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"The Fine Illusion of Free Will": Autonomy and Selfhood in the Major Prose Works of Evelyn Scott

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Timothy O. Edwards
August 1999

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Mr. Orville Edwards

and

Mrs. Margie Edwards

Acknowledgments

I want to thank the faculty and staff of the English Department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for their support and encouragement throughout my years here. The sense of community provided by the graduate students, moreover, has been especially rewarding.

In particular, I want to express my thanks to my Dissertation Committee: my director, Dorothy M. Scura, who inspired and supported this dissertation, Mary E. Papke, Bob Leggett, and Jim Lloyd, all of whom added their valuable insight and assistance to this project.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Kathy, for her emotional and logistical support, and my daughter, Emily, for the patience she has displayed and the joy she has brought.

Abstract

In a letter to Emma Goldman, Evelyn Scott defended her rejection of both Marxist doctrine and middle class philistinism: "'And individualists like myself—incurable believers in what has now become demode as a "romantic" movement—are caught between the Scilla [sic] of bourgeois obtuseness and the Charibdis [sic] of a radicalism that rejects appeal on the only grounds that are moving and arresting to people who love a free spirit'" (ES qtd. in Callard 104). But in a passage in her experimental autobiography Escapade, Scott admitted the weaknesses of her faith in the romantic ego: "The enigma of myself is the failure of romanticism to satisfy a being fundamentally romantic" (E 123). The tension between these two passages is one that is played out in the major prose works of Evelyn Scott's canon: in her autobiographical Escapade, in three of her most successful novels, The Narrow House, The Wave, and Breathe Upon These Slain, and in her unpublished novel, the late work "Escape into Living." Whether the ideal of autonomous selfhood is truly attainable, or even possible, is the question these texts try to answer.

Considered a significant artist in the 1920s and '30s, Scott for several decades had been a largely forgotten writer. A recuperation of Evelyn Scott's canon is under way in the 1990s, however, as evidenced by the recent publication of Mary Wheeling White's biography. Moreover, recent rethinkings of women's writing, as articulated by critics such as Mary Jacobus, Estelle Jelinek, and Sidonie Smith, should aid the

critical recovery of Scott's work. My study commences with an examination of Escapade, Scott's daringly original autobiography. With its themes of domestic entrapment, its examination of female subjectivity, and its strikingly original prose style, Escapade provides an important touchstone for Scott's early fiction. Emerging from this discussion of the autobiography, I examine three novels representative of the major stages in Evelyn Scott's fiction: The Narrow House shows Scott examining feminist concerns through the lens of literary naturalism; The Wave constitutes Scott's most successful foray into modernism as she subverts and reworks the form of the historical novel, all the while examining the possibilities for the freedom and integrity of the individual caught up in the inexorable forces of history; in Breathe Upon These Slain, Scott becomes one of the first twentieth-century practitioners of metafiction, thus pushing her concerns for the autonomy of the self up to the boundaries of postmodernism. The final stage in this work includes a reading of Scott's unpublished novel, "Escape into Living," a text in which Evelyn Scott's fierce devotion to individualism seems finally to have faded, returning her, in a sense, to the naturalistic doom that permeates her earliest work.

By undertaking such a project, I hope to encourage a serious reevaluation of Evelyn Scott's canon. Indeed, as Jean Radford urges us to ask new questions of old texts and search out new voices from the modernist period, Evelyn Scott's innovative but long neglected corpus of work provides a compelling opportunity to do both.

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Introduction

In a letter to Emma Goldman, Evelyn Scott defended her rejection of both Marxist doctrine and middle class philistinism: "'And individualists like myself—incurable believers in what has now become demode as a "romantic" movement—are caught between the Scilla [sic] of bourgeois obtuseness and the Charibdis [sic] of a radicalism that rejects appeal on the only grounds that are moving and arresting to people who love a free spirit'" (ES qtd. in Callard 104); but in a passage in her autobiographical experiment Escapade, Scott admitted the weaknesses of her faith in the romantic ego: "The enigma of myself is the failure of romanticism to satisfy a being fundamentally romantic" (E 123). The tension between these two passages is one that runs throughout the major works of Evelyn Scott's canon, from her first naturalistic novel, The Narrow House, to her later unpublished writings. Nietzsche, Bergson, Pavlov, Marx—all were shaping influences upon the young Evelyn Scott, who proclaimed herself a disciple of these figures (and of artists like Tolstoy) during her youth (Kunitz and Haycraft 1252). Significantly, these figures embody the very tensions we see played out in many of her major novels—Pavlov and Marx, representatives of behavioral and economic determinism, and Nietzsche and Bergson, celebrants of the radical freedom available to the individual through the creative energy of the arts. Her increasing distrust of Marxism and socialism—made clearly apparent in later novels such as Bread and a Sword and Breathe Upon These Slain—shows us unequivocally where Scott's sympathies ultimately rest. Indeed, as Mary

Wheeling White observes, Scott's abhorrence of collectivist political philosophies—whether left-wing or fascist—was, in a sense, an analogue to Scott's rebellion early on against Christian morality and the residual Victorianism of her culture (2). As we see in so much of her work, any code, philosophy, or institution which threatens to impose limits upon the freedom and autonomy of the individual becomes anathema to Scott. And, indeed, the first scholar to attempt a serious study of Scott's work, Robert L. Welker, has observed that "Evelyn Scott's public rebellion was against those cultural, aesthetic, political, and economic forces which wastefully violated individual integrity and constricted intellectual and spiritual life" (Introduction vii). For Scott, then, the issue of individual freedom, of the autonomy of the self, is one of the central concerns of her artistic project; and we see her engaging with this concern in her two autobiographies, in three of her most successful novels—The Narrow House, The Wave, and Breathe Upon These Slain—and in her most complete unpublished novel, the late work "Escape into Living." Whether this ideal of autonomous selfhood is truly attainable, or is even possible, is the question these texts try to answer.

Scott's adherence to the integrity of individualism is reflected in her aesthetics. She is typically categorized as a modernist (White 6), but her approach to each project is idiosyncratic. If Pound urged his contemporaries to "make it new," Scott implemented that aesthetic to the fullest: biographer D. A. Callard notes, for instance, that upon first perusing Scott's books, he found that they "exhibited [such] a bewildering variety of contrasts [that] it was difficult to believe that they had been

written by the same person" (xii). A novelist, autobiographer, short story author, poet, reviewer, essayist, and playwright, Scott experimented in all the genres and deployed varying prose techniques that include psychological realism, stream-of-consciousness narrative, and, on occasion, an "imagistic" style (Scura 288) that crosses the threshold between poetry and prose. Indeed, Scott's work is perhaps most compelling in its ability to transcend simple categories: her novels and autobiographies seldom follow the conventional blueprints of genre.

Regarding her work as merely a series of texts that fall neatly into one or another of the major categories of twentieth-century American literature is far too simple. Nonetheless, we can use these movements as convenient landmarks for examining and contextualizing Scott's accomplishments. The early texts in her oeuvre operate around the axis of the female subject, primarily within the setting of the family. These early works are not only marked by bold strides toward modernist experimentation in narrative technique but are also driven by the naturalistic impulse, as Donald Pizer calls it, that informed much of Scott's early work. Two works, the autobiographical Escapade and Scott's first novel, The Narrow House, establish the parameters of Scott's early period. And both texts are thematically linked, carefully examining the borders of marginality, the thresholds of liminality, through the lens of literary naturalism. It is here that we see these tensions between Scott's desperate—but sometimes shaky—faith in the autonomy of the self trying to negotiate its way through the confining nets of the naturalistic landscape that she explores. These early works focus—with a graphic, sometimes disturbing eye for detail—on female

sexuality, the woman's body, and the special kinds of marginality that attend pregnancy. Indeed, both Escapade and The Narrow House examine Scott's notion that the female subject, while assaulted by a bewildering variety of cultural forces, faces an equally formidable foe in biology itself: "A true feminism," Scott argued, "would investigate women's slavery in nature . . . [that is] her biologically ordained maternal role" (Callard 137). That investigation is one Scott herself embarks on in both Escapade and The Narrow House.

Scott's first, naturalistic period is constituted by the family trilogy initiated with The Narrow House. With her second trilogy—the three historical novels, Migrations, The Wave, and A Calendar of Sin—Scott moves into the field of modernist experimentation, especially in her narrative tour-de-force The Wave. In these novels Scott expands her vision, moving outside the domestic confines of The Narrow House into a larger but more fragmented vision of American history. Here, too, the integrity of the ego confronts a seemingly random and uncaring universe that reminds us of how insignificant the individual seems in the face of the Brobdingnagian forces of the historical process. But Scott's effort is to recover these seemingly insignificant individuals—the one hundred or so characters we encounter in The Wave—by telling their stories, and in doing so, "to unify history into vital meaning," as Welker explains, by imbuing it with "a living context" (Introduction vii). Significantly, Scott chooses what many would contend is the defining moment in American history, the Civil War, to examine the possibilities—or perhaps

impossibilities—of the kind of freedom and individual autonomy the American myth promises and Evelyn Scott, in more existential terms, finds equally attractive.

Finally, in the 1930s Scott enters into a third, more loosely structured trilogy that focuses on the role of the artist in society, thus marking full engagement with one of the central concerns of modernism as it is defined in works like A Portrait of the Artist and "Tradition and the Individual Talent." It is also here that we find some of her most interesting avant garde narrative techniques being deployed—especially in Bread and a Sword and Breathe Upon These Slain. It is the latter work that most interests me, for it also marks her engagement with one of the central concerns of postmodernism. Indeed, Brian McHale contends that chapter eight of Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! might well be labeled as the birthplace of postmodern fiction, the moment when metafiction, fiction that foregrounds its own fictionality, enters into the twentieth-century canon. In 1934's Breathe Upon These Slain, however, Evelyn Scott predates Faulkner's postmodern moment by two years. And still, the concerns in Scott's fiction center on the self. Breathe Upon These Slain, as its title suggests, becomes an effort to construct—or is it really reconstruct?—the lives of people known to the narrator only through photos and domestic furnishings. Simultaneously, of course, that troublingly indistinct narrator occasionally steps into the narrative from time to time, undermining whatever suspension of disbelief might have been achieved. Who that narrator is complicates these issues even further, blurring the borders between fiction and reality as effectively as Faulkner or, later, John Fowles would with their own elaborations of historiographic metafiction. Scott, the defender

and lionizer of individualism, thus moves into the ontological realm of the postmodern and explores its troubling implications for any notion of a stable, Cartesian ego—while simultaneously entering into an artistic project that still seems to privilege the possibility of the self.

Clearly, then, in tracing these issues through Evelyn Scott's canon, we see how one artist, though now long neglected, poses particularly troubling questions about the possibility of the integrity of the ego when that very ego is confined and shaped by gender politics—as in Escapade and The Narrow House—and by a broad spectrum of marginal boundaries—as in The Wave. In an essay on Dorothy Richardson, a writer to whom Evelyn Scott, to her annoyance, was often compared in the early 1920s, Jean Radford observes that the emergence of critical theory has reanimated the study of modernism by, among other things, directing our attention toward women writers as a counter narrative to the more canonical versions of literary history. The emergence of such a rival version of the canon, she points out, allows us to contextualize in news ways the standard canonical works while seeking out new literary voices previously excluded from the canon. A study of Evelyn Scott's novels responds to both of the possibilities opened up by Radford's observations: Scott's canon offers up a largely undiscovered body of work that, because of its almost prophetic perspective not only on certain feminist issues but also on the possibilities of reconfiguring the novelistic form, begs for reexamination now more than ever before; and because Scott's work in many ways parallels the main currents of twentieth-century American literature, reinscribing her work into the

larger canon reconfigures that canon, allowing us to read standard canonical works in a new context—one that includes the voice of Evelyn Scott. Toward that end, I want to conclude my study by considering briefly Evelyn Scott's links to that most canonical novelist of twentieth-century American letters, William Faulkner, a writer with whom Scott shares important connections.

Indeed, when we engage with Evelyn Scott's sadly ignored canon of major prose works, we discover a rich and untapped mother lode of provocative texts, texts that contested the literary and even moral standards of Scott's day, texts that still surprise us with the possibilities of experimentation in the genres of autobiography and the novel. Redrawing the borders of modernism to include Evelyn Scott allows us to mine this mother lode of texts—not simply to expand the canon to yet another marginalized writer, but to help us better understand how American experimental fiction asserted itself in the decades between the wars, to enrich the context of American modernist fiction by fitting another piece of the puzzle into our complex but growing picture of that period of our literature. Scott's reputation is enjoying a relatively slow but steady recuperation, especially with the interest in recovering and reexamining lost voices in the various segments of the canon. But Evelyn Scott's work did not always reside on the margins of our literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, her reputation far outshone her now better known contemporaries like William Faulkner. Our understanding of that period and its place in the broader sweep of American and modern letters is not complete, then, without a reconsideration of Evelyn Scott's role in the literature of our century.

Chapter One

Escapade: Gendering a Self, Embodying a Self

The time frame of Evelyn Scott's career (1920-41) places her squarely within the era of literary modernism. Although Scott wrote in an essentially realist mode in much of her fiction, she began her artistic enterprise as an experimental writer of both poetry and prose, and she would frequently return to her commitment to Ezra Pound's modernist slogan: "Make it new." Despite, then, her deployment of a variety of styles—realism, naturalism, even, in the case of Breathe Upon These Slain, a kind of proto-postmodernism—I think, as Mary Wheeling White asserts, it is most convenient to regard Scott as a modernist (6). Moreover, when we consider what I see as a significant conflict in Scott's work—a struggle between a romantic impulse toward individualism and a genuine dread that this very impulse is illusory—we can locate Scott's work firmly within a grid of similar tensions playing themselves out in the modernist period.

Randall Stevenson's Modernist Fiction posits just this kind of grid, arguing that conflicted versions of subjectivity constitute the driving force of modernist experimentation. Stevenson's study follows the path cleared by Fredric Jameson, who insists in The Political Unconscious that modernism should be seen as a twentieth-century extension of romanticism—a "'Utopian compensation'" for increasing dehumanization in the modern, industrial age (Stevenson 78). The defining impulse at

the core of the narrative experiments of modernist fiction writers, in Stevenson's view, is the determination "'to place everything in the mind'" (17). The romantic poets' artistic achievements "provided a congenial vision of the status and significance of the individual," Stevenson asserts, "at a time when in reality huge numbers of individuals were being reduced to insignificant units within the system of wage slavery" (78).

Emanating from a similar historical dynamic, a similar desire for Utopian compensation, is modernism's efforts to look within, to explore the interior landscape of the mind. This expedition is evidenced, of course, by the now familiar modernist innovations in narrative that map out the workings of the mind, the stream-of-consciousness mode being perhaps the signature contribution of these writers. This turn inward essentially parallels romanticism's congenial vision of individual freedom and worth, for "once narrative places everything in the mind," Stevenson continues, "a sense of significance can be restored to individuals" (77). Randall Stevenson's particular take on what is driving modernist experimental narrative figures as an important starting point for my study, for certainly one of the central concerns of Evelyn Scott's prose and fiction—and this is true of both her highly experimental works and her more conventional ones—is to insist upon just such a "sense of significance" for the individual. Simultaneously, of course, Scott's major prose works struggle also with an instinct that this effort to restore significance to the individual is a

Sisyphian task, doomed ultimately to failure.[1] Indeed, as one of her characters broods in her 1933 novel Eva Gay, even nature itself—the privileged vehicle of romantic utopia—excels in "the horrible waste of the individual; the lavish contempt for the single existence!" (299). When examining this kind of conflict in a writer's work, a logical point of departure would seem to be a consideration of any autobiographies—that most self-oriented of narratives—the artist has produced. Scott published two, both experimental, both widely regarded as among her strongest accomplishments: Escapade (1923) and Background in Tennessee (1937).

When Evelyn Scott's Escapade was published in 1923, reviewers were alternately dazzled and puzzled: "a string of tiny episodes," Ludwig Lewisohn wrote, "pictures, fierce, strange, garish little idyls . . . never permitted to gather sweep, passion, or . . . spiritual impact" (141). Yet in the same review, Lewisohn admitted "that 'Escapade' is indeed literature, and that the major portion of it belongs to what we have in America of quite serious art" (141). Of Background in Tennessee, Eleanor Carroll Chilton observed, "There is much material that is provocative, and some that is fresh. It is honest. But all this goes for nothing in the general shapelessness" (7). Indeed, a complaint lodged against Evelyn Scott's work by the lion's share of her reviewers was, in fact, this "general shapelessness" in her texts. Scott's narratives

[1] David Perkins sees a similar struggle in Wordsworth's vision of the cosmos: despite Wordsworth's conviction that "an indwelling Presence" pervades the natural world, the poet is haunted by the terrifying possibility that "it [this Presence] might seem utterly indifferent to human life" (173). Scott clearly grapples with a similar kind of apprehension, the fear that the "congenial vision" of romantic individualism masks the darker truth of an indifferent cosmos.

seldom followed the conventional patterns contemporary critics expected, and while her work was frequently praised for its moments of "great descriptive beauty" (Canby 19), reviewers often found, as Chilton did with Background in Tennessee, that "what we read is lacking both structural and essential form, and so breaks off without finishing and runs its course without making a point" (7). Of course, skeptical readers might offer the same criticisms of experimental writing from Joyce's Ulysses to Robert Coover's The Public Burning. However, what also we discover in Evelyn Scott's catalogue is that her strongest works are almost invariably those in which she strove to transcend the existing literary forms she and her fellow modernists found stagnant. And for Scott, one of those forms, it seems, was autobiography. Indeed, we find in Evelyn Scott's autobiographies an exploding of genres that equals, perhaps in some ways even surpasses, her experiments with the novel form.

Escapade and Background in Tennessee occupy strategically important positions in Evelyn Scott's canon, roughly bookending her career. It is important to realize, however, that Escapade was not her first published work, nor was Background in Tennessee her last. Nonetheless, both texts reflect in significant ways the kinds of thematic concerns and formal experimentation that characterize Scott's major novels, Escapade serving as an important touchstone primarily for Scott's earliest fiction—the Farley family trilogy— initiated and highlighted by her first novel, the brief but powerful The Narrow House. Similarly, Background in Tennessee, concerned as it is with larger social and historical questions, provides a useful reference point for much

of Scott's later fiction, The Wave, for instance, and Breathe Upon These Slain, although these two novels were actually published before Scott's 1937 autobiography. Therefore, before actually engaging with Scott's major novels, we can establish the parameters of this study by engaging first with her experiments in autobiography. For our purposes, I want to defer until later any closer discussion of Background in Tennessee and focus primary attention on Scott's strikingly original Escapade, a work that establishes, as I have suggested, an important foundation for understanding her powerful first novel, The Narrow House. First, however, it is equally important to establish exactly how Scott's Escapade becomes such a jarringly provocative autobiographical performance—and toward this end, a brief survey of the developments in autobiographical criticism is required.

The study of autobiography as a genre is a fairly recent undertaking in the academy. Actually, two historical studies of autobiography appeared early in our century: Georg Misch's A History of Autobiography in Antiquity (1907) and Anna Robeson Burr's The Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative Study (1909) (Jelinek, Tradition 1). These two works seem, however, to have both opened and closed the book simultaneously on the question of autobiography—at least for several decades. A revival of interest in the genre[2] would have to wait until after World War II, when the publication of two more significant works, William Matthews's British

[2] That is, if we may consider autobiography as a genre. A key concern in earlier studies of autobiography, especially in the 1950s and '60s, became the question of whether autobiography could even be treated as a genre unto itself (Jelinek, Tradition 2).

Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written Before 1951 (1955) and Louis Kaplan's A Bibliography of American Autobiographies (1961), encouraged a more serious literary treatment of autobiography. The titles of many of the ensuing studies—James Olney's Metaphors of Self (1972), for instance, or Karl Weintraub's The Value of the Individual (1978)—demonstrate clearly how studies of autobiography, and even the autobiographical impulse of the author, is driven by what Leigh Gilmore in 1994 called "the politics of individualism" (Autobiography and Postmodernism 8). That is, the autobiographical project is a largely western, individualistic one—a project possible only under certain philosophical conditions and in certain philosophical contexts. As early as 1956, Georges Gusdorf observed that autobiography is a product of a particular set of "metaphysical preconditions": "[The] conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life," he writes, "is the late product of a specific civilization" (30, 29). Interestingly, such an awareness has been considered the shaping force behind much of Evelyn Scott's prose, both her autobiography and her fiction: "Writing about ordinary lives," Mary Carrigg claims, ". . . was her [Scott's] way of giving them whatever permanent significance she could" (85).

Along these same lines, James Goodwin sees the autobiographical impulse energized by events such as the French and American Revolutions, events "which greatly advanced the cultural and political importance of the common individual" (3). The autobiographies of Rousseau and Franklin, both significant contributions to the

emerging genre, were produced during the period between 1760-1790, underscoring the significance of this era of democratic revolution to the development of autobiography. The term "autobiography" actually came into use during this revolutionary period (Goodwin 3). Thus, a political and philosophical context valuing the individual was fundamental to the rise of autobiography. It is this very same "common individual," to use Goodwin's terms, that finally proves to be the focal point of so much of Scott's work, suggesting her often desperate faith, in the face of a "lingering scepticism," in "the transcendent value of ordinary fleeting human life" (Carrigg 85). We should not be surprised, then, that the bulk of Scott's fiction, along with, obviously, the autobiographies, constitute an examination of the self, an effort to define somehow the individual subject. And, indeed, this concept of a stable, individual, and autonomous self—in terms of western philosophy, a Cartesian ego—is the underlying assumption of western autobiography. To tell the story of a self, there must be a knowable self to describe and narrate. Scott's work boldy undertakes that task.

However, the difficulty of this endeavor to "know" the self has been further complicated, in recent decades, by radical new rethinkings of the self or the subject. Most importantly, the emergence of poststructuralist criticism has problematized assumptions about the self much as it has complicated our notions of the text and the author. Two works, both published in 1980, pointed the study of autobiography in new directions: James Olney's Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical and

Estelle C. Jelinek's Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism. In the introduction to his collection, Olney points out that the study of autobiographies provides "a privileged access to an experience . . . that no other variety of writing can offer" (13), and this, he thinks, is especially true of the experiences of marginalized subjects—for instance, the African American experience, the female experience. Simultaneously, however, he concedes that the poststructuralists' anxieties about the self call into question the very possibility of autobiography. This seemingly contradictory response to the autobiographical project is demonstrated, I think, in Scott's autobiographies, but especially in Escapade.

Jelinek's work, as its title tells us, channels the autobiographical debate into the field of gender, and, in fact, the rise of feminist criticism in the last three decades has forced a reexamination of our accepted notions of autobiography—primarily by arguing that women's autobiographies, by and large, differ significantly from those by men. The work of, first, Jelinek and, later, Leigh Gilmore, Sidonie Smith, and a host of other scholars finds that women's autobiography essentially subverts the more familiar male models of the genre, those models held up as icons of the well-made autobiography as defined by the "classic" formula Jelinek outlines in her seminal study Women's Autobiography. Perhaps it should not surprise us that this classic formula is founded upon the rise of individualism Gusdorf, Goodwin, and others have linked directly to the emergence of the western autobiographical tradition. Such a classic

formula, however, fails to account for the more disruptive and transgressive texts that arise when women writers insert their voices into the discourse of autobiography.

The typical or traditional male autobiographies, Jelinek asserts, "[chronicle] the progress of their authors' professional or intellectual lives, usually in the affairs of the world, and their studies are for the most part success stories" (Women's Autobiographies 7). Moreover, such a text, Jelinek writes, "reveals his [the author's] connectedness to the rest of society," presenting the author as "representative of his times, a mirror of his era" (Women's Autobiographies 7). Most male autobiographies, then—especially the most canonical ones such as Jean Jacques Rousseau's Confessions (1781), John Stuart Mill's Autobiography (1873), Ben Franklin's Autobiography (1791), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Poetry and Truth (1812-31)—are typically, in Jelinek's view, both success stories and narratives of their authors' historical eras (Women's Autobiographies 7). As success stories, men's autobiographies become accounts of public lives, projecting a strong sense of self, exuding an atmosphere of confidence and achievement, and reconstructing the authors' lives as narratives of heroic scope (15). Herein lies, in Jelinek's analysis, a significant point of divergence between male and female autobiographies.

Women's autobiographies, Jelinek asserts, differ from those of men in both content and form. First, whereas the typical male autobiography seeks to connect its author to his society and his historical era, "women's autobiographies," Jelinek argues, "rarely mirror the establishment history of their times" (Women's Autobiographies 7).

Rather than focusing on professional careers and public achievements, women's autobiographies typically concentrate on the personal—on the domestic sphere, friends and family, influential acquaintances (Women's Autobiographies 8). And in contrast to the air of confidence and self-assurance that frequently marks male autobiographical voices, women's life stories usually betray "self-consciousness," "a need . . . for explanation and understanding," and a clear desire to bolster "self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to authenticate their self-image" (Jelinek, Women's Autobiographies 15).

In matters of form, too, women's autobiographies deviate from the classic (read male) formula. Male autobiographers, as most critics see it, "consciously shape the events of their life into a coherent whole" (Jelinek, Women's Autobiographies 17). Unified, chronological, and linear, these male autobiographies suggest "a faith in the continuity of the world and [the authors'] own self-images" (Jelinek, Women's Autobiographies 17). Women's autobiographies, on the other hand, prove to be far more irregular, even disorderly, than those of male writers: "The narratives of their [women's] lives," Jelinek writes, "are often not progressive and linear but disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters" (Women's Autobiographies 17). Such discontinuity of form suggests a parallel discontinuity or fragmentation in female experience: for Jelinek, the "multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles"—critics such as Sidonie Smith would refer to this as woman's overdetermined subjectivity—"seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies"

(Women's Autobiographies 17). The woman's autobiography, then, is analogous to her life, to her sense of self—"fragmented, interrupted, and formless" (Jelinek, Women's Autobiographies 19).

