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TANGENTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE
MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM
AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IN THIS ISSUE...

Stories by Matt Moran, Oscar Firschein

Poems by Prabhu Palani, Cheryl Solis

Essays by Michael Breger, Alison Gray,
Gina Haney, Joan O'Neill



PUBLISHING NOTES

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VOLUME 18

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are pleased to present this issue of *Tangents*, the Journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For this the eighteenth volume, we have chosen a diverse group of works by students and alumni, including:

- ✦ two stories, one a new look at the Garden of Eden portion of *Paradise Lost*, and the other about an unexpected visit from a “rat man” who surprises the author with a parallel life as a Talmudic scholar.
- ✦ two poems (*Solstice* and *The Roadrunner*)
- ✦ two essays exploring interpretations and social and philosophical implications of paintings (Winslow Homer’s *A Visit from the Old Mistress* and Kazimir Malevich’s *Cow and Violin*)
- ✦ an essay exploring the influence of the Picturesque Movement in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.
- ✦ an essay discussing the inversion of epiphany in Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “The Displaced Person.”



Be sure to learn about this issue’s contributors, highlighted on the last page.

We hope that our choices will provide enjoyable reading—and inspire future contributions.

This is our first year of service as editors for *Tangents*, and we welcome feedback.

The continuing generosity of alumni and supporters of the MLA program makes our annual publication possible. Thank you!

Candy Carter, editor

Teri Hessel, associate editor

Jennifer Swanton Brown, associate editor (poetry)

BLACK LIVES AS SUBJECT MATTER: WINSLOW HOMER'S *A VISIT* *FROM THE OLD MISTRESS*

by Joan O'Neill



Title: *A Visit from the old Mistress*. Artist: Winslow Homer, 1876

Art reveals whose lives matter in a society. During the Civil War and Reconstruction period, American artists routinely illustrated the experiences of men, Union and Confederate, white and occasionally black. Though the Civil War redefined the status of African American citizens, few nineteenth-century artists or photographers even recorded the existence of African American women. Black or female Americans were seldom able to become fine artists themselves, and those who did rarely selected black or female figures as their subject matter. (The African American sculptors Edmonia Lewis and Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller were

exceptions to this rule, as was the activist, Sojourner Truth, who copyrighted her popular image.) Because of paintings such as *The Bright Side* (1865, de Young Museum) and *The Cotton Pickers* (1876), the iconic American painter and illustrator Winslow Homer thus came to be regarded as “a pioneer in the genre of...Negro life” (Calo, 6). My essay explores Homer’s representation of African American women in his 1876 genre painting, *A Visit from the Old Mistress*, and its implication that these women’s lives mattered enough to be the subject of a painting in the decade after the Civil War.

THE PAINTING'S QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU HERE?

Homer painted *A Visit from the Old Mistress* in oils, composing five figures on an 18 x 24 inch (45.7 x 61.0 centimeter) canvas. His design shows three black women in the interior of a wooden cabin, across from one white woman. One of the black women holds a child on her hip; another remains seated, wearily or warily, her body curled in upon itself and her head resting on upturned fingers. All of the black figures stare in the direction of their pale, elegant visitor. The black and white adult figures occupy the same pictorial plane and are equivalent in size. Together, the figures nearly fill the canvas, which is lit by a fire outside the frame to the left, hinting at the small size of the sparsely furnished cabin.

The central tension of the painting occurs in the confrontation between the black matriarchal figure, presumably a former slave, and the "Old Mistress." Homer limns this tension through the black woman's massive form and frontal pose, squared off against the white woman's rigid, thin-shouldered, side profile. The matriarch's torn red and blue cotton shift presents a stark contrast to the draped black material and lacy white fichu of the white woman's dress. Her rounded shoulders are sloped, but her body is firmly planted. Turning her head slightly to face her visitor, the black matriarch appears solid and columnar, an impression enhanced by the vertical lines of her strong arms and downturned fingers and by the fluting of her white apron. The punctum of Homer's painting is, for me, the matriarch's brilliant right eye, glittering like a sharpshooter's and concentrating the opposition between her steely gaze and set mouth and the white woman's curiously vacant gaze and slightly pinched smile. The viewer's eye is also drawn to the brightly lit open space between the two women, an area defined by the black woman's deep shadow against the plank door. The saturated color of her shadow emphasizes the solidity of the matriarch's figure. In contrast, the Old Mistress' shadow seems to waver in the firelight and her figure, with its soft dark skirt above dark shoes, seems to float. Despite the languid pose of the seated figure, it is difficult to tell if she and the other black women have chosen to cluster near the hearth or if the rarified alien in their midst has them cornered. The central figures could easily touch one another's hands, but do not. Homer's composition implies a vast emotional chasm, a yawning lack of understanding accentuated by

the sharp angles of the doorframe, one bar of which seems aimed at the white woman like a crossbow.

THE PUNCTUM OF HOMER'S PAINTING IS, FOR ME, THE MATRIARCH'S BRILLIANT RIGHT EYE, GLITTERING LIKE A SHARPSHOOTER'S AND CONCENTRATING THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN HER STEELY GAZE AND SET MOUTH AND THE WHITE WOMAN'S CURIOUSLY VACANT GAZE AND SLIGHTLY PINCHED SMILE.



The black women's unspoken question, "Why are you here?" hangs in the air of the composition, behind the matriarch's determined stare and the seated girl's distant gaze. Homer's viewer, positioned with him across the room, can conjure only an echoic silence, and the sense that neither the white visitor with her gold wedding ring and silken reticule nor the emancipated black women in motley homespun have anything meaningful to say to each other. The four adults have their lips pressed shut; only the young toddler has her lips slightly parted.

Intriguingly, the composition of *A Visit from the Old Mistress* traces one of Homer's better-known paintings of the Civil War, *Prisoners from the Front* (1866), in which three Confederate soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder facing a Union officer shown in profile. Homer's ability to render the white male soldiers "simultaneously as individuals and as representatives of northern and southern characteristics" (Conrads, *Critics* 9) attracted approving critical notice in 1866; his willingness to paint such a raw confrontation featuring individuated black women in 1876 proved more problematic.

Only in the twentieth century could an art critic observe, “Homer’s unprecedented play of gestures, expressions, and juxtapositions join forces to relay successfully the awkwardness, tension, and the underlying volatility between the ‘old’ mistress and her former slaves” (Dalton, 11). The passage of time makes it easier to acknowledge that the figures in *A Visit from the Old Mistress* are contained but not united in their frame. Like the subjects struggling to know what to say or do next in Homer’s painting, America in the 1870s was inextricably bound up in the political and economic failures of Reconstruction.

That national failure makes it all the more remarkable that Homer chose to portray three dignified, differentiated black women in 1876. The depiction of women in *A Visit from the Old Mistress* deliberately thwarts late nineteenth-century motifs of domestic virtue and faithful slaves in multiple ways, beginning with the subject matter of a mammy standing her ground. The expressions of Homer’s black figures describe emotions and an interiority that the white woman’s lacks. Distinct facial features and a range of warm colors animate the black women’s portraits. Their figures occupy four-fifths of the canvas and they are presented as individuals, from the compressed jaw of the matriarch to the questioning look of the lighter-skinned mother and from the pensive young woman to the alert toddler twisting around in her white bonnet and patent leather shoes.

BLACK WOMEN DURING RECONSTRUCTION: WHAT HOMER SAW HIDDEN IN PLAIN VIEW

Homer’s perspective in *A Visit from the Old Mistress* situates him just across the small cabin from his subjects, leading the viewer to wonder how physically and politically close Homer came to African Americans during the War and Reconstruction. Though he was lauded for the speed of his sketching from life, Homer also routinely reworked his sketches into oils in his studio. Whether to answer the artistic challenge of representing a black person, especially a black woman, as seriously and with as much complexity as a white male figure, or in reaction to the mythologizing of the South after the Civil War, Homer produced ten oils, five watercolors, and one pencil sketch of black Americans in the 1870s. Throughout his entire oeuvre, Homer’s strongest works often foreground marginalized figures, including children, farm hands, sailors, women and

black Americans.

Though he was not particularly political and did not enlist in the Union army, Homer had grown up in and around the abolitionist hotbed of Boston. For a time, his family attended services with renowned evangelical Reverend Lyman Beecher, and historians believe that his mother named him after another popular minister, Hubbard Winslow (Dalton, 17). A precocious artist but an indifferent student, Homer experienced his apprenticeship with a lithographic firm as a “form of bondage he vowed never to repeat” (Dalton, 16). Joining the fledgling *Harper’s Weekly* “put him in contact with illustrators [including Thomas Nast] who were perfecting a form of acute, often veiled, visual commentary that led to modern political cartooning” (Wood, 18). In October 1861, six months after the start of the Civil War, the twenty-five year old Homer was sent to Virginia to cover the fighting, an experience that honed his observational skills of soldiers white and black.

Unlike the few other artists painting African Americans at the time, Homer did not treat his black subjects merely as stock exotic figures. He depicted a range of experience in their lives, displaying a “willingness to picture subjects that few of his contemporaries would have treated owing to their disturbing content or lowbrow associations” (Griffin, 217). Throughout the 1870s, Homer made repeated trips to Petersburg, Virginia, a place where he spent the final sieges of the Civil War, perhaps still troubled by his own earlier illustrations of the war. He painted black Americans in outdoor settings, as well as *A Visit from the Old Mistress* and *Sunday Morning in Virginia* (1877), interior paintings sometimes seen as companion pieces. In contrast to the combative mood of *A Visit*, *Sunday Morning* depicts African Americans

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quietly engaged in domestic pursuits of reading the Bible and sitting by the hearth on the Sabbath.

Always in pursuit of the telling moment in his subject matter, Homer managed to offend both white and black Virginians during his second stay near Petersburg. He wrote of being confronted by several white men and derided as a “damned [Negro]-painter” (Griffin, 91), and replied to questions as to why he did not paint Southern belles, that the black women were prettier (Morgan). African American residents of Petersburg objected to his portrayal of black subjects in drab colors and torn clothes.

