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# Russian Roots in Southern Soil

James Preston Edge

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RUSSIAN ROOTS IN SOUTHERN SOIL

by

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## Dedication

For my mother, Connie Diann Herndon Edge

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the profound influence that 19th-century Russian authors had on 20th-century Southern writers. Recent analyses of the American South have looked to the fluid nature of this region's borders, often spreading into the Caribbean, South America, and American West, but there has not yet been any book-length study of the ways in which several Russian literary masters, including Ivan Turgenev, Anton Chekhov, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, influenced Southern authors, particularly Ernest Gaines, Eudora Welty, and Richard Wright. In particular, these Southern authors, in interviews and essays, have repeatedly extolled these Russian figures for their elevation of communal folklore, ways of confronting post-war defeat and identity crises, understanding of their own country's ostracism by surrounding nations and domestic social hierarchies, and the establishment of a national literature. I want to suggest that these Southern authors recognized an analogous existence in these Russians' works and sought to not only appreciate and extol their writing but to replicate it in their own texts, frequently utilizing the same formal and stylistic conventions. In embracing the templates put forth by their Russian inspirations, these Southerners found a way to understand their own collisions with indignities and ostracism as well as the methods by which culture could be restored and preserved in a respectable, literary tradition.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Chapter 1: A Proper Descendant, More Than a Cousinly Resemblance .....	1
Chapter 2: Ivan Turgenev and Ernest Gaines .....	16
Structural Influence and Generational Conflict .....	24
Folktales, Myths, and Supernatural Capabilities .....	41
Chapter 3: Anton Chekhov and Eudora Welty .....	57
Storms, Inspiration, and Fate .....	64
Noncommunication and Silence .....	88
Chapter 4: Fyodor Dostoevsky and Richard Wright.....	102
Exile, Indignity, and Empathy .....	107
Raskolnikovs.....	129
Chapter 5: Southern Horizons.....	151
Works Cited .....	153

## Chapter 1: A Proper Descendant, More Than a Cousinly Resemblance

1941 was a significant year in American history for numerous reasons, including the United States of America's entry into World War II, the first publication of a Captain America comic, and the premier of acclaimed films *Dumbo* and *Citizen Kane*, so it is no surprise that the publication of Carson McCullers' "Books I Remember" is often forgotten. In this essay, the Georgia-born author expounds upon the most important texts she encountered throughout her life, paying particular attention to those that significantly impacted her career as a writer. As might be expected, her initial reflections focus primarily on texts populated by "robbers, wicked giants, and anyone outside respectable society" who endured plagues, shipwrecks, and Indian massacres (McCullers 464). In addition to these wildly adventurous tales, McCullers also reminisces on enduring classics that were particularly important on her maturation as a reader and thinker, which were *Treasure Island*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *Little Women*. These novels evoked in McCullers a sense of wonder and an emotional depth that would reside within her throughout her remainder of her life; however, even these books were not the most important ones in her life. The most significant change in her reading history, one where "books suddenly take on a new meaning" and draw one "to the richer and more dramatic adventures of the soul," came "when, at thirteen, [she] read the great Russians" (McCullers 465, 466).



The masterpieces of Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *The Idiot*, “opened the door to an immense and marvelous new world” for McCullers, and the “amazement” and “sense of wonder,” she wrote, would continue to take hold of her until the end of her life (McCullers 466). For her, Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev, and Chekhov were authors with whom she could relate, even though they had been born on the other side of the planet, as she remarked upon their thematic, metaphorical proximity: “The hot lazy Russian summers, the lonely villages on the steppes, the old grandfathers who sleep with the children on the stove, the white winters of Saint Petersburg--these are as close to me as scenes from my own home town” (McCullers 466). Only a few months after the publication of “Books I Remember,” McCullers would expand upon these feelings of appreciation and familiarity in her essay “The Russian Realists and Southern Literature” (1941), famously claiming:

Modern Southern writing seems rather to be most indebted to Russian literature, to be the progeny of the Russian realists. And this influence is not accidental. The circumstances under which Southern literature has been produced are strikingly like those under which the Russians functioned. In both old Russia and the South up to the present time a dominant characteristic was the cheapness of human life.

(McCullers 252)

The cheapness of human life described by McCullers links American slavery and Russian serfdom, which had been a feature of Russian society since the implementation of the serf system in Russia in 1649 and “was not technically slavery,” even though these two systems had many similarities, as the participants were indentured to a certain degree (Lynch). In serfdom, the “landowner did not own the serf” and “the serf was bound to the

lord” solely because of the land on which the serf lived (Lynch). There are minor differences in these systems, however, and the reality of the racial division between white ownership and black and brown human chattel in the American South is impossible to ignore. Furthermore, William C. Hines has asserted that the Russian serf’s experience was slightly ““more varied and complex than its American counterpart”” mainly due to the “time-honored relationship between peasants and the land,” whereby the landowner was responsible for the well being of the peasants is also a minor alteration (Wills). 1861’s Emancipation Statute issued by Tsar Alexander II changed this system definitively, because serfs were “made legally free from their landlords (Lynch). Tsar Alexander II’s mandate resulted in serfs being allowed to buy land from the estates of their former owners, vote, marry a person of their own choice, and even possess legal rights to sue in court (Lynch). However, the newfound freedom that serfs had begun to experience led to new problems, specifically corruption in land divisions and debt entrapment, brought about by landowners seeking a continued hold on their former power. In an analogous manner, the conclusion of Russian serfdom (1861) and American slavery (1865) resulted in a very similar institution known as sharecropping, which was a system of agricultural production through the use of tenant farming.

Though emancipated, sharecroppers were often given some of the worst offerings of land available from landowners and were not only difficult to maintain but also “yielded little food or profit” (Lynch). Furthermore, to ensure the continued commitment of tenant farmers for future generations, many landowners took considerable advantage of the lack of savings of many of their former slaves and granted them loans, which were given at exorbitant interest rates. For many sharecropping families, the first generation

accrued a considerable amount of debt, which tied the next generation to the land, offering a system of cyclical redemption payments that had to be made before a family was free to leave (Lynch). In both Russia and America, this system of sharecropping would remain mired in corruption and frustrating loan schemes for decades until the Revolution of 1917 and the 1940s in each region respectively before these agricultural practices were effectively ended by the rise in industrialization brought on by impending wars (Lynch; Giesen).

While the shared histories between Russia and the American South feature human chattel and agricultural ‘progress’ with similar trajectory, the similarities McCullers found between these two nations were not solely limited to “the cheapness of human life,” as nearly all nations contain some trace of forced subjugation in their past. In elaborating upon more ways in which these two regions were bound in her mind, McCullers wrote:

The South and old Russia have much in common sociologically. The South has always been a section apart from the rest of the United States, having interests and a personality distinctly its own. Economically and in other ways it has been used as a sort of colony to the rest of the nation. The poverty is unlike anything known in other parts of this country. In social structure there is a division of classes similar to that in old Russia. The South is the only part of the nation having a definite peasant class. But in spite of social divisions the people of the South are homogeneous. The Southerner and the Russian are both ‘types’ in that they have certain recognizable and national psychological traits. Hedonistic, imaginative, lazy, emotional--there is surely a cousinly resemblance. (McCullers 471)

In just a few sentences, McCullers addresses a swath of sociological similarities, and though she states her ideas boldly and confidently, many of them appear tenuous, at best<sup>1</sup>. Many critics have professed confusion with the ideas behind McCullers' identification of these two regions as similar, and Temira Pachmuss, for example, claims that the Russian and Southern identities are, in fact, "two completely different cultural backgrounds" with few "parallels and confluences" in the histories of these two societies (Pachmuss 115). Of the few similarities between Russians and Southerners, Pachmuss isolates the comparable ways in which authors from these regions treat "loneliness, love, spiritual searching, physical deformity, and violence, but she goes into little detail about these very broad categories (Pachmuss 115). While Maria Bloshteyn agrees with Pachmuss' considerations that these broad themes are shared between authors from these regions, she disagrees with the reasons behind Pachmuss' cultural equivalency, pointing to the odd logic in Pachmuss' assertion that "Southern writers would have to turn to a Russian novelist for the message 'Jesus Saves'--a notion that they were surely familiar with, if only through roadside signs and bumper stickers" (Bloshteyn 2, 3). Bloshteyn instead aligns closely with Carson McCullers and expands upon the cultural similarities between the two cultures:

[T]he two societies, including the vastness of territory occupied, industrial backwardness, skewed proportion of the small educated and wealthy leisure class

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<sup>1</sup>The most glaringly problematic comment in McCullers' descriptions, apart from her failure to recognize race in the South in her conflation of these two regions, may be that "the people of the South are homogeneous," which was no truer in 1941 than it is in 2018. The bayous, plains, coasts, swamps, and mountainous regions of the South are populated by individuals from a multitude of ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds who participate in cultures with interests as varied as their ancestry. To reduce the region to a homogeneous standard would be to do it and its people a disservice.

to the masses of uneducated poor, devastating military losses (Russia lost the Crimean War of 1853-1856 only several years before the Confederate States lost the Civil War) and, most prominently, the institutions of slavery and serfdom, which reinforced the idea that human life was a relatively inexpensive commodity. (Bloshteyn 3-4)

Bloshteyn also isolates the cultural parallel in the way that “both southern states and Russian claimed God as the champion in their wars,” citing famous contemporary propaganda from each nation viewing their war as a type of crusade (Bloshteyn 4).

These nations, both often made insecure by being viewed as ‘lesser than’ by the North and Europe respectively, also attempted to reflect this feeling onto one another. Prior to the Civil War, “Russia was often cast by southerners into the role of the evil Other whose barbaric customs somehow justified the benevolent institutions of the South” (Bloshteyn 4). The Russian press would also use horrifying stories of slavery in the American South as an analogous way to critique the serfdom in its own nation, though the tales of the American slaves and plantation life were often skewed to seem as if the Southern slave was far worse than the Russian serf, allowing Russians to feel the weight of moral responsibility while still being able to look down on the example of the vile Southerner (Bloshteyn 4). Historically and culturally, the links between these two nations appear quite tangible, and both entered a moment of national crisis at approximately the same time for parallel reasons.

Many Southern authors also felt a deep connection with Russian authors because of their distinct desire to write about Russian identity, instead of culture or locales in Western Europe. In authors like Dostoevsky and Chekhov, many Southerners saw the

celebration of, and templates for, a national literature. The “Russia-centric mentality” of many of these 19th-century Russian authors inspired numerous Southerners to remain “a part of their own communities and to write about them” (Bloshteyn 6). Bloshteyn reinforces this claim well with Flannery’s O’Connor’s assertion that “southern fiction thrives because southern writers ‘apparently feel the need of expatriation less than other writers in this country’” (Bloshteyn 6). In addition to this sense of place, Bloshteyn claims that Southerners have embraced the concept of “Slavophilic Messianism, which included the belief that only Russia can save the world” (Bloshteyn 6). Several Southern authors have embraced this idea and projected it onto the American North and world at large. For example, these sentiments have been exhibited in Faulkner’s 1955 speech to the Southern Historical Foundation where he “suggested, somewhat disingenuously, that the South is in the best position” to oppose monolithicism and communism and prevent ‘the whole world from [collapsing into the abyss]’ (Bloshteyn 7). Walker Percy, too, has suggested a similar approach in his “Aid and Comfort from the South” in which he asserts, “the South alone can help the North remain great and free” (Bloshteyn 6). All of these factors are intriguing when considering the cultural intersections and parallels between these two societies and their rich literary histories.

Nearly all of the extant critical research linking Southern and Russian literature has been limited to only a handful of Southern authors, by and large composed of William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O’Connor. Jean Weisgerber’s *Faulkner and Dostoevsky: Influence and Confluence* (1968) provides the earliest critical link between these two literary traditions, but its slender scope has limited usefulness for scholars looking for more consistent connections between Russian and Southern authors.

Temira Pachmuss' "Dostoevsky and America's Southern Women Writers: Parallels and Confluences" (1981) offers a wider view of the engagement between these literary traditions and, though quite brief, analyzes Dostoevsky's impact on Flannery O'Connor, Carson McCullers, and Eudora Welty. Maria Bloshteyn's "Dostoevsky and the Literature of the American South" (2004) and Bertram Wyatt-Brown's "Russian Literature and the Southern Literary Modernists" (1998) remain the most consequential texts to consult on the links between these two literary traditions, but they, like the preceding texts, are focused mostly on Fyodor Dostoevsky's influence on Southern literature. Bloshteyn's essay is particularly excellent and remains the most consequential piece to be found on the parallels between these two societies and literary canons. By and large, the theme of literary study analyzing the links between Russian and Southern authors begins with Dostoevsky and ends with William Faulkner, Carson McCullers, and Flannery O'Connor. Recent dissertations by Julianna Lee Leachman, *'A cousinly resemblance': Negotiating Identity in Literature of Russia and the U.S. South*, and Benjamin T. Saxton, *Grotesque Subjects: Dostoevsky and Modern Southern Fiction*, expand the Russian authors to include Andrei Platonov and Nikolai Gogol, yet the same Southerners, Faulkner, O'Connor, and McCullers are the American figures discussed. Though Russell M. Hillier's *Morality in Cormac McCarthy's Fiction: Souls at Hazard* (2017) contains a section discussing Dostoevsky's influence on Cormac McCarthy, the influence of Russian literature from the 19th-century on 20th-century Southern authors needs a more expansive and inclusive analysis.

In an interview with William Parrill in 1986, Ernest Gaines claimed, "I don't think I'm taken seriously yet as a writer to a point where there can be long articles or

comprehensive essays about me and my work. I have known people who have done masters on my work. I have known people who have used me in their doctorate, but I'm not one of those people whose work is written about by the major critics" (Parrill 187). Nearly four decades later, this sentiment in the world of scholarship has changed somewhat and there are now numerous monographs on Gaines' work in existence, though none focus on the profound impact Ivan Turgenev's work has had on him. The same can be said of Eudora Welty and Richard Wright. Both of these individuals have been deeply influenced by the style and moral considerations set forth by Anton Chekhov and Fyodor Dostoevsky respectively, yet there are not lengthy studies elucidating how or why this is the case.

The primary goal of this text is to illustrate the myriad ways in which 20-century Southern authors are indebted to 19th-century Russian writers. From the Russian realists that preceded them, numerous Southern authors, as McCullers, Bloshteyn, and Pachmuss have argued, were drawn to their art due to a shared history and culture, though the racial strife in the South has no immediate antecedent in Russia. The following chapters will argue that these Southern authors were fascinated with Russian authors because of their 1) depictions of moments of cultural and social crisis, often caused by intruding and disrupting modernity; 2) desire to construct, preserve, and value a distinct region or people group; 3) commitment to give voice to a traditionally underrepresented or excluded social class; 4) elevation of peasant or folk myths, identity, and figures. Though the chapters will diverge in many ways, these currents run beneath the authors as a shared aquifer from which their inspirations seem to spring.



In perspective, this project will break with other comparative studies in a considerable fashion. To borrow a phrase from Jean Weisgerber's *Faulkner and Dostoevsky*, "This is a curious book that will undoubtedly shock systematic minds" (Weisgerber vii). Many comparative studies hold two common threads between their subjects, which are 1) a shared geographical region in question and 2) a shared time period with the texts or authors in question. This study will challenge these two pillars of comparative study. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* explains some of the purposes of authors appropriating or reworking other sources. She claims that this process leads to new works that "actualize or concretize ideas," "make simplifying selections," and "amplify and extrapolate," (Hutcheon 3). All of these decisions, however, involve a decision to make "critique or show their respect" for an original text (Hutcheon 3). This project looks to the ways in which images, themes, and symbols of the Russian masters have been appropriated and altered by Southern authors decades later to show respect for these authors and also emphasize cultural similarities and critical depictions of problems these societies face. In replicating or slightly altering the images from their idols, these Southern authors are critiquing concepts of linear, agricultural progress, complicating the concept of memory and nostalgia, questioning the value of connectivity and urbanization, and condemning social exclusion. Above all, these Southerners' references, reimaginings, and reexaminations are paying homage to the Russian masters from whom these Southern authors drew inspiration and turning their scenes, motifs, and images into contemporary, Southern adaptations that show connection points between the similar struggles of these societies.

Methodologically, each chapter will discuss two authors, one Russian and one Southern, and begin with historical and biographical information about the time in which each author was born, matured, and wrote. The diverse background of each of the authors will provide considerable context and provide a strong basis from which to engage the literary similarities between each author. After the historical and biographical context, I will begin to discuss personal letters and interviews in which an American author mentions the influence of a Russian author, specifically a text, character, or image. In conjunction with these comments, I will then discuss the literary reference and show how the Russian text, image, or symbol that was lauded by the Southern author was appropriated in that Southerner's work. Though this description of the chapter framework seems rigid, I will do my best to smoothly transition between secondary texts, interviews, and elucidating analysis.

The first chapter of this study focuses on the connection between Ivan Turgenev and Ernest Gaines. In many interviews, Gaines has remarked that Turgenev was one of his most important literary influences, and the Louisiana author's first novel, *Catherine Carmier*, is templated in a direct manner on Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. The overall structures of both novels are extremely similar, as both tales feature the return of a newly educated young man to the estate and plantation from which he came. Though Gaines is often modest about the levels of plot replication between these two texts, the driving force behind each of these narratives is the issue of generational disagreement. In *Fathers and Sons*, the generational differences are philosophical and political in nature, while in *Catherine Carmier* the differences are still philosophical, but these differences are also seen in the tangible loss of young individuals from the plantation, as they have all moved

away from the older generation that still inhabits the land. Each of these novels engages ideas of property division, agricultural changes, and conflicting generational ideologies as a way to illustrate the difficulties with and hesitations toward modernization, even in an agrarian setting. Ultimately, they show the necessary, though often painful, cycles of economic reform and migration.

Furthermore, it may also prove useful to look at the ways in which Turgenev's depictions of peasant folktales, myths, and supernatural creatures in *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* influenced Gaines. Gaines has invoked Turgenev's name in conjunction with great ghost stories and traditions of mysticality and storytelling, so it should not seem accidental for Gaines to appropriate some of the same images and tales Turgenev relies upon in his short stories. In particular, Gaines appears fascinated with harbingers of doom and mystics, often in the form of hoo-doo women. Turgenev's "Bezhin Lea" offers numerous images that Gaines would later appropriate and feature in his own short stories and, most prominently, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. In looking at the way Gaines modeled his supernatural figures on those he encountered in Turgenev's texts, readers can gain a greater understanding of the value and legacy of peasant storytelling and folklore, which gives a voice to a segment of society often parodied, muted, or disregarded.

The next section of this study also features two authors who endowed their characters with dignity and decency, regardless of socioeconomic, gender, or ethnic status, Anton Chekhov and Eudora Welty. The Mississippi-born author was enamored with Chekhov and repeatedly lauded his short stories and plays in numerous letters and interviews. In addition to her respect for him, she also viewed him as a sort of kindred

spirit to the popular Southern authors at the time and explained, “He loved the singularity in people, the individuality. He took for granted the sense of family. He had the sense of fate overtaking a way of life, and his Russian humor seems to me kin to the humor of a Southerner. It’s the kind that lies mostly in character” (Kuehl 75). In addition to this kinship, Welty was particularly enamored with the storm sequence in Chekhov’s “The Duel” and chose to recreate similar scenes in “The Winds,” “June Recital,” and *The Ponder Heart*. Through these adaptations, she sought to illustrate the beauty and power of nature, how it could offer her characters a chance to reflect on their pasts, and how the creativity it could spark might inspire changes for their future. Additionally, Chekhov’s texts also offered Welty a model to investigate the possibilities and frustrations of communication. His characters in *The Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya* might attempt to convey a thought through speech, but by rarely being heard or understood, they are often unable to truly communicate with one another. Welty appears to have been intrigued by this idea, and her “First Love” illustrates what happens not when a character speaks and fails to be heard, but when a character is unable to hear or speak and must communicate and make meaning without language. In essence, Welty’s creative adaptation to Chekhov’s investigation of noncommunication through unheard speech shows how people are capable of deriving meaning from nonverbal forms of communication.

The penultimate section of this study focuses on Fyodor Dostoevsky and Richard Wright. Of all the Russians, Dostoevsky may be the one most discussed in matters of influence on Southern writers and thinkers, and his impact on Richard Wright is undeniable, though there remains a gap in the scholarship on this connection. Numerous aspects of Dostoevsky’s work intrigued Wright, and Wright claimed him as “one of his

main literary models” due to Dostoevsky's “psychology of the outsider” (Bloshteyn 19). Wright was fascinated by Dostoevsky’s depictions of political, social, and penal exiles and how they were forced to endure constant indignities and debasement due to convictions that often stemmed from situations over which they had little chance to escape. In this vein, Wright was particularly laudatory toward Dostoevsky’s *House of the Dead*, as the text “made [him] remember how Negroes in the South, crowded into their Black Belts, vented their hostility up on one another, forgetting that their lives were conditioned by the whites above them” (PM 16). This portion will address how Dostoevsky was inspired by this text and used it as a template to write his first autobiographical text, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” Wright’s text showed how blacks in the American South were placed in similarly challenging conditions as Russian prisoners, forced to endure and navigate daily dehumanization. The next portion of this chapter looks to the ways in which Richard Wright attempted to appropriate *Crime and Punishment*’s Raskolnikov as a black man in America in the characters of Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon in *Native Son* and *The Outsider*. By adapting Raskolnikov into the unique situations of a black man in twentieth-century America, Wright shows that the spiritual regeneration and hope at the end of the Russian novel are not a possibility in these circumstances. Instead, the same brutal societal aspects that continue to oppress, confine, and relegate black Americans to second-class citizenship will continue to occur until the systemic changes that seem to dictate violence as the only route to proof of one’s own humanity are altered.

The coda of this text briefly looks to contemporary beacons of Southern work and how they continue to draw inspiration from Russian sources. In particular, this section

will turn an eye toward the Caribbean and look to the ways in which two texts, Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* and Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics*, may present some fascinating room for expansion of this project. Each of these texts uses Leo Tolstoy's work to offer insights critiquing French expansionism and celebrating the transmission of Russian culture.

## Chapter 2: Ivan Turgenev and Ernest Gaines

*I think [Turgenev] was my first great influence (Gaines 157)*

Born in Pointe Coupee Parish, Louisiana in 1933, Ernest James Gaines, author of numerous short stories and novels, including *A Lesson Before Dying*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and *A Gathering of Old Men*, remains one of the least studied of America's major authors (Carmean 1). Though he has been awarded a National Humanities Medal and been named a MacArthur Foundation fellow, it is somewhat telling that he was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in the same year, 1993, that he was awarded the John Dos Passos Prize for Literature, which annually recognizes an author who has "produced a substantial body of significant publication" but may remain under-recognized ("The John Dos Passos Prize for Literature"). Gaines himself has, on occasion, remarked on his career and the lack of critical attention on his work, and in an interview with William Parrill in 1986, the Louisiana author claimed, "I don't think I'm taken seriously yet as a writer to a point where there can be long articles or comprehensive essays about me and my work. I have known people who have done masters on my work. I have known people who have used me in their doctorate, but I'm not one of those people whose work is written about by the major critics" (Parrill 187). Nearly four decades later, this sentiment in the world of scholarship has changed somewhat, and there are now a few critical explorations of

Gaines' work in existence, with Valerie Babb's *Ernest Gaines* and Mary Ellen Doyle's *Voices from the Quarter: The Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines* being, perhaps, the most introspective and elucidating of those texts. Yet, even in the extant scholarship, including the two excellent aforementioned texts, there remains scant discussion of the importance of Russian literature, especially the texts of Ivan Turgenev, to Ernest Gaines' canon.

The following pages will illustrate the shared fascination in celebrating peasant beliefs and folklore between these authors and show how and why Gaines drew inspiration from Ivan Turgenev. In particular, Gaines modeled his first novel, *Catherine Carmier*, on the template and conflicts within *Fathers and Sons*, preserving many of its characters' central concerns and struggles while also including adaptations to race and religious influences by locating it in rural Louisiana. Furthermore, many of Gaines' other texts exhibit a consistent engagement with some of Turgenev's fiction concerned with peasant beliefs and folklore. Through altering and adapting Turgenev's work, Ernest Gaines shows how African-American sharecroppers have been wronged in many of the same ways as Russian serfs and, due to being powerless in their environments, often pursue folklore or religion as a way to find autonomy in their own ways.

Ernest Gaines' earliest memories of his family's sharecropping identity fundamentally connected him to the characters, especially peasants and serfs, he would later come to adore in Ivan Turgenev's texts. Gaines' childhood was both arduous and harrowing, though sadly common for a black child born in rural Louisiana. Born on the River Lake Plantation, Gaines would enter the world and spend his childhood on the land



<sup>2</sup>that his ancestors had worked as slaves and later as sharecroppers in a post-emancipation America. His earliest memories are filled with grueling labor “in the fields, picking cotton and gathering Irish potatoes for fifty cents a day” and frequently being “sent to cut wood in the swamps” as well (Carmean 2). The intense labor he experienced as a child was also matched by upheaval in the home, as his parents separated when Gaines was only 8. Though this was a trying time for the young man, he had the presence of a strong-willed and graceful woman, his great aunt Augusteen Jefferson, to see him through these events. Many of Gaines’ strong matriarchs and female figures are modeled after her, and the author credits her as being the first great influence in his life. In an essay he wrote about the inspiration of *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, he writes, “Until I was fifteen years old, I had been raised by an aunt, a lady who had never walked a day in her life, but who crawled over the floor as a six-month-old child might” (Gaines 4). Under her guidance, Gaines would spend the rest of his adolescence and early teenage years on the plantation in Louisiana doing sharecropping labor and assisting his family on their plot of land, but at 15 Gaines would leave the family’s land and travel to Vallejo, California, where his mother had remarried (Carmean 3). Once there, Gaines’ perspective would be altered by the size of the nation, the pain of homesickness, and his distance from the place he had, since childhood, known as home.

To combat his feelings of isolation and separation from his great aunt, a teenage Gaines began to visit the Vallejo Public Library (Carmean 4). In search of entertainment and companionship, Gaines sifted through books at random before eventually finding his

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<sup>2</sup> This land remains important to Gaines, as he bought the plantation property, built a home upon it, and also relocated and restored the plantation’s church where he received his primary education.

way to works by Willa Cather and John Steinbeck, and while he found these texts to be somewhat intriguing, the characters in these books were not those he knew or with whom he could truly relate (Carmean 4). It was not until Gaines began to read authors from outside of America's borders that he would find writers who would hold his young imagination. He first discovered "the great European writers," like William Shakespeare and James Joyce, which eventually led him to Guy de Maupassant and Anton Chekhov (Gaines 156-157; Carmean 8). Journeying eastward across Europe's great literary landscapes, he settled upon Russia and began to soak in texts from that canon. He rapidly went from "Chekhov to Tolstoy, then to the rest of the Russians - among them Pushkin, Gogol and Turgenev," enjoying "especially Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* and his *Fathers and Sons*" (Gaines 8). Though he does not mention any specific texts for any of the authors other than Turgenev, the "nineteenth-century Russian writers" quickly became his "favorites, and to this day as a group of writers of any one country, they still are" because Gaines "felt that they wrote about peasantry or, put another way, truer than any other group of writers of any country" (Gaines 8-9). In these authors and many of their characters, he found a link to the sharecropping roots he had left in Louisiana. Unlike the peasant figures created by other authors whom he read, the nineteenth-century Russians, Turgenev in particular, created realistic depictions of peasant culture. Gaines explains:

Their peasants were not caricatures or clowns. They did not make fun of them. They were people - they were good, they were bad. They could be as brutal as any man, they could be as kind. The American writers in general, the Southern writer in particular, never saw peasantry, especially black peasantry in this way; blacks

were either caricatures of human beings or they were problems. They needed to be saved or they were saviors. They were either children or they were seers. But they were very seldom what the average being was. There were exceptions, of course, but I'm talking about a total body of writers, the conscience of a people. (Gaines 9)

These authors brought him considerable joy, and for the first time in his life, Gaines was able to relate to authors for the depictions of a segment of society with which he was familiar and from which he came; however, even these portrayals were incomplete for the young man from Louisiana.

