It was just one night, he thought, who gives a crap.

It was the following morning when Dennis noticed his dead grandfather at the gym. "Looking good, Dennis my boy," he said from the neighboring treadmill. "Long time no see." It was a posh gym, and when Dennis screamed, almost all the pretty women jumped an extra jump in their aerobic workouts. Dennis' initial response was to run, but the treadmill accelerated to keep up with his feet, and he went nowhere. The grandfather continued: "You look like you've seen a ghost! Ha! I'm just fooling' with you. This is pretty awkward for me, too. Believe me."

"What's going on?" Dennis sputtered. "Is this a dream? This is a dream. I'm dreaming."

"I'm afraid not, my boy. I'm here in the flesh."

"But your dead. I swear."

"Not even remotely. As a matter of fact, I'm in better shape than ever. Couldn't do this ten years ago," he said pointing to the treadmill. "I gotta thank you for what you've done. It's been so nice without your grandmother. I was dying with her around." He hit a button on the treadmill to speed it up.

"I don't understand! How could you -"

"Don't sweat it, Dennis," the grandfather interrupted

him. "You're a smart boy. Think about it. Remember what happened in your play last night?"

Dennis stopped the treadmill, leaned over the handles, and thought for a second. "My play?"

"Yep."

"And the people in them-"

"-are parallel to the people in my past."

"Bingo."

"That's unbelievable."

"Very. But who are we to say."

"Exactly," replied Dennis.

"Exactly," said the grandpa, snapping his fingers. "So you think you could write me in a love interest?"

"But I can't-" and then it occurred to Dennis that he could do anything he wanted. Well, he couldn't do *anything* he wanted, per se, but he could do a whole lot. Dennis quickly learned that rewrites didn't alter reality, and that only blundered lines of dialogue by the actors have the aftereffect. He learned that paying off the actors before the show so they would blow their lines not only didn't produce results but dramatically affected his rapport cast. He learned that the only way he had control over getting the cast to mess up was to hire plant to sit in the audience and yell or sneeze or whisper very loudly or otherwise disrupt the concentration of the actors. It wasn't a coincidence that the play closed after Dennis began these tests.

When "Annoying Family" closed, he quickly penned "Much Ado About Ex-Lovers" with an excessive amount of tongue-twisters in the hope of flubbed lines in his favor. To further strengthen the chances of goofed lines, Dennis casted

many horrible actors, some of whom didn't even speak English as a primary language. Ironically, the tongue-twisters were one of the few charming things in "Ex-Lovers," and the play was praised by the critics as being culturally diverse.

Like the tittle suggests, he filled this play with women - and made sure to give them little extra qualities just in case: he made Julie a nymphomaniac , gave Sherri a boob job, and so on. He also stopped being even the slightest bit discreet about the characters' connection to his own life, to the point of using his real name.

Like he suspected, it wasn't long before old girlfriends started showing up ate his door. Sure, there was the occasional tantrum or slap with the purse, depending on the play's flubs, but mostly the girls were at his house to beg for his sweet loving. Life was good for Dennis.

To even his own surprise, it wasn't long before he was in a long term relationship with an ex-girlfriend. Julie was one of the more attractive of his old flings. For the first time in his life, with only minor use of magical realism, Dennis was in a happy, normal relationship that he wanted to nurture.

"I love you, honey," she would tell him every evening.

Dennis would look around the room to make absolutely sure she was talking about him, then would giggle like a child in reply, "I'm the luckiest man in the world. I love you too."

Then, one lazy Sunday afternoon while he and Julie were making wild passionate love, there was a knock at the door. Damn, thought Dennis, I hope this isn't another girlfriend from the past - although he couldn't think of any girls left from his play that he hadn't already encountered. "Don't get up honey," Dennis told Julie. "I'll get it." To his

surprise, it was Roger, his old roommate-turned-gay-suitor.

"I won't let you get away from me so easy, Dennis," he said. "I love you, and I know deep inside of me that you love me back."

"Roger, I'm not gay. Leave me alone."

"No! If there's one thing I know, it's that we were meant for each other! Please, all I ask is that you give me a chan-" but he was cut off by Julie, entering the room:

"Honey, who is it?"

Roger stood there, vacant. Dennis looked at Roger, then at the carport. Julie looked at Roger, then at Dennis. Roger looked at Julie, then at Dennis. One could almost hear Roger's heart break if it weren't for the sound of the running dishwasher.

"I understand," Roger whispered. "I guess I was wrong."

"But - I -" Dennis started, but he could not think of nothing to say by the time Roger turned around, exited through the entrance, and shut the door behind him.

It was only a matter of seconds before Roger returned wearing a helmet, waving a baseball bat above his head.

"Die, you bastard!" he yelled, taking home run swings at Dennis' head.

"Aaaah!" warned Julie.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" yelled Dennis, knocking over furniture to escape the wild bat swipes. "Whatever I did, I'm sorry!"

"You ruined my life!" Roger said, taking another swing.

"I said I was sorry!" Dennis yelled. "Geez!"

"I used to be a banker! Now I'm a bum!" - SWING! -

"Now all I can do is romanticize about you! I used to *hate* you!" -SWING! - "I hate you and your stupid plays!"

"Oh God oh God oh God oh God, please let me live!" Dennis screamed, running into the kitchen and slamming the door behind him. "I wish none of this ever happened!"

Normally in these sorts of stories, when the protagonist admits that he wishes none of this ever happened, it suddenly becomes so. There's usually a giant puff of smoke, or the guy wakes up or whatever, and that's exactly what Dennis is hoping. He hopes that Roger won't kick the door open and follow him into the kitchen.

Roger kicked the door open, and followed him into the kitchen. With a classic Babe Ruth swing, he uppercut Dennis in the jaw with the bat, sending Dennis to the hard, cold linoleum. Blood sprayed across the kitchen as Roger repeatedly golf-swung the bat into Dennis' face. Roger lifted the bat high above his head, and with one final barbaric blow, smashed it down into the back of Dennis' head, sending his nose and forehead into the bloody floor like a fallen tomato, killing him.

Julie ran into the kitchen and screamed in horror. Roger dropped the bat, washed the blood off his hands on the sink, tipped his baseball cap to Julie, and walked out of the house forever.

The "Ex-Lovers" cast and crew wasn't expecting the playwright to show up that night, as Dennis had grown accustomed to skipping the performances now that his life was in perfect shape. So on the night he was killed, nobody noticed anything particularly unusual when he wasn't in attendance.

*INT: Dennis' apartment, laying in front of the fireplace.*

**DENNIS:** I love you.

**JULIE:** I love you too. (They *kiss)*

**DENNIS:** Move in with me.

**JULIE:** What?

**DENNIS:** I want to live forever.

The line, of course, was supposed to be "I want to live *together*," but the actor - distracted and lethargic because the theater was nearly empty - accidentally said "forever." Instantly, the real Dennis woke up on his kitchen floor, face shattered and throbbing in pain. HE searched for Julie, but could barley see out of his bloody eye sockets. It didn't matter: she had fled so in horror and fear of being arrested. After spending a number of days in the hospital, confident that he had learned his lesson, Dennis returned home to work on a new play: "Much Ado About Hot Babes."

## Seventy-Three Seconds

*by Devlin Grunloh*

He was two weeks old the first time he stopped breathing. So did I and as he turned blue, I wondered what the hell to do. He was born with fluid in his lungs, the doctor told me. Tossed it off real casual, as if he had an ear infection or something. As if this sort of thing were normal. The floorboards creaked under the pink carpet as I paced back and forth. "C'mon, breathe, damnit... We just came home from the hospital, I don't want to

go back, not now... Please, little man, for your dad..." Cars swooshed by in the winter mist; the moon sang in through the back door's thick panes. The lime tree simply paces away clattered wetly, full of green fruit that just hung there, lazily waiting to ripen. I wished I were that free.

There was a coldness building at my center, a weight that I didn't realize until it began to lift. Cradled in half the crook of my forearm, he looked like my innards felt. His round, soft head nestled against the compact, solid muscle that I got from pushing book trucks up and down the musty aisles of the library. I always thought that was kinda weird— I'd flex, and this thing the size of a tennis ball, and just about as round, would pop up. I never thought I'd see it used as a pillow, not by someone this small, much less at a time like this. His neck flexed fruitlessly, all hot, stretched skin and struggling tendons. His movements were eerily silent. Then he turned cold, I realized suddenly. Except for his throat, and the parts of him wrapped in flannel, which were still half warm, he could have been on a National Geographic special about penguins. The thin blonde down on his shoulders was misted with an icy sweat. The hair's cold softness, and the short circles his legs made had me thinking *flightless bird.*

His neck, so tiny and undeniable, pinched and rolled, straining with effort. He couldn't even gurgle. That's what he would have done, because of the amniotic fluid still in his chest, but he just couldn't. I tossed him up in the air, *it's just an old wives' tale, but what the hell? Maybe...* He rose about three inches, and nothing changed. My arms trembled like they had Parkinson's. I caught him anyway— what other choice did I have? He didn't move. Up he went again— six inches this

time. He settled back into my hands with a sudden, dead weight. Still nothing.

My arms were damnably heavy. *I'm gonna drop him, I'm so tired...* The fact that I still had to read excerpts from Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica ticked steadily in the back of my mind, way the hell back there in the dark. Inconceivable that it might. Progress should be impossible, from here. His eyes opened, so deep blue, cobwebbed with thin strands of blood, and for the first time, I saw fear in them.

The tree rattled again, reminding me that there's air out there. I caught a meaningless snatch of the gangsta rap booming out of somebody's hoopdie ride on the corner. Out there, people can breathe, I thought. All of a sudden, for a split instant, I hated them, all of them. Even our old retired neighbor, who managed to mow our lawn sometimes. As payback, when I noticed, I trimmed his hedges.

That didn't matter now. Now, I despised them all— my frustration was a black, oily thing slinking through my bowels, and I wanted to scream, in my nineteen-year-old, nearly literate way. At them, at myself, at anything that I knew wouldn't listen. Just because they could do this, this essential life-process, without even thinking, and he hadn't learned yet, not for sure. "Ahhh, shit..." I breathed to myself, "That didn't work— what else would?"

And the doctor said this was normal for someone his age, I thought as I began CPR, my trembling mouth nearly covering his entire small, unnaturally placid face. His nose was cold, his lips almost nonexistent. They yielded too easily, silently sliding over his gums, as I thumbed his mouth open. *I'm gonna suffocate him trying to save his life,* I thought to myself with a

scared-shitless tight grin. The warmth of my cheeks must have calmed him, 'cause he just let his mouth hang slack— it would have gone whichever way I wanted. Or at least that's what I wanted to hope.

*O.K., five short breaths, two compressions, then five more short breaths, and then lift your head and take one long exhale, don't forget that. This whole thing is so unreal, so unfair, so genuinely fucked... Just scream, little man. This once, I won't mind. I did the chest compressions the right way, didn't I? With two fingers, a joint's length below the sternum...* his breastbone was so small, so thin, a sheet of pasteboard under a heat lamp, if it weren't for his rabbit heart... *Oh Jesus H. Christ, what if I fucked up, twisted a rib, or something worse?* "Breathe, damnit, breathe... Normal, my ass. C'mon, peanut, let's see that chest move."

Finally, it did. Blood flooded his small, defenseless face, and his legs stopped pushing angrily against my elbow, his spine expanded, relaxing a little. At least I didn't have to feel the tight rings of his vertebral cartilage anymore. The size of breath mints, they had been pressing through his skin into the soft flesh inside my elbow. He didn't make a noise, except for the air bubbling in a rush into his lungs.

He looked at me quizzically, as if to say, *What the hell just happened to me, Pops?* I realized that my own lungs were bursting. Gently, softly aware of even the slightest stretch of my body, I let my diaphragm push out. The taste of mucus, metallic and watery, flooded my mouth, almost in hindsight. It was stringy and warm. The joy would come later. I shifted his reassuring weight to my shoulder, to give my arms a rest, because I finally could. He was once again full of those little,

little motions that you never notice until they stop. I held him as close as I dared, treasuring every lazy twitch and wondering grab at the world. Carefully.

# Poetry

## Thursday, 8:30

I bumped into him at Canter's
while trying to get a better look at the New York cheesecake
while he was savoring Los Angeles cockroaches
while we were waiting
collecting the deli in our noses.

You've been here for quite a while.
" I was meeting someone here at seven."
Me too. I've been waiting all evening.
I introduced myself and
"Nice to meet you, I'm John."
suggested we get a table and a bite
to wait for our friends.

John was starched,
his mouth gray wool,
his shoes squished with lake water,
and he wore a hair shirt
prickly side out.
He said his friend was still coming.

Our waitress, Theresa, says the blintzes
are on special tonight. But she doesn't eat
them, "They are too rich," She says
repeatedly clicking her pen into her side,
leaving little blue frission marks on her apron.
She recommends the brisket and John
orders locusts and honey.
I have the blintzes.
Theresa returns to kitchen and continues
piercing her side with tiny flinches.

I ask John what de does for a living but
I didn't really listen because
the words in his shirt were creeping across the table
and over the booth
and into my fresh cup of coffee
and scratching up against my skin
and poking through the stitching in my jeans.

So I pay Theresa,
who is staring at the stained glass ceiling,
for my blintzes
without eating them
and sat good-bye to John.

On my way to the car, I stop
and avoid a homeless man
who was talking to squirrels

## Bicycle Ride

Musky morning palms
smell of rooted mud
and sweat
after fingering home
through moist English hills.

## He cries the tears that I cannot

It's the only time I've
ever seen my dad cry.
He stands behind me, and
I wonder if we see
similar things, looking
out the blinded window
of the hospital room.
The world is grey, marked by
dirt-speckled snowbanks that
mar winter's deception.
Colors flash white-red-white;
the mute ambulance stops
in the Urgent Care lane.
I wait for the rear doors
to fling open, bearing
mangled victims—strangers—
upon wheeled beds, hoping for
a surgeon's salvation.
Instead, aqua-clad men
guide her to the white truck
from the cold hospital.
She drags her booted feet,
and I notice the left
one, untied, reveals her
black corduroy pant leg,
tucked in to shun the frost.
Her black parka hangs wide,
showing the pink sweater
        branded by knitted cats
that I bought last Christmas.
        I wonder if she's warm.
They stop, and she turns back
and I recognize the
frizzed curls and thick brown frames

that hide familiar eyes,
which are now locked with mine.
She trips and ducks her head,
unable to watch me
watch her be handed up
into the ambulance.
The doors slam shut with the
weight of the hand that falls
onto my tense shoulder,
making me jerk, as I
recall I'm not alone.
The pressure pushes me
into the sterile tile
and I turn to be held,
but meet his dampened stare:
His eyes glisten with tears
that break and spill over.
Pain, silent and shameless,
pulls his mouth, usually drawn
by a strong, proud laugh; but
today the laughter is
far away, and he cries
the tears that I cannot.

POETRY BY DAWN FINLEY

## Walking Home From a Friend's House II

I take a deep breathe, and run back
To papery walls in the dorm;
hard conversation to unpack,
Hard words to tame onto new form.
Thoughts sizzle, burn, cold as this night;
The moon blazes rapidly, real,
As burning images I fight
From raw poems easy to feel
But I stop, to hear how silent
Spaces where our talk melts into still
Light turn these lines from violent
Fire to quiet strength of will.
Words fall, alert as drops of rain;
Our laughter calms each frenzied quatrain.

## I Have My Own Bathroom Now

A friend says I sound worried about
acceptance. Of he asked, I'd tell him
I find this one-way life bewildering.

The big folks made growing up
sound like building an easy, phallic
skyscraper: the only way to go
is up, into the frosted blue
cake of the sky. My days are
stale pieces now, cut by
the silver fish figure of my key
as it wiggles into the lock
each evening, reminding me
that all Other Wiggling must

be initiated by me. *Every* room
whispers it is lonely and too white.
But I don't mind. I pull my
rotten young self out of bed
morning after rational morning
wipe out the quite bathroom sink,
and build myself up through
the massive skyline of solitudes.

## Whitman Smokes a Marlboro Red

O happy toy, caressing my libs gentle
  as a young boy's hand,
O rocks that slide down my throat
  as the rocks on the hill outside
  the window of the train,
O fiery companion, all your lust and
  power explodes in my lings
How I breathe your hot passions!
You are he wild beast disturbing
  the uneven rhythms of this unwinding machine,
All energies, outbursts, riots, lovers
  past and present,
All nervousness, depression, weariness
  and joy are encased in your soft
  white sheath.
O I sing smoke-circles of barbaric praises to you,
  O Marlboro, Prince of Youth and Pleasure!

Communing the plugged-in power bar

The black cords,
mangled and tight,
slither and make
love to each other,
pump thick electricity

to the stereo, to the
fridge, the computer,
the appliances necessary
as my fat heart,
its arteries pounding
black caffeinated blood
through the coiled
corridors of veins,
shocking my bent body.

POETRY BY ART RICH

## Who Cares?

I broke the moon
Into waves and drops.
Immortality brought *it* back.
Doesn't matter-
My goal's beyond the buoy.

## The Rock

grounded; unmoving tradition
a frontier of possession...
today it's beer cans and tequila.

2/8/98

## potential

an intersecting train
made impatient motorists.
after stepping off and standing
four feet from the tracks,
it seemed impressive.
I turned my head
to the left
then the right.
car repeat car
stretching
sunrise-sunset,
unmoved.

a short distance away
stood Michelangelo's David,
staring up at the calm beast.
on the way to introducing myself
I found David to be a woman
who seemed as confused as I.

wondering
what happened,
we stood there
side by side
just me
and the homeless engineer.

# First Prize

**strectch, jog,**
**lift, sweat,**
**groan, yell,**
**rest, eat,**
**stretch.....**
**again and**
**again and**
**around**
**in**
**a**
circle
of forged metal
meant to look like gold.
poor cursed little boy frozen
to the cycle, 300 pounds forever
pushing sweat from his veins, in
mid-squat stares brotherly at the
lovers on Keats' urn. Eternally
suspended from a noose of red
whiteandblue...how proud...
how patriotic...one yellow
shy of primary
boredom.

# Cemetery Clock

Nine forty three ay em
All over again
And this town is so much different
Than it was
Yesterday.

Can Timmy come out and play?
No more.
My loving soul of proud infection
Gets lynched in this town of
Passing people and steel drums
And nowhere cars and
Clockwork bums.

The suicidal clock slips into the past
And chimes its last chime
As this place becomes a blur
Of wallhole bars and coffee stores
Serving sacrilege.

And Timmy jumped off the bridge.
Will you follow?

Blindfold I walk through a maze
Of cobblestone and assphalt tar
And midnight trees with their
Frightening green stars.
But the cemetery clock is red

# Beyond Reflection

i look at him in a mirror;
slaves of an explorer
capture images and puzzles...
abstracts to ponder.
does he ponder me...
can he?
does he own a heartmindandsoul?

his blank stare
reminds me
i'm alone,
yet i stand invisible in a
crowd
of lonely shells
walking endlessly
on phantom quicksand.
stop and think
begin to sink.
i went under long ago.
but this world below,
beyond the looking glass
ghosts,
spins flesh to light as

poetry and art and music
implode through an open mind
and funnel
into
my
soul.

my twin can counterfeit
my image,
but my trinity remains sacred.

# Incubation

The white cake was
encribed in pale, blue icing:
*"Welcome,Little Guy"*
Yellow and blue streamers,
balloons hung from
the ceiling over the the guests
arriving with gifts:
A stroller, a walker, baby bottles.
We discussed the piano lessons,
private school,the educational fund,
swapped advice on burping and colic.
They said how good I looked,
I had that Mother's glow.

He arrived two weeks later
without screams or cries,
from an amniotic sap of fluid and blood,
arms and legs dangling
limply- an old rag doll.
His whimpers, muffed, as if
someone held a pillow
over his face.
Two nurses dressed in aqua
whisked him away and
I faded into an epidural void.

Later,in the NICU*,
he was lying flat upon his back,
on snowy sheets,
inside a blue and silver coffin-like
box with a plexi glass lid.
Tubes and wires like a
synthetic umbilical cord

probed and pierced his
shriveled body.

*I couldn' t hold him.*
I felt reduced, robbed as I could
only stand watching the hands of
doctors work to save him and
I dissolved into the constant beeping
and flickering of the breathing machine,
swallowed by the droning hum
from lights of devices I didn't
yet know the names of.

*Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

## My Son Is Four Today

My son is four today.
Outside the sky weeps for me
because I seem to have forgotten how.
And today, especially today
like so many days before,
I think of all the "what if's?",
and say good-bye to the boy
that might have been and
celebrate his life today.

My son is four today.
And I still want to know
what necessary elements
and atoms forgot to converge
in the uterine sak,
leaving a damaged cerebrum,
twisted limbs hang useless and
perfect vocal folds

unable to speak.
My son is four today.
An infant in a four year old's body.
He is somewhere I cannot reach.
I will have a cake for him,
sing Happy Birthday and I'll
blow out the candles,
make a wish for him,
and perhaps, one for me.

## Spasm

His brain has tiny earthquakes.
Spastic jerks run through his body—
arms and legs which
flail and flop in jerks and
back arches into a horseshoe.

My boy is like that—
Equpped with arms,
legs,fingers and toes
he cannot use because
the umbilical cord like a
boa constrictor fastened tight
around his neck,
squeezing air from his lungs,
trapping oxygen between
his sternum and brain.

His brain has tiny earthquakes.
And when the shaking is
almost done—
his eyes slightly glaze over
for a moment, then bulge
from blue swelled sockets,
fluttering like damaged wings.

## Evening

It seems to be the end of all things
Great and small they are blanketed
In the warm embrace of evening

There is no violin so melancholic
As the silence of a room
That bears its own weight

The bucolic tenderness tears at me
Helpless in the shelter of your mercy

Like flower on the window
Coaxed by the slender golden
Fingers of the sun

I open myself to you,
This is the extent of
Selfish words.

I am hidden in this florid
Verbose lexicon
(find me here)
This is where I find myself
And understand
When I look sadly
Unto a piece of paper,
I am at my best.

## Ambition

My grandma's orange globe
beckoned from her dusky mantle.
I'd spin it, watch topaz, amethyst, jade
dissolve into one wooshing daze
in my hands.

Tired of gentle mermaid dreams
and sleepy siren songs
I cropped my hair,
dyed it shock-yellow,
and biked down the rutted street
to the second-hand stores.

Two weeks later I was on a bus,
new tie knotted at my throat,
mingling among shades on the Interstate.
The solid hand-me-down suitcase on my lap
anchored the dreams pushing
through my skull and out the points
of my rooster-crest hair.

We bussed through uncut corn rustle,
sleeping fleets of pickers,
sun beaming off molecules of harvest dust
We spent nights unravelling
at dead carpet motels.

Then mornings of eyelids dissolving into face,
wheels melting into road,
and Grandma's globe spinning
into the sticky seat,
through the bus floor,
into a corn-reed nest along the Interstate.

