To: Union University Faculty

From: Sam Myatt, President  
       Faculty Forum

You are invited to participate in the Faculty Forum, which serves as YOUR united voice to the Administration of Union University.

The Forum serves as an advisory body to the Administration. Input from the Forum to the Academic Vice-President receives high priority in many areas:

1) faculty salary parity and competitiveness;
2) faculty work load;
3) schedules of classes and academic deadlines;
4) student registration procedures;
5) speakers for Staley and Jones lectures;
6) faculty workshop programs;
7) etc.

The Staley lecturer for Fall, 1993, will be Dr. William Hendricks, Director of Graduate Studies, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY. The Jones lecturer for Spring, 1994, has not yet been determined. If you have suggestions, please contact Dr. David McClune, Vice-President, Faculty Forum. Your input can improve the quality of our programming.

When the faculty speaks as one voice, that voice is a loud and strong voice clearly heard. You have an opportunity to improve the quality of the academic life of Union University.

Our meetings usually are held on the same dates and times (10:00 a.m. Mondays and Fridays) as the Student Government meetings. The exact dates and times will be published later. Possible programs this Fall will include panel discussions with Mr. Gary Carter, Vice-President for Business Affairs at Union; and with Mr. John Burleson, Union University attorney. One of the important topics for Fall will be a discussion of the UCLA faculty study conducted last year.

Your officers of the Forum for the 1993-1994 academic year are:
   Sam Myatt, President
   David McClune, Vice-President
   Steve Baker, Secretary
   Ernie Pinson, JUFF Editor.

We look forward to a productive year and trust you will become an active member of the Faculty Forum!
DICK ROGERS:
A DEDICATION
Little known to most
Of us Dick Rogers spent
Many secret, dedicated, unpaid,
Late night hours alone in the Union
Library working after all others had left.
His positive attitude in the face of physical
And spiritual adversity created for us all
A moment, intangible though it be,
That is very real. Dick Rogers lived
And does live, a very courageous
Life. He is one who worked in
The trenches, who loved
Books, loved students,
Loved his God. He
Is a true unsung,
Unknown hero.
Praise be!
THERE CAN BE NO MORE SOLID BASE
UPON WHICH MAN CAN BUILD A LIFE.
"A MAN'S REACH SHOULD EXCEED HIS
GRASP, ERE WHAT'S A HEAVEN FOR."
EDITORIAL

WELCOME ROGER STANLEY. This edition of JUFF is in the able hands of Roger Stanley as co-editor. Roger has been an editor before while at ETSU, has published a short story, has written several articles (one is published in this issue of JUFF), has presented at least 6 papers to conferences in his three years at Union, is a vociferous reader, and a critic of modern literature. I owe much to his help in proofing, advising, and overseeing this journal even while pursuing courses this summer toward his doctorate at the University of Mississippi.

SCHOLARSHIP IS ALIVE AND WELL AT UNION. Faculty writing, paper presentation, concerts, publishing, painting, photographing, creative teaching -- all are receiving recognition. Witness no less than five English teachers from Union presenting papers at the same Tennessee Philological Association conference in February 1993 (which some said had never been done before). Witness Joe Blair and George Guthrie's articles in the Baptist Sunday School literature. Witness Scott Bennet and Dave McClune's performances in the Jackson Symphony and other concerts. Witness Bobby Rogers' (UMBH) poetry publications in national magazines. Witness two books published this past year from the history department alone. While there are clearly other events that could be mentioned since these are only randomly selected, it is upon these two books I wish to focus for a moment. The first book, written by Dr. James Baggett (co-authored with Dr. Lucius Wright), is The History of the Jackson Clinic. Published by the Guild Bindery Press in Jackson in 1992, this book, which took two years in the printing process, tells the story of the five founders of the Jackson Clinic and traces its development up to modern times. The clinic, established in 1950, was the first multi-specialty group practice in Tennessee. The second book by Steve Carls called Louis Loucheur and the Shaping of Modern France: 1916-1931, will be published by the LSU Press shortly. It will be a 416+ page book on the influence of a prominent Frenchman. Incidentally, just in case you are planning to publish a book, Steve tells me that it cost him personally $2.00 to $2.50 per page plus many additional man-hours just to have it indexed, and that is after all the researching, writing, editing, amending, and polishing of the text has been done. With extensive archival research Steve did in France, England, Switzerland and the USA no wonder it took more than ten years to write. Such feats deserve our just recognition and praise, and such events as mentioned above, plus other departments and individuals not covered here serve to indicate the high quality of scholarship our faculty produces and deserves our just recognition.

THANKS TO JOHN DAVID BARHAM FOR PHOTGRAPHS. I regret only that we can not print in color - they are beautiful. Stop by his office sometime and look at the real thing in his slides.

THANKS TO JUANITA COTNER OF COLLEGE SERVICES. Without her readings and advice this issue of JUFF would suffer much.
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THE CALL TO DARE GREATLY
by
BOB R. AGEE, PRESIDENT
OKLAHOMA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Union University Red Carpet Banquet
November 5, 1992

Ordinarily I would begin my remarks with the statement: “I bring greetings to you from the administration, faculty, staff and students of Oklahoma Baptist University.” In any other occasion that would be appropriate and I suppose in some ways it fits here. But the joy and exhilaration that I feel over being here with you on this auspicious occasion transcends the mere task of simply bringing greetings from a sister Baptist institution.

I cannot begin to describe the depth of my feelings for this university nor can words describe the depth of my feelings for Dr. Hyran Barefoot and his family. I have through the years taken great pride in claiming Union University as my alma mater and Dr. Barefoot as my major professor. He has told people where appropriate that he was extremely young when he began teaching and I was an older student. Four men have made a profound impact on my life: my father taught me the joy of love within the family circle; Dr. Jonas Stewart imparted to me a deep love for the Bible and for the people called Southern Baptists; Dr. Morgan Patterson, my major professor in seminary, stirred in me the commitment to discipline and organization; and Dr. Hyran Barefoot instilled in me the love of learning and helped me to believe that I could be a serious student and a warm-hearted preacher of the Gospel at the same time. The last two of those men became university presidents.

My years as a student were significant pivotal years in my life. A caring faculty poured their lives and thought processes into mine and challenged me to think. Fellow students opened their hearts and offered me the privilege of being their friend, and they inspired and challenged me. Alumni of note took me under their wings and nurtured and encouraged me to dream big dreams and to dare to believe that I could amount to something. There was not any place in the world where I could have gone and been as blessed as the Union University experience was for me. To this great institution I want to stand on the highest mountain and shout: Thank you for caring and for being who and what you were in my life.

To you, major donors to this great university, I want to express my deep heartfelt gratitude for your support. This campus is a testimony to the power and glory of a miracle-working God. I was on the Board of Trustees when we dreamed this dream. People thought we were crazy to think about totally relocating a one hundred-and-fifty-year-old institution. In tough economic times, administration, trustees, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the fantastic people of West Tennessee joined hands to make this new campus possible. People like you caught the vision, made tremendous sacrifices financially, and poured yourselves into the task of building a totally new campus.

Our biggest mistake was that we caught a partial glimpse of the phenomenal things that God had in mind to do with that dream. We designed a campus that would take care of from 1200 to 1500 students with the firm conviction that that would be adequate well into the 21st century. I remember proposing in a planning meeting in the late 1970s that we could one day have over 2000
students. Several people around that table told me that it would never happen. Little did any of us dream then that the Lord would bless this institution in such a way that it would become one of the fastest growing private colleges in the Southeastern part of the United States.

It has been necessary to add to the facilities almost from the first year after we moved to this campus. First we needed more student housing, then more classrooms, then expanded student activity space, then a larger library. Still the school grew and continues to expand its outreach and grow in the level of respect among students and the academic community. It is no small thing to be listed in the Templeton Foundation’s Honor Roll of Character Building Institutions or to be listed in their Honor Roll of Free Enterprise Teaching Institutions. Again this year the school set a new enrollment record and balanced its budget for the 25th consecutive year. Last year 60% of colleges and universities nationwide had to deal with deficit budgets. Union keeps marching ahead. Now, through careful, thoughtful planning for the future, Union has launched the effort to construct one of the most significant additions to the campus since the school moved to this marvelous new site.

Today, as an alumnus who is deeply involved with higher education in the national arena, I want you to know that Union University is more important to our world than it has ever been. Schools like Union and OBU and those few schools like us around the nation are daring to stand for values and decency and are daring to offer education of the highest quality with the firm conviction that God has called us to make a difference in our world.

In the midst of some recent reading about leadership I was struck by the realization that the students who are attending college today are not just preparing to enter the job market in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Students who are here today will become a part of the reservoir of prospective leaders for the 21st century. Imagine, in less than eight years we will see the launch of a whole new millennium - a fresh thousand years.

Think about it - today’s students will have been out of school several years when the new century dawns. They will have acquired the needed work experience and will have had a chance to establish their role and reputation in the life of whatever business, industry, institution, or organization they have chosen. Leaders begin to emerge within an organization or institution five to seven years after they’ve finished school. Our students will assume the responsibility for shaping the early days of that new century.

What kind of leaders are we going to need for the 21st century?

During a recent conference on leadership in which leaders from a wide spectrum of fields spoke, several speakers identified needed characteristics of those who would aspire to be leaders. An executive with the aerospace industry suggested a profile for the effective leader for the 21st century. She proposed that such a leader will be:

- a person of unquestioned integrity,
- people-oriented,
- creative,
- committed to excellence,
- an expert communicator,
- a team leader and team builder,
- one who exercises leadership through consensus, and
- a person with a global vision.

A leader from the business arena identified eight characteristics which he said are vital for leaders:

- integrity, courage, dedication, vision, humility, openness,
- creativity, and motivation.

I submit to you today that Union University is committed to building into the lives of its
students those characteristics. Through quality instruction by dedicated Christian scholars in all the disciplines, through carefully thought-through student development and residential life programming, through marvelous opportunities to be involved in leadership roles in student government or within a wide variety of student organizations, and through an excellent student ministry program, students are developing the skills and instincts to be effective leaders for the next century.