While he “found the nineteenth-century Russian writers superior for their interest in the peasants, they, too, could not give [him] the satisfaction that [he] was longing for. Their four- and five-syllable names were foreign to [him]” (Gaines 9). Gaines meditated on his distanced feeling from these authors and claimed, “even those who I thought were nearest to the way I felt were not close enough” (Gaines 9). So, in the vein of the authors whom he respected and enjoyed the most, he too began to write stories reflective of his own peasant, or sharecropping culture, in the American South by modeling the structure of his stories, borrowing tropes, and adapting motifs from the author who had most deeply affected him, Ivan Turgenev.

That Ernest Gaines became enamored with Ivan Turgenev's texts is nearly as surprising as it is unlikely, because even though the Russian author wrote about serfs and made them into relatable figures for Gaines, Turgenev was born into the nobility. Born in 1818, Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev was the second of three sons born to Sergey Nikolayevich Turgenev, a retired cavalry officer, and Varvara Petrovna Turgenev, his

to immense wealth and a large estate, Spasskoye, with over 5,000 serfs (“Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev”). Their marriage was one of necessity, stemming from the once-wealthy Turgenev family’s recent economic struggles, and was filled with deep unhappiness and constant discord and infidelity. Ivan Turgenev’s mother would have more of an influence on him than his father, and his mother’s frequent physical abuse and the despotic manner with which she ruled the estate would resonate with the child for the rest of his life. Even at an early age, Turgenev recognized that his mother “ruled over her serfs with a rod of iron, treating them exactly as the Czar treated his own subjects” (Magarshack 14). One particular apocryphal tale describes the regularity with which the lake on the family land would need to be dredged due to the numerous serf corpses that would be found at its bottom, leading to the contamination of the body of water. Despite his mother’s constant mistreatment of the estate’s peasants, Turgenev “played with the serf children on the estate” and even learned most of his Russian from them, as “ [o]nly French was spoken at home” (Troyat 4; “Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev”). Though his mother’s gruesome treatment of the serfs and his own educational and societal opportunities made it clear to him that “he was the master” of these people, he fostered a desire to alter the system of labor and social hierarchies that his country had known for centuries.

By the time he had reached Moscow University in 1833, he was all too ready to join in with his fellow students who detested serfdom; writing became his own way to show his ability to “condemn slavery even more vehemently than his comrades” while also “chipping away at his own maternal colossus,” for whom he reserved a great amount of disdain (Troyat 8). By 1847, an opportunity to publish a collection of his naturalistic

writings that featured an attempted objective depiction of serfs arose and his *Sketches from a Hunter's Album* was published serially in *The Contemporary* literary journal between 1847 and 1851 before being published in book form in 1852 (Freeborn 1; Freeborn x). With these short stories he effectively created “an album of pictures drawn from Russian country life in the period prior to the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861” and “began to devote himself to realistic depiction of the inadequacies in Russian society” (Freeborn 1, 2).

These *Sketches* also cast ripples through Turgenev's life and the social waters around him, and after their publication he “suffered official government disapproval and exile to his estate” (Freeborn x). Though he received political punishments, these tracts “made a very real contribution to the movement for emancipating the serfs after the Crimean War” and were also aesthetically appreciated due to their strength at “depicting the peasants as endowed with a culture of their own” (Freeborn 10). Through “his novels, especially *Fathers and Sons*, he was no doubt to achieve greater things, but his *Sketches* were his first major achievement” and aided in a fundamental reevaluation of peasant value <sup>3</sup>(Freeborn 13).

Ernest Gaines sought to carry on this legacy of “depicting the peasants endowed with a culture of their own” while also adapting, or appropriating, themes, motifs, and relationships he read in Ivan Turgenev's texts into the lives of the sharecropping characters who populate his texts. (Freeborn 10). Much of Turgenev's work, especially his *Fathers and Sons* and *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*, depicts an outsider's

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<sup>3</sup> For greater depth on the life and importance of Ivan Turgenev, read Richard Freeborn's *Turgenev: the Novelist's Novelist*, David Magarshack's *Turgenev: A Life*, Avrahm Yarmolinsky's *Turgenev, the Man, his Art and his Age*, and Henri Troyat's *Turgenev*.

perspective on peasant culture, which is reasonable due to Turgenev's own aristocratic past, but the narrative removal results in a lack of conversation with peasant characters where the "framework of the peasant encounters, then, tends to objectivize and to distance" (Freeborn 5). Though Gaines found considerable enjoyment in Turgenev's work, this quality is not one that he would seek in emulating the Russian's style. Instead of the outsider's perspective in Turgenev's work that seeks to attain societal reform and the retention of culture, Gaines' narratives are written from an insider's perspective, allowing for a more full-bodied experience of the sharecropping culture and an empathetic connection with rural, black characters rarely discussed in such detail by prior American authors, with the exception of Zora Neale Hurston. In doing so, Gaines invites readers to not only learn about sharecroppers and the system in which they operate but to embody these characters through the constant racism, predatory agricultural practices, and religious over-reliance with which they must contend. These views of fully-developed black characters run in stark contrast to many in popular Southern fiction at the time and operate as a way for Gaines to confront long-running tropes of black characters as caricatures or figures in need of salvation from whites. Furthermore, readers of both Turgenev's and Gaines' texts will note that there are frequent commentaries on the clash between traditional views on society and culture and contemporary changes to these systems. For Turgenev, modernity, the abolition of serfdom, and a more homogenous societal complexion appear achievable in his texts, but Gaines' focus on these themes shows us that the Russian's optimistic outlook on the future fails to consider the economic problems that may occur when an established system is upset. Gaines'

continuation of Turgenev's emphasis on peasant culture and sharecroppers shows us that Turgenev's idealism may have been discussing a future that was never truly possible.

For convenience and ease of reading, I have chosen to break this work into sections. My first section investigates the distinct influence that Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* had on Ernest Gaines when he was composing *Catherine Carmier*. Gaines used Turgenev's most critically acclaimed and famous novel as a template for his own text while also making distinct modifications to bring the issues of the peasant, sharecropping class to the forefront of his adaptation. My second section offers an analysis of the use of folk tales, mythical figures, and supernatural capabilities in the fiction of Turgenev and Gaines, illustrating the vital importance myths play in preserving peasant and sharecropping cultures.

### Structural Influence and Generational Conflict

Before all of the critically acclaimed short stories, 1971's Pulitzer Prize nomination for *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and 1993's National Book Circle Award for *A Lesson Before Dying*, Ernest J. Gaines' first published novel was 1964's *Catherine Carmier*. The Louisiana native's inaugural foray into the form was met with modest commercial and critical success, selling less "than fifteen hundred copies" of its first edition run (Gaines 28). However, within the following years, Gaines would hone his craft, perfecting the physical characterizations, speech patterns, and distinctly specific actions of Louisiana agricultural communities, sharecroppers in particular. The evolutions in his form and craft may have not ever existed without the template set forth by Ivan Turgenev's 1862 masterpiece *Fathers and Sons*.

Gaines admits in several interviews to having been influenced by various authors and their unique talents, especially the stream of consciousness technique embraced by James Joyce, regional dialects from William Faulkner, and father-daughter alignments from William Shakespeare (Gaines 156). Yet, Gaines places Turgenev above these authors, calling him his “first great influence” and referring to the Russian’s *Fathers and Sons* in sacred terms (Gaines 156-157). Always a spiritual man, if not specifically religious in a traditional manner, Gaines saw Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* as his own holy book during the composition of his first novel. In a 1976 interview with Charles Rowell, Gaines claims, “His *Fathers and Sons* was a great influence on my first novel *Catherine Carmier*; I used his novel as a Bible when I was writing *Catherine Carmier*” (Rowell 92). Replicating this language and praise for Turgenev in a 1978 interview with Patricia Rickels, Gaines again would claim, “Ivan Turgenev is *definitely* an influence. I read *Fathers and Sons* as a *bible* when I was writing my first novel *Catherine Carmier*. I’ve read him ever since. Definitely an influence” (Rickels 134). When questioned again nearly a decade later in 1986 by William Parrill, Gaines would claim, “*Fathers and Children* was a bible to me when I was writing *Catherine Carmier*. I read that book every day” (Parrill 192). Most recently, in a 2004 interview with John Lowe, Gaines continued with this comparison, recalling, “Oh yes, that book was my bible when I was writing my first novel, *Catherine Carmier*” (Lowe 299). These repeated declarations of Turgenev’s influence on him are fascinating, and at certain moments in these interviews, Gaines gestures toward the specific ways in which *Fathers and Sons* helped to shape his own novel, but these glances are often cursory. To this point, there has been no formal analysis linking these two texts, and the following materials will offer an exploration of



how Gaines not only appropriated certain elements of Turgenev's text into his own novel but also how the Louisiana native would, to borrow a phrase from Linda Hutcheon, filter it through his own "sensitivity, interests, and talents" to adapt *Fathers and Sons* for his own time and place (Hutcheon 18). In doing so, Gaines' novel incorporates the template and importance of societal reform found in Turgenev's text, but Gaines also emphasizes outdated agricultural practices and racial complexities in Louisiana to illustrate continued need for social improvement.

Ernest Gaines' *Catherine Carmier* is a direct reworking of the overall structure and plot of Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. At the most rote level, both tales involve the return of an educated young man to the estate and plantation from which he came, respectively. In his own words, Gaines claimed that his story "is based around Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*" (Sartisky 265). Like that text, Gaines' novel is about a man "coming from the North, coming back to the South, and meeting a beautiful lady, coming back to the old place, to the old people and just as Bazarov does, the doctoral student coming back home for a while to be with his mother and father," which is reflected in how "Jackson [comes] back to be with his Aunt Charlotte" (Sartisky 265).

While Gaines is quite succinct about the level to which he delved into replicating the plot structure between these two texts, it is apparent that the driving force behind each of these novels is the issue of generational disagreement. In *Fathers and Sons*, the generational differences are philosophical and political in nature, and Arkady and Bazarov are constantly seeking out social change that will have major economic and cultural implications. At one point after returning home and having the chance to talk to his father about the estate and their financial distress, Arkady reflects, "this isn't a rich

region, it doesn't strike one as either prosperous or industrious. It can't, just can't stay like this. Reforms are essential" (Turgenev 12). Though his comment is made about the estate, his thoughts ring true for societal reform. Nikolai Petrovich also experiences a newfound understanding of the change his son and Bazarov have undergone during breakfast on the first day after their arrival home. Arkady claims that Bazarov is a nihilist, which he defines as "a man who doesn't acknowledge any authorities, who doesn't accept a single principle on faith, no matter how much that principle may be surrounded by respect" (23). Still attempting to be conciliatory and supportive, Pavel Petrovich simply claims, "We, then of another age," will "admire you from afar" (23). Gradually, the congenial nature of their philosophical and socio-political differences dissolves and Nikolai Petrovich's growing wariness about the younger generation boils over into a full-blown argument about the long-term goals for their philosophy (45). Arkady makes it clear that they "don't recognize any authorities" at all and Nikolai Petrovich exclaims, "You're condemning everything or, to be more precise, you're pulling everything down, but surely you've got to build something as well" (50). Bazarov illustrates this philosophical purge when he retorts, "That's not for us to do. First, we've got to clear the ground" (50). It is telling that Arkady adopts the language of the peasant, proceeding to extol the efforts of labor. Though he is an aristocrat, these moments see him eschew his societal place for a connection with the peasantry.

The key for understanding the transmission of comments into Gaines' text is the tension of philosophical identities between two very different generations. In *Catherine Carmier*, the difference between generations is also philosophical, and it results in the literal separation of the young individuals, who have now moved away, from the older

generation that still inhabits the plantation. When Jackson returns to the plantation, he is reminded of his childhood on the land and is confronted with his Christian past when Mrs. Viney recounts, “I ’member when you got baptized. You sure was a great little Christian. I hope you still keeping up the good work” (65, 66). Jackson hears her words, but “does not answer her,” simply reflecting that “He could not remember the last time he went into a church” (66). Even Jackson’s level of education operates as another divide between him and those on the plantation. During his homecoming party, he realizes that the older individuals “did not know what to do around him” and as soon as Jackson enters into certain circles of conversation, “the conversation came to an abrupt end” (66, 67). The men “waited for him to make the first move” because “He had been educated, not they. They did not know how to meet and talk to educated people” (67). It is only after Jackson exits the circle and reenters the party that the men’s conversation can resume. This moment appears to rework an old peasant’s comment deriding Bazarov at the end of *Father and Sons* where he claims, “Just talkin’ some bloody nonsense. Wanted to wag ‘is tongue a bit. Like all them masters, you know, he doesn’t understand nuthin’, does he?” (Turgenev 185). Both men are portrayed as outsiders due to their education, and they are rejected because of their new ideas that do not smoothly mesh with those around them.

The philosophical differences in generations displayed between the main characters in each of these texts also is reflected in the way that the agricultural community and land are depicted. In Turgenev’s text, Nikolai Petrovich confesses to his son that the peasants are “not paying their rent” anymore and that the hired laborers are “being stirred up” while putting “no real effort into their work” and treating the equipment poorly (10). These peasants are not productive, paying less attention to their

work and yielding few crops. Furthermore, they are beginning to grow anxious, hinting at the possibility of unruly behavior or violent actions that may lead to even more lost production from the field. Arkady's father even discusses the concept of land division as a possible solution to his problems when he discusses selling part of his land, which is eventually "going to the peasants" (12). Arkady's opinion of his father's estate is bleak and he reflects, "this isn't a rich region, it doesn't strike one as either prosperous or industrious. It can't, just can't stay like this. Reforms are essential. But how to go about them, how to start?" (12). When told by Nikolai Petrovich that his philosophy condemns everything without building anything else, Bazarov replies by claiming that that job is "not for us to do" (50). For Arkady and Bazarov, their job is to "clear the ground" because the "contemporary state of the peasantry demands this" (50). Turgenev's text, though focused on the unique relationships with multiple generations of men, is innately engaging with the role of the agricultural peasant by showing depicting conversations about how their labor should be handled, the property for which they should be responsible, and what may happen if reforms are not made.

*Catherine Carmier* engages the same issues of property division, stressed agricultural economies, and a conflict of purpose between two generations, acting, in a way, as a continuation of the struggle on the Nikolai Petrovich estate. Gaines' text features numerous individuals discussing the effects of unfair sharecropping practices, agricultural bullying, and the mass migration of the younger generation due to the absence of reform. Francois expresses serious doubt over Jackson's long-term possibility of staying on the plantation because "People leaving here; not coming back" (5). Francois even questions the economic value of remaining on the plantation and questions,

“what he do here?...Farming? It’s all gone” (5). Francois’ doubts are well-founded because in Gaines’ novel, agricultural pursuits have not ended simply because people have lost the skill but because the white Cajuns have acquired all of the land on the plantation through unsavory means, like intimidation and predatory land acquisition, which have slowly forced the black community to retreat from farming. In fact, Aunt Charlotte confirms this truth and tells Jackson that most “of the houses done been tored down” and “All where they was, now you got crop. Cajuns cropping all the land now” (29). Expressing disbelief at how the black community has been nearly eliminated from the farming system on this plantation, Jackson asks Aunt Charlotte how the Cajuns “take the land when it’s not theirs” and she promptly responds, “They’ve got they way...A white man’ll find a way to take something, that’s for sure” (29). Catherine even reflects upon the hopelessness of the agricultural situation and talks to her sister, Lillian, about the plight of their father, who is the last black sharecropper on the plantation. She claims, “Daddy’s world is over with,” an idea professed by nearly all of the black characters in the text (40). For the black farmers, “The only thing you can do is get away” from the lack of opportunities and attempt to create a new life elsewhere through another pursuit (61). Here, we see a vision of black, agricultural realities where the people of color have not been emancipated as much as they have been erased.

These generational and racial differences in philosophy and opportunity drive the plots in each text and eventually lead to some of the most captivating, and confrontational, passages in both novels. In Turgenev’s novel, the verbal sparring between Pavel Petrovich, Arkady’s uncle who is a proud, aristocratic, retired military officer, and Bazarov offers not only a quick escalation in disparate philosophical

approaches but also provides some impressively crafted linguistic backhands. Pavel Petrovich is initially upset by “Bazarov’s completely free-and-easy manner” and becomes even more so when Bazarov claims, “A good chemist’s twenty times more useful than a poet” (25, 26). Pavel Petrovich begins to loath Bazarov “with all the strength of his spirit” and considers “him arrogant, brazen, cynical and common” (45). Furthermore, he refers to him as a “charlatan” and in reference to his philosophical sensibilities he claims, “The fact is that previously they were simply dunces and now they’ve suddenly become nihilists” (46, 54). These moments of outrage and disparagement eventually reach their boiling point and Pavel Petrovich understatedly declares, “I have decided to fight a duel with you” (149). Despite his lack of familiarity with pistols, Bazarov hears a shot whiz by his ear and “without aiming,” he returns fire as “Pavel Petrovich staggered slightly and grabbed at his thigh” while a “trickle of blood appeared through his white trousers” (154). Bazarov’s success in the duel, a pursuit with which he is not familiar, becomes a symbolic defeat of the older generation on a field which Pavel Petrovich is much more familiar due to his past as a captain in the military (29).

While Gaines’ novel does not feature a weaponized duel like the one in *Fathers and Sons*, Gaines still manages to incorporate two confrontations, one figurative and one literal. The first duel takes place between Jackson and his Aunt Charlotte when he tells her that he did not go to church in California because he “had to study on Sundays just like any other day” (99). For Jackson, the sabbath is no different from any other day, as his studies have usurped his commitment to religion. During this argument, Jackson notices a “calendar with the picture of Christ hung above the mantelpiece” and this “picture was supposed to represent Christ kneeling in the garden of Gethsemane” (99). In

a reflection of Jackson's dismissal of Christianity, he "thought both the idea and the portrait were disgusting, and he looked away" from the illustration (99). His action and rejection of Christianity is reflected when he claims, "I haven't forgotten God. But Christ, the church, I don't believe in the bourgeois farce-" (100). Before Jackson can even finish the sentence, Aunt Charlotte "slapped him across the mouth" and, furiously, "His eyes told her if she were anyone else, he would not have taken that insult" (100). This altercation includes the physical element of Aunt Charlotte hitting him, but Jackson does not retaliate. In fact, his words are enough to gain a victory of independence in the encounter and his choice to elevate knowledge over religion represents a clear deviation from Aunt Charlotte's beliefs.

Jackson also takes part in a physical altercation with Catherine's father, Raoul, at the conclusion of the text. This duel also occurs due to ideological reasons, specifically skin pigmentation, but the fight between these two men is also the most violent passage in Gaines' novel. Raoul, hearing of his daughter's involvement with a Jackson, a black man, retrieves his pistol and returns home as fast as he can, hoping to catch Catherine before she leaves town with Jackson. Raoul succeeds in catching them before they leave and he stares at Catherine in "disbelief," barely able to comprehend that she may be about to leave him (236). When Jackson places his arm on her, Raoul grows irate and as the "gun was shaking in his hand," Raoul screams for Jackson to unhand her, believing that she is being abducted, in a sense (237). Jackson attacks Raoul, knocking the gun away and proceeding to enter into an extended fistfight with Catherine's father over her. At the end of the altercation, Catherine goes to her father, helps him to his feet, and "passe[s] her hand over his face" (241). Jackson can only watch as Catherine assists her father and

after they enter the house, Della approaches Jackson and tells him to “wait for her” even “If it takes twenty years” (248). The text concludes with Jackson outside of the Carmier house, as “He stood there, hoping Catherine would come back outside. But she never did” (248).

In each of these novels, the younger generation appears to engage, and in Gaines’ text defeat, the older generation in altercations brought about by philosophical conflict<sup>4</sup>. Gaines’ text extends the philosophical conflicts present to include matters of ethnicity and religion, evolving Bazarov’s conflict with Pavel Petrovich significantly. Curiously, the protagonists defeat Pavel Petrovich, Aunt Charlotte, and Raoul, but the outcomes they earn through these duels are not necessarily rewarding. These men seemingly gain nothing through their victories, which seems to suggest a push for reconciliation instead of outright conflict.

Turgenev’s text also delineates tropes of hairstyle and grooming as a type of cross-generational bifurcation. Pavel Petrovich, Arkady’s uncle, speaks in disdain towards Bazarov and refers to him as “That long-haired person” during his introduction to the young philosophy student (17). In stark relief, Bazarov returns the favor by describing Arkady’s uncle as an “archaic phenomenon” who “can’t forget the past” and displays an “exquisitely shaved chin” (17). Only pages later, the text features Pavel Petrovich’s well-shaved chin” once more as he is also describe as “wearing a stylish morning suit in the English fashion” with “a small fez” crowning his head (22). Pavel

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<sup>4</sup> In Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, generational conflict is juxtaposed to inter-generational connections, and in the end it is ultimately Arkady’s legacy from his father that is perpetuated, not the generational impulses that Arkady shares with Bazarov.



Petrovich's Western attire and his clean-shaven nature place him in stark contrast with the nihilistic, "long-haired," and seemingly unkempt Bazarov (22, 17).

This divide of facial hair appears quite prominently in *Catherine Carmier*, as Jackson's facial hair is one of the most telling aspects of his maturation and new identity. Once Jackson returns to the plantation, the text focuses on the ways in which he has changed and after seeing him, Aunt Charlotte reflects, "She did not know whether she liked that little beard and that little moustache that was trying to break out in his face. She had never thought of him as having a beard or a moustache. She had thought he would look the same as he did when he left her" (28, 29). Jackson's physical change is apparent, but the aspect of that change on which she meditates the most is the hair growth on his face. Catherine, too, is drawn to this change and as she speaks to her mother about Jackson's return, she claims, "He's not so little anymore...He has a moustache now" (58). For both Bazarov and Jackson, their hair serves as a stark reminder of their extreme difference from their surroundings as well as the philosophical separation from those around them. For Gaines, especially, the moustache acts as a transformative characteristic that reinforces the reality that Jackson no longer resembles the boy that left the plantation; he is now a man and this transformation is supported through his change in perspectives and visual attributes.

Though these novels are about generational conflict and peasant culture, each text also exhibits a significant romantic plot. In *Fathers and Sons*, there are numerous cases of romantic involvement, as Pavel Petrovich and Nikolai Petrovich both appear infatuated with Fenechka at various moments throughout the book. Fenechka was once a serf, but she has become Nikolai Petrovich's mistress and he has already fathered a son with her

by the time Arkady returns home. Pavel Petrovich even appears to have a romantic interest with Fenechka even though she is involved with his brother. Arkady and Bazarov are not exempt from the somewhat convoluted romantic aspects of this novel as they both fall in love with the same woman, Madame Odintsova, before Arkady realizes he is actually in love with her younger sister, Katya. Upon reflection, Bazarov gives in to his affection for Madame Odintsova, but she does not feel the same way for him. The romance between Katya and Arkady as well as the one between Nikolai Petrovich and Fenechka prove to be successful while Pavel Petrovich, Bazarov, and Odintsova end the novel in more lonely circumstances. Odintsova's loneliness, especially, is connoted by her last name, which contains the Russian term for the number one ("odin").

Furthermore, her surname also connotes the Russian term for the state of being alone or solitude, which is known as *odinochestvo* (Cook 41). In reinforcing this theme of isolation within the Odintsova's name, Turgenev shows how the state of longing and romance, like the pursuit of ambitious societal reforms, often meets an unsuccessful end.

While the romantic aspects of *Fathers and Sons* occupy a considerable amount of the plot, these relationships are frequently complicated due to the multiple romantic interests and characters involved. Gaines' story appears to consolidate the manifold romantic relationships of Turgenev's text into one love triangle involving Jackson, Mary Louise, and Catherine. The use of only three individuals streamlines the role of romance in this text, and Mary Louise's passive role in this arrangement is also key. When Jackson returns to the plantation, Aunt Charlotte notices a slight change in Mary Louise's disposition, sensing the emotional connection that once existed between Mary Louise and Jackson before he went to California, and asks, "You still love him?" (35). Modestly,

Mary Louise replies, ““Yes, ma’am”” (35). As the plot continues, Brother speaks with Mary Louise about her feelings toward Jackson. He pleads, ““Don’t tell me you still love Jackson, Mary Louise”” and even though she claims, ““No,”” he ““could tell by her eyes that she was lying”” (179). Mary Louise never gains Jackson’s affection and he elects to pursue Catherine Carmier, whose skin is much lighter than nearly everyone around apart from her sister Lillian. Catherine ““was Negro, but with extremely light skin. With her thin lips and aquiline nose, with her high cheekbones, dark eyes, and dark hair, Catherine Carmier could have easily passed as an Indian”” (8). The relationship between race and romance is discussed very early in the text as Jackson comes home to see Aunt Charlotte and Mary Louise thinks he has returned with a white woman. Aunt Charlotte grows almost hysterical and exclaims, ““Lord-don’t say that...Don’t tell me Jackson done something like that”” (23). Jackson’s desire to become romantically involved with Catherine is not solely predicated on her skin color, but it seems to play a significant part in their relationship, ultimately becoming the reason for Raoul fighting with Jackson. While Gaines is able to incorporate and rework elements of the somewhat difficult romantic relationships of *Fathers and Sons* into *Catherine Carmier*, he untangles these pursuits while also adding the element of race into the text, complicating the Russian’s tale.

While each of these plot elements correlates between *Fathers and Sons* and *Catherine Carmier*, these books are also structurally similar as well, both organized as triptych forms. While Turgenev’s text is broken into three sections that are delineated by location, Gaines’ novel is divided into three sections that are separated by his various pursuits: family, romance, and anger. Turgenev’s text consists of 28 brief chapters that

can further be divided due to the three settings of the story itself. The first part of the story takes place at the estate of Arkady's family, which is known as Marino, the second portion of the text occurs at Madame Odintsova's estate, known as Nikolskoe, and the final third of the novel primarily portrays the events at Bazarov's estate. Gaines' 47-chapter novel also employs brief chapters and while it consists of more than just three main locations by which to divide the novel, Turgenev's influence can be seen in *Catherine Carmier's* division into three narrative parts, which preserves Turgenev's triptych arrangement. Instead of using locations to divide the structure of his text, Gaines uses Jackson's return, his relationship with Catherine, and the action that leads to the confrontation between Jackson and Raoul to segment the text. So, Gaines is influenced by Turgenev's structure, but the Louisiana author preserves the triptych structure of the original text while altering it to show the protagonist's changing motives throughout the novel.

Each of these novels also holds death, especially the perceived accidental nature of a death, as a key for the concluding action in each text. For Turgenev, Bazarov's death at the conclusion of the text is paramount, and mortal end is brought about due to a mistake that occurs when he is performing an autopsy on a peasant who had died from typhus (186). Bazarov attempts to clean and cauterize the wound, but his efforts prove ineffective and within a few days he dies from typhus due to accidentally cutting himself while carrying out the autopsy of an infected man. This particular affliction may have resonated with a young Gaines due to its blood-borne nature. The young, Louisiana author would no doubt be familiar with misguided and ignorant arguments about the impurity of black and mixed race bloodlines, and seeing a character afflicted with a

deadly, blood-borne illness that sprang from attempting to help society would likely have impacted him.

