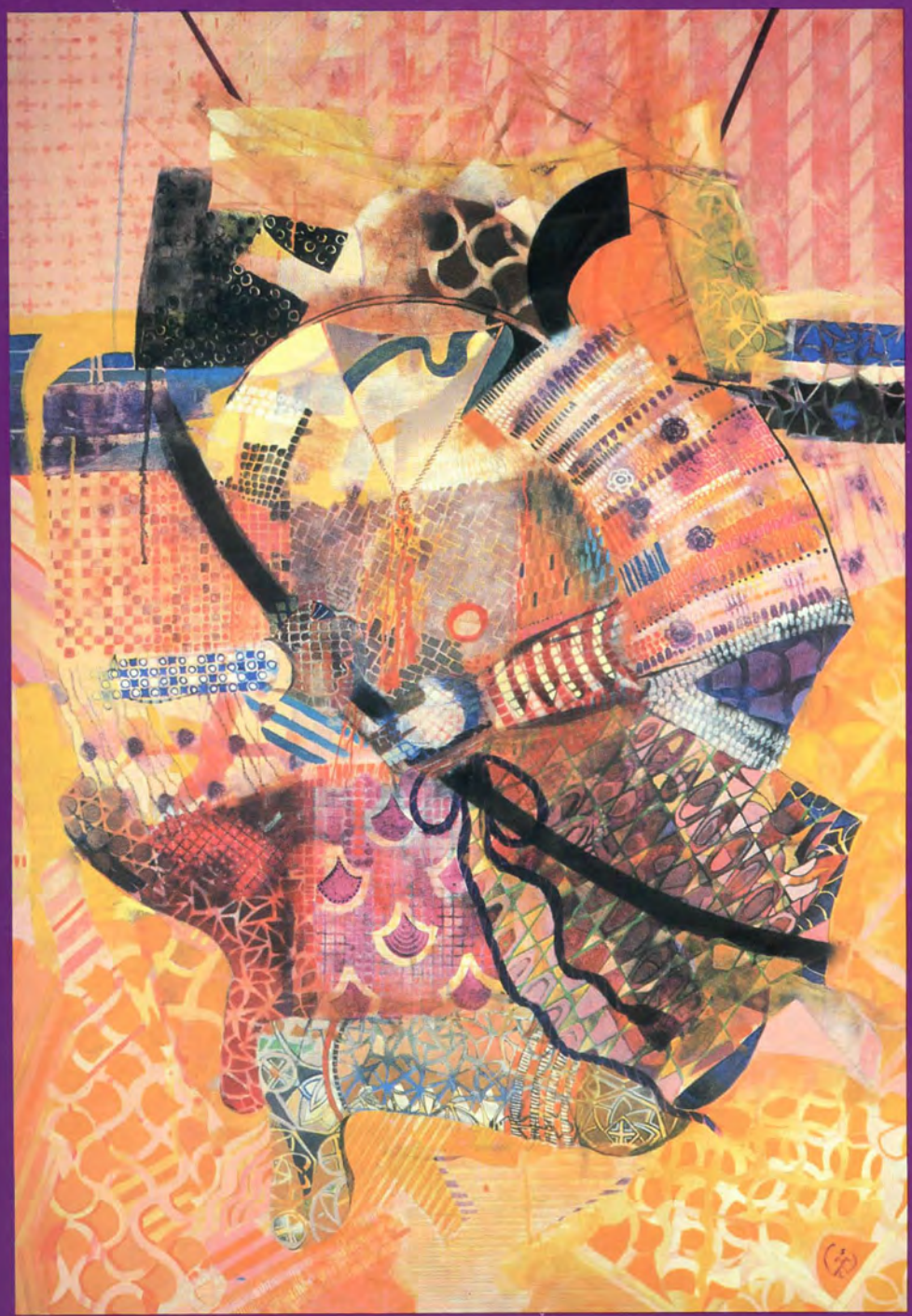
New Orleans Review

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1/$9.00



New Orleans Review

Spring 1988

The *New Orleans Review* is published by Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118, United States.
Critical essays relating to film or literature of up to ten thousand words should be prepared to conform with the new MLA guidelines and sent to the appropriate editor, together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The address is *New Orleans Review*, Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana 70118.
Fiction, poetry, photography or related artwork should be sent to the Art and Literature Editor. A stamped, self-addressed envelope should be enclosed.
Reasonable care is taken in the handling of material, but no responsibility is assumed for the loss of unsolicited material. Accepted manuscripts are the property of the *NOR*.
The *New Orleans Review* is published in February, May, August, and November. Annual Subscription Rate: Institutions $30.00, Individuals $25.00, Foreign Subscribers $35.00. Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography and the Index of American Periodical Verse.
US ISSN 0028-6400

Photographs of Gwen Bristow, Ada Jack Carver, Dorothy Dix, and Grace King are reproduced courtesy the Historic New Orleans Collection, Museum/Research Center, Acc. Nos. 1983.215.99, 1981.330.30, 1974.25.27.147, and 1980.28. The photograph of Kate Chopin is reproduced courtesy the Newberry Library. The photograph of Alice Ruth Dunbar Nelson is reproduced courtesy the Amistad Research Center. The photograph of Lillian Hellman is reproduced courtesy Robert Tobey Vineyard Gazette, Inc.

NEW ORLEANS REVIEW

SPRING 1988 VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1

CONTENTS

Dorothy H. Brown and Barbara C. Ewell

PROLOGUE

This issue of the *New Orleans Review* is in some ways a souvenir—a recollection of a very special event that took place in New Orleans on September 19-20, 1986. During those two exciting days, most of those whose essays, poems and stories appear on these pages gathered together with several hundred others on the campus of Loyola University to explore the significance of the phrase "Louisiana women writers."

Significant it was. Familiar and unfamiliar, the achievements of Louisiana women writers assumed a stature and continuity that few of us had ever before grasped. With a dynamics that conferences seldom realize, a new perspective on our literature was identified. Categories like southern regionalist, popular romance writer, black writer, diarist, playwright, and journalist were reorganized into a new constellation, a fresh figure by which the work of a great many talented writers might be newly understood and appreciated. This recognition of the diversity of Louisiana's literary heritage, and the particular richness of the contributions of its women, invites anew our reflections on the force and shape of both regionalism and gender in defining our cultural identity.

This reevaluation of the full dimensions of our literary heritage, of course, reflects and supports the reconstruction of a tradition of literature by women and the reclamation of a female perspective in our literary canons. Indeed, the recovery of hundreds of "lost" women writers and the "re-vision" of many others has been a major achievement of the past two decades of feminist criticism. One of the purposes of the symposium was to involve a larger audience in the processes of that reconstitution for Louisiana women writers. The selected bibliography of the writers featured here, which is part of a comprehensive work still in progress, and the brief introduction to the tools of recovery continue that effort of enabling a wider participation in and understanding of that essential process of recovery and reassessment.

But in editing this special issue of the *New Orleans Review*, we have tried to share not only the achievement but also the excitement that the recovery of this tradition generated for symposium participants. Certainly, the importance of "Louisiana" and "women" in defining the authority of this group of writers was evident among those who read and discussed and shared their work in two panels, a reading, a play, a gala autograph party, and innumerable lively exchanges between sessions. The identification of a heritage we could claim visibly renewed the sense of community among those writers present—most of whom were not on stage, but all of whom continue to enrich that tradition. We present here a sampling of the work of those contemporary Louisiana women writers, both those who participated formally in the conference as well as a selection of the many others who could not be included.

Like this special issue, the symposium was underwritten by a generous grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Without its innovative support and without the commitment of the several institutions represented by the Women's Studies Consortium of Louisiana [Dillard University, Eleanor McMain School, Louise S. McGehee School, Louisiana State University, Loyola University, Metairie Park Country Day School, Newcomb College, Tulane University, University of New Orleans, and Xavier University], which originated and sponsored the project, the heritage that the symposium identified might still lie unclaimed. But the creation and realization of the symposium remains the accomplishment of the many dedicated individuals whose cooperative spirit distinguishes their purposes and achievements. In reconstructing an overlooked element of our literary and cultural heritage, the Consortium sought to dramatize through the symposium a critical otherness—another perspective on our past and present that purposely includes female, regional, black, ethnic, working-class, and other

excluded minority points of view. It is to the reinstatement of those "other" perspectives, which are essential to our cultural self-definitions, that women's studies and the Consortium are committed. The reclaimed heritage of Louisiana women writers is the Consortium's latest contribution to that redefinition of individual and communal wholeness. And thus it is with gratitude to all those writers and readers and teachers and scholars who maintain and encourage those vital "other" perspectives that we present this special issue on Louisiana Women Writers.□

Dorothy H. Brown, *Professor of English at City College, Loyola University, has been Associate Editor of* Explorations in Renaissance Culture *since 1984 and has published in* New Laurel Review, Xavier Review, Christianity and Literature, South Central Bulletin, *and elsewhere.*

Barbara C. Ewell *is Associate Professor of English in City College at Loyola University. She is the author of* Kate Chopin *(1986), and her essays on Margaret Atwood, John Barth, Michael Drayton, and on feminist criticism and pedagogy have appeared in* Centennial Review, Southern Literary Journal *and* Modern Language Quarterly.

Margaret Jones Bolsterli

ELLEN GILCHRIST'S CHARACTERS AND THE SOUTHERN WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE: RHODA MANNING'S DOUBLE BIND AND ANNA HAND'S CREATIVITY

Since the experiences of any powerless class are considered less interesting than those of the powerful, one of the differences between the writing done by men and women has been the tendency for women to ignore the basic facts of their existence because it was not considered significant enough to read about. On the other hand, because of their superior status, men's every thought, feeling or movement has been considered valid subject for literature, easy access for a writer to a vast area of material. However, the current phase of the women's movement has brought a gradual realization that women are not powerless in their own sphere, that as Adrienne Rich's line goes in "From an Old House in America," "my power is brief and local, but I know my power"—and that the key to transcendence for a writer lies in validating that experience rather than in repudiating it. Because the roles of women and men have traditionally been more clearly defined in the South than in any other region of America, the experience of Southern women, so different from that of its men, is a relatively unmined goldfield. Ellen Gilchrist goes a step further than the canonical Southern women writers, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, in validating that experience because she is willing to go deeper into personality, to shine a light into the dark corners of women's souls to expose the preoccupations that get in the way of their achieving wholeness and coherence. Moreover, she writes about the problems of the female sphere without denying the pleasures in it. Food obsessions may get in the way of happiness, but Gilchrist's characters who have addictions also enjoy the chocolate they cannot resist.

One significant issue she examines is the difficulty of breaking out of the cocoon of the female experience into creativity. For instance, Rhoda Manning's dilemma in "Revenge," or "the Summer of the Broad Jump Pit," illustrates the double bind that tied up bright little southern girls in the nineteen-forties and gave them some of the problems that are so painful to meet in many of the adolescent and adult women in her stories.[1] Anna Hand, in "Anna, Part I," shows that a woman can transcend the limitations of her experience by using it as material for art.[2] Not only is that experience, after all, her capital as a writer, but she can understand what has happened to her only by making order of it in fiction, so what might, under other circumstances, be considered her limitation, becomes her passage to freedom.

"Revenge," told in retrospect by the adult Rhoda, begins with the memory of herself as a child, sitting on top of the chicken house watching through binoculars her five male cousins running down a cinder track to pole-vault into a pit of sand and sawdust, an activity from which she is exiled because she is a girl. "I was ten years old, the only girl in a house full of cousins. There were six of us, shipped to the Delta for the summer, dumped on my grandmother right in the middle of a world war." The societal expectations that put her at this distance from what looks to her like the most fun in the world were reiterated by her own father who, in his letter telling the boys how to construct the track on which they are to train for the Olympics, ended by instructing Rhoda's older brother Dudley "to take good care of me as I was my father's own sweet dear girl." The boys follow these instructions with relish and refuse to let her help with building the track or run on it once it is finished. She is not allowed to touch the vaulting pole. As Dudley tells her, "this is only for boys, Rhoda. This isn't a game." Rhoda is supposed to be satisfied with playing with other little girls. In a pattern she is expected to follow for the rest of her life, *she* is to watch from the swing, or the roof

[1]Ellen Gilchrist, "Revenge," *In the Land of Dreamy Dreams* (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1981) 111-24.

[2]Ellen Gilchrist, "Anna, Part I," *Drunk with Love* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1986) 220-39.

of the chicken house, and sometimes from the fence itself, while *they* run and play and learn the discipline of trained athletes. As her grandmother and great-aunt point out to her, if the boys did let her train with them, all she would get for it would be big muscles that would make her so unattractive no boys would ever ask her out and she would never get a husband. Since she is bored to death by the little girl she is supposed to play with on the neighboring plantation, the only diversion she can find besides watching the boys on the track is learning to dance from the black maid.

So Rhoda's first bind is being kept from doing what she wants most to do because she is a girl; it is the old "biology is destiny" argument dramatized on a Mississippi plantation. Little boys are encouraged to pursue activities that will prepare them for running the world while little girls are restricted to the domestic arena where they are expected to spend the rest of their lives.

The second bind, and perhaps the most pernicious one, is the fascination that this woman's sphere comes to hold for little girls. It is so seductive that they can find themselves up to their necks in quicksand before they have felt the ground quiver underfoot. In Rhoda's case, the seductress is her Cousin Lauralee who comes along and asks her to serve as maid of honor in her second wedding. It is more than a touch of irony that Rhoda's mother had been matron of honor in her first excursion down the aisle. The implication is unavoidable that Rhoda is following exactly in her mother's footsteps. She idolizes and imitates Cousin Lauralee and becomes engrossed in preparations for the wedding, trying on every dress in Nell's and Blum's Department Store in Greenville before the right one can be found. It is significant that Rhoda refuses to look at dresses from the girls' department, she feels herself to be so much a part of the "ladies" world in this matter. And she is adamant in her insistence on the "right" dress.

> The dress I wanted was a secret. The dress I wanted was dark and tall and thin as a reed. There was a word for what I wanted, a word I had seen in magazines. But what was that word? I could not remember.
>
> "I want something dark," I said at last. "Something dark and silky."
>
> "Wait right there," the saleslady said. "Wait just a minute." Then, from out of a prewar storage closet she brought a black-watch plaid recital dress with spaghetti straps and a white piqué jacket. It was made of taffeta and rustled when I touched it. There was a label sewn into the collar of the jacket. *Little Miss Sophisticate,* it said. Sophisticate, that was the word I was seeking. I put on the dress and stood triumphant in the sea of ladies and dresses and hangers.
>
> (121)

And so Rhoda, although maintaining all the while that *she* never will marry but will have a career instead, is caught up in preparation for the wedding, which she sees as a means of drawing the envy and admiration of the boys who have cut her out of the pole vaulting. If she cannot get their attention as an equal in their games, she will get it this way. As she later recalls the drive back from Greenville with her new dress, "All the way home I held the box on my lap thinking about how I would look in the dress. 'Wait till they see me like this,' I was thinking. 'Wait till they see what I really look like.'"

The wedding itself is a disappointment. Held at the grandmother's house, there is much less drama than Rhoda would have liked. But afterwards, at the reception, she does something that lets the real Rhoda out of the prison of the women's trappings she has assumed for the wedding. Under the influence of a strong drink of her own concoction, she goes down to the track, takes off her formal, teaches herself to pole vault, and just as everybody from the wedding comes searching for her, she makes a perfect vault over the barrier into the pit.

In retrospect, she is not sure that anything she has done since has been of any real interest to her.

The girl is mother to the woman. This story with such two strong forces pulling at Rhoda, the male sphere with its activity and power on one hand, and the traditional woman's sphere on the other, shows in a nutshell the difficulties that bright little girls of that generation faced. Gilchrist never implies that the experiences in the woman's sphere are not fun. Rhoda *enjoys* choosing that dress and being a big shot in her cousin's wedding, but she also wants to participate in the male world of activity and power. The dreadful part is that each area apparently excludes the other. Her choices seem to be as final as the choice of figs in Sylvia Plath's novel *The Bell Jar.* To choose one means to give up the others.

This is the "vale of soul-making" of the Southern woman writer; but as Gilchrist shows

in the later stories about Rhoda and Anna Hand and in her novel *The Annunciation*, some women do indeed finally make it through to creativity. And they do it by accepting the validity of their experience and transforming it into art.

A good example of this is Anna Hand's realization in "Anna, Part I" that the context in which she must understand herself is not the male world of power but an adult version of the domestic sphere to which the child Rhoda was confined, and that to order it in fiction is a way to control it. Creativity emerges from the trick of combining the two pulls: one becomes material for the other. Writing is the key to transcendence.

The exclusive nature of the traditional choices for a woman can be seen in the devastating effect of love on Anna, a successful writer whose creativity has been immobilized for ten months by an affair with a married doctor. She has fallen into the pitfalls of such a relationship with her eyes wide open; at the beginning she reflects that she has, after all, already wasted five years of her life on a married man and swears she will never do it again. But she is helpless in the face of love. She is getting old, and this may be her last chance at passion. The doctor, of course, never misses a beat in his career nor in his marriage; it is only Anna's life that is disrupted.

Ellen Gilchrist's opinions about the relative value of the choices Anna has made are implicit in the terms she uses to describe Anna's coming to her senses. The story begins with Anna, having realized the folly of what she has been doing, calling her editor in New York to announce that she is ready to get back to work: "It was a big day for Anna Hand. It was the day she decided to give up being a fool and go back to being a writer" (20). ". . . I've wasted ten months of my life. Ten goddam months in the jaws of love. Well, I had to do it. It's like a cold. If you leave the house sooner or later it happens" (221). What she goes to work on is a story about the affair, "How to ring the truth out of the story, absolve sadness, transmute it, turn it into art" (223). Then Gilchrist's technique is to follow Anna's prescription for writing this story; she begins at the beginning of the affair, noticing everything. It is obvious that the whole thing was hopeless from the start. Not only was the doctor solidly married with no intention of leaving his wife, but Anna knew all along that there were serious, probably irreconcilable differences between them. Yet during the time of the affair she did what women are supposed to do. She ignored the fact that his sentimentality embarrassed her, for example, and let her obsession with him completely dominate her life. Her love blinded her to everything else and induced her to give up her writing, which she acknowledges as the most important thing in her life. She even entertained the impossible dream that one day they would be married and live happily ever after. The incident that breaks the spell, in fact, is that one day, when they have not been together in a while, he comes over and they have such a good time she forgets he is married, thus breaking her one ironclad rule, never to forget where she is and what she is doing. Realizing that she has fallen to this level of consciousness wakes her up; within three weeks she is home again in South Carolina putting her life back together. In other words, she goes home to return to writing, to validate her experience in art and therefore to achieve transcendence. Significantly, Anna knows that this is what she is doing.

> There is a way to organize this knowledge, Anna decided. To understand what happened. This love affair, this very last love affair. In a minute I will get out of this bed and begin to understand what happened. I will pick up the telephone and call Arthur [her editor] and then I will begin to write the stories and they will tell me what is going on.
>
> I will create characters and they will tell me my secrets. They will stand across the room from me with their own voices and dreams and disappointments. I will set them going like a fat gold watch, as Sylvia said. . . . I will gather my tribe around me and celebrate my birthday. There will be champagne and a doberge cake from the bakery that Cajun runs on the highway. Yes, all that for later. For now, the work before me, waiting to be served and believed in and done. My work. How I define myself in the madness of the world.
>
> (238)

At this point, she takes control of her life by climbing out of bed, sitting down at her typewriter and beginning to write. Her subject, of course, is what she knows best: the women's world, the love affair and her survival.□

Margaret Jones Bolsterli *is Professor of English and Director of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Her books include* The Early Community at Bedford Park *(1977) and* Vinegar Pie and Chicken Bread: The Diary of a Woman in the Rural South in 1890-91 *(1982).*

Maxine Cassin

EATING ANIMAL CRACKERS IN THE DARK

The giraffe's neck is broken.
Now it is only the length of the legs
that lets her know whom she devours.
With one hump or two
the camel or dromedary
confuses the tongue.
She reaches deep inside the box,
certain she can find
a form familiar from childhood
when she swallowed, half-chewed,
the drum, the soldier, and the
Sunshine girl.
Tonight she comes up with only fragments—
sweet, amputated heads
for half-toothless wakers
alone in a thunderstorm
except for this doughy elephant
who remembers nothing of the past.
Only a woman seeing the lightning flash
does not forget.

Berthe Amoss

THE MOCKINGBIRD SONG

Lindy put her foot down carefully, one foot precisely in front of the other. She was walking a tightrope, balancing with her arms straight out just like the lady in the ruffled tutu at Barnum & Bailey's Circus last Friday. Lindy's bangs flopped on her forehead just skimming her lashes; she blew them up, her eyes glued to the sidewalk. One false step not exactly in the middle of the springing wire and it was all over—she'd spurned the safety net. If she made it, Eddie N. Smythe loved her; if she didn't, there was nothing to do except her very best until she reached the hedge that marked the end of Miss Ellie's property and the beginning of her own.

"Lynne Louise!"

She lost her balance and fell off the wire inches before the end. As she hurtled though space she heard the collective gasp of the crowd and above it, Eddie N. Smythe's strong voice, "The umbrella, Lindy!" Quick as a wink, she pivoted gracefully in the air, opened the pink and white parasol that she'd had all along, and parachuted the last few feet, landing amid the roar of the crowd, safe in the arms of Eddie N. Smythe, ten years older than he was in real life and the spitting image of Errol Flynn.

"Lynne Louise, when ah call, ah would appreciate a prompt reply!" Millicent yelled. She was standing on the front porch, framed by the sweet-smelling, confederate jasmine Lindy's mother had trained on the trellis. "Didn't you heah me?"

"Yes, Millicent!" Lindy hollered, eyes back on the sidewalk. Step on a crack, break your mother's back—but what difference did it make? There were plenty of cracks but not even one mother. Lindy didn't have a mother even though Millicent pretended to be one.

Millicent had asked Lindy to call her "mommee" if she didn't like "Millie." Lindy didn't like Millie, and she certainly didn't like mommee. As soon call Miss Ellie "mommee." Lindy laughed out loud! Miss Ellie wasn't a mommee or even a mother. More like a granny. A gran-mommee. A Grand Mah-mah, ah-sittin' on her grand-throne chair. Lindy's laughter pealed across the lawn and stopped abruptly at Millicent's small feet in patent leather, high-heeled pumps and black silk stockings that led up to black polka dots and on up, finally to the little red, pouting mouth and ice-queen eyes, fringed in tutus of black mascara.

"Lynne Louise, wheah have you been?"

How could Dan think she was pretty? Millicent was the only one in the whole world who called Lindy "Lynne Louise." It was true that Dan and Honey had named her that after her own two grandmothers, but no one had ever called her anything but Lindy or Lindy Lou, like the Mockingbird song. Millicent was a mean fairy godmother with one wicked wish: may Lynne Louise stay skinny forever even when she gets to be twelve in a few months and let her never be pretty like me.

No one that Lindy had ever heard talking in the whole city of New Orleans talked like Millicent. Millicent was from the country and she talked Southern, sweet talk with sugar-pies and lots of you-alls, but she didn't mean it except to Dan. Lindy'd tried it and Dan had laughed at her, but you could watch him turn to jelly when Millicent said, "Danny, sugar-pie, ah wish we were goin' to the show tonight darlin'?" Lindy's father'd put on his tired, sweet smile and his tired, tweed jacket and off they'd go in the Chevy to the movies to watch William Powell and Myrna Loy kiss while Lindy went to spend the evening at Miss Ellie's. Miss Ellie could hardly be expected to roll over in her wheelchair, and Lindy was too young to spend the evening alone in the house.

In the olden days Lindy remembered sitting on Dan's lap in the dark Prytania movie theatre that smelled of popcorn, holding Honey's hand till she fell asleep to the homey laughter of the audience watching Laurel and Hardy throw pies at each other.

"Movies are just too sophisticated for you these days," Millicent would drawl and send Lindy to Miss Ellie's with four saltines and one can of Campbell's vegetable soup to be diluted with one can of water. That made it an even swap: "A light suppah for two and no vulgah money changin' hands for baby-sittin'." Lindy would wash the supper dishes.

"Wipe your feet before you cross the threshold," Millicent said, pursing her little red mouth. "Dan wants me to go out to dinnah with him and ah've fixed a suppah for you and Miss Ellie. Ah picked a gardenia for the tray."

"I'll take it right now," Lindy said. She could get to Miss Ellie's in time to hear the secret message for members of Little Orphan Annie's Secret Society on the radio. She and Miss Ellie would decode with the Secret Society badge Miss Ellie'd got for sending in two Ovaltine tops and a dime.

Lindy wasn't a member of the Secret Society because Millicent was too cheap to buy two whole cans of Ovaltine just to have the tops to send for the badge and code book.

Miss Ellie was a member even though she hated Ovaltine and her two cans sat full on her pantry shelf. Lindy didn't care one way or the other about Ovaltine, but she adored Little Orphan Annie on the radio. It was thrilling without being as scary as "Tarzan of the Apes." With Tarzan, you never knew who the hunters might catch at night when you lay in your big, old-fashioned bed and wandered through the dark, tangled forest of your own dreams. Tarzan left you to worry all night long that bad men and ferocious animals were chasing you and you couldn't run and all you could do was try, try to wake up and be happy if a mosquito buzzed you awake. But "Little Orphan Annie" left you happy, excited, looking forward to tomorrow to find out the rest.

Miss Ellie said you should go to sleep thinking good and beautiful thoughts and they would come true the next morning. Lindy'd tried it on Eddie and on Millicent but it hadn't worked: Millicent and Dan stayed lovey-dovey and Eddie was a mystery. How was she to know what he was thinking while he shot marbles in the school yard and never looked her in the eye, never called her by her name except maybe the one time he bumped into her backing out of the classroom and mumbled something like, "Uhlinhma"?

Lindy had told her cousin, Marie Louise, that he'd said "Excuse me, Lindy." But Marie Louise had said, "If Harold had bumped into Frances, he'd have apologized all over the place. Harold really loves Frances." Of course, everybody knew that but maybe it was true that Eddie loved Lindy. He just didn't want to show it, maybe.

"Lynne Louise, has the cat got your tongue?" That was it! Millicent was just like her cat, Beauregard: fussy and prim with nasty little claws and a disposition to match.

"No, Millicent. I was trying to memorize the Apostle's Creed for Friday. Sister Thadeus says we have to have it perfect by religion class and . . ."

"Alright then, but it's time to freshen up and change your dress. Dan and I are taking Mr. and Mrs. Howell to the movies after dinner. You wouldn't want Miss Ellie to see dirt under your fingernails. Use the little blue brush and . . ."

Millicent sashayed through the hall and Lindy trotted behind, trying to imagine a tutu around Millicent's narrow hips. She'd never balance on a wire switching from side to side that way. Just staying upright on those spiked heels was pretty tricky. Lindy wondered if she could do it. She used to manage Honey's heels but Millicent's were at least an inch higher and skinny, skinny. Maybe she could do it if she stood very straight and . . . it was worth a try.

Millicent deposited Lindy in the powder room and continued to the kitchen. Lindy turned the faucet on hard so the water sounded loud and ran upstairs to Honey's room which Millicent called her own. It was a mess, all pink and white with ruffles, mirrors and fluffy rugs. Millicent's make-up things were strewn all over her glass-topped dressing table and her face powder had spilled on the floor.

The only nice thing in the whole room was the painting Millicent had done of Bayou Teche, the narrow little river that flowed through moss draped trees past Millicent's home.

Lindy opened the door to Millicent's closet, jammed with dresses, blouses, and Dan's two suits crowded into a corner. Lindy saw just what she was looking for: they were thrown on the floor with about a hundred other pairs of narrow, bright-colored shoes. Millicent had tiny feet and Lindy's feet almost filled the high, high, golden shoes Millicent wore with her strapless evening gown. Lindy buckled the narrow straps across her heels and stood up. It felt wonderful. She couldn't snap her hips like Millicent, but she managed to keep the Cinderella slippers on her feet and mince around a little bit. Just for a second she had the heady feeling of being grown-up, a real lady, telling other people what to do and Eddie N. Smythe tipping his hat, a gleam of admiration, even adoration, in his eyes just like Dan looking at Millicent.

Then she heard Millicent's staccato heels on the stairs and her father's heavy step and she just had time to scramble back into the closet and push behind Millicent's silky dresses where the heavy, sweet smell of L'Heure Bleu perfume almost

choked her. She held her nose and breathed through her mouth, praying she wouldn't cough or faint.

"Ah don't care what she tells you, Dan, the truth is she doesn't like me and ah can't do a thing about it. Lord knows, ah try. Ah do the best ah can but it isn't good enough to suit Miss Priss."

"Now, Millie, don't let it upset you. She'll come around. You just have to give her time . . ."

"Ah've given her one whole yeah! Ah've tried and tried and tried! She hates me!"

"No, she doesn't. Don't get excited, Millicent. It isn't good for you and she'll hear you."

"Ah don't care. Ah quit!"

"Now, Millie, sugar, don't cry, darling. Come on now. Wash your face and dry your tears. We're going out and have a good time, now. Please, Millie? That's the way, my brave little girl. Hurry now or we'll miss the show."

The bathroom door closed on Millicent's sniffling and Lindy heard Dan sigh heavily. She took a deep breath. "Dan?" she whispered, peeking out from behind a flowered chiffon.

"My god!" cried Dan, leaping up from one of Millicent's needle-pointed chairs and whisking Lindy into his arms and out of the ruffled bedroom in a matter of seconds.

"Where did you come from?" he asked, not unkindly. He put Lindy down at the head of the steps and sat down beside her, one arm still around her.

She snuggled up to his side and said, "Dan, I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I had to hide or she'd have seen me in her gold shoes."

"You can't play with Millicent's things, sugar-pie! You know that."

"I used to play with Honey's. She used to let me dress up in her clothes all the time when she was resting with Photoplay and she'd let me eat one of her chocolates sometimes. She'd laugh and tell me I looked gorgeous and I'd be a raving beauty when I get to be sixteen and . . ."

"Lindy, Millicent isn't your mother. She's not even old enough to be. She's the youngest in a big, close family, and they all think of her as the baby of the family."

"Don't you think I know about that?" Lindy said. "I'm sick of hearing about Millicent's wonderful mother and Millicent's wonderful brothers and . . ."

"Lindy, she doesn't mean to annoy you with her family stories. She misses them all. You've got to understand she's not much older than a child herself and she doesn't want you playing with her things in her room. She has a right to privacy."

"She comes in my room! She comes right in, no knocking or anything. She barges in and fools with my things and she read my diary. Yes, she did! I know because I put a hair in the lock and it was gone next day, and when I go in the kitchen her mean old cat, Beauregard, hisses at me and all she does all day long is paint her dumb pictures and oh, Dan, I wish my mamma was back!"

Dan stiffened and his voice grew cold. "She's not coming back, Lindy, and there's nothing we can do about it. You'd be wise to make the best of things and meet Millicent halfway."

Lindy heard the bathroom door open, but she didn't care what Millicent heard. "I won't!" she yelled. "She hates me! She wishes I was gone too so she could have you all to herself. Well, she can have you for all I care. You don't love me anymore anyway . . ."

Millicent was standing at the door, her eyes and mouth wide open as Lindy dodged Dan's arms reaching out to her.

"Lindy, come back here!" he yelled, but she raced down the steps and into the kitchen. Taking just enough time to throw the crackers on the floor and stomp them to smithereens, she pitched the gardenia and the can of Campbell's soup out into the ligustrum bush on the side of the house, as she ran non-stop out of the kitchen, into the yard, and through the hedge by the magnolia tree, praying she wasn't too late for the theme song of "Little Orphan Annie."□

Bernice Larson Webb

SCARECROW

The day you died I fell apart.
Fragments of me flew everywhere,
settling at last
to stick like grains of sand
and puffs of sky
to your casket.

I peeled the pieces off,
one by one,
trying to paste me together again
but nothing fit.
Children pointed fingers,
giggling behind their hands.

When I crumpled into
a butterfly net
strong men carried me
into a corner of someone's
fall garden,
propping me against the fence
to scare away sparrows.

Peggy Whitman Prenshaw

REREADING GWEN BRISTOW'S PLANTATION TRILOGY

Growing up in a little Mississippi town in the 1940s, I remember especially the summers and the twice weekly treks to the public library, where I found worlds and times very different from the stodgy ones, from my view, that I inhabited. When I was eleven or twelve years old, having recently graduated from the romances of Grace Livingston Hill and Emily Loring, I discovered Gwen Bristow's *Deep Summer*, which I read with total absorption and admiration, reading it a second time before I set about to find and read everything else she had written.[1] Remembering those summers, I realize now that I was reading with the passion and desperation of an oxygen-deprived swimmer coming up for air. What I found in Bristow's portrayal of the exotic worlds of frontier Louisiana and grown-up womanhood were thrilling challenges to a young adolescent trying to imagine herself as a heroine of beauty and courage and power.

When I began to search again for the novels of Gwen Bristow, I did so with the misgivings one almost always has in returning to the places and feelings of youth. Indeed, Elizabeth Bowen warns sternly that "it is a mistake to as much as re-open the books of childhood." "They are," she says, "bare ruined choirs. Everything has evaporated from those words, leaving them meaningless on the page." Such was the case for Bowen with Dickens; she found that the intensity of her early reading of him utterly used up and devitalized any interest she might have brought to later readings of the novels. Writing in *Collected Impressions*, she says, "I came to an end with Dickens when I had absorbed him into myself."[2]

Rereading Bristow's plantation novels of the 1930s, I am surprised to find how much of them I have "absorbed into myself." There are characters and themes in these three novels that

[1]The Bristow trilogy includes *Deep Summer* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1937; rpt. Pocket Books, 1948); *The Handsome Road* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1938); and *This Side of Glory* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1940; rpt. Pocket Books, 1964).

[2]Elizabeth Bowen, *Collected Impressions* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950) 265-66.

I have discussed and written about as a professor of Southern literature throughout my scholarly career. As a girl, I was doubtless drawn to *Deep Summer, The Handsome Road* and *This Side of Glory* for the reasons that Rachel M. Brownstein elaborates in *Becoming a Heroine*, her study of the heroines of novels and the readers of novels who *would be* heroines. "Young women like to read about heroines in fiction," she writes, "so as to rehearse possible lives and to imagine a woman's life as important—because they want to be attractive and powerful and significant, someone whose life is worth writing about, whose world revolves around her and makes being the way she is make sense."[3] What I could not have guessed at age twelve, however, is how insistently the roles of Southern women and the tensions between the Southern past and the Southern present—the focus of these three Bristow novels—would engage my thoughts throughout the years.

Let me be clear about the nature of these novels: they are historical romances with many of the stereotypical characters and plot details that are familiar to readers of the genre. Pretty, plucky heroines fall in love with dashing heroes, though none of them quite lives happily ever after. In fact, Bristow devotes only scant space in the three novels to the courtship phase of these marriage plots; rather, she focuses upon the domestic lives of these heroines as wives, depicting the rigors of childbirth, the battles against disease and death of family members, and the labor of planning and managing the work of the "big house" of the plantation, everything from fighting bugs to hosting grand balls.

Writing about Bristow in *American Woman Writers*, Mary Jean DeMarr sums up her achievement as that of a popular, best-seller success, "of the sort generally considered romantic woman's fiction." But DeMarr notes that not only are her female protagonists "more rounded, more assertive and independent than most in that genre," but her "depiction of southern history from the perspective of the poor white is a complement to the familiar myth of the magnolia-laden Old South." DeMarr concludes that Bristow's contribution has been "modest but significant."[4]

Certainly, to my youthful mind and heart, *Deep Summer* was nothing if not significant. In the protagonist, Judith Sheramy, I found a young woman at the beginning of the novel hardly older than myself, whose proper eighteenth-century New England upbringing had barely subdued a lively imagination and love of adventure. In the first chapter the brave and spirited Judith meets and falls in love with Southerner Philip Larne, who like her family is on his way to Louisiana to claim a royal land grant. In fewer than a hundred pages Judith has kissed and eloped with Philip, given birth to her first child in a leaky, ant-and-cockroach-infested cabin in the wilderness, and moved to her new home, Ardeith, the embodiment of the material splendor that Philip had promised and of which she had dreamed. In the next two hundred pages, Judith discovers an affair between her husband and the slave woman who is her closest companion; she plays confidante and mediator in a twisted misadventure involving her brother, Caleb Sheramy, and the ragtag but sympathetic charlatan, Delores Bondio; she rears a family; she moves to an even grander house, puts down a slave uprising, and at last turns over the keys of the plantation to daughter-in-law Emily, wife of her first-born. The novel ends with the aged Judith's reviewing her long life with its various travails and satisfactions: "When Emily had left her she still sat by the window, looking out at the flowers and the cotton beyond, thinking how strange it was that the vigorous little farmer's girl she had been when she came down the river should have helped created this culture of tradition and gentle ceremony, whose strength lay in the fact that everybody knew what to expect from everybody else. . . . Hard to remember that she had first seen those fields as a jungle. Yet all this had happened in her lifetime. She had lived so swiftly. And now that was over. She had seen this incredible transition, had been part of it, and she had reached the time when nothing else was demanded of her" (274-75).

In many respects the novel follows predictable patterns of the popular historical romance—it has major and minor marriage plots as the central action, heightened by a surround of richly developed historical detail. The pace is quick, the characters are lively and the narrative technique is familiarly, agreeable conventional. What is perhaps most interesting about the novel is the rather clear-eyed portrait of the hardships endured by plantation ladies, the afflictions that come to them as typically as the obvious material

[3]Rachel M. Brownstein, *Becoming a Heroine* (New York: Viking, 1982) xxiv.

[4]Mary Jean DeMarr, "Gwen Bristow," *American Women Writers*, ed. Lina Mainiero (New York: Ungar, 1979) 1: 237-38.

advantages of their privilege and wealth. The agony and danger of childbirth, for example, are manifest in that chilling scene mentioned above, a scene that has stayed with me since my first reading of the novel years ago. Bristow also sharply reflects the enslavement that is inherent in the lady-on-a-pedestal myth. Judith comes to realize, for example, that despite the great love Philip bears her, she is vulnerable to his changing moods and ultimately dependent upon his whims. She is crushed to discover the love affair between him and the slave, Angelique, but she has scant resources, she discovers, for avenging the humiliation: "He could do this to her because the very sheltering he had given her made her helpless; she did not own a farthing nor a slave nor a pound of indigo. She bit the flesh of her arm to keep from screaming" (149).

Judith finds vindication and recognition for her contribution to the plantation in the time-honored and celebrated "purity" that she brings to the family line. "Philip has built the plantation. That was what he would leave them. But she would leave them something more, purity of inheritance. Their pride in their line would be based on their faith in her integrity. Civilization had to be a matriarchy" (163). It is not Judith's passive purity, however, that lingers in the reader's mind as the attribute that protects Ardeith plantation. Rather, Judith's bravery and endurance in childbirth, her domestic diligence, and her courageous facing down a hostile mob make her admirable and heroic. In fact, Bristow's Judith Sheramy is to my mind a more interesting character than Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara, for she is not only a spunky, beautiful belle of a girl; she is a young woman who grows beyond spunk and beauty finally to possess resilience and wisdom.

