

Placing the Bomb: the Pastoral and the Sublime in the Nuclear Age

by

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(English Language and Literature)
in the University of Michigan
2014**

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DEDICATION

To Daniel, and the next adventure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My time at Michigan has been enriched beyond measure by my colleagues, friends and mentors. Adam Mazel, Ben Pollak, Chris Barnes, Konstantina Karageorgos, Kya Mangrum, MicKenzie Fasteland, Rachel Feder and Rebecca Porte were my steadfast friends, readers and collaborators.

Patsy Yaeger dazzled and inspired me with her joyful, creative scholarship. John Whittier-Ferguson lent support and encouragement when I wavered and lit my way with his own nuanced and generous work. Scotti Parrish introduced me to both Austin and Silko, which was in itself worth the trip to graduate school. Barbara Hodgdon gave me the gifts of her friendship, of wildflowers and editorial and archival theory. Nick Delbanco guided, supported, and believed in me as a writer while I sought my identity as a scholar.

I'm grateful to Gregg Crane, Phil Deloria and our Camp Davis classes of 2011 and 2012 for the intellectual and wilderness adventures, and to my indoor students, both at Michigan and Westfield, who helped me think about writing, Toomer and Silko more deeply than ever before.

Lastly, I'm grateful to my friends and fellow volunteers at Therapeutic Riding Inc., my running partners, my martial arts family, my spouse, parents and siblings for making this a full and beautiful seven years.

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INTRODUCTION

The Atomic Moment

One pure moment could pierce. Or one symbol. Or one metaphor.¹

But there was no moment. You should know that. How many times have I told you how difficult it is to resist the lure of the historical moment? The one action, the instantaneous truth that changes everything? ... There are always many moments, there is never just one. There are many points of clarity and many causes to one effect.²

In Louise Erdrich's 2010 novel, *Shadow Tag*, Irene America and her husband, Gil, engage in a long-running argument about historiographic methods. Gil believes in the “Lord Jim moment” in which a person's true character is revealed, while Irene believes that there is no such moment, or rather that history is a long accretion of moments that can be shaped into recognizable narrative only by great labors of articulation, arrangement and omission.³ Relationship as well as historiography is at stake here. Gil undertakes misguided efforts to rescue his failing marriage by triggering a perfect moment of revelation while Irene has long ceased to believe such a total change or new beginning is possible.

I begin with Irene and Gil and their arguments about American history and the history of their own marriage because this dissertation can also be figured as being about a conflict

¹ Louise Erdrich, *Shadow Tag* (New York: Harper, 2010): 149.

² *Ibid.*, 48.

³ *Ibid.*, 89.

between the one pure moment and the resistance to the lure of the historical moment. The development by the United States of an atomic weapon and its deployment against civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6th and 9th, 1945 and the ensuing decades of nuclear proliferation are the events and material realities behind the historiographies and literature of interest here. Seldom in human history have the stakes of writing been higher, and not only because this writing is *about* an important thing. Belief about the diplomatic and military efficacy of nuclear weapons is the direct driver of their proliferation. This belief derives from rhetoric, literature, propaganda and historiography. It is made of words, and the words became bombs and dwelt among us.

With this project, I wish to reveal the political valences of what literary critics have identified as the Nuclear Sublime—representations of the atomic bomb as a pure moment that changes both history and hearts. On their surface, such representations seem to deserve the reputation that many literary scholars accord them: the proper stance of awe and terror, combined with a resolve that such things should never happen again. People of conscience committed such representations to paper in the early days after the atomic bombings. But so, too, did political and military spokespersons, American sources who would benefit greatly from the consolidation of belief that the atomic bombings were justified, decisive, and uniquely powerful and terrorizing.

My first chapter devotes itself to tracing the nuclear sublime, turning backwards in time from its emergence as a high-literary term in the 1980s and showing that it applies equally well or better to a group of rhetorical practices as old as the bomb itself: the use of sublime language, mythic metaphor and proclamations of instantaneous or inevitable transformation upon its

witnessing. I next turn to those texts that take the opposite tack, resisting the singular moment and the fetishization of the atomic bomb. I make particular use of the reception of the book and film, *On the Beach*, to recover non-sublime (indeed, pastoral) literary representations of the bomb as holding potential for anti-nuclear activism.

By this work I hope to set the stage for seeing as nuclear a group of texts that may not appear to rest fully within that subject area. The nuclear does not seem central in these texts because it is interwoven with other concerns. Such a structure does deny the importance of the nuclear so much as take the stance that the only way to address the nuclear is as a thorny and intersectional problem. The nuclear world has many causes, many points of clarity, and not one but many effects.

Longinus says that “a well-timed flash of sublimity scatters everything before it.”⁴ Atom bombs may scatter all at the moment of explosion, but the nuclear warheads of recent years have exhibited a habit of remaining in their silos, failing quite profoundly to scatter before them the rest of life's concerns. A nuclear literature such as we find in Jean Toomer and Leslie Marmon Silko, in which nuclear writings are contiguous with non-nuclear ones and nuclear concerns are richly contextualized, reflects this reality, and this mode of historiography and literary production resistant to the lure of the sublime moment and therefore more attentive to our own moment of co-existence with nuclear weapons.

A belief in the Nuclear Sublime can tempt writers to believe that the bomb changes everything and to therefore write histories and literature (and literary criticism) in which the bomb alone changes everything. And to take these actions with our pens is to allow the bomb to

⁴ “Longinus,” *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe in *Aristotle the Poetics*, “Longinus” on the *Sublime*, *Demetrius on Style*, ed. T.E. Page: 122-254. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960): 125.

change everything. Critics, those pen-wielding readers, can likewise be tempted by the lure of the singular moment to so fetishize the bomb that any small mention of the bomb—or even the lack of mention—indicates a repression of larger horror. Indeed, the silence comes to be seen as a mark of a sublime experience that is beyond language’s ability to record.

A W. H. Auden poem provides a cautionary tale in the dangers of reading silences in this manner and writing literary criticism from the premise of the singular moment or the atomic bomb's absolute uniqueness. The piece of writing in question, “If On Account of the Political Situation,” has led a curious double life since 1983. In that year, it was collected by Jim Schley, who printed it as the first poem of an issue of the *New England Review* that was in turn reprinted as a freestanding poetry collection, *Writing in a Nuclear Age*, in 1984. Collected in these two material contexts, printed under the pitch-perfect fatalistic humor of its title, “If On Account of the Political Situation” certainly looks like a nuclear poem. It begins:

If on account of the political situation,
There are quite a number of homes without roofs, and men,
Lying about in the countryside neither drunk nor asleep,
If all sailings have been cancelled till further notice,
If it's unwise now to say much in letters, and if,
Under the subnormal temperatures prevailing,
The two sexes are at the present the weak and the strong,
That is not at all unusual for this time of year.

And it wends after 63 lines to this powerful final stanza:

The violent howling of winter and war has become
Like a juke-box tune that we dare not stop. We are afraid
Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare
Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void.
This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God.⁵

⁵ W.H. Auden, “If On Account of the Political Situation,” *New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1983): 439-440.

Rob Wilson discusses “If On Account of the Political Situation” explicitly as a nuclear work in his 1991 book *American Sublime*. In fact, he holds it up as a nuclear work that strikes the correctly awed tone about the bomb because it “senses the nuclear radiance.”⁶ He glosses the “Void” at the poem's conclusion as “the 'void' of atomic power threatening Cold War consciousness” and helpfully supplies the word nuclear within brackets when he quotes the earlier line, “this [nuclear] Horror starting already to scratch its way in?”⁷

Wilson's bracketing and glossing of nuclear horrors and voids of atomic power are objectionable because they project such certain correlations even as Wilson seems to have lost track of the text's origin. “If On Account of the Political Situation” is in fact not a poem at all, but is a portion of a speech by the Narrator in *For the Time Being*, Auden's decidedly pre-bomb 1944 Christmas Oratorio. The Oratorio was written for but never set to music. It is a moving war poem which is both deeply religious and playful with history. It is a play of many voices, including parts for Mary, Joseph, Herod, shepherds, wise men, and allegorical figures such as Feeling, Intuition, Sensation and Thought, among many others. It ranges in tone from the profane (“In a wet vacancy among the ash cans / a waiter coupled sadly with a crow”) to the triumphantly reconciled and reverent (“He is the Way / Follow him through the Land of Unlikeness”).⁸ The supposed-poem's origin affects how its tone and its pronouncements ought to be read. In this case, the lines known as “If On Account of the Political Situation” are voiced by a narrator in one of the long poem's more despairing, pre-nativity, pre-annunciation moments, which means that Auden did not mean to leave his reader eternally at the mercy of that “Horror

⁶ Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008): 252.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁸ W.H. Auden, *For the Time Being* in *Collected Poems* ed. Edward Mendelson: 347-400 (New York: Vintage 1991): 355, 398.

starting already to scratch its way in.”

For the Time Being sets the Nativity in a surreally bifocal temporal world that is simultaneously World War II Europe and the ancient Roman Empire—a technique anticipated by the (then unpublished) novelist Mikhail Bukgakov's handling of Pilate in *The Master and Margarita* and inherited by Donald Barthelme, whose Arthurian knights go erranting about World War II Europe in *The King*. If the world of Auden's long poem can simultaneously know engines, furnaces, juke boxes, the threat of Barbarians on the northern frontier and conspiracies in the Praetorian Guard, perhaps it is not too much to suggest that it also knows the atomic bomb. It is, like its gospel source material, sufficiently elastic and evocative to speak to ages other than its own.

But in this very proleptic sufficiency lies, I think, a problem for Wilson and other devotees of the nuclear sublime who argue that the nuclear must claim center stage in all artistic endeavors it touches, lest the artist be guilty of insensitivity to the age's greatest moral and physical hazard. Wilson seeks to use Auden as an exemplar of how the “nuclear sublime, whether sensed as a complex presence or hinted at as unarticulated absence, comprises the terror of a technological determination within the Cold War period, reducing the subject to languagelessness and bodily sublation.”⁹ If a 1944 poem can masquerade so convincingly as a poem touched by the bomb's special powers of reducing the subject to awed horror, languagelessness, and physical negation, then we must conclude that the bomb's powers are not so unique after all.

Auden's poem is not expressing terror at the technological determinism of the Cold War,

⁹ Wilson, *American Sublime*, 231.

though Wilson's glossing of Auden's lines is certainly guilty of that determinism. By being so deceived, Wilson is unexpectedly aligned with those authors whose work he calls "morally untenable" because they insist directly or by their aesthetic stance that the bomb has made no difference. As Auden puts it, the means of death make little matter "if, on account of the political situation, / There are quite a number of homes without roofs, and men / Lying about in the countryside neither drunk nor asleep." By 1944, from his leafy wartime posts in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, Auden had seen or imagined enough of Europe's wartime misery to appear to speak of life under the shadow of the atomic bomb.

To return to the lines that have seemed aptest and most useful for nuclear readings of the poems, lines about Voids and Horrors, we find that Auden's Void actually refers to a collective spiritual crisis rather than to the Cold War projection of atomic power through the "hostile objects" of atom bombs or missile silos.

The violent howling of winter and war has become
Like a juke-box tune that we dare not stop. We are afraid
Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare
Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void.
This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God.

If we follow Auden's chain of referential *thises* back up his lines, by ascending the chain of synonyms we see that the "wrath of God" is the Abomination is "this Void" is the "silence" that would come after the end of the then-ongoing war. God's wrath is silence. Auden's void points challengingly to the idea that people at some level enjoy the busy, purposeful "violent howling of... war" and fear the comparable void of peace. The real fear is that "our true existence / Is decided by no one and has no importance to love."¹⁰ In Auden's Oratorio, the Nativity provides

¹⁰ Auden, "If On Account of the Political Situation," 440.

an answer—of multivocally debatable sufficiency, but an answer nonetheless—to that heart's cry for love and purpose.

The recruitment of “If On Account of the Political Situation” into the nuclear canon is not an entirely unique story. Indeed, Paul Boyer observes in *By the Bomb's Early Light* that early literary reaction to the atom bomb consisted of “ferreting out the apt quotation” rather than “vigorous engagement of the literary imagination.”¹¹ From 1945-50, he argues, American writers struggle to assimilate to the new atomic reality but are too numbed by the war or too trapped in wartime patriotism to yet grapple with the meaning of the bomb. I am not so sure that we are in the presence of a uniquely atomic phenomenon here, and indeed it will be my methodological stance, though I identify myself as a nuclear scholar, to question every claim I encounter about the bomb's uniqueness. The phenomenon of considerable lag-time between event and literary event extends to the fictionalizing of much war experience, not just atomic war experience. To expect memoir at half a decade's remove (the approximate timeline of Philip Caputo, Tim O'Brien and Michael Herr, for instance) and perhaps fiction thereafter is more in keeping with the pace of writing, publishing, and human processing of trauma than is allowed for when Boyer attributes the lack of enduring atomic fiction in the five years after the Hiroshima bombing to special qualities of the bomb.

This Auden poem is an extreme representative of the way in which the ferreting impulse that Boyer identifies persists past the end of his study in 1950 and far past the emergence of vigorously-imagined nuclear literature. When exhibited by an American public in those first five years, Boyer may be right to see the impulse as one of grasping after familiar and humanizing

¹¹ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (New York: Pantheon, 1985): 248

meanings in a newly threatening world. When exhibited later by editors or literary critics (as by Frances Ferguson, to whom I turn in the next chapter), I believe it derives not from a search for meaning so much as from a settled conclusion about meaning that is so thoroughly under the sway of the singular atomic, historical moment that it predetermines almost any text (or even any silence) as testifying to the inarticulable enormity of the atomic bomb.

It is the minimal duty of scholarly accuracy to acknowledge the first life of “If On Account of the Political Situation” as part of *For the Time Being*. But after thirty years of life as a nuclear poem, the poem cannot be unread as such. It is now also the arms race that is “a violent howling... like a juke-box tune we dare not stop.” But if it is now a nuclear poem, *For the Time Being's* movement towards the solace of language, story and religion is deeply inconvenient to the cherished notion of unrepresentability around atomic matters. Such belief may even insist that the bomb us best “hinted at as unarticulated absence.” Wilson quotes the poet Jane Cooper, who asserts, “It seems to me almost impossible to address the nuclear threat directly, yet—whether we like it or not—that threat is an undercurrent in all our work now.”¹² This cult of unrepresentability unusefully obscures a long and varied history of representation, elevating one mode of representation to the point of pretending that all the others are impossible.

What are the parameters of impossibility or almost-impossibility that Cooper and Wilson claim? Is speaking of the nuclear impossible without resorting to the science-fiction? Or to overtly activist poetry? Or matter-of-fact journalistic prose? Or ideological and theological embarrassments such as the chipper 1946 country music hit, “Atomic Power,” which proclaimed that “Atomic power / was given by the mighty hand of God” and “Hiroshima Nagasaki / paid a

¹² Wilson, *American Sublime*, 230.

big price for their sin?” It is no use to pretend that an awestruck, horrified silence reigned in the years following World War II when such representations of the atomic bomb were written, released into the airwaves, and eagerly consumed. The chipper strains of “Atomic Power” gesture to how selective scholarly memory has manufactured the supposed-silence that currently obscures our sense of the earliest representations of the import of the bomb. The lurching rise of atomic Frankenstein metaphors and other, often bomb-admiring sublime representations printed in the immediate aftermath of the attack on Hiroshima are hiding in this selective gap in our collective literary, and are deeply problematic for the idea of an anti-nuclear nuclear sublime. It is to these early days of the nuclear sublime that I turn in my first chapter.

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CHAPTER I

For All We Know, We Have Created a Frankenstein: Unleashing the Nuclear Sublime

In his 1991 book, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre*, Rob Wilson posits the first descriptions of the Trinity test as the originating moment of the Nuclear Sublime, which he considers as a sub-genre of the American Sublime, that loss of self before the grandeur of nation. As a critical term, however, the notion of a “nuclear sublime” is far younger, dating to a 1984 article of that name by Frances Ferguson, and the *Diacritics* colloquium from which it originated. The texts upon which Ferguson performs her term-coining analysis are remarkably diverse: a notice from State Farm Insurance (speaking to the confluences of the atomic and the quotidian); Jonathan Schell's then-recent piece of speculative journalism, *The Fate of the Earth*, and Mary Shelley's 1818 Gothic novel, *Frankenstein*.¹

The description of this poetic mode or aesthetic category, then, is from its beginnings ahistorical. Upon this foundation is built the long-accepted idea that nuclear discourse has a sublime quality of awe, terror and wonderment verging on the inarticulable, and that the atomic bomb is that thing which humbles us today as once did God or nature. But if nuclear sublime texts become members of the genre by declaration and without regard to their period of

¹ Frances Ferguson, “The Nuclear Sublime,” *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984): 4-10.

production or original subject matter, it raises the concern the long-accepted sublime quality of nuclear literature emerges at least partly from selection bias. The sublime does not tell the whole story of nuclear literature.

There are ample and important examples of writings on the bomb, both in the period of initial reaction from 1945-6 and afterwards, that do not deploy the sublime mode, or do so very sparingly. Furthermore, many contemporary readers found that restraint meritorious. My next chapter will engage with a particular category of unsublime works on nuclear weapons, those that operate in the mode of what I am calling the *nuclear pastoral*. But first I want to adjust our understanding of the nuclear sublime by historicizing the entanglement of sublime style, mythic and monstrous metaphors, and one-world politics to create a truer history of the nuclear sublime and forge it into a more effective critical tool. In my first section, I take Ferguson at her word that Frankenstein is a good indicator of the sublime rhetoric of awe and terror, and use it as a tracer to follow the nuclear sublime back in time to the dawn of the atomic era. Following on the monster's footsteps, I learn that the nuclear sublime is implicated in a politics of displacing atomic guilt and justifying the bombings. I next explore another massively popular American metaphor for atomic matters, the story of Prometheus, using the two metaphors together to capture a wide-ranging sample of representations of the atomic bomb, both durable and ephemeral. Finally, I turn back to the canonical, to three towering figures in the early representation of the atomic bomb: William Laurence, Norman Cousins, and John Hersey, and discuss their work in terms of the nuclear sublime and the ways in which the nuclear sublime has deformed our nuclear literature canon.

The nuclear sublime's present critical utility is limited because it has become little more

than an affirmatory apparatus. This much is evident when Wilson openly declares that he finds “aesthetic aloofness” to be “morally untenable” and praises works that “sens[e] the nuclear radiance” by complying with the aesthetic dictates of a nuclear sublime.² He looks to such works to “undo” a “large, mythy, power-infatuated tone and stance,” while I find just such a stance to be encoded in the nuclear sublime.³

Wilson's claims are symptomatic of the way in which critics favorable to the sublime nuclear aesthetic have tried to claim it as a literature of protest, incorruptible and un-cooptable. It is unclear why the nuclear sublime should differ so sharply from other forms of the technological sublime, in which “awe and reverence once reserved for the Deity and later bestowed upon the visible landscape” were finally bestowed upon the technologies under description. This, Leo Marx's description of 19th-century writing on technology, suits much of the mid-20th century writings on the nuclear as sublime: “The overblown, exclamatory tone of so much of this writing arises from an intoxicated feeling of unlimited possibility.”⁴ On the twin axes of awe and terror that make up the sublime, these writings in the tradition of the technological sublime skew towards awed celebration of the subject, whether railroad, dynamo, electricity or atom bomb.⁵

² “Gertrude Stein's early stance of aesthetic aloofness and political resignation in “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb” (1946), however ironic, seems to me morally untenable, a modernist illusion of private superiority smugly sustained.”
Rob Wilson, *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008): 252.

³ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 197.

⁵ David Nye devotes a chapter of *American Technological Sublime* (1994) to examining the nuclear sublime as the farthest extension—an overextension—of Leo Marx's technological sublime. Nye argues that, though policy-makers attempted to “domesticate” the bomb as other technology before it—rail, electricity, space flight—had been assimilated into a framework of sublime admiration, in the case of the bomb, a “technology so terrifying ceased to be sublime” because it “could no longer claim to be an engine of moral enlightenment.” I share Nye's

One ought to be skeptical of the supposedly-moral character of the nuclear sublime as literature of protest, knowing the sublime for a rhetorical device for taking upon one's self the mantle of the great soul and knowing it for an attitude more easily achieved from the vantage of a bomber than from ground zero. (There are sensations of danger in the bomber, along with actual safety from which to contemplate the feeling; there is no safety at ground zero.) Just as many early writings on the bomb reproduce the overblown language register of the 19th-century technological sublime, they share in the idea of history as progress, which in the case of the early essays, is expressed in the fervent belief that the end of war must surely follow from the invention of a weapon so terrible as the atomic bomb.

Nuclear criticism has inherited the concept of the nuclear sublime, used it, even enshrined it as the standard for an appropriate response to the atom bomb. In light of such claims, we would do well to recall Longinus' definition of the sublime as a stylistic device deployed by authors—"a well-timed flash of sublimity scatters everything before it and reveals the full power of the speaker in a single stroke"⁶ The writing, not the referent, is sublime in such moments, for to Longinus the sublime is "consummate excellence and distinction in language" that transcends

skepticism about the atomic bomb as an engine of moral enlightenment, but believe his analysis dangerously overlooks the long and ongoing history of viewing the bomb as just that.

David Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1996), 254.

Anthropologist Joseph Masco agrees with Nye that the bomb destroyed the technological sublime—for a time. He sees the current Science Based Stockpile Stewardship regime at Los Alamos as reviving the nuclear sublime for scientists there (via the mathematical sublime) because this non-explosive era allows dizzyingly complex mathematical questions to be pursued without the visceral dangers of the era of atmospheric testing. Masco's analysis is a refreshing inheritance of the concept of the nuclear sublime because it locates the sublime properly—not in the bomb itself, but in the technologies of representing and knowing it. The same object that is too terrible to be sublime in an above-ground testing regime can become a classic object of the vertiginous awe of the mathematical sublime in a science-based stockpile stewardship regime of mathematical models and simulated explosions.

Joseph Masco, "Nuclear Techno-aesthetics: Sensory Politics from Trinity to the Virtual Bomb in Los Alamos," *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 3 (2004): 349-373.

⁶ "Longinus," *On the Sublime*, trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe in *Aristotle the Poetics*, "Longinus" on the Sublime, *Demetrius on Style*, ed. T.E. Page: 122-254. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960): 125.

rhetoric, not persuading but transporting its audience outside of itself as it “inspires wonder and casts a spell on us.”⁷ Longinus' premise that the sublime is style rings afresh to me today.⁸ We have long conflated sublime scenes—discrete durations of text—in narratives with sublime scenes or vistas in the referenced world—perhaps because exposure to post-Romantic texts have trained us to carry a sublime voice with us when we view such scenes.⁹ Wilson can likewise claim that the sublime, this stylistic device for producing ecstasy in readers, is the sole morally tenable response to a worldly phenomenon only because he has assumed that the sublime is attached to the nuclear already, as if it inheres there.

I. Historicizing Atomic Frankensteins

Ferguson's use of Shelley—or at least the use of Frankenstein and his monster—to speak about America and the atom bomb is a tradition with a history of its own. The recourse to this Gothic or Romantic text as, to use Ferguson's words, “a kind of parable to be read into our thinking about the nuclear” is as old as the first representations of the bomb in public discourse.¹⁰ Millions of Americans heard NBC's H.V. Kaltenborn speculate in the evening news broadcast of August 6, 1945: “For all we know, we have created a Frankenstein! We must assume that with

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Longinus' concept is slippery in its way, too, for this elevated language, employed unskillfully, may produce tumidity or puerility rather than sublimity—failures of the sort one knows when one sees. Ibid., 129,31.

⁹ John Baillie's 1747 essay “An Essay on the Sublime” clearly makes the conflation when he claims that “the sublime in writing is no more than a description of the sublime in nature,” though I am not prepared to call it the first. Joseph Trapp's 1742 *Essays on Poetry* claim that “sublime thought” is the “gift of nature only, though it may be much assisted by art.”

John Baillie, “An Essay on the Sublime,” in *The Sublime : a Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, 87-100. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 88.

Joseph Trapp, “On the Beauty of Thought in Poetry, Or of Elegance and Sublimity,” in *The Sublime : a Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, 55-56 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55.

¹⁰ Ferguson, “The Nuclear Sublime,” 9.

the passage of only a little time, an improved form of the new weapon we use today can be turned against us.”¹¹ Other atomic Frankensteins came tumbling after.

These new Frankenstein monsters of 1945 are a significant permutation in the long history of the Frankenstein metaphor in European, American and even global thought. Elizabeth Young writes of how the story functions in the 19th and 20th centuries as a figure for American race relations, with its twinned themes of sympathy for the manmade monster and blowback both reifying portraits of African Americans as less than human and criticizing the power structures that have treated them as such, at times succeeding in “turning an existing discourse of black monstrosity against itself.”¹² Young's study of *Frankenstein* as a race-relations metaphor reveals that the story has long been useful in “voicing dissent against elites whose policies are seen as misguided in intention and disastrous in effect.”¹³ In much the same way, the metaphor has enjoyed a durable life describing back-firing policies in international politics, particularly when the United States faces threats from leaders it formerly supported, from Hitler to Saddam Hussein.¹⁴

Susan Tyler Hitchcock's wide-ranging *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* embraces both these political uses and instances in which Frankenstein is invoked to describe new technology, but it makes no mention of the historic atomic Frankensteins. Hitchcock does, however, name the atomic scientists in an attempt to demonstrate Frankenstein's usefulness as an introspective

¹¹ Quoted in Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 5.

¹² Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ In 1945, prominent chemist and *Afro-American* columnist Harry Keelan claims, “England and the United States built up an arch-fiend in Germany and set him with his face towards the East. But Frankenstein backfired and moved West first.”

Harry Keelan, “Voice in the Wilderness,” *Afro-American*, Dec 29, 1945: 4. For more recent examples, see Susan Tyler Hitchcock, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* (New York: Norton 2007).

metaphor for at least one group of elites. To her reading, geneticists in the early days of cloning and genetic-engineering research hoped to avoid the fate of “the scientists of the 1950s” who “in the pattern of Victor Frankenstein... had looked back with horror only after the atomic bomb had been loosed on the world.”¹⁵ Her passing reference to atomic matters makes swift identification of the atomic scientists with Frankenstein, and implicitly accepts the notion that moral imagination of the implications of the atomic bomb was possible only in the 1950s, “only after the bomb had been loosed.” I argue that Frankenstein and Prometheus metaphors and the literary mode of the nuclear sublime play a key role in constructing this pervasive narrative of 1940s innocence and 1950s regret.

This convenient and simplistic narrative ignores and erases historical incidents like the effort of 155 Manhattan Project scientists, headed by Leo Szilard, to petition President Truman to make a demonstration shot instead of an immediate military use of the bomb. Their efforts clearly demonstrate that opposition to the bomb was possible before Hiroshima. Those close to the Manhattan Project held awareness of the destructive potential of atom bombs at different distances from their consciousnesses, and arrived at their various political and moral conclusions at different stages in the bomb-building process. J. Robert Oppenheimer enters the historical imaginary as the archetype of the modern Victor Frankenstein and America's Prometheus—the most popular face of the regretful scientist, ennobled by both his regret and his later opposition to the development of the hydrogen bomb, which he saw as a weapon that could have no other purpose than genocide. This picture of Oppenheimer meshes uneasily with the one who, thanks to 155 colleagues who awoke to opposition sooner, had the chance to regret before the bombs

¹⁵ Hitchcock, *Frankenstein: A Cultural History*, 269.

fell. Instead of awakening, he vehemently opposed and derided Szilard's efforts and ensured that the petition would not be heard by refusing to expedite it to Washington.¹⁶ The Frankenstein metaphor has covered its tracks well, replacing this complex story with one in which Oppenheimer awakens in a single unforeseen moment to the true nature of what he has helped unleash upon the world.

Ferguson includes *Frankenstein* as a subject for nuclear criticism under the notion not just that it is a useful parable, but that the novel's recovery in the preceding fifteen years testifies to the work's special appeal to the nuclear condition and so renders it already a nuclear text. Such logic—that a work's growing audience indicates its topical relevance and cultural insightfulness—might tend to direct us to look to mass pop-cultural phenomena rather than to evolutions in the rarefied arena of our 19th-century literary canon, but nonetheless, Ferguson argues that *Frankenstein* resonates in the nuclear age because it figures "the Gothic reversal of the sublime dream of self-affirmation, the fear that the presence of other people is totally invasive and erosive of the self."¹⁷ She primes this rather idiosyncratic reading of *Frankenstein* with a reading of a moment in *The Fate of the Earth* (1982) when Schell urges his readers to save the earth for the "generations of the unborn."¹⁸ Schell's unborn generations clamoring for their right to exist strike Ferguson as creepy and undead, and therefore, she argues, Victor Frankenstein must suffer similarly when presented with so many adopted Frankenstein family

¹⁶ For Oppenheimer's opposition to the petition, See Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (New York: Knopf, 2005): 302. For Oppenheimer speaking favorably of the demonstration shot much later, see Robert Jungk, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958): 209.

¹⁷ Ferguson, "The Nuclear Sublime," 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

members.¹⁹ Thus, the 1982 piece of apocalyptic speculative journalism teaches us how to read the nuclear meanings of the 1818 novel.

Ferguson is not alone in preferring a nuclear canon made from postnuclear readings of prenuclear works. Other foundational figures in nuclear criticism scorn the study of both historic public discourse and new imaginative literature on the topic in favor of the already-canonical. In a piece in the same colloquium and issue of *Diacritics*, Derrida avows, “I believe that the nuclear epoch is dealt with more 'seriously' in texts by Mallarmé or Kafka or Joyce, for example, than in present day novels that would offer direct and realistic descriptions of a 'real' nuclear catastrophe.”²⁰ Derrida's distaste for science fiction is a thin reason for nuclear criticism to avoid engagement with historical and contemporary nuclear discourses, so other scholars have taken up the categories of work he scorned. This work has proceeded, however, to use as its critical tool and gold standard the nuclear sublime, a concept developed in explicit rejection of these works.

While Ferguson makes the leap directly from the gothic-Romantic sublime of Shelley to the idea of a nuclear sublime in the late twentieth century, later inheritors of the term have made frequently problematic attempts to backfill the term's conceptual genealogy. Wilson attempts to stretch the concept of the nuclear sublime over the whole duration of nuclear history when he turns to Alamogordo, armed with his assumption that the sublime is the appropriate aesthetic response to all things nuclear. He sees symptoms of the sublime experience in the awed

¹⁹ Ferguson argues that the true horror of the novel lies in over-expansion. Regarding the monster's overstuffed skin, this reading is compelling, but it is thin-stretched stuff indeed when Ferguson suggests that the expansion of the Frankenstein family to include the servant Justine, Victor's cousin/wife Elizabeth and friend Henry Clerval is recapitulating that monstrous overextension, causing Victor to “imagine his identity ebbing” under pressure from so many honorary Frankensteins (9). It's a difficult reading to credit when Victor's praise of his family is so evident and his mourning for them is so much the centerpiece of his misery. I confess great puzzlement at Ferguson's notion that a 20th-century style nuclear family would be a less extended and therefore less monstrous phenomenon in *Frankenstein's* 18th-century setting or 19th-century context.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives),” trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 27.

inarticulateness of a brigadier general and a physicist after the Trinity test. But is it not possible that inarticulateness is merely inarticulateness? Wilson asserts that Robert Oppenheimer's reaction to the Trinity test "can function as a primal scene of postnuclear sublimity." The example is fittingly if unwittingly chosen, since the utterance he lays out as "Oppenheimer's personal scenario of awe/terror before the explosion of the first atom bomb" is the oft-circulated story that the scientist quoted—perhaps aloud, perhaps to himself—the Bhagavad-Gita, "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds," or "I am become death, shatterer of worlds." Historians have, however, suggested that Oppenheimer may have embroidered his experience with sacred allusion only years afterwards. Bird and Sherwin note that one of Oppenheimer's friends thought the quotation sounded like "one of Oppie's 'priestly exaggerations.'" They trace the quotation's first appearance in print to 1948.²¹ The journalist Bill Laurence was present at the test and later claimed to recall the "'shattering impact' of Oppenheimer's words" but never himself committed them to print until 1959, by which time they had circulated in several other sources. Charles Thorpe traces a similarly dubious pedigree for the quotation (161-2).²² More credible than William Laurence's belated claim that he never forgot the "shattering impact" of Oppenheimer's words is Frank Oppenheimer, wishing he could remember what his brother said, but offering, "I think we just said, 'It worked.'"²³

Wilson's devotion to the nuclear sublime makes him determined to locate and study the sublime at Alamogordo, but his originary moment for postnuclear sublimity hinges upon public desire, credulity and veneration for the image of Oppenheimer as the regretful humanist-scientist,

²¹ Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 309.

²² Charles Thorpe, *Oppenheimer: The Tragic Intellect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 161-2.

²³ Richard Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986): 675.

and upon the pressure that Oppenheimer may himself have felt to produce that image through “priestly exaggerations.” When the nuclear sublime makes such distorting demands upon the historical record, it indicates that it has seriously outworn its value as a critical tool. It renders the scholar vulnerable to imbibing rather than explicating national myth because it consistently imagines itself to describe the thing, not its representations. Because Wilson naturalizes the nuclear sublime as an unconstructed aesthetic quality of the bomb rather than seeing it as a literary construction with a literary genealogy, Wilson's narrative demands an Oppenheimer who saw the Trinity test and thought, “I am become death.”

The national determination to find the sublime at Alamogordo points to the role that the nuclear sublime plays in an elaborate guilt-expiation ritual, in which Hiroshima is regretted, but not apologized for because the bombing of Hiroshima is figured as a teleologically necessary site of sublime revelation. Hiroshima can be made into such a site because the sublime experience has long been linked to moral elevation or improvement. If today we are squeamish about speaking of such belief in transformations, the wilderness therapy industry speaks for us: we are a nation that believes that the sublime grandeur of nature can heal us, restore us, leave us better than we were. In this belief, we are inheritors of Romantic sublime aesthetic, and its moral baggage. In *Frankenstein*, susceptibility to sublime scenes in nature is a mark of social and even moral standing. Victor Frankenstein eulogizes Henry Clerval with lines from Wordsworth: “The sounding cataract / Haunted him like a passion.”²⁴ Likewise, Captain Walton admires

Frankenstein because

no one can feel more deeply than he does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the power of

²⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Seventh Edition, vol. 2A (New York: Norton, 2000): 994.

elevating his soul from earth. Such a man has a double existence: he may suffer misery, and be overwhelmed by disappointments; yet when he has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit.²⁵

Victor Frankenstein, Captain Walton and Mary Shelley all use the sublime as a tool to divide the world into those who are capable of these fine sensations and those who are not. Shelley's sublime emphasizes sublime experience, not sublime scenes; by having Victor describe Lake Geneva or northern Scotland in this register, she is displaying Victor's well-bred credentials as one who in nature is "haunted like a passion."

A subjective experience of the sublime before the atomic bomb conveys a similar certification of class and morality. The nuclear sublime as an aesthetic category insists upon sorting the world's authors into one class of celestial spirits and another of dull clods—if one believes its starting assumption that the atomic bomb, like a wild and powerful scene in nature, is a site of the sublime and should be felt as such. Environmental historians have ably traced the extent to which a sublime wilderness experience requires both cultural inoculation and sufficient luxurious estrangement from the natural world to view it as other, as an aesthetic landscape rather than a productive space or dangerous waste.²⁶ Seeing the atomic bomb as sublime, I argue, requires a similar set of prerequisite estrangements. The observer who sees the bomb as sublime requires distance from immediate effects and threats of the bomb (a species of luxury in not being its target) and cultural inoculation (which Ferguson's article and various awe-inflected (or

²⁵ Ibid., 920.

²⁶ On the historical situatedness of sublime wilderness experience: Robert Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, London: Granta, 2003 ; William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995): 69-9. On the dependance of such experience upon the alienation from wilderness labor, see James Nations, "Deep Ecology Meets the Developing World," *Biodiversity* (1988): 79-82; Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *Nature: Thinking the Natural*, ed. David Inglis, John Bone and Rhoda Wilkie (New York: Routledge, 2005): 47-62; Richard White. "Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1996): 171-85.

awe-infected) texts of the 1940s supply in abundance). To declare the existence of a nuclear sublime is to again divide the world into those who are susceptible to sublime sensations and those who are not. As such, it is no wonder that criticism that takes the nuclear sublime as its starting point has little to say about the frank prose of John Hersey, so direct and spare in style that it is frequently spoken of as having no style at all, or the rebellious assertions of Kurt Vonnegut, survivor of a devastating conventional urban bombing at Dresden, who off-handedly mentions in the opening pages of *Slaughterhouse-Five* that “not many Americans knew how much worse it had been than Hiroshima,”²⁷ or of a rich tradition of historiography that challenges early accounts that painted the atomic bomb as militarily decisive²⁸ and even questions the premise of examining ‘the decision to use the atomic bomb.’²⁹ Above all, predicated as it is on the distant bomber’s-eye view, how could literary criticism oriented towards the nuclear sublime take into account the experience of atomic victims? How could it dare?

The nuclear-sublime attitude fetishizes sight and witness (imagined or actual), as if (distant, aggressor-side) personal experience of the bomb is the only means of comprehending it. Los Alamos director Harold Agnew told a Senate foreign relations committee in 1977 (14 years after the atmospheric test ban treaty):

I firmly believe that if every five years the world's major political leaders were required to witness the in-air detonation of a multi-megaton warhead, progress on meaningful

²⁷ Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse-Five* (New York: Dell, 1991): 10.

²⁸ For the historiography and public memory of the Hiroshima bombing, see Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995) and Mike Wallace, “The Battle of the Enola Gay,” in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, ed. Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998): 317-37.

²⁹ For a particularly early and pugilistic version of this thinking, see Gabriel Kolko, who writes: “The basic moral decision that the Americans had to make during the war was whether or not they would violate international law by indiscriminately attacking and destroying civilians, and they resolved that dilemma within the context of conventional weapons. Neither fanfare nor hesitation accompanied their choice, and in fact the atomic bomb use against Hiroshima was less lethal than massive firebombing.” Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War* (New York: Random House, 1968): 539.

arms control measures would be speeded up appreciably.³⁰

He positions himself as an atomic Cassandra: he could convince the committee if he could show them the bombs, but he cannot. There is only his word, the efficacy of which he despairs. Jeremy Bernstein, an atomic test witness writing for the *New York Review of Books*' blog in 2010, shares this attitude. He laments that, with the ban on above-ground nuclear testing, “we have lost the experience of watching a nuclear explosion—perhaps the most powerful lesson about nuclear bombs there is.”³¹ Both men suggest that we need to return to a vanished testing regime to achieve moral education. Bernstein's “we” embraces “the Indians, Pakistanis, Israelis—to say nothing of the Iranians and North Koreans,” as well as most American and Japanese citizens. Aware that the series of Nevada tests he witnessed caused some 2000 deaths from cancer and involved the exposure of 1500 soldiers to hazardous doses of radiation at ground zero, Bernstein stops short of advocating for front-row seats at atomic tests for all, but he is sanguine on the effect of tests on their witnesses. He testifies to his own transformation by asserting, “I was never quite the same. I cannot think of nuclear weapons as an abstraction.” It is similar to Agnew's move to claim authority by virtue of his rare experience: the senators he addresses have not seen what he has seen; they have “no personal experience that they can relate to the actual phenomenon.” If they had, they would prioritize arms control progress.