Gaines appears to appropriate this idea of an accidental death, as Catherine's little brother, Mark, is the one who is supposedly killed in an accident. Mark died when he and Raoul were "sawing down a tree in the woods" when "the tree suddenly made a false turn, crushing the boy into the ground" (16). After this event, many "people in the quarters called it murder, but the sheriff, as well as Mack Grover, agreed with Raoul that it was an accident" (16). At the conclusion of the text during the altercation between Jackson and Raoul, Catherine's father confronts his daughter's lover and declares, "'Boy, I don't want any more blood on my hand<sup>5</sup>...I don't want any more gnawing at my heart'" (236). Della hears him utter these words and reflects, "So he did kill Marky...So he did kill him. And all these years, I thought it was an accident" (242). The reason behind the potential animosity Raoul would feel toward Mark is that Raoul was not Mark's father. In fact, "Everyone knew that the second child was not Raoul's" because he "was darker than anyone else in the family" (16). Like Turgenev's text, Gaines' novel includes a death that is perceived as accidental, but Catherine Carmier has a twist to it and the reader finds out that Raoul is actually responsible for killing Mark. Again, Turgenev's use of an accident for the death of a character provides a template that Gaines modifies and complicates into an investigation of jealousy, violence, and skin color.

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<sup>5</sup> Raoul employs the trope of blood on one's hand as a feeling of guilt, and often remorse, but this phrase also seems to cleverly allude to the deadly blood on the hand of Bazarov that transmits Typhus. Gaines no doubt is attuned to the metaphorical and connotative weight of blood in ways, naming his 1976 collection of short stories *Bloodline*.

The racial violence in *Catherine Carmier* is a significant adaptation from Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*. Raoul, a light-skinned, black Creole man, rejects and murders Marky, the boy whom his wife had led him to believe was his own. This crime is an act of erasure whereby Raoul can exercise his feelings of frustration towards his wife's infidelity and dishonesty, but it is also an act of racial demarcation. Marky's decidedly darker skin than Raoul's locates the boy amongst the blacks that Raoul had rejected, feeling accepted by neither blacks nor whites. Of Raoul's behavior throughout the novel towards blacks, Thadious Davis has observed that he repeatedly and "adamantly rejects assimilation into the black masses" (Davis 10). His murder of Marky is the extension of these rejections, as he actively attempts to dissolve any bond between himself and his family's black identity. Even though Marky may not be related to him by blood, Raoul desire to purge any connection to his own blackness that he may represent. Gaines' inclusion of this plot point in altering the occurrence of an accidental death in *Fathers and Sons* speaks to the importance of racial identity in the American South, positioning it as the foremost concern of import in society. In making this change to his adaptation of Turgenev's text, Gaines asserts that the topic of race may be the foremost originator of social conflict that must first be addressed before any progress, economic or otherwise, can be initiated.

These two novels also manage to make use of literature in a very similar way as well, especially through the engagement of Alexander Pushkin. Nikolai Petrovich proclaims, "I agree with Pushkin" in reference to the beauty of changing seasons and Pushkin's description of this event in *Eugene Onegin* (13). However, Bazarov derides Nikolai Petrovich's choice in author and scoffs, "A couple of days ago I saw him

reading Pushkin...Please tell him that's no good at all. He's not a child any longer and it's time he gave up that childish nonsense" (46). Gaines' novel also features a reference to Pushkin's texts, but the reader, Lillian, is not derided by anyone in the story for her decision to read Pushkin. Jackson asks her what she has been reading recently and she replies that she had "started with Victor Hugo, whom she was reading at present, then she went to Dumas, whom she had read only recently. Dumas, like Pushkin, her favorite poet, was part negro" (123). While Gaines is infusing some of his own enjoyment of Russian fiction into Lillian here, he is also drawing another distinct connection to Turgenev's work through the literature they mention. Specifically, Pushkin was lauded for his elevation of "folk language, especially that of the peasantry" because it could be used "as an inexhaustible source for poetical language in general" (Lopatin 543). Gaines' choice to mention a Russian author who was intrigued with the peasantry is key and Gaines is keenly aware of Pushkin's heritage as well. Abram Gannibal "was the great grandfather of Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin" and he "most likely began life as the son of a chief in the ancient sultanate of Logone-Birni" in Cameroon, a country on the western coast of Africa (Schemann). While Turgenev's text appears critical of a character attempting to engage with Pushkin<sup>6</sup>, Gaines' text elevates the pursuit of Pushkin, particularly for his African roots and emphasis on peasant culture.

Upon reflection of what he had written in *Catherine Carmier* and how he had used *Fathers and Sons* as a template, Gaines claimed, "I could not be as poetic as Turgenev was with Bazarov - having the hero dying, saying those lines - but I could deal

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that Bazarov's dismissal of Pushkin is part of the novel's generational conflict, as poetry and music are representative of the romantic idealism of the Nikolai Petrovich's generation.

with my area and its people” (Lowe 299). Gaines’ use of *Fathers and Sons* as a template for his novel is apparent, but Gaines’ main contribution to the peasant narrative legacy is a combination of regionalism and racial components. In reference to having his own story to tell, Gaines claimed, “I’ve always known what I wanted to say, and I wanted someone to show me how to say it, and Turgenev always showed me much more than Dostoevsky ever could. Turgenev’s *Fathers and Children* or *Fathers and Sons* showed me more than any book of Dostoevsky” (Parrill 191-192). Turgenev’s texts gave Gaines a structure for telling his story and while Jackson is “unable to understand and reconcile the old and the new” while failing “to persuade Catherine to leave with him for the North” at the end of the novel, Gaines’ text stands as a towering achievement that does synthesize the old in the plot and structure of Turgenev’s masterpiece while also incorporating the new of Gaines’ own upbringing in Louisiana, racial complexities, and evolutions in narrative (O’Brien 26).

### Folktales, Myths, and Supernatural Capabilities

Addressing the myriad inspirations for some of the mystical aspects of his stories in 1995, Ernest Gaines told Dr. John Lowe, “We had the great landowners, the sharecroppers, the small towns, uptown, and back of town, the swamps, the bayous - there’s a story behind every tree. Of course you have the great ghost stories and so on. I read these other writers like Turgenev to see how to do things, but I know the story is already there” (Lowe 320). For Gaines, his tales became a way for him to consolidate and continue the stories he had heard as a child and read as he matured, but he himself linked his texts to other authors, particularly Turgenev, due to the ways in which they, too,



displayed the reverence the peasantry held for folk tales, myths, and supernatural occurrences. For many Russian writers, especially Pushkin, Turgenev, and Gorky, Russian literary folklore “ was necessary for the further development of Russian language and literature,” which meant that it must be recorded (Lopatin 543). These stories and beliefs were essential in preserving a culture and furthering the limits of the Russian canon. In his *Sketches from a Hunter’s Album*, Turgenev was able to accomplish just that goal, and “Bezhin Lea,” his short story about a wayward aristocrat’s encounter with rural children, remains one of the strongest examples of peasant culture collected, elevated, and preserved. Though Gaines was fascinated by this entire collection of stories, Turgenev’s “Bezhin Lea” would rise above the surrounding tales for Gaines. In fact, by analyzing the ways in which Gaines modeled his use of folktales, myths, and supernatural characterizations on Turgenev’s figures in “Bezhin Lea,” the “historical and geographical” connotations of nineteenth-century Russia and twentieth-century Louisiana might elide, allowing readers to glean a clear concept of peasant identity (Lopatin 547). While Turgenev’s text shows how peasants attempt to order their world and navigate a world that often robs them of power, Gaines’ adaptations of these images and motifs show that impoverished, rural, black communities often carried out the same pursuit in attempts to feel a sense of control in a society where they often had little self-determination

Ivan Turgenev’s “Bezhin Lea” offers perhaps the most salient glimpse into traditional folk beliefs and myths of Russian peasants during the nineteenth century. Turgenev’s narrator, an aristocratic hunter, begins the story with an account of his business in the woods for the purpose of “grouse-shooting in Chernsk county in the

province of Tula” (Turgenev 100). Though it appears that the narrator is familiar with this territory due to the exact nature of his placement, he quickly becomes lost in the unfamiliar land, as “darkness rose on every side and even poured down from the sky” and he “plunged off in terror” (101). The unnamed narrator wanders “wildly forward” in this darkness as his “heart shrank within [him]” before he is finally delivered into the safety and comfort of a young group of peasant children huddled around a fire in the Bezhin Lea meadowland (101, 102). These children are quite young, the oldest numbering only 14 years, but they protect their horses in the night<sup>7</sup> and pass the time by regaling each other with folktales and myths that have been passed down to them through their families and communities.

Fedya begins the conversation by telling a story about a goblin that appears in “the old rolling-room” of the paper mill in which he works with his brother (105, 106). The boys in the paper mill hear “the floorboards really bending under him and really creaking” and they also see a spout open to allow water to run over the water wheel, turning the wheel, but they see “nothing there” to carry out these actions (106). The only response that the boys in the paper mill can make when confronted with these occurrences is to fall on the floor and attempt to hide under one another while they are “bloody terrified” (107). Kostya is not entertained with Fedya’s tale and begins a story about a “water-fairy” that encounters a carpenter named Gavril and leaves him “just frightened to death” and as he crosses himself as a means for protection, the fairy condemns him to a life of grief and disappears (107, 108). Ilyusha, too, decides to add to

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that these peasant children are out on the meadow pasturing their horses, effectively working, while the narrator is at leisure, further reinforcing the divide between in this story between peasantry and nobility.

the procession of stories and tells of Yermil's encounter with the lamb that "looks right back at him right in the eyes" and "bares its teeth," making otherworldly noises (109, 110). These spectacular stories continue until they hear a terrifying noise from the pond close by and they quickly exclaim, "God preserve us! God preserve us!" and begin "crossing themselves" (118). Pavlusha responds bravely that the noise is nothing peculiar and that the boys should quickly forget it, adding, "Your own fate you can't escape" (118). Soon after this comment, they calm down and retire for the night and in a moment of foreshadowing "Pavlusha raised himself half-way and glanced intently" at the narrator in the "sleep of the dead about the embers" (119). In the morning, the narrator departs from the camp and on his walk home he is "overtaken by the racing drove of horses," and "chased along by [his] acquaintances, the boys" in a beautiful sequence of freedom and natural imagery (119). However, this moment is not the conclusion of the tale. A brief, three-line paragraph ends the tale and the reader is told, "in that same year Pavlusha died" because "he was killed in falling from a horse" (120).

The emphasis on horses in this text is key to an understanding of Russian peasant imagery, but it is also imperative for grasping one of the most salient connections to the fiction of Ernest Gaines, his conception of folklore. Traditionally in Russia, "the most important animals in peasant art were horses - or better, steeds," and "the fascination with horses spread beyond decorative art into every corner of peasant life" (Netting 60). These creatures had qualities such as "pride, flamboyance, free movement - which set them above the other domestic creatures" for Russian peasants, and they were consistently placed in an elevated status in artwork (61). Pavlusha's tragic death appears to act as a literary antecedent for Joe Pittman's death in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

due to the mystical nature of their surrounding occurrences in the text as well as the horses that bring about their destruction.

When asked about what he may have wished to change or put more time into in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in a 1976 interview conducted by Dan Tooker and Roger Hofheins, Ernest Gaines' first response was to "really think more about the horse and the Joe Pittman thing" (102, 103). In this same interview, Gaines links the "symbolic thing of the horse" to Miss Jane Pittman getting "involved in other things like superstitions, and dreams, and the old voodoo woman" (102). Gaines' repetition of the word "thing" in these comments invites analysis as he repeatedly leaves this image defined in the most vague terms. He further connects the death of Joe Pittman with mystical occurrences and also wishes that he would have "read much more on folklore, black folklore, on religion and the ministry, on the interpretation of religion. [He] would go further into the voodooism" if he could change the novel (103).

Even though Gaines does not explicitly claim an influence from Turgenev in this particular scene, their approaches to the role of folklore are quite similar due to choice of animal and the seemingly supernatural events in the surrounding text. Jane Pittman's husband, Joe, is responsible for breaking all of the horses on Mr. Clyde's property and after about "Seven or eight years" of living on his property, Miss Jane begins to have dreams where she envisioned Joe dying in "Every way possible a cowboy could die," but "one dream started coming back over and over, the one where he was throwed against the fence" (Gaines 92, 93). Eventually, a horse is caught and brought to the property and Miss Jane recognizes her premonition, realizing that "This was the same horse I had been seeing in my dreams" (94). The horse itself is endowed with seemingly mystical

attributes, as it “was stronger and faster than any horse” Joe had ever seen, could “Run for days and wouldn’t get tired,” and could even “Leap over a canal that a regular horse wouldn’t even try” (95). After seeing the horse display its power and raw strength, many of the men start to apply a supernatural identity to the horse and begin to refer to it as a “ghost,” some going so far as to refer to it as a “haint,” which is simply a term used primarily in the south for a shapeshifting ghost (95). In fact, this horse’s ability to leap over canals proficiently while also being referred to as a haint depicts it as a particularly strong spirit because of the Geechee belief that “these ghosts could not cross water” (Allen). Filled with terror and driven to protect her husband, Miss Jane elects not to see the doctor in town, but instead chooses to put her faith in “the hoo-doo in town” (96).

Miss Jane travels to see Madame Gautier whose house has “candles burning in every corner of the room, and she had seven on the mantelpiece” as well (96, 97). Miss Jane asks Madame Gautier if she can do anything for Joe, but the hoo-doo eventually tells her that Joe will die. In disbelief Miss Jane challenges her, but Madame Gautier claims, ““Nothing can stop death, mon sha,”” echoing the eerie ethos of Pavlusha’s claim of ““Your own fate you can’t escape”” (98; 118). Madame Gautier follows her prophetic claim with the proclamation, ““Death comes. A black horse. Lightning. Guns. And you have grippe”” (98). When asked to define grippe by Miss Jane, Madame Gautier can only elaborate, ““Grippe is grippe”” (98). Though indefinable, apocalyptic imagery preceding the introduction of the term grippe and the homophonic relationship between grippe and grip connotes that Joe is already in the clutches of death and cannot be aided or redeemed. Joe, like Pavlusha, must suffer a demise from the creature he is employed to command. Furthermore, the demise of these two characters is not illustrated in either text.

Pavlusha's death is described by the narrator in an exceptionally removed manner as "he was killed in falling from a horse" (120). Similarly, Joe Pittman's death is conveyed to reader when the group of men returns from chasing the stallion and they enter the property "with Joe tied to his own horse" (102). The narrative removal from these sequences seems to add to the supernatural elements in each narrative, as we are given no real information on Pavlusha's demise apart from his fall from the horse and Joe's body is "found tangled in the rope, already dead" with the horse calmly "eating leaves off a bush to the side" (102). Each account appears devoid of malice from these creatures, but a simple working out of a fate, that for each character, is equally inevitable and influenced by the mystical surroundings that envelope, and ultimately destroy, them. Gaines reflected on the role of Miss Jane in this text and claimed that by "the very end, Miss Jane becomes a different thing altogether. She becomes almost a recorder of history" (Tooker and Hofheins 102). Gaines is quite accurate with this comment and the history she records appears twofold: recording that of her husband, but also pointing back to Turgenev's peasant whose fate was also decided before he mounted his horse.

These ideas of fate, agency, and influencing one's future do not simply stop at Pavlusha and Joe Pittman, as hoo-doo's are consulted frequently in the work of Ernest Gaines. In fact, Gaines frequently places these supernatural mystics at odds with religious leaders in the community or makes his characters select a certain path by which they will commit. A similar feature appears prominently in Turgenev's "Bezhin Lea," as moments of a fantastic nature consistently collide with religious actions or symbols. Kostya's tale about Gavrila's encounter with the water-fairy offers a strong template for the interaction between folktales and religion, specifically Christianity. When the water-fairy confronts

Gavrila and calls him closer, “the Lord God gave him the idea to cross himself,” but Gavrila does not find this task to be easy and “it was terrible difficult to make the sign of the cross ‘cos his arm was like stone” (107, 108). Providentially, Gavrila receives the ability to move his arm and as he crosses himself, the “water-fairy stopped laughin’ and started in to cry” (108). When confronted with this religious action, the mystical figure’s emotions shift dramatically and she taunts, “If you hadn’t crossed yourself, human being that you are, you could’ve lived with me in joy and happiness to the end of your days, an’ I’m cryin’ and dyin’ of grief over what that you crossed yourself, an’ it isn’t only me that’ll be dyin’ of grief, but you’ll also waste away with grievin’ till the end of your born days” (108). The water fairy is supremely offended that Gavrila elects to hold fast to religious beliefs when offered companionship and because of his choice, she vanishes, but she foretells a prophecy in her claim that he will “waste away grievin’ till the end of your born days,” condemning the remainder of his worldly life, but showing no autonomy over his eternal soul (108). At the conclusion of this story, Ilyusha reflects Gavrila’s response in the story and he whispers, “The power of the holy cross be with us!” (109).

The inclusion of mystical, pagan elements in this story alongside Christian comments, actions, and references acts as a wonderful example of the Russian folk belief of dvoeverie, or “double faith” (Ivanits 4). Essentially, Russian folk belief is a complete amalgam of Christian and non-Christian beliefs, with borrowed iconography, the heightened inclusion of pre-Christian elements remembered in Christian practice, and the recognition that the Christian and pagan beliefs are one in the same (Ivanits 127). These peasant boys are outstanding examples of this ideology, and each of their stories features

the eliding of what many Western readers might see as competing religious concepts. For example, Ilyusha, the boy who had just plead for the “power of the holy cross” to protect them, begins to tell a story about “a real unclean place” with “masses of snakes” where a drowned man is buried (109). Yermil the dog-keeper travels by this grave and “sees a little lamb on the drowned man’s grave, all white and curly and pretty” and he “picks it up in his arms” (109, 110). The lamb reacts peacefully and “doesn’t turn a hair,” but Yermil’s “horse backs away from him, snorts and shakes its head,” in a prominent display of disapproval (110). As their journey continues, Yermil looks into the eyes of the sheep and his gaze is met by the lamb looking “right back at him right in the eyes,” an action that bothers Yermil, who thinks that no lamb had ever looked at him in this way before (110). Yermil grows “terrified” at this moment and as he speaks lightly to the creature, attempting to calm it, the “lamb bares its teeth at him sudden-like and says back to him: “Sssh, there, sssh!”” (110). Just as this lamb begins to snarl Yermil’s sounds back at him, the dogs sitting at the campfire with boys and the narrator begin braking and storm off into the woods as if they have sensed a disturbance around them (110). The action and noise from the dogs startle the reader, creating the effect that something terrible has happened in Ilyusha’s tale. Ilyusha never returns to Yermil’s story and the reader is left to wonder what tragic fate befalls him. This story appears more sinister than Gavrila’s story, but both involve a confrontation of religion and folklore that dooms the protagonist of each. Yermil comes into contact with a seemingly peaceful lamb, appearing to be a straightforward allusion to one of Christ’s many epithets, but the religious imagery is corrupted by the malevolent actions of the lamb. Through this inversion of a traditional symbol for Christ, Yermil’s tale also acts as



a fascinating collision in cultural identity, fusing religious pursuits with folk beliefs and acting as a pagan parable appropriating Christian imagery, even going so far as to subvert a man who has been killed through a type of sinister baptism. Hence, there is the continual representation of religion and pagan imagery that are part of one unified belief system.

Ernest Gaines, however, appears interested not in showing his characters attempting to navigating this fusion of beliefs but in writing fiction that consistently illustrates a choice characters must make between folk beliefs and religion. This adaptation places him in direct contrast with the Russian peasants depicted in Turgenev's work, and it also speaks to Gaines' thoughts on the competing values of religion and folk beliefs in black, Southern communities. In an interview with William Parrill in 1986, Gaines claimed, "Religion is not a main theme that I'm interested in. It's always there, just like the color of the skin," and continues, "the church is there at all times" (Parrill 186). While Gaines may not confess to being consciously committed to investigations of religious commitments in his text, they certainly seem apparent and are made most evident through their conflict with mystical folk beliefs. For Gaines, individuals are confronted with problems and must select which direction they will follow, selecting a religious or mystical path. He makes this decision explicit in the Parrill interview and discusses the conflict of Eddie in *A Long Day in November*, claiming "he goes to the church and the church fails him, so he has to go to the voodoo woman" (186). The failure that Gaines references involves Eddie's wife leaving him because he acts like a fool with his car, staying out late driving it around instead of being at home with her and Sonny. Seeking wisdom, Eddie decides to see Reverend Simmons for assistance finding a

solution. Eddie asks, “Reverend, you sure you can’t do nothing?” and he responds, “I tried, son,” and “Now we’ll leave it in God’s hand” (69). The lack of autonomy from the preacher and Eddie’s frustration shines through Eddie’s reflection that “When you want one of them preachers to do something for you, they can’t do a doggone thing” (69). In this sequence, the church is depicted as powerless and apathetic, relegating the concept of organized religion to a secondary position in the text. Frustrated and with a lack of options, Sonny’s father decides to “go to that old hoo-doo woman” because “there ain’t nothing else [he] can do (70).

When Eddie and Sonny arrive at Madame Toussaint’s house, she greets him by name and as they enter, Sonny notices a “dog bark three times in the house,” the “three old rotten teeth” in her mouth, and the price she charges for consultation, which is “three dollars” (71, 72). Madame Toussaint proceeds to instruct Eddie to run a piece of string “cross the left side of the boy’s face three times,” and then “She picks up three little green sticks she got tied together and starts poking in the fire with them” (75, 76). To conclude her ceremony, she speaks three words to Eddie and simply states, “Give it up” (76). He is unsure of what she is referencing and he asks her to repeat it, but when she repeats it for the third time, she tells him to leave, claiming, “I said it three times...No more, no less. Up to you now to follow it through from there” (77). Eddie, still confused, tries to procure more information from her and offers to do work around the house or chop wood in exchange for clarification on her words, but she claims that she “got three loads of wood just three days ago” and is now bombarded by men “who have been dropping in three times a day” because they are also in “trouble with their wives” (78).

At the conclusion of this exchange, “Madame Toussaint’s big old jet-black dog gives three loud barks” and their conversation is over (78).

Madame Toussaint’s advice proves to be exactly what Eddie needs and he decides to burn the car at the conclusion of the text, which leads to a reconciliation with his wife, but the consistent repetition of the number three throughout this sequence offers an intriguing look at the intersection of religion and folk belief in Gaines’ text. The appearance of numerous events that occur in threes in this scene hints toward a possible corruption of religion, offering an inversion of the Christian trinity. Furthermore, Reverend Simmons’ powerlessness and Madame Toussaint’s advice, which proves to be successful, provokes an intriguing conception of the choice the individuals must make between Christianity and folk beliefs. Just as in “Bezhin Lea,” individuals must make the choice of the system in which they will place their belief. Individuals cannot occupy both spaces. Gaines even discussed this concept of forsaking Christianity, especially in *A Long Day in November*, and claimed that the figures “go back to more basic things, further and further back” (Parrill 186). Gaines appears to take Turgenev’s connection between Christianity and folklore and alter it by elevating folklore above organized religion because he sees folklore as a concept that predates organized religion.

While the collision between Christianity and folklore is key in the work of Ivan Turgenev and Ernest Gaines, these authors employ supernatural abilities, especially related to sight, to explore this conflict while also gesturing towards generational and racial differences respectively. In Turgenev’s “Bezhin Lea,” even a story such as the one Ilyusha shares about being able to “see dead people on Parents’ Sunday” appears to draw a significant connection between religion and the supernatural, which is illustrated

as seemingly mystical sight in this tale (111). Ilyusha claims ““on Parents’ Sunday you can also see the people who’re going to die that year”” and all one must do to experience this event ““is to sit down at night in the porch of the church and keep your eyes on the road”” (111). If these steps are followed, then one will see a procession of all of ““them who’re going to die that year”” (111). The events described by Ilyusha place religion and folklore in concert with one another once again because the mythical procession occurs as individuals walk directly by those who are seated on ““the porch of the church”” (111). One of the women on the porch actually sees an apparition of herself in the procession and cries out ““God help us!”” (112). Ilyusha’s tale about the communal belief of doom for anyone whose spectre appears clearly illustrates an elevation of folk beliefs, yet the location for the event is the church porch, a site intrinsically connected with organized religion. The porch appears to act as an interstice in this story, allowing a middle ground between superstitious and religious beliefs to coexist, highlighting the collision in these beliefs.

Like Turgenev, Gaines is also interested in supernatural abilities for many of his characters, and he also employs mystical sight to illustrate his explorations of folklore. This concept of mystical sight appears most prevalently in “Bloodline,” where a confrontation occurs between Frank Laurent, a geriatric plantation owner, and his nephew, Copper Laurent. Copper’s father was Frank’s brother and Copper’s mother was a black woman, which is the reason for the animosity in Frank when Copper returns to the plantation and requests his birthright. When Copper is first described in the text, the reader learns that ““When he talk he don’t look right”” because ““He looking right at you, but he ain’t seeing you”” (161). Felix continues and claims, ““He was just sitting there,

looking out that door, looking far 'way'" (161). Copper is continually described as a man who "was looking at something far away, or like he was listening to something far away" and who even when he "was talking to you, he wasn't seeing you, he was seeing something 'way off" (204, 206). Copper's mystical eyesight becomes most apparent during his interaction with his uncle at the story's climax and the text declares, "He was looking at Frank, but he wasn't seeing him; he was seeing past Frank. Like he was talking to Frank, but at the same time listening to another voice" (212). The text further brings attention to and complicates Copper's eyesight with the claim that "He was looking down at his uncle. He was seeing him. He wasn't seeing him" (214).

While one possible answer to this issue is that Copper is simply being disrespectful of his uncle because his uncle has been disrespectful to him, that answer to this issue of seemingly mystical sight may appear to come in Gaines' *A Gathering of Old Men* where Clatoo reflects, "Like most of these white folks you'll find round here, when they trying to convince you they'll look you dead in the eye, daring you to think otherwise from what they want you to think" (50). Copper's mystical sight hints at a moment when a black individual will be empowered and he claims that he "only came this time to look around" (217). As Copper leaves the plantation, he claims that he will either take his share of the plantation or he will "bathe this whole plantation in blood" (217). Copper is looking through Frank while also looking into the future at a time where he will be empowered to take control of what is legally his right.

Ultimately, the concept linking the mystical, Christian, and supernatural events in these stories is fear of that which is unknown and unexplained. The figures in "Bezhin Lea" are constantly described as "terrified," "frightened," "scared," and

“shuddering” out of fear (107, 110, 113, 115). Similarly, the characters in Gaines’ texts are driven to act because of the fear of losing a loved one either to death or to another man in *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Long Day in November* respectively. Sonny too expresses fear of the supernatural when he meets Madame Toussaint, reflecting, “I get scared of Madame Toussaint” and ““I was scared...Her face was red and her eyes got big and white. I was scared. I had to hide my face”” (76, 79). Each of these stories involving peasants or sharecroppers depict individuals who are intrinsically impoverished. These individuals are frequently unable to attain worldly means for comfort and instead seek out superstitions or religion for reassurance or safety. However, even the avenues these characters pursue provoke fear as the solutions to the problems or conclusion to the stories often seem to create more terror than what was present in the beginning. This repetitive cycle of panic seems to suggest that neither religion nor superstitions can offer any long-term security or happiness. Additionally, these texts also assert that peasants and sharecroppers are more susceptible to belief in religion and myth because they may be more desperate to improve their circumstances.

Gaines and Turgenev illustrate ways that peasants attempt to bring order to their world and create autonomy in an existence where they are often robbed of it. Through the distinct collisions of Christianity, seemingly supernatural events, and folklore, these characters offer examples of ways characters attempt to find a sense of power and purpose when robbed of societal influence or autonomy. For Gaines, Turgenev provides the template, and the Louisiana author adds regional aspects of race and African myth. Gaines has claimed, “I wanted to start with an individual, with the problems that an individual confronts and then spread it out to the problems of the race. It didn’t

accidentally happen” (Tooker and Hofheins 103). In appropriating Turgenev’s works, Gaines engages the exploration of social reform and captures discusses the beliefs of individuals and characters that have not traditionally been seen as valuable, but he depicts these figures because they are, in fact, worthy of depiction.

