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A Return to the Region: Reconstructing the Past in Jewett, Cather, and Hurston (1896-1935)

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by

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Introduction

When I first thought of my senior project, I was a sophomore in a William Faulkner class taught by Donna Grover. A classmate of mine brought up an interesting point, saying that a Faulkner novel can only take place in the south, and to place it anywhere else in America would mean to strip it of its landscape. It would mean to separate the deep connection between the land and its people– and this separation would make his novels non-existent. I kept wondering why this was the case. Sometimes setting seems arbitrary… but what if it's not? How does setting limit or liberate characters? How does it liberate or limit humans? So much of Faulkner is tied to the land, to the past, to history. And I wanted to explore all three facets.

This project started, in part, from my Midwestern upbringing. I was born in Waukegan, Illinois– the same town as one of my favorite childhood authors, Ray Bradbury. Although I never lived in Waukegan (I grew up in a neighboring town 30 minutes away) the grandeur of sharing the same birthplace was not lost on me. When you grow up in a place where notable figures are rare, it becomes all the more special. I had a similar feeling when, in high school, we read F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator Nick Carraway states that Tom Buchanan "brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest" (10), all the way to New York. It was said within the context of leaving Chicago, and in this moment I put the two together. Lake Forest is an affluent town in Illinois, and where my dad works as a shoe repairman. I chuckled to myself when reading to following line in the book: "It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that" (10). I knew exactly what Fitzgerald was trying to get

at. Growing up, my dad would always tell me about the wealthy customers he would service and how different our lifestyle was from theirs. Because I already knew the connotations of the town, it made Fitzgerald's reference all the more pertinent.

A couple years after I read the book, I was visiting my dad in Lake Forest. Walking around, I noticed a poster put up in one of the storefront windows. It had a description of F. Scott Fitzgerald, and talked about how his ex-lover, Ginevra King– a Lake Forest socialite– was the woman who inspired the character of Daisy Buchanan. Around the same time these posters went up, the mansion that Ginevra King grew up in was for sale. I asked my dad if we could drive to it, absorbed in the idea that I could see what Fitzgerald saw. I felt that we were somehow bound by the same knowledge of the town and that we were somehow bound by walking in the same place. Upon looking at the mansion, I felt connected to Fitzgerald through land. Given this experience, I know I could have written on a Fitzgerald– or Faulkner for that matter– but I chose not to. Sometimes the inspiration is not the place to look, but rather, the idea to grab hold of.

That said, I want to call attention to a scene in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) that occurs toward the end of the novel. When Nick Carraway is sitting on Gatsby's lawn, reflecting on Gatsby's death, there is a moment when Nick begins to reimagine the past, writing that

> I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (189)

In the moment of Nick's reflection, he contrasts the dream that Gatsby had, compared to that of the Dutch sailors. When the Dutch sailors peered into the new world– the supposed untouched, uncolonized land– there was a sentiment that they had discovered something grand and unspeakable. However, this dream is not transferable; the land that meant so much to the Dutch sailors is not able to offer the same type of fulfillment to Gatsby. For this, Nick writes that Gatsby did not understand that his dream "was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city" (189). There is a sentiment, then, of not knowing when one is in the middle of an important moment. Like the Dutch sailors, Nick writes that they were "face to face for the last time in history," seemingly without knowing it. On the other hand, Nick's fantasy of Dutch sailors is completely devoid of indigenous peoples. It is this very reconstruction of the past that allows room to reimagine history, which is arguably a dangerous ability to have.

My senior project, on a large scale, stems from this very idea: understanding the way in which the past is reimagined, especially because of the inability to go back to a prior time or a prior landscape. Literature, then, is what bridges the gap between history and this loss. Writing, in and of itself, allows the ability to reconstruct and reimagine the past, to reimagine the horrors of history, and also to conveniently forget them.

In order to understand how the past can be reimagined, it is imperative to understand the term "regionalism." It is a way of writing that emphasizes the local, and often rural, customs and landscape of a specific culture. It especially made headway in the Gilded Age of America, a time roughly after the Civil War until the end of the 19th century, which heavily focused on efforts of reunification. In Amy Kaplan's essay, "Nation, Region, and Empire" (1991), she writes about the conception of the nation as it relates, and is invented through, regionalist writing during this time

period. She writes that "The regions painted with 'local color' are traversed by the forgotten history of racial conflict with prior regional inhabitants, and are ultimately produced and engulfed by the centralized capitalist economy that generated the desire for retreat" (256). Kaplan stresses that the region is susceptible to becoming an idealized place, somehow without history, and strengthened by the capitalist economy. A large part of focusing on the region was due to the train– a newfound way of travel that linked together communities in a way it had not been able to do previously, while simultaneously destroying "the settlements and livelihoods of the same communities it brings into being" (262). The very duality of the train linking people together and also dismantling them demonstrates the way in which history– and American history specifically– can often try to universalize itself, without acknowledgement of individual struggles. Moreover, "the desire for retreat" was also brought upon from the onslaught of industrialization, and because of this, Kaplan says "regionalists invent places as allegories of desire generated by urban centers" (252), but ultimately find "a contested terrain with a complex history that ties it inseparably to the urban center" (252). In other words, the idea of the region as a place removed from the urban center, unchanged and stagnant in time, is merely a myth; the region and the city are in fact intertwined.

In "The Literature of Place and Region" (1996), written by Roberto Dainotto, there are two ways in which he considers the region: the first, is that the region is a place that liberates marginalized societies from the the unified nation, and the second is that the region is a place that retains a boundary from the nation. This latter form I will call the "regionalist ideal"– that somehow there is a place where time stands still, even while the rest of the country is becoming increasingly urbanized. As Dainotto suggests, "it is an indestructible entity that transcends and

survives history to remain everlastingly the same" (492)– which is truly impossible. Because of this, the former view is, to my personal understanding, the appropriate framework to view regionalism. Dainotto also suggests that "if regionalism is the nostalgia for a past state, it is also the certainty of the survival of that past" (492). In other words, remembrance is a tool that drives the assurance of the past, and therefore does not entirely whitewash America's history.

Notably, the focus on regionalism is also heavily gendered. Eric Sundquist, Scholar in American literature and culture, writes that "those in power (say, white urban males) have been more often judged 'realists,' while those removed from the seats of power (say, Midwesterners, blacks, immigrants, or women) have been categorized as regionalists" (503). Through this claim, it is apparent that the label of "regionalist writer" is deeply embedded into where or how one grows up. Instead, and is seen through Frank Norris's essay, "The Frontier Gone At Last," it is the Anglo-Saxon who primarily holds the power. While Norris's essay deals with historicizing America's past through the closing of the Frontier and therefore what is left of the American identity, his essay is from the perspective of "we-We Anglo-Saxons–" (69). My goal in bringing this up is to demonstrate how Norris's perspective is exclusionary, to say the least, and erases an entire history of those who are other. Like Kaplan writes, "American manhood forges the bond that transcends social conflict and turns a former divided nation into a reunited global power" (249). The ability to envision America as a "global power," then, is constructed through the masculine ability to mitigate "social conflict." Regionalism, on the other hand, attempts to do the opposite, and because of this, it is often thought to be a way to democratize and decentralize literature.

The title of my senior project, "A Return to the Region: Reconstructing the Past in Jewett, Cather, and Hurston," comes from a common thread between the three works. Each protagonist is returning to a small, regional community that they are familiar with, the only difference is that they are now coming back from urbanized cities. There is a benefit of experiencing both ways of living, which brings up the question of what it means to be an outsider. How does this outsider perspective allow the ability to reconstruct history? Kaplan states that, "Like the subjects of anthropological fieldwork.... native inhabitants possessed primitive qualities that made them worth of study also and left them in need of interpretation by outsiders" (252). I believe that it takes the experience of both the urban and rural in order to understand the other, and this is precisely what each text seeks to do, even if the approach is different. Accompanying each chapter title page is also an art piece that reflects the themes of the texts– and I will later return to this in the conclusion.

In the first chapter of my project, "Storytelling and Temporality in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*," (1896) I examine the generational differences in the community of Dunnet Landing, as the unnamed narrator from an urban New England city sees them. I am also using Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller*, to further understand the way in which Dunnet Landing's residents have attempted to make sense of the industrial and environmental changes. The unnamed narrator's status as an outsider allows her room to pass judgement and observe the community, all while seeking acceptance from them.

In my second chapter, "Uprootedness and Memory in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*," I am looking at the effects that these themes have on a few of the characters of the novel: Jim Burden and Ántonia Shimerda, and her father, Mr. Shimerda. The novel is told from the perspective of

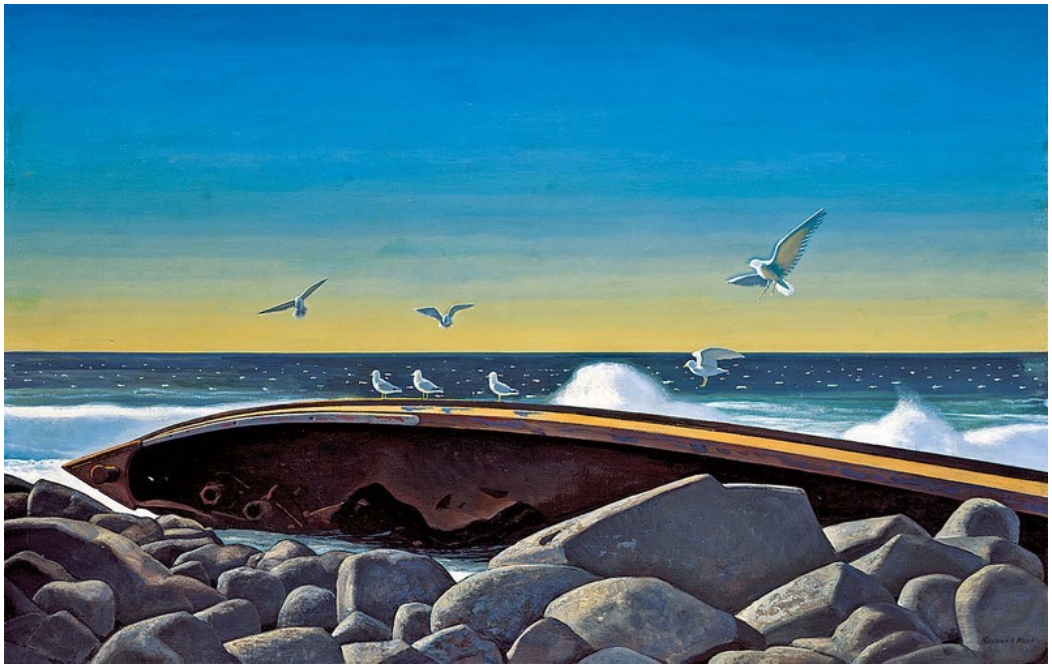
Jim, who although grew up in the same rural Nebraskan town as Ántonia, resides in urbanized New York City. The novel is a reflection of his childhood with Ántonia– an immigrant, an outsider. I argue here that it is the very uprootedness of the characters that leads them to remember the past, without an ability to let go of it.

Bringing in Hurston's *Mules and Men* (1935) for my final chapter was vital to this project. In a time when fiction was reimagining and reconstructing its past– clearly seen through Jewett and Cather– Hurston was undertaking a real anthropological study, using her role as ethnographer in documenting folklore in rural southern communities. In my final chapter, "Laughter and Narrative Framing in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*," I look at the way in which Hurston goes about collecting folklore, inserting her her own personal narrative, describing the way in which she's received the stories. Although the text oscillates between fiction and nonfiction–proving Hurston's ability as a writer– it seeks to capture what has been largely erased by the white theorists and authors of the time. Hurston's experience and study, therefore, cannot be forgotten. The only thing left to do then, through literature especially, is to write about these lost times or landscapes– to in some way immortalize in writing what has ceased to be.