Agnew's involvement in the production and deployment of nuclear weapons could scarcely be more direct. He was Los Alamos's head of weapon nuclear engineering and later Director and was the scientific observer on the Hiroshima bombing run, a man once

³⁰ U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Threshold Test Ban and Peaceful Nuclear Explosion Treaties*. Hearing, 8 September 1977 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1977) (Y4.F76/2:T41): 65.

³¹ Jeremy Bernstein, “A Mushroom Cloud, Recollected,” *NYR Blog*, March 23, 2010. <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2010/mar/23/a-mushroom-cloud-recollected/>

photographed holding the plutonium core of the Nagasaki bomb in one hand like a briefcase.³²

Yet, in their rhetoric about testing, Agnew and Bernstein envision the nuclear production and testing regime as producing not weapons or even military-political theatre for international political posturing, but as moral theatre that creates witnesses who will advocate against nuclear war.

Fetishizing atomic witness as an instantaneously morally-improving experience ignores the historical reality of the Trinity test's failure to produce enough anti-bomb witnesses (or the right witnesses) to prevent the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It also reproduces the teleological reasoning of certain early, appalled reactions to the bombing of Hiroshima—Norman Cousins' *Modern Man is Obsolete* foremost among them—that treat Hiroshima as a solemn but necessary lesson: we had to see the bomb to know that the bomb should never be used again. Hiroshima makes it hard to make such claims about the test at Alamogordo; Nagasaki destroys such claims about Hiroshima. If mushroom clouds are not morally improving, where does that leave us post-Trinitarians? Frequently, it has left us telling each other stories of those selfsame sublime qualities of the nuclear; stories of unexpected, unpredictable Atomic Frankensteins and tragic, self-sacrificial American Prometheii.

The *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune* contain 46 uses of “Frankenstein” in articles about atomic or nuclear matters in 1945-9, and 106 in the 1950s. Frankenstein imagery thus graces a mere fraction of the 145,000 such articles produced in these papers in the fifteen years in question, but it appears at moments when writing about the

³² Photograph reprinted in Matthew Davis, “The Men Who Bombed Hiroshima,” *BBC News*, 4 August 2005. Web.

bomb strives to be exegetic rather than merely informational.³³ Why is *Frankenstein* (or, rather, Frankenstein's monster, as we gather these authors mean from the usage) useful at such moments?³⁴ Surely a shambling Boris Karloff is not an image necessary to illustrate the monstrosly dangerous nature of the bomb? Instead, the Frankenstein of early nuclear rhetoric remains (despite the misnomer) close to his Gothic roots.³⁵ He functions as a figure for unintended consequences, for innocent experimentation gone wrong.

Kaltenborn's radio news statement on August 6 linked the idea of the bomb as “a Frankenstein” with the moment when “an improved form of the new weapon we use today can be turned against us.” The turning of the bomb from its American creators' intended target would be what makes the bomb a Frankenstein. Kaltenborn's separation is milder than other Frankenstein evocations in that he, at least, never loses sight of the bomb's first and only purpose: it is a new weapon designed for use in war. Other writers stretch the gap between intended consequences and possible consequences even wider, and Frankenstein is the figure that helps them push these two ideas apart. Secretary of War Henry Stimson's diary is widely quoted to the effect that he told an Interim Committee meeting convened on May 31, 1945 to discuss the

³³ ProQuest historical newspapers database.

³⁴ Some observers (e.g. Theodore Ziolkowski) blame film for the nominal migration from creator to creation, but Steven Earl Forry demonstrates the slippage occurring in the 19th century, particularly around the time that the monster receives widespread dissemination as a visual metaphor in political cartoons about England's First Reform Bill of 1832. Steven Earl Forry, *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990): 36-7.

³⁵ The monster in the 1931 film never acquires language nor displays the fine sensibilities of Shelley's creature. His abnormal brain was that of a murderer to begin with (more a problem of execution than a problem with the project of creating life from spare dead parts). It removes both Shelley's focus on science meddling in matters best left to deities, and the possibility that Shelley holds out that the monster might have been noble. This latter facet, of the potentially-good monster seems key to its use in nuclear discourse. The film stages one scene that appears to reference the novel-monster's hope of being accepted by a blind man or child (individuals whom he hoped to find unprejudiced by his appearance). The Karloff monster achieves the Shelley monster's greatest wish when he *successfully* befriends a little girl who is unafraid of him—and then he summarily drowns her. Instead of being tragically flawed, the cinema monster is monstrous through and through.

anticipated deployment of the bomb that it might become “a Frankenstein which would eat us up” or be a project “by which the peace of the world would be helped in becoming secure.”³⁶

Perhaps someone at that meeting recalled Stimson's words at the Trinity Test on July 16, for in an August 7 article on the *New York Times* front page, Sidney Shalett locates the Frankenstein metaphor in the minds of the scientists who gathered for the test, “frankly fearful to witness the results of the invention, which might turn out to be either the salvation or the Frankenstein monster of the world.”³⁷ By August 12, Shalett still has an air of quotation, though it is even less clear of who, when he writes, “Some feel that . . . the atomic bomb may prove to be a Frankenstein's monster capable of destroying civilization.” He continues, “but others feel that, under wise control, it may prove civilization's great boon.”³⁸ Again there is the opposition: the savior, or the Frankenstein.

With time, the space opened by the Frankenstein figure to imagine the bomb's intentions as unmonstrous grows appreciably. One *Chicago Daily Tribune* editorial speaks of “this wonderful device for cementing the bonds of friendship among the peoples of the earth,” which might, if used improperly, “become a constant threat and eventually develop into a Frankenstein.”³⁹ Almost incredibly, the writer claims that the bomb is a “wonderful device” for producing friendship and peace. In this deeply denial-infected but not uncommon figuration, any destructive properties are mere unintended and surprising possible side-effects.

³⁶ Quoted in Sherwin 205; the meeting's minutes (reproduced in the appendix, 299-301) are not sufficiently detailed to confirm Stimson's self-quotation. I am cautious of the historiographic deployment of diaries as if they perfectly recreate the speech of their authors, particularly in a climate in which public figures are under pressure to produce profound thoughts (as in the case of Oppenheimer at Alamogordo).
Martin Sherwin, *A World Destroyed: The Atomic Bomb and the Grand Alliance*, New York: Knopf 1975.

³⁷ Sidney Shalett, “New Age Ushered: Day of Atomic Energy Hailed by President, Revealing Weapon,” *New York Times*, 7 August 1945: 1-2.

³⁸ Sidney Shallet [sic], “Pattern of Future War is Changed,” *New York Times*, 12 August 1945: e4.

³⁹ M. Schmidl, “His Debt to America,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1945: 20.

This extreme version of the atomic Frankenstein as “wonderful device” recalls how Victor Frankenstein, consumed with the “ardour” of creation, “selected his [the monster's] features as beautiful” with “infinite pains and care,” and only after the monster's animation did “the beauty of the dream vanis[h], and breathless horror and disgust fil[l] his heart” (935). Intended for beauty, the monster is in his own words “an abortion”—a dreadful miscarriage (1033). The rhetoric of the bomb as Frankenstein attempts to elide the fact that the atom bomb was no miscarriage of science, but was a success, brought full-term at Alamogordo and again at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Rhetorics that compare the bomb to that most famous of monsters thus appear anti-nuclear on their surface, but ultimately, they participate in a discourse of denial. By the fall of 1945, the Frankenstein expression is well and truly on the loose, even functioning as a shorthand for this simplistic and mislocated regret. The *Los Angeles Times* registers a remarkably adjectival, off-hand use: “The headaches over what to do with this Frankenstein device continue to pile up.”⁴⁰ A *New York Times* article similarly leads off by using “the Frankenstein possibilities of the atomic bomb” as a phrase to identify the topic of executive and Congressional action. This language by no means indicates an anti-atomic-bomb stance. The *Times* quickly offers a definitional phrase for the atomic bomb so that the lede reads in full: “The Frankenstein possibilities of the atomic bomb—characterized by one scientist as the 'greatest discovery since the prehistoric discovery of fire'—were matters of increasing debate and concern last week.”⁴¹ In the self-contained world of this sentence, a discovery can have the *possibility* of being a

⁴⁰ “Another Proposal for Atomic Bomb Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 1945: A4.

⁴¹ “For Atomic Control,” *New York Times*, 14 October 1945: E2.

The unnamed scientist's quote appears attributed to James Conant in an October 10 article. William S. White, “Atom Control is Speeded by House Military Group,” *New York Times*, 10 October 1945: 1.

Frankenstein monster, with all of its connotations of abomination and destruction, while at the same time being the greatest discovery since fire, with all of its connotations of civilization and domestic hearth-making.

The domesticating comparison of fission to fire (often shorthanded through metaphor as “atomic fire”) often functions in nuclear rhetoric as an evocation of the story of Prometheus, the eternally suffering bringer of fire. It is unusual to see the two great American myths of the atomic bomb co-existing in a single sentence, for while the Frankenstein archetype provides a framework for expressing anxiety or criticism of the invention or experts' policies around it, the Prometheus story is deployed to vindicate the atomic scientists and displace atomic guilt.

II. American Prometheii

Much like the nuclear sublime, the atomic Prometheus is such an important a mode of representation that it merits its own origin myth based at Alamogordo. In June, 1946, *Washington Post* columnist Leonard Lyons reported a “probably... apocryphal story” of the reactions of three principal individuals to the Trinity test.

Oppenheimer said: “This is a sight man has dreamed of for centuries; this is an accomplishment which will dwarf the discovery of electricity.” Bill Laurence of the *New York Times* said: “I have just witnessed the most important achievement since Prometheus discovered fire.” General Groves said: “I saw three stars.”⁴²

Groves' interest in his own personal advancement and the military's drab utilitarianism are the punchline here. Or is it Laurence's mythic language? The Prometheus figure had been used widely by this date, including by Laurence, and it succinctly typified Laurence's breathless

⁴² Leonard Lyons, “Manhattan Memos,” *Washington Post* 29 June 1946 p. 10.

descriptions of the bomb.⁴³ Oppenheimer's long view is just the setup for the joke about Laurence's language and Groves' promotion. Certainly this apocryphal utterance, with its comparison of the atom bomb to electricity providing a domesticating, atoms-for-peace flavor, is far less remembered than Oppenheimer's likely equally apocryphal statements about becoming a destroyer of worlds.

Half a year later, film critic Bosley Crowther references Laurence's mention of Prometheus at Alamogordo, albeit with mild correction of his storytelling: "Laurence has eloquently compared [the electrifying tryout of the first bomb in New Mexico] to Prometheus' liberation of fire."⁴⁴ It is possible, however, that Lyons (or Lyons' probably apocryphal story) is Crowther's source. I can find no print genealogy that suggests Laurence as the father of this particular metaphor. The first appearance of Prometheus in connection to the atomic bomb appears to have been when, as early as August 8, 1945, Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote of the "Promethean Role of the United States:"

The atomic bomb can turn the world into a graveyard or a garden, and the United States, the Prometheus who has dared the heavens to invoke this power, has assumed the first responsibility for deciding which it shall be.⁴⁵

America is McCormick's Prometheus; later renditions tend to use the atomic scientists, collectively, as Prometheus, and recent decades have crystallized J. Robert Oppenheimer as (to borrow the title of the Pulitzer-Prize winning biography), the *American Prometheus*. All of these uses of the Prometheus image share rhetorical and political tendencies associated with the nuclear sublime: they see the atomic bomb as demanding elevated (in this case mythological)

⁴³ See for example Laurence's description of the "Promethean structures" at the Hanford nuclear facility, "Atomic Factories Incredible Sight," *New York Times* 29 September 1945 p. 6.

⁴⁴ Bosley Crowther, "Hollywood Tries to Make History With 'The Beginning of the End'" *New York Times* 23 February 1947 p. XI.

⁴⁵ Anne O'Hare McCormick, "The Promethean Role of the United States," *New York Times*, 8 August 1945, p. 22.

language; they partake of atom-bomb exceptionalism that argues that the bomb is unique, unprecedented, unforeseeable in history, and that the great good of the end of war must result from it. (In McCormick's phrasing, "The atomic bomb makes peace imperative by making war impossible.") Finally, the metaphor's depiction of the bomb's creators as tragic and self-sacrificial figures is useful for the deflection of guilt over the bomb's invention and use.

Arthur Compton invokes it to this end in his introduction to *One World or None*, the best-selling 1946 essay collection produced by the Federation of American (Atomic) Scientists. His opening line is the assertion, "It was inevitable that mankind should have atomic fire."⁴⁶ "Atomic fire," like his other euphemisms for *fission* or *bomb*—"the release of atomic energy" or "atomic might"—is a self-censorship that recalls the Los Alamos practice of avoiding the word *bomb* in favor of *device* or *gadget*. At the end of the second paragraph, however, he makes explicit the metaphorical import of "atomic fire" when he refers to the bomb as "the Promethean gift."

The story of Prometheus as the bringer of fire is at its heart a just-so story. It begins at the ending—how did man discover fire?—and therefore is useful to Compton's desire to re-frame the building and use of the atomic bomb as resulting from inevitabilities rather than decisions. He frames the main achievement of the Manhattan Project not as creating the bomb, but as achieving this inevitable milestone before the Germans did. In its entirety, *One World or None* represents a disowning of the creation, an elaborate public performance of Promethean suffering by the regretful humanist scientists, for the Prometheus in these myths is not just Prometheus the gift-giver. It is also Prometheus martyred for his generosity, chained to a rock while eagles

⁴⁶ Arthur Compton, introduction to *One World or None*, ed. Dexter Masters and Katharine Way. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946): v.

devour his liver. To call one's selves, collectively, Prometheus, is a covert means of acknowledging the pangs of conscience, speaking of the guilt of having unleashed this weapon upon the world. It speaks to the larger project of *One World or None*, that book's effort to have it both ways, unabashedly deriving its authority from Nobel laurels and wartime atomic service while warning of the dangers that service unleashed. It is at once an act of public courage, a paternalistic exercise in public education, and a self-serving performance of public suffering.

Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin make the suffering-Prometheus component explicit when they use as epigraph for their biography of Oppenheimer the following excerpt from Apollodorus' rendering of the Prometheus story:

Prometheus stole fire and gave it to men. But when Zeus learned of it, he ordered Hephaestus to nail his body to Mount Caucasus. On it Prometheus was nailed and kept bound for many years. Every day an eagle swooped on him and devoured the lobes of his liver, which grew by night.⁴⁷

The implication that Oppenheimer, the American Prometheus, suffers similarly, is driven home in the case Bird and Sherwin make around Oppenheimer's security clearance hearings. They compile two pages of testimony from friends who believe the security clearings nearly killed Oppenheimer. The anguish of betrayal by his nation was mental, but the ravages were physical: his hair “turned silver white” and “for the first time, he looked older than his age.”⁴⁸ They conclude one paragraph with David Lilienthal's impression that, some years after the hearings, Oppenheimer had aged and mellowed. Lilienthal reflects, “He has weathered one of the most violent, bitter storms that any human being ever went through.”⁴⁹ Doing his part to keep Oppenheimer's myth, Lilienthal boldly elevates the violence to Oppenheimer's *reputation* (and

⁴⁷ Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*: vi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 551.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 562.

the effects of stress on an aging body) into one of the terrible ordeals “that any human being ever went through.” Whoever that category of “any human being” includes, it must exclude the atomic bomb victims who suffered actual violence and the bitter wash of atomic rain. The legend of a Promethean gift so quickly ushers humanitarian consequences offstage as to aid the atomic bomb in its work of dehumanizing its victims.

Prometheus proves an elastic and useful metaphor—capable of acknowledging pangs of conscience over the taking of human life, and then moving quickly away from such contemplations. By figuring the bomb as a gift—a useful domestic article, like a hearth fire, it points to possible peacetime uses of nuclear energy. It thus evades the destructive nature of the bomb, or refigures it as a device so powerful that it destroys war itself, not cities.

The early history of atomic Frankensteins and American Prometheii indicates that their myth-infused, elevated language occurs often in conjunction with messianic political expectations for the bomb's effect upon world peace and with a failure to come to terms with its already obvious effects on two Japanese cities. This pattern is repeated in other early examples of sublime-style writing about the bomb. The nuclear sublime has an historical politics, and is not necessarily the politics with the greatest claim to moral tenability (if such is defined by anti-nuclear sentiment) or the aesthetic with the best credentials for usefulness to the anti-nuclear movement. Much to the contrary: Laurence, the Pentagon shrill, exemplifies sublime style, while John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, often credited by historians with jumpstarting the American antinuclear movement, is anything but sublime in its descriptions of the bomb.

III. What is our Nuclear Canon?

The critical concept of the nuclear sublime has, I think, deformed our nuclear literature canon, as evidenced by how surprisingly little discussed the following trio of texts have been in what we call nuclear criticism. William Laurence, the Pulitzer-Prize winning *New York Times* reporter now perhaps best remembered as a propagandist who concealed his knowledge of radiation's harmful effects at home and in Japan, is sometimes quoted sparingly for his descriptions of the Trinity test or the bombing of Nagasaki. His “Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki Told by Flight Member” was finally published on September 9, 1945 after being held up by censors. The other two works, John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and Norman Cousins' editorial, *Modern Man is Obsolete* (published first of the three on August 18, 1945, and written even before the bomb fell on Nagasaki) achieved immediate popular readership in print and then book publication, and generated extensive discussion. *Hiroshima*'s omission from the discourse of nuclear criticism is particularly surprising because it is the widest-read and longest-enduring work in nuclear literature, but is passed over for being incompatible with discussions organized around the nuclear sublime. The Cousins and Laurence pieces are, on the other hand, little remembered today, though (or because) they embody what the nuclear sublime finds lacking in Hersey.

John Hersey's *Hiroshima* made its debut as a 30,000-word *New Yorker* feature filling the entire issue on August 31, 1946. Hersey braided together data about the bomb's effects with his own narration of the experience of six survivors whom he interviewed. The piece was quickly serialized by 30 U.S. newspapers, produced for ABC radio and republished in book form, where it enjoyed extensive distribution through the Book of the Month Club.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ “Literati: Newspapers Take Hersey,” *Variety* 164. 1, 11 September 1946: 61.

The work has proved enduring. It is still in print and retains a place in high-school curriculums. Rigorous national surveys of curriculum are rare, but in 1989, a National Endowment for the Arts-sponsored survey found that *Hiroshima* was taught in 7% of public and 8% of Catholic schools. It was one of just three works of nonfiction to appear on the list of works taught in more than 5% of schools, ranking behind Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* and ahead of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, company that speaks to use of the book as a work of historic witness despite its authorship by a non-victim.⁵¹

Few early nuclear texts reached a wider immediate audience, and even fewer still continue to expand their audience year by year, yet Hersey's account is just a footnote to accounts that explore nuclear literature as sublime, for the simple reason that his prose could never fall under such an aesthetic category. Scholars of war literature and trauma literature have by no means shunned *Hiroshima* as unliterary, and scholars of the history of journalism have seen Hersey's novelistic form as an important midcentury negotiation of the line between journalism and fiction and a forerunner to New Journalism.⁵² These fields that engage more fully with *Hiroshima* can show the way for nuclear criticism to ask better questions of that text: its genre, form, reporting choices, tone towards victims and handling of their emotion, all questions that are not engaged by merely asking whether the bomb is sublime in *Hiroshima*.

Exclusion of Hersey from discussion of nuclear literature echoes a longstanding tendency to flatten Hersey into a writer somehow devoid of style. "Hersey continued to be somewhat overpraised for a good job of reporting," wrote his contemporary, Sterling North, summing up

⁵¹ Arthur N. Applebee, *A Study of Book-Length Works Taught in High School English Courses* (Albany: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature, SUNY Albany, 1989).

⁵² On Hersey and New Journalism, see Doug Underwood, *Chronicling Trauma* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011)" 131.

the literary happenings of 1946 and dryly dismissing the favorable critical reception of *Hiroshima* as misdirected at writing that was only “reporting.”⁵³ Others have found reason to consider Hersey very much worth taking about. In his recent book, *Chronicling Trauma*, Doug Underwood places Hersey alongside Kurt Vonnegut as a key turning-point in war writing, between the pose of the heroic battlefield correspondent and the contemporary habit of candidness about war's impact on the psyche, calling both Vonnegut and Hersey important forerunners of the Vietnam writers' de-romanticization of warfare. Underwood's productive placement of Hersey alongside Vonnegut the experimentalist points to the ways in which the style-free Hersey is an unhelpful caricature.

Phyllis Frus recently added useful context to the discussion of Hersey's style and form, viewing them as part of a tradition of the construction of journalistic objectivity, which she describes as that style of writing consisting of direct, Hemingwayesque prose that insists upon its author's accuracy and neutrality. She makes the bold summation that responses to Hersey fall into two camps, divided “along the lines of form and content.” She divides *Hiroshima*'s readers into those who read the text as transparent, praising it for its content, and those that succeed in reading Hersey more critically—and therefore object to his style and form. This latter camp sees Hersey's work as styled, even stylized, and monstrously so, with “Hersey's understatement... result[ing] in exaggerated effects: excessive detachment, unnaturally impersonal narration, and the monotonous recording of details.”⁵⁴ Foremost among the first wave of the latter critics is Dwight Macdonald, who called Hersey's style “denatured naturalism” and accused him of

⁵³ Sterling North, “1946 Was Great Year For the Hucksters, Literary or Otherwise,” *Washington Post*, 15 December 1946: S8.

⁵⁴ Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 93.

writing with so little emotion as to treat the bombing victims as lab mice.⁵⁵ Macdonald's criticism of Hersey's gaze is significant, particularly because it anticipates the scientific detachment in the attitude of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission which began work three months later, conducting often-humiliating examinations of explosion-affected persons but offering no medical interventions but placebo-like administrations of vitamins to obscure the purely research-oriented nature of the examinations. There are times when the apparatus of journalistic and scientific objectivity can be very cruel indeed.

Yet Frus, writing as she does of the constructed nature of journalistic objectivity, should not have failed to contextualize the Macdonald review and its ethical objections to Hersey as a missile launched at the *New Yorker* from a rival publication. Macdonald, the radical editor of *Politics*, was a longstanding and outspoken critic of *New Yorker* for its bourgeois politeness.⁵⁶ In another rare hostile review (also published in *Politics*), Mary McCarthy famously challenged Hersey to interview the dead because interviews with survivors could never do justice to the atom bomb. She objected to Hersey filling the void of American knowledge of the effects of the bomb with “busy little Japanese Methodists” and to a human-interest format that she found trivializing. McCarthy ultimately protests Hersey's representation in terms which are closely allied to ideas of the sublime as unrepresentable. She believes that Hersey should have bowed to the bomb's unrepresentability by performing impossible interviews with the dead instead of producing a *New Yorker* feature whose material presence was entirely too familiar—right down to the cigarette and perfume ads.⁵⁷ McCarthy was a close associate of Macdonald and a regular

⁵⁵ Dwight Macdonald, "Hersey's Hiroshima," *Politics* (Oct. 1946): 308.

⁵⁶ See for example "Laugh and Lie Down," *Partisan Review*, Vol. IV, No. 1, December, 1937, pp. 44-53.

⁵⁷ Mary McCarthy. "The Hiroshima New Yorker," *Politics* 3 vol. 10 (November 1946): 367.

contributor to *Politics*, and her attention to the *New Yorker's* implication in consumer culture should attune us to the manner in which the Macdonald and McCarthy critiques of Hersey are part of a wider criticism of the claim the *New Yorker* held on the public perception of reliability, objectivity and truth.

Given the power of public belief (however constructed or misplaced) in journalistic objectivity, however, it is understandable that Hersey worked within its frame. To turn it another way: Why, in the interests of promoting effective moral resistance to the nuclear state, should Hersey be criticized for fitting his account within the powerful structures of journalistic objectivity? When McCarthy, Macdonald and the sublime nuclear critics all disparage Hersey for successfully fitting himself to the genre and publishing reality in which he worked, important details about Hersey's choices within those constraints are lost. The “busy little Methodists” McCarthy belittles actually represent one such important choice.

Margot Norris has rightly, and less insensitively, criticized Hersey's six victims as unrepresentative of Hiroshima's larger population—pointing out that they are “peculiarly homogenous with respect to class and culture—bourgeois, respectable, several with Western and Christian orientations.”⁵⁸ Frus blames Hersey's unemotional style for extending that peculiar homogenization to the point of producing the trope of the stoic Japanese victim, who suffers without rage, outrage or even complaint. These are excellent critiques of *Hiroshima* as a text that is less innocent than it seems at first blush in its selection of atomic bomb victims, and one that is inadequate to representing the experience of most of the affected individuals, however much Underwood would praise it for opening the door to representation of war trauma. The

⁵⁸ Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000): 190.

hibakusha literature to which Norris compares Hersey's account, including the poetry of Sankichi Tōge and prose accounts of Yōko Ōta and Michihiko Hachiya, offers great possibilities for alternative texts or paratexts for our classrooms.⁵⁹

Such legitimate concern for the representation of Japanese experiences misses a key point, however. What if Hersey's goal was never to represent all or even most atomic bomb victims? Hersey himself publicly attributed the unrepresentative sample of his victims to his formal aim, following the model of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, to write about people whose “paths crossed each other,” and to the usefulness of the Jesuit mission as an avenue for contact with cooperative individuals, some of whom had English language skills that helped make up for his own lack of Japanese.⁶⁰ Even if it was only a choice of convenience, the ultimate effect was to provide shared religion as an avenue of empathy for many American readers. In 1946, after years of racist propaganda beginning with Pearl Harbor and culminating in the revelations of the conditions suffered by prisoners of war, the importance of this opportunity for identification should not be underestimated. A year prior, in a piece for the *New York Times* about riding along on the Nagasaki bombing run, William Laurence asked himself in disassociated third person, “Does one feel any pity or compassion for the poor devils about to die? Not when one thinks of

⁵⁹ Model teaching materials for *Hiroshima*, developed by Purdue University in the 1970s, focus first on comprehension and second on empathy (how would you feel if an atom bomb were dropped on your city?). The occasional attempt to induce critical engagement with Hersey, through teaching a lesson on 'slanted' and 'unslanted' news reporting, and later suggesting the use of socratic dialogue to elicit a critique of Hersey's choice of victims (“What kind of people are portrayed?” asks the teacher; “Not typical Japanese or Buddhists,” observe the students.) seem sadly over-optimistic about the outside knowledge that high-school students will be able to muster to challenge Hersey's account. The emergence, two decades later, of translations of prominent examples of Japanese bomb literature offered the possibility of more plausible avenues for students to challenge Hersey's account, though it has been slow to arrive in the high-school classroom. In the absence of such supplementary materials, *Hiroshima* is likely to continue to reign in American classrooms as a transparent oracle of hibakusha experience.

Suzanne Dawson and Nancy Dodds, *An Integrated teaching unit on John Hersey's Hiroshima developed at Purdue University*. Skokie, IL: National Textbook Co. 1974.

⁶⁰ Hersey, John. “The Art of Fiction,” interview with Jonathan Dee. *Paris Review* 100 (1986): 247.

Pearl Harbor and of the Death March on Bataan.”⁶¹ Hersey's transformation of Japanese atom-bomb victims from “poor devils about to die” to pious (if atypically stoic) fellow-Christians asks less of his audience than a more representative cross-section of Hiroshima victims might have.

Furthermore, McCarthy is right about one thing: Hersey's Methodists *are* busy. Father Kleinsorge, Rev. Tanimoto and Dr. Sasaki strive throughout *Hiroshima* to render aid to parishioners and patients, hampered at every turn by their own injuries, the devastated infrastructure, and the lack of supplies, information, and assistance. As in many a fictional or non-fictional disaster narrative, elegy for the dead is neglected in favor of tales of the plucky and virtuous actions of survivors, for it is survivors who can provide a narrative with motivation and plot-impetus. The strategy invites Hersey's readers to cheer those engaged in efforts to mitigate the bomb's effects, effecting a change of identification in American readers from bombers and victors to victims and rescuers.

Of the six survivors who lend their points of view to the narrative, only Miss Sasaki, a clerk at a tinworks, could be considered tangentially connected to the war effort. They include two women (one of them with two children), two doctors, and two clergymen. Thus, every one of the eight people whom the book follows most closely would have been instantly recognizable as noncombatants on a conventional battlefield of 1945. It is hard to imagine an assortment of individuals who would have more clearly emphasized the civilian nature of the majority of the Hiroshima casualties. Sterling North complained that “the cross-section of individuals chosen is unfairly weighted to arouse our sympathy” and urged the public to remember Pearl Harbor, the Bataan Death March, and that “all Japs are not merely the innocent victims pictured in

⁶¹ William L. Laurence, “Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki Told by Flight Member,” *New York Times*, September 9, 1945: 35.

Hiroshima,” concluding in the end that Hersey may have set out to show the world the horror of the atom bomb, but had “provoke[d] emotion rather than thought.”⁶² Whether arising from an accident of convenient interviewees (as Hersey would innocently claim) or from a political agenda, Hersey's choice of these six victims is a powerful contribution to the American memory of the bomb.

The notion that Hersey is just reporting on the events at Hiroshima elides the highly selective nature of his facts (or, in the case of North and Norris, acts as if that selectivity is a flaw rather than a design) and downplays the importance of the many choices involved in his style of telling those facts. Nuclear critics who are dissatisfied with Hersey's unsublime approach would appear to fit comfortably and flatteringly within Frus's camp of critical readers. But critics who adulate the nuclear sublime do not produce readings of Hersey. Wilson, who called “aesthetic aloofness” in Stein “morally untenable,” drops a brief reference to Hersey when describing Marc Kaminsky as “a more imagistic John Hersey”—clearly preferring the imagist to the prosaist (252, 251). His preference echoes Derrida's scorn for “present day novels that would offer direct and realistic descriptions of a 'real' nuclear catastrophe.”⁶³ Of course, *Hiroshima* offers direct and realistic descriptions of a real, not 'real,' nuclear event. By treating “direct and realistic” narration (or “transparent prose”) as beneath mention as literature or as morally suspect, nuclear criticism denies itself access to crucially important cultural texts which tend to challenge the hegemony of the nuclear sublime as a critical concept for describing writing on the bomb.

Ultimately, by getting busily about the business of documenting the aftermath of the atom-bombing of Hiroshima, Hersey's book threatens a central tenet of the idea of the nuclear as

⁶² Sterling North, “Look Here, Mr. Hersey,” *The Washington Post* 10 November 1946, S7.

⁶³ Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now,” 27.

sublime: the notion of the nuclear as particularly unrepresentable. Classing Hersey's work as one that fails to “sense the nuclear radiance” is to couch a criticism of his chosen style in an ad hominem attack on the journalist's failure of perception and moral imagination. An accusation that he is insensitive to the sublimity of the subject is actually a complaint that he has failed to write radiantly, failed to produce nuclear sublimity—and should emphasize the sublime's status not as an intrinsic value of all things nuclear but as an aesthetic choice to be created, defended and (in these instances of criticism) demanded by its devotees.

In truth, Hersey did far more than fail to see and write sublimely: both his admirers and detractors agree that he wrote a pitch-perfect example of highly respectable, objective-style journalism. This genre-allegiance was not just a failure to see and write sublimely, but rather the fulfillment of an assignment that quickly entered into dialogue with existing writings on the bomb that fell into other styles and genres, writings that would be more recognizably in the sublime register. While McCarthy demanded a nod to the unrepresentableness of the bomb and Macdonald objected to the scientific detachment of the narrative, it will give a stronger sense of the state of writings on the bomb to know that many of Hersey's early reviewers appreciated that Hersey was not engaged in “power politics or tedious editorials or simply a big satisfying explosion”⁶⁴ and praised him instead for “careful understatement” and “unemotionalism”⁶⁵ and called the book “triumphant in its simplicity.”⁶⁶ Hersey was praised for not editorializing, and was so praised in the context of a topic that had been the subject of frequent and prominent editorials; he was praised for passing up the chance to deliver a “big satisfying explosion”—a

⁶⁴ Bart Barber, “Reading for Pleasure or Profit...” *Nation's Business* 35 vol. 1 (Jan 1947): 81.

⁶⁵ Edwin H. James in *Broadcasting, Telecasting* (finish CITE)

⁶⁶ Untitled item [Most people have a shilling to spare, and everyone who has..], *The Spectator*; (Nov 22, 1946): 177.

skeptical turn of phrase that indicates distrust of texts whose descriptions of the bomb betray satisfaction and admiration. This early skepticism of the “big satisfying explosion” is in contrast to more recent claims by nuclear critics that the nuclear sublime is a form of writing useful for political resistance because it can “undo... a large, mythy, power-infatuated tone and stance.”⁶⁷ Such a claim cannot hold up to a wider archive.

By August, 1946, nuclear literature had seen its share of accounts of big satisfying explosions. The wisdom in the marketing departments even indicates a belief that big, satisfying explosions sold books. Full-page ads for the Book of the Month Club in the *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* in early October prominently featured *Hiroshima*, but they limited quotation from it to just four sensational words which would give a misimpression of Hersey's style. They describe the book as a "simple account of what happened to six people when the first atomic bomb fell: what they were doing when 'a sheet of sun' burst over the city."⁶⁸ Because Hersey retold the moment of the bomb's explosion from the perspective of each of his six characters, the ad copywriter had six depictions to choose from. He or she selected the most figurative of them, "It seemed a sheet of sun,"⁶⁹ and transformed it from simile ("It seemed [like] a sheet of sun") to metaphor: “a sheet of sun' burst over the city.”⁷⁰ Extravagant, sensational language sells books, we must conclude, but the ad agency found little enough of it in Hersey: the more concrete simile, "like a gigantic photographic flash,"⁷¹ was passed over, as were descriptions of the light's white or yellow color. Despite *Politics'* criticism that Hersey's *New*

⁶⁷ Wilson, *American Sublime*, 258.

⁶⁸ Display Ad 208, *Chicago Daily Tribune* 13 Oct 1946: F20.
Display Ad 836, *New York Times* 06 Oct 1946: BR28.

⁶⁹ John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Random House, 1985): 5.

⁷⁰ Display Ad 208, *Chicago Daily Tribune* 13 Oct 1946: F20.
Display Ad 836, *New York Times* 06 Oct 1946: BR28.

⁷¹ Hersey, *Hiroshima*, 14.

Yorker feature made the bombing of Hiroshima over-palatable, the marketing of the book implies that the public palate yearned for language less like Hersey's characteristically taciturn style and more like that one radiant and half-accurately quoted metaphor.

Hersey's brief, unradiant descriptions find their greatest contrast in those of William Laurence. As he describes riding along on the Nagasaki bombing run, Laurence uses an extended description of flight to establish his credentials as one capable of sublime perception, and by extension, a morally sound and high-feeling individual, despite his near-involvement with the atomic bombing. He devotes two paragraphs to rhapsodies on the subject of flight over the Pacific, including:

From that vantage point in space, 17,000 feet above the Pacific, one gets a view of hundreds of miles on all sides, horizontally and vertically. At that height the vast ocean below and the sky above seem to merge into one great sphere. I was on the inside of that firmament, riding above the giant mountains of white cumulous clouds, letting myself be suspended in infinite space. One hears the whirl of the motors behind one, but it soon becomes insignificant against the immensity all around and is long swallowed by it. There comes a point where space also swallows time and one lives through eternal moments filled with an oppressive loneliness, as though life is suddenly vanished from the earth and you are the only one left, a lone survivor traveling endlessly through inter-planetary space.⁷²

Nothing in this description is uniquely relevant to the atomic nature of the mission; its only purpose can be to certify Laurence himself as humane and sensitive because he is sensible to the sublime in nature. His description dabbles in the mathematical as well as the natural sublime, as the great altitude, the length of the view “of hundreds of miles on all sides, horizontally and vertically”, and the vanishing point of the horizon surround him with “one great sphere”—a geometry of nearly incomprehensible vastness. A “great sphere;” “the firmament;” “infinite space”—these are also linguistic markers of encounter with the divine. As Captain Walton knows

⁷² Laurence, “Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki Told by Flight Member,” 35.

Victor Frankenstein for a “divine wanderer” for the way “the starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth,” Laurence's description of his own lonely skyfaring is meant to inspire similar admiration in the *Times* readership.⁷³

The ability to have sublime experience in nature is the chief, but not the only humanizing credential that Laurence flourishes for himself and the flight crew. He is careful to mention one of the crewmembers is “a typical American youth, looking even younger than his 20 years;” he makes elaborate show of asking himself if he ought to feel sympathy for the citizens of Nagasaki, and then talks himself out of sympathy when he “thinks of Pearl Harbor and of the death march on Bataan.” But above all, it is the sublime that is Laurence's shield of innocence, and it is in this vein he eventually describes the explosion and the resulting mushroom clouds.

The bomb is “a whirlwind from the skies” that will “pulverize thousands of [the city's] buildings and tens of thousands of its inhabitants” in “one tenth of a millionth of a second, a fraction of time immeasurable by any clock.” Observers in the tail of Laurence's plane saw “a giant ball of fire rise as though from the bowels of the earth, belching forth enormous white smoke rings” and then “a giant pillar of purple fire, 10,000 feet high, shooting skyward with enormous speed.” The mushroom cloud was “a thousand Old Faithful geysers rolled into one. It kept struggling in an elemental fury, like a creature in the act of breaking the bonds that held it down.”⁷⁴

In a plane, high above Nagasaki and speeding away, there is time to fear the blast, but enough safety to contemplate its vastness, its relation to more familiar powers of technology,

⁷³ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 920.

⁷⁴ Laurence, “Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki Told by Flight Member,” 35.

nature and mythology. Laurence's highly successful adaptation of the sublime to the description of the atomic bomb testifies to this grim fact: The sublime is only possible from the bomber's vantage. The people on the ground in Hersey's account, by contrast, report having experienced no initial, awestruck tallying of the vastness of the explosion because almost all of them experienced it as a local crisis worthy of no special awe. Father Kleinsorge thought a bomb had fallen directly on his mission compound; Dr. Sasaki so mistook the scale of the destruction that he immediately began treating the mild glass-cut injuries suffered by those in the hospital, little imagining the vast number of wounded citizens making their way toward him.

Laurence's account does not bring itself back down to ground level, even in imagination. The article ends not with a contemplation of what it meant to destroy an entire city at a blow, but with the last glimpse of the mushroom cloud, as if the primary interest of the article were meteorological, not moral; as if it described a natural phenomenon, not a human invention. In gentle, pastel terms, he describes how it "floated off into the blue" and "changed its shape into a flowerlike form, its giant petal curving downward, creamy white outside, rose-colored inside. It still retained that shape when we last gazed at it from a distance of about 200 miles."⁷⁵ Despite his painstaking care to establish his credentials for feeling the right things when looking at clouds, Laurence's interest in the sublime visual spectacle of the bomb begins to feel like a dodge, an effort to float away from contemplating on-the-ground realities and human tolls of such weapons.

