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Introduction

I am very pleased to present the Fall 2012 edition of *EAPSU Online*. This volume brings together five strong scholarly essays, with a core of three pieces focused on African American writers, including readings of Ralph Ellison, Langston Hughes, and August Wilson. This edition also offers an engaging, fresh interpretation of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 feminist utopian novel *Herland* and a sensitive, probing meditation of a poem by Swedish poet, Tomas Tranströmer. The volume concludes with two regionally focused, yet universally themed, poems by Phillip Howerton.

To open, Joseph Fruscione's "From *Invisible Man* to Visible Professor: Ralph Ellison as Educator and Public Intellectual" offers a fine analysis of Ralph Ellison's public persona and his role as teacher and theorist after the success of *Invisible Man* (1952). Fruscione examines primary source documents to analyze Ellison's new role as a public intellectual in the wake of his groundbreaking first novel. Next, Wes Mantooth's "Cultural Tool or Economic Boon?: Ambivalence towards the Blues in Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* and *Simply Heavenly* and August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*" considers a range questions, both philosophical and practical, about blues music and folk art as signifiers of identity and as cultural commodities.

In "Utopia and the Children of the Temple: *Herland* as a Feminist Separatist Fantasy," Jenny Lapekas discusses the strong feminist advocacy in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's groundbreaking utopian novel and its structuring of a female-only society. Lapekas redirects our attention to this important but understudied work of American literature. Next, Nagarjun Khanal's "Fighting to Maintain the Hard Won Self in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*" looks at August Wilson's various visions of African American identity in his play *Gem of the Ocean*. Khanal focuses on Wilson's construction of models of African American community that can advance social, political, and economic rights while sustaining the needs of the individual.

In an important first for *EAPSU Online*, we have a close reading of a poem by 2011 Nobel Prize winning Swedish poet, Tomas Tranströmer. Jan Selving's "Not Empty but Open: Tomas Tranströmer's 'Vermeer'" reads the poem "Vermeer" on the renowned Dutch painter, Johannes Vermeer, as a meditation not only on the transformative powers of art, in general, but of the mystery (and majesty) of Tranströmer's verse, in particular.

We conclude with two poems, "Family Photograph" and "A National River Town on a Winter Sunday," by Phillip Howerton. Howerton's poetry focuses on time and place, bringing us to the Arkansas where the poet grew up and that he clearly loves. Howerton's poems are important works of cultural preservation, yet their strength comes from their capacity to speak to experiences that move us beyond region, toward the universal.

As a final note, we remain grateful to our contributors whose work makes this journal a valuable addition to scholarship and literary endeavor in Pennsylvania and beyond. As always, we are especially grateful to you, our readers. Thank you for reading and becoming a vital part of the conversation that these essays begin within these pages.

Yours truly,

Dr. Jeffrey Hotz, Associate Professor of English
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania

From *Invisible Man* to Visible Professor: Ralph Ellison as Educator and Public Intellectual

Joseph Fruscione, The George Washington University

April 2, 1956. Saul Bellow, a few months before taking a teaching position at the New School for Social Research, writes to Ralph Ellison:

> My interest in literature is beginning to revive. I hate it less now than I did last year. God knows how my back ever came to be under *this* cross. To do something once in a while is a thrill, if you don't have the money-spectre [sic] waiting on the throne for you to perform and grovel like a damn clown. It hasn't become easier; it's that I care less.
>
> [….] We're very nearly broke, and I'm trying to arrange some part-time teaching. (Bellow 150)

June 27, 1959. Ellison, off for the summer from a visiting professorship at Bard, writes to fellow writer and educator Albert Murray:

> I've been asked to take part in a seminar on literature which they're running out at Iowa next fall; I'm part of the fiction faculty at Breadloaf during August. Bellow has set up something for me at Chicago during the Winter—and I'm the chief American delegate to the P.E.N. congress at Frankfurt and Heidelberg next month. I'll stay no more than ten days and then right back and to work. I'm not sure but I think that being away from the interruptions of N.Y. and under the pressure of the weekly lectures at the college I've gotten more writing done. (qtd. in Murray and Callahan 208)

As fellow authors reflecting on teaching and literary matters, Saul Bellow and Ralph Ellison enact a kind of performative role here in stressing the public and financial aspects of their writing. Albeit in different ways, Bellow and Ellison both see their writing in a larger social–professional context in the 1950s—Bellow in terms of financial need and role-playing, Ellison in terms of career advancement and being a Major Writer. These letters to and from Ralph Ellison act as useful lens texts for understanding the public, pedagogical aspect of his career. By and large, his active intellectual self-fashioning—seen through his correspondence, teaching labors, and selected addresses—deepens our understanding of the historical moments of his pedagogical and academic roles.

We might also consider here something from the writer and critic Stanley Crouch. Of Ellison's quest for canonical eminence, Crouch has noted, "Bellow told me once […] that Ralph's problem was that he had this ethnic desire, on behalf of the black or Negro people, to have a black writer create literature at the level of Faulkner, Hemingway, or even Melville" (qtd. in Rampersad 551). In Ellison's mind, *he* was the only black writer to undertake such an ambitious task. Crouch then goes on to discuss the problematic implications of this point of view:

> The tragedy lies in the weight Ralph put on himself. [….] Ralph wasn't wary enough of the dangers that come with the magnification of things by one's own imagination. Well, the greater the ambition, the greater the failure. The longer the book remained unfinished, the more excruciating the pain. And for a long time, sadly, he lived with a constant, debilitating sense of having failed. (qtd. in Rampersad 551)

Crouch aptly sums up Ellison's self-appointed quest for such high stature, particularly its emotional toll and creative drain. Ralph Ellison was not a one-novel author by choice; by some accounts, he wrote enough material for three novels after *Invisible Man*. Although his creative energy yielded almost too much material, he ultimately could not meet the high standards of novel writing he set for himself, despite three-plus decades of attempting to do so.[1]

Yet, Ellison's career was certainly successful and robust. Having become an intellectual celebrity after *Invisible Man* was published in 1952, Ellison wrestled with inconsistent creativity, increasing levels of publicity and pedagogical involvement, and his own active self-fashioning as an intellectual and man of letters. Although he was a prolific essayist, lecturer, and visiting professor after 1952, he struggled with the diffuse manuscript of his second novel, first published partially as *Juneteenth* in 1999 and then fully in 2010 as *Three Days Before the Shooting…* (ed. John Callahan and Adam Bradley). The dialectic between Ellison the novelist and Ellison the public intellectual buttresses his personal conflict of quests: on the one hand, for a second bestselling novel, which was ultimately a failed quest, despite all the material he wrote; and, on the other hand, for a viable role as an intellectual, critic, and educator, which was ultimately successful. In much of Ellison's correspondence, especially from the 1950s–1970s, one sees these quests juxtaposed, insofar as Ellison mentions both his writing struggles and activities as a lecturer and visiting professor.

Public Intellectualism at the University

Bard. Chicago. Rutgers. NYU. Bennington. Harvard. Bethune-Cookman. Fisk. Tuskegee. Maryland. The University of Alaska. The preceding are just some of the schools where Ellison taught, spoke, or visited. These and about thirty-five others were sites of his intellectual self-advancement in the years after *Invisible Man* (see Appendix 1). Between 1952 and 1990, Ellison held four visiting professorships, received fellowships from Yale's Silliman College and the American Academy in Rome, gave commencement addresses at William and Mary College and elsewhere, and received honorary doctorates from Wake Forest University and Brown University, among others. From the college scenes early in *Invisible Man*[2] to his years as a lecturer and professor, Ellison's mature public life was rooted in higher education and professional involvement (see Appendix 2). He likely saw his evolving intellectual role as a bellwether of his place as an African American man of letters, intellectual authority, and viable canonical figure.

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[1] That he lost some of his manuscript in a fire certainly did not help. In November 1967, fire destroyed the fire destroyed the house he and his wife Fanny owned in Plainfield, Massachusetts. Ellison's account of what he lost ranged from 364 pages, to just that summer's revisions, to the entire manuscript, and later to 500 pages (Rampersad 493, 443, 538).

Despite the vast scholarship on Ellison as a novelist and early radical, his significant role as a public intellectual begs continued examination. As he was writing his second novel from the 1950s through the early 1990s, Ellison's institutional activities spawned an important body of work: teaching materials, commencement addresses, and correspondence relating to his professorships and lecture work. Some of this material has been published in his *Collected Essays* (1995), but much more remains unpublished, archived at the Library of Congress. This essay examines selections from some published works to investigate how Ellison fashioned and re-fashioned himself professionally through a series of academic endeavors after *Invisible Man*, in the process raising key questions about the politics of race, gender, and pedagogy that influenced Ellison's intellectual self-advancement. Here, we might wonder what it meant for a black writer to have such a prominent academic role at this time, as well as what role Ellison himself played in such academic prominence. Continuing to study his complementary—and sometimes competing—roles as a novelist, educator, and public intellectual demonstrates how his teaching and lecture work strengthened his presence in American literary and higher-educational culture. We see a struggle for self-advancement and creative success in various interviews and letters in which Ellison juxtaposes his teaching, intellectual work, and writing. For example, an April 1960 letter to Albert Murray, while Ellison was at Bard, describes his American Literature course's popularity while outlining his travel itinerary: Rutgers University, Washburn College, and the University of Chicago, all within about six weeks (Murray and Callahan 222). He had also spoken of rejecting teaching invitations proffered by Purdue University and Brandeis University, among others, perhaps as further testimony to his overbooked professional schedule and increased appeal.

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[2] In particular, chapters 2-6 set up a campus/academic context for the novel, one framed by the student's point of view of the campus, students, administrators, and Founder of Invisible's Tuskegee-like school. The college is also an ironic locus of "insight into [the] meaning" of his grandfather's directive to "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running," as well as of self-definition and racial politics.

Between 1952 and 1990, Ellison's manifold academic activities augmented his writerly persona and intellectual heft. These pursuits surely gave him a sense of accomplishment and race leadership as he struggled with his second novel. According to Tim Parrish, he also assumed a role as a "Negro leader" and "orator" after *Invisible Man* in negotiating his *other* and mainstream identities. Parrish comments, "As a novelist and public intellectual, integration was for Ellison both a social ideal and an aesthetic imperative" (150). Whereas his creative struggles tend to dominate scholarly accounts of his later career, exploring aspects of Ellison's teaching, talks, and letters demonstrates convincingly how he deployed his professorships and lecture work to remake himself as an educator and public intellectual in the wake of *Invisible Man*. Continuing to study Ellison as an educator and public intellectual enhances what we know of his significant, because self-cultivated and ambitious, roles as an African American novelist, critic, and cultural figure. Here, we can consider questions about the racial politics and gender-based performances of his teaching roles, as well as his place as a public black author in teaching college-level humanities courses, as opposed to creative writing classes. Further archival research, outside of the scope of this essay, can help determine the significance of his curricula and address a number of critical questions: for example, what texts and cultural narratives did he teach, what kinds of writing did he assign, and what was his teaching style, whether through lecture, seminar-style interaction, and his method of grading? Ultimately, the Ellison Pedagogy complemented the Ellison Persona and Literary Aesthetic through what I call throughout his *performative public intellectualism*.

A "Self-Fashioning" Pedagogy

In his piece on Ellison in *A New Literary History of America*, Adam Bradley identifies the author's "profound period of self-discovery and transformation" in the late 1930s as Ellison cut a promising figure in New York (712). While this is certainly correct, I would argue that Ellison experienced an equally, and perhaps more, profound moment of self-advancement after 1952, given the expanded scope of his professional activities and achieved level of intellectual celebrity. Ellison's professorships and university work are a more traditionally, or regularly, productive counterpoint to his second novel. Ellison's career after *Invisible Man* forms a dual narrative: on the one hand, his protracted labor on the second novel (which he sometimes called "No. 2"), and, on the other, the extensive and successful academic commitments that counterbalanced his creative struggles and canonical status anxiety. Ellision's unease was largely self-imposed, given the high standards he set for himself to become *the* writer of color in the late twentieth century, as Crouch has noted. Akin to what Barbara Foley has recently termed his "self-fashioning of his literary ancestry" (69-70), Ellison's pedagogy and related nonfiction likewise manifest ambitiousness and intellectualism in creating a prominent role as an African American writer and public figure. As his essays also did, Ellison's academic labors advanced an evolving schema of craft, canon, and self to frame his performative public intellectualism. One sees how he veered far away from what Foley terms the "young critic's proletarian aesthetic" of the 1930s and early 1940s (74). A more conservative, intellectualized aesthetic guided the older Ellison's public work, travels, and academic commitments from the late 1950s through the 1980s.

By and large, Ellison enjoyed his teaching, although he sometimes griped about it and his students. He had four visiting professorships: at Bard College (1958–1961), the University Chicago (fall 1961), Rutgers University (1962–1964), and New York University (1970–1979).[3] At Rutgers, he was Visiting Professor of Writing and Comparative Literature and the university's first writer-in-residence. At Bard, students remembered him as engaging and professorial. His first course there was entitled "Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century American History in the American Novel"; the (racially monolithic) syllabus featured four William Faulkner novels, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909), Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* (1847), and R.W.B. Lewis's scholarly work, *The American Adam* (1955) (Rampersad 360). In a sense, Ellison *was* and *was not* part of what Lawrence Jackson has recently described in *The Indignant Generation* (2011) as "the significant African American intellectual class teaching at black colleges" in the postwar era, a class that for Jackson "pronounced a new era of psychological freedom for African Americans" (Jackson 12, 3). That Ellison visited but did not formally teach at Fisk, Howard, and other historically black schools suggests the sorts of figurative interracial politics one sees elsewhere in his career as he privileged mainstream literary works, institutions, and values while performing models of black intellectualism and aesthetics.

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[3] Ellison also rejected invitations for at least two professorships: e.g., Brandeis, 1956; Harvard, spring 1974. These rejections may be as indexes to self-fashioning and performative intellectualism—perhaps a high sense of himself, a dedication to his work in progress, or a means of avoiding conflict and militant black organizations, at least concerning Harvard. See Rampersad 326–27, 495–97.

"If Ellison never completed his college degree at Tuskegee," Parrish notes convincingly, "then *Invisible Man* embodied his scholarly credential to the best (and white) universities in America: only he arrived as a mostly self-taught professor whose experience differed from virtually every one of his students" (143). Again, the letter to Albert Murray in April 1960 shows Ellison as a struggling writer, a thriving teacher, and a traveling lecturer, further enhancing his scholarly credentials:

> I'm damned disgusted with myself because of my failure to finish[;] I know nevertheless that it's better to publish one fairly decent book than five pieces of junk. [….] As you can see, deep down I'm mad as ever—insane, that is, but it seems to be my only way….I'm also lecturing away. My soph. course in American Lit is the most popular on the campus (!), some forty kids in a school where 14 is about tops; my course in the Russian novel is intense and most useful to me, for I'm learning much more than the kids; a lecture at Rutgers two weeks ago during a blizzard brought an offer of a job—which I rejected […]. I go to Washburn College in Indiana on the 14 & 15 […] and in May I'll be at the University of Chicago for four days. The pay for these is quite good considering, but I'll

> earn it—what between functioning as a writer-teacher and having to talk about the problem. (qtd. in Murray and Callahan 222)

Studied in tandem, Ellison's letters, essays, and teaching lectures reflect his notions of an American canon, as well as his own knowledge of and connection to it. In this way, he achieved what Parrish has nicely termed a "seemingly unique critical perspective": that is, Ellison is "one who is completely at ease in 'the idiom' of black culture yet who was also probably the most well read 'classic' author in the history of American literature" (142). Ellison performed this racial–professional—largely but not completely successfully—throughout his post–*Invisible Man* public career.

Perhaps Ellison's most significant professorship was that at NYU in the 1970s. For the early part of his time there, he held the prestigious Schweitzer Professorship in Humanities. In addition to the distinction of such a position, Ellison also had an ideal schedule: he was required to teach only two courses per year, instead of the typical four (Rampersad 470). The longtime Americanist scholar Amrit Singh was one of Ellison's graduate students at NYU—and perhaps the only Ph.D. candidate on whose dissertation committee Ellison served.[4] As Singh noted in a telephone conversation in June 2010, Ellison "was very faithful to the role" and "very proper in all his dealings with me"; they talked on the phone often about Singh's progress. In Singh's view, this professor-as-guide role "doesn't amount to much if you're not willing to mentor younger students in a significant way." Ellison demonstrated such willingness in his regular accessibility, as well as in the careful readings Singh remembers him giving to dissertation chapters.

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[4] According to Singh (email, May 11, 2011), his dissertation director was William M. Gibson. His other committee members, Ellison and James W. Tuttleton, provided "helpful guidance and valuable feedback." Singh's 1973 dissertation resulted in *The Novels of the Harlem Renaissance* (Penn State UP, 1976).