A modern viewer might look at *A Visit from the Old Mistress* and see a moral as well as a literal light shining on the former slaves, and thereby miss the halting truths of past experience and the brush marks of Homer’s unresolved tension. Homer’s contemporaries were not at all convinced of the worth of his African American subjects, especially of black women, and Homer’s own sympathies only developed over time. When *The Bright Side* was displayed in New York in April 1865, African Americans were not even allowed to enter the galleries of the National Academy of Design (Dalton, 7). Following the exhibit of *A Visit from the Old Mistress* at the same gallery in 1880, critics praised Homer’s remarkable rendering of character by noting “the dim and vague look of the Negroes. Three coloured girls, fat, shapeless and stupid [appear] half-pleased and half-stupid [with] black, expressionless eyes, watery and blank as seals” (Calo, 26). One influential critic lauded Homer for his “[d]irect, bold look into the face of things” but disparaged his choice of Negroes as subjects for art, even for genre painting (Conrad, *Stories* 15).

Homer’s gaze was both bold and timid: he did not ever depict the lives of black Americans living in the North, with whom he might more easily have been in contact. Though the portraits of black women in *A Visit from the Old Mistress* are empathetic and central to the composition, Homer did not title the 1876 painting, *At Home with the Emancipated*. While the figure of the Old Mistress is almost wraithlike, in her nearly-limbless shroud of a dress, she stands independent of the other figures, perhaps revealing an autonomy that black Americans in Reconstruction lacked. Homer’s mixed rhetoric may simply reflect the need of a working artist to sell paintings. At a time when Northerners as well as Southerners still hesitated to believe that “darkies” were biologically equal to European Americans and to acknowledge

- let alone effectively address - the terrible injustices faced by black Americans, how much could Homer afford to subvert traditional hierarchies in *A Visit from the Old Mistress*?

HOMER’S GAZE WAS BOTH BOLD AND TIMID: HE DID NOT EVER DEPICT THE LIVES OF BLACK AMERICANS LIVING IN THE NORTH, WITH WHOM HE MIGHT MORE EASILY HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT.



Throughout his career, Homer incorporated and inverted stock characters to great effect, as when women of leisure tower over their male counterpart in *Croquet Scene* (1866) or when boys careen into the unknown future of the post-Civil War era in *Snap the Whip* (1872). Homer’s imagery and title for *A Visit from the Old Mistress* reverse the convention of antebellum slaves deferentially approaching the white owners’ “Big House.” This reading is strengthened by the recent discovery that Homer painted out the Old Mistress’ right hand. That hand held a red rose close to her chest, perhaps as a posy to mask smells but perhaps as a gift. Homer intentionally sets his composition in a home that might have belonged to a black family. He depicts black women caring for their own children, even as the status of domestic labor was becoming fraught in the North and the South and as newspapers ran sentimental stories of warm relations between former slaves and owners. Besides recycling the composition from *Prisoners from the Front*, Homer’s composition may be intended to upend Hammatt Billings’ popular contemporary illustration from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1853). By “[m]apping distinctions in physiques - mistress aloof, ex-slaves slumped; dress - hers fine, theirs ragged; and site - the same old cabin, *A Visit from the Old Mistress* fixed in place a lateral hierarchy” (Morgan). Reading *A Visit from the Old Mistress* in the subversive tradition

of genre painting, the black women appear upright and dignified before the ghost of the Confederacy, the Old Mistress.



Title: Illustration from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
Artist: Hammat Billings, 1853

WHY HOMER'S PAINTING STILL MATTERS

Black figures had appeared only occasionally in antebellum genre painting, and rarely as the central subject matter. Black men were typically portrayed as subsidiary or indolent in these paintings, whether seated on the porch as in Richard Caton Woodville's *War News from Mexico* (1848) or comically obtuse, as in William Sidney Mount's *Farmers Nooning* (1836). Text and photography seemed better suited for documenting the actual horrors of slavery. Yet because they depicted black individuals as anonymous and passive, even such sympathetic representations as a well-known Wedgwood medallion - depicting a black slave and the inscription "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" - were problematic. As the century progressed, there were fewer overt cartoons featuring minstrel black figures, since, rather than illustrating the experiences of black Americans, artists simply stopped depicting them. Occasionally painters such as Eastman Johnson in *Negro Life in the South* (1859) opted for "narrative opacity...whose political meanings could be construed variously and which would be suitable for display in domestic interiors" (Gallati, 68). This at least was better than the fantasy of Ol' Dixie and happy enslaved persons that was fostered after the war via sentimental plays, rhapsodic songs, and all manners of prints.

Homer's painting takes on the dominant image of black women during the nineteenth century: the

selfless black mammy, who dedicated herself to the care of a white family. Few others challenged this stereotype until long after Reconstruction. With images such as his dignified black matriarch, Homer's paintings were not easy reads for his contemporaries in the 1870s. Whom did Homer envision as his audience for *A Visit from the Old Mistress*? For the most part, we do not know who purchased Homer's work from the 1860s and 1870s, though there could not have been many black patrons. *A Visit from the Old Mistress* was exhibited in Europe and northern America throughout the decade but not purchased until 1892 by Thomas B. Clark, a noted collector of American art and patron of Winslow Homer. The painting was donated to the Smithsonian by William T. Evans in 1909.

One critic reviewing the 1876 exhibition of Homer's works suggested that the difficult truths of the Civil War and Reconciliation were perhaps better told by the artist than the historian (Conrads, Critics 117). Yet even most genre painting stopped its rare attempts to represent the lives of black women by the end of the nineteenth century. *A Visit from the Old Mistress* reveals that Winslow Homer thought that the lives of black women mattered in antebellum America; the painting still challenges us to share in the intensity of Homer's gaze.

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THE RAT MAN: A MEMOIR

by Oscar Firschein

Living in the woods as I do, my house became invaded by large rats. The rats were everywhere! I used to set traps over the years to catch and kill the cat-sized buggers. But finally I just let them be. It was becoming too difficult for me to slither through the crawl spaces underneath the house to set the traps. If the rats left me alone, I would leave them alone.

The rats celebrated my withdrawal from the battlefield by further whooping it up under the house. All night I would hear them scratching and biting and clawing as they constructed more and more nests to accommodate their increasing brood.

Finally I decided to get a professional in on the problem and the Rat Man showed up, a sort of scroungy need-a-shave type that I would definitely not like to meet in a dark alley in a major city. He was dressed in worn overalls, appropriate for his crawling through any subterranean tunnels below.

He had observed the *mezuzah*, a small encased parchment inscribed with Hebrew verses from the Bible traditionally affixed to the doorpost outside, and he asked with hesitation if I had ever studied the Talmud. It turned out that he was a Moroccan Israeli Jew, an ardent student of these vast volumes of commentary on ancient Jewish law written in Babylonia about 1500 years ago.

When he determined that I had some familiarity with the Talmud, the Rat Man could not contain his enthusiasm. He started expounding about the volume called *Tractate Taanith* that he was currently studying. *Taanith* is devoted chiefly to the fast-days and their practices and prayers. While not

HE IMMEDIATELY REMOVED HIS WORKMAN'S
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GET TO THE ACTUAL RAT PROBLEM.

exactly my cup of tea, the Rat Man's excitement was becoming contagious.

His phone kept ringing, with his business office calling him, and he explained to his supervisor that he was still busy with a customer. So the hours flew by as he regaled me with the splendors of *Taanith*. Finally he realized that it was late Friday and getting close to the Sabbath. He immediately removed his workman's cap, reverently replacing it with a small skullcap from his pocket, just like Superman changing into costume. I wondered when the Rat Man would finally get to the actual rat problem.

"Good *shabbos*," he said, as he was leaving. "I will bring my Talmud next week, and before I start on the work we will first have a study session."

Sure enough, on Monday he showed up again, and this time carrying his heavy volume of the Talmud. It was marked up in a color code of his own devising that let him track the arguments of the various ancient sages.

"Now we study," he said, and led me through a whirlwind tour of *Taanith*. I tried to follow haltingly along with my iPad English edition, as the Rat Man raced through the intricacies of the rabbinic arguments.

He finally stopped.

"What a wonderful way to start a day!" he exclaimed joyfully.

Then he put away his Talmud, took off his skullcap, and again donned his workman's hat.

He once more became the Rat Man.

**"NOW WE STUDY,"
HE SAID, AND LED
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THE ROADRUNNER

by Cheryl Solis

He stands stock still, sentry of the road peering, alert for enemies.
His upright crest sways slightly in the breeze like the horsehair plumes
of wandering Achaeans, warriors on the windy plains of Troy.
His black helmet pinpricked with stars and his eyes daubed
the pale blue of the summer sky and red ocher, emblem of Ares.

His white speckled cloak made of mottled feathers,
His tail pointed like a spear, stands upright waiting for the signal
To run, to bring the news of danger or victory,
our marathon bird of dry South Texas brush and open fields.

I lie still under the pecan trees, the oaks, in the feathery grass
Near eye level with the road, I watch the Homeric drama in the undergrowth.
My Greek warrior roadrunner, the prating mockingbird our own myth of Echo,
And that strange dry-skinned Medusa of our land, the Horned Toad.
In the hot quiet air, gorgon-faced cicadas chirr an endless Siren call,
This unceasing noise will drive us all to madness by summer's end.

The bells of the Concepcion, San Juan, and Espada Missions clang in the air
Bronze tongues calling us to libation, ritual, and exhortation.
But not for me, yet, the young desert prophet, Rabbi of love and mercy.
Though I have sat in the wood pews and listened to far away words,
They are unfamiliar to me, strange and solemn, too distant to touch me.

I go home to the clash and quarrel of Olympians, the intemperate anger of Ares.
He smokes Kent cigarettes in the kitchen and argues about oysters or gods.
Aphrodite washes dishes, her eyes snapping with anger and allure.
For me these gods are real and I live in the realm of their myths,
Lost in the shadow song of their endless strife.