## My Tenth Rosh Hashannah

The glass pot flashed a slow arch
of reflected flourescence
before his coffee scalded your breast
your neck
your new red dress.
Already late, he dragged you out
by damp elbow.

The stains didn't dull your berry color
brighter than the synagogue carpet
brighter than your cheek when I dared
look past him
to you.
Small burnished flowers warmed your shoulders
sodden, chipped clay
as we rose for "*Avenu Malkenu*"
— Our Father, Our King.

Nine days later we rose again
your shoulders quivering from the fast:
"*selach lanu, mechal lanu*"
—forgive us, pardon us.

Those were our prayers for the year.

# EPIC

Wind chills my aerodynamo shoulders,
elbow bends gravity,
fingercurls condensing
densing,
sing — POW

Punch the sky
for its velvet-tar smile
its deception
Try to
Blast a peek
through such grand majesty but I

Scrape knuckles against glinting spikes
*I suspected stars aren't*
*angels' peepholes*

Bleed storms onto Jupiter, Kick
moons into meteors as I
Thrash in the velvet yawn and
a jagged archipelago catches my
throwback fist and

flips me through tangles of
light years and just
when my toe snags that
smug-fringed curtain bottom
I knock my head unconscious
on Orion's sword.

## Existentialism

You're existential
Perfection
Spherical
Holdable-exultation.
A receptacle of swirling liquid moments.

I reside at the bottom.
My purpose is to elude you.
And yet
You whip up a commotion
A catacylsmic ocean
Hardly sustainable or containable

Within the contoured colloseum.
I never and I always
Wanted to trace
The skin of the lip of the soft velvet flush
To be tickled by the purple plume of passion.

But
You swig it round and round
And down the essence of me
In one contemptable gulp

# Non-Fiction

# Le Problème Philosophique de l'*Inferno* de Dante

*by Demian Marienthal*

"Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σιβυλλα τι θελειζ; respondebat illa: αποθανειν θελω."

—Petronius, *Satyricon*[1]

In the commencement of his essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Albert Camus states, "Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sériex: c'est le suicide. Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie."[2] Indeed, Dante would agree. In Canto XIII of *Inferno*, Dante explores this fundamental enquiry of philosophy. In the second round of the seventh circle of inferno, Dante-the-Pilgrim and Virgil encounter the souls of the suicides trapped within thorny trees upon which Harpies feed, thereby causing these souls to bleed. Only by undergoing this destructive and painful experience of bleeding can the souls of the trees speak. In one mere canto, Dante seems to have already solved this "problème philosophique" that takes Camus an entire essay. For in this canto, Dante clearly depicts suicide as unjust by portraying it as a rejection of faith in God's grace, thereby justifying God's punishments of suicide. Probably the most significant justification for the punishment of rejecting God's grace through suicide is the lack of God's grace; "ché non è giusto aver ciò ch'om si toglie," (XIII, 105).[3]

One of the souls of the suicides, Pier delle Vigne, explains to Virgil and Dante-the-Pilgrim how he was unjust in his act of suicide. Unjustly blamed for treason by others who envied his high relations with the emperor, he states that all his "lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti," (XIII, 69);[4] therefore, as he expounds: "L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto, / credendo col morir fuggir disdegno, / ingiusto fece me contra me giusto," (XIII, 70-72).[5] Thus, rather than continuing "to suffer the slings and arrows of outragous fortune," Pier delle Vigne employed suicide as a means of extricating himself from his acquired state of mourning (*Hamlet*, III. 1. 59-60). By doing so, however, he also removed himself from God's grace by choosing not to have faith in it.

To choose not to have faith, as well as hope, in the grace of God is, as Virgil phrases it to Dante-the-Pilgrim earlier in canto III, to lose "il ben de l'intelletto," (18);[6] one who loses this "good of intellect" is one who does not have the moral capacity to choose to be, and in this case, remain, faithful to God. Pier della Vigne failed to retain this "good of intellect" by thinking too much about himself, rather than for himself. He was, and remains, "coiled and recoiled" in his self-pity by overly preoccupying himself about his decline from the "happy honors" to a state of mourning, thereby not being able to see through the Self (III, 22). Nor is he able to see, and therefore know, the Self due to his preoccupation with his decline. For if he were able to see and know the Self, he would have known that, according to his faith, he was protected by God's grace. Only then would he have had the moral capacity to choose to retain his faith in God's grace and thus possess "the good of intellect."

As he failed to retain "the good of intellect", he committed two sorts of suicides. Vacant of faith and hope in God's grace,

he no only committed suicide, in the traditional use of the word, he committed a sort of spiritual suicide also. As a result of rejecting God's grace, he is abandoned in inferno without it. And as he expressed his misery by rejecting God's grace through self-destruction, so can he express himself only when he is enduring that which destroys and causes him pain (Ciardi, 118). Or as John Ciardi so poetically phrased it: "Only through their own blood do they find voice," thereby experiencing "fanno dolore, e al dolor fenestra," (Ciardi 118, *Inferno* XIII, 102).[7] Thus, ironically, by trying to escape from pain, through death, he has re-encountered it. In addition, whereas a murderer can repent on earth, Pier della Viege, by taking his life, is ever unable to live (on earth) to repent. Thus, the sign above the gate of inferno that reads, "LASCIATE OGNE SPERANZA, VOI CH'INTRATE," directly relates to his state of despair (III, 9).[8] Moreover, paradoxically, though already dead, he must live without "speranza di morte," (III, 46).[9] For eternity, his "'anima si lega / in questi nocchi," unable to liberate himself from this imprisonment (XIII, 88-89).

When Dante-the-Pilgrim initially encounters Pier della Viege in this most unfortunate and painful state, he is "come l'uom che teme," for he sees what could have very well been him (XIII, 43).[10] Lano da Siena's words, "Or accorri, accorri, morte!" echo in from the mouth of Dante-the-Pilgrim in *Vita Nuova* (XIII, 118).[11] Mourning over Beatrice's death, Dante-the-Pilgrim says, "Dolcissima Morte, vieni a me, e non m'essere villana ... vieni a me, ché molto ti desidero," (Dante 41).[12] Thus, although he does not directly express state that he wishes to commit suicide like Pier della Viege did, he strongly suggests it. By desiring death to terminate his state of misfortune, however, he has lost faith and

hope in God's grace to do so, thereby committing also commits a spiritual suicide: "li spirti miei, che ciascun giva errando," (Dante 44).[13]

Dante's *Inferno* is replete with recurring themes of faithlessness. We see this theme as early as the third canto:

> E io, che riguardai, vidi una 'nsegna che girando correva tanto ratta, che d'ogne posa mi parea indegna; e dietro le venìa sì lunga tratta di gente, ch'i' non averei creduto che morte tanta n'avesse disfatta. (52-57)[14]

Yet by committing spiritual suicide, both Pier della Viege and Dante-the-Pilgrim undid themselves. Unlike Pier della Viege, however, Dante-the-Pilgrim eventually resurrects spiritually in the *Divina Comedia* by having faith in God.

In a letter to Can Grande, Dante-the-Poet states that the purpose of his *Divina Comedia* as a whole is "to remove the living from the state of misery in this life and to guide them to a state of happiness" (*Letter to Can Grande*). As we have seen, according to Dante's Christian faith, the accomplishment of this purpose would entail that one does not remove herself or himself from the living in a state of misery; for that act would be losing "the good of intellect" to have faith in God. We are told that it is not just for one to be given what she or he throws away (Ciardi 122).

But let us disregard Christianity for a moment and consider that life is thrown on to us. For I believe that it is thrown on us rather than "given" to us, since initially we do not have the option to refuse life. And if that life thrown on us is one of misfortune, or if misfortune falls into our lives and resides there,

then we have the right to return this "gift" of life in an act of suicide. Some of the people's miserable states we see in Dante's *Inferno* are not different from what their states were on earth. In inferno, Pier della Vigne is in a state of misery. Similarly, when he was living on earth, he was miserable after he was "[u]njustly blamed" for treason and then tortured. Again, disregarding Christian doctrine, he had every just reason to take his life. The unjustness revealed the acts done against Pier della Vigne during his life on earth lead me to suspect that Dante pondered this perspective of suicide, as Camus also did. Probably Dante's faith in the Christian doctrine, however, turned him away from accepting this perspective of suicide as valid. Thus, suicide is still a serious philosophical problem. Dante would say I am trapped in my human reason. And Camus would call me Absurd. I will leave this philosophical problem for them to solve.

## Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Trans. John Ciardi. New York: A Mentor Book, 1982.

*Inferno*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. New York: Bantam Books, 1980.

La Vita Nuova e il Canzoniere.

Vita Nuova. Trans. Mark Musa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973.

Camus, Albert. Le Mythe de Sisyphe.

[1] "For once I myself saw with my own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she replied, "I want to die."

[2] "There is but one truly serious philisophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundemental question of philosophy."

[3] "for it is not just / that a man be given what he throws away," (Cairdi 122].

[4] "happy honors / were changed to mourning," (Ciardi 121).

[5] "my soul, in scorn, and thinking to be free / of scorn in death, made me at last, though just, / unjust to my self," (Ciardi 121).

[6] "the good of intellect," (Ciardi 42).

[7] "pain and pain's outlet simultaneosly," (Ciardi 122).

[8] "ABANDON ALL HOPE YE WHO ENTER HERE," (Ciardi 42).

[9] "no hope of death," (Ciardi 43).

[10] "transfixed by fear," (Ciardi 120).

[11] "Come now, O Death! Come now!" (Ciardi 123).

[12] "Sweet Death, come to me. Do not be unkind to me ... come to me, for I earnestly desire you," (Musa, 45).

[13] "... all my body's spirits / went drifting off, each fainting in despair," (Musa, 47).

[14] "I saw a banner there upon the mist. / Circling and circling, it seemed to scorn all pause. / So it ran on, and still behind it pressed / a never-ending rout of souls in pain. / I had not thought death had undone so many / as passed before me in that mournful train," (Ciardi 43).

# Roots

*by Michael Sarmiento*

When I was one small kid in de Hanabudda days my fadda always said, "No forget who you." I always thought my Dad was talking bubbles. How I going forget who me, I Michael Keone Sarmiento, from Makaha. I know exactly who me, not like my Grandfadda who when catch Altztimers, and started for tell everybody he was Filipino Mohammed Alli. Every time my fadda would talk to me about, "Knowing who me" I would just zone out and imagine I was pulling in one nice right, behind da reef at Makaha. Him, he worry bout me to much. Why he stressing for I stay in GTE and next year I going Kamehameha for intermediate school. Only da smart kine Hawaiians can get in ova dea.

So me I grab my board, jump on my bike an paddle to da beach, like one Sole afta one green banana. I can hea da waves pounding on da beach. When I reach da first bridge I look out to da ocean, and see some monsta sets rolling in. My heary stay going two eighty, but not cause I scad. If you scad you no can go out dis kine waves, cause you going get pounded. Nah, my heart stay going cause I wish I was in da wada already.

I pull up to da lifeguard stand and I see all da regulars, Uncle Buf, Boxer, Bunky, Black Bobby, Brudda Mel, and da rest of da gang. Dem dey da true Hawaiins. Dey come to da beach dawn patrol, and go home late at night. Das why dey all purple, (Except Bunky cause he one Haole, so he red.) Dey good fun though cause dey live like ancient Hawaiians. Dey surf all day, grind fish fresh off da hibachi, play music, and

drink choke beer. I no tell my mom dis, but dey smoke Pakalolo too. My friend Shane said one time was so strong when make him eat it on his bike.

Us guys, we always try cruise by dem cause dey can surf good. Not only dat too, dey just like one big Ohana. Everybody just kick back no worries, no notin. If you stay hungry and you no more money dey buy you someting from da Manapua Truck. When I wit dem my body stay at ease, wit my toes in da sand I stay rooted.

Das what uncle Buf always say; "When you come down Makaha Beach stick your feet in da sand and feel da A'ina. Let your toes dig in cause dey your roots. Once you plant your roots das your home forever, no matter where da Kamajani blows you." He knows too cause he been all ova da world surfing wit da best. But he said no more no place more beautiful den Makaha Beach at sunset.

So, I say wassup to everybody an paddle out to da waves on my board. Me, I love da way da wada feel when you first jump in. Fo one second your body stay in shock, but den afta sat it's magic. Bra, if I could I would live down at da bottom by da reef, swimming wit all da fish. Das where I belong. I tink he live in da ocean deep in one cave. Cause da ocean, da ting forgiving jus like him. No matta what you feed her, or what you make her drink, she no get mad. She still give all da Kanak's plenny waves to ride and plenny fish to eat. Das why when I Mak'e I like dem trow my body in da ocean so da Kahono can carry me to heaven.

Da lazy days of summa pass an da first day of school at Kamehameha starts. Dis one new school fo me an I no know nobody. Scary too cause stay far from home. I gotta wake up

every morning at five to get ready. Den I hop one bus dat take one hour fo reach school in Kalihi. Brah, da ting is torture. But all da smart Hawiians go hea, and I not dum. Me, I like go college so I gotta go to one good school. Da kids ova hea different den my friends at home. Dey more up tight and talk funny kine. Dey use "Proper English." Das what my speech teacha call em. She tell us "If you want to get into a good university, and have a superior job you must learn to speak proper English. If you speak pidgin you will sound unintellegent and get no where in life.".

Unintellegent! No where in life! How I going get into college? I been talking pidgin all my life. Nah, chill out no worry Uncle Buf always say, "When you play music sing loud. If people no like da way you sound, sing more loud.".

So I did my best at school, but didn't have time to surf. Usually I got home around five (eight if it was soccer or base-ball season), and went straight to homework. On the weekends I would play my games or hang out with my school friends at he mall. Sometimes I ride my bike to makaha Beach and say hi to everyone, but I couldn't stay long. I was too busy to watch waves or sing songs. Actually, that was the excuse I gave them. I had time, but it just didn't feel right. They talked about big waves, while I thought about big tests. They wrote songs about beautiful breeze which fans the Koolau's, while I wrote essays about The Big Bang Theory and The Creation of the Comos. We were different. I was different. I no longer felt the deep pull of the ocean that had once dwelled in my dreams and beat in my heart. I could not feel it for it had been replaced by new friends and new dreams.

This wasn't bad though, because I knew my world

could not be stagnant. Change is simply a part of life and it must be accepted. When I surfed the waves would always get smaller as the tides lowered. With the lowered tides came the exposure of the jagged reef and sharp coral. Even the ocean, as pure and as magnificent as it was, bowed it's head to change everyday. And, so I must.

I finally began to feel at ease, going to school at Kamehameha. Things were not as foreign anymore and I got A's in speech. Standard English became second nature now that I was educated Hawaiian. But, with this education came emptiness. Although, I was at ease I was not home. I searched for a niche to fill but found only odd shaped cracks and crevices. None were big enough to fit me, allowing only glimpses of what I could not attain.

At night I ha dreams of massive waves of water engulfing me inhere cool caresses. I could not understand how something so menacing could at he same time be so comforting. I lay in bed longing for those laid back days, when there was time. Time to enjoy a friends company, and share an honest smile. Time to share for the purple burst of light the sun gives off right beforesetting. Time to let Kala cook a little more so the flavors could soak deep into the meat. Time is what I did not have because my life was full.

Then why the emptiness? If my life was so full why did I feel so hallow? I had ambitions, goals, and hopes. I looked to the future, and my dreams like all my teachers said. Then why did I feel this way?

All of a sudden my fathers words came drifting back, "No forgot who you". In this hustle and bustle modern age we are always looking to the future. We talk of what we will be

when we grow up, or what we will plan do when we graduate. Always what we will be, and never what we are. Identity is such a complex organism. It lives not only in our hopes and dreams fort he future, but also in the shells of our past. So, often our eyes focus only on what is ahead of us. This tunnel vision to the future blocks our perception of the past. So many experiences, so many memories, Do much life forgotten. How could there be fullness in anyone's life?

For I had mad this mistake. I had forgotten who I was. Ashamed and ambitious I had Michael Keone Sarmiento from Makaha away in my pocket, and never took him out. Never gave him the freedom to speak or to heard. I convinced myself I was different, and in a way I was. But you can never turn your back on the past, for it is those experiences which fuel your future.

Now I am in college on the mainland, and am that much wiser. I speak standard English when needed, but I no scad talk pidgin eda. Though I am miles away from home, my roots still firmly planted in da A'ina back at Makaha Beach. At bight when I go to sleep, I feel da waves tug my toes and I stay happy. Cause now twenty two years later I finally know who me. I Michael Keone Sarmiento, from Makaha.

# A Blameless Genocide

*by Sean Riordan*

The Holocaust's blinding evil is Hitler's greasiest infamy. The Jew was almost wiped off the face of the Europe in a holocaust that still reeks of atrocity fifty years later. The extermination of the Jews from 1941-1945 holds a special place in the psyche of the postmodern world. If society is not looking for heroes to shield the true nature of genocide it challenger those 70-something and deceased Germans who were there- "Why didn't you do something?" or "How could you put a bullet through a child's head?" All of our second guessing of the German people amounts to the same thing: We cannot comprehend how an entire nation sat on its haunches while their brothers and children became Hitler's willing executioners.

This very issue has been the subject of numerous historical studies which try to make sense of an incredibly irrational and evil event. Some studies European Jews as stemming simply from anti-Semitic feelings. Others such as those of Robert Jay Lifton and Christopher R. Browning use specific psychological theories to construct how ordinary Germans participated in the Holocaust. In another study Ian Kershaw argues that Germany was apathetic to Jewry. Goldhagen's contention is complemented by Lifton's, bettered by Browning's and is superior to Kershaw's.

Goldhagen, author of "Hitler's Willing Executioners," contends that ordinary people participated in the Holocaust decision that what they wee doing was acceptable. Beyond bringing up his own argument that anti-Semitism catalyzed

genocide, he claims that conventional explanations-such as the type made by Browning-are quickly untenable in the face of his own argumentation (Goldhagen, 191-2). Goldhagen chiefly cites cruelty and seemingly joyful killings of Jews by Police Battalions 309 and 101 (the same battalion analyzed in a social psychological manner by Browning). One of the more horrific examples of 309's anti-Semitism was demonstrated as several hundred condemned Jews were packed into a synagogue for quick extermination: "The fearful Jews began to chant and pray ;loudly. After spreading gasoline around the building the Germans set it ablaze. . . The Jews' prayers turned into screams" (Goldhagen, 188). Comments of the participating soldiers included "let it burn, it's a nice little fire, it's great fun." and "Splendid, the entire city should burn down" (Goldhagen, 188). Police Battalion 101 was no more humane. Their victims were often beaten or religiously humiliated during their final moments of life (Goldhagen, 190-1). Goldhagen is trying to illustrate that the only way mass killing could take place in the way were doing the right thing. Many of the killers felt heroism, joy and eagerness in the genocidal exterminations (Goldhagen, 194-5). Though Goldhagen's evidence is convincing, the alternative arguments elaborate on some of his claims bringing into focus a fuller picture of the Holocaust.

Goldhagen intentionally rejects the "conventional" arguments of Lifton, Browning and Kershaw, who also mention anti-Semitism as a key to the Holocaust process without making it central in their argumentation. In the "The Nazi Doctors" Lifton states that hatred of Jews played a very important part in the participation of medical doctors in systematized

killing. He shows how German doctors saw the Jew as a "gangrenous appendix" infecting all of German society (Lifton, 154). Like any good doctor, a German doctor was obligated to destroy the "parasitic Jew" and make Europe healthy (Lifton, 154). In "Ordinary Men" Browning explains the common genocidal perpetrator's role as a result of his conforming to authoritative and social pressure. He makes clear that an ideological justification creates an atmosphere of greater obedience, especially when the task is the morally repulsive act of killing. Stanley Milgrtam - the Harvard psychologist whose study on conformity to authority forms the core of Browning's argument-commented: "ideological justification is vital in obtaining willing obedience, for it permits the person to see his behavior as serving a desirable end" (Browning, 179). Browning accepts that anti-Semitism played a role in the willingness of normal men to be extraordinarily responsive to evil orders. While Kershaw develops a theory of ambivalence towards Jews in "The German People and Genocide" he does concede that Germany was indoctrinated the hatred of Jews. For an argument which effectively asserts that there was a large population of Germans who would much rather ignore a Jew that see one killed some suggestions of anti-Semitism are still illustrated. Letters from all over Germany suggested:

> that Jews should not be allowed in air-raid shelters but should be herded together in the cities threatened by bombing . . . or that the Americans and British should be told that that ten Jews would be shot
>
> for each civilian killed in a bomb-attack (Kershaw, 239).

Each of the four authors, in some respect mention anti-Semitism as a factor leading to the Holocaust.

Goldhagen is taking the straightest line to an answer by naming hate as the primary cause for atrocity against Europe's Jewish population. If Dr. Obvious were reading Goldhagen's opening paragraph and initial thesis he might say: "Duh, hatred oh one set of peoples by another has been the preeminent reason for war and destruction throughout history. The Holocaust is no different." Reading on, however, Dr. Obvious, who will no longer appear in this paper, would discover that Goldhagen does not redundantly express that anti-Semitism made people kill, but convincingly shows that could only stem from a deep disregard for Jews. Agreeing only partially with this contention does not necessarily weaken the arguments of Lifton, Browning and Kershaw, although at the surface it makes it seem as if they have tried to ignore the apparent and simple explanation-which history and science have shown id often important. In order to discover the true theories of Lifton and Browning.

Lifton provides a solid argument which is complimented by Goldhagen's paradigm. Lifton theorizes the process of doubling by which German doctors who oversaw the extramination and concentration camps developed a second self to deal with the trauma of extensive murder. In doubling the doctors would have one self devoted to ordinary family and human life in addition to the "Auschwitz self" which was devoted to functioning as a destroyer of the parasitic Jew. In the maddening environments of the death camps they could either choose evil or lose their minds trying to fight it (Lifton, 161). As discussed earlier, many doctors felt that through

genocide they were doing something to ameliorate the ailments of Germany. Lifton actually complements Goldhagen by providing a specific application complements Goldhagen by providing a specific application of anti-Semitic feelings affecting the actions of doctors. Doubling is the vehicle by which anti-Semitism was carried out. As much as any historical theorem can be valosated, Lifton proves Goldhagen's. While Lifton and Goldhagen coexist nicely, Browning and Goldhagen clash and contradict.