### Chapter 3: Anton Chekhov and Eudora Welty

*[R]eading Chekhov was just like the angels singing to me (Freeman 195)*

While Ernest Gaines was predominantly interested in adapting Ivan Turgenev's works to the American South as a means to show problems of changing agricultural systems, complexities of race, and the collisions between religion and folklore, one of his peers was engaging in a similar pursuit. Born in 1909 in Jackson, Mississippi, Eudora Alice Welty was also deeply enamored with Russian literature from an early age (Messud). In particular, Welty was fascinated with Anton Chekhov's work. Encountering his literature for the first time at the downtown Carnegie Library in Jackson, she would embark on a literary exploration that would have a lasting impact on her worldview and writing, as Chekhov's ability to carefully and empathetically portray characters from all sectors of society would shape Welty's perspective as a reader and, later, writer (Brown 16). In her appreciation of Chekhov's writing, Welty would eventually adapt one of his most gripping scenes and creatively invert some of his characters' consistent speech in her own work as a means to show that the breadth and depth of human experience and communicative ability could span across boundaries of geography, time, and language.

Throughout her illustrious career, Eudora Welty cited the Anton Chekhov as one of her most cherished authors and one of her major writing influences. In a 1986 interview with Patricia Wheatley, Welty was asked if she had any authors about whom



she was passionate. In response Welty excitedly claimed, “Oh, yes. The ones I return to again and again. Well--I love Chekhov, I think, above everyone in the world, and keep going back to read him” (Wheatley 135). To clarify her reasoning why she appreciated and enjoyed Chekov so much, Welty explained,

I think he has all the humanity in what he writes, and I like him because he is such a complete artist. He lets everything speak for itself and doesn't harangue anyone. He lets everybody--characters--reveal themselves in the most tender and truthful and succinct way. He's just a lesson to our writers, but I don't read him for that. I read him because I love his work. (Wheatley 135).

In Welty's comments we see her appreciation for an author who composes clear and full representations of figures and a refusal to pass judgment on their circumstances or choices. These are certainly characteristics with which Welty was familiar, as the same could be said of her writing and her perspective towards her own characters. Welty, too, was keenly aware of this kinship, and when given the choice between writing an essay on either Jane Austen or Anton Chekhov for an anthology Louis Kronenberg was editing, she declared, “Chekhov I do dare to think is more ‘kindred.’ I feel closer to him in spirit...Chekhov is one of us--so close to today's world, to my mind, and very close to the South” (Kuehl 74-75). Though she would ultimately decide against writing on Chekhov, because she felt that “whoever wrote about him should be able to” read Russian, her comments are important for her view of Chekhov as a kind of honorary Southerner (Kuehl 74). When pressed to explain her comments on why Chekhov is close to the contemporary South, Welty would go on to claim,

He loved the singularity in people, the individuality. He took for granted the sense of family. He had the sense of fate overtaking a way of life, and his Russian humor seems to me kin to the humor of a Southerner. It's the kind that lies mostly in character...That kind of responsiveness to the world, to whatever happens, out of their own depths of character seems very Southern to me. Anyway, I took a temperamental delight in Chekhov, and gradually the connection was borne in upon me. (Kuehl 75)

For Welty, Chekhov's ability to endow characters with "a power of resilience, a zest even in the face of outrage" and his refusal "to deny any character in his stories the dignity and purity of singularity" marked him as a kindred spirit, one who sought to achieve the same vision through writing (Welty 64). This vision would often take the form of seeking a knowable truth through understanding figures with whom one might rarely empathize. By confronting the circumstances of others through varied perceptions and different viewpoints in a story, a reader might begin to enlarge his or her own mental capacity, empathetic potential, or idea of humor. For Welty, Chekhov was "the least self-obtrusive of story writers" because it "was his plainest intention that we never should hear him telling us what we should think or feel or believe. He is not trying to teach us, through his characters; he only asks us to understand them" (Welty 68). Welty adored this trait in Chekhov and extolled it throughout her career, claiming in a 1978 interview with Jan Nordby Gretlund that the author should portray "human beings in the sense Chekhov did. He tries to see a human being whole with all his wrong-headedness and all his right-headedness" (Gretlund 226). One decade later, in a 1988 interview with Danyne Romine Powell, Welty would echo this thought and declare that "a writer of short stories writes to

let their characters reveal human nature,” which was the “way you feel when you read a wonderful story by Chekhov” (Powell 182). Welty was quick to recognize this tendency to fairly treat fully-formed characters and produce non-didactic work in Chekhov’s writing not simply because she had seen it in a few of his texts or read it elsewhere but because she had exhaustively read Chekhov’s canon, thoroughly researched his life, and had begun to recognize his influence on her own writing.

As an avid reader, Welty had read the entirety of Chekhov’s work, and it seems to have been a frequent pursuit of hers. In a 1977 interview with Jean Todd Freeman, she remarked, “I’ve just finished reading a whole year of Chekhov which was pure bliss. The one lecture I gave this year was on Chekhov, so that gave me a wonderful reason to--as if you needed one--to re-read everything and track down everything that I had not read. Reading Chekhov was just like the angels singing to me” (Freeman 195). When asked in an interview 11 years later about whose work she was reading at the time, Welty replied, “I’m reading the new editions of Chekhov that Echo Press has just brought out in thirteen volumes, and V. S. Pritchett has just published his new biography of Chekhov” (Pond 185). These comments show that Welty was invested in not only knowing about Chekhov’s primary texts but in learning more about his life than she previously knew, as she claimed to be reading a new biography on his life.

Unlike Welty, Chekhov was born into a situation of pervasive poverty where literary success was, perhaps, his most unlikely future. His father, the son of a former serf, worked predominantly as a grocer and eventually married the daughter of a merchant (“Anton Chekhov”). Chekhov’s parents struggled economically for the entirety of their lives, but they impressed a strong work ethic upon him, which allowed him to

graduate from high school with an accomplished record before entering the University of Moscow as a medical student. Even with this immense opportunity at his fingertips, it is important to note that he never forgot his origins or his family's past, as he once described himself as a "young man squeezing drop by drop the slave out of himself and waking one morning feeling that real human blood, not a slave's, is flowing through his veins" (Kauffmann). In reference to his many readers being surprised to hear of the existence of Chekhov's medical career, Paul Schmidt has remarked, "We know Chekhov as a writer of short stories and plays, but we should remember that healing the sick was his foremost occupation. It helps us to understand the compassion for human beings that suffuses his work" (Schmidt 1). Chekhov's dual identity of doctor and author descended from the legacy of serfdom was not lost on Welty, as she spoke to her full understanding of his past, claiming, "Well, take somebody like Chekhov. It's important to know that he was the grandson of a serf, that he was a doctor, that he had tuberculosis, and that his wife was an actress. All these things matter in understanding his work. But there are a lot of other things, as you know, that don't matter," like minor interests or misleading comments (Royals and Little 253). This response shows that Welty was a student of his life and understood the motivations behind his work. Her understanding of Chekhov's history is, in large part, what cemented her interest in his work.

Certainly his stories and writing style were valuable in attracting the young Mississippian, and she was curious as to how and why he "loved all the splendors and inanities of the human condition," frequently seeking to depict all levels of society with truth, dignity, and humor (Payne xvii). Moreover, Chekhov wrote in a way that might invite readers in, allowing them to take part in a communal experience with which they

could relate. Paul Schmidt, the translator for *The Plays of Anton Chekhov*, claims, “Chekhov’s language is *ordinary* language--flat, banal, unremarkable,” which serves to accomplish his main goal, namely ensuring “his audiences’ identification with their own lives” so that we might “smile and laugh at the follies and absurdities of human beings just like ourselves” (Schmidt 5, 4). Above all else, Chekhov privileged empathy and connections over overwrought diction or obfuscatingly complex structures because he wanted his readers to share in experiences that transcended nationality and social class.

Eudora Welty adored these characteristics in his writing, particularly because “no human being is out of bounds to Chekhov. No state of health or stage of consciousness or time of life could have appeared strange to him” (Welty 69). This description could also be attributed to Welty’s own writing, and it should come as no surprise that they may be discussed in similar terms. When asked by John Griffin Jones in a 1981 interview about the most significant book that changed her life, Welty sidestepped the question as posed and replied, “I suppose Chekhov would come closest to it” (Jones 324). His focus on all figures, honest evaluation of various character types, and willingness to write about the inner workings of sentimental moments affected her style significantly. Welty’s style has often proven hard to define, and how it resembles Chekhov’s style deserves some, even brief, justification. Some critics have described Welty’s prose as residing at “the mysterious threshold between dream and waking,” while others have characterized it as “dreamy, mysterious, or remote” (Fleischauer 65). William Jay Smith has asserted that her “stories come to the tips of your fingers while you listen,” and Elizabeth Spencer has claimed, “her sensitivity takes the form of feeling for the other person. She can guess what is going on in that mind and heart” (Zane 4).

Welty referred to her process of inspiration and the initial stages of writing in her essay “Words into Fiction”:

Before there is meaning, there has to occur some personal act of vision. And it is this that is continuously projected as the novelist writes, and again as we, each to ourselves, read. If this makes fiction sound full of mystery, I think it’s fuller than I know how to say. Plot, characters, setting, and so forth, are not what I’m referring to now; we all deal with those as best we can. The mystery lies in the use of language to express human life. (Welty137)

These descriptions of Welty’s writing and Welty’s comments about her own writing process could just as easily be attributed to Chekhov, and these similar approaches to writing connect them. In particular, the ways in which both of these authors depict beauty, nature, and communication in their fiction seem very well aligned. Furthermore, Welty also appears to write about these themes by appropriating specific imagery or symbols Chekhov used in his own texts, allowing Welty a means to pay homage to the Russian’s work while showing how these ideas remain pertinent to contemporary readers. Ultimately, her reworking of Chekhov’s scenes and images illustrates the timelessness of his plays and fiction their lasting ability to transcend social class and location.

For convenience and ease of reading, I have chose to break this work into sections. My first section discusses the roles of storm sequences in Anton Chekhov’s “The Duel” and Eudora Welty’s “June Recital,” “The Winds,” and *The Ponder Heart*. Both authors use storms to show nature’s role in inspiration and creativity, past memories, and the fragility of life. My second section offers an analysis of the subtleties of gestures and nonverbal communication in Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*, *Uncle*

*Vanya*, and “Heartbreak” and Eudora Welty’s “First Love.” Through these texts, both authors encourage readers to reevaluate how they interact with those around them and question the efficacy in communicating an idea or abstract concept, especially an emotional feeling like grief or love.

### Storms, Inspiration, and Fate

In a 1977 letter to Ross MacDonald, the pen name for Kenneth Millar, Eudora Welty’s longtime friend and detective-fiction author, Welty singled out Anton Chekhov’s “The Duel” as a short story that was especially “miraculous” (Welty and Macdonald 326). In a later letter, she would go on to posit, “Isn’t ‘The Duel’ a marvelous story--I had a feeling you’d think that--The storm scene!” (Welty and Macdonald 349). Welty would close that letter to Millar by writing “Here it’s hot with thundershowers every afternoon” and “I wish I could send you the rain you need,” linking the excellence of the storm scene in Chekhov’s work with her own weather and a sort of benediction for Millar (Welty and Macdonald 349). For Welty, this wish for Millar to experience rain that might offer him happiness and inspiration is significant, and even though this casual remark might appear offhanded or unconsidered, the image of the storm in her fiction is important. Her fascination with the storm scene in Chekhov’s “The Duel” provided her with a template by which she could show how memory, inspiration, and artistic creativity are often connected with changes in weather and violently beautiful storms. In adapting this image from Chekhov’s story, she would employ it in several of her most enduring texts, including “June Recital,” “The Winds,” and *The Ponder Heart* to illustrate the lasting legacy of the transfixing thunderstorm in “The Duel.”

Anton Chekhov's "The Duel" was first published in 1891 as a serialized story in Aleksey Suvorin's newspaper *Novoye Vremya* and was predominantly met with unfavorable reviews by critics (Chekhov 10, 11). In broad terms, the text concerns the affair between Ivan Andreitch Laevsky, an educated aristocrat, and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna (Nadya), a married woman whose husband has recently died, though this fact is hidden from her by Laevsky because he may be forced to marry her once she learns of her husband's fate. Laevsky and Nadya too have run away to the Black Sea for their tryst and while much of the tension of the text comes from this situation, the majority of the philosophical discussions and explorations are set forth by Nikolay Vassilitch Von Koren, a German zoologist, who is boarding at the house of Alexandr Daviditch Samoylenko, a military doctor and friend of Laevsky. In the course of the tale, Von Koren becomes aware of Laevsky's situation with Nadya and, already disliking the man, he remarks, "Of all people I'm not sorry for *him*...If that nice young gentleman were drowning I'd help him down with a stick and tell him, "Drown, my dear chap, please drown"" (Chekhov 32). Von Koren continues to lay out his case against Laevsky for the next few pages, calling him a "swine" and declaring him "as harmful and dangerous to society as a cholera microbe" due to the negative ways he has impacted the community and the ways in which he has led Nadya on (Chekhov 32). Von Koren eventually gets his chance to remove Laevsky from the community, as he twists some of Laevsky's words and goads him into initiating a challenge for a duel (Chekhov 89). As Laevsky exits, weather on the horizon begins to shift, and "Far over the sea lightning flashed and there were hollow peals of thunder," "a sudden gust of wind" that "raised clouds of dust on the sea front, whirled them round and drowned the sound of the sea with its howling"



(Chekhov 97). As the weather worsens, matching the rising action of the story, Von Koren tries to soothe those surrounding him, remarking, ““You can relax, the duel will come to nothing. Laevsky will magnanimously fire into the air--he can’t do anything else--and most likely I shan’t fire at all”” (Chekhov 98). As the scene ends, Von Koren speaks about the approaching weather and declares, ““I’m scared the weather might spoil things tomorrow,”” as the “roaring wind and sea, and the thunderclaps” punctuate the conclusion of this portion of the tale (Chekhov 98).

The next section in “The Duel,” the portion of the story that depicts Laevsky’s night before the confrontation with Von Koren, is one of the most gripping and majestically composed passages in Chekhov’s canon. Here, an anxiety-filled and overwrought Laevsky, unaware of Von Koren’s intentions to fire into the air, languishes as the storm swirls outside of the room. When confronted with this magnificent display of the power and beauty of nature, he experiences nature’s ability to stir memories inside of him, realizes, as Alexander Werth asserts, the “whole ugliness of his past life,” and undergoes a kind of conversion (Werth 629). This storm initially seems to mirror both the impending clash between Von Koren and Laevsky as well as the frantic state of Laevsky’s thoughts, but readers soon learn that the storm may, in fact, be symbolic of an even larger purpose, that of nature’s indelible ability to inspire and alter one’s preconceived path.

Feeling that his life was over, whether he was killed or simply made to look like a fool by Von Koren the next morning, Laevsky’s thoughts returned to the Nadya and how his influence on her life had marked her as a dishonored woman (Chekhov 99). Due to his own indecision and dishonesty in his pursuit of her and his refusal to commit to her,

the only options remaining for Nadya would be to “kill herself in despair and shame” or “drag out her wretched existence” (99). Either way, like him, she was finished. However, just as Laevsky ponders this painful realization, “The window suddenly banged open, the strong wind burst into the room and the papers flew off the table” (99). The storm’s intrusion causes upheaval in his room, disorienting him and altering his perspective by awakening him to his own apathy and disregard for those around him. He shuts the window immediately, but as he begins to reorganize his papers, he experiences “a new kind of sensation, a kind of awkwardness which he had never known before and his movements seemed foreign to him” (99). Altered and inspired to shake off “his own self-centered inaction and self-deception,” he is led to believe he should pen a letter to his mother so she might “forget and forgive everything, and at least partly expiate her son’s terrible sin by her sacrifice,” but when he is reminded of her own sinfulness, he crosses out all he had written (Borny30; Turgenev 99, 100). As soon as he finishes crossing out his draft for penance, he is transfixed by the raging storm all around him:

The lightning flashed vividly in all three windows, followed by a deafening roll of thunder--indistinct at first, but then crashing and crackling so violently that the window panes rattled. Layevsky stood up, went over to the window, and pressed his forehead to the glass. Outside, a mighty, beautiful storm was raging. On the distant horizon lightning constantly darted out of the clouds on to the sea in white ribbons, illuminating the towering black waves for miles around. To the left and right, and probably over the house as well, the lightning flashed. (Chekhov 100)

Though Laevsky is inside, the beautiful storm around his lodging consumes his reality, as he forgetting all else and losing himself in memories of his past and his own personal

regrets. The storm does not worry or scare him, though it causes him deep introspection, and he places his forehead to the window in an attempt to get closer to the beautiful display. To himself he whispers, ““A thunderstorm!”” and ““What a lovely storm!”” before being overwhelmed with “an urge to pray to someone or something, even if only to the lightning or the clouds” (100).

In this moment, he recognizes the beauty of the natural phenomena around him and is humbled to the thought of supplication to the power and magnificence of nature. In this moment, he remembers an experience from his childhood where he was fearful of a violent storm but comforted himself with the chant of a religious phrase (100). In the light of that memory, he is overcome by the feeling that his life has amounted to nothing but waste. His lack of appreciation for nature, loss of a connection with God, failure to care for his friends, and inability to promote societal good and purity lead him to realize that he must change (100). In this regard, his encounter with the storm is a moment of purification where nature offers him a chance to be cleansed of all of his failures and transgressions.

Even his academic pursuits were “all a deception,” he “had done nothing to help people in their everyday life, was indifferent to their sufferings, ideas, religion, knowledge, searchings, strivings,” and had never “spoken a kind word to anyone” nor “had he done a thing for others” (100, 101). These academic pursuits are contrasted with the emotional guilt he feels, showing him he needs to be led more by his emotions, instead of his frequent rejection of feeling and embrace of apathy. This cascade of remorse transforms Laevsky and forces him to recognize that Nadya was, in fact, “the only person in his life who was near and dear to him and who could not be replaced”

(103). Yet, it was only after his encounter with the transfixing storm, its ability to stir powerful memories in him, and force him to recognize a wide array of emotions, including depravity, nostalgia, and the existence of god, that he could enjoy a clarity for the direction of his life. In short, this storm causes Laevsky to reflect upon myriad past decisions, weigh his past and current values, and correct his present sense of purpose. Before he leaves for his duel with Von Koren, Laevsky approaches Nadya, gives her “a violent embrace,” and “showers her knees and hands with kisses” (103). As he departs for his duel, he has a renewed sense of existence and his earlier ambivalence about his future is no more; he now knows that “he wanted to come back alive” (103). This passage captures a moment of resolute change in one’s outlook through the effect of natural imagery in a storm and remains a magnificent example of the power of nature to trigger a memory that can lead to genuine self-reflection.

Eudora Welty was particularly keen on this story, this passage in particular. In “Reality in Chekhov’s Stories,” she discusses this “long, complex, profoundly moving story” at length and refers to the scene with the storm as “the most remarkable night scene” and “surely one of the most powerful and wrenching in all Chekhov’s stories” (Welty 69, 72, 73). In particular, Welty is fascinated by Laevsky’s recognition of his own dishonesty, his disappointment with his past, and his elevation and exaltation of nature. She writes, “Laevsky’s desperation as he waits sleepless through the long night of terrible storm that sweeps the sea, the town, the mountains, when at last he thinks of his life as ‘lies, lies, all lies,’ drives him to implore help from someone” (Welty 73). He first thinks of writing to his mother before rejecting that idea, refuses to pray because he does not believe in God, but feels compelled to “pray to someone or something, even if it must be

the lightning, the clouds: ‘Dear storm!’” (Welty 73). In recognizing this violent and beautiful act of nature, one by which he might guide himself and find direction in his own life, Laevsky has a moment of deep introspection where he is forced to evaluate his life and his previous choices. In Welty’s own terms, “‘The Duel’, with its characters joined in the torment of their deceptions, self-deceptions, dreams, illusions and lies, is a story about truth” (Welty 74). The foremost truth, here, might be in learning what you hold to be true, what is worth believing in, and what is worth pursuing, and Laevsky seems to gain insight into these matters all in the course of the storm, as it affords him a chance to reflect on nature’s beauty and of impulses of belief outside of oneself. Furthermore, these new insights also illustrate the frailty of human life and how fleeting his earthly experience may be. This moment is one of introspection and reflection at his past choices, but it also dramatically alters his future as well, offering him a chance to correct his behavior and right the wrongs in his relationships.

These ideas of reflection, inspiration, and the beauty and power of nature, especially related to this storm sequence, appear to be at the very heart of Welty’s “June Recital,” the powerful second story in *The Golden Apples*. The text begins with the observations of Loch Morrison as he recovers from being sick, but the majority of the story is devoted to Miss Eckhart’s musical tutelage of Cassie Morrison, Loch’s older sister, and Virgie Rainey in their preparation for a performance. In the midst of one particular lesson from Miss Eckhart, Virgie Rainey, Jinny Love Stark, and Cassie Morrison watch as “a sudden storm” jolts in and thunder rolls (Welty 300). As the storm approaches, Miss Eckhart selects a piece of music and begins to perform, which is an oddity, as Cassie reflects, “It was the only time she ever performed in Cassie’s presence

except when she took the other half in duets” (Welty 300). As she begins to play the music, the “thunder rolled,” while “Miss Eckhart frowned and bent forward or she leaned back to play; at moments her solid body swayed from side to side like a tree trunk,” almost being absorbed into the naturalistic imagery of the surrounding storm (Welty 300). While the storm rages outside, Miss Eckhart transforms: “Her skin flattened and drew across her cheeks, her lips changed. The face could have belonged to someone else—not even to a woman necessarily. It was the face a mountain could have, or what might be seen behind the veil of a waterfall” (Welty 300). Once more, we see images of nature in the descriptions of Miss Eckhart’s body, which is fitting, due to her impassioned play being brought about by the storm outside. She is both inspired by and connected to the storm, even in the way her body is described. The children in the house, aware that Miss Eckhart is playing in an otherworldly fashion, grow “uneasy, almost alarmed” because “something had burst out, unwanted, exciting, from the wrong person’s life,” as it was “some brilliant thing too splendid for Miss Eckhart” to be capable of (Welty 301).

It is important to note that the children are not merely impressed by Miss Eckhart’s execution of the piece she performs. Certainly they are taken by her skill in performance, but the text is quite clear that Miss Eckhart’s display is not flawless. When she begins to play the music, the “piece was so hard that she made mistakes and repeated to correct them” and later, while the volume rises, “the fingers kept slipping and making mistakes they had to correct” (Welty 300, 301). In spite of the corrections she has to make and delays she must endure in replaying certain sections, the children are astonished by her emotional engagement in the piece, which is brought about by her

response to the storm that channels memories from the past and her own outpouring of repressed feelings.

During the course of the display, Cassie realizes that it “was when Miss Eckhart was young that she had learned this piece,” and “she had almost forgotten it. But it took only a summer rain to start it again; she had been pricked and the music came like the red blood under the scab of a forgotten fall” (Welty 301). Cassie realizes that Miss Eckhart is no longer in control; she is simply responding to a memory and intuition from her childhood, a memory tied to a summer storm, but she must engage with it. Miss Eckhart, like Laevsky in “The Duel” is forced to reckon with her past and present, due to the storm that confronts them. The text further links the music with the storm when it claims, “The music was too much for Cassie Morrison. It lay in the very heart of the stormy morning-- there was something almost too violent about a storm in the morning” (Welty 301). This instance leads Cassie to an emotionally significant moment as the music caused by the storm resonates with her too. She begins to think of the plight Miss Eckhart has had to endure in the community, the “hideous things,” and “spectacular moments” in existence (Welty 302). In a moment of clarity, brought about by Miss Eckhart’s frenzied music caused by the storm, Cassie meditates, “All kinds of things would rise and set in your own life, you could begin now to watch for them, roll back your head and feel their rays come down and reach your open eyes” (Welty 302). This insight offers up a kind of worldview on negative and positive events in life, but it also uses post-storm imagery to convey new perception, as the rays of light one might expect to see and feel after a storm are responsible for alerting someone when it is safe and secure to open one’s eyes.

Only moments after this realization, Miss Eckhart's "unrelenting" performance ends when "her fingers like foam on rocks pulled at the spentout part with unstilled persistence, insolence, violence" (Welty 302). Even the conclusion of her performance is placed in naturalistic terms, and her performance ends like a wave upon the shore. When the students excitedly cry out for her to repeat her performance, she resolutely responds, "No," as Jinny Love Stark gives them a "grown-up look" before attempting to close the music from which Miss Eckhart has been playing (302). In doing so, she attempts to protect all of them from a similar experience of emotional outpouring and potential terror at the display. Miss Snowdie MacLain comes to the door and asks what she was playing, and Miss Eckhart solemnly responds, "I couldn't say...I have forgotten" (302). Miss Eckhart is fearful of the place from where this emotional passion originated, and she seems unwilling to address it, especially to Miss Snowdie MacLain. Instead, she represses her emotions and refuses to discuss her feelings. As the scene ends, all the pupils run "out into the slackening rain without another word" as they, too, are touched, if even in a partial way at having experienced Miss Eckhart's emotional and awe-inspiring performance brought on by the storm and her memories (302).

This storm scene is one of the most incredible in Welty's canon and seems to be in direct conversation with Chekhov's storm scene in "The Duel." Miss Eckhart, like Laevsky, is confronted by a storm which summons feelings from the past, illustrating the nature of inspiration and the challenge in being able to provoke it or control it fully. Miss Eckhart's response of "No" when asked to perform on command again as well as her claim that she "couldn't say" and had "forgotten" could be more than a show of constraint (302). Instead, these comments could point to Miss Eckhart recognizing that



she might, in fact, be unable to summon the creative inspiration brought forth by the storm and its link to her past memories that draw forth such an emotional outpouring that transforms her. This storm scene, much like the storm scene in “The Duel” is an exploration of memory’s capabilities and the ways in which nature can impose itself on one’s life, even when unexpected, to alter one’s chosen path through forcing one to recall memories that might be inaccessible without the prompting of a sudden gale or summer shower. In both “The Duel” and “June Recital,” characters show that access to one’s memories or intuitive choices are often due to acts of nature or events over which a person may have no control.

The storm scenes in these two marvelous short stories tether these texts together, and the characters of Von Koren and Miss Eckhart also appear to work as a fascinating link further connecting these texts. Both of these figures are imperative in their respective tales because they function, in part, as characters that set the stage for Laevsky and Cassie to gain the insight that the storm brings. Without Von Koren’s challenge and without Miss Eckhart’s tutelage, neither Laevsky nor Cassie would have the opportunity to have a perception realignment. Further linking these characters is their consistent otherness in the texts, as they are both depicted as peculiar, German figures with whom no one can relate or empathize.

Von Koren, as Ronald Wilks has argued, “symbolizes the Nietzschean strong man of action (his name bears witness to the fact that most leading zoologists in Russia were of German extraction)” (Wilks 8). His ideas and opinions set him apart from all other figures in the text, and he is continuously teased by other characters throughout the story about his nationality. Early in the text, Samoylenko celebrates Von Koren’s education but

expresses disbelief in his emotional capabilities, as he claims, ““You’re a deeply learned man, highly intelligent, the pride of your country. But the Germans have ruined you. Yes, the Germans, the Germans!”” (Chekhov 39). Only moments later, Samoylenko thinks, “in his opinion the Germans were to blame for all the evil in politics and science” (Chekhov 39). Von Koren’s actions, too, set him apart from the other figures in the text, and his systematic, point-by-point defense of why Laevsky should be erased from existence shocks his listeners, particularly through his matter-of-fact claim that ““in the interests of humanity, in his *own* interests, such people should be exterminated. No doubt about it”” (38). This mentality and reasoning behind his ideas leads him to trap Laevsky into a challenge for a duel, which leads to Laevsky’s night of reflection while the storm swirls outside. It is essential to note that Laevsky could not have had this experience without Von Koren. The German is the one whose peculiarity disrupts the community and causes several figures to rethink how they engage one another, especially Laevsky. Without Von Koren, Laevsky would not have been prepared to encounter the storm and be so deeply affected by the memories it makes surface and self-reflection it causes.