The dramatic changes that will have taken place during the last quarter of the 20th century call for a new breed of thinkers and doers. The last fifty years have witnessed more changes than have taken place in any 2000-year period of human history. Phenomenal changes have taken place in the mode and speed of transportation, changes in science and technology, changes in geo-political systems, changes in the nature and process of world-wide economies. And then analysts tell us that the next 25 years will witness more changes than took place in the last 25 years. What will it take to be an effective leader in the early decades of the 21st century?

1. Leaders for the 21st century will be people who have developed a GLOBAL AWARENESS. The American business and educational community can no longer operate with a snobbish isolationism, pretending that American products are produced better and cheaper and that the American worker is smarter and more productive. We are the only major industrial nation in the world which has been content to remain functionally literate in only one language, and sometimes we are not very adept at using it. We can no longer be content to introduce students only to western civilization when the emerging leaders in our world are coming from the Orient and little known Third World countries. When thousands of American textile workers are out of work today because of effective cheap labor in Third World countries: and when thousands of oil industry workers are out of work because of decisions and actions by a cluster of small, relatively unknown Middle Eastern countries known as OPEC; and when the American college and graduate school students are being crowded out of our best graduate schools by students from other parts of the globe, it’s time to wake up. We can no longer play Rip Van Winkle and sleep through a new knowledge revolution and the emergence of a new global economy the likes of which this country has never seen. If our nation is to recover its place of leadership in the world, there must be men and women entering the work force now who have begun to develop a deeper awareness of their world and who are willing to think through and be more sensitive to how to function more effectively in their ever-shrinking world.

2. Leaders for the 21st century must be people of VISION. This university has exerted a great deal of effort though the years trying to challenge students to capture a “Vision for Excellence.” It is no accident today that there are four university presidents and a leader of one of the nation’s most prestigious regional accrediting agencies who are graduates of this university. Institutions and leaders of institutions who are willing to dream dreams and see visions for a better tomorrow will be those who will make a profound impact for good on their world. Those institutions and their leaders who never dare to dream, who never issue a challenge to today’s students in order for there to be a better tomorrow, simply sponge off of their world and seldom contribute much to make it better. Students who are here today are participating in a heritage that has shown that you can reach beyond the now, dare to think new thoughts and be courageous enough to try new approaches. This school is about vision and dreaming and miracle. Students who walk these halls will be captured by that ability to dream new dreams and see new visions of possibilities.
There are three kinds of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who sit around and wonder what happened. Union graduates will tend to be people who make things happen. We must have leaders for the 21st century who dare to dream dreams and see visions for a better tomorrow.

3. Leaders for the 21st century must be people who have MADE A DEEP AND ABIDING COMMITMENT TO MORAL AND ETHICAL VALUES. One analyst has voiced amusement over the fact that the business world has begun to adopt the language and many of the concerns of the church while the church has begun to adopt the language and many of the concerns of the business world. There seems to be an enormous amount of interest in the marketplace in seeing our society recover some of the moral and ethical values that form the foundation of a lasting democratic society. Society has suffered from several decades of trying to govern and do business without giving serious attention to the issues of decency. We must wake up to realize that to neglect moral and spiritual foundations and to neglect the effort to develop character in the lives of students would be tremendously costly to the individual and to democracy. So many of the questions today are not questions about whether or not we have the technology to do things, they are questions about what is right to do.

Students are not going to be challenged to deal with moral and ethical issues in very many colleges in the United States today. We are dangerously close to being a nation adrift in a sea of moral relativism without any profound sense of what is right or what is wrong. That’s why the Union Universities of the world are so important to today’s society. There must be schools like this which dare to be the voice of conscience, the instrument of prophetic tension that somehow causes the brightest and best young minds to deal with the moral and ethical imperatives of the Christian faith.

4. Leaders for the 21st century will come from those who are committed to SEEKING TO KNOW THE MIND AND WILL OF GOD for their lives and for their world. That’s what singles Christian leaders out from all the rest. In the early pages of the book of Joshua, Joshua called the people together to talk about moving across into the Promised Land and beginning a whole new era for the people of God. He reminded them that they had never passed that way before. He then issued the call for them to “Sanctify yourselves; for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.” (Joshua 3:5).

That’s exactly where we are today, facing a whole new era in human history, inheriting a world in transition, facing the task of constructing new structures and enhancing old structures. Christian leaders for the 21st century will try to discover what God wants for His world and will do whatever they can to move that world toward what God wants. Christian leaders will grasp the significance of a growing world and its needs and they will be people of vision who are willing to think new thoughts while attempting new solutions to mankind’s age-old problems.

This university is committed to helping young people grow spiritually while they are growing intellectually and professionally. Students are being challenged and are being given tremendous opportunities to feel the claims of Christ upon their lives while they are on this educational pilgrimage. You can be assured that when they walk away from here, God’s will and God’s way are important considerations in what they decide to do or be.

I like the perspective of journalist Hal Wingo when he contended:
“Let us turn our thinking in the direction of a God for the 21st century who may dazzle us into dizziness with all that is to come but who in the process shows himself to be an even more remarkable Creator than we had dared to dream. The future, with its capacity to turn today’s fantasy into tomorrow’s reality, may be awesome, but isn’t the mind of God greater than Steven Spielberg’s? Our task is to dare the 21st century to show us its stuff. And we will show it a people whose God is not through with this world yet.”

Our world needs leaders who dare to walk with God, seeking His mind and His leadership in every dimension of life, seeking to please Him and to live out His will and purpose for their lives and for their world.

CONCLUSION

You are so important to this institution’s future. Union University can dare to dream dreams for an exciting and expanding impact upon their world because there are people like you who stand with her. You have the heart to care and the spirit to try to do something to make your world a better place. You have caught the vision that a quality Christian education for tomorrow’s leaders can somehow make a difference in our world’s chances of survival.

Let me leave you with a call and a challenge from the words of President Theodore Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those old and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

God grant that we will have the courage and the faith and feel the challenge to give and share so that this university can continue to dare greatly for the 21st century!
Creating confusion was an obvious delight for Robert Frost. His life and works overflow with contradictions, ironies, paradoxes. Because of these confusions about himself, about his poetry, and about his legacy, who can know the real Frost? Innumerable articles, books, and speeches about this enigmatic poet swell the list each year. Although Melville's reminder that "truth . . . always has its ragged edges" (559) is true about Frost, continual scrutiny will clarify the focus.

Peter Van Egmond calls Frost "the most popular and most respected American poet of the twentieth century, though sometimes for the wrong reasons" and sees that as a "major part of the complexity-beyond-simplicity Frost factored in to his poems, the 'ulteriority' he often cautioned about." A quick review of biographical studies reveals "a mercurial spirit as intractable as a pebble of white quartz just beyond reach at the bottom of a well just close enough to reveal it, yet far away enough to tantalize us ceaselessly." In his poem "For Once, Then Something" Frost asks if the pebble were "Truth?"

The problem we have had and continue to have lies in Frost's deliberate construction of himself with his work. This is more artful and deceptive than a simple 'persona' like Twain's or Emily Dickinson's. Here is truly a case where an artist has become one with his work. (xii)

A few examples will pose the problem; only Frost knows reasons.

The ongoing confusion about his life started with his birth. For many years he had surmised his conception had been before his parents' hasty marriage because the records of both marriage and birth had been destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire. As he became famous he "tried to protect himself by publicly giving out . . . that he was born in 1875." The facts "eventually proved that his parents were married on 18 March 1873, over a year before his birth on 26 March 1874" (Thompson RF: Early 554). Lawrence Thompson, Frost's official biographer, blamed the mother's influence for causing Frost to vary accounts of his life story so that "whenever the bare facts troubled him, he discreetly clothed them with fictions" (Thompson RF: Early xiii). Leaving Harvard in ill health before the end of his second year and moving to a farm near Derry, New Hampshire, he assumed the role of a New England farmer; the facts were otherwise (RF: Farm-Poultryman 21). After his hired man Carl Burell left, Frost stayed up late to write poetry and rearrange the farm schedule to milk his cow at noon and midnight (Thompson RF: Early 278).

Going to Pinkerton Academy in 1906 to teach--and get away from the farm--he disdained both teaching and schedules. Later at Amherst he insisted, "I don't teach . . . I talk" (qtd. in Untermeyer Letters 5). Ironically, Frost in his forties was still painfully awkward at talking to people. From this rather non-verbal man developed a new American poetry that made the technique of conversation a distinctive trait. Continually feeling himself a failure and disappointment to his family and others, he told John Bartlett that he had "no friends" during the Derry years (Anderson 5); yet he became nationally recognized and internationally acclaimed with multitudes of friends long before his death in 1963. His life was a host of contradictions--whether planned or otherwise.
Confusions about his poetry still create rifts between critics and readers. Frost's poetry, what he called making "music out of . . . the sound of sense" as he told John T. Bartlett (Selected Letters 79), meant using the ordinary speech of ordinary people. Edward Thomas's review of A Boy's Will emphasized Frost's great principle of "sound-posturing . . . the sound of sense" in the "natural voice and in the language of today" (qtd. in Thompson RF: Early 418). John Doyle argued that what Frost actually did was to "reduce his poems to the illusion of conversation, not to the level of actual conversation" (15). Frost's subject matter did not include the autobiographical in the way Theodore Roethke, James Dickey, and Anne Sexton used their personal experiences. Frost himself insisted, I talk of universals in terms of New England. I talk about the whole world in terms of New England" (qtd. in Cook 309).

Early critical response from William Dean Howells and Ezra Pound offered praise after their reviews of his first two books in 1913 and 1914. Yet the fact that Frost had gone to England to publish created an enormous controversy with some American publishers and magazines that had earlier rejected Frost's poetry. It was not until the 1940s that Lawrance Thompson's Fire and Ice: The Art and Thought of Robert Frost presented what scholars believed was the first truly authoritative study of the poetry itself—thirty years later.