Is it possible to breathlessly intellectualize away from the horrors of the atomic bomb just as it is to aestheticize away from them. Norman Cousins' *Modern Man is Obsolete* is a useful

⁷⁵ Ibid.

contrast to both Laurence and Hersey in this regard. If Laurence's was the “big satisfying explosion” that Hersey did not deliver, then Cousins' was the editorial, tedious or otherwise, that Hersey was alternately praised or decried for eschewing. Cousins, the journalist and editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, insisted on marking the bombing as the beginning of a new historical age when he proclaimed that “modern man is obsolete.” The editorial was reprinted in various other publications, and some 60,000 individual reprints were distributed. A book version was out by Christmas of 1945, and was into its third edition by 1946.⁷⁶ The titular phrase had an even wider circulation, thanks to its own slogan-like appeal and an aggressive full-page ad campaign by Viking, featuring a mushroom cloud cut through by the provocative question, “Do you know what really exploded here?” and offering to discount the usual one dollar price for orders of ten or more.⁷⁷ In 1953, an advocate for civilian use of nuclear energy went so far as to say that the American public had spent the last eight years “repeating, zombie-like, that 'modern man is obsolete,’” instead of getting on with the serious business of progress.⁷⁸

Cousins is far less committed to the sublime mode than Laurence: he indulges apocalyptic speculation so far as to ask, “Is it possible that man is destined to return the earth to its aboriginal incandescent mass blazing at fifty million degrees?” (5) In an editorial that otherwise accomplishes all reference to the bombing of Hiroshima by mere allusion (“man stumbles fitfully into a new age of atomic energy...” and “while the dust was still settling over Hiroshima”), it is the sentence that comes nearest to inviting readers to visualize an atomic explosion and contemplate the magnitude of destruction of which the atom bomb might be

⁷⁶ Joseph Preston Baratta. *The Politics of World Federation*, vol. 1 (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 142.

⁷⁷ Advertisement, *The Nation*, 22 December 1945: 71.

⁷⁸ John Chamberlain, “The Explosive Atom: Private Industry Begins to Harness a Vast Potential.” *Barron's National Business and Financial Weekly*, 33:18, 4 May 1953: 3.

capable, both in millions of degrees and in the possibility of creating destruction so vast as to collapse historical time into the aboriginal. Given the early date in efforts to understand the power of the bomb, his question is more guilty of a mistake in thermal analysis and a grasping after descriptions of sufficient magnitudes than it is of outright hyperbole. In any event, he cut the sentence from the otherwise expanded book publication.

Cousins' primary engagement with sublime nuclear writing is not aesthetic, but rather political. He shares with other writers of the nuclear sublime the sense of atom-bomb exceptionalism, viewing the bomb as being without precedent in history, as inaugurating a new age. Cousins' response is the quintessential atom-bomb editorial because it typifies the turn from the bombed past to the lessons of the future. "What a fantastic irony that organized science knows the secret of the atom but as yet knows not a fig about the common cold!" he cries before diverting himself for an entire column with fancies of cures for cancer, heart disease, leukemia, aplastic anemia, and more. All of these are "anomalies in the modern world," and "there is no reason why mobilized research should not be directed at their causes and cure."⁷⁹ What a fantastic irony, as well, to be rhetorically concerning one's self with the common cold while the bomb's victims grew sicker with radiation poisoning, the ailment which was the invention, and therefore the true anomaly, of the modern world.

In Cousins' defense, he is obviously deeply and sincerely concerned by the use of the atomic bomb, and goes on to devote much of the rest of his life and career to nuclear disarmament. It is only that the event he writes of is in many ways unfaceable. Thus, the "violent death" he describes is suffered by "one stage in man's history," and, "what really

⁷⁹ Norman Cousins, "Modern Man is Obsolete: An Editorial," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Saturday, August 18 1945: 7

exploded here,” to quote the advertisement, is not a city and its infrastructure, lives, families and homes, but a concept of modernity. In the space of five pages he takes a city and a site of human misery and transforms it into a temporal point of introspection. “While the dust was still settling over Hiroshima, [man] was asking himself questions and finding no answers.”⁸⁰ Cousins' deftness at these maneuvers gives insight into the editorial's wild popularity: he provides a way of thinking about the bomb without thinking of it at all, a way to think of the living and the future instead of the past and the dead.

Despite his titular statement, we have already seen that Cousins is not rejecting the idea of progress. He would merely rather see progress redefined as the cure for the common cold instead of as the splitting of the atom. Given that modernity has already meant the latter, it is almost inevitable that the defining characteristics of the primitive, the concept against which modernity has been defined, also come up for reinspection.

In the course of his editorial, Cousins advances three definitions of the aboriginal or primitive: an original, uninhabitable planet, blazing too hot for life; a group of head-hunters who are, at least, not dropping atom-bombs, and, finally, that portion of modern man which develops and drops atom bombs. The head-hunters who abandon their “acephalous pastimes” within the space of a single generation prove that human beings may change (though not necessarily for the better, he cautions).⁸¹ Man's future options involve either turning from progress and becoming tribal once more, or, alternately, of leaving modern man, “national man,” behind in favor of something new: “world man.” Modern man, he concludes, was not so much the opposite of the primitive as he was a dual-natured creature, living in a state of “strict national sovereignty [that]

⁸⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

was an anomalous and preposterous hold-over from the tribal instinct in nations.⁸² If it was anomalous then, it is the quintessence of an anomaly now.”⁸³ That makes three anomalies in two sentences. It is Cousins' favorite word for all the things he wishes did not need to be accounted for in his concept of man and progress, for things he wishes to call anachronisms, vestiges of a more primitive stage. Above all, *anomaly* is the word which he wishes to attach to Hiroshima. An anachronism, an anomaly, an accident—anything but what Hersey would portray with such brutal matter-of-factness as the logical and intentional result of “two billion gold dollars” and American “industrial know-how.”⁸⁴ We didn't do it, says Cousins, that was primitive man, who used to be a part of modern man, but now we have kicked him out, and modern man is obsolete. That's not us any more.

In his effort to take stock of human history after the bombing of Hiroshima, Cousins strives to make the bombing a point from which everything changes. A total change of world history seems the only sufficient response, and as one who wishes to help bring about those changes, Cousins has no responsibility to historiography and every reason to write about them as if they are inevitable. Sublime nuclear criticism shares Cousins' eagerness to proclaim that the atom bomb is singular and all-changing. The curious selectivity and voracious prolepticism of nuclear canon-making comes of this notion that all history and all literature must now be re-read through the nuclear. It is by this logic that *Frankenstein* may be a nuclear text, but nuclear texts which do not adopt sufficiently awed poses (such as those I will turn to in the next chapter) must

⁸² One is reminded of Dreiser's naturalistic and loosely evolutionary idea of the nature of man & civilization, as expressed in *Sister Carrie*: “Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason.” (Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Modern Library 1917), 84.)

⁸³ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁴ John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, 50.

be disowned. It is a noble, but ultimately a wishful activist's impulse.

These early days after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are an astonishing time. Respondents like Cousins imagined that the next few years would be utterly decisive for the earth's history: war would end or earth would end; we would have *One World or None*. Today, we must remember, we have neither. Our world limps along, warring, unperfected, but unincinerated. We need a nuclear literature and a nuclear criticism, not only for the rhetorically useful but artificial cross-roads of one world or none, but also for the then-unimaginable world in which we do live: full of conflicting forces, striving for arms, striving for disarmament, experiencing the nuclear as one of the many threats and challenges of modernity.

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CHAPTER II

To Green, Quiet Ends: Apocalypse and the Nuclear Pastoral

They asked me what I thought of the atomic bomb. I said I had not been able to take any interest in it... Sure it will destroy a lot and kill a lot, but it's the living that are interesting not the way of killing them.¹

In “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb,” a short piece completed just before her death in 1946 and published in the *Yale Poetry Review* the following year, Gertrude Stein declares that she “had not been able to take any interest in” the atomic bomb. This at first sounds like a perverse or irresponsible refusal to engage with momentous historical events. What is to be done with it? Though Stein herself is a central literary figure, “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb” is not central to present discussions of nuclear literature. How can a nuclear literature canon, which is organized around texts supposedly *about* the bomb, assimilate literature that refuses to be interested in it?

To enter the discussion, even to declare disinterest, is a political act that betrays that Stein has a stake in the discussion of the atomic bomb after all. It has the ring of a corrective, a critique of the rhetorical use that others have made of the bomb, which becomes clear when she reveals the secret to her disinterest: “If you are not scared the atomic bomb is not interesting.” Her refusal to be interested or scared is a prescient critique of the era of nuclear fear that Stein

¹ Gertrude Stein, “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb,” *Yale Poetry Review* no. 7 (1947):3-4.

only lives long enough to see in its infancy. Her early departure from the nuclear age does not diminish her credentials to answer it, for her strategy of refusal is one upon which she has already relied in Nazi-occupied France. For Stein, treating an imperiled culture or an endangered environment as if it matters and will endure is an act of defiance in the face of an uncertain future.² “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb” is an extended note inviting the reader to return to Stein's prior work and find it still a sufficient answer for the nuclear age. The bomb does not change her worldview.

The editors of the *Yale Poetry Review* reinforce this reflexive reading of “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb” by following the prose piece with the fourth of her “Sonnets that Please,” a 1921 composition whose “How often do I mention that I am not interested” echoes anew below “Reflection.” The poem ends, “We will announce pleasures. / We will resume dresses. / How pleasantly we stutter.”³ Stein is not alone in defiantly announcing pleasures and disinterest even (and especially) after the atom bomb. As such, she is one of the first practitioners of what I am calling the Nuclear Pastoral genre, a collection of texts that respond to the bomb in a crabwise fashion, with challenging and surprising refusals and preoccupations. They are the lost interlocutors for the rest of nuclear literature, and they speak with their own agendas, practicing and asserting the continuity of the nuclear age with those that come before.

My first chapter argues that the critical focus on the sublime aesthetics of nuclear destruction is closely linked to the political ideology of the globalizing bomb that brings world peace, making the genre of the Nuclear Sublime an over-determining framework within which to discuss nuclear literatures. We should be skeptical of the claims of the literature of the nuclear

² John Whittier Ferguson. “The Liberation of Gertrude Stein: War and Writing,” *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (September 2001): 411

³ Gertrude Stein, “Sonnets That Please IV,” *Yale Poetry Review* no. 7 (1947): 4.

sublime and of the criticism that reproduces its assumptions, since many nuclear texts contain an alternate aesthetic and a counter-politics. The nuclear sublime induces the contemplation of the abyss of nuclear destruction, declares the world collectively imperiled and therefore ready to be collectively saved. The nuclear pastoral turns to the local rather than the global and advances a pastoral aesthetic, often in pursuit of a politics skeptical of the consolidation of state powers in which the sublime texts can become complicit.

This second chapter deploys two popular science-fiction titles of the 1950s, *On the Beach* and *The Long Tomorrow*, to define the Nuclear Pastoral genre and limn its political and aesthetic possibilities. Reading the texts as part of this genre can enrich our readings of those texts and expand our nuclear literature canon. Lastly, I will address the question that dogs pastoral literature whenever it appears: to what use is it put? Does it create a radical space of possibility, or is it merely a reactionary retreat from the stresses of modernity, in this case, the atom bomb?

British-born author and engineer Nevil Shute published the enormously successful *On the Beach* in 1957, shortly after he moved to Australia. A largely faithful Hollywood film followed in 1959, inviting audiences to witness the last months of the human race as a cloud of deadly radiation moves south toward Melbourne, one of the last habitable cities. Rather than a post-apocalyptic story, *On the Beach* is a during-apocalypse tale, set while Melbourne waits for the end. By contrast, Leigh Brackett's 1955 novel, *The Long Tomorrow*, opens two generations after the destruction of all cities in atomic warfare. Brackett is best known for her role as a screenwriter for *The Empire Strikes Back*, but, unlike the space-operas that make up much of her other science-fiction work, *The Long Tomorrow* engages with a tradition of earthy post-apocalyptic green worlds and uses its fantasy of rewilding to examine how the values of the

pastoral can be translated across time and space.

I. Is There a Nuclear Pastoral?

The notion of a nuclear pastoral may seem counter-intuitive. Are not nuclear weapons the power that brings all land under the sway of technology's destructive potential? But the pastoral spaces in literature have always existed under the glowering gaze of other lifeways. Frances Ferguson promulgated the notion of a nuclear sublime, but for much nuclear literature, the bomb's explosion is only the flash that relumines the everyday. In such texts, the bomb recalls the survivors, or those awaiting destruction (readers, we might call them), to distinctly pastoral values. The pastoral genre re-emerges and is re-made in response to the atomic bomb. If the garden feels like a more unlikely refuge than ever after 1945, the nuclear pastoral suggests that it has never been a more necessary one.

Proposing the nuclear pastoral as yet another sub-genre of American pastoral literature puts me in good company. Scholars commonly date the assertion that American literature fits within a pastoral tradition to 1923, with D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*.⁴ Eight decades of repetition have rendered Lawrence's claim unremarkable. However, the exploration of pastoral permutations within the multiple historical communities of authorship and the varied landscapes of the American continent has proved fertile ground for literary criticism. Leo Marx discussed the interrupted nature of the American pastoral in *The Machine in the Garden*. Annette Kolodny laid the groundwork for literary ecofeminism by describing the male-dominated pastoral tradition as a hegemonic re-telling of the frontier myth

⁴ Lawrence Buell, "American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised," *American Literary History* (Spring 1989): 1-29. Scott Russell Sanders, "Speaking a Word for Nature," *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996): 182-195.

which could, in turn, be challenged by a uniquely female version of the frontier arcadia, the simultaneously produced fantasy of a cultivated garden in the wilderness. Most recently, Michael Pollan defined the “supermarket pastoral” as a genre unique to food marketing: those bucolic images and narratives with which the industrial food system makes itself palatable to its consumers. Persistent scholarly pressure has established that the pastoral genre is pervasive, versatile, multifaceted, and poly-vocal.

The term, *pastoral*, like its cousin, *bucolic*, promises only the most general description of literary subject-matter: pastoralists (shepherds) and their flocks and the (arcadian) landscape that contains them. I will follow David James and Phillip Tew, editors of *New Versions of Pastoral*, in drawing an etymologically arbitrary but nonetheless useful distinction between “the bucolic tradition” of rural settings and “the structure of the pastoral,” because it is accurate to the ways in which *pastoral*'s noun-ness and formal connotations have outstripped those attaching to *bucolic* in recent decades.⁵ So let *bucolic* be the word for peaceful rural scenes and *pastoral* that for the literary genre. *Pastoral*, even as an adjective, now says as much or more about the structure of a text as it does about the subject matter contained therein. The concept of the pastoral has undergone considerable renovation since Virgil's day: think only of the common consideration of such nature-quest narratives as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *Moby Dick* as part of an American pastoral tradition: there is not a sheep to be seen. *Pastoral* must be defined by other generic signatures.

Scholars have long used *pastoral* to connote something beyond subject matter. William Empson actually defines the pastoral by its radical possibilities when he asserts that “good

⁵ David James and Phillip Tew. “Reenvisioning the Pastoral,” *New Versions of Pastoral* ed. David James and Phillip Tew: 13-28 (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009): 13.

proletarian literature is usually covert pastoral,” conveying a “feeling about the dignity of that form of labor”—labor that is outdoors, physical, skilled and unalienated. To Empson, the entire “pastoral process” is that of “putting the complex into the simple.”⁶ He therefore asks the pastoral to produce in its bucolic setting (“the simple”) a social critique or vision of “the complex”—in short, the moment of dereification or sweeping social insight that is central to the ideal of proletarian literature. He sees the successful execution of such an agenda as central to the “pastoral process.”

In defining the “pastoral process” as “putting the complex into the simple,” Empson makes a tidy anticipatory dodge of the question of whether the pastoral is a whimpering retreat into conservative nostalgia. James and Tew assert that to see pastoral texts as nostalgic is to misread them.⁷ Empson implies that conservative texts are not, by definition, pastoral at all. I am skeptical of both versions of an ideological test for pastoral literature. The world would be full of orphaned and unclassifiable texts if only ones with clear and successfully-articulated shared ideologies were allowed to band together into genres.

Empson, James and Tew, in arguing that the pastoral, as an entire genre, can be either radical or conservative, exclude entirely those flawed or ideologically suspect projects that still retain other signatures of the genre. Likewise, they fail to account for the ways in which even single texts are often of two minds, simultaneously radical and retreating. Lawrence Buell has written persuasively of the twinned radical and conservative impulses of the pastoral. A single novel like Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, to use his example, is radically critical of white

⁶ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1935): 6, 8, 23.

⁷ James and Tew, “Reenvisioning the Pastoral,” 14.

society and yet accommodates “mainstream readers who respond to nature as a spiritual solace.”⁸ Pastoral can be a means of expressing alienation and a means by which alienation is mediated. Jack London planned to exploit exactly this accommodating nature of the pastoral with *The Valley of the Moon*, a novel in which a working-class couple flees Oakland in search of farmland of their own. Of it, he wrote to his publisher, “For once in my life I have a story that will not be offensive to bourgeois morality and bourgeois business ethics, while at the same time it is a story of which I shall absolutely and passionately believe every word.”⁹ London's contemptuous tone towards bourgeois morality implies that he believes that he and his project are still radical. He therefore counted on the potential for misreading (and is it really mis-reading if thus counted upon?) to render his text inoffensive. Rather than possessing a single-minded radical or conservative ideology, then, the pastoral can be a potentially fertile meeting ground for multiple ideologies and multiple readings.

Though such a standard proves neither true, useful, nor fair, Empson's attempt to delineate the pastoral ideologically indicates an emergent sense that the pastoral is less a topic (sheep and shepherds) than a way of writing. In pursuit of a description of this way of writing, we can turn to other critics who provide more formal ways of recognizing pastoral texts. Franco Moretti's descriptions of idealized pastoral geographies and Bakhtin's idea of the pastoral chronotope are useful in this regard.

Bakhtin considers the pastoral to be the “basic form” of the love idyll, and describes the chronotope (or space and time) of the idyll or pastoral as “an organic fastening-down, a grafting of life and its events to a place, to a familiar territory with all its nooks and crannies, its familiar

⁸ Lawrence Buell, “American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised,” *American Literary History* (Spring 1989): 1-29.

⁹ Jack London, letter to George P. Brett, May 30, 1911, in *The Letters of Jack London*, vol. 2 ed. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988): 1007-8.

mountains, valleys, fields, rivers and forests, and one's own home.” The sense of organic, fastened-down time that marks the pastoral chronotope for Bakhtin emerges in a setting in which many generations have existed in one place; lives of people thus become linked to the “cyclic rhythmicalness” of the seasonal and agricultural calendar.¹⁰

Unalienated labor is important to Bakhtin's idea of pastoral, too: such writings include “idyllic objects,” which are “not severed from the labor that produced them, objects indissolubly linked with this labor in the experience of everyday idyllic life.” He sees the idyll's chief influence on the modern novel in the person of a central character in the “idyllic complex,” the “man of the people” figure—frequently a servant—who bears folk knowledge about living and dying well. This figure speaks wisdom to a non-pastoral world that has lost the knack for understanding the important things in life—food, drink, love, labor, childbirth and dying well. Bakhtin's pastoral thus contains a kernel of Leo Marx's pastoral under pressure of industrialization, for it assumes a non-pastoral with which the man of the people interacts, and which threatens to destroy the “craft-work idyll.”¹¹ This non-pastoral world may be internal to the work, or external to it in the presumed reader's world; either way, it needs pastoral intervention.

Bakhtin's description of the pastoral genre is undergirded by his assertion that his category, *chronotope*, “defines genre and genre distinctions.”¹² Declaring chronotope the seat of genre presents a problem. The category is so inclusive that it casts its net over almost everything that makes up a novel. (This is not to say that his description of the pastoral *must* be unsound,

¹⁰ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): 225.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹² *Ibid.*, 85.

but only that no special validity should attach to it because it is built upon this idea of chronotope.) It is symptomatic of a certain emptiness in the term that Bakhtin's translator, Michael Holquist, writes in the introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination* that chronotope "is a category no brief introduction (much less glossary) can adequately adumbrate."¹³ Holquist trustingly instructs that we must not only abandon hope of defining the term, but even of adequately sketching its shadowy outline. One grows impatient with being asked to imagine a substantial (but indescribable and indefinable) category behind that great penumbra.

Bakhtin defines chronotope (inasmuch as he defines it at all) as "space-time," mystically intoning that in chronotope, space and time are "fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" in which "time thickens, takes on flesh," and "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."¹⁴ This is an unnecessary bit of hocus-pocus, for the old familiar concept of *setting*, the place and time of a story's action, already fuses space and time into a single concept. If a novel is to provide the "illusion of a complete world," it must be situated at a real or fanciful historical moment in time as well as a geographic place.¹⁵ Bakhtin refers slightly more expansively to both the period in which a work is set and the rate and manner in which time is elapsed during the narration. *Chronotope* is no fusion of space and time; instead, it is plot-setting with a pseudoscientific name. One hardly needs such a coinage to give license to the discussion of setting and action in a novel!

¹³ Michael Holquist, introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination* by M. M. Bakhtin (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981): xxxiii.

¹⁴ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 84.

¹⁵ I am leaning here on Gregg Crane, who offers three reasons why people read novels: For the "illusion of a complete world;" out of a desire "to know what happens next" (generated by a compelling storyline and characters) and, finally, for a payoff of meaning "beyond a mere recitation of characters and events." Bakhtin's chronotope covers the first one and a half of those, and, in the case of the pastoral chronotope, he makes a grasp at characters by his suggestion that it involve a "man of the people."

Gregg Crane, introduction to the *Cambridge Introduction to the Nineteenth Century American Novel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 1-6.

Later redactors, most notably Keith Basso, have lent the term a borrowed luster. In *Wisdom Sits in Places*, he over-generously credits Bakhtin with “observations on the cultural importance of geographic landmarks.” It is Basso's contribution that transforms chronotope from an uninteresting way to discuss a text into an account of how texts can bleed over into the world, impressing real and fictional moments in time upon the cultural memory and experience of a place. Basso describes in the cultural practices of the Western Apache an instance in which literatures (place-names and attendant stories) do apparently fuse perceptions of actual space and time and allow for the conveyance of quoted ancestral speech, history, and moral lessons through what amounts to geographic theatre.¹⁶ He is careful not to universalize his description of the intertwined functions of landscape, memory, literature and culture that he describes under the heading of chronotope, but his description has nonetheless been ground-breaking for scholars in a wide variety of fields and cultural contexts. A Basso-flavored chronotope is of particular interest to a discussion of nuclear literature because these texts frequently deal with places that have become chronotopes in this new sense—literal places that are differently attached to time because narrative and cultural memory has bound them to moments or stretches—points or lines—of time in the past, in the future, or in the alternative-time of story. *Chronotope*, then, gets at the way texts may act upon the world by creating such attachments, inviting a re-envisioning and remapping of the known world and the histories that attach to it.

Franco Moretti, too, relates text to actual land when he describes pastoral texts. Taking fictive geographies at their word, he describes the shapes made when their events are plotted on a simple map. He uses these maps first to show that pastoral texts conform to a recognizable

¹⁶ Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996): 62.

shape, and then to criticize that shape on grounds of verisimilitude. He distinguishes between English village novels produced before and after the enclosure of the commons, saying that towns have a stronger “centripetal pull” before enclosure, while surrounded by spaces of genuine labor. Enclosure gentrifies the countryside, re-writes it as a space of leisure, and new, gentrified pastoral texts are then produced for city audiences. Nonetheless, Moretti argues that both types of pastorals map onto an idealized geography in which plot incidents occur in concentric rings moving outward from the central place of the village.

Such novels imagine the landscape as an isotropic space, one in which a person can move in any direction with an equal lack of resistance from land features, and in which roads emerge from the town to facilitate this travel, but—falsely—“the road is not prior to the town.”¹⁷ His counterpoint for such settings is the Parisian city novel, in which the city's Seine-split geography, and its division into upper- and lower-class districts, spaces of leisure and commerce and habitation, determine the characters' movements. Anyone with experience of real rural settings knows that those settings are not isotropic. Even if the land is relatively flat, other natural features of water and vegetation, land-use patterns, fencelines and land ownership restrict even informal foot traffic and create variation in the ease of movement out from the central place. The pastoral thus promises a release from the gridded, economically-ruled, class-bound urban space into a fantasy of rural geometry.

Moretti reminds us that the geography of the pastoral is inaccurate to the world because it is stylized in characteristic ways. Basso's expansion of the idea of chronotope leaves us room to

¹⁷ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps and Trees: Abstract Models For a Literary History*, New York: Verso 2005: 41

posit how such stylized descriptions have the power to alter the real landscapes.¹⁸ So we have a triangulation of pastoral characteristics from Bakhtin: a chronotope conveying a sense of long, deep, cyclic time closely tied to one locale (which may therefore seem outside the flow of linear, historical time); a depiction of unalienated labor; an urgency to convey a folksy wisdom about living and dying well. To this we add Moretti's observations on how movements in pastoral space are radial, centripetally tied to one locale, and how that space through which characters go out and return is often attenuated into an isotropic space, a spacialization that speaks to the ideological fantasy of land as nurturing and accommodating to human movement and sustenance. Let this be the formal description of the pastoral genre, of the shapes of the works that sometimes contain the social critique that Empson, James and Tew demand of them, but which do, as Buell and London understand, accommodate differing political readings. The question of whether there is a nuclear pastoral therefore becomes the question of whether there are works upon the subject of the atom bomb that take this form. *On the Beach* will be my primary test case for this inquiry, and for an exploration of the politics of the nuclear pastoral, and the pastoral's surprising powers of resistance to the politics of nuclear fear. I will then use *The Long Tomorrow* to discern the function of time and nostalgia in the nuclear pastoral.

II. Gentle Uses of Apocalypse: *On the Beach*

British-Australian author Nevil Shute released *On the Beach* to international success in 1957. In America, the book spent seven months on *Publisher's Weekly's* bestseller list, selling 95,000 copies in 1957 and enjoying serialization in 45 newspapers, 39 of which were

¹⁸ See for example Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), which speaks of the transformative effect that eastern and Rooseveltian perceptions of the West had on land use via tourism and dude ranching, and parks.

American.¹⁹ Early review responses and the newspaper editors' comments framing the novel's serialization frequently asserted that *On the Beach* was so important that reading (or publishing) it was a social responsibility. A Hollywood film directed by Stanley Kramer followed up this commercial and political momentum in 1959. My analysis will treat the film and the novel as two parts of the same cultural event because of the film's extreme faithfulness to the novel and because public responses to the two works are so concordant.²⁰

Again and again, reviewers note and debate the merits of the same the formal characteristics (preserved from novel to film) of character and plot development and conclude that people have a responsibility to consume this media. *On the Beach* is not just a must-read or a must-see, but a should-see and a should-read: readers and viewers are called to bear witness to it. Despite an overall loss of \$700,000, the film's \$5,000,000 in domestic distribution gross implies a considerable audience.²¹ United Artists bet on getting readers to the movies, and New American Library aggressively marketed the paperback around the time of the film's release,

¹⁹ *Publisher's Weekly*, vol. 173 no. 11, 17 March 1958: 52; *Publisher's Weekly*, vol. 178 no. 3, 20 January 1958: 43

²⁰ I do so knowing that Shute himself would object to this treatment, having refused to attend the film's premier in protest of director Stanley Kramer's decision to leave room for an implied sex-scene between the novel's lovers, Dwight and Moira (played by Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner). Shute sets a great store by the American submarine captain proving his loyalty to his wife and children by avoiding this consummation of his relationship with Moira, and his habit of speaking of his family as if they are still alive lends complexity to his otherwise practical character. Yet even Shute could not resist pushing the boundaries of impassioned chastity, for it is in such moments that reality intrudes, sweetly and harshly, upon Dwight's fantasy of denial. When Dwight and Moira kiss, they do so because Moira has agreed to help Dwight find a present for his son, and Shute immediately has him assure her, "[My wife] Sharon wouldn't mind me doing this. It's from us both." This murmured and unsustainable excuse for a kiss is exactly the half-admitting, half-denying pillow-talk that might ensue after Kramer's camera politely turns itself from the lovers to the storm outside the rustic inn's window, one night during the world's last trout season. The spirit, if not the letter, of Dwight's bisected loyalties is honored in Kramer's *On the Beach*.

On the Beach, directed by Stanley Kramer (1959; Santa Monica, Calif. : MGM Home Entertainment, 2000), DVD.

Shute, Nevil. *On the Beach*. (New York: Morrow, 1957): 159.

²¹ Tino Balio, *United Artists: The Company that Changed the Film Industry*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 138, 144.

making it the largest and most heavily promoted book-movie tie-in ever undertaken by that publisher. The book entered its eleventh edition around the time of the film's release, and sales continued briskly in the years thereafter.²² More than a million copies were in print by the time of Shute's death in 1960; 2,680,000 by 1965 and 4,000,000 by the 1980s.²³

Book reviews and the contextualization that newspaper editors performed when serializing *On the Beach* in August and September of 1957 insist that reading, publishing or viewing *On the Beach* is a political and ethical responsibility. Edmund Fuller's review in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* concluded that it was "an... important book that could become real," and then he turned to his reader: "If you don't read it, you're missing a notable emotional experience and ducking a responsibility."²⁴ An advertisement promoting the serialization in the *St. Petersburg Times* expressed a hope that it could change the global political landscape, naming it "the call for an awakening, a summons to action, a plea for the decision of a world at nuclear crossroads," and concluded with a plea of its own: "We hope you will read this and that it will be read at the White House and the Kremlin, in Downing Street and Cairo."²⁵ Earle P. Brown for the *Washington Post* expressed hope that the novel will be added to cornerstones or time capsules "so that if an atomic Armageddon ever comes, future civilizations may realize that this generation went down the road to destruction with its eyes wide open. It should be required

²² "Paperbacks: 'On the Beach' One of Biggest NAL Tie-Ins Yet," *Publisher's Weekly*, vol. 28 December 1959: 62

²³ "Obituaries: Nevil Shute," *Publisher's Weekly*, vol. 179 no. 3 (25 January 1960): 218; Alice Payne Hackett, *70 Years of Bestsellers 1895-1965*. (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1967); Spencer Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images*. (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988): 218. Hackett and *Publisher's Weekly* are American in orientation, and neither is transparent enough in methodology to convey what account, if any, is taken of sales outside of the United States. Weart's number comes from the jacket blurb of the 1982 Signet edition. Grant, in any event, that the sales are impressive and bespeak a serious and lasting connection with the reading public.

²⁴ Edmund Fuller, "Nevil Shute Wipes Out Human Race in Notable Novel," *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Aug 4, 1957: B1

²⁵ "Tomorrow!," advertisement, *St. Petersburg Times* 24 August 1957: 9.

reading—on both sides of the curtain.”²⁶ This is but a sampling of the musts and shoulds and appeals to responsibility that mark the press response to this book. The novel's international provenance did not hinder its embrace by Americans; if anything, the sense of it as the world's book or film captured the American imagination, dangling the promise of a potentially-transformative, already global cultural experience that could be shared from Melbourne to Washington to Cairo to Moscow.

This hope was at least partly realized in 1959, when *On the Beach*'s simultaneous release in 18 international cities made it the first American film to have a premiere in Soviet Moscow. The Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic echoed the wide faith in *On the Beach* as a political catalyst, sponsoring the Los Angeles premiere in hopes that it would “set off a great debate among the thinking people of America and the world.”²⁷ Concern for the possible effect of such a debate upon anti-nuclear sentiment sparked discussion in Eisenhower's cabinet and instructions to military and defense officials on how to discredit the science behind the film.²⁸ In one such effort, the New York Civil Defense Director (apparently trying out the role of science-fiction author himself) faulted the film for “overlooking the possibility of defense against radioactive fall-out.”²⁹

Film audiences were stunned and weeping from New York to Tokyo.³⁰ Did their reaction live up to the expectations and fears? Deservedly or not, *On the Beach* is one of those works that trails a reputation for changed lives. One Environmental Studies professor of my acquaintance

²⁶ Earle P. Brown, “The Facing of Certain Death,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 July 1957: E6.

²⁷ “Ford Foundation Sponsors 'On the Beach' Premiere,” *Los Angeles Sentinel* 10 December 1959: C3.

²⁸ Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007): 156-7.

²⁹ “‘On the Beach’ Scored by Civil Defense Head,” *New York Times* 18 December 1959: 34.

³⁰ Spencer Weart. *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1988): 218.

had the book pressed into his hands in grade school and called it a mixed blessing: an awakening to the world's peril that set him on a path of environmental awareness but never let him feel secure again. Anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott credits the book with her radicalization.³¹ Concrete effects of texts like this one upon the world are difficult to establish, but these anecdotal occurrences, together with the widespread reception of *On the Beach* as politically and ethically important, suggest that *On the Beach* is not afflicted with the apolitical nostalgia of which scholars accuse the pastoral, but was historically treated as politically-active material. Surely it sees itself as such: the film ends with an altar-call, a last shot of a deserted Melbourne square full of blown paper where, in earlier city montages, there had been a religious meeting underway. A banner over the square reads, "There Is Still Time," which is ironic when directed at the dead citizenry and sincere as a bald appeal to the viewers. Though it depicted a world in which death could only be resigned to, *On the Beach* did not have to inspire resignation.

That paradox troubled many early reviews, who regarded elements of the novel's characterization and plot-structure with a bemusement later echoed in the film's reviews. Some cast doubt on Shute's characterization, complaining that the people in *On the Beach* face their deaths with "upper lips preternaturally stiff."³² Since the setting is the last year of human life, the ending is assured. How can Shute (or Kramer) generate interest in characters and events under such circumstances? For some reviewers, this plot structure was an insurmountable obstacle; others noted it as a challenge or peculiarity and insisted that *On the Beach* succeeded in being engaging and important anyway. Both the positive and negative versions of this observation are registering an understanding that *On the Beach* does not generate conflict the way most other

³¹ Gideon Haigh, "Shute the Messenger: How the End of the World Came to Melbourne," *The Monthly* No. 24, June 2007.

³² Arthur Calder-Marshall, "Setting the Pace," *Times Literary Supplement* June 14, 1957: 361

stories do. Edmund Fuller, writing for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, uses “quietly” twice in the first paragraph, leading with “Nevil Shute... quietly lowers the curtain on the human race,” and later calling the book “a story quietly paced with a minimum of incident.”³³ He knows that he is in the presence of a competent (or “notable”) example of a peculiar type of book, a work less plot-driven than most despite the sensational nature of its premise. Many of the markers of difference that Fuller and other reviewers describe are best interpreted as observations of the work's pastoral structure.

That plot, “quietly paced with a minimum of incident,” is actually full of incidents, but they are episodic and cyclic. The characters quarrel, reconcile, and recreate; a few even take a nuclear-submarine voyage to the northern hemisphere in scientific quest for a glimmer of hope about the fate of the world. Most reviews omit all mention of the submarine voyage, or bring it up only to mention the restraint with which it depicts nuclear devastation. None make the mistake of confusing this incident with the central plot or believing the story's stakes to reside there. It is just one discrete episode among many in which the work asks its readers and viewers to invest.

Characters in *On the Beach* are always up to something. Throughout their last months, despite the complete cessation of petroleum imports to Australia, Shute's characters manage to make an impressive circuit of leisure around Melbourne. They travel by train, bicycle, hoarded petrol, or horse-drawn sportscar to indulge in sailing, trout-fishing, gentleman-farming, suburban gardening, and auto racing. Good food and drink make their appearance, too, as a few older gentlemen make an heroic effort to finish off the good brandy at the Pastoral Club. What's in it

³³ Edmund Fuller. “Nevil Shute Wipes Out Human Race in Notable Novel,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*. Aug 4, 1957: B1

for the audience, however? Of the Grand Prix race, one frustrated reviewer writes, “A fiendishly exciting and brutal race it is, though it really has very little to do with the film's major motive.”³⁴ Love fares no better, as another reviewer speaks of “romantic elements having little to do with the film in question.”³⁵ *On the Beach*, in both novel and film incarnations, is largely constructed of vignettes. Any one of these relationship scenes or leisure-circuit outings, taken alone, has “little to do” with the whole because *On the Beach* is not assembled in such a way as to depend absolutely upon any single character or incident. The many episodic diversions that comprise the action of *On the Beach* are the story's major motive. Each of them is an assertion of pastoral values (albeit a gentrified one), and, if the characters' ability to travel to them strains the bounds of belief in Shute's petrol-scarce world, we can look to Moretti again: such radial movements are a characteristic of the pastoral genre and they happen regardless of practical considerations in the isotropic spacial fantasy of the pastoral.

The pastoral qualities of *On the Beach* are behind another oft-commented upon aspect of the novel and film: those stiff upper lips. There is no villain, and the many protagonists possess few character flaws. For some reviewers, like Arthur Calder-Marshall, writing for the *Times Literary Supplement*, this amounts to a failure of characterization: “Everybody... is so noble, or so gentle, or so forbearing, or so understanding, or so gallant, in the face of the inevitable that nobody seems as real or convincing as the briefly noted catastrophe responsible for their death.”³⁶ Calder-Marshall registers his objection as one of verisimilitude and plausibility. But why does he consider nobility and forbearance less real and convincing than the chaotic scenes

³⁴ Alan Dent, “Making Light of It,” *Illustrated London News*, January 9, 1960: 72.

³⁵ “Film Reviews: On the Beach,” *Variety*, 2 December 1959: 6.

³⁶ Arthur Calder-Marshall, “Setting the Pace,” *Times Literary Supplement* 14 June 1957: 361.

Milton Merlin, “Novel Prophecies End of the Earth by Atomic Warfare,” *Los Angeles Times* 21 July 1957: E6.

of naked, animalistic self-interest and violence that mark many other post-apocalyptic tales?³⁷

Accounts of real human behavior in natural disasters confirm that people tend to act with kindness and cooperation in the most dire situations.³⁸ Insofar as any scenario can be analogous to the final disaster, verisimilitude is arguably on Shute's side. It is apocalyptic literary conventions, not recorded human experience, with which Shute is out of step in *On the Beach*.

In one of the few pieces of criticism of *On the Beach*, C. W. Sullivan echoes Donald Wollheim's assessment of Shute's as "the supreme pessimistic view."³⁹ This sounds like a reasonable criticism of a novel in which everyone dies and human life on earth ends, however, such a declaration ignores the novel's insistence that humankind might die gracefully, without the raping and rioting and cannibalism. It also fails to account for the ways in which the story's pastoral pursuits mount a maximally wishful resistance to the conditions of modern, man-made mass death.