Deep Summer did extremely well in the spring of 1937 when it came out. By the end of June it had sold over ten thousand copies. According to Robert L. Crowell, the publisher, there was tremendous interest in the novel in the South, especially in New Orleans, where Bristow had gone to work in 1925 as a youthful reporter on the staff of the *Times Picayune*.[5] As a native of South Carolina, born in 1903 to a minister, Louis Judson Bristow, and his wife, Caroline Cornelia Winkler Bristow, she had graduated from Judson College in Alabama and then spent a year studying journalism at Columbia University before coming to New Orleans. In 1929 she married Bruce Manning, a reporter for the rival paper, the *Item*, and together they wrote four detective stories. In 1934 they moved to Hollywood, where Manning was employed as a screenwriter and Bristow set to work on *Deep Summer*. Her promotion of the novel doubtless contributed substantially to its sales in Louisiana. She recalled the barnstorming trip throughout the state in an autobiographical sketch she prepared for *Current Biography* in 1940: "When *Deep Summer* was published Louisiana State University invited me down to make a lecture tour. I scampered all over the state in a car driven by Annette Duchein of the university's graduate school, whose job was not only to drive and to make the introductory talk, but to stand around with a watch so she could drag me away from one town in time to reach the next, for the university had given me a schedule that demanded not only split-second efficiency but the constitution of an ox. In short, I lectured in twenty-one towns in nine days. I did it again the next year when *The Handsome Road* was published [1938], only this time it was thirty-six towns in fourteen days. It sounds horrible, but I'm afraid I must own that I enjoyed it."[6]

Despite some apprehension on the part of Crowell, the sales of her second plantation novel, *The Handsome Road*, exceeded those of *Deep Summer*. There were fears that the business slump in 1938, plus the fact that the new novel was set during the Civil War and would inevitably be compared to *Gone with the Wind*, would detract from sales. Instead, the book was not only a commercial success but something of a critical success among reviewers in the country's largest newspapers. *The Handsome Road* was reviewed widely—Crowell counts thirty-nine reviews in his piece on Bristow—and it stayed on the best-seller list for eight months.

This novel opens shortly before the Civil War, having skipped over a full generation of Larnes and Sheramys since the close of *Deep Summer*. In place of the frontier woman, Judith, *The Handsome Road* portrays the pedestal-perfect lady, Ann Sheramy, descendant of Judith's brother, Caleb, and Ann's po' trash counterpart, Corrie May Upjohn, who is the ambitious, honest and immensely appealing great-granddaughter of Delores Bondio and her second husband, Thad Upjohn. Corrie May is portrayed with more subtlety than any of Bristow's characters in the earlier novel. What is most engaging about this

[5]Robert L. Crowell, "One Best Seller Leads to Another," *Publishers' Weekly* 16 March 1940: 1155-56.

[6]"Gwen Bristow," *Current Biography 1940*, ed. Maxine Block (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1940) 108-10.

pair of protagonists, however, is a pattern reiterated in many Southern novels—a pairing of complementary characters to embody the full range of feminine traits admired by Southerners: passive and plucky, demure and flirtatious, weak and strong. This is an ancient coupling of fair and dark ladies, of course, but it has enjoyed special vitality in Southern fiction.

In *The Handsome Road,* Ann Sheramy recites her ladyhood resumé to her brother Jerry shortly before her marriage to Denis Larne in words that remind one of a long line of Southern belles: "'I know I'm not terribly clever but I'm not as empty in the head as everybody keeps saying,' she explained. 'I can play the piano and I dance beautifully as you'd know if you'd ever danced with me, and Madame Bertrand said my French accent was mighty near perfect and that was a big compliment because she thought all Americans were savages riding buffaloes, and I can embroider, and I do know how to be a hostess'" (63).

But even Ann, loveliest of the fair ladies, realizes the contradictions in the ideal she is expected to fulfill. In developing Ann's self-awareness and her grasp of the ironies forced upon her, Bristow gives us a character who grows beyond the stereotypical belle:

> Ann could see herself merging from girlhood into the great lady of the plantation legend. She could do it; not everybody could. A great lady was music and moonshine, but she was also hard as steel. She was too frail to put on her own shoes and stockings but she bore ten children quietly; she had never an idea in her lovely head but she could make a hundred not necessarily congenial guests coalesce into a pleasant unit; she must always be sent up stairs to rest before the ordeal of getting dressed for a ball but she could dance till sunrise once she got there; she turned faint at the sight of blood from a cut finger but she could ride to hounds and be in at the kill; she was an angel of mercy toward the poor and afflicted but cruel as Nero toward any of her own clan who violated the code of gentle behavior; she obeyed her husband with docile respect but she got out of him anything she really made up her mind to have. Ann began to laugh. If that was what they wanted of her, that they would get.
>
> (123-24)

Like Ann, Corrie May Upjohn comes to see and understand the self-defeating contradictions that grow out of the social conditions of her life. Through her story, Bristow makes a strong statement about the exploitation of poor whites by slave-holding plantation owners. Corrie May's brother dies in a yellow fever epidemic, subjected to working conditions that Denis Larne and other planters would not risk for their slaves. Nonetheless, for a time she is enamored of the grandeur of Ardeith and derives much satisfaction from her work in sewing for Ann. She soon comes to understand, however, that neither she nor the slaves have any place but that of servant to the Larnes: "She didn't belong to them. None of their ideals had any meaning for her; she envied their stately, gorgeous life without having any hope of sharing it. All she had experienced of them was their selfishness, their suave cruelty, their assumption that charm and grace made them so superior that they were justified in crushing their fellowmen in order to retain the way of life that had produced those pretty qualities" (163).

With Corrie May's disillusionment comes a new attitude about the impending Civil War: ". . . let the Yankees come on down and free the slaves, and the sooner they did it the sooner Negroes and white folks would both have to work for wages and there'd be no more of this having to work in competition with slaves who worked for nothing. That was the way to be somebody—make them give you the chance to earn your own right to walk up the handsome road and not be poor white trash" (163).

In this novel Bristow skillfully balances the social claims of the rich and poor white Southerners of the ante-bellum South. Much like Faulkner and a long line of other Southern writers, she aims to give her readers a view of both the glory and the sordidness of that recent Southern past. She also portrays the penchant of the survivors for aggrandizing the past, making of it a legend that never was. Cynthia, younger sister of Denis Larne, who is killed in the War during the course of the novel, makes this point quite sharply to Ann's young son Denis near the end of the novel:

> "You'll read the Latin poets, especially Catullus, . . . and you'll be fond of Byron, and you'll treat every lady as if she were in danger of breaking in two, and say the Army of Northern Virginia was the greatest bunch of fighting men God Almighty ever let get together on this earth."

"I never saw it," said Denis, rather wistfully.

"My dear child, do you think that matters? That's the ultimate test of your type, Denis—living by legends you don't know anything about."

(350-51)

Hearing Cynthia's remarks, Ann takes exception, defending the values she is trying to instill in her son, but Cynthia persists, rejecting the heroic image of the slain Denis as well as the bereft-widow figure Ann presents. "Magnolia flower with ribs of steel," she calls Ann. "And your husband the embodiment of a great tradition, when you know as well as I do he was merely a rather nice young man . . . when I hear all these descriptions of the fine Old South I can't help wondering if young Denis is ever going to find out how much of it was never dreamed of until after Appomattox" (352).

Bristow published the final novel of the trilogy, *This Side of Glory*, in 1940. It carries the story of the Larnes and Sheramys into the twentieth century, again skipping over one generation of family before it begins in 1912. Eleanor Upjohn, granddaughter of Corrie May, and Kester Larne, grandson of Ann, form the romantic focus of the novel, which involves, however, a much richer and more detailed social commentary than do either of the earlier books. Bristow clearly intends the book to embody a reconciliation of the separate class and family lines that began with the affluent Larnes and the impoverished Upjohns of *Deep Summer*. Corrie May Upjohn's fervent wish in *The Handsome Road* that poor whites like her be given a chance to compete for some of the economic fruits of the cotton kingdom comes to pass in *This Side of Glory*. Her son has become a highly respected engineer who designs structures for flood control, and her granddaughter Eleanor is a graduate of Barnard. In many ways Eleanor Upjohn represents a return to the New Englander, Judith Sheramy. When she first meets Kester Larne, son of the young Denis in *The Handsome Road*, she apprehends immediately a sharp difference between them.

"Strange, isn't it? You and I—born in the same state, of the same race, the same generation, yet in so many ways we're unlike." She paused a moment, and added, "I believe I know what it is."

"What?" he asked, casually, as though it were not very important.

"You're a Southerner," Eleanor said, "and I'm an American."

(24)

In the course of the novel, it is Eleanor who arranges soberly to pay off the bankers and saves Ardeith from foreclosure, Eleanor who shrewdly trades with New Orleans antique dealers to raise the capital to keep them going, Eleanor who makes a fortune selling Ardeith cotton for the manufacture of armaments during the World War. She proves to be an ambitious, energetic capitalist, and the amiable lord-of-the-manor, Kester, is overwhelmed. Bristow further complicates the marriage plot by developing in the middle section of the novel an affair between Kester and another woman and an accident that threatens the sight of Kester and Eleanor's young daughter. But it is finally the clash of values between the American and the Southerner that shapes Bristow's central theme and holds the most interest for the reader. Throughout the novel, Eleanor's consciousness is the controlling point of view, and so it is she at the conclusion who offers the summarizing analysis of the conflict that has divided her and her husband: "They had rushed into marriage across a barrier that intolerant generations had been building for a hundred and fifty years, they had laughed when warned of its existence and then blamed each other when they had found that laughter did not blow it down. It was all very well to say that such different philosophies as theirs never should have come into existence in a country supposedly based on equality of privilege. Quarreling with dead grandfathers was easy, and useless; they might as well have faced the fact that Kester reverenced the manner of life while she reverenced its means, and that such divergent standards could be reconciled only by humility. But they had not learned humility, and so instead of being indulgent they had been wrathful" (279-80).

Rereading these three novels after so many years, I think I understand why, among the countless books I read as an adolescent, they were especially gripping. Bristow gave me a vision of Southern girls who transcended isolation and prejudice and vapid ladyhood. Richly detailed, with settings I recognized from visits to Natchez and New Orleans and from family excursions down the old River Road, these novels held out the lure of the exotic nineteenth century (exotic to me) and, certainly no less

compelling, the tantalizing view of grown-up womanhood.

Rachel Brownstein has written knowingly of the powerful encounter between women, especially young women, and novels:

> "Generations of girls who did not read much of anything else, whose experience was limited by education, opportunity, and convention, have gone to fiction to escape a stifling or a boring or a confusingly chaotic reality, and have come back with structures they use to organize and interpret their feelings and prospects. Girls have rushed right from novels, headlong and hopeful, into what they took to be happy endings: the advice they have given their friends, their gossip about their enemies, their suspicions and interpretations of the actions of others, and their notions about themselves have run along lines derived from fiction. Women who read have been inclined since the eighteenth century to understand one another, and men, and themselves, as characters in novels."
>
> (xviii)

At a formative time in my life Gwen Bristow gave me a group of characters who fired my imagination and shaped the way I thought of myself and my future. I read the novels with the breath-held, manic reading of youth, but I suspect that the patterns and dreams that took shape as I read these books have stayed with me through the years.□

Peggy Whitman Prenshaw *is Professor of English and Dean of the Honors College at the University of Southern Mississippi. Editor of* Southern Quarterly, *she has written or edited several books on Eudora Welty, and she recently published* Elizabeth Spencer *(1985).*

Lee Meitzen Grue

GOODBYE SILVER, SILVER CLOUD

Malvina drove up to Burger King in a 1976, Silver Cloud Rolls Royce.

I said, "Malvina, where did you get it?"

She said, "Don't ask. It's too sordid."

It was one of those staggered exam afternoons right before school is out, so Malvina, who was not a regular at Burger King, did not draw the kind of crowd she would have had on a normal school day. It was just me and old Chips D'Aubusson, my least favorite preppie (preppies are not big on my list) plus the entire staff of Burger King, in their little orange and gold uniforms, who really got into blowing on and polishing the fenders of the Cloud, and washing down the windshield with a turks-head used officially for Burger King's plate-glass windows.

This last semester most of the Seniors at Benjamin Franklin High School had grown very close. We were like people with the same terminal disease huddled in a hospice. We were tender with each other. Kind. Every afternoon, we sat in Burger King trying to figure out why our stingy parents, who were affluent enough, wouldn't give us enough money to have a coke, fries, a whopper, and a car. The girls kept on the look-out for some special guy, incredibly good-looking, to come riding by in a great car and discover them in Burger King. I thought this was shallow. The B.K. guys, on the other hand, had quit playing with G.I. Joe and Big Jim. They were now fixated on sex, which necessitated a girl, and a sharp-looking girl wanted to ride in a great car, so now they were trying to convince their fathers, who usually called them pet names like "the loser" or "tits on the bull," to pay for their insurance and lend them a car so they could ride around picking up girls.

During exam week things had gotten even more serious; we had a lot of time to examine our lives to see if we'd screwed up permanently or if it was only temporary. Final transcripts were being prepared. We all knew our SAT's and everyone else's. We were anxious about which college would accept us, and scared to death that some of that garbage we'd been getting in lectures from our parents might be true. As somebody once said, "It was the best of times and the worst of times."

Malvina was a little different. Malvina hadn't gone to any of the regular elementary schools like Newman or Trinity. She'd gone to the Free School and she looked like a Sioux maiden or a water nymph. She wore a sweatband, like someone from the sixties, long brown pigtails, and forties clothes from AmVets Thrift Store, which on her looked terrific. She's the first person I ever saw wearing red ankle socks, black baseball shoes and a yellow organdy formal to a Spring Dance. Mr. Glendennis, the principal, made her take off the shoes because the cleats were marking the Gym floor. She danced every dance.

Malvina had spirit. At least, that's what her mother called it. Her mother and my mother took art classes together before her mother decided on a "career" as an artist on Jackson Square, so when we were little, Malvina's mother would come and dump her on my mother, who went around muttering, "Spirit, my eye, the kid's a demolition squad." But my mother liked her anyway. My mother once tried to enroll me in the Free School, but it scared me. I hid in the music room and listened to "Bye, Bye, Miss American Pie" (that was a big song at the Free School) one entire rainy day. I cried and wouldn't go back, but I liked watching the rain fall on the elephant ears in the patio.

I think if Malvina had been with me I would have liked the Free School, but she was absent or something—gone to Mexico, I think.

Malvina made it through the Free School and came to Franklin, which is unreal, because only three kids from the entire Free School ever graduated from a regular high school, but I digress. At Franklin she was the star pupil in Driver's Ed., but her Mom didn't have a car, and that's what I want to talk about—the car. I had never ridden in a Rolls Royce, so when Malvina asked, "Do you want to go for a ride?" we crawled in. We—being me and Chips D'Aubusson. I wanted to go because I had never been up close to, let alone, in one. And Chips Butts D'Aubusson was riding so he could see if

the car lived up to his exacting standards; the jerk had been everywhere and done everything—with his parents, of course; he couldn't go to the bathroom alone.

"My grandfather has a 1937 Classic Rolls with a Waterford crystal bud vase by the back window. Do you feel the company has lowered its standards?"

"No."

"Is the engine sealed?"

"Yes."

Her wrist hooked over the steering wheel, Malvina was driving with her hand just hanging there, relaxed. She looked relaxed, but a little muscle kept working in her jaw. The Cloud took the curves like caramel custard. Chips was right in her face talking classic cars. I was leaning forward in the back seat trying to follow her mind, and blot out his conversation. Chips was one of those guys beloved by the general female populace and loathed by me. How he came along I'll never know. In profile he looked like a rock face in Colorado, hewn by Salvadore the hairdresser on Soniat Street. Malvina didn't know he existed. Some dial in her mind had tuned him out. He babbled on about Maserati and Porsche until we hit the Causeway. Twenty-four miles of lake and sky stretched before us, when suddenly he said, "Where are we going?"

"Going?" said Malvina.

"Yeah, where are we going?"

"Merida."

"Merida, Mississippi? I've never heard of it. You must mean Meridian." He said this in his usual superior tone.

"Merida."

"What's she talking about, Grace? I've got a five o'clock with the orthodontist to tighten my retainer."

"Perish the thought, Lancelot. You're going to the land of guacamole. I think she means Merida. Home of the Mayas, the original heart-breakers." My tone was light with Preppy-Two Shoes, but my heart was beating fast. I had seen that little muscle working in Malvina's jaw; I wasn't about to break her concentration to ask her some dumb question about destination. Once, when we were playing mumblety-peg with my dad's old hunting knife, I broke her concentration and she put the knife through my big toe.

Chips hadn't much experience in the real world, so he immediately became hysterical. He demanded that Malvina "turn the car around this instant"—there was no turn-around until the middle of the bridge; "Heart of Stone" was playing on the radio and Malvina's eyes were super-glued to the highway. I was happy to see Chips fall apart—he deserved it—but then panic began to set in around my own edges. My mother expected me home by seven p.m. or a telephone call explaining exactly where I was going to be. Once I called I had a lot of leeway. My mother believed in "mutual courtesy," but as the call boxes flashed by on the Causeway, I could imagine her reaction to: I'll catch you later, Mom. I'm going to Mexico this evening, Mom. She'd think I'd flipped out. Better to have her think I'd been kidnapped by a sex maniac than out for a joy ride to Mexico with Malvina. I thought, perhaps, it might be wise to reason.

"Hey, Malvina, what's Merida like?" I asked heartily. Chips had lapsed into a catatonic state—a refreshing change.

"Pyramids," said Malvina as she glared at the white highway which stretched between endless brown water and choppy little waves.

"A trip to Merida could be fun," I tried again. "But I bet it would cost a lot. All I have is a dollar. Do you have any money?"

"Plenty," she said and flipped open the glove compartment which looked like a safety deposit box. It was full of money. My jaw hung down further than the door on the glove compartment. Chips missed all this because, when he couldn't get his way, he whimpered down to sleep by rubbing his shirt collar on the fuzz under his nose. This seemed to comfort him. I think this was Chips' usual way of coping with unexpected developments in life.

We whipped along at about eighty. I saw a catfish restaurant whiz by, so I knew we were across the lake. I needed a bigger pacifier than my thumb and, as if she'd read my mind, Malvina said, "Why don't you roll us a joint? It's in there." She flipped her thumb at the spot on the dash. I pressed it and a little doo-hickey like a make-up compartment opened up next to the money box. It was equipped. Papers and everything. I rolled a giant joint and took a quick toke before I passed it to Malvina. I needed it. She sucked it in like she was never going to breathe again. Everything slowed down and mellowed out after that. I watched the highway slide under us like a big snake, undulating and curving around trees. It was getting late and we had an FM station that played jazz. I never understood jazz before, but listening, I knew the saxophone was making it up off a theme like we were making it up off a theme. I knew we'd get back to the melody sooner or later.

We were flying along like Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang, when Chips woke up cranky and insulting.

"You'd better turn this car around right now. You don't even know where you're going. Mexico is off somewhere beyond Texas. You'll end up in Chicago going this way. Besides, smoking pot screws up your chromosomes. Your kids will be defectives. Wrong Way Malvina. You don't know where you're going. You're just going. I think you stole this car. That's what I think."

Malvina's face didn't change, but I knew Chips was right about Mexico. Mexico was not across the Causeway by map, and I didn't know where Malvina got the car, but none of that bothered me. Leaving New Orleans, the right way to go is over water. I said, "Water seems right to me." When we were on the Causeway the road behind us looked like a ribbon I could cut with paper-doll scissors. No school, no Mama, no college. Just cut it off.

"Shut up, Chips. Malvina's driving," I said.

We passed a sign that said MANDEVILLE, and ahead rose twin neon arches which read *Billions Served*. The Cloud hurtled forward toward the Golden Arches; it stopped before the plate-glass doors. Malvina flicked open the lock on the car doors and motioned with her chin to Chips. "Get out where you got in."

"Are you crazy? This is Mandeville. I got in at Burger King in New Orleans. This is McDonald's in Mandeville. Are you crazy?"

"Same life. Same difference. Get out."

He got out—muttering Ivy League curses. The Cloud slipped on, leaving his dazed face behind. Malvina drove as if she knew exactly where she was going, heading now to a sign that said GULFPORT, and then along water faced by large summer houses. I rolled another joint. Again everything smoothed down—the houses went by, the water went by.

The FM station carried a program by a man named Karl Haas, who always said, "Well, Hell *o* there." He had a nice voice. He introduced music by Lily Pons. Her voice had the clearest, highest tone. We drifted along to "The Bell Song" from *Lakme*. I had stopped thinking way back down the road. It was free time—the first time in months that I knew where I was and where I was going. Then the FM station went off the air.

We stopped at a rest stop on the beach—there was a circular drive and little houses with a barbecue pit, under a roof, no sides, and, at some distance from the little houses, a prison-like building, with signs indicating rest-rooms. Other than two big trucks pulled into the drive, the place was deserted. We opened the car windows. There was a slight breeze, the sound of water, plush seats; we sank back to sleep—Malvina in the front and me in the back.

The sun woke me. It was neon blue and distant through the tinted glass. I knew where I was, but after a few minutes realized I didn't know the whereabouts of Malvina. She was not in the front seat of the car. I opened the silver door and squatted behind it. The water disappeared into the sand immediately. The sound and smell of the Gulf gave me a clean, simple feeling like scouring a frying pan with sand does when you go camping.

I could see a figure far down the beach. I thought it might be Malvina, but I wasn't sure. I sat down on the beach with my feet in the surf, let it wash over my feet and toes, examining them in relation to the sand, and the small broken shells embedded in it. There were blonde hairs on my big toes; I don't think I had ever noticed it before. Thick veins bulged on top of my feet; they made me think of Chips, who had bulging veins on his arms from working out. I decided my feet had character. I liked my feet. Solid—they were no lotus blossoms; no one would drink champagne out of my slippers, but they'd probably get me where I was going.

I didn't hear Malvina come up; my mother always called her "Creeping Jesus" because she was so quiet. She didn't say anything, but sat down beside me and let the water roll over her feet. The sand seemed dry, but the seat of my pants was wet. Malvina took off the baseball shoes and a pair of thick blue socks. The skin on her feet looked like Magnolia skin when the buds first open—thick, opaque, creamy. Each toe on her foot was shaped like a perfect, little baby finger. Her feet weren't that small—about a size seven, I guess—but the arch was high and the ankles were thin and tapering. My feet looked like a couple of peasants up side the Grand Duchess Anastasia and her sister.

I said, "You sure have pretty feet."

Malvina's whole body went rigid like a kid I saw once having an epileptic fit. She scrinched her eyes real tight, and sucked air into her throat so hard there was a trough in her neck. Her chest heaved like someone about to vomit. I was toad struck. I didn't know if she was sick or what was happening. I started hitting her on the back as if she had something stuck in her throat, but that didn't help, so I tried talking to her, but she was gone, I mean—nothing I said got through. It was

scary like seeing your mama break down or the principal. She kept up a rasping sort of noise. I thought she was going to die on that beach with just me and nobody else around, but then I saw a little bit of water seep out of those scrinched-up eyes, and I realized she was crying, so I did what my mother always does when I cry. I put my arms around her and rocked her, saying, "There, there, it's going to be alright. There, there, it's going to be alright"—then I started singing it—"There, there, there. Itsa gonna be al right. Well, alright. Okay, wellllll itsa gonna be alright, okay." Real tears appeared on her face and she relaxed a little bit, but she cried so long my arms got tired and I couldn't think of any more ways to sing "There, there, it's going to be alright."

She straightened herself up, but her face was wasted from all that crying.

She said, "It isn't, you know. It isn't going to be alright. Nothing can be undone. You're never the same."

So then I thought I had a glimmer. I said, "Are you pregnant, Malvina?"

"No."

"Are you having an *affaire*?" I said it in a very sophisticated way—the way they do in books. What I meant was "Are you screwing somebody, Malvina?"

"No."

"Then what?"

She started to cry again. She had used the tail of her shirt to blow her nose. Her sinuses were blocked solid; when she talked she sounded as if she had a speech impediment, but she started telling me about it.

Malvina said: My mother believes in letting people be whatever they want as long as they don't hurt anybody, so it's not as if I didn't know about people—hadn't been told—but that was the Quarter. I thought things changed when you got uptown—all those wide green lawns, the shade trees, the big houses—all so clean.

Right after school started in September, when it was still hot, Mary Todd Marsh invited me to her house to swim, and I went. Her house is the big stone one on the corner of St. Charles and Calhoun. Mary Todd is okay and I wanted to see what her house looked like on the inside—I wanted to see what it was like to live there, in that kind of a house. Her mother had gone somewhere, a sanatorium or something, so the cook, Mercie, fixed us a snack, and we went down to eat in the gazebo by the pool, then we swam for a couple of hours. When I climbed out of the pool and headed for the cabana to get dressed, a man, in a flecked, gray sport coat with a little charcoal handkerchief in his pocket, was sitting in the gazebo. He was reading a newspaper which was folded for working a crossword puzzle. When I passed he put an onyx pencil to his mouth and smiled. He said, "You have pretty feet," then he went back to his paper, and I walked into the cabana.

Mary Todd asked me later, "Did you meet my uncle?"

I said, "I think so," but nothing else was said. I like to swim; the lap-swim at the Y costs $30 a month, and Mary Todd kept inviting me over to swim for free. She was very grateful when I came. She acted as if I were doing her a big favor. Sometimes her uncle was there, most of the time he wasn't. There were always servants: a very snooty butler named Robert, the cook, Mercie, and a couple of maids—they all seemed very distant. Mercie was the nicest, but you couldn't say she was Mary Todd's friend; she was the cook, and she got mad if you inconvenienced her. Occasionally, I would see Mary Todd's uncle in the library reading or by the pool writing. He always looked up when I passed, and he always smiled. Once he lifted his black pen, and pointed to my feet, and then he laughed. He had a nice laugh, and there was something kind and fatherly about him noticing me, and not for the things boys in school notice me. I never felt as if he were coming on or anything like that because the only thing he commented on were my feet.

I've been going there all year. We swam until it got cold, and then we played pool or tennis. Mary Todd's house has almost as many facilities as the Y, and they didn't cost me anything. I guess I used Mary Todd, but I got so I liked her too.

About a month ago, I was in the cafeteria at school and Mary Todd came up to me and said, "My uncle has invited us to Houston for the weekend. He has some business there and he wants you to come along and keep me company. Isn't that great? You can come can't you?"

My mother was painting a picture of a one-eyed black cat to sell on the fence. She has painted this cat a lot because he's a good seller. I said, "Jo, can I go to Houston with Mary Todd and her uncle this week-end?" "Sure, why not? But why anybody would want to go to Houston is beyond me. It's a big cow town. They spell culture with a capital K."

"I want to go because I've never been. That's why," I said.

On the plane, Mary Todd and I sat together,

and her uncle sat across the aisle writing—his legs crossed, his paper folded—with his black pen. Sometimes he would touch it to his lower lip. Mary Todd kept looking out the window making little "Oh's and isn't that pretty?" about the clouds.

I watched her uncle. He wrote in long columns, but he would turn the folded paper over, and write on that part too, then he would pause for a moment, and put the pen to his lips. His lower lip was much fuller than his top lip, which had a definite bow to it—a little furrow running to his nose. The more I looked at his mouth, the younger he looked to me.

In Houston we stayed at the Galleria, which has shops, swimming pools, an ice rink, and a French restaurant. You never have to go out. Everything is right there. I think it is probably as sophisticated as Las Vegas. Mary Todd's uncle took us everywhere. He never seemed to work. I said, "I thought this was business?" He said, "A few phone calls take care of it very well." I said, "Then this wasn't a business trip." He said, "Sure, it is—the most important business in the world."

We tried ice-skating. He was pretty good, and I've been roller-skating all my life so I got the hang of it right away, but Mary Todd spent most of her time sitting on the ice. We each had a skating costume from the Skate Shoppe. Mine was teal blue. Mary Todd's uncle fitted me for boot skates, but we had a hard time finding my size because my foot is so narrow. He wasn't satisfied until he found the right pair, so he spent about forty-five minutes kneeling on the ice trying one pair after another on my foot. Mary Todd picked out a yellow costume. She likes yellow, which is probably the worst color for her. I've gotten so I like her a lot. She tries so hard to please everyone, but something about her trying so hard to please makes people think less of her. One night we were sitting up in our beds in the hotel room and she said to me, "I think you're my family." I didn't know what to say because I liked her, but she didn't feel like family.

I think I understand Mary Todd. Her uncle was good to her; she had anything she wanted, but it was the same way some people are good to dogs. You know the kind of people who say, "I don't care much for dogs, but I'd never hurt one, and I wouldn't let one starve." I mean, Mary Todd could depend on her uncle; he'd never let her starve.

We came back Sunday night. My mother liked the skating outfit and the shoe skates, but when I talked about ice-skating lessons she got mad and said, "Stick to roller-skating or get a job at the Plaza so you can skate free. Thirty dollars an hour is too rich for my blood." Then she left for Pass Christian on a commission.

I kept thinking about Mary Todd's uncle touching his mouth with his onyx pen. He didn't seem so old; in fact, one of my problems has always been that the boys I know are too young. They always want to know where you want to go. I get tired of always saying where we're going to go. I want to go places I don't know anything about. Once in a while, I'd like to ride instead of drive.

Mary Todd kept asking me over, but I didn't go for some time because I didn't want to see her uncle again, or I guess I didn't go because I did want to see her uncle again. In April I realized I was not going to pass my make-up class in Algebra II unless I did something quick, so I stayed one afternoon for Senior tutorial, and guess who the tutor was? You've got it. Mary Todd. She had on one of those hot looking yellow dresses she likes. When she saw me she looked mad and said, "What are you doing here? Nothing else to do with your time?"

I said, "Trouble in Math."

She said, "I thought you never had trouble in anything."

I said, "Everybody has trouble with something."

Her face changed. She took the little blue side-comb out of her hair and combed through one side, then she tried to pin it up. It fell right down in her eyes again, but she seemed pleased that I needed help. She laughed a funny, dry laugh. "Come sit over here, and let's see what you don't know."

She went through a lot of basic mathematical principles real fast, but she was thorough, and in about twenty minutes she had analyzed my main problem and given me some drills to study at home. She did more for me in a half-an-hour than old Tittle, the math teacher, had done all semester. After we finished our tutorial session, I was grateful, and I thought maybe I hadn't treated Mary Todd exactly right, so I said, "I'd like a swim after all that work." Besides, I wanted to see her uncle; I thought about him a lot. She was pleased. I could see it in her face, which is broad and gets splotchy if she's nervous or happy. She combed through her hair again with the little side-comb, then she said, "Well, why don't you come home with me. The pool is just right this time of the year."

We put our books in her room, and she dug out a fuchsia leotard for me to swim in. She went on downstairs to get us something to eat. Fuchsia is a good color for me because my skin and eyes are dark. I looked at myself in the pier glass. The suit fit like a new skin. I really liked looking at myself. I'm telling you this because most of my life I haven't even looked in the mirror to comb my hair. I noticed Mary Todd had about fifty kinds of fingernail polish on her dresser, so I sat down on her dressing table stool, and picked out a fuchsia nail polish, then I tucked my knee under my chin, and painted my toenails—heavy, heavy over Mary Todd's pastel rug.

Walking down the stairs with my towel draped over my shoulder, I felt seen, and there he was, in the double-parlor. He gave me a long, hard look as I came down the stairs. I felt it all over my body. He said, "I've never seen you wear nail polish before." I tried to answer in a light tone, but it came out all wrong. I said, "Well, I'm almost grown up now. I'll be eighteen at the end of May."

"Is that right?" He looked like he was adding a bill, and then he laughed. He had such a beautiful smile, and he said, "I'll have to get you something nice for your birthday. Something special, wouldn't you say?"

"I don't care," I said. "Eighteen is the same as seventeen in New Orleans." I meant, because you can drink almost anywhere and nobody checks your I.D., but he said, "Not quite. Not quite."

Mary Todd and I swam all afternoon. I asked her a few nonchalant questions about her family. Her uncle had been her guardian for four years, since her mother had gone to a tea at the Orleans Club and started pointing and laughing at the women arriving two by two in their mink jackets. Mary Todd said her mother yelled at them, "Look at them, two by two. Jesus, it's going to rain. When the animals get on board two by two, you know it's going to rain." To make matters worse it did rain a lot because a hurricane was in the Gulf, so there they were shut up together all afternoon because St. Charles Avenue flooded and they couldn't get out. Mary Todd's mother was drinking vodka from a silver flask she kept in her purse, and she talked to everybody, but she didn't call them by their right names. She called them Mrs. Muskrat, Mrs. Minkshitz, and Mrs. Chinsilly. Mary Todd said she didn't think her mother was all that crazy, but they locked her up anyway.

Mary Todd's father had been killed in Mexico in a jeep accident. He was an amateur archaeologist. Mary Todd said he would have liked to earn his living that way, but he always felt as if he was doing someone else, who really needed it, out of a job. The University always came to him to finance the expedition, then the academics treated him like an amateur because he had money. Mary Todd said her father considered inherited money a curse, and she wasn't too sure he really had an accident. Someone called him Dr. Dilettante, and that same night he ran into the side of a pyramid. Her uncle was her mother's brother; the family came from a plantation around St. Joe. Her uncle is a graduate of the Harvard School of Business. "Diversified holdings" is what Mary Todd said he has, but she said his real interest is in designing shoes. He's been designing shoes since he was thirteen, and he sells them in a special boutique in New York City.

I said, "Why don't you ever wear any of his shoes, Mary Todd?" and she said, "Because the heels are too high."

Mary Todd and I have been friends most of this year, but she's never been to my house. I've always gone to hers. That was the way I wanted it at first; I wanted to see how she lived, but after we were friends I asked her over to our apartment to eat spaghetti, and she said she couldn't. I kept asking her, but she always looked funny and said she couldn't, so I finally asked her why. She said, "My uncle doesn't want me hanging around down there because he doesn't think it's a proper place for a young lady." Her face was all splotchy when she said this, and she said she really wanted to come. That hurt my feelings. I'm a young lady, and her uncle thought the French Quarter was all right for me.

Malvina started to cry again, so I said, "Hey, why don't we get back in the Cloud. The black flies are eating the Bejesus out of my ankles." Malvina was a wreck. She looked like a kid in a Save the Children ad. I've known Malvina since I was in the second grade, and she never looked like a kid. She always looked like she could do anything. She always gave the advice. She pulled herself together, and we got back in the Rolls. I said, "Do you want me to drive?" But Malvina spun that sucker out of there like a TransAm. We were back out blistering I-10. Driving along, you'd never know she had a problem. She had a stainless steel backbone and laser eyes; that girl could drive. "Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Sulu reporting. Sir, I think we've outdistanced the aliens." She smiled a little bit, but no more than

Clint Eastwood in *Fistful of Dollars*. Come to think of it, Malvina was more like Clint Eastwood than Captain Kirk when she was driving.

I could tell she was stronger, so after about a half-an-hour I said, "Then what happened?"

She jumped a little, the way a cat does if it sees a piece of fake alligator hide.

"Oh, him. Things went on the same all year. I went over there a lot. Sometimes I'd work out with Mary Todd in the gym. She lost fifteen pounds working out with me."

"The gym?"

"Yeah, they had a gym in the building next to the cabana—nautilus machines, a jacuzzi and a sauna."

"A jacuzzi!"

"Oh, it's okay. Just a lot of hot water."

"What about the uncle?"

"He didn't seem to pay much attention to me, which was beginning to get to me. I had decided I was in love with Drue Hunt Macklin—that's his name. I saw him with a woman wearing a black linen dress. She had on a wide brim black hat. Very thin, but with high boobs and such high heels she looked like she would topple over from being so top heavy. He gave her the keys and handed her into a Porsche. She drove. He treated her like a china doll. I was so jealous I couldn't stand it. Holding the curtain with one hand and my stomach with the other, I had been watching from Mary Todd's window. Mary Todd thought I was sick, and I guess I was, so I let her fuss over me. She put me to bed. Even brought me some hot soup. I couldn't eat anything. The quality of the competition got me down."

Malvina was concentrating on the road. When I saw the Causeway sign stuck out like an Irish flag, my first thought was that Malvina had gotten her directions mixed. We were heading back to New Orleans. But then I figured she knew what she was doing. Sitting on the beach she was a wreck, but driving the Rolls she was Wonder Woman. I didn't say anything about the new move. I was too interested in her story.

On May 10th—my birthday is May 22nd—an engraved invitation arrived inviting me to a supper dance at the home of Drue Hunt Macklin III on May 22nd at 8 p.m. I was so excited I screamed. My mother said, "What's going on?" When I told her about the invitation I realized there was going to be a problem. She had planned a birthday party at the Alpine—just artists, friends of hers who have known me since I was a kid. I told her I had to go to the supper dance, and couldn't she put off the party. She was pissed. She said, "Little girl, you had better get your priorities straight and figure out who your friends are."

I knew who my friends were, but I wanted this guy with the pretty mouth and manners. He was the first man I've ever been interested in other than James Mason. You know—the English actor. He's older than God, but I always watch his old movies on TV. His voice moves me. He's mysterious, as if he has a deep, dark secret.

So I went to the supper dance. My mother had her party the weekend before the supper dance. Mary Todd had been acting funny before the night of the supper dance. Every time I tried to talk to her at school she'd cut me—cold. I'd been cycling a lot, practicing for a club meet. I figured she was mad because I hadn't been over. She didn't have any other friends, so if I didn't show she knew it. Drue Macklin was a real turnon. I needed to release some energy somewhere so I was doing about fifteen miles every morning. I hadn't been babbling all my girlish hopes and dreams to Mary Todd. She didn't even realize I had a crush on her uncle. I played my hand close to my body, but I think some light had begun to dawn in her head because she was so cold.

The supper dance was on a Friday night. I spent a week haunting the thrift stores looking for something spectacular to wear. It was a 1930's number in black satin. Those dresses are supposed to be skin tight, so you can't wear any underwear because it shows. I got Aunt Took, who lives next door to us on Dumaine, to take up the dress and French braid my hair. She said, "Malvina, you got fine, big legs and a royal behind. You can get anything you want. You got the brains to use it." I said, "That's good, Aunt Took, because I know what I want." I had a terrific pair of solid black suede platform shoes—strictly the forties, and, that night, I put a white gardenia in my hair a la Billie Holiday. I was out to vamp Drue Macklin. I knew just how to do it. Hadn't I seen all the movies? A Checker cab picked me up at the door. Do you know how much a cab costs from the French Quarter to the 5200 block of St. Charles Avenue?—a mint, that's how much. And I was alone. I didn't want to be encumbered by a date, who might object to my making out with the host.