In the 1950s came two startling criticisms. Randall Jarrell, a "member of the new generation," rhetorically explored what he called the "anomaly of his position" in an essay titled "To the Laodiceans." Jarrell cleverly ridiculed the critics who saw only the good or only the bad in Frost as well as those who were distressed that Frost was not "like Rilke" or "Eliot or Moore or Stevens or Auden." He insisted that posterity would vindicate Frost as "that rare thing, a complete or representative poet" (103-04).

Probably the most influential piece of the 1950s was Lionel Trilling's famous speech at Frost's eighty-fifth birthday dinner on March 26, 1959. A former negative critic become a "recent convert" to Frost's poetry, Trilling compared the poet to Sophocles who "... made plain ... the terrifying things of human life" ("A Speech" 158). Attacks were so vicious and unexpected that Trilling answered in an essay about the "cultural episode" of Frost's fierce, loyal supporters. His controversial speech continued to spark critical comments: LLoyd N. Dendering insisted that there were two Frosts: the widely, "traditionally admired rural American poet who reassured us by his affirmation of old virtues ... and the terrifying poet" whom Trilling had identified ("Robert Frost" 17). On the battles raged. Isadore Traschen lamented Frost's "incapacity for the tragic howl"—that he was not involved in the "complexities and contentions of our time" ("Robert Frost" 61). Alfred Kazin refuted the charge that Frost was accommodating only to average capacities and prejudices; he saw Frost as an intellectual with a "bleak, if stoical, outlook" ("Strength" 50). C. P. Snow captured the dichotomy: "Somewhere, at the lowest stratum of the shifting quicksand of his nature, there was rock" (193).

By the 1990s more than 1400 scholarly articles and works have attempted to elucidate Frost and/or his poetry (Lentricchia and Lentricchia; Van Egmond). In the disparate assortment of writings is the subject of Frost himself with many attempts to find the "real Frost" or the "rock" of his true nature. Earl J. Wilcox's 1984 article "Psyching-out the Public and His Contemporaries" describes Frost's methods "to manipulate his contemporaries during his rise to fame." In his examination of Frost's methods in promoting his public image, he argues that those methods were often "quite different in reality" (13). Perhaps the most amazing book in its uniqueness is Norman
N. Holland's *The Brain of Robert Frost: A Cognitive Approach to Literature* published in 1988. Its statement of contents is unique: "This is not a book about Robert Frost...This is, I believe, the first book to bring to bear on literary criticism and theory the revolutionary discoveries of cognitive science and recent research into the brain" (v-vi). Cleverly, Holland uses his love for Frost's poetry and differing explications as his springboard into a scientific study.

Confusions continued not only about his life and his works but also about Frost's importance, his legacy to poetry. The Public Frost was, as Lewis P. Simpson has written, the "greatest exception to the private role of the poet in American society" (iii) because he became so extraordinarily popular. He became the only American poet to be honored with the Pulitzer Prize four times: 1924, for *New Hampshire*; 1931, for *Collected Poems*; 1937, for *A Further Range*; and 1943, for *A Witness Tree* (Simpson 2-3). Partly because of his experiences as Poet-in-Residence and Fellow in Creative Arts at the University of Michigan in 1921-22, Frost fathered a movement that reached far beyond college campuses. He was the first poet given national recognition on his seventy-fifth birthday in 1950 by a Resolution of the United States Senate (Thompson and Winnick 186). Accolades and forty-four honorary degrees came during the decade of the 1950s, including honorary degrees from Oxford and Cambridge Universities in 1957 (Greiner 110). Without even a college degree he became the Official Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress in 1958 (Thompson and Winnick 258).

Television appearances and interviews perpetuated what James M. Cox called the "myth of Robert Frost" (5) as a kindly, rugged New Englander. Honored by groups such as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Poetry Society of America, Frost also received coveted awards such as the Bollingen Prize. The apex of public honor was at John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural. Thereafter he became a Goodwill Ambassador for the State Department to Israel, Greece, England, and Russia. With all these honors, ironically the one that caused him "a yearly agony" until its announcement, he never received. Because T. S. Eliot had won, Frost felt he should have had the Nobel Prize (Snow 183). Stanley Burnshaw, in trying to edit a book of essays by international critics about Frost, discovered one reason. A letter from Alain Bosquet written in French, dated December 20, 1962, was most direct:

I do not believe that Robert Frost is a first-rate poet; he enjoys a glory which seems to me excessive and it is too bad that this misconception...continues. Americans...are doing what they can to have the Nobel Prize awarded to Frost. There are over a dozen of us, European critics, who try to prevent that. We have succeeded, since the old monkey no longer has any chance. (189)

In slightly more than a month, Frost died--without it.

Since Frost's death in 1963 confusions and controversies have increased. According to Donald G. Sheehy,

At the center of the dispute stands not only the poet but also his official biographer, Lawrance Thompson...Frost's advocates have argued that the official biography represents nothing less than a deliberate character assassination. (393)

Untangling his life, his poetry, and his legacy from the hostile negativity of Thompson's biography continues to be a worthy challenge. Frost told Cox early on: "I have written to keep the over curious out of the secret places of my mind both in my verse and in my letters" (*Selected Letters* 385). A fairly typical statement made to Thompson in 1948: "I grow curious about my soul out of
sympathy for you in your quest for it" (Selected Letters 530) changed considerably by 1959: "I trust my philosophy still bothers you a little. It bothers me" (Selected Letters 584). Cognizant of problems he created for biographers, Frost often told the press, "I'm not confused. I'm only well mixed" (Latham 185). Although Frost had personally selected Thompson after Robert S. Newdick's death, the intense distrust of each man for the other grew. Thompson portrayed Frost as egotistical, spiteful, petty. Thompson's notes explained Frost's trip to Russia as "his lust for heroism, his desire to become a HERO... Motive? REVENGE. A way of getting back at life for what life had done to him in childhood" (Introduction Papers). It was a poignant, sad moment last summer at the University of Virginia, where Frost's papers reside, to hold a notecard dated "1963, Jan. 29 (Tuesday) Frost... died of blood clots in the lungs, some time around 1:30 this morning. So I'm spared the unpleasant ordeal of seeing him for the last time alive. I'm greatly relieved" (Papers). Refusing to go to the burial of Frost's ashes, Thompson wrote: "I'm not much for that sort of stuff, and I wouldn't even go out of my way for the burial of God--if he's not already buried" (Papers June 16, 1963).

The three-volume official biography published in 1966, 1970, and 1976 generated eloquent defenders with book-length refutation. Richard Poirier's Robert Frost: The Work of Knowing in 1977 scathingly opposed Thompson's "harsh, distorted, and personally resentful view of Frost's manipulative, calculating use of other people" (43). In 1984 William Pritchard presented Frost, A Literary Life Reconsidered as a corrective to Thompson's view of the poet as a "species of monster in human form" (xii). The most profound shattering of the "monster myth" has been done by Stanley Burnshaw, Frost's companion and editor at Holt from 1958 until the poet's death in 1963. His 1986 book, Robert Frost Himself, attempted to "wipe away the biases, add the missing essentials, and restore for the world the person he [Frost] really was" (xi). Burnshaw ultimately decided to follow Frost's admonition: "I'm counting on you to protect me from Larry [Thompson]. Remember!" (6). Strange request about one's own chosen biographer!

Innumerable scholarly articles have taken up the challenge to refute Thompson's negative assessment. Philip L. Gerber's articles from 1986 in March's The New England Quarterly and September's Contemporary Literature detail his concern that the confusion of the man with the poetry is not a profitable route to pursue, chiefly because Frost, unlike some other writers, was so very successful in preventing his worst traits from coloring his verse. (135)

George F. Bagby in the Spring 1992 issue of Twentieth Century Literature has the lead article with the incredible title "The Promethean Frost." Acknowledging "the familiar Frost is far from Promethean," Bagby makes a convincing argument.

We have for so long thought of Frost as a poet of the 'diminished thing' and the 'momentary stay against confusion,' as an ironist, as a conservative both temperamentally and poetically... that is little short of startling to realize how thoroughly Promethean he can be in certain moods--but then, the Romantic predecessor whom he most often echoes verbally is not Wordsworth or Keats but Shelley, a formidably Promethean writer himself. (14)

Columbia University Press has just published The Top 500 Poems, and yes, Robert Frost is there in the top 10. To be ranked that high out of eight centuries of poetry in an 1100 page volume is surely significant.

The contradictory assessments make one wonder if the "ragged edges of truth" will ever be
smoothed. For whatever reasons Frost often created and perpetuated confusions. In a letter to Robert Newdick, his first chosen biographer, Frost explained on 2 December 1938, "The point I tried to make was that I was a very hard person to make out . . . . I might easily be most deceiving when most bent on telling the truth" (Thompson Papers). It grows harder to see if the pebble at the bottom of the well he wrote about is truth. Clearly Frost had his reasons for the subterfuge, the posturings, the sly humor, the truthful jabes. His own response to the Trilling episode may be the best answer: "No sweeter music can come to my ears than the clash of arms over my dead body when I am down" (qtd. by Flint 24). Undoubtedly, Frost is hearing a symphony—the more cacophonous, the happier he is!

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IMPRESSIONS OF MEXICO
by Lytle Givens

As a nation Mexico has many fascinating aspects. Economically it is undoubtedly a “Third World” country since the average income is less than six dollars a day. However, there are many extremely wealthy Mexicans and numerous places (especially resort areas) that cater to the indulgences of the wealthy, whether native or foreign. Strategies that many individuals must pursue to exist are heart wrenching. Nevertheless, there are also many engrossing and whimsical facets of Mexico that are enjoyable to observe. This commentary relates a few interesting scenes in the drama of Mexican life.

Previously, I have read/heard about the dissimilarity of accident liability in the United States and Mexico. Several sources indicate that when an automobile accident happens, many Mexicans vanish before the police arrive, even if they are not at fault! The chief explanation is that persons involved in accidents (even innocent bystanders) may be required to stay in the district for weeks or months until the trial transpires. Also, if persons involved in an accident cannot show financial resources equal to the cost of the accident, they may be jailed until the trial ensues.