Miss Eckhart functions in a very similar way to Von Koren in Welty’s “June Recital,” as the majority of the figures in the story view her as an outsider who will never integrate into the Morgana community, yet she is the one responsible for preparing the circumstances for the storm to alter Cassie’s perceptions. Miss Eckhart is described as “a heavy brunette woman whose age was not known” and whose “manners were all very unfamiliar” (Welty 288, 289). As a music teacher, she was extremely punctual, “worshipped her metronome,” and would punish students with emotionless, robotic regularity: “All at once as you played your piece, making errors or going perfectly it did

not matter, smack down would come the fly swatter on the back of your hand. No words would be passed, of triumph or apology on Miss Eckhart's part or of surprise or pain on yours" (293, 289). Her own pragmatism and apparent emotional distance separates her from the community, and her origins also place her as an outsider. Due to her "Yankeeess" and consistent use of "danke schoen" to encourage her students after their playing, the residents of the town begin to circulate that "Miss Eckhart was a German and still wanted the Kaiser to win," even after 1918 (294, 305). Jan Nordby Gretlund has observed that Morgana "holds that anything foreign is necessarily and by definition grotesque," and like Von Koren, she is continually rejected by the town's citizens (Gretlund 129). Despite having lived in Morgana for years and tutored their children in music, the citizens of this city refuse to accept this woman because of her German ancestry and her seemingly bizarre manners and actions.

Even Miss Eckhart's one experience at romance is doomed, as the man who is sweet on her, Mr. Sissum, drowns unexpectedly. She attends the funeral "like everybody else" and is able to contain her emotions until the preacher begins his eulogy (299). Overcome with grief when she gets close to the grave, "she would have gone headlong into the clay red hole" or "might have thrown herself upon the coffin if they'd let her" (299). Even in expressing her grief, she is ostracized, not because she is overcome with emotion but because she is unable to put up an exterior to hide her true feelings. She is simply not behaving how women in Morgana are expected to behave, as "she absolutely ignores all the rigid rules and standards of the community" (Gretlund 128). Perhaps even worse than the grief she must face after Mr. Sissum's unexpected death, there is even a brief reference to what appears to be a sexual assault Miss Eckhart endured in the past:

“One time, at nine o’clock at night, a crazy Negro had jumped out of the school hedge and got Miss Eckhart, had pulled her down and threatened to kill her. That was long ago. She had been walking by herself, nobody had told her any better. When Dr. Loomis had made her well, people were surprised that she and her mother did not move away” (301). Though there is no definitive way to know what happened when her assailant “got” her, there is some pointed language that makes it seem that Miss Eckhart was sexually assaulted, particularly that the man “pulled her down” and Dr. Loomis was required to make her well (301). It is also significant that “nobody had told her any better,” as even a few words of warning about the possibilities of being accosted by strangers after dark could have served as a deterrent to change her behavior. Based on how they view Miss Eckhart, it was likely not a case of forgetfulness either but one of disregard. The citizens of Morgana are not as shocked at the occurrence as they are with Miss Eckhart’s decision to remain in the town, even after she has been attacked and rumors have undoubtedly begun to swirl. About this attack and her lack of response to it, Jan Nordby Gretlund claims, “what is much worse is that she never talked about the attack on her, as if it were an unimportant incident” (Gretlund 128). Cassie recalls, “It was because she was from so far away, at any rate, people said to excuse her, that she couldn’t comprehend; Miss Perdita Mayo, who took in sewing and made everybody’s trousseaux, said Miss Eckhart’s *differences* were why shame alone had not killed her and killed her mother too; that differences were reasons (301-302).

What we see repeatedly is that Miss Eckhart is set apart from the others in the community, particularly through her German ancestry and her differences in outlook and manners. Von Koren displays similar attributes, particularly his German heritage and a

formal respect for etiquette, which also mark him as an outsider to the community in “The Duel.” These figures function as peculiar individuals to the others in their stories and their strange otherness presents moments by which other characters might have a chance to gain a new perspective or understanding of life.

In addition to Welty’s “June Recital,” her short story “The Winds” also illustrates how storms might grant a deeper understanding of nature’s beauty and power as well as one’s own memory. Welty herself once told her agent that aspects of this short story ““were little fragments out of my own life and what I sent you is the first story I’ve tried directly attempting to remember exact real sensations” (Marrs). It is important to note Welty’s interest in exploring her own process of understanding her memories and recording them in a story that uses the symbol of a storm at its core. In doing so, she appears to again be acting on her fascination with the storm scene at the heart of Chekhov’s “The Duel” and further exploring the links between the beauty and power of a storm and its ability to summon unexpected memories and experiences from the past.

Structurally, “The Winds” oscillates between periods in which a young girl, Josie, waits out a ““Once in an equinoctial storm”” with her family in the safe part of the downstairs of their house and periods where Josie dreamily recalls her past experiences with a young girl named Cornella (211). In alternating between sections based in the present events of the storm and her past imaginings with her friend Cornella, Welty crafts her story about a storm and memory into a representation of a storm, spinning with Mississippian controlling it. As the storm sets in on the family, Josie sees “a strange fluid lightning, which she now noticed for the first time to be filling the air, violet and rose, and soundless of thunder” (211). Her father tries to comfort by claiming, ““You have my

word that this is a good strong house,” but he also mentions that this storm is part of a “seasonal change,” a moment in time where the weather acts as a display of transition (211).

The storm, while acting as transition between the seasons, also signals a transition for Josie in her own creative understanding of existence. This occasion allows Josie to begin to form artistic outlooks, which we see in the way she describes the house as she and her family members seek out the safe place in the house. The “strange light” of the storm allows her to see that the “curtains hung almost still, like poured cream, down the windows” and the “cretonne pillows smelled like wet stones” (210). In thinking about the impending storm and the “glittering flashes” outside, she realizes that “summer was turning into the past. The long ago . . .” (211). This transition of seasons and the storm mark the turning of a metaphorical page for Josie, what Rebecca Chalmers has referred to as “a coming of age experience for a young woman” (Chalmers 98). These scenes depict Josie beginning to understand the “connection between dreams and reality,” which afford her the chance to learn that she is capable of acting artistically in how she sees the world as well as how she describes it. In other words, she is learning that she is a participant, but she is also active in shaping her existence through the ways she processes and conceives of all she sees and encounters. As the opening scene closes, “the pulse of lightning” and its “persistence of illumination” seem “slowly to be waking something that slept longer than Josie had slept” (212). These outward images of the storm are both responsible for provoking a change within her and symbolically representing the whirlwind emotions and creative capabilities inside of her.

What awakens in her is her ability to create her own narratives by taking elements of reality and infusing them with fiction. As Josie sits with her mother at the close of the opening section of “The Winds,” the text claims, “Josie lay drifting in the chair, and where she drifted was through the summertime, the way of the past . . .” (212). Immediately after this ellipsis, the narrative transitions into what appears to be a dreamy fantasy of her experience with a friend named Cornella.

This section is marked by realistic, somewhat disjointed images that have been distorted by Josie’s imagination. Here, seemingly incongruous figures like a “monkey-man” playing an organ grinder and “fairies” are placed in close proximity (212). Descriptions of a dilapidated house soon give way to a meditation on Cornella’s beauty, and she assumes the role of a fairy-tale princess in Josie’s dream. Cornella’s hair, in particular, is lauded for its “bright yellow” and “wonderfully silky qualities” which was “as constant a force as a waterfall to Josie” (214). Josie even elides Cornella’s identity with that of Rapunzel, thinking, “Cornella, Cornella, let down thy hair, and the King’s son will come climbing up” (214). Only pages later, Josie references numerous child’s tales when she declares, ““The fairest one that I can see. . . London Bridge is falling down . . . Lady Moon, Lady Moon, show your shoe . . . I measure my love to show you . . .”” (217). These numerous references to fairy tales, limericks, and children’s tales serve to reinforce Josie’s dual identity as collector and composer of stories. She must first have a strong base of stories before she can begin to create her own. It simply takes a moment of inspiration, perhaps triggered by an external event, to set one’s artistic endeavors in motion.

Josie's creative abilities begin to take flight on the occasion of the storm, and she even tries her hand at composing a song in her dream before she imagines a host of "June-bugs," "lightning bugs," "butterflies," and "bees" united in a chorus of noise (214). In her dream, she imagines that "A great tempest of droning and flying seemed to have surrounded her, and she seemed not to have moved without putting her hand out after something that flew ahead . . . ." (214). Even in her dream, she is fusing reality and her imaginings, as the "tempest of droning" is how her brain reimagines the intense gales of the storm outside her home (214). A sense of artistic creativity and control is awakening in Josie, and it is brought about the once-in-a-season, awe-inspiring storm.

Only a short while after "their house was taken to the very breast of the storm," Josie has the realization that "the beauty of the world had come with its sign and stridden through their town that night" (218, 220). This new realization comes only moments before her father updates the family on the status of the storm and claims, "It's over" (221). With "only the calm steady falling of rain," Josie reflects on "all that was wild and beloved and estranged," her friends, "all that would beckon and leave her, and all that was beautiful" (221). In that moment, she realizes that she wants to follow this creative path and adopt this avenue toward becoming an artist and believes, "She wanted to follow, and by some metamorphosis she would take them in--all--every one. . . ." (221). Josie's metamorphosis is, however, has been at work. Even though she seems to only now be making this conscious choice, she has previously been dreaming and engaging with her imagination, which is shown by her past memories of dream-like adventures with Cornella in the text. Now, the main difference seems to be that she will dedicate



herself to taking in, remembering, and recording all of these ideas and thoughts that are “wild and beloved and estranged” (221).

Early the next morning, Josie goes outside “to see what signs the equinox had left,” only to discover that the houses and trees on the street have been nearly as altered by the storm as her own perceptions and newfound goals (221). After spending some time glancing at her neighbors’ homes and the rain-soaked landscape, Josie sees “a folded bit of paper, wet pale and thin” on the porch (221). This piece of paper proves to be a letter, and Josie races up to her room after reading it and deposits it “into her most secret place, the little drawstring bag that held her dancing shoes” (221). In the final lines of the story, we learn that the letter is from Cornella and reads, ‘O my darling I have waited so long when are you coming for me? Never a day or a night goes by that I do not ask When? When? When?’” (221). It is telling that Josie chooses to place this letter into “her most secret place” with her dancing shoes, presumably the ones she would wear when enjoying a traditional childhood hobby for young girls (221). Essentially, placing the letter in this bag appears to hint toward a possible change of her focus and hobbies, from dancing to writing. The letter that concludes this short story also beckons Josie to respond, to take up the pen and answer Cornella’s questions at the end of her letter. Here, she is urged to take the leap from simply having imaginary thoughts or adventures to writing down and recording her imagination. This letter encourages her to become an author and transcribe her experiences, fusing imagination and writing to complete the metamorphosis brought about by the storm. This letter also acts as a reference point to the many letters Laevsky begins during the storm sequence in “The Duel.” Where Laevsky attempts to write several letters during the storm, Josie here receives and reads on after

the storm. While these stories are in conversation with one another, through the storms and letters in these scenes, Welty's short story features a character that has not yet accumulated numerous regrets in life. Instead, we are shown the early steps of an artist who has just taken her first steps on her path of creativity, which were facilitated in no small part by an awe-inspiring and beautiful storm.

Eudora Welty's longer fiction was also prominently marked by the use of storms as deciding factors in the outlooks of its characters and as central elements in dictating those characters' outcomes in the plot of the story. Welty's *The Ponder Heart* revolves around the observations of Edna Earle, particularly her musings on her affluent and blithely generous uncle Daniel Ponder. The main action of the text revolves around her uncle's romantic pursuit of his second wife, Bonnie Dee Peacock, her consistent mistreatment of him, and her untimely death for which he is blamed and eventually prosecuted. He is the prime suspect in the murder of his deceased wife not for any sort of mistreatment displayed towards her or presumed malice, but because he is one of the last people to see her alive on the last day of her life, which is also marked by an intense and violent storm that settles over the Ponder household. While this storm is a metaphorical representation of the discord in their marriage, it also functions as a way for Welty to showcase the immense power of nature and how life is far more vulnerable and ephemeral than we often believe.

In sending for Daniel Ponder, Bonnie Dee demands that he return to seek a reconciliation from their most recent disagreement, but he should be quick to make it home "before it storms" (74). Upon reflection Uncle Daniel agrees with her assessment, as he hears "thunder in the west" and exclaims, "Bonnie Dee was right--she always is--

it's fixing to storm'" (74). Due to a narrative shift, the next details we learn about this night related to the actions between Bonnie Dee, Uncle Daniel, and Edna Earle are in the court case where various witnesses speak to the events of this stormy evening. Narciss, the black servant of the family is one of the first to testify, though much of her testimony is discounted by her decision to hide under a bed, due to the violent storm. In speaking about the intensity of the storm, Narciss expresses fear of the "rainin', lightnin' and thunderin'," especially the lightning that "was fixin to come in de windows" (96). When asked by the lawyer examining her account what she was doing during the storm while Bonnie Dee may have been murdered, Narciss exclaims, "*Hidin'*. I don't want to get no lightnin' bolts down me. Come lightnin' and thunder, Mr. DeYancey, you always going to find me under de furthest part of de bed in de furthest back room. And ain't comin' out twell it's over" (99). Yet, her fears about the weather are not uniquely her own. Narciss mentions that Bonnie Dee, too, can typically be found right beside her under the bed during storms, a place of racial unity through the shared fear of violent weather (99).

Though it might seem absurd for adult women to hide under a bed from a storm, it brings them comfort and bridges a racial divide, as their fear of the violent weather makes them feel vulnerable, even inside of their home. Though they are under the roof of a sturdy home, they still feel as if the storm outside can affect them, that they might still be harmed by nature's reach, so they seek refuge in one of the traditional hiding places of children. Along with the storm at the heart of this scene, the inclusion of a child's hiding place is reminiscent of Laevsky's childhood memories of awe and fear he felt during a storm. Instead of hiding under a bed for comfort, he relied upon religion and was

delivered from the danger of that violent storm. Unlike Laevsky, in both his childhood and present experiences, Bonnie Dee is not delivered safely from this violent storm, as she ends up dead by the conclusion of the tumultuous weather. In fact, it appears that the weather is the cause of Bonnie Dee's demise, which may have occurred due to her lack of respect or reverence for the powerful capabilities of the storm.

Narciss has testified to hearing a loud bang during the interval in which Bonnie Dee expired, and though the prosecution hints that it may have been a gunshot, Mr. DeYancey argues for another solution. He presents ““the top four-foot section of the little-blue fig tree the Ponders have always had in their yard, known to all, standing about ten feet away from the chimney of the house, that was struck by a bolt of lightning”” moments before Uncle Daniel and Edna Earle entered the home to see Bonnie Dee (101). DeYancey then claims:

““Look at the lightning marks and withered leaves, and pass it quietly to your neighbor. I submit that it was the racket this little-blue fig tree made being struck, and the blinding flash of it, just ten short feet from the walls of the Ponder house, that caused the heart of Mrs. Bonnie Dee Peacock to fail in her bosom.”” (101)

In Mr. DeYancey's claim that the bolt of lightning that struck the tree outside of the home is to blame for Bonnie Dee's death, there is potential absolution for his clients, but Welty is also pointing to the immense strength of nature, specifically storms. Even in her home, Bonnie Dee is not safe from the power of and reach of a tempest. Much like the storm in “The Duel” that offers an occasion for Laevsky to reflect on his life and alter his perceptions and the ways in which he interacts with those around him, so too does the storm in *The Ponder Heart* fundamentally reorient Bonnie Dee's reality, as she is struck

dead due to the effects of the storm. In this text, nature, storms specifically possess the ability to alter, or end, one's life. Even in her home, she is not safe from the wide reach of nature's dominion.

In reflecting on Bonnie Dee's death, Narciss believes that the loud sound that ended the young woman's life may have been a gunshot, which would have been the same method that would have ended Laevsky's life in "The Duel." However, the true culprit is a lightning bolt from a storm that frightened her to death. In "The Duel," the storm Laevsky witnesses, with all of its awe-inspiring lightning and thunder, is that which reorients his life and brings him salvation through reoriented perceptions and a newfound desire to live by doing right to others. Welty's choice to turn the storm from an image of killer, instead of deliverer, shows that storms can certainly be images of beauty, but they have the terrific and awful power to end someone's life. In fact, Welty emphasizes the power of this storm by directly speaking to the sensory details or Narciss' account of the lightning strike that led to Bonnie Dee's death.

After Mr. DeYancey makes his comments related to the lightning hitting the tree outside of the Ponder home, Narciss points at the section of the tree in the courtroom and then exclaims, "'Storm come closer and closer. Closer and closer, twell a big ball of fire come sidlin' down de air and hit right *yonder*... You couldn't call it pretty. I feels it clackin' my teeths and twangin' my bones. Nippin' my heels. Den I couldn't no mo' hear and couldn't no mo' see, just smell dem smokes. Ugh'" (102). Narciss clearly has a visceral reaction to this experience, as the lightning bolt affects multiple senses, rendering her nearly dumbstruck in losing her hearing and sight. She also remarks, "Ugh," as if the mere memory of the event makes her nauseous or weakens her composure. This lightning

even seems to take possession of Narciss, as it pursues her, nipping at her heels, before it finds its way into her bones and teeth. This experience is both otherworldly and spiritual, as the storm takes on a life of its own, chasing and affecting whom it can.

Ultimately, Welty's use of storms in "June Recital," "The Winds," and *The Ponder Heart* act as appropriations of the storm scene in Chekhov's "The Duel." In each of these stories, characters experience a moment of inspiration fueled by a barely tangible childhood memory, a chance for deeper understanding of existence, and a reminder of the terrific and frightening power of nature, but they are all consistently pushing the characters to spend more time focused on the actions around them that appear normal but are actually extraordinary. Such events, even as simple as a storm, should be investigated and analyzed thoroughly for the incredible collision of actions they offer. Lighting, thunder, and water falling from the sky are incredibly strange, majestic, and mysterious realities that nature sets forth, but because they happen so frequently, people have become desensitized to the sense of wonder they should engender. What Welty and Chekhov offer through these stories is a way to begin to contemplate more fully the incredible moments that account for one's days so that one might be devoted to a more concentrated meditation on the mysteries surrounding him or her every day. Even Welty's closing words in "Reality in Chekhov's Stories" stress this point, as she claims, "The very greatest mystery is in unsheathed reality itself. The realist Chekhov, speaking simply and never otherwise than as an artist and a human man, showed us in fullness and plenitude the mystery of our lives" (81).

## Noncommunication and Silence

When asked by John Griffin Jones in 1981 if non-communication might be “the real enemy in human understanding,” Eudora Welty replied:

I suppose so. It might be different. The *effect* might be non-communication. I was thinking about the plays of Chekhov. You know, the characters sit around, and none of them are really talking to one another, they are just talking like this; yet they possibly love each other, they feel their private emotions. They don’t really talk to each other, and Chekhov uses that dramatically to show the human predicament. It does. It does show it. (Jones 336)

Only a year before this interview, she made similar comments to Joanna Maclay while discussing “purposeful and economical” dialogue (Maclay 280). Welty again returned to Chekhov and claimed, “I’ve learned a great deal from Chekhov, in whose stories you will find it all in only a suggestion of a conversation. Maybe one line or two is enough. It does everything. If only I could just correct everything by him! He’s just a wonder. Imagine what his stories must be like in the original” (Maclay 280). Welty’s fascination with Chekhov’s efficient, yet occasionally confounding, dialogue continually drew her to the Russian author’s texts throughout her life. Chekhov’s characters were fascinating because of their impressive ability to show the difficulties people often face in communicating honestly and clearly, even when speaking directly with one another. In these stories, Welty seemed particularly intrigued by the limitations of language to express or convey a true experience of idea, and she would eventually alter Chekhov’s interest in frequent dialogue that goes unheard or misunderstood in her own stories by contrasting it with the

eschewing of dialogue to illustrate the role of nonverbal communication and the barriers in human relationships.

In her 1972 interview with Linda Kuehl, Welty spoke of her fascination with Chekhov's ability to depict humor, kinship, and a sense of family, though the way the characters actually speak to one another is often secondary to their own understanding of each other's idiosyncrasies and beliefs (Kuehl 75). In describing how these characters learn about one another, she argues that dialogue is not their primary way of learning about one another and claims, "You know, in *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*, how people are always talking and talking, and no one's really listening" (Kuehl 75). Each of these texts is rife with examples of characters speaking, often quite dramatically, with no clear listener or figure engaged in listening or even prepared to respond to them.

In *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov's famous play about provincialism and unrequited longings, some of the characters explicitly reference their own lack of interest in genuinely listening to each other's thoughts. For example, Vanya describes his own existence as trudging "around grumbling and mumbling like an old fart" before speaking about his "magpie of a mother," Mrs. Voinitsky, and saying that her life essentially amounts to "babbling on about equal rights for women" (Chekhov 211). In describing his mother as a magpie, Vanya links her to the famously loud bird widely recognized as one of the most "persistent" and "noisy" in the feathered domain (Nicholls). Only pages later, Vanya critiques his mother for her incessant speech and interrupts her, claiming "But you've *been* talking. And so have I. Talking and talking for the last fifty years" (Chekhov 214). In response, Mrs. Voinitsky sharply questions, "You never want to listen to anything I say, do you?" (214). These characters are constantly speaking with one



another, but very little is truly being communicated or allowing opportunities for understanding.

Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* features similar scenes of characters expressing dramatic dialogue without truly being heard. In this text, though, Chekhov makes the lack of listening more clear by explicitly detailing the stage instruction to exhibit the noncommunication between characters. In the first act of the play, Anya, the youngest daughter of Liubov Ranyevskaya, muses, "Father died six years ago, and a month later our little brother, Grisha, drowned. Sweet boy, he was only seven. And mama couldn't face it, that's why she went away, just went away and never looked back" (Chekhov 338). These comments are immensely sad and speak to the misfortune of the family, but they are also important because no other character responds directly to them. The stage directions even show that Anya is delivering the lines in a manner that shows she is "*Lost in thought*" (338). Though Anya is trying to express her grief and struggles with understanding why her family only seems to have bad luck, no one hears her words and can respond with any means of solace. In the next act, Lopakhin and Firs have a similar interaction where they discuss Russia's former system of labor and enforcement. Lopakhin exclaims, "Oh, sure, things were wonderful back in the good old days! They had the right to beat you if they wanted, remember?" (356). Firs, the elderly butler, responds, "That's right. Masters stood by the servants, servants stood by the masters. Nowadays it's all mixed up; you can't tell who's who" (356). The stage direction preceding Firs' comments is that he "*Doesn't hear*" Lopakhin's comments, which causes him to offer a response that is an acute misremembering of the historical reality (356). On one level, this moment functions as a farcical moment of comedic relief, a slapstick gag

where the 87-year old butler is unable to hear a younger character, but this exchange also works to show the ways in which Chekhov's figures often speak to one another and fail to truly communicate.

Though these moments of noncommunication are pronounced in these two plays, they can be found throughout Chekhov's canon, like "St. Peter's Day," "Gusev," and "The Ninny" to name a few. Welty, of course, was keenly aware of and deeply influenced by his short stories, writing:

The revolution brought about by the gentle Chekhov to the short story was in every sense not destructive but constructive. By removing the formal plot he did not leave the story structureless; he endowed it with another kind of structure--one which embodied the principle of growth. And it was one that had no cause to repeat itself; in each and every story, short or long, it was a structure open to human meaning and answerable to that meaning. It took form from within. (74)

The principle of growth and human meaning Welty references are not only the ways in which characters in his stories engage one another but also the ways in which readers might learn from those characters. In particular, Welty was intrigued by the ways these characters speak to one another and what is communicated or left uncommunicated through their dialogue. Among Chekhov's short stories, there may be no better example of his depiction of noncommunication than his story "Heartache," a meditation on grief and loss.

The plot of Chekhov's story is relatively straightforward and captures the experience of a cab driver, Iona Potapov, and his encounters with two different fares and one fellow driver at the end of the night. The story opens with the seemingly dejected

protagonist “white as a ghost,” “bent double” over his box, and waiting for a fare (99). Though “not a single fare” has come to him so far in the night, an officer soon requests Iona take him to the Vybor District (99). In the course of the journey, the officer proves to be ill-tempered and aggressive in his speech, consistently berating Iona: ““Where are you going, you fool?”” and ““You don’t know how to drive! Stay on the right side!”” (100). Despite the constant barrage of vicious comments, Iona attempts to speak with the officer, but encounters some difficulty in initially forming the words. Though the officer sees Iona’s “lips moving” and appears “to say something,” the “only sound coming from him was a hoarse wheezing cough” (100). Iona’s meek attempt shows the difficulty he has in forming words, but it also gestures toward the likelihood that he has not spoken in some time. Once Iona is able to gather himself, Iona tells the officer ““My son, sir. He died this week”” (100). The officer is unaffected, asks how the boy died, and Iona responds, ““Who knows? They say it was fever. . . . He was in the hospital only three days, and then he died. It was God’s will!”” (100-101). In a moment of vulnerability, Iona honestly expresses the feelings of grief and confusion he has about his son’s death, but the next words to come from his fare are not remotely related to the child’s death. Instead, the officer addresses the speed at which they are travelling and shouts, ““Keep going”” and ““This way we won’t get there till tomorrow morning. Put the whip to her!”” (101). Sensing that his fare is no longer interested in conversing, or even hearing his thoughts, Iona looks back once more to check on his passenger and sees that “the officer’s eyes were closed and apparently he was in no mood to listen” (101). Despite Iona’s intense desire to share his experience and his feelings with the passenger, he is met with disregard and a lack of interest. His communication finds no true listener.

Iona's next fare is, perhaps, even more aggressive than the officer. Iona decides to pick up three young men who are boisterous, and one of them, a "hunchback" with a "cracked voice," is the main one who engages Iona (101). His engagement, though, is often sour and indignant, and exclaims, "Damn you for an old idiot! Will you get a move on, or won't you? Is that how to drive? Use the whip, dammit! Go on, you old devil, give it to her!" (102). In between the insults, Iona attempts to form a connection with the man and speak to him about his son. Quietly, the driver murmurs, "My son died--he died this week..." and before he can even finish his thought, the hunchback responds, "We all die" (102). The hunchback's callousness and refusal to hear about Iona's anguish are also punctuated by a fit of coughing, seemingly acting as a reminder of his son's abrupt sickness and death. In the course of the following conversation between the passengers, one of them decides to question the driver about if he is married, and the driver responds by saying that the only wife left to him now is "the damp earth" before he decides to shift the conversation to expressing his anguish over his son's abrupt death (103). However, his emotional comments will again fall unheard. As he "turned round to tell them how his son died, but at that moment the hunchback gave a little sigh of relief and announced that, thank God, they had come to the end of the journey" (103). Despite Iona's best efforts to attempt to communicate with these men and express his bitter anguish over the unexpected death of his child, these men simply will not listen to him, both due to a lack of empathy and the time limitations of their journey. As he sits alone after dropping off these passengers, the weight of his profound grief returns to "wrench his heart with still greater force" (103). Alone in a sea of people, Iona gazes out on the crowds and wonders "whether there was anyone among those thousands of people who

would listen to him” (103). Iona is isolated from others, despite his efforts to communicate with those whom he encounters, and is left burdened by his “vast, boundless” grief that “would flow over the whole world,” if his heart could break open to show its true holdings (103). Dejected and isolated from his fellow citizens, Iona returns to the stables to call an end to his night.