Robert, the butler, opened the door. His skin is the color and texture of prunes. I can't stand Robert. I never look right at him because his eyes are hooded like a turtle's, and he pretends he never looks at you, but he watches everything. He's known Drue Macklin since he was a little

boy, and he knows whatever there is to know about him. I said, "Good evening, Robert," looking past him. He said, "Good evening, Miss Malvina," looking through me. When I looked past Robert, I noticed there were not a lot of people there. I was early because I was too excited to act sophisticated and arrive late, but I realized there weren't any guests. A band was playing in the small ballroom, so it sounded lively, but a shotgun going off in there would have killed musicians and a waiter or two. I knew most of the musicians from the Quarter, but they weren't playing traditional jazz like they do in the clubs. They were playing mellow stuff—things like "Misty," "Willow Weep for Me" and "Body and Soul." I followed Robert out to the solarium where a little table was set among the ferns and orchids. The room was so humid you could almost swim, but an air conditioning duct shot cold air right onto the table. With "Mon Oncle" you always got the best of the natural and the artificial.

Drue Macklin came out of the shadows and kissed me on the cheek. He said, "Happy Birthday, Darling." I jumped a mile when he kissed me. He scared me coming out of the dark and touching me—he'd never touched me before. Robert sniffed out loud like a dog smelling something dead.

We had a fantastic dinner. Everything was like a fairy tale—even Robert—he was just evil enough to belong there. The waiter, who served dinner, I had never seen before, so I guess the meal was catered. I would have recognized Mercie's food. We even had a little menu. I still have it. I saved it. I felt terribly chic because two years of French at Franklin enabled me to order Escargot, Coquille St. Jacques, Salade Niçoise, and Haricots Verts, and pronounce them—almost. We also had champagne. I've drunk wine all my life so there was no question of my being drunk and not knowing what I was doing. He toasted me and paid me compliments all evening. I was more drunk from compliments than I was from the wine. We all fantasize evenings like that. We're programmed to expect them, if we're just beautiful enough—fascinating enough. I was besotted with compliments, but then I thought about Mary Todd. Where was she? She wasn't there, and I hadn't even missed her. I said, "Drue darling, where's Mary Todd?"

He said, "She left this morning for Switzerland. She'll be going to school there in the Fall."

Then I knew why she'd acted so funny; she'd been dumped by everybody. But I didn't care. After all, Mary Todd was just a friend, and a Junior in High School; Drue Macklin was the man of my dreams. I was a woman of the world. He was the answer to all my immediate worries. If he married me, and I was sure he would, he would take care of me. I wouldn't have to decide which college or how to pay for it. I wouldn't have to take care of myself. I know how. I've done it, but my mother has always been there backing me up, but she keeps saying, "Now you're eighteen, my job is over."

Drue was wearing a tuxedo, and he looked so good, very slender, like a boy, and he did all these interesting things with his mouth. His mouth fascinated me. In French novels characters are always making "moue," pronounced moo. That's how I thought of his expressions, but it's a grimace, a petulant expression, not cute the way it sounds.

The smooth way he did things made me feel good—taken care of. The way my mother could be when she wanted to be. None of the boys I knew were ever that way. I always ended up taking care of them, so I really liked the evening except for one thing—the servants. Drue acted as if the servants weren't there, as if they were invisible hands to do his bidding, but I know how waiters in the Quarter think about tourists, and how musicians think about tourists, so I had trouble pretending they weren't there. They were there. Right in the middle of our enchanted evening they were saying to themselves: Look at those creeps. They don't know how to live. If I had their money, I'd know what to do with it.

About eleven o'clock the band stopped playing, but the music went right on through the whole house—tapes I guess. I went to the powder room, and I passed through the little ballroom on the way. I saw Joe Robichaux packing up his drums, and Walter Payton packing his bass. They didn't say, "Hello."

When I got back to the table, there was coffee and some kind of pouffy chocolate dessert. We lingered over the coffee and B&B. The waiter had disappeared. Drue was holding my hand; his leg pressed against mine so that I felt him like electricity down my whole left side. He said, "You're the most beautiful woman in the world. I could lose myself in your eyes—your skin is ice cream and your little feet are lady fingers." He said all this nuzzling my neck, whispering into my ear, and I bought it. God, all my life I wanted someone to think I was a beautiful, romantic woman, and here I was on my eighteenth birthday being all those things. Then he said, "I

have a present for you, Darling." And he held up these keys. He led me—half-dancing, half-stumbling—"Night and Day you are the one, only you beneath the moon and under the sun"—in my high-heeled suede shoes, out to the Porte-Cochere where this long, shining thing stood in the dark. It was like seeing the Winged Victory in your own backyard. The little silver Spirit of Ecstasy flew upward, and the car throbbed with power the way a big ship throbs on the river—like a silent heartbeat. I could feel it throb all the way down into my stomach. It was almost too much.

Drue put his arms around me, bent me back like the lady at the piano in the Steinway ads, and kissed me. Then he gave me the keys. "It's yours."

The inside of a new car always smells good. This one smelled like Frankincense and Myrrh. I turned the key. Drue said, "Pull out."

I turned the key and said, "It didn't start." He said, "It started a long time ago." I pulled out. I couldn't hear the motor, but we cruised down St. Charles Avenue. I felt so rich. There was no doubt in my mind that Drue Macklin wanted to marry me; that we'd live happily ever after; that I'd be coddled by invisible servants (and I'd get used to it); driven around in a Rolls Royce; and that I deserved it all because he had discovered my true worth—the inner me.

We drove all over town—sailed out to the lakefront, then came down Wisner Boulevard by City Park. The blue lasers from the Museum of Art were shining down Esplanade Avenue, and he said, "Drive into the park. I have another present for you." I drove in and pulled off on the crescent drive under those big live oaks with their arms lolling on the ground and moss dripping down like hair.

He reached under the seat and brought out a package wrapped in slick gray paper with a pale peach velvet ribbon. The package looked like a box from Hausmann's jewelry store—that sort of understated simplicity. It was a big box, and my hands shook so I couldn't open it. I don't know what I thought it was—a ring maybe—although it was such a big box. I thought maybe he'd wrapped the little box in a bigger box, and then a bigger box to confuse me. When my hands kept shaking, he laughed and put my fingers to his lips. My heart, which by now was located right at the top of my weak legs, went into meltdown, and he leaned me back against the door and took my legs across his lap. His tuxedo pants had a bulge in front. I could feel it pressing against my leg. He began untying the ribbon on the box; when he took off the lid, he hesitated for a moment before opening the tissue paper. He looked in my eyes for a long time. I knew the gift was even more important than the Rolls. He was giving me something priceless, and I felt he desired me more than anything, and I wanted him. He put the box in my lap; his left hand was under it; still looking into my face, he reached down with his right hand and took off my sling-back pump, fumbling like a boy trying to unhook a brassiere with one hand while the other hand is occupied elsewhere. His left hand was still holding the box in my lap which was melting into the seat cushions. Next he reached into the box, through the tissue and pulled out—a brass shoe. The dashlights were on, and this shoe had a life of its own. The heel was four-and-a-half inches high, covered with geegaws—fake stones: rubies, emeralds, amethysts, and glass diamonds. The sandal front had hundreds of little rhinestones. It was the tackiest shoe I'd ever seen, and it must have weighed eight pounds. It throbbed the same way the car throbbed, and me, I still throbbed, and Drue's lap throbbed. He reached down with that right hand and put the shoe on my foot, which was still in his lap. I couldn't stop looking at his face; his eyes held mine in the most sensual look. The box had begun to weigh a ton. He took the other shoe out and held it up the way a priest holds the chalice up—it looked like the chalice with all the stones in it—then he put it, slowly, on my other foot. He said, "Oh," in a very soft voice and gave a little shiver. His back arched and the bulge in his pants went down like a balloon losing air. And I was sitting there astonished, but so hot, in spite of the God-awful shoes, that I wanted to crawl all over him. He didn't even move the hand that was in my lap. All he did was sit there, with his head back on the seat, gulping. Then I looked down at my feet with those ridiculous, brass shoes, and I got cold and furious. I tried to sit up straight, but my feet were so heavy I couldn't turn around. He started fumbling with the strap, but his muscles were weak, and he couldn't undo it, as if he'd been asleep.

I said, "Here give me that." I yanked my foot up with my hand. I bent my knee and put the shoe in my lap. When I moved I felt my satin dress split, and the rhinestones on the shoe gave me a brush burn on my thigh, but I got the damn things off my feet. Then I threw them out the window. He didn't say anything while I was trying to get the straps undone, but after I threw

the shoes out, he said, "I'm sorry. Don't be mad at me." I didn't want to talk to him, so I started the car and peeled out.

We didn't talk. The same damn song, "Night and Day," came on the easy listening station, and I had to stop the car and lean out. He didn't make any excuses but he held my head and he gave me his handkerchief. I sat up and punched him away. He sat way over on the other side of the car, very quiet.

We drove up St. Charles Avenue about sixty miles an hour. It's a good thing the cops weren't out, because I was still so hyped I would probably have raced them or something crazy. Driven into a tree. Something.

When we got to his house, I drove into the porte-cochere at about fifty and slammed on the brakes. He bumped his head on the dash, and said, "I'm sorry," again. His eyes looked like something you see on a stray dog, and I felt something for him, but I said, "Get out." He did, but then he leaned back in, and in a sickly sweet way said, "The Rolls is yours. You have the most beautiful feet in the world." So I drove out of there like a maniac, and I've been driving ever since.

Finally, I said, "Well, at least you didn't get raped." She didn't say anything for a while. At last, in a little girl voice, she said, "I'm damaged."

I said, "He's just a weirdo, a harmless weirdo. He didn't hurt you."

"But he did. I can't get it out of my head. It's all connected. I was doing all those things to attract him—to make him want me so I didn't have to think, so I didn't have to grow up. I did attract him, but he was stuck on one part—my feet—and he didn't need any of the rest of me, so I was rejected, but I wasn't really rejected. I mean it's all so mixed-up, and I've got this car like some whore gets money. I feel like a whore, and I feel like I was being a whore all along, using him, and then when he used me, I hated it."

I didn't know what to say to Malvina so I said, "Yeah."

I hadn't been paying attention to the road or where we were going until Malvina hit the brakes in front of some twin arches. I heard her say "Get in" to someone and damned if it wasn't old Chips D'Aubusson again, and he got in and said, "I knew you'd be back," very smugly.

I said, "Chips, you'd better shut your mouth because I don't think Malvina is in the mood for your mouth." But he didn't stop talking: same old thing, his orthodontist and vintage cars. I couldn't help thinking, there must be some guys our age who've got it together or somebody who's grown up and got it together. There must be somebody somewhere who really wants Malvina—somebody nice who really wants me.

Malvina didn't talk at all, and we were back on the Causeway. It was getting hot out there, and the AC in the car was pumping away and kept us from it. There were gulls over the water, and white sailboats in the distance, and the choppy waters looked blue far out in the lake. I felt like I'd been on a long trip to a foreign country.

When we got to New Orleans, Malvina just kept going. She sailed through on the interstate ignoring uptown and the Quarter. She got off downtown at Elysian Fields heading down St. Claude to St. Bernard Highway.

Chips was having a hissy fit, but I think since he had decided Malvina was a crazy person he treated her with more respect. There is something about a crazy person which invites respect. They've rejected the world's craziness and invented their own. With someone like Malvina you're in the same position you are when someone teaches you a card game and there aren't any written rules. You just play it by ear and hope they'll teach you what you need to know. Accept their rules and play as best you can.

So old Chips started whistling. He was pretty good too. He could whistle all kinds of old songs like "Whispering" and "Peggy O'Neal." I didn't know any of them before, but he would announce each one before he whistled it. Like this: "Heartache"—whistle, whistle, whistle, or "Near You"—whistle, whistle, whistle—suddenly, Malvina did one of her dime stops. The Rolls rocked like a car on a Ferris wheel. I looked out and we were stopped by those old brick ruins in Chalmette—the ones called "De La Ronde" in the middle of the highway. We sat there a minute; then she made a sharp right turn and we were going through the Chalmette Battlefield, tombstone after tombstone and around the historical monument dedicated to the Battle of New Orleans, and I thought, "Thank God, we're going to have to stop because the river is there," unless—and I hoped she wouldn't—she turns right around again and goes out the gate the way she came in. But she didn't stop, and she didn't go back. She drove right up onto the levee—it was Spring so the river was up over the willows, and lapping at the levees like it was hungry for dirt. Malvina turned around on the levee—the car was so long it looked like we would fall off, but she turned the Rolls until it pointed down to the water. Then she said, "Get out."

So we scrambled out onto the shell road at the top of the levee. Chip looked like a white roach—all one color—and I was scared too, because I thought if I didn't she would just take us with her like she'd taken us on the trip. She sat there in the car for a while. We didn't know what to do. Then she turned on the lights and a tape. The tape playing was "Bye, Bye, Miss American Pie."

Malvina opened the door and reached in, to the hand brake. When she let go, the Silver Cloud sailed right off into the Mississippi like a silver dream, and we could see the lights shining in the water, like old silver money, and we could hear Don McLean singing underwater.

Malvina said, "That's that for the shoemaker," and we left, walking.□

Sybil Kein

SOULANGAI

"Memory is everything."
—Osbey

There was a house by the river,
A house that sang with the rising
Of soft morning. In the dirt yard,
Children would play like june bugs;
Slender voices entwined with clucks
From orange-winged banty hens and the
Quaver of ripening figs, merletons, and
Blackberries. Blue mosquito hawks posed on
Clothespins to watch the slow flutter of
Butterflies around hand-scrubbed wash.
Morning-glories closed pink over thick wooden
Slats which made fence on the left side of the house.

There was a house by the river,
A house that sang with the searing afternoon sun.

On the right side, a medley of wild
Roses grew in the white stone-lined
Garden near milk-sweet lilies which knew
To blossom at Easter. Often, a young hummingbird
Would linger near the bright hibiscus and ritually
At sundown, small fat fingers clipped sprays of
Red, yellow, and white specked four o'clocks to
String as ringlets for a handsome baby's hair.
Beneath the healing elephant ears were large chunks
Of soft red brick. Evenings, it was expected task to
Crush brick to powder for cleaning the grey three steps
Which led to the front of the house.

There was a house by the river,
A house that glistened as the light of dark descended.

Inside at night, an oil lamp on the mantlepiece
Bounced wicked shadows on the ochre ceiling;
The flame's breath made quick glances at the
Hanging framed figures of religion and kin.
There was reason to believe that the house
Was haunted. Uneasy ghosts weaved in and out
Of the thin, broken walls at will. They left

Their anger to pause on the frail nature of
Holiday arguments which hung in the air until
Past midnight. Pleas and prayers did no good; words
Became spectre-knives to cut the flesh of feeling. But this
Was the house that sang, and tears were part of the singing.

There was a house by the river,
A house that moaned under the yoke of the moon.

It was the mother whose voice made
Harmony with peals of children's fears,
Father's frustrations, the outside world. It was
A voice that swept aside cobwebs of spiteful
Poverty and arranged a glory of stars to cover
The cruelty of storms. It was the mother who broke
The curse of vengeful haunts with her songs, songs
Which invoked the souls of ancestors to foredoom
Such brute intrusions. And it was the mother
Who sang, even to the white stone-lined grave
Covered with curled pink petals of wild roses
Thrown there by the hands of startled children.

There was a house by the river,
A house that shuddered at the footsteps of grief.

It was the father who pitied none;
Whose arms never broke under the tillage
Of bricks, who knew nothing of finery or the
Freedom of gold or grandeur. And it was the father
Who bled like a woman after labor until his body
Wore thin and white. It was the father who whistled as
He dug holes in the ground, in the sky, in the wind,
To hide what money was left for another kind of pain.
It was the father who was struck mute because he saw
No use for singing, but who kept the song in his eyes.
And it will be the children who will carry the secrets
Of the song to give to memory, to circle the need.

There was a house by the river,
A house that sang with the rising of soft morning.

Gloria T. Hull

SHAPING CONTRADICTIONS: ALICE DUNBAR-NELSON AND THE BLACK CREOLE EXPERIENCE

Ensconced with her family in West Medford, Massachusetts, Alice wrote Paul Laurence Dunbar, her husband, in Washington, D.C., a 7 March 1899 letter recounting some remarkable personal history which she had recently learned from her mother:

> Another thing I didn't know. She [Mama], nor any of our family didn't know of the emancipation proclamation for two years! The owners fled with their slaves [from Opelousas, Louisiana] to a wild district in Texas and there held out against the law. Finally the old Judge was threatened with arrest, so he called the slaves together one morning and read the proclamation, and then like a man told them how long he had withheld the news. It must have been a dramatic scene the way mama puts it, the inflexible Yankee soldiers on each side of the white-haired old man, his sobbing daughters and wife, the open-mouthed, indignant and unforgiving slaves, for most of them were of mixed Indian blood. She says he broke down and sobbing like a child threw out his hands and begged them too if they would return to Louisiana with them he would try to pay them back wages.[1]

This plantation melodrama continued with some of the ex-slaves remaining in Texas, while others—including Alice's mother, Patricia—

[1]Letter from Alice Dunbar-Nelson to Paul Laurence Dunbar, 7 March 1899 (unprocessed Alice Dunbar-Nelson materials, Special Collections, Morris Library, University of Delaware, Newark, Del.). All letters and unpublished materials cited come from this source.

made the three-month journey back to Opelousas in "big covered wagons, swimming the Sabine and Red Rivers," "where the Judge tried to make amends by giving them cabins and starting them in life."

At this point, either Mother Patricia tired of talking, or Alice tired of writing. Alice probably told this tale to Paul as an attempt to match the famed southern narratives of his mother (which often served as the basis for his writing) with some "roots" lore of her own. She never referred to or used the story in any public context, for—unlike Dunbar who was Negroid in color and features—slave ancestry was not the kind of personal data which she would choose to emphasize. Dunbar-Nelson would much rather have been taken as a descendant of Louisiana's (preferably free) *gens de couleur*, those mixed-blood, "colored" people who considered themselves superior to pure Negroes, especially those who had been slaves. Throughout her life, ambiguities regarding race and color are apparent in her behavior, comments and writings. Of course, these ambiguities never reached "tragic mulatto" proportions, but they were crucial on both personal and artistic levels.

Alice was born with reddish-blonde curls which darkened to red to auburn, and was fair enough to "pass" for white. Given her mother's Black and American Indian blood, she seems to have received considerably more Caucasian influence from her father, who was always cryptically referred to as a "seaman" or "merchant marine." The specifics are shrouded in history, but there was something irregular, something shameful about her birth which Alice alluded to years later, again in a private letter to Paul. Remonstrating with him about "deriding" her and inflicting "bitterness and hurts," she wells up:

> Dearest,—dearest—I hate to write this—
> How often, oh how pitifully often, when scarce meaning it, perhaps, you have thrust my parentage in my face.[2]

What there was to thrust in her face could have been white ancestry, illegitimacy, or perhaps a combination of the two. At any rate, with this background, she assumed a prominent place in the racially-mixed Creole society of post-bellum New Orleans.

There she shone as a beautiful and talented young woman, starring in dramatic productions, writing the "Woman's Column" of a local newspaper, working as a stenographer and elementary school teacher, participating actively in social and literary circles, publishing her first book, *Violets and Other Tales*, in 1895 when she was only twenty years old. This early promise blossomed further when she came North, married Paul Laurence Dunbar, and established herself as a leading Afro-American educator, clubwoman, racial and feminist activist, poet, writer, journalist, and public speaker. Though her reputation has been shadowed by her more famous husband, she is now becoming more well-known for her own considerable accomplishments.

A good deal of her fame springs from her authorship of the Creole sketches and stories contained in *Violets* and in her second volume, *The Goodness of St. Rocque* (1898). Replete with local color, these pieces are correctly described as charming and well-written. They are also devoid of any significant references to the murkier aspects of racial identity and prejudice, even though history and sociology confirm that color, caste and race were deadly, daily realities for the mixed blood inhabitants of southern Louisiana who people her stories. A few isolated allusions can be found—to Black longshoremen during a strike, to the blond versus dark attractions of two rival heroines, to an orphan girl obliquely described as a little "brown scrap of French and American civilization" whose "glorious tropical beauty" makes her so vulnerable to racial-sexual exploitation that she consigns herself to the convent.[3]

In contrast to this work, other of Dunbar-Nelson's lesser-known writings present a more complex picture of race and the Creole, especially the Creole with immediate or identifiable Negro ancestry. Published in *The Southern Workman*, "The Pearl in the Oyster" chronicles the rise and fall of Auguste Picou, a Creole fair enough to live as white, but whose grandfather was a free Black. He comes to grief because, racially, he tries to have it both ways. He rejects the Negro side gallery and his brown-skinned childhood friend in favor of white uptown life, then seeks to reenter the now-closed Creole fold in order to play corrupt ward politics. His ironically shallow solution is to take his wife and child and "go away

[2]Undated letter from Alice Dunbar-Nelson to Paul L. Dunbar, probably ca. Dec. 1898.

[3]These stories are, respectively, "Mr. Baptiste," "The Goodness of St. Rocque" and "Sister Josepha."

somewhere where we are not known, and we will start life again, but whether we decide to be white or black, we will stick to it." Here Dunbar-Nelson has moved beyond the safe, predominantly love themes of *The Goodness of St. Rocque* to an overt treatment of race and passing.

An unpublished typescript, "The Stones of the Village," is even more telling. Young Victor Grabert's childhood has been blighted by his ambiguous racial identity. His loving, but stern, old West Indian grandmother forbids him social interaction with the youngsters on his street. One of his most painful memories is of himself "toddling out the side gate after a merry group of little black and yellow boys of his own age."

> When Grandmere Grabert, missing him from his accustomed garden corner, came to look for him, she found him sitting contentedly in the center of the group in the dusty street, all of them gravely scooping up handsful of the gravelly dirt and trickling it down their chubby bare legs. Grandmere snatched at him fiercely, and he whimpered, for he was learning for the first time what fear was.
>
> "What you mean?" she hissed at him, "What you mean playin' in de strit wid dose niggers?" And she struck at him wildly with her open hand.
>
> He looked up into her brown face surmounted by a wealth of curly black hair faintly streaked with gray, but he was too frightened to question.
>
> It had been loneliness ever since. For the parents of the little black and yellow boys resenting the insult Grandmere had offered their offspring, sternly bade them have nothing more to do with Victor. Then when he toddled after some other little boys, whose faces were white like his own, they ran him away with derisive hoots of "Nigger! Nigger!" And again, he could not understand . . . all the boys, white and black and yellow hooted at him and called him "White nigger! White nigger!"

Furthermore, Grandmere forced him to cease speaking "the soft, Creole patois that they chattered together" and learn English, the result being "a confused jumble which was no language at all." This "confused jumble," this silence—linguistic, racial, psychic, and emotional—determines his entire life.

Eventually, his grandmother sends Victor to New Orleans. Providence favors him, and he becomes a highly-respected lawyer and judge, marries into a leading family and fathers a fine son. Time and death have obscured his past, so that no one knows of his mixed ancestry. However, Grabert's fear of exposure torments him. To try and protect himself from showing sympathy towards Blacks or arousing suspicion, he becomes a die-hard Negro-hater, firing Black men who work for him, refusing to have a Black mammy for his son, persecuting Black defendants in his courtroom, and so on. Still, his existence is hell. He discovers that a brilliant Negro lawyer named Pavageau, whom he has taunted and unjustly treated, knows of his grandmother and his early background. Pavageau is too principled, though, to expose Grabert and only asks that he judge his cases fairly when they come before him.

Nothing, however, can halt Grabert's descent into psychosis and madness. Rising to speak at an important banquet after a "tumult of applause," he muses to himself:

> "What a sensation I could make now," he thought. He had but to open his mouth and cry out, "Fools! Fools! I whom you are honoring, I am one of the despised ones. Yes, I am a nigger—do you hear, a nigger!" What a temptation it was to end the whole miserable farce. If he were alone in the world, if it were not for Elise and the boy, he would, just to see their horror and wonder. How they would shrink from him! But what could they do? They could take away his office; but his wealth, and his former successes, and his learning, they could not touch. Well, he must speak, and he must remember Elise and the boy.

What actually happens is that his mind completely snaps. Instead of the chairman, he sees his dead grandmother at the head of the table, begins to address her, and then falls into a fit:

> When the men crowded around him with water and hastily improvised fans, he fought them away wildly and desperately with furious curses that came from his blackened lips. For were they not all boys with stones to pelt him because he wanted to play with them? He would run away to Grandmere who would soothe him and comfort him. So he arose, stumbling, shrieking and beating

them back from him, ran the length of the hall, and fell across the threshold of the door.

The secret died with him, for Pavageau's lips were ever sealed.

In this story, Dunbar-Nelson handles complexities she never touched any place else. Clearly, she is treating the popular Afro-American literary themes of the "color line"—that is, passing—and the tragic mulatto from the particular and unique vantage of the Louisiana Black Creole. Her general tendency as a writer was always scrupulously to separate her life and real experience from her "high" art—to the detriment, I think, of her art. For instance, in stories about women, her female characters are usually correct, conventional heroines who exhibit none of the verve and bravado that characterized her own life on both public and private levels. Regarding race, she was a pro-Black activist (despite some personal ambivalences that she harbored), but kept race as a controversial subject out of most of her traditional literary work (though she treated it unflinchingly in her essays and journalism). Looking at "The Stones of the Village," this story about Victor Grabert, one is struck, first, by the fact that she is handling this troubled subject, and, second, by the possible autobiographical implications of the work.

That this story does have autobiographical resonance is made clear when it is compared with an essay which Dunbar-Nelson wrote around 1929, toward the end of her career. Entitled "Brass Ankles Speaks," it is an outspoken denunciation of darker-skinned Black people's prejudice against light-skinned Blacks told by a "Brass Ankles," that is a Black person "white enough to pass for white, but with a darker family back-ground, a real love for the mother race, and no desire to be numbered among the white race." This "Brass Ankles" recalls her "miserable" childhood in "a far southern city" (read New Orleans) where other schoolchildren taunted and plagued her because she was a "light nigger, with straight hair!" This kind of rebuff and persecution continues into a Northern College and her first teaching job:

> Small wonder, then, that the few lighter persons in the community drew together; we were literally thrown upon each other, whether we liked or not. But when we began going about together and spending time in each other's society, a howl went up. We were organizing a "blue vein" society. We were mistresses of white men. We were Lesbians. We hated black folk and plotted against them. As a matter of fact, we had no other recourse but to cling together.

And she states further that "To complain would be only to bring upon themselves another storm of abuse and fury."

This essay was as close as Dunbar-Nelson ever came to revealing feelings about her own racial status as a "yaller nigger." She tried to publish it, but would not, could not do so under her own name, and the magazine editor refused to print it pseudonymously. "The Stones of the Village" is, likewise, as close as she ever got to turning this kind of personal and cultural confusion into art. One notes, though, that in the story, she uses a male rather than a female protagonist, thereby making it easier to write while keeping herself at a safer distance.

Finally, it must be said that Dunbar-Nelson's shying away from race as a literary theme can be partially explained by market conditions, by what agents, readers and publishers wanted. They bought her slight and charming stories, but backed away from serious explorations of the color line. Given the constraints of Dunbar-Nelson's own personal ambivalence and authorial credo, plus the limitations of the marketplace, we must be grateful that any stories like "The Pearl in the Oyster" and "The Stones of the Village" exist. They help us to understand the psycho-racial-social forces which shaped—both negatively and positively—Dunbar-Nelson as a writer, and enlarged the field of her art. She is no longer simply a female regionalist producing safe, run-of-the-mill local color stories, but a Black Creole woman writer who also tried to bring these hidden complexities into literary light.□

Gloria T. Hull, *Professor of English at the University of Delaware at Newark, is the editor of* Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson *(1984). She has also edited Dunbar-Nelson's works for Oxford University Press and is co-editor of an award-winning anthology on black women's studies,* All the Women Were White, All the Blacks Were Men, But Some of Us Were Brave *(1982). Her most recent book is* Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance *(1987).*

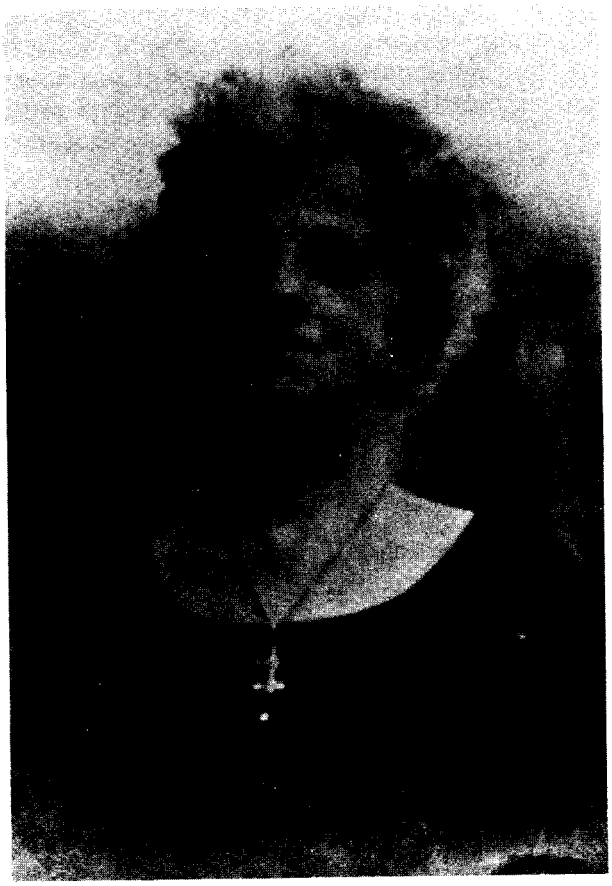
Thadious M. Davis

CONVERSATIONS WITH HOME

"Didn't you read about the fire, or see it on TV?"
My sister, traveller North and West even East
to return South, a still farther South that
lies around the sunrise side of the Gulf.
My sister cannot understand how
I missed the news.
New Orleans is an important place.
Other places have no meaning beyond names
and Mardi Gras visitors.
There at the mouth of the River the world
ends curled and content.
Long-absent sisters flatten into opaque
travellers undeluged with daily "news."
Far into the provinces—Boston, New York—
the outlanders, suspiciously nomadic,
do not know of the fire.
Oil rigs are spectres rising at self-serve stations
on islands along expressways, turnpikes.
Provincial in an oasis fueled by offshore
oil that has no image beyond unleaded—
How much a gallon?
This fire quelled in her blood
My sister knows the wanderers
have not felt the explosion
have not seen the flames.
She listens for a sign in the voice
in the deadness she intones
"Cher, you better be paying more
attention to what's happening in this world."

Clara Juncker

THE MOTHER'S BALCONY: GRACE KING'S DISCOURSE OF FEMININITY



"A woman's writing is always feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine."

—Virginia Woolf[1]

"J'ai soin ici d'employer les qualificatifs *de la différence sexuelle, afin d'éviter la confusion homme/masculin, femme/féminin."*

—Hélène Cixous[2]

"Repeat the rule of the past participle

In the third chapter of Grace King's novel "Earthlings," published in 1888 in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* and never reissued, a father is initiating his daughter into the mysteries of grammar and spelling, an endeavor which leads to the following exchange between the stern, aging teacher and his reluctant young student:

[1]Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, n.d.).

[2]Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981) 245-64.

conjugated with *have*."

"*Le participe passé* . . . You see I know the rule!" triumphantly.

"And the application? Let me see your copy-book. Ah, my daughter, will you never learn that the feminine noun requires a feminine participle, if the noun precedes the participle?"

"Ah, the sentiment was so beautiful, papa! how could I recollect? And a feminine noun, and a feminine participle, and masculine nouns, and masculine participles!—as if words had sex!"[3]

The daughter's resistance to the rules of grammar (or the Law of the Father) focuses on the necessity of feminine (linguistic) determination ("the feminine noun requires a feminine participle"). By insisting that words have no sex, young Misette attempts to escape linguistic and social rules and roles and to redefine the space allotted to her in the prison of gender. She futhermore holds to a feminine aesthetics ("the sentiment was so beautiful, papa") which is excluded from traditional patriarchal grammar. The father, however, ascribes his daughter's participial insufficiencies to "a congenital defect" traceable to his wife's ancestry.

The spacial construction of "Earthlings" supports the clash between two textual landscapes, between the father's library and the mother's garden. On the gallery, among rose-geranium, reseda and jasmine, all gifts from the nurturing landlady to the motherless Misette, the young woman becomes a poet, a composer and a storyteller. Here she sings "anything that came into her head" (616); here her ideas "were her own" (618); here they bloom into incessant chatter (637). But her oral, discursive and intuitive texts are at odds with the phallic order of logic and signs: "If she thought about them they would not come to her at all, as she had explained so often to Mr. Feltus, who wanted her to write them down for him" (616). Her father nonetheless recognizes the subversive power of this gallery of semiotic babbling and desire and forces his daughter into his intellectual constituency of copy-books and grammar lessons. He even threatens to "have the gallery destroyed" because it is "A constant temptation! A constant danger!" (620).

The con-genital difference between father and daughter and their grammatical and linguistic negotiations suggest that Grace King has created a paradigm of the patriarchal literary establishment and the woman writer. "Congenital," the dictionary reminds us, is etymologically rooted in the past participle of *gignere* (to beget, bring forth) and thus establishes the connection between biology and creativity. With examples such as "congenital idiocy" and "congenital malformations," Webster further brings into focus the perceived defects of a woman forced to function within a symbolic system in which she is handicapped "from birth or by nature" to return to the dictionary. By forcing his daughter to obey the rules of spelling and grammar, the paternal authority in King's text rechannels and eventually drowns the voice of femininity, silenced into ellipsis and dashes: "*Le participe passé conjugué. . . .*" "*Le participe----*" (621). Ironically, the daughter pays more attention to what she imagines to be the attractive Mr. Feltus' approaching footsteps outside her linguistic torture chamber than to her father's pontifications and thus manages to create a subtext of female desire, against all odds.

Misette's dilemma in "Earthlings" is also, of course, her author's. With strong male precursors such as Guy de Maupassant and George Washington Cable, and as a Southern woman writer at the mercy of Northern male publishers and editors, Grace King was forced to negotiate not only her themes of femininity and feminism but also their representation and signification.[4] The result of her contracts with father-mentors/editors and with internalized patriarchal systems is a rhetoric which combines obedience to the Law of the Father with the transgressions of a feminine position in the symbolic order.[5] More concretely, Grace King's discourse of femininity spans the void between the propriety of the lady novelist and the *jouissance* of the emancipated feminist, between the dutiful and the rebellious daughter.

* * * * *

In his introduction to *Grace King of New Orleans*, an anthology of selected works which triggered

[3]Grace King, "Earthlings," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 42 (Nov. 1888): 601-79.

[4]See Helen Taylor, "The Case of Grace King," *Southern Review* 18 (Fall 1982): 685-702.

[5]See Julia Kristeva, "Oscillation du 'pouvoir' au 'refus'" [Oscillation between power and denial] in *New French Feminisms* 165-67.

new interest in the neglected Louisiana author, Robert Bush comments on the curious mixture of attention to fashion and attention to mind which characterizes Grace King's correspondence.[6] On a personal level, this Southern woman writer walked the tightrope between domesticity and ambition by cultivating an abundance both of female modesty and of male mentors. King repeatedly refers to "how hard it is to write these poor little pages," as in "At Chenière Caminada," and opens "The Story of a Day" by assuring her reader that "It is really not much, the story."[7] Self-depreciation, deference towards men and a reluctance to discuss her writings and honors preserved for the Southern lady of letters a spotless social reputation, while at the same time allowing her to pursue her covert literary ambitions and influential male editors and publishers.[8]

The attention granted Grace King during her lifetime was thus primarily as a member of "a gentler tribe of the ink party," as Sherwood Anderson wrote in 1924 (*Grace King of New Orleans* 29). In a discussion of King's first short story, "Monsieur Motte" (1886), Charles W. Coleman noted in *Harper's* how a young New Orleans lady had "modestly" come forward, how the story was "written with no definite idea of publication," and how her fiction demonstrated "a delicate touch" and "a quiet and charming humor."[9] After an introduction of Grace King's father, Coleman felt obliged to state that "to him the young author feels that she owes much of her success in the field of letters" (840-41). Henry Snyder observed in 1903 that "there is in Miss King's manner the charm of a personal flavor essentially feminine" and found her literary output to be "the work of one who has no desire for mere publicity, no desire for a fictitious fame due either to prolific writing or unmerited praise."[10] Mildred Rutherford commended Grace King in 1907 for being "a true woman in her home, throwing aside her literary work without a murmur when sickness or other duties make demands upon her time," while John Kendall thirty years later characterized her work as "fine and stately . . . like the rustle of starched petticoats and the perfume of lavender."[11] The critics emphasized the "charm" of her rhetoric, her "miniature painting," and her "dainty suggestions of femininity."[12] During the tribute to Grace King arranged by the Louisiana Historical Society in 1923, Dorothy Dix concluded that "New Orleans' favorite daughter" "has not only given us back our past, but she has stuck a rose in its teeth, and set a pomegranate bloom behind its ear."[13]

Grace King's allegiance to her region, race and class, what Robert Bush calls her *pietas*, made her the dutiful daughter of the Louisiana establishment and ultimately secured her the position of Grande Dame of literary New Orleans.[14] A deep conservatism pervades the pages of King's works; from her wistful reminiscences of "old mammies and daddies" back on her childhood plantation to her comments on "the shrieking sisterhood" of Julia Ward Howe (*Southern Destiny* 130), Grace King proved herself a proselyte and eventually a symbol of the post-Reconstruction aristocrat.[15] "New Orleans has been called the most feminine of cities," she writes in a little-known introduction to S. Chatwood Burton's *Pen Sketches*

[6]Robert Bush, *Grace King of New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973) 12.

[7]*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 88 (May 1894): 871-74. "The Story of a Day" appears in *Balcony Stories* (New York: Century, 1893) 69-88.

[8]See Louise Hubert Guyol, "A Southern Author in Her New Orleans Home," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 6 (July 1923): 365-77; and Anne Goodwin Jones, "Grace King: That Great Mother Stream Underneath," *Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1981) 93-134.

[9]Charles W. Coleman, "Grace King," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 74 (May 1887): 840-41.

[10]"Miss Grace Elizabeth King," *Southern Writers*, comp. William Malone Baskervill (1903; New York: Gordian, 1970) 2: 272-90.

[11]Mildred Rutherford, "Grace Elizabeth King," *The South in History and Literature* (Athens, Ga.: Franklin-Turner, 1907) 590-93; John Kendall, "A New Orleans Lady of Letters," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 19 (April 1936): 436-65.

[12]Reginald S. Cocks, "The Fiction of Grace King," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 6 (July 1923): 353-59; Dorothy Anne Dondore, *The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description* (Cedar Rapids, Ia.: The Torch Press, 1926) 359; Fred Lewis Pattee, *American Literature Since 1870* (1915; New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1968) 362.

[13]"Dorothy Dix Talks on Miss King," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 6 (July 1923): 359-62.