The Roadrunner speeds away churning spurts of dust that climb the staircase of air.
Hail little warrior, I whisper to the vanished Roadrunner,
You speed my truth and if I am lost, you will lead me home.

“... MY FIRST SEEING HIS BEAUTIFUL GROUNDS AT PEMBERLEY”: THE INFLUENCE OF THE PICTURESQUE MOVEMENT IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

by Gina Haney

Principles of the Picturesque Movement play a significant role in shaping the characters in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Based on design theories brought forth by William Gilpin and illuminated by Uvedale Price, the Picturesque Movement greatly influenced Austen’s settings and values embodied by the people she portrays. Austen’s careful descriptions of the motions through—and views of—nineteenth-century English landscapes provide a deeper understanding of two primary figures, Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, and the changes in their relationship over time and through space. Often read as a romantic novel based on conservative notions of social status, Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* relies upon tenets of the Picturesque Movement to invoke liberal views of society and the politics of the age.

Austen lived and wrote during one of the most significant phases of architectural and landscape design in Britain. As Georgian country houses became fashionable among landed gentry, publications outlining how to shape the land grew in popularity. Writers such as William Gilpin and Uvedale Price described this period of time as the Picturesque Movement. They understood the

landscape as liberating and embodying a self that would be free from artificial constraints.

First attributed to Gilpin, the Picturesque Movement applied concepts—previously used to observe and critique painting—to a way of viewing and shaping the English landscape. Price advanced such theories of the movement ascribed to Gilpin, writing specifically about man-made, naturalistic landscapes in rural England as venues for stimulating societal change. Familiar with these ideas and publications, Jane Austen relied on elements of the Picturesque in many of her works.

A schoolmaster and vicar in rural England, William Gilpin (1724-1804) published his writings from Hampshire and was known to the Austen family, who also lived there. Jane’s brother, Henry Austen, remembered her as a “. . . warm and judicious admirer of landscape, both in nature and canvas.”ⁱ Henry also recalled, “. . . she was enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque; and she seldom changed her opinions either on books or men.”ⁱⁱ

Released years prior to *Pride and Prejudice*, Gilpin’s *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the year 1772, On Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland*





and Westmoreland had a lasting impact on Austen. At that time, the war with France forced those likely to begin the “Grand Tour” or similar elaborate trips outside of the country to remain at home and participate in domestic tourism instead. Improved roads combined with the popularity of Gilpin’s work (the first edition of *Lakes Tour* sold out within a few days) led to the creation of inns, taverns, and other facilities accommodating visitors.ⁱⁱⁱ In his observations, Gilpin includes a detailed description of a tour through Derbyshire. Unlike the “Grand Tour,” visits to the Lakes District and other natural destinations were affordable and attractive to the middle class. Consumed by the general literate public, Gilpin’s work made certain all tourists had the proper aesthetic training to respond to natural beauty. As a result, such tours, driven by the appreciation of the artistic, challenged notions of the social hierarchy by bringing together members of disparate classes, as well as reflected societal shifts in Britain at this time.^{iv}

Gilpin believed that the organization and representation of landscape could be associated with the improvement of self. His successors, Uvedale Price and Humphry Repton, translated this association in varying ways. Elaborating on

Gilpin’s ideas of personifying space, Price connected the Picturesque with more progressive ideas, maintaining that the movement catalyzed broad political shifts. In this respect, Price was deemed a “preserver.” Alternatively, Repton was considered an “improver” and worked in a more conservative manner supporting the status quo. Much of his work consisted of creating watercolors and designs for wealthy patrons and continuing the fashion of heavily architected estate gardens.

Uvedale Price (1747-1829) was unequivocal on the association between the picturesque landscape and human feeling. In this respect, Price furthered Gilpin’s line of thinking, associating designed rural scenery with significant societal revision, even political independence. In other words, Price saw the Picturesque as a disruptor, challenging conformity and testing the ability to know and predict. While primary sources do not connect Austen with Price, many twentieth-century critics consider Austen an admirer of the Herefordshire landowner, and a biography of Price suggests that her sympathies with the Picturesque clearly align with him and the values of the “preservers.”^v Price connects the picturesque with political independence and change, implicating

the “improver” as a conservative element holding back liberty:

... it seems as if the improver said, ‘You shall never wander from my walks; never exercise your own taste and judgement, never for your own compositions: neither your eyes nor your feet shall be allowed to stray from the boundaries I have traced:’ a species of thralldom unfit for a free country.^{vi}

An enlightened patriot, Price believed that the landscapes of the “improvers” were unfit, even stifling, for England as it began the nineteenth century. He writes, “My love for my country, is, I trust, not less ardent than theirs, but it has taken a different turn; and I feel anxious to free it from the disgrace of propagating a system, which, should it become universal, would disfigure the face of all Europe.”^{vii} In other words, the aesthetic beliefs of Price, articulated by his admiration for the irregular and abrupt, align with his political beliefs advocating revision — that without both the future of Europe is endangered.^{viii}

Jane Austen uses the ideas of Gilpin and Price to paint complex, evolving and unconventional portraits of both Elizabeth and Darcy throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. Jill Heydt-Stevenson, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, finds Austen “... lucidly informed about the picturesque controversies ... played out during her lifetime ... between the preservers and the improvers.”^{ix} This is made manifest in *Pride and Prejudice*, which favors the “preservers.”

Throughout the novel, Darcy is confounded by Elizabeth’s example of womanhood. He is attracted to her vitality yet taken aback by her boldness. Soon after Elizabeth and Darcy meet, Elizabeth travels on foot to visit her sister, who is ill. Her casual movements, through paddocks and fields, mimic her shift away from the delineated path of conformity, and allow her to assert her individual freedom, disrupt order in the Netherfield household, and attract Darcy’s attention. The independent move to walk three miles alone in bad weather “... was almost incredible to Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley,” prominent female figures at Netherfield.^x Speechless, Darcy “... was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion’s justifying her coming so far alone.”^{xi}

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Elizabeth makes her most direct reference to the Picturesque soon after her three-mile hike. Elizabeth’s commentary has both social and aesthetic implications and contains a not-so-indirect slight of Darcy and his companions. At Netherfield, Elizabeth finds herself on a stroll with Mrs. Hurst. As they cross paths with Darcy and Miss Bingley, Mrs. Hurst quickly leaves Elizabeth alone to walk beside the other party. This arrangement and the desertion of Elizabeth is “immediately” felt by Darcy who suggests they move to a wider avenue so as to accommodate another.^{xii} Amused by the action, Elizabeth replies, “No, no; stay where you are. —You are charmingly group’d, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good bye.”^{xiii} On the one hand, Elizabeth suggests that she has no interest of being included in this social group. On the other hand, she alludes to her knowledge of the popular prescriptive texts on the Picturesque Movement. While Gilpin’s text directly refers to the ideal grouping of cattle to obtain the most pleasing picture, Elizabeth applies this thought to the grouping of class, using it to quickly excuse herself.

Gilpin’s text on the Picturesque Movement, especially his suggested routes through Derbyshire, is closely followed by Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner (the

aunt and uncle of Elizabeth Bennet). Accompanied by the Gardiners, relations who had the education and disposable wealth to take such a trip, Elizabeth's excursion within Derbyshire exemplifies the domestic tourism encouraged by Gilpin. Finding themselves within miles of Darcy's estate, Pemberley, the Gardiners want to visit the place and encourage Elizabeth to join them. Elizabeth, "tired of great houses" and having "... no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains," has little interest in the excursion.^{xiv} Taken aback, Mrs. Gardiner retorts, "If it were merely a fine house richly furnished . . . I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country."^{xv} Mrs. Gardiner's memories of the fine woods and grounds override Elizabeth's hesitation; they decide to set off for Pemberley.

At Pemberley, Elizabeth is introduced to a true example of the Picturesque. As she moves through the grounds and the house, winding valleys and window-framed views of the estate reveal another facet of the owner himself. Darcy is shown not to be an "improver" ensconced in conservative thought and heavily architected estates but, rather, a "preserver" open to individual freedom and liberty as well as excited by the agency of the natural environment. These understandings move Elizabeth to consider her feelings for Darcy as love; it is the landscape that unlocks her emotion. Austen describes Elizabeth's approach to the estate:

... the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House . . . in front, a stream of some natural importance . . . , but without any artificial appearance. Its banks were neither formal, nor falsely adorned. Elizabeth was delighted. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste. . . . at that moment she felt, that to be the mistress of Pemberley might be something!^{xvi}

Pemberley is the ultimate example of the Picturesque, and the landscape, like Darcy, is considered to be "neither formal, nor falsely adorned" nor harbors the beliefs of an "improver."^{xvii} Through the landscape, Elizabeth is able to visualize a more sensible and less precious Darcy, a man she could consider worthy of marriage. In her eyes Darcy is proper caregiver to the land, taking time to both tweak natural beauty and elicit delight; he is

neither too fanciful nor too fine to be worthy of her admiration.

**IN HER EYES DARCY
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NATURAL BEAUTY
AND ELICIT DELIGHT;
HE IS NEITHER TOO
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HER ADMIRATION.**

As Elizabeth begins to publicly acknowledge her feelings for Darcy, she internally admits her wish to marry him. When her sister asks, "... how long have you loved him?" Elizabeth jokingly replies, "It has been coming on so gradually, that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley."^{xviii} The development of Elizabeth's character is conveyed by her response to Darcy's landscape as an embodiment of self. By connecting with the land, she connects with Darcy. By using principles of the Picturesque Movement, Austen personalizes place and allows it to convey a sense of freedom through physical, mental, and social action.

Elizabeth's walk to Netherfield and her initial slights of Darcy reinforce her independence, her democratic values—they are what draw Darcy to her. As Price viewed the Picturesque landscape as a disruptor, challenging the streamlined hedges and gardens of "improvers" such as Humphry Repton, and testing our ability to know and predict, Austen portrays Elizabeth as defying the social norm, and order, of her time. Jill Hedyt-Stevenson argues, "In Austen's novels arguments about the construction of national identity converge with arguments about the construction of womanhood and the construction of landscape."^{xix} In *Pride and Prejudice* feminine freedom is unencumbered from the heavily architected landscapes of the "improvers" and allowed to move unconstricted and with determination in the natural world of nineteenth-century England. This physical freedom is accompanied by mental freedom and the

self-determination to think and speak for one's self.