The seductive, life-affirming appeal of the pastoral is that, by insisting that living and dying well matter, it insists that our lives matter. Shute's apocalypse is populated almost exclusively by men (and women) of the people—persons who possess the crucial wisdom of living and dying well. Under the cloud of approaching fallout, desires are clarified and wishes fulfilled. The scientist, John, is suddenly able to buy a Ferrari for a hundred quid and win the Australian Grand Prix; the promiscuous, drunken Moira finds love with her straight-laced submarine captain. One of the other main sub-plots hinges on whether the young wife and

³⁷ See, for example, Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* before it; *On the Beach*'s rough contemporaries, *Alas, Babylon* and *Canticle for Leibowitz*, and countless tales after it, ranging from Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

³⁸ See, for example, Rebecca Solnit, *A Paradise Build in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster*, New York: Viking 2009.

³⁹ C. W. Sullivan III, "Alas, Babylon and *On the Beach*: Antiphons of the Apocalypse," *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World*, ed. Carl B. Yoke (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987): 43.

mother, Mary Holmes, can accept the coming demise of her family and forgive her husband Peter's insistence on preparing for it. It is important to the novel (and the film) that marital strife be resolved so that Mary and Peter can have a good death.

Above all, agrarian values serve as the markers of a good death in *On the Beach*. Dwight and Moira find peace walking behind a bullock on Moira's family farm, spreading dung to enrich a land that will never again bear a harvest, and Mary and Peter take solace in planting and tending a garden they will never see bloom. To do well by a plot of land, even one that radiation-resistant (but equally doomed) invasive rabbits will soon ravage, is an essential mark of humanity, an essential part of what allows one to live and die well in *On the Beach*.

All of these acts of land stewardship take place within a story closely attentive to the inhabited earth's final round of seasons. Even as the director of civil defense criticized *On the Beach* for imagining fall-out as fatally dangerous at all, at least one film-reviewer mutters about the "ill-explained reasons" for Australia's 22-month window of habitability.⁴⁰ Shute imagines that circumglobal wind systems will take 22 months to carry radioactive particles to the southern hemisphere, but the work follows only the last ten of these months. The highly episodic nature of the plot means that Shute often leaves his characters for months at a time, even when those characters are undergoing developing conflicts or budding relationships. Despite the characters' laments that their lives are ending prematurely, the sense of time is spacious, not accelerated, in *On the Beach*. Everything that happens between the characters could have been compressed into a frenetic month, but it is to say farewell to the land that Shute needs nearly a year. In this, *On the Beach* joins a great deal of green literature, from Thoreau's *Walden* to Leopold's *Sand County*

⁴⁰ "Film Reviews: On the Beach," *Variety* 2 December 1959: 6.

Almanac, Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and Kingsolver's recent *Animal Vegetable Miracle* in chronicling the cycle of a year in one place, a distinctly pastoral narrative strategy. In the case of these non-fiction examples, the authors have been willing to compress the experiences of multiple years into one story year. This is not an untruth so much as an alternate, and very pastoral, way of writing about a place: a certain thing happened there in Winter or in Spring.⁴¹ *On the Beach* does not complete the round: opening just after Christmas and closing in September, the novel finishes with a spring that will never break into the promised summer, which is probably just right for a novel about the end of human life on earth.

This evocation of land-stewardship and rooted, cyclic time is pastoral in general, but the novel's most central and courageous optimism is an expression of the nuclear pastoral in particular, a fierce doubling-down upon the pastoral answers of love, family, dirt, dung and blooms, even in a world with the bomb. *On the Beach* makes extravagant promises about how much the arc of an individual life still matters in a nuclear age. It is this promise, that one may go fishing, cradle a child, and plant flowers, and *matter* in the very shadow of the bomb, that is at the heart of the nuclear pastoral.

III. Time in *The Long Tomorrow*

The Long Tomorrow is not as obviously pastoral in structure as *On the Beach*. Movement is not radial or centripetally tied: a single quest and abortive return occupies too much of the geographic movement. It is incomplete even as a nature-quest narrative, for it begins in

⁴¹ Other scholars have noted the prevalence of the trope of the year in environmental writing. For instance, Scott Slovic discusses in *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1998) how Bronson Alcott and Harrison Blake posthumously edited Thoreau's diaries to compress many years into one, following the convention set by *Walden*.

the green world instead of journeying into and then out of it again. The novel has confounded conventional attempts to read it as a political allegory or as a mainstream science-fiction tale. In the latter case, science-fiction critic Damon Knight observes that it at its most literary when only mildly speculative (during the opening scenes at Piper's Run), and he distinguishes it (or what it is trying to be) from science-fiction by naming it a “future-tense novel, for want of a better term.”⁴² *The Long Tomorrow* is a political and generic misfit that is usefully contextualized amongst other green post-apocalypse tales through attention to its pastoral elements. This nuclear pastoral novel of the future tense—or, as I will argue, the future anterior, disrupts the usual relations of time, history, technology and nostalgia, bending that tense to unsublime ends.

The Long Tomorrow opens two generations after nuclear war has destroyed all the cities of America. Brackett sketches this sensational temporal setting only off-handedly, by reference to “when the cities ended,” which is a measure of the extent to which she eschews sublime visions of destruction or a similarly cathartic death-world of mangled bodies and retrograde technology.⁴³ Though a book set after a spectacular nuclear apocalypse, it is like other nuclear pastoral texts in that it is scarcely interested in the bomb and its powers.

Critical response to *The Long Tomorrow* has registered puzzlement with Brackett's apparent lack of nuclear politics. Donna DeBlasio argues that “Brackett is telling her readers that anything carried to extremes is bad,” but such a milk-toast message would scarcely seem enough to inspire a novel.⁴⁴ What would that look like in terms of apocalypse? Let us have the end of the earth, but only a little of it? The main character himself often asserts that his problem

⁴² Damon Knight, review of *The Long Tomorrow*, *Future Science Fiction* no. 29 (1956): 128-130.

⁴³ Leigh Brackett, *The Long Tomorrow* (New York: Ballantine, 1985): 4.

⁴⁴ Donna M. DeBlasio, “Future Imperfect: Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow*,” *Phoenix from the Ashes: The Literature of the Remade World*, ed. Carl B. Yoke: 97-103 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987): 100.

is precisely that he is a moderate, one of “the in-between ones” with neither his father's commitment to the New Mennonite religious sect or his cousin Esau's loyalty to the technological enclave of Bartorstown.⁴⁵ When Len later tries to return to his pastoral boyhood home of Piper's Run, the Bartorstown residents will not allow him to escape with his knowledge of the community. Only his decision to resign himself to the imperfect life in Bartorstown saves him from the deer-rifle toting SWAT team who would have killed him to protect their secrets. One cannot turn one's back on nuclear knowledge in *The Long Tomorrow*; it is a knowledge that, once acquired, must be lived with. If it has anything to say about moderation, *The Long Tomorrow* is a quiet lament for the elusiveness of the possibility of full disarmament, and for the modern condition that forces the compromise of living with the bomb upon us at gunpoint (or missile-point).

DeBlasio elaborates her moderation reading with the idea that the different communities occupying Brackett's post-apocalyptic Earth represent different negative examples: Don't be a religious fanatic like a New Mennonite or a New Ishmaelite (she leaves out the revivalists who stone a man to death in the opening chapters, but one presumes they, too, are exemplary in the negative sense) or a technological fanatic either. DeBlasio's reading rapidly loses the simplistic elegance that is the main selling point of allegorical interpretation when she makes multiple groups of figures redundant upon the same meaning. Rather than contorting ourselves to imagine what the New Ishmaelites (who deck themselves in goat skins and wander the wild places of the West, menacing wagon trains) are allegories for, it is simpler to read all of their hunting, gathering and standing about on ridges as fulfilling the stock role of Native Americans

⁴⁵ Brackett, *The Long Tomorrow*, 212.

in a Western. It is hard to use such thinly sketched characters to deduce what Brackett says about the bomb or about technology because to do so mistakes her project, which is not to explore the bomb. Instead, Brackett's novel is about those values that are powerful enough to make the bomb beside the point. She is less interested in making a cautionary tale about it than in using the bomb as a plot-device to sweep the continent exhilaratingly clean for story. (Also swept clean, apparently, are any non-white populations and any trace of female advances into the workplace. Even amongst those who cling to most elements of 20th-century technology and culture, there are no Marie Curies, only male engineers, scientists and traders, and their wives, who "always seemed to be where [they were] wanted."⁴⁶) Brackett describes the North American continent as "a land as wide now as it had been centuries before," which is crucially distinct from a land as wide as it has always been.⁴⁷ For a time, she implies, it was narrowed by technology. It is wide enough again, now, for a Western or a pastoral.

In her use of catastrophe to clear the land, Brackett follows other post-apocalyptic tales that imagine the world a greener place with fewer humans. One notable example is Jack London's *Scarlet Plague*, which, when completed in 1910 and published in 1915, became the first American work in that genre. In both cases, one goes astray by seeking the novel's politics or values in what it destroys. They are more interested in what remains, and what regrows.

Like Brackett's, London's book opens two generations after the apocalypse. The main character, Granser, once a professor of English at the University of California, spends much of the novel repeating his memories of the eponymous plague to his grandsons. The description of the epidemic is remarkable largely for the display of class consciousness—and class anxiety—it

⁴⁶ Ibid., 189-90.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

occasions. By 2013, the year of the plague, London's America is ruled by a board of magnates, democracy is a memory, and the working classes are enslaved in all but name. It sounds like a simple dystopian satire, but for London, the socialist's and activist's vision in recognizing dehumanizing conditions is intertwined with a tendency to view the lumpenproletariat as actually subhuman. When describing the looting and violence that broke out with the plague, Granser opines:

In the midst of our civilization, down in our slums and labor-ghettos, we had bred a race of barbarians, of savages; and now, in the time of our calamity, they turned upon us like the wild beasts they were and destroyed us. And they destroyed themselves as well.⁴⁸

Picking up on the obvious eugenic drift of “we had bred a race of barbarians,” David Raney strives in a 2003 article to trace the origins and political thrust of London's thinking, declaring it an often-contradictory autodidact's admixture of Darwin, Spencer, Marx and Nietzsche that ultimately amounts to a vision of “beleaguered Aryans now set about on all sides by savagery.”⁴⁹ This may be too tidy a distillation of a politics that is as muddled as it is ugly.

London's narrator, Granser, clearly paints the proletarian violence as a moral comeuppance against the haughty magnates and the intellectual classes, but it should be obvious even to Granser that the entire assertion that anyone “destroyed” anyone else in the plaguetime chaos is incoherent. It does not matter how many liquor stores are robbed, fires set, or parents murdered before their children. The “thousand atrocities” committed by the working class could have affected virtually no one not already doomed. It is all just a colorful backdrop for the plague that spares one immune person for every million victims. London's determination to make a biological apocalypse into a social apocalypse is intriguing, but I believe he uses it more

⁴⁸ Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague and Before Adam* (London: Arco Publications, 1968): 39.

⁴⁹ David Raney, "'No Ties Except Those of Blood': Class, Race, and Jack London's American Plague," *Papers on Language and Literature* 39, no. 4 (2003): 427.

to create dramatic stakes than to make political or social commentary. An account in which nearly four million San Franciscans died peacefully and four walked off to repopulate the earth would not have been nearly as rousing as the class riot he uses instead.

With similar showmanship, London further amplifies the dramatic reversals of the apocalypse through a scene of class miscegenation. Granser describes how Vesta Van Warden, the widow of a magnate, is enslaved by and forced to bear the children of her servant. Though his name denotes only his labor status and London makes no specific statement of Chauffeur's race, Granser describes him in racially-charged terms as “a large, dark, hairy man, heavy-jawed, slant-browed, fierce-eyed...” an “ape-like human brute.”⁵⁰ This is only a small sampling of the vile descriptions Granser heaps upon a character whose persistent habits of rape and domestic violence serve to independently confirm the former professor's low opinion of him. The over-the-top verbal excess reveals that London is not the master of his own contempt for the worker; to probe such descriptions for a key political statement seems a doomed endeavor.

If we step back from violent depictions of class turmoil and power reversal, however, we find the one thing that *The Scarlet Plague* is sure of. The frame narrative, of a green earth reclaimed from human civilization, is marred by none of the economic violence of pre-plague humanity or the savage physical violence of the risen proletariat. Just before Granser and the children turn and leave the beach where they have talked, they see “a small herd of wild horses which had come down on the hard sand.”

There were at least twenty of them, young colts and yearlings and mares, led by a beautiful stallion which stood in the foam at the edge of the surf, with arched neck and wild bright eyes, sniffing the salt air from off the sea... The low sun shot red shafts of light, fan-shaped, up from a cloud-tumbled horizon. And close at hand, in the white

⁵⁰ London, *The Scarlet Plague*, 51, 55.

waste of shore-lashed waters, the sea-lions, bellowing their old primeval chant, hauled up out of the sea on the black rocks and fought and loved.⁵¹

After Granser's litany of losses and destruction, there is this: the suddenly elevated language that, together with the halo of late red sunlight, announces (however clumsily) the arrival of a symbol on the scene. The bounteous multiplication of the emancipated animals, referenced before by Granser, is now on display in the form of the prolific stallion and his band. The sea-lions are engaged in fights harmonized with acts of reproduction and “primeval” chants that connect this scene of resurgent fecundity to a pre-civilized, prelapsarian past. The earth and life endure. Even that adjective, barbaric, (once applied to the “race of barbarians” in the slums) is transformed in the final line, as “an old man and boy, skin-clad and barbaric, turned and went into the forest.” The forest takes them back, and their barbarism is, finally, an emblem of their fitness to live in it. London, at least, is reconciled to all that is lost. *The Scarlet Plague* doesn't express a yen for revolution—proletarian or Aryan—but rather a wish that we should step back from the subtler warfares of wealth accumulation and class oppression and live in a world with space for wild horses, woods, and old primeval chants.

Brackett's boys, like London's, are fitted to live in their new, greener world. The objects and the language on her book's first page vividly establish her setting and the boys' snug niche within it: sitting by a horse barn, enjoying corn pone and sweet butter, they are “contemplating a sin” and are nearly “being counted among the men.”⁵² You would be forgiven for imagining that you were encountering an 18th or 19th-century setting. The young boys, Len and Esau Coulter, are New Mennonites, for the Amish and Mennonite sects of the twentieth century were “best

⁵¹ Ibid., 62

⁵² Brackett, *The Long Tomorrow*, 3.

fitted to survive” in the new century without cities, engines or electricity and “swiftly multiplied into the millions” after the cities ended.⁵³ The retrograde technology of *The Long Tomorrow* is no object of horror or death-world dehumanization. Instead, Len and Esau's early life in Piper's Run is pastoral and explicitly Edenic. It is a closely-knit community, a place where the Coulter family farmed for a hundred years before the cities ended, where their grandmother lives under their roof and where Len's brother will marry and raise the next generation.

Brackett provides no etymology for the name of Piper's Run's antipole, the semi-mythical technological enclave of Bartorstown, but a simple symbolic reading can offer one: barter's town, the ends of capitalism. When the boys arrive at this promised land, instead of the shining city they have envisioned, they find only its cover, a mining town called Fall Creek. A preacher once warned that the whispers and rumors of Bartorstown were “tempting our boys and young men, dangling the forbidden serpent's fruit in front of them,” so it is no surprise that they come to a Fall.⁵⁴ That temptation and fall ultimately rob Len of a contentment in which the book believes wholeheartedly. As rumors of Bartorstown entrance him during his early life, Piper's Run offers opportunities to repent. For three ecstatic pages, Len follows his father's advice to “go into the fields and look around you... and ask God for... a contented heart.” During this interlude, Len is filled with a “passionate, wordless love” for the prosperous farm, marked as it is by the generations of human labor, and the “rough woods” beyond it. But no sooner does he doze off, enjoying this “feeling of absolute peacefulness” than he wakes to hear “a sound in the woods” that “was not a right sound.”⁵⁵ It is his first encounter with a radio, and the end of his peace.

⁵³ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35, 37, 38.

Len's eventual longing for Piper's Run at first seems to enact the expected relationship between a man's personal timeline, technological hierarchies and nostalgia: the older, wiser man yearns for the comparative technological innocence, the less alienated labors of his rural youth. But his relationship to technology is outside the historical chronology of *The Long Tomorrow*, where it is the nuclear reactor, the computer and the radio that are retrograde, each a century-old relic that grows harder and harder to repair with every passing year. When the boys ask their mentor, Hostetter, what the people who stoned another trader to death were afraid of, he tells them, "Of yesterday. Of tomorrow."⁵⁶ Later, a resident describes Bartorstown as "all yesterday and all tomorrow."⁵⁷ These phrases encapsulate the chronological entanglement that *The Long Tomorrow* generates. By positioning the bomb in the future anterior, the novel inverts the ordinary relationships of technology, history and nostalgia.

One expects the present to be nostalgic for the less technologically-advanced, more bucolic, past. The resemblance of the local, rooted lifeways described in pastoral texts to such a past raises the question of whether the pastoral is a nostalgic genre. To see (as the pastoral often does) a bucolic space as existing outside the flow of linear, historical time is a vision offered in implicit contrast to the viewer's own position within the flow of that time. It is thus almost by definition an act of imperialist nostalgia, the empire's tendency to see the subaltern people and lifeways with whom it now shares the planet as existing in the past or outside of history.⁵⁸ But the past and the pastoral should not be flattened into synonyms. DeBlasio reports that the New

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁸ Kaplan borrows the term from Renato Rosaldo. Amy Kaplan, "Romancing the Empire: The Embodiment of American Masculinity in the Popular Historical Novel of the 1890s," *American Literary History* 2 no. 4 (1990): 659-690.

Mennonite culture in *The Long Tomorrow* grew out of Brackett's simple fascination with Amish and Mennonite communities she encountered upon moving to Ohio, but this observation neglects the most important question: not why she writes about them, but why she juxtaposes these cultures with the bomb. Her inversion of nostalgia challenges readers to imagine bucolic communities not as stuck in the past, but as sharing their time. In *The Long Tomorrow*, a reader looks into the future and sees a landscape that looks strikingly like the past, but which gazes longingly back at the reader's day. The novel makes a bid to stitch the North American continent into a chronotope in which readers of the landscape will see a text with greater connectivity of past, present and future, greater awareness of presents that are not really past, a whisper of that long, deep cyclic relationship to time that marks a pastoral world.

But what use this anti-teleological imaginative exercise, this understated apocalypse? *On the Beach* is undoubtedly cautionary. "There is still time," it implores, to prevent it. But do not be awed by it. We are not awed by catastrophe in *The Long Tomorrow* either, where Brackett will not even entertain a scene of nuclear destruction. Value in *The Long Tomorrow* is located in Piper's Run, though what use those pastoral values are for Len, who must live in Bartorstown, or readers in their own Bartorstowns, is left hauntingly unclear. It is a question for anyone who inherits pastoral values in a decreasingly bucolic world.

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I turn now away from the broad cultural phenomena of science fiction works, essays and journalism, and turn to two highly literary authors, Jean Toomer and Leslie Marmon Silko, and

their far more private archives. I move away from attempting to take the pulse of a national public, of what it read and saw and understood of the atomic bomb through time, and a bear down upon the authorial process of forging representations of nuclear weapons.

Each of the following two chapters has a before-and-after the nuclear arc. My work on Toomer examines his peace writing from 1944 and his Southwestern writing from 1935 in order to better understand the alterations in Toomer's depictions of New Mexico, and of the world, after the bomb. Toomer, who once expected America's race-relations problems to be solved by interracial marriage and the eventual creation of a new, hybrid American race, experienced the bomb as so threatening that it compressed the future time available: intermarriage would now be too slow; education would be too slow; there was only radical spiritual transformation, the turning of human hearts from war, left to hope for.

The non-nuclear to nuclear arc of the fourth chapter traces a different development, as this change occurs not in the life of the author (Silko herself being born in 1948) but in the course of the composition of a novel. This chapter traces the evolution of her novel, *Ceremony*, from a non-nuclear to a nuclear work, a transformation she accomplishes by removing the novel from a setting in her own youth of the 1970s and displacing it onto her father's generation of World War II servicemen coming home to the newly nuclear world of the Southwest. My reading of *Ceremony* reveals the novel attempting to bring into existence an earth-up revision of human hearts that is in some ways remarkably concordant with Jean Toomer's vision of thirty years prior when he bet upon human transformations to preserve the earth from nuclear war instead of placing his hope in the United Nations. Silko's interlocking visions of land ethic, animal ethic, and peace ethic use Tayo's particular lifelong constellation of war trauma, personal

and cultural traumas, to dream a ceremonial formula for a life that, lived in accordance with those ethics, might be enough to avert the final destruction.

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CHAPTER III

Green World or None: Jean Toomer's Pastoral Vision for a Nuclear Age

They will come southwestward, not on horseback or in a covered wagon but driving a motor-car. Even so they will strike experience here, as man ever does when his heart is freshly given to a place.¹

That country is surely my country too. I have a love for it. Yet, as you know, I hate it also... It is almost as if, ages ago, I suffered deeply in it—and a memory of that suffering sometimes stirs in the regions of myself far below consciousness. I want to found and build a world there. Also I feel that no good can come of it to me or anyone I love.²

In Jean Toomer's late work, a man of great moral imagination struggles with violence and war, with questions of class and race relations in his New Mexico community, and finally, with the atom bomb, which renovates his feeling for the landscape around Taos and utterly changes his opinion on the solution to America's race problems. The bomb challenges, but does not diminish, the commitment to non-violent writing about war that he established before 1945. Toomer uses elements of a pastoral mode to resist those moments when, as he puts it, "war sets itself up as the end and compels its victims to so regard it."³ Refusing to make war or the bomb the central subject of his war writings is a way to avoid the trap of imagined victimhood that

¹ Jean Toomer, *A Drama of the Southwest*, typescript, n.d. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 44, Folder 917, p. 7. Yale University Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, James Weldon Johnson Collection, New Haven, CT. This collection will hereafter be cited as Jean Toomer Papers

² Jean Toomer to Marjorie Content, 14 June 1934, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 8, Folder 251.

³ Jean Toomer, "Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace": Notes and Drafts 1943 Nov-Dec, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 54, folder 1228. p. 50.

engulfs so many works in the nuclear sublime tradition and makes them complicit with an age of nuclear fear. Toomer's pastoral aesthetic is a practice of the ethics of anti-war and anti-nuclear protest, advancing the idea that the landscape whose resources, testing grounds and research facilities birthed the bomb may also provide the spiritual and social resources necessary for living with its presence.

By the time Toomer penned his New Mexico notebook of 1947, the atomic bomb had shifted the meaning of the New Mexico landscape under his feet. Perhaps, in the bomb, Toomer at last met the “no good” that he felt would come from this place. Where he once looked out at the desert landscape and saw a source of strength for independent Southwestern women, now he looked to it as a source of spiritual lessons and resources for an entire world living with the atom bomb. The pastoral vision that he offers has a deep appreciation for human habitation in inhospitable climes, and is at its heart a vegetable-garden radicalism. Yet that does not make it impractical or unmodern. New Mexico's intimate relationship with radiation, research, testing and material resource extraction argues against the notion that New Mexico was for Toomer a retreat or refuge from the pressures of modernity.

By asserting that one can speak with relevance from the hinterlands, I do not mean to say that the view from Taos is just like the view from New York or Sparta, Georgia. The sometimes luminous, ecstatic descriptions of nuclear destruction in the New Mexico notebook are lent an immediacy and specificity by their site of production, which they share with the bomb itself. As nuclear writing, they occupy a fascinating in-between place. Toomer's engagement with the moment of destruction displays the heightened anxiety and grandeur of the nuclear sublime, but he resists the globalizing politics typical of such texts. Like other nuclear pastoral writers,

Toomer is persistent in using rural, agricultural, small-scale places as sites of resistance to the global powers of the atom bomb.

He offers two such places as alternatives to the authoritative perspectives of the centralized United States government, the United Nations Organization, and the book, *One World or None*. This best-selling collection of essays was published in 1946 by the Federation of American Scientists and represents authorities of various kinds: governmental, industrial and scientific. Toomer writes of the New Mexico locales as unknown places, but in the end, it is the centralized powers that wind up negated:

Vadito, Peñasco, Chamizal, Trampas, Ojo Sarco are remote from the national congress and even from the state legislature. The President of the United States does not know of Chamizal, or of Trampas with its mission church built so solidly from the earth that it would seem that not even an atom bomb could dissolve it. They seem to have believed, in those days, that the worship of God must have strong, solid, earthly foundations. Nor does Chamizal know of the President of the United States, nor of the United Nations Organization, nor of the stark alternatives of modern times—One World Or None.⁴

Writing about the bomb from Chamizal and Trampas allows Toomer to write about it in an alternate generic mode. The pastoral is Toomer's answer to the teleological history-making and the self-mythologizing of prominent nuclear scientists, who agree throughout *One World or None* that “it was inevitable that mankind should have atomic fire.”⁵ Partially, *One World or None* is an attempt (both paternalistic and courageous) by leading scientists to assume a moral leadership and promote the possibility of world peace through a strong United Nations Organization. It is also a showy performance in public suffering, in which the scientists paint themselves as the Titanic figures who brought what Compton refers to as “the Promethean gift” of the bomb, but are now suffering regret for the human consequences of their discoveries. The

⁴ Jean Toomer, New Mexico Notebook. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482. p. 15.

⁵ Arthur Compton, introduction to *One World or None*, ed. Dexter Masters and Katharine Way. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1946): v-vi.

book assumes a rapt audience of concerned citizens. Toomer refuses to gaze upon the scientists' penance, cuts it down to less than Titanic size, when he insists that Chamizal does not know of *One World or None*. Turning from the national atomic spectacle, Toomer uses Chamizal to offer a green, earthen vision in answer to the bomb instead of a global-political one.

Looking at Toomer as he comments upon American atomic activities from his vantage in New Mexico provides new answers old questions about the author himself. Whatever happened to him, anyway? Why was he such a failure after *Cane*? Was he a fugitive or an exile from his community of birth? Neither, I will argue. He was a sojourner, and no failure. In addition, I want to ask new questions of a body of work that can richly reward them. I have chosen to focus on three works, one to answer each argument for dismissing Toomer. These works also trace a trajectory which will suggest new paths through Toomer's body of work and provide a clearer picture of the arc of his thinking about the Southwest and about war. "Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace" is to Toomer's later New Mexico notebooks what Stein's *Paris, France* is to her "Reflection on the Atomic Bomb"—a chance to see how the author thinks about war before the atom bomb comes on the scene. For Toomer, the atomic bomb was particularized and localized in the Southwestern landscape he loved. *A Drama of the Southwest* shows us Toomer's New Mexico before the bomb and allows us to picture how the bomb changes the meaning of that place for him. Lastly, his New Mexico notebook will show us Toomer grappling with his Southwest when it is a newly nuclear world.

I. Jean Toomer Teacher: Modernity Under Influences

To speak of Toomer's writing from nuclear New Mexico as the potentially valuable

meditations of a deeply morally and politically engaged thinker cuts powerfully against current public discourse about him. Following the publication of the new Norton critical edition of *Cane* in January of 2011 and its attendant fanfare in popular media including the *New York Times* and National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, Jean Toomer is enjoying a resurgence in the public consciousness. Unfortunately, non-specialists' first association with Toomer is not the title of his great work, or his high modernist and Harlem Renaissance contexts. It's passing. In the imagination of the public and of students who first encounter *Cane* as the book is packaged in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Rudolph P. Byrd's introduction, Toomer is the African American man who wrote briefly and beautifully about black life in rural Georgia and then betrayed that work and that community by spending the rest of his life passing for white. Gates and Byrd do more than reach an incorrect and over-simplified conclusion about Toomer. They begin by asking the wrong questions, falling in line with a long tradition of scholarship focusing too much on who Toomer was and too little on what he wrote.

Engaging with Toomer's hitherto nearly-ignored late work can help correct the biographical record. Gates and Byrd want to reinforce the idea of Jean Toomer as a fugitive—a man on the run from his own African American identity. When we locate Toomer in terms of his class, culture and region as well as race, however, we learn that Toomer was as productively, uneasily and incompletely at home in New Mexico as he ever was in the rural Georgia setting of much of *Cane*. The parallels between the work from these two locales and periods challenge the dominant picture of Toomer after 1923 as failed or ruined. His much-praised and prematurely mourned lyricism is intact, as is his remarkable ability to imagine and empathize his way into an unfamiliar community. New Mexico was not a retreat or a flight for Toomer. It was a return to

what he recognized as his position of greatest creative power, that of one whose heart is “freshly given to a place.”

Scholarly dismissals of late Toomer fall into three categories, all of which contain underlying assumptions about places and contexts in which Toomer could not possibly be knowledgeable or authentic. First, there is the argument that Toomer's encounter with the ideas of philosopher George Gurdjieff tainted him and destroyed his artistry; next, the idea that he became less African American, and so lost himself and his art, and, finally, the geographic aspersion that Toomer's residence in places like Portage, Fountainbleu, Taos and Doylestown constituted a retreat from the modern, a spatial symptom of what scholars have long counted as his “virtual retirement from literature” after *Cane*.⁶ These critical dismissals are co-reinforcing with biographical practices dedicated to seeking explanations for purported failure, and they have intertwined to place an almost paralyzing thicket of ideas between Toomer's readers and his works.⁷

Toomer's scholars and admirers have long considered December 12, 1923 a dark day. It is the day Jean Toomer encountered the ideas of the mystic philosopher Georges Gurdjieff

⁶ Robert T. Bone, *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958): 89. See also Arna Bontemps' assertion that, after his marriage to Marjorie Content, Toomer “seemed to vanish from literature amongst the tolerant Quakers of Bucks County, Pennsylvania.” Arna Bontemps, “Introduction to the 1959 Edition of *Cane*,” Rptd. in *Cane*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Norton, 2011).

⁷ I am far from the first to express concern about a critical tradition stands in the way of consideration of Toomer's work. In a study of the early critical response to Toomer from 1923-1932, Ronald Dorris reports that the criticism bore little relation to the work's content, but instead consisted of “highly personalized accounts of *Cane*” based on an “assessment of... Toomer himself,” which often involved questions of Toomer's spiritual development, and of whether he had “surpassed race.” Dorris blames critics' mania for positioning Toomer for their failure to prevent *Cane* from sliding into decades of obscurity. Dorris' critique easily extends to more recent critical trends. Ronald Dorris, “Early Criticism of Jean Toomer's *Cane*: 1923-1932,” in *Perspectives of Black Popular Culture*, ed., Harry B. Shaw (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990): 65-70.

through the work of his student, Peter Ouspensky.⁸ As many a biographer and critic tell it, Toomer's failure to replicate the early success of *Cane* lies at Gurdjieff's feet. This is a strangely singular answer to a complex problem. Enduring commercial and critical success in the literary arena is a mysterious alchemy. The enemies of promise that beset young writers are many, and they only gather force with early success, so that failure requires far less explanation than sustained excellence, and seldom derives from a single cause.⁹ Yet the story of the eccentric befezzed philosopher who swooped in and extinguished the Harlem Renaissance's brightest star has persisted.

Introducing *Cane* for Liveright in 1975, Darwin Turner writes of Toomer's meeting with Gurdjieff:

The effects on his literary career were deleterious... Rather than sketching his personae lyrically from a narrator's detached perspective, he more often enters the characters' psyches to describe their thoughts and suggest their psychological motivation. His style too is harsher, more reflective of a sophisticated urban world. ... Toomer now asserted that the primary purpose of literature is to teach, and, in order to teach well, he imitated the ponderous style of his master [Gurdjieff].¹⁰

Turner blames Gurdjieff for Toomer's use of close third-person narrators (who are, one might point out, still possessed of “a narrator's... perspective,” if not a “detached” one), for the supposed loss of lyricism they entail, for an interest in psychology, for didacticism, and even for Toomer's city stories reflecting “a sophisticated urban world.” The final allegation is particularly

⁸ Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge, *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1987 p. 126.

⁹ This phrase, the enemies of promise, is borrowed from Cyril Connolly's book of the same name. I am indebted here to Nicholas Delbanco's *Lastingness* (New York: Grand Central, 2011), in which he writes, “There's no obvious reason why... writers can't improve with age—but it's the rule, not exception, that most of the important work transpires early on” (17).

¹⁰ Turner, Darwin T., introduction to *Cane* (New York: Liveright, 1975): ix-xxv. Turner also claims that the middle section of *Cane* (which contains the urban stories) bears Gurdjieff's harmful influence, and that Toomer met Gurdjieff in 1923. These claims are in disaccord with Byrd and Kerman & Eldridge's timelines, which have Toomer reading a pamphlet on Gurdjieffian philosophy in December 1923 and meeting the man himself in January 1924.

absurd, since Toomer was born in Washington, D.C., spent his childhood in Washington and New York, and remained firmly ensconced in the urban world for all but three months of his pre-*Cane* life. But this reality has no relationship to the Toomer that Turner constructs for Gurdjieff to tear down, an unbelievably fragile figure, possessed of an almost precontact primitive innocence, so easily and terribly altered by the influence of the modern city, and of Gurdjieff. Turner's tale connects the two, as if Gurdjieff could be blamed for Toomer's decision to write about the urban settings that were more familiar to him than Georgia, and as if such a decision were blameworthy to begin with!

Byrd's book, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff*, seeks to complicate the picture by arguing that Toomer had long been interested in the development of man, and so his study with Gurdjieff was not a radical break from his past, as envisioned by Turner (as well as Bone and Fullwinder). Byrd does nothing, however, to disturb the picture of Gurdjieff's entrance into Toomer's life as a cataclysmic event in which Toomer has no say. He writes:

After the discovery of Gurdjieff, the philosopher-poet of *Cane* vanished and in his place appeared a spiritual reformer and social critic whose obsession with Gurdjieff's theories weakened and then wasted his great talent.¹¹

Byrd's account grants almost magical powers to Gurdjieff (the power to make Toomer vanish), and no agency at all to Toomer. Why can't Toomer, an intelligent, educated adult when he meets Gurdjieff, be painted as responsible for his own spiritual, philosophical and professional destiny?

The answer to such a question lies not in what passed between Toomer and Gurdjieff, but in the demands that scholars place upon Toomer. The loss, to which they have assigned the date

¹¹ Rudolph Byrd, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990): xv. For a more recent example, see Mark Whalan, who echoes this traditional critique when he writes in 2008 that, after Gurdjieff, Toomer's writing became "more didactic and denotational." Mark Whalan, "Jean Toomer and the Avant-Garde," *Cane*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Norton, 2011): 377-86.

of December 1923 and the cause, Gurdjieff, is not just a hypothetical literary future for Toomer in which he produced work after work in the vein of *Cane*, but also the hope that he would be the South's great voice, the New Negro's great voice. And in the heaviness of this mantle that had been laid upon Toomer's young shoulders, we find an explanation for the vehemence with which scholars curse his meeting with Gurdjieff. Perhaps a literary talent as luminous as Toomer's feels to us like something that should be held in trust for a race, a nation, or a generation, not a resource to be traded upon. If becoming a follower of Gurdjieff was really incompatible with authorship, the true horror and outrage is not that Toomer (as these scholars have understood it) traded his authorship for discipleship, but that he was happy with the bargain.

Here we see the roots of the *ad hominem* savagery with which S.P. Fullwinder assesses the unpublished novel, *Eight Day World*. Leveled in 1966, this is one of the first attacks in the Gurdjieff-ruined-Toomer tradition, and it is worth examining the values and assumptions that are encoded in it, so that we can learn about the standard by which Toomer and his work are found wanting. Fullwinder declares:

Eight-Day World ended as Toomer had ended, with all problems solved, with everyone satisfied. The artist could no longer express modern man's restlessness and lostness. His work had become smug -- and dead.¹²

From the connection that he draws between *Eight-Day World* and the author himself, we gather that Fullwinder considers Toomer, like his work, to be “smug and dead.” Toomer's terrible crime is that entrance into the Gurdjieff work left him “satisfied,” and “with all problems solved.” Fullwinder further contends that satisfaction takes a toll on the work. “After writing

¹² S. P. Fullwinder, “Jean Toomer: Lost Generation, or Negro Renaissance?” *Phylon* 27, no. 4 (1966): 396-403.

Cane,” Fullwinder explains, “Toomer fled from reality, found his absolute and clung to it.”¹³ It is not Toomer's happiness or satisfaction, then, that is the problem, so much as the source of it, a presumably simple-minded belief in an “absolute.” Fullwinder makes the dubious assumption that people with belief in an “absolute”—that is, people with faith commitments—no longer doubt or quest. The notion of final satisfaction achieved in the 1920s does not square well with Toomer's life. Up until his death in 1967, Toomer's faith commitments were a study in evolution, not clinging. His level of commitment to Gurdjieff's esoteric version of Christianity fluctuated over the years; it coexisted with an active engagement in the Religious Society of Friends, and was informed by an interest in psychoanalysis and a trip to India in search of a spiritual teacher. What could inspire such evolutions if not continued doubting and questing?

Fullwinder's generalized hostility towards faith affiliations expresses itself not only in the assertions that they are smug and static, but also in the idea that they are not modern. “Toomer had been modern in *Cane*” before his new outlook robbed him of the ability to “express modern man's restlessness and lostness,” as if, by taking up Gurdjieff or Quakerism, he resigned his membership in modernity or time-traveled his way out of the 20th century.¹⁴ Fullwinder's twice-used term, *modern* is distinct from and more general than *modernist*, but his esteem of “restlessness and lostness” is reminiscent of definitions of modernism that emphasize disillusionment and fragmentation as characteristics of the literature. Through a conflation of the terms, Fullwinder argues that Toomer ceased to be modern by ceasing to be modernist.

This is not just a simple overlooking of work that is inconvenient to one definition of the modern, but a vehement rejection of it. Fullwinder confuses a description of some dominant

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

strains or characteristics in modern American thought with an exclusionary standard. It is an easy mistake to fall into when one imagines culture as a hegemonic “intelligence” possessed of a single trajectory and without dissenting voices. For Fullinwider says elsewhere, “Following willy-nilly behind Gurdjieff, [Toomer] had got himself completely at cross-purposes with the whole thrust of American intelligence of the 1920s.”¹⁵ Such monolithic conceptions of culture are no longer in vogue; the practice of dismissing Toomer's late work, which here rests upon such a conception, is unfortunately still alive and well.

Toomer's post-*Cane* modernity looks different from restlessness and lostness. It is our categories, not Toomer, that should be chastised by this revelation. Toomer departs from one cultural strain, one that, in Fullinwider's view, involved turning outward to experience for beauty and meaning, and enters another that takes a spiritual, inward turn, but it does not follow that he enters such a stream alone, or that it represents a cultural dead-end. Yet a look at the portion of Toomer's work—an essay solicited by the *Friends Intelligencer* in 1943—that should display most fully the sins of didacticism and religiosity reveals neither smugness nor disengagement from modern problems. Instead, Toomer struggles to work out a philosophical response to World War II, and in the process produces challenging religious rhetoric that compares favorably with that of leading modern preachers, and lays the groundwork for his own later response to the atomic bomb.