[14]Robert Bush, *Grace King: A Southern Destiny* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1983) 57.

[15]Grace King, *Memories of A Southern Woman of Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1932) 28.

of New Orleans and proceeds to describe this aging lady:

> Her people, in imagination, love to picture her in the handsome old age of a grande dame of the old regime; sitting in her high back antique chair, dressed in flowing black satin, garnished at neck and wrist with real lace—receiving year after year with kindly maternal smile the visit of always some new artist or writer friend who wants to kneel before her and kiss her hand and present their bouquet, which she takes with tender grace in her aged wrinkled hands.[16]

At the end of her life, Grace King had become just this picturesque ambassador of the old regime.

Critics of Grace King's work, few as they are, have thus primarily focused on her as a southern personality, as a genteel advocate of ante-bellum ideals, as a realist trained in the French tradition, and as a Southern historian.[17] More recently, however, the critical focus has been on feminist issues in the King canon. David Kirby's monograph identifies the major themes of King's fiction as "the fallibility of men" and the necessity of female bonding.[18] Anne Goodwin Jones agrees that the lives of women, not the defense of Creoles, is King's true subject (127). In her analysis of the impact of the genteel literary tradition on King's career and the emancipatory effect of her personal and literary friendships with other women, Helen Taylor finds that "Grace King's gender is of crucial importance" and considers the writer "profoundly self-conscious about her own sex and concerned centrally with the nature of women's lives" (700).

"I write from the standpoint of a white lady," wrote Grace King to a male critic in 1915, thus rooting her body of work in the female experience (*Grace King of New Orleans* 398). With abundant generalizations about woman's condition, she claimed for herself a female text, written, read and lived by a community of women, as in "Bonne Maman" (1886): "Women live close to nature and are guided from initiation to initiation in life by signals and warnings *which they, and only they, can see*" (my emphasis).[19] King's awareness of the female sign surfaces in her reading of "The Tignon" (1891); her sensitivity to a female audience is evident in, for example, "A Splendid Offer: A Comedy for Women" (1926).[20] Most importantly, however, she privileges, particularly in her fiction, what Taylor, with little further explanation, calls "that female tone of voice" (702). Occasionally manifest as the "wee, shy, furtive voice" of the little convent girl in Grace King's allegory of a Southern woman in a man's world, occasionally as the semiotic babbling of female desire, Grace King's tone of voice invents for herself—and for her readers—a linguistic space of our own (*Grace King of New Orleans* 150; Jones 125).

The representation of this space, as in the "Earthlings" vignette, is the mother's balcony. "Men are not balcony sitters," states Grace King on the opening page of *Balcony Stories*, while "the women love to sit and talk together of summer nights, on balconies, in their vague, loose, white garments . . . with their sleeping children within easy hearing . . ." (2). She significantly dedicated this volume to her own mother, "whose balcony stories were the delight of my childhood."[21] Soft-spoken, digressive, secretive, and emotional, the murmurs from the New Orleans galleries, past and present, blend with their author's voice into an unmistakable discourse of femininity.

* * * * *

Elaine Showalter discusses in *A Literature of Their Own* the notion of shapelessness as the natural expression of female empathy, and the hybrid form of several of Grace King's works connects her not only to the languid balcony *raconteuses* but also to a female literary tradition.[22] Grace King's disregard for plot, most obvious in *Balcony Stories* and her Reconstruction novel, *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard* (1916), spans her

[16]S. Chatwood Burton, *Pen Sketches of New Orleans* (n.p., n.d.).

[17]Robert Bush, "Grace King (1852-1932)," *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 8 (Winter 1975): 43-51.

[18]David Kirby, *Grace King* (Boston: Twayne, 1980) 16.

[19]Grace King, "Bonne Maman," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 73 (June-Nov. 1886): 293-308.

[20]Grace King, "The Tignon," *The Chatauguan* 12 (Feb. 1891): 656-67; Grace King, "A Splendid Offer: A Comedy for Women," *Drama* 16 (March 1926): 213-15, 235-37.

[21]Compare King's statement in Guyol: "My mother was very delightful. When people came to our house she charmed them. If I have any talent for story telling I got it from her. She could tell the most delightful stories about everything."

[22]Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977) 256.

career from *Monsieur Motte* (1888) to *La Dame de Sainte Hermine* (1924).[23] "The Chevalier Alain de Triton," for example, a historical romance published in the *Chautauguan* in 1891, takes up character after character, only to lose track of their fates or send them off to untimely deaths, while *La Dame de Sainte Hermine* continually loses interest in its romantic plot line and digresses into accounts of Bienville's political difficulties or courageous *filles des cachets*.[24] The episodic form of King's writings has not endeared her to the male literary establishment, then as now. George C. Brett of Macmillan rejected the manuscript of *The Pleasant Ways* because of its weak structure, "the interest not culminating to a climax, and not being at any point very vivid from the plot standpoint" (*Southern Destiny* 252). Thomas Nelson Page advised his female collegue to "rip the story open and insert a love story." He continued: "Get a pretty girl and name her Jeanne, that name always takes! Make her fall in love with a Federal officer and your story will be printed at once. The publishers are right . . ." (*Memories* 378). King's insistence on "the plotless world of reality," or on woman-as-process, resulted in a sixteen-year-wait from Brett's initial request for a Reconstruction novel to the eventual publication of *The Pleasant Ways* by Holt in 1916 (*Southern Destiny* 249).[25]

The mutual engendering of text and (auto)biography in Grace King's works further links her voice to the women of "The Balcony," whose stories interest and move their hearers because "the relater has observed it, and gathered it, and finds it worth telling" (*Balcony Stories* 3). With stories set in her native New Orleans and drawn from the author's personal experiences and observations during the Civil War, as in "Bayou L'Ombre" (1887), or during Reconstruction, as in *The Pleasant Ways*, Grace King writes herself as woman and as Southerner and inscribes her own destiny into Louisiana history and culture.

The colloquial tone of King's writing, as well as her constant dialogue with the reader, connects her to the oral tradition of female creativity, which, "in a languor-breeding climate, [saves women] the ennui of reading and writing books" (*Balcony Stories* 3). The reader is consistently assigned space in King's fiction, as in "Bonne Maman," where the narrator assumes that "'nous autres,' we women, going through so much, we like to remember when everything happened for the first time" (299). King's most experimental stories are oral texts, compositions in which women speak themselves. "This is how she told about it," begins the narrator in "Mimi's Marriage" and then withdraws to make Mimi the subject of her own discourse: "Do you think it is amusing, to economize and economize, and sew and sew, just to go to a party to dance? No! I assure you, I went into society only for that . . ." (*Balcony Stories* 39, 41). By refusing to appropriate her characters, and her reader, King invents a communal, democratic (con)text of multiple signatures.

The constant chatter which fills the pages of King's fiction is in itself a traversing of phallic discourse, as Julia Kristeva explains in an interview with Xavière Gauthier. Instead of assuming a phallic dominance, a feminine position, "women," may assume a *negative* function. The semiotic babble of King's protagonists thus creates a rupture in the symbolic system. In "One Woman's Story" (1891), the matron tending her son's grave (a woman whose body incidentally seems "too short" to the male observer) literally usurps the narrative position from that masculine I/eye with her prattle; in "A Domestic Interior" (1895), a convalescing mother similarly inscribes her femininity with constant chatter: "The truth is, I forgot it. It seems to me I am always forgetting the most important things. You will find everything in my work-basket. Can you not find the work-basket? It ought to be in the room somewhere. Did you look under the bed?"[26] Her discourse, situated in that female space, the lying-

[23]Grace King, *The Pleasant Ways of St. Médard* (New York: Henry Holt, 1916); Grace King, *Monsieur Motte* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1888); Grace King, *La Dame de Sainte Hermine* (New York: Macmillan, 1924).

[24]Grace King, "The Chevalier Alain de Triton," *The Chatauguan* 13 (July 1891): 409-64.

[25]The impatience with Grace King's formlessness is, to some extent, shared by contemporary male critics. While Robert Bush defends the structure of *The Pleasant Ways* in *Grace King: A Southern Destiny*, he denounces the "untidy plot" of "The Chevalier" and concludes, perhaps correctly, that "Grace King failed in structure and plot with this relatively short work" (103). David Kirby notes that the digressive vignettes of *La Dame de Sainte Hermine* "contribute virtually nothing to the novel's climax" and "only disrupt the narrative flow." Yet, he observes with wonder, "King's real strength lies in just this sort of writing . . ." (77).

[26]Grace King, "One Woman's Story," *Harper's Bazaar* 24 (21 March 1891): 218-19; Grace King, "A Domestic Interior," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 90 (Feb. 1895): 407-11.

in room, marks this yet-to-be-named woman as a Kristevan "subject-in-the-making" (Kristeva 167). In such instances, the *différance* of King's feminine voice, suffering as it speaks, allows it to escape the linguistic and ideological system of the Father.

The rhythmic, repetitious voices of the balcony-sitters echo throughout King's fictional and historical texts. An example from "The Story of a Day" should suffice:

> Not in clumps and bunches, not in spots and patches, not in banks, meadows, acres, but in—yes; for still it lifted beyond and beyond and beyond; the eye could not touch the limit of them, for the eye can touch only the limit of vision; and the lilies filled the whole sea-marsh, for that is the way spring comes to the sea-marshes.
>
> (*Balcony Stories* 70)

The soft-rolling sentence rhythms, the parataxis and the repetitious diction break down the boundaries between signifier and signified, between speaker and audience.

The tentative, groping circularity of the sentence construction might be still another feminine characteristic of Grace King's rhetoric. Virginia Woolf distinguishes in *A Room of One's Own* between what she calls "a man's sentence" and a sentence more suited to Woman Writing. Woolf effortlessly demonstrates what she considers to be a masculine sentence ("Success prompts to exertion, and habit facilitates success"); however, she seems at a loss when attempting to describe the feminine alternative to the hard, succinct brevity of her masculine example. Apart from noting that "Jane Austen looked at it and laughed at it and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence proper for her own use," Woolf retreats from her discussion of feminine form by stating that "these are difficult questions which lie in the twilight of the future" (79-80). Yet Woolf's difficulties suggest that one characteristic of the feminine sentence may be its very resistance to definition. Certainly the "not in clumps and bunches, not in spots and patches, not in banks, meadows, acres, but in—yes . . ." of the King sentence quoted above echoes Kristeva's discussion of a "feminist practice," one that "can only be negative, at odds with what already exists so that we might say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it!'"[27] Interestingly, Woolf backs away from these "difficult questions" because, as she confesses, "they stimulate me to wander from my subject into trackless forests where I shall be lost and, very likely, devoured by wild beasts" (80-81). To the modern reader, it seems that it is exactly in the trackless erotic landscape of this fantasy that the feminine sentence is born.

The ambiguities which permeate Grace King's works are thus at best the result of a similar feminist practice, or at worst an attempt to reconcile an emancipatory stance on gender with a conservative position on region, race and class. Edmund Wilson, advocating the latter possibility in *Patriotic Gore*, finds in the pages of Grace King's works at least an element of Orwellian "doublethink."[28] Helen Taylor comments on King's "muddled, inconsistent, often unsatisfactory but always compelling fictional treatments" (702) of race, class and gender issues and connects "the ambivalences and anxieties of southern women of her time and place" to King's use of irony (700), and, one should add, of parody.[29] Yet King's heavily ironic voice and her, to many critics, infuriating inconsistencies are also possibly an integral part of feminine discourse. Dorothy Richardson maintains in *Revolving Lights* that "Women can hold all opinions at once, or any, or none. It's because they see the relations of things which don't change, more than things which are always changing" (Showalter 251). The feminine mind (whether belonging to a biological male or female) is thus "capable of being all over the place and in all camps at once" (Showalter 252). Grace King's ambivalences and ironies may thus have grown out of a desire to be uncontained and uncontainable by phallic registers, to insist on *différance*.[30]

King's double entendres and multiple meanings are, moreover, a part of a feminine aesthetics rooted in what Woolf calls "the poetry" in woman. Early critics of King's work found, predictably, that "The descriptive style of Miss

[27]"La Femme, ce n'est jamais ca" [Woman can never be defined] *New French Feminisms* 137-41.

[28]Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962) 575-76.

[29]For King's use of irony and parody, see, for example, "The Self-Made Man: An Impression," *Harper's Bazaar* 23 (5 April 1890): 258-59.

[30]Grace King's merging of genres, her fictionalization of history and historicization of fiction, constitute a similar rebellion against masculine notions of genre and gender, a wish to remain unclassified and unclassifiable.

King is poetic and true to nature"; and the elaborate style of the lady novelist is certainly an element of King's rhetoric.[31] This traditionally feminine mode surfaces, for instance, in her description of young lovers in "Earthlings":

> Apart from each other, they lived in absent-minded contemplation of the boundless ocean of love spread out before them, in anticipation their thoughts flying like sea-gulls over the expanse, dipping crescent wings into it, flashing a silver breast up in the sunlight, with unseen treasures down in the depths for bold divers, and never a tempest nor a calm.
>
> (646)

Yet it is also possible to see the feminine frills of the passage as the subversion of a masculine linguistic economy, as what Hélène Cixous calls "the gift as excess." By offering to the reader "a poetic *plus value*" of pleasure, feminine writing may establish an affective economy of giving and spending which computes not sums but differences and transformations (Cixous 264).[32]

King's experiments with musical forms and structures further link her to Cixous' notion of poetical excess and of writing as song (Cixous 251; Conley 50). Young Misette of "Earthlings," whose name alone connects her to *musette* (waltz), actually sings out her poetry on her balcony of feminine creativity. The protagonist of "An Interlude" (1894) expresses her literary enthusiasms in a voice "rising and rushing, *crescendo e accelerando*," and, in fact, plays the piano "like a woman to whom no other language is given."[33] In "Theo. Bentzon—Madame Th. Blanc" (1896), a biographical sketch of a Parisian literary friend, King finds that "Madame Blanc is a cadence—once heard, never to be forgotten" (*Grace King of New Orleans* 348). King, too, inscribes musical movements into her fictional compositions, as in this passage from "The Chevalier": "The young novitiate saw it as she lifted up her head to sing; still burning and chilling, fainting and thrilling, under new emotions that played over her as if she were a windowset Aeolian harp and they the wind . . ." (445). The young woman of these lines, herself an image of the feminine voice in the wilderness, becomes in a second movement a musical instrument, played upon by and playing her emotions. She is, moreover, embedded in a sentence with a musical structure and rhythm. On a larger scale, King composed her first published volume, *Monsieur Motte*, in four movements with variations. "Piano was a part of Grace King's education," writes Bush in *Southern Destiny*; "she frequently played for pleasure, and her general knowledge of and taste for music were considerable" (96). By writing this musical pleasure, King amplifies tones and configurations of femininity.

A rhetoric of excess is similarly apparent in the abundant intensifiers and rhetorical questions which litter King's writing and through their waste, their uselessness, provide *sorties* which inevitably resist, question and thus open up her texts. Moreover, innumerable exclamations and expletives explode the symbolic from within, as in this passage from *Balcony Stories*:

> Not all at once, nor all together, but a thinning, a lifting, a breaking, a wearing away; a little withdrawing here, a little withdrawing there; and now a peep, and now a peep; a bride lifting her veil to her husband! Blue! White! Lilies! Blue lilies! White lilies! Blue and white lilies! And still blue and white lilies! And still! And still! Wherever the veil lifted, still and always the bride!
>
> (70)

What emerges from behind the veil is not only the Other Woman but her voice as well. The groping, rhythmic, repetitive, musical, and excessive writing establishes an affective economy of femininity, a volcanic Cixousian chaosmos.

To write from a feminine position is thus to blaze trails in the symbolic order and, moreover, to flood it with a prose of liquefaction. "Can one write water, can one read water?" asks Cixous in an interview from 1982, and she answers her own question by stating that "One can do it only by throwing oneself into the water, by becoming one with the water" (Conley 132). To throw oneself into the water is to write one's bodily fluids, to be open-ended, hybrid, flowing. While Grace King's prose is as humid as the climate in which she writes, the "wetness" of her writing is not

---

[31]Alcee Fortier, *Louisiana Studies* (New Orleans: F.F. Hansell, c. 1894) 117.

[32]Verena Andermatt Conley, *Hélène Cixous: Writing the Feminine* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1984) 18, 26.

[33]Grace King, "An Interlude," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 89 (June 1894): 918-19.

just a simple representation of bayous, snakes and alligators, but a repository of passion and energy, a writing of the body. As Madame Goupilleau ponders the mystery of love in *Monsieur Motte*, wondering if there were "one human being in the world whom this great ocean had not yet enfolded, engulfed, drawn down, drowned beyond recollection, beyond comprehension of past, present, future, self, interest, money," the waves of love break the sentence into splashes of passion, movement, flow, and intensity (272).

The innumerable dashes and ellipses in King's works likewise speak as eloquently of "a silent underwater body" of femininity underneath the usually quiet surface of her texts (Kristeva 166). Whether inscribed in the stutter and the dash of the narrator's description of "the pretty honeymoon costume that suggests, that suggests—well!" (*Balcony Stories* 39) or in the missing predicate of Feltus' "feverish thoughts" about "How the doctor might have loved! An she------!" ("Earthlings" 630), the holes in King's writing map a secret terrain of desire and suffering outside of phallic linguistic/ideological systems. An exchange between two sisters in "A Domestic Interior" thus results in a narratorial explanation of the gaps of feminine discourse:

> "Yes, that is an advantage too for you . . . With me and Alfred. . . ." And the vast hollow that received the difficulties of the family received also the conversation, for conversation in a family always runs through the furrows made by the difficulties of life—the conversation, that is, of women during the intimate evening hour.
>
> (411)

The dots and dashes of King's pages thus speak the unspeakable and inscribe into a masculine linguistic order the furrows of femininity. Yet the silence of King's discourse voices above all the difficulties of the woman writing. As a genteel New Orleans lady in a patriarchal literary world, Grace King was writing a story which still could not be told.

* * * * *

At the end of "Earthlings," Misette has retreated from the balcony into her father's house and, confined to bed, is slowly dying, surrounded by the masculine writers of her destiny: father, doctor and lover. Kept alive by champagne administered by the patriarchal triangle, she speaks their creative fluids in texts she no longer recognizes: "Mr. Feltus, what am I talking about? I do not know, you know . . ." (669). While Grace King's own ending was less melodramatic, the celebrities who in 1923 presented the aging writer with a loving cup toasted the dutiful rather than the rebellious daughter of Louisiana history and culture. After the publication of *La Dame de Sainte Hermine*, King remained silent until her posthumously published *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (1932), which, in Robert Bush's estimate, "gives us the polite and public Grace King, but . . . has little to say about what Ellen Glasgow would have called the woman within" (*Southern Destiny* 308). Unlike Misette, whose soul, at least, would "seem to fly like an escaped bird?—to soar up and up, singing, higher and higher," Grace King—the woman and the writer—remained trapped in patriarchal sign systems, her (until recently) out-of-print stories and histories hidden in obscure periodicals or in infrequently visited library collections (669). Ultimately, only her barely audible voice of femininity resists enclosure, despite the critical efforts of a new generation of dutiful daughters emerging from their fathers' libraries and institutions. Yet this is as it should be. As the more rebellious Hélène Cixous has written in white ink, "It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist" (253).□

Clara Juncker *teaches in the Writing Program at the University of California at Los Angeles. Her book* Black Women: Afro-American Women Writers *appeared in 1985.*

Sue Owen

NEEDLEWORK

Help is on the way.
I am the needle
of starlight and wind.
I am the silver one like them
and when you pull me
out of your pin cushion,
I will fly for you.
I will fly when the thread,
licked by spit until it points,
threads my eye.
And then I will see forward.
And the thread and I
will not look back to
that unwinding
of time off the spool.
But the two of us, like
a body and its shadow, will
fly over the miles of cloth
to the hems, the darts,
and the cuffs in need,
and there we will work for you
the trickery of the stitch
that holds the far near.
And there in time
we will save what comes undone
and the bare threads
that were ready to give up.
And we will leave behind
the knots like roots
to hold all our good works
in place.
I am the needle and fly
and I stitch what I preach.
And this is my creed:
to make your salvation
the thread of my thought.

Arthenia J. Bates Millican

A NOTE FROM CELL THIRTY-THREE

I

Tomorrow bright and early I march inside out. I'm going to march out this Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women at St. Gabriel, back into what they call the Greater Baton Rouge Area.

Believe you me.

I tell you what pass by me (ever since they put me up) as something a little out of the ordinary. This place trust to be named at St. Gabriel. I guess the Archangel, St. Gabriel.

Who else?

If he's a proper Brother, maybe he'll respect me some for learning to respect me, myself and I behind these walls the way I never did before.

You might as well tell the truth, if the truth is in you, even if it hurts you a little here and there. I know this place made me be good for something (just like my sewing), instead of nothing by twisting my skirt-tail. I don't know all that well what's out there like I know for sure what's been up in here for twenty-five years. And I know I'm going to shed a few briny tears when that door lock me out, because you don't do nothing for the first or last time without it getting to you if you have a heart instead of a gizzard.

There's a whole lot of ladies up in there wish they was me. Maybe not so much me as maybe being through laying on one hard bed, and through sorting one whole big stack of mixed-up stuff out so you can look through the rock.

"Now I lay me down to sleep."

I'm not no more sleep than nothing.

My eyes are stretched wide open or my mind either one.

I'm remembering.

I'm remembering things.

After all, I'm forty-seven and in my forty-eight. Wasn't but twenty-three when I got in here, but I know that I'd done some pretty high-toned strutting, and I'd tilted over some stones that some great-grandmas ninety-three hadn't touched, say nothing about turning them over. I thought I knew how to read above the line, between the line, and below the line. Say nothing about the line. But be that as it may, life grabbed me by my arm and twisted it all behind my back and threw me for a spin. But life went right on—sometimes like a shab cat, pawing that ain't got claw the first. But he acts like he don't know it, and think he's scratching to beat the band.

Believe you me.

And let me tell you something else. When I get out here, nobody, nobody, but definitely, nobody is going to grab on me like some children like to grab a cat by the tail and swing him around like mad. Then they put him down and expect him to walk a straight line to his milk pan.

Me.

I'm not going to be no children swinging and flinging the cat all around. And I'm not going to be that cat that's being swung. You mark my word. I'm going to be somewhere betwixt and between. And I'm going to have an invisible sign on me that says what the snake said: "Don't tread on me."

I tell you something else that ought to stand me in good stead: I know something. I know a man can't be everything that supposed to be to a woman. And I know that a woman can't be everything that supposed to be to a man.

I don't know who started that crap, but it's not nothing but a bunch of crap that's got to be shucked.

Believe you me.

II

I want to run you by this thing called "respect" a minute, to show you how I landed myself za-boom!—right in this slammer they call the "F-A-C-I-L-I-T-Y."

I was by chance helping Tootie Baby's mother that worked up on the Southern University Campus in the girls' dormitory. My main job was waiting on tables, but I was between jobs. As the girls say, wasn't nothing wrong with picking up a little church money.

Some head folks called a meeting so all the people doing everything in the dormitory could meet so as to know how to do what they was

doing better. When I got there a lot of ladies was sitting here and there. A whole lot of chairs had just been plopped down in the lounge.

You know me. I like to see things straightened out, so I commence shoveling those chairs like hell at a yearling.

"Child," (This high yaller with her pear-shaped self and her big ball of whiffy hair pulled to the top of her head)—she yelled. I went right on shuffling the chairs. She tackled me with the words the second time like a football man tackled another one on the field:

"Miss." Her cheeks were burning now. And her eyes bucking, in earnest, like they could chastise a burglar without a gun. "Leave those chairs alone! That's what the janitor is paid to do. You're in the housekeeping crew, but your job is above lifting and shoveling things around. Our men have got to be made to respect us. I'd bet my last dollar that if the D.A.R. had a meeting scheduled here, every chair would be in place. And the woman who checked up on Booker T. Washington's cleaning couldn't get a speck of dust on a lace trimmed linen handkerchief. They knew that we were coming and that we would need a decent setting."

Her words hit something somewhere in me and wouldn't let go. All that I kept saying to myself was that she ought to know some of the men on my time, starting right at home with my own daddy.

Right then another lady (this time a firm-looking high brown looked out on us with her eyes sought over her glasses, looking all handsome and suited down though she was sort of tall and lanky) came on with just as much vim and vigor as the first one. "We've got to watch our men," she said. "If they're off the track, we have got to teach them that when they respect us they respect themselves. Some of them don't understand that we want something other than material things. Sure money is needed; a decent home, a car, new outfits—but we want more."

And another one, a little chocolate-colored lady about the size of a minute with a pretty little face and as neat as a pin basket, said: "If we don't get respect from our men, what is there to enhance the ego in a one to one relation? They are the ones who ought to give us the feeling that we really stand for something, girls."

I was remembering by now that enough is enough and too much is good for nothing. But I was up on the Southern University Campus where there had to be these hoo-te-too ladies, so I said, "Yes?"

Couldn't say "yep" to these ladies.

"I beg your pardon," the little chocolate dip said.

"I thought you were speaking particularly to me because my name is Girley."

"Oh no, dear." I could see that she was laughing up her sleeves. "It's just a form of address used in the presence of lady friends. The form of address is Legion."

I said under my breath, "Who in the hell is Legion?"

That's all right. After that I found myself flinching when somebody shut a door in my face. I couldn't stand for anybody to look right through me and not see me. I got so I couldn't talk to people who listened to you a minute and left you to rattle, a link of chain by yourself.

Last but not least, I put down on my own boyfriends about respect. I got so I could detect huffing a mile off.

III

Going back to home, I truly don't know what was wrong with my mama.

My daddy had a old nasty way of throwing up his Saturday night rot in my mother's face if she tried to straighten him out on any little thing like paying a bill on time. He was trying to get across the big deal of those sluts swallowing him hook, line and sinker, just the way he was.

When he'd get pleased sometimes he'd tell Mama: "Little Bit, you takes too much." And she didn't have no better sense than to stand up and cry in front of him—all the time dishing up his food. And he'd say something sweet like: "I can do bethout more salt and water in my vittles."

One time I asked Mama: I said, "Mama, why you take all that."

Guess what that woman told me.

"Baby, Mama love peace. And Girley, I want you to be a woman what love peace, too. Peace pasteth all understanding."

"Yesm," I said.

But just like I wasn't going to wash every Monday morning if it was cold or hot, rain or shine, sleet or snow, like my mama, I wasn't going to let no man ram his fist down my throat without my biting down. And I wasn't going to let no man pull the cover over my eyes and tuck it around my ears.

Not me.

I'm not saying this just to be talking.

Ask Mr. Mayo.

I was working at the Chicken Shack where he

came with some more insurance men to get lunch. He was up-to-date and downright handsome—not too tall, no big belly, nice clean fingernails, nice clean teeth, and a nice shaped mouth. He had those deep dark eyes setting back in a head that just missed being egg-headed. He was a nice brown with those high Indian cheeks and some half good hair that he kept cut up to time. He didn't have any old big, heavy boggish voice either. Everytime he leaned his head back and blew that Kool smoke through his teeth, I'd say to myself, that's all that I'd ever want.

Him.

Now you just wait a minute, before I go any further.

Do you think that I was dragging my feet?

Oh no.

I always had on some little clickety-click heels hitting right-on the pavement. If an eye fell to the heels, they'd move on up to the leg and move on up until one day those eyes were going into an eclipse. I knew how to take it on from there. I kept my hair waved just right and my ginger boy, ginger-colored face all smooth and made up right, and I did what Ginger Rogers would have done with the little green nylon uniform to accent the positive. I was above popping gum though. You wouldn't catch me doing that because I didn't.

Not me.

Mr. Mayo got around to studying me in due time. Wouldn't you like somebody better if he was studying you like he was studying an insurance policy to sell in Brest France? Deliver me from the brazen type that start learning your name and calling the cab the same time.

I had sense enough to know that someone like Mayo most likely had a steady somewhere and maybe a whole lot of unsteadies on the road; but when he got down to business, I told him that I was the lady of the hour and didn't want him admitting the truth about any rot about him and his times thrown up in my face.

He bowed to my way.

When I ran off and married Blemp the night I finished McKinley Junior High, I hadn't gotten the Word, but I had the Feeling. He brought his extra where I was working one night, knowing I was waiting tables in the place. It made my blood boil but I wouldn't let it show. After work I went right straight back home to my mama and daddy.

Shirley, a girl waiting tables with me at the Chicken Shack, swore that she saw Mayo at a dance on the Temple Roof one night with some chick.

Said his date was some high-classed looking female all dolled down, and he was touching her elbow, and smiling down on her like the sun trying to light up the moon.

When he came by my place the next night, I gave him Hail Columbia. He had to calm me down with a big bear hug and a nice little kiss on the forehead. When I cooled off enough for him to understand what I was saying about the Temple Roof, he said just as sweet as pie: "Doll, who would think that I'd even want to set foot on the Temple Roof? Why don't we go to a Hideaway and dance until the light of day."

I hadn't done the death-do-we-part stunt with him as I'd done with Blemp, but I might nigh fell to pieces when he was transferred from Baton Rouge to Memphis. Shirley had the nerve to tell me that I should've had a baby to remember him by.

Not me.

Young and foolish as I was when I had Blemp, I knew better than to get in any family way. I didn't have no way for any family.

Believe you me.

After Mayo left, I found something out. You can sure enough fall in the blues barrel and you can't get yourself up and out of it even if you want to. There's a group of guys that don't classify for nothing else but barrel scrapers. And when you're down there, you're just as apt to be scraped up as Matilda Blount who never took the blanket off her knees.

All the time you're trying to pretend things are all right when you're on the job, when deep down in your heart and mind, you are D-O-W-N, down.

I'm singing and believing while I'm dancing about the floor at home all by my lone self that the song supposed to make some sense. It says, "The purpose of a man is to love a woman, and the purpose of a woman is to love a man."

IV

That's when Mr. Hydel came on the scene—right at the time when I was scraping the bottom of the blues barrel and feeling that I needed somebody to lean on.

I look back now and shake and shudder because I was the kind who wasn't supposed to let nothing die in my hand.

But here came High; tall-yeah-black, but wasn't no more handsome than nothing. He was something hewn out the mountain by hand and blown up with hot air. I was blue, but I wasn't looking through no fog when I looked at him.

And he talked like he had some kind of weight on his tongue. Almost made it to liver lips, too. Had these cloudy eyes with a whole lota white in the background. He could look at you in a way to show you nothing but white.

My mama didn't usually bother me about my boyfriends, but she said enough to let me know that I wasn't doing much for myself. She told me that if I wanted to take care of somebody's child that bad, I should've gotten a baby to remember somebody I liked. But why was I going to be in some family way when I didn't have what it took to make a family? Didn't want to have to say it again either.

She teased me, then, about my aunty who was a looker in her time, but got so she scraped the barrel in her lonely times. Mama said she used to laugh and say that if it wasn't but one man on earth, she'd have to have a part of him if it wasn't nothing but a thread from his coattail. I told her that that was cute but I beat her sister by saying that if it wasn't but that one man, I wouldn't settle for less than a little finger. She laughed, and me too, but it wasn't no good laugh. I came back real quick with this thing about our affair being temporary. I had learned the word "A-F-F-A-I-R."

You know as well as I do that you can't always make the temporary temporary. I went along with High a goodly number of months because I was so sure he was going to learn my way sooner or later. He was always saying "didn't I pick you up when you was low?" And I kept telling him over and over: I'd say, "High, love me enough to lie to me when somebody come in my face telling me you been messing around with another, when I put the hammer down."

Not High.

For some reason he didn't want to take me up on the Southern University Campus to none of those high class games like Florida and Tennessee. I'd hear folk at the Chicken Shack talking about the half-time show and touchdowns and all that. And what you bet? Me? Cooking up something I bought in my place for—guess who?

—He'd say, "You don't wanna sit up in all that noise with skeeters nibbling on them pretty yams. 'Sides, the football might put your eyes out."

I asked him straight and plain in broad open daylight. I said, "High you shamed of me? (It ought to be the other way around.) I make a honest living; I buy stylish clothes and get my hair done, so why can't I go out in the public with you?"

Even when he came to the Chicken Shack he darted his eyes around a little while, then took off. Shirley down-right asked me what've I see in him. And I said it's a good question but we were just temporary.

V

Things got sticky when I heard that he'd taken a waitress that worked at Percy's Barbecue to the Tennessee game. I half knew her but I wanted to test him. Instead of him telling a nice little white lie that wasn't too specific, he comes on with, "Baby girl, a guy get carried away with a new model broad with a new model car. You name me a dude who wouldn't let hisself be swooped up in a old long-tail, smooth riding Catalac."

"What say," I said.

"You heard me, Babes," he said.

He spun me around to face him and said just as nasty as he could: "A Catalac can move faster then feets can shuffle cross the floor of the Chicken Shack. You oughta see the picture and not stick your neck out so far. You stick your neck out too far and you get your neck chopped off. Why I'm telling this to you anyway? Ain't you a country girl? If you not, you work at the Chicken Shack. You know about Chicken."

All I could do was to come back with a question. I said, "You're going to stand up in my face like a brass-ass monkey and try to belittle me, of all things, about chicken? As much as I haul chicken home to stuff your empty craw, you don't have no more sense than to kick my teeth down my throat? Don't you think it'll be fine and dandy if you don't darken my door again?"

"You don't mean that," he said. "You know you don't want to get rid of me. I'm good for a Blues-Baby girl like you. When the lights go down low."

I walked away from High to catch air.

I went home early and couldn't get myself together so I started to cook me some pork chops so as to keep myself company.

A whole lot rolled across my mind. So much so one time I thought that all the water in the Atlantic and the Pacific was trying to push through my two eyelids. Let anybody that know what I'm talking about tell you how it really is.

You know how it is when you go to the window to look out just to get out yourself.

I got out myself all right. Here was this long-tailed Cadillac going down the street with High at the steering wheel. This got next to me. Something told me that my time with High had

come to an end.

I was about half through cooking when High knocked on my front door. If lipstick had been on his face I couldn't have seen it, but it was all on his shirt collar. I could smell some kind of old rank perfume on him, too.

Right then I thought about that kind of old thing playing in the movies. Instead of saying anything, my mind told me to throw pork chops, grease and all, in his ornery face. Then I told myself he wasn't good enough for me to waste my pork chops and good grease on.

"Ole gal just got off from Percy's and I ask her to run me by here. Didn't want to call you to come pick me up."

I just went on frying my pork chops.

"Guess you don't 'preciate another woman dropping me off by here, Babes?"

I didn't say a word.

I smiled remembering Mama and all her peaceableness.

High thought that the smile was for him.

I was cutting up onions in the pork chops when he came up to me puffing like Satan himself in heat.

"Babes, I knew you'd understand."

I had the knife in my right hand so I put my left arm around his neck as he started kissing the life out of me. And do you know I found myself responding—responding to a man who had just murdered my womanhood. Here I was getting weaker and weaker as he started backing me back, backing me back until my heel bumped on something going to the bedroom. Ice water ran up and down my spine as I backed my left foot in the bedroom. I lifted my right arm and plunged the knife in High's left side with all the strength of everything I had packed up in me about everything.

He fell on his left side.

I didn't realize at the time that the wound was seven generations deep.

VI

Me.

I'm choking and dialing the cops to come and get me.

They came all right just like everybody else in the Park the way it looked in my house, my yard and all up and down the street.

One of the questions I remember was: "Why didn't you call the ambulance for your man?"

"Because," I said.

"She temporary insane," one of the neighborhood women said when I started talking.

"The way she rattling off at the mouth, she too crazy to be insane," one of the officers said. "Whoever heard of some slut talking about she couldn't look at herself in the mirror bethout feeling respect. They can't deal with nobody like that in Jackson. She just ripe for St. Gabriel."

I kept on talking.

"Hush woman," another policeman said, holding a billy stick over my head. "You just now killta man in cold blood for nothing and got the nerve to run your mouth like a damn bell clapper."

Somebody started whacking me on the back of my neck to make me close my mouth so that gave me an excuse to wipe the water out my eyes.□

Emily Toth

KATE CHOPIN'S NEW ORLEANS YEARS

"N. Orleans I liked immensely; it is so clean—so white and green. Although in April, we had profusions of flowers—strawberries and even black berries," Kate O'Flaherty of St. Louis wrote in her diary for May 8, 1869.[1]

She had just returned from a two-month trip with her mother, cousin and friends—her first long venture from home. Exactly thirteen months later, Kate O'Flaherty would be marrying Oscar Chopin of Louisiana and going to live in New Orleans. The Chopins would stay in New Orleans for the first nine years of their marriage—formative and inspiring years for the future writer.

Two decades later, Kate Chopin would begin publishing novels and short stories set in New Orleans and in the Cane River country of Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana. By the mid-1890s, Chopin would win national acclaim as a Louisiana writer—but by then she had long since left the state.

Kate Chopin, a widow in St. Louis, wrote about Louisiana from memory, from emotion recollected in tranquility: she wrote about Louisiana as a way of meditating on her own past. During her years in New Orleans, 1870-1879, Chopin had given birth to all but one of her children, and it was in New Orleans that she herself came of age.

Kate O'Flaherty Chopin, born and raised in St. Louis, was a twenty-year-old bride when she came to live in New Orleans in 1870. She and her new husband, the cotton factor Oscar Chopin, had just returned from their European honeymoon, which Kate described with great glee in her diary. She and Oscar had visited museums, cathedrals and zoos, where they saw "any number of wild beasts that showed their teeth in the most wonderful manner." Kate and

[1]Kate O'Flaherty's diary is reprinted in *A Kate Chopin Miscellany*, eds. Per Seyersted and Emily Toth (Natchitoches, La.: Northwestern State Univ. Press, 1979) 47-88. A more fully annotated edition of the diary and Kate Chopin's other personal papers will appear in *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*, eds. Emily Toth and Per Seyersted.

Oscar had examined mummies ("ghastly old things"), climbed mountains and gambled at famous spas—and, at least once, they skipped Mass and refused to feel guilty (*Kate Chopin Miscellany* 71, 72).

Although the new Mrs. Chopin dutifully collected linens for future housekeeping, she also smoked cigarettes in public and revelled in wandering around alone, drinking beer. But the young Chopins' time in Paris was cut short by the Franco-Prussian War: they witnessed the overthrow of the French Empire, and escaped the city just days ahead of the invading Germans.

By the time the Chopins arrived in New Orleans, Kate was pregnant with her first child.

In *The Awakening*, the novel she began writing twenty-seven years after her own arrival in New Orleans, Kate Chopin gave Edna Pontellier and her husband

> a very charming house on Esplanade Street in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage with a broad front verandah whose round fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green.[2]

According to Daniel Rankin, Chopin's first biographer, that description in *The Awakening* "is a picture of Kate Chopin's own home in New Orleans"—but Rankin was wrong.[3] Only old-line Creole aristocrats still had homes on Esplanade Avenue in the French Quarter, and the young Chopins lived on a much more modest scale. Their first home, at 443 Magazine Street, was indeed a double cottage, like the Pontelliers', but the Chopins lived in only one side of the side-by-side duplex. Another family occupied 445 Magazine, and shared the balcony in front and the long gallery in back.[4]

The Chopins' block, between Terpsichore and Robin (now Euterpe) Street, was not in the Garden District, where the wealthy "Americans" lived. The Chopins' first home was ordinary, fairly new and pleasant enough: a two-story frame building, with the gallery in back forming part of a servants' wing. (Most middle-class white people kept servants, and the Chopins employed a cook and a laundress.)