ELIZABETH'S WALK TO NETHERFIELD AND HER INITIAL SLIGHTS OF DARCY REINFORCE HER INDEPENDENCE, HER DEMOCRATIC VALUES—THEY ARE WHAT DRAW DARCY TO HER.

It isn't until Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley that she considers Darcy, through his landscape, as "neither formal nor false adorned" and worthy of her affection.^x Her physical freedom of movement through the land surrounding her, and her mental freedom allowing her to feel emotion for Darcy are demonstrative of an unrepressed and liberated Elizabeth. As Elizabeth's character develops, Darcy is also revealed to be a progressive thinker, open to social inclusion, and a man of morals.

Jane Austen effectively uses principles of the Picturesque Movement employed by William Gilpin and Uvedale Price to convey both her aesthetic and social values. Through precise character development, Austen cleverly creates a romance infused with progressive ideals that unfold in the natural, or Picturesque, world. *Pride and Prejudice* is a radical nineteenth-century novel conveying complex issues of feminism, revolution, social reform, and love in nineteenth-century England. As the paths of Elizabeth and Darcy cross, their affection grows and social boundaries as well as liberties are challenged. The power of the Picturesque is both inescapable and instrumental in creating this new world. In the words of Uvedale Price, the Picturesque "... insensibly wind[s] round the heart."^{xxi}

As a lens through which Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy are viewed, comprehension of the Picturesque Movement, and the role of the "preservers" and "improvers" within it, is key to understanding *Pride and Prejudice*. Through it, we see Elizabeth, Darcy, and their developing relationship and are allowed to grasp the progressive social and political ideals espoused by Jane Austen. Austen is clear about her allegiance to the ideals valued by the "preservers" and, thus, fills both Elizabeth and Darcy with movement and agency.

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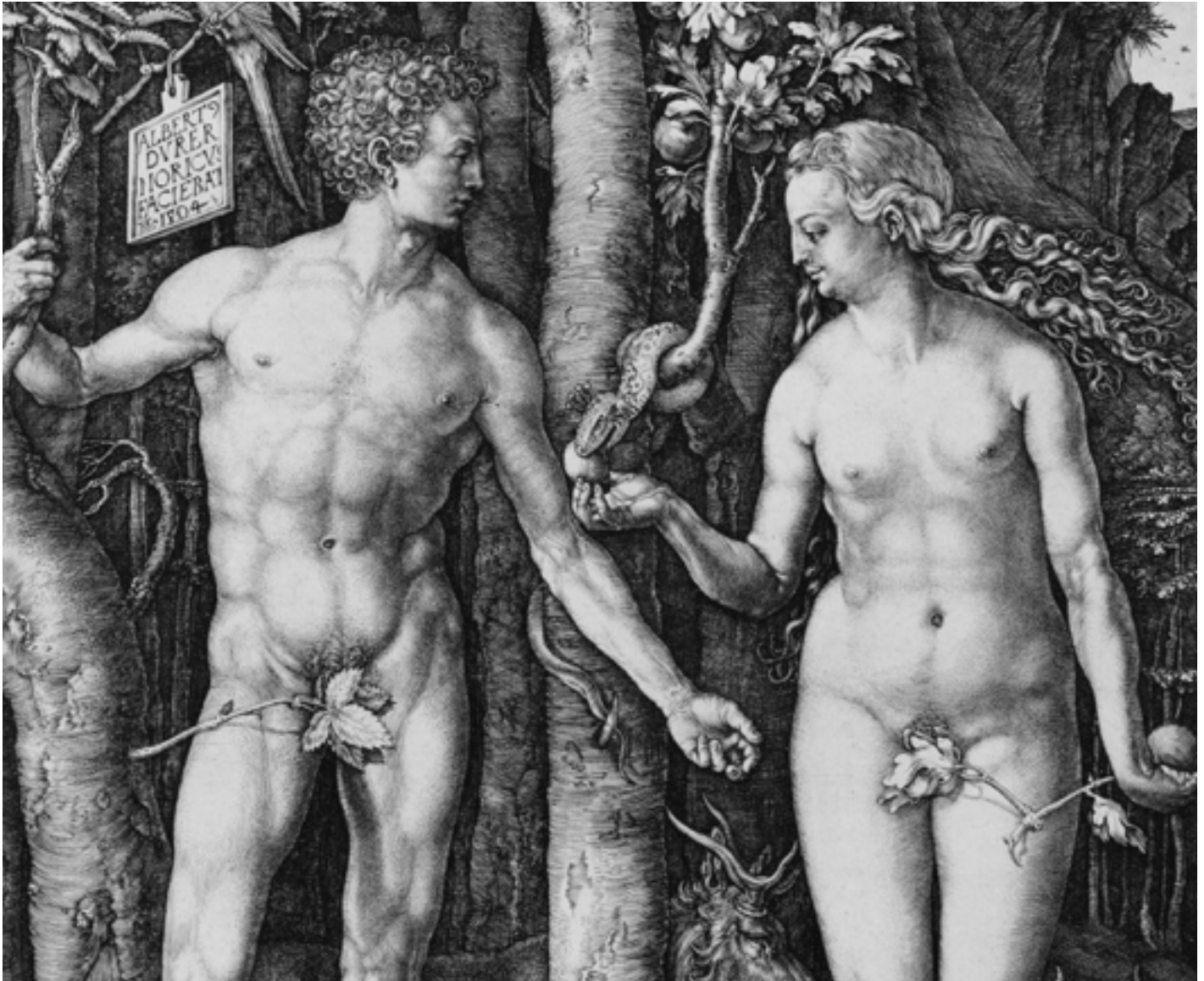
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ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Henry Austen, <http://www.austen.com/persuade/preface.htm>
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Batey, 52.
- ^{iv} Vuong, 23.
- ^v Watkins and Cowell, 198.
- ^{vi} Ibid, 338.
- ^{vii} Ibid, 331.
- ^{viii} Interestingly, Price also authored a political pamphlet advocating individual landowners taking up arms against the French. See Uvedale Price, *Thoughts on the Defence of Property*. Addressed to the County of Hereford, 1797.
- ^{ix} Heydt-Stevenson, 262.
- ^x Jane Austen, 33.
- ^{xi} Ibid.
- ^{xii} Ibid, 52.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.
- ^{xiv} Ibid, 232.
- ^{xv} Ibid.
- ^{xvi} Ibid, 235.
- ^{xvii} Ibid.
- ^{xviii} Ibid, 353.
- ^{xix} Heydt-Stevenson, 261.
- ^{xx} Austen, 238.
- ^{xxi} Price, 342.

OF MAN'S FIRST OBEDIENCE

by Matt Moran



Title: *Adam and Eve*. Artist: Albrecht Dürer, 1504.

Using Milton's language to subvert many of his intentions, this story reworks the temptation of Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* by making a statement about human sexuality and religiously instituted marriage and recasting Satan in the spirit of the modern anti-natalist philosopher David Benatar.

Adam exhaled. His breath came in fits and starts, sweat covering his back. His eyes came back into

focus. With a soft, fierce expression, he gazed upon his lover's sweet grace. "Praise the maker omnipotent, for never has there been a being more favored than I, who gets to behold a creature so elegant and pure." Beneath Adam's weight was the most precious creature he knew, a puzzle piece composed for him, of him, molded to fit his form, like and unlike. Her silky unblemished skin against his roughness filled him with the spirit of love and amorous delight. His senses saturated, there was an ease in his soul, never

more complete than in her glow, as if he wore the crown of all bliss. His nose was filled with her essence and the faintest touch of Eden's thornless roses, a reminder of the paradise formed for their sake awakening under the rising sun. Stealing moments from yesterday, the gift of sleep took him, bringing darkness, bliss and dreams.

Feeling Adam let go of this world, Eve rose from their bed with a pure, adoring cast to her eyes. Her skin, hot to the touch, could still hear their sensual conversation. Conversing with him made her forget all time, the seasons and their change. Not the charm of the earliest birds, nor the fragrant, fertile earth glistening with dew, nor the silent night with its fair moon and gems of heaven could distract her from his sweetness. His ruggedness turned tame as honeysuckle. This transformation created a tempest in her heart, making the world fade to shadows and edges, her senses full of nothing but the man she was made for. Her body did his bidding unargued, as God had ordained.

A breeze rustled their tent, and she smiled when the flowery roof showered Adam's naked limbs with rose petals. As the flaps shuddered with the breath of morning, they revealed golden shafts rising above the hills, suggesting a walk while Adam slept. Clutching him, Eve spoke a farewell. "Though I will miss the strength of your arms and the tendrils of your hair, sleep blessed Adam. Sleep and seek no happier state, to know no more than our love under God."

Adam, heaven in his heavy eyes, felt the physical world diminish around him, his weightless body buoyed by Eve's love. Lulled by the rhythm of her heart, a lullaby only his ears were trained to hear, he drifted into slumber. The warmth of her limbs was soon replaced by contemplation. His creator often showed himself in his dreams, and he felt a sublime presence pulling upwards, as if he were falling toward the stars. Adam cried out, "What in me is dark, illumine! What is low, raise up and support! That to the height of this great realm I may assert eternal obedience, and justify the ways of men to God."

The Almighty, tempering his voice to suit his ears, spoke to Adam. "Faithful servant, you exalt the best parts of me, as they are present in you. You have been steadfast holding to the laws of Eden, as has the flesh of your flesh, Eve. She draws on the strength of your love, and has resisted the infernal serpent's attempt to corrupt your unblemished nature by eating from the forbidden tree. She collects only innocent fruit, nourishing your bodies to be fertile. The day has

come for you to fulfill my second commandment. I have said, "be fruitful and multiply," and thus far have allowed your union to be rapture, but not fruitful. Adam, I have provided you with a companion whose existence is to be made meaningful by bearing the children of Eden. By day's end, her purpose will be fulfilled. When the sunlight fades, you will plant a seed inside Eve's fertile womb, and she will produce another servant of Eden. She will grow for me a flower worthy of paradise."