“Santa Claus Will not Bring Peace” is one of many essays and lectures Toomer produced in his most active period with the Society of Friends. A two-page essay in an obscure religious weekly publication is not a magnum opus by any stretch of the imagination, but as we consider

¹⁵ Ibid., 401

how we weigh an author's participation (or retreat from) his historical moment, it is worth noting that the *Friends Intelligencer's* circulation of 4000 copies provided Toomer's front-page article with a larger audience than *Cane's* initial print run of 500.¹⁶ His words were addressed to a ready audience of theologically-minded and peace-minded readers of 1943, but have potential for today's readers, as well.

The essay displays no symptoms of a swift or smug leap to an easy answer, Gurdjieffian or otherwise. Its composition was a long struggle, as befits the subject matter. Toomer's drafts of this essay (the published version of which is equivalent to seven of Toomer's typewritten pages) run to 149 pages. There are ten distinct drafts and would be more pages yet if all of the drafts survived in their entirety. In its public life, the essay is a thoughtful meditation on war and peace. Privately, in a draft, he called it “an attempt at... renewal” of his search for God. “The essential matter,” he confided, “is to become more thoroughly convinced that the only way is the only way.”¹⁷ The essay, though it ends by advancing an argument, is searching in the truest sense.

The essay falls into two parts. In the first, Toomer uses the occasion of Christmas, 1943, to explore what people mean when they wish for peace, arriving at the rather cynical conclusion that most people hope for the resumption of peacetime activities, and that the activities are what they yearn for, not the cessation of violence. Without a murmur of judgement for the selfish peace-seekers, he moves to the question of how such peace is to be achieved. The contention here has the potential to surprise.

[War] has survived the peoples, the institutions, the cultures which it destroyed. The

¹⁶ Carolyn F. Ulrich, ed. *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory*, New York: R.R. Bowker Company 1943. p.249.

¹⁷ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace”: Notes and Drafts 1943 Nov-Dec, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 54, folder 1228. p. 29.

causes of war are not in this or that economic system, or in this or that national psychology. The causes of war are deeply embedded in man himself.¹⁸

The only way to prevent war, he argues, is personal moral improvement, an idea he extends so far, in the close of the essay, as to assert that it does not matter if such efforts lead to peace, for they lead to God, and “as we first seek the kingdom, peace will be among the things added unto us.”¹⁹ It is a deeply personal response to a political problem.

Toomer sees a world federation as a step in the right direction, but lacks faith in the ability of a second League of Nations to do more than delay a future war. In the 1947 New Mexico notebook, he maintains this position even after the atomic bomb causes others to redouble calls for a world government. In the *Friends Intelligencer* this is a note of dissent, for global political organization is a perennial favorite Friends cause.

Toomer's move to consider war's causes as present in all people has its analogue in other strains of Christian thought. Twenty five years after Toomer, Martin Luther King, Jr. makes the same connection between individual and national psychology in his wide-ranging sermon, “The Drum Major Instinct.” King argues that the war in Vietnam, the threat of nuclear war, the racism of poor whites, and the widespread tendency to overspend in order to keep up with the Joneses are all facets of that prideful instinct.²⁰ On the other end of the political spectrum, a Remembrance Day sermon preached in 1955 by the influential British evangelical minister, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, at Westminster Chapel strikes the same notes.²¹ “[Man] lives, he walks in

¹⁸ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace,” *Friends Intelligencer* 100, no. 52 (25 December 1943): 852.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr, “God's Way of Reconciliation,” 4 February 1968, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA. Reprinted in Clayborne Carson and Peter Holloran, *A Knock at Midnight*, New York: Warner Books 1998.

²¹ Tony Sargent, in his book *The Sacred Anointing* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), dates the sermon to 1957 (88). There is reason for confusion because Lloyd-Jones preached this popular message many times, but the D.M. Martin Lloyd-Jones Recordings Trust has a recording of this sermon dating from 6 November 1955, with a

trespasses and sins. He does it individually, he does it in groups; therefore there will be industrial strifes and misunderstandings and there will be wars.” Lloyd-Jones shares Toomer's skepticism about the United Nations: through an understanding of man's fallen and wicked condition, he says, “we shall be delivered at once from all the false enthusiasm and false hopes of men who really believe that by bringing in some new organization you can outlaw war and banish it forever.”²²

As Toomer and Lloyd-Jones make World War II an occasion to contemplate the nature of man, they are straddling a dangerous ethical position. Toomer is removed from the war by space (and medical exemption) and Lloyd-Jones by time. In the least generous reading, their philosophic use of the war is a luxury afforded by this distance, or even a coping mechanism to hold the war's very immediate sufferings at a greater intellectual remove. From this vantage, however, Toomer brings himself and his readers into another variety of close contact with the war, inviting people to take the event inside themselves and allow it to change their self-conceptions. This is where he differs from Lloyd-Jones. As his sermon concludes, Lloyd-Jones dissolves into Christian back-patting and assurances that “the Christian is absolutely certain and assured that whatever the world and men may do, he is safe in the hands of God.”²³ A rhetorical distance opens between “Christians” and “men”—those people whose sinfulness is the cause of war. It becomes a message of endurance to the good Christian victims of war. Toomer, on the other hand, is at least willing to entertain the possibility that war can be overcome, and has taken the same idea of war's causes to deliver a call to spiritual action to his audience, the good people

similar one preached on Remembrance Sunday, 13 November 1955. (Robin Lane, D.M. Martin Lloyd-Jones Recordings Trust, personal correspondence, 12 December 2011).

²² D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “But God...,” in *Great Sermons of the 20th Century*, ed. Peter F. Gunther. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986): 35-47.

²³ Ibid.

who cause wars.

In this matter, Toomer's essay is bold, even courageous. But in other ways, compared to its own drafts, it is a retiring document. As Toomer pruned his work, the drafts evolved to become less material, less recognizably radical. Away goes his discussion of the Detroit riots, of race and class relations, of the means of production, and of the relationship between injustice and war. Some of the final cuts were undertaken by the *Intelligencer's* editor, William Hubben, but, long before Hubben began his work on the essay, Toomer established the pattern and direction of his revision: the essay's inward turn.²⁴

Among the glimmering insights that go to the cutting-room floor is the memorable declaration, "As long as the many are needy the few will have but a precarious peace,"²⁵ a sentence that survives three drafts before Toomer excises it from the draft that is closest to the final essay. With its sharp distinction between the many and the few, the needy and the comfortable, it sounds like the warning of an eminent proletarian uprising or a call for caring on a massively broad scale, at home and abroad. Radical as such a sentence sounds, however, we misunderstand the Friends if we imagine that such a sentiment would not be welcome in the *Intelligencer*. The dependence of peace upon justice is a common Friends teaching—content that wouldn't have required dilution for his audience's sake.²⁶ So why does that powerful little sermon have to go?

²⁴ William Hubben to Jean Toomer, 9 December 1943. Friends *Intelligencer* Correspondence, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 3 Folder 86. Hubben reports that he and his assistant cut the manuscript significantly, reducing it from an unspecified size down to 2300 words. (Presumably they were also responsible for the additional cuts that brought it to its 1800-word published length.) The nearest extant draft in the archive is around 3500 words, though it is possible that the version that Toomer sent to the *Intelligencer* was shorter and did not survive.

²⁵ "Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace": Notes and Drafts 1943 Nov-Dec, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 54, folder 1228. p. 25, 50, 135.

²⁶ Numerous articles and essays published in the *Intelligencer* in 1943 speak freely of "peace through justice," "just peace," and "just and enduring peace," "just and lasting peace," etc. See also Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003): 165.

When he solicited the essay, Hubben told Toomer that he would have to perform “a piece of exorcism” to deprive war “of its frightening aspects.”²⁷ Why did Toomer agree to perform such an exorcism? I think Toomer knew that his readers had fear enough already. When he excised (or exorcised) the sentence about the precarious peace, Toomer was not turning his back on the issue or his own care for justice. Rather, I think that he believed the essay more right-spirited and therefore more effective without it. The sentence can be traced in three drafts, indicating that Toomer found the idea important and even central. The use he makes of it in a partially-surviving typed draft, the most concrete and material of any in the collection, illustrates the problems that come with its power. There he places it at the conclusion of a discussion of the world food supply. It makes a powerful note of warning, particularly with the help of the sentence that Toomer places before it: “Physical starvation and inward frustration are as deadly as bombs: violent explosions are in them.”²⁸

To write of injustice as if it is a ticking time-bomb is to attempt to startle or terrorize the comfortable into caring. From the final essay, we can recover the rationale that makes Toomer decide that such violent threats are an ineffective way to move an audience to care about world hunger. He believes that motivations will drive outcomes—in “Santa Claus” he mentions that he does not believe that “the aim of ending war and living in a peace-time society is motivation enough to release a power commensurate with the task,” but that such work must instead be driven by “profound religious urges.”²⁹ In “What Prospects for Peace?,” the connection of this idea to the Gospel is more evident: “If we seek our lives and our projects as ends we shall lose

²⁷ William Hubben to Jean Toomer, 15 November 1943. Friends Intelligencer Correspondence, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 3 Folder 86.

²⁸ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace”: Notes and Drafts, 25.

²⁹ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace,” *Friends Intelligencer*, 852.

them,” Toomer warns, echoing Matthew 16:25, “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”³⁰

In the same draft, he makes the last use of the “precarious peace” phrasing, but is already beginning to move away from “violent explosions” and towards the personal, moral angle of “Santa Claus.”

If we wanted war with all our might, we could do nothing better to promote it than what we have done and are doing to make vast numbers of people frustrated and embittered. The most elementary kind of reasoning should make it clear, even to gluttons, that as long as the many are needy the few will have at best but a precarious peace.³¹

In that thrice-repeated “we” Toomer emphasizes collective responsibility for injustice, and he makes an individuating turn by attaching the global-political problem of war to the highly personal sin of gluttony. The program at work here is literary as well as a theological, however.

With each revision, Toomer cuts away these threats and pronouncements and leaves behind an essay about war that is striking in its non-violence. It lacks the green-earth imagery which usually indicates the presence of the pastoral, but its strategy in the face of war resembles that of nuclear pastoral works in the face of the bomb; it practices a similar mode of resistance. As Toomer wrote in “What Prospects for Peace?” “War sets itself up as the end and compels its victims to so regard it.”³² Toomer's refusal to see or portray war in that manner is studied and even pointed. In one draft, Toomer declares that war is not the greatest threat to man's spiritual development, but only the third-greatest, behind poverty and prejudice. Many a rhetorician falls into superlatives about the topic at hand, but, with each revision, Toomer's war essay pushes him farther away from regarding war as ultimate threat.

³⁰ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace”: Notes and Drafts, 35.

³¹ Ibid., 50.

³² Ibid., 50. He leaves the subject of war rather quickly here, leaping in to explore prejudice as setting up race as an end, arriving at a reworking of the idea of double-consciousness.

“What Prospects for Peace?” and the other drafts are full of forceful social statements like these that Toomer telescopes—or rather microscopes—into points of personal ethics. One draft, with its concern over mechanization and the vanishing of family farms and individual craftsmen, articulates a full-blown William Morris-style arts and crafts socialism, gloomily forecasting the day when “every city, every town, yes even every rural community will become a factory town.”³³ Such sentiments survive in only a muted critique in the final essay, where he muses, “Our national policy is bent on the greater production of material goods, and we vaguely expect the development of people as human beings to come about as a by-product of materialistic progress.”³⁴

Similarly, in “What Prospects for Peace?” he contends that the Detroit race riot of 1943 indicated that the hatred-motivated clashes between races and between capital and labor are more brutally violent than wars between nations, and that they will prove harder to eradicate, for doing so will require addressing the social conditions at their roots.³⁵ This comparison of the world war to racial and class struggle persists in “Santa Claus” only as Toomer's contention that “it is one thing to end a war but quite another to establish a social order that will really function for all its members.” Social justice is harder than armistice. Once you read the drafts, you can catch the thread of this thinking where it was not immediately apparent in the final essay. Workers and blacks are the disenfranchised *all* whom he wants to see embraced by the social order, and his later reference to creating a “serviceable society” is a shorthand for this society that can serve all

³³ Ibid., 19, 80.

³⁴ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace,” *Friends Intelligencer*, 851.

³⁵ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace”: Notes and Drafts, 51-52.

its members, again with special emphasis on the *all*.³⁶ Here Toomer may have cut a more explicitly radical sentiment while believing he had encoded it in the simpler language of the final essay. In “Santa Claus” as in his nuclear writings, Toomer puts to work what Empson would call the central pastoral process of “putting the complex into the simple.” The drafts, particularly “What Prospects for Peace?” provide a window into the complexity of all of those issues that Toomer hoped to address with “Santa Claus.”

Toomer advocates for wholesale social and spiritual change in two pages, and his approach is holistic in part because he wishes to avoid fetishizing the subject of war. It is an approach carried to the point of a flaw if Toomer's social-justice agenda is at last so esoterically coded as to be impossible to decipher from the published work alone. In addition to being guided by the drafts, however, further study of other work from this period may help place “Santa Claus” in the context of a body of work directed at a Friends audience that often asked Toomer for additional essays and repeat lecture engagements. He published “Santa Claus” with its glancing references knowing that this work was only one part of an ongoing relationship with those he hoped to teach.

Although I find the unmicroscoped drafts more compelling, in wishing for his work to be more recognizably politically radical, I am imposing my own tastes and seeking the heady thrill of being in the presence of a political dissident. In fairness to Toomer, it is not a choice between a commitment to peace and a lack of one that Toomer makes here, but a choice about the scale upon which the response to a massive societal problem (war) must be mounted. Toomer is clear-eyed about social realities but casts his lot with the personal. Toomer does not abandon his hope

³⁶ Jean Toomer, “Santa Claus Will Not Bring Peace,” *Friends Intelligencer*, 852.

for social change with that choice.

We need to pay attention to pieces that, like “Santa Claus,” are micro-responses to massively macroscopic events. Works in a nuclear pastoral vein often have great effectiveness (as in the case of *On the Beach*) and political potential, and Toomer's New Mexico writings deserve the latter defense. A similar campaign is harder to mount for “Santa Claus,” which is the right piece for its audience and for few others. The longer drafts, particularly “What Prospects for Peace?” are full of shards of wisdom, but are too loosely connected, too raw and rough and early, to stand as finished pieces. They only tantalize us with another shimmering mirage of what Toomer might have written, had he pushed “What Prospects” towards another audience or another aesthetic goal, creating a manifesto instead of a meditation. I will argue this for “Santa Claus,” however: Whatever Santa's flaws, they are not Gurdjieff's flaws. Toomer did the work and shaped the essay. Didacticism is not its downfall. Why should anyone object to a professorial tone from a man who had these things to teach?

II. Jean Toomer Sojourner: They Will Strike Experience Here

Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. recently renewed focus on Toomer's identity by giving the authenticity/apostasy binary pride of place in the introduction of the new Norton critical edition of *Cane*, which also serves as the afterword to the new “authoritative text” from Liveright that is likely to be the most readily available classroom edition for years to come. In these books and in the *Chronicle Review* and *New York Times*, Gates and Byrd have declared that, beginning after the publication of *Cane*, Jean Toomer decided to pass for white. Though they acknowledge Toomer's role as a “pioneering theorist of hybridity,” they dismiss his writings

on a new American race as mere self-justifying aids to his passing.³⁷ The story of Toomer passing is now ascendant, and sits unopposed in the Liveright edition, despite a considerable scholarly tradition of disagreement over the matter.³⁸

To argue that Toomer passed is a two-part project, consisting of establishing that he had one proper community of origin and belonging, and showing that he then abandoned it. Passing narratives about Toomer frequently employ an unacknowledged set of secondary parameters in addition to race when trying to place him in a community of origin. Gates and Byrd build upon a long tradition of mislocating Toomer in terms of class, region and culture, and therefore of encouraging the misapprehension that he belongs more fully to the community he portrayed in the first and third sections of *Cane* than the record of his life will support. I would like to add dimensions of region and class to the analysis of the role of race in *Cane's* reception already pioneered by George Hutchinson and Michael Soto in order to reveal the constructedness of the regionalist credentials that the passing narrative naturalizes too readily. After more correctly situating Toomer in relationship to the rural Georgia settings of *Cane*, we can draw the circle of continuity in his work wider still, to encompass the New Mexico work from the 1930s that he produced from a similar position.

³⁷ Gates and Byrd, "Song of the Son," xxxviii. Gates and Byrd make the claim that Toomer "was a Negro who decided to pass for white" and do so "based upon an analysis of archival evidence previously overlooked by other scholars" ("Jean Toomer's Racial Self-Identification" lxx). This methodology privileges the evidence of census forms, marriage licenses and draft cards—the residue of encounters with highly coercive government bureaucracies invested in enforcing a racial binary—and ignores Toomer's many and complex writings upon the subject.

³⁸ George Hutchinson has argued against the rupture of sudden passing by demonstrating the considerable continuity of Toomer's treatment of race and his associations with elite black artists and writers throughout the 1920s ("Jean Toomer and the 'New Negroes' of Washington"). Others, including Werner Sollors and Darwin Turner, have rejected the push to read Toomer's theorizing of race as hypocritical, and read those writings as sincere, but where Turner calls his self-presentation naïve ("Jean Toomer Exile" 50; "Introduction" xiv), I would call it deliberately provocative. Certainly it could be no use for the project of passing: the very existence of texts like the one written for publication before his marriage to Margery Latimer, declaring a new race in America, argues against any attempt by Toomer to fade quietly across the color line.

The strong parallels between *Cane*, particularly its drama, *Kabnis*, and Toomer's unpublished 1935 play, *A Drama of the Southwest*, help us recognize—and celebrate—Toomer's talents in the context of his true vantage as a particular kind of outsider to the communities of the rural South and the desert Southwest. In *A Drama of the Southwest*, Toomer examines the desires of an entire taxonomy of outsiders who come to Taos: tourists in search of novelty; male and female artists; neonatives who stay and become hosts and patrons to the other newcomers. *A Drama of the Southwest* is a self-conscious staging of the quest for experience in Taos, and that it describes the problematic nature of the roles available for entering this land. I use the word sojourner for the elusive other role that the play seeks after because it is a word that acknowledges motion while taking its origin and its emphasis from the act of staying—temporarily. Scholars have paid much attention over the years to the idea of Toomer passing, running, fleeing, exiled; I propose shifting attention instead to how he dwelt, to his gift for opening himself to a new place with profound imagination and sympathy.

A Drama of the Southwest's concern with how to court meaningful experience in a new place parallels *Cane's* interrogation of a Northern African American's encounter with black rural Southern culture. Paul Stasi defends *Cane* from charges of primitivism by arguing that *Cane* is modern precisely because it foregrounds its Northern narrators' primitivist desires to recover and preserve African American folk culture.³⁹ In *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, Flannery Burke shows how Harlem Renaissance patronage resembled and existed in the same social networks as

³⁹ To Paul Stasi's reading, modernism both creates and dismantles racialized discourse. He defines primitivism as "modernist production of blackness," and then locates *Cane's* modernity in Toomer's use of modernist aesthetics to "question the logic of racialized discourse. . . in the nostalgic primitivism that would seek to discover an 'authentic' blackness in a supposedly premodern South" (Paul Stasi, "A Synchronous but More Subtle Migration': Passing and Primitivism in Toomer's '*Cane*,'" *Twentieth Century Literature* 55:2 (Summer 2009):148-9).

modernist patronage of Native American and Nuevo Mexicano arts and culture around Taos and Santa Fe. In this cultural context, and in the context of Toomer's long-term fascination with the possibilities and limitations of the position of the invested sojourner, Toomer's work from New Mexico emerges not as curious late-career vagary, but as a logical extension of *Cane's* critique of modernity, racialization, and primitivism.

These are great claims about a play that has been little read and almost invariably maligned in criticism, but the critical treatment of *A Drama of the Southwest* is a striking example of the editorial violence that can be done—even to an unpublished play—when low expectations overdetermine archival encounters. Scholars speak of *A Drama of the Southwest* as a 57-page typed draft of an inconclusive and didactic one-act play that fits neatly into established narratives about the dissipation of Toomer's talents after 1923.⁴⁰ This treatment of *Drama*, however, entirely ignores (and so suppresses) 270 pages of handwritten manuscript which reveal the four scenes in question to be not a one-act play but a fragment of a larger unfinished or partially lost work.⁴¹ Despite its incompleteness, the play merits attention because it can help

⁴⁰ Rudolph P. Byrd complains that it is “without action or plot” and describes it as Toomer's first attempt at a “lecture drama.” Though Toomer never links the play to that form, Byrd makes the connection by citing Toomer's intent to create such a work, a play that would essentially trap a theatre-going audience in a theatre to be “talked to by an actor as seriously as if this actor were... an agent in life through whom certain ideas and feelings of importance are transmitted.” Declaring a play to be a lecture drama is a way of calling it an un-play, a document unworthy of good reading practices. Byrd makes clear that the urgent ideas and feelings are Gurdjieffian ideas, so classifying *Drama* as a lecture drama is another cloak for that old dismissal—the notion that Toomer, after Gurdjieff, produced didactic propaganda pieces instead of art. (Byrd, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff*, 131.) Byrd levels this accusation despite the fact that 1935 is a curious moment to picture Toomer shilling for Gurdjieff. Toomer wrote in 1936 that he experienced Gurdjieff's 1934 visit to America as a definitive break from the man and the movement. (Jean Toomer, “Unidentified Autobiography,” 1936, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 22, Folder 557.)

⁴¹ The practice of ignoring the more extensive holograph draft is an editorial process, even if an inadvertent one, because it implies a belief that Toomer abandoned it, slashing a lively and ambitious full-length drama into a complete one-act play “without action or plot” that fails to answer its own central question (Byrd, *Jean Toomer's Years with Gurdjieff*, 140). But even if it could be proved that Toomer revised *Drama* in this ill-advised manner, there would be no reason to be over-punctilious about final or authoritative drafts. There is little evidence that the holograph draft is a rough or abandoned version of the typedraft. The play's archive shows evidence of

reorient our view of Jean Toomer's canonical and late works, and because it offers Southwest studies another picture of the Mabel Dodge Luhan years in Taos. He writes sensitively of one of the great limitations of that artistic community—the barriers that cultures of connoisseurship and patronage throw up against genuine intercultural contact, suggesting that his experience on the receiving end of primitivism-tinged Harlem-renaissance era interracial patronage primed him to criticize that dynamic in New Mexico. His writings also attend with raw honesty and humor to the trials of the male ego in an artists' community rich in female luminaries, a dynamic that D.H. Lawrence's misogynist critique of Luhan (as Flannery Burke has called it) more indulges than inspects.⁴²

The typedraft of *Drama* opens with a night scene at Taos Pueblo, proceeds through a philosophical dialogue on a rooftop to a brief speech by a Chorus-like figure, the Interpreter, and ends with an extended scene of the arrival of Lewis and Grace Bourne in Taos. The arrival scene opens at least two plot arcs that are never concluded—reported trouble in the marriage of the Bournes' friend, Clifford Genth, and the Bournes' search for belonging in Taos, as expressed through their desire to buy land and through their interactions with other visitors and neotives.

The holograph draft extends the play's chronology by more than twenty-four hours (See Figure 1). The second day is bookended by the Elliot (rather than Bourne) family's dubious

Toomer alternating between typewriting and hand-writing as he composes, and this cautions against imagining a simple hierarchy in which typed drafts replace and supersede holograph ones. Such a conclusion is also disturbed by the existence of a single stray typewritten page, using character names that match the holograph draft instead of the typedraft, and type-numbered 116 (Toomer, *Drama* holograph 916.101). It is therefore likely that the draft I have been referring to as the holograph once boasted a mass of typed material twice as large as that of the supposedly-complete 57-page typedraft. Toomer also once used the title *Drama of the Southwest* to refer to a different text from either of those available to researchers today, as evidenced by his notes for the play containing a manifesto-like paragraph that appears in neither extant draft, but which he attributes parenthetically as “taken from Drama of the Southwest” (*Drama* notes).

⁴² Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008: 11.

interactions with Pueblo culture. In the morning, Tom Elliot performs an imitation of a Pueblo dance outside the house, and the landladies warn Grace that he is intruding upon sacred traditions. His dancing is the talk of the Taos Plaza in the next scene. The Genth marital troubles are taken up again when Helen Genth confides in Grace that her husband believes she is unfaithful and Tom Elliot makes a disastrous attempt to meddle in the relationship by confronting Helen's mother and (we learn by his own report) chasing Genth in his car. That evening, the Elliots bring two friends to the Taos Pueblo to hear the Indians sing, but are disappointed by silence. This silence is powerful in the context of Southwestern anthropological and literary production where so many other writers have traded on the cachet of special access to Indian traditions, voices and subjectivities. While Elliot is ready to explain the silence that results from his own obtuseness with recourse to a stereotype of Indian inscrutability, the play builds an alternate narrative in which Anglo invasiveness, appropriations and false expertise strain the relationship between the communities. In the end, *A Drama of the Southwest*, with its attention to the many different ways to live in a place, adds up to a testament against the false binary of authentic and inauthentic that is too often applied to Toomer's life and career. It calls attention instead to the creative potential and the challenges of the gradations of intimacy and alienation that arise when a place experiences successive waves of inhabitation and visitation.

That *A Drama of the Southwest* has hitherto been mined only for petty autobiographical insights and evidence of Toomer's supposed late-career artistic bankruptcy owes much to the longstanding critical practice of drawing a bright line through Jean Toomer's life after the publication of *Cane*. Gates, Byrd, and others before them have offered a story of Toomer as a

man who found his rightful place and ran away from it. The flip-side of the overeager embrace of Toomer as a son of Georgia is a vehement denial of his authority to speak from other geographic and cultural locales, including New Mexico. Toomer's Southwestern writings lay claim to a relationship between the writer and the desert landscape that will be familiar to readers of *Cane* because it is a return to his position of greatest creative power, that of an artist with "his heart. . . freshly given to a place."⁴³

Kabnis, the play that makes up the third section of *Cane*, is often interpreted autobiographically, as a record of Toomer's un/successful return to his roots in the South, or, as I would frame it, as a depiction of the struggle to relate to an alien culture.⁴⁴ *Kabnis* opens with the title character in acute distress, unable to sleep in a small cabin that is too permeable to the rural space outside. A pet hen belonging his employer's wife has taken up residence and will give him no peace. Eventually, he gets up from bed, takes the chicken outside, and tears its head off with his bare hands. He is not so much punishing the animal for a few ill-timed clucks as he is rebelling against the perceived indignity of living in such a cabin, under the sway of his employer's fowl, and of the man's imperious attitude. The desperate act of murdering the hen (whom he's made a figure for a woman with the epithets, "egg-laying bitch" and "she-bitch") could signify a total rejection of his surroundings and the people in them. Then, all at once, *Kabnis* finds himself struck dumb and driven to his knees by beauty, as much as he wants to resist it. He prays aloud, "God Almighty, dear God, dear Jesus, do not torture me with beauty.

⁴³ Toomer, *Drama*, Typescript 917.7.

⁴⁴ Catherine Gunther Kodat argues that no other section of *Cane* has sustained so many deeply antithetical interpretations. (Catherine Gunther Kodat, "To 'Flash White Light from Ebony': The Problem of Modernism in Jean Toomer's *Cane*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 46:1 (Spring 2000): 12.) I would argue that this is because of the intensity of scholarly investment in Toomer's identity: *Kabnis* is so resplendent with semi-autobiographical details that it becomes the textual locus for the airing of disagreements about the author.

Take it away. Give me an ugly world.”⁴⁵ Moments like this, when Kabnis is most fully open to an experience of the land and lives around him, are his most tormented.

This powerful combination of newness and intimacy, of love and hate for a land, is also evident when Toomer reflects upon his relationship to New Mexico. What he writes of New Mexico in 1934 could almost be uttered by Kabnis in Georgia.

That country is surely my country too. I have a love for it. Yet, as you know, I hate it also. . . . It is almost as if, ages ago, I suffered deeply in it—and a memory of that suffering sometimes stirs in the regions of myself far below consciousness. I want to found and build a world there. Also I feel that no good can come of it to me or anyone I love.⁴⁶

Kabnis' enslaved ancestors did suffer deeply in the South, and the threat of lynching that drives him to justified paranoia is reason enough to fear that “no good can come of it.” The would-be reformer character, Lewis, another Northern transplant who might have wanted to “found and build a world there,” ultimately flees the stage and the town not because of the threats to his person but because when he draws near to Kabnis, Carrie and the others, “their pain is too intense.”⁴⁷

The play's ending leaves it unclear whether Kabnis will make a similar break with the South, or whether he will remain, the improbable apprentice to a cartwright. The final scene offers up potentially revelatory symbols and moments at a dizzying rate: Father John's oracular pronouncement; Carrie's laying-on of hands and chaste embrace of Kabnis; her prayer; Kabnis' ascent from the pit with the bucket of dead coals; the landscape vision with a sunrise like a

⁴⁵ Jean Toomer, *Cane*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Norton, 2011): 83.

⁴⁶ Jean Toomer, Letter to Marjorie Content, 14 June 1934, Jean Toomer Papers, Box 8, Folder 251.

⁴⁷ Jean Toomer, *Cane*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Norton, 2011): 110.

birthsong.⁴⁸ *Cane* affords room for a reader or director to choose which symbol gets the loudest of these last words, but Hutchinson has documented a strong scholarly tradition of electing Father John's speech as the play's key moment, and of declaring Kabnis a failure for not more fully embracing Father John or the slave past and African American folk religion he represents.⁴⁹ The readerly desire to connect Kabnis with the slave past interpenetrates with attempts by critics to root Toomer himself more fully in that past, and so testifies to the enduring influence of early reception and marketing strategies for *Cane* that emphasized not just Toomer's blackness but his rural Southern blackness.⁵⁰

This assertion of Toomer's belonging was packaged with readers' first experience of *Cane*. Waldo Frank's foreword asserts that Toomer “know[s] how to turn the essences and materials of his Southland into the essences and materials of literature.” By identifying Toomer's “Southland” with “still virgin soil,” Frank leaves a strong impression of ruralness that frames Toomer's depictions of Georgia as more apparently-authentic by encouraging readers to think that Toomer comes from there rather than the “segregated self-conscious brown belt of Washington.”⁵¹ The dust-jacket of the first edition (like much of the print advertising imagery) drives the exoticization and misidentification of Toomer even further south, into a tropical

⁴⁸ Sollors uses the prevalence of sunset imagery in *Cane* to argue that the play's final image of sunrise is an optimistic endorsement of the successful development of Kabnis' tortured but promising mind (Werner Sollors, *Ethnic Modernism* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2008): 108.

⁴⁹ George Hutchinson, “Jean Toomer and American Racial Discourse,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 35:2 (Summer 1993): 240-241.

⁵⁰ Soto gives fine attention to Liveright asking Toomer to “feature Negro,” as Toomer put it, and probes the sources of Toomer's discomfort with the request. He points out that race was just one angle Liveright pursued in marketing *Cane*: other ads contextualized it as Southern literature or as a difficult (and therefore high-status) modernist text. Soto concludes that practices of Jazz Age historiography have focused upon the racial marketing angle to a disproportionate extent, but assuredly the continuing efforts to pin down Toomer's particular racial identity also drive the practice. *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Waldo Frank, “Foreword to the 1923 Edition of *Cane*,” *Cane* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011): 117-119.

landscape of mist-shrouded purple peaks and green palm trees.

Early reviewers took the cues from both Frank's foreword and the marketing.

Montgomery Gregory, despite knowing that Toomer's "contacts with life in the south" were slight and temporary, chose to trumpet him as "a native son of Negro descent. . . sprung from the tangy soil of the South" to give that land its "most notable artistic expression."⁵² Gregory thus endorses *Cane* by endorsing Toomer as being a genuine, native product of that soil.

W. E. B. DuBois, also a Northerner who traveled in and wrote about the South, was one of the few contemporary reviewers who did not embroider upon Toomer's belonging to Georgia.

In a laudatory review in *Crisis*, he wrote:

Toomer does not impress me as one who knows his Georgia but he does know human beings; and, from the background which he has seen slightly and heard of all his life through the lips of others, he paints things that are true, not with Dutch exactness, but rather with an impressionist's sweep of color.⁵³

DuBois did not need to construct regionalist credentials to appreciate *Cane*, but Toomer scholarship has relied upon such constructions for decades when asserting that Georgia is the most right or natural habitation and subject matter for Toomer.⁵⁴

⁵² Quoted in Michael Soto, "Jean Toomer and Horace Liveright; or, A New Negro Gets 'into the Swing of it,'" in *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001): 176.

⁵³ W.E.B. Dubois and Alain Locke, "The Younger Literary Movement," *Crisis* 27 (1924) p.161-163. Quoted in Michael Soto, "Jean Toomer and Horace Liveright; or, A New Negro Gets 'into the Swing of it,'" *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*, Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith, ed. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2001. p.177

⁵⁴ Gates' retributive narrative about the loss of Toomer's artistic gifts as a result of "running away from a cultural identity that he had inherited" is one of many arguments in this tradition (Lee C1). It repeats the assertion Gorham Munson made about Toomer in 1969, as he reflected upon how his friend's late works "were quite different from *Cane*." Munson writes: "Toomer was no longer drawing the strength of his roots in Negro life and had abandoned his lyrical vein" (quoted in Kerman and Eldridge 390). In the introduction to the 1975 Boni & Liveright edition of *Cane*, Darwin Turner takes up Munson's lament for Toomer's lyricism, but locates its loss even earlier, at the moment when Toomer began writing about a "sophisticated urban world" in the second (and last-composed) section of *Cane* (xxiv).

Though Gates, Munson and Turner make these summations after Toomer's death, Toomer was no stranger to

Today's racialized policing of Toomer's subject-matter is a phenomenon with which Toomer was familiar during his lifetime, and he was an incisive reader of such critics' demands. "I wrote a story of a negro lynching," he said to Margery Latimer, "and they want me to keep on writing that over and over, feeling crucified myself. They want me to keep on with that forever."⁵⁵ Here Toomer refuses to capitulate to the conflation of his own identity with the Georgia stories. When he describes "Blood Burning Moon" as a story about "a negro lynching," he uses a word that, for him, often functions not merely as a racial category but as the signifier of an intersection of cultural, regional and class groups to which he knows he does not belong. He writes to Waldo Frank of encountering this culture when he first went to Georgia:

There, for the first time, I really saw the Negro, not as a pseudo-urbanized and vulgarized, a semi-Americanized product, but the Negro peasant, strong with the tang of fields and soil. It was there that I first heard the folk-songs rolling up the valley at twilight, heard them as spontaneous and native utterances. They filled me with gold, and tints of eternal purple.⁵⁶

The description captures his enthusiasm for the culture he encounters, but there is more than a hint of exoticism: the "Negro peasant" culture is wonderful because he does not consider it American or even "semi-Americanized;" the folk-songs are "spontaneous and native utterances" rather than art forms with histories. Negro culture, by which he means a rural black culture, is distinct enough from his own experiences both for him to delight in that culture and for him to

reports that he was abandoning his heritage through his choice of style and subject matter. Toomer's contemporaries were persistent in linking the lyrical to the authentically Negro. New Orleans-based editor John McClure, who published Toomer in *The Double Dealer*, expressed his hope in a 1924 letter to Sherwood Anderson that Toomer would "follo[w] that African urge, and rhapsodize"—for he could be "an unusually good short story writer or a supremely fine lyrical rhapsodist" (McClure). McClure's desire to see his author follow "that African urge" in his stylistic choices echoes even in present-day discussions of Toomer's later works, though few of today's critics make their racially-constituted demands upon the author's style so explicit.

⁵⁵ Letter of Margery Latimer to Meridel LeSueur, October, 1931. quoted in Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge, *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987): 198

⁵⁶ Letter of Jean Toomer to Waldo Frank, 26 April 1922. Reprinted in *Brother Mine: The Correspondence of Jean Toomer and Waldo Frank*. Edited by Kathleen Pfeiffer. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

aver that writing of a negro lynching is no act of self-ethnography.⁵⁷

The first flush of Toomer's love for the South was exoticizing and problematic, indicative not of a prodigal or native son finally returned home to his rightful place, but of an outsider. Even "Blood Burning Moon," the work that many readers took (to Toomer's chagrin) as the emblem of Toomer's authentic Southernness, evidences the distance between author and characters. Toomer modifies the spelling of nearly every word of Tom Burwell's confession of love for Louisa to portray rural, Southern speech. In following this orthographic convention for dialect, Toomer aligns himself with a readership which will not already hear or read "fo" when they see "for." The story succeeds because Toomer speaks through and around Tom's words to make him more than a spectacle of the rustic, violent other. When Tom begins by telling Louisa, "Seems like th love I feels fo yo done stole m tongue," one recalls Othello's protestation that he is rude in speech, for what follows is neither rude nor inarticulate, but rather a clear picture of Tom's love and his ultimately tragic wish to redeem Louisa and himself by his labor.

I oughtnt tell y, I feel I oughtnt cause yo is young an goes t church an I has had other gals, but Louisa I sho do love y. Lil gal, Ise watched y from them first days when youall sat right here befo yo door befo th well and sang sometimes in a way that like t broke m heart. Ise carried y with me into th fields, day after day, an after that, an I sho can plow when yo is there, an I can pick cotton.⁵⁸

Tom goes on, in a richly ironic moment, to express his wish to use his work for the whites—if old Mr. Stone will give him a farm to sharecrop—to free Louisa from the domestic service to the Stone family that has been so damaging to her sexual reputation. Thus Toomer acquaints readers with the dream that allows Tom to endure his own exploitation "day after day," even as he

⁵⁷ In this he differs from the longtime residents of the town of Sparta, to whom the music of the "back-country Negroes" that fills Toomer with 'gold and tints of eternal purple' is unseemly and unsophisticated "shouting" ("Outline of the Story" 123).

⁵⁸ Jean Toomer, *Cane* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company 2011): 33.

reminds them of the speaker's status as an agricultural laborer trapped in a social and economic system that will destroy him. It is a tremendously sympathetic portrait of a character whose language and possibilities are entirely alien from his author's. Excepting his years of intermittent lecturing, Toomer managed to live his entire life without holding a job for more than a few months, and his hardest stint of physical labor, at a shipyard in New Jersey, lasted a matter of weeks. Yet Burwell's lengthy soliloquy reveals an idealist who, in the depths of his feeling and his willingness to dream, is not unlike the urban, educated heroes whom readers more frequently take for analogues of Toomer. Burwell is a remarkable character: a violent and possessive man whose rich emotional life holds the reader's sympathy even while Toomer makes social commentary over his head as his doom takes shape.