Though Browning argues that ideological justification made it easier for non-coercive authority to impel Germans to kill innocent Jews, Goldhagen refutes any such social psychological arguments. This is understandable since Browning's assumption that the role in mass extermination is contradictory to Goldhagen's account of the same battalion as a group of torturers who mocked Jews before they killed them. Discontinuity in the two studies is explained by Browning's finding that about one-third of the unit were exceedingly cruel in their treatment of the Jews-probably the same third from which Goldhagen drew his strongest evidence of cruelty (Browning, 174). This raises question about which segment of the German population is representative of the whole. The major problem concerning Goldhagen's otherwise infallible argument is that it takes the very worst of the purveyors of genocide and focuses on their cruelty. This would be the same thing as someone taking all the white supremacists, convicted rapists, crack dealers and libertarians as an accurate representation of the psyche of America today. If a study was done on these subjects it would be skewed to suggest that America had made a choice for evil, just as looking at the cruelest of the Nazis exclusively

makes it seem as if the entire population had consciously chosen evil. Browning's augment about the Holocaust is superior to Goldhagen's not because it is written better-because it isn't-but because it discusses all ordinary men, not just the cruel ordinary men.

Goldhagen makes one eloquent attempt to disconfirm Browning's theorem that group pressure caused Germans to slaughter massive numbers of Jews. He states:

> If a large segment of a group, not to mention the vast majority of its members, opposes or abhors an act, then the social psychological pressure would work to prevent, not to encourage, individuals to undertake the act. If indeed Germans had disapproved of the mass slaughter, then peer pressure would not have sustained their individual and collective resolve to avoid killing (Goldhagen, 193).

While this would be a very convincing argument on Goldhagen's part if all Germans were appalled by the idea of the elimination of the Jews, the truth of the situation was that a minority of Germans did feel that the world would be better without the Jews. What both Browning and Kershaw also show is that the majority of Germany- while being anti-Semitic- was ambivalent to the destruction of Jewish ethnicity. In this situation a minority of zealous killers could easily influence a neutral group to follow their atrocity. Goldhagen's theory-concisely written and far more convincing than Kershaw's assertion-includes some arguments that don;t stand up to critical analysis against Browning.

Compared to Goldhagen's sensible assumptions, Kershaw's theory is a reach. It attempts to prove that the German people were unaware of and apathetic toward the Holocaust because they were detached from the situation is plausible, he also makes some great leaps of faith with his own speculation as the backing evidence. The biggest problem Kershaw faces against Goldhagen is that he uses argumentation like :They were presumably only the tip of the iceberg, but on the available evidence one can take it no further" (Kershaw, 237). Goldhagen's theory is superior to Kershaw's because his argument is based on fact while the latter's is based too much on speculation.

Goldhagen's arguments fail to stand to Browning's, overshadow Kershaw's and complement Lifton's. By analyzing these four studies I have gained a better academic understanding of how the Holocaust. At the same time, however, I am more perplexed and concerned than ever at he state of evil in human nature when hate, dual personalities, social pressure and apathy allowed the intentional slaughter of six million Jews. We, as the human race, are relegated to the task of learning from the atrocities of the past.

Works Cited

D.L. Niewyk (Ed.), Problems in European Civilization: The Holocaust.
New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Browning, C. R. (1982). Ordinary Men. (pp. 168-184).

Goldhagen, D. J. (1996). Hitler's Willing Executioners. (pp. 184-197).

Kershaw, I. (1983). The German People and Genocide. (pp. 229-241).

Lifton, R. J. (1986). The Nazi Doctors. (pp. 152-168).

[Note] :The following is an essay I wrote for my Introduction to Literature class for Professor David Paddy, who helped me edit the final draft and has succeeded in totally ruining whatever skills I had in writing the English language. Our assignment for this paper was to isolate an event or detail in either Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine* or Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* and to illustrates its relation to the overall theme(s) of the novel. The first book deals with paying attention to details and the main vehicle of communication is through the extensive use of footnotes while the second book deals with the rite of passage a Native American veteran goes through.

*Written by Shariyar Kazia and Edited by Professor David Paddy*

# Relativity: A Relative Perspective on the Relativity of Relating to the Civilized World Relative to One's Perspective

Throughout Time, peoples have questioned the nature, logic, and truth behind the beliefs and traditions of other people, never hesitating to correct, with persuasion of force, what they perceive as the wrong beliefs and traditions. Each person perceives the other as existing in another world, the wrong world, relative to one's own world. Take for example, M. C. Escher's drawing *Relativity*[1]. These sort of intertwined and coexisting worlds also appear in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony*, in which the main character Tayo attempts to return to his home[2] after struggling in the lost[3] state of the aftermath of World War Two. A predominant theme of the novel deals with re-entering one's world after being away from it, having seen the other worlds from a different perspective. And one's journey outside of one's world may cause changes in oneself or may instigate changes in one's world depending upon one's relative importance and influence[4]. Children are taught to differentiate things early in life, to stay within the boundaries set by their culture. And the basic differentiation tool used is relativity (black versus white, good versus evil). But then again, all this is relatively true or false relative to the particular society to which one belongs.

[1] The people in Escher's *Relativity* exist in their won worlds, knowing that other worlds exist besides their own and assuring themselves that their own world is the right one. The drawing

is made of three planes, all coexisting at the same time, with people in each plane able to understand and relate to people in their plane but not to people in the other planes. In one case, one person is going up the stairs while another person is going down the same stairs but at a totally different angle. Taken from one person's perspective, the other cannot physically coexist in that condition. It is wrong[1] for the other person to live in the first persons' world in the other person's current position. Similarly, people from two vastly different cultures may stubbornly hold on to their values while rejecting the other person's as false and wrong. A minor example of this is the language difference existing in Urdu and English. While the former is read from right to left, the latter is read from left to right (although this is not right). Both are right in some respects and, relative to the other, wrong or left in other respects.

Escher's *Relativity* is not about being right or wrong, true or false, but illustrates the concept of multiple worlds of vastly different perspectives existing in the same plane, the same universe. This idea also comes up in Silko's *Ceremony* where people with different perspectives coexist, although each person tries to convince the other that he/she is wrong. Silko does not say who is right and who is wrong but what she does is present several characters who live in different worlds and lets the audience select the right from the wrong. The main character Tayo seems to be in the wrong world according to his Native American family and, basically, the rest of the world. He exists in a different plane (or plain, if you want) which threatens others like Emo, a fellow Native American veteran. As his uncle Robert says, "They want you to come home. They are worried about you. They think you might need the doctors again" (228). Even though Tayo is

"healed," with the help of an unorthodox medicine-man Betonie, he still is relatively different from the rest. And his being in a different world is not acceptable to others. Silko tries not to label Tayo, Betonie, Emo, and the others as right or wrong, but does lean towards Tayo, since the novel is really about his struggle to live, to be a part of his culture, after coping with the evils of wars. In other words, being right or wrong is relative to one's perspective. And so it is with Escher. Escher does not point out whose is the right world in his *Relativity*, but allows the observer to select a perspective as the right way. However, he understands that another perspective could also be the right way.

---

[1] In matters disregarding mathematics and other subjects, being wrong is sometimes right. As many prominent leaders and inventors have proven, success, although not guaranteed, is achieved when a person goes against the normal standards, goes beyond excellence, to cause a paradigm shift. All it takes is the Wright people to lift their dreams and reach for the sky. As an example, artists constantly rebel against the "fixed" standards set by previous generation artists and create whole new ways of presenting their thoughts and ideas. Monotony, or always being right according to the "civilized society," leads not toward new frontiers, but keeps the mind restricted in the boundaries of society. But, it is precisely those "wrong" people that change the world and turn yesterday's wrong into today's right (which in turn is tomorrow's wrong and the day-after-that's right, etc.).

[2] Home is considered by most as the place to which one feels one belongs; however, for Tayo, this is not an easy question. Since his is of mixed blood, half Native American and half White, Tayo does not exactly fit[1] into either world. Before World War 2, Tayo was stuck between the two world, although he was leaning towards the Native American side. He performed the rituals and practices of his kind, although his "brother" Rocky preferred to listen to the lies taught by the Whites[2] in school. Tayo desires a home, some place where he can peacefully reside, but his Aunt's house and the Native American reservation is not really home for him. He is not part of the community as his mother ran off with the Whites and he was a product of her stepping out of the circle. After the war, Tayo returns to his Aunt's

house, but not to his home. He feels alone and wounded, without Rocky, without Uncle Josiah. And his healing process is not possible within the Native American community, as the only thing the war veterans do is drink all day, beat up others, and trash bars. But, by returning to his true culture[3], Tayo escapes from his tormented state and returns home. After he is "healed" of his wounds, both physical and mental, Tayo seems to have found his home in the traditions and lands of the Native Americans. Although his mother had decided to live with the Whites, Tayo settles for his "Indian"[4] side.

---

[1] Fitting into one's world, being accepted by society, is one aspect in life for which many strive. To be acknowledged as belonging to a recognized society plays a great part in the ego (and resume) of certain peoples. An award or recognition from a respected social organization makes the individual feel his/her worth. This also provides an excuse for the media and the public to indulge in lavish functions and unnecessary glamour. However, our society now recognizes this glamour and lavishness as the proper way of fitting people into their society.

[2] Colors designated to the various human cultures began in the ancient times, and still continues in this modern world. Some familiar ones are White for the people of Europe and the U.S., Yellow for East Asians, Black for Africans, and Red for Native Americans. Although these colors have no scientific validity nor do these peoples resemble the colors exactly, this concept of coloring people is actually quite humorous.

[3] Throughout Time, peoples have grouped themselves into clans or societies with certain rituals, traditions, and symbols, which we collectively label as their culture. In ancient times, cultures were defined and strict boundaries classified all persons as belonging to an enemy or friend of that culture. People were proud of belonging to a culture in the ancient times, their lives had meaning only be their inclusion in their culture. In modern times, the boundaries separating cultures have broken so that some persons have mixtures of several cultures. In other words, they are mutants and should be eliminated. Although this "modest proposal" is quite unique, the implementation of it will drastically decrease the population of the world, which is a problem in itself.

[4] The mistake of calling the natives of the New World "Indians" is due to the stupidity[1] of Christopher Columbus. Granted that he found more land for the European nations to exploit, he, nevertheless, knew not where he was headed to nor knew where had been upon returning to Europe. The fallacy of this explorer continues to this day, although Indians now usually mean people from India and Native Americans now usually mean the natives Columbus

"discovered" in the New World.

---

[1] Being stupid has nothing to do with Columbus's ignorance and lack of direction; however, he certainly should have corrected his first impression. The world is full of stupid people. But since stupidity is relative, many persons are not as incompetent as they may feel. Taken from another perspective, the reason for smart people's existence is the relative stupidity of the majority of the people. Because intelligent people go beyond what average people think and do, they are the ones that change the world. Nevertheless, Columbus's error has remained with us for the last five hundred years, and he certainly was not the most intelligent of people so his error can be overlooked. It is such a common error that I will not spend much time discussing it.

[3] Being lost is a relative state since only certain people designate others as being lost or not. People may forget their ways or enter into new land, but they really are not lost to themselves. To others, they are lost because they are not in any way able to communicate with them, but to themselves, they are there, and not lost. While looking for the stranded cattle he has decided to bring back, Tayo remembers a past instance when he and Rocky were looking for the green truck after a hunting trip : "They expected to see the old green truck parked on every ridge that came into sight. They weren't lost, because they knew where they were, but the green truck was lost" (190). Relative to Tayo and Rocky, the truck was lost, but relative to the truck, carrying Robert and Uncle Josiah, Tayo and Robert were lost. This theme of being lost reoccurs in the novel[1] and, I believe, relates to the overall theme of relativity that Silko points out.

Tayo is in this lost state after coming back from the war, and his journey to recovery and to home requires going back to the old ways[2]. By rounding up the cattle, Tayo heals himself, although he needs the help of Betonie and the lion-spirit Ts'eh. When he decides to live by himself and tend to his cattle, the community feels he is lost again. It is not for him to decided his state of mind but for the community. When Tayo was born, he was in a lost state as he was of mixed blood[3]. When he came back from the war, he was in a lost state as he was abandoning his work and his rituals. And when Tayo was healed, he was in a lost state as he had left the community and was living alone. In the end, Tayo returns to his Aunt's house, and relative to the community, is not lost anymore.

---

[1] The novel was traditionally a long narrative with set standards, a definite and visible plot, and common characteristics differentiating itself from the much earlier and much more popular form of writing, the poem. However, modern writers have so twisted the concepts of rules and regulations that there now exists no real definite boundary separating the novel and the poem. Nicholson Baker can write and outlandish book, *The Mezzanine*, and still be accepted by

the public. It is ridiculous how people can find interest in such a novel that uses footnotes as its vehicle of communication. But, my assurance in the future generations rests on the fact that no one will even try to recreate what Baker did nor be affected in any way with the form in which Baker chose to write.

[2] As generations evolve and reach new frontiers, the old traditional ways of living seem to be left behind. The computer age ridicules the slow, but patient, way of performing tasks, such as writing an essay. Instead of typing from the start for each draft of an essay on a typewriter (what else can you do with a typewriter?), people now furiously type their first drafts and edit very efficiently on their personal computers. Sad to say that many cultures are losing their essence with the onslaught of technology. What remains to be seen is the day when technology so cripples the human kind that their return to the slower, yet more patient, way of life is inevitable. Traditions will not die, yet, tradition exists only to be broken.

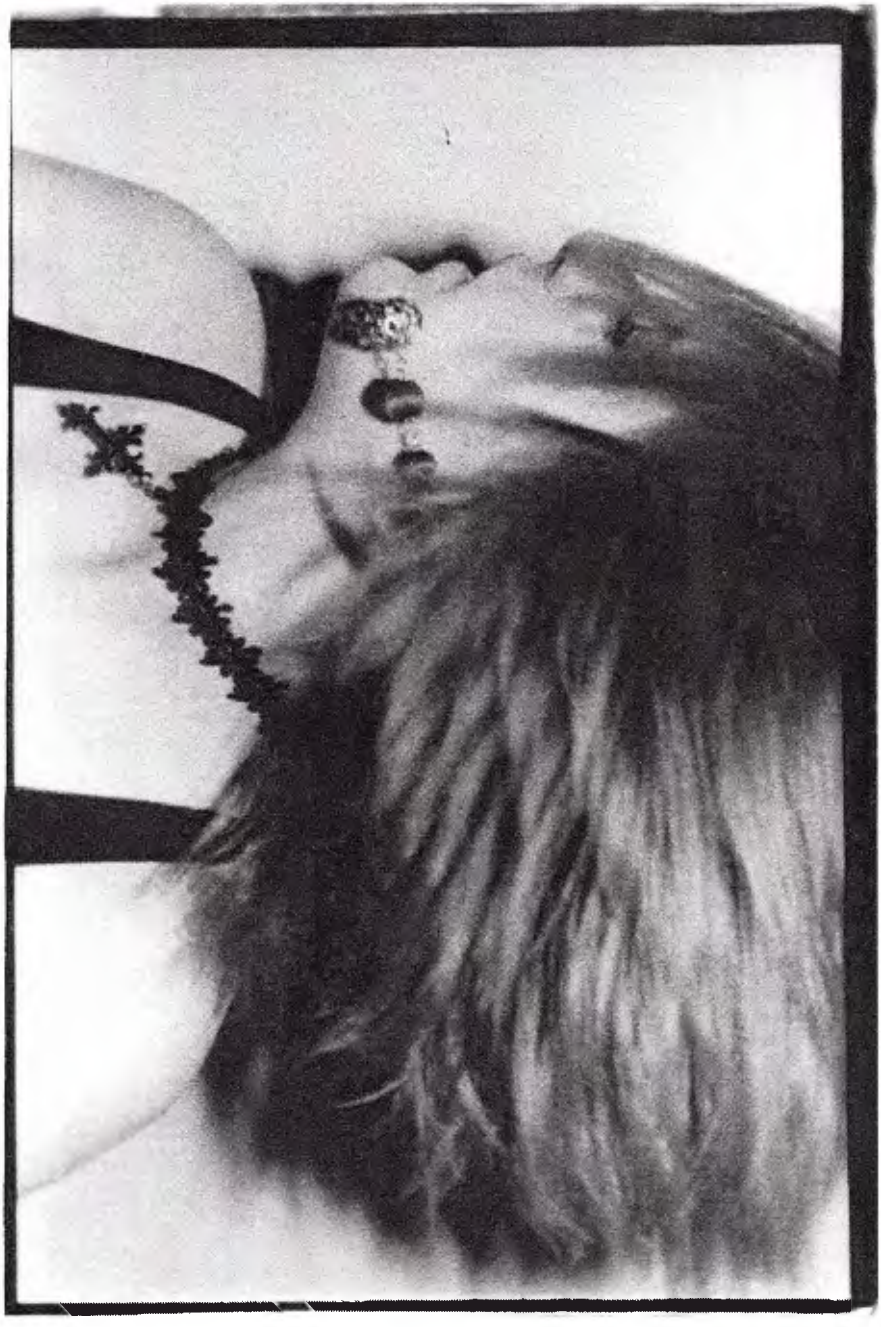
[3] Mixed blood is an interesting concept as it means the joining of two separate world, two different cultures, two relatively incompatible forces, two paradoxes occurring at the same time, which in itself is a paradox. Then again, it may just represent the simple idea of two streams joining together to form a river that heads for the ocean.

[4] A rite of passage may occur when one steps out of one's safe and secure home and gets lost in the other worlds. By seeing the world through a different perspective, one may notice changes in oneself. For Tayo, the ceremony undertaken to release himself from his lost state required a return to the past, to the traditional way of doing things. Instead of moving on to new frontiers, Tayo had to back up and find himself in his culture. But, this still proved to be a new perspective from which to view the world. And to him, the world of the veterans and of the Whites, which was the normal[1] and right way of life right after the war, becomes the lost world after he returns to his home. Relative to his community, Tayo is in the right state when he returns to his Aunt's place, but relative to his veteran friends, Tayo is in the lost state, which is the reverse for the veterans.

The desire to change one's world, or one's mind stems from watching one's world from a different perspective. Only by listening to silence can one enjoy sound; only by watching the day can one enjoy the night. Relativity is what guides our ideas and thoughts in our lives. We label night only after being in light; we name religion only after science pokes its head into the world. Relative to me, this essay is clear and straight-forward while, relative to you, this essay may be tangled and lacking any form of connection. But then again, is not life and its many aspects relative to one's perspective[2]?

[1] There is no such concept as normal, just as there is no real Truth. Normal just means one society's accepted actions and ideas, which are relatively abnormal to another society. Abnormality within one society results in being sent to mental asylums and jails or being ostracized from the community. It is normal that to feel abnormal is normal but it is not normal to feel normal is abnormal, relative to one's society and perspective.

[2] As a conclusion of the conclusion of a footnote of a footnote, this footnote is designated to clear things up and make sense of the above tangle mess. However, since relativity, being wrong, the concept of home and Tayo's need for a home, fitting into society, colors, cultures, Columbus's stupidity, being lost and Tayo's struggle to be unlost, the novel as a written form, rites of passages, and, finally, being normal is all relative, I feel no need to list the major concepts of the essay nor feel the need to clarify what is, relative to me, a perfectly clear and normal essay.



Quick Profile Nicole Coates Burton

# Ancient Roman Sculpture and Changing Concepts of Gods and Humans

*by Lisa Rollins*

The prevalent philosophies of a civilization are integral to an understanding of its history. Philosophies develop within a culture based on the values that its people hold to be important and on the questions and answers that it uses to explain its existence. Today, modern scholars are the heirs to thousands of years of thought, but even now, no definitive answers to the question of "Why?" exist.

Art is the among the best indicators existing today of the values of past civilizations. Paintings, owing to their perishable pigments, are relatively ephemeral; architecture, although often better preserved, is meant to serve certain functional purposes that may limit its expressive possibilities. Sculpture, on the other hand, is by nature ornamental and, depending on the medium used, may be extremely long-lived. In Rome, sculpture was a public and utilitarian form of art, commissioned by the wealthy to reflect their values. Thus, extant sculptures can provide modern scholars with insight into the priorities of their creators and, by extension, of the cultures that produced them.

Western philosophies have generally held that an entity or several entities exist outside of the human realm. Consequently, one of the questions that has long preoccupied humans is how we relate to this other being or beings. Ancient Rome is one civilization for which substantial visual and

written records address this important question. Due to the size and duration of the Roman civilization, however, ideas of humans' relationship to god(s) changed over time.

This paper will discuss the transformation of philosophies regarding humans' relationship to the gods in ancient Rome as expressed through pagan and Christian Roman sculpture. It will discuss how the sculpture of republican and early imperial Rome conveys the generally accepted pagan convention of a close relationship between humans and gods; it will also examine Neoplatonic Christian notions of the distinct separation between the human realm and God's realm as intimated by late imperial Roman sculpture.

Barrow (1949) notes that from the beginning of their civilization, "the Romans were acutely aware that there is 'power' outside man" and thus had a long tradition of recognizing beings other than themselves (p. 9). Romans not only recognized these other beings but also worshipped them, and even before an organized Roman state religion came into being, Romans practiced a "sense of dedication [that] at first reveals itself in humble forms, in the household and in the family" (Barrow, p. 10). Barrow refers here to the Lares and Penates, the household gods that every early Roman *domus* worshipped through daily ceremony and ritual; these domestic deities, protectors of the home, cupboard, and family line, are the probable beginnings of the tradition of ancestor worship which persisted into the republican and imperial eras (Glover, 1909, p.14).

Major Olympian gods such as Jupiter, adapted from Greek religion, functioned primarily to protect certain classes of people or activities and lacked the all-encompassing power

that the Christians would later assign to their God (Glover, p. 19). The polytheistic tradition of ancient Rome and the great number of local deities with which the Romans made contact served to expand the pantheon of gods almost ceaselessly and to dilute control over the world among various gods and demi-gods. The consuls, emperor, and other prominent government officials sacrificed to major gods on public holidays, but the majority of worship performed by the ordinary Roman citizen was directed toward the local ancestor and household gods.

Ancestor worship called for the reverence of each household's past *paterfamilias*, or head of the family. The implication of ancestor worship is that showing proper respect to one's ancestors ensures protection of the home and family, the basic units of Roman society. Thus, every Roman family had its own set of family gods to worship in addition to whatever official pantheon of gods the government declared to be sacred.

The pious *paterfamilias* could hope to rise to the status of family god himself after his death and to be worshipped in turn by his descendants; the posthumous transition from father to god was virtually guaranteed provided the *paterfamilias* exhibited proper behavior and reverence for his own ancestors during his lifetime. Thus, Roman citizens perpetuated a dynastic line of minor gods. Obviously, the tradition of ancestor worship yielded a great number of minor gods within Roman society. More importantly, this tradition stressed the close connection between gods and living Romans and the ability of pious Romans to rise to the status of gods themselves.

The republican sculpture of a *Roman Patrician with*

*Ancestor Busts* is an indication of ancient pagan Rome's belief in a close connection between gods and Romans. The subject of this first century C.E. work is a well-to-do Roman citizen carrying two portrait busts (Ramage & Ramage, 1996, pp. 68-69). The subjects of the two busts bear a striking resemblance to the patrician himself, leading the viewer to conclude that the busts are meant to represent two of the patrician's relatives; given the Roman tradition of ancestor worship, these portraits are probably, as the sculpture's title alleges, ancestor busts. The physical similarity between human and ancestor underscores the ease of transition between the two states of mortal and god and implies that one day this stately patrician will also become a deity revered by his household. Additionally, this sculpture suggests that no extraordinary behavior is required for one to become a god; these ancestor deities were men with strengths and flaws, just like the patrician himself, and yet they transcended the mortal realm to become gods.