Fragmented, interrupted, and formless—certainly Jelinek's general rubric for discussing and understanding women's personal narratives applies remarkably well to Scott's autobiographies—especially Escapade, the more experimental of the two. Escapade offers itself up as a brief but extraordinary example of the kind of disruptive autobiographical text Jelinek theorizes, violating virtually every boundary established by the classic models of male autobiography. Scott's autobiography is hardly a sweeping account of one individual's life or career. Instead, the narrative recounts only the first three years of Scott's self-imposed Brazilian exile. Nor can the narrative be seen as a success story. Much to the annoyance of many of Scott's contemporary reviewers, Escapade's mood is morbid (a favorite appellation for Scott's work, in general) and grotesque. Intensely subjective, the narrative dwells on isolation, on a belligerent defiance toward the staid culture left behind in the American South, on the alienation and hostility Scott's narrator (for she remains curiously anonymous throughout the text) finds in a foreign and fiercely patriarchal Brazilian culture, and, perhaps most significant, the odd mixture of fear, pain, and desire associated with her own body both during and after her complicated pregnancy. Escapade, then, is anything but a success story. This focus on negation seems a deliberate move on Scott's part, as the latter three years of her stay in Brazil—a period of much greater

stability, comfort, and financial security—is entirely excluded from the account (Scura 293). And despite one reviewer's comment to the contrary, there is little of the heroic in Scott's adventure.[3] Although the primitive locale of section six provides a convenient staging area for some kind of adventurous frontier narrative, Scott resists any temptation to romanticize her experience. There is, instead, a bold frankness in the content of the text, bold enough to invite censorship of the manuscript by its publisher, Thomas Seltzer (Scura 312).

And, finally, the narrative does in fact focus on the private and domestic spheres rather than the public one. As Dorothy M. Scura has noted, the time frame for the narrative coincides with the World War I years, but only marginal reference is made to the global conflagration (288). Thus, no effort is made to connect the narrator in some significant way with her historical era—another clear divergence from the classic male autobiographical formula as Jelinek outlines it. There are passages that discuss, albeit briefly, Scott's aspirations as a writer, but a meticulous account of career building and professional development as is epitomized in Franklin's Autobiography, for instance, is conspicuously absent from Escapade. In its place, we find an account of a self in jeopardy, a self in dire need of authentication, a self unsure of its own stability, its own autonomy—and a fragmented prose style as discontinuous, as formless and shifting as the troubled consciousness it attempts to narrate.

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[3] Ludwig Lewisohn's review in The Nation ("Defiance," 8 August 1923) struggles to categorize Scott's recalcitrant autobiography, alternately labeling Escapade "a high and heroic adventure" and a "singularly unheroic" account (p. 141).

Most important for our purposes is how Escapade provides a point of entry into some of Scott's important early fiction—The Narrow House, as I have mentioned, but also Narcissus, and segments of Ideals. Escapade, in fact, proves to be a confluence of several important questions with which Scott's early fiction struggles. Is the notion of an autonomous self—the sort of self that the western autobiographical tradition assumes—a possibility? More to the point, is such an autonomous self possible for the female subject? How, in fact, do gender, culture, even biology intersect with the notion of a self? Escapade explores the borderlands of these complexly interwoven issues while simultaneously challenging the sorts of formal structures undergirding the typically factual, linear, public voice of the well-crafted or classic male autobiography.

The question of how the self is represented, constructed, and narrated in an autobiography such as Escapade is a complex one. We have already seen how the classic male autobiography insists on a defined, delineated, knowable self. Escapade radically subverts that notion of the autobiographical ego. As autobiographies go, Escapade is a strange one indeed. As one would expect, the narrative is a first-person account, and its short fragments of prose, episodic in nature and usually voiced in the present tense, suggest, as Dorothy M. Scura points out, a journal or diary as the raw material for the text (289). These aspects of the volume lend a sense of immediacy and intimacy to the narrative and perhaps locate the text closer to customary models of autobiographical writing. But when we move beyond the expected "I" narrator and

the journal-like authenticity of some passages, Escapade begins to elude the categories of standard autobiography.

The narrator—and this, I think, is crucial—remains virtually unnamed throughout the text. At only two points in Escapade is reference made to the possible name of the narrator: a drunken song sung in Portuguese by a group of Brazilian men which refers to Evelina (208), and a note addressed to Nannette and Evelyn (239). These are the only concrete clues as to the identity—if we dare use such an absolutist term—of the narrative voice. And, further, the narrator seems completely effaced of identity, a point Scura comments on in her afterword to the 1995 edition. If autobiography is an effort to shape, mold, or even gain control of a sense of self, an effort to "lay claim to one's life," as Janet Varner Gunn has asserted (17), Escapade illustrates how difficult such a struggle becomes for the marginalized female subject.

Despite the illusiveness of the textual self, however, we need to realize that the self posited in the text is essentially a modernist one—alienated, isolated, solipsistic. When Bakhtin decries the interiorizing shift of twentieth-century fiction in the introduction to Rabelais and His World, he might well have been painting the narrative landscape of Escapade. Bakhtin unleashes his attack on what he sees as the life-negating impulse of modernism, which he regards as a revival of the darker aspects of romanticism. This "Romantic grotesque," as he terms it, depicts a modern world in which "[a]ll that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life . . . becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile. Our own world becomes an alien world" (Bakhtin,

Rabelais 39). Moreover, this dark romantic character emerging in twentieth-century literature is "marked by a vivid sense of isolation"(Bakhtin, Rabelais 37), the individual human being figured as a "puppet," "the victim of alien inhuman force," a kind of "tragic doll" seemingly manipulated by some omnipotent but anonymous puppeteer (Bakhtin, Rabelais 40).

Escapade's narrator finds herself in exactly this kind of hostile universe. Of course, as an American woman in Brazil, she is quite literally moving through an alien topography: surrounded by "the interchange of unintelligible noises," the narrator tells us, "I felt my exclusion from the life around me, my helplessness" (1). Without language (she speaks no Portuguese), without a sense of time—"I had broken my watch"(3)—and except for the two ambiguous references near the end of the volume, without even a name, the narrator seems to be a completely untethered consciousness, helplessly adrift with no concrete reference points to anchor any sense of self. Indeed, even her efforts early on in the narrative to write a self prove futile: "If I could only write! But I had no thoughts" (2). In several sequences the narrator describes herself as a sort of disembodied emanation—"The world was a field of light and I was a ghost" (30)—and even, at times, seems to question her own reality: "I wonder what I am and if I have actually ceased to exist. . . . I no longer know myself. I haven't any self" (73). When the narrator describes consciousness as "fragmentary and derived" (204) and the self as a fluid, fleeting stream of experience that "ceased to be even while I was thinking of it" (126), we are clearly taking the turn inward Stevenson

describes as characteristically modernist. Whether Scott's turn inward serves as a Utopian compensation for the fallen world in which she is entrapped is, however, certainly open to question, for it becomes increasingly clear as one examines Escapade that the effort to posit, construct, or lay claim to a self one might expect from an autobiography—even a modernist, experimental one—is problematized by a plethora of confining forces.

We are inevitably reminded of Bahktin's "tragic doll" image when we note how frequently the autobiographical voice of Escapade portrays herself in mechanistic terms—as an "automaton" (23), "caught in a mechanism" (52) (and we will return to this important passage presently), terrified by forces "huge and formless and blindly motivated" (17). The self described in Escapade clearly lacks autonomy, freedom, any stable selfhood. And the fact that Escapade's narrator is a female subject now assumes a crucial role in our discussion. The narrator's awareness of her body is, as I have already suggested, the linchpin of Scott's text, and we can demystify, to some degree at least, the strangely elusive self narrated in Evelyn Scott's autobiography when we consider how that narrator's body shapes—and, in a sense, is shaped by—the problematics of subject formation, especially since that subject is a woman.

Absolutely central in Escapade is the narrator's troubled and often equivocal reactions to her own body—a body that seems transgressive and disruptive in the androcentric milieu of Brazilian culture, a body that represents for the narrator a strange hybrid of pride and shame, of pain and pleasure, of ruthless autonomy and

helpless entrapment. In fact, the narrator's body, in many respects, becomes a text within a text, an autobiography, perhaps, within the larger autobiography, mapping and inscribing the narrator's complex and often tenuous position in the world around her. Understanding exactly how Escapade constitutes a "desperate struggle to write the female body" (Scura 310) goes far in clarifying the questions of how female subjectivity, selfhood, and autonomy come into play in many of Scott's most significant fictional works.

Sidonie Smith has contributed groundbreaking insights into the nature of autobiography—especially women's autobiography—by examining how the notion of subjectivity is shaped by cultural and biological constructions of the body. Much like Jelinek, Smith sees autobiography as "one of the West's master discourses" (Subjectivity 18), a discourse that posits an "essential self" with "internal integrity," a self "autonomous and free" (Subjectivity 6, 7). Such a self Smith labels the universal subject—a subject, it is important to realize, that Smith insists is always already gendered male. Thus, traditional notions of autobiography prove narrowly restrictive, perhaps even inaccessible, in a sense, to those marginalized subjects, among them women, whose sense of self and worth and cultural stability seems less certain, less "universal," than that of the privileged white male subjects who customarily engage in this master discourse. We can see that Smith's work is clearly building upon the feminist critical tools forged earlier by Jelinek, but Smith's project adds new textures of significance to the study of women's autobiography. The woman's sense of self is

not merely complicated by her multitudinous social roles, which is the tack Jelinek's study follows. Smith's angle on the issue is more radical and, of course, informed by the strides taken in feminist theory since the publication of Jelinek's work in 1980.

Smith sees the woman as an "encumbered" self, identified by social roles, yes, but also powerfully shaped by what Smith unabashedly labels biological entrapment: for Smith, a woman's anatomy, in part, shapes her destiny (Subjectivity 12). Autobiography, Smith argues, "is one of those cultural occasions when the history of the body intersects the deployment of subjectivity" (Subjectivity 23). This is particularly the case if that body is somehow abnormal, in transgression, somehow grotesque or Other. The woman's body is such a grotesque site—"always already transgressive" to borrow Mary Russo's phrasing (217), a locus of carnivalesque unruliness. Tapping into Bakhtin's conceptions of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque body, "the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change" (Russo 219), feminist scholars, Smith and Russo among them, see the female body as a locus of radical difference, a grotesque body that opposes the "monumental, static, closed, and sleek" body of the classical Western ideal (Russo 219)—which, significantly, is, much like the well-made autobiography of that same tradition, gendered male.

The transgressive and grotesque nature of her body powerfully and inevitably shapes the autobiographical voice of the woman writer, Smith asserts. While she notes that "current notions of the constitution of the subject anchor subjectivity very

much in the body" ("Identity's Body" 267), such conceptions, for Smith, are most important when we consider the especially problematic position of marginalized autobiographical subjects, those who, because of the differentness of their bodies, "find themselves partitioned in their bodies, culturally embodied" ("Identity's Body" 269).

The biological turn in Smith's theorizing of the autobiographical subject is crucial for our understanding of Escapade. This is particularly true with respect to the narrator's pregnant body. The pregnant woman's body, for many feminist critics, is the carnivalesque body par excellence, in process, regenerating life, transgressing boundaries—and thus different, Other, when considered in counterpoint to the classical, symmetrical, and, of course, "male" body feminists see as the privileged and normative cultural ideal.

Mary Russo introduces her essay "Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory" with the anecdotal observation that young girls and even women are often warned not to make spectacles of themselves: "Making a spectacle out of oneself,' she writes, "seemed a specifically feminine danger" (213). The female body, differing as it does from the classically ideal body of man, is a particularly vulnerable site (sight): "For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself [has] more to do with a kind of inadvertancy and loss of boundaries" (213). The pregnant woman's body is, from Russo's perspective, exactly this kind of spectacle, a liminal state in violation, or, as Mary Jacobus explains, "a threshold that unsettles the paternal and symbolic order" (149) in

its inherent difference. No wonder, then, that for many feminist critics, "the representation and ideology of motherhood . . . make mothering the basis for women's oppression" (Jacobus 144). Even the physiological conditions of maternity come to signify the marginalized position of women: "'confinement;' sexual subordination" (Jacobus 144). Maternity, then, further marginalizes the already marginal female subject, makes the Other woman even more Other.

Scott's narrator in Escapade is vividly aware of the transgressiveness of her own body. First, the male gaze absolutely haunts Scott's narrative: "inwardly shrinking and cold with an obscure fear" (E 7), the narrator boldly attempts to return the stares of the Brazilian men she encounters on the street, and throughout the narrative she remains "very conscious of being looked at by men" (E 107). Fixed and defined by this gaze, Scott's narrator, despite her inherently rebellious spirit, nonetheless comes to realize that "[i]t is through the flesh that you are at everyone's mercy" (E 107).

To be more precise, it is the narrator's maternal body that intensifies her sense of alienation, of Otherness. Indeed, the narrator's pregnant body occupies perhaps the central position in the early sections of the text, and the transgressive nature of this maternal body is examined in ruthless detail. For instance, her obviously pregnant condition adds a new dimension to the narrator's awareness of the male gaze: "I want to be proud of my self, and I am ashamed. . . . I try to ignore the men who stare at me" (E 5). Clearly, her pregnancy categorizes her as a grotesque, as always already in

transgression: "I can not bear to expose myself to the naked gaze of the men I see" (E 38); "I was conscious of my flesh as of some horrible garment" (E 19). The examinations she endures under the scrutinizing eye of Dr. Januario are rendered with disturbingly vivid detail: "He looked at my body, even touched me intimately to assure himself that everything was going on all right" (E 53). But despite the "cold sexual curiosity" of his professional responsibilities (E 53), Dr. Januario finds his patient, she believes, grotesquely Other: "Something quite usual is occurring in regard to me, something about which he has a faint curiosity but which repels him" (E 53). Perhaps most strikingly, though, the narrator, at several points, recognizes that Januario defines her solely through her body: "I felt his cold eyes all over me, ignoring me" (E 51); "somehow I know that he has never seen me" (E53); "I yet feel that he has never seen me, that he never will" (E 56).

Clearly, then, as Sidonie Smith has argued, female subjectivity, especially within the autobiographical context of a work like Escapade, is largely defined by the body—or, better, by the cultural constructions of the body. This physicality seems inescapable, as the narrator's description of her flesh as a "horrible garment" suggests. In fact, we also see in Escapade a clear sense that the narrator is hopelessly trapped in her body, that her maternal body, especially, moves forward inexorably, impelled by its own reproductive momentum. As the moment for delivery approaches, Scott's narrator begins to perceive herself as a veritable biological/maternal machine, a mere vehicle for reproduction: "I knew that I was caught up in a mechanism of some kind

that had to go on and on to the end—even if the end were death" (E 52). For Escapade's narrator, then, the Otherness of her female body and, indeed, the very biological principles upon which this cultural Otherness is founded together weave a net of entrapment from which there seems no antidote: "Horrible to be a part of flesh," she reflects, "from which there is no escape" (E 203-04).

When we consider these issues of subjectivity and the body, of how female subjectivity is inevitably affixed to public and private conceptions of the body, we begin to see why the effort to write a self utilizing the accepted notions of male-centered autobiography simply does not work for a writer like Evelyn Scott. Mary Wheeling White's discussion of Escapade describes Scott's narrative self "[working] through what critic Susan Stanford Friedman terms a 'dual consciousness'" (77). Friedman sees women autobiographers caught up in a seemingly contradictory project, attempting to capture in writing a "self as culturally defined" and simultaneously aiming to inscribe a "self as different from cultural prescription" (39). Perhaps Scott understood, as she undertook the writing of a self in this book, that she was in fact attempting to write the unwritable. In Escapade, Scott's narrator at one point reflects that "the self-contradictory phrase, the paradox, is likeliest to approach the truth" (140).

As I have already pointed out, Scott's prose at its most experimental seems to flaunt deliberately any crystalline clarity of meaning, perhaps because she does not consider such an endeavour possible in some cases. Even Scott's more sympathetic

contemporary reviewers found her prose style simply too new, too different: "Her faintly beautiful prose glides and drifts and slips hither and thither without object or direction," Ludwig Lewisohn wrote in his review of Narcissus; "In its texture there is no continuous pattern; her pattern is a deliberate absence of pattern. It is all done earnestly in the pursuit of truth. One can only say that truth is not to be captured in this fashion" ("Through a Glass" 192). Clearly, as the passage quoted above from Escapade confirms, Evelyn Scott would disagree with Lewisohn's advice concerning how one gets at the truth in writing. In the case of an autobiographical project like Escapade, perhaps paradox, as Scott's narrator proposes, is as close as Scott can come to writing the truth about herself—that is, if we can take Escapade as, unequivocally, an autobiography.

The problem facing Scott can be clarified somewhat when we return to Sidonie Smith's work. For Smith, remember, the autobiographical endeavor, that of the classic mold, at any rate, is a fruitless one for the female autobiographer. "The unified self disperses" for a woman, Smith insists: "woman's destiny cannot be self-determined, and her agency cannot be exercised" (Subjectivity 13). Such remarks as these from Smith should remind us of the sense of isolation and entrapment in Escapade, of objectification before the male gaze, of the mechanistic determinism Scott's narrator attributes to her pregnant condition. And all of this is summarily confirmed in an important passage late in the narrative. In a short sequence of reflection, largely unrelated to the narrative events surrounding it, Scott's narrator

describes herself—and surprisingly, but significantly, she utilizes the second-person form of address: "You are not a woman at all. You are a dead thing. . . . But no one will take from you the thing that you are. You can tell that when you recall the face in the mirror—pale face, sagging breasts, thin body, starved by its own ugliness" (220). This passage underscores the reification of the narrator on a number of levels. The use of second person to address herself not only suggests a sense of alienation from the self—a typical modernist move, perhaps—but, more important, it suggests her objectification, literally placing her own self in the object rather than the subject position in her autobiographical discourse. The repeated use of "thing" powerfully reinscribes this sense of objectification. The depleted female figure in the mirror completes this bitter reckoning of the self—deprived of beauty not only by poverty but by the ills associated with her complicated delivery, the narrator recognizes in herself an object bereft of worth, a commodity now without the exchange value commonly linked to feminine beauty.

In other lines from this passage, however, there also lurks a sense of autonomy, though it is easily overlooked amid the stark and despairing imagery: "Your feet walk proudly over the living grass. It cannot wound you any longer with its agony of green. You are beautiful, white with sorrow. Your embrace is eternal" (E 220). Passages such as this underscore the "dual consciousness" of Scott's narrator. There are, then, moments in the text, moments of defiance if not triumph, when Scott's narrative struggles fiercely to define and mold a solid sense of self.

In the first full-length study of Scott's work, Robert L. Welker's unpublished dissertation, entitled "Evelyn Scott: A Literary Biography," Welker regards Escapade as "the portrait of a soul in torment, but," he explains, "the torment is the pain of giving life to its spirit and birth to its being" ("ES" 204). For Welker, Scott's work is best understood in terms of the structuring concept of liebestod—love-death, "the spiritual vision" that realizes "the birth of life out of death" ("ES" 210). Following the route indicated by this motif, he sees Escapade as a narrative not only of a physical pregnancy but of a spiritual one in which not only a new human life but a new self—that of the narrator—is born. This self, interestingly, Welker describes in terms we can only see as romantic: "Our true existence is not in the illusionary self, but is in identity with Nature, and the clues to this force are best understood by our awareness of death, darkness, and that which is apart from the purely individual" ("ES" 212, Welker's emphasis). In her love for John (her lover), for nature (embodied in her many pets on the farm), in her love for her child, Welker argues, the narrator achieves "a more total identification, a more complete loss of self to otherness" ("ES" 221); and rejecting any charges that such loss of self constitutes nihilism, Welker insists that this identification with otherness suggests "a life which unifies inner and outer being," one "which accepts death and the oneness of all things" ("ES" 223). To a degree, Welker's commentary is astute. There are the earmarks of a kind of romanticism in some sequences of Escapade, as a Wordsworthian or, perhaps better, a Whitmanesque spirit of unity is announced: "I feel that I shall become everything to myself, as if through me

only the trees and rocks exist" (E 242). Clearly, the narrator, at times, draws a powerful sense of self, of autonomy, from her pregnancy: "I undressed to look at myself. I was elated. All at once I had discovered a kind of hard unquestioning satisfaction in my own being. I was strong and important. A new ruthlessness seemed to be born in me" (E 8). So, yes, we do see in the narrator an effort to locate or solidify a self, as Welker asserts. It remains equally true, however, as we have seen, that Scott's narrator is deeply troubled by the "illusionary" nature of her self, to deploy Welker's terminology: we might indeed question how the narrator can lose herself to unity with nature, with lover, with child, or with whatever "otherness" we wish to posit simply because, as she has told us, she "hasn't any self."

For Sidonie Smith, this conflicted effort is to be expected in the struggle to write a feminine self: although in traditional autobiographical terms, selfhood and autobiography mutually imply one another, the woman autobiographer, grappling with a "dispersed" sense of self, with a lack of self-determination and agency, "cannot find herself as universal man does in his romantic journey inward to the core of his being" (Subjectivity 15). In fact, Scott's narrator seems painfully aware of the futility of her struggle: despite her desperate efforts to write a self into being, she simply cannot "find a pattern into which I can fit myself" (E 15).

Welker's assertion that Scott's narrator seeks unity with nature is, then, a problematic claim. As with so much of Scott's elusive narrative, the paradoxical nature of the text frustrates simple elucidation. The effort to lay claim to a self is

there, to be sure, with all of its attendant romantic implications, and likewise, much is made of humankind's place in nature, especially of the individual's place in nature. However, as I earlier suggested, to see Scott's text as a romantic "Utopian compensation," while a convenient starting point, is inadequate for explaining the complexities of Escapade. That is, a variety of literary naturalism seems to be undercutting any romantic impulses in the text.

Scott's depictions of nature, while often strikingly beautiful, are overshadowed by the dark presence of a Darwinian determinism. The nature of Escapade is redder in tooth and claw than Tennyson ever envisioned. The overarching imagery of death many of Scott's contemporaries found so powerfully distasteful in her work is simply the logical conclusion of the Darwinian jungle Scott's text portrays. In his claims about the liebestod, Welker works hard to redeem Scott's text from this near obsession with death, but the naturalistic impulse of Escapade should not really surprise us. Scott herself explained in Background in Tennessee her strong early connections with the most high profile of the naturalistic novelists, citing Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane as important influences. Moreover, such a naturalistic impetus is compatible with the clearly feminist spirit of Scott's work. Barbara Hochman argues that some women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—such as Edith Wharton and Kate Chopin—may have intentionally chosen naturalistic plot lines for at least some of their major novels in order to legitimize their work, to tap into the accepted literary forms of the period in "a bid for

position in a male-dominated professional world" (212). It is possible such an argument could also carry some weight in the case of a young writer like Scott. More likely, however, is the more obvious explanation, an explanation linked indirectly with the intersections of subjectivity and the body we have seen powerfully shaping the autobiographical voice of Escapade.

Scott's narrator consistently describes her cosmos in clearly Darwinian terms. For her, competitive struggle constitutes the very nature of existence. In one of the few contemporary references in the text, for instance, the narrator expresses no surprise upon hearing of the outbreak of World War I: for her, the war merely "presents the customary struggle in nature," albeit "more dramatically than it has ever before been presented" (E 97). Indeed, in the narrator's view, "[a]ll species of creation exist in enmity and devour each other in order to survive. Why should people be shocked by warfare when war is the very law of life" (E 218). The narrator's interaction with the wilds of Brazil provides an illustrative context for her opinions. In part six, the brutal realities of nature are called to the fore in the failure of the family's farm: "conspiring Nature" seemingly "has no use" for the narrator's individual consciousness (E 218-9). The narrator finds herself surrounded by a natural world that seems bent upon the family's destruction—"Every day sheep die. Everything dies" (E 220). Enveloped in this terrifying natural world, she comes to see "Death [as] . . . the name I have given to Nature itself" (E 206). This, of course, is far from the sort of harmonious vision we associate with romantic conceptions of the cosmos. And

when the narrator finally declares we must "[f]eed ourselves to Nature who is greater than Moloch" (E 223), it is hard for us to imagine this passage as a reflection of some sort of cosmic unity. But this obsessive aversion to nature we encounter at certain points in the narrative is not without precedent in Escapade. Recall the sense of entrapment shaping the narrator's consciousness: therein lies the key for understanding what is at stake in Scott's autobiography. Scott's narrator sees in nature the customary state of human society: a devouring maw of competition and exploitation, a violent struggle for dominance masked by the pretenses of social amenities. Though we know only through relatively indirect references the controversy from which she and John have fled, it is clear the narrator regards her former home as a vicious social jungle as frightening as any real one:

> Though I am at a loss to understand the unkind assumptions of the newspapers from home that, without a single fact as to what has actually occurred, anathematize John and me in the most vulgar terms, the exposure of injustice gratifies me, and gives me an almost mystical assurance to my sense of right. Yes, I want to be an outcast in order to realize fully what human beings are capable of. Now I know that fear and cruelty underlie all of society's protestations in favor of honesty and moral worth. (E 9)

More important, however, are the implications this social jungle holds for a female inhabitant. The deterministic traps the narrator struggles against simply will

not allow her the luxury of an autonomous, integrated self. As a young southern girl, the narrator battles confining fetters customarily binding a woman of her breeding and class, fetters forged by both society and family. Among these restrictions is the denial that she is capable of any kind of autonomy: "What I resent most deeply is the attempt to deprive *me* of responsibility for my own acts. To have John sent to prison as though *I* had not equally selected the condition to which we have been brought!" (E 17, Scott's italics). So, from the outset of her escapade, she has found herself "in rebellion against all those people who make the laws, who edit the newspapers, who . . . condemn in advance all those who fail in a conformity which has no individual significance" (E 17). These special encumbrances restricting Scott's narrator are, of course, further intensified in her new Brazilian environment. We have discussed the narrator's troubling encounters with the local men; we have seen her pinned repeatedly under the scrutinizing male gaze of Brazilian spectators. What Scott's text clearly presents is a reworking of a naturalistic impulse along the lines of female subjectivity: for the female consciousness, Scott seems to saying, certain public spaces, certain cultural situations, constitute a dangerous, consuming milieu for women. Let us return briefly to the haunting figure of Dr. Januario, who, it seems, becomes a disturbing confluence of cultural pressures in the text—in many respects, a figure of cultural enforcement, working to contain and categorize Scott's narrator within narrowly prescribed boundaries of gender.