Visualize this scene that transpires about three days before we are scheduled to leave Cuernavaca, where we stayed for a month studying the language/culture of Mexico. My wife Sandra, two female friends, and I go to the main plaza for a few hours to observe the Mexican nightlife. When we are ready to return home we locate a taxi, enter it, and tell the driver the name of the street where we are staying. About five blocks later the taxi needs to turn right at the stop light. In Mexico, car drivers don’t necessarily stop directly behind the front car if both want to turn in the same direction. The rearmost driver may cut the wheels sharply and then pull up to the front car’s rear door to gain the inside position; by performing this tactic he/she may be able to speed past the front car as both drive off.

A taxi behind us carrying two Mexicans passengers performs this maneuver. However, our driver does not notice the tactic; when he drives off and turned right, he grazes the other car (probably the other car’s front bumper has scraped our right rear fender). Anyway, the two drivers stop in the middle of the street, get out of their cars and manifest much verbal and nonverbal annoyance with each other (although there is never any physical contact). Our taxi is already adorned with several scrapes and dents (similar to most Mexican taxis), while the other car appears to be almost new. After three or four minutes of vocal displeasures, they climbed back into their respective taxis and drive away.

We depart in the left lane of the winding four-lane street increasing our speed as we go. Out of the corner of my eye I see the other taxi behind us going faster and faster in the right lane. Apparently, he is trying to accelerate rapidly past us, then merge quickly into our lane (thereby showing his displeasure with our driver) as we are speedily overtaking slower right-lane traffic. He endeavors to squeeze past us and both drivers hit their brakes. Alas, disaster!!! There is an exceedingly loud screech as the two cars make solid contact with each other. The damage seems limited to our right front fender and several scrapes along the other taxi’s left side. I glance inside the other car and notice the other passengers have disappeared (probably they had visions of Mexican liability laws dancing in their heads). As you probably can imagine, the two drivers are even more hostile and demonstrate much more verbal/nonverbal irritation. After several minutes,
both drivers (the other taxi being in front) drive off again and, after eight or ten blocks, pull up to a bus depot where a police car is parked. However, since no policeman is present our taxi departs.

As we continue toward home, our driver says the other driver is threatening to sue him for damages. Our two friends are fluent in Spanish and discuss the incident with him. One says in English that she is quite willing to validate in court our driver’s claim of the other driver being at fault. Getting closer home we tell him our house number, he stops at the front gate, and we get out.

After we are safely inside, I visualize some possible consequences of this night. If our driver is sued, he probably will want witnesses who support his description of the accident(s). Therefore, since he knows exactly the house where we are staying, the task of finding these gringo witnesses will be very easy. Until we leave town, I keep envisioning a big Mexican policeman swaggering up to the house, knocking on the door and handing us a subpoena. Since the trial probably will not occur for two or three months, the odds are great we will be stuck in Cuernavaca for the duration of the summer or even longer. Thankfully, this does not happen, but it is within the realm of possibility.

On an earlier occasion Sandra and I are at one of the out-door cafes in the plaza. Numerous vendors who sell items ranging from balloons, to wooden statues, to baskets constantly wander through the plaza displaying their merchandise and endeavoring to get persons to buy something. Our light complexions are usually like magnets attracting the vendors.

While we are sitting at a table (striving to be as invisible as possible), six persons arrive and sit at a table about twenty feet away. Two are very fluent in Spanish and seem to be of Hispanic origin. The others appear to be Anglo-Americans. Moreover, one male presents the stereotypical “Ugly American” image by wearing a polo shirt, shorts, and tennis shoes with a camera dangling upon his protruding stomach. Also, he is speaking very loud in English about wanting to buy souvenirs.

He walks toward the nearby open-air market, returning shortly with two small, very ugly wooden statues and asks his (presumed) wife which one they should buy. As vendors begin scurrying toward them, one of the females loudly says, “We brought an empty suitcase to Mexico just to carry back all our purchases.” As you may imagine, these sights and sounds attract more and more vendors like flies to their table. Ultimately the vendors surround it literally four or five deep, each vigorously trying to sell his goods. The noise level goes higher and higher as each vendor aspires to make himself/herself noticed. We contemplate this scene, still trying to be inconspicuous, and ponder the image that Mexicans probably have of (North) Americans.

Toward the end of the summer, we decide to ride a first-class bus from Oaxaco to Mexico City. After boarding at the bus station, there is a fifteen minute delay before we leave. A well-dressed man in a business suit carrying a briefcase also gets aboard about the same time. He launches into a very rapid spiel while strolling to the bus’s rear and returning to the front. It turns out he is making a sales presentation for a slender booklet about fifty pages long that describes folk medicines (we deduce). Interested persons are allowed to examine the material. Meanwhile, his patter is continuing at ninety miles an hour as the fifteen minutes slowly pass.

Finally, the bus sluggishly pulls out of the station and leisurely drives away as the man
continues with his rapid-fire pitch. After traveling about three blocks, the driver maneuvers to the curb and lets the salesman off. He starts walking toward the bus station where, presumably, he will board another outgoing bus and make a similar presentation. The man probably sold (at most) three or four booklets for maybe fifty cents to a dollar each. Without a doubt, his machine-gun delivery that continues (and continues and continues) is uniquely different, not only to us, but also to the Mexican bus riders. Any profit he makes is unquestionably merited.

A notable benefit of becoming involved in a culture other than one’s own is the fresh viewpoint which can be provided on social situations. I am positive that a Mexican wandering through the United States could also carry home similar amusing images of our culture.
Almost sunset in Estes Park, Colorado, just outside Rocky Mountain National Park
In 1983 The Washington Post book reviewer Jonathan Yardley wrote an article entitled “Women Write the Best Books and Men Are Losing Their Grip on Literature.” He explained that when he sat down to make a list of the best writers working in 1983, the first twenty-two names he listed at random were women. “We are entering a significant period in American letters, one that will be dominated by female writers and characterized by feminist themes.” He further insisted that the “male iron grip on the publishing industry itself has...been forced to loosen.” A class of female managers who have risen to the level of publishers, chief editors and agents has emerged. “Serious American writing is increasingly a woman’s place, and since all of these are relatively young writers with most of their mature work ahead of them, we can only expect this dominance to continue,” Yardley predicts (B-1).

Since the days of Washington Irving, American literature has been a “male preserve,” with only a few women writers “to be reckoned with.” According to Jonathan Yardley, now “the women have taken over the place,” a phenomenon easily explained by the impetus of the feminist movement. “Most of these writers,” however, according to Yardley, “have difficulty transforming what is at heart a political point of view into the range and form of fiction.” Another danger facing women writers is that the themes of feminism are in certain respects narrow: “woman’s desire for independence and self-fulfillment, yearning for freedom to compete in a difficult world and her need to prove herself in it, the conflict between her love for individual man and her anger at men collectively.” Still there are “ample” and in some cases “startling gifts” among these writers. Yardley cites two Southerners among these twenty-two writers who have already “shaken off the strictures of feminist orthodoxy” and have established their individual voices and themes, Gail Godwin and Anne Tyler (B-11).

By the time Yardley made his discovery in 1983 about what women writers were doing, the South Atlantic Modern Language Association was getting ready to host its second Special Session in two years on Southern Literature by Women.

Contemporary Southern writers come from a long and rich heritage. In her book entitled Tomorrow Is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936, Anne Goodwyn Jones examines the work of seven Southern women novelists. Her title comes from the most famous character created by any of these seven novelists, perhaps the most famous ever created by any Southern writer, Scarlett O’Hara. By the time Scarlett uses the expression for the last time near the end of Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind, it has accrued three distinct meanings expressing evasion, despair, and hope. Jones suggests that these three attitudes describe the work of these seven early novelists: Augusta Evans, Ellen Glasgow, Frances Newman, Kate Chopin, Ann Douglas, Helen Johnston, and Margaret Mitchell. Jones’ examination of the work of these Southern women writers reveals that without exception “these writers criticize conventions that prescribe specifically southern womanhood.” The Southern code demands that Southern woman be “compliant, deferential, nurturant, domestic, quietly and uncontrovertially intelligent, chaste, beautiful, cultured, religious, and loyal to her region and to its definition of herself.” Their reaction to the prescription that “Southern women always care for and think of others first” is to isolate their protagonists. Conventions of behavior are “breached,” and many characters reject traditional roles altogether.
Their family units, likewise, do not fit the convention of Southern society: the family unit is not the center of interest. If the protagonist’s family exists, it collapses. Family roles are taken by outsiders. Although the realistic impulse of each of these seven early novelists is ultimately superseded by some form of romanticism, “traditional images of the southern female are, in almost every work, scorned or ignored” (Jones 353, 362). Also, gone are violet eyes and magnolia blossom skin.

Beth Kline Schneiderman says that the “task of the woman writer...always has been to create good art.” One of the qualities of good art, she continues, is a “view of life sharpened by insight, sensitivity, intelligence, and understanding.” She believes writing by women to be the “main source for gaining understanding of all aspects of the feminine experience” (vii.ix).

It is quite obvious that post—World War II Southern writing has been dominated by women; but Southern writing, whether by women or men, has distinctive characteristics:

1) it distrusts the abstract,
2) it cares about time/place,
3) it is affected by religion,
4) it deals with the elemental,
5) it associates language with magic/incantation,
6) it explores the past, often within families,
7) it renders the natural world,
8) it develops among other themes a sense of human limitation, including philosophical limitation (Betts 2)

The second generation of Southern women writers (Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, Carson McCullers, and Katherine Ann Porter) all lived exclusively or for a significant period in The South, and the South figures significantly as place in their work. The South as place has been a rich ground for writers. C. Hugh Holman calls it “a union of opposites”: a place of “calm grace and raw hatred, polished manners and violence, the Bible Belt turned Sun Belt” (Betts 1). Marjorie Kinnon Rawlings says the reading public has always found the American South “glamorous” (Magee 17), and Margaret Walker says there is not a southern state that has not figured prominently in literature (Magee 29). Eudora Welty insists that “Southern writers really don’t have any excuse for writing vaguely or unobservantly or without enlightenment about human relationships, when they thrive in the thick of Southern life” (Magee 140).