HIS CREATOR OFTEN SHOWED HIMSELF IN HIS DREAMS, AND HE FELT A SUBLIME PRESENCE PULLING UPWARDS, AS IF HE WERE FALLING TOWARD THE STARS.



The swell of Adam's chest mirrored that of his pride. "God of existence, I will fulfill your commandment under the setting sun, grateful for its warmth on my back and on the face of my precious Eve. What you bid, unargued I obey; as God ordains is law. On pain of banishment, I will produce as my creator has bid. Before the Lord of All: Freely we serve, because freely we love, as is our will to love or not. In this we stand or fall."

The Almighty was satisfied. "Angels shall watch over your union, coming to me in darkness with triumphant news. Go now. Enjoy the song of spring. Forget not what has been pledged."

Eve left her companion to embrace the day, grace all in her steps, illuminated by the beams that make the stars hide their heads. Wisps of dandelion floated on the breeze, beckoning that she follow. She heard a solemn bird call out in the morning, piercing the air with its whine. As the song filled the air, hunger sent her towards a lake and grove of fruit trees, all save one blooming for nourishment. Walking the path lined with thornless roses, her feet were the only sound. The sun, halfway to its zenith, kissed her face as she looked towards the tree she had refused. Grandest in its solitude amongst its brothers and sisters, it cast a shadow that reached the center of the lake. From the shore she saw the source of the sound.

In the shadow of the tree, saturated by serenity and stillness, was a blissfully white swan, sending not a ripple outward, as if the water was frozen in spite of the air, anchored by shadow.

Eve felt the weight of its stare. Sitting intensely, the swan coaxed the shadows closer, seeming to reject the sun and its warmth. Made uneasy by its presence, Eve plucked her breakfast in silence, ignoring the eyes burrowing into her back. Her sustenance gathered, she turned back to the water. Eve saw nothing but ripples listening to the faint suggestions of the wind, the shadow of the forbidden tree the lake's lone occupant. Puzzled, but relieved, she followed the path back to her tent. Had it been sunbeams reflecting on the water? The further she walked, the more she doubted her eyes, each step helping shed her burden. The sun's warmth returned. Once again she helped herself to the image of Adam awakening to her kiss and a sumptuous mid-morning breakfast. She did not notice the lone white feather that clung to her curls.

Adam, waking from his dream, embraced Eve as she entered. "Hail, mother of mankind, whose fruitful womb will begin today to fill the world more numerous with our offspring than these fruits the trees of God have heaped upon this grassy table. Today, as the light retires, under the gaze of love's harbinger, the rising evening star, our union shall provide an offering to the Almighty, conceived in the evening, born into the light of morning. Our child, grown in the garden of our love will fill the world with golden days, fruitful of golden deeds, with joy and love triumphing, a flower akin to Eden's roses." Eve looked upon her love, blushing like the dawn, with a smile that glowed celestial rosy red, love's proper hue. The news washed away the morning's unpleasantness, replacing it with joy that filled her soul to the brim. Heartbeats could be observed in the heat of their gaze as they laid again upon the floor to engorge themselves on the sweetness of paradise.

Full of delight and calm, they lounged in the comfort of their love. Adam saw Eve drift into the world of dreams, lips curled in contentment, tired from her morning's work. Just as he reached for her, a fluttering of wings stayed his hand. Curious at the size of the sound, he peered out the slits of the tent. Despite the sun's height, shade cast long from a somber sky. A chill upon the air disturbed the hairs on his forearms. Adam followed the sound, curiosity overshadowing his desire for Eve's sunny comfort. As he exited, he noticed the path was covered with petals. Perhaps the winged beast had disturbed it?

Had this not once been a path of roses?

ADAM SAW EVE DRIFT INTO THE WORLD OF DREAMS, LIPS CURLED IN CONTENTMENT, TIRED FROM HER MORNING'S WORK.



Following the trail of petals to the lake, breathing deeply the reds, pinks, and purples trampled underfoot, his curiosity grew. Approaching the water, nostrils full, he saw something as he peered into the lake. A face appeared in the watery gleam. The figure bent as he bent, starting back as he did. When Adam looked again, he was pleased to find the figure returned his gaze. Is this how he would look upon his child? His own creation, his image, moving as he did, looking at the world through the same eyes, embracing it with the same purpose, a true servant of his almighty father, Adam. He imagined how pleased God would be, a reflection's reflection pointed back to the heavens. His child, the most perfect version of himself, would steward the land like he did. With a thirst for that moment the water couldn't quench, Adam engorged himself on this thought.

"Adam!" Eve approached all at once. He started erect, emptying the water of his reflection. "Adam, what have you seen?" He replied, eyes smouldering, "My son, crowned in glory. I must prepare for the failing light!" Adam left as quickly as he had arrived, leaving Eve alone on the fragrant water's edge.

The void of Adam's departure was filled by an icy weight. A heaviness pressed upon Eve's shoulders as a voice called out to her, "Hail Eve, oh fairest creation, last and best of God's works, who this day will become the mother of generations, bringing life into the world as only one before you! Hail mother of mankind, who in service to her Almighty will birth from her body all the greatness of humanity!"

Eve looked upon the swan, who appeared to grow larger as it spoke, digesting its greeting. "Who are you? How does a beast come to know such things?" Lit up with mirth, it answered, "News of your child is being trumpeted across the sky and thundered in the belly of the earth. Holy Eve, mother of mankind, this news has spread to choirs of angels above and below. Every bird and beast in the grass and trees celebrates, none louder and more triumphantly than I! How

could I not know, when even the wind announces it? Oh precious Eve, not to know would argue myself unknown!"

The swan drifted closer. Eve could feel heat in its dull, lifeless eyes despite the ice in its voice. She had just heard, with barely time to ruminate on the news, yet all of creation had been told of her child? She had not even conceived, and its birth would not take place for many days. How could this be so? With sweaty palms and a glistening brow, Eve stood in silence.

"Ha! Oh fairest Eve, I can see that I have added weight to your burden. Fret not for your child, for I am most assured your wisdom will guide you, as you are indeed a child of God, sharing in his likeness. See how Adam's love grows with each passing moment! Your child will be just and right, sufficient to stand, yet, like its parents, free to fall." Eve trembled as her vision was now wholly consumed, the behemoth swan a grasp away from the shore. She had not thought of that possibility. Her child could fall. Her first and only creation could choose, the same as she had. What if her child chose differently? Could she shield her children from all harm? Pulse quickening, breast swelling in trepidation, Eve lashed out. "How does a lowly creature such as you know these things? Who are you to speak to me of love and birth and fallen grace?!"

The swan's voice boomed forth like a thunderclap, knocking Eve down. "Oh fruitful Eve, was our last meeting so frivolous that you have let it wash away from your memory? Have you forgotten the wailing and gnashing of teeth? Have you forgotten the sound of that unblemished fruit, skin unbroken, as it collided with the earth, falling from your empty hand? That sound still echoes in the empty caverns of my soul, as if I had fallen again, adding to my eternal torment. You, Eve, the one who resisted me, the one who would not join me amongst the fallen through sheer force of unbroken will. You know who I am. Though my form may have changed, my essence remains, and my churning, boiling hate for this world is rivaled only by that for our creator." Eve turned from the creature to empty her stomach on the sand. The water that had been welling up behind her eyes broke from their levies as she spasmed. "You see it even now, don't you Eve? You see yourself living in fear, and you know I will be there around every corner, just out of sight, waiting, a whisper on the wind. What if they aren't as strong as their mother? You can see your child, belly full of knowledge, empty of love and life, slipping from your sight, cast out

into the wretched world beyond Eden. To suffer, like I have. To die each day, like I have, while you live on in eternity to walk your garden. Should this come to pass, Eve, your child will be mine. Whichever way you walk will bring infinite wrath or infinite despair, and the heaven of your garden will wither and seem a hell. Nature's grassy wealth will turn to ash under your feet, and flowers of all hue will grow thorns to prick them, seeing all your delight undelighted." The swan paused. "Even should it resist me, what if your child resists its mother? What if all your good proves ill, and someday, wrought with malice, corrupted by pride, driven by ambition, your creation thinks itself one step higher than you who created it? How awful will it be to look upon your first creation with disgust, the seed of your union turned grotesque, just as our father looks upon me, his first-created son?"

Taking a moment to bask in her torment, the swan's voice shrank down to a hiss. "Eve, you must know, there is no fault in us. If God knows all that has been and all that will come, then he created us knowing we would suffer so. Why would the giver of life choose to have you suffer the same fate as I if HE were not the true deceiver, hiding in his righteousness? If malice exists in me, it must exist in the Lord as well, and you, the children who share his face, must share his holy cruelty. What good is it to have been born into such a fate, thrust into the world flawed and helpless, with no choice but to exist? It is better to never have been than to be forced to live a life this wretched, with nothing but the illusion that our choices matter. It is better to never have been." As Eve's sobs echoed across the lake, filling the air with woe, the swan took flight. From her knees she watched as its shadow pulled all the brightness from the water below, as if darkness had become visible. Under the setting sun, she wept. She wept because the words spoken by the swan, the father of all lies, were true.

SHE WEPT BECAUSE THE WORDS SPOKEN BY THE SWAN, THE FATHER OF ALL LIES, WERE TRUE.



Eve staggered into the tent, tears staining her cheeks. "Adam, my love, my sunrise..." With pride saturating his face and purpose in his posture, he had made their home as pristine as the day he built it, cups filled with nectar and a feast laid out. The air

smelled of rose and azalea. A low fire burned. Pillows were strewn about, as if for a hundred guests. With every detail she noticed, the tightness in her throat worsened.