This example is more broadly suggestive of how Ellison seems to have embraced the professorial facet of his public life, perhaps adopting, at the same time, a literary sage-like role comparable to that William Faulkner embraced at UVA in the late 1950s. Asked in a 1976 interview if he was happy with his NYU students, Ellison noted: "you know, the quality varies from class to class. I am unhappy with the numbers who can't write. I consider myself as having had a fairly incomplete education, but as I look back I realize that even in high school there were a number of us who could write rings around some of my graduate students" (qtd. in Graham and Singh 336). Yet, "[t]he end of Ralph's career as a professor at New York University," Rampersad notes, "came suddenly" at the beginning of 1978–1979. Between drastic cuts for Schweitzer professorships at the state level and a "mandatory" retirement age of 65 for NYU faculty, Ellison's nine-year professorship was effectively over in fall 1978 (Rampersad 519). Rampersad comments, "When he turned in his keys, the truly active part of his life was over"—after two-plus decades of teaching, lectures, commencement addresses, and writing (519). This "truly active part of his life" was richly meaningful for Ellison in the amount of work and writing it yielded, as well as in the persona of the public intellectual it enriched.

Lectures and a "Personal Quest"

I now will focus on excerpts from a few texts to touch on how Ellison was engaged in a performative balancing act of writing, teaching, lecturing, and canonical negotiation.[5] In July 1971, after his first year at NYU, he delivered a talk at the University of Iowa entitled "Remembering Richard Wright." This was the keynote address at a weeklong celebration of Wright hosted by the Institute for Afro-American Culture. Ellison's multilayered talk embodies a number of elements: respect for an elder and mentor by describing "Wright's important impact on my sensibilities" (Ellison, *The Collected Essays* 659); a symbolic competition and influence anxiety regarding his relationship to Wright;[6] and Ellison's sense of his own literary stature.

After describing his reading in the early 1930s, Ellison reflects,

> [S]uch reading and wondering prepared me not simply to *meet* Wright, but to seek him out. It led […] to a personal quest. I insist upon the "seeking out" because, you see, I too have an ego, and it is important to me that our meeting came through my own initiative. Not only is this historically true, but it has something to do with my being privileged to be here on what I consider to be a very important moment in the history of our literature. (*The Collected Essays* 660).

Of course, one stage of this "personal quest," and the "ego" undertaking it was speaking at the marquee event of Iowa's Institute for Afro-American Culture, further acknowledgment of

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[5] An irony is that Ellison's lecture and pedagogical work helped his creativity when it came to nonfiction, but seems to have hindered it when it came to shaping and organizing his fiction. According to John Callahan and Bradley in the editorial apparatus for *Three Days Before the Shooting…* Ellison's "taxing schedule of appearances" and "steady round of lectures on college campuses" hampered his progress on the second novel. This intellectual labor as a professor and lecturer, while very successful, exacerbated Ellison's intense pressure to complete another "big" novel, hence his conflict of quests. *Three Days Before the Shooting…* xx.

[6] See Joseph Skerrett, "The Wright Interpretation: Ralph Ellison and the Anxiety of Influence." In Kimberly Benston, ed., *Speaking for You: The Vision of Ralph Ellison* (Howard UP, 1990), 217–30.

Ellison's professional authority. In many ways, this speech telescopes Ellison's continued challenge: he is reaping the fruits of his own literary acclaim, but he is somewhat in Wright's shadow, or, at least, situated as mentee to Wright. That it was Ellison's own "initiative" to establish a relationship with Wright echoes Ellison's ways of revising the influence of Wright, Hughes, and other "ancestors," as Lawrence Jackson, Alan Nadel, and others have noted. Ellison's Iowa speech is largely positive; he discusses Wright's time in Chicago and New York, his affiliation with the Left, and his important accomplishments in *Black Boy* and *Native Son*. The speech is also positive regarding Ellison himself, particularly when he "must turn critic" regarding aspects of *Native Son* (*The Collected Essays* 670). Despite the novel's worth, Ellison also notes how "Wright failed to grasp the function of artistically induced catharsis" while over-relying on a Leftist "theoretical perspective" (*The Collected Essays* 670-671). This portion of the talk is almost moody as Ellison shifts from praising Wright to criticizing aspects of his work and literary vision, which suggests Ellison's constant revision of his own place in American letters.[7]

"I find it extremely ironic that now my own [novel] is being passed along to you, and that I'm responsible," Ellison had told cadets at West Point two years earlier, revealing a similar canonical self-awareness (*The Collected Essays* 520). The March 1969 talk "On Initiation Rites and Power" shows his intellectual well roundedness and role as an author read and taught in an academic context. According to Rampersad, Ellison addressed all 900 plebes and underscored the "universality of his novel" (460), while outlining his reading of such authors as Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, Herman Melville, and André Malraux. Ellison comments that he had "tried very seriously to identify myself with the concerns of the classical American novelists" (*The Collected Essays* 525). He states a bit earlier in the talk,

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[7] See also my "Knowing and Recombining: Ellison's Ways of Understanding Hemingway" in *Hemingway and the Black Renaissance*, ed. Gary Holcomb and Charles Scruggs (Ohio State UP, 2012), for further discussion of how Ellison often criticized *and* embraced his literary influences—while always strengthening his own canonical place.

> I seemed to appear, or my *people* seemed to appear, only in the less meaningful writing. I felt that I would have to make some sort of closer identification with the tradition of American literature, if only by way of finding out why I was *not* there—or better, by way of finding out how I could use that very powerful literary tradition by way of making literature my own. (*The Collected Essays* 521)

Ellison's meaning and performance here are multifaceted: he seeks a balance between his sense of the individual and of the racial collective; he advocates a fluidity in choosing literary touchstones; and he hints at his own jazz-like literary aesthetic, which was based on knowing and riffing on tradition. In the same talk, he discusses his own jazz-like literary aesthetic. Similar to a jazzman, he "knows the tradition of his form, so to speak, and he can draw upon an endless pattern of sounds which he recombines on the spur of the moment into a meaningful musical experience" (*The Collected Essays* 520). During the discussion portion, a cadet asked Ellison about Wright's presence in *Invisible Man*. Ever balancing inspiration and influence, Ellison notes, "by 1940 I was not showing Mr. Wright any of my writing because by that time I understood that our sensibilities were quite different, and that what I was hoping to achieve in fiction was something quite different from what he wanted to achieve" (*The Collected Essays* 539). As in his keynote address on Wright, this talk reveals Ellison's notions of a literary canon, as well as his own knowledge of, and connection to, an American canon as a novelist, critic, and intellectual of consequence.

Knowledge and Discipline

While much of this activity and nonfiction output buttressed Ellison's intellectual self-fashioning, it also may have taken away from the time, creative energy, and editorial acumen he needed to complete his second novel. This must have felt bittersweet for Ellison: his public activities and essays enhanced his cultural presence, finances, and intellectual acclaim, yet his essays and public appearances also took time away from the necessary editing, organizing, and shaping his novel needed, while perhaps continually reminding readers of the second novel they had been awaiting since the mid-1950s. This was the conflict of his two quests, which seemed to relegate his second novel to perpetual "in progress" status even as he solidified his critical, cultural, and pedagogical contributions. Ellison was clearly engaged in a balancing act of teaching, traveling, lecturing, and being courted for professorships at Rutgers, NYU, and elsewhere, all while ostensibly using his free time to write and finish his second novel. Ellison's critical and pedagogical treatment of his predecessors, coevals, and himself embodies his rhetoric of canon negotiation—both of others' placement and his own. As many essays and letters indicate, he wanted it both ways, as it were: that is to say, to be an exemplar of black literary and intellectual writing while being fully accepted in conventional American literary and university culture.

Werner Sollors has observed about the period from 1910 to 1950 in his book *Ethnic Modernism*,

> Black America saw the flourishing of the Harlem Renaissance, and strong literary production of fiction continued through the 1930s and 1940s, paving the way for the full entrance into American mainstream literature marked by the book-of-the-month-club

> selection of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and the winning of the National Book Award by Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). (39)

Ellison was clearly aware of the impact that *Native Son*, *Invisible Man*, and other works by non-white authors had on the American literary scene. He had, to his mind and in terms of the standards of the literary establishment, secured a canonical place for himself with *Invisible Man*. Yet, he wanted to boost his place with both very active public intellectualism and, he hoped, with a second, perhaps better, novel. Although his success with performative public intellectualism and essays is admirable and significant, he most wanted success with the second novel, which is largely why he put so much pressure on himself to produce a follow-up masterpiece.

Ellison's public and pedagogical involvement in American intellectual life before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement helped his active self-fashioning as a respected teacher, man of letters, lecturer, and commencement speaker. Whereas Ellison's creative struggles have been well documented, his teaching materials, talks, and letters can continue to illustrate how he deployed his professorships and lecture work to remake himself, with each university a site of his ongoing performance as writer *qua* intellectual. As he told Murray in November 1956, he rejected a professorship offer from Brandeis, in part because they "only" offered a $6,500 salary. Ellison writes: "for $8000 I'd have taken it and would have worked like hell—which I've been avoiding all my life. [….] The Man up there [Abram Sachar, then president of the university] might not know it but there's a hell of a lot more knowledge and discipline in writing a novel than it takes to get a Ph.D. or at least *most* Ph.D.s and if he can't see it *I* can." (qtd. in Murray and Callahan 151-52). "Knowledge and discipline," indeed: arguably this is the same kind of “knowledge and discipline” that undergirded Ellison’s rich, successful roles as an African American novelist, critic, and professor, roles that were self-cultivated, ever-growing, and highly ambitious.

Appendix 1

Colleges and Universities where Ellison Taught, Lectured, or Received an Honorary Degree 1950s-1980s (cf., Rampersad *passim*)

Bard
Harvard
Texas
NYU
Swarthmore
Davidson
Rutgers
Coe
West Point
Chicago
Bennett
UNC, Chapel Hill
Bennington
Amherst
Iowa
Iowa State
Williams
William and Mary
Hollins
Illinois
Douglass
Oklahoma State, Norman
Lafayette
Carnegie Mellon
Tuskegee
Howard
Fisk
Bethune-Cookman
CCNY
CUNY
SUNY
Brown
Brandeis
Yale (Silliman College)
Boston College
Maryland
Michigan
Grinnell
Wake Forest
Princeton
Notre Dame
Dartmouth
Alaska

Appendix 2

Scholarly, Professional, Cultural, and Other Organizations with an Ellison Connection

American Scholar

John F. Kennedy Center

National Council on the Arts

MLA

National Foundation for the Arts

National Endowment for the Humanities

NAACP Legal Defense Fund

Arts & Humanities Council (Oklahoma)

Colonial Williamsburg

American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Library of Congress

Commission on Educational Television

American Academy, Rome

National Institute of Arts and Letters

Century Club (New York)

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Cultural Tool or Economic Boon?: Ambivalence towards the Blues in Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter* and *Simply Heavenly* and August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*

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> Folk arts are no longer by the folk for the folk; smart businessmen now put them up for sale. Gospel songs often become show-pieces for radio slummers, and the blues become the double-talk of the dives. And yet, in spite of the commercializing, the folk roots often show a stubborn vitality... Assuredly even in the new gospel songs and blues much is retained of the phrasing and the distinctive musical manner. Finally, it should be pointed out that even in the transplanting, a certain kind of isolation—class and racial—remains. What may come of it, if anything, is unpredictable, but so far the vigor of the creative impulse has not been snapped, even in the slums.
>
> —Sterling Brown[1]

During the early decades of the twentieth century, African American writers who created characters involved in some way with spirituals, ragtime, jazz, or blues almost necessarily situated themselves within a debate concerning the "appropriate" cultural representation of African Americans. Writers, such as Langston Hughes, who dealt with the blues during this time did so with a consciousness of taking an aesthetic and political stand in this debate. And more recent writers, such as Albert Murray and the late August Wilson, whose literature continues to reflect on the significance of blues wrote, if not as *participants* in the same ongoing debate, at least out of a keen historical awareness of the peculiar tensions surrounding blues music during roughly the first half of the twentieth century.

"New Negro" writers of the 1920s, such as Alain Locke, theorized about African American cultural production with the underlying belief that a heightened awareness of African Americans' rich contributions to American culture would lead to an improved status for African Americans relative to white American society: "the especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable further betterment of race relationships" (Locke 15). African American folk-music traditions were seen as relatively free from the self-conscious socio-political responsibility that had chained much African American literature to "the arid fields of controversy and debate" (Locke 15). While a number of theorists saw music, in its diversity and irrefutable originality, as making the strongest bid for African-American artistic genius, their theorizing nevertheless contained various value judgments concerning which type of music represented the *highest* achievement of musicality, lyricism, potential for high-art development, or expression of humanity. In general, New Negro writers such as Locke and W. E. B. DuBois tended to commit themselves most strongly to a promotion of spirituals, while expressing reservations about the worth of still-emerging blues and jazz forms. Sterling Brown quotes one representative devotee of spirituals who called this music "the finest medium for interpreting to the whites some of the best qualities of the Negroes" (189). Spirituals, of course, expressed sentiments of devout Christianity that resonated with white American values, while blues and jazz tended to be linked to poverty and physical and moral abandon—a side of black life from which many "progressive" blacks wished to dissociate. It is important to note that this was not just an intellectual stance: Langston Hughes, in *Not Without Laughter* (1930), demonstrates that preferences for spiritual or secular music (and the cultural settings in which these musical forms were performed) were often viewed as mutually exclusive and could polarize a black community, often along lines of social class.

It is probably not coincidental that debates over the respectability of blues also coincided with the explosion of this music as a valuable commercial commodity. One might speculate, in fact, that blues commanded such attention in the socio-cultural debates of African American writers and intellectuals partly because the deep pockets of the white-controlled popular-culture industry embraced it, and thus made it more susceptible to appropriation by white entertainers and reproduction according to regressive stereotypes of minstrelsy. Had blues remained just a rural Southern folk practice, perhaps socio-politically concerned African American writers would have turned more energy elsewhere.

The massive flow of African Americans from the rural South to northern cities during the early decades of the twentieth century was crucial to the sense among New Negro writers of a people's social uplift and artistic rebirth. Locke described this exodus as "a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern" (6). While Locke emphasizes the progressive aspects of migration, other later writers have granted the ongoing importance of traditional cultural matrices, such as the blues in the northward movement. Robert Cataliotti, for example, characterizes the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North as a "'blues movement,' for it is a pattern followed by numerous black musicians and chronicled in countless songs" (83-4). This description has at least two important implications. First, as Cataliotti suggests, the drama (cultural, economic, social, geographic) inherent in such a migration was reflected, consciously and unconsciously, in blues compositions. Farah Griffin also observes that "the blues provides an excellent metaphor for what happens to the migrants when they arrive in the city. In terms of content, blues lyrics focus upon the impact of the city on the migrant" (52). The blues continued to provide a viable and flexible form to express the experiences of African Americans, even as migration radically altered life conditions.

Second, the northern migration can also be classified as a blues migration because of the significant number of rural Southern men and women who saw their ability in blues—heretofore a communal, noncommercial avocation—as a potential ticket to economic freedom in the North. Their stories, historical and fictional, are emblematic of the larger vicissitudes of this migration experience: ambitions were hindered by economic and social injustices; relative commercial success was often cheapened by a loss of artistic integrity.

Thus, used in literature, blues may function as a powerfully concentrated symbol of the experiences particularly of lower-class African Americans in a time when continued economic and racial injustice tempered the anticipation of improved conditions. In portraying characters who perform and listen to the blues, twentieth-century African American writers such as Langston Hughes and August Wilson take an aesthetic and political stance that values the reality of lower-class life over more theoretical speculation concerning the use of African American music to create high-brow art or to gain white middle-class respectability. Few of Hughes' and Wilson's poor black characters, for example, would unhesitatingly see their current or future prospects reflected in Alain Locke's optimistic assessments for the "New Negro": "The Negro to-day is inevitably moving forward under the control largely of his own objectives. What are these objectives? Those of his outer life are happily already well and finally formulated, for they are none other than the ideals of American institutions and democracy" (10). In contrast, the "blues impulse" of Hughes' and Wilson's characters arises, as Steven C. Tracy suggests, out of "a shared need to deal with the tension created by America's theoretical democracy in conflict with a systematic network of racist attitudes that were (and are) often granted the authority of law" (59-60). For them, spirituals and blues are more than poetic reminders of how a strong people dealt with a hard past—they are folk-based cultural resources that continue to provide a way of expressing life's frustrations. Further, while acknowledging the blues as an intrinsic facet of black (folk) values, these writers express an ambivalence towards the multiple potential functions and meanings—often in complex tension—of blues in a rapidly changing world, as my opening epigraph from Sterling Brown suggests. Opiate or healing force? Vital cultural resource or exploitable commodity? An awareness of such concerns provides a useful framework for reading the blues in Hughes' novel *Not Without Laughter* (1930) and August Wilson's drama *Seven Guitars* (1995), along with several less significant works.