Both male and female Southern writers look keenly at place. Mississippi writer Eudora Welty finds the South a place of “mobile homes, T.V. and plastic utensils.” Even earlier, Georgia writer Flannery O’Connor had noted the KKK was “beginning to light its crosses with G.E. light bulbs.” There are also recognizable sub-Souths: Memphis in the work of Nikki Giovanni and Joan Williams; Jackson and Yazoo City, Mississippi in the work of Welty; Southern Appalachia in the work of Lee Smith, Wilma Dykeman, Harriet Arnow and Mary Lee Settle; Stamps, Arkansas in the work of Maya Angelou; the Mississippi Delta in the work of Ellen Douglas and Ellen Gilchrist; and Durham County, North Carolina in the work of Sylvia Wilkinson (Betts 4).

Some black writers, like Maya Angelou, who see the South as “metaphor for racial bigotry but still a life-affirming force,” have come back often to visit families or even to stay. An Eleanor
Ross Taylor poem advises: “Stay here where the suffering’s homemade, sure to fit” (Betts 7). Katharine Ann Porter says “a good Southerner doesn’t kill anybody he doesn’t know” (Magee 5). Lisa Alther explains, “Northerners ignore you until they get to know you and then they ostracize you. Southerners bring casseroles until they get to know you and then they kill you.” She thinks that in the fiction of Southern whites “any killing blows will arrive disguised, from ambush” (Betts 7). Margaret Walker “cherishes the beauty of the physical landscape” but “decries endemic violence, bigotry and destruction there” (Pettis 9).

Doris Betts believes that in contemporary Southern writing “distinctions of both gender and region are blurring” (7). Leslie Fielder says that “geography is mythological,” that all our novels could be classified as Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Westerns” (Betts 7). Betts notes the “sweet irony” in Southern high school libraries where “those white parents who used to fear integrated schools might put their children in thrall to the rage of Eldridge Cleaver, now hope their children are reading such positive novelists as Ernest Gaines and Toni Morrison, black writers who value family, duty, and love” (7).

This blurring of gender and place in Southern fiction may be reflected in the fact that each year Southern women writers “want larger spaces” for themselves and for their characters. Indeed, in Peggy Prenshaw’s Women Writers of the Contemporary South, the interviews with seven writers (Lisa Alther, Ellen Douglas, Gail Godwin, Shirley Ann Grau, Mary Lee Settle, Elizabeth Spencer, and Anne Tyler), reveal that they do not view themselves as Southern women writers. For example, in an interview with Laurie Brown, Mary Lee Settle says, ‘I’m more of a writer’s writer than a woman writer--as a composer friend of mine says-I am a woman and I am a composer, but not at the same time” (3). Anne Tyler also declares, “I see no essential difference between the sexes when it comes to writing and I’d have to be a great pretender to present myself as a Southern writer” (3).

Doris Betts may indeed be correct when she suggests that the essentially Southern characteristic among younger women writers is not content or theme but “the music of language” that “still is drawled in rhythm, still arranged in a particular way” (7). Flannery O’Connor agrees that “Southernness” is not so much a matter of geography. “I think,” she says, “it is the idiom...People in Princeton don’t talk the way we talk, and these sounds build up a life of their own.” Yet even more than the language itself, O’Connor continues, it is the “business of being story tellers. I have Boston cousins, and when they are down South, they discuss problems, they don’t tell stories. We tell stories” (Magee 44-51).

According to Betts, another characteristic of the language of Southern writers is an “indirection behind a mask of politeness.” The language of women writers is a “form of disguise known to all women, since the prose says one thing and means four, by implying dense, invisible secrets beneath the signs and allusions in the sentences” (7). Such “disguised language” Eudora Welty is an expert at creating. Other influences on the language of black writers like Margaret Walker are the King James translation of the Bible and the rhetoric of black ministers in Southern pulpits (Pettis 18). Walker’s ear for “distinctive rhythm of spoken words developed precociously” from listening to her father’s sermons, negro spirituals and her great-grandfather’s and her mother’s tales of slave life (Pettis 9).

Some other identifiable characteristics of Southern women writers are of interest. Religion, for example, is less influential than might be predicted. The recurring thematic assertion is that
“love is probably the best anodyne we have,” as depicted by Shug Avery in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (Betts 5). There is also a “positive streak” visible in both black and white Southern women writers. They are “increasingly unsentimental” (Betts 8). “They may not be Whitmanesque, but most know who they are; they consider their imagined houses more as daily manifestations of reality than as refuges from reality” (Betts 6).

A significant characteristic that recurs in the writing of Southern women is the use of family. Ellen Douglas published her first novel at age 40—about a family. Gail Godwin mixed family microcosm with academia (Betts 5). Human conflict mirrored in family settings has been acquired firsthand. Many have married, borne and reared children. These circumstances delayed their careers but did not prevent writing and publication (Betts 4).

One marvelous example of a writer who, within the confines of the family, made a heroic effort to pursue her career as a writer is the black novelist Margaret Walker, author of *Jubilee*. Walker, a second-generation Southern writer along with Welty and Porter, in 1940 completed an M.A., married and began her family of four children. In 1942 she won the prestigious Yale Younger Poets Prize, the first black woman so honored in national literary competition. In 1949 she became a member of the faculty at Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi, where she taught till her retirement. Over a seven-year period of illness and financial pressures (1955-1962), she wrote and published almost nothing (Pettis 10). For *Jubilee*, she did twenty years of research. She took history classes, read slave narratives and Southern history. Walker recalls, sometimes the only quiet and private place I could write was in the bathroom, because that was the only room where the door could be locked and no one would intrude. I have written mostly at night in my adult life and especially since I married, because I was determined not to neglect any member of my family. I cooked every meal daily, washed dishes and dirty clothes, and nursed sick babies (Pettis 13-14).

Walker’s *Jubilee*, published in 1966, was the first novel by a black writer to depict extensively the slave culture from the daily perspective and to expose the havoc of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the black population. Her focus on the survival and growth of a Southern black woman has forged a tradition: “the black historical novel with women at its center,” such as Ernest Gaines’ *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. This revisionist history depicts “daily lives and the survival of plain folk,” not “heroic feats of achievers of great things” (Pettis 12).

A distinctive characteristic of black women writers is that they have a stronger sense of community than do white women writers. In black writing there is a “steady linkage of some truths and individual freedom to their social and political consequences” (Pettis 5).

An interesting contrast between Southern women writers and their male counterparts is their “sense of regional guilt.” Characters created by women writers are “less haunted by guilt” than characters created by Southern male writers, whose characters often are grandsons of slave owners and rebel soldiers (Pettis 5). The women writers are not “blind to evil or irrationality” but are “less preoccupied by them than such writers as Robert Penn Warren and William Styron” (Betts 5).

Doris Betts suggests that contemporary Southern writers, female and male alike, are helping us to take a long second look at the South by creating characters who seem “resurrected to star in transformed books of their own” (3). Alice Walker’s Celie seems a resurrection of Faulkner’s Dilsey. Margaret Mitchell provided in her *Gone With the Wind* a paradigm for the black myth in
Alex Haley’s *Roots*. We are seeing literary history through fresh eyes with biographies like Alice Walker’s *Zora Neale Hurston* and Joan Williams’ *The Wintering*, in which William Faulkner appears as a fictional character (3).

An overview of Southern Women writers would be incomplete without lingering for a brief moment in an often overlooked area of the South, Appalachia. A body of good Appalachian writing has grown, and interest in Appalachian literature has increased. Critics are now looking at this frequently ignored part of American literature, and current native-born writers like Mary Lee Settle are “out to set things straight” (Speer 21). Ironically the media found Appalachia but preserved the myths: “Deliverance,” T.V.’s “Beverly Hillbillies” and “The Dukes of Hazzard.” All of these depict people unable to cope with the modern industrial world. Jean Speer says, “One thousand people KNOW mountaineers weave coverlets and sing ballads to one who knows that millions of them have been industrial workers for one hundred years, have organized unions, picketed for constitutional rights, laid bodies in front of strip-mine bulldozers and overloaded coal trucks, drive Camaros, watch T.V., and shop at K-Mart” (21).

Mary Lee Settle says that most turn-of-the-century Appalachian literature was written by non-natives, who either “overromantized” or “much maligned” Appalachia as a “strange land inhabited by peculiar people, resistant to change and passive in the face of change forced on them” (Speer 21). Settle examines the complexity and the causes of differences in Appalachia. The central interest of her work has been “exploration of perception.” She is concerned with perceptions of historical events and the effects of the perceptions on the present. Critics praise her “fine feeling for the geography of West Virginia hillsides,” for “knowing her land and its people well,” and for “exploring the psychology of the mountain man” (Speer 22). West Virginia, the only state whose boundaries fall entirely within the Appalachian region, is called the Mountain State, and the state motto is *Montani Semper Liberi* (Mountaineers are always free.) Settle’s work *Beulah Quintet* been called an “evocative, provocative guide” on a journey from seventeenth century England to contemporary West Virginia. It ultimately “pinpoints the tension...between rootedness to place and tradition and the need for change, for freedom from the tyranny of tradition and misperception” (Speer 39).

If you come to contemporary Southern fiction looking for the aristocrat behind his white Greek columns or poor white trash in a sharecropper’s shack, you will be disappointed. What you will find are condominiums, sprawling suburbs and housing projects, embezzlers and abortions. But you will also find the Little League—integrated—and young businessmen and women struggling toward the top. In other words, you will find life in the South headed at break-neck speed for the twenty-first century. But some of it will sound familiar, from the chirping of crickets and the droning of July flies to the crescendo of the voices of tent revival preachers. There will be the scent of Jasmine and honeysuckle mixed with odor of burnt rubber on the race track. There will be rolling hills and flowing rivers—the Wabash and the mighty Mississippi. If you look long enough, you will find your grandfather and your grandmother. You may even find yourself. You inevitably will find real live Southerners.
Works Cited


The Badlands, South Dakota

[Image of a landscape]
"BY ITALIAN LIGHT' INNOCENCE ABROAD IN THREE NOVELLAS OF ELIZABETH SPENCER"

By Roger Stanley

With the 1960 publication of “The Light in the Piazza,” the heretofore quintessentially Mississippi novelist Elizabeth Spencer effected a new orientation in her prose which her life had been undergoing for over a decade. That is, years after an initial summer visit in 1949 and a more extended sojourn begun in 1953 upon receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship, Spencer eventually used the wondrous setting of Italy in her fiction. Following three novels with male protagonists, all firmly anchored in her native American South, Spencer turned to the Mediterranean as locale for “The Light in the Piazza.” She later told interviewer Peggy Whitman Prenshaw that she had to “find my place in a world that was geographically bigger” than the relatively constricted one of her early life and art. Furthermore, she placed a mother and her daughter as lead characters in this novella, making much satirical capital off their blatantly touristic Piedmont ways among the bright squares and shadowy labyrinths of summertime Florence. This “American abroad” motif, with all its attendant meteorological and cultural clashes, is of course territory covered by Henry James in the previous century, and reviewers and critics have also likened Spencer’s Italian fiction to certain E. M. Forster books.