- Anna Russian, May 1st, 2019

Chapter One:

Storytelling and Temporality
in Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*



Rockwell Kent– *Wreck of the D.T. Sheridan* (1949)

Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is a novel that takes place in Dunnet Landing, a fictional coastal town in Maine. The novel is told from the perspective of an unnamed narrator, a young woman who returns to Dunnet Landing from an urbanized New England city. The narrator is a writer, and a traveler who spends the summer under the guidance of Mrs. Todd. The fact that she is unnamed allows room for her to remain observational, a traveller who is merely glimpsing into the life of a small community, weaving through the inhabitants' narratives, assuming the place of a middle class traveller. In Robin Magowan's essay, "Pastoral and the Art of Landscape in The Country of Pointed Firs" (1963), he talks about how the narrator understands Dunnet Landing as "an outsider, a summer visitor newly arrived" (233), and because of this, she has a certain leverage in interpreting the community. The narrator is temporarily observing everyone while "for most of the other characters… a broader, more historically determined view prevails" (233). The narrator is able to exist in the present moment, untouched by the historic struggles around her. She is separate from their existence: an outsider.

Jewett exemplifies America's changes through the cross-generational relationships in Dunnet Landing, especially when the narrator becomes acquainted with Captain Littlepage, a former shipmaster and an elderly member of the community. His character presents a foil to the new generation of Dunnet Landing residents, reminiscing about his own youth as he speaks of the current youth. It is through Walter Benjamin's *The Storyteller,* that I will seek to understand Captain Littlepage's dissonance between himself and the community at large, which is in particular contrast to the way in which Mrs. Todd is immersed in the community.

The narrator first interacts with Captain Littlepage after the funeral of the elderly Mrs. Beggs, an established member of the community, who according to Mrs. Todd, "could not get used to the constant sound of the sea" (12), demonstrating Mrs. Begg's inability to adapt to the very landscape she lives in. The same type of unwillingness to adapt can be found in Captain Littlepage, who has a hard time fitting in with the current way of life in Dunnet Landing. His desire to retain the past, however, is done through the oral tradition of storytelling.

The narrator and Captain Littlepage meet at the schoolhouse, notably a place to learn. Before beginning their conversation, there is a point made about the seating arrangement. The narrator returns to her "fixed seat behind the teacher's desk, which gave him [Littlepage] the lower place of a scholar" (14). The power dynamic between the two of them is displayed; the narrator is in a seat of authority, occupying the present-day resident, while Captain Littlepage is in a seat of inferiority, a scholar– or student– near the window. In this moment, the narrator is elevated and the fragility of Captain Littlepage is highlighted.

Captain Littlepage opens up dialogue with a quote from John Milton's Paradise Lost, and begins with saying "A happy, rural seat of various views" (14), which refers to an unfallen Eden. Incidentally, the schoolhouse sits upon a hill, where one can see the "most beautiful view of sea and shore" (10). The view from the schoolhouse is one of beauty, comparable to the prelapsarian era; from the hill, Captain Littlepage is able to sit and see a "beautiful view," one that appears as though it is void of fault– void of good and evil. From the hill, Dunnet Landing resembles the utopian, idealist narrative of the region, one which remains beautiful and unchanged, but on the ground level this is not the case.

Captain Littlepage reminisces about his life as a shipmaster and the accompanying authority, only complicating the fact that he isn't sitting in the teacher's desk– a seat of authority itself. He remains critical about the current state of Dunnet Landing. He points toward the village and claims that "in that handful of houses they fancy that they comprehend the universe" (15). At this moment, the distance between Captain Littlepage and the rest of the community becomes apparent. He believes the current generation of Dunnet Landing residents are living a passive existence and only receive word of the outside world through "cheap, unprincipled newspapers" (17). It is reminiscent of what Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities*, where the rise of print media allows for a collapse in spatial distance; people who may never physically meet in real life still feel connected in some way. If everyone reads the same newspaper in Dunnet Landing, there is an effect: if everyone shares that same knowledge, then there creates a sense of community– and this is the cultural shift that has occurred in Dunnet Landing. Benjamin writes that "by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information" (VI, 4), noting an important shift that has occurred within the community; most stories are actually just information from newspapers.

But what is this? What is the importance of oral storytelling in the age of information? How does it keep the past alive? How does this create a "region" in place of a nation? There is a multitude of stories and experiences. It is the shift from communally recounting a story to then reading information in the newspaper, that has left the community in a generational disconnect, and ultimately why the aged Captain Littlepage looks down upon young Dunnet Landing residents. In relation to *The Storyteller*, Benjamin focuses on a similar transition from oral storytelling to books. In it, he makes the distinction between two forms of communication— one

which is the old, traditional form of storytelling, as opposed to widespread information. The two forms have a hard time coexisting, as the way of consuming them is different. Instead of voyagers traveling to distant lands and coming back home with stories, now people are only concerned with what is immediately near them. Instead of hearing stories orally in a communal setting, people are reading the newspaper in solitude and at their own leisure. Newspapers, therefore, provide an opportunity to live life in isolation, while still remaining knowledgeable about the world. Captain Littlepage has a hard time accepting this change, which makes him recede into the past. While the narrator is an outsider to Dunnet Landing because she is merely visiting, Captain Littlepage feels as though he is an outsider because he is unable to connect to the new way of receiving information– only truly able to exist in his youth.

Captain Littlepage continues telling the narrator about his time on the *Minerva*, a large vessel that ended up in a shipwreck. The narrator's patience is tested as she begins "to find this unexpected narrative a little dull" (17), furthering on that when he speaks, it's with a "slow correctness that lacked the longshore high flavor to which I had grown used" (17). The narrator finds Captain Littlepage to be different from what she is used to; she finds him disinteresting and he lacks higher class qualities–and so his meandering story leaves her feeling apathetic. Benjamin writes that retaining attention through listening to stories "requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer" (VIII, 5), which is what is happening to the narrator. As experience starts coming from written newspapers instead of from oral tradition, sitting down to hear a story becomes strenuous, and the inability of the narrator to pay attention demonstrates the cross-generational difference.

Captain Littlepage furthers his opinion on Dunnet Landing residents by stating that it is "full of loafers now, small and poor as it is, who once would have followed the sea, every lazy soul of 'em" (17). He believes that the current residents are idle people, but had they been born around the same time as him, they too would have sailed the sea. He also makes note of the differing transportation, stating that "these bicycles offend me dreadfully; they don't afford no real opportunities of experience such as a man gained on a voyage" (18). The two modes of transportation, the ship and the bicycle, offer fundamentally different experiences. While both can be individual activities, the ship focuses more on exploring transcontinentally, while the bicycle is solely for local, continental life. This shows the changing American culture and the focus on the domestic. In previous decades, residents would have searched the sea just like Captain Littlepage. Instead, the residents live within their own worlds, and according to Captain Littlepage, are disassociated from the outside world, demonstrating the isolation of the community. With the cessation of the shipping business in Dunnet Landing, there is less room for conversation and the sharing of experience. Mrs. Fosdick, another resident, even exclaims: "how times have changed; how few seafarin' families there are left!" (51). Fewer people are traveling to and from port, adding to the changing nature of how information and stories are received. It has compounded the cross-generational difference in the residents and further isolates Dunnet Landing as a place removed from the national realm: a retreat into a regional landscape that is no longer connected to the current reality.

In the following chapter, "The Waiting Place," Captain Littlepage tells the narrator about an acquaintance with a Scottish seaman named Gaffet, who lodged Captain Littlepage after his ship crashed. Captain Littlepage learns more about Gaffet, how he was sent on a "voyage of

discovery" (20), which incidentally, also ended in a shipwreck, leaving Gaffet as the sole survivor. Captain Littlepage recalls how Gaffet explained what he discovered on the tragic voyage, with Littlepage claiming that "no other living soul had the facts, and he gave them to me" (21). The passing of knowledge from one person to another demonstrates the fact that "the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force" (Benjamin, 1). In other words, Captain Littlepage is recounting a story from the past, while living in the present moment. The memories and the nostalgia he clings onto is an assurance of the past, validating his experience and his life. Once he tells the story to the narrator, memory begins to vividly exist again in the present moment.

Captain Littlepage discloses that Gaffet discovered a world "two degrees farther north where ships had ever been" (21)—a place "where there was neither living nor dead" (21). The mystique of the story begins to arouse Captain Littlepage, and he is no longer the frail old man first presented. Instead, "the captain had sprung to his feet in his excitement, and made excited gestures" (22) in explaining his adventure. Once in the story, Captain Littlepage is able to transcend his age and becomes youthful, and in recalling these times he is brought back to a time that has already passed. Like the fleetingness of youth, the temporal nature of his experiences is gone before he realizes he knows they have left.

According to Benjamin, it used to be that "the intelligence that came from afar—whether the spatial kind from foreign countries or the temporal kind of tradition—possess an authority which gave it validity" (4). In other words, the spatial distance between him and the experience gave him an authority over the audience; if an incident occurred far away people would not question the validity as much than if it were in their immediate area. Going off this claim, it is no

surprise that when Captain Littlepage begins to recite Gaffet's story to the narrator, the narrator does not question the validity and says that the "tale had such an air of truth that I could not argue with Captain Littlepage" (24). Captain Littlepage begins to describe the story with a mysticism that makes it appear fictitious. He describes people in the newly discovered town as "fog-shaped" (22) and "blowing gray figures that would pass along alone" (21) and as "a kind of waiting place between this world and the next" (22). These eerie, ghost-like figures are not real, but represent the faceless entities he remembers. This description makes it appear as though they are inhuman, living in a world that doesn't quite exist. Though false, the story, the old age, the mysticism of Captain Littlepage, make it apparent that storytelling doesn't require explanation. In fact, Benjamin writes that "the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader" (4); the reader is able to determine their own connection.

Death plays a vital role in storytelling as well as in the novel; a story can be told an infinite amount of times and through various adaptations, but a book is definite. In talking about the importance of death within storytelling, Benjamin writes that "a man's knowledge or wisdom… first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death" (X, 7). This is an important process in the way in which stories live on. According to Captain Littlepage, since the late Gaffet never told him the coordinates of the mystical town, the story only lives on in Captain Littlepage's memory, unable to be proven true. From here, the art of storytelling becomes a distant idea–left only for the older generations who went on great adventures. The knowledge Gaffet gave Captain Littlepage becomes his own. Then as Captain Littlepage passes it on to the narrator, it becomes her own. In this way, storytelling becomes a tool in which the past is remembered.

Throughout Captain Littlepage's stories and demeanor, it is apparent that the tangible experiences of a shipmaster have been lost to the past and made obsolete. Later on, the narrator notices Captain Littlepage from afar and explains how "there was a patient look on the old man's face, as if the world were a great mistake and he had nobody with whom to speak his own language or find companionship" (70). Captain Littlepage, from the narrator's observation, is unable to fit within the Dunnet Landing narrative. Perhaps he decides to speak to the narrator in the first place. Perhaps he engages the narrator exactly because she is new, without prior history, a blank canvas to share his stories and ideas with, without fear of being shunned by the narrator– an outsider.

If Littlepage is a mythic storyteller, residing in the realm of fairytale and fantasy, then Mrs. Todd is the antithesis, residing in Benjamin's claims of the storyteller as someone who "has counsel" (IV, 3) and is "rooted in the people" (XVI, 10). Mrs. Todd is someone who is connected to the land and the people around her. She is an herb gatherer– quite literally rooted within the earth– demonstrating her immersion to Dunnet Landing. Mrs. Todd also notices a change within the community, stating that "there was certain a good many curiosities of human natur' in this neighborhood years ago. There was more energy then… in these days the young folks is all copy-cats, 'fraid to death they won't be all just alike" (51). Like Captain Littlepage, Mrs. Todd feels as though there is a disconnect occuring within the community; the younger generation is believed to be one entire homogenous group, rather than individuals. Mrs. Fosdick has a similar feeling toward the young residents of the community, when she says that

> it does seem so pleasant to talk with an old acquaintance that knows what you know. I see so many of these new folks nowadays, that seem to have neither past nor future.