Kate and Oscar had been in New Orleans for only a month when Oscar's father died in a French Quarter hotel (Oscar's mother had died the previous April). The rest of his relatives were in Natchitoches Parish, or St. Louis, or France—and Kate's were all in Natchitoches Parish or St. Louis.[5]

For the first time in her life, Kate Chopin was without a circle of friends and relatives, and she was able to create, out of her solitude, an inner world of her own.

Much of Kate Chopin's life during her New Orleans years is mysterious, unknown. There are no school records, no surviving diaries, no letters, and no church records. Kate Chopin led a quiet private life—although she did have her unusual side: she liked to do imitations of animals and birds and people, and Oscar used to egg her on (Rankin 89). She also spent months at a time in St. Louis, visiting her mother, a practice that may have been an attempt at birth control.

Virtually the only sign of Kate Chopin's presence in New Orleans between 1870 and 1879 is her name on three birth certificates:

Jean Baptiste, born May 22, 1871
Frederick, born January 26, 1876
Felix Andrew, born January 8, 1878

During that decade, Kate also gave birth to two other sons, both born in St. Louis:

Oscar Charles, September 24, 1873
George Francis, October 28, 1874

And on December 31, 1879, after the family had

[2]Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969) 931.

[3]Daniel Rankin, *Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1932) 79.

[4]The house was renumbered 1431 Magazine Street in 1894, and the site is now the paved playground for Jackson School. Information about the Chopins' first house appears in *Insurance Map of New Orleans, LA.* (New York: Sanford Publ. Ltd., 1876) 1: n.p. Volume 4 shows that the house was still standing in 1964. Photographs of surviving houses in the Chopins' block, together with architectural descriptions, appear in Mary Louise Christovich, Roulhac Toledano and Betsy Swanson, eds., *The Lower Garden District*, vol. 1 of *New Orleans Architecture* (Gretna, La.: Friends of the Cabildo and Pelican Publishing Company, 1971) 135-36. I am indebted to Geoffrey Kimball for assistance with these materials.

[5]Rankin claims that Dr. J.B. Chopin, Oscar's father, was at first hostile to his new daughter-in-law, but that Kate's charm, perfect French accent and piano playing won him over (84). But the two actually knew each other for only a month before the Doctor died, probably of yellow fever, in Nov. 1870. As my forthcoming biography of Kate Chopin will show, many of Rankin's generalizations are not supported by historical facts.

moved to Cloutierville in Natchitoches Parish, Kate gave birth to her last child and only daughter, Lélia (baptized Marie Laiza).[6]

Kate Chopin spent the 1870s as a mother-woman, at least outwardly, and her only description of those years is her recollection of giving birth.

On her son Jean's twenty-third birthday, May 22, 1894, Kate Chopin described his birth in her diary:

> I can remember yet that hot southern day on Magazine street in New Orleans. The noises of the street coming through the open windows; that heaviness with which I dragged myself about; my husband's and mother's solicitude; old Alexandrine the quadroon nurse with her high bandana tignon, her hoop-earrings and placid smile; old Dr. Faget; the smell of chloroform, and then waking at 6 in the evening from out of a stupor to see in my mothers arms a little piece of humanity all dressed in white which they told me was my little son! The sensation with which I touched my lips and my fingertips to his soft flesh only comes once to a mother. It must be the pure animal sensation: nothing spiritual could be so real—so poignant.
>
> (*Kate Chopin Miscellany* 93)

Few of Chopin's contemporaries recorded childbirth so directly in their diaries. Sometimes they wrote, with delicate reticence, that "a little stranger" had arrived; rarely did they talk about the sensuous, animal pleasure in touching a newborn baby. But by 1894, Chopin had had ten years of "my real growth," as she said in the same diary entry, and she had overcome whatever reticence she once possessed.[7]

Kate Chopin also drew on her own memories of childbirth for *The Awakening*, in which Adèle Ratignolle, the traditional mother-woman, chooses to suffer a "scene of torture" in bringing children into the world. But Edna Pontellier, like Kate Chopin, had preferred chloroform for her own confinements, which seem to her "far away, unreal, and only half remembered":

> She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go.
>
> (chap. 37)

Edna, a motherless child, takes no particular pleasure in the memory, and the following day she takes her life into her own hands for the final time.

But when Kate Chopin gave birth for the first time, she was in her mother's hands: Eliza O'Flaherty had come from St. Louis for the 1871 Mardi Gras, at which—for the first time—a Queen of Carnival was chosen. (King Rex made his first appearance in 1872.) By Mardi Gras time, Kate, six months pregnant, would not have been appearing regularly in public: like Madame Ratignolle in *The Awakening*, she would have been considered "unpresentable" (chap. 30).

By the 1870s most white middle-class women had doctors for their deliveries: midwives had been losing ground to male physicians for several generations. The presence of a physician—even one whose major interest was yellow fever, not babies—was supposed to lend prestige and extra skill to the occasion, although it was generally acknowledged that midwives had more practical knowledge.[8]

Dr. Charles Jean Faget, the eccentric French-born practitioner who attended Kate Chopin, had made significant medical discoveries: he was the first to define the differences between yellow fever and malaria. But among everyday New Orleanians, Dr. Faget was equally noted for something else: his "very striking appearance."[9]

Dr. Faget was tall, thin, unbearded, with "a slightly hooked nose, a high receding forehead and long wavy black grizzly hair, brushed backward." His clothes were deliberately unstylish: he wore a low crown silk hat, with the broad brim rolled up, and liked to imitate the

[6]Kate and Oscar's first three sons—Jean, Oscar and George—were baptized at Holy Guardian Angels Church in St. Louis. According to diocesan archives in St. Louis and New Orleans, no baptismal records have been found for the fourth and fifth sons, Frederick and Felix.

[7]For an example of a reticent diarist, see Arvazine Cooper's journal in *Growing Up Female in America: Ten Lives*, ed. Eve Merriam (New York: Dell, 1971) 148-49.

[8]The displacement of midwives by male doctors is discussed in Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979); Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses* (Oyster Bay, New York: Glass Mountain Pamphlets, n.d.) 15-32; and Mary Poovey, "'Scenes of an Indelicate Character': The Medical 'Treatment' of Victorian Women," forthcoming in *Representations*. I am indebted to Mary Poovey for sharing with me an earlier draft of her essay.

apparel of European priests. In wintertime, he wrapped himself in a long black coat and fastened it with a silver chain and hook, just as priests did; in the summer he wore a black straw hat like the priests, and he cultivated the look and the soft, gentle voice of a priest.

Still, he was not a conservative man: he was one of the first physicians to provide chloroform for women in childbirth. Chloroform had come into regular use for childbirth only recently, after Queen Victoria took it in 1853 with the birth of her eighth child. Evidently Dr. Faget did not share the traditional physicians' belief that women would love their children more if they suffered more in bringing them into the world.

But chloroform also required that a woman trust her doctor: the drug made some women more tractable, but in others it induced unseemly displays of obscene language and sexual excitement. Medical literature stressed the need for doctors' discretion about whatever confessions they heard, and Dr. Faget's priest-like garb and his gentle, priestlike voice allayed women's fears.

Kate and Oscar Chopin named their little son after his late grandfather and registered his birth with the civil authorities. In August, Kate had him baptized in St. Louis.

She was now a mother, and entered a new phase of her life with the ecstasies, doubts, pleasures, and fears that she described much later in her fiction—from Athénaïse's delight in her pregnancy ("Athénaïse"), to Mrs. Mobry's terror of hereditary madness ("Mrs. Mobry's Reason"), to Edna Pontellier's sensing herself unfit as a mother-woman. In "Regret," Chopin described once more the sheer animal pleasure of being close to a child's body: Mamzelle Aurélie, a single woman who has never before enjoyed the company of children, learns to "sleep comfortably with little Elodie's hot, plump body pressed close against her, and the little one's warm breath beating her cheek like the fanning of a bird's wing" (*Complete Works* 377).

But having a child meant that Kate Chopin herself was no longer a child, her time and creative energies all her own. For the rest of her life, she would do first what Edna Pontellier finally refuses to do: "Remember the children."

Dr. Faget, Kate Chopin's first obstetrician, was an intensely religious man who evidently had little interest in material things. According to another physician of the time, Faget was "one of those intellectuals to whom the almighty dollar was of little concern. He at one time had a large practice, but he was a poor charger, a bad collector, no investor at all. He died poor" (Wilds 125).

But he had made a very strong impression on Kate Chopin. Two decades later, when she wrote her first short story about a doctor, she gave him Dr. Faget's compassion, generosity and discretion. She also celebrated Dr. Faget's medical honors: for his findings about yellow fever patients' temperature and pulse, Dr. Faget had been decorated as a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor—and Kate named her hero Dr. Chevalier.

She made no great effort to conceal the real-life inspiration for her story. In "Dr. Chevalier's Lie," Chopin's physician character lives in a poor part of town in a city not identified by name, but he can easily hear midnight rung in "the old cathedral tower," as anyone could in the French Quarter of New Orleans (*Complete Works* 147-48).

In the story—based on the kind of event respectable ladies in New Orleans knew about, but weren't supposed to—Dr. Chevalier hears a sudden gunshot on an autumn night and is summoned to a house for a scene with "the ghastly sameness of detail that accompanied these oft-recurring events."

Dr. Chevalier sees

> the same scurrying; the same groups of tawdry, frightened women bending over banisters—hysterical, some of them; morbidly curious, others; and not a few shedding womanly tears; with a dead girl stretched somewhere, as this one was.
>
> (147)

But "this one" turns out to be a young girl Dr. Chevalier knows. He had met her a year ago, at a homely cabin in Arkansas, with her proud, hard-working parents. The bright young girl, whom everyone agreed was "too clever to stay in an Arkansas cabin," had resolved to seek her fortune in the big city.

"Dr. Chevalier's Lie" is only twelve paragraphs long, with a quick conclusion showing the

[9]John Wilds, *Crises, Clashes and Cures: A Century of Medicine in New Orleans* (New Orleans: Orleans Parish Medical Society, 1978) 125, gives information about Dr. Faget, whose name is sometimes listed as Jean Charles rather than Charles Jean. Faget's famous medical papers include "Type and Specific Character of True Yellow Fever" (New Orleans: Jas. A. Gresham, 1873) and "The Type and Specificity of Yellow Fever" (Paris: J.B. Balliere, 1875).

doctor's generosity and discretion:

> "The girl is dead," said Doctor Chevalier. "I knew her well, and charge myself with her remains and decent burial."
>
> The following day he wrote a letter. One, doubtless, to carry sorrow, but no shame to the cabin down there in the forest.
>
> It told that the girl had sickened and died. A lock of hair was sent and other trifles with it. Tender last words were even invented.
>
> Of course it was noised about that Doctor Chevalier had cared for the remains of a woman of doubtful repute.
>
> Shoulders were shrugged. Society thought of cutting him. Society did not, for some reason or other, so the affair blew over.
>
> (148)

"Dr. Chevalier's Lie" was based on "an actual incident in the life of a physician of New Orleans," his informants told Daniel Rankin. And when Kate Chopin wrote the story in St. Louis in 1891, twenty years after giving birth to her first child, the man she called "old Dr. Faget" was evidently still living in New Orleans (Rankin 134; Wilds 185).

"Dr. Chevalier's Lie" appeared in *Vogue*, a new literary periodical, in 1893. Chopin had six short stories in *Vogue* that year, marking her emergence as a national writer, and her literary ambitions may have impelled her to set "Dr. Chevalier's Lie" in an unnamed city, rather than New Orleans. But people in New Orleans would have recognized that she was drawing her character from life: praising the eccentric and compassionate Dr. Faget, and damning his critics.[10]

"Dr. Chevalier's Lie" was only the second story Kate Chopin wrote from New Orleans memories (the first was the romance called "A No-Account Creole"). Both drew on her first years in New Orleans, when she was listening and learning much more about the world than respectable ladies were supposed to hear or see.

Kate and Oscar Chopin never lived in the French Quarter.

After four years at 443 Magazine Street, they moved to the corner of Pitt and Constantinople—uptown—and then finally to 209 Louisiana Avenue, between Coliseum and Prytania. (The house—the only Chopin residence still in existence—is now numbered 1413 Louisiana.)

Kate and Oscar enjoyed entertaining friends at home, and a Mrs. L. Tyler, a frequent visitor, later described the Chopin *ménage* to Rankin:

> Oscar, ever jovial and cheerful and fun-loving and really very stout, liked to romp with the children through the house and about the gardens. "I like disorder when it is clean" was his favorite saying.

As for Kate, she

> enjoyed smoking cigarettes, but if friends who did not approve of smoking came to visit her, she would never offend them. She was individual in the style of her clothes as in everything else. She loved music and dancing, and the children were always allowed to enjoy themselves.

According to Mrs. Tyler, Kate was "devoted to Oscar and thought him perfect" (Rankin 89-90).

According to another informant, Mrs. John S. Tritle, "Kate was very much in love with her Oscar," and though she was a social favorite, she and her husband always preferred each other's company to anyone else's.[11]

Years later, of course, Kate Chopin described the apparently-perfect married couple in *The Awakening*: the Ratignolles "understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union" (chap. 18). Rankin believed that Kate was describing her married life with Oscar, but in fact, the Ratignolles fill Edna with depression and boredom and pity, for the "blind contentment" that strikes her as unthinking and even bovine (81).

Kate Chopin herself was never unthinking, and never totally conventional. Years later she more-than-hinted in her diary that Oscar's presence had inhibited her "real growth"—and her sharp insights into marriage and its discontents did not suddenly arise in the 1890s (*Kate Chopin Miscellany* 92).

[10]Kate Chopin's manuscript account book, now at the Missouri Historical Society, will be published in *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*. See n. 1.

[11]Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: a Critical Biography* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969) 38.

Evidently no one described any marital discord in the Chopin household, but, then, Southerners rarely reveal secrets of the human heart to outsiders. The sunny picture of Kate and Oscar's New Orleans years is not the whole story. Kate O'Flaherty Chopin, a spirited young woman who enjoyed solitude and reading and writing but found herself engulfed by the demands of children, was already gathering material for a very different kind of tale, and a different set of truths.

According to Daniel Rankin, Kate Chopin loved to explore New Orleans, taking solitary walks like Edna's in *The Awakening*. Chopin liked to take the mule car to the end of the line, where New Orleanians could explore City Park and the Metairie cemeteries, a favorite strolling place (Rankin 92-95).

She also kept a diary, now lost, in which she recorded realistic and minute details of everyday life. She was especially taken by the lavishly painted "mule cars" running on Canal Street (she described them in an 1894 story, "Cavanelle"); she frequently noted river front scenes in her diary; and she discovered out-of-the-way eating places like the one Edna finds in *The Awakening*—a place to read and eat and dream. As Edna says in *The Awakening*:

> I don't mind walking. I always feel so sorry for women who don't like to walk; they miss so much—so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole.
>
> (chap. 36)

But by the time Kate wrote *The Awakening*, she knew a great deal of life, and most of it, contrary to Rankin, she could not have learned during solitary walks in New Orleans.

Kate Chopin was pregnant for much of the time she lived in New Orleans: she was expecting her sixth child when the family left in the fall of 1879. Unless she committed extraordinary violations of propriety, she would have spent most of her time indoors—listening to the stories of other people.

She was fascinated by New Orleans customs and people: the proud and beautiful Creoles of color, the *gris gris* and voodoo. New Orleans was the home of Marie Laveau, the Voodoo Queen, famous for her magical powers, her love powders and her snake rituals. By 1873, when the *Daily Picayune* described her monster serpent, named Zombi, seventy-nine-year-old Marie Laveau was said to be the best-known of three hundred Voodoos in New Orleans, among whom were, "strange to relate, at least eight or ten white women who partake as the others in the hellish orgies."[12]

Native New Orleanians also told Kate about the blacks and their famous dancing in Congo Square, at Orleans and Rampart Streets. Before the war, slaves used to dance on Sundays on the dirt ground on Congo Square, performing the Calinda and the Bamboula to the intricate African rhythms pounded out on drums. It was a release of tension, and a passionate sexual display.[13]

According to Rankin, Kate Chopin "never attempted to write or take notes" during her New Orleans years, but she was constantly storing up impressions. For Kate O'Flaherty of St. Louis, voodoo queens and Congo Square dancing were exotic but revealing glimpses of what she called, much later, "human existence in its subtle, complex, true meaning, stripped of the veil with which ethical and conventional standards have draped it" (Rankin 92; *Complete Works* 691).

Two decades later, Kate Chopin did write about the dancing in Congo Square, but not—as her contemporary George W. Cable did—just for local color. Instead, in "La Belle Zoraïde," Chopin created a light-skinned slave who is supposed to marry a man of her own caste. But Zoraïde falls desperately in love with "le beau Mézor," because of his tenderness and the black beauty of his body—like a column of ebony—when he dances the Bamboula in Congo Square: "That was a sight to hold one rooted to the ground." But the white world—represented by Zoraïde's mistress—refuses to understand that people of color love and hate and feel just as white people do (*Complete Works* 304).

Instead of making the world of Congo Square picturesque, charming and distant, Chopin made "La Belle Zoraïde," in 1893, a universal tragedy: the story of a passionate woman deprived of her lover and her child (304).

During the social season—October to May, roughly—the Chopins lived in New Orleans, but

[12]Raymond J. Martinez, *Marie Laveau* (Jefferson, La.: Hope Publications, 1956) 13-14. Marie Laveau is also a character in many historical novels, among them my own *Daughters of New Orleans* (New York: Bantam, 1983).

[13]Grace King, *New Orleans, the Place and the People* (New York: Macmillan, 1911) 340. See also George W. Cable, *The Dance in Place Congo and Creole Slave Songs*, originally in the *Century Magazine* Feb.-April 1886, reprinted New Orleans: Faruk von Turk, 1974. Congo Square, later renamed Beauregard Square, is now Louis Armstrong Park.

according to her friend Mrs. Tyler, Kate's "long summer vacation times were spent with the children at Grand Isle" (Rankin 90).[14]

In the city, the Chopins evidently associated mainly with English speakers and Anglo-Saxons: Mrs. Tyler and Mrs. Tritle attended parties at the Chopin home, and Oscar's political allies included the Irish-born poet and lawyer Frank McGloin and the English-born dentist John Angell. But at Grand Isle, most people were Creoles, and Kate—like Edna in *The Awakening*—was a foreigner.

Whether Kate was astonished, like Edna, to read racy books that were passed around and discussed freely, and whether she blushed when childbirth was described in harrowing detail, and whether Creole gentlemen stopped telling risqué stories because she was present, cannot be known. But Kate, though she spoke French and was a Catholic, was not a Creole descended from generations of New Orleans Creoles. She was a Northerner, an outsider (*étrangère*) and an oddity (*Awakening* chap. 4).

Grand Isle had become the quintessential Creole resort after the Civil War, when middle-class people began to patronize "home resorts," where they could live in cottages, like the ones in *The Awakening*. Men came to Grand Isle on the weekends, but mostly it was a world of gossip and swimming and amusements for women and children.

The approach to Grand Isle was romantic, through mazes of swamp forest, and on Grand Isle itself, the birds were everywhere, as in *The Awakening*: mockingbirds, and gulls with broken wings, and at midnight the only sound was "the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak," with its eternal accompaniment, "the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night" (chap. 3).

For Kate Chopin, and any other young mother, Grand Isle was a wholesome escape from a city that was mercilessly humid, with swarming mosquitoes, festering open canals and sewers, marauding street gangs, and annual epidemics of yellow fever. On Grand Isle, children could romp everywhere, and guests had no need to lock their rooms. (In *The Awakening*, Edna brings down her key only "through force of habit" [chap. 7].)[15]

Especially to someone like Kate Chopin, who had spent summers among the baking red brick streets of St. Louis, Grand Isle was a tropical paradise of palm trees and vines, orange and lemon trees, acres of yellow camomile, and no streets—only grassy green or sandy paths. And everywhere there were the "strange, rare odors" Edna Pontellier notices: the smell of damp, new-plowed earth, the "heavy perfume of a field of white blossoms," and always "the seductive odor of the sea" (*Awakening* chap. 5).

When Kate Chopin described Grand Isle, she concentrated on its irresistible emotional resonance, on Edna's susceptible soul:

> The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.
>
> The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.
>
> (chap. 6)

Possibly Kate Chopin had also celebrated the seductions of the sea in her 1889 novella, "Unfinished Story—Grand Isle—30,000 words." Possibly she included the soft, baby-sounding Creole patois, which she used several years later in "La Belle Zoraïde." But she destroyed the unfinished novella, and by the time she wrote for publication about the Grand Isle she remembered, it was gone.

On October 1, 1893, the hurricane of Chênière Caminada devastated the lower coast, killing 2,000 people and destroying the resort cabins. John Krantz, owner of the Grand Isle Hotel (Klein's in *The Awakening*), barely escaped alive.

In St. Louis, three weeks later, Kate Chopin wrote "At Chênière Caminada," about the kind of romance that was gossiped about at Grand Isle: the passion of a poor, illiterate fisherman for a young society woman from New Orleans.

Chopin described going to church on the Chênière—on a midsummer day, "with a lazy, scorching breeze blowing from the Gulf straight

[14]Mrs. Tyler's statement is the only evidence that Kate Chopin and her children spent summers at Grand Isle. In fact, Kate Chopin spent at least two and possibly three summers in St. Louis (1871, 1873 and 1874).

[15]For history and descriptions of Grand Isle, see Sally Kittredge Evans, Frederick Stielow and Betsy Swanson, *Grand Isle on the Gulf: An Early History* (New Orleans: Jefferson Parish Historical Commission, 1979). Pp. 249-56 are particularly relevant to *The Awakening*. Literary portrayals of Grand Isle are discussed in Frederick Stielow, "Grand Isle, Louisiana, and the 'New' Leisure, 1866-1893," *Louisiana History* 23.3 (Summer 1982): 239-57.

into the church windows," while (she noted wryly) "A few mosquitoes, floating through the blistering air, with their nipping and humming fretted the people to a certain degree of attention and consequent devotion" (*Complete Works* 309).

"At Chênière Caminada" was a preliminary sketch for *The Awakening*, with many of the same local characters, and much of the sensuous atmosphere: the sea and the sky, the power of love and the power of music, birds and water, love and death, and the magical atmosphere of the island.

And even *The Awakening* itself, Rankin reported, was based on a story Kate Chopin heard at Grand Isle. According to Chopin's brother-in-law, Phanor Breazeale of Natchitoches, the main theme and the ending were from the real life of a woman well known to the Creoles of the French Quarter (Rankin 92). Just after she read the proofs for *The Awakening*, Chopin wrote a short poem which seems to be about that woman:

> Of course, 'twas an excellent story to tell
> Of a fair, frail, passionate woman who fell
> . . .
> But when you were gone and the lights were low
> And the breeze came in with the moon's pale glow,
> The far, faint voice of a woman, I heard. . . .
> (*Complete Works* 733-34)

By then Grand Isle as a resort had died, and so had the happy moments of Kate's married life in the 1870s. *The Awakening*, like "At Chênière Caminada," was an elegy to a lost way of life—and to memories of youth.

The Louisiana cotton crops in 1878 and 1879 were poor, and Oscar Chopin's business failed. And so, in the fall of 1879, the Chopins left New Orleans for Oscar's remaining properties in Natchitoches Parish, in northwest Louisiana. Kate and Oscar and their five sons left the busy, crowded, raffish city for a tiny French village just one street long: Cloutierville in the Cane River country, where their daughter was born.

In Cloutierville Kate and Oscar rejoined the world of kinship and family, tradition and religion. Lélia was baptized much more promptly than her brothers had been, and most of the relatives from Kate's mother's side disapproved of "Madame" Chopin's Cuban cigarettes, flamboyant fashions and flirtatious ways with other women's husbands.[16]

It was also in Cloutierville that Kate lost her own husband. Oscar Chopin died of malaria in December 1882, just two weeks before Christmas.

Two years later, Kate Chopin moved back to St. Louis, and five years after that, she began publishing short stories, poems, essays, and novels. She wrote frequently about New Orleans, and published eight short stories in the New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, including one about hereditary syphilis ("Mrs. Mobry's Reason"). She also frequently visited Natchitoches Parish, but rarely returned to New Orleans: only one visit—in December 1898—can be documented.[17]

And with *The Awakening*, which appeared in 1899, exactly twenty years after she left New Orleans, Kate Chopin produced a masterpiece that was damned by male reviewers and critics. Women readers praised *The Awakening* for its daring portrait of an artistic soul—but men condemned it, and Chopin's literary career was destroyed. She died five years later.[18]

At least in the beginning, New Orleans for Kate Chopin was associated with a profound solitude, a separation from a houseful of female relatives, the women's world in which she had spent all her life. The New Orleans years were also her immersion in motherhood, and she had many questions about the role of mother-woman.

But after Kate and Oscar Chopin left New Orleans in 1879, evidently Kate considered that part of her life and her literary growth to be over. When she wrote *The Awakening*, originally titling it "A Solitary Soul," Kate Chopin was revisiting New Orleans, but by her favorite method: her imagination.□

---

[16]Kate Chopin's flirtations—at least one of which was not at all innocent—will be discussed fully in my Chopin biography.

[17]According to the Natchitoches *Enterprise* 22 Dec. 1898: "Mrs. Kate Chopin left for New Orleans on Friday night where after a short visit she will return to her home in St. Louis." I am indebted to Evelyn Stallings and Carol Wells of the archives at the Northwestern State Univ. Library (Natchitoches, La.) for discovering this clipping.

[18]Only two women reviewed *The Awakening*, and both praised its artistry. The women readers of St. Louis applauded the book, wrote Chopin admiring letters, and invited her to give a reading for St. Louis's most prestigious intellectual group, the Wednesday Club. But the male editors and reviewers, some of whom were Chopin's friends, condemned the book and its author.

Emily Toth *is Associate Professor of English and American Studies at Pennsylvania State University. She has published a novel,* Daughters of New Orleans *(1983), and is presently completing an authoritative biography of Kate Chopin, to be published by Atheneum.*

Pinkie Gordon Lane

NEGOTIATIONS

— For Gordon

"A new baby has arrived,
I have to make a space for him
In this tired world"
—Sukanta Bhattacharya, "Passport"

When I see this hand
held before me
stroking your forehead
carrying the promise
of a good life,

Enfant of my choice,

and as I watch you
grow into the wilderness
of youth's goods
and promises strained
through the broken air,

I see you move into
manhood buffeting all
that carries with it your
stubborn watchfulness
and eyes soft with
love.

Child of my loins, son
given to me from out of the Universe,

I carry your weight of sorrow
only for a little while, knowing
that in the forest
your power is in your strength

bequeathed to you
from a womb of everlasting
song bursting from this
tired world, and beauty
born of listening turning into

Light.

Milly S. Barranger

LILLIAN HELLMAN: STANDING IN THE MINEFIELDS

Lillian Hellman (1905-1984) was a complex individual of great personal and professional courage. Born a Southerner in New Orleans in 1905 on the fringe of the Garden District at 1718 Prytania Street, she migrated between New Orleans and New York for the first sixteen years of her life between the Hellman and Newhouse families.

The environments were diametrical opposites: life in a Prytania Street boardinghouse (at 1718, then 4631 Prytania) run by her father's two unmarried sisters and the "lovely oval rooms" of her maternal grandmother's upper West Side Manhattan apartment in New York City.[1] Her itinerant girlhood—described by her biographer, William Wright—finally settled upon the Northeast out of professional and personal interests. Nevertheless, her artistic roots remained for the most part with the Alabama Newhouse merchant/banking families and the colorful Hellman relatives in New Orleans and were realized over thirty years later in her four major plays about the South.

In her adulthood, after her marriage to screenwriter Arthur Kober failed, she resided in New York, Los Angeles, Connecticut, and on Martha's Vineyard, living a liberated lifestyle exceptional for a woman of her generation, and practicing liberal politics that took her as a journalist to Spain in 1937, to the Russian front in 1944, and to the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities in 1952, where she enunciated the line about not cutting her conscience to fit this year's fashions, for which she is most quoted today.[2]

In the closing months of Lillian Hellman's life (she died on June 30, 1984), playwright Marsha Norman—author of the Pulitzer prize-winning *'night, Mother*—became the spokesperson for the influences of Hellman upon the new generation of American women writers. While Hellman claimed interest in the women's movement (and viewed the movement as a battle for economic equality), her considerable accomplishments as playwright and author truly cleared a pathway for others to follow.[3] In an early interview Hellman, referred to by a journalist as one of the

[1]William Wright, *Lillian Hellman: The Woman Who Made the Legend* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) 20.

[2]Lillian Hellman, *Scoundrel Time* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971) 93.

[3]*Conversations with Lillian Hellman*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1986) 204-5.

country's leading "female" playwrights, snapped, "I am a playwright. You wouldn't refer to Eugene O'Neill as one of America's foremost male playwrights" (Wright 98). While Hellman did not view the world in feminist terms, she was aware of male condescension in a profession where women, if they did write commercial plays, wrote largely comedies or romances. She, in turn, undertook the tough, serious themes for which she would become most notable.

In writing about the Hellman legacy, Norman said, "Writers like Lillian Hellman, who are willing to share their lives as well as their work, make it possible for those who come after them to survive."[4] In an unrelated interview with critic Mel Gussow in 1983, Norman used a powerful metaphor for the relationship of women playwrights to their art and profession which is applicable to Hellman's life and career. Norman is quoted as saying:

> I almost see us as this battalion, marching, valiant soldiers on the front lines, and we must not step on the mines. We are trying as best we can to clear the path, to tell you what's out there.[5]

This paper explores Lillian Hellman's leadership for three decades in the professional theatre for those women, such as Carson McCullers, Marsha Norman and Beth Henley, who were to follow her in that most difficult career of the professional playwright. Her Southern literary heritage, in particular the New Orleans milieu, as manifested in four of her most important plays is likewise explored here.

In *The History of Southern Literature*, Jacob H. Adler names Lillian Hellman as one of three important *Southern* dramatists who have given American drama a special eminence; Paul Green and Tennessee Williams are the other two playwrights cited.[6] Hellman's Southern roots are well-documented in her two memoirs—*An Unfinished Woman* (1969) and *Pentimento* (1973)—in *Conversations with Lillian Hellman* (1986), and in the biography by William Wright titled *Lillian Hellman: The Woman Who Made the Legend* (1986).

Her Southern heritage came first from New Orleans and Alabama Jewish families. Unlike her contemporary Clifford Odets, there is little in her plays directly reflecting this ethnic background. Also, unlike many Southern writers, her career began and ended with the New York literary and theatrical establishment. After desultory attendance at Columbia and New York Universities, Hellman settled into jobs of manuscript reading for the prestigious publishing house Boni and Liveright and playreading for Broadway producer and director Herman Shumlin. She had a brief marriage with Arthur Kober, and, upon meeting novelist Dashiell Hammett, she maintained an off-again, on-again relationship until his death in 1960, thirty-one years later.

Two significant factors must be mentioned. In the 1930s Lillian Hellman entered the chic New York intellectual set where she met her life-long friend Dorothy Parker, and she labored in the male-dominated vineyard of the Broadway theatre to be a produced (and highly successful) playwright. There was no alternative to Broadway for Lillian Hellman as there is today in the non-profit, professional regional theatres. From her first play, written in 1934 to her last play, written in 1963, Lillian Hellman literally stood for twenty-nine years in the "minefields" of a life lived in the explosive landscape of the liberal politics of her day and the conservatism of the commercial theatre where she wanted to make her mark. In this posture she wrote a body of melodramatic plays (eight original plays and four adaptations). Many of her theatrical effects and themes on the evils of money, power, political and sexual repression shocked audiences who, nevertheless, flocked to see *The Children's Hour* (1934) for 691 performances, *The Little Foxes* (1939) for 410 performances, *Watch on The Rhine* (1941) for 378 performances, *Another Part of the Forest* (1946) for 182 performances, *The Autumn Garden* (1951) for 101 performances, and *Toys in the Attic* (1960) for 556 performances.

By the 1960s Hellman had become disillusioned with the Broadway theatre where she had labored for three decades. As she explained her loss of interest, she cited the Broadway Theatre as an increasing question of money: "I didn't want to live in a world where one was a wild success one minute and a wild failure the next and it seldom depended upon the worth of what one was doing" (*Conversations* 163). While the corpus of her dramatic work is small in comparison to

---

[4]Marsha Norman, "Lillian Hellman's Gift to a Young Playwright," *The New York Times* 26 Aug. 1984: 1, 7.

[5]Mel Gussow, "Women Playwrights: New Voices in the Theatre," *The New York Times Magazine* 1 May 1983: 22-38, 41.

[6]Jacob H. Adler, *The History of Southern Literature*, eds. Louis R. Rubin, Jr. et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1985) 436-39.

Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, of her eight original plays, four are commonly identified as her "Southern" plays. Together with Tennessee Williams and Carson McCullers, she pioneered the current renascence in Southern drama most evident today in the works of Marsha Norman and Beth Henley.

Let us consider the distinguishing marks of Southern life and culture transposed into the theatre in these four remarkable plays about the South, only one of which is set in New Orleans: *The Little Foxes, Another Part of the Forest, The Autumn Garden,* and *Toys in the Attic.*[7]

* * * * *

In answer to the question "What is a Southern writer?" the editors of *The Literature of the South* assert that genuinely Southern writers usually show an awareness of Southern ties and cannot throw them off if they would. Moreover, while Southern writers may live in later years outside the area, they will continue to draw upon a fund of Southern materials in their writing.[8] Hellman confirmed this insight in an interview when she said: "Well, I have no right to, because the New York years now far outweigh the Southern years, but I suppose most Southerners, people who grew up in the South, still consider themselves Southern" (*Conversations* 186). Further defining the Southern literary tradition, Cleanth Brooks suggests that the Southerner has ". . . a belief in human imperfection, and a genuine and never wavering disbelief in [human] perfection . . ." (*History of Southern Literature* 263). Furthermore, as Brooks indicates, the Southerner has a profound sense of living in a fallen, imperfect world; hence, Southern writers—novelists, poets and playwrights—know that human beings are fallible and are, therefore, more tolerant as observers and recorders of human foibles and imperfections. Consequently, when Southern playwrights depict suicide, murder, cruelty, grotesque characters, and family histories, they are writing in a regional literary tradition one hundred and fifty years old. In terms of the American theatre and conventions of Southern drama, Lillian Hellman stood in the 1930s in the vanguard in giving definition to the drama of the South.

While *The Children's Hour*—produced on Broadway eleven years before Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*—appears to have no Southern ties, it was remarkable in its day for bringing to Broadway taboo subject matter and for depicting the perverse evil of the public denunciation of two individuals accused of a lesbian relationship. Moreover, the play's ending in suicide and crippling guilt affirms the playwright's concerns for human imperfection and for the destructive power of slander, pervasive themes in novels and plays written about the South by William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, William Styron, and Walker Percy.

The Little Foxes (the first of what was planned as a trilogy but never completed) was Hellman's first explicitly Southern play in which she pioneered aspects of the Southern *dramatic* tradition. The center of the play's dramatic universe is the Giddens/Hubbard families coupled with a specificity of place (a small Southern town around 1900), concerns for property and inheritance, rapacious and fragile characters, events of theft and murder, exploitation of the underprivileged (white and black), and the intrusion of industrial technology into a traditionally rural society. Moreover, Hellman writes within the strong Southern tradition of Gothic humor, regional dialect, a fascination with the past (both real and imaginary), and the enactment of taboos (social and sexual). In addition, she develops themes characteristic of Southern writing relative to money, power, greed, property, exploitation, disease, death, and dying.

The Little Foxes concerns the South at the turn of the century and centers on the machinations of the favored few. Ben and Oscar Hubbard and their sister Regina Giddens are beginners in the promotion of the industrialized South—the bringing of the "machine to the cotton, and not the cotton to the machine," as Ben Hubbard says (159). The Hubbard family's rapacity and cruelty lead to oppression, theft, blackmail, and murder. They are contrasted with helpless, aristocratic gentility (Oscar's wife, Birdie), moral rectitude (Regina's husband, Horace), and with ineffectual adolescent rebellion (Horace and Regina's daughter, Alexandra). None of these individuals is strong enough to cope successfully with the rapacious forces surrounding them. In what is a uniquely Southern viewpoint, Hellman pointedly admires the effective strength and machinations

[7]Textual references for Hellman's plays are to *Six Plays by Lillian Hellman* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) and *Toys in the Attic* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1960).

[8]Thomas D. Young, Lloyd C. Watkins and Richmond C. Beatty, eds., *The Literature of the South* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1968) viii.

of these imperfect human beings. Ben Hubbard, momentarily out-maneuvered by his sister over the theft of the crucial bonds, says,

> . . . But I'm not discouraged. The century's turning, the world is open. Open for people like you and me. Ready for us, waiting for us. After all this is just the beginning. There are hundreds of Hubbards sitting in rooms like this throughout the country. All their names aren't Hubbard, but they are all Hubbards and they will own this country some day. We'll get along.
>
> (222-23)

What we have here is a typical Hellman paradox stated with humor, subtlety and truth: on the one hand, Ben Hubbard's speech is a tribute to Southern optimism regarding human continuity and endurance; on the other, Hellman's liberal politics condemns an American capitalism which exploits the masses (black as well as white) and implants technology upon an agrarian culture, thus transforming a land, a people, and a way of life.

Hellman's Southern roots are laid bare in this play. The North is viewed as a faraway, inaccessible world, the class differences between the two families is pointed (aristocrat versus merchant), the dialogue sounds Southern in its rhythms, humor and colloquialisms. Blacks are treated as an oppressed, serving class and poor whites as an exploitable labor force for the future cotton mills. Hellman's treatment of the black retainers in Regina's household is reminiscent of the portraits of Dilsey in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), of Berenice Sadie Brown in Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), and of her own portrait of Sophronia Mason in *An Unfinished Woman* (1969). They have moral strength, understanding, and advocate good against evil.

The advent of the European war and Hellman's political liberalism and geographical remoteness from the region of her birth produced a change in her work in the 1940s. She wrote her Washington plays—*Watch on the Rhine* and *The Searching Wind* (1944)—which center on the war in Europe. The only explicit connections to *The Little Foxes* and her Southern heritage are the family as centerpiece, compassion for the world's oppressed, and a sustained humor and optimism despite gross human imperfection. Hellman's belief that human goodness can overcome the "little foxes that spoil the vines" was part of her Southern heritage and her liberal politics as well. The wealthy family in *Watch on the Rhine* and their penniless German anti-Nazi son-in-law learn from the evils of the historical moment.