Langston Hughes' *Not Without Laughter*

> 'They [Harlem Renaissance intellectuals] thought the race problem had been solved through Art.. I don't know what made any Negroes think that—except that they were mostly intellectuals doing the thinking. The ordinary Negroes hadn't heard of the Negro Renaissance.' (Langston Hughes, qtd. in Shields 612)

The circumstances of Langston Hughes' 1930 novel *Not Without Laughter* embody what literary critic Steven C. Tracy describes as the "blues impulse" in Hughes's writing. Within the cast of black characters in Stanton, Kansas, are, for example, Tom and Sarah Johnson, who, after the Civil War, lived in Mississippi, in "Crowville," a black community on the outskirts of the white town. When Crowville began to appear too prosperous, jealous white townspeople burned it and drove its occupants away. Another character, Jimboy must travel far from home to find decent work. His wife, Anjee, labors so that a white family can live in ease, and must feed her own family on what is left after the white family has eaten. Anjee's younger sister, Harriett, is a top student in high school, but ends up dropping out because she thinks she'll just end up working in a white family's kitchen like Anjee. Within this troubled world, Hughes introduces blues as one potential cultural resource that people use to help them deal with their frustrations. Most notably, Jimboy sings blues and plays guitar, and Harriett later combines Jimboy's country-blues influence with her own style to become, by the end of the novel, Harrietta Williams, the "Princess of the Blues."

Despite Hughes's obvious passion for the blues, it would be simplistic to describe the novel's presentation of this music as an unqualified celebration. Rather, Hughes creates ambiguity by showing a blues tradition in tension with a people's desire to progress economically and socially within a world manipulated by white interests. Jimboy, in particular, embodies this tension. As certain critics have noted, Hughes does not develop Jimboy to the degree of the novel's other key characters. Tracy describes Jimboy as "certainly a type of the wandering bluesman, irresponsible, but also someone who brings spirit and good times with him when he comes. In fact, he is more of a spirit or a repository of songs than a fully developed character" (121). Cheryl Wall also views Jimboy as primarily "an aesthetic principle" (43). I would suggest that perhaps Hughes distanced Jimboy from the reader because he had difficulty resolving Jimboy's romantic role as the archetypal free-spirited bluesman with his responsibilities as a husband and father. Early in the novel, Hughes uses Jimboy's far-reaching search for employment to complicate his tendency to wander: "There was no well-paid work for Negro men, so Annjee didn't blame Jimboy for going away looking for something better. She'd go with him if it wasn't for her mother" (45). Nevertheless, the novel creates a definite tension between Jimboy's lazy indifference to work and his wife's entrapment in the daily grind of cooking and cleaning for a white family. Surprisingly, this tension neither explodes nor resolves within the novel. Only Jimboy's archetypal bluesman's charm, it seems, causes his wife to tolerate and justify his irresponsibility. Wall sees this lenience toward Jimboy as part of "the novel's romantic representation," in which "the blues man's art compensates for his marital infidelity and his dereliction of paternal responsibility" (43).

Befitting Jimboy's symbolic function as an ideally free bluesman, his music has also remained free from any of the possible corruptions that commercialism might bring. Early in the novel, Hughes tells us that the famed early blues innovator W. C. Handy had told Jimboy, "when he was a lad in Memphis," that "'You ought to make your living out of that, son.' But he hadn't followed it up—to many things to see, too many places to go, *too many other jobs*" (emphasis added 66). Thus, Hughes suggests that Jimboy's free spirit *and* tough economic realities both contributed to his decision to remain simply a recreational player. As such, he is a pure folk artist, who uses his music to bring joy and meaning to his own life and the lives of friends and family.

Without belaboring the point, Hughes portrays Jimboy's music as an important form of interpersonal communication. In a much later 1959 essay, Hughes describes jazz, in its "combination of sadness and laughter," as never "frivolous or meaningless music or merely entertainment, no matter how much it is played for fun" (*Defender* 217). This same conviction emerges from Hughes' subtle treatment of Jimboy's (and, later, Harriett's) blues in *Not Without Laughter*. In one example, having just returned home from a long stint working somewhere in the North, Jimboy plays a series of alternating "man-verses" and "woman-verses" that dramatize the tension between a northbound man and the woman he will leave behind. Hughes does not need to explain that Jimboy uses these folk verses to express uncertainties or guilt about his absence from his wife and child.

In another example, when Jimboy sings the lament of a man who is "*chain gang bound*" because no one can "*go ma bail*," a neighbor, Tom Johnson, "in great sympathy" with the song, starts to tell of his own experience in "de Turner County Jail." Tom's wife, however, would repress the memory of past indignities rather than relive them therapeutically through song: " 'Shut up yo' mouth!' squelched [his wife] Sarah, jabbing her husband in the ribs" (66). Here, then, we see a tension between Sarah's progressive tendencies and the function of Jimboy's blues, which fulfills Ralph Ellison's description of blues as "an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism" (78).

In his reading of *Not Without Laughter*, John P. Shields finds evidence of Hughes' feeling that the blues, for all its magnificent artistry, is, along with religion, one "of the more subtle forces working in opposition to the struggle against racial inequality": "Hughes realizes that the blues and religion work in different ways, both leading to complacency rather than to action" (610). In particular, he reads imagery describing the effect of a blues / jazz performance on dancers as suggestive of rape: "Cruel, desolate, unadorned was their music now, like the body of a ravished woman on the sun-baked earth; violent and hard, like a giant standing over his bleeding mate in the blazing sun" (100-1).[2]

Indeed, when "Benbow's Famous Kansas City Band" reaches the climax of its performance, people have become so absorbed in this "utterly despondent music" that they are "quite oblivious each person of the other" (105). Such scenes contribute to the ambiguity Hughes achieves in rendering the blues in various contexts. This music, it seems, explores the depths of the "heart of loneliness" (106), without bringing people together in healing interaction. As Roger Rosenblatt explains, "Music in *Not without Laughter* functions partly as a narcotic, but each of the songs in the book, like the original slave songs, contains a sober or practical undercurrent. Occasionally the music gets out of control, and the undercurrent overwhelms the sound" (39).

Hughes shows as well that although blues may unite certain segments of a community, it may also divide others. Within Stanton, people's allegiances are split between a revival and a carnival simultaneously being held there; these events even "widened the breach between the Christians and the sinners in Aunt Hagar's little household" (110).[3] Later, Hughes describes the social division between "the Bottoms," where "folks ceased to struggle against the boundaries between good and bad, or white and black, and surrendered amiably to immorality," and "the opposite side of the railroad, where the churches were and the big white Y.M.C.A." (217-18). Hughes portrayal links the way of life at the Bottoms—where Harriet goes to live and engage in prostitution—to a blues ethos steeped in world-weary capitulation to sin:

> *Ma bed is hard, but I'm layin' in it jest de same!*
>
> sang the raucous-throated blues-singer in her song. (218)

Hughes does not, however, suggest that this blues ethos promotes or causes the "sin."

In Tempy, Aunt Hagar's oldest daughter, Hughes gives a scathing portrayal of a woman who has no use for revivals *or* carnivals as she denies everything associated with "low-down folks" in the interest of her own social and economic gain. She and her husband, Mr. Siles, scorn blues and spirituals as "too Negro" (239). Tempy feels that "colored people needed to encourage talent so that the white race would realize Negroes weren't all mere guitar-players and house-maids" (236), and her husband thinks that blacks need to "stop being lazy, stop singing all the time, stop attending revivals, and learn to get the dollar—because money buys everything, even the respect of white people" (238-39).

Sandy will live with Tempy for some time after his grandmother dies and will thus be able to take this life of economic security and greater educational possibilities mixed with racial-cultural self-loathing and weigh it against the life of poverty mixed with racial-cultural nurture that he had known with his parents, aunt, and grandmother. Through Sandy's reflections on these contrasting living experiences, Hughes challenges the "progressive" view Tempy represents—that the tendency of lower-class African Americans towards singing and dancing contributes heavily to their economic instability:

> But was that why Negroes were poor, because they were dancers, jazzers, clowns?... The other way round would be better: dancers because of their poverty; singers because they suffered; laughing all the time because they must forget… It's more like that, thought Sandy. (289-90)

In his own future goals, vague and yet clearly not linked to music or dance, Sandy sees himself as carrying on his people's "[dance] of the spirit" (290). He realizes that their particular type of song and dance has been, in part, a reaction to their poverty and social oppression, and hopes that he himself can "dance" (in a metaphorical sense) "far beyond the limitations of their poverty, of their humble station in life, of their dark skins" (290). But the continuity Sandy sees between his people's literal dancing to whatever type of dance he will do suggests that his "low-down" cultural background will somehow aid him in the future.

Immediately following these reflections, however, the novel's final chapter will reveal that Sandy's aunt Harriett (now Harrietta) has become the popular and successful "Princess of the Blues." The significance of Harriett's achievements is enhanced by what we can surmise about the difficult path she has taken to reach her modest stardom. Earlier in the novel, Hughes describes a minstrel show at the very carnival with which Harriet will run away as she makes her first foray into the world of commercial music. This show includes degrading songs longing for "Dixie" and skits of mock razor fights and superstitious African Americans whom "the audience thought… frightfully funny and just like niggers" (116). These white people even laugh at a blues banjo player, whom Jimboy considers good, and whose music strikes Sandy as "the saddest music in the world" (117). We know, then, that this is the kind of show and audience that Harriett has had to negotiate on the way to becoming an independent blueswoman. Although her reasons for quitting the show, as she eventually does, are vague, Harriett shows that she has gained insight into the insincere nature of minstrelsy: "I wonder who made up that song about *Dear Old Southland*. There's nothing dear about it that I can see. Good God! It's awful!" (165). Although even Harriett's current vaudeville show includes slapstick racial comedy, at which Sandy and his mother "laughed nervously," she herself delivers the blues with dignity and sincerity.

Through Harriett, Hughes shows a positive synthesis of the blues as economic commodity and as cultural resource. Hughes does not seem to be concerned here with whether commercial considerations compromise Harriett's artistry in some way (he does not suggest that they do). More importantly, Harriett uses her economic success for a cause that demonstrates her familial loyalty, high value on education, and strong dedication to her "people." When she learns that her nephew, Sandy, plans to drop out of school to work as an elevator boy so that he can he can help his mother pay the rent, she warns Sandy about her own choice to quit school and offers to help Sandy continue his education.[4]

Further, although Harriett achieves financial success, her music, like Jimboy's, continues to unite black people—in this case those who have migrated north—around a shared repository of cultural memory:

> The man at the piano had begun to play blues—the old familiar folk-blues—and the audience settled into a receptive silence broken only by a 'Lawdy! … Good Lawdy! Lawd!' from some Southern lips at the back of the house, as Harriett sang:
>
> *Red sun, red sun, why don't you rise today?*
> *Red sun, O sun! Why don't you rise today?*
> *Ma heart is breakin'—ma baby's gone away.* (293)

In a comment that could aptly describes Harriett's role at the novel's end, Griffin sees the Northern blues performer as "conven[ing] the community and set[ting] the atmosphere to invoke tradition. The blues performance therefore exists as a safe space where migrants are healed, informed, ministered, and entertained" (55).[5] For such reasons, Steven Tracy argues for Harriett as the novel's "real hero":

> Using her intelligence and her love of the type of songs Jimboy sang, she has become a successful commercial vaudeville blues singer and a racially proud businesswoman; … Through intelligence, hard work, and racial awareness and pride (like the vaudeville blues singers, she drew on the folk roots of the blues—Jimboy—for her material and spirit), Harrietta has 'built herself up' and is now able to provide for future generations. (121-22)

Literary critic George Kent, however, provides what is perhaps a more realistic assessment of Harriett's success (as Hughes wished us to see it):

> Hughes's complex awareness of what the folk were up against in the attempt to assert the free life spirit is also apparent in his portrait of Harriett, who learns through her intermittent bouts with prostitution and utter destitution the price-tag placed by a

> machine culture upon spontaneity. Near the end of the novel, she seems to be on the way to fame and fortune, but Hughes was too familiar with the instabilities that hovered about the success of the black actors, actresses, and entertainers of this period. For most, it was an up and down sort of life, and the 'down' area was often slimy. (25-26)

John P. Shields also cites a speech—deleted from the published version—in which Harriett gives Sandy a sobering, realistic vision of her music's ability to radically alter economic and racial oppression: "The people who come to hear me sing, Sandy, those are the people you've got to help... They pay their thirty cents to come and hear me sing and see the comedian act a fool so they can laugh for a little while, but don't think they're all happy people—like the white man does, just because a nigger grins" (qtd. in Shields 611-12).

Unlike Harriett, Jimboy has become a distant presence at the end of the novel: he has been sent to fight in Europe during World War I and his family has little hope of his survival. This plot construction (one of convenience, perhaps) might indicate that Hughes was unsure of how to resolve Jimboy's status as a rambling bluesman with the needs of his family. Faced with Sandy's pressure to quit school, would he quit his wandering and buckle down to work? The novel chooses not to answer such a question. Perhaps, though, through Jimboy's unresolved status, the novel makes a more definite statement: that the wandering bluesman's fate is to be irresolvable into society's norms. In Kent's view, Hughes, "an honest and realistic writer" with a "complex awareness," "can not make of Jimboy's situation a very simple triumph and must report the cost of Jimboy's joy, charm, and exuberance" (25).

Langston Hughes' *Simply Heavenly*

Hughes' work *Simply Heavenly*, a "New Musical Folk Comedy" based on his novel *Simple Takes a Wife*, was written and produced several decades later than the peak of the Harlem Renaissance (1957). Thus, it is interesting to see that some of the same "folk vs. progressive" tensions are still viable concerns (to Hughes, anyway) at this relatively late date. Although this work, as a comedy, does not engage as deeply with serious social issues as *Not Without Laughter*, its jovial tone might be seen as a conscious liberation from a constant imperative to use literature as a social weapon. The relatively light tension in the work is not explicitly racial; rather, it comes from the conflicting social aspirations of the characters Simple and Joyce. Simple (Jesse B. Semple), represents—similar to Banjo, the protagonist in Claude McKay's novel of the same name—a way of life relatively unhindered by racial self-consciousness; he acts and speaks naturally, with little regard for social ramifications. He must reconcile this integrity of character, however, with his desire to win the hand of Joyce, a black woman with self-consciously (white) middle-class aspirations. Steven Tracy characterizes this tension as "the alternate impulses to retain ethnic identity (Jess) and adopt white values to achieve social and economic stability in the white world (Joyce)" (47).

Blues, while not given a profound role is this work, is shown as being integral to the lives of the characters, described in the play's introduction as "on the whole, ordinary, hard-working lower-income Harlemites" (245). Through these characters, we see that African American folk culture has remained vital to the lives of "low-down folks" (Hughes' term) in its migration from a rural to an urban setting. Hughes warns, however, that commercialism jeopardizes the integrity of this folk culture through his ominous description of the blues-guitarist character

Gitfiddle as "a folk artist going to seed, unable to compete with the juke box, TV, and the radio, having only his guitar and his undisciplined talents" (245). The deliberate bestowal of the appellation "folk artist" upon a character who is also described as a "seedy looking fellow" (259) shows Hughes' reverence for those who, like Gitfiddle, chose artistic integrity over economic security.

Although the social powers-that-be are antagonistic to Gitfiddle, the low-down folks make a point of expressing the value they still have for him. When a policeman runs Gitfiddle off the street for "hustling for dimes" with his music, the play's various minor "folk characters" (Mamie, Bodiddly, Arcie, and Melon) assure him that they still value his live music, and even join him in singing a blues song. Gitfiddle's lyrics at this point reinforce his commitment to tradition ("Maybe to some people / What the blueses say is news / But to me it's an old, old story") and anti-commercial aesthetic ("If you ain't got five strings, / make four strings do").

Suggesting another force that jeopardizes the various cultural practices comprising a folk identity (blues included), Hughes satirizes a racial push towards respectability, which derides these practices as stereotypical rather than genuine. In one of several scenes that occur in a bar, a nameless character (identified only as a "snob") accuses several other characters—who have been joking about gin, domestic quarrels, and the virtues of watermelon—of acting like "disgraceful stereotypes." To this, Mamie indignantly responds, "Why, it's getting so colored folks can't do nothing no more without some other Negro calling you a stereotype" (257). She likes her watermelons, chitterlings, gin, blackeyed peas, and colorful dresses and does not care who knows it. Mamie might well have include blues or jazz here as one of her lower-class “vices.” Her defiant cultural stance resonates well with Hughes’ famous manifesto “The Negro and the Racial Mountain,” in which Hughes celebrates

> the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are the majority—may the Lord be praised! The people who have their hip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round… These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. (“Negro” 306)

Although *Simply Heavenly* never makes Gitfiddle’s plight (or the general plight of African American traditional music) more than a minor side issue, this evidence alone shows Hughes’ belief in the value of traditional music (and other folkways) and his concern for the effects of modern commercial interests on this music.