> Conversation's got to have some root in the past, or else you've got to explain every remark you make, an' it wears a person out. (49)

Mrs. Fosdick believes that conversation must be rooted in the past in order to properly communicate. Since the younger generation have fewer experiences, there isn't much of a past to look back on. Mrs. Fosdick believes that the people who currently live there, do so freely, without acknowledgement of the past or intrigue for the future. The very thing that Mrs. Fosdick complains about plagues Captain Littlepage; he is unable to find companionship, and because of it, is constantly looking toward the past. Mrs. Todd on the other hand, who is standing alongside the narrator, quickly counters Mrs. Fosdick's assertion that conversation needs to be rooted in the past. She suggests that "'old friends is always the best, 'less you can catch a new one that's fit to make an old one out of'" (49), which stresses that one can always learn about the past and be a part of a community even if they weren't directly born into it– precisely what the narrator is doing.

Later, when the narrator reunites with Mrs. Todd, the two of them overlook the harbor, noticing the weather turn "gray and cloudy" (25), until "the sunburst upon the outermost island made it seem like a sudden revelation of the world beyond this which some believe to be so near" (25). This is notably reminiscent of when Captain Littlepage explains the mystic town he has discovered that sits between "this world and the next." The "outermost island," as it turns out, is actually Green Island—where Mrs. Blackett (Mrs. Todd's mother) lives. The sunburst amongst the gray sky makes it appear as though there is something of great importance on the island—a place which stands out from the rest of Dunnet Landing. Perhaps the light that shines on Green Island is a metaphor for the "light-hearted nature" (25) of Mrs. Blackett, as well as a

paradisal land where people can go and get what they need, leaving fulfilled. The following day, Mrs. Todd and the narrator make the trip to Green Island. Mrs. Todd displays her affectionate nature during the trip. This serves as an insight into the ways in which Dunnet Landing residents interact with each other, specifically, those who are able to adapt to the landscape. Before Mrs. Todd and the narrator make their voyage to Green Island, they discuss how they will get there. The narrator suggests the big boat, to which Mrs. Todd exclaims, "Oh, my sakes! Now you let me do things my way" (27), demonstrating her authority and judgement. Instead, they take a smaller dory boat, with Mrs. Todd suggesting that her and Johnny Bowdin will "man her ourselves" (27). Later, when Mrs. Todd is struggling to launch the boat, she sees Asa, man who she says is "too ready with his criticism" (28) and offers unsolicited advice on how to get the boat out to sea. She rejects his help, claiming that they'll be fine on their own. This fluidity of gender roles is an important factor in adaptability; Mrs. Todd is able to fend for herself.

When Mrs. Todd gets off the boat, she does so with "great dignity" (30); she is completely sure of herself and her surroundings since she is already familiar with the area. When the narrator meets Mrs. Blackett for the first time, she claims that "You felt as if Mrs. Blackett were an old and dear friend before you let go of her cordial hand" (30) and then a bit later, "you felt as if she promised a great future" (32). In this moment, the second point-of-view, "you" figure, breaks the boundaries between the narrator and the reader. Mrs. Blackett's presence is able to immerse the reader into the text, reassuring the reader just as she is reassuring the narrator herself. While Mrs. Todd's "you" figure is one that is more authoritative, calling out the narrator. On the other hand, the narrator's use of "you" suggests something of an invitation to the community. She is being welcomed as an outsider.

When the three of them are near the island, they see Mrs. Blackett's home–the place where Mrs. Todd was born. It is a "white house, standing high like a beacon" (29), and incidentally resembles the white school house that the narrator writes in; both are elevated and overlook the surrounding area in a pristine regional ideal. Moreover, when describing the rest of the Green Island, the narrator writes that there is

> a great stretch of pastured land round the shoulder of the island to the eastward, and here were all the thick scattered gray rocks that kept their places, and the gray backs of many sheep that forever wandered and fed in the thin sweet pasturage that fringed the ledges and made soft hollows and stripes of green turf like growing velvet. (31)

With this description, Green Island is essentially an embodiment of the regionalist ideal; a place that remains timeless, untouched, and forever unchanged. When considering "Green" or greenery, one thinks of plants growing, fresh grass, or as described above, the "green turf like growing velvet" (31). The rocks also do not change, and instead "kept their places," along with the sheep that "forever wandered," adding to the immortality of the Island; there will always be food and water, and therefore, eternal life. It is also important to note that Mrs. Blackett is constantly noted as youthful, with "bright eyes" (30), which mirrors the description of Green Island; she is forever young in the same way that the island is seemingly immortal. Adding to this idea, Mrs. Blackett's home is described as a house appears "firm rooted in the ground, as if they were two thirds below the surface, like icebergs" (32). Once again the theme of rootedness reappears. Mrs. Todd grew up in a home that has a long history, and Mrs. Blackett still lives within this. However, it is noted that Mrs. Blackett "passed the line that divides mere self-concern from a valued share in whatever Society can give and take" (33). Even though she lives

on a secluded island, she is not entirely concerned with herself, and because of this is able to tolerate change and live in a society both communally and independently.

Even though Green Island appears to be a place of immortality, when Mrs. Blackett's home is described, it is apparent that it has very much been lived in; there is a history to the house. Inside, the best room are a

> few pieces of good furniture and pictures of national interest. The green paper curtains were stamped with conventional landscapes of a foreign order,– castles on inaccessible crags, and lovely lakes with steep wooded shores; under foot the treasured carpet was covered thick with homemade rugs. There were empty glass lamps and crystallized bouquets of grass and some fine shells on the narrow mantelpiece. (33)

In the best room, there are traces of landscape that mimic those that are outside or otherworldly. The paper curtains have "landscapes of a foreign order," indicating that she has knowledge of land outside the one she lives in. There is also something to note about how the castles stamped on the paper curtains are "on inaccessible crags," as if they are out of reach. Even still, there are "homemade rugs" under the "treasured carpet," which inevitably ties in what is far away to what is close to home. Mrs. Todd suddenly says "I was married in this room" (33). This room, which somehow feels immortalized through the "crystallized bouquets" and "fine shells" is also a room of great significance– of history, to say the least.

Toward the end of the chapter there is also a mention of William, Mrs. Todd's brother, who is characterized as something as a recluse; he is "odd about seein' folks" (33), yet not without "deep affections" (34). Mrs. Blackett even states that "'William has been son an' daughter both since you [Mrs. Todd] were married off the island'" (33). William's ability to transition between gender roles mirrors that his sister, Mrs. Todd, who does the same by taking charge of sailing. This proves how taking on both gender roles, in part, is a means of

independence and adaptability. Additionally, the chapter stands as a way to understand how to live in a community, stressing the difference between Captain Littlepage's approach and Mrs. Blackett's. While Mrs. Blackett "was of those who do not live to themselves" (32), Captain Littlepage "suffered from loneliness" (15). Despite being roughly the same age, their outlook is completely different. Mrs. Blackett looks onward and Captain Littlepage languishes. The relationships in this chapter become a commentary on the importance of mutual affection and how it keeps a community thriving. Perhaps it is also a commentary on the way in which America needed to adapt to the closing of the frontier; it is less about discovering the outside world, and more about "making a home," living in the domestic space.

One of the most significant places in which the past is reconstructed is through the chapter, *The Bowden Reunion*, in which Mrs. Blackett, whose maiden name is Bowden, reunites with the rest of her living family. Mrs. Todd is there as well, along with the narrator who explains that, in regards to the reunion, that "it is very rare in country life… that any occasion of general interest proves to be less than great" (76). In other words, reunions such as these are always grand events. As the narrator reflects upon the way in which

> in quiet neighborhoods such inward force does not waste itself upon those petty excitements of the cities, but when, at long intervals, the alters to patriotism, to friendship, to the ties of kindred, are reared in our familiar fields, then the fires glow, the flames come up as if from the inexhaustible burning heart of the earth. (76)

There is a large historical meaning in the Bowden a reunion; since Dunnet Landing lacks the supposed excitement of the city, the reunion is a place in which worlds collide. It is a time in which different people from the same lineage come together to keep the memory of their ancestors alive, and confirm the present.

During the reunion, the narrator and Mrs. Blackett are "overlooking the bay" (77). In this scene, Mrs. Blackett says that "there were plenty of scattered Bowdens who were not laid there– some lost at sea, and some out West, and some who died in the war; most of the home graves were those of women" (77). This attachment to home–a domestic space– is vital when it comes to the family reunion. The home is a place of coming together, of catching up, and of community. The home also remains unchanged, with the Bowden home specifically one in which "five generations of sailors and farmers and soldiers" (77) had come to live. This goes back into the theme of rootedness; the Bowdens laid stake in the land for generations, and their memory is kept alive through the relatives who meet up at this reunion, telling stories of the past.

As the narrator observes family members rejoicing at seeing Mrs. Blackett and Mrs. Todd, she states that she "felt like an adopted Bowden in this happy moment" (79). After a summer in Dunnet Landing, the narrator finally feels like she has become a part of a family she was initially observing. Benjamin's writes that "memory creates the chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (XII, 9). The use of memories and storytelling is vital in the existence of a community, as it keeps the past alive in the present, as seen through the narrator's observation of the Bowden reunion in which

> The sky, the sea, have watched poor humanity at its rites so long; we were no more a New England family celebrating its own existence and simple progress; we carried the tokens and inheritance of all such household from which this had descended, and were only the latest of our line. We possessed the instincts of a far, forgotten childhood; I found myself thinking we ought to be carrying green branches and singing as we went. (79)

In this moment, the narrator concludes that the past never truly ceases to exist. She acknowledges life's finite nature; even though the sky and the sea have seen "have watched poor

humanity," life still continues. The reunion becomes a larger indication of survival; every person at the Bowden reunion carries a piece of history with them–of their ancestors, their skills, their memory. Within this, youth also resurfaces. The narrator claims that everyone at the reunion "possessed the instincts of a far, forgotten childhood," indicating that they are trying to rekindle the same joy that childhood supposedly brings. In other words, recounting stories of the past is like trying to recall childhood; and like childhood, the memory is preserved through its retelling.

Toward the end of the chapter, the narrator says that "one sees exactly the same types in a country gathering as in the most brilliant city company. You are safe to be understood if the spirit of your speech is the same for one neighbor as for the other" (82). As the narrator completes the circulation of experience, ultimately going home at the end, there is a realization that perhaps the region and the city are not that far from each other after all. This is the narrator's key to understanding how to get on the "inside" of the community. No matter where someone goes, all that matters is matching the same "spirit of your speech" to what is reflected in the community.

In the last chapter, *The Backward View*, the narrator reflects back on her summer at Dunnet Landing, while she prepares to leave it. She claims that "I wished to have one of my first weeks back again" (99), effectively showcasing how memory is fleeting, complete with a nostalgia for the past. Like childhood or like Captain Littlepage's stories, she wants to go back to the past, to a time "with those long hours when nothing happened except the growth of herbs and the course of the sun" (99). Her memories are colored by the emotion she felt; she was so preoccupied with the community that she abandons her writing project– the reason she visited Dunnet Landing in the first place.