"Eve, the sun is setting! Do not worry, my heart of hearts, for preparations are complete. The time has come for our love to grow, for me to become the father of the world, for you to produce a flower worthy of this paradise. This evening, we do as commanded, and as I have grown to desire above all else."

Her legs no longer able to bear her burden, Eve folded to the floor. "My dearest, nothing would please me more than to see the flesh of my flesh beaming with pride, filled with the love of our children. But Adam, we mustn't! What if our child is grotesque and tortured? What if our baby is deformed or weak? What if our little one does not prefer us, but rather itself? What if our creation desires not to be created and wars against us for the rest of our days? What if our child eats from the tree, cast out from us for all eternity?! So dearly I would love our child, that all deaths I could endure; yet without my child I could live no life. I am sick, Adam! I cannot bear it!"

With each word that tumbled forth, Adam's face—incensed by Eve's disobedience—twisted. "You can bear it, woman, and you will! How dare you speak of defiance to me. Me who is favored most under the heavens, me who has loved you from the moment you were pulled from my side. What sickness you speak of is your own making, raised in your mind! We stand in the greatest moment of our lives, with the heavens raining down praise and glory upon our heads, creators of our own race and future, and you spit in the eye of the world. I have pledged before the Almighty, on our lives and the future of Eden, that you will produce a child, one with my face and name and soul. This night Eve, with the angels and Almighty as witnesses, you will fulfill your purpose in this world!"

Adam's hand, enraged in that evil hour, reached forth to pluck his fruit, the fading light replaced with violence. The Earth felt the wound. Nature, from her seat, sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe that all was lost. As two became one once again, Eve wailed. Moments passed. The night sky filled with anguish and despair. Having done her duty to Adam, her God, Eve walked gracelessly out of her tent, plucking a rose to accompany her in the darkness. She hardly noticed the trickle of blood that dripped from her fingertip.

THE EARTH FELT THE WOUND. NATURE, FROM HER SEAT, SIGHING THROUGH ALL HER WORKS, GAVE SIGNS OF WOE THAT ALL WAS LOST.



SOLSTICE

by Prabhu Palani

my body bent
ever so slightly
swirling around
my celestial partner

arms fully stretched
to the musical crescendo
in December
or is it June



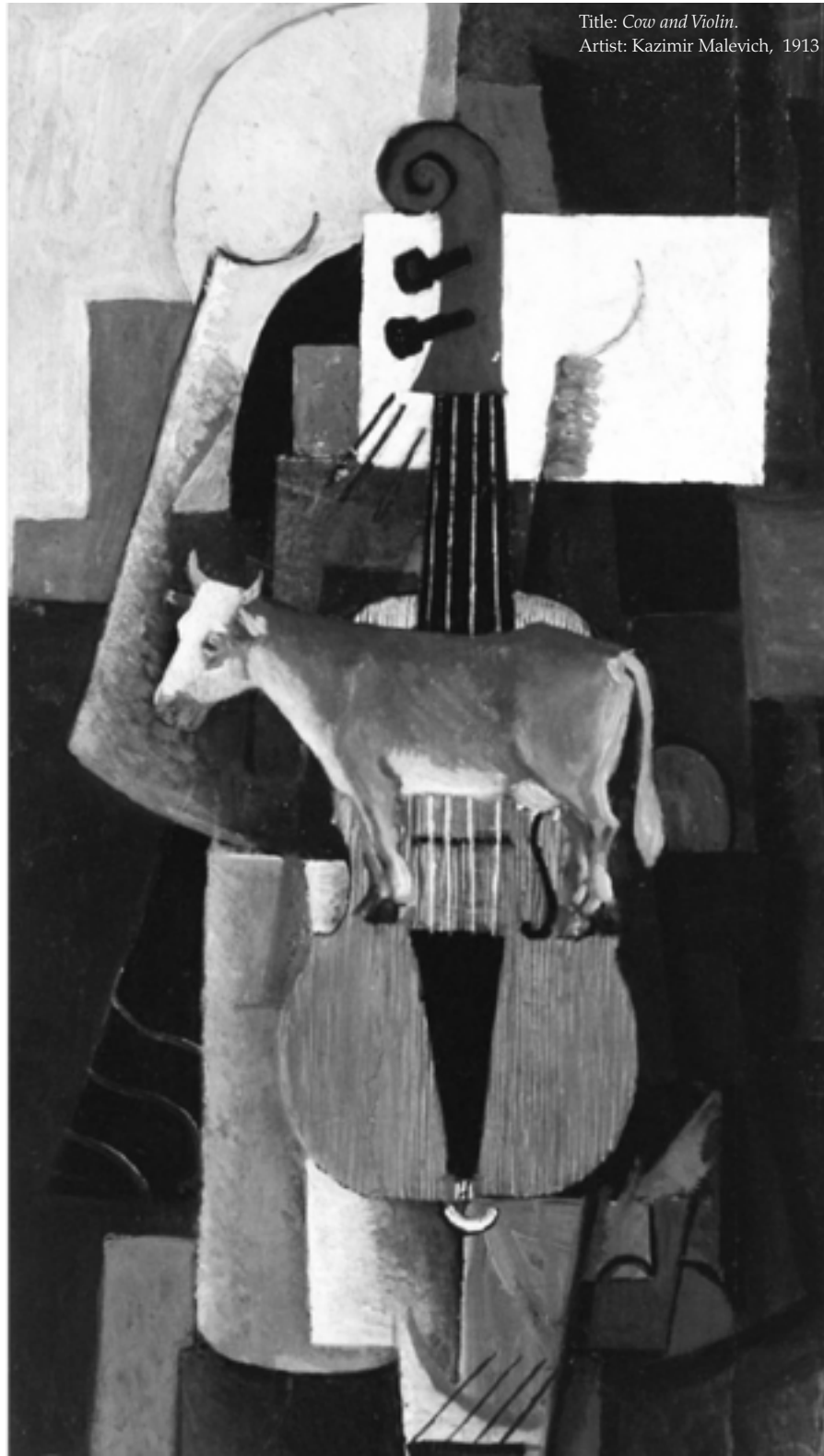
seasons
moods
festivities
rituals

hibernate or dance
the unending cosmic tango
as winter is to summer
life mirrors death




ARRIVING AT SUPREMATISM: “ZAUM” AND THE ALOGICAL PRAXIS OF KAZIMIR MALEVICH’S *COW AND VIOLIN*

by Michael Breger



“You are caught in the nets of the horizon, like fish! We, suprematists, throw open the way to you.”
– Kazimir Malevich, *Manifesto: From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism*, 1915.

The only immediately recognizable forms in Kazimir Malevich’s 1913 painting *Cow and Violin* are those identified in the title of the work. Like a bullseye, these two eponymous objects reside at the dead center of the painting and invite the wandering eye with their familiar, rustic umber tones. Within a split second of acknowledging these two objects, this viewer’s eye then drifts to the background, which appears synthetic, fragmented, and hectic. Any sense that these two primary objects could exist independently of the rest of the painting is abandoned as the viewer steps back and observes the totality of competing forms and forces. An early attempt to transcend the bounds of artistic rationality, *Cow and Violin* presents a knot of antagonistic contradictions between reality and the noumenal realm of the mind, between the past, and the future. When taken together, these contradictions convey a sense of movement and coherence overshadowed by irreconcilable extremes.



***COW AND VIOLIN*
PRESENTS A KNOT
OF ANTAGONISTIC
CONTRADICTIONS
BETWEEN REALITY AND
THE NOUMENAL REALM
OF THE MIND, BETWEEN
THE PAST, AND THE
FUTURE.**

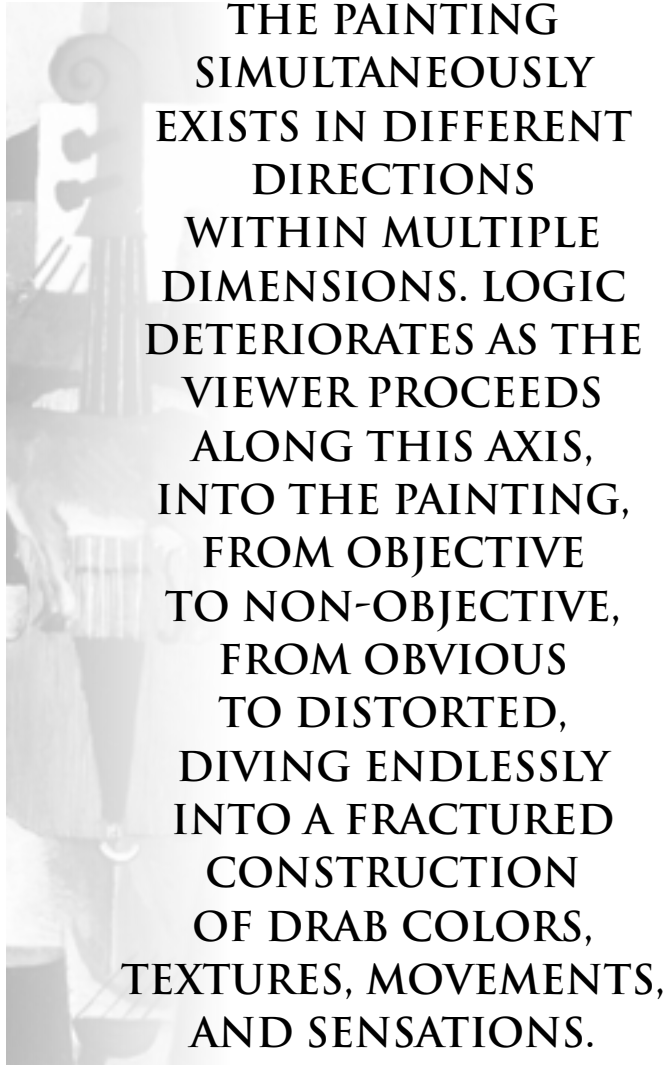
Sporting udders and horns, the cow is the most realistic component of the painting, yet its mundanity evokes an air of idealized caricature, even farcical humor. While it treads upon nothing, the cow is still on stable footing and provides an ironic sense of lateral stability. Immediately behind the cow is the violin, seemingly balanced on its endpin. The violin bisects the painting with its stubby pinstriped neck, its textured natural wood grain, and its

slender triangular tailpiece. This sense of verticality is physically reified by the painting surface itself, a 48.8 x 25.8 cm wooden panel, cut long and lean. The viewer’s eyes keep returning to the center of the composition. Together, the vertical and horizontal impressions derived from the cow and the violin construct a sense of temporary stability and focus, a seemingly recognizable objective. However, this uneasy symmetry is contradicted by features like the head of the violin, which Malevich has abstracted into primitive essentials, a single whorl and two rudimentary tuning pegs flattened in profile. The sense of balance is finally toppled by the movement of the background.