August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars*

Written sixty-five years after *Not Without Laughter*, August Wilson’s *Seven Guitars* (1995), set in 1948 Pittsburgh, upholds and continues to explore Hughes’ ambivalence over the relationship between music as a cultural force and as an economic resource. Like Hughes, Wilson shows in this work his preference for dealing with low-down characters who have plenty of reasons for singing the blues. Wilson’s protagonist, Floyd “Schoolboy” Barton, is an aspiring blues singer and guitarist who, although he currently has a hit record, “That’s All Right,” on the radio, has just gotten out of the “workhouse,” where he has been held for ninety days on a charge of vagrancy. Now he hopes to return to Chicago, where he has received an offer to make a follow up to his successful recording. All financial cards seem stacked against him, however. He had recorded for a flat rate, and thus sees no extra money from his hit. His guitar is in the pawnshop (as are the drums of his bandmate, Red Carter [45]), and his time in the workhouse causes him to miss the deadline for redeeming his guitar for the agreed-upon value. Adding to his bad luck, he has lost the letter that will give him thirty cents a day for his time in the workhouse.

Besides Floyd, Hedley, a 59-year-old man who has chronic TB, is perhaps the play’s most significant character. Hedley, too, desires a connection to the world of professional jazz and blues. His desire is also based on money, but rests upon much stranger and self-delusory hopes than Floyd’s goal of becoming a blues star. From his father, who had loved music “more than my mother,” (67), Hedley has inherited the story of once hearing the trumpeter King Buddy Bolden play in New Orleans. Hedley’s father reflected this passion by naming his son “King.” The grand and onerous implications of this title, however, taunt the unglamorous realities of Hedley’s life (he is 59 years old, single, and dying of TB). Somehow, Hedley has turned a very tenuous connection to a commercially successful luminary of yesteryear into a wild fantasy that his namesake will someday appear and give him some money. He constantly sings out this fantasy, by ending the line “I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say...” with lines such as “Here go the money, King, / Take it away” (16). Although Hedley’s condition can only be fully explained as insanity (related, presumably, to his TB), his case is perhaps an extreme form of a more common phenomenon in which people entertain mystical dreams that contact with the talented and successful will somehow charm their own conventional lives. Hedley has made such a connection with a musician of his father's generation who has been dead for many years.

In evoking Bolden, *Seven Guitars* places the work within a loose historical framework. Although not revealed in the play, the actual Buddy Bolden, widely remembered as a great New Orleans trumpeter (he never recorded), lived from 1877-1931. After his health failed in 1907, he spent the rest of his life in a mental institution. He has been immortalized through Jelly Roll Morton's popular "Buddy Bolden's Blues." Like Hedley's verses, this song does contain lines beginning with "I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say," but the words don't seem to have any deeper connection to Hedley's case. As Wilson has commented, he often used music to generate plot ideas, giving greater attention to the feelings they evoke than to historical details:

> To me, research is like putting on a straitjacket because you're limited to what your research uncovers as opposed to just coming from inside you. Most research I do is listening to music of the period... If a guy says: 'I'm leaving in the morning...' you say: 'What are the circumstances of his life? Who's he talking to? Why's he leaving?'... If you take the logical extension of things, it'll take you to a whole new world" (qtd. in Tu 16).

In adopting such a strategy, Wilson's own work continues the oral tradition of the blues and exemplifies this tradition as reliant much more on conveying poetic insight and human truth than on preserving accurate historical narratives.

In what could potentially seem a forced and awkward plot denouement, Floyd will commit robbery in an attempt to throw off the various financial obstacles blocking his musical ambitions, and Hedley, thinking that Buddy Bolden has brought him riches at last, will cut Floyd's throat to get this same money. But if this plot cannot be neatly interpreted in every detail, perhaps the lack of sense in Hedley's murder of Floyd *can* be explained as the chaos that results from various deferred (and yet unrelated) dreams in collision with one another. Hedley does not see Floyd as any sort of an opposing force; both are simply characters driven by frustration to commit desperate acts. Robert L. King sees the ending similarly: "By making Hedley the instrument of fate, Wilson rejects neat causal patterns as false to dramaturgy and history… The killing makes no more sense than does the 1948 world beyond the boundaries of *Seven Guitars*" (44).

Although Wilson is sympathetic towards his characters' material anxieties, he is more concerned with showing how the quest for money can dull more humane values. In one scene, rather than focus on congratulating Red Carter about his baby boy, Floyd and Canewell bicker with the new father about the cheapness of the cigars he hands out to celebrate the birth (35-6). Wilson seems to link this preoccupation with money to a detrimental loss of cultural values that occurs with the migration from the rural south to the urban north. In another example, Wilson's characters see a strident rooster, who, like themselves, has been transplanted to the city, as an unwelcome reminder of a rural past. One comments that the owner could easily replace her rooster with a dollar-forty-nine alarm clock from Woolworth's (59). And, reflecting his view of Chicago as more metropolitan (and thus more desirable) than Pittsburgh, Floyd claims, "You ain't gonna find no rooster living next to you making all that noise in Chicago." His friend Canewell, however, speculates, "There's more roosters in Chicago than there is in Pittsburgh. There's more people from the country in Chicago than there is in Pittsburgh" (61).

Although Floyd’s desire to succeed in the music business is understandable, one senses that his commercially oriented ambition seems to have overshadowed healthier, more fundamental values. Floyd seems more interested in the material possibilities that might come from success in the music industry than with creating meaningful music (80). Feeling that he needs his electric guitar (which is in the pawnshop) in order to pursue his professional ambitions, Floyd no longer cherishes his old acoustic guitar (44-45). As part of his misplaced values, Floyd seems to have lost focus on the healing possibilities of blues within a communal, non-commercial setting. Forgetting that blues is foremost an expression of feeling, Floyd scoffs at Hedley’s attempt to play along on a homemade bass made from a board and a single strand of chicken wire. Thus, he shows that, even among friends, his music is mired in cutthroat commercialism. Hedley can’t possibly “top” him, he claims, since his guitar can make “six times as much music” as Hedley’s one-string (49).

Hedley does temporarily sway Floyd when he explains how he came to play on this crude homemade instrument: as a child, he had once asked his grandfather where his (grandfather’s) mother was. In apocryphal response, his grandfather had told him to listen to a plucked string. This simple, yet profound, suggestion inspired Hedley to delve into this most basic of instruments for the “voice” of his grandfather’s mother, for a musical feeling that would transcend time and link generations. But he is humble about his ability to conjure the past through music: he thinks he might have reached this elusive goal “Once. Maybe. Almost” (49). Hedley’s story causes Floyd to reflect on his own mother’s praying and singing (and of his plans to buy a marker for her grave) (50-1). He sings “The Lord’s Prayer” as she had once done and thinks of buying a marker for her grave. Then, his intimate reflections are, not insignificantly, cut short by an intrusion from an outside world of commercialism: everyone rushes away to listen to a radio broadcast of a boxing match where Joe Louis will defend his title for Heavyweight Champion of the World.

Given the poverty in his background, Floyd can hardly be faulted for desiring the security that money (and an exploitation of music) could bring. Having just gotten out of jail for vagrancy, he is clearly not well off. And he remembers that his "mama ain't had two dimes to rub together" (81). Merely seeking "a little shelter" from "a cold world," he vows that "Floyd Barton is gonna make his record. Floyd Barton is going to Chicago" (82). In this moment of weakness, he goes out and takes part in the robbery that will indirectly lead to his death.

Hedley's poor and troubled background also helps to explain his fixation on money and a successful musician like Buddy Bolden. For his father, a caretaker of horses who was no stranger to hunger and poverty, Bolden perhaps represented a black man who had, within the framework of popular culture, beaten the odds against success in white-dominated America: "my father play the trumpet and for him Buddy Bolden was a god" (67). But Hedley as a child had not been able to understand how someone like Bolden could be a viable hero. He learned in school about Toussaint L'Ouverture (the black leader of the Haitian rebellion) and saw in this figure the pinnacle of black achievement. He had then gone home and judged his father by this criteria: "I go home and my daddy he sitting there and he big and black and tired taking care of the white man's horses, and I say, 'How come you not like Toussaint L'Ouverture, why you do nothing?' And he kick me with him boot in my mouth" (86-7). This had silenced Hedley until "Marcus Garvey come [and] he give me back my voice to speak" (87). Hedley's reference to Garvey (1887-1940), an important early promoter of black nationalism and pan-Africanism, suggests that he has learned to take pride in the spectrum of black *cultural* (and not just political) achievements in Africa, America, and other diasporic locales.

With this shift from political to cultural values, Hedley would have been able to see a musician like Bolden as a valuable part of African American uplift. Unfortunately, his father had died before Hedley could ever ask his forgiveness and show that he had reconciled his clash with his father's values. Perhaps, then, Hedley's insanity comes from an unrealized desire to fulfill goals (represented by Bolden) that his father had never achieved. Hedley, though, emphasizes the monetary aspect of his father's dreams, whereas his father probably would have emphasized the dream of attaining the musical ability that made Bolden a star in the first place. The emptiness of Hedley's values is revealed in a dream in which Bolden actually does give Hedley the money and it crumbles "like ash" (70).

Hedley's insanity still seems exacerbated by a tension between valuing the free gifts of community and culture and desiring radical action to get his long overdue material and spiritual satisfaction. Despite lucid moments, such as that when he teaches Floyd the lesson regarding the power of simple music, he insanely gets a machete so that he will be "ready for the white man when he come to take [me] away" (87). He also shows a self-destructive fanaticism when, in response to people's complaints about the rooster's crow, he seizes the bird and cuts its throat (64). Killing the bird to punish the shortsightedness of people who do not realize that "[when] you hear his rooster you know you alive" (64), he also unwittingly punishes himself. Later, with a similarly self-destructive rationale, he will cut Floyd's throat, thinking him to be Buddy Bolden, the man his father had revered as an artist and he himself had revered as a (supposedly) rich man.

Strangely, in the play's presentation, Hedley seems to have suffered no consequences for murdering Floyd. The play ends with the stolen money falling through Hedley's fingers like ashes as he repeatedly sings "I thought I heard Buddy Bolden say…" (107). "Thought" is the crucial word here, expressing Hedley's sense that his dream has betrayed him. We are left to wonder to what extent he realizes what he has done. Symbolically, in his desire to deal with his economic and social frustrations through violent action, Hedley destroys a potential bearer of cultural healing.

What emerges from these works by Hughes and Wilson (as well as from other Wilson plays such as *The Piano Lesson* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*) is an image of a musical tradition that is at once vulnerable to change, capable of evolution and bearing offspring, and, finally, too vital and relevant to die. Representing the people who carry traditions to new physical and aesthetic places, this music will have to face dilemmas of cultural integrity as it establishes its place in America's socio-economic fabric. To what extent can the music's function as a pure cultural resource coexist with the attempts by musicians and non-musicians, white and black, to exploit its commercial value? Neither Hughes nor Wilson uses these works to promote a traditional folkloristic valuation of unchanging artifacts of folk culture. Indeed, even Jimboy, the most tradition-rooted musician I have discussed here, values his style (that of a lone singer accompanied by guitar) for practical reasons, not because he sees himself as a torchbearer of old values. In Hughes' and Wilson's presentation, insofar as the blues remains a viable folk form, it must continue to be relevant within the community. Surely, this concept of relevance cannot exclude the quality of economic usability. Complicating a conservative view of economic interests as entirely threatening to folk / creative forms is the possibility that economic viability may also help sustain folk culture by giving talented individuals the economic incentive and freedom to work creatively. And, while intellectuals may debate such issues vainly and in vain among themselves, ultimately, as Hughes and Wilson show, the weight of carrying culture forward intact into new and often troublesome phases of a people's socio-economic evolution rests upon the shoulders of the people who use the culture, as necessary, to help them survive.

Notes

[1] Sterling Brown "Negro Folk Expression: Spirituals, Seculars, Ballads and Work Songs," 263.

[2] Shields also suggests an alternate, and more positive, reading of the effect of this musical performance: whereas religion may promote a passive waiting for a better life after death, blues "forces the individual to face her misery" (610).

[3] Albert Murray, in his novel *Train Whistle Guitar*, also discusses the inevitable tension between "church folks" and the blues. To the spiritually minded, having the blues "was exactly the same as saying that the blues had you" (97). This meaning of having the blues can be traced back to the folk belief that "blue devils" could plague people, tempting the flesh and in turn causing torment of the soul. Those who were "saved" presumably did not have the worldly temptations that singing the blues supposedly manifested (97). Most were not, however, above an occasional enjoyment of a blues performance (98). Unlike these church folks, the narrator always associated blues with the "blue steel train whistle blueness of the briarpatch" (97).

[4] In *Train Whistle Guitar*, Murray's principal bluesman, Luzana Cholly, expresses pro-education sentiments strikingly similar to Harriett's for Sandy. Discovering that young Scooter and his friend Little Buddy have tried to emulate him by hopping a northbound train, Luzana, instead of being flattered, fiercely scolds them for their foolishness. His emphasis is on the merits of "going to school and learning to use your head like the smart, rich and powerful whitefolks" (29). His own blues and wandering, he suggests, reflect his limited socio-economic circumstances. In contrast, Scooter and Little Buddy, as a new generation, are "supposed to take what they were already born with and learn how to put it with everything the civil engineers and inventors and doctors and lawyers and bookkeepers had found out about the

world and be the one to bring about the day the old folks had always been prophesying and praying for" (30). And, in contrast to his heroic image in the eyes of Scooter and Little Buddy, he tells the boys that "*You going further than old Luze ever dreamed of. Old Luze ain't been nowhere. Old Luze don't know from nothing*" (30).

[5] Griffin discusses Bessie Smith as fulfilling such a role for Northern blacks (57). And, in an article written for the *Chicago Defender*, Hughes described Memphis Minnie's performance at Chicago's 230 club on New Year's eve, 1942, as "music with so much in it folks remember that sometimes it makes them holler out loud" ("Music" 196). Like the music of Smith (and of Harriett), the music of Memphis Minnie *combines* memories of the rural South with experiences of northern migration.

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Utopia and the Children of the Temple: *Herland* as a Feminist Separatist Fantasy

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote *Herland* (1915) as America swam through the turbulent waters of World War I and the gathering tide of the Women's Rights Movement, shortly before women's suffrage was gained; the novel is born from strife, violence, and the harkening of American voices. Gilman's text serves as a forthright response to the unfolding tragedy of The Great War documented within newspapers and in the popular press, and as a vision of a better world in which the rights and freedoms that women were fighting for each day had been realized in untold ways. In 1915, America was in many ways a battleground, and looming in the forefront was a gender battle that Americans encountered in every facet of life: within the domestic, social, civic, and economic spheres. Published in five years before the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment that secured women's right to vote, *Herland* responds to a resolute patriarchy, which developed and executed American laws and ideals. Gilman's creation of a purely female utopia, although achieved solely in the realm of the imagination, soothed the fears and discomforts of American women who fought depression, misogyny, and domestic boredom on a daily basis, all of which resulted in a loss of feminine identity. The dissected roles of mother, wife, and caretaker had overcome the complex title of "Woman," an unfortunate state that had proven a hindrance to self-exploration and personal fulfillment. Herland offers a hopeful glimpse of what could be rather than the grim spectacle of what is.

Critic Jennifer Burwell tells us that “U-topia literally means ‘nowhere’ – an ‘unplace’ whose nature is to be inaccessible to the ‘real’ dystopian world – and the defining goal of utopia is to establish itself as a harmonious and stable space that exists as a self-contained ‘elsewhere’ of existing conditions” (1). Thus, Herland serves as an “elsewhere,” to Gilman’s world of war and death emblazoned with the conquests and misadventures of men: Herland is an Other place that is easily queered by the same-sex population and also as a “non-place” that looms on the periphery of our fanciful conceptualizations. Above all else, the plot line serves as a feminist travel narrative relayed by three unsuspecting men. In her article “*Herland*: Utopic in a Different Voice”, Minna Doskow writes,

> [f]rom earliest times, humanity has longed for a perfect world, one in sharp contrast to whatever its particular surrounding reality happened to be. Such utopian longings are still prevalent, still written about in our literature, and still, as always, unrealized… Yet, it has always been man’s view; ‘man’ used in the generic sense, of course, but unavoidably expressing the male perspective and carrying with it limitation in the sexual sense as well. (1)

Herland is a powerful response to this call and an offering of perfection to those who seek an alternative to the constraints of heteronormative culture.