Roman gods were not necessarily perfect; in most cases, they were far from it. Cicero (1972) describes

> gods afire with rage or mad with lust, [who] make us the spectators of their wars, their battles, their violence and wounds...their hates, quarrels, altercations; and also of their births and deaths, their complaints and lamentations, their lusts erupting into excess of every kind, adultery, captivity, and intercourse with human beings, so that mortals may have gods for parents (p. 87).

In this brief passage, Cicero both points out the less-than-ideal behavior of the gods and reiterates the fact that humans may be

directly descended from these imperfect gods. Humans aspired to be gods not because gods were models of appropriate behavior but because becoming a god meant achieving immortality; as long as one's descendants continued the tradition of worship, one's memory remained alive.

Besides conveying the close relationship between humans and gods, the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts* illustrates a conception that is characteristic of pagan Rome: humanism. Humanism considers humans to be the measure of all things and is evident in this sculpture by virtue of its depiction of a recognizable individual. This sculptor depicts specific details of his subjects' physiognomy, including muscles, wrinkles, and facial lines, in a veristic manner. The result is a sculpture that glorifies human appearance, human emotion, and human tradition.

The *Augustus of Primaporta*, a sculpture dating from the first century B.C.E., is an example of Roman imperial humanistic portraiture. An imperial commission, this sculpture, like the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts*, calls attention to specific details of human appearance such as individualized features, well-defined musculature, and realistic stance.

This sculpture is a representation of Augustus, the first Roman emperor. Although somewhat idealized, his features are recognizably similar to those of his later portraits and bear a close resemblance to the sculpted features of his Julio-Claudian successors, most notably Caligula and Claudius. Such physical similarities emphasize family ties and the dynastic succession of authority and status, as in the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts.*

Augustus's well-defined physique is portrayed by a clear modeling of individual muscles, which indicates that the sculptor has closely studied anatomy from nature. The tradition of representing realistic anatomy, particularly male anatomy, is borrowed from Greek practice. Beauty is defined as possessing a well-proportioned body; spiritual well-being is downplayed in favor of physical beauty and order.

The *Augustus of Primaporta* is shown in a pose of *contrapposto*, or counterbalance, modeled from the Greek *Doryphoros*; the pose is characterized by visible weight shift in the hips and the opposition of flexed and relaxed limbs. The sculptor clearly is interested in a convincing representation of human stance, which reveals his humanistic interests. As will be evident in analyses of later sculptures, a shift away from humanism is paralleled in art by less naturalistic and more conceptualized representations of the human form.

The most prominent traits of the *Augustus of Primaporta* are strength, virility, and courage; these are almost universally admired among Western civilizations as desirable traits in males. By commissioning a portrait of himself that accents these traits, Augustus assumes the role of model for his society. Roman citizens are encouraged to emulate the Emperor Augustus rather than look to the gods as ideals.

In case his authority as an ideal is placed in doubt, Augustus includes references to his divine heritage in the *Augustus of Primaporta.* The decorative and functional strut supporting his proper right leg is carved with Cupid riding a dolphin. According to Greco-Roman mythology, Cupid is the son of Venus, the goddess of love; dolphins are symbols of Venus and her birth from the sea. In this context, Cupid and

the dolphin remind the viewer that Augustus is the adopted son of Julius Caesar, who was deified after his death and is said to have been descended from Venus. This strategy is more subtle and perhaps more sophisticated than the one adopted by the republican sculptor of the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts* in that the *Augustus of Primaporta* does not physically pose with his immortal ancestors. The reference to a familial tradition of divinity is clear, however, and the line between human and god is again blurred.

Despite the fact that he would have been an old man by this time, an early first century C.E. portrait of the first emperor, *Augustus as Pontifex Maximus*, shows Augustus in virtually the same youthful state in which he was shown in his earlier sculpture. Immortality, according to Cicero, was widely believed to be one of "the attributes of divinity only" (p. 109). By commissioning images of himself that made him appear ageless, Augustus in effect declares his own status as a god. Although Augustus shrewdly ensured that he would not be officially deified until after his death (lest he anger the Roman populace), he is shown here in the guise of the *pontifex maximus*, or bridge between the human realm and that of the gods. The *pontifex maximus* was the office of the high priest of the Roman people that was assumed by the Roman emperors and eventually by the Roman Catholic popes. Without presumptuously claiming godlike powers, Augustus suggests that he is able to communicate with the gods by virtue of his office as *pontifex maximus* and that he therefore possesses comparable power to that of the gods. Although he does not officially obtain the status of god until after he is dead, Augustus clearly insinuates that he is a god already during his lifetime.

After roughly 200 years of imperial rule, the Neoplatonic philosophy of Plotinus becamea significant force in the Roman intellectual world. The new interpretation of the works of Plato came during the time that Christianity was beginning to make a transition from an Oriental cult to a viable force within the empire. As founder of Neoplatonism, Plotinus set forth a set of philosophical principles in The Enneads that laid the foundation for future Christian theologians, including St. Augustine of Hippo, whose remarks on the nature of God have great relevance to art in the early Christian era.

Although it was developed in a pagan context, Neoplatonism espoused the existence of two levels of reality: the material realm, in which humans live, and the intelligible realm, in which the One dwells. The One, described by Plotinus as "neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul [but]...the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Motion or Rest," is the supremely perfect source of all things (1991, p.539). It is at once the origin of everything and a force far above all other things; humans and all other beings and objects are good and happy only with respect to their closeness to the One; as a creature or object sinks to levels of reality farther and farther from the One, it becomes more and more grounded in Matter, the basest substance. Christian philosophers equated the One with God, and they appropriated Plotinus's thoughts to support their conceptions of Christianity.

As Rome entered the Christian era, its sculpture began to reflect the new God-centered philosophy rather than the humanism of the pagan age. One famous example of imperial portraiture that represents a marked contrast with the

material-focused sculpture of Augustus's age is the *Colossal Statue of Constantine*, an imperial commission that originally stood in the fourth century C.E. Basilica Nova. The *Colossal Statue*, dating from around 315 C.E., is a portrait of the first Christian Roman emperor, but its sculptor's intentions were clearly different from those of Augustus's portrait artist. The existing fragments of the 30-foot tall statue include the emperor's hands, feet, kneecap, upper arm, and, most importantly, the head.

This statue was commissioned shortly after Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312. Shortly before engaging Maxentius in battle, Constantine had a vision of the Christian chi-rho and saw the words "*in hoc signo vinces*," meaning "in this sign you will conquer." He interpreted this vision to mean that the Christian God was watching over him, and although he was not baptized until he was on his deathbed, Constantine was responsible for a series of advances for the Christian cause in Rome during his reign as emperor.

Constantine's monumental vision at the Milvian Bridge may be specifically alluded to by the *Colossal Head*'s upward gaze. The viewer is drawn to the emperor's eyes because of the disproportionate scale employed by the sculptor. Clearly, the monumental size of the complete statue would have commanded awe and respect for the emperor himself, but the sculpted emperor's gaze suggests that Constantine himself shows deference to an even higher authority.

The representation of Constantine is a far cry from earlier sculptures like the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts* and *Augustus of Primaporta*, both of which made humanistic

characteristics of the patrons high priorities. In the *Colossal Statue of Constantine*, the focus is not on the emperor and his physical attributes but on the intelligible reality to which he is looking; this new convention marks a preoccupation with conceptual rather than optical representation. Instead of communicating what Constantine looked like, this imperial artist attempts to show the intangible connection to God that lies at the core of Constantine's being. Neoplatonic philosophers at this time sought the unseen intelligible reality above the tangible material reality; sculptors too were beginning to show the same interests in their art. Sculpture was now being used to transmit something beyond the appearance and power of the individual. Constantine does not allege, as Augustus did, that he shares in the powers of the immortal(s); Constantine claims only to have awareness of and veneration for God.

Dualism, the central tenet of Neoplatonism, was a part of the Platonic thought long before Christians began borrowing from Plotinus, but art seemed mired in the lower of the two levels of reality: materialism. It was with Constantine's official patronage that art began to exhibit the higher level of intelligible reality.

Neoplatonic principles extended to portrayals of Christ himself. An early Christian sculpture of *Christ as the Good Shepherd*, illustrated in Thomas Mathews' The Clash of the Gods, shows Christ not as a recognizable individual but as a being whose love for other creatures is His most prominent feature. Little attention is paid to the differentiation of the sheep's fleece and the Shepherd's hair in this early fourth century C.E. work; the sculptor's intention is not that Christ's physiognomy be represented accurately. Augustine (1943)

claims that "images of corporeal things barred me from turning back towards the truth," and thus early Christian artists refrained from realism (p. 115). Transcendent power and love are the essential attributes of Christ that the artist accentuates here; he willingly sacrifices anatomical accuracy because preoccupation with Matter grounds one's soul in lowly material reality.

The sculptor of *Christ as the Good Shepherd* acknowledges his limitations as a human and the limitations of Matter as a medium for depicting Christ. Rather than attempt verism, he creates a sculpture that possesses an inherent simplicity appropriate for an image of Christ, whose unity defies human comprehension. This work is an imperfect human representation of a Being who is entirely unsuited to physical representation, being "a spirit, having no parts extended in length and breadth, to whose being bulk does not belong" (Augustine, p. 41). Since mass is not a characteristic of God and Christ, the sculptor makes an effort to downplay these features of Matter without rendering the sculpture unrecognizable to human viewers.

As illustrated by the large extremities of the Shepherd, little attention was devoted by the artist to the construction of Christ according to a canon of proportions. Augustine points out that "we must distinguish between the beauty which belongs to the whole in itself, and the becomingness which results from the right relation to some other thing, as a part of the body to the whole body," and the sculptor does so by abandoning any pretense of accurate anatomical dimensions (Augustine, p. 61).

*Christ as the Good Shepherd* is the polar opposite,

in Neoplatonic terms, of the *Augustus of Primaporta*. Both sculptures represent powerful rulers, but the *Augustus of Primaporta* claims supreme authority by deliberately calling attention to material signs of divinity. *The Good Shepherd*, on the other hand, justifies His reign by ignoring inferior, material symbols of power and instead referring to the intelligible attributes implied by the simplicity of His image.

As illustrated by the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts*, *Augustus of Primaporta*, *Augustus as Pontifex Maximus*, the *Colossal Statue of Constantine*, and *Christ as the Good Shepherd*, sculpture is a highly visible outlet through which ancient Roman artists expressed the popular philosophies of their day. With the exception of the Constantinian work, these examples were not of monumental scale; instead of overwhelming the viewer with impressive size, these sculptures appealed to the human search for the divine within themselves.

Both pagan and Christian philosophies provided opportunities for humans to achieve a higher level of consciousness. Pagan beliefs allowed for a direct transition from pious mortal to god, since the imperfect nature of Greco-Roman gods was such that they were more powerful than but not morally superior to humans. Powerful Romans, especially emperors, could become gods simply by issuing imperial decrees. Thus, human will could elevate the status of an individual from humble human to venerated god. The society that embraced this school of thought yielded such humanistic, materialistic sculptures as the *Roman Patrician with Ancestor Busts* and the portraits of Augustus.

The Christian notion of God was significantly different from that of the pagan Romans. Christian Romans'

God was supremely omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, establishing Him as a level of reality far beyond human knowledge. Neoplatonic philosophy held that every creature is descended from God, but although humans are a derivation of His Goodness, they can never attain the true Good because humans are tainted by Matter and physical concerns. By avoiding palpable temptations, however, humans could hope to draw closer to God.

In spite of the asymmetrical intentions of pagan and Christian sculptors, they have one underlying concern in common: the search for one's place in the cosmos. Whatever the differences in appearances among ancient Roman sculptures, all of them encourage the viewer to find something of the subject in him- or herself and to use that experience to gain a deeper understanding of humans' roles in the universe. Plotinus uses the carving of a statue as a metaphor for refining one's knowledge of the unknown:

> Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful; he cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer...So do you also; cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine...When you know that you have become this perfect work...when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now become very vision: now call up all your confidence, strike forward a step — you need a guide no longer — strain, and see (pp. 54-55).

**Sources Consulted:**

Augustine. (F.J. Sheed, Trans.). Confessions. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1943.

Barrow, R.H. The Romans. New York: Penguin Books, 1949.

Cicero, M.T. The Nature of the Gods. (H.C.P. McGregor, Trans.). New York:
Penguin Books, 1972.

Glover, T.R. The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire. Boston:
Beacon Press, 1909.

Mathews, T.F. The Clash of the Gods. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Plotinus. (S. MacKenna, Trans.). The Enneads. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Ramage, N.H., & Ramage, A. Roman Art. (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ:
Prentice Hall, 1996.

# Points of Light

*by Demian Marienthal*

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."
—Albert Einstein

M.C. Escher's sketch *Waterfall* depicts reality from many different angles. From one, the water falls yet while from another, the water moves upward. Thus, in doing so, this sketch challenges the certainty of the law of gravity as a set representation of reality. Similarly, in the epigraph to her novel Sexing the Cherry, Jeanette Winterston explains that "[m]atter ... is now known to be mostly empty space ... and points of light" as opposed to "that thing the most solid and the well-known, which you are holding in your hands and which makes up your body." She continues by asking, "What does this say about the reality of the world?" At one point in Salman Rushdie's Haroun and the Sea of Stories, one character also asks an enquiry concerning reality and truth: "What's the use of stories that aren't even true?" (Rushdie 20). But what if fantasised stories and "A ll our dream-worlds ... come true"? Or what if one's truth, one's perception of reality becomes known to be merely "[e]mpty space and points of light" (Winterson 167)? In Sexing the Cherry and Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Winterson and Rushdie paradoxically use fantasy in order to reveal alternate realities, thereby refuting the common belief that only fixed realities exist.

By controlling the use of fantasy, most of the characters in both novels retain a belief in their society that only one fixed reality exists. In Haroun and the Sea of Stories, for example, Mr

Sengupta is reputed to have told Rashid Khalifa: "You are only interested in pleasure, but a proper man would know that life is a serious business. Your brain is full of make-believe, so there is no room in it for facts" (Rushdie 22). Thus, his view of reality is fixed to seriousness and an absence of fantasy. Snooty Butto explains his idea of how reality should be when he describes the "folk in [the] foolish Valley" where he resides as "crazy for make-believe," he says:

> My enemies hire cheap fellows to stuff the people's ears with bad stories about me, and the ignorant people just lap it up like milk. For this reason I have turned, eloquent Mr Rashid, to you. You will tell happy stories, praising stories, and the people will believe you, and be happy, and vote for me.
>
> (Rushdie 47)

Here, Snooty Butto's tactic to control the use of fantasy is censorship. Censorship is a device of control through withholding information and/or ideas. Thus, through censorship, Snooty Butto restricts the stories that Rashid tells and that the folks hear to ones that only praise him in order to prevent other ideas from overpowering his own and thus causing him to fail in his pursuit for political victory. In doing so, he has only his own perception of reality presented to the folk in the foolish Valley, thereby restricting and restraining their view of reality to his own. As a result, his society receives an incomplete if not a false sense of

reality similar to Mr Sengupta's.

Like this society in Haroun and the Sea of Stories, in Sexing the Cherry, Dog-Woman's Elizabethan (for most of the novel, anyway) society is responsible for restricting her view of reality also; for she believes "the earth is surely a manageable place made of blood and stone and entirely flat" (Winterson 19). Her adoptive son Jordan, however, seems to have be the antithesis of her, for "he has not [her] common sense and will no doubt follow his dreams to the end of the world and then fall straight off" (Winterson 40). She shares a similar opinion of fantasy as Mr Sengupta's: "Where do they come from, these insubstantial dreams?" (Winterson 40). Yet in her lack of dreams, she ironically lacks the ability to see that her fixed sense of reality is "insubstantial"—empty space and points of light. In fact, Jordan's dreams are pregnant with so much substance that they enable him to have a different, if not better, sense of reality than that of the Dog woman's.

Let us take the earth's shape for example. While Dog-Woman believes the earth to be flat, Jordan sees that the shape of the "earth is round and flat at the same time. This is obvious. That it is round appears indisputable; that it is flat is our common experience, also indisputable. The globe does not supersede the map; the map does not distort the globe" (Winterson 87). Thus, Jordan sees the reality of the earth's shape from a different point of view. Unlike Mr Sengupta in Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Jordan does not find anyone's idea to be a fixed reality in and of itself. Rather, unlike Snooty Butto's society, Jordan sees more realities than merely one. He sticks his head out of one reality and sees another: in this particular case, a marriage between two realities concerning the earth's shape thereby creating another: a

flat and round earth. Thus, while his point of view of the earth's shape is considered fantasy by almost anyone from Dog-Woman's society, he proves it to be real at the same time. In doing so, he shows that reality and fantasy shape each other.

Similarly Jordan shows another vision of reality through a fusion of fantasy and reality when he discusses time. While his observation of the earth's shape objectively shows how to comprehend reality, through his enquiry concerning time, here, he explores how mentally to understand reality. He states:

> Did my childhood happen? I must believe it did, but I don't have any proof... I will assume to have had the one I remember... Everyone remembers things which never happened. And it is common knowledge that people often forget things which did. Either we are all fantasists and liars or the past has nothing definite in it. I have heard people say we are shaped by our childhood. But which one?
>
> (Winterson, 102)

Thus, while Mr Sengupta and the Dog-Woman, for example, are concerned with a reality, Jordan's concern is with multiple realities.

As Jordan reveals, sometimes we remember events which never occurred through such forms of the imagination as dreams. Sigmund Freud argued that everything in reality enters the im-

agination. If so, we may conclude that reality shapes the imagination, that our dreams, our fantasies, are pregnant with reality, and that indeed, "A ll our dream-worlds may come true" (epigraph to Rushdie). On the other hand, we forget events which have occurred in reality. But does our failure to remember them then shatter their existence in the realm of reality? That is, does it render them figures of fantasy, of the imagination, rather than of reality? If so, our failure to remember that certain events occurred still does not change the fact that they did. If we are to label those events as fantasy, however, then we can say that fantasy shapes reality also. From this point of view, reality truly is nothing but empty space and points of light.

In Haroun and the Sea of Stories, the mutual shaping of and between fantasy and reality occurs through metafiction, that is, making the same story we are reading as a part of the story itself. We recognise this method when we discover that the story which Rashid is telling is also titled *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. As we continue, we read the novels first lines again: "There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name" while we have forgotten that our whole experience of reading it was mere fantasy itself. We are only brought back into the realm of reality when Rushdie spoon-feeds us by personally informing us, "As you will have guessed, Rashid told the people in that park the same story I've just told you" (206). "It isn't real," we may say, parroting Haroun's words of incredulity (Rushdie 208). Nevertheless, we still feel very much like Jordan: while he asks by which childhood was he shaped, we ask in which reality are we in relation to the story Haroun and the Sea of Stories: are we outside the text reading it, or has Rushdie pulled us in, rendering

us fantasy characters within the text? By building a wall of fantasy throughout the novel and then smashing it like a rock thrown through a window, Rushdie has revealed to us his shaping of reality through fantasy, with our certainties of reality and fantasy shattered to the floor.

Certainly in a more subtle manner, Rashid reveals a reality through fantasy as Rushdie does with us. Rashid does so by telling a tale to the citizens under Snooty Butto about Snooty Butto's censorship. Thus, the fantasy serves as a mirror of reality: "when Rashid told the audience how almost all the Chupwalas had hated the Cultmaster all along, but had been afraid to say so ... a loud murmur ... ran through the crowd, *yes*, people muttered, *we know exactly how they felt*" (Rushdie 206). As a result, Snooty Buttoo is "frighted with false fire," so to speak, by the realisation that the citizens will now probably stone him rather than vote for him (*Hamlet* III.ii.267). Thus, this shaping of reality through fantasy has a feeling of justice.

Discussing the different meanings of two words which sound almost alike, Rashid states, "All names mean something" (Rushdie 40). That is to say, there are no fixed realities, "the past has nothing definite in it" (Winterson 102); everything is open to infinite interpretation. Thus, we are liberated from the restraints of fixed realities, such as the ones practised by Dog-Woman, Mr Sengupta, and Snooty Butto. Instead we are left with a multitude of realities. In this same manner, according to Winterson, it is therefore a lie that "Reality [is] something which can be agreed upon... [and that] Reality [is] truth" (Winterson, 90). For reality for one individual may differ from another's. In addition, as M.C. Escher exemplifies with his interpretation of gravity, when we arrive to a reality, that discovery leads us to another and another

interpretation of reality. We are constantly changing reality everytime we try to discover it.

*Bibliography*

Rushdie, Salman. Haroun and the Sea of Stories. Granta Books: London. 1990.

Winterson, Jeanette. Sexing the Cherry. Vintage International. 1991.

# "How Did Coupon Clipping Become so *Sexy*?"

*by Elizabeth Freudenthal*

Frederic Jameson: a Neo-Marxist Culture Hound

When one skims the table of contents of Frederic Jameson's *Postmodernism, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, one is so excitedly surprised that one loses control of one's jaw muscles. After one's collegiate career of reading theorists whose titles are more complex than the average undergraduate term paper, Jameson's chapter headings are stunning. "He writes a chapter on *video*??!! *Architecture*??!! *FILM*??!!" one might utter. The facts that these chapters are sandwiched by very long ones on "ideology" and "theory," and that each heading has a daunting subtitle along the lines of "Immanence and Nominalism in Postmodern Theoretical Discourse," take a few moments to sink in. Then one realizes, "Hey! This is a famous theorist. Of course he'll write a few hundred pages that require graduate school to understand. And I bet that chapter on movies isn't any fun to read, anyway." Fun or not, the diverse chapter headings indicate both Jameson's breadth of interest and his conglomerate version of theoretical ideas, a generally Marxist body with apendages culled from pieces of deconstruction, structuralism, new historicism, psychoanalysis, and some figures that bridge different schools. He constructs his own neo-Marxist framework from which he can examine all aspects of contemporary culture, and their relation to contemporary world economics.

The exact nature of his Marxism is a hybrid of traditional, Frankfurt School, and recent theories. One aspect of his

classic Marxist affiliations is most clearly evidenced by his strict, implicit adherence to the base-superstructure dialectic:

> Every position on postmodernism in culture ... is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today. (Jameson 3)

This direct statement displays Jameson's stance that the West's dominant economic system, multinational capitalism, is the base upon which all other aspects of world culture, our superstructure, depend. Further, all analyses of different postmodernisms, from architectural to literary, must be political stances on this economic system. Material conditions of a society determine all other facets.