In a trio of works beginning with “The Light in the Piazza” and continuing over a twenty-five-year span, Spencer has used Florence, Rome, and other Italian cities not just for setting, but as Pearl K. Bell has put it, as “foil(s) for American innocents bewildered by Italy’s myriad temptations, yet succumbing to its hazards of enchantment.” Thus the country itself can be construed as yet another character, a foil which throws the (mainly female, mainly Southern American) characters into sharper relief. This happens almost literally at times, particularly in the 1960 work; the word “light” in the title refers to streaming, dazzling sun but also works figuratively (“in light of” or “in a different light”), as well as in the sense of “Enlightenment.” Indeed, Spencer has written in the introduction to the 1986 Penguin edition containing all three works that “to see, as it were, by Italian light” was her own blessed task in the mid fifties. Calling the American South and Italy “the two concepts that are the strongest in my life,” Spencer has mined them repeatedly, from “The Light in the Piazza” to her 1985 short story “The Cousins.” Dislocations in space are matched by dislocations in time for these American female characters. In looking at “The Light in the Piazza,” “Knights and Dragons,” and “The Cousins,” one can trace this complex cultural/geographical interplay through its various manifestations.

Winston-Salem matron Margaret Johnson, characterized as “the busy American housewife, mother, hostess, cook and civic leader who paid attention to her looks,” is the past-ghosted Southern protagonist of “The Light in the Piazza,” a work to which its author referred in a 1990 interview as “a delicious little romance.” Certainly the novella’s denouement does meet the traditional definition of the romantic or comic tale—that is, a marriage between Margaret’s daughter Clara and a native Italian is effected, or rather engineered, by Margaret. Twenty-six-year-old Clara has the mind of a ten-year-old thanks to a girlhood injury (she was kicked in the head by a pony), but as the blockbuster MGM motion picture version released in 1962 makes clear via the casting of Yvette Mimieux, Clara is all of twenty-six in body. One might profitably note a reversal in the traditional Jamesian pattern of romance or comedy here, however, as it is the American who shrewdly manipulates the courtship proceedings in favor of her child, hiding Clara’s injury from an admittedly gullible family of upper middle-class Italians eager for their son’s own betrothal. Pearl Bell is
probably right to see in the novella an “interplay of American ingeniousness and Italian guile,” but groom Fabrizio and his father are no match ultimately for the “positive, clipped American figure” of Margaret Johnson. As Brendan Gill remarked in his New Yorker film review a propos of George Hamilton in the role of Fabrizio, “the young man appears to have had some trouble with a pony’s kick himself” not to pick up on Clara’s deficiencies. Prenshaw, author of the best extended study of Spencer’s work, scores a similarly ironic point in her chapter on “The Light in the Piazza,” calling Clara Johnson by way of comparison with James’ Daisy Miller “doubtless. . .the last twenty-six-year-old girl to visit Italy with her so-called ‘innocence’ unquestionably intact.”

The paradox of placing a disability of affliction at the center of an ostensibly comic story has not escaped Spencer’s notice, though she reports in an interview that the several letters she received from readers with similarly injured offspring were favorable. Clearly, the Johnsons are moving away from some sort of maimed past even by being in Italy; in the words of Hilton Anderson, they are typical of “today’s Americans in Europe. . .seeking escape, not relationships.” It is only because of a chance encounter with Fabrizio, followed by his incorrigible courtship, that Mrs. Johnson even entertains the possibility of marriage, finally doing so after much ambivalence. She has spirited her daughter to Florence not for romance, or even to partake of art and culture, but in flight from husband Noel, a tobacco company kingpin left behind in the heart of Jesse Helms country. This character makes a brief appearance in the movie version but exists only via transatlantic wire and phone in Spencer; nonetheless, he is important because he has always wanted to isolate, even institutionalize Clara in contrast to his wife’s fleeting efforts through the years to “mainstream” the child. Spencer has spoken of a “psychic break of sorts” from Noel prior to the novella’s events, and has Margaret herself musing at one point midway in the book: “Nobody with a dream should come to Italy. . .no matter how dead and buried the dream is thought to be, in Italy it will rise and walk again.”

This is exactly what transpires during the long hot summer in Florence, a city called by Bernard Berenson a “sunny place for shady people.” Spencer employs imagery of sunlight throughout and has said the novella started with the idea of light. The gradual Italianization of Clara, whose name means clarity and brightness, comes complete with an attack of sunstroke late in the story. In passage like “Everything stood strongly exposed in sunlight and cast its appropriate shadow: in Italy there is the sense that everything is clear and visible, that nothing is withheld” and “one had the sense of being able to see everything exactly as it was,” Spencer minglels literal and metaphorical images of light. Yet light has a dual nature, if not a cruel flipside, in this work; Spencer conceded that the motives of the characters are “sometimes opaque,” and an important early sequence culminates not in a sunny nook of Florence but in a “labyrinth, the chill stench of the narrow streets, “a formulation which looks ahead to the wintry Rome milieu of “Knights and Dragons.” Finally, light is blinding as well as enlightening: at novella’s end, even as the marriage celebration dominates the foreground, Margaret is reminded of a fatal cannon shot heard earlier in the summer during a public parade at which a man accidentally died: “in the strong sun the flash of powder, which must have been considerable by another light, had been all but negated.” Thus the traditional comic ending has been tempered, an international marriage which may or may not last has been cast in a light both beneficent and threatening by Spencer’s selection of concluding imagery.

The impact of the Italian climate upon characters and the notion that these travellers may be fleeing from American memories rather than to Italy also informs the 1965 novella “Knights and Dragons,” which Spencer has called a “dark companion” to “The Light in the Piazza.” Indeed while
the book opens in Venice by June, its primary scenes affecting the life and sanity of protagonist Martha Ingram happen during late fall and early winter in damp, labyrinthian, indoor Rome. Martha works in the United States cultural office, and her interactions abroad are primarily with non-Italians, her American boss and two guest families from the States, headed by opera expert Richard Coggins and economist Jim Wilbourne respectively. Thus there are no native antagonists after the fashion of Fabrizio and his father from the previous novella. Instead, Martha's prime human nemesis seems to be her ex-husband Gordon, a "renowned American philosopher" who keeps a hold on her by sending cryptic messages and messengers across the seas and popping up in Martha's increasingly enigmatic dreams and nightmares.

The novella's opening line sets a tone of estrangement: "Martha Ingram had come to Rome to escape something." In her essay titled "Two Women Adrift," Prenshaw argues that this "something" is more than just an overbearing ex-spouse, is in fact a whole outmoded chivalric way of conceptualizing the world in male terms. Thus Gordon is the shaggy-headed dragon described in the novella as forever "rumbling and growling, breathing out complaining letters and worried messengers." Jim Wilbourne, in this schema, is a potential candidate for, to quote Prenshaw, "the knight's role in the release of Martha from her past." This married economist with whom the protagonist has a brief but wrenching affair is in some way supplanted eventually by "erstwhile knight" George Hartwell, Martha's supervisor whose good-ambassador workplace philosophy is this: "Americans never lose their experience abroad, they simply magnify it."

Like Clara if not Margaret Johnson, Martha Ingram gradually becomes acclimatized to Italy as the seasons pass. Visits from American "strangers" like the Wilbournes and the Cogginses embolden her: "She always had a feeling of hope about moving toward total strangers, as if they would tell her something good and new." While in "The Light in the Piazza" Spencer kept her principals in Florentine summer except for a one-chapter excursion to Rome, the author here shuffles her protagonist among Venice, Rome, Genoa, and other locales—and through a whole cycle of seasons. Thus Martha near the end of part one can reflect, "a new season lay ahead"; in part two she forswears Venice for a Rome where "the fall was bright and sane." Questions of light and sanity are indeed more seminal for Martha Ingram than for Margaret Johnson. Except for one memorable Sunday of sun, the Rome sequences do not evoke brightness at all; for Martha, "a sunny, amiable, amusing, golden land had passed in one night into a dreary, damp, cold dungeon of a world." Bell probably goes too far in asserting that Rome itself "takes over as the true protagonist," but the city and its shadowy environs, particularly Martha's apartment, do prove antagonistic to her.

The ending of "Knights and Dragons" is more ambiguous than the previous Italian work. Does Martha "simply become the winter past," as Spencer puts it? Winter "had been a definitive season" for this character, but does she "opt for the free self" and "gain her niche in the world," as Prenshaw suggests? Clearly Martha's affair with a man who seems to move from pseudoknight to surrogate dragon, though it ends definitively with his return to the States, has dominated that "winter past." There is much chaos, even madness in Martha; however, this is no longer the character we note in part one "deciding to blame everything on the weather." Spencer's own remark that her protagonist experienced, at best, an "ironic liberation...going crazy to get free" perhaps better captures the paradoxical finale to this obliquely lyrical work.