Gilman’s narrative constructs a peaceful, chimerical stretch of matriarchal territory wherein females are the builders and exercisers of virtue and goodness within a self-contained space of refuge. Gilman delivers this solace to American women in the form of a utopian novel. Bernice L. Hausman notes in her essay “Sex before Gender: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Evolutionary Paradigm of Utopia,” Herland was “originally published serially in 1915 in The

Forerunner, a journal written and edited by Gilman herself" (490). The work of fiction was designed to draw in, carefully and slowly from serial to serial, an audience of American women who clung hopefully to the wildly progressive ideas contained within its pages, and these same women perhaps secretly hoped that somewhere the lost paradise was a reality. Gilman's unequivocal message is that America (in fact a dystopian paradigm from a feminist perspective) has suffered at the hands of men due to traits males seem to possess. According to Emily Stoper and Roberta Ann Johnston, in their article "The Weaker Sex and the Better Half: The Idea of Women's Moral Superiority in the American Feminist Movement," a study of the construction of women's virtues in the feminist movement, the construction of male identity is thus the opposite of female morality: "the[...]allegedly male qualities of debauchery, selfishness, corruption, coldness, aggressiveness, emotional repression" (193). The novel encourages readers to locate the real world social problems in the first two decades of the twentieth century—problems absent in Herland—with patriarchy itself and the feminist prescription depends on this location.

Herland breaks, however, with one key genre element for feminist utopian fiction: the examination of women's limited roles in patriarchy. Carol Pearson in "Women's Fantasies and Feminist Utopias" argues that "[a]uthors of Feminist utopian fiction usually begin by showing how women are profoundly alienated and limited by patriarchal society; they then go on to acquaint the reader with an alternative society in which women could feel at home and manifest their potential" (50). Rather than taking this particular approach, Gilman trusts her readers enough to understand that women have fulfilled the roles of quiet victim, obedient housewife, and sexualized vixen for long enough so that her readers find refreshment, excitement, and a sense of liberation at the male explorers' discovery of Herland: readers are quite aware that the victim, housewife, and vixen are not here. Emily Stoper and Roberta Ann Johnston point out that "many feminists have argued that women's superior qualities could make this a better world" (193). As the male character and narrator, Vandyk "Van" Jennings in the novel eloquently puts it, "Here was Mother Earth, bearing fruit" (61). Earth has always been equated with the feminine divine because of its nurturing qualities of growth and reproduction, as well as the continued presence of cycles observed in menstruation, its twin the moon cycle, and the transitioning of seasons. As Judith "Jack" Halberstam, gender and queer theorist, has comically pointed out recently in 2005, "every year is the year that masculinity is declared to be in crisis, requiring lots of help from the church, the government, the media, and Dr. Phil." While today we fret over the state of masculinity, Americans have remained consumed by the conflicting messages of femininity both today and 100 years ago. Van's marveling over Herland as the embodiment of the unleashed power and splendor of Mother Earth reflects his own crisis of masculinity, his uncertainty about his role in this world. Masculinity, often defined in terms of the concealment of emotions in literary figures and cultural figures within American society, is also akin to an apparent condition of vulnerability.

When Gilman wrote Herland, women fought for a place in the workforce, advocated for better wages, and struggled to open up more career pathways beyond low status employment. Carol Pearson explains that "[t]o the degree that feminist utopias are critiques of patriarchal society, they tend to emphasize the forces which most directly oppress women" (50). The metaphor of the "glass ceiling" impeding women's economic progress and opportunity was both much lower and much more resilient in the early 1900s. Ann J. Lane writes of the labor conditions of women in the early twentieth century in terms of profound class division that hampered women's solidarity: "[w]omen found themselves divided... working-class women locked into hideously exploitative jobs and middle-class women locked into lonely and privatized existences. It was a world of fear and powerlessness" (159). While working women were exploited in the workforce for their labor or appearance, women who worked at home as mothers and homemakers were domestically confined as exploited objects of servitude and degradation while their male counterparts enjoyed the luxuries of clean, quiet offices. Pearson also comments, in contrast to these real world economic disparities, that "[i]n no feminist utopia is there any difference in income according to the kind of work done" (50). In Herland, women may work as school teachers or temple leaders, but their chief duty and central focus, which they share as a loving, collective unit, is the most honorable of Herland's vocations: the role of the Mother and Motherhood. For such a vocation, the land's women receive no monetary gain, which would demean motherhood, but rather the simple and consistent love of their daughters. The women of Herland have no use for money or material objects as they have acquired enlightened agricultural and governmental systems that transcend the need of such items through the realization of a maternal community.

Our Herlanders meet their uninvited guests with some initial fear and suspicion, which later shifts to comfort and openness, as curiosity remains an enduring factor throughout their interactions. Narrator Van Jennings comments, "[b]eing at last considered sufficiently tamed and trained to be trusted with scissors, we barbered ourselves as best we could" (74). Van's description not only implies that for the first time in Herland's long and rich history, the women of Herland fear for their physical safety, but also proves that the infantile images of the trio, exacerbated by the ladies' decision that the men are not fit to handle any sharp tools (which also shatters the men's enduring and esteemed self-perception as explorers), is part of what repositions the female – male relationships in the novel. The first men in the historical time of patriarchy acquired tools and proficiency in their use, but Van Jennings, Terry O. Nicholson, and Jeff Margrave, the first men to step foot in Herland, must suffer the emasculation of being denied such a ritual. In this way, the women initially experience affection toward the men as their own children, who must be contained and guided to protect not only Herlanders, but the men from themselves.

Upon the men's arrival, Terry fires a gun into a chaotic crowd of women as the frantic women attempt to seize the men. Van explains, "Terry soon found that it was useless, tore himself loose for a moment, pulled his revolver, and fired upward. As they caught at it, he fired again - we heard a cry" (25). This violent greeting clearly carries an ejaculatory element and serves as a moment of foreshadowing of what Terry is capable of and what may come to pass if the Herlanders do not guard themselves well during the men's stay. However, as relations between the two groups progress, a comfort level is obtained between the female civilization and the three men. Before Ellador weds Van, for example, she shares her excitement of her impending visit to the men's land. She gullibly exclaims to her future husband, "Oh, how I shall love your mother!" (126), ignorant to the harsh realities of the land from whence the young men have traveled so far. Unknown to Ellador are the man-made problems of pollution, crime, and poverty, as well as the typical jealousy and hostility that exist amongst women who live in patriarchy: these are all concepts a Herlander's mind fails to comprehend wholly because they are incomprehensible in a world guided by motherhood. Ellador assumes that she will immediately feel the utmost respect and adoration for Van's mother simply because she is just that: a mother (the mother of the man Ellador loves, at that). Ellador fails to realize that such marital situations do not always prove so sunny and successful because she does not understand what it means to suffer any ill will toward another female. Regardless of a woman's relation to Ellador in the world of our men, the Herlander views any woman as her mother, her sister, and a fellow creator of human life.

Due to gender roles and stereotypes within patriarchal societies, we have particular expectations of what it means to be "feminine" or "masculine." When individuals contradict these norms, it is considered taboo and unnatural. For example, women in the early twentieth century were traditionally considered to be the "softer sex," the emotional creatures that lack stability and clear logic when faced with difficulties. That Herland's denizens fail to meet these standards as frazzled, illogical women, rattles the male explorers, which forces our narrator to question his own ideologies surrounding gender. Van admits that "[w]ith these women the most salient quality in all their institutions was reasonableness" (77). A logical female mind is apparently a rare find or perhaps even impossible for our brave men. Halberstam writes that "[f]emale stupidity can make men feel bigger, better, smarter; and it, in turn, can make many women themselves feel desirable." However, this idea does not apply to Herland's women. Herlanders know only logic and reason—much like the virtuous Houyhnhnms of Gulliver's Travels, who understand a lie only as "the thing which was not" (Swift 243)—rather than the manipulation and deceit the men associate with women's behavior. If it does not enhance their land, better educate their little girls, or make their work more efficient, the women of Herland know not of it. Scholars of the feminist movement, Stoper and Johnson describe women's perfections as presented in the American feminist movement as "wholesomeness, altruism, purity, compassion, nurturance, [and] authenticity (193). These qualities contrast with the aggression, destructiveness, and violence associated with men. Herland both revises early twentieth- century notions of feminine and masculine and challenges these categories as a whole.

For example, Van tells us somewhat confusedly and desperately, "What left us even more at sea in our approach was the lack of any sex-tradition. There was no accepted standard of what was 'manly' and what was 'womanly'" (93). Van, Terry, and Jeff see women as creatures that are designed to be chaste and coy in their dealings with males, and to express shame and modesty in regard to their bodies. As Van begins to grasp Terry's misguided ideas and expectations of Herland, he tells us that "[w]hat Terry meant by saying they [Herlanders] had no 'modesty' was that this great life-view had no shady places; they had a high sense of personal decorum, but no shame - no knowledge of anything to be ashamed of" [emphasis added] (102).

Because of our visitors' desire to categorize the women within a biased gender spectrum, the women are labeled asexual, based in their construction of desire and heteronormative relationships. Of the Herlanders, Terry angrily claims, "[t]hey've neither the vices of men, nor the virtues of women - they're neuters!" (99). Perhaps if Herlanders frolicked in silken underthings and platform stilettos or carried spears and initiated the men as their personal sex slaves, Terry may have demonstrated a bit more patience and understanding. Patience and understanding, indeed, are the only requests that the Herlanders make of the men. Because the women the men meet fail to mirror Terry's image of the sexually aggressive warrior goddess, nor behave recklessly or irresponsibly like men, Terry's sense of gender ideals is threatened and disrupted by these strange women. Had the men been beaten and tormented by the ladies upon their arrival, Terry's mind would likely rest easy that his suspicions of women's deeply rooted evil had been proven correct and that the country's inhabitants fall safely into the category of uncontrollable, reckless women: in current parlance, the "bitch." Van tells us that "[t]hese stalwart virgins had no men to fear and therefore no need of protection," which suggests that the men feel emasculated by the idea that they cannot protect the women from other men—if masculinity is defined by the ability to protect. Again, of paramount importance to Van is that these women are defined by the penetration of men and thus labeled "virgins" (56).

Of the three men, only Van expresses an interest in the offspring of Herland. He astonishingly tells us, "I never heard a child cry in Herland, save once or twice at a bad fall" (103). The country's daughters are raised ignorant of crime, corruption, pollution, and other treacherous dangers posed by mankind. Van expresses a newfound admiration not only for women and the motherhood they so much enjoy, but for babies as well: "[a]s for the babies - a group of those naked darlings playing on short, velvet grass, clean-swept; or rugs as soft; or in shallow pools of bright water; tumbling over with bubbling joyous baby laughter - it was a view of infant happiness such as I had never dreamed" (104). Van feels a sense of personal loss when he contrasts the lives of Herland's babies with his own infancy and early years: "I spent many days with the little ones … and began to feel a crushing pity for my own childhood, and for all others that I had known" (108). Rather than relishing in the innocence and unassuming nature of these new human beings, Van instead lingers on his own sense of personal loss. Van's egocentricity suggests a patriarchal framework in the very moment when he marvels at the wonders of a matriarchal world.

Carol Pearson reminds us that "[i]n feminist utopias, children are never illegitimate, because they all have mothers" (50). Because motherhood encompasses every facet of Herland life, fathers are not necessary, and indeed fathers are not thought to be missing from the biologic processes of conception and the raising of a child; thus, legitimacy is determined by the presence of a child's mother rather than both parents. Hence, if a Herlander girl has her mothers, the threat of illegitimacy is never present. However, in terms of the typical nuclear family of the men's land, this gender imbalance may lead to a suspicion that Herland's utopic framework would crack and eventually shatter. Popular opinion in the twenty-first century also deems that every child, and especially every boy, needs a father. Gillman challenges long cherished and persistent beliefs about parenting by asserting the primacy of genuine, connective, nurturing love itself between a parent and a child, a trait that she aligns specifically with the maternal.

Access to birth control in the United States was still very limited in 1915, and Margaret Sanger's pioneering efforts to raise educational awareness about birth control and women's reproductive health were still beginning. In the context of reproductive choices and family planning determined by women, Gilman offers an interesting vision of childbirth in *Herland* that is an extension of this discussion: Herland's women must truly want a baby to become pregnant; a sort of "immaculate conception" takes place. Ann Lane in her analysis of the cultural context for the novel states, "Given the absence of satisfactory birth-control technology, career and family decisions carried delicate and complicated ramifications." Due to such inconveniences, many women had no choice but to give birth to unwanted children or to wed and procreate with men unfit for fatherhood; the result was many unwanted (and thus often neglected and even unloved) children born to parents who were forced into parenthood. Thus, according to Judith Hausman, "[p]arthenogenesis is a metaphor for women's control of reproduction" (506). Gilman carefully makes certain that once the men of Herland vanish long ago, Herlanders reign over their land, heir economy, and most importantly, their reproductive rights. Hausman notes that "Herlanders reproduce parthenogenetically (that is, asexually), and they are responsible for their own livelihoods. Thus, Herlanders do not depend upon men economically nor do they need them for procreation" (496).

Parthenogenesis is symbolic of Herland's collective liberation from males; the women fail to realize this fully, even after the arrival of Van, Jeff, and Terry, but this is, after all, a part of their liberation and an aspect that they take for granted as inhabitants in a women only world. The process and mere possibility of parthenogenesis represent much more than procreation in the absence of men; this scientific marvel signifies a complete and holistic existence without male assistance or fertilization. When men are no longer part of the civil or biological puzzle, the dawn of an enterprising civilization, Herland, is birthed. In the context of late twentieth and early twenty-first century families, the need for lesbian couples to consider in vitro fertilization or review potential sperm donors is vanquished, nor would adoption be chosen as a last resort for such couples. Gilman imagines a lesbian world in reproduction occurs as a loving enactment of a mother's wish for a daughter and thus a large feminine, maternal community.

Interestingly, in the context of twenty-first century science one can contemplate the genetic implications and possibilities of parthenogenesis for lesbian couples, as well as the political repercussions of this idea in terms of feminist utopia and separatism. In her article "Cell Fusion and Parthenogenesis," for example, Diane Stein speculates that perhaps one day "[a] woman could have her daughter in this manner by use of two of her own eggs, or with an egg of her own and that of another woman. Two lesbian partners could have a child by cell fusion that is genetically both of theirs" (10). The future success of such technology would mark a triumphant point in history for lesbian couples who do not wish to call on men to successfully become pregnant. Examining the political elements of female separatism, Greta Rensenbrink offers in her essay "Parthenogenesis and Lesbian Separatism: Regenerating Women's Community through Virgin Birth in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s", that "by labeling men mutants, lesbians could affirm the superiority of women's culture. A housing advertisement posted in a woman's bookstore described a project exploring 'our dyke/amazon culture of the past, before there were parasitic male mutants,' while working 'toward our dyke/amazon culture of the future, when only xx's exist' " (302). Rensenbrink also tells us that "[w]hile parthenogenesis occupied a fringe position in lesbian and lesbian feminist thinking, it was a powerful idea that percolated and continues to percolate through lesbian communities and lesbian culture" (289). *Herland* as a novel imagines such a separatist community, politically, socially, economically, and genetically.

Gender separatists might argue that male-dominated hierarchies do not operate successfully (depending on how we define "success") within the departments of government, religion, or ecology, and then conclude that the easiest and most natural response is for women to construct their own Herland from scratch. Rensenbrink reflects that as a political movement "separatism was an end in itself, a project of creating all-female cultures and community and possibly, ultimately, an all-female world" (290). Because Herland is a self-contained land, it greets us as not only a female-centered world but as a universe *in toto* containing only females. In the feminist utopian novel, Carol Pearson states, "feminists envision families of equals, with no patriarchs to 'own' them" (52). This idea of patriarchal ownership of women demonstrates the eroded value of women as bearers of life and the patriarchal exchange of women as akin to chattel to be owned, handled, and tamed. Rensenbrink also adds that "[t]he first lesbian separatist groups began to appear around 1971... [and] [b]y the middle of the decade lesbians were heading to what became an explosion of lesbian urban and land communes across the country" (291). The lesbian separatist movement of the 1970s expressed women's frustrations and the feeling of a desperate need for "a way out" of patriarchy and gender inequality: Gilman in 1915 imagines such a world defined by the primacy and centrality of motherhood.

Thus, Ellador lovingly tells Van, "you have to be patient with us. We are not like the women of your country. We are Mothers, and we are People" (125). Unlike the feminist separatist movements that took form in the 1970s, Herlanders have not run from an oppressive or suffocating situation to seek feminine solidarity. Their world emerges organically and evolutionarily. That said, Ellador's clarification that Herlanders are mothers and indeed people reflects Gilman's own feelings that women were not recognized as such, but only as full-time mothers and wives, machines used for the purpose of creating more people: that is, woman reduced to womb.