She explains that "once I had not even known where to go for a walk; now there were many delightful things to be done and done again, as if I were in London (99). In this acknowledgement, the narrator concludes that the "region"– that Dunnet Landing–is its own place in and of itself; a place where the seasons change and opportunities arrive, demonstrating the absence of a real fundamental difference between the city and the region. Instead, the narrator–who was once an outsider–becomes worried about returning back "to the world in which I feared to find myself a foreigner" (99). The narrator, from urban New England, returns back home with a newfound sense of identity and knowledge. Once the narrator sets off from Dunnet Landing, she looks back at how

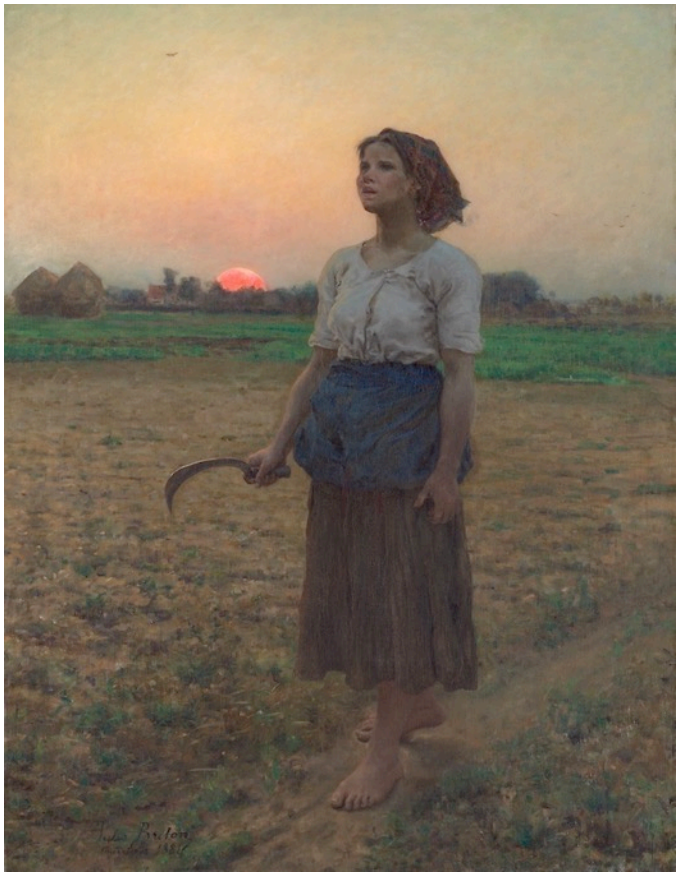
> The little town, with the tall masts of its disabled schooners in the inner bay, stood high above the flat sea for a few minutes then it sank back into the uniformity of the coast, and became indistinguishable from the other towns that looked as if they were crumbled on the furzy-green stoniness of the shore. (101)

The narrator finds that the landscape is changing the further away she gets. Dunnet Landing becomes smaller and smaller, until eventually she is unable to make out the difference in the towns, they all become "indistinguishable" from each other. While this can be seen as Dunnet Landing embodying the regionalist ideal, it can also be a commentary on how this is merely the perception of the region. As the narrator backs away, the region becomes homogeneous, but once she is in it, it proves to be anything but. This in fact proves that the region is not devoid of conflict. There is no longer any stretch of land that hasn't been colonized, that can go back to its original landscape. Like the loss of childhood, there is no pure origin to return to. The past is recalled through memory and stories, trying preserve a time which can no longer be obtained.

Chapter Two:

Uprootedness and Memory in

Willa Cather's *My Antonia*



Jules Adolphe Breton– *The Song of the Lark* (1884)

Willa Cather's, *My Ántonia* (1918), is a novel that, according to James E. Miller Jr. in his essay, "My Ántonia and the American Dream," encompasses "the American experience, the American dream, and the American reality" (112). It is told through the perspective of Jim Burden, a narrator who has moved from Virginia to rural Nebraska, and in this way mirrors the life of Cather herself, who made the same move when she was just 10 years old. The novel centers around Jim recounting his childhood in Nebraska, reflecting on his friendship with an immigrant girl, Ántonia Shimerda, who has come from Bohemia with her family. Similarly, Pulitzer Prize winning author, Jane Smiley, writes that when Cather and her family moved to Nebraska they encountered a "huge population of other immigrants" (xii), namely from "Norway, Sweden, France, Bohemia, [and] Mexico" (xii). It is safe to say, then, that from a young age Cather's exposure to different cultures and languages left a strong impression on her, opening her eyes to the immigrant struggle. At the same time, Smiley writes that this exposure also gave Cather "a sense of the world that is deeply American, simultaneously local and exploratory, rustic and cosmopolitan" (xii). Because of this, she was able to witness a conglomeration of American life before her eyes.

In Cather's essay entitled "Nebraska," (1923) which was published in *The Nation*, she writes that her "American neighbors were seldom open minded enough to understand the Europeans, or to profit by their older traditions. Our settlers from New England, cautious and convinced of their own superiority, kept themselves insulated as much as possible from foreign influences" (5). In saying this, the leverage she has as a writer is undeniable; while her New England neighbors were isolating themselves, Cather was not. Instead, she paid close attention to their way of life, always keeping an open mind.

Smiley continues on to say that *My Ántonia*, as well as Cather's other works, "stick in the reader's mind as flickering memories of places we may never have seen with our own eyes" (xiii). This description can work in two ways; the first is that Cather is able to transport the reader into a town they may not physically have gone to, and the second is that Cather is recreating an American landscape that has now passed. In constructing the novel, Smiley also writes that "Cather managed to successfully remove herself from the present and even more deeply immerse herself into the past" (xvii). This immersion allows Cather to go deep into her memory, to understand her identity and upbringing through the character of Jim Burden. In trying to capture this ephemeral time, she is writing on characters who try to internalize the changing American landscape, though sometimes this internalization is unsuccessful– and perhaps this is the point. How does one deal with a changing landscape? How does one deal with the changing present while simultaneously remembering the past? In what way does memory hurt us or mend us? In this chapter, I argue that memory is a large construct of the novel because of the very fact that the characters are uprooted.

In Terence Martin's essay, "The Drama of Memory in 'My Ántonia'" (1969), he acknowledges the criticisms of the novel, which mainly regard the structure of the novel. The novel is told in five parts, with no particular plot. It revolves around the memories of Jim as he reimagines them. Even though the title is *My Ántonia*, there are parts of the novel that completely omit her presence. In doing this, Ántonia becomes something more of a symbolic character– a figure who acts as a placeholder for Jim's memory and his recreation of the past. Literary critic E.K. Brown, as quoted in Martin's essay, claims that having a man narrate the novel inevitably weakens it, saying that Jim "'was to be fascinated by Ántonia as only a man could be, and yet he

was to remain a detached observer, appreciative but inactive'" (305). In this way, Ántonia is never truly able to be an attainable woman for Jim, but though she remains distant, she is still highly impactful in his life. Martin also writes that "The unity of My Ántonia thus derives… from a drama of memory fulfilled in the present" (311). Through reminiscing and framing the novel around the memories Ántonia brings to him, he is able to live in the present moment.

For Jim, and other characters in the novel, the past the past either serves as a cathartic, or sometimes painful, means to live in the present. In My Ántonia, the past becomes a way to share and recall a fond memory, or the past becomes a dangerous nostalgia. The past also serves as a way to connect the people and their land, and the two often depend on each other for survival; having a shared community makes it easier to communicate, and living on the same land calls for the same understanding of nature. However, when there is a fracture in this dependency, there is pain. The fracture often shows itself through uprootedness; of leaving behind a country in search of freedom, or of moving from one place to another in search of knowledge. Ántonia finds herself in the former position, and the latter part is where Jim finds himself. When Jim describes Nebraska, he says that "There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material in which countries are made" (11-12). The land is the closest it can be to untouched territory; an undeveloped place where supposedly nothing happens– encompassing the regional ideal. However, it is this very empty canvas of Nebraska where Jim and Ántonia learn how to survive; they use the past as a way to mend their uprootedness– to recall, constantly, their childhood.

My Ántonia opens up with an introduction from an unnamed narrator who happens to be traveling at the same time as "James Quayle Burden," or, "Jim Burden, as we still call him in the West" (3). The name change– the fact that he is called something else when he is in the east, and

simply a nickname when he is in the West, offers an interesting insight into how he has grown up. The East is where he is formal and official– where he currently resides as a successful lawyer in New York City– however, the West is characterized by his freewheeling childhood. This separation of location sets the grounds for the novel. Jim is not focused on his life out east, but rather, his life in the Midwest– in Nebraska. It is later revealed that the unnamed narrator grew up with Jim in Nebraska, and that they both now live in New York City. The narrator states that "our talk kept returning to a central figure, a Bohemian girl" (5). This Bohemian girl being Ántonia, by whom the book gets its title. The narrator goes on to say that "this girl seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood" (5), strongly suggesting that Ántonia is the embodiment of their lives. She is able to evoke a multitude of memories and feelings, all of which have defined Jim. The narrator, therefore, suggests to Jim that they both write about Ántonia. To try to, in some way, "get a picture of her" (5). Although the narrator ends up writing nothing, Jim on the other hand, does. When the novel is finished he tells the narrator that "I simply wrote down what of herself and myself and other people Ántonia's name recalls to me" (6)– and from this, the story is created. Ántonia's name evokes a strong sense of childhood memory, and to Jim, her name is inextricably tied to a multitude of people and events.

When Jim is young and taking in his new life in Nebraska, he writes that "As I looked around me, I felt that the grass was the country, as the water is the sea… There was so much motion in it it; the whole country seemed, somehow, to be running" (17). In this description, the vastness of the grass is compared to the vastness of the sea. It is infinite. The grass is personified in such a way that it seems to be alive; it is "running," thus making it appear as though the nature

has the same status as people themselves. Nature, in part, becomes the driving force in how Jim remembers his childhood. This is exemplified when Jim finds himself in the garden, propping himself up against a pumpkin. As he rests, he writes that

> The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. Queer little red bugs came out and moved in slow squadrons around me. Their backs were polished vermillion, with black spots. I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. (19-20)

In the opening sentence, there is an intertwining between Jim and the earth he sits on. The "earth," in this case, is a metonymic device for dirt- which he crumbles with his fingers. However, using the word "earth" makes it appear much more holistic. It is not just dirt, it is the embodiment of the world. In the meantime, red bugs appear to surround him, with"polished vermillion" and "black spots." In this scene, it is most likely ladybugs that are surrounding him, but he does not move. He states that he didn't "expect anything to happen," and in this curious way, he begins to anticipate the world around him. He feels as though he is a part of nature, basking in the sun and feeling it "like the pumpkins" (20). There is a collapse between body and nature as he writes that he "did not want to be anything more" (20). In this oneness, he finds happiness.

Jim's particular ease in assimilating into Nebraska is only highlighted when juxtaposed to his neighbors– the Shimerdas, who have immigrated from Bohemia (now modern day Czech Republic). It is through the daughter– Ántonia– that he understands struggle and resilience. The opening chapter, entitled *The Shimerdas*, details the tribulations of their adjustment to their new American life as they sacrificed their homeland of Bohemia for the emptiness of the Nebraskan

prairie. Ántonia's father, Mr. Shimerda, has a particularly difficult time adjusting to his new environment, and his life is a tale of failed assimilation; he is never able to properly live in the present moment, continually longing for his homeland. When Jim speaks of Mr. Shimerda, he writes that Ántonia "was the only one of his family who could rouse the old man from the torpor in which he seemed to live" (36). This says something both about Ántonia's nature– that her presence is so powerful she can even lighten up her father's day– and also about the state of Mr. Shimerda in general, who is not doing well. Jim goes on to say that "The old man's smile… was so full of sadness, of pity for things" (37), and because of this, he is stuck in an endless malaise, unable to adjust to the strenuous life of farming, in a very different American culture.

Mr. Shimerda is briefly able to find some peace on Christmas morning, when Jim and Ántonia's families both celebrate the day together. Jim writes that everyone was

> enjoying the deepening grey of the winter afternoon and the atmosphere of comfort and security in my grandfather's house. This feeling seemed completely to take possession of Mr. Shimerda. I suppose, in the crowded clutter of their cave, the old man had come to believe that peace and order had vanished from the earth, or existed only on the old world he had left so far behind. (68)

For Mr. Shimerda, the safety and security of Jim's grandfather's home offers a peace that he has not felt in a long time. It is no wonder that Mr. Shimerda feels comfortable in the home, especially since Jim calls Mr. Shimerda's home a "cave." The two different homes depict two different lives; the grandfather's is one of ease, but Mr. Shimerda's is one of difficulty. These demonstrate two different American realities. While the grandfather is able to create an atmosphere of comfort, Mr. Shimerda cannot do the same. Even though he has a home himself, it is not in his country of familiarity. This is only exacerbated when Jim goes on to say that in Mr.

Shimerda's cave– in America– he began to feel as though "peace and order" has left, only existing in his past life in Bohemia. In essence, distance becomes palpable. Mr. Shimerda is unable to adjust, only believing he can exist in the "old world" he left. Because of this, Mr. Shimerda's uprootedness becomes the main reason as to why he is unable to adjust into his American life.