Another Part of the Forest, directed by Hellman on Broadway, is the second of the four Southern plays which returns us to the Hubbard family in 1880, twenty years earlier than the period of *The Little Foxes*. Hellman, as William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, deals with families in more than one generation and in more than one work, a practice indicative of a particular Southern concern for the continuity of the past in the present. In this play the Hubbard patriarch, Marcus, despite his poor origins, has acquired through unsavory, if not criminal means, money, power and "culture." Hellman's Southern roots are revealed in the following ways: Marcus, oppressive and unscrupulous, is unaccepted by the town's genteel citizens despite his money and "cultural" interests. We are given specifics of postwar history, the "new" Ku Klux Klan, and the absence of legal rights for blacks in the 1880s. Lavinia, Marcus's wife, like Birdie Hubbard in the earlier play, is one of Hellman's consistent portraits of vulnerable, ineffectual women whose frailty is their protection and their misery. There is something of Hellman's mother, Julia Newhouse Hellman—a genteel, docile, often foolish woman—in both of these characters (Wright 16). Lavinia has compassion for blacks who welcome her to their churches and engage her in their desire to educate their children. As the Hubbard siblings struggle among themselves for money and power at the play's end, Lavinia, mentally unstable but steadfastly determined to begin a school for black children, departs the Hubbard menage with her black companion, thereby foreshadowing the blowing winds of social change.

The Autumn Garden and *Toys in the Attic* are Hellman's final two Southern plays. In both, there is a specificity of place: a summer resort on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in September 1949 and a middle-class house in need of repair near the river in New Orleans. Both present family and money as centerpieces for action and conflict. Both concern domestic issues, class distinctions, blackmail, lies, fidelity, separation, betrayal, missed opportunities, and loneliness. Hellman spoke of *The Autumn Garden* as her best and favorite play; she described it as a story about middle age and broken dreams (*Conversations* 55, 175, 215). In the canon of her work *The Autumn Garden* introduces the subject of Hellman's

characteristic dramaturgy, that is, her affinity for the melodramatic, well-made play tradition popularized by Henrik Ibsen in his plays of social realism. Unlike Tennessee Williams, Hellman did not pioneer in her dramaturgy, though she was an effective craftsman. In the Hubbard plays, her consummate use of the well-made play conventions are found in the symbolic titles, secrets revealed, mysterious bank boxes, hidden envelopes, unresolved endings, plot reversals, clear-cut characters, and highly theatrical moments. *The Autumn Garden*, however, also reveals the influences of Anton Chekhov on Hellman's dramaturgy, despite Richard Moody's insistence that she had not been reading Chekhov prior to writing *The Autumn Garden* and the fact that her edition of Chekhov's letters appeared four years later.[9] Nevertheless, the play is rich in Chekhovian qualities, and Chekhov is a writer of immense influence on other Southern authors, in particular novelist Walker Percy.

The setting of *The Autumn Garden* is a summer boardinghouse on the Gulf Coast near Pass Christian, Mississippi. Traces of Chekhov's influence are to be found in the gathering of disparate middle-aged people into a central place where they confront individual truths about their lost opportunities and wasted lives with little formal plotting of confrontations and irreversible crises. The characters wander aimlessly through the boardinghouse, all the while laboring to understand their past mistakes and present unhappiness. Hellman's focus is on the loss and gain within interpersonal relationships: the broken dreams, the small illusions, the painful truths. As in almost all of her plays, *money*—the presence or the absence of it—becomes the catalyst for resolving the play's action. Moreover, the details of boardinghouse life—the endless meals, the small demands, the required services, the intrusive strangers—mirror the New Orleans setting of Hellman's childhood in the Prytania Street boardinghouse and her memories of a Gulf Coast resort as well. In this play, the three generations of the Ellis family (along with Denery, a familiar New Orleans name) replicates the Southern writer's penchant for tracing family histories. Finally, New Orleans is the scene to which most of the characters return at summer's end—a pattern of summer migration among New Orleanians familiar to the youthful Hellman.

Hellman likewise returns to New Orleans as the scene of her next and penultimate play. (She did not write another play after the failure on Broadway of *My Mother, My Father and Me* in 1963.) *Toys in the Attic* has New Orleans as its setting, including specifics of ambience, landscape, weather, food, foliage, manners, voodoo rites, violence, as well as references to Galatoire's restaurant, Audubon Park, the Mississippi River, and the waterfront docks.

The references to characters, ambience and minor incidents share a close affinity to details included in the memoir begun by Hellman almost a decade later. Hellman seems to have rummaged through her own personal attic for characters and themes. The play's setting closely approximates the middle-class boardinghouse lives of her New Orleans aunts described in *An Unfinished Woman*, even including the detail of her eccentric aunt who ate her meals on the front porch steps for two years. The Berniers' middle-class house is described as "a house lived in by poor, clean, orderly people who don't like where they live" (5). In addition, Hellman's childhood memories of New Orleans, its class distinctions, the importance of money, food and manners among its people comprise the warp and woof of the play's fabric.

As in all of Hellman's work, family and money are the catalysts for dramatic interest and conflict. Dashiell Hammett is reputed to have given her the idea that became the plot for *Toys in the Attic*: a play about a man whose loved ones think they want him to be rich and successful, but who find that they really do not want his success; when he bungles his opportunities and ends up a worse failure than before, they are satisfied (Wright 279). However, in Hellman's terms, Julian Berniers, the ill-fated success story, is reminiscent of her father who married a doting young woman whose wealthy mother set up her son-in-law in a shoe manufacturing business on Canal Street that went bankrupt under his management. Moreover, Max Hellman's two unmarried sisters doted on their only brother. Hellman interweaves her adolescent memories of the Hellman family history with a revision of Hammett's original plot line and constructs a play centered upon the women surrounding Julian's life, their motivations and their part in his hapless fate.

Toys in the Attic in its final version tells the story of two sisters, Anna and Carrie Berniers, who are forty-two and thirty-eight respectively and are employed as office and sales clerks. They have

[9]Richard Moody, *Lillian Hellman: Playwright* (New York: Pegasus, 1972) 227. See also Hellman's "Introduction" to *The Selected Letters of Anton Chekov* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1955).

devoted their lives to rearing their younger brother Julian, now thirty-four. Their psychological makeup demands Julian's financial (and emotional) dependence on them, so that his failures as a businessman give meaning to their habituated, unhappy lives. Reflecting upon Hammett's original story line, Hellman said: ". . . It became to me a man who had a momentary success, brought up by women who certainly had never wanted him to have that minute of success. That wasn't the way they saw him and they ruined it for him. I don't think that is an uncommon situation" (*Conversations* 103).

It is provocative that Hellman's memory of the favorite city of her youth and the conditions of the Hellman household during her New Orleans years resulted in her selection of New Orleans as the setting for this matriarchal society dominated by Julian's elder sisters (portraits derived from Hellman's aunts, Jenny and Hannah), and by Albertine Prine, his wife's wealthy, elegant and domineering mother (a character present in all of Hellman's plays reminiscent of her maternal grandmother, Sophie Marx Newhouse). The plot turns on the now familiar Hellman leit-motif—the acquiring of money and power—a symbolic sign of Julian's success or failure, his independence or dependence upon women. The plot reversal casts Julian (who bears kinship to Hellman's father) into financial disaster, destroying his hopes, self-esteem and new-found assertiveness. Hellman has embedded the story of three women in this rather undistinguished melodramatic plot composed of secret real estate deals, fortunes won and lost, mysterious telephone calls and trysts, religious epiphanies with diamond rings exchanged for knives, and the betrayal of a deeply-guarded miscegenatious marriage. In the second act, the play turns from Julian's story into the story of three women: Anna and Carrie Berniers and Albertine Prine. Albertine's public acknowledgement of her black lover and Anna's revelation of her sister's sexual feelings for their brother Julian set these two characters apart. Anna, the older sister, forces Carrie to confront her long-repressed feelings for Julian; she says, "Don't you know what's the matter, don't you know? You want him and always have" (*Toys* 59). However, Carrie is not freed by this revelation. Instead, she engages in further denial and her emotions turn to hatred and destruction under the guise of sibling love and understanding. Rather, the epiphany belongs to Anna, for Carrie in bitterness and hatred manipulates Julian's neurotic young wife, Lily (Hellman's nickname and the name of her great aunt Lily Marx), into betraying the source of his newly-acquired fortune and independence. Aware of her sister's betrayal and consuming hatred, Anna packs her bags to leave a way of life based on self-delusion, deprivation and dependency. At the play's close, she realizes that they have depended upon their brother's failures to give meaning and solace to their existence. Anna Berniers takes up the literal and figurative baggage of her life and starts to exit the New Orleans home of her youth and middle-age. But Hellman, in a consummate dramaturgical moment, freezes these two women of strength, dignity and self-knowledge—Anna Berniers and Albertine Prine—in a tableau that leaves the play's end a question mark.

The scene is the following: Repeating a life-long habit, Carrie is in the kitchen making soup for the injured Julian. (She says, "You always liked a good soup when you didn't feel well" [*Toys* 81].) Julian is in bed with his child-bride mending his self-esteem. Anna and Albertine are center stage confronting the profound changes in their lives brought about by acquired truth and by the symbolic loss of two men: Albertine's black "chauffeur" (a euphemism for her long-time lover who will leave her if she ever brings her daughter, Julian's wife, home again) and Anna's "child" (a brother who, for her, has passed into adulthood). Hellman does not resolve the futures of these two women at the play's end. What they will do in the strength and self-awareness that separates them now from their weak and destructive kin the audience does not learn. Lillian Hellman provides no answer to the choices of the stronger as they turn emotionally and physically away from life-lies relegated, like toys, to the attic of their lives.

* * * * *

Having examined Hellman's career as a successful Broadway playwright who used her Southern (and New Orleans) heritage in the making of four major American plays, let us return to the larger perspective. Lillian Hellman stood in the minefields of her profession and society for fifty years, first, as a controversial writer and civil libertarian imbued with a sense of justice which was often overridden by an even greater sense of self-preservation (Wright 417-36). In her Southern plays she applied her sense of the moral and the ethical to social injustice and class distinctions, to the evils of ill-used money and power, to self-deception and conscious lies, and

to the tragedy of manipulation and personal waste.

Hellman did not consider herself a feminist, but she wrote some of the great roles for actresses in the American theatre (*Conversations* 136): Regina Giddens, Mary Tilford, Birdie Hubbard, Fanny Farrelly, Constance Tuckerman, Anna Berniers, Albertine Prine. Her portraits of women have their source in her childhood memories of her favorite Hellman aunts, her docile mother and her formidable maternal grandmother. Hannah and Hellman's favorite aunt, Jenny, one dominant and one weak, ran the New Orleans boardinghouse and pampered her father as the Berniers sisters pamper their brother Julian. Her mother, Julia Marx Hellman, was a dreamy, docile woman of genteel elegance who provided the prototypes for such characters as Birdie and Lavinia Hubbard, while her domineering maternal grandmother—Sophie Marx Newhouse—remote, strong, and wealthy, was the inspiration for Regina Giddens. Hellman's women provide a spectrum of modern womanhood. They are weak and strong, foolish and cunning, vulnerable and iron-willed, genteel and malevolent, sensitive and insensitive, married and unmarried, employed and leisured. In her portraits Hellman did not ignore the variety and dilemmas of modern women, even those in a postwar South that was just beginning to encroach upon modern times. Her plays are peopled with women from all venues: clerks, wives, mothers, spinsters, opportunists, landlords, society ladies, secretaries, cooks, heterosexuals, homosexuals, lovers, and poets. Almost as a reward for her rich female characterizations, the Hellman women have been realized on stage by many of the great actresses of our time: Florence Eldridge, Tallulah Bankhead, Lucile Watson, Patricia Neal, Mildred Dunnock, Maureen Stapleton, and Irene Worth.

Lillian Hellman, as her slightly younger contemporaries in the commercial theatre—Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller—casts a large shadow over the history of the modern American theatre. However, the paradox is that, in the words of director Harold Clurman, her spirit was alien to the theatre (Moody xiv). Dashiell Hammett is cited in her memoir as saying about her: "The truth is you don't like the theatre except the times you're in a room by yourself putting the play on paper."[10] Even though a strong individualist and committed author, Lillian Hellman admitted that she had no talent for collaboration—and the theatre is an art of collaboration, most often among strangers. Not only did Hellman succeed in a profession where she was not altogether comfortable and where few women playwrights of her generation were successful, but she had the courage to take rigorous public stands on social and political issues. As we gain perspective on her gigantic presence in the American theatre, learning of her personal commitment to art and to society from memoirs, interviews and biographies, we can better perceive her signal contribution to the American commercial theatre: *her presence*.

Lillian Hellman cleared a path through the minefields of politics and art in a profession which is fickle at best, inimical to writers in general, and to women playwrights in particular. Her personal courage and professional determination are seen as signal flames for those following in her path.□

[10]*An Unfinished Woman: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969) 75. The final volume of Hellman's memoirs is *Pentimento: A Book of Portraits* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).

Milly S. Barranger *is Chair and Professor of Dramatic Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Executive producer of PlayMakers Repertory Company, she has written numerous articles and books on drama and theater. Her most recent work is* Notable Women in the American Theatre *(1987).*

Alice Parker

THE CIVIL WAR JOURNAL OF JULIA LEGRAND WAITZ (1861-1863)

In 1911, fifty years after it was written, a portion of Julia LeGrand's Civil War journal was published by two Daughters of the Confederacy.[1] And now, seventy-five years later, the first thing that strikes us is the wide divergence between their Julia and ours. For her editors the author of the journal was a high-born Southern lady, courageous perhaps, but remembered primarily according to the signs of late-Victorian womanhood, in a trailing white gown, permanently bereaved over the loss of her first love. For us LeGrand is a feminist, a writer and intellectual, born into cultural codes and thrust into a historical moment that prevented her from attaining her most cherished goals.

When as readers we meet her, Julia LeGrand is in her early thirties and unmarried, having lost the fiancé who never returned from Mexico where he had gone to make his fortune, a story she recorded in a novel that is likewise lost. The journal was to have been a private document, kept in the family, and thus addressed to her niece. I will not go into the ironies of its recovery, release into the public domain, and relapse into the obscurity of archival special collections. Clearly aware of the extraordinary nature of the events she was witnessing during the Federal occupation of New Orleans, LeGrand wanted to preserve for future generations not only first-hand impressions, but a whole constellation of messages evoked by the political events, the responses of officials and "statesmen," friends and unknown persons on both sides of the struggle. When she was able to escape the city, fleeing East with friends but hoping to rejoin her family which had emigrated to Texas, she destroyed the journal for political reasons, afraid to risk carrying incriminating material in her baggage. The part that remains was fortuitously saved between the pages of a book she was reading to her friends on their difficult voyage through war zones.

Chronicling day by day the siege of her adopted city, the journal combines letters, descriptions, reported dialogue, news articles, and a long meditation on her situation. LeGrand gives us a human record of what it felt like to live through civil war, and more particularly the responses of a liberal, educated woman, caught by an especially difficult configuration of events. What makes this journal special is the way Julia LeGrand is able to rise to the challenge of the circumstances in which she finds herself, and the conceptual sophistication of her analysis of events. The editors, one of whom had direct access to family papers, include an ample biographical introduction, which provides us with a context for viewing the text and the writer. LeGrand invites us to examine the relationship between class, gender, race, and the articulation of experience. These intersections are clarified by her awareness of the many differences that inform her existence, and by her untiring efforts to illuminate their interpenetrating boundaries. A transplant herself, having emigrated from Maryland with her family to some property in Louisiana along the Mississippi which was to make the family fortune in the sense of both money and destiny, LeGrand has an acute sense of displacement that enables her to view events, people and behavior as both familiar and bizarre.

As we conjure up her voice and image, a century and a quarter later, Julia LeGrand is living with a younger sister, Ginnie, who, along with the journal, is her only confidante. In the mode of the period the orphaned sisters cling together as fruits severed prematurely from the vine; they are isolated from their married siblings and from their brother, Claude, who is a Confederate soldier. They have abandoned the little house they had arranged to their own needs and tastes for the home of an older woman whom they have been encouraged to join for mutual protection. Although they are deprived of comforts they formerly took for granted, they do not appear to suffer physically as much as psychically. They are ill all of the time, and in a constant state of anxiety. Occupied by invaders from the North who are at once countrymen and the enemy, the people of New Orleans ponder the many ironies

[1] *The Journal of Julia LeGrand, New Orleans 1862-63*, eds. Kate Mason Rowland and Mrs. Morris L. Croxall (Richmond, Va.: Everett Waddey, 1911).

of civil war. And the women, in particular, demonstrate remarkable resources in dealing with the disaster, in the day-to-day details of survival, communication among themselves and with the outside, in acts of civil disobedience, in all of the gestures that define their humanity and their determination to preserve their culture.

LeGrand feels intensely her ideological and cultural differences and her isolation from appropriate systems of support. Her mixed loyalties, to Maryland, the "land" of her birth, and Louisiana, her adopted country, complicate her ties to the Federal government of the United States. "I am thought all sorts of things because I endeavor to do justice to all parties," she writes; "one day I am an abolitionist, another a Yankee, another too hot a 'rebel,' another all English, and sometimes I love my Maryland and no other State; all the while I love my own land, every inch of it, better than all the world and feel a burning desire ever kindling in my heart that my countrymen should be first in all the world for virtue" (77). Prizing honesty and justice, she is suspicious of reductive abstractions that diminish human beings to objects or destroyers. "I cannot contemplate without horror the idea of civil war and its desolations. 'They deserve it,' say my friends, who are ready to shake me for what they call my luke-warmness. How painful it is never to be comprehended. . . . Love of country does not consist in hatred of other countries, or patriotism in believing that ours is free of faults . . ." (87). Hatred, she sees, operates in a domino fashion, pushing progress and civilization backward: ". . . we have leaped back, as it seems now, thousands of dark and hopeless years" (96). This thought leads her into a long meditation on cruelty and ignorance (98).

Sectarianism and of course the war propaganda machine grind out messages of ideological purity. They encourage hatred of the "other," a category that represents those not in the center, who are therefore not protected by the Logos, the Word that represents Right, God, Country, *etc.* Well before Viet Nam we see a woman who finds herself on the horns of an intellectual and moral dilemma induced by armed conflict, in this case the "War between the States," which has turned many of her countrymen into bloodthirsty fanatics. What form did this dilemma take? On the one hand, LeGrand was completely devoted to her country and to her people (family, friends and associates, in widening circles that for her included all people of breeding, North and South). To a friend she wrote in November 1862: "You used to doubt my feelings, but it was because you did not understand them. I have met no one whose ideas of *defense* were more stringent than my own. I would give up all, sacrifice all to honor. What is a city compared to a city's good name. . . . Yet I feel just as I used to do, that this honor and truth do not belong to any land exclusively. I have had ample proof of this. Men of Northern birth here have gone to prison as bravely and nobly as any, while our own people have been in many instances recreant. It is a safe philosophy that teaches us a love for the good and hatred of the bad of all lands, and a resistance *to the death of all* invaders" (49).

On the other hand, LeGrand, who admits to having been an abolitionist before the War, must justify her appreciation of the Southern cause. Not only is she pressured by family and friends to join ranks—it would be literally unthinkable not to support her brother, who has lost an arm in the conflict—but the events themselves position her as a resistant. The only way she could resolve the dilemma was to subsume moral and political issues under the single problematic of legitimate defense. No one has a right to break into another's domain and seize one's goods. From property to propriety is a small step. The inhabitants of New Orleans (and other Southern towns) generalize from the fact of their city's occupation by alien soldiers to the legitimacy of their struggle against the invaders. An aristocratic code orders an individual's response: if attacked one defends one's honor and name. It is irrelevant what ideas or principles precipitated the conflict. Thus, LeGrand's ambivalence, her defense of New Orleans and the Confederacy, in spite of earlier sympathies with antislavery movements, makes perfect sense in terms of the code of her region, time, and class. But she is unhappy with the resulting violence and mindless fanaticism on both sides.

Her education and natural propensities encourage LeGrand to resist not only the invaders, but the war itself. "Oh, if we were only all safe together in some quiet land where there would be no war, no government even to make war! I long to be rid of the evil and suffering which spring from the passions of men! Clap-trap sentiments and political humbugs! I almost hate the word 'Flag' even!" (44-45). With violence surrounding her, LeGrand was attracted to a promise of inner peace beyond the rewards of her writing and her companionship with her sister. It may seem odd for a woman who was steeped in the rationalist tradition of the Enlightenment

to be drawn to the spiritualist movement that existed beyond the confines of established Christian churches and doctrine and was frowned upon by the social and religious establishment. In fact, in the wake of romanticism, and in the light of LeGrand's circumstances, nothing is easier to comprehend than a philosophy that eschewed material reality and a conservative socio-cultural programme in favor of the twilight zone of nonrational phenomena. In Mrs. Waugh, her spiritualist friend, Julia found a woman who evaded restrictive categories of gender and class (98). The importunities of her situation and the barbarism of war also induced in LeGrand a pronounced agoraphobia: "Did not go out again all day, but saw several visitors in our rooms," she writes; "I hate the squares and streets and would be content in a prison to be rid of them" (78).

In her journal LeGrand explores relationships between the personal and the political, between his-story and hers, between authoritative codes and the voices of individuals trying to cope under exceptional pressure. The greatest stresses are the uncertainty in which she lives—lines of communication having been severed, and messages sent or received with only the greatest ingenuity—and the fact of living for an unpredictable amount of time with strangers. As unmarried women Julia and Ginnie had no status; they were at the mercy of friends who were to arrange their escape, and of the whims, uninformed opinions and noisy guests of the woman whose house they shared. This was perhaps a more significant imprisonment than the occupation itself, interfering as it did with every attempt of the sisters to arrange their existence. "I do not talk much," Julia writes, "but the suppressed life of pain which I lead is enough to kill a stronger person. We lead a lonely, anxious life and are sick most always" (49-50).

Neither Julia nor her sister fear physical harm, though alarms are common. Their host, Mrs. Norton, "has a hatchet, a tomahawk, and a vial of some sort of spirits with which she intends to blind all invaders" (59). What Julia does worry about are the soldiers in the field, especially her poor mutilated brother until he is transported to Texas. She is touched by the gesture of a Federal officer, who asks for some rosebuds to press for his wife, and a poor private whom she hears exclaim: "Here I am, so many miles from home, and not a soul that cares a damn whether I live or die, or what becomes of me" (76). The contrast is marked between the hated war, which although proving men's dispositions to evil also justifies defense of home and country, and the imbecility of daily activities in the Norton household:

> We have company every day, and often all day; I can neither read nor write. What I commit to this book is so disconnected that I have half a mind to desist. Even if we are free from company for a moment or two, Mrs. Norton fills up the time by reading aloud to us these tiresome city papers. I have a disgust of them, because they do not dare to speak of anything that interests us. I write in such confusion and so rapidly when I have an opportunity, that I often cannot read myself what has been written. I fear my little niece, Edith, for whom I wish to keep a good and interesting journal, will think her Auntie has a sorry, sorry sort of mind and style. I never could concentrate my thoughts when in a confusion, and here we have it all the time. Our room fronts on the gallery and it seems to be a thoroughfare for all parties; not one moment can we command. Dear Mrs. Norton can't comprehend how young people can wish to be alone; she is old and hates solitude. When she sits in her own room and we in ours she continually calls something out to us.
>
> (130-31)

The comparison between the grand, public scale and the petty, private one leads LeGrand to one of her most interesting analyses of intersecting categories of gender and history as the latter is first narrated and later transformed into a meta-discourse:

> . . . We are leading the lives which women have led since Troy fell; wearing away time with memories, regrets and fears; alternating fits of suppression, with flights, imaginary, to the red fields where great principles are contended for, lost and won; while men, more privileged, are abroad and astir, making name and fortune and helping to make a nation.
>
> (52)

In contrast, she complains,

> I cannot tell you what a life of suppression we lead. I feel it more because I know and feel all that is going on outside. I am like a

pent-up volcano. I wish I had a field for my energies. I hate common life, a life of visiting, dressing and tattling, which seems to devolve on women, and now that there is better work to do, real tragedy, real romance and history weaving every day, I suffer, suffer, leading the life I do.

(52-53)

To read this journal makes us aware of what it feels like to be living in someone else's fiction, and the extent to which history is a story, a narrative like others. There are no experiences that escape the mediation of cultural codes. This makes reading or interpretation not only the most significant activity in which we engage, but a continuous practice. What LeGrand admires in her spiritualist friend, Mrs. Waugh, is what Pascal called the language of the heart (146). We might say that Mrs. Waugh forces open the interpretive codes of her period: "How purely intellectual she is! How free from vanity, egotism and pedantry which *men* have pleased to associate with a learned woman" (146). This, then, in 1863, is a new reading practice that women can learn from each other. It permitted Julia to survive as a transplant from one state to another, from plantation to town, and to keep her head and her heart amidst the rhetoric of civil war.

There were languages that she would not or could not understand: although she had favored abolition, the reality of Afro-Americans charting their own existences and finding their own ways in the white culture around them was impenetrable to LeGrand as an interpreter of codes of behavior. Nothing prepared her to read this new language or to interpret the gestures of Black people around her with anything approaching sympathy or comprehension.

There is of course a worst side to all of us, more understandable in 1863 than now, although the symptoms and signs of racism continue to plague us. At her best Julia LeGrand helps us as she says to "look under the veil" (154). Her shaken "faith in civilization, learning, religion—anything good," helps us look sharply at the codes that inform our institutions of culture and power. Most importantly, she helps us revalue the political and military events that have been the substance of traditional history: "All these things and more the Tragic Muse and her sisters may gather and record in this awful year of '63—" LeGrand writes, "and here am I penning the common items which belong to a suppressed and narrow life; the pitiful details, *the painful platitudes;* the wearisome monotony incident to the everyday life of two women. Well, I have some right to make my cry go up with the general voice, more especially that I feel indeed that I 'have no language, but a cry'" (160). It is in the space between the language and the cry that she speaks to us with the most significance.□

Alice A. Parker *is Associate Professor of French at the University of Alabama. Her recent work includes essays on Ada Jack Carver and on Creole and Acadian women of Louisiana.*

Ellen Douglas

LEAVING THE COUNTRY

I ever tell you about how me and Son made up our minds to move to town? Tweet said. It begun on Christmas Eve nineteen and forty-two. By that time we was farming on shares with Mr. Lord. I tell you about that? And we made a good crop that year.

No, Cornelia said. You didn't tell me about that.

Well, I can't tell you everything at once, Tweet said. I'll get to that another day, if I can bring myself to it.

There are some things Tweet talks about openly with Cornelia and some things she speaks of guardedly or not at all. It amazed me, for example, to hear her speak so openly of Wayne Jones's outrageous behavior. How could she be sure a white woman would listen tolerantly? The answer, I think, is that she did not care. She had her requirements of herself and of an employer: She *would* speak about certain matters. If she got fired, she got fired. She'd always been able to find a job when she needed one.

On the other hand, she hasn't spoken yet of the sequence of events that led to the loss of her grandfather's farm. She passes over them: I hadn't told you about that? Well. . . . And so forth. I'm not sure it will be through her, even if she knows, that we find out what really happened. She must be angry with herself—ashamed—because she didn't succeed in keeping the land. She is vain—not of her beauty, but of her resourcefulness. And besides, she may think it would be too hard on Cornelia for her to tell this story. The implications might damage their friendship. Cornelia, after all, didn't steal her land. She may not even believe that, given the opportunity, Cornelia would steal from her, although, hmmm. . . .

But a scene pops into my mind that I think must—just because it popped into my mind at this moment—have a bearing on Tweet's reservations (not on either of the reasons I've mentioned, but on other even darker feelings). It's the day after Martin Luther King's assassination. He's dead, murdered, a bloody hole blown through his chest as he stood in innocent conversation on his motel room balcony not so many miles from the city where Cornelia and Tweet live.

Tweet has not come to work this morning, and she has not telephoned. The city is everywhere under a pall of sullen silence. Black children stay home from school. White kitchens are empty. Assembly lines grind to a halt. Garbage is not collected, chickens are not picked, trucks not loaded. Cornelia gets into her car and drives through streets where black men stand in hostile clusters on the porches of houses where radios and television sets mutter the news again and again. She is paying a bereavement call. She knows that King's portrait hangs in the place of honor over the mantelpiece in Tweet's living room.

She parks her car, gets out and walks briskly up the sidewalk toward the stoop. Next door at a window a dark and threatening face appears and disappears. Across the street three men stand silent together. One spits deliberately into the open ditch at his feet. Cornelia, however, sees none of this. She looks neither to left nor to right.

Now she and Tweet are facing each other in the half-open doorway. The face Cornelia sees might be not Tweet's but Rosa's—older, ravaged, stoic, expressionless, but still, somehow, pulsing, heavy with silence.

Cornelia doesn't think: She's not going to ask me in. She speaks. It's awful, Julia, she says. Awful. I came to tell you. . . . She puts her hand on the door knob, moves the door gently back against the pressure of Tweet's presence, steps in. I'm sorry, she says. On the wall over the mantel, King looks down at them. Tweet cannot nod. She turns away and shakes her head, as if to say, What do *you* know about it? I'm sorry, Cornelia says again. But she dares not reach out, dares not cross the two paces that separate them.

They stand, Cornelia empty-handed (she's come in such haste, she's forgotten her purse), in the middle of the tiny cluttered room, Tweet looking away, staring out the window at the blank gray peeling wall of the house next door. Cornelia looks distractedly around her at

overstuffed chairs, a sofa piled with not yet folded wash, a glass-topped coffee table littered with ashtrays, old bills, magazines, a Bible, discarded jewelry. There is a barette, a twisted rope-like circlet in a pin tray, a pair of earrings and matching necklace on top of a stack of magazines. In the chimney opening that once housed a coal grate a gas space heater glows and pulses. The room seems to Cornelia to be airless, as if the heater has sucked in all the available oxygen. The mantel above, like the coffee table, is piled with possessions—boxes of shotgun shells, three shoe boxes stacked on top of each other, strands of Mardi Gras beads, and a net bag filled with doubloons that Cornelia remembers bringing back from New Orleans. Andrew or Sarah must have . . . ? A green glass vase filled with artificial flowers, photographs of Cynthia and Charlene at various ages. Cornelia has been in Tweet's house many times, has sat and visited in this living room, but now she gasps at the stifling air, feels the walls closing in on her like the walls in "The Pit and the Pendulum." She stares at the barette on the coffee table, gleaming like a round gold target, like the bauble a hypnotist uses to subdue his subject's will, under the light from the standing lamp at the end of the sofa.

I'm sorry, she says.

And then, thinking that she may be ill if she doesn't get out into the fresh air, she stumbles out of the house.

But Tweet was talking about Christmas nineteen forty-two, about Mr. Lord, about settling up.

In those days in the South most black people (and some white) farmed on shares with white land owners; Tweet and Son were farming on quarter shares. That is, Mr. Lord furnished seed and fertilizer and credit at the commissary, and after the crop was sold, Tweet and Son got a quarter of the money, minus the commissary bill.

He's sold the crop, Tweet said. We knew that. But he always was slow to settle up. Never would until up in December. He hated to part with money. But now it's come up to the twenty-third. If anybody's going to town, buy shoes, a present for their mama, something to put on the table besides side meat and black-eyed peas, tomorrow was the last day to do it. I been getting madder and madder all week. Son would say, Now, Tweet, he always settle up. We going to get our money. He ain't never been known not to settle up.

Cornelia knows well enough what Son's house looked like, like a thousand tenant houses she's driven past all her life: tin-roofed, board and batten sided, three rooms in a row you could shoot a load of buckshot through from front door to back, a chimney between the front and middle rooms and a smaller one at the back, beds and chairs and tables crowded in, wall to wall. She knows, because Tweet has told her, that she and Son and his two daughters shared the house and that Rosa and her husband now lived next door in one exactly like it; and that both yards were crowded in spring and summer with the plants that Rosa loves and has taught Tweet, too, to cherish: ragged robins and four o'clocks and hollyhocks and sunflowers and daffodils and princess' feathers; day lilies and hydrangeas that Mrs. Lord rooted for them; zinnias and marigolds and a climbing Lady Banksia on the fence and a Paul Scarlet in the corner. And that behind the houses fig and peach and persimmon trees flourished and the vegetable garden was laid out in neat rows and fenced against the chickens.

But now it is December. The landscape is gray. Only a row of collards and one of turnips show green in the garden. Everyone is inside around the fire.

Tweet goes on with her story: I ain't going to put up with it, I says. No. No way.

You want to lose me my job? Rosa says.

She wouldn't let him fire you, I tell her. Where she's going to find a cook like you closer than Phillippi? She won't put herself out to fire you.

It won't do no good, Rosa says. Nothing going to make him hand you your money til he wants to.

Next morning comes, Tweet says. Rosa goes to work. Our house is across the road from Mr. Lord's, and I can see everything over there: see his fine brick house, the trim just painted last year, with the carport, so you don't get wet when you come home in the rain, and the barns and tractor sheds set back behind a locust wind break, so nobody has to look at them, and, a little way off to the south, the pond they keep mainly in case there's a fire the fire department can pump water out of it. On the pond, ducks swimming and four or five geese they keep just for looks, and a boat drawn up on the bank if anybody wants to go fishing.

I'm up early, standing in my front room, looking out the window, and before eight o'clock I see him come out and get in the car and drive off. Maybe he's going to town to get the money—he always pays off in cash. I wait, and along about ten-thirty here he comes back. But he doesn't stop

by the carport and ring the big bell—that would be a sign for everybody to come on up to the house, he's going to settle up.

I've waited long enough. I put on my coat and my old boots that I wear to slop the pigs and cross the road to his house and go around back and knock on the door. Naturally, since it's the kitchen, Rosa answers. She cuts her eyes at me, shakes her head. Go on home, Tweet, she says, low voicey. I look past her, see Mrs. Lord at the kitchen table rolling out cookies—they got a crowd of children and grandchildren coming in. She looks up, says, Come in, Tweet. Don't stand there letting the cold in, and I come in. I'm looking at Rosa.

I needs to see Mr. Lord, I say.

Rosa acts like she doesn't hear me, turns around, commences running water in the sink.

Rosa, would you call him? Mrs. Lord says. My hands all flour. (She's like you, Tweet said. Always polite. Likes to cook. Makes an excuse if she ax you to wait on her.)

Rosa looks at me like she's gonna cut my throat, goes on out of the kitchen, and in a minute, here he comes. Done put on his bedroom slippers. Top button of his pants unbuttoned and his little round belly poking out over his pants. Got the morning paper in his hand. I know he ain't planning to go out again no time soon. Well, Tweet, he says, Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas to you and Son. What can I do for you?

How we going to have a Merry Christmas, Mr. Lord? I say. That's what I come over here to ax you.

What's that? He's still smiling. Hitches up his pants, grinning at me like Santa Claus out of that round, rosy-cheek baby face. He's fat on Rosa's cooking, scalp shiny, like he's so rich inside, oil pops out of his head.

Mrs. Lord don't even look up. She's got her mind on the cookies, all cut out in stars and trees and Santa Clauses for the kids to decorate. She crosses between us like we ain't there, slides the tray in the oven, looking pleased with herself.

I say it again: How me and Son or anybody else going to have a merry Christmas when you ain't settle up? How we going to buy us a turkey? What we going to give one another for presents—a stick of stove wood? What we going to use for wrapping paper?

Now, Tweet, he says, you got credit at the commissary. You know that.

Ain't no turkeys at the commissary, I say. And I might want to buy my presents at Sears and Roebuck instead of the commissary.

Business complicated this year, he says. Takes a while to get everything straight.

I done run out of time, Mr. Lord, I say. I want me and Son's money.

He looks at me and shakes his head. Ain't got no money yet, he says. You can't get blood out of a turnip.

Rosa's still got the water running, like she's trying to wash us all down the drain. She turns it off, dries her hands. You hush up and go on home, Tweet, she says.

I'm standing there trembling. Seems like the air has got heavy. Like I'm inside a drum, somebody pounding on the outside until my head's about to bust.

Tweet was silent a moment. She rubbed the soft vulnerable spot behind her ear where the jawbone hinges to the skull, where an icepick will slip in without resistance and kill a man. Somebody need to kill him, she said thoughtfully. I would've done it, if I could get away with it.

Cornelia shook her head, no.

Yes, Tweet said. I'd like to've seen the blood come busting out of that fat belly after I stuck him. She raised her voice, as if to make sure Cornelia heard her. I would have stuck an ice pick in his belly, behind his ear, she said.

Julia, you don't mean that. Not really.

Tweet shrugged. Now I'm walking home, she said. It's beginning to snow. Flakes float down, melt on my face. Seems like I take big steps. I step over the road with one giant step. Far off behind me I hear Son calling. Now, Tweet, he's saying, calm down, Tweet. But I *am* calm. I'm at our house now, and I go to the kindling barrel on the porch beside the firewood, all stack neat against the wall. On the wall above the barrel, the hatchet hanging on two nails. On the window sill the file. Son keeps all his tools right—the hatchet's got a good edge. I take it down and go in the kitchen and get me a handful of chicken feed out of the sack and put it in my pocket. Then I step over the road again and I'm in the middle of the yard hollering.

Come on out, Mr. Lord, I say. Come out. I got anything to do with it, me and Son going to have us a Christmas dinner.

I see Rosa in the kitchen window. She's like she always is when people get mad. She's gone way in the back of her head, who knows what's back there, won't come out. Mrs. Lord peeping over her shoulder, sees me and that hatchet and disappears like she thinks I'm coming in after her.

Mr. Lord comes out the kitchen door, rosy

cheeks, still in his bedroom slippers, holding up his pants. He don't step down off the porch. Now, what you want, Tweet? he says.

I'm going to get me a goose for me and Son's Christmas dinner, I say. I always been partial to goose. Dark meat—but it's got a good flavor.

Goose? he says, like he ain't never heard the word.

Yeah, get me a goose. I start across the yard towards the pond. Geese and ducks see me coming, start paddling in towards the bank: Quawk, quawk!

Now, Tweet, he says, sticks his paper under his arm, commences to button his pants. You settle down, you hear, he says. Ain't no sense in this.

I don't say a word.

Tweet, he hollers, I'm going to call Son. He looks like that little Frenchman, ain't but nine days old, stuck his finger in a crawdad hole.

Don't need to call him, I holler back. Look over yonder by the barn, peeping out from behind them locust trees. He's over there, ain't he? Because I knew he had followed me. I seen him watching the whole thing. So Son, when he knows Mr. Lord sees him, he starts on across the yard towards me.

Now, Tweet, he says. You needs to come on home.

But I keep walking. Don't mess with me, Nigger. I'm going to get me this goose or know why.

He stops. All of them scared of my hatchet.

I stand there by the pond and start clucking and them fool ducks and geese come swimming up and I take the corn and scatter it. I've fed them plenty of times, they know me well enough to come up close. And when the fattest of the young ones waddles up and gets near to my feet, I reach down, grab her by the neck, squawking, flapping her wings, lay her against a stump, and Whack! she's dead before she knows what grabbed her.