The concept of equality through segregation that emerges in feminist lesbian separatist communities is a product of progressive thinking within an omnipresent patriarchal society. The invention of a feminist utopia is a vision that has sprung from the seeds of grief and frustration.

Art, music and literature are frequently utilized as vehicles of voice when minority groups are neglected and chastised for a period of time; the result is an inevitable backlash, a phenomenon that sets the wheels of change into motion in a societal sense. Herland speaks to this idea and suggests that segregation of the sexes is a solution not only to the American "battle of the sexes," and the antidote for the country's sexism and lack of genuine and unbiased opportunities for hardworking women. Gilman's text works as rhetoric to persuade us that Herland is a factual location, but we must recognize our own abilities to manifest such an existence. A book we may carry with us—we have no choice but to confront the charming characters of the segregated community (although Herlanders are happily ignorant of the concept of segregation).

Carol Pearson remarks, "[i]t is interesting to note that women may be able to design societies without dominance, because they lack the experience of dominating. So, too, it may be that women find it easier than men to imagine societies in which people work without being paid and without an atmosphere of competition for scarce, privileged jobs" (51-2). Because women have never been given the freedom or the power to rule any particular class of people, their minds have remained chaste to a certain extent. However, Jennifer Burwell explains that "Women can [...] attribute the whole history of their oppression not to disempowerment but to a morally superior refusal to use their power because they regard it as inherently oppressive. The refusal to use their power preserves their status as innocent victims at the same time that it refigures their disempowerment as a conscious choice and upholds their perception of themselves as omnipotent" (80). While Pearson explains that women lack the corruptive experience to "dominate," Burwell points out that this is so because women have chosen to use their natural instincts to love and nurture rather than to command and wage war. In this way, women may be unsure how to act aggressively and to destroy, disintegrate, and wage full-scale war.

Among our male explorers, Terry in particular, seems the most uneasy as the men slowly discover that no uncharted territory lays within Herland, no new expanses beg to be "mastered," nowhere place exists for the men to plant their flag. Pearson rightly states that "[i]t is male violence, connected with the desire to 'master' others that is antithetical to a feminist utopian vision" (51). While all three men seem to express a desire to follow their natures as men of science, they are also equally interested in discovering a flaw within Herland, such as an infectious disease or a characteristic that would prove the women as fallible creatures. The men are slowly (and in Terry's case, painfully) proven wrong, and Gilman's sarcastic wordplay here as an author of the novel goes unnoticed by the male speakers themselves who make these verbal gaffes. For example, Van explains, "we had been cocksure [an appropriate adjective] as to the inevitable limitations, the faults and vices, of a lot of women." (76). Terry also makes clear that he wishes to master the women as a culture, and eventually his wife, Alima, sexually. Gilman writes, "'[b]ut our time's coming,' he [Terry] added cheerfully. 'These women have never been mastered, you see -' This, as one who had made a discovery" (94-5). In his own mind, the country's women become Terry's discovery because they are as majestic and untouched as any land uncharted by man. The men's misogynistic arrogance obfuscates for them the fact that these women are not "master-able" or consumable, invulnerable to the taming and ownership the men have in mind.

This wish to master, consume, and conquer by which Terry is compelled inevitably leads to the first instance of crime that Herland witnesses. Pearson points out eloquently that "the absence of crime is a corollary of the absence of men" (51). Thus, it appears logical that the initial appearance of men in thousands of years augurs a natural fear of violence either by brutality or rape, or possibly a combination. As the land's inhabitants are restricted to females, the very idea of crime is not considered even a faint possibility to the ladies. Bernice Hausman offers that "[g]ynocentric evolutionism suggested that women were the 'race type' - 'her natural impulses were more in accordance with the laws of growth than were those of the male'; 'woman was the natural, patient, tireless worker, the mother. Males were essentially individualistic and competitive'" (500). Certainly, Herlanders fail to think of their daily toil as "work" or labor, but rather what simply must be done if life is to continue.

Thus, when Terry attempts to rape his new wife, we are supposed to be prepared as readers, rather than feeling shocked and horrified at such a vile crime. Van tells us that "he [Terry] hid himself in her [Alima's] bedroom one night" (130), and we quickly grasp that the merging of his sexual frustration and the expectations of his new wife's marital duties, have created the full Herland embodiment of man: miserable and frustrated, bitter and sexually stifled, but most vital, stubbornly unable to accept that Herlanders are a different breed of woman: far more progressive and independent than the women of Terry's land.

Writing about sexual abuse and its impact on women, Vanessa Veselka tells us that "[a]ll acts of violence that change our lives are… acts of betrayal. Rape is betrayal. Sexual abuse is betrayal." Terry has betrayed his own wife after much thought and consideration, in a single attempted act. Veselka references the dictionary definition of rape to highlight the loss and the robbery that it enacts: “Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines rape as forced sex and also plunder - robbing or despoiling, to be exact.” In every sense of the word, a series of rapes have already taken place in which, significantly, the men have been victimized by their own patriarchal society in contrast with the utopia of Herland: the men’s land, its morals, and government have robbed from the men. At the same time, Herland itself has been spoiled or tarnished by the sudden appearance of men who bring their values with them. Veselka goes on to say that “[f]inding out that your country is capable of vast atrocities is betrayal.” This concept applies primarily to Van and Jeff as they slowly begin to understand that they have been deceived by their own world, which contains the horrors of sexual assault and murder as part of its foundation. They feel cheated that their own land has done them a great disservice by glorifying war and violence, and reducing women to passive objects that receive sex and bored, lonely housewives. However, much like Gulliver, Van, Jeff, and Terry do not have a social contract with Herland. As a sort of Wonderland that contains “wonder women” who are capable of reproducing without sperm, Van and Jeff cannot be held entirely accountable for any of their actions during their stay. This idea, of course, excludes Terry, given that rape is never a justified act in any land or under any circumstances.

To describe contemporary American patriarchal society and the punishment that society exacts on rape victims, Veselka writes that “[a]s a culture, we tell girls from the cradle that rape is the worst thing that can ever happen to them. We say it will destroy their lives and they will lose their sense of purity.” This idea of a woman in crisis is not a concept easily understood by our Herlanders, however. As a result, young women are taught to take the proper precautions to protect themselves in order to avoid what can apparently ruin a female’s life and shatter her sense of self. After Alima's sisters come to her rescue, we naturally discover that "Alima was in a cold fury. She wanted him [Terry] killed – actually," just as any violated woman of the men's land may desire; however, this breed of swift and severe justice is not considered realistic by American standards (131). Terry is found guilty for the crime of being a man in Herland (which is essentially what his crime is). Veselka goes on to describe the idea of a "female victim" held by many American men who share commonalities with our confused Terry, as she writes, "[s]he is too weak to hear debate, too soft to speak openly about her experience, and too fragile to expect much from." However, this certainly does not suffice as a description of Herland's proud women. Veselka adds that "[t]his definition [created by men] doesn't come close to accounting for the grit and character that can be found among us," a comment which sounds remarkably similar to what Ellador may offer to Terry, if the occasion demands the clarification.

Herland's maternal divinity, which focuses on a spiritual life force rather than an anthropomorphized deity that passes judgment from above, is of particular interest to our narrator. Van states, "Their religion, you see, was maternal; and their ethics, based on the full perception of evolution, showed the principle of growth and beauty of wise culture" (102-3). As Ellador explains what their idea of "God" means to Herland, Van realizes that "Their cleanliness, their health, their exquisite order, the rich peaceful beauty of the whole land, the happiness of the children, and above all the constant progress they made - all this was their religion" (114). Herlanders seem to replace the idea of worship with the active joy of being aware of their environment, appreciating what they have, and selflessly devoting themselves to their daughters, who are seen not only as the future of Herland, but as living embodiments of the country's sacred eternity. In his essay "Countercultural Spiritualists' Perceptions of the

Goddess," Jon P. Bloch writes that "[t]he Goddess movement is said to offer self-empowerment through a specific 'naming' of female experience as divine, and to shun what are perceived to be patriarchal values that promote gender inequalities" (181). While Herlanders are empowered, they lack the need to "name" their female experience, as any and all experiences are affable and beatific.

Ellador asks our narrator, "[w]orship? What is that?" (111). The question is innocent and lacks a theological agenda as Herland's practice of worship fails to coincide with that of Van's. Rather than expressing adoration for a "higher power," Herlanders practice worship in a relational, mutual context as they work in their gardens, for instance, and the teachings passed from mother to daughter are their prayers. Their sacrificial love can be observed not as they kneel before an altar but when the Herland women nurse each other's babies after they help their sisters, aunts, nieces, and cousins through the often tedious and painful delivery process, a scene undoubtedly pictured as chaotic, bloody, and unpleasant by our three explorers.

Puzzled Herlanders resist the label "Goddess Worshipers," because they fail to comprehend the concept of "worship"; these women worship nothing. Rather, they revere themselves and their children as the most transcendental or heavenly phenomena, relying on the foundations of sisterhood to endure and continue the female tradition of childbearing and childrearing. In her essay "Lesbians and Virgins: The New Motherhood in Herland", Val Gough writes that "Herland is not a feminist blueprint for the future, but a fantasy of what would happen if motherhood was conceived otherwise than in hetero-patriarchal terms; it is a lesbian-feminist vision of the nurturing and collective capacities of women" (195). Filled with wonder about the religion of our explorers, Ellador asks Van, "'what I cannot understand is why you keep these early religious ideas so long. You have changed all your others, haven't you?" (113-4). Although we are easily able to detect the biting sarcasm within Gilman's voice here, the question and the logic that surround the text are sensible and direct. The men's refusal to assimilate and adhere completely to the Herlanders' way of life—in addition to Terry's disgraceful behavior—are simply reflections of a patriarchal religion that has failed to bend or update its teachings and doctrines to meet the current century. Ellador is left with no choice but to question a patriarchal religion that promotes sexism and defies the laws of logic.

During a sustained discussion of religion, Ellador questions Van: "'[t]hey [the people of Van's country] believed that God was Love - and Wisdom - and Power? And yet that such a God could put little new babies to burn - for eternity?'" (110). The idea proves too much for the woman to bear, and she finds sanctuary in one of the country's temples. The phallocentric concept of a male deity governing our lives and destinies is thus indirectly challenged by Herlanders; rather than praying to such an entity as a desperate response, Ellador derives comfort in solitude as she retreats from the apparent myths of Westernized theology.

Van describes Herland's group marriage ceremony for Gilman's 1915 readers: "Thousands of voices rose in the soaring climax of that great Hymn of The Coming Life. By the great Altar of Motherhood, with its crown of fruit and flowers, stood a new one, crowned as well" (119). We are overwhelmed with a sense of beauty and pride, as well as the constant flow of new life developing, receiving nourishment, and growing to create yet more vigor and bounty from steady maternal love. Even marriage, of which Herlanders are evidently ignorant, is representative of "The Coming Life," a holy unity that will hopefully produce children, the true fruits of Herland. Had our men been more thoughtful, cautious, and more level headed, they may have noticed that their marriage altar is one of "Motherhood," and not "Wifehood," or in Terry's case, "Sex Slavery."

As Ellador, Alima, and Celis are introduced to the concept of patriarchal marriage, they maintain optimism that the ritual may somehow function successfully in their land. However, Lisa Miya-Jervis reminds us in her Ms. article "What, Me Marry?" that "[w]e all know the institution's tarnished history: women as property passed from father to husband; monogamy as the simplest way to assure paternity and thus produce 'legitimate' children; a husband's legal entitlement to his wife's domestic and sexual services." Marriage has long served as a chauvinistic tradition that congratulates the man on his successful circumstances from which his "manliness" has been molded and perfected and penalizes the woman for suffering the misfortune of being born a woman, and thus an assumed supplier of everything from sex and food, to home maintenance and career advice. In her similar utopian novel The Female Man, published in 1975, Joanna Russ writes:

> Men succeed. Women get married.
> Men fail. Women get married.
> Men enter monasteries. Women get married.
> Men start wars. Women get married.
> Men stop them. Women get married.
> Dull, dull. (126)

This passage in the form of prose poetry makes up the entirety of chapter eight of Russ's novel to argue that marriage may enshroud an entire chapter of a woman's life. Clearly, women are (and always have been) defined by marriage, even (or perhaps especially) by women themselves. The masculine utilizes marriage as a goal or a life step predicated on masculinity itself while marriage becomes a suffocating phenomenon that simply happens to women and then defines them. After the marriages of Gilman's adventurous young men, Van confides to us, "[w]e, having no special leanings, had long qualified as assistants," which clearly communicates their own unhappiness and possibly a typographical error within their marriage contracts, had they been formally documented before agreeing to marry (123).

The ceremony of marriage inherently objectifies women as the bride is "given away," a gift, meant to be enjoyed, from one man to another. The bride's transition from paternal to matrimonial property begins and likely ends in the home: a life of domestic imprisonment, where she rescues the husband in the kitchen and the nursery, only to be told that she is not equal enough to vote, position herself politically, or work outside of the home. As Van begins to suffer marital difficulties, he shares with us that "[t]he more external disagreement was in the matter of 'the home,' and the housekeeping duties and pleasures we, by instinct and long education, supposed to be inherently appropriate to women" (121). As "education" is the key word here, we understand that the condition and practice of misogyny is conditioned within the men and seen as the inevitable direction of marriage, rather than plainly celebrated as an honorable lifestyle.

Gilman's novel, importantly, narrates the vision of Herland and all of these experiences through a man's voice. Perhaps, Gilman chooses Van to narrate her text in an attempt to navigate the presumptuously sexist standards set forth by the phallocracy of her time, and also to establish that the Vans of America are not overtly woman-hating monsters, but rather cultural victims themselves, just as women have always been: a common bond perhaps overlooked by the three men and the women of Herland. Hausman explains that "Gilman tried to prove that what the men think is a biologically ordained pattern of behavior was, in fact, a convention specifically related to their society and the biohistorical organization of human culture" (500-1). Gilman persistently reminds us of the typical commitment to marital failure when Terry clarifies to his bride Alima that "[a] wife is the woman who belongs to a man" (117). Gilman later seems to speak to us directly as the narrator declares that "[t]he woman may have imagined the conditions of married life to be different; but what she imagined, was ignorant of, or might have preferred, did not seriously matter," a sentiment which may reflect what many female readers experience as they work through the novel (120).

In this land, motherhood is celebrated communally and, surprisingly, never linked with the stressors or inconveniences such a role permits, such as postpartum depression, weight gain, and other effects on the female mind and body. Minna Doskow explains that "[a]ny selfish, possessive, or restrictive aspects of motherhood are eliminated from this portrait. Only the love, aspirations, care, and nurturing, and the concern and responsibility for children's interests that characterize a mother's love for her particular child are evident, and these are applied to the entire population" (4). Herlanders are never faced with the dilemma either to abort a pregnancy or to bring one to term because they are simply unable to interpret the meaning of a pregnancy that is deemed "unplanned" or "unwanted." Due to these social and familial miracles, the controversial issues of abortion and birth control are conveniently avoided in Gilman's novel. Pearson writes, "because women are also in an advantaged position to see why the family is not always a nurturing place, they redefine it" (52). This is certainly what Gilman accomplishes through her creation of the female-controlled land: a redefining of feminine ideals and a reclaiming of bodily power and security. There is no process of "trial and error" in Herland; the women simply know, perhaps due to traditional female intuition, how best to care for their daughters.

Herland's growth and fulfillment, as well as the happiness of its offspring who represent future generations of the unique civilization, lay at the center of interest in the quiet utopia. Because the women of Herland cherish nothing more than the learning and advancement of their daughters, Van labels the Herlanders "Conscious Makers of People" (69), an appropriate title considering that our curious adventurers surely never encountered such parent-to-child love and conscientiousness in the men's own land, which is forlorn and hopeless by comparison. Arguably, the society where the men originate is filled with "unconscious" makers of people, unaware of the implications and inevitable hardships of pregnancy and raising children. Hausman states that Herland's "culture is entirely and absolutely 'mother-oriented' (the society itself organized around principles of motherhood and the care of children - to the extent that the idea of providing cow's milk to human children at the expense of calves is conceptually repulsive to Herland women" (496). Herland's daughters need never fear of coping with abandonment issues due to an absent father or a failed marriage. Jeff's guide, Zava, tells him that "[r]eproduction is in inverse proportion to individuation" (64). Women are, by definition, born creators, the poets who need not speak nor write, as their bodies are designed literally to move new people into the world. Again, this construction of parthenogenesis in the novel echoes the idea of inherent sex traits which, while dooming man to a frustrated life of corruption and self-imposed isolation, seem to nurture woman's drive to sustain life by the acts of cooperation and solidarity.