The doctor literally embodies the forces of patriarchy working to deprive the narrator of any sense of self. As a Brazilian—and, of course, a man—the doctor's nationality defines him as an agent of the powerfully androcentric culture the narrator has encountered. As a doctor, part of a profession then dominated by men, Januario represents exactly the kind of patronizing male physician—ill-equipped to respond to the woman patient's "otherness" and always verging toward misdiagnosis—we see lamented elsewhere in women's writing: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" springs immediately to mind. As we have seen, the doctor comes to personify the male gaze Scott's narrator has endured throughout her stay in Brazil: "It . . . stimulates his sense of power to look on women like this" (E 53). It is in these passages policed so forcefully by the male gaze that we see the selfhood of the narrator under the most strenuous attack: indeed, to return to the Darwininan perspective the narrator embraces, we see the narrator's self quite literally devoured in many of these scenes, consumed by the voracious appetite of male spectatorship: "I felt his cold eyes all over me, ignoring me. . . . To have one's individuality completely ignored is like being pushed quite out of life. Like being blown out as one blows out a light" (E 51).

The real power of Scott's text, however, lies in its unflinching determination to confront these issues of the female body and their implications for female subjectivity. The woman is hopelessly trapped in a body always already defined as marginal, as Other, a body upon which nature itself has placed further confining restrictions—

namely, the ever present possibility, even danger, of pregnancy. D. A. Callard has suggested that Scott's own brand of feminism was deeply rooted in these issues surrounding the woman's body: "A true feminism would investigate women's slavery in nature rather than in society, by which she meant, largely, her biologically ordained maternal role" (137). This biological slavery, he contends, "was, to her, the core of the feminist dilemma" (Callard 138).

I think it is clear, however, that Escapade, despite Callard's comments to the contrary, offers an investigation of woman's slavery in both nature and society. As we will see, that investigation is not limited to Scott's forays into autobiography, for her early fiction, especially The Narrow House, dwells at length on many of the same questions of subjectivity and the body. Indeed, in his Creating the Modern American Novel, critic Harlan Hatcher asserts that The Narrow House and its companion novel Narcissus are "made of the same goods" as Escapade (179). Any reader of both The Narrow House and Escapade will immediately recognize parallel characters, circumstances, concerns, such as complications in pregnancy, for instance (embodied in the character of Winnie), female grotesques (Alice, in particular)—in sum, women characters who, like the narrator of Escapade, are powerfully shaped by an awareness of the problematic status of their own bodies. And all of this is rendered, as in Escapade, in shifting prisms of prose—realist, expressionist, imagist (Welker, "ES" 169)—that nonetheless work "within the general framework of naturalism" (Welker, "ES" 245).

However, it is important to recall the initial thrust of our discussion. The naturalistic framework shaping Scott's early prose, the framework suggested by critics like Welker, is a convenient but limiting reference point. Scott's work—as Escapade demonstrates—is far too protean for neat categorization. The deterministic forces shaping the subjectivity of Escapade's narrator are counterpointed by the very interiority of the narrative itself: Scott clearly pursues the turn inward Randall Stevenson characterizes as definitively modernist. One response, of course, to any threat to the autonomy of the self—whether by an uncaring cosmos or, indeed, a fiercely patriarchal social structure—is to reassert that selfhood in writing, to look within the self and thereby stake out an interior space of autonomy. Scott's turn inward in Escapade is not Utopian, but it does constitute a struggle toward autonomy, even if this autonomy is rooted solely in difference: "I believe in my weakness, but I shall keep on, with all the determination I have, discovering myself through everything I am not" (E 44).

This same unflinching determination drives her early fiction as well. Thus, having taken up these questions in Escapade, we are better prepared—and certainly moreso than her puzzled and scandalized contemporaries—to respond to Evelyn Scott's frank and disturbing first novel, The Narrow House.

Chapter Two

No Exit from The Narrow House: Naturalism, Ocularcentricism, and the Sartrean Gaze in Evelyn Scott's First Novel

At issue in this chapter is the question of how Evelyn Scott stretches the boundaries of our received notions of naturalistic fiction, what innovations Scott brings to the established field of American literary naturalism, and how these innovations add to our understanding of what Donald Pizer labels the naturalistic impulse in American fiction. As we will see soon enough, Evelyn Scott's work in this novel again prefigures certain evolutions in both literary criticism and philosophy, often with extraordinary prescience. The Narrow House has been commonly characterized as an example of a kind of naturalistic fiction, but critics have differed on just what kind of naturalistic fiction the novel exemplifies. Thus, it is important to recognize that our discussion may take some striking turns—but turns made necessary by even more startling folds in the narrative terrain of Scott's text. With this caveat offered, I want to turn our attention to Evelyn Scott's first novel, the acclaimed but controversial The Narrow House.

Sinclair Lewis's review of The Narrow House in The New York Times Book Review and Magazine hailed the publication of Evelyn Scott's first novel as "an event": "Salute to Evelyn Scott! It would be an insult to speak with smug judiciousness of her 'promise.' She has done it!" (18). Although not a commercial success, The Narrow House nonetheless sparked an intense debate among critics and

reviewers, many of whom found Evelyn Scott's first novel painful reading.[1] The few more recent critics who have written extensively on Scott's life and work record a more positive shock of recognition in engaging with her first novel: Mary Wheeling White, for instance, recalls how the work "shocked and thrilled [her] with its unexpected narrative" (xiii); Mary Carrigg comments on the "stark power" of the novel (92); and Robert L. Welker considers the work "a remarkably fine presentation," "complete in the record it gives of the spiritual death of one family generation" (253). Pessimistic, graphic, almost claustrophobic, Scott's unrelenting vision of a quietly (sometimes quietly, at any rate) disintegrating Farley household is, as Steven Ryan has observed, astonishingly sustained in its brutal tone: "the unity of atmosphere," Ryan writes, "is the novel's most remarkable accomplishment" (36). The ruthlessness of Scott's vision in The Narrow House is unsettling, though, as we will see, the consistency of atmosphere is not the only remarkable accomplishment of this novel. Evelyn Scott herself called the writing of the novel one of the most intense experiences she ever had (Salpeter 284): a similar kind of intensity awaits the reader.

Written while Scott was also grappling with the concept of Escapade, The Narrow House, as Harlan Hatcher observes, is clearly cut from the same cloth as the later autobiography (179). The narrative tells the story of three generations of the Farley family, all confined together within what Steven Ryan has aptly described as

[1] One anonymous critic complains that the novel suffers from a lack of "calm explanatory narrative" and a too elevated "degree of emotional hysteria" among its characters (TLS 13 October 1921, p. 666).

"the terroristic universe" of the novel. The central conflicts revolve around the long term infidelity of Mr. Farley, the oddly ineffectual family patriarch, who has fathered a child with a lover in Kansas City (it is unclear where exactly the story is set, which ambiguity not only adds a mysterious, faintly gothic uncertainty to the tale but also, of course, serves to universalize the narrative). Despite the public knowledge of the affair, the elder Farleys have remained together, though somewhat tenuously—largely due to Mrs. Farley's stubborn refusal to face the reality of the adultery issue.

An atmosphere of ill-health emanates from this tension between the older couple, infecting the entire household with a sense of decay, of mutual distrust, and of an explosive fury and frustration that simmers beneath the surface of the family members' seemingly innocuous conversations, erupting only in a few wildly chaotic scenes involving the troubled Alice, the Farleys' unmarried adult daughter, and Mrs. Farley. Indeed, both of the adult Farley children, Laurence and Alice, have been powerfully shaped by the tense and painfully strained relationship of their parents. Laurie's own marriage to the sickly but beautiful and manipulative Winnie proves to be a kind of domestic trap for both partners. Alice, in turn, suffers her own kind of entrapment, unhappily wedded not to a spouse but to her own indelicate, unlovely body, her own grotesque self-image, and assaulted by the cultural ideals of beauty—embodied, for instance, by Winnie—that continually haunt and taunt her nearly to the point of suicide. But, as Steven Ryan observes, "Scott's The Narrow House is not held together as much by plot structure or characterization as by the atmosphere of the house itself" (36).

That atmosphere, as I have already suggested, is primarily one of entrapment. As with Escapade, a naturalistic framework (Welker 245) shapes the narrative dimensions of The Narrow House. In his Contemporary American Authors, Fred B. Millett classifies The Narrow House as an example of what he calls "psychological naturalism" (33), an extension of the familiar novel of social reform (works such as Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, for instance) that moves into the interior topography of the characters' minds: "In the main," Millett writes, "the naturalistic novel has tended to develop in the direction of deeper and deeper subjectivity or more and more austere objectivity" (32). The subjectivity of psychological naturalism, Millett asserts, is strikingly illustrated by the work of Evelyn Scott, whose novels, he observes, are marked by "an emphatically, not to say a personally subjective quality" (33). Nonetheless, the "austere objectivity" (32) Millett identifies as the strain of naturalism competing with the psychological variety seems almost as well represented in Scott's fiction—at least in the eyes of critics such as Harlan Hatcher, who sees in Scott's work "a sharp, scientific eye riveted on truth" (181).[2] In fact, Harlan Hatcher's Creating the Modern American Novel (1935) includes one of the first scholarly commentaries on The Narrow House. Grouping Evelyn Scott with writers such as Waldo Frank and Conrad Aiken, Hatcher is careful to classify The Narrow House as an example of what he labels the erotic or psychological novel, an experimental fiction in which "[t]he narrative background, while distinct, is

[2] Warren Beach makes a similar comment about Scott's objective style: "She touches human nature with the coolness of a laboratory scientist. . . . She is afraid of being unscientific" (484).

deliberately subordinated to the psychological implications of the events" (180).[3] So, despite his assertion that the novel provides a coldly objective viewpoint at times, Hatcher, too, emphasizes the interior nature of Scott's narrative. Moreover, Hatcher's study offers high praise of Scott. After lauding Escapade for its "delicately kept" balance between "objective reality and the febrile imagination of the perceiver," between a "style at once so poetic and yet so tight and firm" (180), Hatcher turns to the first two installments of the Farley family trilogy, noting that "[t]he early novels [The Narrow House and Narcissus] are obviously an extension of these qualities [the "delicately kept" balance of Escapade] in a minute study of other lives" (180).

Despite the clearly psychological impetus of her early fiction—exemplified equally effectively in the early autobiography—The Narrow House, like Escapade, is, then, at least in terms of theme, "an exercise in naturalism" (Callard 61), though as Donald Pizer explains, we need not label a writer such as Evelyn Scott a definitive naturalistic novelist to admit a powerful naturalistic strain in her early novels. Much like Theodore Dreiser—a writer whom she both admired and befriended—Evelyn Scott sought in her early fiction to push the borders of naturalism in new and innovative directions. In fact, Scott corresponded fairly regularly with Dreiser, and the older writer frequently endorsed Scott's career, "[going] to bat for Scott in New York," as Mary Wheeling White reports, "writing and calling some publishers" in a

[3] It is perhaps this emphasis on the psychological, on the interior mood of the characters rather than the exterior unfolding of plot, that leads Stephen Ryan to regard the atmospherics of the novel as so significant.

push to publish her experimental Civil War epic The Wave (White 112). In Background in Tennessee, as we have already noted, Scott herself claims an early fascination with the work of Theodore Dreiser, along with that of two other significant naturalistic novelists, Frank Norris and Stephen Crane.

Upon reading Scott's early fiction, it becomes clear why the younger writer counted Dreiser among her major influences. A number of common themes are evident in the oeuvre of both writers: among them, their shared "identification with the 'outsider'" (Pizer, Theory and Practice 58, White 13) and their contempt for "the mainstream of middle class American life" (Pizer, Theory and Practice 58), both themes strikingly prominent in The Narrow House. Reviews of her novels demonstrate conclusively that these connections were clear to Evelyn Scott's contemporaries as well. H. L. Menken, for instance, compared The Narrow House favorably to Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt, actually concluding that Scott's novel demonstrates "a far greater venturesomeness and a far finer virtuosity in the novel form" (204). Less sympathetic reviewers were apt to regard the works of both writers as equally flawed—such as Clifton Fadiman, who complained that Scott's novel The Shadow of the Hawk seemed in part to be "one of those Dreiserian studies of the effect of society upon character" ("Disappointments" 73). The tone of Fadiman's review seems as implicitly critical of anything Dreiserian as it is explicitly critical of Scott's work. These connections with Dreiser are more than incidental, however. In fact, such connections are critical for understanding exactly where Scott's early

fiction, especially The Narrow House, locates itself in the topography of literary naturalism.

In Theory and Practice in American Literary Naturalism, Donald Pizer defends the naturalistic tradition in American fiction from what he sees as too narrowly prescribed definitions of literary naturalism barring our full understanding of this movement. First, for Pizer, naturalism cannot be conveniently herded into that brief period in American letters extending from the 1890s to the first decade of the twentieth century. Instead, Pizer sees a long-standing tradition of naturalism. This naturalistic impulse, as he calls it, commences with the high tide of naturalistic fiction dominated by Norris, Crane, and the early Dreiser. This naturalistic surge recedes in the early years of this century, marking the end of what we customarily define as the era of naturalistic fiction. But the impulse itself lives on, continually coursing through the body of American fiction, periodically resurfacing during certain phases in the history of our literature—such as during the 1930s with the work of John Steinbeck and John Dos Passos or during the 1950s with the arrival of Norman Mailer, William Styron, and Saul Bellow (Pizer 25, 29).

Historically, Pizer sees the 1920s as a transitional period in which naturalistic themes raised by the writers of the 1890s mesh with the experimentation of the emerging modernist movment. James Joyce's Ulysses, Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, and Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy, Pizer asserts, all treat the "abstract deterministic ideas" of 1890s naturalistic fiction with a more experimental "oblique expression" (25):

> Many of the novelists of the twenties appeared to be saying that we live in a trivial, banal, and tawdry world that nevertheless encloses us and shapes our destinies. We seek to escape from this world into the inner life because only there do we seem to find the richness of feeling denied us in experience. (25)

Clearly, this escape into the inner life is an alternative portrayal of the turn inward Randall Stevenson describes in Modernist Fiction. And, of course, we have encountered this turn inward in Scott's Escapade. But Pizer's vision of 1920s fiction is a remarkably apt profile of the aims and achievements of The Narrow House, particularly when we consider Pizer's further comments about the fiction of this period:

> But in fact we do not really escape. The retreat into the inner life transforms us into grotesque exaggerations of what we wish to be, or causes us (with fatal consequences) to seek the translation of fantasy into reality, or engages us in an endless search for the understanding and love denied us in life. (25)

The passage quoted above could, indeed, easily have been lifted from a contemporary review of Scott's novel so closely does it conform to the central imagery, themes, and narrative turns of The Narrow House.

Perhaps even more significant, however, is the shift in setting we see in this experimental hybrid of modernist experimentalism and naturalistic thematics. Scott's Farley tragedy is foremost a domestic narrative, far removed from the Darwinian

landscapes and seascapes of much naturalistic fiction. As Pizer explains, "By the 1920s, the naturalistic impulse had refined itself into a more subtle representation of the qualifications placed on man's freedom than was true of naturalistic work of the 1890s. Rather, the theme of constraint is dramatized within more domesticated and everyday phases of life" (158). The harsh natural settings characteristic of Crane's or Norris's or London's naturalistic fiction have been supplanted by the familiar trappings of typical bourgeois existence: the stagnant streets of Joyce's Dublin, the homes of Anderson's Winesberg, Ohio—and the loveless and ill-lit bedrooms, kitchen, and parlor of Scott's The Narrow House.

In addition, this domestic turn in naturalistic fiction carries, on the whole, a distinctly feminist flavor, exemplified, for instance, in the works of women writers such as Edith Wharton and Ellen Glasgow, both "novelist[s] of society and manners" whose fiction satirizes "a world where serious codes have been defeated by economic laws and can produce only static and absurd behavior" (Ruland and Bradbury 246). Like much of Glasgow's work, Scott's novel seems to concern itself, at least in part, with "[a]ristocratic decline in a society in transition" (Ruland and Bradbury 246). While the economic status of the Farley household is largely a background issue, a sense of financial decline contributes to the atmosphere of foreboding and quiet (and occasionally unquiet) desperation that haunts The Narrow House. For instance, while musing over the deteriorating condition of her home, Mrs. Farley, the narrator tells us, considers the family's restored relations with their in-laws primarily in economic terms: "At any rate, now that her daughter-in-law, Winnie, had become reconciled to

her parents things would be better. Mr. and Mrs. Price [as their name suggests] were rich. . . . Winnie's two babies, a girl and a boy, would now enjoy many things which the Farleys had not been able to provide" (NH 8). In preparing to entertain the Prices, Mrs. Farley's thoughts are never far from money: "Mrs. Farley, in spite of a gala occasion and the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Price were to do her the condescension of coming to dinner at her house the next day, had not intended to buy anything so expensive as chicken. For all those people it would take two hens" (NH 10). And the dilapidated state of their house—which we will examine in more detail presently—further underscores the Farleys' economic woes.

The autobiographical roots of Scott's domestic fiction— The Narrow House being the most remarkable example—are clear enough to her biographers. D. A. Callard observes that "[a] common thread in much of Evelyn's work is the oppressive nature of the family" (5). This "bleak vision of family life," Callard speculates, is almost certainly "derived from personal experience" (5). Mary Wheeling White implies a similar autobiographical foundation for much of Scott's more domestic fictions: like the Farley family, "the Dunns' appearance of aristocratic gentility" was just that—mere appearance (14). In actual fact, "[a]s did many other southerners at the turn of the century," White points out, "Elsie struggled to reconcile the social class her family represented with the way they actually lived" (15). As a child, then, Evelyn Scott endured firsthand exactly the kind of social, moral, and economic tremors that marked "a world where social codes," to recall Ruland's and Bradbury's assertion, "have been defeated by economic laws" (246). Thus, a small part of the

naturalistic framework of The Narrow House is erected upon a foundation of economic determinism—a characteristic component of the naturalistic narratives of the first decades of the twentieth century. Economic and social decay, however, are not indicted in Scott's novel as the root causes of the Farley family's despair. Instead, the sense of despair emanating from their financial struggles becomes just one of a constellation of tropes and images that serves to sustain the intensely foreboding atmosphere critics such as Stephen Ryan have found so astonishing.

The waste land imagery that marks the opening scene of the narrative establishes the tone of moral, spiritual, and physical decay that led many contemporary readers to decry "the repulsiveness of Scott's artistic vision" (White 60). The novel's initial sequence opens on the Farley family neighborhood, a "hot, bright street [that] looked almost deserted" (NH 1); a "disheveled building" presides ominously over the near empty cityscape, flanked by a "glaring heap" of "broken plaster" (NH 1). The themes of alienation, fragmentation, and decay suggested by this imagery shift soon enough from the deserted terrain of the opening scene to the Farley family members themselves, a transfer of meaning carried through the medium of another crucial image—the Farley house:

> The old-fashioned house next door [the Farley family home] was as badly in need of improvements as the one undergoing alterations. The dingy brick walls were streaked by the drippage from the leaky tin gutter that ran along the roof. The massive shutters, thrown back from

> the long windows, were rotting away. Below the lifted panes very clean worn curtains hung slack like things exhausted by the heat. (NH 1)

Recall Norris's octopus, Crane's unforgiving sea in "The Open Boat," the harsh, frozen tundra of Jack London's "To Build a Fire." Naturalistic texts typically feature a central and controlling metaphor which serves to underscore the sense of entrapment and constraint naturalistic fiction typically posits. In Scott's novel, the house itself serves that function.

Indeed, the short passage above bristles with metaphorical energy. As a number of critics have realized (Stephen Ryan, most notably), the house itself serves not only to enclose and entrap the Farleys but also to embody and signify the family. The choice of the term "old-fashioned" to capture the architectural detail of the house is a significant one, serving equally well to label the dated and ultimately superficial Victorian morality to which the family (certainly the elder Farleys, at any rate) so desperately and futilely cling. As White explains, "Scott's novel reflected a mindset widely held by young experimental artists of the 1920s . . . [who] felt oppressed by an older generation that clung to outmoded Victorian moral codes" (61). The Narrow House, then, deploys its naturalistic arsenal in the domestic arena in order to critique that sort of family environment all too familiar to the young Elsie Dunn, an environment in which "the values of middle America" prove to be "hopelessly bounded, nihilistic, cold" (White 61).

With their dated moral codes, antiquated gentility, and declining social status, the Farley family proves to be as "dingy," "streaked," and "rotting" as their home. And like the worn curtains hanging "slack" and "exhausted" in their windows, the Farleys' vain efforts to sustain a "clean" facade cannot conceal the decay within. Clearly, then, such a domestic environment, like the dwelling that houses it, is "badly in need of improvements" (NH 7).

When Mrs. Farley, the first family member we encounter, steps onto this sterile and rotting stage, we see the transfer of tropes from landscape to house to family. Dressed in a fading but genteel fashion, with "shabby white cotton gloves" and a skirt "too long behind," Mrs. Farley "wish[es] that something might be done to improve her home" (NH 8)—and, of course, as the narrative unfolds, that desire takes on an increasingly rich meaning. Whether any improvements will be forthcoming seems answered, if somewhat obliquely, when Mrs. Farley attempts to ignore the letter with "a Kansas City postmark" she finds waiting in her mailbox:

> Some papers had been thrust in the tin letter box before the clumsy dark green door, and as Mrs. Farley emerged from the house she stopped to glance at them before descending to the street. One of the papers had a Kansas City postmark and she thought it must have come for her husband from a certain woman whom she was trying to forget. She placed the papers clumsily back where she found them. (NH 7-8)

The aversion of Mrs. Farley's eyes from the troubling reality of the Kansas City letter is one of the first of an extraordinary pattern of ocular images that

powerfully shapes the dynamics of Scott's text. Later in the narrative, the guilt-ridden Laurie attends his wife's funeral while "[refusing] to see what was going on. He kept his eyes fixed on the bright ground, and permitted himself to realize nothing more than that" (NH 188). And when Alice confronts her parents with the reality of their failing marriage and "the moral cellar" it has produced, Mr. and Mrs. Farley are careful to turn a blind eye to the issue: "[Mr. Farley] would not look at her" (NH 121); "He could not answer. He put his hand to his head and walked away from her. For a moment he stood by the window with his hands over his eyes" (NH 123). The description of the Farleys as "sightless parasites" inhabiting the "monstrous phlegmatic beast" of the house, then, is more than a gratuitous grotesquery (NH 154); in fact, it demonstrates what sorts of forces are truly shaping the family's fate. As central as the house is as a signifier of entrapment and decay in the narrative, it is the Farley family itself—a family Laurie describes as "a monster which fed on pain " (NH 191)—which weaves the naturalistic web around its individual members.

Donald Pizer has noted how frequently naturalistic novelists are taken to task for not portraying a strictly deterministic vision of reality in narratives which are in theory driven by such a vision—that is, by "[introducing] elements of free will and moral responsibility into accounts of a supposedly necessitarian world" (Pizer, Theory and Practice 14). A later naturalistic novel such as Richard Wright's Native Son is one familiar example of such an apparent contradiction: Wright's novel strives energetically to prove how Bigger Thomas is essentially destined to his fate, yet Bigger's murder of Mary Dalton is finally figured as his first "free" act. A

philosophically rigorous reader will find an inherent inconsistency in Wright's novel. A similar charge might be leveled against a strict reading of the naturalistic elements of Evelyn Scott's The Narrow House: as we have seen in the passages discussed above, the Farley family themselves clearly seem to be complicit in their own entrapment, often simply refusing to "see" the frightful reality around them. But Pizer downplays the significance of such inconsistency, noting, for instance, that Frank Norris's conception of naturalism as he outlines it in several of his essays notably excludes determinism from naturalistic literary criteria (American Realism and Naturalism 8).

In fact, the domestic turn Scott's naturalism undertakes in this novel is not solely centered upon simply another reworking of the notion of mechanistic fate but, rather, around the idea of Darwinian struggle. Charles Child Walcutt sees the ideas of conflict and competition as definitive elements of literary naturalism (20), and it is with these concerns more than with any hard and fast conception of philosophical determinism that The Narrow House operates in the field of naturalistic fiction. How this sense of predatory conflict is played out in the text involves Scott's most striking use of ocular or visual metaphors. As we have already seen, Scott employs a cluster of tropes suggesting the blindness—apparently, the voluntary blindness—of many of the inhabitants of The Narrow House. Perhaps even more provocative is Scott's use of eyes not only to suggest a refusal to see things as they are but to embody or illustrate conflict between her characters. Eyes, especially gazing eyes, mirrors, and other visual images and metaphors permeate the text. Characters are forever gazing

at one another or, alternately, averting their eyes in a refusal to see or acknowledge other characters, or, in some cases, such as Mrs. Farley's ignoring the letter from Kansas City, in a refusal to acknowledge the unhappy truth of their circumstances.