In at least one respect, however, Burwell is a failure: Toomer did not write him a voice that could pass for that of a poor, black son of the Southern soil. Some have even argued that Toomer's attempts to recreate Southern dialect made his inexpertise obvious. John McClure praised many aspects of *Cane* but was of the opinion that Toomer “cannot handle dialect.” Darwin Turner spoke of Burwell's speech in particular when he argued that “Toomer faltered when he attempted to imitate Southern dialect,” with that word “imitate” implying that Toomer slipped troublingly close to mockery or inadvertent caricature as he did so.⁵⁹

Even skeptics of Toomer's regionalism like Turner and DuBois, however, value Toomer's creation of an atmosphere, an evocation of a powerfully imagined South. By this last measure, Toomer performed the work of throwing his voice so well that he would be long frustrated because he could not find an audience who could believe that his authority extended beyond the

⁵⁹ Darwin T. Turner, “Jean Toomer Exile” *In a Minor Chord : Three African American Writers and Their Search for Identity*, ed. Darwin Turner. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971): 19.

subject of Negro lynchings. Before we join a long tradition of attempting to chase Toomer back to these expected subject-matters, we should remind ourselves that we do not, strictly speaking, value Toomer for his testimony. We value him for receiving and assembling a richly varied collection of experiences and cultural, historical and literary influences into beautiful fictions. Jean Toomer, in New Mexico in the 1930s and forties, retains that receptiveness, the outsider's keen eye, and the ability to make us feel he writes of a place with authority. To watch Toomer at work in New Mexico is to become more sensitive to the skills he brought to Sparta.

Toomer did not need to be native to New Mexico—any more than he needed to be native to Georgia—to write insightfully about the world that he found there. He never did buy land in New Mexico, but, by the summer of 1935, when he worked on *A Drama of the Southwest*, he was on his fourth visit to the state. He was more intimate than a tourist but less permanent than the neonatives like Georgia O’Keeffe and Mabel Dodge Luhan with whom he associated.⁶⁰ Yet we see in his Interpreter's proclamation about “strik[ing] experience” a defense of creating from this stance.

To give full consideration to *A Drama of the Southwest*, I advocate laying aside the longstanding fiction of a neatly contained, completed *Drama* and stepping—with appropriate humility about what we can know of the work—into the broader archive. Because it offers the most intriguing interpretive possibilities, this inquiry will utilize a ten-scene composite draft, of which two scenes are unique to the typedraft and six are unique to the holograph. Pieces of the

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Hal Rothman for the term, *neonative*, and for his discussion of the growth of tourism and the art scene in Santa Fe and Taos. Hal Rothman, “The Tourism of Hegemony: The Railroad, Neonativity and Santa Fe,” *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West*, (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2000): 81-112.

holograph are missing, so this play exists partially in a realm of possibility, of what it might have been, had Toomer completed it, and/or had it all survived. To look at *A Drama of the Southwest* in this way is to risk allowing ourselves to mourn a partially lost or uncompleted work by Jean Toomer instead of being disappointed in a stunted and inconclusive one. If this sounds like an over-abstract position from which to write criticism, consider that it is not so different from the position of an audience partway through a play, when multiple possibilities for resolution and meaning are tantalizingly alive.

The play opens at Taos Pueblo, the iconic millennia-old adobe village northeast of Taos. Toomer's prose description of this place is so rich in its geographic specificity that it is hard to imagine the cardboard Taos or projector-screen night sky that could stage it. "The only sounds," initially, are those of a creek that flows, he specifies, from Blue Lake towards the Rio Grande. A creek might be staged in some fashion, but the geographical knowledge concerning its origin and destination is harder to convey.⁶¹

The extravagance of these stage directions does not necessarily mean that *A Drama of the Southwest* is a closet-drama. Toomer actively sought staging opportunities for *Kabnis*, and comparing the two plays suggests that, throughout his career, Toomer was willing to lavish gorgeous metaphorical language (the moon as a "white child that sleeps upon the tree-tops of the forest. . . Black mother sways, holding a white child on her bosom") and supra-visual geographical information ("Somewhere, far off in the straight line of his sight, is Augusta. . . . And hours, hours north, why not say a lifetime north? Washington sleeps.") upon his stage

⁶¹ Jean Toomer, *A Drama of the Southwest*, Typescript, 914.1.

directions.⁶² In the text of *Kabnis*, seemingly unstageable stage directions offer up not a setting but a vision of Kabnis seeing the place. His fears of lynching, his consciousness of a history and ongoing reality of interracial sexual coercion, and his longing for cities to the north all shape what he sees in the Georgia night.

The opening scene of *A Drama of the Southwest*, too, has stage directions that alter perceptions of a landscape. The staging challenge that these rich and geographically intensive directions present could be resolved by the simple use of narration, a choice that would be much in keeping with *Drama's* third scene, which consists entirely of a speech by a chorus-like Interpreter. With the help of such narration, the unnamed watercourse at the center of the scene becomes “the creek that comes down from Blue Lake” and so situates the Taos Pueblo's absolute dependence upon its water in an arid mountain ecosystem and connects it to a religious and political present. To a listener with local knowledge, the creek's source at Blue Lake is legible as the sacred origin site of the Pueblo people, and in political ones as the locus of a then-ongoing struggle by the Pueblos to regain the site, which had been guaranteed them under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo but appropriated as part of a national forest by Theodore Roosevelt in 1906. There are environmental implications, too, touching on the precarious nature of desert life. Today, tribal control of Blue Lake and its outflow stream assures that the water in Taos Creek (the Rio Pueblo de Taos) is safe to drink; in 1935, that water supply was vulnerable to pollution from upstream uses of resources on federally-managed land.

The play's first movement is a gathering at this water source, when, after a long silence, a group of Pueblo men emerge from the buildings on either side of the water, greet each other in

⁶² Toomer, *Cane*, 82-3.

their own language, and gather on a bridge to sing three Taos songs. Thus, after holding his audience in prolonged anticipation for the first line of his play, Toomer provides a line of greeting that most of them will not understand, and then directs their attention to the Pueblo songs. Just what is meant by such an opening? On the surface, there is an element of local color, an auditory sampling of the type of song and dance that tourists had long come to the Southwest to see. Yet by placing the Native American art form upon the same stage as the domestic drama that follows it, Toomer makes a claim for the equivalent valuing of those two art forms. This is in keeping with the interest Toomer shows in Native Americans throughout the New Mexico notebooks, and with his project, visible even in his first drama, *Natalie Mann*, of elevating music and dance as fundamental ways for drama to advance characterization, plot development and symbolic meaning.⁶³ Certainly Toomer expects a great deal from the three Taos songs, for, after them, his stage directions instruct: “Then silence again. . . and life becomes existence again. . . and existence, focused for a time in a group of singing men, expands to the mountain and the close stars.”⁶⁴

This opening scene allows the audience to see a representation of the Taos Pueblo and hear the Taos songs without extensive framing or expectations. For the remainder of the play, they will watch as the Anglo main characters arrive in Taos and quest after this very experience: the chance to sit in darkness and hear the Taos songs. The effect is not quite to deflate the importance of the fetishized Taos songs. That stage direction describing how existence was “focused for a time in a group of singing men” is an instruction for profound attention, even breathless fascination and enjoyment. Without making the decision to take an Indian Detour, to

⁶³ Darwin Turner discusses Toomer's use of dance in “The Failure of a Playwright,” *CLA Journal* 10 (June 1967): 308-18.

⁶⁴ Toomer, *Drama*, Typescript 914.4.

participate in a tourism transaction built upon primitivism and patronage, without lusting after and seeking out the novelty or profound mystery that Native song might offer, they have simply encountered the performance. Toomer has made the audience of *A Drama of the Southwest* into accidental tourists.

As the play unfolds, that local network of power and patronage will be interrogated through the staging of a continuum of acts of tourism, viewership, invasion, and cultural appropriation, but the audience is implicated in them from the very first scene. The next scene, a rooftop dialogue at dawn between Ubeam Riseling (the Taos Visionary) and Buckter T. Fact (the Taos Kid) develops this theme. It opens with Ubeam seated in a chair on an adobe roof, and Buck Fact reclining on an elbow. Ubeam is "a figure wrapped in a blanket like an Indian, though he is not an Indian"—a "poet, import, and visionary, a person of some depth and dignity who does not belong to the art colony because he is above art."⁶⁵ Names in *A Drama of the Southwest* are often suggestive, if not outright allegorical. Ubeam Riseling's name conjures any number of associations: sunbeams; riesling grapes or wine; the steel universal beams (I-beams, or U-beams, as they are sometimes called) that undergird so much non-adobe, frame construction. It marks him as the ambitious Du Bois to Buckter T. Fact's Booker T. Washington; but Riseling's name is also ghosted by a fear of impotence and infertility of the whole approach. (*Risling* is a word for a male horse with one or more testicles retained within the body cavity.) Ubeam and Buck Fact, the dungaree-clad butcher and proletarian described as "below art," represent two ways of looking at Taos, two possibilities for its promotion and, indeed, its uplift.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Toomer, *Drama*, Typescript 917.4.

⁶⁶ Toomer compares competing theories of the advancement of the black community to ideas of how the regionally-constituted community of Taos would develop, and indeed to how the entire nation could recover from the Depression "after this awful winter of man" (917.6). This innovation suggests that scholars like

When Ubeam rapturously declares of Taos, “This is the roof of the world,” Buck Fact immediately converts the observation into a hard fact: “Elevation six thousand nine-hundred odd feet.”⁶⁷ Buck Fact then spins into a marketing rap: “Over Raton pass. . . down Cimarron Canyon. . . and you, too, my dear tourists, will be here on the roof of the world, even as he and I.”⁶⁸ Buck Fact's welcome to the tourists could be delivered with showmanship or sarcasm. He calls them “queer birds” and jokes about Mabel Dodge Luhan, “a writer who sees to it that her history is better known” than that of the nearby Pueblo.⁶⁹ When Ubeam describes the Indians “magnetiz[ing] Taos” until “the entire world comes,” Buck Fact sees a frivolous movement (“Why should anyone come all this way to get dust in his eyes?”) that is nonetheless an important economic force: “As for me, it means a job.” Luhan's self-promotion and her promotion of Taos make Pueblo culture function as a magnet for tourists. This is not what Ubeam had in mind when he described the Indians as charming the mountains, filling the canyons with echoes, and magnetizing Taos. He responds by trying to take back his metaphor, to connect the idea of magnetism to a non-economic form of productivity:

Taos magnetizes, hence it must create. In the days of the great seasons, after this awful winter of man, something very great will come to growth in the Southwest, uniting the geography and the people, the earth and mankind, this planet and the universe.⁷⁰

One senses Toomer's considerable investment in the Taos of Ubeam Riseling's dream-vision, a Taos with much to teach the world. This hope is consistent with the racial, political and

Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr seeking to judge his late work's merit by whether or not it engaged in “an open discussion of racial matters” may be missing an opportunity to see how Toomer synthesized and applied the lessons of racial politics to other areas of concern (*Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History* 219).

⁶⁷ Ubeam here appropriates a phrase usually applied to the Tibetan Plateau or the Pamir Mountains of central Asia, and which functions to mark Taos as possessing high, mountainous beauty to rival that region and as being likewise a site of spiritual pilgrimage (Toomer would undertake such a journey to India in 1939-40).

⁶⁸ Toomer, *Drama*, Typescript 917.5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 917.6.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 917.7.

ecological vision of Toomer's other New Mexico work. After World War II, Toomer's journals posit New Mexico as a place where people of different cultures might learn to live side by side, where the aridity and scarcity of resources might teach a proper reverence for the preciousness of the earth. Emily Lutenski has suggested that Toomer saw the Southwest as a place with unique possibilities for standing outside the black-white racial binary prevalent in much of the nation, operating as it did on different axes of Indian, Chicano, and Anglo, and with a different relationship to hybridity—the Mestizo.⁷¹ *A Drama of the Southwest* never makes its motives for pinning its hopes on the Southwest so clear, but the vague vatic prediction that “something very great will come to growth in the Southwest” gets the last word of the scene.

Any revelation to be found in Taos must be negotiated within a network of tourism and patronage, in which the earnest questing of pilgrims is always at risk of being cheapened or turned to dust. In the next scene, the Interpreter again strikes a tone of breathless prophesy while setting the stage for the arrival of the main characters:

People are coming, people from the East. They will find this land preinhabited, even as the first desert was; but they will come as if discovering Taos, planting their flag in this high earth. They will come southwestward, not on horseback or in a covered wagon but driving a motor-car. Even so they will strike experience here, as man ever does when his heart is freshly given to a place.⁷²

This last sentence functions as a manifesto justifying creation by outsiders, people from the East like Toomer himself and like the writer-character who arrives in the next scene. But the Interpreter establishes a crucial distance from such figures by noting their tendency to misinterpret New Mexico's empty-seeming land. He credits these people from the East as coming “as if discovering Taos,” not as discoverers; he associates their arrival with “planting

⁷¹ Emily Lutenski, “A Small Man in Big Spaces!: The New Negro, the Mestizo, and Jean Toomer's Southwestern Writing,” *MELUS* 33 no.1 (Spring 2008):18-19.

⁷² Toomer, *Drama*, Typescript 917.7.

their flag,” placing them within a history of imperialist projections into the region by Spain and the United States. He warns the audience not to forget that the land is “preinhabited,” no matter how persuasively the Elliots will speak the language of discovery.

The Interpreter's admonition asks that we look back as well as forward. The first scene of *A Drama of the Southwest* is its only one comprised exclusively of Native American characters. Furthermore, there are no technologies in the scene (excepting the rather peculiar costume detail of the white robes) that serve as temporal markers. If an audience facing the set as Toomer describes it were watching the scene unfold at Taos Pueblo itself, they would be standing on the plaza with the San Geronimo chapel and the ruins of the 1619 church both invisible behind them. Thus, their absence from the set gives no clue to the date; the scene might easily have been set in 1618 as in 1935. Unmoored in the centuries as it is, the play's first scene emphasizes the long duration of human habitation in Taos even as it tempts viewers toward the fallacy of aboriginal timelessness by initiating a jarring contrast between the still evening of song and the morning dialogue on automobile tourism. The audience is invited to misapprehend and then to revise misapprehensions in a process that may ultimately leave them questioning the trustworthiness of their own sensations of discovery and the voyeuristic ethics of finding themselves camped upon the Taos Pueblo's plaza hearing those songs.

Moments like the Interpreter's speech argue for a self-consciousness in the *Drama's* staging of the Eastern intellectuals' quest for experience in New Mexico. By the time the Elliot family arrives in Taos, the audience is well prepared to regard them as the latest in a long series of newcomers and to contextualize their activities as part of a commonplace touristic trend, perhaps even a suspect one. The fourth scene, and the real plot arc of the play, opens with two

landladies preparing an adobe house for the Elliot family as roofers work above them. Given local labor patterns, the men on the roof are surely Pueblo or Nuevo Mexicano, like the maids, gardeners and other nearly-invisible menial workers employed by neofortunes in Taos. Here, however, they refuse to consent to their invisibility. It would be possible to stage them so they can be seen by the audience, or merely to provide evidence of their presence—their preinhabitation of Taos—in the form of the much-romanticized adobe plaster that rains onto the heads of the interlocutors.

The landladies are soon interrupted by another character who, like the Interpreter, forewarns the audience against attending to Tom Elliot with too much credulity. Hanna Gow cuts a jaunty figure, making her entrance in a cowboy hat and boots with her horse tied up off stage. In both drafts, before Tom and Grace arrive, she delivers a swift and brutal character assessment of him to the landladies: “He thinks he's God's own man. One of those real men who tame shrews and all that.”⁷³ Byrd's reading of Hanna Gow is typical of autobiographical uses of *A Drama of the Southwest* in that it identifies Gow as a spitefully unflattering portrait of an ex-lover, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and fails to appreciate her role as a challenger to Tom's interpretations of New Mexico and its inhabitants. Tom and Hanna immediately flourish their disagreements about the women in Taos when she teases Tom about the status of his revolution “against female fascism.” Yet her aggressive stance toward Tom does not mark her as the play's antagonist or make Luhan and the Taos women the butt of its jokes.⁷⁴

⁷³ Toomer, *Drama*, Holograph 914.40. The typedraft omits the first sentence and reads, “One of those real men—you know the kind I mean—who fancies himself taming shrews and all that” (917.14).

⁷⁴ Byrd reads Hanna negatively because Genth and Tom do, and because his reading of the play as a lecture drama leads him to believe that Toomer endorses Tom's views (Byrd 142). He makes much of Tom and Genth's unfavorable views of Hanna, but Tom's approval of Genth's later description of Hanna Gow as a “wildcat,” and the observation, “Rub her right and she purrs. Rub her wrong and she claws,” serves only to confirm for the

Furthermore, the archive will not support a swift identification of Hanna Gow as Mabel Dodge Luhan. In the holograph, this character is called “Tough Girl.” One year before her creation, in June, 1934, while Marjorie Content and Georgia O’Keeffe drove to New Mexico, Content and Toomer kept up an energetic correspondence in which Toomer refers to the two traveling women by the nickname, “The Tough Girls.”⁷⁵ Hanna’s name in the holograph thus indicates that Toomer did not model Hanna upon Luhan, the friend, patron or lover with whom he had a falling out over money, but instead modeled her after his new bride and O’Keeffe, the good friend and former lover who was the sole witness at their wedding. This finding bolsters the argument that Hanna can be read sympathetically, and that characters like Genth and Tom will bear increased skepticism.⁷⁶

Hanna cuts right to the heart of Tom and Genth’s insecurities by alluding to the discomfort that egotistical male artists feel in an art community particularly known for female leadership. Flannery Burke’s study, *From Greenwich Village to Taos*, describes how Luhan and Mary Austin leveraged their patronage and perceptions of a special connection to primitive New Mexico for local and national cultural capital. In her reading, D.H. Lawrence and Carl Van Vetchen were (like Toomer’s Tom Elliot) latecomers to the New Mexico art scene who might

audience Hanna’s notion of Tom as a man who (much to the amusement of the women involved) thinks he can handle women (*Drama*, Typescript 917.38).

⁷⁵ Jean Toomer, letters to Marjorie Content, 7 and 10 June 1934. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 8, Folder 251.

⁷⁶ That Tom is untrustworthy as an authority of New Mexico also emerges frequently with reference to his daughter, Betty. Betty never appears on stage, and only appears in her parents’ minds when New Mexico offers her some new peril. Otherwise, they allow her to wander where she will outside the house. “I’ve hardly been out, except to snatch Betty off the road,” Tom confides in a letter, meaning to describe how hard he has been working, but inadvertently revealing something about his parenting skills (*Drama*, Holograph 915.65). He and his wife express concerns about black widow spiders, about Betty crossing the cattle guard to play with the Mexican children who live nearby, and about the cars on the nearby road into which she wanders so freely. All of these worries foreshadow one of these various dangers coming to fruition. If such a climactic scene existed (or survived), we would learn much about how the play judges the elder Elliots’ ability to read the social and ecological landscape of Taos. Tom’s arrogance, and the mounting critique of male modernists who would set themselves up as authorities on Taos, however, does not bode well for Betty.

have engaged there more fully had they not chafed to find the position of cultural authority already occupied by women. The female artists and art patrons of Taos, then, form another layer of preinhabitation that is inconvenient or threatening to men like Tom Elliot who would like to set themselves up as discoverers.

A Drama of the Southwest is deeply interested in these “strong resourceful women who like the starkness and isolation of this country and have the power to be alone,” but it is in staging such women in relationship to other persons and communities that the play probes most deeply at their role in the community.⁷⁷ Luhan's home, Burke points out, frequently offered visitors and newcomer artists an escape from domineering husbands. In Toomer's play, Tom Elliot's tone-deaf efforts to assert expertise in matters of Pueblo dance and sacred geography are contrasted with his wife's more subtle efforts to interpolate between the Pueblo community, the neonative landladies, and her family, raising the possibility that women become successful cultural go-betweens in New Mexico by deploying some of the same skills involved in flattering and deferring to a vain and self-important husband.

The neonative landladies expect Grace Elliot to begin this diplomatic work the next morning when they find Tom outside the house, greeting the dawn by performing his own rendition of a Pueblo dance. One landlady warns Grace, “You mustn't encourage such antics in men. The Indians' dances are sacred to them. Mr. Elliot will be ashamed of himself.”⁷⁸ Tom shows no signs of such shame yet, but his dancing is soon the talk of the plaza in Taos and may soon become the reason for his rebuff at the Pueblo.

Grace, more experienced at living in Taos than her husband and friends, is chameleon-

⁷⁷ *Drama*, Typescript 917.30 verso

⁷⁸ Toomer, *Drama*, holograph, 914.43.

like in her ability to communicate with them and with the neonative population, which derives cachet from intimacy with and understanding of Native Americans. Speaking with the landladies, Grace is quick to assert that the Indians are no exotic spectacle, but are people among whom she has friends and with whom she can sympathize. “Imagine having strange people descend on you at all hours of the day, and poke about,” she says.⁷⁹ She might have included “all hours” of the night, too, considering that she and Tom have been promising to take their friends to hear the Indians sing, and that she plans, that very evening, to lay siege to a private dwelling until she hears the songs.

The extent to which one can live in Taos without exotifying one's neighbors is crucial to identity in *A Drama of the Southwest*. The opening of the scene at the Taos Plaza which immediately follows Elliot's ill-advised dancing is a crowd scene in which Toomer's stage directions describe seven distinct groups of people, a taxonomy of inhabitants and visitors that begins with Indians and ends with tourists.⁸⁰ The tourists, “they of recent arrival and soon departure,” are “dressed in all manner of garb” but “are distinguishable from all the others by the sort of nervous curiosity which lays hold of our countrymen when they are sighting and seeing what they believe to be exotic.”⁸¹ Believing others to be exotic is as important as transience in identifying the tourist, and Toomer's coinage of “sighting and seeing” in place of *sightseeing* splits that action into two: a restless *sighting* that carries the thrill of discovery and the violence of gunsights; and *seeing*, which seems to offer little insight, only a glimpse into the tourists' own preconceptions. As the act of sightseeing is broken apart in this manner, Toomer makes clear

⁷⁹ Toomer, *Drama*, holograph 915.3-4.

⁸⁰ Also included are “Mexicans,” ranchmen, “native whites,” summer visitors, and artists. (Toomer, *Drama*, holograph 914.64).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

how the tourist's gaze functions to make *sights*—objectified spectacles—out of people and places. The tourists, Buck Fact's “queer birds,” are certainly held up for ridicule here as the people who behave worse than any other group in Taos, but it is difficult to trust Tom Elliot's difference from them. His day, moving from the Taos Plaza to the Taos Pueblo, covers the same itinerary as the Taos day on a classic Indian Detour—one of those those famous prepackaged motorcar tours that shepherded railroad passengers through historic and cultural sites in northern New Mexico in the 1920s and 30s.

The final scene of *A Drama of the Southwest* brings the Elliots' quest to hear Indian song to its disappointing denouement, and brings the play back to where it began at Taos Pueblo. Tom, Grace, Lillian, and Bill Bryne approach the Pueblo and settle near the stream on their blankets to hear the songs that Tom and Grace have been promising to their guests, and that the play's audience has already heard. The four wait, but no one comes to sing.

Even as each passing moment of silence casts further doubt upon Tom and Grace's self-appointed status as local Indian experts, Grace and Bryne strive to put their knowledge and connoisseurship of Pueblo culture on display.

Lillian: I haven't seen a dance. Do they dance well here?

Grace: Not as well as at some of the other pueblos.

Bryne: Everyone says the Domingo corn dance is the one to see.

Grace: It is intense and beautiful, one of the most impressive, but the tourists spoil it.⁸²

Grace wins this exchange when she gives Bryne a subtle slap with her scorn for the tourists at the Domingo dance. To call it the best is to have a tourist's taste.

When showing off for a tourist or short-term visitor like Lillian, Grace and Tom try to appear like more sophisticated and knowledgeable versions of tourists: they know the places, the

⁸² Ibid., 914.11.

songs, and the dances that no one else does. Striving to fill the empty time, Tom imparts information in a headlong rush, lecturing his wife and friends on Pueblo spiritual practices, their relationship with landscape, and the sacredness of Blue Lake. (In an earlier scene, he remarked to Lillian that at Blue Lake, the Indians perform dances that “no white man has ever seen,” and she responded, perhaps ominously, “I’d love to go.”⁸³) Due to the incompleteness of *A Drama of the Southwest*, it is not clear whether these persistent mentions of Blue Lake are setting up a later plot event like an actual expedition to intrude upon the sacred site, or if they are only Toomer’s efforts to keep New Mexico geography in the foreground. Even if nothing else comes of it, the discussion of Blue Lake serves to develop Tom’s character and his relationship to the Pueblos. When Lillian asks him, “What is Blue Lake that it fascinates you so?” Tom, who can rarely keep any utterance under a paragraph, is at an uncharacteristic loss for words. “I couldn’t tell you,” he says.⁸⁴ Here Tom admits to being unable to answer two questions at once. What is Blue Lake? He has not been and cannot really know. Why does it fascinate him? Even his own fascination with the Pueblos is inarticulate or insufficiently examined.

Everyone sits in silence for a moment after Tom’s admission of ignorance on the subject of Blue Lake, until Lillian observes, “No singing yet.” The Elliots look sillier and sillier, unable to deliver the promised after-dinner spectacle to their guests. Grace’s flustered reply is, “There must be some reason, but I don’t know it. This is most unusual. Perhaps we should wait no longer.”⁸⁵ She is the first to catch the drift that they might not be welcome, and charged as she was with reining in Tom’s mimicry of Pueblo dance, she even has an idea of why. The silence at

⁸³ Ibid., 916.42.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 914.14.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the Pueblo is a censure of Tom's behavior, as Toomer denies his characters the long-sought performance he has already granted to the audience in the first scene. But Tom's self-absorption bears him easily over the disappointment. Rhapsodizing about the mere nearness of the Pueblo, Tom declares, "There is a leaven here which the more fortunate of us may [take away] share and use for our own baking."⁸⁶ Tom's impulse is extractive. He and the other visitors to Taos see in Pueblo culture a flickering mirror of their own ideals: now a political model for communal society; now a source of spiritual wisdom. Bryne defines the Soviet project as "trying to manufacture... in a few years" what "took centuries to grow" in New Mexico, while Tom, interested in matters of the soul, inverts the usual primitivist developmental hierarchy when he offers the Pueblo community as a model of a "mature civilization" from which his "boisterous, child-active civilization" might learn the art of contemplation and so grow a soul.⁸⁷

All of these constructions of meaning are briefly punctured when an older Pueblo man approaches the group and engages them in seemingly uninformative small talk. "Will the boys sing tonight?" Tom asks him, striking a note of breezy familiarity or even insulting infantilization of a group that consisted, by all other descriptions, of adult men. "Sing every night," and "Don't know. The boys sing every night," is the man's twice-repeated reply to Elliot's further queries about when the singing will begin, providing him with only the assumptions he brought with him.⁸⁸ The real Indian moves off stage, once more leaving Tom to field the questions of their friends and spin his elaborate theories of the meaning of Pueblo culture. As Lillian puts it at the conclusion of the scene at the Taos Pueblo, "If [the Indians] had

⁸⁶ Ibid., 914.24. Tom continues, "Seeds for a forgotten field, yeast for forgotten wheat, a promise of harvest for the radiant reapers." Here he associates reapers with the fulfillment of the creative process where once, in *Cane*, he cast them as the pastoral raw material for an artistic production.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 914. 6, 23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 914.9.

sung, we would have heard them. In their silence, we heard ourselves.”⁸⁹

The recursive experience of trying to listen to Indians and hearing only one's self is reminiscent of Toomer's definition of tourists, those people who move about in a state of “nervous curiosity. . . sighting and seeing what they believe to be exotic.” It is thus possible to read Lillian's statement along the same lines as Hanna Gow's objections to Elliot—as a withering character assessment of the man who “thinks he's God's own man” and who sat before the Pueblo and did the most talking when he might have been listening. If this is the case, Elliot has failed in his efforts to become something more than a tourist, to escape the cycle of frantic motion in automobiles and superficial interactions with people whom he insists on exoticizing. It is just possible, however, that Lillian does not mean to criticize herself and her friends when she observes that the group heard only itself. Certainly Elliot experiences the evening as a gift. The play ends with a benediction, as Elliot calls back, “Indians of the Pueblo, you will not hear me, but thank you—and goodnight.”⁹⁰

Elliot, despite every rebuff, seems to have received a dose of the inspiration he sought at the Pueblo, but his final words enact a moment of cross-cultural communication that misses its mark—the Indians won't hear because Elliot has chosen to speak to them when they are not even within earshot. This final salient example of Elliot's failures to dwell gracefully in Taos reinforces the play's skepticism of persons who would set themselves up as authorities upon those whom they consider to be exotic or primitive. Ultimately, *A Drama of the Southwest* suggests it is possible for Elliot to find valuable experience in New Mexico—not an an experience of approaching 'authentic' Native American culture but an experience of his own discomfort and

⁸⁹ Ibid., 914.24.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 914.25.

productive estrangement from the various local communities already inhabiting the region.

While *Drama* criticizes and at times even ridicules the desires and actions of tourists and other newcomers, it never rejects the premise that such experiences are worth seeking, if one can only learn how to open one's self to a place.

Though *A Drama of the Southwest* should not be mistaken for autobiography, it is a hitherto undervalued text in its cultural and literary-historical context. The play dispels several myths about Toomer's late career and his literary output from New Mexico. Despite widespread reports of the failure of a playwright and of an author who “abandoned his lyrical vein” when he ceased to write of rural Georgia, *A Drama of the Southwest* delivers astute social commentary, contests of ideas, and moments of great beauty. The play also provides, like D.H. Lawrence's *Altitude* or Mabel Dodge Luhan's memoirs, a vivid glimpse into the social world of the artists who mined Taos for creative and spiritual renewal in the early 20th century. The failure thus far to value it for its portrayal of this important moment in New Mexico's artistic history flows from both an undervaluing of the outsider's position and a knee-jerk skepticism about Toomer's authority to write from New Mexico, and these positions are ones that the play itself can help unsettle.

By demanding that Toomer be of the region about which he writes, we invest in precisely the kind of self-important expertise and authority to speak for a place that *A Drama of the Southwest* holds up for skepticism. This is the authority that will dare to dismiss strong Southwestern women like Hanna Gow as shrill wildcats or monologue upon Pueblo spiritual practices so long as no actual Pueblos are present. It is not enough for our criticism to vet the author's credentials to claim such dubious authority. A more delicate negotiation is required, in

which we remain open to the possibility that outsiders can strike deep experience in a new place, but in which their assertions about the meaning of a place are always subject to undermining and interrogation—interrogation at which the dramatic form excels and which Toomer uses to good effect in *Kabnis* and *Drama*.

If it gives us pause to see Toomer deeply engaged and firmly emplaced in the Southwest instead of in the rural Southern landscape, it is a pause in which we can recognize how long exaggerated Toomer's Southern regionalism has been, and how that exaggerated regionalism is entwined with the latest round of attempts to shore up Toomer's pre-1923 claim to blackness, the better to accuse him of later abandoning it in passing. Claims of Southernness, functioning as coded claims of race-identity, are involved in arguments that inscribe *Cane* as a classic of African American literature by differentiating it from and disparaging the rest of Toomer's life and work. This critical rush to condemn Toomer's late work cannot possibly heap greater laurels upon *Cane* than the book earns for itself, but it has played editorial havoc upon the late work. Toomer's achievements in the Southwest in the 1930s do not threaten or dilute his achievements in the Georgia stories or the urban stories of 1923 once our understanding of the merit of those stories is uncoupled from a quest for racial authenticity. Toomer need not write from the South, or from a moment of whole-hearted Negro identity, to write with insight and clarity of vision. *A Drama of the Southwest* teaches us as much, for Toomer has no great claim upon the Southwest, any more than the other modernists who embraced and claimed New Mexico as a spiritual home. Nor does he need such a claim. We risk blinding ourselves to Toomer's artistry when we cast his creativity as reportage and his sojourning as belonging.

III. Jean Toomer Visionary: The View of the Bomb from Taos

The Jean Toomer who opens his notebook in Taos in 1947 and sets out to write about the ramifications of the atomic bomb has been a sometime sojourner in the Southwest for more than a decade and has been writing for, speaking to and with Friends about peace since the outbreak of World War II. The New Mexico notebook of 1947 represents a culmination and drawing together of both strands of work, composed as it is during his last visit to the state and providing a final meditation on peace after the close of the war.

This untitled New Mexico notebook can be called fragmentary, flipping as it does through thirty scenes in fifty narrow pages. Frederick Rusch clearly treated it as already fragmented (and exacerbated this formal quality) when he published it in heavily ellipsed and excerpted form as “The Dust of Abiquiu” in *A Jean Toomer Reader*. Yet the scenes read with remarkable fluency, and Toomer refers to the manuscript internally as “this book,” as if its movements are juxtapositions, not a mere chance assembly. In contrast to Toomer's often scattered and truly early holograph drafts on loose-leaf paper, Toomer's holograph drafts in notebooks often seem so fluent and free of correction as to indicate a final draft or fair-copy status.⁹¹ As such, the notebook's dance between the local and the global can be read as a formal choice with powerful thematic impetus. Reading Toomer's 1947 notebook alongside earlier writings on peace, on the Southwest, and even on race, I begin to account for how the bomb changes Toomer's thinking on these matters.

The notebook opens with two men working in a vegetable garden. As a statement on global politics, the text is aware of its own incongruity. It tells us, “Men still hoe their vegetable

⁹¹ See, for example, the 1936 autobiographical writing in Box 22, Folders 557-61.

gardens. Is this not a reassuring fact?" Toomer sets up the arid, weedy New Mexico garden as a "reassuring fact" against the recent atomic traumas. The two men, one white and the other darker-skinned, lean against their hoes and talk, but "do not talk about hating men, fighting, or making a million dollars."⁹² Throughout the notebook, Toomer posits the daily life of this dry place in opposition to, or even as an inoculation against, the bomb.

He knows that "some twenty-five miles due south, as the plane flies, over mesas and mountains, is the Hill" (to give Los Alamos its local name), and it is this Hill that he connects to the Pueblo elders' vision that "the mountain will smoke, great winds will come up, [and] the world will be destroyed by fire."⁹³ After glancing away from "the fatal strip—Los Alamos," he changes registers and speaks of other human traces on the landscape: a local church building, and then a small forest that a retired forest ranger made to grow in sagebrush land. Under the cultivated aspens and poplars, Toomer has "seen some strange things," including a pair of cows.

As they moved, they moved into a patch of sunlight and then into a patch of shadow. In the sunlight I saw them; in the shadow they disappeared. They were creatures alternately visible and invisible. They were like mysterious beings with the power to appear and disappear at will. They were like men living in two worlds, the seen and the unseen.⁹⁴

Cows in a wood hardly qualify as an oddity, especially given the long tradition of grazing livestock in forest lands in this locale. If anything is strange here, it is the un/natural forest, planted by man, and the tension Toomer feels between the visible and invisible worlds. The invisible world is of particular urgency to residents of New Mexico, which anthropologist Jake Kosek has asserted "can... be a haunted place, contaminated by a silent ghost [radiation] that may or may not be there but that is undeniably deadly." A landscape like the Santa Fe National

⁹² Jean Toomer, *New Mexico Notebook*. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Forest looks pristine, and then unmask its toxic legacy by producing smoke of every color of the rainbow during a forest fire.⁹⁵ This possibility of unseen danger from radiation was available to Toomer, and lent a local edge to his contemplation of an atomic world, and an atomic edge to his contemplation of the in/visible cows in their un/natural landscape. The *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* carried news reports of “mysterious” delayed deaths from “atomic bomb rays” in Japan, and there was a growing public awareness of the radioactive legacy of nuclear tests in New Mexico.⁹⁶ Nuclear accidents at Los Alamos made national news when they affected prominent American and international physicists, like the Canadian Louis Slotin, who died after radiation exposure in 1946.⁹⁷ In his New Mexico community, Toomer may have interacted with Los Alamos employees and local residents (frequently Hispanic, Native American or Mestizo) whose experiences with radioactive contamination went unreported in the press.

The arrival of atomic science and the planting of poplar trees are just a few of the many human-induced changes in the land that Toomer gestures to in “The Dust of Abiquiu,” and throughout, life in this arid land teaches lessons about living in community. In the barely-arable mountain meadows, inhabited for three hundred years or more, “to kill your neighbor was to kill your helper.”⁹⁸ In the same vein, he alludes to the story of “the Indian who could not be taught to play chess because he cooperated with his “opponent's” moves.” The tiny, one-sentence sketch of an anecdote comes in an equally sketch-like section, punctuated breathlessly with

⁹⁵ Jake Kosek, *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 274.

⁹⁶ Howard W. Blakeslee, “Delayed Jap Deaths Laid to Atomic Bomb Rays,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 August, 1945, 4.
“A-Bomb Radiation: Air Contaminated Over Area as Large as Australia,” *The New York Times*, 26 May 1946, E7.

⁹⁷ “Radiation from Accident Hits 8 at Los Alamos,” *The New York Times*, 25 May 1946, 20.
“Radiation Kills Atom Physicist,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1946, 1.

⁹⁸ Jean Toomer, New Mexico Notebook. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482.

dashes and contrasts. He translates the Spanish place name, Sangre de Cristo. As if pointing across the land, he changes the subject, “Over there, Los Alamos—the zenith of material force in man's hand. In between, the life of ordinary men. And—the Indians. Their dance a prayer.”⁹⁹ And then, the chess anecdote, with its quotation marks around *opponent* implying that the Indian may be the best chess player of all, or at least another and valid kind of chess player. In the context of the other land-lessons, this figure is not one of a racially-bound or precontact primitive innocence, so much as a figure for what one might hope to become by living at Abiquiu.¹⁰⁰ Throughout “The Dust of Abiquiu,” Toomer is more interested in local lifeways than in racial identities; less in skin color than in actions: dancing, praying, chess-playing, church-building, and garden-tending.

When Toomer finally turns to the globe and takes on some of the heightened anxiety and grandeur of a sublime nuclear text, he is insistent, as he was in his 1943 peace essay, that individual spiritual lives are at the crux of the peace issue. The twelfth section of the notebook ends:

I know by experience that human beings can be transformed—not simply improved but changed in the root, radically altered into new beings. We know by experience that atom bombs can fall. I grant that it is more probable that we shall have a third world war than that there shall be a Christ in every country. Yet new men and women are as possible as war. I will hold to the faith that we will be reborn until I see destruction sweep the earth and I am knocked to smithereens.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Although Toomer never attributes this sense of land lessons to a Native American perspective, the idea is very close to one expressed by a Hopi elder when asked in the documentary *Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World* why his people chose to live and farm in such an unforgiving landscape, when corn could surely be grown more efficiently elsewhere. He answered that the land nourished them by making them more faithful, more grateful, and more dependent upon their community. *Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World*, directed by Pat Ferrero (1983; San Francisco, CA : Ferrero Films, 1983), Videocassette.

¹⁰¹ Jean Toomer, New Mexico Notebook. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482. p.8.