Once back and amongst his fellow drivers who are now asleep, Iona reflects on his state and realizes that he has not “earned enough even for the hay” to feed his horse, but he is startled by one of the other drivers who awakes (104). Realizing that one of his fellow drivers is awake, Iona offers him a drink of water, and the man accepts. Iona wastes no time in attempting to express his grief to the man and proclaims, “Well, it’s a good thing to be thirsty, but as for me, brother, my son is dead. Did you hear me? This week, at the hospital. . . . Such a lot of trouble!” (104). Curious to see how his words are being received and “producing any effect,” Iona glimpses over to the man and sees that “the young man had covered up his face and was asleep again” (104). Disappointed yet again at the lack of engagement with a listener, Iona meditates, “Soon it would be a week since his son died, and still no one had let him talk about it properly” (104). Though he has spoken words of grief to various individuals, no one has actually listened to him and engaged him in his sorrow, which he recognizes. Iona knows that for his pain to pass, he will need a listener to participate in their communication, almost performing: “the listener would have to gasp and sigh and bewail the fate of the dead man” (104). Left disappointed with those around him and his own state of internal anguish, Iona walks to see his horse and begins to speak to her about his son, claiming, “My son should be driving, not me. He was a real cabdriver, and he should be alive now. . . .” (105).

Continuing, Iona laments, “That’s how it is, old girl. My son, Kuzma Ionich, is no more. He died on us. Now let’s say you had a foal, and you were the foal’s mother, and suddenly, let’s say, the same little foal departed this life. You’d be sorry, eh?” (104). In almost childlike simplicity, Iona lays out a comparison of grief that the horse could understand, if she was a person, and it is also telling that, for the first time in the story, he speaks his son’s name, engendering a sense of intimacy with his listener, his horse (105). As her only form of response to this tale of grief and the newfound sense of her driver’s vulnerability, she “munched and listened and breathed on his hands” (104). Iona feels a connection with his mare and tells her “the whole story” of the loss of his son, “Surrendering to his grief” (105).

Chekhov’s story offers a glimpse into the brutal pains of grief and the frequent inability of language to communicate understanding. In repeatedly attempting to vocalize his emotions, Iona shows that speech, as Lawrence Jay Dessner has asserted in his interpretation of the story, “the need for it and the ability to produce it, is the distinctive human attribute and therefore the essential human need,” but Iona is unable to find a listener to fully express himself and unburden himself from his grief (Dessner 247). The continuous emotional anguish felt by Iona reinforces the cold reality that true and effective communication must have two participants, one to speak and one to listen. In exploring the depths of human experience and the complexities of transmitting one’s own feelings about those events, he uses the simplest of interactions, those between a driver and passenger. In speaking about his characters’ actions and the moments in which they find themselves, Chekhov famously responded to a critique of his fiction and drama not containing much of a plot and said, “In life one does not shoot oneself in the head, hang

oneself, and declare one's passion at every fencepost. And one does not pour out profound thoughts in a constant flow. No, mostly, one eats, drinks, flirts, makes stupid remarks. That is what should be seen on the stage" (Enright). He would echo these sentiments by claiming, "What happens onstage should be just as complicated and just as simple as things are in real life. People are sitting at a table having dinner, that's all, but at the same time their happiness is being created, or their lives are being torn apart" (Schmidt 5). One of Chekhov's preeminent investments in his drama and literature was in showing how people interact or, inversely, what is lost when people are unable to communicate through their words, when one participant, the listener, is not as committed to the exchange.

Welty was keenly attuned to these verbal imbalances between listener and speaker in the Russian's writing, even speaking to her own decisions in including similar moments in her writing. When asked by John Griffin Jones if she was using Chekhov's ideas of noncommunication to show the human condition in the scene with "the ladies talking in the back yard of the McKelva house in *The Optimist's Daughter* denigrating Fay, and Laurel won't listen to them and goes back in the house," Welty responded "Yes" (336). Welty's admission shows that she was intrigued by Chekhov's concepts of the limits of verbal and nonverbal communication in his texts, and her response also shows a willingness to incorporate these elements into her own writing. However, Welty was also deeply intrigued to play with the ways in which noncommunication could function. She was led to consider if noncommunication might involve a saturation of words without a true listener, then what might happen if there were no words spoken or heard, yet communication still occurred. Welty's "First Love," the initial story in *The*

*Wide Net and Other Stories*, is what arose from that pursuit. While Chekhov's stories focus on the incommunicability of emotions, often grief, and how verbal communication fails in expression, Welty's "First Love" offers a major contrast, focusing on how much can be communicated, learned, and felt without speech.

In an innovative twist, Welty attempts to write a story focused on a character who is unable to use all of his senses. The main character of the story is "Joel Mayes, a deaf boy twelve years old," who has lost his parents to an attack from Natchez Indians and is now employed by an innkeeper (Welty 154). Readers watch as the young boy becomes enamored with Aaron Burr's "'conspiracy' to separate the Mississippi (Southwest) territory from the United States" serving as the historical backdrop (Kreyling 52). Unable to hear or speak to the figures around him, Joel is forced to keenly watch the movements of the figures around him and becomes highly aware of the subtle actions of each figure he sees. For example, the young boy sees "the breaths coming out of people's mouths" and has the "secret desire" within himself to know what they are communicating to one another (154). Though Joel cannot hear their interactions with each other, he can see the puffs of heated air and moisture when the vocalize words to one another, and these moments are no less than magic for the boy. These occurrences are "marvelous to him," filled with wonder, and are times "when the infinite designs of speech became visible in formations on the air, and he watched with awe that changed to tenderness whenever people met and passed in the road with an exchange of words" (154). Unaware of what they have said to each other, Joel is consumed with learning how to parse meaning from the subtle movements and gestures each figure displays.



In particular, he is transfixed by watching Aaron Burr in his dealings with Harman Blennerhassett and the other figures in the tavern where he works. On the night he first sees these men, Joel awakes unexpectedly and gazes “with the feasting the eyes do in secret--at their faces, the one eye of each that he could see, the cheeks, the half-hidden mouths--the faces firelit, and strange with a common reminiscence or speculation” (157). In the course of this clandestine meeting, the boy notices a quick, but important, movement: “the gesture one of the men made in the air transfixed him where he waited” (157). Burr lifts his arm in “a tense, yet gentle and easy motion” that makes “the dark wet cloak fall back,” and to the young boy watching, “it was like the first movement he had ever seen, as if the world had been up to that night inanimate” (157). This seemingly insignificant movement opens “to his complete astonishment upon a panorama in his own head, about which he knew first of all that he would never be able to speak,” granting him a moment of infatuation and deep awareness before he falls back asleep. He is so captivated and distracted by this moment that he forgets to perform his duties in the tavern and faces the physical consequence of “a light beating for forgetting to clean the boots” he was supposed to before the morning (157). Despite the beating, the young boy is permanently affected by Burr’s gesture, one that leads to him being “seized and possessed by mystery” (158).

Michael Kreyling has observed that for Welty, “Gesture is of central, if sometimes obscure importance. The lift of an arm stylizes the ordinary representation of the event, giving it meaning” (Kreyling 53). There may be no truer example in Welty’s fiction of this claim than “First Love,” as each of the movements the young Joel Maye observes carries weight and forces readers to consider the limits to what can be learned

without verbal communication. Without a doubt, it is a bold choice to begin a collection with this kind of perspective, and Diarmuid Russell, Welty's longtime agent, claimed as much in a letter in 1941: "The idea of trying to make a deaf boy give an impression of Burr has an element of subtlety and nobility that I like very much....But the whole concept, though magnificent, demands tightrope walking" (Kreyling 59). Welty's risk, though, surely has turned into the reader's gain, as this story forces its audience to reconsider the communicative possibilities of a seemingly ordinary act devoid of speech.

Maye's lack of hearing ultimately allows him to shape his own reality, one detached from Burr's treason and legal proceedings. Burr, for the young boy, becomes his hero, and "since he cannot hear the testimony at the trial nor the gossip at the inn, he cannot know the 'plot' of history" or of the events in which he finds himself (Kreyling 54). At the end of the story, Burr displays this gesture once more when the young Maye sees him in "his mock Indian dress with the boot polish on his face" (167). Maye, unnoticed once more, watches as "Burr lifted his hand once more and a slave led out from the shadows a majestic horse with silver trappings shining in the light of the moon" (167). With the crack of a whip, he leaves the town and Maye behind. As the posse pursuing Burr reaches an emotional Maye in the wake of Burr's path, "he fell down and wept for his father and mother, to whom he had not said good-bye" (168). Psychologically and emotionally, he has linked Burr with his parents, and losing the man whose gesture had transfixed him forces him to confront emotions he had buried.

Burr's gesture, then, functions as a way for Maye to learn of nonverbal forms of communication, showing him that signs, motions, and subtle movements can often contain more meaning than words. "First Love" depicts a character in Maye who

contemplates the intricacies in ordering one's own reality and inspecting the truth that arises from those moments. For Maye, Burr is a heroic man who can do little wrong, despite his historical identity of which the young boy knows nothing. As the figurative entryway through which a reader must step to explore *The Wide Net and Other Stories*, "First Love" offers readers a chance to evaluate the weight of nonverbal communication and challenges them to reconsider how they define meaning in their own lives. Yet, it also puts forth a warning, as Maye's impressions of Burr were both entirely full of personal value and truth, while also being a departure from his historical identity. In depicting this collision, Welty depicts how individuals go about understanding their circumstances and historical moments, pushing them to rethink how they may have formed opinions of various people in their own lives, all through the perspective of a character for whom speech is an inaccessible form of communication, a major contrast with Chekhov's Iona who constantly speaks with no one to hear him.

What we might learn from Chekhov and Welty's fascination with language and communication is that speech may serve as a barrier to characters understanding one another as often as it serves to elucidate their relationships or circumstances. Both of these authors laid bare the realities and mysteries of communication to illustrate the complexities of generative speech and the nuance of subtle gestures in forming a character's perspectives. In her essay "Place in Fiction," Welty celebrated the author's foremost gift, which was "the blessing of the inexhaustible subject: you and me. You and me, here" (Welty 118). Characters need not speak to communicate or understand each other, and characters that speak incessantly may not even be heard by those around them. More than anything, Chekhov and Welty show us that true, empathetic communication

can occur only when both parties make an effort to do so, and one of their many blessings is that all of their characters offer readers a chance to be understood in their own fullness and complexity. They, like each of us, desire to be known, listened to, and heard.

## Chapter 4: Fyodor Dostoevsky and Richard Wright

*“Foremost among all the writers who have influenced me in my attitude toward the psychological state of modern man is Dostoevsky” (L’Express 1955 [163])*

Like Ernest Gaines and Eudora Welty, Richard Wright’s understanding of the literature could not have come to fruition without Russian literature. In particular, he was, as he said in numerous interviews, most influenced by the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. From Dostoevsky, Wright was deeply impacted at his ability to portray the horrendous realities of certain social classes that endured ostracism and were extremely limited in their opportunities for success. Recognizing a similar experience to his own and to his fellow black Americans in Dostoevsky’s characters enduring this social and economic exile, Richard Wright became fascinated with Dostoevsky’s work and sought to adapt many of the Russian’s themes, including the importance of language in navigating social constraints as well as how an individual, if continually debased, might be forced to resort to violence as a means to prove his or her humanity. For Wright, there may have been no more important author in shaping his voice than that of the Russian with whom he felt such an important bond.

Upon first meeting Richard Wright, Dr. Robert Park, sociology professor at Fisk University and former aide to Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee University, shook the native Mississippian’s hand in Chicago and remarked, “How in the hell did you happen?”

(Rowley 250). Dr. Park's sentiments could almost certainly be attributed to the majority of critics, public intellectuals, and authors who met Wright, as this amazing man's life began in such inauspicious beginnings. Richard Nathaniel Wright was born on 4 September 1908 to Ella, a schoolteacher for sharecroppers' children, and Nathaniel Wright, an illiterate sharecropper ("Richard Wright"; Webb 19). Due to his father's absence from the family, Wright's family endured near-constant economic hardship, and his mother was forced to take numerous jobs that often left her children with other family members or alone to entertain themselves. Due to these moments of solitude, Wright would often try to play with other children on his block, but he found the pursuit of stories, both reading and listening to them to be one of the most enjoyable ways to pass his time as a child.

From Wright's earliest memories of reading, it is important to note that access to this realm was guarded from him. Reading, writing, and literature were inherently connected with his own freedom and, by extension, rebellion from the oppressions and constraints under which he found himself. His grandmother had stigmatized reading, Scripture excepted, as an evil practice, and Jim Crow Laws had made it nearly impossible for him to pursue the act that he loved. Yet, the perceived illegality of reading would not hinder Wright from reading, and he found ways to transgress these limits through what could be seen as disobedience. Much like his grandfather before him, his namesake, he had to risk his well-being and safety to pursue his intellectual freedom.

Wright's encounter with Mencken's *A Book of Prefaces* startled him with how it was "using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club" to attack prejudice while "denouncing everything American" (Webb 79). For the first time in Wright's life,

this strange, exciting world of possibilities had been opened before him, and he was also brought into immediate contact with some of the authors who would act as the most important influences on Wright's writing for the rest of his life. Though "he did not yet know how to pronounce" their names, "Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Maupassant, Nietzsche" formed the pillars of his early education and showed him that he was "reading the literature of the twentieth century, the literature of rebellion, and each author seemed to be telling him that he was not queer or strange to rebel" (Rowley 46; Webb 79).

Language, specifically writing, became intrinsically linked with freedom for the young Wright, and he would later make this thought explicit in a 1955 interview: "Writing is my way of being a free man, of expressing my relationship to the world and to the society in which I live" (*L'Express*). This idea is one that Wright would see displayed in Dostoevsky's texts and later attempt to replicate in his own work.

In beginning to exercise this pursuit of freedom through writing, Wright repeatedly spoke of the major influences certain writers have had on him, often returning to Theodore Dreiser, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway, but above all others, he held Fyodor Dostoevsky in particular esteem (*Romance* 32; *Revista Branca* 141). In fact, Wright once told Margaret Walker that he "rated Dostoevsky 'the greatest novelist who ever lived'" (Rowley 120). Furthermore, Wright claimed, "Foremost among all the writers who have influenced me in my attitude toward the psychological state of modern man is Dostoevsky" (*L'Express* 163). In clarifying these comments, Wright would laud Dostoevsky for his ability to approach life directly, to convey "tough, direct, realistic, naturalistic" ideas in his fiction, illustrating the ways in which certain individuals are rejected or exploited by society (Charbonnier 214). Ultimately, what

Wright found fascinating in Dostoevsky's texts was the very idea he had been captivated by in his own life, freedom.

Wright claimed that when he found a writer he respected, he would "take an author, study his works carefully, go into his life with the same thoroughness, follow the way the facts of his life are related to the fiction he created" (Minor 16). In saying that he had "done this with Dostoevsky," he must have found an even deeper level of similarity with the Russian once he learned that Dostoevsky, like himself, had to contend with unjust social and legal restrictions (Minor 16). By his own admission of having studied Dostoevsky's writings and his life, Wright must have been clearly aware of Dostoevsky's crippling poverty in childhood, his struggles with his emotionally distant father, and his unjust imprisonment due to involvement in the Petrashevsky Circle (Morson). This intellectual group was fascinated by utopian socialism, and members often used terroristic acts in pursuit of their goals. Due to his involvement in this group, he was arrested on 23 April 1849, spent eight months in prison, and was led out to a mock execution ceremony where the guns were lowered and the prisoners were released at the last possible moment (Morson). Instead of being executed, Dostoevsky was granted a four-year prison sentence at a Siberian labor camp to be followed by an unspecified term as a soldier (Morson).

Wright's knowledge of Dostoevsky's circumstances and his writings deeply affected Wright's on views of literature and how one should use one's writing platform. Speaking of Dostoevsky in 1960, Wright claimed "Dostoevsky was my model when I started writing" in large part because Wright could not find "American literature about black people" (Charbonnier 214). Finding "nothing about [his] environment," Wright



sought out “Russian novelists, especially Dostoevsky,” because they provided examples that “might shed some light about life in the ghetto” (Charbonnier 214). In doing so, Wright hoped to use Dostoevsky’s themes, like imprisonment, punishment, and freedom, and techniques, like “direct encounters and passionate exchanges” to illustrate “the basic issues of human living, moral, political or whatever you call it” (Charbonnier 214; Cameron 4). Wright’s goal in writing with these ideas in mind would, hopefully, lead to the humanization of black citizens who had consistently been robbed of freedom and repeatedly had violence visited upon them since before the nation’s foundation. For Wright, Dostoevsky’s texts and characters provided a template by which he could make rejected figures empathetic and position them in a way for readers to relate to their perspectives. If Wright were to solve the problem of objectification and violence where “a Negro can’t be treated like a human being,” then he would need to find a way to bridge the “two separate worlds, the white world and the Negro world” (Cameron 4). In attempting to erase this racial distance, Wright would lean heavily on Dostoevsky’s literature, particularly the ways in which his characters are often exiled or rejected from society express universal and timeless truths, and grapple with the often extreme actions they must display to maintain their freedom. In creating texts with many similarities to the famous Russian author, Wright actually was internationally known, by 1949, as “the black Dostoevski’ according to the sonorous definition of his racial brothers” (Gomez 133).

For convenience and ease of reading, I have chosen to break this work into sections. My first section discusses the role of exile in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The House of the Dead* and Richard Wright’s “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” Both authors use the

theme of societal rejection and repeated indignities to show how ostracized populations are dehumanized and separated from the general populace. In showing these perspectives, both texts act as didactic pieces that are intended to engender empathy and push for social action and equality. My second section offers an analysis of the ways in which Richard Wright was fascinated by the character of Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Wright's intrigue with this figure migrated from respect to homage and eventually appropriation, as Wright's *Native Son* and *The Outsider* both feature main characters strongly modeled upon Dostoevsky's famous protagonist.

### Exile, Indignity, and Empathy

In a 1945 essay titled "*Black Boy* and Reading," Richard Wright claimed that he had been repeatedly interviewed about the creation of the autobiographical *Black Boy*, but he had not yet been able to say what he honestly wanted to say about it (Wright 81). In writing this essay, Wright hoped that he might be able show, in his own words, "how it was possible for me to feel that my life had a meaning which my Jim Crow, southern environment denied" (81). Writing about the ways in which he had felt blinded by his restrictive upbringing, Wright proclaimed, "Living in the South doomed me to look always through eyes which the South had given me, and bewilderment and fear made me mute and afraid. But after I had left the South, luck gave me other eyes, new eyes with which to look at the meaning of what I'd lived through" (81). Wright's essay then shifts into an exploration of two texts which had a predominant influence over the perspective shift he describes, describing how these texts from across the globe contained elements

that resonated deeply with his own childhood. Of the first text, the native Mississippian writes:

I came North in my 19th year, filled with the hunger to know. Books were the windows through which I looked at the world. I read Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead*, an autobiographical novel depicting the lives of exiled prisoners in Siberia, how they lived in crowded barracks and vented with their hostility upon one another. It made me remember how Negroes in the South, crowded into their Black Belts, vented their hostility up on one another, forgetting that their lives were conditioned by the whites above them. To me reading was a kind of remembering. (Wright 81)

Wright finds direct similarities between the violence, exclusion, segregation, and a white societal group in control of the Siberian prison camps on the other side of the world detailed in Dostoevsky's book and his own childhood. This semi-autobiographical book would be integral in shaping Wright's earliest biographical endeavor, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" in *Uncle Tom's Children*. Through this story, he sought to clearly portray the significant divide between black and white society, the dehumanization this divide often provoked, and the anger consistently created in black communities by this divide. *The House of the Dead*, then, represents an important texts that influenced Wright, having an immediate impact on the ways in which he would portray how the indignities inflicted on black individuals would lead to the painful dehumanization and consistent mental anguish of this community.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The House of the Dead* was published in 1860 and describes many of the events Dostoevsky witnessed while imprisoned in "the prison fortress at

Omsk, Western Siberia” for his “four-year term of penal servitude” (McDuff 7). Of this experience, Dostoevsky would later write his brother and explain, “Just how horrible that time was I have not the strength to tell you...it was an indescribable, unending agony, because each hour, each minute weighed upon my soul like a stone” (McDuff 7). Throughout the entirety of Dostoevsky’s penal servitude, “the only book [they] were permitted to have in the prison was the Bible,” and “he was forbidden to write while in prison,” though “he did manage to make notes during a hospital visit” before years later writing them from memory (Dostoevsky 40; Garner). Yet, even in prison, he knew it would be of fundamental importance for him to tell of these experiences later. The text that would arise from his abhorrent, four-year imprisonment would be an “autobiographical work,” but it would take the form of “a documentary novel” that sought to “achieve a kind of photographic accuracy” and avoid “being overtly didactic” (Miller 22). In doing so, Dostoevsky’s narrator “endeavors to minimize his prejudices and suppress the oddities of his personality in favor of factual, dispassionate reportage” (Miller 22). In writing a text that was decidedly not an autobiography, though heavily informed by autobiographical biographical material, Dostoevsky hoped to avoid further punishment for any possible accusations of governmental critique or overt societal reform. Apart from his expert choice in using genre to his advantage in safeguarding himself from further punishment like he described in *The House of the Dead*, Dostoevsky also sought to depict the “outcast criminal inhabitants of this hidden universe” of the “prison gulags of the vast tsarist empire” (Frank 10, 9). These people, who were “generally looked down upon as little better than subhuman,” were in Dostoevsky’s text “treated with respect and even occasionally sympathy” to show that they were “sentient

human beings whose behavior deserved to be understood if not pardoned” (Frank 10). *The House of the Dead* shocked its initial readers in its descriptions of the prisoners’ lives, but, more importantly, it explored the ways in which people who are forced to endure constant debasement and indignities attempt to maintain their own humanity through even the most meager of methods they might have available to them.

The book’s title, *The House of the Dead*, is a twofold expression for the way in which society felt toward the inhabitants of the prison system in Russia as well as the immense personal isolation Dostoevsky himself felt. As convicts, these men had been exiled from society, sent away to remote provinces to perform hard labor until penance for their crimes had been performed. While at these prisons, it was as if they no longer existed. They were, metaphorically, dead men until they literally died in servitude or were fortunate enough to live through their sentence and be reintegrated into society. For Dostoevsky, his own personal isolation in these prisons, in addition to the more widely felt isolation from society, was immense and led him to feel as if he were buried alive, confined and suffocated. In an 1854 letter to his brother Andrey, he wrote, “I consider those four years as a time during which I was buried alive and shut up in a coffin” (McDuff 7). Dostoevsky, a nobleman, was vastly different from the convicts in this text, as they are, for the most part, peasants (Miller 24). Separated by various barriers, particularly socioeconomic and literacy, Dostoevsky was largely hated and ostracized by his surrounding prisoners and bunkmates. In keeping with the autobiographical elements of this text, he chose to endow this same kind of exile on the main figure in his text, Alexander Petrovich Goryanchikov, a 35-year-old nobleman much like Dostoevsky who

“had subsequently been made a convict deportee of the second category for the murder of his wife” and sentenced to a “ten-year spell of hard labour” (Dostoevsky 22).

Goryanchikov’s first impressions with the prison camp are replete with daily humiliations and troubles, and he quickly realizes that the convicts seem to be treating him differently than the other new prisoners. Goryanchikov discusses this idea with an acquaintance, Akim Akimych, and he explains, ““No, they don’t like noblemen, he observed, ‘especially the political ones, they’d like to sink their teeth into them. No wonder. To start with, you’re a different sort of person from them, and then again they were all serfs or soldiers before. You can see for yourself that they’d find it hard to take a liking to you”” (Dostoevsky 53). Goryanchikov struggles to understand that these fellow prisoners reject him, not due to a specific characteristic or opinion he holds but because of the station in life from which he came, essentially an unchangeable aspect over which he has no control. Only pages later, the protagonist confronts a Polish prisoner who was also a nobleman and questions, ““Tell me, they also have their own food to eat, and I have my tea. But they look at me all the time as though they envied me my tea. What does that mean?”” (Dostoevsky 60). Irritated, the Pole responds:

It’s not the tea that bothers them, replied the Pole. They don’t like you because you’re from the nobility and are different from them. Many of them would like to pick a quarrel with you. They would like nothing better than to insult you and humiliate you. You will meet a lot more unpleasantness here. All our lives are very hard here. Ours are harder than the rest in every way. You will need all the detachment you are capable of in order to get used to it. You will meet again and again with unpleasantness and abuse because you drink tea and have your own

food, even though very many of the men often eat their own food and some of them drink tea every day. It's all right for them to do it, but not for us.

(Dostoevsky 60)

As soon as the fellow nobleman convict utters these words, he leaves, as if he feels he may face a punishment for even explaining the unspoken rules of the prison to Goryanchikov. The Pole's words prove to be prophetic for the protagonist of the novel, because he is continually ostracized by those around him, due to his former status in society, but this man's comments are also important because of the way certain hobbies may and may not be enjoyed by specific prisoners. Outside of prison, Goryanchikov, like any nobleman, enjoyed his tea with regularity, but now that he is in jail, acts like drinking tea make him a target. In this prison, the convicts, mostly comprised of peasants and serfs, do not take kindly to noblemen drinking tea. The Pole even makes this double standard explicit when he warns, "It's all right for them to do it, but not for us" (Dostoevsky 60). In this way, some societal standards in the prison are reversed, leading to actions and hobbies once seen privileges now being acts that could lead to retribution from other prisoners. For the first time in his life, Goryanchikov must contend with being the other who is cast out from society due to circumstances out of his own control, much like the convicts all around him.

Goryanchikov's isolation even extends to the role of monotonous labor in the prison. Desiring to assimilate into the surrounding community of prisoners, he found himself "desperate to be sent to work as soon as possible, so as to discover and experience the whole extent of [his] wretchedness at once, to begin to live as the other convicts did, to get into the same rut as everybody else" (Dostoevsky 96). However, he is

later included in the labor team to break down a barge, he notices, “wherever I went in order to try to be of help, I was always out of place, in the way, and the men would drive me away with a curse” (Dostoevsky 123). Furthermore, he perceives just how low his place on the hierarchy is when he perceives that the “very lowest ragamuffin, himself the most inferior of workmen, not daring to utter a word in the presence of the other convicts, who were more alert and intelligent than he, even such a man thought himself entitled to shout at me and drive me away if in his way” (Dostoevsky 123). Frustrated with his continual efforts to assist and ingratiate himself with the prisoners, a convict directly and casually tells Goryanchikov ““Who told you to shove your nose in? Beat it. Quit pushing in where you’re not wanted”” (Dostoevsky 123). Goryanchikov’s efforts to use labor as his means to convince the prisoners to accept him into their community fail, as they have no interest in welcoming him, even if his energy saves them time, energy, and hardship. He simply cannot work hard enough to engender support or community because these men have already made the conscious decision to reject him fundamentally because of who he was before he came to the prison. In this prison, the way others view him is out of his control, and his own autonomy to alter his situation or earn his way into the community has been removed. For a former nobleman, the feeling is crippling, and it is reflective of the very same circumstances many of these serfs and peasants populating the prison faced on a daily basis before their penal servitude.

By the end of the text, the protagonist has still not found acceptance from the populace of the prison. In a moment of introspection near the end of his sentence, he reflects, “I realized that I should never be accepted by the men as their companion, not even if I were to remain a convict forever, not even if I were to belong to the special



category” (Dostoevsky 321). There is simply nothing he can do that will earn him inclusion or respect from the majority of the convicts at the prison, due to his noble upbringing and background. This isolation forces him to recognize what it must be like for those in lower classes in the society at large. As an outsider amongst outsiders, one doubly rejected by both free and imprisoned Russians, his conceptions about the humanity of the peasantry is challenged and ultimately revised once he lives with them and is forced to inhabit their abhorrent position of rejection.