Moreover, the male gaze is a powerful presence in the text. As we have seen, the specter of the male gaze haunts Escapade; and this same specter stalks the corridors of Scott's The Narrow House. As in Escapade, the male gaze possesses a particular potency in The Narrow House, but it is joined by other gazes equally fixating and objectifying, though not necessarily operating around the axis of gender. The result is a powerful interplay of looks locking all of the central characters, regardless of gender, in a grid of cutting gazes. This extraordinary—and, indeed, pervasive—use of ocular imagery is a strikingly innovative reconfiguration of a standard naturalistic theme—the struggle for dominance in a universe ruled by Darwinian principles of survival. Much as Escapade anticipates with an almost eerie prescience issues taken up recent feminist criticism, The Narrow House's ocular imagery prefigures—often in startling ways—similar tropological systems (in both literary criticism and philosophy) that postdate Scott's work by decades.

The primacy of the visual, then, is of extraordinary importance in Evelyn Scott's novel. The Narrow House is a disturbingly ocularcentric environment, and such a milieu shares important connections with the fountainhead philosophy of the gaze—the work of Jean Paul Sartre. Indeed, perhaps the most useful avenue for discussing The Narrow House is not through a rigid examination of its typical or commonly received naturalistic tenets, important though they are, but, rather, by

examining how the naturalistic impulse of the novel infuses the narrative with striking anticipations of the Sartrean gaze.

Since Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the notion of the gaze—particularly the male gaze—has shaped critical responses to the politics of gender operating in literary texts as well as in film and other artistic media. Mulvey's study, of course, draws upon Lacan, but as Martin Jay explains in his history of the ocularcentrism of Western thought, Downcast Eyes, any theoretical system concerned with critiquing "the hegemony of the eye" (282)—whether we are speaking of Lacan, of Foucault, of Irigaray, or of their American followers, such as de Lauretis or Mulvey—traces its origins primarily to the work of Jean Paul Sartre, particularly Being and Nothingness (1943) and his "sinister dialectic of gazes" (Jay 289).

Of course, we commonly associate the idea of the gaze with the work of feminist critics, both French and American—Irigaray, de Lauretis, and Mulvey among them. However, though the oppressive presence of the gaze and of male spectatorship holds powerful, even threatening implications for those who, like the grotesque bodies in Escapade, fall outside the boundaries of the culturally ideal, Sartre's work is essentially gender neutral—although he does seem implicitly to link the power of gazing to racist and imperialist notions of difference and Otherness (Being and Nothingness 373).

Sartre's work, especially in Being and Nothingness (1943), Jay argues, is among the first important critiques of ocularcentrism in Western thought. Certain

ages and cultures, Jay asserts, are dominated by vision, a hegemonic construction he labels "ocularcentrism" (3). According to Jay's history of ocularcentrism in Western philosophy, the eye, the look (as it is often rendered in translations of Sartre), or the gaze are all inextricably linked to notions of self and subjectivity, an "equation of the 'I' and the 'eye'" (284). In short, the Cartesian ego is an ocularcentric construct. Descartes himself leaned heavily upon ocular metaphors to describe his theories of an autonomous, self-aware ego: "Descartes," Jay writes, "is considered the founding father of the modern visualist paradigm" (70). Descartes's efforts to "prove" the existence of a self or an "I" were often voiced in terms of looking within and "seeing" the self. Indeed, Jay speculates, "Descartes may thus not only be responsible for providing a philosophical justification for the modern epistemological habit of 'seeing' ideas in the mind, but may also have been the founder of the speculative tradition of identitarian reflexivity, in which the subject is certain only of its mirror image" (70).

Sartre's work is a response to, Jay prefers a "critique of" (294), this primacy of the visual in Western thought that finds its origins primarily in the Cartesian tradition. The Sartrean gaze or "look," as it is sometimes translated, is the central metaphor of Sartre's philosophy of social relations, and it is upon this notion of the gaze that Sartre's critique hinges. Sartre's notion of human relations, for example, is figured primarily through this metaphor of the gaze, and, as we will see, Sartre's notion of human relations recapitulates in significant ways exactly the kind of Darwinian domesticity Scott's naturalistic text posits.

Significantly, Alfred Stern characterizes Sartre's view of human relationships as a vision defined by conflict. As an existentialist, Sartre holds to the notion that human beings are somehow radically free, that human consciousness is always in process, always in a state of becoming, continually on the cusp of choice. Because of its fluid nature, the self is essentially always autonomously creating itself, moment by moment. This state Sartre calls "being-for-itself," indicating the autonomous nature of the human consciousness as Sartre sees it. As in the case of Bergson before him, then—a philosopher, incidently, Scott considered a significant early influence (Kunitz and Haycraft 1252)—Sartre's work builds a bulwark against deterministic theories of human behavior. This kind of radical human freedom would necessarily appeal to Scott, who D. A Callard suggests, was, in an informal sense, a kind of existentialist, at least at times (137). Although there is no evidence of a direct link between Scott and Sartre, Sartre himself did admit that a powerful influence upon his work emanated from modernist fiction—and interestingly, he most often cites Scott's southern contemporaries, William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell. In a key scene from Faulkner's Light In August, for instance, Sartre found "an impressive example of the gaze of other people as revealers of our moral being" (Stern 94). In Being and Nothingness, Sartre quotes and comments at length upon the passage describing Joe Christmas's death at the hands of Percy Grimm:

> He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable

> and unbearable eyes. . . . Upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. (464-5)

The condemning power of Christmas's gaze will haunt the onlookers eternally, Faulkner suggests: "They are not to lose it [the look] . . . It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatful, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant" (LIA 465).

As we will see, however, the Sartrean gaze can indeed prove "threatful," and this threatening, Medusa-like quality is perhaps better illustrated by another modern southern text often referenced by followers of Sartre, Erskine Caldwell's "We Are Looking at You, Agnes." In this story, a young woman working as a prostitute in New Orleans returns home each Christmas to endure the inexorable scrutiny of her family, who do nothing but fix her silently with their condemning gazes: "Everyone sits in the parlor and looks at me all day long. . . . They all sit in the parlor saying to themselves, We are looking at you, Agnes" (Caldwell 601).

Literary images such as these helped Sartre formulate his rather disturbing profile of the dynamics of human relationships. As Alfred Stern points out, for Sartre, "[e]verybody's gaze is the petrifying gaze of Medusa, changing the other for-itself into an in-itself and depriving it of its freedom" (94). That is, the radically free human consciousness, the being-for-itself, is reduced by the gaze of another to the status of being a mere object, what Sartre calls a "being-in-itself" (Sartre 24). For Sartre, the wielder of the gaze or look is always in the subject position, the recipient of the look or gaze, always in the object position. "If someone looks at me," Sartre

contends, "I am conscious of being an object" (246, Sartre's emphasis). As Alfred Stern explains, "It is through his gaze that the other person reveals himself to me as a being-for-itself; a subject; a consciousness; a free project of itself" (97). However, as Stern points out, "this also means that by his gaze this other person can transcend me and change me from a being-for-itself, from a free project into a determined thing, into a solidified object—as I can change him by my gaze" (97).

Even lovers live in a state of struggle and conflict, Stern explains: "Sartre tries to show that all possible relations between the own and any other self—even love—are only different forms of conflict. . . . All relationships between different persons are attempts by each of them to subjugate or to possess the other's freedom" (99). It is this sort of oppressive vision of love and family that is clearly suggested by the quotation from William Blake that Evelyn Scott chose as the epigraph for The Narrow House: "Love Seeketh only Self to please, / To bind another to its delight, / Joys in another's loss of ease, / And builds a hell in heaven's despite."[4] Thus human relationships, even the relationship between two lovers, is a constant state of conflict, a struggle to assert one's freedom at the expense of the freedom of the Other, even though that Other is a loved one. And the metaphor of the look or the gaze is the vehicle by which Sartre tries to explain this conflict. For Martin Jay, Sartre's philosophy of human relations is indeed a kind of ocularphobia—a fear of the gaze (276).

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[4] The novel's epigraph is actually the final stanza of "The Clod and the Pebble," plate 32 of William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794).

Although Being and Nothingness most thoroughly articulates Sartre's critique of the gaze, his 1945 one act play, No Exit, offers a powerful dramatization of this same critique. Indeed, the same claustrophobic closeness, the same profound sense of entrapment, the same vicious view of human relationships that mark Scott's novel are equally central to Sartre's play. In No Exit, three characters—Cradeau, Estelle, and Inez—find themselves trapped together in a small, simply furnished room from which there appears to be no escape. As the narrative unfolds, the characters reveal that they are all recently deceased, and it becomes increasingly clear to the audience that these trapped souls are, despite the innocuously familiar setting, damned to eternal hell. The surprising twist in Sartre's narrative levels a devastating critique on human interaction, culminating with Cradeau's realization of the enormity of their predicament: "Hell is just—other people" (52). How Cradeau comes to this epiphany, however, is equally important for understanding Sartre's view of human relationships and how they are so powerfully shaped by the threat of the gaze. Ocular imagery permeates Sartre's drama, and the end result is a strikingly ocularphobic environment. One character, the lovely Estelle, is continually searching for mirrors in which she can lose herself in her own narcissistic gaze. At one point in the play, Inez threatens to avert her gaze from Estelle, as if doing so, in some sense, undermines the power of Estelle's beauty: "[What] if I should shut my eyes and wouldn't look at you, then what would you do with all that beauty?" (25). Of most significance, however, is Cradeau's realization of the darkest implications of the gaze: "I don't want to see your eyes. I don't want to sink down into them. They're like a swamp" (47). And

Cradeau's delivery of the most memorable line from the play—"Hell is just—other people"—is prefaced by a neat distillation of the ocularphobic atmosphere of the play: hell is not "being roasted on the spit, sulphur and brimstone" (52); instead, he realizes the true nature of his eternal punishment: "all these eyes looking at me. All these eyes devouring me" (52)

When we enter Evelyn Scott's The Narrow House, we step into just such a "cross fire of wounding gazes" (Jay 297). What we find inside is a family locked in a continual struggle for dominance and possession. This struggle is perhaps best illustrated in the crucial clusters of visual metaphors that permeate the text—eyes, mirrors, often astonishing moments when characters pin one another with powerful, unnerving looks and domineering, possessive stares. Like Eliot's Prufrock, the inmates of the Farley family panopticon find themselves continually "fixed and formulated" by the gazes of their rival family members, trapping each other in a Darwinian struggle for survival in the same kind of "sinister dialectic of gazes" (Jay 289) Sartre theorized. At other key moments, however, characters avert their eyes as if shutting out or denying the Other's existence—and in response to the hegemony of the eye that tyrannizes the Farley home, characters like Alice desperately hide from the "ridiculing eyes" (NH 32) of others, seeking safety in the dark, for "[t]here are no eyes in the dark" (NH 109). In fact, each central character in his or her own way attempts to subjugate the others, to deny their freedom, "to possess the subjectivity of the other[s]" (Jay 292). Thus, the complex interplay of Sartrean gazes in the text actually underscores the fundamental tension evident in much of Scott's work—the

struggle between individual freedom and naturalistic constraint, between a deep desire for autonomy and a terrifying cosmos that blocks all efforts toward such freedom. More importantly, this particular terroristic universe is the frighteningly familiar setting of hearth and home. The disturbing portrait of domesticity drawn in The Narrow House suggests the impossibility of true individual freedom even within the context of what should be—or what is traditionally regarded as—the loving context of the family. The Farley family is anything but loving, however. Sartre's No Exit asserts that hell is other people, and we certainly see just that in The Narrow House, for in their interchange of dueling gazes, it becomes clear that not just Winnie and Laurie but the entire Farley clan are "oppressed by their consciousness of each other" (61).

The female inhabitants of The Narrow House are among the most compelling characters in Scott's fiction. I want to focus my discussion on three of these female Farleys, in particular—May, Winnie, and Alice—as they constitute not only richly drawn characters but also dramatically illustrate the power of the gaze in Scott's text. As both subjects and objects of the look, these three characters are in fact crucial interstices of the Sartrean gaze—in many cases, at once both predatory and preyed upon, both victimizer and victim—thus providing the most startling mediums through which the gaze is here refracted.

As we have seen, a number of scholars have noted the autobiographical roots of the The Narrow House, especially in its portrayal of an unhappy household wracked by infidelity and socio-economic decline. But of more importance for our

discussion is the novel's examination of gender issues, the very same issues so central to Escapade—the woman's body and its connections to subjectivity, the pregnant woman's body, the grotesque female body. Given the importance of the gaze in this text, bodily images such as these take on greater urgency than they might otherwise. But, interestingly, just as the Sartrean gaze is a two-edged weapon, each individual gazer engaged in a power struggle with the other, the female characters in the novel, shaped though they are by these culturally encumbered bodies, prove, at least at times, equally capable of returning a Medusa-like gaze, or, in fact, of turning the male gaze against itself, transfixing the gazing male, subjugating him, forging a new dynamic in which "[t]he power is in the one beheld and not in the beholder" (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 16).

The least possessive and most victimized of the Farley family—the character who virtually always seems to occupy the oppressed position of object in relation to those around her—is May, the youngest Farley female. The promise of warmth and life her name connotes is a bitterly ironic commentary on the reality of her incarceration in The Narrow House. With an unsettlingly rich eye for detail, Scott's narrative voice describes the child in phrasings that clearly imply her victimization in the household: "May, Winnie's little girl, an unhealthy looking child with lustrous wax-like skin, large, vapid, glazed, blue eyes, and thin, damp curls of gray-blond hair which clung to her hollow shoulders, rose from the shadowed doorstep" (NH 11-12). This corpse-like portrait is indeed appropriate, for of all the figures in the novel, May is clearly the least alive, the most brutalized and objectified. Early in the narrative,

we are offered a clear picture of the Darwinian dynamics of the Farley family. In the case of May, her sole response to her environment seems to be fear: "When her mother glanced at her, her face quivered a little" (NH 13). This is just the first of many "wounding gazes" that will cut and batter the child throughout the narrative: "Winnie's eyes, with soft hostile possessiveness, fastened themselves on the little girl's face," Scott writes, "May would have preferred not to meet her mother's eyes so straight"(NH 14).

In passages like these we see a gaze as terrifying, as mortifying as those Sartre's ocularphobic theory describes—and, significantly, gender is not an issue in these particular passages. The male gaze is a crucial presence in the text, but it is not the only gaze, nor is it necessarily the most deadly. Sartre's terrifying vision of human communities, even those supposedly founded upon love, is illustrated with frightening clarity in Winnie's demanding relationship with her daughter: "'Come here, May!' Winnie sank suddenly to her knees and held out her arms. May walked forward, seeming not able to stop herself. 'You love Mamma anyway, don't you? . . . You *must* love me, May! I'm your mamma! You must love me!'" (NH 14-15, Scott's italics). Demanding that May love her more than she loves her father—"'Then you love Papa best? . . . You mustn't love him best!'" (NH 15)—Winnie, much like the scrutinizing party goers who fix and formulate Prufrock, turns her objectifying gaze upon her own child: "Winnie drew away and stared at her daughter. Winnie's eyes were soft and wistful with hurt, but underneath their darkness as under

a cloud May saw something she was afraid of. It was angry with itself and demanded that she give it something" (NH 14-15).

May illustrates, furthermore, how this gridlock of possessive gazing simply disallows any real sense of love, transforming what should be familial community into vicious entrapment: "Without knowing what had occurred, she felt utterly subjugated. She wanted to love her mother, but the soft, angrily caressing eyes would not let her" (NH 15). May does not comprehend her predicament, but she does understand its threat: "May had a terror of eyes. They made her know things about herself which she could not bear. Sharp looks splintered her consciousness"(NH 75).

But May is not the only consciousness threatened by sharp looks or terrorized by gazing eyes. In fact, even May herself, victim though she is throughout most of the text, poses this kind of threat on occasion. Although seemingly without the malice of the adults around her, May, too, is capable of fixing a disturbing look upon the others as we see in the following example: "Mrs. Farley was conscious of this [May's] all-absorbing gaze which had in it neither approval nor condemnation. She felt at a disadvantage before the child, and, when May asked for anything, found it difficult not to push her away with expressions of violence" (NH 136). Mrs. Farley's instinctive reaction to May's apparently innocuous gaze is telling: although no condemnation is made obvious in the child's stare, the grandmother nonetheless finds the look May gives her powerfully disturbing. In part, the ocularphobic reaction to the Sartrean gaze lies in its threat of exposing the object of the gaze: as Alfred Stern explains, part of the disconcerting nature of the gaze is its apparent power to reveal

"our moral being" (94), to expose the self to judgment, evaluation, exposure, for the notion of shame is at the heart of our discomfort with the Other's gaze (Sartre 264-65). As the presiding matriarch over one of the most dysfunctional families in modern American literature, Mrs. Farley has much to conceal from any probing gaze. But even sharper glances than those of May cut the atmosphere of Mrs. Farley's home.

Mary Carrigg agrees that of the characters in The Narrow House, the female ones are ultimately the most provocative, and her work suggests how the three adult female Farleys—Winnie, Alice, and Mrs. Farley—may be read. These women, in Carrigg's view, embody culturally defined feminine stereotypes: Winnie is the incarnation of the cult of feminine beauty; Alice is her polar opposite, the bitter old maid trapped in a grotesque, manly body; Mrs. Farley provides a somewhat skewed rendering of the domestic ideal of cook and housekeeper and, in light of Winnie's sickness and subsequent death, is the only real maternal figure of the household (98). Carrigg's rubric is a convenient if obvious one that can serve as a useful reference point for understanding how Scott depicts the broad trajectory of dangers and possibilities confronting different kinds of feminine consciousnesses. In the cases of Winnie and Alice, in particular, Carrigg's categories allow us to consider how these stereotypical roles function in the field of gazes that encloses the text.

Winnie, as we have seen in her possessive interactions with May, wields a powerful Sartrean gaze. With Winnie, however, the ocular metaphors move beyond the possessive Sartrean gaze she deploys with such devastating effect on May. It is

worth noting that she frequently gazes with similarly mortifying effect upon Mrs. Farley. Anticipating a confrontation between her own parents and her in-laws, the Farleys, Winnie fixes Mrs. Farley with a guilt-inducing gaze not unlike the unnerving stare the older woman endures from May: "Winnie's soft relentless gaze clung to her mother-in-law's face. Mrs. Farley nervously desired to evade. Winnie made her feel guilty of the situation with which she had nothing to do" (NH 40).

At the same time that we see Winnie terrorize others with the gaze, much of the narrative describes Winnie's fascinated gazing at herself. In this sense, the novel looks ahead to its sequel, Narcissus, for although Winnie's death writes her out of the final two volumes of the Farley trilogy, she is certainly the most narcissistic of the family members. In the character of Winnie, Mary Carrigg contends, Scott's "satire on the myth of the home" (98) "is aimed at the cult of the beautiful woman which is so important to the mythification of the home" (100). And much like Sartre's Estelle in No Exit, even when Winnie is fixing her objectifying gaze on another, she frequently becomes absorbed in her own image, lost in feeding her own narcissistic ego: "May saw that her mother's eyes were like things standing in their own shadows and loving themselves. . . . They yearned over May's face, but it was as if they did not see it and were yearning for themselves" (NH 16). A similar sequence occurs between Winnie and Mrs. Farley: "She gazed at her mother-in-law with a childish look of reproach. . . . As she spoke she glanced beyond her mother-in-law's head to the heavily beveled mirror in the old bureau, and her rapt, tragic face became even more voluptuously tragic as it contemplated itself" (NH 12-13).

Indeed, although Winnie is never far from "the mirror from which she seemed always to shine" (NH 65), she is also careful to place herself strategically before the gaze of others when her entrancing beauty can serve as a weapon. In an essay on Strauss's opera Salome, Linda and Michael Hutcheon theorize the possibilities of being empowered by the gaze, of literally "[altering] the power dynamics of the gaze itself" (16) by consciously thrusting before the onlooker a transfixing object of desire such as in the case of Salome, her body or, more properly, her dance "in which she offers her body as a sensual, sexual spectacle to his [the male spectator's] eyes, in return for a promise that will fulfill both her childlike willful stubbornness and her consuming sexual obsession" (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 14). A similar kind of power dynamic transpires more than once with Winnie—and especially so when she encounters her father-in-law, a man already haunted by his own sexual guilt:

> Again and again, as if in spite of himself, he allowed his gaze to rest on Winnie. His daughter-in-law disturbed him and if he could avoid it he never looked her in the eye. . . . She knew he was afraid when she touched him. Vulgar old man, she said to herself. She despised him so that she wanted to touch him again out of her superiority. (NH 30-31)

As Linda and Michael Hutcheon point out in discussing Salome, "Here, to be the object of the gaze is to have ultimate power; it is the position of being looked at that conveys mastery and control" (15). We see a similar kind of power play on Winnie's part, but one crucial difference, of course, is that Winnie does not offer her

sexuality as any kind of commodity; instead, she clearly seeks domination and superiority for their own sakes.

Winnie's enslaving beauty does not, however, survive to continue its domination of the Farley household. Instead, Winnie's seductive body itself falls from grace in a sequence of events similar to those to be played out two years later in Escapade. As in the autobiography, the image of the maternal body and its grotesque deviations from the cultural ideal of feminine beauty Winnie so powerfully embodies becomes a central player in the text. Early on in her pregnancy, we see Winnie "[glancing] stealthily sidewise at the mirror and the Madonna look came into her face" (NH 160). Later in the narrative, however, as her body begins to alter, Winnie is deeply disturbed by the image the mirror reflects: "As she walked she was obliged to sway grotesquely backward to balance the weight she carried before her. When she passed the long mirror in the little-used parlor, and saw herself hideous and inflated, she burst into tears" (NH 166). Such passages, of course, clearly prefigure strikingly similar portrayals of the maternal body in Escapade.[5] And like that of the narrator of the autobiography, Winnie's pregnant body becomes a kind of deterministic maternal mechanism: "She hated her family for dedicating her to this sordid thing every minute of her life" (NH 167).

[5] In Escapade, Scott writes, "When I take off my clothes and stand sidewise before the cracked mirror I see that my body is no longer hollow and unfilled. It has a swelling line, a trifle grotesque, such as I have observed in the meager figures of old women" (5).

Like much of Sylvia Plath's poetry about motherhood, Scott's narrative voice deploys a studied lack of sentimentality in attempting to narrate maternity: "Its life had become definite and independent of her. It lay in her, complete, as though it had no right there. . . . . It seemed to Winnie that her life was being taken away and given to the child" (NH 167). When the child finally arrives "to wrestle with her" (NH 171), the manipulative Winnie, she who, of all the Farleys, has perhaps most successfully asserted her subjectivity in dominating the household, finds her efforts at autonomy snuffed out by anatomy; she becomes a victim of her maternal destiny: "something leaped angrily upon her and dragged her to earth. Hot claws sank into her" (NH 173). Like the flat indifference of nature in a Stephen Crane or Jack London story, the birthing process ruthlessly absorbs and blots out Winnie's selfhood (she dies in childbirth), until the narrative voice blankly reports, "The child passed from the torture which went on without it" (NH 174).

Winnie thus only briefly but tragically plays the role of the female grotesque in this novel. An even more troubling figure is Alice, a character Mary Carrigg suggests is "one of the most powerful characterizations of a woman in American fiction" (103). Alice is another of Scott's female grotesques. Moreover, she serves as a sort of antipode to the ideally beautiful Winnie in that Alice is tragically aware of her flawed and unattractive body. In counterpoint to Winnie's narcissistic fascination with mirrors, Alice loathes them, just as she loathes her own image, her own body, the threatening male gazes, the judgmental and "ridiculing eyes" (NH 32) of the patriarchy.

Like the autobiographical subject Sidonie Smith theorizes and Escapade so powerfully illustrates, Alice's consciousness is inherently shaped by her grotesque physicality. This awareness of her "Other" body is most graphically portrayed in her deeply rooted ocularphobia. Whereas Winnie is infatuated with her mirror image, Alice is repulsed by hers. And while Winnie's beauty becomes an empowering weapon—at one point Mrs. Farley assures her, "'Look in the mirror. They'll love you'" (NH 69)—Alice is terrified of her own image: "She dared not see herself in the glass opposite" (NH 32). A heavy, mannish woman, with a "homely rugged face," "coarse sallow skin and large hands and feet" (NH 25), Alice has long since given up "[trying] to make herself into something men would like" (NH 32).

> One day she had done her hair a new way, and, going into the living-room, had caught Laurence's ridiculing eyes upon her. . . . Alice realized something had gone wild in her. She had picked up a paper knife from a table and hurled it at him and it had cut his hand. . . . After that she fixed her hair the old way and avoided the mirror. (NH 32)

Alice bitterly resents the more culturally ideal examples of the feminine who surround her, both within and outside the walls of her narrow house, and in her failure to conform to the ideal images they exemplify, she turns viciously upon those around her, as she did upon Laurie, even upon strangers: "When she met a pretty woman in the streets Alice had a sense of outrage. A self-righteous flame burnt in her" (NH 32-33).