Lutenski reads these “new men and women” as yet another expression of Toomer's longstanding hope for an “entirely new race” in America, to be achieved through hybridity.¹⁰² This would be in keeping with Toomer's larger body of work on a new race in America, but Toomer himself has already cautioned against this misreading in the seventh section of the notebook, writing, “What we need is not the mingling of bodies in copulation but the meeting of hearts, the unification of the spirit.”¹⁰³ He makes it very clear in the passage above that to be a new man or woman is to “be a Christ,” which is not a racial category but a spiritual one. Toomer's beliefs about the hybrid future of the American race have been at the heart of the controversy over his assertion of a neither black nor white identity, but this text is remarkable not because it re-articulates that same long-held position but because it abandons it, preferring “the meeting of hearts, the unification of the spirit” to “copulation,” a rougher and more biological word than has characterized his previous discussions of interracial marriages.

Some have derided Toomer's vision of an American race as too naive, but his abandonment of it in the face of the atomic bomb reveals that vision as pessimistic at heart. In 1920, he believed that “inevitable amalgamation and consequent cultural unity” through racial mixing would someday create “the true American, the evolved spiritual pioneer of humanity,” a “continent of Walt Whitmans... universal in their sympathies and godlike of soul.”¹⁰⁴ It may sound like dewy-eyed idealism, but genomic change is slow. The spiritual perfection Toomer envisions would take generations to arrive, as intermarriage slowly leveled physiological, religious and cultural difference. To turn it the other way around, Americans would not begin to

¹⁰² Lutenski, ““A Small Man in Big Spaces,”” 26.

¹⁰³ Jean Toomer, *New Mexico Notebook*. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482. p.7.

¹⁰⁴ “Americans and Mary Austin,” *New York Call* (10 October 1920). Reprinted in *Arizona Quarterly* 52 no. 2 (Summer 1995): 122-126.

treat each other as equal fellow humans until Jews and Christians, blacks and whites and recent waves of Asian immigrants were all fused into a single recognizable American race. Toomer was optimistic, but only in the very long range. No wonder he never made a civil rights activist.

Toomer's first wife, Margery Latimer, shared his long-range vision. She wrote to a friend in 1931, "My stomach seems leaping with golden children, millions of them, and my head is purged of darkness and struggle and misery."¹⁰⁵ Her death in childbirth less than a year later may have done much to steal the luster from Toomer's idea that racism and religious discrimination could be procreated away.

By 1947, under the threat of the atom bomb, Toomer finally found the amalgamatory solution untenable because it was simply too slow. He estimated that the next five years would be critical, and that even minds could not be changed in such a time frame. "The race between education and catastrophe will be lost by education," he predicted.¹⁰⁶ There was nothing left but to write and to hope for a miraculous spiritual transformation.

Either we shall be transformed, lifted above these little selves into larger beings, raised above these problems into a unity with all creation, or the third world war will begin. Either men and women with Christ-like qualities will appear in every country, or the atom bombs will begin to fall. If the first happens, I shall stop writing voluntarily (having something more important to do). If the second happens, I shall of course stop writing involuntarily, and stop breathing too.

Toomer argues that the atomic bomb forces him onto this messianic footing – there is no time for "the mingling of bodies in copulation" or for education to save the world. He chooses to believe in the possibility of individual transformations on a massive scale where others placed their messianic hopes in a world government, a political force to redeem the wreckage of modernity.

¹⁰⁵ Margery Latimer to Meridel LeSueur, October 1931. Quoted in Cynthia Earl Kerman and Richard Eldridge, *The Lives of Jean Toomer*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1987. p.199

¹⁰⁶ Jean Toomer, New Mexico Notebook. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482, p.7.

Toomer's contacts with the Friends and his rejoinder to *One World or None* makes it clear that he is well aware of the political movements afoot to save the earth from atomic destruction, but, as he did during the war years, he holds himself aloof from the one-worlders. According to Toomer, it will not be any single saving solution, but “men and women with Christ-like qualities” who will need to be “a Christ in every country.” He believes that these new, Christ-like men and women are “as possible as war,” but, until we reach the final (and most extensive) scene of the notebook, it is hard to imagine what could bring about their advent or transformation.

It will not be the forces of government, national or one-world. Speaking of the small towns around Abiquiu, he says that they “do not know of the President of the United States, nor of the United Nations Organization, nor of the stark alternative of modern times—One World or None.”¹⁰⁷ Instead, this place offers a vision with which Toomer concludes. He looks down from a height, across a land “utterly barren and utterly brilliant:”

Far down in the center, in the very bottom of this crater, was a tiny green spot, no larger than a dime. That was the fertile valley. That was where men lived. I had a sense that what I was seeing was so immense that the... entire North American Continent could be dropped in, and still the cauldron would be far from filled to its rim. I had a sense that I was seeing the created Earth as God may have seen it relatively soon after He stopped work.¹⁰⁸

This image offers a great contrast to the images that dominate the nuclear sublime. Instead of a gray newsprint mushroom cloud or a purple pillar of fire, Toomer provides this tiny, jewel-like image of fertile earth, no larger than a dime. Like the photos of the earth from space which would become icons of the environmental movement two decades later, Toomer uses New

¹⁰⁷ Jean Toomer, *New Mexico Notebook*. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482, p.15.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 16.

Mexico's barren landscape to present the fertile valley, indeed the whole earth, as a small place of fragile and precious fertility.¹⁰⁹ Toomer's is a beautiful image that emerges in the shadow of Los Alamos, in the shadow of the bomb, suggesting that simple acts of local living can teach about, and perhaps even save, the wider world.

The sight of this green land in the crater so far below calls like an abyss, but Toomer feels it drawing not his body, but his gaze, and ultimately his cares, into itself. "You could throw your troubles in, your hate, your fear, your ugliness," and "the furnace of Truchas is big enough and fiery enough to hold all, and to burn all clean." Toomer then breaks into an extended fantasy of using the valley as a furnace for the world's spiritual debris, envisioning a network of trucks and planes, "trouble-collecting trucks, problem-collecting trucks, sin-collecting trucks, evil-collecting trucks" that call door-to-door and take the world's troubles to Truchas."¹¹⁰

Toomer's New Mexico is tied to the world's troubles, not just through the exportation of the atom bomb, but as a potential space for spiritual salvation. There will be no trouble-collection trucks, but the fantasy of them is ultimately a reminder of the power of a land, and writing about a land, to draw people out from their own concerns, to enlarge them into Christs in every country, and perhaps to make Walt Whitmans of us after all.

¹⁰⁹ This insight into the meaning and the significance of the 1972 photograph, "The Blue Marble," is Stewart Brand's. Al Gore makes the same claim for the 1968 photo, "Earthrise," in *An Inconvenient Truth*, saying, "The image exploded into the consciousness of humankind. In fact, within two years of this picture being taken, the modern environmental movement was born." He further quotes Archibald MacLeish, who wrote that to see the photograph was "to see ourselves riders on the Earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold—brothers who know now that they are truly brothers."

¹¹⁰ Jean Toomer, *New Mexico Notebook*. Jean Toomer Papers, Box 65, Folder 1482, p.17.

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Typescript	Holograph
1 Pueblo Scene, Night Several white-robed men	
2 Day. Rooftop dialog <i>Ubeam Riseling</i> and <i>Buckter T. Fact</i>	Day in the Southwest. Rooftop dialog(s) <i>Taos Visionary</i> and <i>Taos Kid</i>
3 Speech by the <i>Interpreter</i>	
4 Taos, 4pm a June afternoon, Interior of an Adobe House with roofers working above. <i>Landladies</i> are joined by <i>Hanna Gow</i> ; <i>Lewis Bourne</i> & <i>Grace Bourne</i> arrive; <i>Landladies</i> and <i>Hanna</i> depart; <i>Clifford Genth</i> arrives. <i>Lewis</i> describes their trip; they discuss <i>Genth's</i> marital problems and the <i>Bournes'</i> plan to buy land.	Enter: <i>Tough Girl</i> (the <i>Landladies</i> appear to have already been on stage, in the house, roofers above) <i>Tom Elliot</i> and <i>Grace Elliot</i> arrive; <i>Tough Girl</i> & <i>Landladies</i> depart <i>John Genth</i> and <i>Elliot</i> discuss <i>Genth's</i> marital problems & the <i>Elliot's</i> plan to buy land.
	<i>Elliot's</i> bedroom. 9:00. <i>Elliot</i> and <i>Grace</i> discuss the trip; spiders; <i>Indians</i> go by outside, singing.
	Morning, outside the house. <i>Elliot</i> stops dancing abruptly. <i>Landladies</i> warn <i>Grace</i> about “such antics.” <i>Elliot</i> writes a letter and reads it to <i>Grace</i> .
	Taos Plaza, 10am of a business day, with various populations of Taos represented. <i>Landladies</i> tell <i>Tough Girl</i> about <i>Elliot's</i> dancing; <i>Bill Bryne</i> flees <i>Martha Coleman</i> and runs into <i>Elliot</i> . In a separate fragment, <i>Elliot</i> and <i>Coleman</i> exchange barbs.
	<i>Grace</i> and <i>Helen Genth</i> discuss <i>Helen's</i> rumored affair. <i>Elliot</i> arrives and confronts <i>Helen's</i> mother.
	4:30 that afternoon. <i>Grace</i> and <i>Elliot</i> discuss the <i>Genths</i> . <i>Vin</i> , a newspaper editor, visits with news of the land. <i>Lillian</i> and <i>Bill Bryne</i> arrive for tea, discuss Taos, Blue Lake, and <i>Martha Coleman</i> .
	Pueblo Scene at night with <i>Grace</i> , <i>Elliot</i> , <i>Lillian</i> , <i>Bryne</i> , and one <i>Indian</i> who does not sing.

Figure 1. Scenes from *A Drama of the Southwest*. This chart displays the limited overlap of the two drafts. It also offers one possible ordering of the scenes in the holograph according to contextual clues to the play's internal chronology. These scenes are sometimes incomplete and are scattered across folders 914, 915 and 916.

CHAPTER IV

All Tayo's Sisters: The Lost Women of Silko's *Ceremony*

Leslie Marmon Silko's 1977 novel, *Ceremony*, is intensely involved with exploring what it means to live in the nuclear-armed world. I am far from the first to make this observation but I remain struck by how often the assertion of a nuclear theme strikes interlocutors and readers as novel or surprising. The bomb in *Ceremony* exists in pastiche, co-existing with a great many other important symbols and themes in a complex mosaic of the modern condition. The structure runs counter to the bomb's totalizing reputation and stands in contrast to the formal space the bomb occupies in early nuclear rhetoric from around the time of its setting in the years immediately following World War II.

To speak of the nuclear in *Ceremony* is both to assert its importance and to grapple with the trait it shares with the literature of the nuclear pastoral: its remarkable un-centrality. In *Ceremony*, the atomic bomb can be the crucial symbol for Silko's vision for humanity and the plot can find its denouement in, of all places, the mouth of a uranium mine, without the novel presenting entirely as an overtly nuclear text. The nuclear can lie in wait for us in *Ceremony* like so much invisible background radiation because of the novel's vast list of concerns: war and its aftermath; mixed-race identity; the cultural trauma of racism and stolen land; alcoholism; the negotiation of an identity between the traditional, familial and tribal forms of belonging, and the unrealized promise of a race-blind American identity held out by the military uniform or football

jersey or permanent hair treatments.

This chapter tries to compass—and to some extent even expand—the incredible richness of Silko’s thematic investments in *Ceremony* by bringing forward an untold story from Silko’s drafting process by attending to what I refer to as the Angie drafts. In the course of writing the novel, Silko developed and then ultimately discarded a richly realized female protagonist named Angie, as well as the friends, lovers and family members who populated the worlds she moved in in the 1970s, from the reservation in Laguna to the New Mexico cities of Gallup and Albuquerque. I will explore the many changes wrought in the novel when Silko makes Tayo its protagonist instead of Angie, including a flattening of women’s lives in *Ceremony* that must perhaps be tallied as a sad loss to literature.

The substitution of Tayo for Angie shifts *Ceremony's* investments in trauma, healing and recovery by pointing towards the global and trans-historical readings of *Ceremony's* witchcraft. When the Angie drafts describe witchery, they concern themselves explicitly with peyote, the Native American Church, and with the Navajo community with whom she comes in contact through her rodeo boyfriend. The lines of pitched battle are drawn between one isolated Pueblo girl and a powerful community of Navajo witches. Moments in *Ceremony* speak of Tayo as a singular hero, but if he is such, he represents far more than his own side in the struggle. Betonie's parting words to Tayo as he refuses Tayo's offer of payment for the ceremony are, “This has been going on for a long time now. It's up to you. Don't let them stop you. Don't let them finish off this world.”¹ The ceremony has been going on since at least the time of Betonie's grandparents, and, if its completion or successful continuation is now up to Tayo alone, far more hinges upon his ceremonial role than his own healing. If he fails, we are to understand, the

¹ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin, 2006): 141.

witchery will “finish off this world.” Tayo's struggle is thus persistently linked across time, human boundaries and space to represent multi-tribal and multi-ethnic generations of good ceremonies and to seek to save the entire world from the final witchery, which *Ceremony* figures as nuclear destruction.

Angie's lone struggle against the Navajo witches might have been powerfully informed by the Laguna symbolic geography that enriches *Ceremony*, but the abandonment of Angie's history in favor of Tayo's wartime experience in Japan and his moment in the late forties allows that site-and-culture-specific symbolic geography to exist in overlay with a landscape freshly made nuclear. This landscape functions as a mind for holding the whole world's problems. Tayo's vision of convergence emerges both out of his physical proximity to the important nuclear sites of Trinity, Los Alamos, and the mine, and out of his cosmopolitan wartime experience. Through his service in the Pacific theatre, he gained an instinctual and then an explicit understanding of how racism and hatred enabled the disparate treatment of Native Americans he experienced at home; how it drove the massacre of Japanese prisoners of war in which his unit was ordered to participate, and, by this logic, how it also drove the atomic bombings.

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth had been laid. From the jungles of his dreaming he recognized why the Japanese voices had merged with Laguna voices, with Josiah's voice and Rocky's voice; the lines of cultures and worlds were drawn in flat dark lines on fine light sand, converging in the middle of witchery's final sand painting.²

The malarial hallucination of Josiah's face among the Japanese prisoners first functioned as only a nightmarish premonition of the personal loss of his uncle, but in the light of this new revelation, Tayo learns to re-read it, to trust the vision and see “why the Japanese voices had

² Ibid., 228.

merged with the Laguna voices.” At first it may seem as if the atomic bomb, the final and greatest witchery, causes this convergence, but I think it more correct to suggest that the bomb illustrates the convergence. Satterlee argues that Tayo's individual experience of trauma points towards or mirrors Native American *cultural trauma*, the "officially sanctioned, sadomasochistic system of oppression in which a targeted group, perceived by the dominant culture as an obstacle to the goals of the existing hegemony, are tortured, imprisoned, or killed."³ The nuclear components of *Ceremony* allow for the expansion of this already capacious vision of cultural trauma to include how one culture's experience of trauma can speak to that of others across the globe.

Some pages earlier, Tayo's vision takes on a chronologically broad scope as he looks back over the valley in which he and Josiah had chased the cattle and through which the Spaniards had travelled, concealing themselves in deep valleys as they went to attack Acoma. The region's long history of habitation and conquest is thus used to extend the work's scope across history as well as geography. Tayo gathers strength as he looks out and sees it at dawn, “balancing day with night, summer months with winter. The valley was enclosing this totality, like the mind holding all thoughts together in a single moment.”⁴ The totality described here includes the reconciled binaries of summer/winter and day/night, the bright and painful instances of his own life, and of a history of brutal conquest. This valley, as a few pages later the nuclear landscape of northern New Mexico, functions as a mind—a place in which a long and diverse violence of history can be seen.

The atomic bomb aptly illustrates, but does not create, the conditions in which the people

³ Satterlee, “Landscape Imagery and Memory in the Narrative of Trauma,” 74.

⁴ Silko, *Ceremony*, 220.

of the earth share a common peril. Fragmentary *Ceremony* draft materials suggest that the atomic bomb initially appeared in a list of disparate technologies, some of them ordinarily thought of as non-violent:

—— engines and machines
plastic and steel
electricity and atom bombs
You let these kyo things fool you too
just like they fooled the people a long time ago

The meaning of the phrase “kyo things” is illuminated by a preceding couplet: “You don't see the messengers now? / Then the evil ones have fooled you.”⁵ In *Ceremony's* verse sections, Old Woman K'yo is the mother of the Ck'o'yo medicine man who causes the neglect of the mother corn altar, while the Ck'o'yo gambler locks away the rain clouds. By grouping the atom bomb into a list of deceptive “kyo things” that often serve as symbols of progress, this fragment associates them all with Ck'o'yo witchery and gestures to the violent potential of all of these inventions, calling into question the ideals of modernity and progress that they represent. This is a crucial distinction between *Ceremony's* treatment of the nuclear and many anti-nuclear texts from the era of its setting in the 1940 that present similar visions of a hoped-for global unity. To such texts, the unprecedented power of the atomic bomb suddenly makes both war and nationhood obsolete. Their global vision relies upon the historical singularity of the bomb to create the occasion for peace-making; *Ceremony's* insists upon contextualizing the bomb amidst other kyo things or elements of Ck'o'yo witchery.

In its published form, the atomic bomb in *Ceremony* is presented not in the context of other inventions like steel and plastic but as a new iteration in a long practice, this time of the

⁵ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, autograph manuscript and typescript. Undated. Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Box 1.

genocidal and ecocidal violence of the colonial project: the vision of historical totality Tayo experiences while looking over the valley. The bomb in *Ceremony* is a process, not a thing: part of a centuries-old genocidal pattern that encompasses the introduction of guns and disease; the wiping out of entire villages and the slaughter of whole tribes; stolen land; poisoned water, and, finally, the uranium-containing “rocks with veins of green and yellow and black” that euro-Americans will use to “lay the final pattern... across the world... and explode everything.”⁶ The atomic bomb is the final witchery, but it exists in the context of and depends upon all of these other modes of destruction, death and imperialism. Tayo's mind; the valley; the atomic bomb: these are capacious spaces of convergence that reach to encompass the dislocating effects of supposed technological progress; the march of steel, guns, disease, the slaughter of villages and tribes, the theft of land and poisoning of water and even the poisonous racism that crept into both Tayo and Emo's hearts while they fought and suffered in the Pacific theatre. Silko settles opportunistically upon the World War II milieu and the atomic bomb and as symbol for man's common fate and as a way to speak of the persistence of genocidal violence and its aftereffects into the present day.

It is just this opening-out of Tayo's experience through time and space and into global and historical themes that Silko fought to preserve from Richard Seaver's editorial hand, as documented in Jeff Karem's “Keeping the Native on the Reservation.” As Karem points out, Silko encountered a publishing-industry resistant to the idea that a Native American novel could tackle global themes or a Native American novelist could function as more than “a local informant,” and advocated fiercely and successfully to preserve her novel's ambitiously global

⁶ Silko, *Ceremony*, 127.

scope and experimental form.⁷ *Ceremony* is courageous in its insistence on Native American experience as eloquent and relevant to the entire world, but in the Angie drafts, Silko was also writing off the reservation in valuable ways: by insisting upon paying attention to the experience of Native American women; by daring the urban environment and making sometimes surprising claims about what really made people kin.

When Silko elects instead to use Tayo as protagonist and late-forties Laguna as the setting, she access the atomic bomb as a symbol for her vision of convergence, tapping a powerful cultural practice of seeing the bomb as an inflection-point in history. To examine the Angie drafts is to glimpse the novel's alternate, parallel universe of choices and opportunities foregone: the subtler, social meetings of Indian and Chicana, the habitable city and the shades of cultural change or acculturation unflattened to witchery and harmony. Perhaps the richest lesson of the Angie drafts is about the questions we ask novelists. We so often demand, How did you get the idea or the inspiration for your book? The Angie drafts remind us that it can be misguided to ask for a singular original moment for a complex work of fiction. The third origin story provided here in the Angie drafts shows that *Ceremony* began not only as an historical trauma—World War II service and its aftermath—but as a great wilderness of intersecting cultural traumas in need of literalization. Much was found, as well as lost, along the way.

I. Origin Stories

Leslie Marmon Silko has offered several origin stories for her 1977 novel, *Ceremony*. The novel is an often bleak portrayal of the after-effects of war on a man's psyche, his generation and his wider community, but in the best known origin story, Silko claims that she set out to

⁷ Jeff Karem, "Keeping the Native on the Reservation: The Struggle for Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 25, no. 4 (2001): 32.

write a humorous tale about the lengths to which an alcoholic veteran will go for a cold beer. The project thus began not as Tayo's story but as incorrigible, well-meaning Harley's. In the preface to the Penguin 30th anniversary edition of the novel, Silko reiterates this account and adds another when she emphasizes that she wrote the great Southwestern novel while homesick in Ketchikan, Alaska, and that its vivid landscape descriptions resulted from her efforts to write herself home. To these two points of origin we can add a third: the untitled novel Silko began and abandoned before she wrote *Ceremony*.

That novel, like *Ceremony*, tells the story of a healing ceremony for a mixed-race young person who returns to the Laguna Pueblo Reservation west of Albuquerque after suffering great trauma. And in that novel, Silko works out the form that this telling ultimately takes in *Ceremony*: the famous structure of the novel *as a ceremony*. Of the female protagonist of these “notes and false starts,” Silko writes in the new preface:

Before I began the funny story about Harley, I tried twice to develop a young female protagonist to be the main character of a novel; but I found I was too self-conscious and failed to allow my fictional woman to behave independently of my image of myself.⁸

An examination of the female-centric novel drafts reveals more than seems to be promised under the heading of “notes and false starts.” Some 150 holograph and typescript pages featuring a woman named Angelina or Angie survive in the collection of Yale's Beinecke Library, and a careful reading of these papers troubles the idea of Silko setting aside the Angie drafts before she began work on the Harley story which was invaded by Tayo.⁹ In 1990, Silko spoke of two “stillborn novels” not as attempts to write “a novel” but as attempts to write “the novel,” *Ceremony*:

⁸ Leslie Marmon Silko, preface to *Ceremony* (New York: Penguin, 2006): xvi.

⁹ All archival materials quoted, unless otherwise noted, are from Box 2 of the Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. These materials were acquired in June of 1992 and do not yet have folder numbers.

What caused the first two attempts at the novel to be stillborn was that I had a narrator who was a young woman, about my own age. And it just did not work. It just becomes yourself. And then you have to look at how limited you are, and so the only way you can break out of your personal limitation is to deal with a fictional character.¹⁰

In the same interview, Silko points to the section of *Ceremony* set in the riverside camp in the city of Gallup, New Mexico as “the only surviving part” of the stillborn novels. The Angie drafts, I suggest, are far more richly and crucially entangled in the drafting of *Ceremony* than these statements indicate.

I will also argue that Silko underestimates her own achievements in the Angie drafts. Particularly when compared with female characters in *Ceremony* (whom Silko herself admits are “not as fully realized as the men”), Angie emerges as a three-dimensional, strong, provocative, flawed, sensual, seeking female character.¹¹ Her rich characterization shows that considerable pressure can be brought to bear upon the shallowness and hostility of *Ceremony's* representation of its ordinary human women. Angie is all the more remarkable because *Ceremony's* weak female characters are part of a larger paucity of female protagonists and well-developed female characters in Native American literature. Judith Antell attributes this to a problem of audience: the Indian male “excit[es] romantic nostalgia in the minds of readers,” neatly slotting into the role of the “vanishing savage “ because traditionally male roles (trade, hunting and tribal warfare) are imagined to be more disrupted than female ones (nurturance) in the wake of conquest. Male protagonists, Antell concludes, “best illustrate the alienation and despair which Indian people have experienced in the 20th Century.”¹² If female characters have so seldom been

¹⁰ Leslie Marmon Silko, interview by Laura Coltelli in *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook* ed. Allan Chavkin: 241-256 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 245.

¹¹ Silko says, "I was pleased for what I knew then; I was pleased with those characters. I'm not really pleased with them now, especially the women. I think I understand why they're not as fully realized as the men." Silko does not elaborate as to why, and Coltelli does not follow up. *Ibid.*, 243.

¹² Judith A. Antell, “Momaday, Welch, and Silko: Expressing the Feminine Principle through Male Alienation,”

tried, however, and if their rarity is driven by market preferences, it seems premature to conclude that male protagonists have a special ability to best illustrate the alienation and despair of Indian people. Writing in 1988, Antell allows notable exceptions for Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983) and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984). In *Angie* we have a prior attempt at such a female character, and one through whose drafting and discarding Silko raises the question of whether female pain can be universalized.

When these drafts, vastly different from *Ceremony* though they are, take their place in *Ceremony*'s genealogy, they invite us to consider the effect of some of the most fundamental variables in the work's construction. Most startlingly, Tayo was once (in some way) a woman named Angie. He was once a Vietnam veteran. *Ceremony* began a generation later, had traffic with cities, and attempted to be a Chicana novel as well as a Native American one. In ultimately electing the protagonist and setting that she did, Silko flung her novel's radius of geographic concern outwards, reaching toward Japan, toward the atomic bomb, and through it to the trans-historical problem of genocidal and ecocidal violence, but that the *Angie* drafts show what she sacrificed for this vision.

II. *Angie's Ceremony: Tayo as Angie*

Two scenes in the *Angie* draft make for uncanny reading because Angie is clearly making the uphill trudge that Tayo makes in *Ceremony*, walking to his tense first meeting with the unconventional Navajo medicine man, Betonie, above Gallup. As Silko brings Angie to her crucial meeting with the medicine man, she is clearly experimenting with Angie's timeline and her present-day status. A page of notes identifies her as twenty-five years old and pregnant again

in August of 1973, nearly a decade removed from the deaths of her first child and her elder sister, when she seeks the help of a medicine man at Zuni. It is a year of drought. The medicine man watches from a mesa as a woman drives to the foot to see him. She comes in an old Dodge, and she brings \$200 worth of offerings for his services: soft white buckskins, a sheep to butcher, turquoise and silver. He is quick to warn her, "I'm not a real medicine man."

The descriptions in these drafts share *Ceremony's* preoccupation with characters' eyes as a sign of mixed heritage. In another version of medicine-man scene, Angie "saw that his eyes were brown" and concluded with the simple sentence fragment, "Somewhere a white or a Mexican in his past." Similarly, in the novel, Tayo is puzzled about something familiar in the strange medicine man's face, until he "looked at his eyes" and saw "they were hazel like his own," at which point "the medicine man nodded" and offered, "My grandmother was a remarkable Mexican with green eyes."¹³

The parallels between Angie and Tayo run deep. Like Tayo, Angie is of mixed heritage and was raised by a maternal relation in Laguna, an uncle who took her in from age ten, but not on the same footing as his own twin daughters. He taught Angie to cook for all of them and to have supper waiting when he got home. In a very close prefiguring of Tayo's blank time at the hospital in Los Angeles where "he could merge with the walls and ceiling, shimmering white, remote from everything,"¹⁴ Angie loses track of time in a white-walled sanitarium in Albuquerque to which she is sent, complaining of headaches, after witnessing a murder. The color of those white walls "blanked out her mind until she couldn't remember to eat or wake up" for months. The hardship of only half-belonging to a family and community and the

¹³ Silko, *Ceremony*, 190.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

ineffectualness of white medicine in the face of great trauma were clearly part of Silko's vision from a very early stage, as was the idea of an unconventional, mixed-race medicine man holding the key to the main character's cure. The setting and cause of the trauma that requires such intervention is very much up in the air during this early stage of drafting, as indicated by the substitution of Tayo (a young World War II veteran) for Angie (a young woman in the 1970s).

The list of painful events in Angie's life is staggering, and quite possibly was never meant to exist within one book. Silko refers to two novels, and to some extent they may be broken into a rural novel and an urban one. But the urban Angie has rural roots, and the rural Angie has an outward trajectory. Their timelines, evolving as they are under Silko's persistent experimentation and rewriting, are reconcilable. Rather than seek to untangle the two Angies, I speak of Angie as if she had one life, or at least one personhood. The unfinished and partial state of these drafts makes it more viable to read them as an accrual of versions and scenes of the development of a rich character than as the internally consistent description of a life's history and circumstances.

The first of Angie's wounds is the death of her mother. In two different versions of the same scene, Angie witnesses her mother's murder. In one version, her mother is stabbed by a John; in another, two black women storm into the apartment, wielding big knives and yelling that her mother is a “fucking no-good Indian whore.” Angie, just ten years old, runs six blocks to a service station to get help, waits until the ambulance and police are called, then runs home and kneels beside her mother in a growing pool of blood. The police arrive and render no first aid but speak words that haunt her for years: “Serves them right.” One way or the other, the stabbing was related to her mother's work as a prostitute, but her death was attributable to police racism and indifference.

Angie and her sister, Marie, are split up in the wake of their mother's death. Marie is adopted by a white family in Colorado while Angie is sent to Laguna to live with her uncle. After a girlhood comprised of equal parts heartbreaking half-acceptance by her family and cattle-working idyll, she falls in love with a cousin whose family will not allow him to marry a half-breed woman. She has a baby at sixteen with a bull-riding, alcoholic Navajo boyfriend whom she met while riding racehorses on the rodeo circuit, and who turns out to be married. Her child either dies at birth or is stolen and ritualistically murdered by Navajo witches. Angie and Marie are reunited in young adulthood the following year and live together in Gallup for a time, but then, in the course of her own career as a prostitute, Marie leaves a bar with some men and places one last, haunting payphone call to Angie before turning up dead a few days later, apparently though improbably having hanged herself with her own belt. Angie attributes Marie's mysterious death to Navajo witchery and cannot bring herself to finish high school after her sister dies. She moves to Albuquerque and supports herself a while by working at a bar and taking men home for money. Then she becomes pregnant again and goes home to Laguna, eventually to meet the proto-Betonie at Zuni.

In the second version of Angie's scene with the medicine man, she drives up not in an old Dodge but in a new pick-up truck, "shining chrome all around and yellow paint." She wears a velvet skirt and the turquoise and silver appear not as gifts but as rings that she wears. She is married now and has at least one surviving child. The medicine man observes her as she walks up. "The woman was young and had beautiful eyes, brown eyes. He wanted to like her, but he could also see that she was rich. Rich and beautiful. What more did she want?" He wishes to like this woman but feels prevented from doing so by her apparent wealth and the easy life it implies.

In this conflicted impulse, he voices the experiment that Silko makes in the two drafts. Is Angie worth healing if she is poor and alone? If she is rich and married? Angie admits that she has come to seek help with a love problem. She has been bewitched by a man—a white doctor. At first, the medicine man is impatient, and tells her, “People come to me only with illness, or danger, not with their love affairs.” His first impulse is to reject her problem as beneath his notice. Only slowly, as her story emerges, does he become willing to believe that it contains real darkness and witchery. His initial question, “What more did she want?” rings rich with irony when it is spoken about a character whose life has been marked by such an endless string of unjust and heart-wrenching losses. Yet even this terrible tally—the loss of a mother, a first love, a sister and a child—does not add up to enough to make her legible to others as a sufferer. Each of these losses has a small radius, taking place in the domestic space of a family. When Silko ultimately discards Angie and gives the planned healing ceremony to Tayo, she throws Angie over in favor of a maximally legible and worthy sufferer, the traumatized male veteran. Much of Tayo's appeal may lie in his geographic mobility, his involvement in the great national project of a world war; the many suffering miles walked in the Philippines and his preoccupation with the geographic reach of modern weaponry, some of which he has seen first hand. His is a vastly specialized trauma, in contrast to the small social and domestic spheres within which Angie suffers. Ultimately, Tayo's replacement of Angie provides a dispiriting answer indeed to the medicine man's question of whether womanly pain is worth caring about, and to the question of whether this pain can be universalized in the way in which Silko ultimately strives to universalize Tayo's.

A page of notes suggests that Silko initially planned for Angie to win over the medicine man. (See Figure 2.) In a large hand, Silko jots:

Healing Ceremony

cut into story

The suggestion (or imperative command to herself) that the Healing Ceremony will be cut into the story seems to imply the prose and verse structure that emerges in the novel, *Ceremony*. Silko further notes the purpose of the ceremony, or the structure, as “bringing two worlds together.” What are those two worlds? To the left of these notations, she has circled “A visit to the valley of the lavender she-elk” and drawn an arrow to the ceremony. To the right of the notations, she has boxed a list: “peyote / dreams / darkness / frenzy / witchcraft.” The two worlds may be those of the generative symbol of the she-elk and the witchery listed opposite one another here. The two worlds could also refer to the mythic world of traditional story in verse and the prose sections containing Tayo's (prosaic) existence. These worlds of verse and prose finally converge and interpenetrate in the final scenes of *Ceremony*, and, in their convergence, make Tayo whole and mark his reintegration into Pueblo community.

No draft of Angie's visit to the valley of the lavender she-elk exists in the archive, but this visit does occur in *Ceremony*. In that scene, Ts'eh and Tayo stand before the elk, “her belly swollen with new life as she leaped across the yellow sandrock, startled forever across the curve of cliff rock, ears flung back to catch a sound behind her.”¹⁵ Ts'eh tells Tayo to remember the elk, even though she is fading because no one has come since the war to repaint her in pale lavender clay. She promises, “As long as you remember, it is part of the story we have

¹⁵ Ibid., 214.

together.”¹⁶ Tayo will preserve the elk within himself, as a part of his story. It is not hard to imagine Angie as the page of notes projects her. Angie stands before the elk, also nearing the culmination of a healing ritual, and perhaps enjoying a special connection with the rock painting because her own belly is swollen with new life in defiance of all of the darkness, frenzy and witchcraft that has stalked her.

There is power in this vision of Angie and in this story. So much power that Silko did it the complement of taking its structure, its “Healing Ceremony / cut into story,” and giving it to Tayo's story. Silko rendered Angie's novel forever incompletable not when she sold its papers or when she decided that she had “failed to allow [Angie] to behave independently,” but when she removed from it its very skeleton and used it as the armature for Tayo's *Ceremony*.

III. No Ceremony for Helen Jean: Silko and Women

Perhaps as a result of long and tiresome questioning, Silko's stance regarding her decision to use a male main character in *Ceremony* is defensive.

After *Ceremony* was published, some readers remarked on my male protagonist and many male characters, something of a novelty for female novelists in the English language. My childhood was spend in the Pueblo matriarchy, where women owned property, and children belonged to the mother's clan. The story of returning World War II veterans could only be told from a male point of view, so I did it without hesitation. Besides, I thought, male novelists write about female protagonists all the time, so I will write about men.¹⁷

Silko's contention that a female novelist ought to be free to write of male protagonists rings deeply true, but does not explain the particular kinds of women missing from the novel. By gesturing to her childhood in the Pueblo matriarchy, Silko reminds readers of some of the

¹⁶ Ibid., 215.

¹⁷ Silko, preface to *Ceremony*, xviii.

strengths in *Ceremony's* cast of female characters. Ts'eh and the Night Swan, with their glorious, generative sexuality and their ability to exert supernatural influence on the lives and world around them, are drawing upon this tradition of feminine power. *Ceremony* has no lack of positive female figures, but it is lacking in richly drawn and sympathetic female characters who are merely human.

Paula Gunn Allen contends that there are two kinds of women and two kinds of men in *Ceremony*: one category who “belong to the earth spirit and live in harmony with her,” and a second group who are associated with “human mechanism” and serve the witchery, “essentially inimical to all that lives, creates and nurtures.”¹⁸ Allen is correct as far as *Ceremony's* women go: they exist in stable categories. There is no danger of the Night Swan or Ts'eh crossing over into the category inimical to life. Tayo, however, is fitted to be the novel's protagonist precisely because he is both a round and dynamic character whose final status is contested throughout the novel. Allen sees Tayo as always unconsciously knowing his place in the world and needing only to come to know it consciously, though she grants that, by cursing the rain, he became “a major element of the counter ceremony.”¹⁹ Helen Jaskoski also underplays both Tayo's complexity and peril when she asserts that Tayo “exemplifies the pastoral figure of the shepherd, the exemplar of a materially simple life sought in harmony with nature.”²⁰ I would argue that Tayo is far from exemplary at many moments in the novel. Tayo's allegiance and the reader's interpretation of him both hang in the balance to an even greater extent than Allen and Jaskoski imply.

¹⁸ Paula Gunn Allen, “The Feminine Landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*,” *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*: 118-126. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986): 118.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁰ Helen Jaskoski, “Thinking Women's Children and the Bomb,” *The Nightmare Considered: Critical Essays on Nuclear War Literature*, ed. Nancy Anisfeld: 159-76. (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press, 1991): 162.

Ceremony has two great, driving questions: the plot-based question of what will befall Tayo and the metatextual question of how the reader is to interpret him. Tayo's actions come to the reader most often by way of a close third-person narrative that provides access to Tayo's thoughts, feelings and decision-making. This mode of contact with Tayo is only occasionally calibrated through dialogue or by rare moments when the narrative enters the mind of a character like Harley or Helen Jean. Yet the reader knows Tayo to be considered ill, hallucinatory or crazy by others. He even admits to Betonie, "I've been sick, and half the time I don't know if I'm still crazy or not."²¹ Silko's text therefore leaves room for a stubbornly rationalistic reading of Tayo, especially his interactions with the earth spirit, Ts'eh. When Tayo lies down across a pool from her, sleeps, and dreams of making love to her, he wakes with his fists full of sand, feeling "shaky inside" and fearfully wondering, "What if there were no traces of her, no lines of sand pressed by her body, no delicate track of her blue shawl trailing into the weeds?"²² In this moment, even Tayo doubts Ts'eh's existence. He wants desperately to find her corporeal traces, because if he does not, the answer to his "What if?" question has devastating implications for his mental state. He finds the traces; he hears her calling to him, but Tayo's moment of uncertainty raises the possibility that these perceptions are no more trustworthy than the dream that left his hands clasping only sand.

Tayo spends the summer in healing communion with Ts'eh, but, seen from another angle, Tayo spends the summer sleeping in the hills instead of at the sheep ranch, companioned by a woman whom only he can see (and that only sometimes). His community, his family, and even the traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh, all begin to entertain questions about his sanity. As his

²¹ Silko, *Ceremony*, 115.

²² *Ibid.*, 206.

uncle Robert puts it to him, "They want you to come home. They are worried about you. They think you might need the doctors again."²³ This is a crucial juncture not just for Tayo, who must prepare himself for the consequences of others' assessments of his mental state, but for the reader, who must confront the knowledge that every available outside observer available finds Tayo's actions erratic and possibly pathological.

To the Veteran's Administration doctors, this apprehension is only confirmed when Tayo eludes their ministrations by lighting out across the desert on foot, hiding in irrigation ditches. This is, after all, the same young man who nearly gutted Emo with a broken bottle with what bystanders saw as little apparent provocation or warning. Readers might never wish, in final analysis, to align their interpretations of Tayo with those of Emo and the Veteran's Administration, but *Ceremony's* 1977 post-Vietnam War context makes it clear that Silko is toying with the cultural figure of the tripwire veteran. One may conclude along with Jaskoski and Buell that Tayo's summer in the hills ultimately makes him literally and generically pastoral, but much of the novel holds forth a darker reading. Tayo's affinity for undomestic space also makes him literary kin to the now-archetypal Rambo, the protagonist of David Morrell's 1972 novel, *First Blood*, which follows a former Vietnam prisoner of war on a flashback-fueled killing spree.