I'm all over blood, and she's flapping and flopping like she's still alive, blood spouting out of her neck, head laying on the ground with the bill opening and shutting like she's still squawking. Mr. Lord has done retreated into the kitchen, looking out the door.

Now, Tweet, he says. You more than welcome to that goose. You take her on home and enjoy her, you hear me? Son (Son's standing up by the porch by now), Son, you take Tweet on home. She don't hardly know what she's saying, much less what she's doing.

But Son stays a safe way off. He knows better than to mess with me.

Tomorrow I'm coming back, I say. Get me a pig.

I didn't have nothing like that in mind, of course, Tweet said. We got pigs of our own.

But that was the end of the country for Son and me. I made up my mind we'd go to town soon as he settled up, and we went. Son was scared to go. Everybody said, ain't no work in town. Mr. Lord said, Son don't know how to do nothing but farm. You and him be back before planting time, begging for a crop. And I'm going to give it to you. Not for you, Tweet. But Son's a good worker.

Son found him a job at the Gypsum Company before January was out, and he's been working there ever since. Slack times he never gets laid off like most. It's true he still works like a nigger. They call him sometimes, two, three o'clock in the morning to take a shift, they know he'll always get up and come. He'll work in the cyclone without complaint, breathe that smoke when the trash catches fire, come home with his skin all full of gypsum splinters like a million little bitty cockleburs, I'll spend an hour helping him scrub and picking them damn splinters out with the tweezers.

She paused here, as if expecting a comment from Cornelia, but Cornelia said nothing. Like Mrs. Lord she was absorbed in the task at hand—stirring, rolling, turning, cutting out.

One of these days, they don't do right by him, they better look out, Tweet said. I'm liable to take my pocketful of corn, go down there, chop their goose's head off.□

Carol Reuss

DEAR DOROTHY DIX

When I discovered, years ago, that Dorothy Dix had lived and worked in the big duplex at 6334 Prytania Street, where Prytania meets Aubudon Park, I began a ritual. Whenever I walked or rode around the Park, I would look up at the second floor windows. I would wonder whether her muse was still in that house, whether the people who followed her there became more understanding of human nature, or were better able to respond to human needs, as a result of their living in her home. Sometimes I wondered whether they even knew that America's confidante to the world had lived and worked there.

"Dorothy Dix" was born Elizabeth Meriwether in 1861 on a horse farm or plantation in Montgomery County, Tennessee, near the Kentucky border.[1] Her family suffered privation during the Civil War, but with the help of their loyal servants, they were able to keep their land and their genteel ways. Her mother, she said, taught her to speak the truth, fear God and remember that "gentlefolk don't whine."[2] She described her early life this way:

> We were sent to school to Miss Alice's or Miss Jenny's, not because they were either trained or even qualified to teach, but because their fathers had been colonels under Beauregard, or had been killed at Shiloh, and somebody had to help the poor souls along. And so I could climb like a squirrel and ride like a jockey long before I knew a great deal about the three R's.[3]

She did learn the three R's though, especially

[1]Many articles about Elizabeth Gilmer erroneously report that she was born in 1870, and references to subsequent important dates in her life are also in error. Perhaps sometime during her life she wanted to appear to be younger than she was; perhaps other mythologists were responsible. Such erroneous information appears in *Time, Current Biography 1940,* Associated Press articles, and the 1961 edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary.*

[2]Hildegarde Dolson, "Dear Miss Dix, This Is My Problem," *Reader's Digest* Feb. 1945: 40.

[3]Hermann B. Deutsch, "Dorothy Dix Talks to Hermann B. Deutsch," *Saturday Evening Post* 10 July 1937: 62.

reading. She is said to have devoured all of the books in the classical library that her family had accumulated years before her birth, as well as books owned by neighbors, including Shakespeare, Scott, Josephus, Motley, and Gibbons, and she once said that Dickens, Fielding and Thackeray "made me distrust mushy writing" (Dolson 40).

When the family's fortunes improved, the Meriwethers moved to Clarksville, Tennessee, and the three children were able to attend more organized schools. Elizabeth was graduated from the Female Academy in Clarksville and completed one year at Hollis Institute, now Hollins College in Virginia.

Although numerous accounts quote Elizabeth as saying "at age eighteen I tucked up my hair and got married, as was the tribal custom among my people," she was twenty-one when she married George O. Gilmer, whom Hermann B. Deutch described as "a man-about-Clarksville in his late twenties, a debonair who dabbled a bit in business" (62). George, the brother of Elizabeth's stepmother, brought only temporary happiness to Elizabeth, but he might well be given credit for her becoming a professional writer.

Two years after their marriage George began to show signs of serious mental problems. While his condition sometimes improved enough for him to work—he was an inventor—and to be with Elizabeth, eventually he had to be institutionalized. She nursed and supported him for almost fifty years.

The pressure on Elizabeth during and after George's first breakdown was immense. Women of those days were not expected to be breadwinners; they were not trained or otherwise prepared for out-of-the-home occupations. Elizabeth's own health deteriorated as she faced the reality of the situation, and in the early 1890s, her family took her to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to recuperate. There, as her health improved, she began to write short stories to while away the time and distract her from her problems. She later said that her first short story was mostly adjectives but the fifth one had nouns and a plot.

By chance, her neighbor at Bay St. Louis was Eliza Holbrook Nicholson, the owner and publisher of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*, who wrote poetry under the name "Pearl Rivers." At some point Elizabeth told Eliza Nicholson that she was interested in writing and Eliza graciously agreed to read some of her stories. The publisher-poet especially liked one, "How Chloe Saved the Silver," a story based on the true account of how Meriwether servants buried the family silver to protect it during the Civil War. Nicholson gave Elizabeth three dollars for the short story, which was published in the *Picayune*, and a job on the paper.

There were very few women on newspaper staffs in 1894 when Elizabeth Gilmer, then thirty-three, started as "Girl Friday" for *Picayune* editor Major Nathaniel Burbank for the grand salary of five dollars a week. In fact, there were very few women in any salaried jobs. She said that her family "raised only mild and formal objection" when she told them she wanted to begin earning her living in New Orleans (Deutsch 62). Little did any of them realize then that half a century later Elizabeth would be perhaps the most widely known woman of her generation—but that's getting ahead of the story.

Elizabeth lived in a rented room on Camp Street when she worked for the *Picayune*, and sometimes George was with her in the cramped space. But living accommodations came second to getting established professionally. Gilmer learned newspaper reporting and editing by completing even the most elementary assignments accurately and efficiently and by studying newsgathering and writing at the office and in her room after working hours. She later recalled:

> I had a passion for newspaper work and I set about learning my trade with the zeal of a fanatic. I studied the backs off books of synonyms, and word books, and dictionaries. I memorized editorials that I liked. I followed big stories in every part of the country to see which paper played them up best. I dissected the work of the leading paragraphists to find what made them snappy.[4]

At first she gathered vital statistics and wrote obituaries and short news items at the *Picayune*. She learned the trade well. Within three years she was also writing a theater column and editing the women's page, which included the column that was to establish her place in history and make her rich.

In 1895, at Major Burbank's suggestion, Elizabeth began writing a weekly column called

[4]From Gilmer's autobiography, *Dorothy Dix, Her Book: Everyday Help for Everyday People* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1926) as quoted in her "Obituary," *Times-Picayune* 17 Dec. 1951: 1.

"Sunday Salad"—in addition to her other assignments, of course. Alliterative pen names were popular in those days, often "for gentlewomen concealing their real names from the stigma of the sordid newspaper world," and Elizabeth decided to use the name "Dorothy Dix" for the column.[5] Within months the column was renamed "Dorothy Dix Talks," destined to become the world's longest-running newspaper feature, just as Elizabeth Gilmer was destined to live the rest of her professional life as Dorothy Dix.

Dorothy Dix was soon noticed by publishers outside of New Orleans, and she sometimes found time to do some freelancing for them, but she stayed with the *Picayune* because she said her loyalty to Major Burbank was more important to her than a bigger job. Only when Burbank died did she accept an offer from William Randolph Hearst and move to New York. Until this time, Elizabeth had not travelled much, and never out of the South. Imagine her surprise when she got to the bustling New York *Journal* office in 1901 and was assigned almost immediately to cover a murder trial in New Jersey. The assignment, and many others that followed for the *Journal* and the Hearst syndicate, was in addition to her "Dorothy Dix Talks" columns, which were scheduled for three times that week and every week that she stayed with the Hearst paper—for the next sixteen years.

Dorothy Dix became a well-known reporter for the Hearst chain. She could synthesize situations, she could interview effectively, she could write clearly and dramatically. She became a fixture at murder trials that involved women and, with three other top women reporters of the Roaring Twenties—Ada Patterson, Nixola Greeley-Smith, and Winifred Black (who wrote under the name of Annie Laurie)—became one of the original "Sob Sisters." As Ishbel Ross reports, during the trial of Harry K. Thaw, a playboy accused of killing architect Sanford White after a quarrel with Evelyn Nesbit Thaw, "a cynical colleague, looking a little wearily at four fine-looking *girls* [emphasis added] who spread sympathy like jam, injected a scornful line into his copy about the "sob sisters."[6] In time the phrase "became the hallmark of the girl [woman] reporter and only recently has worn thin from such abuse," wrote Ross in 1936 (65).

By 1917 Elizabeth was tired of the New York pace, especially the murder trials. She accepted an offer from the Wheeler syndicate (later the Ledger syndicate) to concentrate on the Dorothy Dix columns, and she moved back to New Orleans. Her schedule for the next thirty years would be six Dorothy Dix columns a week, usually three "Talks" and three based on readers' letters. Only once after she left the *Journal* did Gilmer ever return to the murder beat. In 1926, as a special favor to her syndicate, she agreed to head back to New Jersey to cover the Hall-Mills murder trial. She was in her mid-sixties and a decade away from the daily newspaper grind, but she and her public found that she had not lost her reporter's touch.

The public liked Dorothy Dix's columns from the beginning and responded with enthusiasm. By the late 1930s she was getting as many as a thousand letters a week from men and women of all ages, educational backgrounds and social levels, asking about life, health, wealth, beauty, religion, etiquette—you name it. "People tell me things," she often said, "that you would think they wouldn't tell to God" ("Obituary" 1). She used what her readers wrote, however, as the basis of "Talks" columns (she often called them sermonettes) and, of course, the "Letters" column.

The volume of her mail necessitated a system for handling correspondence. Secretaries helped her sort and respond to mail. Every letter that was signed and carried an actual return address was answered either in the column or in an individually mailed reply. Form letters were used for routine questions, those asked over and over by the men and women who wrote to Dorothy Dix, but individually drafted letters were dictated and sent when a form letter wouldn't suffice. She destroyed all the letters she received because she was conscious of protecting the names and confidences her readers entrusted to her. She answered thousands of letters personally until 1949 when, nearing ninety, her health forced her to quit.

Elizabeth Gilmer said that she pondered for a long time how she would approach her column:

> [T]hen it came to me that everything in the world had been written about women for women, except the truth. . . . They had been celebrated as angels. They had been pitied as martyrs. They had been advised to be human

[5]Madelon Golden Schilpp and Sharon M. Murphy, *Great Women of the Press* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1983) 115.

[6]Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press* (New York: Harper, 1936) 65.

> doormats. I knew that women knew that they were not angels, and that they were tired of being martyrs and doormats. They were fed up on fulsome flattery and weary of suffering and being strong.
>
> ("Obituary" 1)

Gilmer's early columns blasted the theory that tears are a woman's chief weapons. Men found tears merely "damp and tiresome," she wrote. She urged wives to have outside interests and warned them against "expecting husbands to act like heroes in absurd novels" ("Obituary" 1).

Although she had grown up during the Victorian era, apparently she had failed to absorb its affectations. Her philosophy of life remained very un-Victorian throughout her long career. It is difficult to decide, however, whether Gilmer was in the vanguard of those proposing post-Victorian manners and attitudes or whether she simply rode the tides of change. Whatever the case, her access to the public through newspapers across the country made her very influential. Moreover, her writing was always direct and easy to read. She used everyday words, including slang if she thought it helped her reach her readers.

Gilmer also used her own life experiences, including her unfortunate marriage and her "Sob Sister" reporting experiences, to help readers approach and solve problems. In her autobiography, she explained:

> I have seen women in their moments of triumph and in their hours of despair; and there is no joy or sorrow that can tear at the human heart that I do not know.
>
> All of this has given me a knowledge and understanding of human nature that no young girl or woman who had just a home life could have. . . .
>
> (*Dorothy Dix* 15)

Time magazine marked the fortieth anniversary of the Dorothy Dix columns in 1936 by noting her "firm practicality" and crediting her column for its "hardheaded, domestic common sense." It said:

> With frilly feminism she has no truck. "Millions of women make themselves miserable because their husbands never make love to them," she has said. "Those suffering sisters could save themselves nearly all their woe if they would just throw their rosy dreams of how a husband should treat a wife into the discard. . . . A man marries to end romance."[7]

In 1939 *Time* reviewed her book, *How to Win and Hold a Husband*. Its reviewer called her work "distilled love-lore for the pathetic public that sends her more than 500 letters daily," but said Elizabeth Gilmer had "the kindly solicitude of a slightly prurient older sister and the hard-boiled realism that would do credit to a brothel-keeper." The review included a quotation from the book, exemplifying just how Elizabeth Gilmer's writing style and philosophy remained terse and down-to-earth: "The wise girl keeps a wary eye out to note how a man reacts to the money proposition before she says 'Yes' to a marriage proposal. . . ."[8]

The book was popular when it was published, and it was republished in 1974.[9] [Recently, while doing research for his paper at a major research library, your author had to wait for the book because it was out and, soon after getting it, had to return it earlier than expected because someone else wanted it.] The following quotations from the book further demonstrate Dorothy Dix's direct writing style and common-sense approach to life:

> . . . if you think that the first thing you will do after you marry him is going to be on the reformation side, you don't really love him. There is no truer test of love than to love the faults of a dear one, and to think of them tenderly as being just amusing traits of individuality just because they are his.
>
> . . . marriage is more bills than thrills. . . .
>
> . . . marriage is no picnic, and that for any two people to live together in reasonable peace requires courage, and grit, and self-abnegation, and humor, and philosophy and the good sense to put romantic visions behind them and make the best of realities.
>
> Marriage in the future is going to be more like investing your all in gilt-edged bonds and less like buying a lottery ticket, as it has been

[7]"Decades of Dix," *Time* 20 Apr. 1936: 68.

[8]"Did I Do Wrong?" *Time* 14 Aug. 1939: 66-67.

[9]Dorothy Dix, *How to Win and Hold a Husband* (1939; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1974).

in the past.

(12, 17, 128, 204)

In 1946 *Time* called Dorothy Dix's advice "sympathetic, but not syrupy."[10] And Harnett Kane, author of the most thorough account of Elizabeth Gilmer's life, recounted that Dorothy Dix once wrote that curlpapers for young wives at breakfast were worse than tobacco-steeped velveteen jackets for men.[11] The instruction could apply today with little change.

In 1926, Elizabeth Gilmer told a *Literary Digest* writer that her readers were asking the same questions and had the same problems as they did thirty years earlier, but there were some differences:

> . . . the girls are much more candid nowadays. When I first received those letters, I had to read between the lines. Now my correspondents take care to leave nothing to the imagination.
>
> In the old days the boys used to write telling me they wanted to know how to win a girl. The girls were more coy about it, but they wrote me long letters asking me how they might become worthy of a man's love.
>
> To-day the girls come right out and ask what is the best line to use to catch a husband, and the boys write wanting to know how to dodge the husband-hunting girls. But fundamentally they are just like their parents and grandparents. You know Talleyrand wrote: "There are many histories, but only one human nature." Outward conditions and social conditions have altered and so have slightly changed the attitude of the sexes toward each other, but the underlying tone is the same.
>
> The subject of disagreeable in-laws is just as prominent now as it ever was. Also the man complaining about his nagging wife and the wife who seeks advice in regard to her grouchy husband are always with us. For the grouchy husband and the nagging wife first appeared in the Garden of Eden.[12]

Economic conditions were responsible for many changes, she admitted:

> Thirty years ago there were very few jobs open to women. I received only despairing wails from unhappy wives—they sought sympathy, but saw no outlet. They seldom asked about divorce. Now that is the first question.
>
> (38)

Many times during her career, Elizabeth Gilmer said she could understand divorce, but she said it was not her way to solve her own problems with George Gilmer. Reflecting on her situation, she noted that she immersed herself in her work, and she felt that she would not be fit to give advice to others unless she could live that advice herself. "I could not say to others: 'Be strong!' if I did not myself have the strength to endure" (Deutsch 62).

Dorothy Dix got letters from men as well as from women. "Men are as interested in having happy homes as women are . . . they really need more advice than women do about handling the opposite sex" ("Obituary" 1).

Elizabeth Gilmer somehow managed to control the rights to her column throughout its long course. Over the years she took pride in always writing the copy herself, in never missing a deadline, in always having a three-month supply (which she regularly updated) stored in a safety-deposit box in case something would happen to her. But Mrs. Stanley Arthur, her long-time confidential secretary, is quoted in Elizabeth Gilmer's obituary as saying that Dorothy Dix "wrote the column until about April, 1949, and since that time it had been continued by others, under her name" (1). The columnist's will stipulated that the name not be used after her death, which was 16 December 1951.

In addition to Elizabeth Gilmer's obituary on Page One of the *Times-Picayune*, she rated an editorial in the same issue, as might be expected. An Associated Press account of her life and death were also on the front page of the New York *Times* and many other newspapers. The New Orleans account summarized her philosophy of life:

> Mrs. Gilmer gave short shrift to the marriage of immature boys and girls, of persons with dissimilar tastes and temperaments, and of couples whose attraction "was founded on nothing but sex and drink."
>
> She was as vehement against hasty divorce

[10]"Dear Miss Dix," *Time* 22 Apr. 1946: 71.

[11]Harnett T. Kane with Ella Bently Arthur, *Dear Dorothy Dix* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1952) 134.

[12]"The 'Invisible Referee' of the Matrimonial Ring," *Literary Digest* 25 Dec. 1926: 38.

as against hasty marriage, declaring that divorce could "not undo the past or guarantee the future."

She advised widows and widowers to remarry if they found companionable mates within their own age groups, believing that human happiness was more important than romantic fidelity to a dead spouse. But infidelity to a living spouse she could not condone.

Mothers-in-law were warned to keep hands off—that it was the "law of God" for children to marry and leave home.

Parents, she reiterated, should realize that customs changed since their own youth and "talk as friends" to children—teaching them obedience and politeness. "Good manners are a better thing to leave one's children than a fortune," she declared.

("Obituary" 1)

Gilmer's way of sharing that philosophy with others was to write very ordinary newspaper columns. Her platform was not a classroom or pulpit or works of fiction, but almost three hundred newspapers around the world, reaching approximately sixty million men and women every day.

Did Dorothy Dix really influence readers? One index of her popularity with readers is the thousands of letters she received from them. Another might be her salary. By the 1920s, Elizabeth Gilmer was one of the highest paid women in the country, if not *the* highest paid. Her income in the 1930s was estimated to be at least $80,000 a year—and the average income in the U. S. at the time was less than $1500 a year.

But less tangible indicators are perhaps more suggestive. In their famous study, sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd noted that the columnist was well-known to the people of Middletown (really Muncie, Indiana). She was, they wrote, "perhaps the most potent single agency of diffusion" from outside the town.[13] She clearly shaped the habits of thought of Middletown in regard to marriage.

> 'Women,' as Dorothy Dix [writer of an advice column in Middletown's newspaper] says, 'make the family social status. . . . The old idea used to be that the way for a woman to help her husband was by being thrifty and industrious, by . . . peeling the potatoes a little thinner, and . . . making over her old hats and frocks . . . . But the woman who makes of herself nothing but a domestic drudge . . . is not a help to her husband. She is a hindrance . . . . The woman who cultivates a circle of worthwhile people, who belongs to clubs, who makes herself interesting and agreeable . . . is a help to her husband.'
>
> (430)

But, the Lynds warned, there was also evidence of differences among various social classes in Middletown:

> In a world dominated by credit this social function of the wife becomes, among the business group, more subtle and important; the emphasis upon it shades down as we descend in the social scale until among the rank and file of the working class the traditional ability to be a good cook and housekeeper ranks first.
>
> (430)

New Orleans honored Elizabeth Gilmer in 1928 with a Dorothy Dix Day. During the festivities Dr. Brandt V. B. Dixon, president emeritus of Newcomb College, said a reason for Dorothy Dix's phenomenal popularity was that "in her solutions of problems she always appealed to the self-respect of her questioner, reminding them that within themselves were the only judges from whose decisions there could be no appeal" ("Obituary" 1).

Ernie Pyle, a reporter who became famous as a war correspondent who wrote about and for everyday people, interviewed Elizabeth Gilmer in New Orleans and reported "she's the kind they speak of around the editorial rooms as 'a damn good newspaperman.'"[14] While Pyle didn't spend words explaining his accolade, Elizabeth Gilmer's long career as a writer amply demonstrated that she was sensitive, concerned, industrious, methodical, careful. She could report, she could write, she could relate to readers, she could meet deadlines. She respected people and, in turn, was respected by millions of men and women who turned to her for advice.

[13]Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown, 1929* (1929) rpt. in David J. Rothman and Sheila M. Rothman, eds., *Sources of the American Social Tradition* (New York: Basic Books, 1975) 430.

[14]Quoted by Stella Pitts, "She Was Read by Millions, Her Byline Was 'Dorothy Dix,'" *Times-Picayune* 21 March 1976.

She took care to protect the confidentiality of her sources and to guard the reputation of her name and her column. Those are all the attributes of good journalists. The fact that she used her skills professionally for half a century, that her column was popular and attracted correspondence from millions of readers during most of those years, that even serious sociological research noted her impact on people, all add to our recollection of her as a woman writer of significance and worth. Her incisive, practical language and her efficient work habits remain models for imitation and admiration.

The next time you wander through Audubon Park, pause there where Prytania Street meets it and look up to the second floor at Number 6334. Maybe the muse of America's confidante to the world is still there. Maybe she will inspire you, too.□

Carol Reuss *is a Professor in the School of Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also serves as Contributing Editor of* Journalism History.

Elizabeth Meese

WHAT THE OLD ONES KNOW: ADA JACK CARVER'S CANE RIVER STORIES

In the 1920s, Ada Jack Carver (1890-1972) won some of this country's most prestigious literary awards: the O. Henry Memorial Award (several times), *Harper's* Prize and others. Carver's fiction, set in Louisiana's Cane River country, explores the spaces between such conflicting forces as culture (Creole, Black, mulatto, redbone), generation (grandmothers and grandchildren), and values (tradition and materialism). As the pieces in *The Collected Works of Ada Jack Carver* demonstrate, "fiction" composes a field within which the powerful human struggles of identity and meaning are elaborated.[1]

Carver was born and raised in Natchitoches in an upper middle-class family. She attended Louisiana State Normal School and Judson College, and in 1918 married John B. Snell, who was on the faculty of Normal College. A son was born a year later, and in 1920 they moved to Minden. Her first son died tragically (he fell in a tub of scalding water) only two days before the birth of her second child in 1921.

Carver began writing in 1908. The stories of this early period—"The Ring," "The Story of Angele Glynn," "A Pink Inheritance," and "The Joyous Coast"—are conventional pieces which focus on trite concerns of the white middle and upper classes: how to send a husband to his Civil War regiment's reunion, female ghosts and party dresses. Her characters, moved by "the irresistible rhythm of Dixie," are victims of and, as such, are unquestioning victimizers according to white Southern culture's historic biases of race, sex and class (*Collected Works* 23). The stories are

[1]*The Collected Works of Ada Jack Carver*, ed. Mary Dell Fletcher (Natchitoches, La.: Northwestern Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1980).

tidy; everything is accounted for as human and narrative problems are predictably resolved.

Of more enduring interest are Carver's stories of the 1920s. These works are set in the agrarian, traditional culture of Cane River (the Isle Brevelle area) which Carver preferred to the more predictable and confining urbanized culture of Minden. For example, in a letter to Cammie Henry in 1925, she wrote: "I have been so busy since my return [to Minden from Melrose Plantation]—and have been with my friends a lot. There are some darling people here and they are so good to me. But they know only half of me! Or rather they don't know the real me at all,—and my *self*—my soul—sort of gets lost up here some times. It's really very difficult for me to write in my present environment and I'm trying to start my house in the woods." Isle Brevelle, an area once owned and developed by free people of color, was also the site of Melrose Plantation until the twentieth century when it fell to white ownership, specifically to Cammie Henry, who ran the place as an artists' colony which Carver frequented.

Isle Brevelle was the locus of racial, cultural and geographical differences. Its curiosity to the Southerner, respecter of categorical boundaries, quantifier of blood, enumerator of geneology, rested in ambiguity, the transgressions of the conventional, which characterized its inhabitants who were African, French, Spanish, Indian, and Anglo-Scots-Irish. The psychic landscape of ethnicity was as curious as the rich, mysterious topography of the swamps, rivers and bayous. As Oliver Jackson Ford notes in his unpublished dissertation, "Ada Jack Carver: A Critical Biography," "By writing about 'Redbones,' mulattoes, and Blacks, Ada Jack could avoid any allegations regarding her own propriety, for such characters would be considered curious, amusing, and exotic by the more privileged whites."[2] Similar speculation has been offered concerning other white Southern women like Julia Peterkin (South Carolina Pulitzer Prize winner—*Scarlet Sister Mary*): that they purchased a certain freedom by writing outside their own race and class. What this freedom is, how it functions artistically, and what its limits are, present some of the most interesting questions concerning white American women writers in the early twentieth century.

[2]Oliver Jackson Ford, "Ada Jack Carver: A Critical Biography" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Connecticut, 1975) 120.

What appears to fascinate Carver the most is "the something unaccounted for" in the quantification of blood and the specification of racial and cultural origins: an excess of some kind that manages to escape inherited stereotypes. The what-is-left-over and perhaps even the what-cannot-be-said provide the fulcrum for her most successful stories. The notion first appears in "Redbone," a prize-winning story published in *Harper's* in 1925. This story of the redbone planter Baptiste Grabbo is set in the Côte Joyeuse area, and opens with the following description:

> And here among the whites and blacks there dwell in ecstatic squalor a people whom, in the intricate social system of the South, strangers find it difficult to place. For although they may be bartered with, jested with, enjoyed, despised, made friends and enemies of—yet in the eyes of those born to subtle distinctions they are forever beyond the pale.
>
> (62)

Because they do not represent "pure" categories, they defy "subtle distinctions"; they are themselves subtle, somehow obscure and difficult for the white writer to "read." Carver resorts to stereotypes, the way she has learned to identify the "Other":

> They are a mixture of Spanish, French, and Indian, and God only knows what besides; and along the Côte Joyeuse, a region given to phrase and to fable, they are dubbed 'redbones' because of their dusky skins so oddly transparently tinted. They are shiftless and slovenly, childlike and treacherous; and yet from somewhere, like a benediction, they have been touched with something precious.
>
> (62)

The story relates Baptiste's celebration of his son's birth in terms dictated by a "creed" that Carver describes as "past understanding":

> things vaguely heard and remembered; things felt and but dimly divined; superstitions drilled into him by the wrinkled crones of his race. His religion is compounded of Catholic altars where candles burn through the thick dim smoke from the swinging incense bowls; of

> pinewoods tremulous like a sounding organ; of forest fires and thunders and winds; of fetishes against the powers of darkness; of a moon that comes up red from the swamp; of a wilful river that doles out life and death.
>
> (65)

Thus, the ways of nature, the rituals of Catholicism, Black and Indian culture, assume similarly exotic properties in a story about the unspecifiable difference of otherness.

The reader watches the exoticism of "the something unaccounted for" being played out. It provides a way of understanding Baptiste's choice of carved tombstones as a birth present to his wife Chlorinda. The inappropriate gift becomes the ironically appropriate occasion for the fiction as Baptiste murders and buries Olaf, the hired man whom he discovers in an adulterous relationship with his wife. Even this event is not fully accounted for, as the stereotypes of racial identity exhaust their capacity to specify:

> The Indian in Baptiste performed the deed with neatness and despatch, so that Olaf for an instant knew only a face before him—high cheek bones, thin straight lips, and comic eyes that were sad. The Spanish in Baptiste dug the grave and the French tossed a rose upon it. But the something unaccounted for that made him what he was sent him dragging back to the house, his face the color of leaves.
>
> (79)

The "unaccounted for" is the mark of Baptiste's humanity, beyond the stereotype of identity. The tombstone guards the fiction's concluding revelation—the mysterious bones discovered many years later, after the death of Baptiste, as the gravediggers prepare to bury Chlorinda next to her husband.

Through the "something unaccounted for" Carver explores with increasing complexity the mysteries of identity. Her approach is exemplified in "Treeshy," which was published in *Harper's* in 1926, won an O. Henry Memorial Prize and was selected for O'Brien's *Best Short Stories* that year. The story begins with a mysterious young painter from Gascony who is called Prometheus, his real name forgotten. The young man is befriended by the narrator's grandfather who offers him a bed for the night. He disappears just as mysteriously as he appeared, leaving an unruffled bed and a note of gratitude, claiming to have given the town a gift. The first part of the story ends with the double mystery of the identity of the young man ("'Perhaps . . . he was just one of those fawns or gods or something out of mythology'") and the gift ("What had the young stranger left?") (86).

The rest of the story concerns Treeshy, a light-fingered seamstress who never uses the things she takes (silk stockings, though she has a wooden leg). The painter's gift slowly becomes apparent through the progression of items Treeshy steals. She is both familiar (she sews for everyone) and mysterious: "there was actually something sort of Dutch about old Treeshy. . . . But then there was about her something Irish too, and something Spanish and French. She was, in a town largely Spanish and French, of every land and clime and yet of none. She was engagingly and disconcertingly herself" (89). In spite of her peculiar behavior, Treeshy possessed "great poise and tremendous *savoir faire*," "a puzzling surety" "as if she knew things beyond the common ken" (89). Of course she has a secret knowledge and motive which none of the others recognize. In her capacity as savant one night near Christmas she explains to the outcasts in her abandoned refuge of a house: "They's *this* that I know regardin' the Virgin . . . she knowed things she couldn't talk on. It says: 'and them things she hid in her heart'" (91). Only when Treeshy is dying are the mysteries revealed: she stole to support her illegitimate daughter, now a famous young violinist, the young artist's gift to the town, and the secret Treeshy kept hidden in her heart.

Age in Carver's stories serves as a vehicle for wisdom and values. It is most evident in two of her best stories, "The Old One" (*Harper's* 1926) and "The Raspberry Dress" (*Century Magazine* 1926). "The Old One" concerns Nicolette, her grandson Balthazar, and his new wife Rose—free mulattoes of French descent living on Isle Brevelle. Rose is an outsider, French but "not a native of Isle Brevelle . . . not even a Catholic—a common girl, with no raising" from a town in northern Louisiana (120). The story revolves around the issue of dominance, space in the house and ownership of possessions, focusing on Nicolette's old bed, where she and her children were born, where her husband died and she too will die. At first the bed—a "tacky old thing"—embarrasses Rose until she learns of its value to

white antique hunters from Natchitoches (120). Despite Nicolette's refusal to sell, Rose promises it to the visitors, hoping to purchase a car. Similar to Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," the story turns on the transformation of traditional culture with its emphasis on use value to the urban economy of surplus value.

The contest of wills creates the fiction. Rose pretends to be pregnant, and as a counter-trick, Nicolette feigns illness and takes to her bed as a way of preventing Rose from selling it. Each perceives the other's dissimulation. In a final ironic turn, Granny dies in her bed, but the bed is sold to Poleon, the store owner, to pay for her funeral. Carver affirms the values of traditional culture and indicts the economy of the urban middle class (the white treasure hunters), as well as the youthful outsiders like Rose.

"The Raspberry Dress," one of O'Brien's best for 1927, tells another story of intergenerational relationships between a grandmother, Eugénie Laston, and her favorite granddaughter, Aline. Eugénie, nearly sixty, has worn black mourning clothes, which she despises, for almost twenty years. She hoards her money in the hope of fulfilling her dream: to recapture the joys of her more youthful days in New Orleans, captured in her memory of being painted in a red pigeon-throat silk dress. Now she lives with her two daughters and their families on a two-story steamboat house. Her daughters spend most of their time making grey, look-alike dresses for their ten growing girls. Eugénie, however, sees herself in the young Aline, who, rebellious and lovestruck, wants a dress of another color.

Having received a letter from an old New Orleans friend, Eugénie plans her trip, a reunion with the artist and old times. In her black widow's clothes, she goes into town and purchases a raspberry silk dress and a red fan. As her departure draws near, Eugénie perceives Aline's unhappiness. A young boy whom she loves is captivated by a town girl with a pink ruffled dress. Rather than attempting to repeat her own youthful experience, Eugénie gives Aline the raspberry dress, recapturing her past through her granddaughter, who "was her very image, herself grown young again" (146).

Like its inhabitants, Isle Brevelle cannot prevent change. Cars and technicolor movies bring different images. As Balthazar explains to Rose, "'A old un, they is made different'" (129). Earlier generations of French mulattoes, according to Carver's narrator, "had guarded the blood in their veins. Ignored by whites, ignoring and scorning the blacks, they had kept themselves to themselves" (148). One unquestioned point is obvious, however: certain essential transgressions of racial lines had taken place at one time or another.

Carver's stories are simply and carefully crafted, but because of her limitations in engaging the complex issues of race and class relationships, they play in a small register. It is curious to consider, as all of her critics do, why she wrote so little after her remarkable success of the 1920s. Following this decade, she wrote and produced *The Clock Strikes Tomorrow* (a children's play) in 1935, and a story, "For Suellen with Love" (*Centenary Review* 1949). There are a number of reasonable ways of accounting for her silence: 1) She exhausted the range of her limited familiarity with the people who were the subjects of her best fiction; 2) Isle Brevelle changed gradually but markedly, requiring a story that Carver was not able to tell; 3) her regenerative and productive trips to Melrose Plantation where she could live in the company of artists were too infrequent an antidote to the domestic and social claims of Minden; and/or 4) her increasing respect for these "other" people narrowed the gap between them and herself, accentuating the differences she already felt between herself and other Minden matrons.

Without question, Carver took her several roles seriously. In her letters she worries about the performance of her duties as a wife, wanting her husband to perceive her as having common sense (which he never did). She sought as well to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother, worrying about her duties to her son. Carver was plagued in later years with bad health—debilitating attacks of asthma, headaches, "nerves." In an undated letter to Cammie Henry, she wrote, "But for your beautiful, serene understanding, (and that of John, my mother, and Lyle [Saxon]—and perhaps a few others) I should have despaired long 'ere this, and either blown out my brains or settled down as one of the 'popular young matrons' of Minden, going happily to clubs and playing bridge! etc.": The *on ne sait quoi* of identity characterized as well Carver's struggle as a Southern woman with the conflicting demands of life and art, family and personal desire.[3] I will

[3]Carver's papers are in the Melrose collection, Eugene P. Watson Library, Northwestern State Library, Natchitoches, LA.

let her conclude in her own words, again from a 1931 letter to Cammie Henry in which Carver summarizes all too familiar circumstances:

> "I have just finished *A Room of One's Own*. You remember I told you I would order it! How I wish I had written it. I could have, I think—Oh, for that five hundred pounds a year, and that room of one's own. And Oh that one's mind could be truly 'incandescent' and free of hatred and grievances, bitterness, anger—so that one could write calmly. . . . However, as far as that goes, I feel strangely calm and clear and at peace with the world. I *ought* to write. . . ."□

Elizabeth A. Meese *is Professor of English and Adjunct Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Alabama. She has published widely in American literature and in women's studies, including a recent book on feminist criticism and feminist theory,* Crossing the Double-Cross: The Practice of Feminist Criticism *(1986).*

Dorothy H. Brown

A NOTE ON "BIBLIOGRAPHY: LOUISIANA WOMEN WRITERS"

A growing number of anthologies of fiction and poetry by Louisiana authors attest to the increased interest in looking at writers within the matrix of setting. For many years the most noted of the state's authors, male and female, have been the subjects for critics of Southern literature such as Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Cleanth Brooks, Lewis P. Simpson, and others, and limited genre bibliographies have appeared in *Louisiana History* and other journals. However, although recent publications by other Southern states attempt to provide general bibliographies of creative literature in those states, no work of similar scope has been published in Louisiana since 1935 and would be welcome. Of even more urgency, however, is that up to this time no one has published a comprehensive bibliography devoted exclusively to Louisiana women writers of poetry, fiction and drama.

Increased awareness today of the many roles that women have played in our history should make it clear that recognition of women writers is long overdue. And, if we are to better understand our cultural and intellectual heritage as well as other facets of our society, it is imperative that knowledge of these writers not be lost. As the list of published writers happily continues to grow, the risk of overlooking or forgetting the pioneers becomes more pronounced. By restoring early writers to public consciousness and by reclaiming Louisiana writers as our own (while surely not denying their broader literary reputations and influence), we can establish a new and significant identity.

Despite attracting little attention from literary historians, an important literary legacy exists in the writings of Louisiana women from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, we know, women authors of the state are being published in every literary genre. They are poets, novelists, playwrights; they write short stories, children's books, mysteries, romances, science fiction, and so on. It may come as a surprise to some, but almost from the earliest times in the state, women have written many types of literature, not just memoirs and diaries.

Whether from today or from the past, a record of writings by Louisiana women should be established either because of inherent literary value or as cultural and social history not available through other sources. Such a record will retain those writers already well known, but will also help to recover both little known writers and those accepted and popular writers of past eras who have been "lost" because of passing modes of criticism. The focus on women alone, it is hoped, will be of concrete assistance and inspiration to future researchers in women's studies and other disciplines.

We believe a bibliography of Louisiana women writers will be of aid to scholars and to general readers. The completed work will be unique in culling from myriad sources a wealth of information attesting to the creativity of women native to or resident in Louisiana over a period of over one-hundred and fifty years.

Although women in the state have written in French, Spanish or other languages, this study attempts only to record those works written in English. Also, despite the many scholarly publications of Louisiana women writers, the bibliography is confined chiefly to authors of poetry, fiction and drama (some of whom may also claim non-fiction works in their canons). Usually a volume of poetry has served as an indicator for inclusion, as do published novels, short stories and plays. In some rare instances writers have been listed in the complete bibliography who have a verifiable body of work (stories and poems) published by newspapers, journals or magazines.

Listings of major works by all writers are as complete as possible. However, secondary sources have been limited to several entries, although with writers such as Lillian Hellman the list could be almost endless.