Ántonia further explains the struggles that Mr. Shimerda has been going through, telling Jim that "'He not look good. He never make music any more. At home he play violin all the time; for weddings and for dance. Here never" (70). The difference between Mr. Shimerda back in Bohemia, and the one in America is drastic. In Bohemia, he is playing music for especially sentimental moments: weddings, dances. His music is what brings people together. But in America, he is unable to bring people together in the same way. His reluctance to play violin in America demonstrates his overall reluctance to try and make America home. Jim later rather vehemently tells Ántonia "'We don't make them come here'" (71), in which he denotes immigrants to "them" in a tone that sounds rather condescending and exclusionary. Ántonia does not take well to this, telling him that "'He not want to come, nev-er!'" (71), which tells a completely different story than Jim believes at first. Ántonia continues on and says that "'My mamenka make him come. All the time she say 'America big country; much money, much land for my boys, and husband for my girls.' My papa, he cry for leave his old friends what make music with him'" (71). In this statement, Ántonia divulges the American dream that her mother believes in. It is a belief so real that it is enough to convince her husband and family to move to rural Nebraska. However, they are not met with the American dream that Mrs. Shimerda wanted. What they come to live in is a strenuous Nebraska life– one without money and husbands.

Not too long after, Jim awakens with "with a start" (74), feeling as though something has happened. When he heads downstairs he sees his grandmother is in great distress, and his grandfather tells him that "Mr. Shimerda is dead" (74). His death is a huge loss to the family and to the Burdens, and it is especially shocking since Black Hawk is such a small town. When the grandmother speaks of the Shimerdas, specifically Ántonia, she says that "The oldest one was his darling, and was like a right hand to him. He might have thought of her. He's left her alone in a hard world" (76). Ántonia here, is depicted as an extraordinarily important person to Mr. Shimerda; instead of his wife being his right hand, it is his daughter, demonstrating the incredible resilience of Ántonia, and the way she is able to lift those who are in the darkest of places. But ultimately, the grandmother concludes that Mr. Shimerda has left her "in a hard world" (76), and now Ántonia must fend for herself.

While there is some talk about whether or not Mr. Shimerda's death was murder or suicide, everyone decides that it was suicide. Jim, who a chapter previous is angry at the Shimerdas for not creating wealth for themselves, recalls "his contented face when he was with us on Christmas day. If he could have lived with us, this terrible thing would never have happened" (78). Suddenly, Jim begins to understand the pain Mr. Shimerda had been experiencing, and wonders if his family could have saved him. It is an interesting shift in his character, and it demonstrates his changing feelings about the immigrant experience. Mr. Shimerda's life is a stark awakening into this experience. Jim slowly starts to piece everything together, saying that "I knew it was homesickness that had killed Mr. Shimerda, and I wondered whether his released spirit would not eventually find its way back to his own country" (78). Without question, Jim believes that Mr. Shimerda's suicide is caused from severe displacement.

He considers that his death is a release for Mr. Shimerda's soul, and that it will go back to Bohemia- his homeland. The death, in essence, marks an inability to move forward. Even though America is seen as a land of prosperity, this is not the experience that Mr. Shimerda gets to have.

Once the funeral is over and Mr. Shimerda is buried, Jim begins to reflect on this time. He tries to uncover all the industrialization that has now taken over the prairie, and he slowly remembers the time when the land was not industrialized. After the years pass by, and "As grandfather had predicted, Mrs. Shimerda never saw roads going over his [Mr. Shimerda's] head' (91). Even though time as moved on, the grave has not changed. It has not been touched. Instead, "that grave, with its tall red grass that was never mowed, was like a little island" (91). Much like Mr. Shimerda himself, who felt as though he was isolated and separated from the land in America, his grave provides the same type of isolation. Even in death Mr. Shimerda cannot escape the burden of his life in America– he is, quite literally, part of it; he is now within it, buried in the dirt. While he was alive, his life in America centered around a mental distance, and now that he has passed away, there is a sense that people are still thinking about him, or what he represents. His death has elevated to a mythic symbol: the immigrant's sacrifice.

In talking about Mr. Shimerda's grave, Jim says that "under a new moon or the clear evening star, the dusty roads used to look like soft grey rivers flowing past [the grave]" (91). Even though Mr. Shimerda's life has physically stopped, around his grave are roads that appear like rivers; there is, in essence, a continuation of life– a feeling of immortality. Because of this beautiful scene, Jim says that 'I never came upon the place without emotion" (91), stressing that Mr. Shimerda's death has left an impact on his life. Jim also states that

> I loved the dim superstition, the propitiatory intent, that had put the grave there; and still more I loved the spirit that could not carry out the sentence– the error from the surveyed lines, the clemency of the soft earth roads along which the home-coming wagons rattled after sunset. Never a tired driver passed the wooden cross, I am sure, without wishing well to the sleeper" (91).

In this moment, Jim is moved by the sheer placement of the grave. It seems to be one of atonement, and the diverging roads that seem to barely miss the grave almost has a divine quality to it. Even Mr. Shimerda's tragic life has an ending of resiliency. On the roads near his grave are "home-coming wagons," which incidentally, is slightly ironic considering Mr. Shimerda never had a sense of home while he was living in America. Even still, Jim believes that in those wagons are drivers who look at Mr. Shimerda's grave and wish "well to the sleeper," evoking a sense of eternal peace so long as his grave is there and the roads for people to see it.

After her father dies, Ántonia does all that she can to better her life and provide for her family. She undergoes a transformation. Ántonia must now endure a difficult way of life, one that Jim has a hard time accepting. He states that "Ántonia ate so noisily now, like a man, and she yawned often at the table and kept stretching her arms over her head, as if they ached" (95-96). There is now a physical difference between the Ántonia he knew as a child and the Ántonia he sees now. He compares her to a man, and this is because she is working the brutal life of a farmer; she is "out in the fields from sunup until sundown" (96), trying to make a living, however strenuous it might be. Jim also writes that "Nowadays Tony could talk nothing but the prices of things, or how much she could lift or endure" (96). Jim pines over the lost youth in Ántonia; she becomes engrossed in her hard work ethic, constantly trying to prove her worth and relishing in her ability to do so. But Jim believes that "She was too proud of her strength" (96), which reads in a condescending tone. While Jim tries to, in some way, keep her within his grasp,

Ántonia is unable to be controlled. Jim feels a protectiveness for how things are, and when this is interrupted, he safeguards it in his memory.

On the other hand, Jim writes that "Grandfather was pleased with Ántonia. When we complained of her, he only smiled and said, 'She will help some fellow get ahead in the world'" (96). While Jim is unable to positively conceive Ántonia's change, his grandfather is able to see past her roughness, ignoring the complaints of her from Jim. The grandfather is able to possess a positive outlook toward her, noting that her resilience will help others. Jim further states that

> Whenever I saw her come up the furrow, shouting to her breasts, sunburned, sweaty, her dress open at the neck, and her throat and chest dust-plastered, I used to think of the tone in which poor Mr. Shimerda, who could say so little, yet managed to say so much when he exclaimed, "My Ántonia!" (96)

In this quote is a melancholic, yet triumphant, use of imagery. Jim recalls seeing Ántonia in the furrow– undoubtedly farming– and takes in her appearance. She is worn out, "sunburned" because she is working all day, with her throat and neck covered in dust. This scene further demonstrates the physical change Ántonia is going through. She is working within the bounds of nature, working through the harsh conditions. This scene calls Mr. Shimerda to mind, and Jim remembers how much Ántonia meant to him. Once again, it is only Ántonia who is able excite her father. In Mr. Shimerda's exclamation of "My Ántonia!" there is much to be said about how these two words "managed to say so much" (96), and it is no coincidence that these words are the name of the book– sans the exclamation point. The use of "My" in the beginning of the title is a way to show possession, yet Ántonia is unable to be possessed, and the title is the only way in which Jim is able to do this. Perhaps in this way, Ántonia is for Jim what Ántonia was for Mr.

Shimerda. A real, yet mythic woman: someone who illuminates goodness even when reality is difficult.

After a beautiful summer day in July, Jim and Ántonia have a conversation in which Jim asks Ántonia: "'Why aren't you always nice like this, Tony?'" (106), later saying that she emulates her aggressive brother Ambrosch too much. In response to this, Ántonia "put her arms under her head and lay back, looking up at the sky. 'If I live here, like you, that is different. Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us'" (106). As she looks up at the sky– the same sky for Jim as well– she tells him how different their lives are. Her America is not the same as Jim's America, and she is a constant reminder of this. She cannot be possessed because their lives are not even, and because of this, there will always be a distance between the two of them.

There is also a moment between Jim and Ántonia, where Jim tells her that one day he will go to the small village in Bohemia where she is from. He asks Ántonia if she remembers it at all and, even after years of being uprooted from her country, Ántonia states that

> If I was put down there in the middle of the night, I could find my way all over that little town; and along the river to the next town, where my grandmother lived. My feet remember all the little paths through the woods, and where the big roots stick out to trip you. I ain't never forgot my country. (178)

Even in Ántonia's successful assimilation into America, Bohemia still remains an entirely vivid place. After all these years, Ántonia still possesses a deep connection to her homeland, and affirms that she would remember it indefinitely, as though nothing has changed. There is a connection between the land and her body; it is her "feet" that know the land, the woods. She remembers it all so vividly that she even knows "where the big roots stick out to trip you." This incredibly specific detail reassures the reader that Bohemia is in no way lost on her, and still

remains an incredibly vivid memory, apart from the fact that her reimagination of Bohemia assumes it has not changed, which is inevitably impossible.

Jim's memory is tested for the first time when he goes off to college in Lincoln, Nebraska, effectively leaving behind the pastoral country-land of Black Hawk, and he finds that the past lingers within him. Even though college is the first time is he able to truly withdraw from his childhood, he is constantly reminded of it. He acknowledges the "world of ideas" his scholarly classmate, Gaston Cleric, awakens him to, claiming that "when one enters that world everything else fades for a time, and all that went before is as if it had not been" (193). In this moment, Jim begins to understand the separation between his previous life in Black Hawk, and his current life in Lincoln. He is able to see the world differently in a way that demonstrates the acquisition of knowledge. However, even still, he says that "some figures of my old life seemed to be waiting for me in the new" (193), suggesting that he is engulfed in the past. Later on in the chapter he writes that

> Whenever my consciousness was quickened, all those early friends were quickened within it, and in some strange way they accompanied me through all my new experiences. They were so much alive in me that I scarcely stopped to wonder whether they were alive anywhere else, or how. (196)

This excerpt begins with Jim acknowledging the prominence of his childhood memories; he still regularly thinks about the past in a way that is reassuring, perhaps even comforting. However, the past starts to encompass him in a way that is dangerously nostalgic; he begins to recall his childhood friends in a way that becomes counterproductive and harmful. He is unable to consider them as evolving human beings, and instead as friends who have remained young and

unchanged. Jim's inability to believe his friends "were alive anywhere else, or how" is a clear example of the danger of a blindsided romanticization.

On the other hand, Ántonia uses the power of memory in a positive way– as a way to endure and move on. She does this when she recounts her father's death to Jim. She starts by saying "Look at my papa here; he's been dead all these years, and yet he is more real to me than almost anybody else… The older I grow, the better I know him and the more I understand him" (237). Rather than romanticizing her father, Ántonia is able to reimagine him in a way that evokes some type communication. While Jim cannot understand how his friends have moved on from their childhood, Ántonia is able to understand her father, and even more so as she ages. It's not an abrupt stop in her father's death, but rather, a positive continuation of his memory. In this instance, memory is a tool that is used to help console and endure the present; to mend the gap between people and their death.

By the end of the novel Jim meets Ántonia again for the first time in over twenty years. Ántonia is living a fulfilling life; she has plenty children, a husband, and a farm of her own, and because of this, Jim states that she was a "rich mine of life" (259). As Jim reflects upon his relationship with Ántonia, he says that "Ántonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade– that grew stronger with time" (258). Perhaps this is why Jim is able to vividly recall his childhood with Ántonia; the older he gets and the farther away he lives, the stronger the memory of her becomes. It is comparable to how Ántonia states that, even though her father has been dead for many years, he still appears to her even more real than before. Jim states that

> She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. I had not been mistaken. She was a battered woman now, not a lovely girl; but she still had that something which fires imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed the meaning in common things. (258)

In saying this, it is apparent that Jim has some type of idolization of Ántonia. She rises above a human, and becomes mythic. To Jim, she is the universalizing piece in his life; she is able to transcend age and become a symbol. Even though her physical appearance has changed, Ántonia still carries a tangible imagination. She reminds Jim of the simplicity of life– a reminder that he does not get in New York. It is no wonder, then, why in the introduction of the book Jim states that he is writing everything "of herself and myself and other people Ántonia's name recalls to me" (6). For Jim, Ántonia symbolizes a multitude of events and memories; she is the reason why Jim is unable to move on from his past. Memory, therefore, plays an important role in the creation of this novel; it is what keeps the events of Jim's childhood fresh and detailed. It is the reason why he feels most complete in Nebraska, writing that "out there I felt at home again" (271)– which is especially meaningful when considering he does not say this about New York–where he currently resides.