There are subtler points in Jameson's economic theories that also point to his traditional Marxist leanings. He describes the problems in using Marx's ideology-reality dialectic while authoritatively stating that Marx intended the dialectic to be problematic. "The Marxian concept of *ideology* was always meant to respect and to rehearse and flex the concept of the mere semiautonomy of the ideological concept . . ." (261). In *Postmodernism,* he mentions a common complaint about Marx, but defends the subject of the complaint as "a strength rather than a weakness" (265). The frequent use of terms like "market," "ideology," and "commodification" convey faithfulness to classic Marxian tradition, while quotes about Marx himself, such as "Marx observes dryly," (260) "in Marx himself," (261)

and "Marx suggests" (272) all give Marx an air of unquestionable authority.

Nonetheless, Jameson sees beyond his allegiance to the founder of his theoretical school. His economic views are profoundly influenced by the Frankfurt school and contemporary Marxists. The Frankfurt school was "to be grounded in non-dogmatic Marxian thought, critical of existing society yet yielding, in Grundberg's words, 'only relative, historically conditioned meaning'" (Groden and Kreiswirth 280). Frankfurters Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Jurgen Habermas, and Georg Lukacs are quoted, drawn upon, and extended throughout *Postmodernism.* The Frankfurt School's specific ideological developments profoundly influenced Jameson's work. Specifically, the school examined growing monopolies instead of emphasizing class struggle. They modified the base-superstructure dialectic to render the theory more useful. They sought to bridge the gap between psychoanalysis and Marxism and rigorously applied Marxist theory to aesthetics. As I will show soon, these ideas form a framework for Jameson that he could not have found in Marx alone.

Post-Frankfurt theorists also influenced Jameson greatly. Ernst Mandel's book *Late Capitalism* enabled Jameson's economic analysis of contemporary culture. Mandel connects three stages of technology— steam engines, electric and combustion engines, and electronic and nuclear power— to three stages of capitalism. Market capitalism, monopoly capitalism or imperialism, and multinational or consumer capitalism divide up all economic history since the Industrial Revolution. Mandel also said that late capitalism, this third stage, is "the purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a

prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (Jameson 36). In other words, our present economic structure controls so many aspects of our lives, from our recreational television, movies, and any number of other commercially funded activities, to our basic survival through eating food purchased at capitalist chain supermarkets. The pervasive nature of late capitalism makes it the perfect demonstration of Marxist theories. The fundamental dialectic of base and superstructure, in particular, is intensified by this omnipresent type of capital.

Jameson's wholehearted belief in this aspect of classic Marxism is enough reason to connect our economic system to the phenomenon of postmodernism. Yet, Jameson seeks to convince the non-Marxist cynics (could any possibly exist?) by making explicit connections between multinational capital and the characteristics of postmodernism.

> The theory of ideology ... is itself a kind of form determined by social content, and it reflects social reality in more complicated ways that a "solution" reflects its problem. What can be observed here is the fundamental dialectical law of the determination of form by its content...The deeper affinities between a Marxian conceptions of political economy in general and the realm of the aesthetic (as, for instance, in Adorno's or Benjamin's work) are to be located precisely here, in the perception shared

> by both disciplines of this immense dual movement of a plane of form and a plane of substance. (265)

This affinity, however, is not enough reason to assert that economics determine aesthetics. Jameson continues his discussion of "market ideology"— the realm of ideas made hegemonic by our capitalist rule of a free market economy, which, by the way, is an illusion. "Oligopolies and multinationals," (266) the Walmarts and McDonald's that make independent entrepreneurial endeavors impossible, dominate the global system now. Even the conservative economists and philosophers, Jameson says, describe the market as "the competitive system [that] does the taming and controlling all by itself, no long needing the absolute state" (273). This idea is represented, for example, throughout US. history's pro-business, anti-business governments that form a main difference between our political parties; again, our social superstructures are dependent on the economic structures at our base. However, Jameson believes that the idea that the market is a self-sustaining entity leads to social control:

> Market ideology assures us that human beings make a mess of it when they try to control their destinies ("socialism is impossible") and that we are fortunate in possessing an interpersonal mechanism — the market— which can substitute for human hubris and planning and replace human decisions altogether. We only

> need to keep it clean and well oiled, and it now —like the monarch so many centuries ago— will see to us and keep us in line. (273)

His attitude is that "controlling their destinies" as start-up, burgeoning little capitalists is impossible in the present late-capital system, and socialism, represented here as the only thinkable way to maintain individual practical autonomy, is virtually outlawed by market ideology. He does this in order to argue against market ideology from the other side, the dominant hegemonic, conservative side, because obviously his Marxism exempts him from explaining the charms of socialism from his side of the political spectrum. Furthermore, he explains the somewhat obvious (if any kind of literary or social theory could be "obvious") cause of this market-as-god consolation. Khruschev failed so miserably to revive Marxism in the Soviet Union, as did sixties' anarchism in the U.S.A. and the Cultural Revolution in China. Well, sure, Marxist ideals and the realities of Chinese and Soviet daily life do not jibe. These perceptions of what socialism does to a country, and the dominant U.S. world view, lead us to think that capitalism is the only way to have a nice life in the world. "None of these things, however," as our friend points out, "go very far toward explaining...how the well-nigh Dickensian flavor of title and appropriation, coupon-clipping, mergers, investment banking, and other such transactions should prove to be so *sexy*" (274).

His use of such a word foreshadows the answer: the media is responsible for propagating the myth of fun-time free market economy. Moreover, the media is analogous to the

market. "It is because the "market" is as *unlike* its "concept" (or Platonic idea) as the media is unlike its own concept," that aesthetic and Marxist dialectic now applies to the media too, "that the two things are comparable" (275). Explicitly, the media offers "free" programming on radio, television, and now the Internet (mostly excluded from this book but prophetically described,) without any choice about what is actually presented; it presents an illusion of free choice while choosing for us what we can consume. Deeper still with the relationship, the market now can only work through the media.

> In the gradual disappearance of the physical marketplace, of course, and the tendential identification of the commodity with its image (or brand name or logo) ... the products sold on the market become the very content of the media image, so that, as it were, the same referent seems to maintain on both domains. (275)

Therefore, one commodity has a referent in the market and in the media, occupying both space and time in a new blending of market, information, and entertainment that characterizes the culture so many decry. Jameson cites Guy Debord's description of the extension of market and media's shady alliance. "The image, [the double referent,] is the final form of commodity reification" (276). Jameson clearly states that this does not refer to the process of advertising commercial products with images. Rather, "the very entertainment and narrative pro-

cesses of commercial television ... are, in their turn, reified and turned into so many commodities" (276). The images of the media, including the formal process of creating within a medium, become as much a product as the products they sell. Television characters, for example, are discussed as if they are "real" people with life histories printed in the newspaper. News broadcasts and soap operas share the same structure, and living people are discussed in the same venues as if they were "fictional" characters, ("fiction" being a term much thrashed by theorists.) Thus emerges

> a new realm of image reality that is both fictional (narrative) and factual, ... and which now —like the former classical "sphere of culture"— becomes semiautonomous and floats above reality, with this fundamental historical difference that in the classical period reality persisted independently of that sentimental and romantic "cultural sphere," whereas today it seems to have lost that separate mode of existence. (277)

Reality and image reality become indistinguishable in our system of blended market and media. Then reality and media themselves become indistinguishable, so that the "double referent" from before is reflexive, eliminating any "depth" or "space" between referent and reference.

One consequence of this elimination is a lack of critical distance, one of Jameson's "constitutive features of

postmodernism." Such a phrase allows Jameson to explore different spatializations of ideas, from very physical spatial issues in architecture to theoretical space in paintings and sculpture. Specifically in language theory, he revives French language theorists and writers by analyzing sentences, using Claude Simon's and other *nouveau* novels as his only examples. (My "enough with the French already!" grumblings are answered by his assertion that the *nouveau roman* is the last innovative movement in the novel. Oh.) Simon's sentences are highly descriptive but manage to describe vague, undefined "its."

> The sentence sequence leaves the mind without an object, which it therefore conveniently supplies itself in the form of an ideal or imaginary literary reference...But this image— whose elaboration might continue with the logically entailed positing of an unconscious subjectivity in which it was formed— does not exist; it is a figment of the interpretive process and a sign of the desperate malfunctioning of the subject position generated by the sentence just read. (136)

Language itself does not malfunction; the subject or object position is out of sight, as in a film's reverse shot. This relates to both the unity of referent and reference above and the history of discussion about the signified/signifier pair. Language

is unable to describe specific subjects and objects because of deconstruction's cherished lack of inherent relationship between specific words and their meanings. Even proper nouns are randomly chosen. Jameson sees Simon and the *nouveau roman* as the literary embodiment (so to speak) of Hegel's description of the failure of language to precisely describe things; in Simon's novels

> this breakdown is reexperienced over and over again as a process, a temporary runoff between the habitual onset of linguistic belief and the inevitable degradation of the signified into its material signifier or the sign itself into mere image. (139)

The breakdown of signifiers, echoing the melding of referent to reference above, is used in a different context to discuss more general aspects of postmodern art. Jameson uses Lacan's description of schizophrenia, this snapping of the relationship between signifier and signified, to describe the feeling of depthlessness within postmodernist works.

Depthlessness is, in fact, the first of four "constitutive features of postmodernism" (6). The rest are the weakening of historicity, consequent to depthlessness; "a whole new type of emotional ground tone," (6) characterized by "intensities" that can be best understood in terms of older theories of the sublime; and the intricate relationship of all these qualities to the new form of capitalism, based on new technologies as I described above. I will expand on each of these as represented by

Jameson and interpreted by myself, then see how many pages are left and decide then how to fill them. (Hee hee.)

Depthlessness involves more than the collapse of the signifier. The idea "finds its prolongation both in contemporary theory and in a whole new culture of the image" (6). Jameson goes through significant examples of this in art by comparing Any Warhol's postmodern moment with Van Gogh's modern moment, both represented by paintings of shoes. A brief description of the two paintings show that Van Gogh's tremble with individuality and the glory of the agrarian life, while Warhol's shoes are depicted in a black and white negative of shoes in a pile, "a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms" (9). Warhol's human subjects, Marilyn Monroe and other stars, "are themselves commodified and transformed into their own images" (11). Thus does the literal lack of depth in Warhol's use of color, and the pure surfacality of his subjects, reflect the market-media relationship described above. His impersonal shoe images also reflect the "death of the subject itself— the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual," (15) the broader theoretical equivalent to the earlier linguistic discussions, which is another quality of depthlessness. This is also interpreted as the end of personal artistic style, the brush stroke, the individual and unique, replaced by "the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction" (15). Jameson calls the dissolution of the subject "the waning of affect," describing not the loss of emotions, but rather "intensities." Feelings with no subject or referent are left "free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria" (16).

This euphoria will be discussed after the more immediate consequence of depthlessness: the loss of history.

> Faced with these ultimate objects— our social, historical, and existential present, and the past as 'referent'— the incompatibility of a postmodernist 'nostalgia' art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. The contradiction propels this mode, however, into complex and interesting new formal inventiveness. (19)

Some examples of new "formal inventiveness" include nostalgia films that "approach the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image" (19). Also emerges the new form of pastiche, the neutral, judgment-free "imitation of a peculiar or unique," (17) a satire without any of the bite that comes from an awareness of historical context. Nostalgia films, of course, represent the image of history replacing history itself. Jameson spends a few pages describing a book about "the disappearance of the American past," (24) where sentences have a specific personal style and seek to create a version of the Latin or French past-perfect tense.

I am surprised that Jameson, usually so, uummm, *complete*, here omits talking about Los Angeles's general tendency to compulsively rebuild shopping malls and tourist centers until the only historical buildings remaining in the metropolitan area stand in traditional immigrant districts. I

happened to notice this when I first arrived here for college three years ago. Los Angeles, the emblem of postmodern culture, rips down old (1970's) buildings to build bigger, shinier buildings that attract more paying customers. An apt example of this is the ripping down of a traditional working class Mexican-American neighborhood to build up the formidable and forbidding financial district near the Bonaventure Hotel Jameson spends so long describing. Nonetheless, postmodernism features inaccessible historical substance. So a subject, then, with no ability either to refer to itself or to refer to its history, be aesthetically represented only by a series of present-tense, temporally flat, fragments. Hence the fragmentation that characterizes popular views of the postmodern.

Fragmentation, flatness, loss of history, new technology all lead to what Jameson calls "intensities," the post-affect euphoria that appears to flavor postmodern life. He describes "the extraordinary surface of the photorealist landscape," related to new technology, "where even automobile wrecks gleam with some new hallucinatory splendor" (32). Here I am reminded, though Jameson is not, of Don DeLillo's incredible cathedral-supermarket scene in his postmodern leviathan *White Noise*.

> The automatic doors opened and closed, breathing abruptly. Colors and odors seemed sharper. The sound of gliding feet emerged from a dozen other noises, from the sublittoral drone of maintenance systems, from the rustle of newsprint as shoppers scanned their horo-

> scopes up front, from the whispers of elderly women with talcummed faces, from the steady rattle of cars going over a loose manhole cover just outside the entrance. Gliding feet. I heard them clearly, a sad numb shuffle in every aisle.... The fruit was gleaming and wet, hard-edged. There was a self-conscious quality about it. It looked carefully observed, like four-color fruit in a guide to photography. (DeLillo 169-70)

The speaker's hyper-awareness more perfectly exemplifies Jameson's "intensities" better than any example he gives. Moreover, the passage's connections between technology, reality subsumed by image reification, the fracturing of the self, and the loss of history are evident.

Jameson relates this intensity of experience to Kant's modification of Burke's theory of the sublime.

> The sublime was for Burke an experience bordering on terror, the fitful glimpse... of what was so enormous as to crush human life altogether: a description that was refined by Kant to include the quality of representation itself. (Jameson 34)

This malleable framework fits perfectly into Jameson's schema. Kant's discussions of "representation" have been

extended already by discussing how the postmodern image has collapsed onto postmodern reality. Burke's ideas are modified for late capitalist culture by transforming the enormous symbol of death, the glimpse of which causes anxious hysteria, into the multinational economic system itself. This system developed nuclear power, a global and personal system of economic dependence, delicate power differentials, and the baffling machinery that we rely upon for everything from toast to daily entertainment, but that we cannot repair. The dependence that Jameson alludes to in his discussion of the illusion of the "free market" is blatantly clear when one reflects simply on a modern automobile. Now loaded with thousands of tiny computers that operate most of the machinery, and now relied upon for safety, status, identity, and transportation, the consequences of a small glitch become disastrous. Such dependence on material objects we cannot control brings a metaphorical death of autonomy. This is described a different way by the Marxist Jameson:

> Technology may well serve as adequate shorthand to designate that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery— an alienated power, ... which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as individual praxis. (35)

Any glimpse into this enormously vast network might offer us an element of knowledge, disguised as control and autonomy, incredible enough to cause an intense euphoria along the lines of Jameson's postmodernist sublime.

Such a terrifying entity requires some means of orientation to maintain sanity. Here the "cognitive map" idea enables an individual to form a "situational representation ... to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (51). Such a mapping can help one navigate through the horrors caused by third-stage capital without that draining emotional intensity Jameson describes. Here, despite my sarcastic tone, I find Jameson's ideas prophetic, particularly in response to his incidental mentions of "the salvational nature of high technology" (46) and conspiracy theories as "degraded attempt[s] — through the figuration of high technology— to think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (38). Internet fever and the very recent *X-Files* hubbub are easily explained as attempted cognitive maps, stabs at grasping at and orienting ourselves within the vast technological network for one, and for the other, a desperation to imagine part of the global political network as a secret conspiracy controlled by veiled human beings.

Jameson is careful to emphasize that his concept of postmodernism discussed in this book "is a historical rather than a merely stylistic one" (45). Indeed, he discusses the history of postmodernism thoroughly, from its evolution as a consequence of the development of capitalism, and the analogous transition from modernism to postmodernism, to a careful discussion of all the major critics in his field. Still, his empha-

sis is about evenly weighted between historical and aesthetic issues. This is necessary for any cultural theorist seeking more than pure historical analysis or unmitigated social action.

*Postmodernism*'s structure parallels its subject matter; it describes the history and the style of postmodernism without ever defining it outright. Certainly in light of all his postmodern theories about the lack of critical distance, the dissolution of the usefulness of signifiers, and a world system almost impossible to assess, he would be silly to give any definitives about the theory itself. At one point he states, "The postmodern may well in that sense be little more than a transitional period between two stages of capitalism," (417) the next stage to be developed later. Despite this uncertainty about the nature of the idea itself, however, he goes as far as declaring "moment of truth" for postmodernism: "this whole extraordinarily demoralizing and depressing original new global space" (49). One truth underlying the entire complex of whatever is "postmodernism" is the premise of this entire book. Moreover, if one restates this thesis to a non-Marxist, it might sound a bit absurd: "all the different postmodernisms are united under the oppressive umbrella of a vast, terrifying economic, media, and political network, akin to Pynchon's '*Trystero*,' but created by capitalists." He certainly proves his point, that a Marxist analysis of this new cultural dominant works quite well. However, I'm not well acquainted enough with economic theory to properly judge the exact nature of "multinational capitalism." It sounds reasonable, and the metaphors involved are powerful, but not yet utterly convincing. I also wonder why, as a Marxist, his ideas de-emphasize, to the point of omitting, a push for social change. Perhaps he feels that the effort is hopeless, if

not for the U.S., at least for his own elite voice; perhaps he saves the social work for other books.

Another unconvincing portion of this book (as my tone may have betrayed) is the analysis of Claude Simon's novel. Jameson opens it by reflecting that the *nouveau roman* is merely a fad and might not be critically valuable because the fad is probably over. Simon's particularities, his Frenchness, his specific audience (which I'm inferring is gay, male) his literary context all make an analysis suspect because his place and importance for us today is largely unknowable. Yet, Jameson goes on with the extensive discussion. I understand that Simon's book is an excellent example of the logical extensions of postmodern ideas of signifiers, subjects, discontinuities, and "relationship through difference" (31). Nonetheless, I wonder what happened to the rest of the novels written since 1960. A cursory mention was made of a few, all *nouveau roman*, but there must have been a few others somewhere. Where does Magical Realism fall into the discussion? Some Latin American authors, Borges, Cortazar, Marquez in particular, and likely others untranslated or more obscure, discuss space and the problematized subject in exciting ways too complex to outline here.

Along these lines, I'd like to protest the aforementioned ommittance of DeLillo's *White Noise*. Not only does Jameson omit this splendid book, so apt for all his analyses, he declares outright that postmodernism produces lousy novels. Perhaps he was talking about his *nouveau roman*, because in my young naiveté, I see nothing without worth in DeLillo's novel, and nothing that cannot be more precisely understood using Jameson's ideas. I am sure that many more possible examples

of these theories exist, and are not as lousy as postmodern books are apparently supposed to be.

I admit that my gripes are petty. Overall, I believe that his framework of the four general characteristics of postmodernism and their relation to the third stage of capitalism, corresponding to the third movement of the industrial revolution, seem complete, yet not exclusive or exhaustive. Thus he retains a somewhat open, albeit cautionary, mind about his theories. I enjoy his interdisciplinary perspective, so necessary for discussing a theory with so many disparate components. He spends much of the book critiquing other theorists and defending himself against public barrages; I must admit, I skipped many of those sections because I had no hope of keeping up a proper contextual knowledge of their discussions. Still, the conflicts are exciting; such written, public debates among living and dead theorists, all lacking the intention of finding the "winning" position, comprise the Talmud. I have always respected that aspect of Judaism, and I'm glad it survives in this secular form. (Perhaps I misjudge these secular theorists; do they actually believe that one of them will eventually "prevail"?)

I find Jameson's analyses gracefully applicable to everything I see around me, especially in Los Angeles. I am almost convinced that the malls, tourist industry, and media cultures down here are governed by Jameson's rules. (I except more traditionally ethnic physical and emotional regions of the metropolis; these tend to retain historical and social context, especially when resistant to mainstream assimilation.) "Cognitive mapping" explains all kinds of phenomena that have baffled me. For example, the close social relations of com-

puter/Internet fads, X-files fever, and Renaissance reenactment groups, are better understood under the framework of an image of historicity substituting the loss of historicity created when multinational capitalists must make money off of us. The referent of our idea of structured times, the highly stratified feudal system and the simple technology of swords, not nuclear weapons, offers a moment of comfort after a hard day's impotent grappling with global oppression.

What with the extremely recent grocery store "club cards," where all our eating habits are entered as computer data into some vast network, technology is becoming more and more intimate. Computers are inserted into our bodies for our health, are becoming required in the classrooms, are serving as substitutes for an infinite number of educational, social, and practical functions. Our media is turning in on itself, as the recent rash of "self aware" action flicks and the FOX network's *X-Files* updates on their evening news programs prove. Welfare, immigration, and affirmative action reforms are eliminating even more aspects of California's slightly socialist tendencies. Only a few years after *Postmodernism* was written, its ideas seem prophetic. The society Jameson critiques has intensified every one of it's aspects discussed here. Jameson will soon be one of the theorists who can help us most with whatever mess into which we're sinking ourselves unknowably deeper.

Booker, M. Keith, ed. A Practical In*troduction to Literary Theory and Criticism*. New York: Longman Publishers USA, 1996.

DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Groden, Michael and Martin Kreiswirth, ed. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

McGowan, John. *Postmodernism and Its Critics*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Newton, K. M, ed. *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988.

# Toni Morrison: Speaking the (Formerly) Unspeakable, Completing Interpretations of American Canonical Literature

*by Toni Panetta*

(A Critical Examination of the Role of
Africanness in American Literature)

5 December, 1997
Critical Procedures in Language and Literature
Dr. William Geiger

**Toni Morrison: Speaking the (Formerly) Unspeakable, Completing Interpretations of American Canonical Literature**

**(A Critical Examination of the Role of Africanness in American Literature)**

"Afro-American culture exists and though it is clear (and becoming clearer) how it has responded to Western culture, the instances where and means by which it has shaped Western culture are poorly recognized or understood."
—Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 3

Toni Morrison asserts that the issues of race and racial inquiry have belatedly entered into the arena of academic discussion which continually examines canonical American

literature. With this recent addition to the discussion, readers and critics are able to arrive at a more complete interpretation of the texts which have shaped and defined American culture and history. The honest and public acknowledgement and contemplation of African culture in the formation of American cultural identity has generated much debate as to how critics should examine the place of Africans in American literature. In answer to this query, Morrison presents a theory of critical analysis that uses African presence as the tool with which American canonical literature is examined. Her theory draws on elements of poststructuralist literary criticism, and implements aspects of feminist critical theory in its application. By incorporating the general issue of African-American culture in her critical studies, Morrison also features aspects of multicultural literary theories. She explains that serious debate and consideration about the presence and influence of race, particularly Africanness, in canonical American literature has traditionally been avoided because of the political implications of those discussions. However, Morrison claims, while issues of race, racism, and discrimination (between cultures, not necessarily against one by others) are inherently political, the unavoidable influence that race has had on the development of American cultural identity demands that critical analyses consider the African presence in discourse. She elaborates that a nation's identity is revealed through its literature; consequently, America's identity should be studied through its canonical texts. She advocates a re-examination of these texts with special consideration applied to the presence of Africans and blackness within the works. Based on her re-examination of canonical literature, Morrison concludes that literary black-

ness is evident in major American words, and that this literary blackness both reflects and informs America's cultural identity. She asserts that it is imperative to consider literary blackness to form a complete interpretation of canonical American literature. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison presents a series of lectures and essays in which she formulates her critical theory and applies it to works by several significant American authors.