In addition to the many ways Goryanchikov is continually ostracized from his fellow convicts and how this rejection allows him to understand their wrongful treatment in society, *The House of the Dead* also depicts the deplorable living circumstances with which these prisoners must contend as they serve out the remainder of their sentences. As one would expect, a 19th-century Russian prison in rural Siberia is not pleasant, but the protagonist of Dostoevsky’s novel is painfully descriptive about every aspect of the prison experience the daily debasements these outcasts must endure. The housing of the Omsk prison is dreadful, as the men live in poorly constructed wooden barracks where the “stuffiness was appalling,” and they attempt to sleep in a sardine-like proximity on a “communal plank bed” (Dostoevsky 45). Any prospect of sleep for Goryanchikov is challenged by the tight quarters, grotesque smell of unwashed prisoners, and the incessant noise and movement of other prisoners, because “Nearly all the convicts talked and raved in their sleep at night” and “tossed and turned on the plank bed all night, as if in delirium” (Dostoevsky 37, 283). Furthermore, nighttime in the bunkhouse presents some of the most challenging temperatures he experiences in the camp, and he decries the “intolerable heat and airlessness” as well as the blasts of cold night air he must endure in

the rickety bunkhouse (Dostoevsky 283). Apart from the convicts and the oppressive temperatures, the must also deal with the “teeming myriads of fleas” in their clothing and on the communal plank (Dostoevsky 283). With only a remote possibility of comfort, these prisoners have little chance to gain any solace or escape from their punishment through sleep and must spend their days in a state of groggy confusion.

The food, too, is portrayed as yet another abominable feature of the prison. Convicts in this camp are given beef, bread, and a cabbage soup for sustenance, and the protagonist focuses particularly on the “very unprepossessing” soup (Dostoevsky 45). He describes this liquid as “thin and watery,” having been composed in a large, “common cauldron,” but the most upsetting aspect of this solution is the “enormous amount of cockroaches it contained” (Dostoevsky 45). Though Goryanchikov claims to have been “horrified” by the countless number of insects in this foul mixture, “the convicts gave this no attention whatsoever” (Dostoevsky 45). It is telling that the peasants and serfs fail to see this circumstance as noteworthy, signaling that the food in this prison camp may not be any different from that which they normally experienced when they were free. In the Goryanchinkov’s horror toward his new reality, this scene of the perceived dregs of society eating creatures from the lowest form of the food chain becomes yet another effective avenue to show the continuous ways these men are robbed of their human dignity at nearly every moment while in the Siberian camp.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, rampant theft consumes the prison, and Goryanchikov experiences this aspect of Omsk prison life very early in his internment. Of the constancy of robberies in the outpost, he claims, “the convicts did a fearful amount of stealing from one another” (Dostoevsky 40). Though most of these men have lockboxes in which they

keep various items of prison issue, “the boxes were no safeguard against theft,” especially with the “skillful thieves” amongst the prison population (Dostoevsky 40). No items are seen as untouchable, and Goryanchikov even has his Bible stolen by “a man who was sincerely devoted to [him]” (Dostoevsky 40). He only learns of this theft after the man confesses later that day “not because he had repented for what he had done, but because he felt sorry for me when he saw me spend such a long time looking for it” (Dostoevsky 40). Stealing is treated in this prison as a kind of ever-present condition of their confines, like their clothing, housing, and food. Stripped of their autonomy and with no ability to protect even their most meager of belongings, theft is simply another debasement of their internment they must endure.

While many of these indignities were physical, some of the most dehumanizing aspects of the prison were moral or somewhat more abstract avenues for punishment and debasement. Punishments of this variety were particularly painful, and of them, Dostoevsky writes, “moral deprivations are harder to bear than any physical torments” (Dostoevsky 93). One of the most effective ways for stripping away the human dignity of the prisoners, Goryanchikov asserts, was the use of fetters. The individual constraints were attached within the first two to three days on one’s internment and were “designed to be worn at work” and “consisted not of rings, but of four iron rods, each of almost a finger’s thickness, connected by three rings. They had to be worn under one’s trousers. To the middle ring a strap was fastened, which in turn was fastened to the belt one wore next to one’s shirt” (Dostoevsky 45). Being under one’s clothes, they were as much an aspect of the convict’s uniform as the very clothing and shoes he was issued. However, these constraints, to Goryanchikov’s understanding, served not merely to hold convicts

captive but to demean, discourage, and debase them. After months of his internment, he reflects on the effects of the fetters and remarks that these constraints “were simply a public dishonour, a disgrace, and a shameful physical and moral burden,” which was the intended outcome of the prison system (Dostoevsky 220). These instruments, in Goryanchikov’s estimation, “could never have prevented any man from running away” and the “most inept and clumsy convict knew how to saw through them or knock their rivets out with a stone,” but these “leg fetters were really no prevention of anything” (Dostoevsky 220). What they did inhibit, however, was the feeling of personhood or equality with those around them. These constraints did not merely have the practical purpose of confinement or burdensomeness but to serve as markers of societal exclusion, acting to continually remind convicts of their lowly place and consistently debase them. Even those on the doorstep of death in this prison camp were not safe from these humiliating fetters, as “men who were dying” were kept in these constraints even up to their final breath (Dostoevsky 220). Thus, these fetters served as one of the most painful moral humiliation that could be endowed on those interned in the Omsk outpost.

Despite these constant physical and moral indignities, numerous prisoners find a way to preserve their humanity and rise above the deplorable conditions into which they have been thrown. Dostoevsky himself, as Dwight Garner has asserted, “finds humor in the unlikeliest places” through the “oddball parade of animals — dogs, geese, a goat — that march through this novel” (Garner). These moments provide the text with comic reprieves and levity, despite the brutal circumstances of the Russian prison, and show that these men can rescue moments of happiness and resilience in the pits of their confinement. In these scattered moments of positivity, *The House of the Dead* illustrates

the ways these men can maintain their human dignity, and these moments most often occur through their use of language or the pursuit of linguistic achievement. For some, it occurs simply through speech with one another, which Goryanchikov notices near the beginning of his internment: “On my right two sedate convicts were holding a conversation, each evidently trying to preserve his dignity before the other” (Dostoevsky 48). Simply conversing with one another, using generative thought and language, leads to a genuine human connection and reminds them that they are, indeed, more than beasts in this prison camp. Dostoevsky’s protagonist meditates often on the dehumanization of his fellow convicts and near the middle of his internment he asserts, “Everyone, whoever he is and however low the circumstances into which he has been pushed, demands, albeit instinctively and unconsciously, that respect be shown for his human dignity” (Dostoevsky 145). In analyzing the ways in which human dignity can most easily be shown to one another, he posits that these convicts, “these degraded creatures,” experience “something approaching a moral resurrection” upon hearing just a “few kind words” (Dostoevsky 145). For these prisoners, language becomes their most consistent method to prove their personhood and show they are unique.

Though these convicts are ill-fed, fettered, and must carry out strenuous labor, they are still free to express themselves with one another and can take enjoyment from clever expressions and well-formed stories. Max Nelson has written about the cataloguing nature which Dostoevsky’s novel takes toward the litany of “overheard insults and tossed-off sayings” that can be found throughout the text (Nelson). The “ribald, cacophonous” phrases depict a people possessing “a spirit not easily suppressed,” and though he lists several of the convicts most impressive and humorous sayings, “Poor

me, I don't even have an aunt, so screw her" and "You with your dirty mug dare stand in the breadline?" may remain the most impressive of his collection (Nelson). Robin Feuer Miller has also written about how *The House of the Dead* depicts the ways in which "Language--particularly proverbs and eloquent streams of abuse--was frequently chosen by the prisoners as a favorite arena for the exercise of art for art's sake" (Miller 30). Of the rampant swearing and creative ways in which someone could be insulted, Goryanchikov asserts, "The dialectician of the curse was held in great esteem. He was applauded almost like an actor" (Dostoevsky 49). Though this freedom pales when compared to how many freedoms they have been robbed of in this prison, it is still a way they can express themselves and show their own creativity and personhood.

Goryanchikov comes to learn just how impressive these men can be later in the novel when he witness the staging of a play in prison. Upon witnessing the performance the convicts muster, he is stunned with their abilities and left to consider what their lives may have become under different circumstances: "Once could not help thinking in astonishment, as one watched these makeshift actors, of how here in Russia so much vigour and talent goes almost entirely to waste in captivity and bitter misfortune" (Dostoevsky 201). Language and performativity become their greatest asset in showing their human dignity and proving they are capable of achieving linguistic excellence, despite the fetters on their limbs and their deplorable circumstances. They, too, are people who cannot be denied their personhood, despite the constant barrage of indignities they endure.

Near the end of his prison sentence, Goryanchikov reflects on the purpose of the text he is writing and claims, "the reason I have written all this down is that I believe it

will be understood by anyone who serves a prison sentence in the flower of his years and strength, for the same things are bound to happen to him” (Dostoevsky 340). This statement points to the documentary nature of the text as a whole, but it also reinforces the communal aspect this text is meant to have. It is supposed to deeply register with others in a state of plight or who might be experiencing a similar state of oppression, not explicit imprisonment.

Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky’s biographer, has claimed that the Russian author had his initial “revulsion against the prisoners and their world” fundamentally altered by his imprisonment with them (Frank 23). Frank claims, “the more he learned about the circumstances in which many of their crimes had been committed, the more he could see that they were often a response to unbearable oppression or mistreatment” (Frank 23). Goryanchikov, in fact, has a similar moment of enlightenment on one of the final pages of the text as he reflects, “How much youth had been buried in vain within these walls; how much power and strength had perished here for nothing! For the whole truth must be told; all these men were quite remarkable. These were perhaps the most gifted, strongest of all our people. But mighty powers had perished in vain, perished abnormally, unlawfully, irrevocably. Yet who is to blame?” (Dostoevsky 355). Franks reads this passage as Dostoevsky “obviously protesting against serfdom and the whole complex of Russian social customs that treated the peasant as an inferior species” (Frank 27). In doing so, Dostoevsky’s Goryanchikov undergoes a perception realignment and spiritual awakening when he is freed at the end of his internment. He no longer sees the peasants and convicts as debased monsters or societal mishaps but as hardworking, clever artists and thinkers who are capable of empathetic acts. In writing *The House of the Dead*,

Dostoevsky displayed how the systemic injustices that had led to the ostracism or imprisonment of any oppressed people across the globe might be remedied with empathy for those undergoing such plight.

Richard Wright was deeply affected by *The House of the Dead*, likening the experiences within it to his own childhood. Wright had seen the systemic dehumanization depicted by Dostoevsky not in an exiled prison population but in the black communities in which he lived throughout his formative years. Like the peasant convicts that populate Goryanchikov's narrative, black communities in the United States were being dehumanized, spatially restricted, and forced to contend with constant indignities. In finding such a profound feeling of similarity with Dostoevsky's semi-autobiographical *The House of the Dead*, Wright's first attempt at writing autobiography, 1940's "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," heavily relied on Dostoevsky's model. Wright's text sought to catalogue the indignities that those in the black community endure on a daily basis, illustrate their ability to navigate these challenging encounters, and depict how those in this community preserve their own human dignity. In Marcia Minor's "An Author Discusses His Craft," she writes, "When Dick wrote *Uncle Tom's Children* he had a hope for his purpose in writing it--that the person who reads it, especially the white reader, would get from it a sense of a people, often defeated, who remained strong with a strength which, if released and organized, would be a rallying pole for democratic forces; that these people, whose bodies, homes and personalities are violated and yet can still fight, brighten the outlook of democracy and give it hope" (Minor 18-19). Though Minor's comments are treat the entirety of *Uncle Tom's Children*, her thoughts can apply to the tone-setting, autobiographical first story in the collection. Based on the model set



forth in *The House of the Dead*, “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” was to be a similar didactic text showing the personhood of those populating an ostracized community and forced to endure numerous social constraints.

Like Dostoevsky’s text, Wright’s autobiographical story at the beginning of *Uncle Tom’s Children* depicts the ways communities are divided and isolated. The first paragraph of the story notes the clear visual differences in the “skimpy yard” that “was paved with black cinders,” and “Nothing green ever grew in that yard” (Wright 1). These yards, the yards of the black individuals in the community, are markedly different from the “only touch of green” they could ever see, which “was far away, beyond the tracks, over where the white folks lived” (Wright 1). Thus, the communities were divided in how they physically appeared but also the productivity of what could be grown in these yards. For those in the black community, there was little hope of growing anything of much value, as the soil quality was abysmal, which acts as a metaphor for the opportunities and successes that could come from those who populated these homes.

Wright claims that he “never fully realized the appalling disadvantages of a cinder environment” until he found himself engaged in a cinder war with some of the white children “who lived beyond the tracks” (Wright 1). After hurling some cinders, Wright and his friends believed they had won the war, but he quickly realized that the opposing force was replying with “a steady bombardment of broken bottles” (Wright 1). Without the fortifications the white children had, like pillars, shrubs, and trees, Wright and his friends were forced into retreat, but he was caught with “a broken milk bottle” in the course of his movements (Wright 1). Though the wound bled profusely, he only needed a few stitches and was left to brood on these events while he waited for his mother’s return.

The opening section of this story and the cinder war is important for a number of reasons, and it shows the inherent disparity in available opportunity for the children of white and black families. In addition to the homes and vegetation in the yards of these homes, there is also a stark contrast in the weapons and fortifications of these dueling forces. The white children have every advantage at their fingertips, while the black children have none, and these black children realize their disadvantages only once the barrage of broken glass assails them.

This cinder war is also an important scene for its context within story as well as outside of the text. Wright's memory of the childhood battle is of one predicated on a territory dispute between factions composed entirely of different races. This memory would have been ripe with meaning for readers in 1940, the year of this text's publication, as it could easily connect with events in Europe at the time. Only a year before, Germany had invaded Poland in one of the first conquests to secure Lebensraum, or "living space," for the German people (Lightbody). In doing so, the German territorial expansion carried out one of the most mismatched attacks in history when the "world's first armoured corps" swiftly defeated Polish cavalry units on horseback (Lightbody). This engagement would have provided an inviting comparison for the disproportionate weapons at the fingertips of the white black children. Furthermore, the events being described in the text would have taken place close to, if not during, World War I. These numerous references to historical divisions and combat are meaningful, and as B. Eugene McCarthy has asserted, "It would seem that Wright presented the stories with full awareness that one could, and thus should, read them as history or commentaries on history" (McCarthy 730). For Wright, this childhood memory is a painful one, and that

pain is compounded by knowing that this event was just one of the first experiences in his life that was filled with racially motivated encounters.

When she returns home, Wright's mother is extremely aggravated to hear of her son's endeavors. Thinking that she will fix the situation and tell him how to handle it next time, a young Wright is startled when she first examines his wound before promptly slapping him (Wright 2). She exclaims, "How come yuh didn't hide?" and "How come yuh awways fightin'?" (Wright 2). Afterwards, she beat him with a "barrel stave, dragged [him] home, stripped [him] naked, and beat [him] till he had a fever of one hundred in two" (Wright 2). In doing so, she hopes to teach him "gems of Jim Crow Wisdom" that will keep him subservient and, hopefully, safe (Wright 2). Her intense punishments are attempts to force the young Wright to understand his powerlessness and how vulnerable he and other black people are to the whims of the whites they might encounter. Of his new understanding, he reflects, "I was never, never, under any conditions, to fight *white* folks again. And they were absolutely right in clouting me with the broken milk bottle" (Wright 2). His mother's parting comments that he "ought to be thankful to God as long as [he] lived that they didn't kill [him]" reinforce her comments and lead to a new understanding of the predicament he and other black people face (Wright 3).

His mother's comments illustrate the lack of safety for black individuals and their lower value than whites. These words also serve to isolate Wright and make him keenly aware of "the situation of black people in the South during the time" (Gibson 494). His new personal understanding of this racial situation causes him immense frustration and he reflects on the social failures that led to the ostracism and oppression of black

communities. Though he spends that night delirious and imagining “monstrous white faces suspended from the ceiling,” his education in the Jim Crow system and the ways in which it attempts to oppress and dehumanize black people has begun (Wright 3).

Wright’s next major experience in learning about the extent to which white individuals will attempt to exercise control and debase minorities occurs when he begins his job “with an optical company in Jackson, Mississippi” (Wright 3). In the course of the interview for the position, Wright is, like Dostoevsky’s protagonist’s willfully “obedient and submissive” attitude when speaking with the guards in *The House of the Dead*, keenly aware of the value and importance of language, answering all of the questions from the boss “with sharp yessirs and nossirs” (Dostoevsky 35; Wright 3). Of the importance of speaking well and clearly, Wright reflects, “I was very careful to pronounce my *sirs* distinctly, in order that he might know that I was polite, that I knew where I was, and that I knew he was a *white* man” (Wright 3-4). Fortunately, Wright gets the job, but he quickly runs into some challenges when he is not as attentive in his speech when showing his white coworkers the level of respect that they demand. In accidentally referring to one of his coworkers by his last name, instead of attaching the prefix Mr., Wright is confronted by the man who feels aggrieved. He asks confronts Wright and asserts, “Richard, Mr. Morrie here tells me you called me *Pease*” (Wright 6). In calling Wright Richard instead of Mr. Wright, he fails to show him the same level of respect he expects, which is his point. But Wright quickly realizes that it will take some verbal gymnastics to navigate this situation, denying the witness’ account would show Wright labeling the other man a liar and Wright agreeing that he had referred to the man as Pease would also lead to a violent end. Thus, Wright quickly decides and says, “I don’t

remember calling you *Pease*, Mr. Pease...And if I did, I sure didn't mean it” (Wright 6). Even this seemingly diplomatic choice is met with fury, and Pease “spat, slapping [him] until [he] bent sideways over a bench,” aggravated that Wright’s response had featured a moment where he was referred to by only his surname (Wright 6). In this way, even an answer that might be viewed as a peaceful solution was still able to provoke white men to violence. For Wright, there was no clear safe answer, and this moment is meant to serve as an example of the extremely heightened awareness that black individuals had to have when carrying out their daily activities. Even extreme verbal dexterity and seemingly thoughtful answers were not always avenues that could guarantee safety.

After this experience, Wright left that job, returned home, was called a fool, and told to “never again attempt to exceed [his] boundaries” (Wright 7). If he wanted to hold a job or work for whites, then he would need to stay in his place. Wright’s next opportunity allowed him to exercise his verbal dexterity once more as he sought to ensure his safety. While portering at a clothing store, he witnesses and hears the boss and his son violently beat a black woman before she stumbles out of the store “bleeding, crying, and holding her stomach” (Wright 7). She is quickly accused of being drunk by a nearby police officer and thrown into a patrol wagon (Wright 7). Wright’s boss comes over to him and proclaims, ““Boy, that’s what we do to niggers when they don’t want to pay their bills” before offering Wright a cigarette (Wright 8). He accepts the cigarette and quickly realizes “This was a gesture of kindness, indicating that even if they had beaten the poor old woman, they would not beat me if I knew enough to keep my mouth shut” (Wright 8). His intuition proves correct, and he simply accepts the cigarette and stares “at the bloody floor till the cigarette went out,” showing that he has realized that in addition to

continually choosing the safest words, it is also vital to understand when a black individual should not even speak at all (Wright 8). In other words, a valuable lesson to learn in one's Jim Crow education is that silence can be just as valuable as knowing the appropriate response to a bigoted white person. Goryanchikov displays similarly deferential behavior with some of the more aggressive prisoners and corrupt guard. In Wright's adaptation, treacherous situations with these white figureheads of power and social control must be navigated carefully.

In his growing understanding of using language to survive the Jim Crow South, Wright also begins to see ways that he can use the system's bigotry to his advantage. Realizing that many of the white people around him view him as less than human, Wright seizes on the opportunity to access library books by playing on the ignorance of the librarian. Armed with the library card of a Catholic co-worker and a note from him reading, "Please let this nigger boy have the following books," Wright procures the books he desires (Wright 14). In reflecting on his success, he thinks, "No doubt if any of the white patrons had suspected that some of the volumes they enjoyed had been in the home of a Negro, they would not have tolerated it for an instant" (Wright 14). It is telling that Wright navigates this division in society and then speaks to how upset some whites would be to find out that the books in their hands had previously been in the house of a black man, not because he had found a way to corrupt their system but because an object they touch might have been in his home. It is this unwillingness to engage with or come into contact with any book that reinforces the desired goals of the ethnic segregations in the Jim Crow South.

Despite his successes in engineering a way to access a host of books at the local library, “The Ethics of Jim Crow” also contains a horrifying passage of a bell-boy who is castrated. In what is the shortest episode of the short story, Wright matter-of-factly relays the story in six brief sentences. For being “caught in bed with a white prostitute,” this young, black man is “castrated and run out of town,” as if he were livestock (Wright 12). Wright claims that the other bell-boys are gathered together, told that the castrated man was a “‘mighty, mighty lucky bastard,’” and also told that “next time the management of the hotel would not be responsible for the lives of ‘trouble-makin’ niggers’” (Wright 12). The brevity of this passage separates it from others, and the extreme economy of words makes the violent act stand out even more. The lack of detail and explanation also makes it seem as if this type of violent, dehumanizing event happens with regularity, as it may not be worth expansion because it is so common.

At the conclusion of “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow,” Wright directly addresses the reader and writes, “How do Negroes feel about the way they have to live? How do they discuss it when alone among themselves? I think this question can be answered in a single sentence. A friend of mine who ran an elevator once told me: ‘Lawd, man! Ef it wuzn’t fer them polices ‘n’ them ol’ lynch-mobs, there wouldn’t be nothin’ but uproar down here!’” (Wright 15). His friend’s joke is a cruel reminder of the systems of control in place and also speaks to the inability of language to fully express the rage felt by minorities who have been systematically persecuted. However, in recording these memories from his own childhood, this text serves the documentarian role of bearing remembrance and can show the repeated injustices he and those he witnessed were forced to endure. As an adaptation of Dostoevsky’s *The House of the Dead*, Richard Wright’s

“The Ethics of Living Jim Crow” offers lessons in the repeated cruelties black individuals in the South were forced to endure during the early twentieth century and the lengths to which they were forced to go to maintain their human dignity. In recording these often-painful memories, Wright “wanted to show exactly what Negro life in the South means today, the total effect, a kind of common denominator” (Cameron 4). To this end, Wright’s purpose, as B. Eugene McCarthy claims, “was to reproduce the history that was there, correct false views of received history for both black and white audiences, and offer a paradigm for understanding the future processes of history” (McCarthy 730). By shifting the paradigm and declaring these rampant injustices through a first-person perspective, Wright had effectively given voice to the other, forcing readers, white and black, to consider empathy and a corrective avenue to the injustices in the United States.

### Raskolnikovs

In a 1955 interview, Richard Wright was asked if his heroes were real, historical figures or fictional, literary inventions. Wright quickly responded, “I have no political heroes in life; all politicians, to me, are misfortunes” (*L’Express* 165). Elaborating, he would claim that his “heroes are medical and scientific ones,” like Pasteur and Einstein, but foremost amongst all of his literary heroes was “Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment’” (*L’Express* 165). Wright read the Russian masterpiece for the first time in 1928, when he was 20 years old and has made pointed comments in the past about its lasting significance in shaping him as a thinker and writer (Magistrale 59). When asked about the impact of Dostoevsky on his own work in a 1960 interview with Annie Brière, Wright coyly responded, “The notion of crime and punishment is one of my major



preoccupations,” mentioning the broad theme of the Russian author while also explicitly referencing one of his greatest works, *Crime and Punishment* (Brière 209). Wright’s word choice here, while potentially unintentional, seems pointed, encouraging readers to analyze and evaluate the implications of these works being read in conversation with one another. In doing so, these works could show how they might offer a fuller picture of oppressive tethers, strategies for escape, and the ultimate ability for one to overcome or escape challenging societal constraints. In particular, Wright’s *Native Son* and *The Outsider* are indebted to Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, as they relocate and recast Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov as Bigger Thomas and Cross Damon, black men in the United States, to show the lengths some figures are willing to go to escape their physical and moral confinement.

Critics have long held that Richard Wright, like many other authors, was affected by Dostoevsky in the ways the Russian depicted isolation and the way certain figures could be rejected from society, and Wright often sought to emulate his writing. Arnold Rampersad, in his introduction to *Native Son*, asserts:

With some justification, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, who in her introduction to the first edition of *Native Son* compared the novel to Dostoevsky’s “revelation of human misery in wrongdoing,” declared that there is ‘no one single effect in [Dostoevsky] finer’ than this last page, in which Bigger “is born at last into humanity and makes his first simple, normal human response to a fellowman.”

(Rampersad xxi)

Yet, these similarities extend far beyond the emotional weight of a singular scene or the “violence and gloom of the novel” (Rampersad xxi). In fact, *Crime and Punishment*,

*Native Son*, and *The Outsider* are incredibly effective texts because they depict the ways in which an individual is affected by numerous societal constraints, including socioeconomic, physical, and racial, illustrating the ways in which these barriers can dictate the outcome of an individual. These two novels by Wright attempt to accomplish these goals in large part due to the influence of Dostoevsky, and these texts are so impressive because they are studies not just in literary excellence but because they are excellent studies in psychology, sociology, and criminology. As Edward Margolies asserts, Wright's work fundamentally jolts the reader's conscience while it also raises "questions regarding the ultimate nature of man," traits he observed in *Crime and Punishment* and sought to replicate with *Native Son* and *The Outsider* (Margolies 82).

Perhaps the most immediate similarity to note in the construction of these three texts is the way in which physical barriers prevent the metaphorical and literal freedom of its characters. In his essay "From St. Petersburg to Chicago: Wright's *Crime and Punishment*," Tony Magistrale claims, "Dostoevski heightened Wright's awareness of the psychological dimensions of physical space, the sense of the city or a bedroom in possession of certain traits which influence human behavior" (Magistrale 59). These limited spaces become imperative for how Raskolnikov, Bigger Thomas, and Cross Damon understand the social constraints placed on them. The sweltering St. Petersburg streets and cramped bedroom of Raskolnikov become the suffocating and stinking ghetto buildings of Chicago in *Native Son* and *The Outsider*. In each of these locales, there is continual confinement that reinforces the sense that these characters are trapped in their predicaments with little hope of freedom. In one of the first pages of the text, Dostoevsky's introduces Raskolnikov and the surrounding area where he lives:

It was terribly hot out, and moreover it was close, crowded; lime, scaffolding, bricks, dust everywhere, and that special summer stench known so well to every Petersburger who cannot afford to rent a summer house--all at once these things unpleasantly shook the young man's overwrought nerves. The intolerable stench from the taverns, especially numerous in that part of the city, and the drunkards he kept running into even though it was a weekday, completed the loathsome and melancholy coloring of the picture. A feeling of the deepest revulsion flashed for a moment in the young man's fine features. (Dostoevsky 4)

This suffocating, oppressive scene features incredible description of all the minutiae of a poverty-stricken area, and this scene also shows the immediate physical and mental effects on Raskolnikov, as he has "overwrought nerves" and displays a facial contortions that will haunt him for much of the text (Dostoevsky 4). In one of the first pages of Dostoevsky's novel, Raskolnikov clearly is being physically and mentally affected by the sense of confinement he feels in this section of St. Petersburg.

Bigger Thomas, too, is a victim of similar environmental conditions of restraint. While speaking with Gus about the benefits of being outside and the manipulation of the temperatures in the tenements by the white landlords at the beginning of the novel, the narration describes his movements:

He stretched his arms above his head and yawned; his eyes moistened. The sharp precision of the world of steel and stone dissolved into blurred waves. He blinked and the world grew hard again, mechanical, distinct. A weaving motion in the sky made him turn his eyes upward: he saw a slender streak of billowing white

blooming against the deep blue. A plane was writing high up in the air. (Wright 16)

It is important to note the noisy, mechanical way in which his surroundings are depicted, almost as if Bigger is simply a cog, trapped and constricted, within the larger machine of the city. James A. Emanuel's "Fever and Feeling: Notes on the Imagery in *Native Son*" posits that Bigger's views of the city and understanding of reality is "presented through images of restriction: urban closure, walls, curtains, and blurred vision" to "metaphorically dramatize part of the black man's American experience" (Magistrale 60; Emanuel 24). These continual restrictions and Bigger's awareness of them, then, "make Bigger continually aware of the advantages available to whites, while simultaneously underscoring the impossibility of achievement for blacks" (Magistrale 61). This impossibility of achievement for black folks is highlighted in Bigger's view of the plane writing in the air. When Gus remarks, "Them white boys sure can fly," Bigger "wistfully" responds, "They get a chance to do everything" (Wright 16). Though this plane and its white pilot are capable of untethered travel and boundless freedom, Bigger recognizes that he and Gus will never have that opportunity.