The cow and the violin are enmeshed with the undulating patchwork that lurks behind. This jolted and fragmented backdrop contains multitudes. Explosions of geometric forms weave amongst each other as squares dissolve into curvatures, circles, and amorphous prisms. The composition employs a limited chromatic range of dusky blacks, glossy saturated blacks, grays, various taupes, with highlights of grass colored verticals and subdued plum hues throughout. The limited chromatic palette may reflect the limited availability or high cost of vivid pigments and medium in Russia at the time. The familiar brown-orange ochres of the cow and violin are indeed the brightest colors in the work. The natural tones seem overwhelmed by the repeated artificial industrial hues of the cubist inspired forms. White squares, gray squares, and curves intermingle with long green vertical rectangles, suffocating the green, crowding the space, pushing aside the natural taupe of the top left, herding it into a cramped corner. There is a forceful scraping *grattage* through angular saturated layers of oily black, revealing the washed out black of layers below. Interdependent yet isolated motifs of a violin appear throughout this cubist-inspired backdrop- the bridge and strings at the bottom center, the strings to the left of the neck of the violin, the strong sweeping diagonal in the top left corner, evoking the dynamic movement of the bow. The totality of these shapes and fluid image-movements orchestrate the action in the work.

The painting simultaneously exists in different directions within multiple dimensions. The neck of the violin defines a strong vertical axis and lends an initial sense of structure and symmetry to the painting. Four circles also mark the corners of the painting, while they seem non-representative, they add a rough sense of unity and alignment, like a

vision test. However, this sense quickly fades as the viewer's attention is once again swallowed by the asymmetry and off-kilter chaos of the geometric forms in the background. If there is any balance or asymmetric unity to be found, it is tenuous and uneasy, on the verge of toppling over. Unlike a traditional painting of terrestrial phenomena, there is no definable horizon, as these forms exist outside of physics. In fact, Malevich has transcended three-dimensional reality here. Aside from the two objective forms, Malevich abandons any sense of realistic proportion or logical perspective, yet his painting contains a strong sense of depth derived from the potentially infinite layering of forms.



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This depth acts in two different ways. The first is initially established by the literal hierarchy of forms. Malevich has placed the cow in front of the violin, in front of the abstract shapes with violin motifs. The shadow of the neck of the violin upon the

white square, the powerful darkness of the painting immediately behind the violin, the white square atop the other forms—all lend a sense of traditional physical depth and interval between the forms. His second technique is an abstraction gradient along the allegorical “Z” axis that proceeds from the objective realistic cow, to the partially realistic violin, to the abstract, non-objective background, to whatever lies behind the amalgamation of forms. Logic deteriorates as the viewer proceeds along this axis, into the painting, from objective to non-objective, from obvious to distorted, diving endlessly into a fractured construction of drab colors, textures, movements, and sensations. As one travels along this axis, Malevich guides the viewer to a higher reality, free from the constraints of meaning, logic, and physics. This artistic truth-beyond-logic saw its genesis in many artistic movements of the time. Cubism, Futurism, and eventually Suprematism all employed this sense of *zaum*, (зѡумъ, which is comprised of the Russian prefix за “beyond, behind” and noun ум “the mind, nous” and has been translated as “trans-reason”, “trans-ration” or “beyond-sense”) or beyond-reason as a means of overturning the established, academic artistic orthodoxy, and of grappling with the future.

A sort of hybrid piece, *Cow and Violin* serves as an indicator of Malevich's early steps towards *zaum*, Suprematism, and wholly non-objective allogical art. However, as it still contains the clearly objective elements of the cow and the violin, the piece is only ever arriving at Suprematism. Much of Malevich's early work, especially from 1910-1913, sits solidly between his original foundation of symbolist-impressionist orthodoxy and his new foray into Cubo-Futurism and the philosophical trappings that accompanied such styles. The collective inheritance of all of these styles pulled Malevich further away from formal representation. The synthesis of these intersecting traditions would become the evolved form of consciousness expressed in Suprematism.

Cow and Violin is therefore a thoroughly dialectical work, as it simultaneously embodies several contradicting forces, and at all times confronts the viewer with an unstable synthesis of multiple contending conceptual agents. At once objective and non-objective, *Cow and Violin* presents exactly what the title describes, a cow and an instrument, two immediately known forms, but the fragmented background is equally, if not more distinctive, and gives the painting its overall identity. The contrast of the background with the foreground mimics the

struggle between phenomenological reality and the noumenal realm of the mind, of free association. Without this struggle, the painting is merely a sketch of two pastoral objects adorned with futuristic ornament. As these planes of reality vie for attention, Malevich also invites a historical dialectic into the painting.

The work undoubtedly contains Malevich's allegorical meditations on modernity and progress, as does much of his other work. A kind of temporal tension between past and future is present in this piece, as the primitive composition of the cow and the violin competes with a futuristic, synthetic sea of forms. One must question whether the two quotidian objects will emerge out of the chaos, become subsumed by it, or exist somewhere in between. The work suggests a looming inevitability of the future, painted in dark, angular, industrial, high contrast tones, the alogical *zaum* again eating up what remains of the "known" rationality and objectivity of the past.

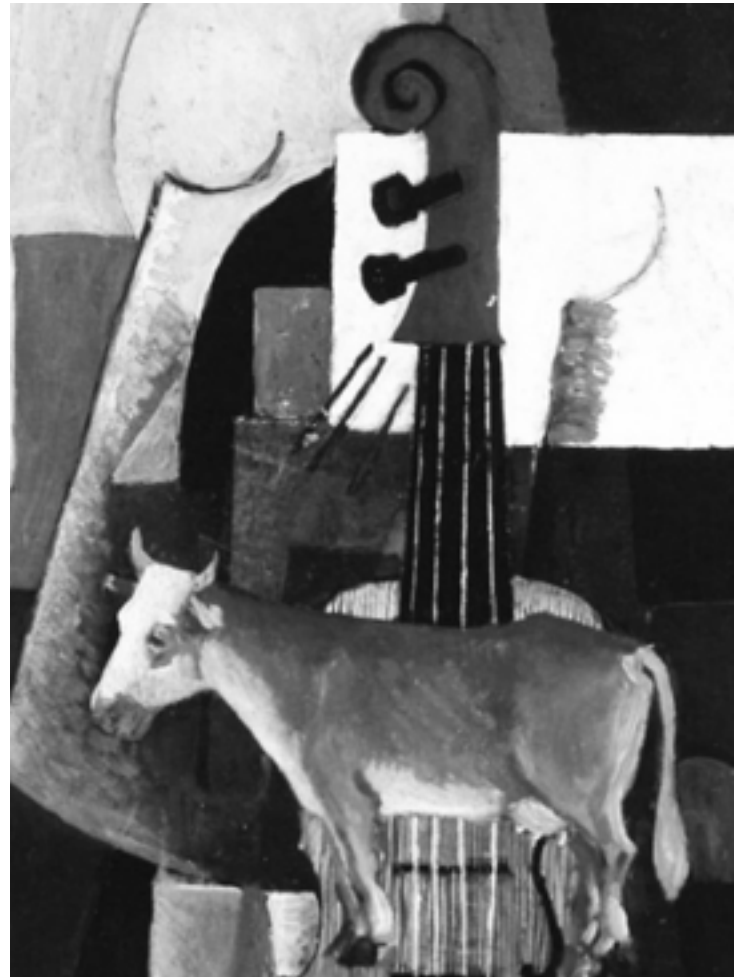
The tension between the various layers of the painting also mirrors the tumultuous economic and political atmosphere of Russia in 1913. Often dubbed an agrarian underdeveloped power that hoped to engage in the great power game, Russia sat in the

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balance between refined European society and gritty agricultural toil—equal parts cow and violin. These forms indicate Malevich's juxtaposition of high and low culture, of rural and urbane sensibilities. As it faced the effects of archaic social, economic, and political structures and decades of military and diplomatic failures, Imperial Russia was divided, weakened, and on the brink of engagement in the

First World War. These conditions, when paired with cruel treatment of peasants by the bourgeoisie, brutal industrial working conditions, and food shortages resulted in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Whether Malevich anticipated Revolution in this work is open to debate, but the contrast of past and future is central to the work, to *zaum*, and to the artistic movement at large.

Malevich's *Cow and Violin* seems to posit the inevitability of progress, and the irrationality of praxis. Things will develop over time, and the accompanying mood may be one of nonsensical confusion. For *zaum* practitioners, known phenomena will still exist, but the truth and the meaning lies somewhere beyond objective reality. The historical context of the work only adds to the sense of contradictory competing forces that may or may not find resolution, all with the mundane as the centering feature of life. Those living through such a time of uncertainty might have found some solace in known commonplace objects, perhaps recognizing the past as essential to the entire project of modernity.



FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S "THE DISPLACED PERSON" AS AN ANTI-EPIPHANIC STORY

by Alison T. Gray

Flannery O'Connor's first collection of stories, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, explores moments of epiphany often at times of violence or extreme distress. O'Connor establishes her particular motif of epiphanic grace in the opening story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and, I argue, inverts it in "The Displaced Person," the final story of her collection. Instead of a vision of grace, "The Displaced Person" offers the reader an anti-epiphanic moment of violence unsanctified by grace or any clear redemption.