At the close of Gilman's novel, we are forced to question if our male protagonists have evolved or if they remain static characters as they reenter their own land. It is somewhat apparent that Van and Jeff are better men at their exit of Herland: more sensitive, more appreciative of nature's beauty and enduring gifts, and certainly more sympathetic to the plights that plague the lives of the women of their land. Due to the jarring juxtaposition of the men's lives with the lives of Herlanders, the two men detect much that they had been ignorant of prior to their arrival in Herland. Curiosity led to the betterment of Van and Jeff as they became settled in their new surroundings, which is, after all, aligned to the goal of their original journey: to travel to a new land and obtain knowledge. Van and Jeff do not expect, nevertheless, to experience self-reflection so thoroughly and to learn such a great deal about the opposite sex and, inevitably, about themselves. Van tells us, "[t]here were many things we meant to ask - as soon as we could talk well enough" (35). In contrast, Terry embarks on his journey fueled by the fantasy of exotic, scantily clad Amazonian women who yearn to please men. When the men initially arrive in Herland and initiate contact with Celis, Alima, and Ellador in a tree, Terry excitedly exclaims, "[p]eaches! Peacherinos – Apricot-nectarines! Whew!" (19). At this point, the men have been in Herland for scarcely a matter of minutes, and Terry is already sexualizing the land's women.

Throughout the novel Terry clings stubbornly to this fantasy, even as it becomes increasingly clear that this is simply not Herland's reality nor any country's for that matter. Even after he is convicted of attempted rape by Herland's judicial system, Terry shows no shame or regret for his actions. He later tells Van, "I'd give a year of my life to have her alone again" (141), and Van notes that "his [Terry's] hands clenched till the knuckles were white" (141).

While Terry remains a static character, Van slowly begins to think less of his travel-mate, as Van mentions early within chapter seven, “I hated to admit to myself how much Terry had sunk in my esteem” (75). Unlike the changes that take place in Van and Jeff’s perspectives due to their experiences in Herland, Terry’s most deeply held beliefs that women are silly dreamers, incapable of logic, whose sole uses are for sex and childbearing are confirmed in his eyes by our Herlanders. The prejudice and violence he practices can now be justified by his experiences in Herland.

Ironically, because the bodies of women are capable of much more than the bodies of men—the capacities for procreation and the sustenance for newborns—this is simply what women become to the insecure, anxious Terry: bodies. When the minds of those bodies are stimulated and formulate thoughts and practical ideas, the Terries of the men’s land become frightened as men’s work and achievements appear futile in comparison to women’s capacity to birth and nurse children. Thus, the men’s travels have taken them far, and their journey by air and water has aided in some examination of each man’s sense of self, which is what each man was initially after, although they were not cognizant of such an idea before embarking on their adventure. An early escape attempt also serves as a metaphor for their initial rejection of Herland’s ideals and practices, as well as their weaknesses in comparison to the Herlanders: “at an end window, as less liable to observation, we fastened one end of our cable, strongly, to the firm-set hinge of the inner blind, and dropped our coiled bundle of rope softly over” (37).

Gilman’s text is a direct challenge of the patriarchy America has steadfastly put in place. The rhetorical argument of Herland dictates an alternative to submitting to the American phallocracy or participating in its infrastructure: simply eliminate the males who are accused of enforcing the quickly disintegrating quality of life for its female citizens. The novel is a fantasy, the fantasy for women of any country or continent. The text advocates gender equality as an enduring, omnipresent equality, which takes root and blossom only when gender segregation is put into place, the threat of rape is nonexistent, and women's bodily ownership is a given. Lest a reader conclude that the novel is unpatriotic either in its critique of American society or in the men's willingness to participate in Herland, Gilman explains that "[p]atriotism, red hot, is compatible with the existence of a neglect of national interests, a dishonesty, a cold indifference to the suffering of millions. Patriotism is largely pride, and very largely combativeness. Patriotism generally has a chip on its shoulder" (95). Gilman's personification of patriotism implies that American women do not reject America's ideals due to their lack of allegiance, but because they are part of those suffering millions, waiting for recognition and relief. In 1915, women waited, and today women wait still, and the loving natives of Herland stand tall with open arms to greet any and all of these suffering millions who happen to wander into their sanctuary in search of rest and an alternative vision of society.

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Fighting to Maintain the Hard Won Self in August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*

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Set in 1904 Pittsburgh, *Gem of the Ocean* (2003) is the play that begins August Wilson's ten-play cycle dramatizing the African American experience of the opening decade of the twentieth century. Elderly characters—Aunt Ester Tyler, Solly Two Kings, Eli—are freed slaves, and the young—Citizen Barlow and Black Mary—are the first generation that did not directly experience slavery but the faced aftermath of slavery in an American society that curtailed African Americans' legal and civil rights through practices of institutional racism. Despite being entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the well-known phrase from The Declaration of Independence, the characters in *Gem of the Ocean* are people with lives complicated by forces of social oppression and institutional racism, forces that restrict their opportunities and limit the fulfillment of their dreams. Their freedom is barred by legal limits imposed by regional authorities, in the North, the South, and the Middle States, and by the federal government; they cannot even carry a walking stick because "[t]hey got laws against carrying a stick in Pittsburgh. That's a weapon" (*Gem* 34). Such a situation justifies Howard Zinn's statement that "racial injustice was a national characteristic. Not limited by region, it was an American disgrace" (qtd. in Horton 5). But, despite all these hardships, African Americans have been attempting, as critic Missy Dehn Kubitschek says, "to recover wholeness in the face of European attempts to control and possess their spirituality" (qtd. in Nadel 6). They are, in their struggle to overcome the impact of bondage, fighting a battle even fiercer than the battles they had fought during their slavery.

In an interview with Kim Powers, August Wilson stated, "I was writing one play for each decade… [S]o ultimately they could stand as a record of Black experience over the past hundred years presented in the form of dramatic literature. What you end up is a kind of review, or re-examination, of history" (372). Wilson's statement mandates a historical analysis of African Americans' lives and their experience in America. Precisely because Wilson inscribes African American culture and history in his drama, it begs the question of how each cycle play delineates African American life and the African American experience of the decade in which a particular play is set. At the same time, common to all ten plays in Wilson's cycle, including *Gem of the Ocean*, is African Americans' struggle to reinvent their cultural identity and place in America.

The action of *Gem of the Ocean* takes place in Aunt Ester's Pittsburgh house at 1839 Wylie Avenue, a sanctuary for Pittsburgh African Americans. An ex-slave old enough to have survived the Middle Passage, Aunt Ester's experience encompasses the whole African-American people's suffering in America. She embodies the wisdom of her race, and she is the strength and ultimate peace for African Americans who come to her door. She is a spiritual healer, who owes her mythological ancestry to Voodoo Queen, and she obtains her dreams and visions from African rituals that stretch back through slavery to her African tradition. Commenting on Aunt Ester, Ben Brantley, in his review of the play, entitled "Sailing into Collective Memory," writes: "Aunt Ester, of course, is not just folks. She is the presiding figure in an allegorical canvas, an enduring spirit from a brutal past …" (1). As a keeper of ancestral wisdom, she channels a voice from the past for those who are lost and fills them with energy in order to move toward their right destination.

Aunt Ester clearly shows an intense commitment to her people. In the best tradition of diviner Ositola—the Yoruba mentor—she creates a pathway of spiritual guidance for African Americans to travel toward their destination. Her education unites their personality and soul together, and prepares them for survival in a world in which they suffer serious privations. There are ten paths indicative of Yoruba morals and expectations that assume both partly negative and partly positive connotations. As an Ositola, she describes for African Americans the significance of the path on which they need to travel and encourages them to make necessary sacrifices that allow them to stay on the correct course all the way through life: "The world is a rough place. But there's gold out there in the world. There's good luck out there in the world. Them brave men went looking for it" (*Gem* 64). Very much in the here and now, she treasures her bill of sale, formed into a paper boat, which she calls "Gem of the Ocean," seeing it as a sacred talisman that she uses to reincarnate the image of the event that history describes. She, in fact, utilizes her talisman to recreate the experience of her own agonizing slavery and painful rebirth in order to assist African Americans like Solly Two Kings and Citizen Barlow so that they can understand directly the meaning of their history. She reminds the audience and characters in the play that the past is crucial because it helps people understand who they are and how they can travel together to arrive at a place larger than where they had originally started. This place is their true destination where they can achieve identity, dignity, and pride. Aunt Easter is thus primarily concerned with "constructing a unified black subject that might guide the race along the path to progress" (Gaines 148). As a leader of her community, she wages a constant struggle to enact her vision of intra-racial progress by educating African Americans about their history.

Aunt Ester, in her relationship with dispossessed African Americans, also reveals a maternal side of her character. She provides them food, shelter, and adequate economic care: "Are you hungry? …Were you looking for money, Mr. Citizen?... Go in that room and get my purse and I'll give you two dollars" (*Gem* 20). For example, she scolds Citizen Barlow as a loving mother might: "When you gonna comb out your hair? You got pretty hair. I don't know why you trying to hide it" (*Gem* 39). Though deprived of her own son, she uplifts herself to the level of a self that allows her to exude the maternal warmth of a real mother. She bestows inner contentment and peace and provides an ability to survive any challenge to their authority. Aunt Ester is, in Kim Marras's words, "perhaps Wilson's most explicit example to date of black maternal figures functioning as forces of cultural cohesion and continuity" (153). With her protective nature and authoritative behavior, she epitomizes what, in fact, Lorraine Hansberry says in her October 5, 1963, address to the American Academy of Psychotherapists: "The Black matriarch incarnate: the bulwark of the Negro family since slavery; the embodiment of the Negro will to transcendence… It is she who, while seeming to cling to traditional restraints, drives the young on into the fire hoses and one day simply refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery" (qtd. in Wilkerson 257).

There is yet another aspect of Aunt Easter's feminine character. Though she signifies strong traditional values associated with African-American women, she affirms a contemporary feminist voice. She articulates her perspective and motivation of her actions to define herself as an African-American woman in the face of assaults by male chauvinism and racial discrimination. Using the force of her individual personality, she asserts her right to freedom. When Caesar comes with a warrant to arrest her, she tells him, "You see, Mr. Caesar, you can put the law on the paper but that don't make it right… The law say I needed a piece of paper to say I was a free woman. But I didn't need no piece of paper to tell me that" (*Gem* 78). In her speech lies the assertion of a perpetual freedom of her spirit and a sense of self—a self that breaks all hegemonic legitimacy and traditional gender limitations. Her consciousness that she is a free woman is an exercise, almost setting itself up as a paradigm of a feminist challenge for freedom and equality.

Among the African-Americans desperate to see as Aunt Ester a symbol for self-redemption is Citizen Barlow. He has been wandering in Pittsburgh with an agonizing sense of guilt about a crime he has committed: being responsible for the death of an innocent African-American who was accused of stealing a bucket of nails actually stolen by him. He feels he must have his "soul washed," believing that only then will he have thrown off the painful burden of guilt and brought himself to justice of his community. Aunt Ester is the only person who can provide this purification with her mystical powers. Citizen's awareness, however, signifies a transition, a beginning of African American people's journey into their soul. This transition depends on a strategy that enhances communal faith in a larger unity, that marginalizes intraracial conflict, and that helps the African American community forge a new identity to transcend white prejudice. It is essential for African Americans to maintain a unified existence as much socially and culturally as it is for them to do so economically. As the problems of a complex industrial society have multiplied their sufferings, the African American community needs to create and exercise their own formulas for survival. Citizen's realization epitomizes this new strategy.

Citizen had run away from the racial terrors of Alabama in order to find a meaningful life in Pittsburgh. Once in Pittsburgh, he finds anything but support for this vision. His endeavor to carve out a new life for himself by working in the labor market traps him between the racism of whites and the resentment of Caesar Wilks, a self-made black entrepreneur and constable who plays, cynically and self-importantly, by white man's rules. Caesar's slavish devotion to white law is, in fact, a major cause for the deplorable condition of ordinary African-Americans in the area. He shoots them to death even for a small crime of stealing a loaf of bread, but he justifies his action in the name of maintaining law and order: "I told him he was under arrest. He started running! With the loaf of bread under his arm! I had to shoot him. You can't do nothing like that and get away with it. People don't understand the law is everything" (*Gem* 36). Caesar's snobbism is the manifestation of the value some African-Americans had set for themselves to gain social standing in American society. The back-cover page of Kevin K. Gaines's book, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1995) summarizes this stance, though not the criminal activities of Caesar themselves, in this way: "Amidst the violent racism prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century, African American cultural elites, struggling to articulate a positive black identity, developed a middle-class ideology of racial uplift. Insisting that they were truly representative of the race's potential, and distinguished themselves from the black majority as agents of civilization." Citizen finds Caesar's manipulative exploitation of his own race an impediment to his development and to the development of African-American people more broadly. He, therefore, avenges himself by stealing a bucket of nails from Caesar's tin mill. Citizen's action is definitely the product of the shattering sense of frustration and alienation that cannot be measured in any measurable, quantifiable terms—at least not until this sense of oppression explodes into violence of the kind that occurs later in the case of Solly Two Kings.

Using her talismanic paper boat, Aunt Ester inducts Citizen into the City of Bones composed of the bones of slaves who perished on the hideous Middle Passage at the bottom of the sea. As a spiritual shaman, Aunt Easter performs a "healing ritual" of exorcism. She casts a spell on him by her incantatory speech and through song: "The captain of the *Gem of the Ocean*. He took all the water and left the crew to die. But they survived. They followed the law of the sea. Life is above all. God raised it to a great height. Live, Mr. Citizen. Live to the fullest. You got a duty to life. So live, Mr. Citizen! Live!" (*Gem* 67-8). Her incantation takes Citizen back down the long span of years, until he begins to see the image of the City of Bones emerged from the depth of his subliminal trance, which August Wilson describes in stage directions: "[h]earing the song, Citizen slowly unfolds from his fetal position. All is calm and peaceful. He stands up and looks to see the most beautiful sight he has never seen. He has arrived at the City of Bones" (*Gem* 68). Letting him relive the whole experience of his race, Aunt Ester helps Citizen understand his true identity and his destiny in America. His soul is washed clean: "Citizen Barlow, now reborn as a man of the people, sits down and begins to cry… The journey is over" (*Gem* 69-70). He is free from afflictions of inner conflicts and achieves individual affirmation.

Aunt Easter's attempt to keep Citizen within communal bonds has a cosmic significance as it unites his individual soul with the soul of his traditional community. It makes him re-experience the actual terror of history in order to free himself from its terrifying ordeals and from his trapped energy, making his liberation possible. He understands that he, too, is a part of African people and African history, regardless of differences in cultural history and personal experience. Aunt Easter's purpose in performing this history lesson is, however, not to evoke a nostalgically perfect past—this is neither possible nor desirable either—but rather to fashion this history for the present world and enable it to speak to a realization of present-day unity. The paths she shows are "more like pieces of parchment on which legends of the past and maps to the future have been drawn" (Brantley 1). As these are the positive paths, they lead African-Americans to a celebration of life in the liberty of a living community, which will enable a recovery of real pride and palpable self-esteem. Citizen Barlow, walking along the path shown by Aunt Easter, not only recovers his self-esteem but also takes up Solly's crusading mission of liberating innocent African Americans from oppression.

Perhaps the most rebellious of all August Wilson's character in the entire cycle is Solly Two Kings, an aging African-American with dignity and considerable history of fighting for the freedom of his race. Despite the stern prohibition of law, he carries a stick and a knife to use against his enemies. He believes in retribution rather than mercy and forbearance: "God say different things. Say, 'I will smite my enemies.' Then he tell you to, 'Turn the other cheek.' That don't get you nothing but two broke jaws" (*Gem* 29). In his opinion, a man should continue to protest against injustice until justice is restored, and moreover a man should be determined to do all within his power to eliminate what holds his freedom and security back. When he finds Caesar a traitor to his community, he wages war on Caesar, seeing Caesar's very existence as a bane, and thus he resorts to the destructive act of burning his tin mill. In response to those who note the freedom that African Americans enjoy in contrast to bondage, Solly exclaims, "They never made Emancipation what they say it was… They wave the law on one end and hit you with a billy club with the other" (*Gem* 60). Solly's indomitable spirit, always ready for active revolt for the liberation of his own race, carves out pathways to the development of protest strategies for coming generations in the future history.

Solly's rebellious energy and complex character establish his kinship with Esu-Elegbara, the divine trickster figure of Yoruba mythology. "Esu," says Henry Louis Gates Jr., "represented him as the liberator of the slaves and as enemy of the enslavers 'killing, poisoning, and driving mad their oppressors'" (31). In this persona of Esu-Elegbara, Solly affirms importance and retains his traditional function of the trickster by fighting for their freedom. He is never without the chain he once had worn because it always reminds him of who he was in the past and what he must do in future: "That piece of chain used to be around my ankle. They tried to chain me down but I beat them on that one. I say, I'm gonna keep this to remember by" (*Gem* 57).