While the street offers her little escape, inside the Farley household, Alice is also haunted by the feminine beauty and sexual energy of Winnie: "Christ died on a cross. She felt sick as with disgust. Good to others. Hate. Winnie. . . . When she said beauty to herself her heart was hard with resentment" (NH 34). It is in passages such as these, in which Alice's consciousness figures so significantly, that Scott unleashes her most fragmented experimental prose. The stream-of-consciousness narrative offered intermittently in these sequences underscores the dispersed and fragmented nature of Alice's consciousness. If, as Randall Steven asserts, women writers such as Dorothy Richardson pioneered this kind of experimental prose in part because it reflects the fragmented and dispersed reality of a woman's experience (42-43), perhaps no more appropriate figure can be found to utter (mentally, at any rate) this kind of disrupted discourse than Scott's Alice Farley.

Despite her scattered consciousness and her fear of the derisive gaze, Alice, too, is armed with a transfixing and predatory stare. Alice acts perhaps most oppressively toward her mother, whose state of denial regarding Mr. Farley's adultery is responsible, in Alice's view, for "[t]he atmosphere of this moral cellar" (NH 121). As is the case with the other characters in the novel, Alice's eyes become the most expressive vehicles of her tyranny over others. For instance, in urging her mother to end her farcical marriage, "Alice, mysteriously urged to cruelty, bore down upon her mother. Alice's eyes glittered inscrutably" (NH 81). And in a similar sequence later in the narrative, "Alice kept a rigorous gaze full of cruel pity steadily upon her mother's face" (NH 118).

More troubling than her reactions to Winnie and Mrs. Farley, however, is Alice's disturbing relationship with May. While the narrative paints May as a shrinking, anemic child, Alice nevertheless sees in her something closer to the ideal beauty fully embodied by Winnie. "Alice looked down. Pale. May's hair shining like a dead sun. Alice all at once hated May's hair because it was pale and bright. . . . With a violent push Alice put the little girl aside and walked briskly up the path" (NH 138). During this episode, Scott's terse prose manages to carry an enormous payload of meaning: "Conscious of May's pale hair floating after her in unsubstantial brightness, Alice rushed up the stairs to her room. . . . Where will my light go to? Ugly old maid. Emanicipation of women" (NH 138-39). Note the juxtaposition of "Ugly old maid" and "Emanicipation of women"—Alice's fragmented consciousness seems here to be weighing the possibilities a woman's freedom against the entrapment imposed by a grotesque physicality. Like Winnie, Alice is a victim of her own anatomy. Winnie, of course, falls victim to her own maternal body. For Alice, the threat lies in her own grotesque and unappealing body, a female body that falls outside the cultural definitions of beauty.

Finally—and this is particularly provocative—Alice so fears those "ridiculing eyes" of the male gaze that she literally seeks to free herself from the marginal, grotesque body that entraps her subjectivity: "She wanted to tear away her flesh, but it seemed to resist her. . . . Life sucked at her like a wild beast. . . . Her body oppressed her" (NH 35). Her earlier encounter with Laurie's derisive gaze drove her into denial: "She did not want to realize what she was" (NH 32). However, over the

course of the narrative, Alice mounts increasingly desperate efforts to overcome the corporeal trap in which she is ensnared: "She got up, feverish, and stood before the glass, hating herself. . . . She saw her breast. Strange shiver of curiosity about herself. Why did it hurt to see her breast? She covered it up" (NH 34). Still fearing the gaze, still more comfortable in the dark, as "[t]here are no eyes in the dark" (NH 109), Alice finally begins to attack her own body: "She went there and picked up a pair of scissors, plunging the points twice into her flesh with quick stabs" (NH 109). This is not the only such instance: early on in the narrative, she bites her own flesh in an apparent effort to free herself from its prison (NH 35); later, wielding a bread knife, she considers "[cleaving] her vision of herself" (NH 200), and the novel concludes shortly after she contemplates but fails to carry out a suicide attempt with Laurie's pistol. Perhaps most disturbing of all, however, is that Alice uses May herself as a similar kind of weapon against her body. Shortly before her flirtation with suicide, Alice initiates a troubling interchange between herself and May as she is putting the child to bed:

> She uncurled May's loose fingers and laid them against her breast in the darkness. She wanted May to be conscious of breasts burning and unfolding of themselves. She wanted May to help her to understand her breasts. . . . The child's small, thin nakedness was like a knife. Alice wanted the child's nakedness to cut her heavy flesh into feeling. (NH 194-95)

The sequence played out in this passage, with its possibly pedaphilic undertones, certainly arouses in the reader disturbing reactions. We may also read the scene, however, as a desperate attempt on the part of the isolated Alice to communicate somehow her sense of entrapment in a marginalized and grotesque body to someone, anyone, outside her terrifyingly narrow sphere of experience. Here, language seems to fail Alice—note that she "wants" May to be conscious of her, "wants" May to understand, but neither actually speaks—and for Alice, only some kind of dramatic paroxysm of transgression appears capable of forging some sense of community and communication with another. Whether we read Alice's gesture toward May as perverse or moving, or possibly even both, its failure seems foreordained in Scott's domestic hell: "May felt Aunt Alice big and soft under her palm. She did not want her. She had no name for the feel of her beyond the consciousness of softness which she did not like" (194).

Alice's effort, no matter how desperate, fails: like Sartre's characters, Alice discovers there is no exit from her own version of hell. She, then, remains hopelessly confined within her own grotesque physicality, much as the entire Farley clan remains trapped within the walls of The Narrow House. When Alice finally becomes certain that her body must be destroyed in order to set her self free, she ritually removes her clothing in the darkness of her room, symbolically shedding her encumbered bodily self much as Edna Pontellier strips away her old self when she sheds her garments before entering the water: "She began to pull her clothes off. . . .

The darkness was thick about her. It loved her. . . . Take this body away from me. I do not know it. I can no longer bear the company of this unknown thing" (NH 196).

Though Alice finally resists her suicidal urges, the power of her bodied self over her subjectivity demonstrates how entrapped she is in the narrow house of the Farley clan. And, of course, it is the power of the gaze that drives her into darkness, just as the awareness of the grotesqueness of her own bodily image drives her to seek freedom, even if that freedom means self-annihilation. Although we have examined in detail only the women characters in the text, it is within the power of every Farley family member—even the weakest, May—to possess and dominate the others, and, in fact, this power is asserted constantly in the narrative, more often than not, couched in the kind of ocular metaphors, the thrust and parrying of riveting gazes, Sartre systematized over two decades after Scott's work was published.

This ruthless portrayal of a domestic hell that Scott thrusts before the reader seems, then, to illustrate the darkest implications of Sartre's philosophy of human relations, for clearly, in The Narrow House, we see a brutally frank illustration of exactly what Sartre envisions in his critique of the gaze—"the inability to create a meaningful community" among human beings (Jay 290). The entrapment the gaze threatens, the predatory power it offers—this is the extraordinary variation on naturalism Evelyn Scott's novel presents. In The Narrow House, we encounter a domestic jungle as vicious and predatory in its own way as the frozen tundra of Jack London, the raging sea of Stephen Crane, or even the Brazilian wilds of Evelyn Scott's own Escapade.

The remaining volumes of the trilogy—Narcissus (1922) and The Golden Door (1925)—examine the subsequent relationships of the Farley family, though without the jarring power of the first novel. The more successful of the two is Narcissus, which work explores Laurie's life after Winnie's death, focusing primarily on his relationship with his second wife, Julia, whose many affairs seem to leave Laurence strangely unconcerned. The novel's openness regarding sexual mores positions Narcissus as a counterpoint to The Narrow House, in which the Farleys' desperate efforts to conceal or deny Mr. Farley's infidelities play such a pivotal role. Most Scott scholars consider the later novel a success, and Mary Wheeling White observes that, excluding Kenneth Burke's scathing review in The Dial, "Narcissus did receive important praise [from critics like Carl Van Doren and Ludwig Lewisohn] attesting to Scott's consequence as a modern novelist" (71). This second novel, though written in much the same stylistic vein as The Narrow House, nonetheless lacks the intensity and sustained gloom of the first Farley narrative, but it does serve to prove, as White suggests, that even life outside The Narrow House does not guarantee the individual's freedom (71).

With the third and final installment in the Farley saga, the sprawling, two-volume The Golden Door, Scott's work begins to take on the massive, Hardyesque, often heavily philosophical dimensions that mark her forays into historical fiction. The novel focuses on the adult life of May and her marriage to the idealistic artist, Paul. White remarks on the clear connections to Tolstoy's ethical philosophy that emerge in the narrative, as Paul, May, and Paul's lover Nina (whom May learns to

accept, as much out of selfless love for Paul as out of some sort of bohemian liberality) try to carve out a communal utopia on a rural farm (White 93). This dream—in the fashion of so many similar earthly paradises—finally fails. The Golden Door, then, despite its promising title, proves to be only an illusory exit from The Narrow House. And, in fact, its original working title, "Children in Hell" (White 66) suggests that the dark visions of The Narrow House had not been completely ameliorated by the author's philosophical musings.

For our purposes, however, The Golden Door's verbose philosophizing and sheer narrative scope indicate Scott's first moves away from a restricted focus on the isolated self or the imprisoning family. Scott's ensuing fictions range farther and farther away from the more confined loci of the earlier novels, taking on a more sweeping perspective and enlisting even more open and experimental prose forms to accommodate her increasingly ambitious narrative aims. Though she would continue to produce short stories, novellas (1927's Ideals), and lyric poetry, The Golden Door marks a shift from her early short, terse narratives—the brevity of which, at least in the case of The Narrow House, somehow seems to reflect the narrowly confined lives the story itself describes—to the broader canvasses of Scott's later fiction, especially the historical novels. When we step out of the narrow house of Scott's domestic naturalism, we step onto the sprawling stage of her historical fiction, and it is to that work, more specifically, to her experimental The Wave, that we now turn.

Chapter Three

A War of Words: The Polyphonic Voices of The Wave

"Panoramic," "cycloramic," "cinematic," "mosaic," "kaleidoscopic"—it was terms such as these that Evelyn Scott's contemporaries enlisted in their struggles to define exactly what it was they had encountered when they first engaged with her epic vision of the Civil War, The Wave. Published in 1929, Scott's novel stepped into the literary marketplace in company with an impressive array of competitors—Thomas Wolfe's Look Homeward, Angel, Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms, and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury.[1] While these better known works have since overshadowed Scott's massive war novel, The Wave, arguably the centerpiece of her canon, secured Scott the largest readership of her career.[2] Other than The Sound and the Fury, The Wave constitutes the most challenging and experimental of these major American novels. Greeted (as were so many of her works) with equal measures of acclaim and puzzlement, The Wave, quite simply, did not fit what most contemporary critics and scholars regarded as a well-made novel. Indeed, there was considerable question as to whether the text was a novel at all. Even in the aftermath of experimental works such as James Joyce's Ulysses and

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[1] Scott publicly and enthusiastically endorsed Faulkner's novel in a short but insightful essay which Cape and Smith (publishers of both Faulkner and Scott) published in pamphlet form to promote The Sound and the Fury (White 115).

[2] The novel was selected by the Literary Guild of America while still in manuscript form—the first work to be accepted by the book club before actual publication (White 113).

Sherwood Anderson's Winesberg, Ohio, contemporary readers of The Wave were still hard pressed on the issue of genre.

Writing of the Civil War in Specimen Days Walt Whitman predicted that "the real war will never get in the books"—the "countless minor scenes and interiors" (60) will be forever swallowed up and forgotten in the ceaseless ebb and flow of historical time. With The Wave, however, Scott comes perhaps as close as any artist has to answering Whitman's challenge.

In over one hundred short, episodic narrative vignettes focusing on a bold array of characters and events, Scott constructs a fragmented vision of history, a sort of Bakhtinian dialogic of the war embracing virtually every kind of experience imaginable from every sort of perspective—every region of the nation, every level of social class, both black and white, northern and southern, soldier and civilian, even ranging to near global dimensions as the ripple effects of the wave of war in America lap the distant shores of Europe. A series of narratives divided into twenty chapters, Scott's text attempts to capture the broad sweep of the historical cataclysm which was the American Civil War. These short, seemingly discontinuous vignettes, taken as a whole, construct a loosely woven fabric of narrative. But a sense of continuity is provided only by the war itself: characters seldom reappear, and when they do, it is because they are major players in the most conspicuous events—Lee, Grant, Sherman, Lincoln. Scores of lesser characters step briefly onto the narrative stage, then disappear from Scott's pages. But to call these characters lesser is to mislead, for each is carefully drawn and fully realized over the course of the short vignette in

which he or she figures. And while some of these episodes would serve as fully formed short stories,[3] many break off without a sense of closure or resolution. The text is further complicated by a multifarious company of discourses and genres interpolated into the narrative—letters, poems, popular songs, black spirituals, excerpts from newspapers, passages from diaries, even an epigraph taken from a book on physical geography describing the nature and effects of a wave. The result is an experimental narrative that defies comparison even to many of the best-known modernist texts. Although marked by sequences of stream-of-consciousness narrative, the novel (to settle for the most convenient genre label) remains largely omniscient in viewpoint. The multitude of characters means we have an entire cosmos of centers of consciousness, not just one or a select few, as in experimental novels such as The Sound and the Fury or As I Lay Dying. Moreover, the lack of central characters or narrative links between the many separate vignettes suggests the work is something other than a short story cycle. Perhaps the best touchstone for comparison is Jean Toomer's Cane, a text that raises similarly vexing questions about genre.

The question of form, the absence of unified plot or some sense of narrative continuity among the various episodes, the lack of sustained character development all conspire to render The Wave a particularly difficult text for literary critics. Scott's canon has never received the attention it deserves, but especially surprising is the

[3] Indeed, the Kalizc vignette was frequently anthologized in collections of fiction during the 1930s (Welker, "ES" 426).

neglect suffered by The Wave—a novel regarded by Joseph Wood Krutch and Carl Van Doren, both important critics of Scott's era, as a major literary achievement.[4]

Contemporary reviews latched onto this question of genre as a critical point of contention. For critics resistant to the innovations forged by the modernist movement, The Wave was simply another extension of that movement's avant-garde aesthetic, yet another bewilderingly recalcitrant experiment in narrative form. Percy Hutchison's review in The New York Times Book Review and Magazine seemed to find Scott's text an affront to the novelistic tradition. All Civil War novels until The Wave, he claims, "have one thing in common: the accepted method of the historical novel, so called, has invariably been followed" (1). Lacking the defining elements of the historical novel—a central character or characters, a sense of "progression," "something of plot," The Wave, Hutchison charges, ignores "all the traditions of the historical novel" (1). An anonymous reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement was similarly suspicious of this "phantasmogoria of civil war," finding "the disadvantages of Miss Scott's method" to be the chief flaw of the work (574).

More sympathetic reviewers found the novel's refusal to conform to established rules of genre one of the defining strengths of the text. Clifton Fadiman called the novel "one of the few really formidable expressions in fiction of the anti-heroic viewpoint—or, if one may be permitted so lax a term, the modern viewpoint" (119). Indeed, for Fadiman, the form itself is perfectly suited to the overwhelming

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[4]See The Saturday Review of Literature (6 July 1929, p. 1163) for Van Doren's remarks; see also Krutch's review in Wings III (July 1929): 1.

scope of the narrative's historical subject matter: "It is the multifariousness, the incoherent and unrelated multifariousness of the tragedies, that is the most dreadful thing about war" (119). And Scott's novel far outstrips more conventional Civil War narratives in fully capturing "these multifarious, senseless, individual tragedies" (Fadiman 119).

Allan Nevins likewise applauds Scott's originality and daring: "It was an ambitious design which Miss Scott formed, and it is ambitiously executed. The Civil War, she implies, was too tremendous and profoundly significant to be apprehended through any of the older forms of art within one's grasp" (1142). Largely because of its idiosyncratic form, The Wave, Nevins contends, "is one of the most interesting of all the efforts to deal with the Civil War in fiction" (1142).

Indeed, in contrast to the skepticism voiced in some high profile reviews, much of the early criticism discussed this novel only in the most superlative terms. Harry Hartwick, in his The Foreground of American Fiction (1934), listed The Wave among the "[s]tructural innovations of real interest" to emerge from the experimental fiction of the period (148). Harlan Hatcher, a critic who championed both Escapade and The Narrow House, holds The Wave in particularly high regard, declaring the work "a technical triumph in craftsmanship" (182). Comparing Scott's method favorably to Dos Passos's use of a similar kind of episodic narrative in Manhattan Transfer, Hatcher judges The Wave to be "a high point in her [Scott's] career, combining her technical equipment, her intelligence, and her scholarship, with a significant theme" (182). These critics, of course, were Scott's contemporaries. As

Evelyn Scott's work became increasingly pushed to the margins of the canon, The Wave is one of her novels that did survive in large surveys of American fiction, particularly in specialized overviews such as Ernest E. Leisy's The American Historical Novel and, most notably, Robert E. Lively's Fiction Fights the Civil War, in which work Lively, in a spirit of unabashed canonization, selects the best Civil War novels published up to 1950: The Wave, it is worth noting, is ranked eleventh out of the top fifteen, not a bad showing for a novel so frequently overlooked or dismissed.

The few critics who have written about The Wave in some depth have done so in a piecemeal fashion—selecting a set of images or recurrent themes or character types in an apparent effort to impose some sense of order upon this most unruly of texts, to shore up the fragments of the narrative with some overarching thematic structure. One of the first scholarly reactions to attempt this is contained in Joseph Warren Beach's The Twentieth-Century Novel. Beach places Scott's work in company with other "composite" novels, as he calls them; Thornton Wilder's The Bridge of San Luis Rey and Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time are the other examples best known to today's readers (476-77). However, The Wave and its two-volume sequel, A Calendar of Sin, Beach asserts, together constitute perhaps "[t]he most monumental, and in many ways the most serious, of such composite views" (481). Beach's comments, though brief, are prescient in terms of how later critics would respond to Scott's novel. Regarding The Wave as "an impressive original conception," Beach angles in on what he sees as the connecting thread of this

otherwise discontinuous narrative: "we see them [the many individual characters in The Wave] working out, in terms of this national disaster, their own individual salvation" (482).

Perhaps picking up on the religious subtext of Beach's commentary, Robert L. Welker finds a wealth of religious symbolism and biblical references which, for him, serve as a sort of skeleton key for opening up this difficult text. Peggy Bach, in turn, has remarked on the pervasive water imagery in the novel, a system of tropes playing off the metaphorical suggestiveness of the work's title (106-7). Finally, Joseph M. Flora sees the possibilities of escape and freedom and Mary Wheeling White the broader notion of ideals as central to the text. In both cases, how well these notions of freedom or idealism survive (or fail to survive) the trauma of war is regarded as Scott's foundational theme.[5]

All of these responses to The Wave, as I have noted, have to one degree or another attempted to unify the text under the umbrella of a particular set of themes or images. The drive among these critics toward constructing some sort of coherence in such a demandingly diverse text is, perhaps, a natural one, especially so with the powerful sway New Criticism would hold over several of these scholars. But for the reader seeking such unity, The Wave is particularly troubling.

The Wave is actually the second installment in a massive historical trilogy which begins with 1927's Migrations: An Arabesque in Histories and concludes with

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[5]See Flora's comments on Scott in The History of Southern Literature (Louis D. Rubin, ed. Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1985. 287). White's commentary, of course, comes from her biography of Scott (121).

the two-volume A Calendar of Sin: American Melodramas (1931). As the first volume's subtitle announces, both Migrations and A Calendar of Sin are experimental narratives, following complex, multivalent story lines that weave a complicated tapestry of histories. The Wave, however, is unique among the three in the radically fragmented nature of its narrative. While the other two texts follow a stable core of characters, The Wave, as has been noted, refuses to focus long on any one individual: there are multiple appearances by such central players as Lee, Grant, Lincoln, and Davis, but, in the final analysis, these high-profile historical figures are almost lost among the narratives of common soldiers, fleeing slaves, and terrified civilians. Scott biographer D. A. Callard calls The Wave a sort of "people's history of the war" (113)—an apt description, indeed, and one which suggests that Walt Whitman might agree that Scott comes close to getting "the real war" into a book.

Scott's fascination with history and the location of the self in the broad sweep of history is the driving force of her historical fiction. She faces this issue more directly and personally in her second autobiography, Background in Tennessee (1937). Less dark, less forbidding, and less obviously experimental than Escapade, Background in Tennessee dips into regional history, sociology, economics, philosophy, and feminism. For Scott, writing about history, region, and culture—the culture from which she springs—is inseparable, ultimately, from writing about the self, and, likewise, writing about the self is inevitably to write about the self's interactions with region, history, and culture: "all I possessed which might be

regarded as Tennessee documenta to be presented to a public," she admits, "seemed to be myself" (BT 1).

It is this sort of impulse to write the self into history that impels The Wave. More precisely, The Wave attempts to write the individual into history, to give voice to the seemingly insignificant multitudes that people the "countless minor scenes and interiors" Whitman describes as "the real war." The Wave, then, straddles a line of demarcation between pluralism and individualism, achieving what Georg Lukacs claimed was impossible for a modernist work—a vision of history "'from below,' from the standpoint of popular life" (285).

The descriptive terms enumerated at the beginning of this chapter show contemporary critics drawing upon visual metaphors as a way of talking about The Wave—and with good reason. Scott's text does seem to deploy cinematic techniques for her narrative methodology: it is easy to see the shifting fragments of the narrative as prose counterparts to the flickering images of the cinema.[6] But in his dissertation on Scott, Robert L. Welker offers another useful metaphor for Scott's massive historical undertaking: he labels the trilogy a "fugue in history" (330), a polyphonic composition consisting of a complex interplay of voices. In many respects, this suggestion of a multivoiced text is perhaps an even more useful way of reading The Wave than resorting to the battery of visual metaphors offered up by most other critics; for, indeed, a multiplicity of voices and discourses interweave throughout

[6] Both Callard and Welker comment on the cinema, particularly the movie The Covered Wagon, and its influence on Scott's turn to the historical trilogy (Callard 92; Welker 339).

Scott's narrative, and it is for this reason that Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of novelistic discourse promise a particularly inviting avenue into Scott's text.

Among Bakhtin's contributions to our understanding of the novel, his notions of heteroglossia and the polyphonic novel, outlined in his discussions of Dostoevsky's fiction, are especially useful for elucidating a complex narrative such as The Wave. Although most scholars agree that Bakhtin's various writings fail to pull together a coherent system for understanding the novel, his work nonetheless opens up promising possibilities for reading texts he would call polyphonic, works that weave together a multiplicity of discourses, discourses that typically seem to contest one another, in Bakhtin's view.

The roots of Bakhtin's theories are founded in his notion of the social context of language—or, actually, of many competing languages. "For Bakhtin," David Murray explains, "we experience and represent the world to ourselves and others not in a single shared language, but in a multiplicity of overlapping and often conflicting versions of that language (official, vernacular, technical, literary, the jargons of different age-groups, etc.)" (116). Moreover, these languages are always in a context of conflict, of dialogue, each language and even each utterance of a language being shaped by its contextual relationship to the other languages surrounding it. Bakhtin is most interested in languages that subvert authority, especially "the unheard, unofficial voices generated in the less-recognized areas of society" (Murray 116)—languages that parody or dare to contend with the official discourses of society, the languages of government, of dogmatic religion, of class privilege. Indeed, coming as he does out

of a Marxist context, Bakhtin, inevitably perhaps, sees the dialogic conflict of languages as a sort of extension of class struggle.[7]

The novel, for Bakhtin, is the literary genre that best reflects the dialogical interplay of discourses, providing an arena in which this competition of languages plays itself out. His most complete discussion of how the novel represents this interplay of languages is offered in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. In this work, Bakhtin essentially distinguishes between two kinds of novels: the monologic novel and the dialogic or polyphonic text. Bakhtin claims that Dostoevsky's novels are marked by "[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (Poetics 6, Bakhtin's emphasis). This "multiplicity of language," what Bakhtin elsewhere calls heteroglossia ("Heteroglossia" 206), distinguishes Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels from what Bakhtin labels monologic novels, texts in which the narrative is dominated by a single authorial voice (Tolstoy is Bakhtin's example of a monological novelist). As Brian McHale explains, "the polyphonic novel, unlike monologic genres [including the epic and the lyric], acknowledges and embraces a plurality of discourses and the ideologies of world views associated with them" (166). The polyphonic novel is constructed from a myriad variety of discourses and languages: "generic, professional, class-and-interest group (the language of the nobleman, the farmer, the

[7] Evelyn Scott, a confirmed and enthusiastic enemy of Marxist dogma, would certainly balk at the possibility of a Marxist critical framework being applied to her text.

merchant, the peasant); the tenditious, everyday (the languages of rumour, of society chatter, servants' language) and so forth" (Bakhtin "Heteroglossia" 206).

Modernist works such as The Waste Land (although a poem), Ulysses, Mrs. Dalloway, the U. S. A. trilogy, The Sound and the Fury—all can be considered sorts of polyphonic texts by Bakhtin's definitions. Brian McHale cautions us about how we should regard the heteroglossia complicating so many modernist works. The Waste Land, for instance, is clearly a polyphonic text, McHale points out, yet the disunity of the text is, in his view, inadvertent, as a central narrative consciousness attempts to hold together the heteroglossic fragments of the poem. We might regard The Wave in a similar light: much of the narrative is centered by an omniscient, powerfully objective narrative voice, but interspersed with these objective passages are multitudes of other voices, voices of authority, voices from the margins, voices in conflict.