Title: *Central Valley Orchard*. Photographer: Janette Canare

For O'Connor as a Catholic writer, grace is an unmerited gift from God while redemption "is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live" (*Fiction Writer* 33), by which O'Connor means sin. Nevertheless, she felt she wrote for an audience that did not believe in sin. She explains that "writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have . . . the sharpest eye for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable. . . . I think . . . the reason for this attention to the perverse is the

difference between their beliefs and the beliefs of their audience" (*Fiction Writer* 33). In this Christian context, O'Connor strives to make the "distortions" of modern life appear as distortions to an audience accustomed to seeing them as "natural" (*Fiction Writer* 33). To that end, O'Connor employs the grotesque and the perverse to shock the reader into seeing clearly what O'Connor sees as unacceptable.

As both the opening and title story, "A Good Man is Hard to Find" sets the tone of what a reader should expect from an O'Connor story: shocking violence is a particular component. The opening story tells of a family on a road trip during which an accident leaves the family vulnerable to a murderer and his accomplices. The whole family is shot to death because the grandmother recognizes the murderer: The Misfit. As the closing story for her collection, "The Displaced Person" is the longest and most complicated work, dealing with the reactions to the addition of a Jewish family displaced from Poland by World War II to small farm in Georgia. The owner and those working on the farm are threatened by the efficiency and non-Southern ways of the Polish father, Mr. Guizac, and allow his "accidental" death to occur.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *epiphany* as a "manifestation or appearance of some divine or superhuman being" (V, 333). Epiphany comes from the Greek 'ἐπιφάνεια,' which Liddell & Scott's *Greek Lexicon* defines as "appearance, coming into light or view" as well as "a manifestation of divine power" (264). The root of this Greek word is the verb φαίνω, meaning "to bring to light, to make to appear: to shew, to make clear or know, hence to lay bare, uncover, disclose" (*Liddell & Scott* 750). While O'Connor does not use these definitions precisely, she writes epiphanies in a way that shows their nuances.



Title: *Camellia* Photographer: Janette Canare

For O'Connor, seeing and knowing are vital and connected aspects of epiphany with the reader understanding its appearance visually as well as through other senses. Thus, an epiphany is meaningful cognitive recognition of what has always been there, with an uncovering as well as an accompanying sense of vulnerability. An epiphany occurs in a moment of time, sometimes an instant; it is not something built or learned, but rather it is the bolt that opens the heart and allows recognition. With O'Connor, the bolt is often an act of startling violence, and yet, in such a moment, grace is possible through touch.

O'Connor establishes her "classic" epiphanic moment in "A Good Man is Hard to Find." As the first story in her collection, it sets the reader's expectations of an O'Connor epiphany. The grandmother, knowing she is next, faces The Misfit after her family has been murdered. As The Misfit complains that by not witnessing Jesus's actions himself, he cannot verify their truth, the grandmother has an epiphany:

"Listen lady, he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would've known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake

had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. (*Collected Works* 152)

In a sudden flash, the grandmother sees The Misfit as human, worthy of the unconditional love that a mother gives her children. She recognizes his pain and his struggle against his own nature: "I wouldn't be like I am now." She sees all this in "an instant," and acknowledges her epiphany aloud. Then she touches the man in an act of grace that precipitates her own murder. In that moment of danger, the grandmother increases her vulnerability by reaching out. The act of touching him imparts grace to him as if it were a physical force, enough to cause him to spring back. The grandmother receives no pity from The Misfit. She dies, as she knows she will. In fact, the touch spurs The Misfit to shoot her. O'Connor uses a violent moment to shock the grandmother into an epiphany characterized by recognizing the humanity of The Misfit. In an instant, she not only sees and knows him, but despite her vulnerability also shares her insight aloud and seems to forgive him when she reaches out and touches him.

In the final story of the collection, "The Displaced Person," O'Connor creates an anti-epiphanic moment that inverts these "classic" O'Connor elements. Instead of an act of violence leading to an instant of recognition spoken aloud, O'Connor presents the opposite: a series of silent moments in which the characters choose not to see and understand Mr. Guizac as a human. The moment of violence unfolds in "The Displaced Person" without redemption:

Mrs. McIntyre was looking fixedly at Mr. Guizac's legs lying flat on the ground now. She heard the brake on the large tractor slip and, looking up, she saw it move forward, calculating its own path. Later, she remembered that she had seen the Negro jump silently out of the way . . . and that she had seen Mr. Shortley turn his head with incredible slowness and stare silently over his shoulder and that she had started to shout to the Displaced Person but that she had not. She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever, and she had heard the little noise the Pole made as the tractor wheel broke his back. (*Collected Works* 325-6)

Written from Mrs. McIntyre's point of view, O'Connor implies she has the potential for an



Title: *California Oak*. Photographer: Janette Canare

epiphany. An epiphany for Mrs. McIntyre, a murderer through her own inaction, would complete the transfer of grace from victim to killer. The grandmother's gesture in the first story implicitly creates the potential for grace in Mrs. McIntyre, (too) neatly balancing the opening story. Instead, O'Connor sets up the expectation for an epiphany and then undermines it.

INSTEAD, O'CONNOR SETS UP THE EXPECTATION FOR AN EPIPHANY AND THEN UNDERMINES IT.

Unlike the moment in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" when the grandmother's "head cleared in an instant," the anti-epiphanic moment in "The Displaced Person" unfolds through recollection. The shift in timeframe starts at the end of the second sentence in the quotation above. Mrs. McIntyre is in the action until the brake slips. She sees the tractor move, "calculating its own path." This final phrase before the time shift is odd. Is the tractor calculating or Mrs. McIntyre? The subtle conflation of the two implies that Mrs. McIntyre calculates the path

while moving the responsibility for the calculation to the tractor so that she does not have to bear the responsibility of anticipating Mr. Guizac's death. Mrs. McIntyre has the opportunity to recognize her role and alter it. Instead she dissociates from the event, transferring her responsibility to an inanimate object and steps out of time. The process of dissociation begins where the shift from unfolding moment to memory occurs: "Later, [Mrs. McIntyre] remembered that she had seen" The narration remains in free indirect discourse from Mrs. McIntyre's perspective; however, she has changed her temporal place in the narrative. She is no longer in the moment, but instead holds that horrible moment at bay by moving it into the past and refusing to look at it. An epiphany happens in time, in a moment. O'Connor undermines the conditions for an epiphany when Mrs. McIntyre displaces the potential epiphanic moment into the past.

In this way, O'Connor underscores the importance of time. As she remembers the murder, Mrs. McIntyre sees Mr. Shortley's head turn "with incredible slowness." The temporal slowness is the opposite of the instantaneous revelation of the grandmother. Even the final look shared between Mrs. McIntyre, Mr. Shortley, and Sulk "froze them in collusion forever." By the end of the scene, time stands still; the moment lasts forever. There is no



Title: *Searching for Methuselah (Series) No. 1*. Photographer: Janette Canare

instant of recognition, only an everlasting sense of guilt.

When the three witnesses share that frozen look, O'Connor inverts the element of recognition. The trio sees only one another. Their insular look keeps their gaze away from where it should be: Mr. Guizac. They do not recognize him as connected to themselves in any way. The chance for an epiphany is avoided. Whereas the grandmother acknowledged the terrifying stranger facing her, Mrs. McIntyre and the men avert their eyes, withholding the possibility of recognition and locking themselves in an eternal moment of culpability.

This anti-epiphanic moment features silence instead of speaking aloud. None of the three says anything. O'Connor uses the word "silently" twice. Mrs. McIntyre starts to shout but does not. That she starts implies a potential for recognition and epiphany. Her silence separates her from Mr. Guizac and his humanity: in her recollection, Mrs. McIntyre stops calling Mr. Guizac by his name. He becomes "the Displaced Person" and "the Pole." Unlike the grandmother who acknowledges The Misfit's humanity, Mrs. McIntyre swallows back her warning, an act of separation. The only sound is "the little noise" when Mr. Guizac is run over.

In O'Connor's classic epiphany, touch can close any separation and impart grace. The motionlessness

of Mrs. McIntyre and Mr. Shortley is underscored by Sulk's silent leap out of the way. Touch—which requires motion—is the culmination of recognition and acknowledgement, neither of which occur in "The Displaced Person." Epiphany never happens. Grace is not received.

O'Connor opens her collection of stories with "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and with it sets the

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reader's expectations of what an O'Connor story entails: usually shocking violence, and often an

epiphany forced by the violence or traumatic event. The stories between the first and last contain a pair of drownings, an accidental pregnancy, the abandonment of a deaf mute girl, a hermaphrodite in a freak show, and the theft of a wooden leg during a seduction—all provocative moments that force the reader to grapple with O'Connor's "distortions." Only the first and last stories end with murder. The impact of the anti-epiphany of "The Displaced Person" comes from its position as the last story in the collection. The reader has developed a set of expectations for an O'Connor story that she then skillfully undermines, increasing the impact of the lack of epiphany, and underscoring the sheer callousness of her characters.

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Murder is the most shocking violence, and O'Connor uses it in the stories that frame her first collection of stories. She opens her collection with a clear epiphany and ends with an anti-epiphany in which she inverts the elements of the former: time, recognition, acknowledgment and touch. She offers Mrs. McIntyre's punishment against the grandmother's act of grace. O'Connor explained that "Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live" (Fiction Writer 33). The grandmother finds her redemption when she recognizes the humanity of The Misfit. There is no redemption for the characters in "The Displaced Person." Both Sulk and Mr. Shortley leave without notice by the end of the day. Mrs. McIntyre loses her farm, and is subjected to regular but unwelcome visits from a Catholic priest. While Mrs. McIntyre does not

achieve any personal redemption, O'Connor saw a subtle redemption in "The Displaced Person." In a letter to A., O'Connor explains the "displaced person . . . destroyed the place, which was evil, and set Mrs. McIntyre on the road to a new form of suffering. . . . There is certainly no reason why the effects of redemption must be plain to us . . ." (*Collected Works* 970-1).



Title: *Searching for Methuselah (Series) No. 2.*
Photographer: Janette Canare

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