Solly is an uncompromising voice of African-American militancy, and he dies a valiant death fighting the battle for dignity, freedom, and justice of his people. His death embodies the rebellious stance of Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "It is better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." As a leader of his community, he informs his people that there is no freedom until they break from their psychological and cultural dependence on dominant values. He tells them that they are themselves the actors in the making of their own destiny. Solly is the hero who changes the world, remaining firm in his belief that every human being possesses the capacity to change oneself and thus change the conditions under which one lives. His songs are always inspirational:

> So live, that when thy summons comes to join
> The innumerable caravan which moves
> To that mysterious realm, where each shall take

His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Though go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave
Like one that wraps the drapery of his cough
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.
(*Gem* 59)

Historian Michael Eric Dyson's observation of Malcolm X's significance in African American history provides a fitting description of the important role that Solly plays within the African American community as a whole: "… his life was for the people to learn and grow as much as they could in the struggle to free mind and body from the poisonous persistence of racism and blind ethnic loyalty, as well as economic and class slavery" (qtd. in Marable 54).

While Solly possesses an unceasing rebellious spirit, Eli, his friend since slavery, represents a different path. Eli is a transformed person, who is calm and peaceful person, and remains determined to maintain the very peace that Aunt Easter offers to the agitated African Americans who come to her for solace. Eli serves Aunt Easter as a butler and allows no one to enter her house without her permission. "This a peaceful house" (*Gem* 7), he reminds those who tussle with him and demand that he break the rules of the sanctuary. Significantly, though, Eli, too, has a violent past. Like Solly, he has fought for the freedom of his people. Having been both slave and freedom fighter, he has seen much in life the horrible things men can do to each other. His transformation is meaningful because of the life he has led and the risks that he has taken on behalf of fugitive slave. Eli describes his role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad:

> Sometimes we'd hear the dogs right behind them. We'd make contact and get the runways from the other conductor. See he just pass them on. Otherwise if he don't hook up with us he got to go out his section. He got to carry them farther. Maybe he don't know the woods as much as he do his own section. See, that make slower going… all the time the dogs after you. All the time. You got to keep going. (*Gem* 58).

Although Eli has transformed himself into an aging sage, there are close affinities between him and Solly. He is still in rebellion in heart, but he carries out his acts without violence. He has been erecting a wall around Aunt Ester's house to create a site in which he can preserve and protect his race against destructive external forces. Whatever else African Americans have lost, Eli seeks their rights, demanding authority within the confines of the house, in a symbol of the community as a whole, and he guards the entrance with all his powers.

Besides Eli, Aunt Easter's court includes another hanger-on, Caesar's young sister Black Mary, who has left her brother due to his deceitfulness. She resists her brother's lies: "You selling magic bread and overcharging rent. Putting people out in the street. I don't want no part of it" (*Gem* 35). Though she has no house of her own, she symbolizes the strength of the traditional homemaker as a foundational member of the community. Essentially because she spends her time directing her energies toward making what may be called home, she is Aunt Easter's assistant, helping her in performing shamanistic ritual. She cooks her meals, washes her feet, and does her laundry. Confined to the private sphere, critic Sandra Shannon argues that Black Mary "best exemplifies the ambivalence exhibited in Wilson's African American women between the innate desire to nurture and the concomitant need to maintain self-respect and a sense of self" (154). Black Mary has left economic comfort to maintain her independence and her integrity. In this renunciation of material well being for morality lies her victory. As such, this young lady establishes a portrayal of the African American woman as the heart of the community.

The only white character in the play is Rutherford Selig, an itinerant peddler, whom Wilson presents with sympathy and with an idea that not all white folks are alike and not all black-white relationships are monolithic. As Solly himself says to Eli, "Don't never let nobody tell you there ain't no good white people. They got some good white people down there..." (*Gem* 58). Selig has, in addition to selling pots and pans, the role of finding people. Selig travels about knocking on people's doors and therefore knows better than others the whereabouts of a person, which is why the people of the community call him people finder. In August Wilson's words, "he's not evil at all. In fact, he's performing a very valuable service for the community. The fact that his father was a 'People Finder' who worked for the plantation bosses and caught runaway slaves has no bearing on Selig's character" (Interview with Kim Powers 374). Selig helps black people find their lost ones in a guise of a benefactor, and we see in Selig a transformational role in contrast to Selig's own familial history: Selig transcends his own family history and becomes an agent of good.

Gem of the Ocean addresses the issues of newly freed African-Americans in whom the pain of slavery is still a living memory. Their first taste of autonomy in free American society is as bitter as in the days of slavery. But at the same time the play explores how this history helps African Americans to overcome the terrible psychological burden of that memory and to fight physically in the aftermath of emancipation for greater freedoms and for true equality. Wilson's play offers a reconstructed African American self that inspires transformation and the reconstitution of community.

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Not Empty but Open: Tomas Tranströmer's "Vermeer"

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In describing Tomas Tranströmer's poems, Seamus Heaney said, "He has a way of conjuring that in-betweenness" (Bartholomew). This is a wonderful description of Tranströmer's work because it suggests in its tone and oddly recognizable phrasing, the everyday events of his poems—a man driving his car down a crowded highway or waking from a consuming dream, couples sleeping in a hotel room, or walking down a city street in winter. Tranströmer's poems are full of these kinds of happenings that one might consider mundane if they were not so deftly illustrated by the exactness and the luminosity of his images. Moreover, Heaney's wonderful phrase, "in-betweenness" also suggests a place or a state of mind that could be called the void. The speaker in Tranströmer's poems is often jarred into confronting the void in states that one might describe as meditative terror, when the veil drops and the speaker senses a primal force, creative and destructive, that most often resides in the natural world. Tranströmer characterizes this force in many ways, including as a disorienting, as an isolating, and as a threatening power. The speakers in Tranströmer's poems often encounter a momentary darkening or effacement of self, a realm beyond language, but also, as with Federico Garcia Lorca's *duende,* an abiding inspiration for art. Unsurprisingly, Tranströmer's poetry is filled with references to art. For example, in "The Sad Gondola" (1996), the great composer Franz Liszt carries "his own suitcase through slush and sunshine" (168), which is a wonderful metaphor for the artist making his way through the world. Tranströmer describes Liszt the man, grounded in the familiar.

In the poem “Vermeer” (1988), Tranströmer describes a passage into and through the void to a place of expansiveness. Even though that passage can be difficult, Tranströmer gives us an entry point to this journey through his re-creation of Vermeer’s domestic life, and through the visual, sensory facts of two of Vermeer’s most famous paintings, *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (1664) and *The Music Lesson* (1665). Tranströmer invites, thereby, us into mystery, toward an aesthetic tuning that deep engagement with art provides, and then he moves his readers beyond this engagement to a transcendent and spiritual experience that is even richer.

One can see Tranströmer’s affinity with Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) through the solitary, sun-lit figures that inhabit the Dutch master’s interiors. Vermeer’s father owned a house in Delft called Mechelen, which adjoined a tavern on the Market Place (Bailey 44). In the opening lines of “Vermeer,” Tranströmer points out that the artist does not live in some remote atelier, but in close proximity to the barbarous aspects of human nature:

> No protected world … Just behind the wall the noise begins,
> the inn is there
> with laughter and bickering, rows of teeth, tears, the din of bells
> and the insane brother-in-law, the death-bringer we all must
>   tremble for. (1-5)

The artist lives in a real place with disturbances and disruptions. The infiltrating noise with its inherent threat coalesces in synecdoches: “rows of teeth,” “tears,” and “the din of bells.” Following these lines, the speaker reference the very real threat of Vermeer’s wife brother-in-law, Willem Bolnes, who, driven to rash acts of violence by debt and disgrace, had once pulled a knife on his mother and threatened to club Maria, Vermeer's wife, when she was several months pregnant (Bailey 71-72). In Tranströmer's imagining, the violent brother-in-law brought low by life's harsh circumstances becomes a recognizable death archetype, the death-bringer we are bound to. Tranströmer makes the brother-in-law, both as a literal person and as symbolic presence, part of the everyday texture of Vermeer's world and reality.

Tranströmer then broadens the context for Vermeer's lived experience even further by referencing a historical event, a gunpowder explosion at a nearby arsenal, which serves as yet another backdrop to the artist's work. The speaker notes, "The big explosion and the tramp of rescue arriving late. / the boats preening themselves on the straits…" (6-7). The explosion on October 12, 1654, shook the entire city of Delft, and put the city in real danger of being consumed in flames (Liedtke *et al.* 486). Tranströmer follows these images of death and destruction with boats preening themselves, a nod to Amsterdam's leading role in overseas trade that made Delft very wealthy. The word "preening," however, suggests vanity, a concern with that which is shallow, temporary.

The lines that follow further open the poem's focus on the emptiness of commercial life and the demands of daily transactions in the business world. The speaker notes,

> … the money creeping
>   down in the wrong man's pocket
> demands stacked on demands
> gaping red flowerheads sweating premonitions of war. (6-10)

These lines contain the final strains in a long series of images that embody those soul-stealing forces that subsume our humanity. Importantly, they also point to Vermeer's own financial difficulties, having to borrow money from business partners and family members, namely his mother-in-law, to supplement the income from his commissions. Though extraordinary and artistically profound by any measure, Vermeer's output was very small, at times only three paintings a year. The "gaping red flowerheads sweating premonitions of war," therefore, bring the lens on Vermeer's life to its widest aperture. These lines comment on the fear of war that exists in every society, and the lines possibly refer contemporaneously to Sweden's Cold War era when Russia was a constant and serious threat. The constriction of that shadow on Swedish life is a major focus of Tranströmer's poem "Baltics" (106-114). In "Vermeer," we have Tranströmer perhaps signifying on his own contemporary Swedish context, giving a sense of the ever-shifting historical moments that inform reception of both art and artist.

While the first two stanzas sum up the coarse, brutal world outside Vermeer's studio—a world we perhaps recognize in the world of today—the third stanza takes us into the quieter realm of the artist's inner life and into the paintings themselves:

> In from there and right through the wall into the clear studio
> into the second that's allowed to live for centuries.
> Pictures that call themselves 'The Music Lesson'
> or 'Woman in Blue Reading a Letter' — (11-14)

Walls figure significantly in this poem. Walls represent the barriers between everyday consciousness and the heightened awareness that comes from interaction with something beyond ourselves, beyond, at times, our ability to articulate. Art is a vehicle to this place beyond, so much so that Tranströmer animates these paintings in his verse, as if the sum of their parts emulsified into one voice. Vermeer's paintings have named themselves because they have taken on lives beyond the artist, become independent of him, and exist in another kind of time, beyond the limits of our life expectancy—that "second that's allowed to live for centuries"—where perception is capsulized and become eternal.

The nesting effect of a life within a life that Tranströmer describes in this poem—the speaker notes that of the painting's subject, "she's in her eighth month, two hearts kicking inside her" (15)—further accentuates the idea of the painting having its own vivid reality. The map on the wall in the painting marks differences in spaces and realities: "On the wall behind is a wrinkled map of Terra Incognita" (16). The map may actually be of trade routes or real landmarks, but that hardly matters given the term *Terra Incognita*'s metaphorical punch. The burgeoning life the woman carries is yet unknown, like the territory of the painting itself, yet both images raise the possibility that something lying outside the confines of the canvas pulls at us as well. This is the "way of conjuring that in-betweenness" that Seamus Heaney so admires in Tranströmer's work.

The next stanza focuses on the particular facts of the paintings with an almost cartoon-like sense of physics, yet Tranströmer gives his readers a yoga-like, incantatory instruction before we see the studs jutting from somewhere else into the world of the painting. The speaker reflects,

> Breathe calmly… An unknown blue material is nailed to the chairs.
> The gold studs flew in with incredible speed
> and stopped abruptly
> as if they had never been other than stillness. (17-20)

The last three lines in this stanza are strangely comforting. So many moments in Tranströmer's poems involve the speaker's sense of the familiar world, driven by some strange encounter or psychic momentum, stopping, and with these breaks, new worlds open. Openings occur when one expects them least: while walking in a snow-covered field or waking at night in the back seat of a car. Often, after a momentary panic, quiet follows as the speaker finds his way back to his identity and his place. A sense of promise emerges in this odd flight of "the gold studs" into the "unknown blue material" and in the stillness that comes after.

However, Tranströmer does not give us an easy resolution. He acknowledges that the way to stillness, the peace of mind that comes from dedicated aloneness and aesthetic engagement, remains difficult. The pull of the void is frightening when we first encounter it. The space we must cross to get there has its own atmosphere. He compares the experience of the void to the pressure a diver might feel as she rises to the surface from a great depth:

> Ears sing, from depth or height.
> It's the pressure from the other side of the wall.
> It makes each fact float
> and steadies the brush. (21-24)

The pressure we intuitively sense in moments of intense dislocation, or in a dream, paradoxically both discombobulates and steadies. Tranströmer's lines are incredibly compressed here, and he makes a huge imaginative leap linking the trope of a diver's rise through water with the floating facts of the ordinary world, and with the larger artistic process. One can read in that image a moment of suspension before the artist commits something to the canvas or the page. In this suspension the artist is a cipher or a conduit that draws from something larger, beyond language, that is then translated to a work of art. The floating facts become reconstituted into a heightened reality. The brush is steadied. Tranströmer is justly celebrated for these amazing tropes that take us into, for lack of a better term, a happening that defies explanation.

The speaker in "Vermeer" remains kind and gentle, perhaps a reflection of Tranströmer himself, so it is unsurprising that he will not abandon us, or take on the distant persona of one who has had a privileged view and then denies us access. Instead, in acknowledging the difficulty of going through walls, of entering the unknown, Tranströmer becomes a guide:

> It hurts to go through walls, it makes you ill
> but is necessary.
> The world is one. But walls…
> And the wall is part of yourself —
> we know or we don't know but it's true for us all
> except for small children. No walls for them. (25-30)

The word "ill" is an intriguing choice because it brings to mind dis-ease in its broadest sense. Yet, if we are to fully experience that which exists outside our ordinary consciousness, we must experience that discomfort. The world itself, what we engage with every day, is itself a wall because it is both so immediate and convincing. The walls within ourselves—created by our limited perceptions—are yet another boundary. Tranströmer asks us to make a leap into uncertainty, to go beyond the literal physical reality. Unlike adults, children are the exception. They easily cross back and forth because they easily accept a world that isn't factual or finite.

The last stanza contains the promise and the generosity of spirit that exists in Vermeer's *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*—the shaft of clear, northern light that shines from a leaded glass window onto the page she is reading—and in the beauty of our natural world:

> The clear sky has leant against the wall.
> It's like a prayer to the emptiness.
> And the emptiness turns its face to us
> and whispers
> 'I am not empty, I am open.' (31-35)

Clearly, Tranströmer identifies with that solitary, introspective figure in Vermeer's painting reading in a shaft of light at an open window. This consummate image in the poem connects the natural world that surrounds us with the transcendent and the spiritual, as expressed in the painting. The speaker personifies the sky and, in so doing, brings it closer to us, and then turns it into a prayer, a beckoning. Now the emptiness has form, a face. The face's response is both a statement of simple fact and an invitation. The conflated images create poetic tension, a silent friction that makes mystery possible. The scene is described simply, so the communion we feel at the end of the poem seems inevitable. The images of the sky, of the light illuminating the young woman's face, and of the letter that she intently reads allow this happen—they create a microcosm of introspection and harmony. Many of Tranströmer's poems are full of references to light and specifically to the sun, which is often a kind of emissary sent to bring us back to who we are, yet which changes us by our passage.

In "Vermeer," Tranströmer provides readers with a way into a transformative mystery. The void is mystery without form, but art gives form to mystery. Art creates a vessel through which we can experience a heightened consciousness, which is rooted in an aesthetic response that is essential and sustaining.

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Selected Poems:
Family Photograph and A National River Town on a Winter Sunday

Phillip Howerton, Missouri State University, West Plains

Family Photograph

Gathered on the front sidewalk,
after Christmas dinner and gifts,
we—brothers, sisters, cousins,
uncles, aunts, and in-laws—
posed for Grandma's box camera,
squinting into bitter December sun.
Four decades later our impatience
with one another shadows deeper
into our faces as she repeated,
with her head bowed to focus,
"Closer together, get closer together."

A National River Town on a Winter Sunday

A sign boasts
of the small population,
but most of the 52
have gone
to their real homes
for the winter,
leaving a regiment
of crows to tend
the dormant grass
of the town park.
The store, café, and canoe
rental are closed
for the season;
only the streets
and river are open.
Fiberglass canoes, yellow,
red, forest green,
lie silent on trailers,
their backs to the sealed sky.
A yellow, diamond-
shaped sign
continues to warn
out of season,
“Watch Out For Children.”
Another sign,
encased in Plexiglas,
recites the town’s history—
how the railroad
came to town
around the turn
of the century and left
by mid-century
with most
of the timber
and young folks—
the only history the town has
or may now ever have.

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