Morrison's examination of Africanness and literary blackness begins with a critical study of the language that informs the text. She explains that the language used by Americans is informative in the development of the thoughts presented by writers and interpreted by readers. Morrison explains:

> The imagination that produces work which bears and invites rereadings...implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language. Readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform within a common language shareable imaginative worlds. And although upon that struggle the positioning of the reader has justifiable claims, the author's presence—her or his intentions, blindness, and sight—is part of the imaginative activity. (*Playing in the Dark*, xii)

Toni Morrison is concerned with a "shareable language" that is available to both the writer and the reader as a means of understanding literary works. According to Morrison, within this "shareable language" are words, symbols and phrases found in Western literature (belonging to the canon comprised of European and North American works) that affect the reader's

understanding of the African presence *simply through their usage and existence within the texts.* Morrison describes her interest in how the "shareable language" used by writers to create literary works (and used by readers to understand those works) is charged with racial language that necessarily communicates conventional attitudes, beliefs, and images about Africanness. Morrison identifies these characteristics as paradoxical. "On the one hand, they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship and endless love. On the other hand, they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality, and chaos" (Morrison, "Friday on the Potomac," xv). While Morrison contends that the author's role in interpreting a text derives the fact that the author partook in the imaginative activity of creating the text, she does not subscribe to the notion of authorial intention. Rather, Morrison asserts that the author uses the "shareable language" common to herself/ himself and the reader to construct the text, but the language *itself* is instrumental in developing an interpretation for the reader. The text functions only so far as the "shareable language" allows for the reader to find meaning in the way the text has been compiled. Consequently, there are pivotal words, symbols, and codes which shape the meaning of the text. Morrison identifies racial language as examples of such pivotal words, symbols, and codes that are instrumental in determining a text's meaning. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison explores "the sources of [black images and people in expressive prose] and the effect they have on the literary imagination and its product" (x). Morrison does not restrict her examination to contemporary works. Instead, she reexamines works belonging to the American canon of

literature. She asserts that her "purpose...is to observe the panoply of this most recent and most anxious series of questions concerning what should or does constitute a literary canon in order to suggest ways of addressing the Afro-American presence in American Literature that require neither slaughter nor reification" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 1). She pays particular interest to the way that racially-charged language develops the meaning of literary works. Morrison demonstrates that contrary to conventional readings of such major American authors as Cather, Twain, Poe, and Hemingway, the African presence is strongly felt and in fact necessary for a complete understanding of the novel. Morrison asserts that the way that the African presence is depicted within these works demonstrates the roles of Africans and Africanness during the times the novels were written. She contends that the "literary blackness" found in the novels reflects the "existent blackness" of the authors' worlds.

In addition to the "literary blackness" which permeates literature and identifies the presence of Africans and Africanness, Morrison questions the authority which conventional interpretations of canonical literature are given. She explains:

> For some time now I have been thinking about the validity or vulnerability of a certain set of assumptions conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics and circulated as "knowledge." This knowledge holds that traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uninformed and unshaped by the four-hundred-year-old presence of, first, Africans and then African-Americans in the United States. It assumes that this

> presence—which shaped the body politic, the Constitution and the entire history of the culture—has had no significant place or consequence in the origin and development of that culture's literature. (*Playing in the Dark*, 5)

Furthermore, Morrison contends that accepted understandings of texts resides in the assumption that because the authors of the canonical texts were white males, the opinions, reflections, and depictions presented in those texts arose out of the white male's experience. This experience necessarily excluded the presence, or acknowledged influence, of Africanness in the development of the world (especially the post-colonial American world). However, Morrison contends that such an understanding of these texts is misinformed and misleading. She asserts that "the contemplation of this black presence is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination" (5).

Consequently, Morrison questions "whether the major and championed characteristics of our national literature—individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell—are not in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5). She calls for a re-reading and re-evaluation of canonical literature to study the African presence in the development of those qualities that have come to be identified as characteristic of North American literature. Her desire to re-examine canonical literature

through a racial lens—in particular, an African lens—is consistent with the desire of some multicultural literary critics who advocate a revision of the accepted interpretations of canonical texts. Regarding such movements within the field of multicultural literary criticism, M. Keith Booker explains:

> Multicultural theorists have demonstrated the historical complicity of the canon and of literary studies in racism, imperialism, and the general cultural domination by Western Europe and North America of most of the rest of the world. Until very recently, virtually every text in the Western literary canon was authored by a white male from Western Europe or the United States. Moreover recent rereadings of major canonical authors have concluded that many of the major texts of the canon are informed by racist biases and stereotypes. (151)

Morrison's desire to re-examine canonical texts with respect to the African presence subscribes to the latter idea that Booker addresses, that "many of the major texts of the canon are informed by racist biases and stereotypes."

Morrison acknowledges the importance of allowing and exploring African-American criticism as a unique form of critical analysis; however, she notes that she does not wish an African-American analytical perspective to replace the dominant, traditional Eurocentric tinge to criticism. Instead, Morrison advocates a co-existence of the two, which will offer equally valuable and valid interpretations, especially of literature and history as reflected in literature. She does not seek to privilege one at the expense of the other, but rather advocates

the development of both to an equally accepted level of use. Consequently, Morrison explains that her underlying interest in tracing the African presence in literature is not to promote culturally-based African-American criticism and contribute to its development, *per se*, but to demonstrate the way the African presence in literature reflects shifts in the intellectual conception of Africanness. *Playing in the Dark* does not demand that the reader/critic accept or understand African-American culture, as its own thing, as necessary for an accurate interpretation of a text. Joy James explains that *Playing in the Dark* "is not an argument for Black 'essentialism'—recognizing the political place of African-American cultural views, which manifest and mutate through time and locations" (210). Instead, Morrison asks the reader/critic to acknowledge African presence as existent within the American culture from which the canonical works arose, and to evaluate the influence of the African presence in shaping the meaning of texts. It is not a critical study of the African culture, but of its presence in American and American literature.

While Morrison is concerned with the consequence of the writer's use of racial language—part of that "shareable language" common to the reader and the writer—on the reader's understanding of Africanness, she does not focus on the potential perpetuation of imperialist or colonialist attitudes Booker mentioned that other multicultural critics have identified and criticized. Instead, Morrison explains that she intends to study American Africanism, which she describes as a form of literary criticism that examines "the origins and literary uses of...the Africanist presence" (*Playing in the Dark*, 6). Morrison explains that her definitions of Africanist and

Africanism are different from those proposed earlier in academia. She uses Africanist, in relation to its use in literature, to mean:

> the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people....As a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. (6-7)

Morrison wants to demonstrate how Africanness has been reified, both in culture and in literature, to communicate ideas about the author's world. Her examination of literature is not pronounced by the author's intended use of Africanness within his/her text, but rather is concerned with the inherent, almost subconscious inclusion of Africanness in American canonical works. She demonstrates that this inclusion is almost subconscious because of the way that Africanness permeates and shapes the "shareable language" from which the author draws to construct a text.

According to Morrison, "American Africanism makes it possible to say and not say, to inscribe and erase, to escape and engage, to act out and act on, to historicize and render timeless. it provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom" (7). Morrison identifies American

Africanism as demonstrative of exclusionary tactics common in many imperialist countries. Morrison further explains that "this shared process of exclusion—of assigning designation and value—has led to the popular and academic notion that racism is a "natural," if irritating, phenomenon" (7). The result of exclusionary practices—a marginalized group, in this case, Africans, and later, African Americans—is similar to Foucault's concept of "the Other." Morrison explains that "the othering" of Africans in America was a unique phenomenon, despite the similar practice in other imperialist countries. She contends that America's unique situation derived from the idea of cultural hegemony that other European countries had not yet embraced or employed. In the Young American nation, "the process of organizing American coherence through a distancing Africanism became the operative mode of a new cultural hegemony" (8). Social organization as a result of race was the primary means of establishing identity in early America. Morrison elaborates, "Michael Rustin has described race as 'both an empty category and one of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categorization'" ("Friday on the Potomac," ix). Societal hierarchy in early American was based on the need to define blackness, then offer blackness as the reified object which shapes its opposite, whiteness. From these opposing categories the two categories into which early (white male) Americans placed themselves were derived. Thus, throughout the development of American cultural identity, Africans and Africanness were subjugated to a subservient role. According to Morrison, this relegation of Africanness to an inferior position in the American cultural hierarchy is reflected in much of the literature that grew out of the postcolonial era.

The examination to the African presence in literature will yield a comprehensible view of "literary blackness" as a tool to re-interpreting American canonical texts. Morrison contends that gaining an understanding of the place, presence, and use of Africanness in literature, of literary blackness, will lead to a similar understanding of literary whiteness, both its origins and its significance. She asserts that "it may be possible to discover, through a close look at literary 'blackness,' the nature—even the cause—of literary 'whiteness'" (*Playing in the Dark*, 9). Morrison also contends that once literary "whiteness" is acknowledged, it too can (and should) be examined. Of particular interest to Morrison are the questions of what literary whiteness "is...*for*...[and] what parts...the invention and development of whiteness play in the construction of what is loosely described as 'American'?" (9).

Morrison delineates a dichotomy of "blackness" and "whiteness," whereby an understanding of one will yield an analogous understanding of the other. Her contentions demonstrate a necessary idea or concept for comprehension of its opposite. This polarization of ideas also demonstrates the exclusionary tactic of which Foucault's "other" is an inevitable consequence. Once "blackness" has been established and defined, that which does not exhibit any attributes of "blackness" can be identified as belonging to "not-blackness"; here, "whiteness." The emphasis shifts from defining all others in relation to blackness to defining others with relation to whiteness, thus privileging whiteness as the dominant characteristic against which all others are measured. Consequently, because "blackness" was not "whiteness," it (blackness) became the marginalized Other while whiteness assumed the role of the

"preferred". Of concern to Morrison is how the shift from emphasis on (and preference for) "blackness" to "whiteness" occurred. Thus, Morrison seeks to explain how whiteness came to be privileged at the expense of blackness, and similarly, how blackness came to be derogated when considering American culture.

Until recently, race and racial language have been overlooked or ignored as important areas for exploration in literary criticism. Morrison offers as explanation the uncomfortableness of acknowledging the question of race in literature: if a critic examines the power dynamics depicted in literature as functions of race, that critic necessarily identifies a political undercurrent in the text, thereby leaving him/herself vulnerable to passionate criticism toward the contrary. Morrison succinctly notes:

> When matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of a humanistic nostrum—or a dismissal mandated by the label "political."...A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only "universal" but also "race-free" risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist. (12)

Accordingly, the very act of acknowledging race as a characteristic to study within literature concedes that what exists for analysis is a recognizable difference and inequality between races, although it has been long-denied in American history. Morrison explains:

> ...in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse. Evasion has fostered

another, substitute language in which the issues are encoded, foreclosing open debate....It is further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture. To notice is to recognize an already discredited difference. (9-10)

Morrison further contends that this omission of acknowledgement of the significance of race—both in cultural and literary development—has tainted the validity of conventional interpretations of canonical texts. Morrison explains that the practice of omission is perpetuated by the idea that silence about race—a lack of discussion and debate about the influence of Africanness—actually enables the marginalized "other" to continue to exist within the framework of the dominant society. The "other's" existence only continues invisibly, so as not to disturb cultural and literary equilibrium. However, Morrison argues:

> According to this logic, every well-bred instinct argues *against noticing* and forecloses adult discourse. It is just this concept of literary and scholarly moeurs (which functions smoothly in literary criticism, but neither makes nor receives credible claims in other disciplines) that has terminated the shelf life of some once extremely well-regarded American authors and blocked access to remarkable insights in their works. (10)

In essence, Morrison argues that the interpretations of texts which do not consider the issue of Africanness are incom-

plete analyses, because the readers and critics have disregarded and dismissed fundamental pieces of texts. Such incomplete literary analyses are analogous to the reader-critic who tries to find meaning in a completed puzzle without recognizing or acknowledging the "edge-pieces"—those which form the frame and define the boundaries of the image contained within the puzzle and of the puzzle itself. For Morrison, literary blackness does indeed frame a work, because the African presence determines how the texts are able to develop.

Morrison initiates the "adult discussion" and provides access to the "remarkable insights" by questioning the methods of literary criticism that produced the interpretations of canonical work that have come to be accepted. She then offers a critical theory which incorporates a new tools of analysis. Foremost, she identifies literary "blackness" as the primary variable to study while re-examining works of the American canon. She elaborates, "I want to address ways in which the presence of Afro-American literature and the awareness of its culture but resuscitate the study of literature in the United States and raise that study's standards" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 3-4). Second, Morrison explains that the responsibility of the author for the creation of texts is imperative for this new critical geography which advocates the examination of racial language in literature. It is through the author that "shareable language" takes form to represent the author's world. The author's creative imagination produces the texts which readers and critics examine, dissect, and interpret for meaning. Morrison shares, "the ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. The languages they use and

the social and historical context in which these languages signify and indirect and direct revelations of that power and its limitations" (*Playing in the Dark*, 15). Consequently, Morrison places emphasis on the author's use of language to construct a meaningful text.

When initiating her analysis of literature, Morrison concedes that she understood and interpreted the literary "blackness" she encountered in a conventional way: that "black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers...other than as objects...a reflection...of the marginal impact that blacks had on the lives of the characters in the work as well as the creative imagination of the author" (15). However, Morrison's experience as a writer challenged her to transcend the conventional method of analysis. Instead of relegating herself to the position of "uninformed"-reader-encountering a text, she "stopped reading as a reader and began to read as a writer" (15). This shift in critical focus, to that of an informed writer-reader who brings with her the knowledge and understanding of the task and ability of the author to draw upon "shareable language" to portray the imagined, altered Morrison's critical lens of analysis. Morrison explains the significance of this shift to approaching texts when she says:

> [It was] important...to contemplate how Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom moved and enriched the text in self-conscious ways, to consider what the engagement meant for the work of the writer's imagination.
>
> How does literary utterance arrange itself when it tries to imagine an Africanist other? What are the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to

> accommodate this encounter? What does the inclusion of Africans or African-Americans do to and for the work? (16-7)

By relying on her knowledge of the writer's experience, Morrison came to understand that the canonical literature which included Africanness demonstrates the authors' struggles to represent themselves. According to Morrison, "what became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17). Consequently, the canonical literature which chronicles the cultural development of post-colonial America only exists in relation to the African presence which was so long repressed within that society.

Morrison identifies Poe as one of the most significant writers to emerge from early America and in whose writing she can demonstrate the influence of the African presence on the construction of American society. She concurs with scholars who propose that Poe's works are instrumental in understanding the Young America that embraced and perpetuated the notion of America as "the land of opportunity." In her critical examination, Morrison chooses a selection from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* to demonstrate the representation of the "escape from the Old World to the New World" ideology which has been romanticized as the foundation of post-revolutionary American development. Morrison uses as her example the end of *The Narrative*, a scene in which Pym and his (white male) comrade record their encounter with a consuming whiteness, into which their boat enters. After their initial encounter with

the looming whiteness, the characters notice that their native (black) companion, Nu-Nu, is dead. An afterword to the text explains that the whiteness killed Nu-Nu (32). This explanation is consistent with the attitude held by settlers (white male settlers) in America—that arrival to America is their whiteness, which they not only encounter but embrace; and that the blackness represents the Old World from which they have fled, often generalized as repressive and inhibiting. Morrison contends that the "images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness—a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing" (33). Thus the American literature that used whiteness and blackness as metaphors for hope in the New World and oppression in the Old World, respectively, use the writing style of romanticism to capture the spirit of the young nation. However, as Morrison notes, "it is difficult to read the literature of young America without being struck by how antithetical it is to our modern rendition of the American Dream" (35). She explains that in this growing body of national literature, writers continuously recaptured the habits and attitudes of the worlds from which immigrants were fleeing; these abandoned lands and attitudes came to be associated with bleakness; darkness; and even the unchanging, as Young Americans considered themselves to be progressive with their optimistic focus on the future. Regarding the romantic style employed by early American writers, Morrison explains:

> For young America [romanticism] had everything: nature as subject matter, a system of symbolism, a thematics of the search for self-valorization and valida-

> tion—above all, the opportunity to conquer fear imaginatively and to quiet deep insecurities. It offered platforms for moralizing and fabulation, and for the imaginative entertainment of violence, sublime incredibility, and terror—and terror's most significant, overweening ingredient: darkness, with all the connotative value it awakened. (37)

The place and significance of this darkness took its meaning and shape from that part of the American population which seemed to have made itself useful for exactly that purpose. The connection between African blackness and literary darkness was inevitable. According to Morrison, "there is no romance free of what Herman Melville called "the power of blackness," especially not in a country in which there was a resident population, already black, upon which the imagination could play; through which historical, moral, metaphysical, and social fears, problems, and dichotomies could be articulated" (37). Consequently the slave came to signify all that America was not: oppressed, subject to the laws and religions of a tyrannical motherland, and lacking in opportunity for individual success. To be an American meant the extreme opposite, and it was important for Americans to preserve their freer selves. Thus the Constitution was written to ensure the rights of (white)man. Morrison argues that without the Africanist presence in America, the Constitution would not have held the same idea of individual liberty upon which the concept of America is based. "The rights of man, for example, an organizing principle upon which the nation was founded, was inevitably yoked to Africanism. Its history, its origin is perma-

nently allied with another seductive concept: the hierarchy of race....Nothing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery" (38). Thus the American identity transformed itself from one of common nationality, Americanness through a common geographic home, to one of un-identification. To be free meant not to be enslaved, nor to identify with those who were enslaved—the black population. Consequently, to be American was *not* to be black. Black and blackness came to signify all that was avoided and reviled, while whiteness came to signify all that was desirable and good.

This explanation of the American identity answers Morrison's query as to how the shift occurred regarding identification of self in early America: measuring things and people against blackness progressed to measuring things and people against whiteness. Morrison expands her query (from studying the shift of referent) by questioning how this shift is intellectualized. She asserts, "More interesting is what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism" (8). Her question seeks to explain how intellectual domination by one (whiteness) over the other (blackness) could firmly establish itself as a valid practice. For explanation, Morrison points to the European settlers' belief that entrance to America brought with it autonomy, now recognized as individualism; authority; and uniqueness; all of which were realized by the settler's sense of absolute power. He identified himself as having absolute power over himself, but the penultimate display of *being* absolutely power*ful* was his mastery over others; in American

history these "others" were identified as the African slaves (44). Morrison explains that this relationship, American as absolutely powerful, slave as savage force to be controlled, is reflected in American canonical literature. She notes:

> Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and an invisible mediating force. Even, and especially, when American texts are not "about" African presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation....Race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor...necessary to the construction of Americanness... (46-7)

Morrison contends that the source of American identity—*not* enslaved, *not* black—is ingrained within the very word American. She explains that "American" connotes whiteness. Whereas in cultures such as South Africa additional modifiers (e.g., "white," "black," or "colored") are needed to clarify what type of citizen one means by the term "South African", in America that is untrue. "American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen" (47). It is evident that race informs the meaning of a term thought to be inclusive of and applicable to all who are geographically located within North America. This term, a very significant symbol from the "shareable language" used by American writers and readers, demonstrates the influence of Africanness in cultural and literary discourse.

For Morrison, American history and cultural development, as it is represented in literature, cannot be completely understood without considering the African presence which framed Americanness. Any interpretation of literature which suggests meaning without reference to blackness is blind, not having acknowledged Africanness as a central reference of societal structure. Morrison demands that "reading and charting the emergence of an Africanist persona in the development of a national literature is both a fascinating project and an urgent one, if the history and criticism of our literature is to become accurate" (48). For her, American literature *cannot* be understood without contemplating the place of Africanness both within the text (although in some cases Africans as objects appear to be absent) and the culture which fostered the text. Indeed, discourse in America—literary or otherwise—is shallow if the African presence remains unacknowledged and accounted for:

> How could one speak of profit, economy, labor, progress, suffragism, Christianity, the frontier, the formation of new states, the acquisition of new lands, education, transportation (freight and passengers), neighborhoods, the military—of almost anything a country concerns itself with—without having as a referent, at the heart of the discourse, at the heart of the definition, the presence of Africans and their descendants? (50)

Africans provided the often-thought invisible line of demarcation for citizenship: they provided the labor for a healthy economy, but did not regulate it; they were classified as free in

some new states, but they did not decide when they were free; they did not receive education; nor did they serve in the military. Thus to be American meant to be involved in those central issues; not-Americans were excluded. Reflected in literature, only white Americans could be characters who enjoyed the ability to participate in free society. If texts presented a conflict of freedom, they presented the African's exclusion.

Morrison turns to several major authors to demonstrate the necessity of the not-American to articulate the ideas of the American. She examines Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, a work of Cather's that has traditionally been labeled as problematic due to a failure of creation on Cather's part. She explains, "References to this novel in much Cather scholarship are apologetic, dismissive, even cutting in their brief documentation of its flaws—of which there are a sufficient number" (18). While conventional interpretations have identified style and presentation—authorial attributes—as the causes for the flaws of the work, Morrison identifies the most important flaw to be the interpretations themselves *for having ignored* "the problem [of] trying to come to terms critically and artistically with the novel's concerns: the power and license of a white slave mistress over her female slaves" (18). Morrison contends that without the African characters *and* their condition, Sapphira, the white mistress, would have no means to exert her power. She depends upon her slaves to give meaning to her demands. Indeed, it is a dependence upon the African characters—by both Sapphira and Cather as author—that shapes the actions and abilities of Sapphira and the novel. Furthermore, in the plot's concern with the escape of "the slave

girl" from the title, Cather explores her own ideas regarding race and the racial culture of her America. Specifically, the escape plan "functions as a means for the author to meditate on the moral equivalence of free white women and enslaved black women" (27). Morrison's assertion that the novel functions as a means of self-reflection for Cather—with respect to race, slavery, and the relationships between Blacks and Whites in America—demonstrates Morrison's earlier contention that the author's creative imagination is significant to study. Morrison relies on her technique of approaching texts as a writer-critic. Her explanation of Cather's dependence upon the African characters exhibits traces of a previous postulation, that "the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious" (17). Thus, Cather's inclusion of the issue of slavery within her canon of works enables Cather as author to "literate"—to examine through literature—a defining aspect of American culture.