In the twenty years between "Knights and Dragons" and the 1985 long short story "The Cousins," the stories and novels of Elizabeth Spencer most typically found their settings back in the
South. The Eisenhower era and beyond was examined in works like *The Snare* and *The Salt Line*, set respectively in New Orleans and on the gulf coast of Mississippi. Invited by the Rockefeller Foundation for a month's stay in Italy in 1984, Spencer penned "The Cousins" while there, the only of these three works actually composed in Italy. An O. Henry Award-winner, "The Cousins" was also anthologized in the 1988 collection *Jack of Diamonds and Other Stories*, as well as included with two longer works in the Penguin edition. Its protagonist Ella Mason, like Margaret Johnson but not necessarily Martha Ingram, is distinctively Southern, hailing from a proud extended family of Alabamians. It is the jarring dislocation wrought by time, not just space, which distinguishes "The Cousins"—the present-day Ella Mason is "a widow just turned fifty" who relives a summer vacation taken thirty years ago with the four title characters by returning to Florence. There she meets the only one of their group of five (three male, two female) who has chosen to live his adult life abroad, "kissing kin" cousin Eric.

"The Cousins" is very much a memory piece, alternating between its protagonist's recollection of their boat trip and subsequent adventures abroad in mid-century on the one hand, and her contemporary reunion at age fifty with Eric in the other. The "escape from domestic cares" motif is sounded early in a sentence from the flashback: "we all grasped for Europe like the drowning, clingling to what we could." This image of aquatic travel also comes up in a more comic context later when the older Eric of the story’s present time frame says he went to Europe because he felt he’d missed the boat for everywhere else. Spencer herself has remarked in an interview a propos of not having the cousins fly to Europe that "boat trips are binding for the people involved."

All in all, the group of five would seem to be more pulled apart than drawn together by the voyage. The flashback narrative reveals that third cousins Ella and Eric shared more intimacy than a kiss in Italy, and Spencer’s references both to shimmering sunlight and "stairss that twist back upon themselves among dark silent doors" evoke the backdrops of "The Light in the Piazza" and "Knights and Dragons" respectively. The story’s final paragraph, in present-day time on a Florentine terrace, features the two holding hands and talking in the "pitch black dark"—Spencer told an interviewer they had probably been "always together anyway in a certain kind of resurrection of memory." Still, the comic denouement is again tempered by the figurative implications of the next-to-last sentence: "Midnight struck long ago, and we know it."

Interestingly enough, two male characters—Jim Wilbourne of "Knights and Dragons" and cousin Jamie—perhaps best express the two poles of sentiment toward Italy between which Spencer oscillates her female protagonists. For the brisk American economist, "Italy was the original tar baby...getting out was the thing now." As for the impressionable young college student, "he had got on to something new in Italy. What he had got was an idea of devotion." Spencer not uncoincidentally has remarked in an interview, "Italians are very Madonna-conscious." Margaret Johnson, Martha Ingram, and Ella Mason feel hopelessly stuck at times in Italy, but experience an exhilarating sense of piety and reverence at others. It is their effort to see the events of their lives in this particular light, a light which might be different from one cast in America, which marks, in the words of Pearl K. Bell, "the miracle of Italy that can somehow defy the somber permanence of human catastrophe."
Near Fall Creek Falls,
Fall Creek Falls State Park, Tennessee
INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS CARROLL GRIFFIN

This continues the series of interviews of Union’s administration officers in JUFF. We have made a practice in each issue of trying to foster a dialogue between faculty/staff/administration by providing a forum for questions in areas vital to all our interests. Last year Mr. Gary Carter was our guest. In the past we have had Dr. Craig, Dr. Barefoot, Dr. Brewer, Mr. Stewart, among others. Carroll Griffin came to Union first as a student in 1967, then as Union’s Director of Admissions in 1982.

He came to Union from his position of Minister of Youth and Activities at West Jackson Baptist Church, and since that time he has had phenomenal success in his efforts at Union. When he arrived at his desk, Union’s enrollment was 1382. Last year (1992-93) the total enrollment on both campuses reached 2432, almost double the enrollment in 10 years. He and his wife Kay (also a Union graduate) have three children: Meg, Scott, and Tobey.

JUFF: You’ve been at this 11 years now; is this job agony or bliss?
GRIFFIN: Some of both. It depends on the time of year. Summer is difficult because that’s when we lose some we really wanted to keep. In this job you tend to “get attached” and it’s like losing your best friend . . . over and over.
JUFF: Other than Union, where would you choose to hold this same position as Admissions Director?
GRIFFIN: I would not hold this position at another school. I would not accept the job somewhere else. I love this school. I think God wanted me to be here. I have no desire to move to any other school.
JUFF: How many staff members do you have, and how are they assigned in the field?
GRIFFIN: We have 6 counselors, 2 secretaries, and some student help. The counselors have quite a free hand in how they run their office and their area of responsibility--I’d say 95% freedom in their job; whatever gets results; whatever works. The counselors are assigned to geographic boundaries and tend to build contacts over a period of time. That is one reason it is so important to keep the same admissions staff each year.
JUFF: What attracts most students to Union? What do they most dislike?
GRIFFIN: Now the number one attraction is the combination of a strong Christian environment with an equally strong academic reputation. What they most dislike before they get here is the cost. Then they find out how Union compares to other private schools. Of course we can’t compete with the low cost factor of public schools.
JUFF: Who’s our competition?
GRIFFIN: This may surprise you--Memphis State, UTM, MTSU, not Lambuth or Belmont.
JUFF: And for the same reason, the cost of attending?
GRIFFIN: Yes.
JUFF: What are the entrance requirements now as opposed to when you came in 1982, and do we accept any who do not meet those requirements?
GRIFFIN: When I came to Union the catalogue ACT requirement was 12. We now require an 18 ACT to even look at a student for the freshman class. We have zero freshman students that fail to meet minimum requirements. That’s been the case ever since I came here. Now, we do have some transfer students that do not reach those standards. This year the Admissions Committee has taken a closer look at entrance requirements and wanted to set 20 ACT as a goal. We won’t quite reach that; we have 37 freshmen at present (June 30) in the 18 to 19 ACT category. We may be down in
numbers a bit as a result, but I can handle decreases in numbers, even though that pains, better than I can handle decreases in quality of students.

JUFF: Last year I believe the average ACT was 22.75. Is that changing?

GRIFFIN: We may go to 23.2 this year. I won’t know, of course, until we look at it after they get here, but it should definitely be an increase since last year’s minimum was a 16 ACT.

JUFF: I get to ask that frivolous question I always wondered: how many college catalogues do you have to give out to snare one student in return?

GRIFFIN: We have 5500 made up yearly, but we don’t give them to prospective students very often. Really, they need something less cumbersome, so we have some mail-out marketing material we send, and we give them catalogues in May as they graduate from high school. It would be $5.00 wasted too many times if we used the catalogue as publicity.

JUFF: What’s the student cost per year? What percent does that pay Union’s expenses per student?

GRIFFIN: The on campus cost is about $8000 per year; off campus is $5,690. Student tuition generates about 50% of the total university budget.

JUFF: Our daughter, a senior in high school next year, has already received information from 18 or 20 schools. Most of those are from central and east Tennessee (UTK, Milligan, Cumberland, ETSU, Lee, University of the South, King, Austin Peay, MTSU, Belmont). Only Union from west Tennessee. What’s the story here; is that a fluke?

GRIFFIN: Many of those schools buy names and addresses from ACT headquarters. Union does not. But some of those schools canvas students across the state. I’m surprised at a couple of schools in West Tennessee not contacting a student of her ability.

JUFF: What program/opportunities are most asked about by prospective students (nursing, travel abroad, computer, etc.)?

GRIFFIN: In the past it has been nursing. That may change though with our dropping the ASN program. More and more are asking about placements and types of careers and opportunities.

JUFF: How do most students learn about us--through what source (church, guidance counselors, friend, etc.)?

GRIFFIN: That’s a difficult question because there are 37 different combinations of sources we keep on file. But high school counselors and visits account for the most, about 18%; Centrifuge 11%; Churches 11%; alumni, friends, etc. 9%.

JUFF: Is there a question you like to be asked by an interviewer in order to let the faculty know something else about your work?

GRIFFIN: I’d like the faculty to know two things. I’m very concerned about raising the quality of students they teach. Now the ACT score is not the ultimate indicator, but it is one of the best. Second, I’m much more concerned about retention than recruitment.
CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Agee was Vice President for Religious Affairs at Union from 1975-1982 and before that was a Union University Trustee. He has been President of OBU since leaving Union and serves in that capacity at present. He has a BA from Union, BD at Southwestern Seminary, MD and Doctor of Ministries from Southern Seminary.

John David Barham, currently Director of Academic Computing Services, graduated from Union with a BS degree and from Georgia Institute of Technology with an MS. He came to Union as instructor of Computer Sciences in 1984. John D. has photography as a hobby and his work has appeared in JUFF before.

Louise Bentley, Professor of English, arrived to teach at Union in 1981. She has a BA degree from Bob Jones University, MA from University of Southern California, and Doctor of Arts from Middle Tennessee State. She has presented several papers to Christianity and Literature conferences and the Tennessee Philological Association of which she is the past president.

Lytle Gives, Professor of Sociology and past Chairman of the Department, came to Union in 1978. He has both the BS and MAT from Middle Tennessee State and a Ph. D. from the University of Georgia. He contributes frequently to this journal, writes much, and is a prolific reader and world traveler.

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Marilyn Smothers recently retired as Assistant Professor and Department Chair of English having been at Union since 1969. She has a BA from Belmont and an MA from East Tennessee State and is the past president of the Tennessee College English Association. Her previous writings published in this journal include short stories and poetry.