Richard Wright's *The Outsider* also uses this trope of confinement, showing how the suffocating realities of these impoverished characters dictates their fates. In one of the opening passages of the novel, the narration introduces the protagonist, Cross Damon, and his friends walking through an early frigid morning in South Side Chicago while "an invisible February sky" drops "a shimmering curtain of snowflakes" on them (Wright 1). Damon and these men banter with one another, but Cross meditates, "He knew that they liked him, but he felt that they were outside of his life, that there was nothing that they

could do that would make any difference. Now more than ever he knew that he was alone and that his problem was one of the relationship of himself to himself” (Wright 8).

Though he is physically with them, he feels deeply isolated from them, constrained to his own thoughts while they slog through the freezing slush in the desolate streets. Once he returns home, he is overcome with anxiety in his tiny apartment as a gray day unsuccessfully attempts to penetrate “the curtained window” near his bed:

He hunched determinedly forward and his crinkled pajamas bagged about his gaunt body and the muscles of his neck bulged. He’d not crawl like a coward through stupid days; to act quickly was the simplest way of jumping through the jungle of problems that plagued him from within and from without. A momentary dizziness swamped him; his throat tightened; his vision blurred; his chest heaved and he was defenseless against despair. He sprang to the dresser and yanked open a drawer and pulled forth his gun. Trembling, feeling the cold blue steel touching his sweaty palm, he lifted the glinting barrel to his right temple, then paused. His feelings were like tumbling dice. . . . He wilted, cursed, his breath expiring through parted lips. Choked with self-hate, he flung himself on the bed and buried his face. (Wright 13)

Damon experiences very similar sensory experiences to Bigger in this scene, as his throat tightens, vision blurs, and he feels overwhelmed with the weight of isolation and confinement in both his station in life and the lack of opportunity for freedom from them. His lack of a relationship with the men around him reinforces this division and illustrates the separation between them and his increasingly dangerous removal from personal safety.

In each of these novels, the protagonists are consistently hemmed in by their oppressive, often suffocating surroundings. Dostoevsky's and Wright's characters must contend with environments that are deeply inhospitable and utterly restrictive. Raskolnikov, Bigger Thomas, and Cross Damon have no opportunity for moral advancement, spiritual growth, or economic prosperity available to them, which leads them to feel "smothered by forces beyond [their] control" and the consideration of any option that may grant them, even for a moment, the freedom they previously have been denied (Magistrale 62).

In addition to the physical barriers that confine and prevent the free movement, thoughts, and actions of these characters, the mothers in these novels also are significant in how the protagonists experience confinement. Michael F. Lynch has commented on some of the similarities between the protagonists in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Outsider* and has claimed, "Both have widowed, meddling mothers who have infused guilt and a neurotic self-image into their sons" (Lynch 258). Though Bigger Thomas' mother does not engender a sense of guilt and neurosis in him, she acts as another force that confines him, like the other mothers, in how her son experiences oppression and isolation. In each of these texts, Raskolnikov, Bigger Thomas, and Cross Damon must contend with attempts by their mothers to exert control over them through seemingly ineffective means.

Raskolnikov, an impoverished dropout, receives a letter from his mother near the beginning of *Crime and Punishment*. In this letter, his mother updates him on recent developments, tells him of his sister's recent proposal, and expresses deep concern over his own spiritual condition. She writes, "Do you pray to God, Rodya, as you used to, and

do you believe in the goodness of our Creator and Redeemer? I fear in my heart that you have been visited by the fashionable new unbelief. If so, I pray for you” (Dostoevsky 39). His mother is correct to suspect his unbelief, as he has been dealing with feelings of cynicism and questioning the value of the religion he had once believed when he was younger. His wavering belief in an afterlife, morality, and Russian Orthodox belief is signaled in his own name, as “Raskolnikov comes from *raskolnik*, a schismatic, from *raskol*, schism” (Pevear and Volokhonsky xx). Though his mother encourages him to draw close to the religion that once centered him and gave him comfort “in [his] childhood when [his] father was alive,” he is no longer confined by this outlook or his mother’s insistence that he hold to it (Dostoevsky 39). Despite her best efforts to keep him controlled by religion, he refuses and begins to exercise his own autonomy in this regard.

Michael F. Lynch has argued that Cross Damon’s mother acts in a similar way to Raskolnikov’s mother, attempting to push him back to religion when she sees him exercising doubts or acting in ways unbecoming of a Christian. Lynch asserts, “In imitation of the letter of Raskolnikov’s mother, Cross’ mother pressures him about his evident atheism and fears for his soul” (Lynch 259). In the course of their interaction at the beginning of *The Outsider*, she repeatedly chides him for how he treats his wife, his drinking, and his recent infidelity. Invoking her religion and hoping to correct his behavior, she proclaims, ““God’ll punish you! He *will!* You’ll see before you die! You’ll weep! God is a just God. And he’s a hard and jealous God! If you much him, He’ll show you His power!”” (Wright 21-22). She initially attempts to strike fear into his heart, lauding the justice of God, but she soon tries to use her religious belief to invoke guilt in

her son. She claims, ““To think I named you Cross after the Cross of Jesus”” and ““I need to know that you’ve found God, Cross”” (Wright 23). Like Raskolnikov’s mother, Cross’ mother desperately needs her son to return to the faith they possessed when they were children for their own well-being and happiness. However, like Raskolnikov, Cross refuses to be ensnared in his mother’s attempts to control him, and he leaves her house with the same mentality as when he entered: ““His mother was lucky; she had a refuge, even if that refuge was an illusion”” (Wright 21).

Bigger Thomas’ mother, like her counterparts in *Crime and Punishment* and *The Outsider*, also uses religion as a means to exert control over her son, though her comments are also pointedly tinged with fatalism. Ms. Thomas’ approach to her son indicates that she knows a single misguided choice by him could result in his imprisonment or death at the hands of a police officer, bigot, or capricious passerby. Her desire to protect Bigger through religion illustrates her understanding that what is fair for a black man is not what is fair for a white man in America. Her son is more likely to receive unfair or aggressive treatment than equality, if he is placed in a compromising situation. Unlike *Crime and Punishment*, *Native Son* features a mother who recognizes the inherent inequality her son will face because of his ethnicity, so she tries to impress the importance of religion upon him as a means to safeguard him.

At the beginning of the novel, Bigger’s mother is unhappy about the way in which he has disposed of a rat in their home and expresses regrets over her son’s existence: ““Bigger, sometimes I wonder why I birthed you”” (Wright 8). Only sentences later, she remarks on their less than ideal apartment and claims, ““We wouldn’t have to live in this garbage dump if you had any manhood in you”” (Wright 8). In her view, the family’s



failings are due in large part to Bigger's inability to find regular employment and fulfill the role of a male breadwinner in the household. Her own frustrations about the absence of Bigger's father and his lack of a positive example find their way back to him in the form of a chiding from his mother insulting his own sense of masculinity, for which he has no proven role model. It is no surprise that he can be chastised for behaving so poorly, as he has no positive male figure whose behavior he should replicate. Instead, his behavior shows that he is only self-serving and immature, privileging self-indulgence over sacrifices for the family. She admonishes him and claims, "All you care about is your own pleasure! Even when the relief offers you a job you won't take it till they threaten to cut off your food and starve you! Bigger, honest, you the most no-countest man I ever seen in all my life!" (Wright 9). In a prophetic moment, his mother finishes her comments to him and declares, "If you don't stop running with that gang of yours and do right you'll end up where you never thought you would. You think I don't know what you boys is doing, but I do. And the gallows is at the end of the road you traveling, boy. Just remember that" (Wright 9). Her solution, then, to his choices rests in her own comfort in religion, as she vents her frustrations before she reflects, "I reckon I'll be dead then. I reckon God'll call me home" (Wright 10). In recognizing her ultimate outcome as assured due to her faith, Bigger's mother draws significant comfort in that resolution and also feels compelled to thank the God that ordained that outcome for all that she has, even if it be a cheap meal or a squalid apartment. As the family gathers to eat together, she reverently proclaims, "Lord, we thank Thee for the food You done placed before us for the nourishment of our bodies. Amen" (Wright 11). Even with his mother's prophetic gestures towards the outcome that awaits him if he continues on his current path as well

as his mother's displays of religious behavior, Bigger remains resoundingly unaffected by her attempts to control him through her Christianity.

Collectively, these mothers' attempts to impress the importance of religion on Raskolnikov, Cross Damon, and Bigger Thomas are an important shared trope due to these women's insistence on religion as a way to potentially protect or confine their sons. Each of them speak to the eternal ramifications of rejecting God or turning away from the religious pillars they once held to as children, but the immediate effects are also imperative for the mothers as well.

Raskolnikov, an impoverished student, has seemingly had problems with belief for some time when his mother writes to him in hopes of encouraging her son to return to his former life of commitment and prayer. By returning to his faith, she believes he will, even in this challenging season of his life, find relief from his mental and socioeconomic burden in God. The mothers of Cross Damon and Bigger Thomas also appear to try to implore their children to turn to religion in hardship as a form of consolation, but their approach also has a racial undertone that Raskolnikov's does not. Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Damon also are indoctrinating their sons in religion as a way to mollify them through the subservience, pacifism, and humility inherent in Christian belief they feel compelled to follow. In encouraging their black sons to cling tightly to the tenets of religion, they hope they are offering their children a defense against potential violence from whites or a desire to seek out vengeance or retribution towards whites for a slight. In doing so, they are acting out of a desire to care for and protect their children, but they are also perpetuating a belief system at the expense of freedom of thought and actions, which serves to reinforce the numerous physical and socioeconomic barriers these characters

endure. In refusing to take part in the religious activities encouraged by their mothers, Raskolnikov, Bigger Thomas, and Cross Damon find a minor form of rebellion and exercise even a small amount of freedom in their troubled existences.

While turning away from these modes of religious confinement by their mothers proves to be one of the main ways these men begin to attempt to exercise their freedom in the novels, they also seek out other methods of escape to avoid their daily oppressions and frustrations. Frustratingly, the methods these characters often pursue to escape their suffocating and discouraging circumstances often force them to return to this state of dissatisfaction. In essence, they may present momentary distractions, but they little to little more than a passing reprieve.

Raskolnikov, for example, repeatedly dreams throughout the text, and while Tony Magistrale has claimed that his dreams are about little more than “wealth and power,” Ruth Mortimer more accurately suggests that “the succession of dreams forms a psychic pattern of motivation” for Raskolnikov’s later actions (Magistrale 61; Mortimer 67). While some critics have read these dreams as an escape for Raskolnikov from the drudgery and poverty of his life, they are, in fact, continuances of those same frustrations he must endure while awake. Though these four dreams about are about a mare, a police official, a figure in a coat, and a plague, they are all loosely “associated in Raskolnikov’s mind by the conscious theme” of “the state of poverty and degradation into which he has fallen” (Mortimer 68). They are all ordered around and stem from the feelings of anxiety and turmoil he feels because of the murders he has committed. Thus, his desired form of escape from reality and the problems therein, dreams, only serves to remind him and

further prevent his escape from the anxiety and turmoil that comes from the murders he has committed.

Bigger Thomas, Wright's character modeled after Raskolnikov, also attempts to escape his reality through a pursuit that can momentarily alter his perceptions. Instead of dreams, Bigger seeks out films to distract him from his daily frustrations and grant him some form of enjoyment. The narration claims, "He wanted to see a movie; his senses hungered for it. In a movie he could dream without effort; all he had to do was lean back and keep his eyes open" (Wright 13-14). These movies function, for Bigger, as a similar form of escape as Raskolnikov's dreams, and they provide him entertainment and fantasy. They are also passive forms of pleasure where needs to expend little effort to enjoy himself and inhabit a "world where wealth and power are commonplace and where desires are magically fulfilled," fitting with his mother's analysis of his unwillingness to trade commitment or hard work for amusement (Magistrale 61). However, though the movies grant him momentary satisfaction, they leave him with a stark reminder of the white world into which he will never be fully welcome. The newsreels of "*the daughters of the rich taking sunbaths in the sands of Florida*" and the brief mention of Mary Dalton, the daughter of the man for whom Bigger will soon be working, lead Bigger to reflect on the possibilities of his future (Wright 31, 32). The fantasies on the screen give way to fantasies in his own mind, as he believes that this new job and the Daltons will serve as the gateway for his own personal improvement. He leaves the movie house having "seen practically nothing of the picture," but he does "not care," as he has gotten the desired distraction and hope he sought when he came, though it now takes the form of optimistic belief that the Daltons will provide for his future (Wright 34). In this manner,

Bigger comes to the movies to escape his reality and be distracted, but he leaves the theater a prisoner to his hopes of the future through the whims of the white Daltons for whom he will be working. He is still held captive by the oppressive circumstances around him, and his future opportunities may even be more limited as he firmly places all of his hopes not in his own hands but in the charity of the Daltons. In other words, Bigger's hopes perpetuate a cycle of dependence on white generosity that led to many of the suffocating realities in which he and his family now find themselves.

Cross Damon, too, falls prey to a method of escape that actually serves to remind him of his own dreadful circumstances. Alcohol acts as Cross' preferred avenue of trying to evade the painful realities of his own life. At the very beginning of the novel, Cross is asked by a friend why he drinks so frequently, and the protagonist responds, "My soul needs it" (Wright 2). Only a few lines later, he declares that he enjoys drinking so much because it "Makes [him] fee *less*" (Wright 2). However, his seemingly ever-present attempts to deaden the pain and oppression he feels by drinking alcohol only exacerbate his problems, and at one point near the beginning of the novel he drinks an astonishing amount of alcohol in a brief period of time without even feeling the effects of the substance: "He drank eleven shots before he could feel the influence of the alcohol" (Wright 102). His extreme tolerance points to his repeated abuse of the substance and a serious problem; yet, he views alcohol as an escape mechanism that will allow him to evade the harsh truths of his life. Sadly, most of his own life's problems are due, in large part, to his alcoholism and the cycle of self-abuse it creates in his life where he feels suffocatingly trapped in his circumstances, proceeds to drink, and then broods on the dismal realities of his life before becoming abusive, violent, or paranoid his past

transgressions will be discovered. In this way, his intended escape from his sad reality functions as another form of confinement that further traps him in even worse circumstances.

For each of these characters, their methods of escape from their daily environmental and familial oppressions prove ineffective, so violence, both planned and unanticipated, becomes the next and perhaps only, outlet to attempt to exert control over their lives. For Raskolnikov, his intended murder of the pawnbroker, Alyona Ivanovna, would present the immediate solution to his destitution, as her murder would present him with the opportunity to rob her apartment and presumably live a better life and provide some financial support to his family. However, it would also allow for what Raskolnikov attempts to rationalize as a moment of altruism wherein he might “end the life of a pernicious and cruel usurer in order to bring happiness to those who otherwise might perish” (Magistrale 62). Essentially, her death could grant him immediate financial freedom, release others from their debts to the pawnbroker, and prevent the pawnbroker’s future mistreatment or economic shackling of others. It is only when Raskolnikov hears two men speaking in a bar about the reasoning behind why one might wish to kill her that Raskolnikov feels more confirmation to murder her. One of the men claims:

Kill her and take her money, so that afterwards with its help you can devote yourself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think, wouldn’t thousands of good deeds make up for one tiny little crime? For one life, thousands of lives saved from decay and corruption. One death for hundreds of lives--it’s simple arithmetic! (Dostoevsky 65)

Even as he leaves the bar and reflects on this conversation, his steps appear set and he thinks to himself, “This negligible tavern conversation had an extreme influence on him in the further development of the affair; as though there were indeed some predestination, some indication in it” (Dostoevsky 66). Only pages later, he commits the premeditated and violent murder of Alyona Ivanovna with an axe before being surprised by the entry of her sister, Lizaveta, whom he also promptly and gruesomely dispatches. After these murders, he quickly robs the apartment of all its valuables and quickly flees the scene without being spotted. In doing so, he exerts his will and illustrates “the idea that individuals have an irrepressible psychological and spiritual need for self-assertion, especially in oppressive circumstances--even if it results in the individual’s harm or destruction” (Lynch 261).

Bigger Thomas, “a black Raskolnikov,” follows a similar path in his murders of two women in pursuit of his own freedom (Peterson 381). On returning an inebriated Mary Dalton to her home and helping her into bed, Bigger is tempted to kiss her, but he hears Mrs. Dalton approaching the room and fears that she will discover him. His fear drives him to attempt to conceal his presence and also keep Mary quiet, so he places a pillow over her face to mute her, though he does so with far too much strength: “Again Mary’s body heaved and he held the pillow in a grip that took all of his strength. For a long time he felt the sharp pain of her fingernails biting into his wrists. The white blur was still” (Wright 86). In his realization that he has killed her, he is overcome with panic, frightfully thinking, “She was dead and he had killed her. He was a murderer, a Negro murderer, a black murderer. He had killed a white woman. He had to get away from here” (Wright 87). In unintentionally murdering Mary, a figure “representative of all that

the white world has traditionally held most sacred --aristocratic white womanhood -- her murder brings Bigger his first real sense of power and identity,” and shows Bigger that he, a poor black man, is capable of exerting his will over those society has told him are superior (Magistrale 63). His subsequent rape and brutal murder of Bessie is one predicated, in his mind, on her death for his safety: “He couldn’t take her and he couldn’t leave her; so he would have to kill her” (Wright 236). In murdering Bessie and discarding her body down an airshaft, Bigger believes he has freed himself from his final connection to Mary Dalton’s murder and any further implication that may link him to the crime. The calm, premeditated murder of Bessie with a blunt force instrument, a brick instead of an axe, is very similar to Raskolnikov’s murder of Alyona Ivanovna, particularly in their disturbingly graphic nature and the emotional distance the murderers experience while carrying out the actions. For each, it is a step necessary to cast off the societal restrictions that previously bound them and execute acts to preserve their self-will and newfound freedom. However, in violently murdering others and escaping the confinement that had held them, operating outside of social and moral constraints, they lose their humanity and become subject to anxiety and guilt that becomes even more burdensome than their previous constraints.

Cross Damon also figures in this progression of protagonists using violence as a way to pursue freedom. Damon, thought to have been killed in a train crash, is freed from many of his problems, including his hyper-religious mother haunting him, a ruined marriage, potential legal trouble due to a sexual encounter with a minor, an extramarital affair, and an unwanted pregnancy as a result of his extramarital affair. However, he is spotted by an acquaintance named Joe Kelly after his funeral and, in a moment of rage



because this “clown was tearing down his dream, smashing all he had so laboriously built up,” Damon murders him with a empty liquor bottle, bringing “down the bottle with a crashing blow on Joe’s head” (Wright 107, 108). In the immediate aftermath of the murder, he reflects, “ he had killed so swiftly and brutally that he hardly recognized what he had done as he recalled it to his mind” (Wright 110). In order to preserve his free existence, untethered from the oppressive forces of his life before the train wreck, Cross Damon had murdered a man. Later in the novel, he would also murder two other individuals involved in the Communist Party with which he had gotten involved. These attacks are carried out, like Raskolnikov and Bigger Thomas before him, with the use of a blunt instrument, “the heavy oaken leg” of a broken table (Wright 226). In murdering these men, he erases his links to the Communist party in an attempt to ensure his future safety and erase all bonds of control in his life. However, even these attempts to safeguard his freedom fail, as an assassin from the Communist Party later murders him.

While each of these men engage in repeated violence and murder in order to pursue and protect their freedom, thereby illustrating the lengths individuals will go to circumvent social and moral ethics when met with oppressive conditions, they must ultimately contend with the physical and moral effects of these actions. Due to the murders of Alyona Ivanovna and her sister, Raskolnikov spends much of the novel riddled with guilt, paranoia, and horribly ill, bordering on madness. It is only after he makes a dramatic confession to Sonya, the woman he loves, saying that he did it not simply for her money but so he could “become a Napoleon,” that he is surprised to learn that she will not leave his side because of his wretched behavior in the past (Dostoevsky 415). In fact, she expresses her commitment to him and cries out, “I’ll follow you, I’ll go

wherever you go!” (Dostoevsky 412). With newfound strength, Raskolnikov confesses his crimes to Porfiry Petrovich, the skilled investigator who previously had a cat and mouse relationship with him, plainly stating ““It was I who killed the official’s old widow and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them”” (Dostoevsky 531). For his crimes, he is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian prison camp where he is left to experience a kind of spiritual regeneration. Of Raskolnikov’s state at the end of the epilogue, the narration claims he is experiencing a “gradual renewal” and a “gradual regeneration” that is allowing him to “transition from one world to another,” bringing him understanding of “a new, hitherto completely unknown reality” (Dostoevsky 551). With seven years and many months left to his sentence, Sonya living nearby, and his realization that a new life is upon him, Dostoevsky’s novel draws to a hopeful end.

Bigger Thomas is not as fortunate. Second chances are not blessings often afforded to black men in Wright’s depictions of America, showing that the margins for societal or penal forgiveness, like in *Crime and Punishment*, are nonexistent for a black man. Apprehended on a rooftop shortly after discarding Bessie’s body, he spends much of the remainder of the novel in jail, interacting with his lawyer, Boris Max, and proceeding through the justice system. Forced to reflect on his crimes and given the chance to speak about them with Max, “Bigger becomes aware that in performing the crime of murder he has also destroyed himself” (Magistrale 64). In speaking with Max after he has been found guilty for murder, he claims, ““really I never wanted to hurt nobody. That’s the truth, Mr. Max. I hurt folks ‘cause I felt I had to; that’s all”” (Wright 425). Max responds to his comments and further understands the circumstances Bigger was forced to endure and provoked his desperate actions, describing the rich in society,

“in order to keep what they’ve got, they make themselves believe that men who work are not quite human” (428). In understanding his past and how he was robbed of his humanity, Bigger shouts, “When a man kills for something. . . . I didn’t know I was really alive in this world until I felt things hard enough to kill for ‘em” (Wright 429). In murdering Mary and Bessie, Bigger was lashing out at the system which had denied him personhood by making a claim that he was, in fact, a human being. His deplorable actions made him into a figure that could no longer be ignored or disregarded anymore. Bigger’s final comments to Max are an expression of goodbye and a request to say goodbye to Jan, Mary Dalton’s white boyfriend who he had befriended. In ending the novel on this note, Wright shows that his sensibilities toward society have changed, even if society has failed “to change in its attitude toward Bigger” (Magistrale 68).

Of *Native Son*, Richard Wright claimed that that it “is about the life of Negroes in the United States in their relations with whites. It is the story and the psychological portrait of a young Negro who lives in the “black ghetto” of Chicago, unemployed, with all roads out closed and with the constant logical temptation to break the law” (*Romance* 32). The novel shows us the dramatic lengths to which Bigger will go to act to pursue freedom and declare his humanity. Though the circumstances of Raskolnikov and Bigger’s crimes are not entirely analogous, due to race, Wright modeled his protagonist after Dostoevsky’s and wanted to show how similar situations of rampant poverty and systemic inequality had impacted twentieth-century America for its black citizens. In doing so, he relied on, perhaps, the most famous novel about crime and the exploration of its motives. Wright’s novel, however, does not end with the hopeful resolution for its protagonist, as Bigger Thomas will most certainly be put to death due to his actions only

a short time after the final action of the conclusion. There is no prison sentence that will offer him a chance to reform his moral condition. He is just one of many young, black men in America men who are consigned to a sad fate due to violent actions he committed because he saw no alternative.

Wright's *The Outsider* offers a comparably cynical outlook through a similar conclusion, but the main character has gone through no encouraging alteration in perceptions. Cross Damon, also modeled on Raskolnikov, chooses to confess to his crimes in the final moments of the text and of his life to Ely Houston, Wright's Porfirio Petrovich stand-in. Bleeding to death from multiple gunshot wounds, Damon responds to Houston's question about why he chose to live as an outsider. Struggling to breathe, Damon responds, "I wanted to be free . . . to feel what I was worth . . . what living meant to me" (Wright 439). Only moments later, he elaborates on his worldview and claims, "Men hate themselves and it makes them hate others. . . . We must find some way of being good to ourselves. . . . Man is all we've got. . . . I wish I could ask men to meet themselves" (Wright 439). These comments show Damon has held to his rejection of religion and also desires for men to realize they need to depend on one another and correct how they view each other. In his final moments, Houston asks him how his life was, and Damon responds, "It . . . it was . . . horrible. . . . All of it. . . . Because in my heart . . . I'm . . . I felt . . . I'm *innocent*. . . . That's what made the horror. . . ." (440). By achieving full freedom from societal, moral, and legal structures or rules, Damon erased all limitations that bound him, and he found it deeply unsatisfying, even horrifying. While Edward Margolies has argued that Wright's *The Outsider* "is saying that freedom is an impossibility," Michael F. Lynch's claim that "Wright is saying not only that

freedom is a definite possibility, but that in spite of its burden and awful potential risk it is perhaps the individual's most profound duty to him- or herself" seems to be far more accurate (Margolies 137; Lynch 265).

By making this creative adaptation to Raskolnikov, Wright suggests an even less hopeful outcome than that of Bigger Thomas. Through *The Outsider*, Cross Damon's final comments seem to assert that societal change that corrects systematic racial disparities is unlikely. Instead, Cross Damon "indicates that there may be no answer outside the limitations imposed by the self," which can be deeply problematic when one decides there are no limits (Lynch 265). Wright's texts, both *Native Son* and *The Outsider* offer deeply cynical adaptations of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, critiquing the possibility of any black man receiving leniency for committing similar crimes and similar circumstances as Raskolnikov. If anything, Wright's novels suggest a continued unfairness and perpetuation of dangerous environments for black individuals, particularly men, and hint that the only escape from these systems may be a forceful rejection of the society that allows this mistreatment to continue.

## Chapter 5: Southern Horizons

The pattern of Southern authors modeling their work off of Russian authors is not an idea modeled solely by authors from the American South. Recent scholarship by Southern scholars, including Dr. John Lowe, Dr. Jon Smith, and Dr. Michael Bibler, has sought to expand the scope of Southern literary criticism to include the Caribbean and South America as regions that engaged with many of the same institutions, like slavery, agricultural production, and racial oppression. Due to these similar circumstances, the authors who sprang from these regions engaged, and continue to engage, with similar thematic investigations in their literary work. This Caribbean horizon marks a possible destination for the continuation of this project and would offer some intriguing possibilities for expansion. In particular, it would prove interesting to chart analyze the influence of Leo Tolstoy on Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* and Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics*.

Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* depicts the story of Haiti before and after the Haitian revolution from the perspective of Ti Noel, a slave who gains increasing levels of freedom as the novel progresses. Carpentier's novel blends historical figures with real and fictional events, and one of these figures, Charles Leclerc, serves as a fascinating entryway into the impact of Tolstoy's influence on this novel. General Leclerc rode east into Russia with Napoleon when he invaded and was later sent to Saint-Domingue to put down the Haitian Revolution. Though he eventually succumbed to

yellow fever in this endeavor, his experiences in Russia and the Caribbean make him a fascinating figure for analysis in the ways authors have sought to include him in their work. Leclerc appears in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and he features somewhat less prominently in Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World*. Analyzing the ways in which these authors depict this character as well as French attempts at expansion and colonial rule might present some intriguing discoveries.

Additionally, Nilo Cruz's *Anna in the Tropics* would invite more possible avenues of discovery in how Tolstoy has affected Caribbean authors. This particular play focuses on a cigar factory in Tampa, Florida at the beginning of the Great Depression. The title is derived from a lector's choice to read *Anna Karenina* to the cigar rollers and the subsequent disorder that arises from this novel's influence on those who hear its plot and reflect on its characters. This text could offer some intriguing possibilities about matters of immigration, self-determinism, and infidelity in both Tolstoy's novel and similar plot points Cruz chose to depict in his play.

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