The most formidable single aspect of compiling the bibliography has been to establish biographical data for each writer. Misleading inferences of Louisiana affiliations through subject matter, titles or other facets of works have been checked, resulting in elimination of some

entries found in earlier listings. For the names remaining, information has varied tremendously, being especially scarce or unreliable for certain nineteenth-century authors. Such works as May W. Mount's *Some Notables of New Orleans* (1896), with its descriptive and biographical sketches, and Mary T. Tardy's *The Living Female Writers of the South* (1872), arranged by states, have been gratefully read, as has Frances Willard's *A Woman of the Century* (1893). These are valuable sources for the researcher, due in no small part to the serious consideration of women's work as writers.

The focus on Louisiana authors was pioneered in a sense by *The Literature of the Louisiana Territory* by Alexander N. De Menil, published in 1904. In De Menil's study, biographical/critical introductions precede one or two selections from the author's works. For lesser known writers, a summary of the state's literary history includes brief notes and titles of works by many authors. In the same year, Thomas P. Thompson of New Orleans published a short bibliography, *Louisiana Writers, Native and Resident.*

The style adopted by De Menil was the same followed in a more comprehensive work, the fifteen volume *Library of Southern Literature,* edited by Lucian L. Knight, in which Louisiana is represented in fiction, poetry and essays. A *Biographical Dictionary* followed this series in 1929, with citations for additional writers.

Albert George Alexander recorded a list of 193 writers in his M.A. thesis in 1931, *Louisiana Writers 1875-1900.* Among these were 131 men and 62 women writers. Of the women, 40 wrote in English, 21 in French, one in both languages.

A significant contribution to the study of Louisiana literature was the publication by LSU Press in 1935 of *A Bibliography of Fiction by Louisianians and on Louisiana Subjects* by Lizzie Carter McVoy and Ruth Bates Campbell. Works included are those published in English up to that date, and many entries are annotated. Louisiana authors, when known, are indicated, but no biographical information is provided. Later published by McVoy and Campbell was a compilation of short stories by authors represented in the bibliography along with brief biographical notes.

Even at the time of the McVoy work, many titles were out of print. In this and in other sources, authors are frequently indicated by initials, *noms de plume* or maiden names, leading to difficulty in complete identification. Rarely is the chatty information about an author found on a book jacket to entice buyers also placed within the volume itself where it could be of permanent interest to readers and researchers. Therefore, even if the book is available, the writer may remain a mystery regardless of efforts to "find" the author in the work itself.

The method of search for works and authors has included the use of earlier bibliographies, literary histories, indexes, directories, church and parish records, newspapers, and many other sources. Where possible, individual works have been examined and read. Literary reputations have been noted from contemporary criticism in publications such as *Harper's, Scribner's, Lippincott's, The Century, Appleton's,* and *The Atlantic Monthly* for writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For writers of modern times, this does not pose a comparable problem with the many book review sources and scholarly publications available, plus lists of sales. A fine work on past and modern writers is Barbara White's *American Women Writers: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism* (1977) with 415 entries. The four-volume work *American Women Writers* edited by Lina Mainero (1978-1982) is important in helping to place "recovered" writers within the proper context of American women writing. Of course it is excellent also on a wide range of women authors not newly discovered.

The help of writers today and of the general public has been solicited through notices in newspapers, magazines and scholarly journals with happy results in many instances. Letters have come from relatives or friends of writers or from readers who do not want a favorite author to be forgotten. Forms have been sent to all correspondents for whatever information can be supplied on the lives and works of Louisiana women. Even with the necessary checking of this data, such assistance has been much appreciated.

Over 400 names are now in the file on Louisiana women writers, verified as having published poetry, fiction or drama. Some are incomplete entries, but the majority are supported by biographical or publishing data which should aid future researchers.

The following bibliography is comprised exclusively of those Louisiana women writers represented at the symposium and/or in this special issue of the *New Orleans Review.* The complete bibliography should be in print by the end of 1988.□

BIBLIOGRAPHY: LOUISIANA WOMEN WRITERS

Compiled by Dorothy H. Brown and Elizabeth Sarkodie-Mensah

AMOSS, Berthe

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Sumter Davis (lawyer) and Berthe (Lathrop) Marks.
Married Walter James Amoss, Jr. (President of Lykes Bros. Steamship Co.) in 1946; six sons.
Educated at Newcomb College, Tulane University; University of Hawaii; Kunsthalle in Bremen, W. Germany; Academie des Beaux Arts in Antwerp, Belgium.
Teaches at Tulane University.
Lives in New Orleans.
Children's books writer and illustrator.

WORKS:

It's Not Your Birthday. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
Tom In the Middle. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
By the Sea. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1969.
The Marvellous Catch of Old Hannibal. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1970.
Old Hasdrubal and the Pirates. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1971.
The Very Worst Thing. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1972.
The Big Cry. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.
The Great Sea Monster; or A Book By You. New York: Parents Magazine Press, 1976.
The Chalk Cross. (Young Adult Novel). New York: Seabury Press, 1976.
The Witch Cat. New Orleans: Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 1977.
The Loup Garou. Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1979.
Secret Lives. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979.
The Mockingbird Song. (In Press). New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Contemporary Authors.
Something about the Author.

BOSWORTH, Sheila

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Married to Hilton Bell (Lawyer); two children.
Educated at Academy of the Sacred Heart; Newcomb College; Tulane University.

WORKS:

Almost Innocent. Greenville, N.C.: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 1984.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

"Birth of a Novelist." *Times-Picayune* 25 Nov. 1984.
"Getting Around to Writing." *Times-Picayune Dixie Roto Magazine* 20 Jan. 1985: 1.
Struebling-Beazley, Kristen, and Danella P. Hero. "Salvaged Memories: New Orleans Artists, Southern Writers and a Common Sensibility." *Helicon Nine* 1987.

BRISTOW, Gwen (1903-1980)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Marion, S.C.
Daughter of Louis Judson (minister) and Caroline Cornelia (Winckler) Bristow.
Married Bruce Manning in 1929.
Educated at Judson College; Columbia University School of Journalism; Anderson College.
Reporter for the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* 1925-1934.
Died in New Orleans.
Novelist; Poet; Journalist.

WORKS:

The Alien and Other Poems. 1926.
The Invisible Host. (With Manning). New York: Mystery League, 1930. (Drama adaptation by Owen Davis. *The Ninth Guest*. New York: French, 1932).
The Gutenberg Murders. (With Manning). New York: Mystery League, 1931.
The Mardi Gras Murders. (With Manning). New York: Mystery League, 1932.
Two and Two Make Twenty-two. (With Manning). New York: Mystery League, 1932.
Deep Summer. New York: Crowell, 1937, 1964.
The Handsome Road. New York: Crowell, 1938, 1968.
This Side of Glory. New York: Crowell, 1940.
Gwen Bristow: Self Portrait. 1940.
Tomorrow is Forever. New York: Crowell, 1943. (Film, 1946).
Jubilee Trail. New York: Crowell, 1950. (Film, 1953).
Celia Garth. New York: Crowell, 1959.
Calico Palace. New York: Crowell, 1970.
Golden Dreams. New York: Crowell, 1980.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Chicago Tribune 19 Aug. 1980. (Obituary).
American Women Writers. Vol. 1.

BROWN-GUILLORY, Elizabeth

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Lake Charles, La.
Daughter of Leo and Marjorie (Savoy) Brown.
Married to Lucius M. Guillory; one child.
Educated at University of Southwestern Louisiana; Florida State University.
Currently Assistant Professor of English at Dillard University.
Lives in New Orleans.

WORKS:

Bayou Relics. (Play). Aurora, Colo.: Contemporary Drama Service/Meriwether, 1983.
Snapshots of Broken Dolls. (Play).
Twelve plays written and produced.

CARVER, Ada Jack (Mrs. J. B. Snell) (1890-1972)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Natchitoches, La.
Daughter of Marshall Hampton and Ada Whitfield (Jack) Carver.
Married John B. Snell in 1918.
Died in Minden, La.
Dramatist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

The Cajun, a drama in one act. New York: S. French, 1926.
Bagatelle. 1927.
The Clock Strikes Tomorrow. (Children's Play). 1935.
The Collected Works of Ada Jack Carver. Natchitoches, La.: Northwestern State Univ. Press, 1980.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Ford, O. L. "Ada Jack Carver: A Critical Biography." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Connecticut, 1975.
American Women Writers. Vol. 1.
Southern Writers: A Biographical Dictionary.

CASSIN, Maxine

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Alvin (accountant) and Dora (Hurwitz) Kaplan (Russian Immigrants).
Married Joseph Cassin in 1954; one child.
Educated at Newcomb College; Tulane University.
Editor and publisher of New Orleans Poetry Journal Press Books.
Lives in New Orleans.
Poet.

WORKS:

Nine by Three. (Joint Author). Eureka, Calif.: Hearst Press, 1962.
A Touch of Recognition. Denver: A. Swallow, 1962.
The Maple Leaf Rag: An Anthology of New Orleans Creole Poetry. (Co-editor and Contributor). New Orleans: The Poetry Journal Press, 1980.
Turnip's Blood: Poems. Baton Rouge: Sisters Grim Press, 1985.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Minneapolis Star Tribune 9 Mar. 1986: G11.
LLA Bulletin 48.4 (Spring 1986): 155-56.

CHOPIN, Kate O'Flaherty (1850-1904)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in St. Louis, Mo.
Daughter of Thomas and Eliza (Faris) O'Flaherty.
Married Oscar Chopin of Louisiana in 1870; six children.
Educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, St. Louis.
Lived in New Orleans and Cloutierville in Natchitoches Parish, La.
Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

At Fault. A Novel. St. Louis, Mo.: Nixon-Jones Printing Co., 1890.
Bayou Folk. (Short Stories). Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894.
A Night in Acadie. (Short Stories). Chicago: Way & Williams, 1895.
The Awakening. A Novel. Chicago: H.S. Stone & Co., 1899.
The Complete Works of Kate Chopin. Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969.
The Chopin Papers are held by the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Arner, Robert. "Kate Chopin." *Louisiana Studies* 14 (Spring 1975): 11-139.
Dyer, Joyce Coyne. "Epiphanies Through Nature in the Stories of Kate Chopin." *University of Dayton Review* 16 (Winter 1983-1984): 75-81.
Ewell, Barbara C. *Kate Chopin.* New York: Ungar, 1986.
Grover, Dorys Crow. "Kate Chopin and the Bayou Country." *Journal of the American Studies Association of Texas* 15 (1984): 29-34.
Webb, Bernice Larson. "Four Points of Equilibrium in *The Awakening.*" *South Central Bulletin* 42 (Winter 1982): 148-51.
Wolff, Cynthia G. "Thanatos and Eros: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening.*" *American Quarterly* 25 Oct. 1973: 449-71.

DAVIS, Thadious Marie

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Educated at Southern University, Baton Rouge; Atlanta University; Boston University (Ph.D.).
Currently Associate Professor of English at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
Poet; Activist.

WORKS:

"A Greeting on Tabaski." (Poem).

"Asante Sana." (Poem).
"Te Te." (Poem).
"In Mordiop's Room." (Poem).
Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context. Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1983.
Afro-American Writers From the Harlem Renaissance to 1940. (Ed.). Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research Co., 1987.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Directory of American Scholars.

GILCHRIST, Ellen

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Vicksburg, Miss.
Daughter of William Garth (engineer) and Aurora (Alford) Gilchrist.
Has three sons.
Educated at Millsaps College; University of Arkansas.
Lives in New Orleans.
Poet; Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

The Land Surveyor's Daughter. (Poems). San Francisco, Calif.: Lost Roads, 1979.
In The Land of Dreamy Dreams. (Short Stories). Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1981.
The Annunciation. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1983.
Victory Over Japan. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1984.
Drunk with Love. (Short Stories). Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1986.
Riding Out the Tropical Depression. (Selected Poems 1975-1985). New Orleans: Faust, 1987.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Lowry, Beverly. "Redheaded Hellions in the Crape Myrtle." *The New York Times Book Review* 23 Sept. 1984: 18.
Yardley, Jonathan. "Knockout 'Victory': The Best Stories Yet from Ellen Gilchrist." *The Washington Post* 12 Sept. 1984: B1, B10.
Kirkus Reviews 52.15 (1 Aug. 1984): 698.
Publishers Weekly 226.4 (27 July 1984): 136.

GILMER, Elizabeth Meriwether (1861-1951)
("Dorothy Dix")

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in 1861 (some say 1870) in Woodstock, Montgomery County, Tenn.
Daughter of William Douglas and Maria (Winston) Meriwether.
Married George O. Gilmer in 1882.
Educated at the Female Academy of Clarksville; Hollins Institute, Botecourt Springs, Va.
Literary Editor of the New Orleans *Daily Picayune*; started Lagniappe section.
Died in New Orleans; buried in Metairie cemetery.
Fiction writer; Journalist.

WORKS:

Fables of the Elite. New York: R.F. Fenno & Co., 1902.
What's Sauce for the Gander Is Sauce for the Goose. 1912.
Woman's Lack of Pride. ca. 1912.
Dorothy Dix on Woman's Ballot. 1914.
Mirandy. New York: Hearst's International Library Co., 1914.
Hearts a la Mode. New York: Hearst's International Library Co., 1915.
Mirandy Exhorts, a Black Mammy Story. Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1922.
My Trip Around the World. Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Co., 1924.
Dorothy Dix: Her Book: Everyday Help For Everyday People. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1926.
Mexico. Gulfport, Miss.: C. Rand, 1934.
How to Win and Hold a Husband. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1939.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Kane, Harnett T. and Ella Bentley Arthur. *Dear Dorothy Dix: The Story of a Compassionate Woman*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1952.
Dolson, Hildegarde. "Dear Miss Dix—This is My Problem." *Reader's Digest* Feb. 1945: 39-42.
Deutsch, Herman B. "Dorothy Dix Talks." *Saturday Evening Post Biographies of Famous Journalists*. Ed. John E. Drewry. Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1942. 29-47.
Ross, Ishbel. *Ladies of the Press*. New York: Harper, 1936.
New York Times 16 Dec. 1951. (Obituary).
American Women Writers. Vol. 2.

GRAU, Shirley Ann

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Adolph Eugene and Katherine (Onions) Grau.
Married James Kern Feibleman (Professor at Tulane) in 1955; four children.
Educated at Newcomb College, Tulane University.
Lives in New Orleans.
Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

The Black Prince and Other Stories. New York: Knopf, 1955.
The Hard Blue Sky. New York: Knopf, 1958.
The House on Coliseum Street. New York: Knopf, 1961.
The Keepers of the House. New York: Knopf, 1964.
The Condor Passes. New York: Knopf, 1971.
The Wind Shifting West. (Stories). New York: Knopf, 1973.
Evidence of Love. New York: Random House, 1977.
Nine Women. Ed. Robert Gottlieb. New York: Knopf, 1985.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Berland, Alwyn. "The Fiction of Shirley Ann Grau." *Critique* 6.1 (1963): 78-84.
DeBellis, Jack. "Two Southern Novels and a Diversion." *Sewanee Review* 70.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1962): 691-94.
Gosset, Louise Y. *Violence in Recent Southern Fiction*. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1965. 177-95.
Keith, Don Lee. "A Visit with Shirley Ann Grau." *Contempora* 2.2 (Mar.-July 1973): 10-14.
Pearson, Ann B. "Shirley Ann Grau: Nature is the Vision." *Critique* 17.2 (1975): 47-58.

GRUE, Lee Meitzen

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Plaquemines, La.
Daughter of Leroy Robert (geophysicist) and Catherine (McCullar) Meitzen.
Married to Ronald David Grue (Mississippi River Pilot); three children.
Educated at Tulane University; University of New Orleans; Warren Wilson College.
Editor of *World Port* (a commercial magazine on the Mississippi River) and of *New Laurel Review* (literary magazine); Director of New Orleans Poetry Forum.
Poet.

WORKS:

Trains and Other Intrusions: A Chapbook of Poetry. New Orleans: New Orleans Poetry Forum, 1974.
French Quarter Poems. New Orleans: Long Measure Press, 1979.
Goodbye, Silver, Silver Cloud. (Short Stories in Progress).
In the Sweet Balance of the Flesh. (Poems in Progress).
Has also edited several books of poems by children in New Orleans Public schools, including *Going Downtown New Orleans, Get My Mama Some Good Red Beans*. 1975.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Who's Who of American Women.
Directory of Poets and Writers.
Struebling-Beazley, Kristen and Danella P. Hero. "Salvaged Memories: New Orleans Artists, Southern Writers and a Common Sensibility." *Helicon Nine* 1987.

HAXTON, Josephine Ayres
("Ellen Douglas")

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Natchez, Miss.
Daughter of Richardson (engineer) and Laura (Davis) Ayres.
Married to R. K. Haxton, Jr.; three children.
Educated at University of Mississippi.
Writer-in-Residence, Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe (1976-1979).
Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

Moon of Violence. (Romance Mystery). New York: Bouregy/ Avalon, 1960.
A Family's Affairs. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
Black Cloud, White Cloud; Two Novellas and Two Stories. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.
Where the Dreams Cross. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.
Walker Percy's The Last Gentleman. New York: Seabury Press, 1969.
Apostles of Light. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973.
The Rock Cried Out. New York: Harcourt, 1979.
A Lifetime Burning. New York: Random House, 1982.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

New York Times Book Reviews 18 Feb. 1973.
New York Times Book Reviews 31 Oct. 1982.
New Yorker 3 Mar. 1973.
Newsweek 5 Mar. 1975.

HELLMAN, Lillian Florence (1905-1984)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Max Bernard (businessman) and Julia (Newhouse) Hellman.
Married Arthur Kober (Writer) in 1925; divorced in 1932.
Educated at New York University; Columbia University.
Dramatist; Wrote many screenplays and adaptations; Non-fiction.

WORKS:

The Children's Hour. New York: Knopf, 1934. (Film, 1962).
Days to Come. New York: Knopf, 1936.
These Three. (Film, 1936).
The Little Foxes. New York: Random House, 1939. (Film, 1941).
Watch on the Rhine. New York: Random House, 1941. (Film, 1943).
The Searching Wind. New York: Viking, 1944. (Film, 1946).
Another Part of the Forest. New York: Viking, 1947. (Film, 1948).
Regina. (Opera). 1949.
Monteserrat. (Adapted from Robles). New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1950.
The Autumn Garden. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1951.
The Lark. (Adapted from Anouilh). New York: Random House, 1956.
Candide: A Comic Operetta based on Voltaire's Satire. New York: Random House, 1957.
Toys in the Attic. New York: Random House, 1960. (Film, 1963).
My Mother, My Father, and Me. (Adapted from Blechman). New York: Random House, 1963.
An Unfinished Woman: A memoir. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970.
Pentimento: A Book of Portraits. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973. (Film *Julia*, 1977).
Scoundrel Time. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1976.
Maybe: A Story. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1980.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Adler, Jacob. *Lillian Hellman*. Southern Writer Series 4. Austin, Tex.: Stack, Vaughn, 1969.
Adler, Jacob. "The Rose and the Fox: Notes on the Southern Drama." *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting*. Ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert Jacobs. Garden City: Dolphin Books, 1961. 349-75.
Bentley, Eric. *The Theatre of Commitment*. New York: Atheneum, 1967. 39-40.
Harriman, Margaret Case. "Miss Lily of New Orleans." *New Yorker* 17 (8 Nov. 1941): 22-31.
Lederer, Katherine. *Lillian Hellman*. Boston: Twayne, 1979.
Bain and Rubin. *Southern Writers*.
Wright, William. *Lillian Hellman: The Image, The Woman*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986.

KEIN, Sybil

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Francis (bricklayer) and Augustine (Boudreaux) Moore.
Married Felix Provost in 1959; divorced; three children.
Educated at Xavier University; Louisiana State University at New Orleans; Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; University of Michigan.
Teaches at the University of Michigan.
Lives at Flint, Mich. and New Orleans, La.
Poet; Dramatist.

WORKS:

Visions from the Rainbow. Flint, Mich.: N.D. Hosking, 1979.
Gombo People: New Orleans Creole Poetry. New Orleans: Leo J. Hall, 1981.
Delta Dancer; New and Selected Poems. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1984.
The Blueberry Boy. (Juvenile Book).
When It Rains. (Juvenile Book).
American South. (Volume of Poetry in Progress).
Des Gardenias et Roses: Les Chansons Creoles. (Creole Songs in Five Languages in Progress).

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

New Orleans Magazine Apr. 1972.
Miami News 28 Sept. 1985.

KEYES, Frances Parkinson (1885-1970)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Charlottesville, Va.
Daughter of John Henry (Professor of Greek) and Louise (Johnson) Wheeler.
Married Henry Wilder Keyes (Governor of N.H. 1917-19, and U.S. Senator 1919-37); three children.
Lived in Beauregard House at 1113 Chartres St., New Orleans.
Died in New Orleans.
Poet; Fiction writer.

WORKS:

The Old Gray Homestead. Boston: Houghton, 1919.
The Career of David Noble. New York: F.A. Stokes, 1921.
Letters from a Senator's Wife. New York: Appleton, 1924.
Queen Anne's Lace. New York: Liveright, 1931.
Lady Blanche Farm: A Romance of the Commonplace. New York: Liveright, 1931.
Silver Seas and Golden Cities: A Joyous Journey through Latin Lands. New York: Liveright, 1931.
Senator Marlowe's Daughter. New York: Messner, 1933.
The Safe Bridge. New York: Messner, 1934.
The Happy Wanderer. (Poems). New York: Messner, 1935.
Honor Bright. New York: Messner, 1936. New York: Grosset, 1948.
Capital Kaleidoscope: The Story of a Washington Hostess. New York: Harper, 1937.
Written in Heaven: The Story on Earth of the Little Flower of Lisieux. New York: Messner, 1937.
Parts Unknown. New York: Messner, 1938.
The Great Tradition. New York: Messner, 1939.
Along a Little Way. New York: Kenedy, 1940.
Fielding's Folly. New York: Messner, 1940.
The Sublime Shepherdess. (Originally *Bernadette, Maid of Lourdes*). New York: Messner, 1940.
All That Glitters. New York: Book League of America, 1941.
The Grace of Guadalupe. New York: Messner, 1941. New York: Eyre, 1948. New York: Grosset, 1947.
Crescent Carnival. New York: Messner, 1942.
Also the Hills. New York: Messner, 1943.
The River Road. New York: Messner, 1945.
Came a Cavalier. New York: Messner, 1947.
Once on Esplanade: A Cycle Between Two Creole Weddings. New York: Dodd, 1947.
Dinner at Antoine's. New York: Messner, 1948.
The Third Mystic of Avila. Trans. Keyes. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1960.
All This Is Louisiana. New York: Harper, 1950.
The Cost of a Bestseller. New York: Messner, 1950.
Joy Street. New York: Messner, 1950.
Therese: Saint of a Little Way. (Rev. ed. of *Written in Heaven*). New York: Messner, 1950.
The Old Gray Homestead and *The Career of David Noble*. (Two Novels). New York: Liveright, 1951.
Steamboat Gothic. New York: Messner, 1952.
Bernadette of Lourdes. New York: Messner, 1953.
The Royal Box. New York: Messner, 1954.
Frances Parkinson Keyes' Cookbook. Garden City: Doubleday, 1955.
St. Anne: Grandmother of Our Savior. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1955.
The Blue Camellia. New York: Messner, 1957.
Land of Stones and Saints. Garden City: Doubleday, 1957.
Victorine. New York: Messner, 1958.
Frances Parkinson Keyes' Christmas Gift. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959.
Mother Cabrini: Missionary to the World. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1959.
Station Wagon in Spain. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1959.
The Chess Players. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1960.
Roses in December. (Autobiography). Garden City: Doubleday, 1960.
The Rose and the Lily: The Lives and Times of Two South American Saints. New York: Hawthorn, 1961.
Madame Castel's Lodger. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1962.
The Restless Lady, and Other Stories. New York: Liveright, 1963.
Three Ways of Love. New York: Hawthorn, 1963.
A Treasury of Favorite Poems. New York: Hawthorn, 1963.
The Explorer. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
I, the King. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.
Tongues of Fire. New York: Coward, 1966.
The Heritage. New York: McGraw, 1968.
All Flags Flying. (Memoirs). New York: McGraw, 1972.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Breit, Harvey. *The Writer Observed*. New York: World, 1956.
Ehlers, Leigh A. "'An Environment Remembered': Setting in the Novels of Frances Parkinson Keyes." *Southern Quarterly* 20.3 (Spring 1982): 54-65.
Fitzgibbon, Robert and Ernest V. Heyn. *My Most Inspiring Moment: Encounters with Destiny Relived by Thirty-eight Best-*

selling Authors. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.
American Women Writers. Vol. 2.

KING, Grace Elizabeth (1852-1932)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of William Woodson (lawyer) and Sarah Ann (Miller) King.
Educated at Institut St. Louis; Heloise Cenas.
The Grace King Papers are in the LSU Library Dept. of Archives, Baton Rouge.
Short stories; Translations; Non-fiction.

WORKS:

"Earthlings." *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 2 (1888): 599-679.
Monsieur Motte. New York: A.C. Armstrong & Son, 1888.
Jean-Baptiste Le Moine, Sieur de Bienville. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1892.
Tales of a Time and Place. New York: Harper & Bros., 1892.
Balcony Stories. New York: The Century Co., 1893.
A History of Louisiana. (With J. R. Ficklen). Baton Rouge: University Publishers, 1894.
New Orleans: the Place and the People. New York: Macmillan, 1895.
De Soto and His Men in the Land of Florida. New York: Macmillan, 1898.
Stories from Louisiana History. (With J. R. Ficklen). New Orleans: L. Graham & Son, 1905.
The Pleasant Ways of St. Medard. New York: H. Holt & Co., 1916.
Creole Families of New Orleans. New York: Macmillan, 1921.
Madame Girard, an Old French Teacher of New Orleans. New Haven, Conn., 1922.
La Dame de Sainte Hermine. New York: Macmillan, 1924.
A Splendid Offer: A Comedy for Women. (One Act Play). 1926.
Mt. Vernon on the Potomac: History of the Mt. Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union. New York: Macmillan, 1929.
Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters. New York: Macmillan, 1932.
Grace King of New Orleans: A Selection of Her Writings. Ed. Robert Bush. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1973.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Bush, Robert. "Grace King (1852-1932)." *American Literary Realism* 8 (Winter 1975): 43-49.
Bush, Robert. "Grace King: The Emergence of a Southern Intellectual Woman." *Southern Review* 13 (Spring 1977): 272-88.
Kirby, David. *Grace King*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.
Slayton, G. C. "Grace Elizabeth King: Her Life and Works." Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1974.
Vaughan, Bess. "A Bio-Bibliography of Grace Elizabeth King," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly* 17 (Oct. 1934): 752-70.
American Women Writers. Vol. 2.

LANE, Pinkie Gordon

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Philadelphia, Pa.
Daughter of William Alexander and Inez Addie (West) Gordon.
Married Ulysses Simpson Lane (deceased); one child.
Educated at Spelman College; Atlanta University; Louisiana State University.
Professor in English Dept., Southern University, Baton Rouge.
Lives in Baton Rouge, La.
Poet.

WORKS:

Wind Thoughts. (Poems). Fort Smith, Ark.: South & West, 1972.
Mystic Female. (Poems). Fort Smith, Ark.: South & West, 1978.
I Never Scream: New and Selected Poems. Detroit: Lotus Press, 1985.
Discourses on Poetry. (Editor and Contributor). Fort Smith, Ark.: South & West, 1972.
Poems by Blacks. (Editor and Contributor). Fort Smith, Ark.: South & West, 1973.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Newman, Dorothy W. "Lane's Mystic Female." *Callaloo* 2 Feb. 1979: 153-55.

LE GRAND, Julia Ellen (1829-1881)

BIOGRAPHY:

Daughter of Colonel LeGrand (wealthy Maryland planter).
Family moved to Louisiana when J.L. was a child.
Married Adolph Waitz in 1867.
Kept "select school for girls" in New Orleans with sister, Virginia "Ginnie" Le Grand.
Wrote poetry.
Left manuscripts of journal and two novels, and poems.

WORKS:

The Journal of Julia Le Grand, New Orleans, 1862-1863. Ed. Kate Mason Rowland and Mrs. Morris L. Croxall. Richmond: Everett Waddey Co., 1911.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Freeman, Douglas Southall. *The South to Posterity: An Introduction to the Writings of Confederate History*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939.
Jones, Katherine M. *Heroines of Dixie: Confederate Women Tell Their Story of the War*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955.

MARTIN, Valerie

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Sedalia, Mo.
Daughter of John Roger (sea captain) and Valerie (Fleischer) Metcalf.
Married Robert M. Martin (Artist); one child.
Educated at University of New Orleans; University of Massachusetts.
Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

Love. (Short Stories). Amherst, Mass.: Lynx House Press, 1976.
Set in Motion. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978.
Alexandra. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979.
Documents. (An Epistolary Novel Set in New Orleans in Progress).
A Recent Martyr. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Ball, Millie. "Surrealistic: New Orleans Images Inspire Author." *Times-Picayune* 24 May 1987.

MILLICAN, Arthenia Jackson Bates

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Sumter, S.C.
Daughter of Shepard (educator) and Susan Emma (David) Jackson (craftswoman).
Educated at Morris College; Atlanta University; Louisiana State University.
Taught English at Southern University, Baton Rouge.
Lives in Baker, La.
Poet.

WORKS:

Seeds Beneath the Snow: Vignettes from the South. New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1969, 1973, 1975.
The Deity Nodded. Detroit: Harlo Press, 1973.
Such Things From the Valley. (Poems). Norfolk, Va.: Millican, 1977.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

"Legitimate Resources of the Soul: An Interview with Arthenia Bates Millican." *Obsidian* 3.1 (Spring 1977): 14-34.
"Reflections: Arthenia Bates Millican." *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature.* Ed. Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1979. 201-9.
Personalities in the South.
World Who's Who of Women.

MORGAN, Berry

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Port Gibson, Miss.
Daughter of John Marshall and Bess Berry (Taylor) Brumfield.
Has four children.
Educated at Loyola University, New Orleans; Tulane University.
Instructor at Northeast Louisiana University, Monroe.
Novelist; Short story writer.

WORKS:

Pursuit. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966. London: Heinemann, 1967.
The Mystic Adventures of Roxie Stoner. (Short Stories). Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
Fornica Creek. (In Progress).

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

New Orleans Courier 12 Dec. 1973.

NELSON, Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar (1875-1935)

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Joseph (seaman) and Patricia (Wright) Moore (seamstress).
Married Paul Laurence Dunbar (Black Poet); separated 1902.
Married Robert John Nelson in 1916.
Educated at Straight College; became teacher and social worker.
Died in Philadelphia, Pa.
Poet; Dramatist; Fiction writer; Journalist.

WORKS:

Violets and Other Tales. 1895.
The Goodness of St. Rocque, and Other Stories. (Collection of Local Color Tales). New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899.
Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence: The Best Speeches Delivered by the Negro from the Days of Slavery to the Present Time. Ed. Nelson. New York: The Bookery Publishing Co., 1914.
Paul Laurence Dunbar, Poet Laureate of the Negro Race. Philadelphia: R. C. Ransom, 1914.
Mine Eyes Have Seen. (Drama). 1918.
The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer. Ed. Nelson. Naperville, Ill.: J. L. Nichols & Co., 1920.
The Negro in Louisiana; People and Music.
Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Ed. Gloria T. Hull. New York: W. W. Norton, 1985.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Kerlin, Robert. *Negro Poets and Their Poems.* 1935.
Metcalf, E. W., ed. *The Letters of Paul and Alice Dunbar: A Private History.* Univ. of California Press, 1973.
Whiteman, Maxwell. "A Century of Fiction by American Negroes, 1853-1952: A Descriptive Bibliography." *Journal of Negro History* Jan. 1936.

NICHOLSON, Eliza Jane Poitevent Holbrook (1849-1896) ("Pearl Rivers")

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Pearlington, Hancock County, Miss.
Daughter of William J. and Mary A. (Russ) Poitevent.
Married Col. A. M. Holbrook (died in 1876).
Married George Nicholson (Newspaperman) in 1878.
Educated at the Amite (La.) Female Seminary.
Became first woman in the world to own and manage a major newspaper—*The Daily Picayune;* gave Dorothy Dix a start.
Died in New Orleans.
Poet.

WORKS:

Lyrics by Pearl Rivers. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1873.
Four Poems by Pearl Rivers. 1900.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Harrison, J. H. "Pearl Rivers: Publisher of the Picayune." *La. Hist. Quarterly* Oct. 1923.
Daily Picayune 16 Feb. 1896.
New Orleans Times-Democrat 16 Feb. 1896.
American Women Writers. Vol. 3.

OWEN, Sue

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Clarinda, Iowa.
Daughter of Theodore and Elizabeth Jeanne (Roderick) Matthews.
Married Thomas Owen in 1964.
Educated at University of Wisconsin; Goddard College.
Lives in Baton Rouge.
Poet.

WORKS:

Nursery Rhymes for the Dead. New York: Ithaca House, 1980.
The Book of Winter. 1986.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Library Journal Dec. 1980.
The Southern Review Winter 1983.
Personalities of the South.
Who's Who of American Women.

RICE, Anne
("Anne Rampling," "A. N. Roquelaure")

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in New Orleans.
Daughter of Howard (sculptor) and Katherine (Allen) O'Brien.
Married Stan Rice (Poet) in 1961; two children.
Educated at Texas Woman's University; San Francisco State University; University of California, Berkeley.
Novelist.

WORKS:

Interview with the Vampire. New York: Knopf, 1976.
The Feast of All Saints. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980.
Cry to Heaven. New York: Knopf, 1982.
The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty: An Erotic Novel of Tenderness and Cruelty for the Enjoyment of Men and Women. (As A. N. Roquelaure). New York: Dutton, 1983.
Beauty's Punishment. (As A. N. Roquelaure). New York: Dutton, 1984.
Beauty's Release. (As A. N. Roquelaure). New York: Dutton, 1985.
Exit to Eden. (As Anne Rampling). New York: Arbor House, 1985.
The Vampire Lestat. New York: Knopf, 1985.
Belinda. New York: Arbor House, 1986.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Contemporary Authors.
Chicago Tribune Book World 27 Jan. 1980.
Los Angeles Times Book Review 19 Dec. 1982.
New York Times Book Review 10 Oct. 1980.
Village Voice Literary Supplement June 1982.

WEBB, Bernice Larson

BIOGRAPHY:

Born in Ludell, Kans.
Daughter of Carl Godfred and Ida Genevieve (Tongish) Larson.
Married Robert MacHardy Webb in 1961; two children.
Educated at University of Kansas; University of Aberdeen, Scotland.
Professor of English at University of Southwestern Louisiana.
Lives in Lafayette, La.
Poet; Dramatist; Short story writer; Literary critic.

WORKS:

The 90th Moon. (One-act Verse Play). Edgemoor Pub. Co., 1973.
The Basketball Man: James Naismith. (Biography). Lawrence, Kans.: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1973.
Poetry on the Stage: William Poel, Producer of Verse Drama. Salzburg, Austria: Universität Salzburg, 1978.
Beware of Ostriches. (Poems). Baton Rouge: Legacy Pub. Co., 1978.
Picking at the Goophered Grapevine. Bowling Green, Ky.: Kentucky Folklore Society, 1979.
Thursday Verse. 1982.
The Days of Auntie May: Mary Amelia Hay (1832-1907). (Biography). Colby, Kans.: Western Plains Heritage Pub., 1986.

SECONDARY SOURCE(S):

Contemporary Authors.
The International Authors and Writers Who's Who.
Who's Who of American Women.

Elizabeth Sarkodie-Mensah *is Reference Librarian at the Loyola University Library.*

Bernice Larson Webb

PERSIMMON DAY

Laden with armful of golden raintree leaves
and basket of persimmons, she arranges
branch and fruit on ivory tablecloth,
a centerpiece like offering to the gods.
Once my lithe girl in jeans
who turned cartwheels on the lawn,
today in new-found formality she greets her guest.
Where he stands tall, her glance bestows
treasure engraved from mine of ancient Greece.
I note bemused, reading her metaphor,
that she would wish to lave his feet, set wine
and meat
in reach, bring linen for the night
and burnish antique armor while he slept.

My daughter moves in intense ritual
Toward golden sphere inscribed for her.
When she smiles, I fear, remembering
Paris and Troy, power of a thousand ships
and passion of a flaming tower.
The world and I have taught her more
than we intended to.

FEATURED ARTISTS

Berthe Amoss has written and illustrated many children's books and two young adult novels, *Secret Lives* and *The Chalk Cross*, the latter winning an award from the Mystery Writers of America in 1976. Her original watercolor illustrations are in collections at the University of Minnesota, the University of Mississippi and the Louisiana State Library.

Maxine Cassin is editor and publisher of the *New Orleans Poetry Journal Press Books* series. She has written two book-length collections of poetry, *A Touch of Recognition* (1962) and *Turnip's Blood* (1985). Her work has been published in numerous anthologies and journals, including *The New York Times, The New Republic, New Orleans Review,* and *The Chicago Review.*

Thadious M. Davis is Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Her scholarly works include *Faulkner's "Negro": Art and the Southern Context* (1983) and *Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940* (1987).

Lee Meitzen Grue directs the New Orleans Poetry Forum and edits both the *New Laurel Review*, a literary journal, and *World Port*, a commercial magazine on the Mississippi River. Her poems and stories have appeared in *Argo, Negative Capability, The Fiddlehead,* and *Quarterly West*. The story appearing in this issue is the title selection of a forthcoming fiction collection, which won her a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Josephine Ayres Haxton (Ellen Douglas) has written several novels, including *A Lifetime Burning* (1982) and *The Rock Cried Out* (1979), and has recently completed a collection of retold fairy tales, illustrated with Walter Anderson's linoleum cuts and published by the University of Mississippi Press. Her latest novel, *Scenes from Two Lives*, will be published by Atheneum in 1988.

Sybil Kein has published four books, and her poems and plays have appeared in many periodicals and anthologies.

Pinkie Gordon Lane is Professor Emeritus of English at Southern University in Baton Rouge. She has published three collections of poetry, *Mind Thoughts* (1972), *Mystic Female* (1978) and *I Never Scream: New and Selected Poems* (1985).

Sallie Whistler Marcucci, who was born in 1940 in Atlanta, Georgia, has spent much of her life in Europe. A student of Oskar Kokoschka, she has had exhibitions of her work in Italy, France and the United States. Well known for her illustrations and cartoons, she has also designed sets and costumes for a number of Italian operas.

Arthenia J. Bates Millican is the author of three books, including *The Deity Nodded* (1973). Her poems and short stories have appeared in *Black World, Obsidian, Callaloo,* and elsewhere.

Sue Owen published her first book of poetry, *Nursery Rhymes for the Dead*, in 1980. Her second collection, *The Book of Winter*, was a finalist in the 1986 AWP Award Series in Poetry. Her poetry has appeared in *Harvard Magazine, The Iowa Review, The Nation, Poetry, The Southern Review,* and *The Best of Intro.*

Bernice Larson Webb, Professor of English at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette, has published five books, including a volume of poems, *Beware of Ostriches*, and two biographies, *The Basketball Man: James Naismith*, which has been translated into Japanese, and *Lady Doctor on a Homestead* (1987).