Roger Stanley has been instructor in English at Union since 1990. He has a BA degree from Appalachian State, MA from East Tennessee State, and is currently working on a doctorate at the University of Mississippi. He is a frequent contributor to journals and is co-editor of this year’s JUFF.
Professor G. Wilson Knight refers to “the fantastic incongruity of parent and child opposed.” Regan and Goneril unite to defeat their father, but Edmund severs their fidelity to each other when the married sisters vie for the love of that villain. The ensuing rivalry leads to their deaths. Goneril poisons Regan before stabbing herself to death. Edgar kills his wicked half-brother, but before Edmund dies, he revokes the death sentences he has passed against Lear and Cordelia; however, this bit of charity from the bastard comes too late for Cordelia who has already been killed. Yale University’s Professor Maynard Mack says that “man’s tragic fate, as King Lear presents it, comes into being with his entry into relatedness, which is his entry into humanity” (“The World of King Lear” 65). Mack’s “When we come crying hither, we bring with us the badge of all our misery; but it is also the badge of the vulnerabilities that give us access to whatever grandeur we achieve” (69) echoes Innocent III’s De Contemptu Mundi’s “We came crying hither. . . . When we are born, we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools” (114), and Lear’s rendering of those words in Act IV, vi., 183-84. Elated that Cordelia loves him, Lear displays grace under pressure when he extends this lighthearted invitation to her:

Come let’s away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we’ll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
As gilded butterflies. . . . (V.iii.8-13)

The tragic figure of Lear is the embodiment of everyone who has lost someone dearer to him than life itself; whether that loss occurs as the result of rivalry over a kingdom, or an inheritance, or simply the inevitable consequence of having lived. Kirsch speaks of “the universality of this experience [death] and of its immeasurable pain” (170). The pain proves to be too much for Lear who follows his daughter in death as she had endeavored to follow him in life. In his provocative article “On the Greatness of King Lear,” Booth refers to Lear’s entrance with Cordelia in his arms as "the most terrifying five minutes in literature...for the audience" (101). Rife with rivalries, King Lear’s rivals litter the stage with bodies in the closing scenes. Death claims all three sisters, as well as the evil half-brother. Too late Lear learns that love is far more precious than kingdoms; too late Gloucester learns to differentiate between true and counterfeit love; and too soon Edgar, the survivor, experiences the emptiness that so often accompanies victory.

Although Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Prince Of Denmark, is a revenge play, the revenge flows from intra/inter-family rivalries. Rivalry sets in motion the domino effect that ends in the fall of the play’s most important characters as well as the fall of Denmark to Norway.

Family rivalry causes Claudius to murder his brother Hamlet. This Cain-like action accomplishes several objectives: Claudius wins the crown he covets, he satisfies his ambition, and he marries the lovely Gertrude, his brother’s widow. Briefly it appears that Claudius has murdered with impunity, but then his brother’s ghost appears and poisons the air of Denmark with his tale of murder most foul. Mack says, “The juice he [Claudius] pours into the ear of the elder Hamlet is a combined poison and disease. . . . From this fatal center, unwholesomeness spreads
out till there is something rotten in all Denmark” (“The World of Hamlet,” 58). Sickness and disease metaphors abound throughout the play. Poison begets poison and that poison begets death. The original murder [Claudius’ murder of King Hamlet], which occurs in a garden and leads to more deaths, resembles Satan’s miasmic intrusion into the Garden of Eden and man’s subsequent fall. Whereas the Edenic fall was symbolic or figurative, in Hamlet the fall is literal, with bodies falling all over the stage.

Although Hamlet is distressed when his mother, Gertrude, marries Claudius so soon after King Hamlet’s death, it is not until Hamlet speaks with his father’s ghost that he views his Uncle Claudius as an intended murder victim. However, once the older Hamlet reveals Claudius’ role in his death, Hamlet begins to consider ridding the world of his and his father’s rival for Gertrude’s love. Now he has a stronger reason for despising his uncle. Now his actions will be justified by his commission to murder that “smiling, damned villain!” (I.v.106). This despicable villain, according to Professor Fredson Bowers, has “killed [Hamlet’s] father, whoered his mother, popped in between the election and his hopes” (90), and if that were not enough, the villainous uncle plots the young Hamlet’s assassination.

Professor Ernest Jones speaks of Hamlet’s “long, repressed” desire to take his father’s place in his mother’s affection,” which Jones says is “stimulated to unconscious activity by the sight of someone usurping this place exactly as he himself had once longed to do . . . .This someone was a member of the same family, so that the actual usurpation further resembled the imaginary one in being incestuous. Without his being in the least aware of it these ancient desires are ringing in his mind...” (108). Consumed by jealousy and righteous indignation, Hamlet watches his mother and uncle enjoy each other’s company. Unable and unwilling to stem his grief over the loss of his father as readily as have Gertrude and Claudius, Hamlet stands silhouetted in sorrow and muses:

But two months dead, nay, not so much...
So excellent a king...so loving to my mother
That he might not betheem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. . . .
Frailty, thy name is woman! (I.i.138-42)

A few months earlier Claudius had berated Hamlet for continuing to grieve for his father: “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?...to persevere / In obstinate
condolence is a course / of impious stubbornness, tis unmanly grief” (I.i.66; 92-94). And Gertrude in turn had reminded her son: “Thou know’st ’tis common, all that
lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity” (I.i.72-73).

As Marcellus says in Act I, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (iv. 89). The ghost of the murdered king walks abroad, frightening a few former subjects and alarming his son by describing his assassination and commissioning young Hamlet to avenge his father’s death. Thus a rival rises from the grave to demand revenge. He pours into his son’s ear a poison quite as deadly as Claudius had poured into his brother’s kingly ear. The newly-commissioned son, already deeply saddened by his father’s death and by the unseemly haste in which his mother had remarried, must now set aside his grief, forsake his scholarly pursuits, alienate his
beloved Ophelia, and devise a scheme that will end in the appeasement of his father’s ghost: regicide! The ghost recreates the murder scene:

Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch’d,
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin...
No reck’ning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head. (I.v.74-76; 77-78)

Earlier in that scene, the ghost has told Hamlet, “My hour is almost come / When I to sulph’rous and tormenting flames / Must render up myself” (I.v.5-7). The elder Hamlet has lost his heavenly paradise as well as his earthly kingdom. Bereft of hope and obsessed by his monomaniacal desire to be avenged, this man reposes back from the grave to destroy his survivors—loved ones as well as enemies.

Instead of assuring Hamlet that Gertrude played no role in his murder, the elder Hamlet just says, “Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven...” (I.v.85-86). Thus Hamlet must act while believing that his own mother had conspired against his father. No wonder he begins to think of Denmark as a prison and to marvel “that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!” (I.v.108). In accepting his father’s commission Hamlet forfeits his own freedom, never to regain it. He feigns insanity to accomplish his deadly purpose, but the many tragedies that occur almost shove him over the brink into insanity. When he leaps into Ophelia’s grave, he never really emerges alive. He goes through the motions of living, but he no longer prizes life: “I lov’d Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum” (V.i.269-70). Mack sees this scene as pivotal, noting that following the grave scene, Hamlet is “ready for the final contest of mighty opposites.” He states that Hamlet now “accepts the world as it is, the world as a duel, in which whether we know it or not, evil holds the poisoned rapier and the poisoned chalice waits; and...if we win at all, it costs not less than everything” (“The World of Hamlet“ 63). This writer feels, however, that an earlier scene, the “To Be, Or Not to Be” soliloquy, determines Hamlet’s course. Indeed, William Butler Yeats’ “Why should we honor those who die on the field of battle? A man may show as reckless a courage in entering into the abyss of himself” seems especially applicable to Hamlet, for in his famous soliloquy he explores the abyss of self and rises from his search with renewed determination to destroy his father’s and his rival.

Although Hamlet welcomes an opportunity to kill Claudius, murderer of his father and thief of his mother, he feels overwhelmed by the ghost’s command and he wishes that circumstances were different: “The time is out of joint—O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!” (I.v.188-89). David Kestan observes that Hamlet reluctantly finds that revenge is a “desperate mode of imitation, avenging wrongs with wrongs. The revenger is prevented from originating an action. He is allowed only to re-act to—and to re-enact—the original crime” (113). When Hamlet holds up before Gertrude and Claudius the mirror [the play within the play], he sees himself reflected therein. He and Claudius are both murderers or would-be murderers. Shortly after this unsettling scene, Hamlet hears a sound behind the curtains of his mother’s bedchamber and thinking it is Claudius lurking there, he stabs at the curtain and kills the unfortunate Polonius, guilty only of nosiness, pomposity, and
loquaciousness—all irritating traits but hardly sufficient cause to be murdered. Now
Hamlet’s hands, like Claudius’ hands, are stained with blood.

Boris Pasternak, Russian translator of Hamlet, views the Play not as “a drama of
weakness...but of duty and self-denial” (cited in Levin, 80). In order to kill his
father’s rival, Hamlet must lose everything, including the love and life of his beloved
Ophelia and his own life. Rivalry between two brothers results in a rottenness in
Denmark. Each brother precipitates the deaths of several people. Each brother has
tunnel vision and each little cares that his actions will incur misery and death.
Hamlet the avenger—son and nephew—is swept along by the tide of events as he
moves toward the final reckoning. Poison—the poison of rivalry at its most
despicable level—leaves yet another stage strewn with bodies. Sounding like an echo
of his father’s ghost, the young Hamlet, as he is dying, speaks to Horatio and asks to
be remembered:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity a while,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story. (V.ii.346-49)

Hamlet implores his friend not to join him in death but to live and tell his story.
Referring specifically to King Lear, but applying equally as well to Hamlet, Mack says
that King Lear “begs us to seek the meaning of our human fate not in what becomes
of us, but in what we become. Death...is miscellaneous and commonplace; it is life
whose quality may be made noble and distinctive. Suffering we all recoil from; but
we know it is a greater thing to suffer than to lack the feelings and virtues that make
it possible to suffer” (“The World of King Lear,” 69).

No one can see the tragic figures of Lear, Gloucester, and Hamlet on the stage
without being very much aware that these figures’ feelings ran deep and that their
“virtues...[made] it possible to suffer,” even to suffer the angst of familial rivalry.
According to Mack, “tragedy never tells us what to think; it shows us what we are
and may be” (69). Therein lies the palpable poignancy one experiences when he
perceives the unrealized heights these characters could have reached had they not
fallen while poised on the precipice. Lear’s words regarding Cordelia say it all:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more
Never, never, never, never, never. (V.iii.307-09)
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Contributors

**Lillian Baggett** came to Union’s English Department in 1981 and taught on a part-time basis until 1987, when she was employed full-time. She has a BA from the University of North Texas and an MA from MTSU. She has contributed several papers to the Joseph E. Martin Shakespeare Circle in Jackson.

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