Jim continues to wander around and comes up at the various locations of his childhood: the road "that went from Black Hawk out to the north country" (271), his grandfather's farm, the Shimerda's farm, and the Norwegian settlement. It is the same location of his childhood, but over two decades have passed. As Jim is looking at this land, he writes that the land "had been ploughed under when the highways were surveyed; this half-mile or so within the pasture fence was all that was left of that old road" (272). The landscape, in essence, has changed. There has also been a change in infrastructure; what used to be the open prairie now has a highway, and

Jim clings to the last piece of land that remains the same. In this scene, Jim begins to ponder his life in relation to the land in front of him. He notes that he's "found what a little circle man's experience is" (272), stressing cyclical nature of life: his childhood happened in Nebraska, and he returns there as an established adult.

In this return, there are tones of mourning for Jim; he is reminiscing on what used to be and no longer is. He notices the train tracks that brought him to Black Hawk, which had now disappeared and "were mere shadings in the grass" (272)– a history that has now almost been completely obliterated. He notes that "a stranger would not have noticed them" (272), leading to the fact that it it really only exists in his head. He notices the road that he and Ántonia walked on when they first arrived in Black Hawk, and writes that "I had only to close my eyes to hear the rumbling of the wagons in the dark" (272). In this private moment, Jim is personally able to recall the day he and Ántonia arrived in Black Hawk. When his eyes are closed and he is inside his mind, he is able to imagine his childhood. He further states that

> For Ántonia and me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed, we possessed together in the precious, the incommunicable past. (272)

In this moment, Jim clearly states the cyclicality of life. The road that first brought him and Ántonia to Black Hawk was one that signified uncertainty. Jim writes that the road was "Destiny"; that it led to "accidents of fortune"– which of course, he could only say after the fact. As children neither of them knew what the road what lead to, but now as an adult, Jim understands that the road is what helped shape their lives. The same road brings them together, but the context has changed: they are no longer children. In the last sentence, Jim captures a

hopefulness about his life. He knows that, even though Ántonia was only a friend, they both share the same past. And the past is a deeply rooted time, forever binding Jim to Ántonia.

There is one scene in particular that is able to capture the ephemeral nature of *My Ántonia,* which occurs at the end of the chapter, "Hired Girls." During this scene, Jim is with Ántonia, and they notice a "curious thing" (182) in front of their eyes. The two of them see a "black figure [that] suddenly appeared on the face of the sun" (183), which immediately catches their attention. Jim writes that

> On the upland farm, a plough had been left standing in the field. The sun was sinking just behind it. Magnified across the distance by the horizontal light, it stood out against the sun, was exactly contained within the circle of the disk; the handles, the tongue, the share–black against the molten red. There it was, heroic in size, a picture writing on the sun. (183)

In this scene, there is an extremely visceral image in front Jim and Ántonia. It is important to note that the plough– a tool for farming– was "left standing in the field," and seemingly abandoned. The abandoned plough is symbolic of the conditions in which Jim and Ántonia grow up in; though it is standing in the field alone, it is also "magnified," with its silhouette standing perfectly in the diameter of the sun. Jim calls it both "heroic" and "a picture writing," which indicate that the plough carries a great significance– so much so that it stands out "against the sun," even as it is illuminated by it, and there is something colossal and unforgettable about this image.

As Jim and Ántonia watch this scene unfold, the moment quickly becomes lost. Almost as soon as they realize what they are seeing, Jim states that

> Even while we whispered about it, our vision disappeared; the ball dropped and dropped until the red tip went beneath the earth. The fields below us were dark, the sky growing

> pale, and that forgotten plough had sunk back to its own littleness somewhere on the prairie. (183)

In this scene, the sun has finished setting, leaving the fields "dark." Jim and Ántonia can no longer see the plough– it is gone with the sun. The plough becomes "forgotten," and what was once "heroic in size" as stated in the previous paragraph, soon disappears into its own "littleness." There is an undeniable transformation occurring; in the previous paragraph the plough is a "picture writing," and in the last paragraph it is lost "somewhere on the prairie." The plough, which once held importance in its grandeur and symbolism, is gone as quickly as it came. In some way it is a metaphor for Jim's life. It is a scene that grounds the novel in a space that no longer exists. Throughout this novel, Jim is reminiscing about his upbringing while he is well into his adult years. He is plagued by the ephemerality of life, especially as he vividly recalls his youth. Although Jim is a successful lawyer living in New York, he is in some way that plough: illuminated for a short time, then gone before realizing the importance of what he's seen.

In understanding the effect of the novel, it is vital to return back to the introduction. The unnamed narrator states that Jim, who is now over forty, "is still able to lose himself in those big Western dreams" (4), and that "He never seems to me to grow older" (5). In given this information, it is interesting to reflect on the imprint his childhood has left on him. Even though he is now a lawyer in New York, the nostalgia of the West is ingrained in him; it keeps him, in some way, from growing up. In his current life in New York, he is married to a woman who is "unimpressionable and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm" according to the unnamed narrator, which demonstrates a sharp contrast to Ántonia– who is very much impressionable and enthusiastic. This contrast– *his* uprootedness– is what ignites his memory, and taking the

unnamed narrator's offer to write a book about his life– about Ántonia– is the only way in which he is able to truly preserve what he has tried to capture his whole life: the ephemerality of childhood, the memory of good times.

Chapter Three

Laughter and Narrative Framing

in Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*

Roy DeCarava– *Graduation* (1949)

Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* was published in 1935, and it tells of Hurston's experience in collecting folklore. The text stands as an autoethnographic work, but has also been categorized as literary fiction. This very blend of fiction and nonfiction, incidentally, is what allows Hurston to be such a versatile writer. She is able to maneuver through spaces in such a way that allows her to write about her experience, while also preserving folklore. Throughout the text, Hurston travels from urbanized New York City– where she was attending college at Barnard– and then goes back to her hometown in Eatonville, Florida, and then to unfamiliar places, namely, Polk County, Florida, and New Orleans, Louisiana, where she continues her self-immersion into isolated communities, collecting folklore and participating in voodoo practices.

Reading Mules and Men, I had a particularly difficult time trying to figure out the angle from which I wanted to analyze the text; I couldn't figure out if it was the folklore that interested me, or if it was the way in which she obtained them. I luckily fell upon theorist, Keith Walters', essay, "He Can Read My Writing but He sho' Can't Read My Mind": Zora Neale Hurston's Revenge in Mules and Men" who wrote that "The original manuscript consisted of 70 folktales" (352), and because they were merely transcribed, it was not deemed publishable. Publishers insisted that "no one would be interested in another collection of folktales from the Black community" (352). Walters continues to say that, as a response, "Hurston revised the work, adding the narrative that currently frames it– her own story of collecting the tales and her descriptions of the backgrounds" (352). It is this very narrative framing that allows this text to have such a large impact; understanding the context in which these folkloric stories were transcribed adds even more to the folkloric stories themselves. In a time when anthropology was

merely viewed as purely scientific, Hurston instead inserts herself into the narrative, greatly discussing the process in detail. Walters continues on, saying

> That Mules and Men was published at all demonstrates that Hurston triumphed, at least in some senses, thanks to her own ability to use language strategically in not only creating and revising the text but also persuading publishers of the work's value and convincing Boas to write a preface (355).

In essence, this novel's existence is due to Hurston's ability to strategically create an imprint of black southern life; her ability to use language and construct narrative is why the book is here. The preface, written by the late world-renowned anthropologist, Franz Boas, ensured that the book would be taken seriously by its white audience. Hurston, in this sense, was highly aware of the hurdles she would have to jump through in order for her book to see the light of day, and her skills as a writer made her triumph.

What makes *Mules and Men* such a peculiar text is the very fact that Hurston framed a narrative around the folkloric stories. This narrative is what helped the novel get published, and therefore, is worth looking at. Why couldn't stories stand on their own? What would the novel lose without its narrative framing? When analyzing the text, it became imperative answer these questions. I argue that laughter is one of the most important mediators between Hurston and her subjects (the very people who give her stories to preserve). Without Hurston describing the process of doing such a task, the folkloric stories lack any context; they would just exist without noting the people or circumstances in which she obtained them. It would make for a book of folkloric stories that were seemingly devoid of difficulty, merely existing to exist. Instead, Hurston peers into people's lives in communities that have been ostracized by white America, while having to camouflage her anthropological motives to gain access to their stories.

Professor Sandra Stahl Dolby, a specialist in folklore, offers insight into the power of Hurston's writing in her essay "Literary Objectives: Hurston's Use of Personal Narrative in 'Mules and Men'" (1992). Dolby writes that "Hurston's dialogues in *Mules and Men* are not verbatim transcripts of real speech events but rather artistic fictions created by the author" (60), which is important to keep in mind while reading the text. Hurston's ability to construct a narrative around the folklore is what makes her so compelling as a writer and an anthropologist; it allows Hurston to build the same trust within the author and reader as she does between her and her subjects.

Dolby continues on to say that Hurston "is telling us the story of her experiences while collecting folklore, and she wants to create the illusion that her role as author is simply that of recorder and transcriber" (59). Hurston, therefore, is able to manipulate her literary goals in order to create an illusion that her narrative is exactly how it all happened. This is, in part, one of the reasons why *Mules and Men* has difficulty in being categorized; it seems as though elements of it are purely nonfiction, but perhaps this is Hurston's greatest trick. She is able to use literature to her benefit, to assure the reader that everything has happened as it is written, to invite the reader to trust her. And it is effective. Dolby also states that Hurston "has written a personal narrative that, like most oral personal narratives, is based on a true experience but enhanced by the demands of a literary genre" (61), and this cannot be overlooked. The blending of fact and fiction within the literary genre is what has made *Mules and Men* a success– for this reason, Hurston proves to be both a storyteller and a writer: someone who is able to weave in and out of narratives and folklore, while simultaneously inserting herself in different communities.

But why enter into these isolated communities? Why collect folklore? In the introduction of the novel, Hurston herself claims that collecting folklore "is not as easy to collect as it sounds" (2). The process is grueling. It requires attentiveness and patience, and perhaps controversially, a bit of exploitation. This last part is seemingly justified under the umbrella of anthropology. Under that umbrella, Hurston is able to explore these different lives through a scientific eye, detailing each story and commenting on the process. In regards to folklore, Hurston, as quoted in Barabara Johnson's essay, "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God," says that folklore "does not belong to any special area, time, nor people. It is a world and an ageless thing, so let us look at it from that viewpoint. It is the boiled down juice of human living and when one phase of it passes another begins which shall in turn give way before a successor" (160). In essence, Hurston is on a quest to preserve something that is particularly evasive: stories that are willfully passed down from generation to generation. The fact that folklore is ageless offers some insight into the difficulty of collecting these stories. It isn't rooted in a specific time or place, passed down through oral storytelling, making it even more strenuous to find.

When Hurston begins her journey in Eatonville, she states that it's because she could find folklore there "without hurt, harm, or danger" (2). For Hurston, Eatonville is familiar ground– a place where she is known by name–so the act of collecting folklore is not much of an invasive endeavor. Although the land is familiar, Hurston herself has changed; she is a black woman with a "diploma and a Chevrolet" (2)–both metonymically a sign of education and money. However, Hurston acknowledges that the people of Eatonville "were not going to pay either one of these items too much mind" (2), which effectively strips her away those identifiers for the time she is

in her hometown. In Eatonville, she's just "Lucy Hurston's daughter, Zora" (2), which allows her to revert back to her childhood, removed from all the education and money of her adult life. Although her outer self appears to be the same, her inner-self has changed drastically. She writes that "It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else" (1), and so coming home gives Hurston a sense of reevaluation. Her ability to remove herself from her hometown, and go back to it as an educated black woman offers a certain duality; she is able to exist in a transitory state, both an observer and a member.