But let us return to Bakhtin for a moment. There are important aspects of the Soviet critic's work that parallel Scott's project in The Wave. First, and this is a crucial connection with the libertarian spirit of Scott's aesthetic, Bakhtin suggests that the polyphonic technique is one in which "the discourses of self and other interpenetrate each other" (Dentith 42). In Dostoevsky, for instance, Bakhtin sees a narrative form that "[affirms] the moral and existential irreducibility of the other" (Dentith 43, Dentith's emphasis). Bakhtin, then, as Raman Selden asserts, is "profoundly un-Stalinist" (18), and his theories of the novel are as much rooted in an ethical and libertarian enterprise as in the milieu of Russian Formalism out of which

his work initially grew. The polyphonic novel, for Bakhtin, is not simply a remarkable advance in narrative method; it is actually a novelistic form that asserts the integrity and autonomy of the individual consciousnesses of the characters in the narrative, a form that celebrates the individual self—but, significantly, it does so in a social context, showing individuals freely interacting with other consciousnesses, thus avoiding the kind of solipsistic interiority that Bakhtin, Lukacs, and other Marxist critics of the modern period regarded as anathema.

In his essay on Evelyn Scott in The Bookman, Harry Salpeter offers an illuminating quotation from Scott: "'. . . I don't know anyone whose imagination is more open to identification with other people than mine'" (284). If we are to take this statement as one that suggests something about the motives shaping her fiction, and Salpeter seems to think we should, we see that Scott's literary project may in fact share some important parallels with Bakhtin's aim as a literary critic—for The Wave, indeed, seems to engage in the "double emphasis" in Bakhtinian thought Simon Dentith defines for us: "both the ethical stress on the irreducibility of the individual and the recognition of the complex social determinations that make the individual unique" (63). The Wave examines the seeming insignificance of the individual consciousness tossed like a cork, as the epigraph for Scott's novel explains, in the nightmare wave of war. Such vast historical processes, much like the "huge and formless and blindly motivated" forces the narrator of Escapade so fears (E 17) threaten to swallow up any possible integrity of self. Scott's historical trilogy—but especially The Wave, with its emphasis on so many individual consciousnesses—

constitutes an effort to recover those individual perspectives, to identify with the other, and to reinscribe the individual in the text of history by giving a voice to those multitudes who move through the short, fragmentary episodes of her narrative. The multiplex construction of The Wave, then, is a bold effort to express as many individual consciousnesses as is possible, to generate an "[a]esthetic form [which] is founded and validated from within the other [or in Scott's case, others]" (Bakhtin, Art and Answerability 90, Bakhtin's emphasis). Read this way, Scott's project in her historical trilogy strives toward realizing the ethical impulse of Bakhtinian aesthestics, since for Bakhtin, "the aesthetic act—the attempt to give form and meaning to another's life in art—is a supreme form of all genuine human interactions, in which our sense of another person emerges from the distance which divides my situation from yours" (Dentith 12).

Part of the challenge confronting any critic who faces a text of the scope and complexity of The Wave is, in fact, the multiplicity of voices and discourses that both complicate and contribute to the fragmented form of the narrative. It is simply overwhelming to consider the full range of heteroglossic voices in the novel, and therefore I will choose a range of representative moments of polyphony, moments of tension and contention between the voices that constitute the text. Toward that end, then, I want to consider several important instances of confrontation between different sorts of voices and discourses—between individual characters, between groups of warring voices, even between interpolated texts that seem to play off one another dialogically. First, however, I want to begin by examining certain stylistic

elements that Scott frequently employs, elements that will provide a sense of the multivoiced texture of The Wave.

A number of critics have noted the variety of narrative styles employed in The Wave. Multitudes of dialects course through the dialogue—the Black English of the slaves, the rough dialect of the unschooled southern mountaineers, the French-tinged voices of Creole New Orleans, the ornate nineteenth-century English of the upper classes, both north and south. This raucous chorus of tongues is accompanied by a wildly diverse collage of narrative techniques and styles: the omniscient third person voice is joined by stream-of-consciousness passages and sequences of free indirect discourse. Robert L. Welker, for instance, counts among The Wave's narrative styles variations of imagism, quasi-biblical prose, "repetitive staccato" language that recalls that of Gertrude Stein or Ernest Hemingway, and echoes of gothicism ("ES" 425n).

What is important about these shifts in narrative style and tone is how they inform our reading of a particular scene or character—and, almost without fail, it is how the character's consciousness is illuminated by the prose style that is of most importance. Bakhtin is struck by the importance of what he calls "character zones" in a polyphonic text: the presence of particular characters at particular points in the text exerts an influence, Bakhtin claims, on "the authorial speech that surrounds the characters, creating highly particularized character zones" ("Heteroglossia" 210,

Bakhtin's emphasis). "These zones are formed," Bakhtin explains, "from the fragments of character speech" ("Heteroglossia" 210).[8]

Examples of such character zones are legion in The Wave, but the scope of this work permits only a representative cross section. One instance early in the narrative focuses on a southern child, Henry Clay, who finds himself confused and troubled by the mixed allegiances in his immediate family. Short, clipped, simplistic phrasings—"Aunt Amanda wore blue dresses" (W 20), "Aunt Amanda was Papa's sister" (W 20)—reflect the limited fluency of a young child, much like the famous opening lines of James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. More importantly, this technique gives us a sampling of Henry Clay's consciousness—and of how that consciousness is being refracted and contorted by what the adults are telling him of the war:

> He thought he would like to go to war on Papa's horse. He didn't care about the religious part of it—if Mamma would only let him go to war and wear a Confederate uniform. . . . He looked at the moon again, and pretended it was a silver-golden cannon ball that was sailing down to get him. . . . Jesse was a 'nigger,' and a coward. Jesse belonged to him. He would like to send Jesse to the battle front and *make* him fight the Yankees. (W 25)[9]

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[8] Charles Dickens's fiction, for example, abounds with these character zones, such as the terse, utilitarian phrasings used to introduce Mr. Gradgrind in Hard Times.

[9] Scott makes liberal use of italics throughout The Wave—to indicate emphasis, to mark sequences of stream-of-consciousness or interior monologue, and to denote interpolated texts such as newspaper articles. In my quotations from her text, I have consistently preserved her italicized passages.

We see here a wealth of indicators about what Henry Clay has absorbed from the events and debates surrounding him and his family. Clearly, he has been powerfully shaped by the rhetoric of Confederate patriotism, and the image of the silver-golden cannon ball descending upon him suggests a complex mixture of the romanticized militarism of such patriotic rhetoric and a threatening hint of foreboding in the almost gothic image of the moon slowly but ominously sinking towards him. The racist discourse of the chattel slavery system is clearly evident in the concluding descriptions of Jesse. These passages are not stream-of-consciousness; they report neither the spoken words of the character nor his directly recorded thoughts. Instead, Henry Clay's character, his consciousness, infects and shapes the narrative voice, contouring that language within the character zone Bakhtin would ascribe to him.

The Kalicz episode, which some critics consider the best single sequence in the text, employs a similarly complex interplay of voices, indeed, perhaps even more complex, as the language within the character zone shifts between a simplistic voice—not unlike that of the Henry Clay episode—to a biblical tone that reflects the messianic delusions of the mentally unstable steel worker at the center of this vignette. A simple-minded Polish immigrant who "would never be a good workman and never learn to speak English well" (W 314), Kalicz and his mother had left Poland when the Russian invaders displaced their old aristocratic landlords: "And when the new people had come and she did not like the new people, she told Kalicz to come with her, and she and Kalicz walked for maybe a whole year, and came to the shores of what maybe was called the Black Sea, and took a boat" (313). The prose

style in this passage reflects perhaps the simple intelligence of Kalicz, perhaps his halting and simple English—probably both. The narrative voice, however, shifts fluidly but nonetheless unexpectedly into a biblical, anaphoric discourse that clearly recalls the King James Version:

> And the iron that brimmed the pail was whole and like glass. . . . And the iron that came out of the cupola and poured into the ladle was a thousand tons. And it, too, might have been as nothing. But the light that sprang from it was as if the sun lay in a casket in the middle of the foundry, and basked itself, and the men basked together, in the light of the sun, and it was as in the beginning when the sun was near and there was neither light nor day. (W 315-6)

Such a quasi-biblical narrative style is an entirely appropriate one for the apocalyptic musings of Kalicz, who, like some Luddite messiah, looks forward to the day when "the foundry would be destroyed. . . . The men who were enslaved by the engines would be freed" (W 323). Kalicz finally acts upon that prophetic vision, hastening, in his mind, this freedom from industrial enslavement by burning down the foundry in which he works. The apocalyptic spirit of this episode comes to full fruition, then, as Kalicz's corrupted industrial world is consumed in purifying flames:

> Flames ran along up the new boards in the scorching walls. Exorcised demons flitted high in the clouds of smoke. . . . Fire was purified of all its dross, and there was only water and light, where the flames shone molten and the East River was enmeshed in blood, where the East

> River was like brass, where the East River flowed out to the Harbour that was blood. (W 326)

Another frequently used technique in The Wave, in terms of Bakhtin's categories of heteroglossia, is a variety of double-voiced discourse,[10] and its effect is similar to that of character zones. Although most of Scott's episodes are narrated primarily in the third person, that narration is often liberally sprinkled with bits of what seem at first glance to be quoted text—individual words or short phrases that appear to represent either the thoughts of the central character or the sort of language the character would use were he or she actually speaking. Scott encloses these words in single quotation marks to distinguish them from the surrounding authorial voice narration. One episode in the first chapter is devoted to Charlie, a young Yankee braggart who finds the discipline of army life tedious and annoying: "Charlie regarded him [his sergeant] contemptuously because he looked 'unhealthy.' The army was no place for a 'feller' who wanted to do 'right' by himself. He'd like to see the sergeant at a 'quiltin' bee.' The 'gals' would know how to make a fool of him, 'you bet'" (W 29). The result is a sort of bifurcated narration in which the omniscient narrative voice is interrupted, almost taken over, if only momentarily, by the "voice" or consciousness or presence of the character in question, breaking down the binary

[10] Double-voiced discourse occurs, Bakhtin claims, when "[s]omeone else's words [are] introduced into our own speech [and] inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation" (Poetics 195). Such language, then, actually contains two voices: that of the speaker or narrator and that of the person whose words are being appropriated. Bakhtin describes a complex variety of such double-voiced discourses, of which irony and parody are the most common types.

opposition between narrator and narrated. This bifurcated narration not only provides a sense of authenticity, even a measure of autonomy, for these characters but also demonstrates, in a sense, exactly what Bakhtin sees unfolding in a polyphonic text: the interpenetration—through the medium of language—of self and other (Dentith 42).

The multiplicity of discourses in the novel is complicated, moreover, by a sense of struggle, of contention, of conflict: thus, Scott's narrative of war becomes itself a war of words. This conflict unfolds on several levels in the narrative as different kinds of languages and discourses compete in different kinds of contexts and arenas: characters, as bearers of particular languages and particular ideologies (Bakhtin "Heteroglossia" 209), argue with one another, mob scenes provide cacophonous clashes of voices, biased newspapers propagandize the events they report.

Further, although many of the episodic fragments in The Wave are largely solitary affairs, focusing tightly on one individual consciousness, there are many more obviously dialogic sequences in the text, moments when characters break into open debate with one another, becoming much more clearly the bearers of certain ideologies and certain languages. A powerful scene depicting the Confederate home front provides a brief but illuminating instance of this sort of dialogic at work. The concluding section of the first chapter describes a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society, apparently in Richmond, shortly after the South's victory at Manassas. The episode focuses primary attention on Mrs. Witherspoon, the mother of two sons, James and George, fighting for the Confederacy. Mrs. Witherspoon, who, we are told, "liked

'orating'" (W 40), provides the voice of militaristic patriotism and impassioned Southern resistance against "'the great mass of those misguided ones who have been sent into our territory to accomplish our subjugation'" (W 39). The sort of ostentatious rhetoric just cited is typical of the kind of discourse Mrs. Witherspoon spouts constantly at the ladies' meetings: "'I have two sons in the war'" (W 39), she is fond of reminding the ladies, "'. . . If I had *ten* sons,' she reiterated, using an old phrase, but somehow, now, with a more despairing vigour, 'I would gladly give up every one of them. . . . It would be an insult to faith—to *my* faith, anyhow—to think of such good boys—so conscientious and high-minded—as guided in their present decisions by any hand but that of God'" (W 40). It is important to note, too, that Mrs. Witherspoon constitutes a voice of authority, or, at least, a voice utilizing and appropriating the authoritative discourse of her society—the patriotic rhetoric of Davis's Confederacy and, significantly, the voice of the church, insisting, as she does, that God fights on the side of the Confederacy.

Much to Mrs. Witherspoon's dismay, Annie Byrd, her son George's fiancée, notably lacks Mrs. Witherspoon's martial spirit: "Annie Byrd, recently, had become silent, almost surly, and Mrs. Witherspoon, who would some day be her mother-in-law, did not approve of this new phase" (W 36). Though silent throughout much of the episode, Annie Byrd becomes the bearer of a powerful discourse herself, one quite opposed to the romanticized rhetoric of the older woman. When the ladies' meeting is interrupted with news from the front, Annie's language literally transforms

into a weapon far more powerful than Mrs. Witherspoon's pretentious but ultimately hollow oratory:

> Unexpectedly, Annie Byrd came forward. "He's dead, Miss Agnes." The announcement, in that calmed, emotionally vibrating tone, was like an attack. . . . Annie Byrd's hard speech could not be halted. She talked viciously. "He died like a *hero*, Miss Agnes, at Manassas, but I haven't your consolations. It's not in me to care more for a lot of politics than for flesh and blood." (W 46-7)

Here, Annie actually seizes upon Mrs. Witherspoon's patriotic rhetoric—note the brutally ironic recasting of "*hero*"—and turns its language against the older woman. In fact, Annie's rejoinder to Miss Agnes's authoritative discourse deals a seemingly fatal blow. Though still steeped in her nationalistic rhetoric, language begins to fail Mrs. Witherspoon: "'You're a wicked girl,' she articulated slowly. 'Your're not fit to be the sweetheart of my—my patriot.' Her voice quavered flatly" (W 47). Annie's vicious coup-de-grace—"'There's nothing more I can say. I hate—her—her *damned* Confederacy'" (W 47)—actually leaves the girl awkwardly repentant as she realizes the dreadful power of her own language. For, indeed, as the scene closes, Mrs. Witherspoon, the embodiment of the Southern Cause, the proud bearer of its patriotic rhetoric, finds herself confused and defeated, her orator's tongue confounded:

> Her head lolled, inclined toward the girl's shoulder, and she moaned: "You won't try to tell me the war's *wrong*, Annie Byrd. You won't take my only comfort from me. Why, everything I have's wrapped up

> in it. God wouldn't take my only son away but in His Own cause, would He? The war's *right*!" Her tongue was thick. She found herself talking in a daze. (W 47)

A more startling clash of voices—more startling because it includes two similarly marginalized voices in conflict—involves a Jewish immigrant family recently moved to the South which endure a racist and xenophobic environment even while participating in the chattel slave system of that environment. Section two of the seventh chapter jars the reader with an especially unexpected discourse, a Hebrew prayer: "'Anenu adono, anenu b'yom zom taanisenu, ki b'zoroh g'doloh anachnu' (Answer us, O Lord, answer us on this day of the fast of our humiliation, for we are in great trouble)" (W 211). As the prayer suggests, the family finds itself in particularly dire straits under the Union occupation of Vicksburg. Sally, the sole slave of the household, was purchased primarily as a cultural novelty so that the family could own a slave "such as the gentiles kept" (W 215). The arrival of the Union forces has encouraged Sally's already belligerent personality into open defiance of her owners and, finally, flight. Her relationship with the Jewish family has literally been a war of words, which escalated dramatically shortly before her flight: afterwards, Scott writes, "'She's gone,' Jacob was whispering, using the Yiddish despised of the very servant of whom he spoke" (W 212). Language is an especially important cultural marker in this episode. Indeed, Yiddish and other sorts of discourse become rhetorical weapons in this complex arena of multicultural conflict: "Since Sally's hostile advent in the family, Yiddish had become uncomfortable on the children's

lips. Yet they turned it against her, to speak their fear of her and to betray her secrets" (W 212). A crossfire of racist epithets drives the fiercest scenes in this narrative vignette, with the eldest son labeling Sally "'Schweine!'" (W 213) in response to her own racist badgering of the family: Jews, she has told the children, are "the lowest of the very lowest race" (W 214).

A third presence, an outside presence, hovers over this extraordinary battle of racist discourses—the larger, more authoritative discourse of the white gentile society enclosing and oppressing both black and Jew. Moreover, it is clear that the origins of these racist attacks wielded by both black and Jew find their origins in this authoritative or master discourse of white society. Throughout the episode, Sally, having lived previously "'wid a Christian mastah'" and "'used to decent, Christian ways'" (W 224), deploys a powerfully anti-Semitic rhetoric, one that inspires a painful self-consciousness in the family of their inherent differentness, their inherent marginality: "Jacob leaned against the wall and watched, thinking how many times he had heard Sally say, 'Yo pa ain't nuffin but a ol' Jew ragman, anyway.' Jacob shivered. Recalling Sally's words, and oppressed by them, he felt a new awe, and a horror in his father's grief" (W 220). When Sally returns to reclaim some belongings, a full-scale verbal confrontation erupts, and how these marginal voices appropriate the racist rhetoric of their white gentile oppressors becomes increasingly explicit: "'Jew! Ol' Jew pedlar! 'Tain't mah talk. Hit's white folks' talk. Come on you ol' Shylock—da's what dey call y'all!'" (225). The Jewish family draws upon this same discursive source in response. As Sally shouts her derision at the "greasy, goose-

grease-eatin' Jews" (W 224), Solomon responds in kind: "'Take dot word back! . . . Do you mean to insult me—dot dirty slave you are, dot low, ignorant nigger!'" (W 224). A more direct insertion of anti-Semitic authoritative discourse joins the dialogue through an edict from the Union occupation authorities, more specifically General Grant: "*The Jews, as a class, violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department, and also department orders, are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-four hours of the receipt of this order*" (W 218). Backed by the legally sanctioned anti-Semitism of her deliverers,"[d]e Linculm men" (W 224), Sally clearly feels fully justified in her disdain for the "'dirty Jew folks'": "'debbil folks, dat's what y'all is'" (W 222).

Larger confrontations of voices arise in several clamorous riots that figure prominently in the narrative. In these mob scenes, we see an even more dramatic illustration of the multiplicity of clashing languages in the novel, languages that mark class, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, voices of authority and voices from the margins. The riotous response to Federal troops in Baltimore in the opening days of the conflict provides the first important mob scene in The Wave. In this episode, Scott keeps the reader oriented to the events through the character of Percy, the middle-class law clerk who provides the center of consciousness in this episode. Despite "this talk of war" (W 8) surrounding him, Percy obstinately tries to remain neutral in the secession debate. But with the movement of Federal troops into Baltimore, Percy finds himself caught up in the mob resistance to occupation. Again, much of the struggle is oriented in significant ways through the medium of language.

Even before the riot occurs, Percy's efforts to remain neutral involve a clash of languages: "It was a fact that, after you heard *one* lot talk, and then the other, your single desire was to keep your mind clear and remain aloof" (W 11). To complicate matters, his wife is among the clashing voices that would have Percy join the struggle: he anticipates that upon his arrival home, "she would be 'at him' again, quoting Great Aunt Phoebe's hope that he would ally himself with the Secessionists" (W 9). Resolved to neutrality, when Percy emerges from the law office at which he works, he steps into a clamorous arena of struggling languages: "These men who were idling, filling up the streets today, they need not stare at *him* as if they expected *him* to hiss the government" (W 9). Inevitably, a dialogic clash of languages ensues, and Percy is among the participants. When Percy encounters an old black man, a significant struggle of discourses unfolds: "Percy, disturbed, guarding the confidence which he could show to an inferior, said, 'What's the matter, Uncle? . . . What's happening down the street today?'" (W 10). The black man's reply—"'Um—um, Mistah. Um—yes-suh, Cap'n. Hit's de Union sojers'" (W 10)—simple as it is, seems to carry a surprising amount of ideological weight: "His head was cocked sidewise. His eyes glinted moistly, and his information, given with a doubtful chuckle, was a timid challenge" (W 10). Indeed, Percy is reluctant to enter the arena of discourse with the black man. First, Percy turns a deaf ear to the black man, who tries to continue baiting his white superior: "Percy, nervously keen to suspect any insolent intention, ignored the negro suddenly" (W 10). Moments later, Percy lashes out in verbal abuse: "'All this excitement about you worthless niggers . . . I never saw a

nigger yet who was valuable enough to fight about'" (W 11). And finally, unwilling to meet his social inferior on the field of discourse, Percy removes himself from the sullying contact with the black man and plunges deeper into the street mob: "Percy resisted the levelling of interchange. Like a dog emerging from unwelcome waters, he shook himself, pushed with his elbows on a massive back, and tried to forge a progress" (W 12). Entering the larger crowd, Percy discovers, however, even more dangerous discourses. Finding himself among people he considers rabble, he grows fearful of "being subjected to unmerited degradation": "A woman beyond him burst forth unexpectedly with shrill words that cursed the Lincolnites. Percy shuddered and despised her—'a flat-nosed, common Irish girl.' He had a terror of association with her incontinent speech" (W 13). Finally, Percy is literally swept away on a tide of language: his efforts first to remain neutral, then to dissociate himself from the common or inferior tongues around him prove futile as "[t]he crowd, with fifty wild voices to encourage, leaned mindlessly upon the forward uproar that attracted it" (W 15). Like the bobbing cork described in the epigraph to Scott's novel, Percy becomes "an insignificant unit" in the inexorable wave of the mob (W 14). Once reluctant to take sides, once disturbed by the proximity of the rabble and their crude speech, Percy finds himself facing off against the Federal troops, whose presence is felt in yet another sort of discourse—that of the authorities, of the military: "'*Charge bayonets.*' The order was brutal with directness" (W 18). It is actually this authoritarian language that seems to spur the formerly neutral Percy: "Whoever doubts my loyalty to the South is a dirty blackguard, he thought excitedly" (W 18).

Hearing "the abrupt command" to [*c*]*lear the streets* (W 18), Percy impetuously joins the street resistance, swinging a fence paling at the soldiers until he falls, apparently mortally wounded by a bayonet, as real weapons usurp the warring words of this episode.

The struggle of discourses is equally important in another episode, one describing the bread riots in Richmond. The now aging and impoverished daughter of a once prominent family, Miss Araminta lives with her sister Maude Mary, once a belle of Richmond society, now a sickly and cynical old woman cared for by her sister. The episode opens with Miss Araminta preparing again to seek work in Richmond, doing "'plain' sewing" for families that can afford to pay (W 195). Though dreading the long day ahead and the failure to secure work it will likely bring, Miss Araminta is nonetheless eager to flee the house, and, significantly, she flees in part the troubling language of Maude Mary: she fears "the querulous lips, that had been so pretty, always parting now to utter accusation. Sister Maude Mary's voice was flat these days, with an intentional weariness" (W 192). Entering Richmond, however, Miss Araminta encounters a mosaic of troubling languages. Initially, her aristocratic origins leave her with a distaste for the street scene she encounters: "when she saw 'common men and women loitering,' she could not but regard them as interlopers. Poor women in 'wrappers' and sunbonnets disturbed her strangely" (W 196). Approaching a young woman, Miss Araminta asks about the mob. The woman's reply reveals much about the role of language in this vignette: "'I reckon this is the first time any of us ever had the grit to git up a real protest about

things, ma'm. . . . I thought I didn't have hardly the strength to complain, but when I heard that a whole crowd was expected and we were gonta tell folks what we thought about it, I came along'" (W 197). When Miss Araminta quietly chides the young woman—"'You look like too nice a girl to be in a crowd like this'" (W 197)—she is clearly still speaking the language of privilege, the language of support for Davis's cabinet. Indeed, her words place her at odds with the crowd around her, and especially at odds with the young woman, who, in her working class dialect, makes her allegiance brutally clear: "'Yah—en ef they don't do nothin' to help us, we're gonta git rocks and smash the 'White House' windows,' the young woman shouted, in a cold, derisive tone, speaking to Miss Araminta's humiliated back" (W 197). As the fever of the crowd grows, other common voices join the chorus of rebellion: "'You better come along with us, ma'm,' a giber invited. 'You don't look too fat and rosy yourself. If they ain't gonta ration us nothin', we gonta *take* it'" (W 197-8). Miss Araminta, despite her best efforts, cannot ignore this powerful discourse of the common people: "Miss Araminta disregarded the voice, yet some sense of the words arrested her to sharp, unwilling attention. . . . If Maude Mary should ever hear *this*!" (W 198). The ensuing scene becomes a chaos of protesting voices, of "*halloos*" and "urging exclamations" (W 198), the voices of the poor, the voices of women, who, we are told, "predominated" (W 199). As the crowd cries out for bread and ominously approaches the bakeries, Miss Araminta, much as recurred with Percy in Baltimore, is caught up in the wave of revolt, a wave driven by a storm of language: "'Bread. Give us some bread. We ain't kept our men out of the army, have we? We won't stand

bein' put off with promises.' The call grew stronger, harsher" (W 200). Though unified in purpose, the protesters, driven by hunger, bitterly compete for the bakeries' wares, and Miss Araminta enters the tumultuous conflict. Joining the crowd looting the bakeries, she "snatch[es] a loaf rudely, covetously. . . . It was hers. She was alone against these other unruly longings, hatefully opposing her own" (201) As the authorities arrive to control the mob, the crowd turn their voices again against their common foe, the government, and the clash of languages intensifies:

> On the carriage steps, a flushed man, in the broadcloth of an important functionary, was declaiming, "Fellow citizens and townspeople of Richmond—" She saw his arms waved in a very anguish of insistence on calm. He was calling on them to remember what the Confederacy expected of them in its time of stress. She [Miss Araminta] joined the intermittently sensed phrases together in a vague jumble of meaning. "Talk on [a voice cries]. It does yawl good. You think you kin give us a lot of fine language in place of bread fer our sick stomachs." (W 202)

Again, as with Percy, the language of authority, here nearly drowned out by the protesting voices of the mob, sways Miss Araminta to action—against the voice of authority: "Miss Araminta, baffled by her position, grew red, and felt ill. But her conviction of some outrage, impersonally perpetuated upon herself, was curiously revealed by the false measure of consoling oratory. . . . Let him *go* with his flowery speeches. What did *he* know about the miseries women had to undergo" (W 202).