Morrison demonstrates that a re-examination of *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, when critically studying the presence of Africans and the African condition as it exists within the text and America, offers a different and comparable interpretation of the work. Morrison's evaluation exhibits the way racial issues—overlooked in conventional critical analyses of the same work—shape the structure of the narrative. The inclusion of literary "blackness"—here in the form of the slave community—serves as a guide to mapping out a meaning of the text and of postcolonial American society that has not yet been thoroughly examined. Thus, Morrison shows that con-

ventional understandings of Cather's work have failed to comprehend the significance of the African presence in defining the white slave mistress—her role, her actions, and her representation of Americanness.

As further demonstrations of the tool of enablement that literary blackness provides for the writer, Morrison briefly discusses the pivotal roles black characters have in many major authors' works. In Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim acts as the unfree thing that Huck recognizes as human; however, Jim could not be freed at the end of the work, because without Jim—the representation of not-free—Huck's freedom would lose its meaning (56). Additionally, Morrison shares that Poe, Faulkner, and Hemingway use blackness as figurations for their protagonists to escape from a sense of enslavement. Traditional black things—the soul of an African king, the experience of having gone to Africa—enable the characters to emerge unencumbered by whatever societal obligations had oppressed them before their encounters with blackness. Consequently, Morrison explains that "images of blackness can be evil *and* protective, rebellious *and* forgiving, fearful *and* desirable—all of the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable. Or so our writers seem to say" (59).

The place of blackness in discourse extends beyond literary use. The African presence has become situated within the "shareable language" used in all forms of discourse. Morrison asserts that "racism...has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before"

(63). Consequently, the need to examine literature with an awareness to the presence of Africanness as a referent for meaning heightens in its relevance. As such, discourse—literary or otherwise—requires understanding of the place of blackness in determining the corresponding meaning of the whiteness that is overtly represented. Morrison argues that "the metaphorical and metaphysical uses of race occupy definitive places in American literature, in the "national" character, and ought to be a major concern of the literary scholarship that tries to know it" (63).

However, the significance of blackness in discourse is best studied through literature, due to the immortality of the written word—once recorded, not forgotten. It is imperative to study the implications of literary blackness because, as Morrison contends, "cultural identities are formed and informed by a nation's literature" (39). This idea is an extension of Said's assertion that "the novel is implicated in the project of empire" (McCarthy *et al*, 250). Consequently, America must be examined through its literature; most importantly, the early development of Americanness must be studied in order to understand contemporary notions of American culture. In studying early forms of Americanness, Morrison argues that the place of blackness must be traced within the nation's canon. In Morrison's critical approach, canonical American literature reflects the nation's attitudes towards and uses of Africans and Africanness. The literature is important to examine through this blackness-informed lens because the texts demonstrate the intellectual concepts maintained and perpetuated at the time the texts were written. Morrison explains that "the literature has an additional concern and subject matter: the private imagina-

tion interacting with the external world it inhabits" (*Playing in the Dark*, 65-6). Thus by studying this literature, the reader-critic can understand the imaginative process by which Africanness came to connote darkness, primitiveness, ignorance, and other generally negative concepts within the literary framework.

After re-examining American canonical literature, Morrison identified certain patterns and techniques that major authors repeatedly used to incorporate Africanness in their works. She identifies six methods that writers use to actively engage blackness as a meaningful concept within their works: economy of stereotype; metonym displacement; metaphysical condensation; fetishization; dehistoricizing allegory; and patterns of explosive, disjointed, repetitive language (67-9). By using racial stereotypes, the author is not responsible for "specificity, accuracy, or...useful description" in the presentation of African characters (67). Metonymic displacement allows the writer to rely upon the reader to give meaning to the text. By relying on the reader's external associations of the words used in the text, i.e., their non-literary meanings, "color coding and other physical traits become metonyms that displace rather than signify the Africanist character" (68). This is a function of the "shareable language" upon which both rely for understanding of the words in the text. When writers use the technique of metaphysical condensation, they collapse "social and historical differences into universal differences" (68). Examples include attributing animalistic qualities to the African characters (e.g., monkey- or ape-like imagery for physical description); or devolving the African character so as to deprive him of "inherently" human (or American, as in the

specific context of the canonical American literature which Morrison re-examines) abilities: replacing coherent and expressive speech with incomprehensible grunts.

The author employs fetishization as a tool to depict sexual, erotic, or exotic attitudes and behaviors which, if attributed to "white" characters or ideas, would otherwise be considered inappropriate, taboo, or otherwise "not done" in literature. The African presence enables the writers to introduce and explore the unspeakable realm of sexuality which the proper white (American) persona cannot. By extension, "fetishization is a strategy often used to assert the categorical absolutism of civilization and savagery" (68). Next, the practice Morrison identifies as "dehistoricizing allegory" produces the effect of distancing historical accuracy from literary depictions in which the subject matter, usually the civilization (or dis-civilization) of Africans, is presented. To Morrison, "this produces foreclosure rather than disclosure. If difference is made so vast that the civilizing process becomes indefinite—taking place across an unspecified amount of time—history, as a process of becoming, is excluded from the literary encounter" (68). The final method, the use of disjointed language, is supposed to reflect an inherent trait of the subject matter discussed by that language. Typically erratic, irrational language, thoughts, and behaviors are either attributed to African characters who appear in texts where numerous races are represented; or are used in connection with images pertaining to and represented by literary blackness (e.g., the process of dying, mystery, sexual encounters, etc.) (69).

These six methods, of using literary blackness to construct meaning in a text, demonstrate the way the writer's

creative imagination draws upon an American "shareable language" that is itself informed by the African presence. Thus, Morrison contends that "studies in American Africanism...should be investigations of the ways in which a nonwhite, Africanist presence and personae have been constructed—invented—in the United States, and of the literary uses this fabricated presence has served" (90). It is evident that Morrison's American Africanism is a study of the way that American writers have used Africanism—the African presence and "blackness"—to give meaning to their works.

Morrison's critical technique borrows from multicultural and feminist schools of literary criticism. Heather MacDonald asserts, "that Morrison is in fact quite familiar with race and gender studies is clear from the derivative quality of her prose; [*Playing in the Dark*] could not have been written without prior knowledge of contemporary criticism" (26-7). The main aspect of Morrison's criticism that aligns her with multicultural critics is her desire to study the African and African-American culture and how that culture has contributed to literature. She is concerned with both the actual creation of African-American works by and/or about Africans, as well as the way that Africanness is depicted in "not-African" texts. Morrison outlines three dimensions that can form the basis of African American literary studies. The first "is...a theory of literature that...accommodates Afro-American literature: one that is based on its culture, its history, and the artistic strategies the works employ to negotiate the world it inhabits" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 11). This theory focuses on African-American culture—its nuances, characteristics, and defining differences from European-American cul-

ture—as the primary object of examination. By understanding the culture, the critic can study the use and appearance of cultural traits—including method of communication, religious beliefs, gender roles and expectations, and community dynamics—in literature.

Morrison's second method of analysis of African-American literature focuses not on the culture itself as the tool for interpreting the text, but on the *existence* of an African culture that interacts with its surrounding non-African culture. She explains that "another [method] is the examination and re-interpretation of the American canon, the founding nineteenth-century works, for the "unspeakable things unspoken"; for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature" (11). This focus enables the critic to study the way the existence of one (African/African-American) culture helps to define aspects of another (American/European-American) culture. The application of this theory towards literature examines the influences of the African presence on the actions, abilities, and thoughts of the white culture. In particular, Morrison is concerned with early American literature and the major works and authors that have contributed to the development of American culture as a textually definable notion.

Extending ideas from this second method, Morrison's final technique for African-American literary analysis focuses on African-Americans and African-Americanness in contemporary literature. "A third is the examination of contemporary and/or non-canonical literature for this presence...the resonances, the structural gear-shifts, and the *uses* to which Afro-

American narrative, persona, and idiom are put in contemporary 'white' literature" (11) This theory allows for an exploration into the influence of the acknowledged African persona in literature. Unlike the second technique, where the Africanness must be unearthed and then used as a tool for comprehension of the text, this third method does not need to establish an African presence as its first step. As an extension of the second, it is more concerned with non-canonical works, especially those that have been labeled as "non-white".

Morrison forms her critical analysis from the second method explained above. She is interested in exploring a relationship between literary blackness and whiteness where, conventionally, one has not been recognized to exist. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", Morrison lays the groundwork for the critical method she develops in *Playing in the Dark.* In the former essay, she puts forth many hypotheses which she develops in the latter work:

> It only seems that the canon of American literature is "naturally" or "inevitably" "white."...Never questioning the strategies of transformation...disenfranchise[s] the writer, diminish[es] the text and render[s] the bulk of the literature aesthetically and historically incoherent—an exorbitant price for cultural (whitemale) purity... ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 14)

Here Morrison suggests that critical inquiries into early American literature, from a perspective previously unused—the defining influence of Africanness on American cultural identity in literature—will enhance conventional readings of the texts. She does not seek to destroy, reject, or replace the conventional

interpretations provided by earlier techniques of analysis. Instead, Morrison intends to complete those interpretations by providing a means for studying and understanding the African presence within those texts. She proposes that "the re-examination of founding literature of the United States for the unspeakable unspoken may reveal those texts to have deeper and other meanings, deeper and other power, deeper and other significances" (14). Thus, Morrison advocates a method of literary analysis that will re-examine canonical American literature to understand the place of Africanness in the development of a national identity.

Morrison's theory of critical analysis also borrows from feminist theories of literary criticism. The similarity primarily resides in the aspects of multicultural criticism from which she derives her critical theory. Booker explains the connection between multicultural theories of criticism and feminist theories when he says, "Multicultural theory has much in common with feminist theory in the way it poses fundamental challenges to traditional literary canons and traditional modes of literary interpretation" (151). Similar to feminist studies which locate women as an objectified group that enables male characters to have meaning, Morrison locates Africanness as the enable of white culture. In addition to adopting this strategy employed by feminist critics, Morrison also adopts the same call for re-analysis: she urges a re-reading of canonical literature to demonstrate the usefulness and validity of her theory. Morrison attributes the success of feminist theories of criticism as being the enabling tool for multicultural criticism to occur and to be considered seriously within the academic debate concerning interpretation and definition of American canonical

literature. Regarding the African-America school of critical analysis, Morrison explains, "part of the history of this particular debate is located in the successful assault that the feminist scholarship of men and women (black and white) made and continues to make on traditional literary discourse" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 2).

Morrison's critical strategy relies heavily upon post-structuralist theory, and particularly incorporates assertions made by Derrida. Essential to Morrison's theory is the Derridean notion that a thing's absence does not equate to its non-existence. Rather, that thing's absence actually constitutes its presence: the recognition of a thing's "not-being" makes the thing "be". MacDonald contends that "Morrison knows enough to exploit the poststructuralist convention that the absence of a thing signifies its presence" (28). Similarly, Morrison employs the poststructuralist rejection of the structuralist notion of the self-referential authority that written-word-as-sign-reveals-meaning. According to McCarthy *et al*:

> Contemporary poststructural and postcolonial theorists...have deconstructed the authority of the sign by drawing its veil and revealing the hollowness of its claim to absolute presence. Morrison...in...*Playing in the Dark*, deconstructs the trestle of signification that provides the matrix of a purported white American cultural autonomy registered in Euroamerican fiction. She challenges the language of self-referentiality that has been used to support the idea of a free-standing, self-forming white male identity and authority. (252)

Morrison rejects the European American notion that American canonical literature reflects early America only because it

explores the lives of early (white male) Americans. Instead, she deconstructs the dominant paradigm that culture relies on self-referential arguments that cannot be subjected to criticism. Morrison contends that the "early American culture," as an object of reflection in literature, must be broken down in order to understand its essence: what constitutes "early American culture"? Consequently, in her critical theory, Morrison explains that a fundamental feature of early American culture was an inextricably entwined and exploited African population or subculture. The interplay between the African culture and the European-American culture created the early American culture revealed in literature. Consequently, the European-American lens of literary criticism is blurred, because traditionally, it excludes from consideration even the existence of the African presence. McCarthy *et al* conclude that Morrison's "work registers a deep affinity with a larger global community of postcolonial writers now engaged in a project of deconstructing colonizing Western master narratives" (248).

Morrison's critical approach to canonical American texts introduces a new theory for readers and critics to consider when interpreting the works that have reflected and shaped American cultural identity. Morrison explains that her theory finds its inception in the ability to discuss matters of race in the academic environment—a discussion that had traditionally been avoided. In her introduction to *Race-**ing** Justice, **En**-gender**ing** Power*, Morrison explains, "in matters of race and gender, it is now possible and necessary, as it seemed never to have been before, to speak about these matters without the barriers, the silences, the embarrassing gaps in discourse" (xxx). Morrison finds poignancy in her ability to finally

engage in mature dialogue regarding matters of race; what she finds most significant is the way this enables her (and other literary critics) to re-examine major American works by looking at the presence of Africans and blackness. Morrison contends that this new lens of analysis reveals an understanding of the development of American cultural identity that had not been articulated in earlier studies of the same texts: one based on the African presence in early America. Her examination of early American texts with a particular consideration for the presence of Africanness revealed a corresponding development of literary "blackness" as a tool of enablement in developing the (white male) American persona. Morrison explains that this revelation should be considered by the educated reader-critic who seeks to find meaning in the texts of American authors because this lens allows for the engagement of an important part of American culture—the African presence—in the consideration of America's canon of literature. Earlier in her career, Morrison asserted that "canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range (of criticism...), is the clash of cultures. And *all* of the interests are vested" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken," 8). By this, Morrison meant that the continual examination and definition of the American canon that occurs in academia must consider every relevant aspect. Until recently, the place of Africans and Africanness in the American canon was not critically examine or even considered. Morrison insists that an American canon that does not consider the place of Africanness in the nation's literature is an incomplete canon. American Africanism, as Morrison refers to the technique of using literary blackness to define the roles of

the non-African characters, offers a tool for the critic to use to formulate a more complete interpretation of canonical literature.

REFERENCE LIST

Booker, M. Keith. "Multicultural Literary Criticism." *A Practical Introduction to Literary*

*Theory and Criticism.* New York: Longman Publishers, 1996. 149-63.

——. "Deconstructive Literary Criticism." *A Practical Introduction to Literary Theory and*

*Criticism.* New York: Longman Publishers, 1996. 55-69.

James, Joy. "Politicizing the Spirit: 'American Africanisms' and the African Ancestors in the

Essays of Toni Morrison." *Cultural Studies* 9. (May 1995): 210-25.

MacDonald, Heather. "Toni Morrison as Literary Critic." *Academic Questions* 7 (Summer

1994): 26-36.

McCarthy, Cameron, S. David, K.E. Supriya, C. Wilson-Brown, A. Rodriguez, H. Godina. "The

Hypocrisy of Completeness: Toni Morrison and the Conception of the Other." *Cultural*

*Studies* 9 (May 1995): 247-55.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* New York:

Vintage Books, 1992.

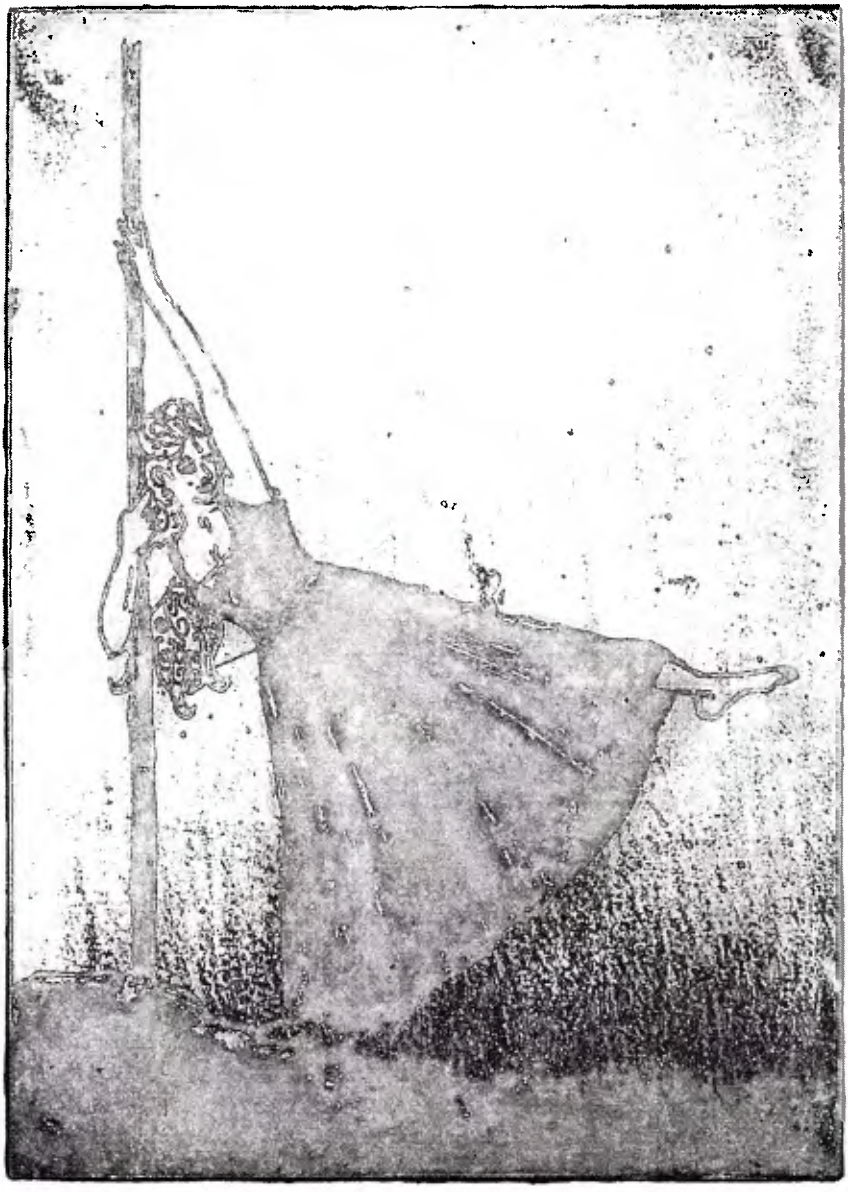
——. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American

Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (Winter, 1989): 1-34.

——. "Introduction: Friday on the Potomac." *Race-**ing** Justice, **En**-gender**ing** Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality.*

Ed. Toni Morrison. New York: Pantheon Books, 1992. viii-xxx.

**The following three essays are the 1998 winners of the Freshman Writing Contest.**



Siren Nicole Coates Burton

# Truth Versus Story
# or
# Follow Your Heart Not Your History

*by Katy Stiman*

My family has a very strong tradition of story telling. Most of my knowledge of my family, until recently, was through stories that have been passed down for generations. In the last year I have begun researching my family tree and trying to uncover actual proof in documents, instead of going on old wives tales. I started with trying to verify the stories I remembered being told, mostly by my Great Aunt Anna, who died a few years ago. I was very close to her and she used to tuck me into bed at nights when I stayed with her and tell me stories about my grandmother, who had died a few weeks before I was born. While researching my family tree I found some of the stories she had told weren't entirely true. When I first discovered this I was disappointed and even angry, but as time went on I began to realize that I was actually glad she had told me the story the way she wished it had happened instead of the way it really happened, because it made me a more generous person. It also showed me the way many myths and fairy tales are created, and taught me that sometimes the story is better than the truth.

My favorite story as a child was about my grandmother when she was relatively young. It was always told to me in Yiddish, and it still sometimes difficult to translate, but I will do my best. My grandfather Samuel and my grandmother Hana Rifke had been married in Germany. Hana was my

grandfather's second wife. She only had one child with him, and that was my father, but Samuel had twelve other children with his first wife. When Hitler began to come to power my family figured out what was happening and decided to leave their estate outside Berlin. When they left my grandmother was pregnant with my father. They couldn't take any of their possessions with them, and they had to pay so much money to the people who got all of them out that they didn't have much to take with them, but the sailed to America.

my grandmother had been a piano teacher in Germany. When she was a young girl her father had given her a beautiful baby grand piano, which she had to leave behind when my family fled Germany. When World War II ended she was the only one able to leave the states for long enough time to go back to Germany and search for any of our relatives who might still be alive. Shortly after she arrived she saw one of her old neighbors whose husband had been an S.S Officer. This is where the tales begin to differ. As my aunt told the story the women, named Mishe, told Hana that she and her husband had done something for her. My grandmother went to her home and in their living room was my grandmother's piano. According to my aunt Hana had the piano sent home, and also brought back a fur coat that her neighbors had also kept. My aunt told me that the piano in my living room was that very piano. I later found out the truth.

I began my research by calling my other Great Aunt Ida. I asked her to tell me any other family stories that might help me in my research. I also asked her for some details about the stories that my aunt had told me, like the last name of the old neighbors, and when exactly Hana flew back to Germany.

It was then that Ida told me the true story. It turns out that when my grandmother met her old neighbor the women spat at her and called her a dirty Jew. It was the other neighbor, Lana Gretner, who had my grandmother's old coat. Ida told me that the piano in my living room was from a pawn shop in Boston. My grandfather had bought it fir my grandmother when my father was two years old.

I was shocked that Anna's story had been false. I talked to my father, and he verified Ida's story. I then began to think about family stories and traditions, as I reached a revelation; one of the things Anna had always said was true, "The best stories don't have to be true, only told from the heart." If my aunt had told me the true story, I wouldn't have learned anything positive about human beings. I would have been bitter at the evil German women who spat at my grandmother, and I wouldn't have learned anything about treating others as you would like to be treated. I always thought of that story as a lesson. Whenever I was put in such a situation, I would remember that kind German lady who was so loving, and do my best to do the right thing, whether it was returning a wallet with money intact, or sharing my cookie with a friend on the play yard.

I began to research my Aunt Anna thoroughly, trying to figure out why she would have told me such a falsehood, and I discovered that she was a women who was far ahead of her time, and a very creative women. My family had all come to America in the early forties, when Anna was only sixteen. When she turned twenty-one she asked her father if he would give her the money she stood to inherit when he died, and then cut her out of the will. He actually agreed, and my aunt took

the money and moved to Los Angeles, leaving her whole family behind in Boston. I realized that she must have been very strong willed, and independent. She only told triumphant stories. She was a very imaginative young girl, and showed enough ingenuity to figure out a way to get money to move across the nation. This helped me understand some of her motives. She wanted me to be strong, like her, and so she tried to tell me the stories that would make me stronger. So instead of showing how my grandmother was degraded, she told me she had triumphed over a horrible time when her people were oppressed, by finding a kind person amongst all the others.