To further examine the multiple identities Hurston has, it is apt to bring up literary critic Arnold Rampersad, who writes "Hurston first effected a genuine reconciliation between herself and her past, which is to say between herself as a growing individual with literary ambitions on the one hand and the evolving African-American culture and history on the other" (Hurston, xvi). Going off this quote, as well as the idea of a "transitory state," Hurston is able to occupy many roles within the literary canon. One of them is her identity as a black woman in America and the traditions that comes with it, and the other as an aspirational American writer. Hurston, in essence, has multiple identifiers. She is a writer, an anthropologist, a black woman, and a scholar. In *Mules and Men*, she blends all these attributes together, effectively demonstrating her power as a writer. Hurston is completely aware of this power. She has the ability to construct multiple narratives– and this leads to her being incredibly aware of her actions as a black woman. In her essay, "How it Feels to be Colored Me," she writes that "It is thrilling to think–to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep" (2). In saying this, Hurston acknowledges the way in which writing can be used to satisfy

or falsify. With this leverage, she knows that no matter how she approaches her work, she will keep readers on edge, not quite knowing how to react. For these reasons, there are some places in Mules and Men that are rather uncomfortable–though perhaps this is the intention.

Bringing back Walters, he states that "part of the scholarly task in creating or consuming research is understanding the multilayered relationship between the tales told as research and the life and circumstances of the researcher-as-teller" (346). This role is an important one in understanding Hurston; she is a writer who acts as a liaison between the north and the south, offering up a single perspective on black southern life to a wider American audience. However, the misunderstanding of Walter's words is also a reason as to why there have been criticisms for the text. Literary critic Lillie Howard writes in her essay, "'Them Big Old Lies'" that "most of the tales are light and pleasant, and because of this Hurston and the book have been and will be harshly criticized" (98). There is a lot of pressure placed in in trying to portray an entire race "accurately," and the amount of personal stories and narratives is seemingly infinite, and therefore cannot completely be told. Hurston has been criticized for not including enough folklore about slavery, or for excluded over certain folklore because they depicted black people in a negative light. According to Sterling Brown, as quoted in Howard's piece, "one can only speculate-perhaps to show that 'the picture of Blacks being saturated with our sorrows' was a false one. 'We talk about the race problem a great deal, but go on living and laughing and striving like everybody else'" (98). In essence, there is a discrepancy between trying to make sense of past historical struggles, in contrast with living in the present moment. To survive in the present moment means to, in some way, let go of the past. However, it is particularly the past that Hurston seeks out to find.

As a black women studying anthropology, Hurston is well aware of her position in society. She knows that every choice she makes has some type of implication; she is just one woman, and it is impossible to encapsulate every experience. In Barbara Johnson's essay, "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God," she writes that "there is no point of view form which the universal characteristics of the human, or of the woman, or of the black woman, or even of Zora Neale Hurston, can be selected and totalized. Unification and simplification are fantasies of domination, not understanding" (170). And this offers a realistic way to understand Hurston. Her one narrative does not stand for the entirety of the black community, or the anthropological community, or the folkloric community. In essence, Hurston only offers a single perspective to her work. There is no such thing as a unifying story or unifying quality. She cannot be totalized.

Before Hurston begins her journey to Eatonville, Hurston states that "the best source is where there are the least outside influences and these people, being usually under-privileged, are the shyest" (2). In other words, the vulnerable people Hurston seeks out are the most excluded from society. The places with the "least outside influence" are reluctant to divulge their stories, and are the most susceptible to exploitation. It is an exploitation that is inevitably tied to race. As a black woman, Hurston acknowledges the cultural implications of collecting folklore. She states that "The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries" (2-3). In this quote, Hurston uses the "we" figure–the black community she is a part of– to acknowledge the inevitable oppression they have (and continue) to endure. As Hurston undergoes this anthropological pursuit, she is playing the role of the superior. She enters these black communities as an outsider. She is the

probe and she is well aware of what it means to be the probe. She observes that the tentative nature of recounting stories entails hesitation– a moment of doubt and vulnerability that ultimately gets masked by laughter and deflection. In this way, laughter is used as something of a defense mechanism. She continues on that "the negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive" (2), which explores the dichotomy between the inner and outer self. Laughter can act as a shield to the inside, a tool used to fend of exploitation. Hurston continues on, stating that

> The theory behind our tactics: "The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door of my mind for him to play with him to handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song (3).

In this moment, Hurston uses the "our" determiner to signify the larger black community. In quotes, the white man is directly addressed as someone who is constantly wanting to peer into black lives– someone who is intrusive. Toys and playing are used metaphorically, as something that is rather useless, but will occupy the white person's mind. The "play toy" is a mechanism that allows the black person to not give away their inner self. Telling the white man "something outside the door of my mind" means that he can not reach within the mind, and so there is an inevitable limitation. Interestingly, in the preface of the novel, Franz Boas writes that Hurston "has been able to penetrate through that affected demeanor by which the Negro excludes the White observer effectively from participating in his true inner life (Hurston, xiii). As he writes about the text itself, he acknowledges that Hurston is able to reach a level that the white man ultimately, cannot reach. It is Hurston's role to benefit from this very limitation–to probe inside the mind, to garner trust in order to collect folklore.

When she arrives in Eatonville– a town that "had not changed" (7)– she immediately sees a group of people sitting down on a porch. Once they recognize her, they ask her why she's back, and she tells them that she's there to collect folklore. One of the men questions this, wondering "who you reckon want to read all them old-time tales" (8). And she responds "they are a lot more valuable than you might think. We want to set them down before it's too late" (8). With this, Hurston begins her re-immersion into the south, and sets out to collect folklore.

After everyone welcomes Hurston back home, Hurston states that "it's too bad that it must be two churches in Eatonville… De town's too little. Everybody ought to go to one" (26). This comment of hers demonstrates how fragmented Eatonville is, but the two different churches stand as a means to uncover this fragmentation. In order to understand why this is the case, folklore is used as a means of rationalizing; it fills in the gap between what is known and why life is the way it is. This type of rationalization is used in the story for why churches are divided.

When a few people are disputing whether or not the church was built on a rock or not, there are some dissents until Charlie says "'Yeah, he built it on a rock, but it wasn't solid. It was a pieced-up rock and that's how come de church is split up now'" (27). He then delves into folklore, explaining that Christ and his disciples were going on a walk and asked that each person pick up a rock. Everyone does this except Peter, who cuts an entire mountain in half and is unable to move it. Peter asks Jesus to turn the mountain into bread, and he complies, eventually using everyone else's rocks to build a church. As soon as Charlie finishes telling this story, "there was a storm full of laughter" (28). Coincidentally, this goes back to the beginning of the introduction, where Hurston writes that a lot of folklore is masked by laughter. In this

instance, laughter is used as a way to bring people together, and is perhaps also used in a way that humiliates Hurston for not knowing why churches are divided in the first place.

Within this brief moment of humiliation, there is an instance in which Hurston becomes separate from her community. While she asks a simple question: why is the church divided? it becomes a larger indication of her ignorance. In response to this, a friend says "'Zora, you come talkin' bout puttin' de two churches together and not havin but one in dis town,' Armetta said chidingly. 'You know better'n dat'" (28). In this moment, Armetta slightly ridicules Hurston, which demonstrates a limitation in Hurston's understanding of Eatonville. But if not for her ignorance, she would not have a folkloric story– which is what is assumed by the narrative framing. Perhaps this mishap is the exact reason why she starts her collection of folklore there; she is able to learn how to go about collecting folklore in a safe environment before she heads off to unknown territory.

The first of this unknown territory is Polk County, Florida– which entails another example of Hurston feeling like an outsider, separate from the community. As she enters this county, she writes that "I saw at once that this group of several hundred Negroes from all over the South was a rich filed for folk-lore, but here was I figuratively starving to death in the midst of plenty" (60). In this excursion, she feels as though she is not a part of the community. At one point, she states the people there "all thought I must be a revenue officer or a detective of some kind. They were accustomed to strange women dropping into the quarters, but not in shiny gray Chevrolets… The car made me look to prosperous" (61). In this moment, Hurston feels separate from the rest of the members of Polk County, stressing the feeling of outsiderness. The Chevrolet acts as a metonymic device, implying the fact that she has a wealthy and established life. For the

members of Polk County, it appears that she is someone of status. Approaching this through ethnography brings about a few questions; how does one immerse themselves in a community in such a way that does not evoke status or difference? How can immersion be used as a tool to understand culture? At what point does merely observing becoming ineffective? This outing becomes an important moment in which she must quickly react to the circumstances.

In effect, Hurston quickly comes up with a backstory to explain why she has a car. She tells them that she "was also a fugitive from justice" (61), running away from authority because she is wanted for bootlegging. She states that "that sounded reasonable. Bootleggers always have cars. I was taken in" (61). Instead of telling the truth, Hurston masks the fact she is in Polk County to collect folklore by saying she is a fugitive. In doing this, she breaks free from her status as an outsider and moves on into the inside. It also brings about ethical issues; as the "probe" discusses earlier, at what point does it become problematic to lie so drastically? What types of stereotypes or circumstances is she perpetuating by being more comfortable telling strangers she is a fugitive than a woman with a degree?

Once she is inside, she has an opportunity to collect folklore. The main event is the dance. When she attends it, she notes that "nobody asked me to dance" (62), and then recalls how she "heard my mother speak of it and praise the square dancing to the skies, but it looked as if I was doomed to be a wallflower and that was a new role for me" (62). As a wallflower, she undergoes the role of observer, effectively being put back on the outside. This thwarts her plans of collecting folklore; she becomes someone who is separate from the rest. When she talks with another person, Mr. Pitts, at the dance, Hurston asks: "'Do I look like a bear or panther?'" (63) to which his response is "'Naw, but they say youse rich and dey ain't got the nerve to open dey

mouf'" (63). In this moment of isolation, Hurston writes that "I mentally cursed the $12.74 dress from Macy's that I had on among all the $1.98 mail-order dresses" (63). Her clothing, in this instance, is what separates her from everyone. The fact that she is wearing a dress that is too expensive ends up hindering her ability to camouflage herself into the environment. In this moment, Hurston then admits: "I did look different and resolved to fix all that no later than the next morning" (63). Hurston learns that she has to know when to blend in, and how to do it most effectively. If anything, it is a learning experience for Hurston.

Later on at the dance, Hurston writes that "I stood there awkwardly, knowing that the too-ready laughter and aimless talk was a window-dressing for my benefit" (62). In this instance, Hurston acknowledges that laughter acts as a way into the inside; where there is laughter, there are stories– and Hurston, of course, goes where the stories are. She also notes the multitude of meaning that laughter holds, saying that

> The brother in black puts a laugh in every vacant place in his mind. His laugh has a hundred meanings. It may mean amusement, anger, grief, bewilderment, chagrin, curiosity, simple pleasure or any other of the known or undefined emotions. (62)

This quote shows that laughter does not have a singular meaning. In fact, its complexity makes it an incredibly diverse reaction. The fact that it is able to hold emotions that are "undefined" shows the multiplicity of its use; it is so powerful that it is able to occupy emotions unbeknownst to the world. Hurston takes this knowledge and, in the instance of the Polk County dance, tries to use it to her advantage.