And finally, Miss Araminta casts her lot with the common people, joining her voice to the cacophony of protest: "'You're brutes!' she yelled, in her fierce cracked little tones. 'You have no right to interfere with these women—with *any* of us. You don't know what you're talking about'" (W 202). As in the Baltimore riot, we see here the sheer force of language. The clash of voices and discourses literally shakes Miss Araminta from the isolation of her once privileged origins, culminating in her rejection of Jefferson Davis as he attempts to assuage the mob by "throwing pennies, with a free, chill hand, to the prideless populace who forgot him": "Giving us *money*, she thought. The idea! Does he consider us *beggars*! . . . People were starving hungry when they behaved that way, and President Davis ought to know it" (W 203). Undermined along with Davis's authority, however, seems to be a broader allegiance to authorities: "she would never trust or believe anybody again" (W 203).

The dialogue of languages seen in these individual scenes moves beyond interpersonal confrontations, however, as Scott's text introduces other levels of discourse. Interpolated texts—newspaper excerpts, sermons, songs—are among the heteroglossia complicating The Wave. Some contemporary readers found these inclusions distracting: "somewhat irrelevant newspaper cuttings," the TLS reviewer writes, "intervene to increase the effect of irrationality" (574). In actual fact, however, these newspaper excerpts further demonstrate the struggle of voices in this text, the newspaper fragments providing yet another example of a kind of authoritative or official source of discourse, for as one character, Mrs. Pettis, points out, "'If you can't believe the newspapers, what *can* you believe'" (W 44). Mrs.

Pettis is friend to another voice of authority in the text, Mrs. Witherspoon: and like Mrs. Witherspoon, indeed, like so many other authoritative voices in Scott's novel, the authoritative voices of these interpolated texts will be interrogated and undermined as they enter The Wave's polyphonic war of words (574).

As in T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, the spatial arrangement of The Wave's interpolated texts sometimes serves a crucial function. In two instances, excerpts from two different newspapers are juxtaposed with one another, each roughly facing the other on opposite pages of the text, squared off in an obvious sort of dialogue. The clearest example juxtaposes fragments from The Cincinnati Bugle with passages from The Vicksburg Chronicle: both report on, among other things, the attack on Memphis by a fleet of Union gunboats. Ornate patriotic rhetoric colors both accounts—and we have in this sequence the unusual dialogue between two authoritative discourses, though, of course, each is authoritative only to certain, indeed, quite different, readerships. The paper trumpeting the Union victory is, of course, The Cincinnati Bugle: "*anxious spectators . . . throng the levees by thousands in order to confirm with their own eyes the news of an impending triumph for the cause of justice and liberty to all men*" (W 144). Much is made of "*panic-stricken*" rebels and the intrepid energy of Colonel Ellet and his attacking fleet (W 144). The Vicksburg Chronicle, however, provides a contrapuntal voice: "*their onslaught on us was met by a speedy and courageous action . . . [T]he gallantry of the resistance offered to the Yankees made an inspiring spectacle for those loyal citizens of Memphis who, undeterred by dangers to life and limb, lined the levees and shores*

above the city by thousands and heartened our defenders with cheers and prayers" (W 145). Similarly, excerpts reporting a treaty negotiated between the United States and Great Britain effectively blocking the slave trade betray marked differences in perspective, each paper vilifying and ridiculing the opposing government. The Cincinnati Bugle declares the treaty a successful riposte of Confederate diplomacy: "*the South's play for foreign sympathy and foreign aid in conserving her nefarious interests and giving subrosa support to her illegal institutions becomes a joke*" (W 145). The Vicksburg paper takes a decidedly different tack: "[*T*]*hose who are falsely representing themselves as emissaries of all the American states*" have tried to shame the South in the world's eyes: "*As benevolent protectors of the negroes already in our midst, we resent and shall resist the thrusting into our civilized areas of further barbarous blacks from the Congo jungles*" (W 146). That ideology drives the journalistic voices in these excerpts is underscored by how similarly they each report less politically charged material: "*Grand Duke Constantine has been appointed Governor of Poland*" (W 144); "*The Grand Duke Constantine has been appointed Governor of Poland*" (W 145). The result is an undermining of the authority of both "official" or authoritative discourses: on matters of political import, neither voice seems fully trustworthy; neither seems fully truthful.

A more oblique sort of dialogue is presented in the juxtapositioning of The Richmond Appeal and The London Guardian. As these newspapers do not give voice to opposing factions, the dialogism requires some rooting out. Nonetheless, a sort of dialogue exists, not only between the newspaper excerpts but, in the case of the

British journal, within the excerpt. The Confederate newspaper offers exactly the sort of propagandistic rhetoric we might expect given our previous encounter with The Vicksburg Chronicle: "*Southern people must content themselves with assurances, ever trusted, from those who know, and with President Davis's assertion that never before have the troops under the direction of our Commander and Chief been in a stronger position*" (W 236). Here the paper is clearly speaking with the voice of authority, urging unswerving faith in the Southern leadership and unquestioning confidence in the cause. The excerpt concludes by praising the humane restraint of Confederate forces in the border states which behavior "*contrasts with the unjust, outrageous, even blasphemous descent of Yankee marauders upon peaceful Virginians, women and children and tillers of the soil, alike*" (W 237). The excerpt from the British paper which follows offers an indirect but ironic commentary on the quality of this sort of journalism exemplified by the Confederate paper: "*War news from the United States of America is infrequent and independable, and, owing to constant censorship, such information as we receive is of doubtful authenticity*" (W 237). Having undermined the dependability of the Confederate excerpt to which it is juxtaposed, however, this British newspaper fragment actually undermines its own authority when we examine it carefully. The portion devoted to reporting the war in America finally concerns itself primarily with the economic inconveniences the war presents to Britain: "*Whatever the result, however, this year will produce no further cotton crop for the Manchester market*" (W 237). With economic interests at heart, the paper insists that the neutral British must do whatever is necessary to guard

their own financial interests: "*As charity begins at home, so does the obligation, shared by all British statesmen and every loyal subject of our Gracious Queen, to protect British trade and British interests, take precedence over any other duty*" (W 237). The horrors of war in America, then, are important to Great Britain only in terms of economic impact, the paper suggests. While millions of fellow human beings suffer, however, the British paper piously salutes "*the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,*" which has successfully "*obtained a conviction . . . against the Marquis of Hastings*" for cock-fighting, which sport they hope "*is waning in popularity*" (W 237). A further internal irony in the excerpt involves two other fragmentary items. The paper reports on the death of "*Mary Anne Walker, who was said to have died from overwork, and from sleeping in a badly ventilated room at a fashionable milliner's establishment in Regent Street*" (W 237). While the "*tyranny*" of cock-fighting is decried as an outrage, the death of Mary Anne Walker is reported with dispassionate neutrality. Even more telling is the fragment which follows the Walker story: "*The Guards gave a grand ball to the Prince and Princess of Wales in the picture-galleries of the International Exhibition Building. The decorations were of surpassing splendour, and it is calculated that the gold and silver plate used represent a gross value of two millions sterling. The guests invited were limited to 1,400. . . .*" (W 237, Scott's ellipsis). This celebration of privileged splendor juxtaposed with the coolly objective report of the woman's death from overwork in effect shows the newspaper excerpt dialogizing itself, unwittingly undermining its own authority, at least, its moral authority, in the voice and tone with which it reports

these events. Indeed, when the paper warns that news from America is "*of doubtful authenticity*," we must wonder if that does not apply with equal justice to The London Guardian.

A final excerpt near the end of the novel—again from The London Guardian—though it stands alone, also proves to be internally dialogized. Actually, this interpolated text, in fact, consists of several excerpts from the London paper from May and June of 1865. Among reports of Jefferson Davis's capture, Emperor Napoleon III's visit to Algeria, and a train wreck between Shrewsbury and Chester, the paper appropriates another voice of authority—in fact, as we will see, two such voices. The paper recounts a presentation before the Geographical Society declaring that a Mr. Baker "*had succeeded in discovering the second great source of the Nile*" (W 595-96). The journalistic voice then shifts into the confident rhetoric of nineteenth-century progress:

> *As the confirmation of each successively conjectured fact removes some of the glamour from the romance of antiquity, it brings compensation in opportunity for the dissemination of peaceful arts and cultures. Our grasp on the realities of the known world is constantly and rapidly increasing. Even the dream of discovering the poles begins to seem to us a likely achievement.* (W 596)

Of particular interest is the confidence in "*racial concords*": "*We begin to look forward with assurance on an epoch of peace and good will among nations. Certainly, in contradiction of the dogmatic controversies that have stirred England*

during the last decade, evidence of an All-Wise Intelligence is much clearer now that it was a generation ago" (W 596). Given the pageant of terrors and miseries paraded before the reader in the preceding 500-odd pages, this interpolated text speaks volumes in irony. What we have witnessed in Scott's novel is firm evidence that peace and good will are far from assured in this age of progress. Moreover, the newspaper excerpt's efforts to resolve that most important of nineteenth-century dialogues, that between religious faith and science, actually serves to undermine both authoritative discourses at one stroke. Neither the wise implementation of human science nor the supposed omniscience and benevolence of the Almighty has been in much evidence in Scott's text: instead, we have witnessed chaos, death, and man's inhumanity to man. Rather than offering a single countervoice to question or undermine these authoritative discourses, The Wave has provided a chorus of voices, all arguing, through the terror of their experiences, against the sort of blithe positivism articulated in this most ironic of Scott's interpolated texts.

Scott's novel, then, continues to examine the troubling issue of selfhood as it is seemingly overshadowed by the enormous forces of history. Bakhtin's narrative theories suggest that the polyphonic novel is the form most capable of creating and giving voice to fully valid, autonomous characters—that is, as autonomous as a created, fictional character can be. Scott undertakes just such a task in The Wave. In doing so, however, her work calls into question the sorts of authoritative voices that seek to dictate to or drown out the voice of the autonomous individual. Like Bakhtin's, Scott's work is a libertarian project, an enterprise in individualism—yet

one that universalizes and even collectivizes individualism. Despite the charges leveled by Bakhtin and others against the modernists as a group, Scott manages to focus tightly on the individual consciousness without slipping into solipsism: Scott's individual consciousnesses are in dialogue with other like consciousnesses.

Having moved away from the domestic setting of her Farley trilogy—and the autobiographical impulse that seems to shape that trilogy—Scott has raised her narrative eye to the larger project of giving voice to myriad individual selves, the particles that taken together constitute the wave of history. This project continues as Scott moves into a third, more loosely structured trilogy—Breathe Upon These Slain, Bread and a Sword, and The Shadow of the Hawk—one that examines the place of the artist in modern society.[11] The most interesting of these is Breathe Upon These Slain, a novel that anticipates the metafictional experimentation we typically associate with the postmodernists. Yet many of the same themes we have seen in so much of Scott's fiction and autobiography persist in this novel. In fact, the narrative pulls together various strands from Scott's preceding work, concerning itself with both domesticity and history, the self and the other, and, moreover, with its British setting and characters, actually crosses cultural and national boundaries. But just as importantly, Breathe Upon These Slain crosses another sort of boundary, the ontological border between fiction and reality, as Evelyn Scott moves beyond the

[11] Some would include the highly autobiographical Eva Gay, Scott's most personal "artist" novel. Eva is a writer, but the novel's focus is almost solely on love and marriage, and the work does not qualify as a true Kunstlerroman.

modernist experimentation in her historical fiction into the shadowy region of a sort of proto-postmodern metafiction—and in the following chapter, we cross that boundary with her.

Chapter Four

Constructing Selves: Death, Didacticism, and the Historiographic Metafiction of Breathe Upon These Slain

In the opening chapter of Postmodernist Fiction, Brian McHale strives to outline the parameters of literary postmodernism by delineating the distinctions between postmodern novels and their modernist predecessors: "the dominant of modernist fiction," he asserts, "is epistemological" (9, McHale's emphasis). As McHale points out, modernist texts ask questions about the nature and reliability of our knowledge of the world: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?" (9). Postmodern novels, McHale asserts, challenge us with a different set of questions than that posed by modernism, questions regarding not the realm of epistemology but that of ontology. The emphasis shifts, he thinks, "from problems of knowing to modes of being—from an epistemological dominant to an ontological one" (10, McHale's emphasis):

> What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on. (McHale 10)

Just these sorts of ontological questions shape Evelyn Scott's ninth novel, Breathe Upon These Slain, a text that, much like The Wave, marks an extraordinary experimental leap in Scott's oeuvre. A first-person narrative told by an American woman writer vacationing in a cottage in Suffolk, England, Breathe Upon These Slain surely startled contemporary readers and reviewers with the metafictional devices framing the narrative. Deploying techniques we commonly associate with postmodernist novels, Breathe Upon These Slain is perhaps the most interesting and provocative of Scott's unrecovered texts. In contrast to the works we have discussed thus far—Escapade, The Narrow House, The Wave, and Background in Tennessee—only Breathe Upon These Slain has been almost completely neglected, while the others have been reprinted, in some cases several times.[1] Those who have written extensively about Scott seem similarly unwilling to tackle Breathe Upon These Slain with the critical energy it demands and deserves. Mary Wheeling White devotes three pages of discussion to the novel in her biography of Scott, often raising interesting issues but leaving them frustratingly unexamined. Callard gives the novel only passing mention. Welker and Carrigg, both clearly impressed by the poetic philosophizing of the text, seem unsure how to approach the work comprehensively,

[1] The Narrow House was reissued in 1977 by Arno Press and in 1986 by Shoreline-Norton. Background in Tennessee was republished in 1980 by the University of Tennessee Press. Escapade and The Wave were reissued by Carroll and Graf: the former in 1985, the latter in 1987. Both were recently republished as well: Escapade in 1995 by the University Press of Virginia and The Wave in 1996 by LSU Press.

limiting their treatments of the novel to short, focused discussions.[2] Other critics have remained silent.

The neglect this novel has suffered is especially surprising in that Breathe Upon These Slain foregrounds issues about narrative, about authorship, about history, and about the self in ways that look ahead to the ontological interrogations that characterize so much of the fiction we label postmodern. Welker's 1958 study comes on the cusp of the postmodern period, and, for him, the critical vocabulary was not yet in place for a discussion of Scott's "metafiction,"[3] a term most scholars attribute to Willam Gass.[4] The reluctance of more recent Scott scholars to examine Breathe Upon These Slain is more difficult to explain, for given the currency of metafiction among contemporary writers, the novel begs for reconsideration. Part of a spectrum of novels considering the place of the artist in society, Breathe Upon These Slain, much like Bread and a Sword, The Shadow of the Hawk, and, to a lesser extent, Eva Gay, deals openly with political and philosophical issues and how these issues intersect with aesthetics and artistic freedom. From a political standpoint, Scott's aims become increasingly reactionary—her term is counterrevolutionary—with each installment of this series of works.[5] An intrusive, editorializing narrator marks these

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[2] Carrigg focuses on feminist issues; Welker, casting about for comparisons, sees a Hardyesque strain in the work.

[3] Welker, struggling to explain Scott's metafictional frame, compares her novel to Thornton Wilder's Our Town.

[4] Patricia Waugh traces the term's origins to Gass's Fiction and the Figures of Life (NY: Vintage, 1972).

[5] The term trilogy is a mere convenience: other than the common themes (politics and the artist) already enumerated, these novels are in no sense related as the Farley trilogy or the historical trilogy are.

texts, a voice that carries through to Scott's late, unpublished novel "Escape into Living." This voice intrudes, however, from somewhat different angles and operates on somewhat different discursive levels in each of the texts. Bread and a Sword, another experimental text, is marked, for instance, by a lengthy and, for many, an annoyingly strident antiMarxist preface. Both The Shadow of the Hawk and "Escape into Living," though more in the mode of nineteenth-century realism, nonetheless feature narrative voices whose editorial comments take on an almost didactic tone.

Of all of these works, however, Breathe Upon These Slain constitutes by far the most fascinating inclusion of an intrusive narrative presence. In fact, Scott engages in "what the Russian formalists called 'baring of the device'" (Lodge 18)—a formula now subsumed under our more familiar category of "metafiction"—as the novel's narrator frankly admits the fictionality of her own tale. Having become intrigued by the cottage's furnishings, the photographs, domestic bric-a-brac, and especially the family portraits, including one photo of four young girls, the narrator is seized by the impulse to create, to clothe these skeletal artifacts with a narrative flesh, and this urge proves too strong to resist: "I am not here to write stories, but to rest, and my knowledge of Suffolk is small—my knowledge of these people, nothing!—yet I feel queerly urged to give the four little girls their names" (BUTS 11). The novel, then, is a narrative about narrating, a text concerning itself with the creation of texts, a fictional work that foregrounds its own fictionality.

Such multilayered worlds of discourse are familiar enough to many late twentieth-century readers who, in works like John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's

Woman (1969), Kurt Vonnegut's Breakfast of Champions (1974), Martin Amis's Money (1984), and Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Cherry (1989), have seen several decades of metafictional experimentation. Evelyn Scott's work, published in 1934, of course easily predates these later metafictions. Indeed, when Mary Wheeling White suggests that Breathe Upon These Slain's metafictional frame was "uncommon for the time"(173), she, though perhaps unintentionally, dramatically underestimates the uniqueness of Scott's achievement.

Brian McHale identifies chapter eight of William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! as a moment of rupture in the modernist canon. At this point in Faulkner's text, when Shreve and Quentin begin openly speculating about the Sutpen saga, essentially creating the story out of their own imaginations, the shift is enacted from the epistemological concerns of modernist fiction toward postmodern questions of ontologies: "Quentin and Shreve project a world, apparently unanxiously. Abandoning the intractable problems of attaining to reliable knowledge of *our* world, they improvise a possible world; they fictionalize" (McHale 10, McHale's emphasis). McHale, however, is quick to point out that this postmodern rupture occurs at only this point in the novel—that is, it is a temporary and isolated postmodern moment. We might look about for other such metafictional or postmodern eruptions—continental works such as Luigi Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921) (which McHale asserts is not postmodern, not metafictional) and Andre Gide's The Counterfeiters (1926) are possible examples—but David Lodge's comments clarify exactly how striking a metafictional text published during the high tide of

modernism really is: writing of postmodern narrative technique, Lodge points out that metafiction is not "a new phenomenon in the history of fiction" (43). "It is to be found," he writes, "in Cervantes, Fielding, Sterne, Thackeray and Trollope, among others—but not, significantly, in the work of the great modernist writers. At least, I cannot think offhand of any instance in the work of James, Conrad, Woolf and Joyce (up to and including Ulysses) where the fictitiousness of the narrative is exposed as blatantly as in [postmodern novels]" (Lodge 43). Scott, then, provides one of the very few examples of this kind of fiction to emerge from the modernist period.

At any rate, despite the scholarly neglect, Breathe Upon These Slain generally played well in the eyes of contemporary reviewers. Particularly impressed was Dorothy Van Doren: "I think it is not too much to say that in 'Breathe Upon These Slain' Miss Scott has done in prose what T. S. Eliot did in poetry twelve years ago, and I am quite aware of the quality of that praise" (680). As with so many twentieth-century texts, from F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby to Martin Amis's Money, The Waste Land is, in fact, one of the intertexts informing Breathe Upon These Slain, for the fragmentation of the modern world, the crumbling of the old gods, is one of the central concerns of Breathe Upon These Slain.

Louis Kronenberger further complicates the issue by declaring the book "'a kind of resume of English fiction for the past two generations'" (7). "In other words," he explains, "each portion of this book reads like an extract from a typical English novel of its day. At the outset you might be reading Archibald Marshall; then you have advanced to Arnold Bennett; now you are reading a war novel, now a

disillusioned post-war novel, finally a class-war novel of the present day" (7). As appealing as such intertextual possibilities are to late twentieth-century critics, Kronenberger's comments are not to be taken as praise: the novel, in his view, "smacks of the Virginia Woolf school," he complains, and "Miss Scott has, besides, an unfortunate habit of introducing editorial comments on almost every page" (7). The metafictional frame irritated other critics as well: for instance, one critic protests that "[h]er setting, which is perhaps a rather too intimate introduction into the novelist's workshop, does not aid the conviction of reality" (TLS 672). But welcoming us into the author's creative workshop is exactly Scott's aim in this text: "In 'Breathe Upon These Slain,'" she explains in her preface to Bread and a Sword, "I tried to demonstrate the operation of a fictional imagination in a way to point philosophical implications in the creative process itself" (vii). She might well have added political implications to accompany philosophical ones, for Breathe Upon These Slain is a deeply political novel, one in which the intrusive narrator's voice inserts itself into the political debates that traverse the narrative space of Scott's text. The editorializing narrator Kronenberger finds so distracting is actually an integral element of Scott's narrative strategy. Like The Wave, Breathe Upon These Slain encloses an arena of conflicting discourses, and that conflict is further complicated by the metafictional presence of the narrator. This intrusive narrator is more than mere narrative play, more than simply an interesting new romp in the field of modernist experimentation: the metafictional frame is crucial for achieving Scott's goals in this novel. And as we will see, the avenues through which postmodernist writers deploy

metafictional techniques provide illuminating insight into Evelyn Scott's metafiction, for, in my view, Breath Upon These Slain anticipates how later writers would utilize metafictional frameworks. Willam Faulkner, it seems, was not alone among American authors in pushing epistemological questions over the line into ontological territory: Evelyn Scott's effort is more sustained than Faulkner's, more fully realized, and very much in line with what postmodernist writers of historiographic metafiction have been attempting for the last thirty to forty years.

Although what we now call metafiction is not new, having been employed by eighteenth-century novelists like Sterne and Fielding, the technique has been enthusiastically reanimated by postmodernist novelists. But to what ends? Actually, metafiction is a preferred postmodern narrative technique for a range of reasons. First, of course, it complicates the interplay of discourses in a text, allowing a freer play with language—and with perceptions of realities. The ontological boundaries between fiction and reality are radically blurred, calling into question what we can ever know about the world (or worlds) we inhabit. If this sounds suspiciously like modernism's epistemological endeavors, we should not be surprised. For McHale, the ontological questions of postmodernism are in fact more complex extensions of the epistemological issues of modernist fiction: "push epistemological questions far enough," Brian McHale explains, "and they 'tip over' into ontological questions" (11). The progression from modernist ways of seeing to postmodernist ones, McHale is suggesting, is a natural, perhaps even an inevitable one. The postmodern universe is much like the modernist one—an unknowable and undefinable reality.

Postmodernism, however, raises the stakes by pluralizing modernism's mysterious cosmos—the unknowable and undefinable reality of modernism becomes the unknowable and undefinable realities of postmodernism. Metafiction reflects this notion of multiple worlds by pluralizing the discursive worlds of the text.

Metafiction serves other ends as well, however. More than simply complicating the levels of discourse in a narrative, metafiction becomes in the hands of many writers a means by which fiction can spill over into reality and interact with the world outside the text. In violating the boundaries between fiction and reality, metafiction already, in a sense, seems to bring the world of fiction into contact with the world outside the text, the world of real (not fictional) people and actual (not fictional) events. For instance, writers of metafictions often comment directly in their novels not only on their own fiction writing processes but on political and philosophical issues. As Robert Scholes points out, contemporary metafiction is characteristically didactic, presenting to the reader "ethically controlled fantasy" (3). In fact, postmodern novels are often marked by a direct, even confrontational tone—usually confrontational in a political sense. Linda Hutcheon, for instance, sees in postmodern metafiction an effort "to make a connection to the real world of political action through the reader" (Poetics 115). Historiographic metafiction, Hutcheon claims, is characterized by an "overt (and political) concern for its reception, for its reader" (Poetics 115).

Hutcheon's preferred label for this type of fiction—historiographic metafiction—indicates clearly that history has become the special province of

metafictional experimentation: John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969), Jeanette Winterson's Sexing the Cherry (1989), Robert Coover's The Public Burning (1977), John Barth's The Sot-Weed Factor (1960), Thomas Pynchon's Mason and Dixon (1997) are only a few examples. How we can know and understand the past is the concern of such novels. In historiographic metafiction, the historical past is yet another of the multiple worlds from which our universe is constructed, a world to which we have access only indirectly and imperfectly through archives, documents, artifacts, and eyewitness accounts—never direct access, only access through such fragmentary and fallible media.

To one degree or another, all of these characteristically postmodern issues come into play in Breathe Upon These Slain. In Background in Tennessee, Evelyn Scott expresses an inherent distrust of "[t]wo-dimensional histories" (3). In Breathe Upon These Slain, she attempts to push the boundaries of narrative in new directions, directions that lead us beyond two-dimensional histories into a multidimensional and multileveled narrative of self and history. Simultaneously, however, these complex levels of narrative suggest the radical instability of our notions of reality, reflecting the "sense of crisis and loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order" which Patricia Waugh sees as prompting both modernism and postmodernism (21).