She used the money she got from her father to attend college in Los Angeles where she studied English and history. She was the first person in my family to graduate college in America, and if I graduate, I will be the second. It seems like her plan to make me s strong as her has succeeded, and I'm beginning to feel that I am following in her footsteps. She then proceeded to write a novel in German which was published in West Germany. I managed to obtain a copy of her novel, in German. I do not speak German myself, but my father does. He translated the first chapter for me, but refused to do any more because he didn't have time. The title of the book translated is, "The Music That Haunted The Night." In the first chapter we meet Berthe, who fits my grandmother's description entirely. It begins when Berthe is seven years old, and her father gives her a piano. She learns to play Chopin and Beethoven. Her father would listen to her play for hours. That's all of the story I could get translated, but it makes me think that the whole story is about my grandmother. I tried to find an English translation of the story, but the books were only

published for a brief period in Germany and were never translated into any other languages. It was then I saw how important my grandmother was to Anna. Hana was her next eldest sister, and Anna looked up to her. She admired her for teaching music, and for having the personal strength to return to Germany alone to try to find out about our family. Naturally she didn't tell me that Mishe spit on my grandmother, because she held my grandmother in such high regard that it was unimaginable to her. She created a story which showed Hana the way she had pictured her, rather than at her weakest moment.

She also admired Hana for marrying my grandfather who was a kind man. Unlike most wealthy German land owners, he never treated his servants poorly, and although he was very strict, he never beat his children. My Aunt Anna never married, possibly because she couldn't find someone like my grandfather, but she lived with a man named Glen for nearly twenty years, until he died of cancer. When he died she returned to Germany for three years and fell out of touch with the family until her return in 1978, when she began to work on a cancer research campaign. She was always very strong and tried to influence the world. I'm sure she was trying to influence me by telling me the versions of the stories which she chose, and she succeeded. I was sure that she had done something wonderful while she was in Germany so I called the German embassy in Los Angeles to see if there was any way I could research when exactly her visa had been issued, and if I could trace where she stayed while in Germany. I had to first prove to them that she was dead, by showing them her death certificate in person. They then told me that her visa had been issued on March 21, 1975. I know that she returned on July 25,

1978 because my Aunt Ida had a diary entry on that day talking about how happy she was to have Anna back. I had no way of finding out what she did while she was there. I had no idea where she stayed or what she did, so I had no where to start with my searching. I tried checking with most of the major hotels in West Berlin, but they either didn't have records back that late, or wouldn't release the information to me, so I eventually gave up, but I realized that Anna had emulated my grandmother in her return to Germany, which only convinced me further of her respect for her sister.

I was disappointed that I couldn't find any more information, but I had discovered the answer to my questions. Anna was a writer, so she loved to tell stories. She was proud of her family and especially my grandmother, so she would never tell a degrading story. She had a strong desire to create change in the world, and so she tried to mold my personality so that I would grow up as strong as her. When I really thought about it, her changes to the story of my grandmother's return to Germany made for a much better story, it was inspirational and touching, where as the truth was painful and showed flaws in the human race as a whole. I am sure this is how many myths and fairy tales are created. Something a little bit incredible or mildly interesting happened and someone tells the story the way they think it should have happened, instead of how it really happened. This new improved story is passed down further and further, until it is accepted as the truth, and by then there are no Great Aunt Ida's to tell the true story anymore, so it goes unchallenged, and the false story becomes the one accepted as the truth, or as the fairy tale. I don't find that to be a flaw, but a benefit. I'm not really interested in what hap-

pened to the original Cinderella all those years ago, but the story it has become teaches young girls to be kind so they can be rewarded and not mean or spiteful because they will be punished. This experience showed me there is a great moral in my aunt's words, "The best stories don't have to be true, only fro the heart." I know, that like Anna, will tell my children what I think they should believe about their Great Grandmother Hana Rifke. I well tell them about the piano she brought back from Germany, and the generous spirit she found in the most unlikely of places, not the unkind heart she found, and the humiliation she endured. Maybe I'll tell the truth, when they are old enough to understand.

# An Ideal Scientist

*by Tanya De La Cerda*

Richard Rhodes, in The Making of the Atomic Bomb, discusses Michael Polanyi's belief that science is a "republic," "a community of independent men and women freely cooperating," "a highly simplified example of a free society." If science really is a republic, then there would be attributes and characteristics that a scientist would need to have in order to work effectively within this republic. All members must contribute equally. Each scientist must have the confidence to assert his point of view and yet have the objectivity to yield when his point is proven wrong. He must also be patient and creative enough to develop theories and create ideas. In order to gain this patience and creativity, a scientist must enjoy his work. So, to most effectively work in the "free society" of science, the ideal scientist must be confident, objective, patient, and creative; and must love his work.

A republic is "any group whose members are regarded as having a certain equality..." (Webster's New World Dictionary. 2nd edition). Therefore, to sustain a republic, all members must contribute equally. The same is true for a scientist republic. Scientists must be confident enough to realize they have a right to contribute to science, and they must also be confident enough to actually contribute when they have new work or ideal. Take Neils Bohr, for example. In 1926, the theoretical physicist Eriwn Schrödinger published a theory claiming that atoms consisted of waves, instead if the particles of Bohr's atom. Bohr was so sure the particle model was

correct that, when Schrödinger went to visit Bohr's home, Bohr relentlessly tried to convince Schrödinger that the wave model of the atom was incorrect; Bohr persisted even when Schrödinger became sick and took to his bed. Bohr was not even afraid to argue with the distinguished Albert Einstein about the validity of the uncertainty principle. Bohr was so sure about his theories and confident in his work that he didn't fear disagreement with anyone. Eventually, his confidence was proven justified. Bohr was correct about the uncertainly principle, and, though some of Schrödinger's wave mechanics are still used in today's quantum theory, Bohr's particle model of the atom was proven correct.

Though a scientist must nor give up on his theories because of a feeling of inequality or a lack of confidence, he must also be able to accept criticism from other scientists and to objectively analyze his experiments and theories. For one thing, the republic of science depends upon a system of checks and balances. Each scientist must submit his work to the group of scientists making up the republic. They test his theory and approve or disapprove of it, and it thus becomes generally accepted or rejected. For another thing, scientists must be able to objectively analyze the results of their experiments. The consequences of the inability to do this were shown when the Vienna Radium Institute used young women to count scintillation's. When Vienna got a different count than the Cavendish when both institutions conducted the same experiment. Vienna accused the Cavendish of having inferior equipment. As it turned out, though, Vienna was at fault. The young women counting the scintillations knew what they were expected to find and, therefore, lacking the proper objectivity,

came up with the expected results. Another example, this time of the proper objectivity, is James Chadwick's experiments. Along with Ernest Rutherford, Chadwich felt that there must be a neutral particle, a neutron, in the atom. He conducted experiments with hydrogen atoms, trying to find a neutron. No matter how much he bombarded the hydrogen atoms, and immediately detected neutrons. Though he expected to find a neutron in the hydrogen atoms, he objectively analyzed the results of his experiments and concluded it wasn't there. This is a very good example of objective analysis of experimental results. Finally, scientists must be objective about their hypotheses and theories and those of their colleagues. Many scientists accepted Schrödinger's wave theory because it supported classical Newtonian physics. They simply chose to overlook the fact that it couldn't explain Max Planck's experimentally proven quantified radiation formula. Without objectivity and the ability to accept criticism, a scientist could develop any theory and not listen to anyone who's telling him it's wrong.

To proper;y conduct experiments and fully develop a theory, a scientist must have a great deal of patience. One example of this patience in conducting experiments is Enrico Fermi's neutron-bombardment experiments. In order to see which elements he could induce to radioactivity by bombarding their nuclei with neutrons, he planned to irradiate most of the elements on the periodic table, starting with the lightest ones. He built Geiger counters by hand and found a good neutron source. He tediously prepared his experiment and t hen began to irradiate elements. With many of the lighter elements - hydrogen, oxygen, lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon - re got no

results. He became somewhat discouraged, but continued on. On his next attempt, he was successful in causing fluorine to become radioactive - Fermi's patience finally paid off. Another example of an experimenter whose patience paid off is James Chadwich. When he heard of the Jolior-Curies' discovery of high-velocity protons emitted from paraffin wax bombarded by beryllium radiation, Chadwick suspected the protons were finally neutrons. To prove this, he repeated the Joliot-Curies' work. He began to experiment further, bombarding lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, helium, oxygen, and argon with beryllium radiation. The only explanation for his results was a neutral particle with nearly the same mass as protons, otherwise known as a neutron. After he discovered neutrons in the atom, Chadwick had to work out his hypothesis mathematically. The work took him ten days to complete. He got about three hours of sleep a night, worked over the weekend, and still kept up his other responsibilities. By the end of his experimenting and calculations, Chadwick was exhausted. However, his patience paid off; he had discovered a new element particle. Without a great deal of patience, many scientists would never make it through the tiring, tedious work of conducting experiments and developing new theories.

Another characteristic the ideal scientist must have to work most effectively in the free society of science of creativity. Scientists must think up experiments and apparatus to test hypotheses. How, for example, do you test whether alpha particles are helium atoms? Ernest Rutherford used a custom-made glass tube, then sealed off the space between the two. "After some days," he said, "a bright spectrum of helium was observed in the outer vessel." Rutherford was admired for the

style and creativity is Ernest Lawrence's invention of the cyclotron. Building on a Swedish physicist's calculations, Lawrence figured out how to accelerate protons to an energy range above one million volts. Unfortunately, the accelerate tube would be too long for the laboratory. That's when Lawrence figured out how to accelerate a proton to the desired energy range using a spiral tube - he would "wind up" the tube. He then calculated how to use two electrodes and a magnetic field to guide the protons through the spiral. Only a few scientists thought Lawrence's machine would work; but when he built it, it was capable of producing 25 million electron-volt protons. Because of Lawrence's creativity in "winding up" the accelerator tube, he was able to build a machine that could be used in countless experiments to probe the nuclei of atoms. No matter how simple a theory, without the creativity necessary to test it, nothing may ever become of it.

Finally, the most necessary characteristic a scientist must have in order to gain the patience and creativity necessary to work effectively within the scientific republic is a love for his work. Without this love, many scientists wouldn't want to take the time to think up creative experiments, and they wouldn't have the patience to conduct tedious, time-consuming experiments. An example of a scientist who did have the necessary love for his work is Enrico Fermi. During World War II, Jews in Europe were persecuted by the Germans. As, Italy began to ally itself with Germany, anti-Semitism in Italy, Fermi's home, grew. Many scientists were leaving Italy, and Fermi became anxious about his wife, who was a Jew, and his country. To distract himself, he turned to experimentation. He worked from eight in the morning until late into the evening.

He worked as long as needed to solve a problem and then turned to another problem. he loved his work so much that he was able to use an escape from anxieties and fears of war. Another scientist who loved her work enough to continue on, even while in exile, through World War II was Lise Meitner. Because she was a Jew, she suffered persecution directly. In anticipation of her explosion from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute and her exposure as a Jew, she crossed the Dutch border with an expired passport. This was very dangerous, but she made it to safety and eventually moved to Sweden. Unfortunately, she was away from her friends and in a country in which she didn't even know the language. Her answer was to write to Otto Hahn, asking for her equipment so that she could conduct experiments. She then continued conversing with him about his work and, even in exile, helped to explain the extraordinary results of his experiments - the splitting of the uranium nucleus. She loved her work too much to let persecution and exile stop her. In fact, without her work she felt useless. It's just this type of feeling that will allow a scientist to gain the other necessary characteristics to effectively contribute to science.

So what characteristics would a scientist need t work effectively within the republic of science? He would need the confidence of Niels Bohr, the objectivity of Jam Chadwick, the patience of Enrico Ferni, the creativity of Ernest Rutherford, and the love for scientific work of Lise Meitner. These scientists were all great scientists, most definitely because they all possessed one or more qualities of the ideal scientist.

Rhodes, Richard. The Making of the Atomic Bomb. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

Webster's New World Dictionary. Guralink, David B., ed. Second Edition. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986

# Seekers of Truth: The Beat Generation

*by Nancy Chaires*

Truth, Love and Beauty. As I see it there is very little else in the world that means anything. And this is what the real meaning of the Beat Generation is. This is what so-called Beatnik wants. The Beat wants his life to mean something to himself. He is looking for an Order. Whether he finds it in poetry, painting, music, plumbing, carpentry, weight-lifting, selling shoes, no matter what, he must find meaning for his life. ~Allen Ginsberg (McDarrah 3)

It's a warm summer night in Greenwich Village, New York. The year is 1958. Inside a small cafe people in their twenties sip espresso and gin, the crowd is fixated on the poet reciting his latest work. The poet on the stool speaks his lines with such emotion and energy that a bead of sweat forms on his brow and now proceeds down the side of is face and disappears into his beard. In the crowd, some people close their eyes to better receive the *Word*. Others are locked into an intense gaze as their eyes meet those of the poet. They too began too sweat. When the performance is over, the crowd applauds the poet for creating and sharing his art. A women buys a round of gin for her friends. A guy in the back lights up a tea joint and the sweet aroma floats across the room.

Coffeehouse scenes as this were common for the Beatniks, though one could hardly say they had routines or schedules. Jazz clubs, coffeehouses, and parks were common stomping grounds for Beats. These were people dedicated to

living on a day-to-day basis. Planning for tomorrow meant that one had to assume there would be one.

The term *Beat Generation* refers to the "members off the generation that cause of age during World War II, who, supposedly as a result of disillusionment stemming from the Cold War, espouse mystical detachment and relaxation of social and sexual tensions" (Watson 5). In 1945, Herbert Huncke introduced his friends to the word *Beat*, but he didn't mean it as a positive thing: "I meant beaten. The world against me" (Huncke qtd. in Watson 3). Jack Kerouac coined the term "Beat Generation" in a conversation with John Clellon Holmes in 1948 (Stephenson 2). It became part of mainstream American language a few years later when Holmes published an article in the November 1952 issue of the *New York Times Magazine* entitled, "This is the Beat Generation" (Watson 3). The exact meaning of the word *Beat* is debatable because both the word and the culture it refers to evolved over time. Originally, it was Carnie-circus nomad-slang that referred the bleakness of circus life (Watson 3). They were perceived by mainstream society as immoral and out to destroy society (McDarrah vi). The truth of it was that the members of the Beat Generation had different *view* of morality.

Although the Beatnik movement was as informal phenomenon, we can draw a time-frame. Its roots go back to the late 1940's, when their rebellious attitudes originated (Stephenson 2). Others would argue that the 1950's most adequately represent the movement because it was during this time that the Beats nurtured their intellectual and spiritual sides. In *The Daybreak Boys*, Stephenson claims that the public period did not begin "until after the Six Gallery reading

in October 1955 and the publication of Allen Ginsberg's *Howel and Other poem's* in 1956" (3).

Because they were a product of the Second World War and of the Cold War, their disillusionment is similar (Stephenson 4). In the 1950's, the Beats saw the world crumbling around them and the government only seemed to sweep problems under the rug. Everyday, Senator McCarthy and his disciples persecuted someone else and American concealed its sinful lifestyle behind closed doors. The Beats saw America as a false society where those who dared question, think or protest were shunned and treated like criminals. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in the US v. the Board of Education of Topeka that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional. Many Americans fought against the implementation of integration laws. Racial tensions were flaring in South America, and Europe was still recovering from the devastating effects of World War II. How could Beatniks have faith in anything? John Mitchell, the owner of the Gaslight Cafe-a popular hangout for the Beats in Greenwich Village- best phrased the Beatniks' sentiments: "With the bomb and all, I don't blame these kids for flipping. They're rejecting the incredible mess that adults have created in the world. Every time you pick up a newspaper you find another corrupt government official exposed" (McDarrah 6). The Beats did not want to perpetuate the behavior that they believed was responsible for "messing up" the world. They did not discriminate like most other groups of their day. For instances, some prominent figures in the movement were black, and women were also included in great numbers.

In this era, when free speech was rare, the media was quick to perpetuate a false image of the Beats (McDarrah 2).

"Here's a classic description of American's Beatnik:... unwashed, bearded, free-loving, pseudo-intellectual, reefer-smoking, non-working, self-styled artists or writers living in protest of something or other" (McDarrah 1). When the press *exposed* the "movement" in the early 1960's, the public feared that this wild bunch was out to "undermine and destroy society's morals" (McDarrah vi). During this time, fear and suspicion were the natural ways for society to deal with anything new. The media - especially *Times* and *Life* magazines—launched an attack on the Beats that distorted their image and made the public fear them (McDarrah vi). Even the term *Beatnik* was meant to be derogatory: A San Francisco journalist gave them that name after Russians launched Sputnik into orbit. He felt that the Beats were just as "far out".

The Beat Generation was composed largely of artists of all sorts. Their activities centered around living life to the fullest. The development of the atomic bomb made the future of the world uncertain, so they had to enjoy the world while they still could. This is why they were spontaneous people who lived to read, experience and travel. members of the Beat Generation were interested in religions, especially Buddhism and eastern philosophies. They didn't feel the need to confine their beliefs into present categories, they created individual philosophies based on what they experienced. Education was very important to them. They were scholars in the sense that Ralph Waldo Emerson defined scholars, they learned from the school of life. This nonconformist view also applies to their political ideals, even though most of them rejected politics altogether (McDarrah 7).

One thing the Beat Generation was passionate about

was *truth*. Even though they held contempt for morality in the traditional sense, they had almost moralistic view of honesty. The Beats thought that the rigid American social structure was a joke and those Americans who claimed to be moral were hypocrites (McDarrah 4). The supposedly *moral* society likes to use sayings like "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." However, brotherly love was not a popular concern in the era of the Cold War, given McCarthyism and the racist turmoil that later ignited the Civil Rights Movement. Other major problems of their era were largely ignored. Alcoholism, racism, teenage sexuality, homosexuality and domestic abuse were customarily considered private matters or degeneration's (McDarrah 6). Whatever the case, in mainstream society these issues were to be kept behind closed doors and not discussed out in the open. The Beats were some of the most "forward-thinking members of their community" (McDarrah 4). "African-Americans, women, and homosexuals were all prominent members of the Beat movement, and were all treated as equals" (McDarrah vi). By 1950's standards, they were truly a revolutionary group.

The Beats did not want to waste their lives away trying to please others and by trying to live up to unrealistic, impossible ideals of perfection. They valued honesty and truth because they were rebelling against an atmosphere of hostility and dishonesty. As the epigraph from Allen Ginberg describe, they believed that they had to be true to *themselves.*

Their search for mystical truth manifested itself in many ways. The Beatniks were spiritual people. Their love for Eastern philosophy popularized it and they challenged their contemporaries to "look beyond American Puritanism"

(McDarrah vi). There was a tendency among the Beats to associate Catholicism and Protestantism with repression. Because of their collective personal experiences, to them these religions became symbolic of what was wrong with America. Jack Kerouac feared Catholicism for a different reason. He was born into a tight Catholic family. He idolized his older brother Gerald who died of rheumatic fever when Kerouac was four years old. After that, Kerouac's mother directed all of her anger towards him, and hios father became an alcoholic. From that day forward, Kerouac always associated Catholicism with impending doom. Many Beatniks were Buddhist and some of them practiced mixtures of several religions. They believes in total freedom of expression.

In 1944, Kerouac and Lucien Carr began to speak of *The New Vision* and *The New Consciousness*. In accordance with their new openness, they began to analyze and question everything in the world around them. Their love for art and literature was based on three principles:

1) Uncensored self-expression is the seed of creativity. 2) The artist's consciousness is expanded through non rational means: derangement of the senses, via drugs, dreams, hallucinatory states, and visions. 3) Art supersedes the dictates of conventional morality. (Watson 40)

Also, Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs relishes communal living in 1945, 24 years before Hippies popularized it during the Summer of Love (Watson 49). Like many other subcultures, the Beatniks needed an environment where they could express themselves.

In continuing their search for meaning, the Beat Gen-

eration made great contributions to the fields of literature, music, poetry (Stephehson 2). The writers out their own spin on the stream of consciousness style. jack Kerouac wrote some of the most memorable books of the Beat Generation. His book, *On the Road* (1957) is considered a chronicle of the Beat movement (Stephenson 3). William S. Burroughs was likely one of the most ingenious novelists of the century. After Allen Ginsberg won his battle with censorship in the 1960's and published *Howl*, he was established as a great American poet. They contributed to the world of music, even though they did not create much of it themselves. The Beats favorite music was Jazz, which was thought of by mainstream Americans as purely Negro music (McDarrah vi). They helped bridge the racial gap by bringing "Negro music" to white populations. Some of them believed that Negroes were the original Beats. The trials and tribulations of Black Americans exemplified what being B*eat* was all about.

The Beats lived primarily in two places: Greenwich Village, New York and North Beach, San Francisco (McDarrah 221), but they are most well known for their activities in the Village:

Greenwich Village was truly a *village*, a small town within the large city of New York. On weekends, all of Greenwich Village congregated in Washington Square Park to be part of the scene... Everybody knew everybody, and it was like a

family get-together. Painting, poetry, music, dance, and off-Broadway theater were all in full swing; abstract painters threw gobs of paint on canvases; poets shouted Beat words at enthralled cafe crowds. Everybody was *creating* something

and no one deliberately set out to attract media attention. In those years the park was positively quaint with the Shanty Boys playing their homemade instruments,

and people danced around the Arch. (McDarrah VII)

Every movement comes to an end. The group dispersed in the early 1960s when the media publicity brought tourists from all over into the Village looking for "real live" Beatniks (McDarrah IX). Some writers and poets moved to San Francisco and most other people gave up the fight or just moves on with their lives (MaDarrah IX).

In the 1950's and 1960's, the media portrayed the Beat Generation as an amoral group that was seeking to "undermine and destroy" American values (McDarrah VI). Many people must have felt that the Beats were trying to weaken society. We have evidence of this form the countless articles that *Time* and *Life* magazines wrote about the Beats. However, those who studied them closely learned that the Beats were not trying to destroy anything, they simply wanted to expose American's hypocrisy to itself. They subverted the dominant ideologies because they saw them as false (McDarrah 6). They did not think America was moral, it was sanctimonious. This very hypocrisy is what drove the Beats to shun American society and embrace the open-mindedness and honesty of eastern thought. Members of the Beat Generation contributed to society by expanding our horizons and reminding us that the dominant view is not necessarily the best one. So, instead of complying with the dominant views of morality, members of the Beat Generation lived by the simple rules of *honesty* and *openness*... two important characteristics which mainstream American seemed to have left behind. Beats wanted honesty in

society, sex recreation and every other aspect of the self. The way the Beat expected to find truth was by experiencing everything. Ultimately, the Westward migration from the Village changed Beatnikdom. Many settled in the Haight-Asbury District which later became the home of the Hippie Movement in the 1960's. Still others got married, had families and paid endless mortgages. In the end, only their art, music, and literature remained to influence later generations.

## References Cited

McDarrah, Fred W. and Gloria S. Beat Generation: Glory Days in Greenwich Village.
New York: Schirmer, 1996.

Stephenson, Gregory. The Daybreak Boys: Essays on the Literature of the Beat
Generation. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press,
1990.

Watson, Steven. The Birth of the Beat Generation Visionaries, Rebels, and Hipsters
1944-1960. New York: Pantheon, 1955.