Pitts goes on to say that all the men want to talk to her, but don't know how to– that they're all too "thin-brainded" (64). He goes on to say that he's not like the other men; he would

fix her breakfast and treat her nicely. Although this is seemingly useless banter, it is a conversation which Hurston must take part of, not only because it pertains to her, but because it's her chance to become part of the inside. Further down in this exchange, Pitts asks: "'Now you ast me somethin' and see how Ah'll answer yuh'", and Hurston responds: "'Mr. Pitts are you havin' a good time?' and then, "(In prime falsetto), 'Yes Ma'am. See, dat's de way tuh talk tuh you'" (64). As soon Pitts responds, Hurston writes that "I laughed and the crowd laughed and Pitts laughed. Very successful woofing" (64). She continues on that "My laughing acceptance of Pitt's woofing had put everybody at his ease" (65). In other words, once Hurston laughs at Pitt's response, she is accepted into their circle. It is a response that brings the dance attendees and Hurston together. After this exchange, she further explains the new position she is in, saying that

> By the time that the song was over, before Joe Willard lifted me down from the table, I knew that I was in the inner circle. I had first to convince the "job" that I was not an e enemy in the person of the law; and, second, I had to prove that I was their kind. 'John Henry' got me over my second hurdle. (65)

In this way, laughter becomes the bridge between the outside and the inside. Once Hurston is able to demonstrate her ability to socialize, she is able to slowly retract from the initial lie– that she is collecting folklore, instead of being wanted in Miami for bootlegging. She is able to gain access to their lives and stories. It is also important to note that she refers to the people as the "job". Ultimately, it is Hurston's duty to examine and collect these folkloric stories through a scientific eye. No matter how friendly she is with them, no matter what extent she goes to in order to win their trust, the people involved are essentially only used for their knowledge. Much like how she states earlier about how "laughter and aimless talk was a window-dressing for my

benefit" (62), she uses these moments of banter as a way to advance her own anthropological agenda.

After she tells everyone she is there to collect folklore, Hurston states that "After that my car was everybody's car" (65), noting an interesting shift. In the beginning, when she arrives to Polk County, the car is an object that quickly solidifies her as an outsider. The car evokes status, and therefore, separateness. However, by the end, as she becomes more honest and open with her subjects, the car becomes an object that brings everyone together; it is no longer an object of alienation. Hurston, therefore, is effectively able to move into the inside.

One of Hurston's most profound moments in the book is the ending. In it, she recounts one last folkloric story– except it's peculiar in the fact that it is not formatically indented (as it is when she writes down collected folklore). Instead, the story she writes is formatted in a way which is separate from the rest of the folklore; it is formatted in such a way that prioritizes her own voice– her own narrative framing. The book ends with the following story:

> Once Sis Cat got hongry and caught herself a rat and set herself down to eat 'im. Rat tried and tried to git loose but Sis Cat was too fast and strong. So jus' as de cat started to eat 'im he says, "'Hol' on dere, Sis Cat! Ain't you got no manners atall? You going to s et up de table and eat 'thout washing yo' face and hands?"
>
> Sis Cat was mightly hongry but she hate for de rat to think she ain't got no manners, so she went to de water and washed her face and hands and when she got back de rat was gone.
>
> So de cat caught herself a rat again and set down to eat. So de Rat said "Where's yo' manners at, Sis Cat? You going to eat 'thout washing yo' face and hands?"
>
> "Oh, Ah got plenty manners," de cat told 'im. "But Ah eats mah dinner and washes mah face and uses mah manners afterwards." So she et right on 'im and washed her face and hands. And cat's been washin' after eatin' ever since.
>
> I'm sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin' my manners.

Within this story, there is an inexplicable power dynamic. It is the typical story of cat and mouse: the cat, who is bigger, spends its time chasing around the mouse in order to kill it. The killing of it is a victorious win for the cat, but the mouse is constantly trying to thwart the process– so it can, after all, *live*. In this story, however, once Sis Cat catches the rat in order to eat it, the rat is responsive. The rat asks if the cat will wash her hands before she eats him– an odd thing to bring up. It is the perfect distraction. There are hurdles the cat must jump over so she can eat him. The cat is ultimately complying, and in doing so ends up losing the first rat. By the time the second rat comes around, Sis Cat is more sure of herself; she has taken ownership of her life and she sets the parameters. This time, when the second rat asks her if she will wash her hands before eating, she responds with "'Ah eats mah dinner and washes mah face and uses mah manners afterwards'" (245). In other words, first she will get what she wants, and then she will clean up and be polite.

The novel and the story both end with Hurston's last line: "I'm sitting here like Sis Cat, washing my face and usin' my manners" (246). In the last sentence, Hurston confesses that she herself is the cat. As the cat, she has to act quickly and think on her feet. It the perfect metaphor. She is the person who has to sweet-talk in order to get the prey (the folklore). This very moment is reminiscent of how, in Polk County, she tells everyone that she is wanted for bootlegging, and then as she gets to know them, slowly reveals that she is there to collect folklore. Like the cat, Hurston decides to "eat" the rat (collect folklore) and then use her manners (actually tell the community why she is there). Hurston, overall, metaphorically embodies the cat. Sweet on the inside with an ulterior motive, using language in a way to persuade or manipulate, and using her manners all the while.

In Hurston's autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), notably published almost after a decade after *Mules and Men*, Hurston has a chapter entitled "Research," where she speaks about the anthropological work she has done. In it, she offers insight into her anthropological endeavors. In some way, it explains the choices that Hurston made in her pursuit of folklore, especially when considering the ethics of that pursuit. Hurston states that "Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose" (127). It is interesting to note the word "formalized." There is a sense that nothing is truly arbitrary– even if Hurston makes it appear that way. It is Hurston's greatest trick: is able to manipulate this autoethnographic work in such a way that makes it appear effortless and holistic. Her pursuit is justified because her curiosity is safe under the umbrella of anthropology– and she knows this.

Hurston goes on to say that "My search for knowledge of things took me to many strange places and adventures. My life was in danger several times" (128). In trying to understand what Hurston was trying to achieve with her folklore, I do not believe it is my place to state whether or not the situations she ends up in are ethical or not. I think her experiences is one that is profoundly personal, something that *Mules and Men* cannot entirely capture. Simply put, I trust Hurston. I believe she understood the circumstances, and did what she had to do to collect the stories she wanted to collect. Through the use of laughter, she was able to capitalize on social circumstances, effectively allowing her fulfill the task.

That said, her anthropological pursuits were no easy task. Hurston says that " If I had not learned how to take care of myself in these circumstances, I could have been maimed or killed on most any day of the several years of my research work" (128-129), which only adds to the difficulty of the research. In maneuvering through social situations, Hurston writes that "Some

little word, look or gesture can move them either to love or to sticking a knife between your ribs. You just have to sense the delicate balance to maintain it" (128). Hurston is incredibly aware of the dangers of probing; she is aware that she has to balance being friendly with an inevitable performance– and this is the greatest success of the work.

Overall, Hurston is able to reflect on her experience, and does not hold back on the danger of her work. Understanding her experience only adds to the powerful nature of collecting folklore; these are stories that Hurston had to work for in order to access, sometimes putting her life in grave danger. However she is able to use her knowledge as a writer and anthropologist in such a way that creates a work of brilliance. By piecing together black folkloric tradition and inserting herself in the narrative, she is able to undertake the role of an ethnographer, where she is able to wear the "spy-glass of anthropology" (1), uncovering folklore and preserving these stories. Hurston uses this "spy-glass" as a way to make microscopic observations in the communities she looks in, and uses anthropology as a way to justify her findings.

Conclusion on Images

I chose to include art pieces in front of each chapter because they seem, to me, ulterior ways to understand and reimagine history. The two paintings for instance, included on page 9 and page 27 reflect a response to historical events at the time, and the photograph on page 48 demonstrates how photographic setting and framing are crucial. Each art piece is also personally meaningful to me, as I was lucky enough to have seen them all in person (except the piece by Roy DeCarava– which I will discuss below). Nonetheless, the paintings and photograph stand as a way to mirror the themes I have explored in each chapter, and because of this, were essential to include.

For *The Country Of the Pointed Firs*, I chose to Rockwell Kent's painting, *Wreck of the D.T. Sheridan*, which was painted 1949. I saw this painting for the first time at the Portland Museum of Art (PMA), when I was visiting my friend in Portland, Maine last August. The painting is Kent's interpretation of the actual shipwreck of the *D.T. Sheridan*, which occurred in 1948 on Monhegan Island, Maine. In regards to the painting, Curator Diana Greenwold of PMA says that "there was a huge wave and a terrible storm that wrecked this ship onto the shore. But, what we're seeing here is a very calm seemingly pristine kind of aftermath." It is precisely this contrast that gives the painting a sense of allure; despite the shipwreck, seagulls are happily flying around, with complete disregard for the ruined ship. The painting and the novel, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*– which also takes place in Maine– both highlight the past and the present. The ship itself is left to decay on the rocks, which can be compared to Captain Littlepage aging. When he tells the narrator about the shipwreck he was in, he narrator seems disinterested, and in this moment she is like the seagull. Although she is in the presence of Captain Littlepage's

historical retelling, she is also oblivious to it; she is not directly associated with the shipwreck, but hears of its aftermath.

In my second chapter I chose Jules Adolphe Breton's painting, *The Song of the Lark*, which was painted in 1884. I first saw this painting at the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) a couple years ago– around 2017. Making my through the gallery, I caught sight of this painting and stood there completely mesmerized– particularly by the bright sun, which in real life, appears to be neon. In front of the sun is a woman working on a farm, with (to me) a look of exhaustion and also optimism. When picking an art piece for this chapter, this was the first and only thing I thought of. I immediately took to my phone to find the photo, and when I found it, typed in the name of the painting into Google. Two things came up: the first was the painting, *The Song of the Lark*, and the second was *The Song of the Lark*, a novel by Willa Cather– a novel that I had no prior knowledge that Cather wrote. I was completely shocked (and also in awe) that Cather must have also felt moved by the painting, and inspired enough to use the title for one of her novels. I couldn't help but feel that the painting somehow connected us.

According to an audio-recording on AIC's website, the painting was made "at a time when French peasants were deserting the countryside to work in urban centers and mechanized equipment was replacing the simple farming implements of old." Much like the Gilded Age of America, which was occurring around the same time as the painting, industrialization created a newfound way of life, with the urban challenging the rural. Additionally, the "painting is a nostalgic nod toward a vanishing past," which is also what occurs in My Antonia. As Jim recalls his childhood while living in urbanized New York City, his memory brings him back to Antonia. He tries to capture this ephemeral time, not realizing its importance until it is gone.

Last semester I was in a history of photography class taught by Laurie Dahlberg. Upon the numerous photographers we looked at, one of them was renowned Harlem photographer, Roy DeCarava, whose work I had the pleasure of viewing at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Although I didn't see his photo, *Graduation*, live, I still felt as though it depicted themes central to Hurston's *Mules and Men*. Including a photograph for this chapter, instead of a painting, was also intentional; photographs are often deemed as "real" because they are not painted, but this is not necessarily the case. There still is– and especially in DeCarava's piece– a calculated way to frame the photo in conjunction with the light and shadows. In the photograph, DeCarava shot a photo of a woman in a beautiful dress, while situated in a dilapidated setting. There is a Chevrolet advertisement hidden in the shadow toward the upper right– which seems unattainable amongst all the trash on the ground. The woman, on the other hand, is illuminated and is almost able to stand apart from the setting, but she is inextricably tied to it. This photograph and *Mules and Men* interact in an important way; how does one blend in– or not? To me, this photograph reflects Hurston's immersion into Polk County, Florida. She must be able to control how her academic and affluent self is perceived because she has a degree, and incidentally, owns a Chevrolet. Because of this, she has to learn how to blend in when venturing into isolated, vulnerable communities to collect folklore. DeCarava's photograph mirrors a scene in *Mules and Men*, where wearing an expensive dress disadvantages Hurston in probing into a community dance. In this moment, Hurston, much like the woman in the dress photographed, is disconnected from the landscape through dress.

With the three texts I have written about, and the art pieces that correspond, I hope to have depicted the ever-changing relationship between landscape and people. I believe there is

some truth to the aphorism, “art imitates life.” Art is the one way in which the past is remembered, no matter the medium. It reminds me of the last line in the *The Great Gatsby:* “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” (189). It melancholically suggests that even in the effort to live in the present, it is ultimately impossible to do so. The boat proposes an attempt to go forward, but it is “against the current,” and therefore not going forward at all. My senior project, then, stands as a way to reconstruct the past– to understand the intersection of landscape, nostalgia, and preservation, as depicted in the region– while unaware of already being in the middle of something great.

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