The Angie drafts provide a textual history for Tayo's resonances with Vietnam in the person of a character named Lighteagle, a Vietnam draftee whose grandfather dies while he is at war. Lighteagle confides in Angie, "He was going to teach me about the Sun Dance and visions. Just like he taught me to fish and to hunt." Angie understands that, with his grandfather's passing, "any chance of ever being close to the incur circle of the traditional way ~~had been stolen~~

²³ Ibid., 212.

was gone from him as it had been taken from her too. Lighteagle was tormented with blame."

This is an early working-out of Tayo's predicament, in which Josiah's death while he is at war in the Pacific Theatre cuts Tayo off from his most likely religious sponsor and initiator. (Edith Swan correctly deduces this from *Ceremony* by leaning on early 20th-century anthropologist Elsie Clews Parsons, who asserts the principle that in the acquisition of Laguna identity, "social identity passes through women" while "religious identity and access to ideology formally pass through men."²⁴ By making explicit the religious implications of the loss of Lighteagle's grandfather, these early drafts strongly endorse reading Tayo's loss of Josiah in the same manner.) "Lighteagle was tormented with the blame," not only because he was not with his grandfather when he died, but because his absence broke the chain of transmission of traditional knowledge. He concludes, "I guess it is my fault anyway. For not knowing all that stuff in the first place." Tayo resonates with the Vietnam era because he began as a Vietnam veteran, Lighteagle projected backwards onto an earlier time. In choosing Tayo as her novel's sufferer, Silko draws upon the cultural figure of a suffering Vietnam veteran whose pain has the potential to destabilize and jeopardize his entire community.

Is Tayo a peaceful shepherd or a murderous Rambo? Tayo sees himself with this double consciousness when, at the novel's climax, he considers attacking Emo with a screwdriver in order to save Harley. He knows that his act of violence cause him to fall into the witchery's plan, completing "the deadly ritual of the autumn solstice," and moreover knows that by it he would forever lose control of how his life's story was represented.

He would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud; and the Army doctors would say that the indications of this end had been there all along, since his release from the mental ward at the Veterans' Hospital in

²⁴ Edith Swan, "Laguna Symbolic Geography in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12 no. 3 (Summer 1988): 235-6.

Los Angeles.²⁵

The stereotypes of the drunk Indian, the violent veteran and the mental patient stand open to receive and interpret him. The heroic intentions of his violence would disappear into them without a trace. Clearly Tayo is thinking of how others will see him, but the phrase, “he would have been... a drunk Indian war veteran” shows that he locates not just his reputation but his actual identity in the stories that are told about him. In pushing down the temptation towards violence, Tayo wins the right to create himself through story, which he does before the elders in the kiva. He returns home secure in the knowledge of Ts'eh's true nature, knowing that “she had always loved him, she had never left him; she had always been there.”²⁶ The elders accept his interpretation, knowing he saw not a corporeal woman or a mad hallucination, but a powerful and benevolent spiritual being, and the verse and narrative prose portions of *Ceremony* briefly converge:

They started crying
the old men started crying
“A'moo'ooh! A'moo'ooh!”
You have seen her
We will be blessed
again

27

The novel thus resolves its two main questions with Tayo surviving to be embraced by his community, and with the narrative thoroughly endorsing the reading of Tayo as mentally and spiritually sound.

The rich indeterminacy of Tayo's characterization stands in stark contrast with that of Helen Jean, one of the novel's few non-mythic women. The bare outlines of Helen Jean's life

²⁵ Silko, *Ceremony*, 235

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

point to a woman who should be worthy of readerly engagement and sympathy. Armed with typing skills, professional ambition, and dreams of supporting her younger sisters, she moves to Gallup but is quickly disillusioned when she can only find work as a janitor. Soon even that work comes with a manager who sexually exploits her, and she quits the job and turns to hanging around the bar when the veterans' disability checks come in, sleeping with men and asking them to help her out with a few dollars. During the course of a year, she maintains for her roommates the illusion that she leaves each morning for work as a secretary. The dissimulation is cowardly and dishonest, but it is also a daily enactment of the distance between the life that her desires and skills fit her for and the life that Gallup's racist and sexist horizons circumscribe for her. So why does the novel handle her with such savage finality?

The Helen Jean section comes just before Tayo's first meeting with Ts'eh, setting up the two characters as foils for one another and slotting them neatly into that binary that Paula Gunn Allen names: Ts'eh belongs to the earth spirit, while Helen Jean serves the witchery. There is no room for Helen Jean to be of dual nature, or to be, like Tayo, a character who is offered a choice of whether to belong to the earth or the witchery. As Tayo sizes up Helen Jean, taking in her permanent, her "eyelashes... stiff with mascara" and the lipstick she keeps reaching for to make "her lips...thick and red," he concludes, "She wasn't that much older than they were."²⁸ Hair, dress, and makeup are fraught cultural markers for the women in *Ceremony*. Just a few pages prior, Helen Jean had thought of the women dancing in the bars in Gallup and compared their hair to her own. "Her hair was cut short and was tightly curled. It needed to be washed, but at least it wasn't long or straight."²⁹ Helen Jean's internalized racism is such that her sense of self-

²⁸ Ibid., 145.

²⁹ Ibid., 154.

worth is based upon being unlike other Indian women. Her preference for curly permanent waves becomes a symbol of her betrayal of her native identity. She is a woman lost to her own community because, like Tayo's mother a generation before (and also through contact with white missionary types), she has acceded to the notion that to do her lipstick and her hair “perfectly” is to do them “exactly like the white girls.”³⁰

Tayo's first impression of Ts'eh is a near echo of his observation that Helen Jean “wasn't much older than they were.”³¹ After taking in Ts'eh's yellow skirt and pale buckskin moccasins, he observes: “She wasn't much older than he was, but she wore her hair long, like the old women did, pinned back in a knot.”³² The echo reinforces a favorable opinion of Ts'eh at Helen Jean's expense. *Ceremony's* endorsement of Ts'eh's traditional hairstyle, dress and life comes at the expense of seeing Helen Jean as redeemable.

Despite the fact that Helen Jean, like Tayo, is able to stand outside the self-aggrandizing performance of war stories by the Indian veterans and see them as a pathetic attempt to recall a time when “they had been treated first class,” Helen Jean and Tayo regard each other with wariness.³³ With instincts sharpened by violent encounters with other men, Helen Jean sees Tayo, “the quiet one” whom Harley and Leroy picked up along the highway, as potentially dangerous. Her decision to ditch Harley and Leroy and leave the bar with the Mexican man, which Tayo reads as coy and faithless, is actually a calculated decision to put as much distance as possible between herself and the ominously silent Indian veteran who “acted funny.”³⁴ Tayo, for his part, is immediately nauseated by Helen Jean's heavy, rose-scented perfume and the

³⁰ Ibid., 63.

³¹ Ibid., 145.

³² Ibid., 164.

³³ Ibid., 153.

³⁴ Ibid., 149-50.

insincerity of her flirtation with Leroy, as she rubs her leg against him but “star[es] out the window while she did it, as if her mind were somewhere else.”³⁵ He is disturbed by this detachment, as well as by the perfume and lipstick and artifice of her appearance, which both he and the novel treat as reliable markers of corruption.

IV. Angie's Story

Given the narrative hostility towards Helen Jean, it is a surprise that the Angie drafts on which Silko worked just before *Ceremony* focus on a Native American woman living very similarly to Helen Jean, and that this woman is well-drawn and sympathetic. Silko was at this early phase of her career both interested in and capable of sensitively illuminating the double-binds and compromises of existing while female. Through it all, Silko's description of Angie's life in Albuquerque has a languid and sensual quality, not a degraded one.

She slept from 6, when the men usually left, until 2 o'clock, when the afternoon Santa Fe Chief went north. She always woke up then, and if she felt like it, she would drag out the long galvanized tin tub—the Mexican bath tub of her youth—and start filling it with hot water from the little sink. She bought perfumed bath salts in expensive flower-covered tins, and she lathered her hair in perfumed soap. She had soft thick towels with colored bright designs on them. It was like Marie always said, cheap rent and plenty of men [and] you could enjoy a lot of nice things.

Despite Angie's blithe tone, it is not as if Angie's story wholeheartedly endorses prostitution as an occupation: Angie's older sister, Marie, about whom she reminisces here, disappeared and died by foul play while living a similar life. But this is no tragic, fallen-woman tale. Silko doesn't shy away from showing Angie enjoying the consolations of this dangerous but self-chosen path. Perhaps she is astray, and “nice things” are nothing from which to make a life, but

³⁵ Ibid., 144.

there is no sense that Angie is irredeemably lost to herself: the “Mexican bath-tub of her youth” is a particularly poignant reminder of her rural up-bringing that shows she is not entirely disconnected from her past and her identity while living in the city.

Angie has come here to live Rocky's dream “to get away from the reservation... to make something of himself. In a city somewhere.”³⁶ In *Ceremony*, the cities can never fulfill this promise. From his vantage in the heights above Gallup, Betonie looks down and tells Tayo, “They are down there. Ones like your brother. They are down there.”³⁷

Ceremony cannot come any closer to a vision of Indian life in the city than such distant and often deterministic glimpses. By contrast, in the fine-grained attentions of the Angie drafts, Angie's ability to shape her own life is often represented in the details of her living space. She rents the loft above a hide warehouse near the railroad tracks after being unable to bear the thought of living in a building with “apartments side by side, thin walls, a gold couch and arm chair” and music drifting in from a neighbor's stereo. If the city was to be like this, she realized, “she might not be able to stay.” The space she finds in the warehouse district makes it possible for her to live in the city. On the iron stairs outside her loft she can sit and look east over the tracks to the Sandia mountains, “hazy blue in the afternoon sun.” She fills the space with potted geraniums, and looks up through the many industrial, rectangular windows at the stars, thus finding a way to be connected to both earth and sky.

That view of the sky helps her place her own life in the context of the lives of other women she has known, making common-feeling out of her solitude.

Occasionally she would wake up and lay on the mattress and look up at the sky through the rows of little square windows and she would realize that Marie had lived this way too, and that her mother had lived something like this, except that she had been older and had

³⁶ Ibid., 121

³⁷ Ibid.

them to look after.

As the rows of square windows assemble a vision of the night sky, Angie seeks to assemble a shared vision of female experience from the glimpses of the separate lives of women she has known. By *Ceremony's* worldview, Angie's sky-gazing also identifies her as a person looking in the right place for direction and solace. During his healing journey, Ts'eh and Betonie teach Tayo to look up at the sky for guidance, and he does so at key moments before making love to Ts'eh and before eluding Emo and the Veterans' Administration doctors.

Moments like Angie's bathing scene or her star-watching, along with other details of her Albuquerque life, undo one of the binaries familiar to readers of *Ceremony*: the divide between the rural and the urban. Cities in *Ceremony* are corrupt and draw the corrupt to them.³⁸ They are the site of the wild furlough exploits of the soldiers; the dead-eyed crowd of alcoholics outside the bars in Gallup and the homeless community living in squalor beneath the bridge. At the Albuquerque Indian School, Rocky learned to hate the old ways and Tayo's mother learned to be ashamed of herself.³⁹ The white-walled veteran's hospital in Los Angeles is one of the book's greatest symbols for the destructive anonymity of cities. When Emo kills Pinkie and leaves the reservation for California—presumably also for Los Angeles—Tayo's reaction is to repeat softly: “California... that's a good place for him.”⁴⁰ That man and that place belong together: it's the greatest insult Tayo could utter about either of them.

³⁸ Paula Gunn Allen and Patricia Clark Smith attempt to rehabilitate *Ceremony's* depiction Gallup by arguing that the description of a child playing amidst cigarette butts and scavenging used chewing gum on a barroom floor is “acute evocatio[n] of New Mexico landscape” that notices and treasures with “careful regard” the “things and creatures that others would call trash.” The homeless and undernourished child of an alcoholic prostitute is a figure of such pathos that it is hard to give the scene such a positive spin.

Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Gunn Allen, “Earthly Relations, Carnal Knowledge: Southwestern American Indian Women Writers and Landscape” in *The Desert is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, ed. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, 174-196 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987): 193.

³⁹ Silko, *Ceremony*, 47, 63.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

Rather than representing a space of deculturation or a space belonging to the witchery, Angie's Albuquerque is a complex meeting-place for peoples. The draft has expansive investments in multi-ethnic experience. Black characters appear on the periphery; white people occasionally appear, but the main interactions are inter-tribal relations between Pueblos and Navajos; the negotiations of urban and reservation Indian life, and possibilities of intercourse or mobility between Indian and Chicano/a worlds. While traces of these interests survive into *Ceremony* in characters like Betonie and the Night Swan, *Ceremony's* main plot conforms largely to the Indian/white binary of half-breed literature. When scholars speak of Tayo in this literary context, they frequently flatten his ambiguous paternity in order to call him half-white.⁴¹ In fact, though Tayo's mother "went with white men" (and with men of all colors), the Night Swan is attracted to him by his "Mexican eyes."⁴² Tayo's unknown paternity makes his heritage a contested cypher. He is sometimes claimed painfully, as when the men on the white road crew see him as a child and "elbo[w] each other and win[k]," congratulating themselves on a half-white by-blow.⁴³ However, his ambiguous paternity also serves as a means of connecting him with Betonie and the Night Swan, who find gentler and more welcoming ways to name him as kin. Despite this trace of welcome, *Ceremony* is structured as what William Bevis calls a "homing in" story, and there is only one possible home for Tayo.⁴⁴ The novel never holds out a chance of Tayo permanently entering the white or Chicano world, so his quest for belonging is

⁴¹ See for example Thomas E. Benediktsson, "The reawakening of the gods: realism and the supernatural in Silko and Hulme," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 33, no. 2 (1992): 121-131; Catherine Rainwater, "The Semiotics of Dwelling in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: A Casebook* (2002): 117-38 and Matthew Teorey, "Spinning a Bigendered Identity in Silko's *Ceremony* and Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 47, no. 1 (2010): 1-20.

⁴² Silko, *Ceremony*, 118, 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁴ William Bevis, "Native American Novels: Homing In," in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat: 580-620. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

always a question of how fully he can enter the Pueblo one.

The Angie story uses the instability of Angie's racial categorization to explore the fluid meeting place of culture, ethnicity and identity in ways that are sometimes more nuanced and multivalenced than the plea for acceptance of mixed-race Indians that emerges in *Ceremony*. Soon after moving to Albuquerque, Angie tries to socialize with Indians who have spent more time in the city. Being around them makes her self-conscious about her faded jeans, calico shirt and worn tennis shoes. This clothing marks her as having recently arrived from the reservation, while they dress to distance themselves from reservation Indians.

The women... liked Western style clothes and elaborate hair does. The men liked cowboy boots and sport coats; they didn't wear Western shirts because that's what reservation Navajo men wore, the ones who could hardly speak English, and these men did not want to be mistaken for them. They all wore silver and turquoise bolo ties over their white shirts and outside of their sport coats. Jo Ann's husband, Eddie, was showing off his tailored western slacks. Angelina knew that it was o.k. to wear those because it's what all the rich white ranchers and Texas rodeo stars wore, and no poor Navajo ever owned a pair of those.

Angie believes that their self-expression (like Helen Jean's in *Ceremony*) emerges from distaste or hatred for other Indians. There is no seeking to pass for white here, but the Albuquerque Indians dress like "rich white ranchers and Texas rodeo stars," choosing to assert themselves by projecting the image of the culture that represents the theft of tribal lands instead of the ones from which the land was stolen as a way to mark themselves as unmistakably urban, educated and middle-class.

This party scene from inside a thriving community of happily acculturated Indians plays interestingly with the parameters of half-breed literature. Patricia Riley asserts that "acculturated full-bloods can also qualify for a kind of mixed status" and quotes Paula Gunn Allen, who says that "The breed (whether by parentage or acculturation to non-Indian society) is an Indian who is

not an Indian." Allen describes a classic tragic-mulatto scenario in which the breeds "are a bit of both worlds, and the consciousness of this makes them seem alien to traditional Indians while making them feel alien among whites."⁴⁵ Angie's story complicates this trope when it places Angie, the traditional Indian, in a room full of acculturated Indians (many of them more full-blooded than she) and it is she who is left alienated and self-conscious, even as she makes a withering reading of their fashion choices. Angie removes herself from this crowd, but not from Albuquerque. She believes some other path is possible, even in the city.

For a time it seems possible that this other life for Angie will exist in a multi-ethnic rather than an Indian context. Angie's most important lover is a Chicano man named Viviano. His wooing takes a serious turn when he asks her if she knows she is beautiful and she answers, "Sometimes I think so. But it depends. There are people who don't like to see mixed bloods." To this, he offers, "I thought you were chicana. Until I heard you talk. ~~You look like us except~~²² ~~he hesitated,~~ "you are not quite "right". He looked into her eyes + smiled—"You're an Indian all right." Silko's in-line editing softens Viviano's initial comment, but both versions suggest that Angie's voice, either her reservation accent or her lack of a Chicana one, reveals her as a non-Chicana. Otherwise, she might pass. Indeed, Viviano's observation shows that Angie is a character who is to some extent always passing, whether it be by staying silent and allowing herself to be taken for Chicana or by asserting herself as linguistically or culturally Indian.

Viviano is not the first to make the observation or to offer her lack of Indian appearance as a back-handed compliment. "You don't look like an Indian," her boss, Primo, says when he hires her as a bartender. Angie is insulted but "did not bother to answer," consoling herself with the thought, "All he was, she knew, was a mixed blood Indian raised in Spanish ways." This

⁴⁵ Patricia Riley, "The Mixed Blood Writer as Interpreter and Mythmaker," in *Mixed Race Literature* ed. Jonathan Brennan: 57-69 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002): 59.

sentence was initially drafted to read: "All a chicano was, she knew, was a mixed blood Indian raised in Spanish ways." Angie senses Primo holding Indians below Chicanos in his mental hierarchy and displays a hostile desire to take Primo down a peg by asserting that "all he was... was a mixed blood Indian." As the story unfolds, Primo becomes a dependable friend to Angie, and her initial aspersion about Primo being a mixed-blood Indian becomes a foreshadowing of the connection that the two enjoy. As the bar endures a plague of graduate students, Primo tells old stories of people who don't cut their hair and suffer infestations of black widow spiders. Angie "always smiled at Primo's stories" because "they reminded her of the stories she'd heard all her life about children who touch prayer sticks at the shrines and children who kill toads and frogs." Though Angie and Primo assert different racial, ethnic and cultural identities, the common thread of their stories which use the natural world as a guide to right living serve as a marker of true—perhaps even truer—kinship.

If a breed is an Indian who is, for one reason or another, not an Indian, then Angie's story also presents at least one other type of half-breed: a Chicano who is not a Chicano. Viviano is first introduced (in one version of this narrative) as one in an interchangeable series of lovers who fit into stable ethnic categories: "a homosexual Navajo" and "the big Pawnee" are replaced when she "found a big Chicano." But this identity is destabilized by Angie's assertions about Chicanos, mixed-blood Indians, and Spanish ways, as well as by measure of acculturation. Viviano has rural roots—an uncle with a ranch north of Ojo del Padre—but he "was writing his doctoral dissertation on the economic impact of the white man on rural Chicanos in New Mexico" and his work was supported by a National Science Foundation grant. At the bar where Angie works, Primo and the regulars stare at him, making him "uncomfortable to be a college chicano" drinking with other graduate students. The students are pretentiously slumming it in

the working-class bar, "always watching from the corner of their eyes, Angelina was never sure for what, but maybe it was to see if their earthy realism was being appreciated at the table across from them." Viviano stands across a class and educational divide now from the other Chicanos. Through his research, has set himself up in the historically Anglo role of sociological or anthropological observer of the rural community. In a different iteration, Viviano is married to a white woman and employed by the City Hall in an alcoholic counseling program. At night he weeps in Angie's bed because "he was a tormented man living a life he believed he should live, but not his life." In trying out these different lives for Viviano, the Angie drafts explore the experience of the alienated Chicano alongside that of the alienated Indian.

With Viviano as with Primo, stories and traditional beliefs mediate the Indian-Chicano interaction. On the first night that Angie took Viviano home with her after her shift, they walk near the zoo, and she tells him, "They keep a mountain lion in there." She says that the lion doesn't sleep because it is a captive and implies that she feels she must do something about it. He is taken aback and asks her why she thinks about herself as if she is special. Why is she personally involved by the mountain lion's torment? Then he laughs at her when she says, "It is a sacred animal. I believe that," and he bitterly mocks the idea of sacred mountains. Later he apologizes. His willingness to stop setting himself against her beliefs and to admit, "I don't know anything about it," is why she takes him to bed, recognizing in him another seeker from the margins. In the interactions Angie has with Primo and Viviano, the Angie drafts portray a multi-ethnic Southwest that moves on a Chicana-Native American axis that will become more characteristic of Silko's later work like *Almanac of the Dead*.

V. Uses of Archival Knowledge

What are we to do with the knowledge that Tayo was once a woman? That *Ceremony* held but abandoned considerable investments in Chicana identity, in nuanced exploration of urban life and shades of acculturation? By outlining the trajectory of a composition process, drafts can be indicative of important variables in a finished work. By showing what an author changed, they suggest choices to examine and place interpretive pressure upon. The Angie drafts show that (despite Silko's efforts to deflect it), considerable pressure can be brought to bear upon the choice of a male protagonist for a novel and upon the shallowness of its representation of human women, as well as upon the choice of a 1940s setting, and even on the rural setting and the novel's form.⁴⁶

Regional literature is often synonymous with the provincial and rural. *Ceremony* is easily considered inextricable from its rural setting because it is famed for its use of the landscape not just as a setting but as a volitional entity.⁴⁷ Edith Swan's detailed and oft-cited "Laguna Symbolic Geography" unfolds the rich symbolic significance of colors, spiritual figures, animal symbols and their associated directions and mountains in order to show how Tayo is brought home to his social and spiritual place in Laguna through relationships with these places and figures. Tayo's journey has particular meaning in this locale and within this Laguna world view, but the vast differences in the settings and protagonists that Silko tried out as she worked on this novel suggest that the choice of Laguna as setting (and all of the symbolic geography that flowed from that choice) was far from inevitable.

⁴⁶ Because Silko and Tayo are both of mixed race ancestry, Tayo is frequently identified explicitly or implicitly as "the novelist's alter ego" (Swan, *Laguna Symbolic Geography*, 229). Silko's revision away from Angie and toward Tayo marks a trend away from such a simple correlation, if gender and generational difference did not already do so.

⁴⁷ See for example Bruce Franks, "Consciousness of Landscape in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," *The Image of Nature in Literature, the Media and Society*, ed. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan: 337-45. (Pueblo: University of Southern Colorado Press, 1993).

By reminding us that she was homesick in Ketchikan, Alaska when she began work on the book, Silko casts its composition process not as writing to the center (or population centers) of the nation from the Southwestern provinces but as one of writing herself home to “the Southwest land of sandstone mesas, blue sky, and sun.”⁴⁸ Her situation in Alaska (farther from Laguna than James Joyce was from Dublin when he wrote *Ulysses*) should caution against seeing *Ceremony*'s setting as a natural or inevitable outgrowth of Silko's birthplace, and the entanglement of *Ceremony*'s roots, as revealed in the Angie drafts, with the cities of Gallup and Albuquerque likewise emphasizes *Ceremony*'s rural, reservation setting as one that Silko chose deliberately and indeed one towards which the work needed to be revised.

It can likewise be tempting to see *Ceremony*'s form as inevitable to the novel. For Michelle Satterlee, “situating *Ceremony* in a discourse of trauma affords the opportunity to examine the formal strategies Silko employs to represent traumatic memory.”⁴⁹ These strategies include Silko's use of flashback, which Satterlee calls “narrative dissociation,” and the “fragmented narrative with multi-genres and multiple plot lines.”⁵⁰ Satterlee's description of flashbacks as “narrative dissociation” further medicalizes literary terminology—as if the novel's form results from the narrative manifesting the symptoms of the trauma it depicts.⁵¹ Archival evidence challenges such a conclusion by suggesting that its dissociation—especially the intercut use of multiple genres—is partially a vestige of composition, with characters and plot-lines emerging from the Harley story or the Angie drafts being conserved in *Ceremony*. In either

⁴⁸ Silko, preface to *Ceremony*, xv.

⁴⁹ Michelle Satterlee, “Landscape Imagery and Memory in the Narrative of Trauma: A Closer Look at Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 80.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵¹ The DSM-IV describes dissociative symptoms as “a disruption in the usually integrated functions of consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment” (532). The DSM-5 adds disruption in emotion, body representation, motor control and behavior and notes that such symptoms are frequently associated with trauma.

event, it is clear that *Ceremony's* multi-stream drafting process has contributed to the text's eventual, successful mimicry of the formal language of trauma.

Trauma must remain an important part of the conversation about *Ceremony*, particularly the common experiences shared across different types of trauma, since, as the Angie drafts make it possible to argue, *Ceremony* was a novel about healing from trauma before it became a novel about war. Veterans' reintegration and post-traumatic stress disorder or combat fatigue are important lenses through which to read *Ceremony* in its historical setting, its initial moment of publication, and its present-day context, but we should also recall Angie, Marie, and their mother as we have these conversations. Veterans and post-traumatic stress disorder are intensely linked in the public mind, but the lost women of *Ceremony's* Angie drafts can remind us that, though many veterans suffer from PTSD, the majority of PTSD sufferers are not veterans: they are women. A veteran's chances of coming home from Operation Iraqi Freedom with the disorder were around 14%, but just living as a female in America puts one in the path of so much physical and sexual trauma that women's lifetime incidence of PTSD is 9.7%.⁵² These numbers would assuredly only grow more alarming if they were broken down along racial or socio-economic lines to isolate women of a similar background to Angie's. There is more than trauma enough in women's lives to carry off a story about trauma and healing.

Indeed, there is trauma enough in women's lives in *Ceremony* to tell such a story, but, despite Helen Jean's sympathetic history as a victim of workplace discrimination, sexual exploitation, and her essentially accidental descent into prostitution, Helen Jean's curls and her thick, red lips are signs enough for Tayo to invite readers to see her as the witchery's woman.

⁵² A 2008 RAND Corporation study placed the percentage of Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans then suffering from PTSD at 13.8%. The US National Comorbidity Survey Replication conducted between 2001 and 2002 put the lifetime prevalence of PTSD for men at 3.5% and for women at 9.7%.

Perhaps the vision of Angie, the unrepentant, sensualist former prostitute, so terribly misread by Betonie as having it all and deserving no healing, can invite us to re-see Helen Jean, to imagine room for her within the novel's healing ceremony and to reach for a strain of meaning in *Ceremony* lamenting how one type of suffering *should* breed empathy for another, but often fails to do so.

This strain of meaning can in turn inform our readings of the nuclear and geopolitical in *Ceremony*, highlighting as it does the novel's near-misses of empathy as key moments for measuring Tayo's affliction and recovery. The first of these occurs very early in the novel when Tayo, newly released from the veteran's hospital, collapses in a Los Angeles train depot and is bent over by a Japanese-American mother and child. Their natural expression of human concern leaves him reeling and asking, "Those people. I thought they locked them up" (16). The depot man's response, "Oh, that was some years back. Right after Pearl Harbor," obliquely evokes one of the classic prophylactics to empathy offered in postwar discourse about the atomic bomb, while Tayo, himself a survivor of the Bataan Death March, embodies the other. (Recall William Laurence telling the *New York Times* readership that he felt no sympathy for the "poor devils about to die" in Nagasaki when he thought "of Pearl Harbor and of the Death March on Bataan.") After all he has suffered, hatred and fear are lodged within Tayo like an illness (perhaps as they are lodged in the nation like an illness). He vomits again and again into a trashcan, not trying to rid himself of this hatred and fear, but trying consciously to "vomit that image from his head" of "the face of the little boy, looking back at him, smiling." The little boy reminds him of Rocky in their shared boyhood, but Tayo resists that moment of familial identification and the gravitational pull of his dawning knowledge that this boy and his compassionate mother have also suffered as a result of the war that wounded him and killed

Rocky.

If Tayo's physical aversion seems extreme, consider that even the most strident atomic bomb apologists also shrink from confronting this figure of the Japanese child in atomic discourse. During the 1994 controversy over the Smithsonian exhibit around the Enola Gay, critics of the exhibit demanded both an expanded and de-problematized treatment of the decision to drop the bomb *and* the removal of artifacts from Ground Zero that they deemed likely to arouse inappropriate sympathy for the bombed. Among these artifacts was a lunchbox formerly containing sweet green peas and polished rice, the "carbonized remains" of which spoke eloquently of fate of the child who had been carrying it.⁵³ This simultaneous thrust towards arguments for justification and the muting of evidence of the consequences of the bombing indicates just how unfrontable that child is, how devastating to argument is her implied incineration. Dead and suffering children and the artifacts which symbolically evoke them have a way of dodging the much-debated casualty figures, arguments, and barriers to sympathy and striking at the heart.

So the child in the train-station, a fellow victim of internment, struck at Tayo's heart, though he tried to push the moment of empathy away, as he and his fellow soldiers later tried to deny the truth of his vision that placed Josiah amongst the prisoners of war massacred by his unit. When Tayo emerges from his healing ceremony, on the other hand, his vision leaps across space and time to bring him into expansive sympathy with people devoured "in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter."⁵⁴ Tayo's newfound ability to see

⁵³ Mike Wallace, "The Battle of the Enola Gay," in *Hiroshima's Shadow*, ed. Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1998): 317-37, p. 322.

⁵⁴ Silko, *Ceremony*, 228

his own suffering as one part of the destroyers' great plan, a part which links him to other sufferers across the globe, is the achievement of a generous capacity for vision that marks both his healing and his full maturation. This maturity underlies his ability to choose non-violence instead of attacking Emo just a few hours later.

Tayo's decision not to attack Emo is not merely a metaphor for the preferability of choosing peace over war. Peace and war are called up in this moment because the nuclear vision that emerges in *Ceremony* is, rather, an interpersonal geopolitics. Though I have drawn examples here from relations between men and women and former combatants both personal and military, Silko's relentlessly intersectional, capacious vision deploys similar moments of near-empathy and empathy fended off in discussions of various characters' treatments of animals, or in the stirring Tayo feels along his spine when he hears Harley laughing about the thirty sheep and the good sheepdog who died under his care. Tayo was chilled because his friend scoffed at the commercial value of the sheep and "didn't seem to feel anything at all."⁵⁵ Tayo's quest in *Ceremony* is to find a way to feel without being incapacitated by it, to learn to heed rather than shout down those moments when human experiences come near converging and humanity intrudes upon habitual wartime stances of inhumanity. The central motive of the work, and indeed of nuclear literature in both its sublime and pastoral veins, might be described in the same way.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 22.

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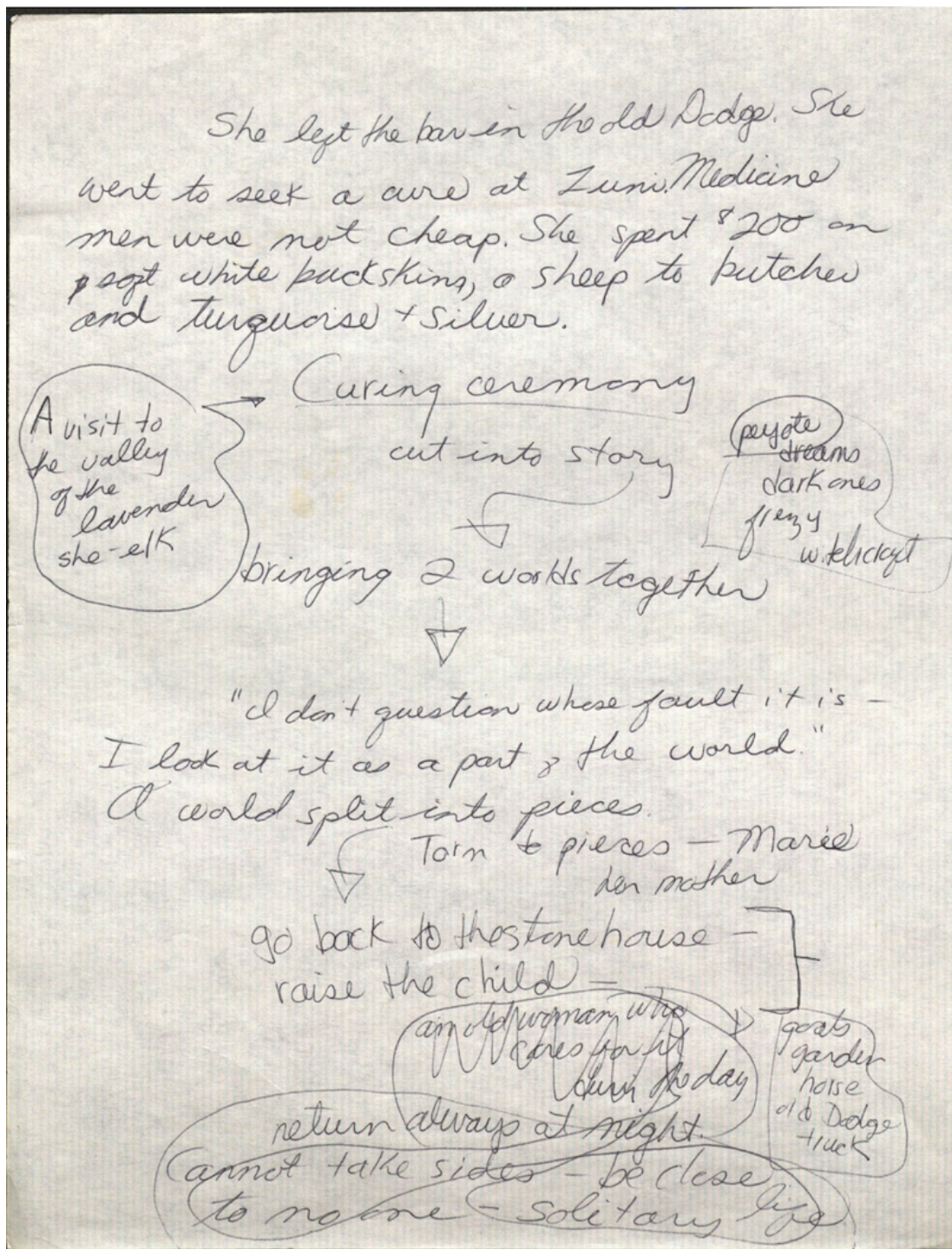


Figure 2. Notes for Angie's Ceremony. Untitled Work. Leslie Marmon Silko Papers, Box 2. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT.

CONCLUSION

Background Radiation

The bomb has disappointed the sublime expectations of 1945: it has of its own power neither destroyed the earth nor proved a wonderful device for cementing the bonds of friendship among its peoples. Nor has it provided the political will for such friendships on the scale of international relations. The literature of the nuclear pastoral dwells not in this expectation but in the everyday work of creating those bonds of friendship and earth-citizenship that the bomb alone has no technological, aesthetic or moral power to fuse. I have sought in my first chapter to offer a corrective to the scholarly tendency to replicate rather than examine the claims of the nuclear sublime, and to the tendency to presume the anti-nuclear thrust and effect of sublime writings merely because their rhetoric soars. My attempt to counter these notions has been twofold. I look at sublime representations of the bomb dating from earlier moments and evincing considerably more enthusiasm for the weapon than nuclear critics have hitherto acknowledged, and I also look at unsublime texts that engage in the anti-nuclear rhetoric so often attributed to their sublime cousins. Heresy's *Hiroshima*, with its avoidance of the sublime register for describing the bomb's impact, and Shute's *On the Beach* have far more credible résumés for

moving public opinion and continuing to influence it than do the often ahistorical and esoteric works that nuclear critics have hitherto endorsed as properly sublime.

My second chapter pursues unsublime nuclear texts by positing the nuclear pastoral as a second significant category of nuclear literature. I take the nuclear pastoral as a term for those texts which create worlds in which the bomb may be a powerful external force but is not the singular actor of history. They may employ episodic structures, green settings, explication of complex social and political problems and systems through encounters with bucolic lives and their wise livers; they call for return to pastoral values of attributing central importance to essentials in life—food, drink, love, childbirth, unalienated labor, ethical care for land, and (through adherence to these values) living and dying well.

My reception history of both the film and novel *On the Beach* shows that viewers and readers in the 1950s noted the works' disinterest in apocalyptic spectacle but found the episodic structure and earthy values to be no barrier to their experiencing its profound political and personal impact. The nuclear pastoral, then, is not just a neglected counter-discourse to the nuclear sublime; it is perhaps *the* important mode of anti-nuclear discourse. For Shute and Brackett, the important actions are taken not by bomb-makers or bomb-droppers but by ordinary persons seeking and then living out their values in the bomb's shadow.

Working in the decades before and after Shute and Brackett, Toomer and Silko produce nuclear literature that also decenters the bomb and focuses instead on fine-grained, everyday human responses to it. Each of them provides an emplaced Southwestern vision that nonetheless has global import. Toomer believes that the preciousness of arable land in the arid landscape of New Mexico, and the necessity of good neighbors alongside whom to till it produces a way of

life that can enable the radical transformations in human hearts—transformations that he sees as necessary to the project of global peace. Silko’s novel, *Ceremony*, is one that resists the impulse of sublime nuclear literature to set the bomb apart by her insistence upon contextualizing it with other kyo things, including imperialist, colonial, racialized and ecocidal violence of all sorts. By dint of careful attention to Toomer and Silko’s archives, I chart the emergence of these nuclear visions from the contexts of each author’s wider work and writing processes. This scholarly project opens the question of how the sweeping and sometimes dangerously singularizing language of literary criticism can be tamed and made patiently attentive to material archival histories of texts that evolve and accrete, containing, like the words of Silko’s medicine man Ku’oosh, the story of their own making. Fragments in these archives become not emblems of an atom bomb’s shattering potential but of displacements of temporality. Untangling vision from revision in the *Drama of the Southwest* or the Angie drafts is difficult or impossible, and therefore these texts invite a non-teleological mode of reading that offers careful attention to the many moments that make a literary world: a pastoral reading practice for a nuclear age.

Nearly seventy years after the invention and first use of the atomic bomb, the gardening and party-giving under the shadow of the bomb that nuclear writers penned as acts of pastoral defiance in the 1940s are our everyday. The pastoral is often central to nuclear discourse, whereas the sublime ought to be seen not as the hegemonic genre of all things nuclear but as one rhetorical strategy among others, and one that wanes in significance as awe and terror become more difficult to gin up in response to the bombs and missiles with which we have lived for so long. There is no need to lament the passing of the nuclear sublime as the passing of an age of better awareness of our peril. The nuclear has receded into the background of cultural concern,

and yet is always with us, like the background radiation from tests, accidents and war. This is not a lamentable lack of political consciousness so much as a testimony to human adaptability: it is our blessing and our curse that we can live with anything, and it is the literature of the nuclear pastoral that has striven to teach us how.