Indeed, Breathe Upon These Slain is primarily a novel about loss. This point was not missed by earlier scholars. Both Welker and Carrigg, for instance, comment on the elegiac tone of the work. Certainly, too, Dorothy Van Doren's comparison of the novel to The Waste Land points us in the right direction. Scott's text concerns

itself with the dramatic cultural shifts that occurred in the transitional period between the Victorian era and the modern world. The narrator's invented tale follows an imaginary British family, the Courtneys, a family based on the photographs the narrator peruses at the cottage. Early in the narrative we already find ourselves in the postmodern milieu of multiple ontologies: the photos, for the narrator, are real enough; the story she spins from them, however, is pure fabulation; and, of course, all of this, the narrator and the narrated, are fictional constructs themselves.

Through her reading of the photographs, the narrator chooses to examine the cultural dynamics of English bourgeois existence from the late Victorian period to the narrator's own era, the mid-1930s. Focusing on a family she calls the Courtneys—Philip and Fidelia, their four daughters (of whom more will be said later), and son Bertram. Contemporary reviewers like Kronenberger suggested the family consists of nothing more than unoriginal fictional types: Philip, the worshiper of hearth and home who proves to be a viciously Darwinian Victorian businessman; Fidelia, his aptly named "Angel of the House;" Bertram and son-in-law Patrick, both embodiments, in different ways, of British colonialism and imperialism; and the four daughters—Tilly, who dies in childhood; Meg, sentenced to spinsterhood by her plain looks; the materialistic Cora; and the philosophical Ethel (married to Patrick), who ultimately becomes the central character in the narrative. That the narrator chooses to people her narrative with types, however, may demonstrate something more than a mere lack of originality. The narrator needs typical characters representative of the historical periods in question in order to examine and interrogate the social and

historical processes molding the lives of the eminent Victorians—much as John Fowles populates The French Lieutenant's Woman with characters who seem almost walking embodiments of certain Victorian ideals and cultural interests: Charles Smithson, the scientist; Ernestina, who seems to have stepped out of a Phiz or John Leech drawing (FLW 26); Sam, the Dickensian manservant; and Sarah Woodruff, the Hardyesque temptress. In addition, the Courtneys are counterbalanced by an array of servants and working class villagers, examples of the disgruntled proletariat who become increasingly shrill in their anticapitalist protestations by the end of the novel.

World War I is the central historical event in the narrative, and the narrator as well as the characters discourse at length over the loss of faith and certainty in the wake of the European holocaust. By the end of the novel, the narrator imagines her surviving characters (for the war indeed takes its toll on the imaginary cast) choosing sides in the culture wars that mark the era, as Marxist revolutionaries and romantic individualists struggle to fill the void left by the collapse of the old order. Such an overview should suggest why The Waste Land is a clear reference point for Scott's novel. But, while Eliot's poem finally concludes with a sense of hope and restored order—the "Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata" triptych that closes the poem—Scott's novel, in its metafictional questionings, presents an even more troubling view of the modern western world.

Metafiction, with its problematizing of the reality/fiction distinction, is a response to the idea "that reality or history are provisional: no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures"

(Waugh 7). Indeed, if the coda to Eliot's poem is supposed to offer some sort of eternal verity to help shore up the ruins of the modern waste land, Scott's text proves more radically skeptical as the narrator, her yarn finally but inconclusively winding down, realizes, "This is not *your* world! It doesn't belong to you. . . ." (BUTS 394, Scott's italics and ellipsis).[6]

The narrator begins by constructing the lives of the four young "misses in sailor suits, brass buttoned jackets and tam o'shanters" depicted in one of the cottage's photographs: "The four sisters shall be called: Cora, Ethel, Tilly and Margaret" (BUTS 11). The youngest, Tilly, proves to be a central figure in the narrative—central, ironically enough, because of her absence, suggested by another photograph of three older sisters: "Were the little girls in the west bedroom one with the big girls in the east bedroom? In the west bedroom are four little girls, all dressed alike; while, of the big girls, I see only three. . . . Must I presume, then, that . . . one of the anxious, self-conscious young faces was lost?" (BUTS 11). This metafictional moment sets in motion the notion of loss—lost time, lost cultures, lost lives—that haunts Scott's narrator and, indeed, her imagined characters as well. Along these same lines, two important issues frequently addressed in postmodern metafictions powerfully mold Scott's novel: the indecipherable nature of reality, a Weltanschauung deeply rooted in the skepticisms residing at the cores of both modernism and postmodernism, and the politically and philosophically didactic tone

[6] As in The Wave, Scott uses italics frequently in Breathe Upon These Slain. Again, I have preserved that usage faithfully in my quotations from her text.

of the novel's narrative voice. Furthermore, interweaving through both of these concerns is the question of where the individual self figures into the modernist/postmodernist equation of flux and chaos, of despair and skepticism. All of these issues are, moreover, themselves shaped by the notion of writing. In Breathe Upon These Slain, the processes of writing are foregrounded, as we would expect in a metafictional text. In fact, writing enjoys a place of privilege in the novel. As we have seen, the heteroglossic tension between voices and discourses is central to The Wave. Language, too, is critically important in Breathe Upon These Slain. In Escapade, Scott's narrator at one point laments, "If I could only write!" (E 2). The narrator of Breathe Upon These Slain faces no such creative block. For her, writing may indeed be the only answer to the modern waste land, for, as we will see, the writing of fiction, the writing of selves, the writing of histories becomes one way to impose "meaning and formal coherence on the chaos of events" (Hutcheon, Poetics 121).

Epistemological/ontological concerns drive Scott's text. The universe in Breathe Upon These Slain is consistently portrayed as an unknowable, unfathomable cosmos, a "huge, indefinite agglomerate" (BUTS 211), a Nietzschean cosmos in which exist no truths, only perspectives, one in which our origins as well as our final destinies remain completely unknown to us. Not all of the narrator's invented characters recognize the universe in such pessimistic terms: Philip clings to the "truth" of his business endeavors; Cora to her comfortable bourgeois existence; and, in contrast to the "faithless" Ethel (BUTS 112), "Meg, like Fidelia, had the church.

Even repressed Bertram seemed to retain *some* sort of vague confidence in a directing Power" (BUTS 113, Scott's italics).

Ethel, in turn, proves to be the most skeptical of the Courtney clan. Ethel's photograph, the narrator thinks, depicts a "far-off stare, showing a mind abandoned to scepticism and mysticism together (for they are really variants of the same condition)" (BUTS 41). Accordingly, she casts Ethel as the philosophical sister, the character, other than the narrator, through whom the lion's share of the novel's skepticism is filtered: "How," Ethel wonders, "can you tell? In this vastness and darkness, with the coarse whisper from the sea filling the quiet air, nothing, really, can be ascertained. You make your choice of belief or disbelief" (BUTS 82).

The "weirdly indefinite sea" (BUTS 189) that troubles Ethel in the passage quoted above is, in fact, a constant presence throughout the novel. Like Thomas Hardy's ancient heath in The Return of the Native, Scott's sea forms a vast and indifferent backdrop against which the dramas of human history, both large and small, are staged: "There spread the ploughing water, of the dun colour of sleep—the same as ever, untouched by what had special meaning for ourselves. . . ." (BUTS 385, Scott's ellipsis) Akin as much, perhaps, to Arnold's "unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" as to Hardy's Egdon Heath, Scott's ocean, "the sorrowful accumulation of obscurity" (BUTS 75), hovers ever present in the background of the novel, ever mysterious and menacing to the characters, suggesting exactly the sort of troublingly unknowable universe posited by modernist and postmodernist fiction: "The sea has a quiet, mythical-seeming turbulence, and it quenches reality" (BUTS 75-76). This

ocean, too, provides a striking image of what Scott's narrator is attempting in reconstructing these past "lives"; regarding the seashore itself, that ontological boundary between the marine and terrestrial worlds, the narrator seems almost to comment on her own creative urges: "Here is a creation which draws vitality from very indefiniteness. Things with hard contours are not a part of this unnatural life" (BUTS 76).

Faced with such an indecipherable universe, Ethel's skepticism becomes all encompassing, forcing her at times to question the most mundane realities around her: "Was there something deceptive inside the skull, where these small tokens of sound and sight were accounted *real*? Weren't her eyes and ears, telling her so much of this sun-dustied silence, truthful? Then why was she frightened? (BUTS 225, Scott's italics). Significantly, in the narrator's mind, Ethel is the character most powerfully affected by the death of Tilly: "My first conjecture that when polite ignoring, more than the earth, buried Tilly, her end ceased to trouble anybody, must have been wrong. It did dreadful things to Ethel" (BUTS 34-5). Tilly's presence—or absence—is the connecting thread weaving together this narrative of loss. More large scale losses mark the text—the war, the culture it shatters—and, of course, there are many more deaths than simply Tilly's, most of them connected to the war: those of Bertram, Patrick, and, indirectly, Philip, whose business is boycotted into bankruptcy because of his German ancestry. But it is Tilly's death that sets the narrative wheels in motion, for it is her apparent absence from later family portraits that spurs the narrator to spin her yarn.

Thus the death—or imagined death—of one individual urges on a narrative impulse that finally engages with portentous political and philosophical musings and debates. Significantly, Brian McHale points out that "postmodernist fiction is about death in a way that other writing, of other periods, is not" (231, McHale's emphasis):

> Indeed, insofar as postmodernist fiction foregrounds ontological themes and ontological structure, we might say that it is always about death. Death is the one ontological boundary that we are all certain to experience, the only one we shall all inevitably have to cross. In a sense, every ontological boundary is an analogue or metaphor of death; so foregrounding ontological boundaries is a means of foregrounding death, of making death, the unthinkable, available to the imagination, if only in a displaced way. (231, McHale's italics).

Although Scott's text predates the period of literary production McHale is discussing, Breathe Upon These Slain clearly engages in exactly the sort of postmodern project he describes. Like postmodern fiction, Scott's novel is, in fact, about death. In its fascination not only with the past but with what happens to those individuals who once peopled that past, Breathe Upon These Slain shows Evelyn Scott pushing against, even violating ontological boundaries—including that most inviolate of boundaries, the frontier between the world of the living and that of the dead.

Moreover, we see here the narrator of Breathe Upon These Slain following a typical impulse in Scott's work: the recovery or recuperation of the individual, in this

case, a sort of narrative compensation for the loss of the individual. As with The Wave, Scott essentially tries to write the individual back into history, an effort her intrusive narrator explains: "Tilly, like the clear day which had been taken by the fog and the evening, all immaculately inexperienced as she was, began to fade. Very soon, nothing was left of her—nothing but the pinched, wistful face of the photograph . . . So, as no memorial was erected . . . it has been left to me to say, now, humbly: *Tilly, this is for you*" (BUTS 32).

If our knowledge of the universe is fraught with uncertainties, what can we know of the past, of history, of the individuals like Tilly who peopled that history? Postmodern novelists have been busily exploring that troubling issue in their historiographic metafictions for some three decades or more. Of particular interest to these writers is how the "facts" of history are transmitted and how reliably they are transmitted. As Patricia Waugh has pointed out, history, like reality itself, proves "provisional" in the face of epistemological and ontological interrogations of modernism and postmodernism (7). The uncertainty of history is a prominent concern of Scott's narrator. Postmodern metafictions like Coover's The Public Burning (1977) or Ishmael Reed's Flight to Canada (1977) delight in questioning public or official histories, parodying or rewriting these authoritative historical accounts. Scott's form of metafiction, despite its political dimensions, is, like so much of her canon, profoundly concerned with the individual. For her, then, playing with historiographic metafictional frames is not so much a way to parody official history (though she does this, in a different sort of sense, in The Wave) as a way to

reaffirm the notion of the individual, or, as Mary Carrigg puts it, "to recover individual Victorians" (360). Significantly, however, both Scott and her postmodern literary descendants arrive at quite different destinations by following the same historiographic route.

The epigraph of Breathe Upon These Slain is taken, we are told, from The Encyclopedia Britannica: *In order to illustrate the grateful services which paleonotology through restoration may render to the related earth sciences let us imagine* . . . . (Scott's italics and ellipsis). This fragment of discourse sets the parameters for what Scott's text attempts to achieve—the imaginative reconstruction of a history built upon the archaeological residue of that history. Much like T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, Breathe Upon These Slain is constructed from fragments of a past culture. Many postmodern novels that delve into the problematics of narrating or reconstructing history likewise draw upon fragments of the past. Scott's work actually comes much closer to that of the postmodernists, however, than to that of Eliot, her modernist contemporary.

Linda Hutcheon explores this idea of our fragmented access to the past in The Politics of Postmodernism (1989). The "didactic postmodern fiction" of contemporary metafictional texts attempts to teach us lessons about history, Hutcheon claims (67): "we now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men" (Politics 66). Although this passage seems to describe the impulse behind Scott's The Wave, it is

Breathe Upon These Slain that best illustrates how we can know the past only imperfectly: "the past exists for us—now—only as traces on and in the present" (Hutcheon, Politics 73, Hutcheon's emphasis). Such traces, Hutcheon explains, include "documents, archives, but also photographs, paintings, architecture, films, and literature" (Politics 78). Thus, Scott's use of the photographs to construct her history of the Courtneys presents a striking prefiguration of exactly how postmodern novelists would also choose to explore the past: "the photograph," Hutcheon explains, "presents both the past as presence and the present as inescapably historical. . . . It is not odd that the historiographic metafictionist, grappling with the same issue of representation of the past, might want to turn, for analogies and inspiration, to this other medium" (Politics 91). The photograph, Hutcheon asserts, is a "paradoxically undermining yet authenticating representation of the past real" (Politics 91). In the case of Scott's novel, the narrator is confronted both by real pictures of real people from the past and by the frustrating question "How to build a make from the inner solitude to something else?" (BUTS 226):

> On the photographer's plates, a couple of images have been impressed, but these scraps of sensitized paper—all that has been left to posterity!—do not corroborate feeling. They offer no record of emotions experienced, no proof science would tolerate as to what *was* . . . The pictures mounted on cardboard, have not departed, like quenched sparks, into the night toward which everything is traveling; the rest, we must guess. (BUTS 226, Scott's italics).

Not only the photos but other fragments of the past aid the narrator's fabulation of the Courtney history. An oleograph of the Bengal Lancers, "black men, riding wild horses in the Far East" (BUTS 9), not only graces the cottage's kitchen but, in the narrator's imagination, once stood guard over the family's ornate seaside home, Seabourne—which, of course, is purely a construct of the narrator's imagination as she decides to depict the Courtneys as representatives of Matthew Arnold's class of well-to-do Philistines. That the oleograph is a "'facsimile of a water colour by Miss Busker, R. A.'" (BUTS 10), not the authentic work, perhaps subtly adds another epistemological/ontological layer, suggesting a further remove from any "authentic" notion of a history. A portrait of the ill-fated Lord Kitchener[6] hangs in the kitchen as well, a mute reminder of the war and, like the absence of Tilly in the later family portraits, a reminder of loss on a more individualized scale: "Poor Kitchener! Britannia never kept her sway over the seas for him!" (BUTS 10).

These fragments also allow the narrator at least partial access to a cultural past. Both the oleograph of the lancers and the portrait of Kitchener function much like the stained glass window at the Courtney's church "erected as a memorial to *Captain Ian John James Edward William Heath-Gratton*" (BUTS 159), a local British officer killed "by the spear of one of Cetewayo's warriors, in Zululand, in eighteen-eighty-nine" (BUTS 159). These fragments, these unofficial archives, if you will, serve as reminders of Britain's recent imperial past, when young men like

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[6] Lord Kitchener, one of Britain's most prominent military leaders during World War I, was killed in 1916 when a German mine struck and sank the ship on which he was traveling.

Ethel's husband, Patrick, grew "very ambitious and militant and Empire-minded . . . [and learned to] glorify conquest and killing" (BUTS 112). In addition, however, such fragmentary traces are themselves liminal objects, standing astride the ontological boundaries between past and present, just as the intrusive metafictional narrator seems to step into and out of the narrative, just as Scott's story reconstructs a sort of liminal historical period in the early years of the twentieth century, with the demise of one kind of world (the Victorian) and the onset of another (the modern).

Other traces of the past are even more problematically vague. Having admittedly "gone far afield from the pictures on these walls" (BUTS 124), the narrator conjures up the existence of Annie Rose, the alternately domineering and obsequious head of the household's servants, whose "very existence receive[s] corroboration only from the imprint of her bulk on the dingy cushions of a chair" (BUTS 124). And she moves farther afield still, as imagined characters beget imagined characters, compounding the multiple realities of Scott's narrative with even more fictional worlds: "And now, continuing further and having invented a Pat for Ethel, I feel urged to supply Annie Rose with a brother-in-law" (BUTS 124).

Mary Wheeling White claims that Scott's narrator spins her tale largely out of domestic cloth—photos, furniture, and so on—which suggests a kind of specifically domestic/feminist variety of metafiction. While true to some extent, this assertion does not hold for every character. The imagined history of Bertram and his death on the Somme in 1916 is constructed from items and fragments less overtly domestic: "Let us then return again to a specific year when Bertram was still in India, where a

little writing has been left on the sand. . . . In a time called, for convenience, 'nineteen-twelve,' and a place called 'India', Bertram, according to a snapshot, stood before a certain bungalow at Mahabaleshwar, near Poona" (BUTS 190-91, Scott's ellipsis). Otherwise, Bertram's existence is constructed from "a chest which belongs to my landlady. It is padlocked, and Bertram's name is on it. (Or a name which might have been his, if I had not given him another!)" (BUTS 208). Perhaps containing a "three-guinea microscope" and a "scribbled diary he kept at fourteen" (BUTS 209), the traces of Bertram's personal history, the chest actually urges the narrator to address her created character: "When you recall *Seabourne*, and Ivy Terrace, and the chest with the microscope, in a place like this [India], they are always farther and farther from you, each minute" (BUTS 211). Worlds within narrative worlds multiply as the narrator continues to fabulate: "Have Ivy Terrace and *Seabourne*, shrunken to dots, ever really existed? Are they not merely Bertram's imaginings—imagined as I am imagining him? At this rate, soon, even England will be unverifiable as the dream of someone dubiously awakening. . . . Fortunately, persons more detached attest the location of the British Isles in *some* planet, *some*where. . . ." (BUTS 211-12, the italics and final ellipsis are Scott's). Clearly, here, we are in the Chinese-box world of postmodern narrative, several removes from whatever reality there is, working our way through a text that seems as unfathomable and mysterious as the "whole incalculable (call it calculable if you will!) universe" (BUTS 118).

Scott's narrator returns to another set of historical traces in concluding her imagined history of Bertram Courtney: "Official condolences must have been sent to Mrs. Courtney when Bertram was killed, but a couple of empty shell cases, used as ornaments in the living room, are the only reminders my cottage contains of those horrible years of the war" (BUTS 243). Two important points emerge from our perusal of Bertram's story. First, Scott's metafiction is constructed from more than just domestic (read feminine) items; the chest and the shell casings (although they serve as ornaments) seem to fall outside what we would commonly consider domestic bric-a-brac. Second, Breathe Upon These Slain, though it is certainly marked by a feminine spirit (Scott's story primarily follows the sisters and the other female characters), seems much more concerned with the status of the individual, regardless of gender. That the poignantly empty shell cases rather than any official government condolences help construct Bertram's history perhaps further underscores the private, individualistic thrust of Scott's project. Throughout this work, Scott eschews drawing upon any public records, official documents, or other archival traces of the past: her metafiction is in a sense domestic, yes, built as it is upon the furnishings of a cottage, but perhaps more to the point, it is a historiographic metafiction that plays not with public histories but with private ones; like The Wave, Breathe Upon These Slain is concerned less with past cultures and civilizations than with the numberless individuals who peopled that past.

Postmodern metafiction, as we have noted, problematizes our notions of history. In doing so, it frequently takes an instructive, often even politically

confrontational stance. Linda Hutcheon points to Coover's The Public Burning as one example. In the postmodern works of writers like Ishmael Reed, the metafictional narrators step into the story to point out what the official histories left out or even simply got wrong (in the narrator's view, at least). Scott's narrator in Breathe Upon These Slain is intrusively present for a similiar reason—to teach us a lesson about history, although such didacticism raises complex questions about which history lesson we should believe.

Postmodernism is, however, fraught with paradoxes, as Linda Hutcheon points out: it is "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining" (Politics 1). In postmodern historiographic metafictions, for instance, the accepted "facts" of history are frequently contested and alternate histories—which are themselves, of course, equally vulnerable to contestation—are offered in their stead. Such a paradox seems to occur when Scott's narrator steps into her own bewilderingly complex narrative universe and begins confidently holding forth on one issue or another. Scott's narrator, as I have mentioned, is profoundly concerned with examining exactly what happened to people like the Courtneys and the culture from which they sprang. As a result, many of the metafictional moments in the text involve the narrator commenting directly on cultural and political issues—teaching us about the Victorians, contrasting "[w]e moderns" (BUTS 284) with the "antediluvian" Victorians "of the era before subtleties had been resolved" (BUTS 254). In actual fact, as we will see, the narrator thinks we have no more resolved the subtleties of the universe than did our own "frankly confused" Victorian forebears (BUTS 254).

Indeed, Scott's didactic and intrusive narrator finally becomes as interested in commenting on the newer orders battling to control the twentieth-century waste land as she is the on old orders who have vanished from its landscape. As the narrator's story moves forward in time toward her own era, her brooding about the lost Victorians is supplanted by her dark ruminations about the state of political discourse circa 1933.

However, before proceeding almost exclusively to politics, the narrator seeks to explain the mysterious Victorians to her contemporary readers. The narrator sets her stage by imagining Seabourne as a sort of "Egyptian tomb" of Victoriana, "contain[ing] all the paraphernalia accompanying middle-class Victorians through this existence" (BUTS 151). Scott's narrator is much more concerned with Victorian people and ideas, however, than with domestic furnishings. Much as John Fowles would do over sixty years later, Scott frequently juxtaposes Victorian standards, values, and mindsets to those of her own society of "moderns." She compares, for instance, the "Victorian obsession" with "agoraphobia" with the "claustrophobia" so "characteristic of our age" (BUTS 387). Many of her comments consider the place of women in Victorian society: "Our current condemnation of Victorian old maids," she warns, "(like our current condemnations of so much else!) is too smug" (BUTS 154).[7] There is more often than not a genuine empathy in the narrator's tone, especially

[7] Compare such passages, for example, to John Fowles's intrusive narrator in The French Lieutenant's Woman: "The supposed great misery of our century is the lack of time . . . But for Charles , and for almost all his contemporaries and social peers, the time signature over existence was firmly *adagio*" (16, Fowles's italics); "One of the commonest symptoms of wealth today is destructive neurosis; in his century it was tranquil boredom" (16).

regarding Victorian women: "In the Victorian period, women, as lovers, were supposed to starve. Many had to. Others—Fidelia among them—pretended to. It was part of their refinement" (BUTS 155). Indeed, a sort of romantic yearning seems to creep into the narrator's tone at times: "in those days, every man (and woman, too) had a poem in him, which, though it was borrowed, gave a little of its texture to the meanest thought" BUTS 183-84). We might be tempted to regard this sort of comment as a critique of the triteness of Victorian society "before the war," as Virginia Woolf put it. But the narrator clearly suggests that something in the moderns is missing when she sardonically observes, "Besides . . . in another twenty years, people will have given up writing love stories. . . ." (BUTS 232, Scott's ellipsis).

This text, however, is also rife with political confrontation. We see it first in the narrator's most sustained description of Philip's ideological make up, as she imagines it:

> All that, in his family, he *was*; in business, he was *not*. There, his tyrannical impulses became harsh, and made him cunning in buying, crafty in selling, and, as an employer, stingy as could be. Philip simply detested paying for work. And he righteously resented any attempt of underlings to lift themselves to positions of equality with himself. (BUTS 98)

The language is this passage is weighty with biased and evaluative adjectives: "tyrannical," "harsh," "cunning," "crafty," "stingy." The narrator is no defender of

this particular eminent Victorian. Simultaneously, however, the narrator suggests that Philip is representative of his era, not a montrous aberration: "Philip is everything a middle-class father in the reign of Victoria (and, now, Edward) should be. Himself the son of a ship chandler, he has recently branched out with several new enterprises. . . . Perhaps you are already familiar with the superior quality of *Courtney Kippers*: the fruit of the elaboration of his labor?" (BUTS 97). Philip, this description suggests, is, like Fidelia, typical of a certain class, a certain culture, a certain era. And although we might decry his Darwinian capitalism and his class prejudice, when the proletariat voices of Courtney's underlings ring out vindictively against him, they fare far worse in the narrator's eyes than does Philip Courtney himself.

The direct counterpart to Philip Courtney is Annie Rose's brother-in-law, George Yallup, a hard drinking fisherman with an almost instinctive and near inarticulate proletariat rage. Yallup, when drinking (which is often), "[becomes] truculent, and vaguely blame[s] 'Government' (as well as his wife)" for his ill luck (BUTS 129). Yallup's hopes of "own[ing] his [own] smack, [and] working it for himself" (BUTS 129) as his father had are frustrated by Philip Courtney's monopoly on the local fishing industry; Courtney, we are told, could "despatch twenty crews to sea at once and glut the market with herring" (BUTS 129), effectively locking out independents like Yallup.

When Annie Rose arranges an interview for Yallup with Mr. Courtney to "talk about cottages [for rent], and hint about a job" (BUTS 130), a class confrontation ensues:

> "About that cottage," Yallup interrupted bellicosely, without preamble, "I fare to think the rental 'ud be a bit stiff fer folk in our position, without nothin' you might say we can depend on out o' 'errin'season, and if you was to ask arf what my sister-in-law towd me you was gettin' chaps to pay fer one of them cheesy dog-kennels—" George delivered himself with a terrible deliberateness, between clenched teeth, his thick, rebellious joy in insolence discernible in every word. (BUTS 132)

Understandably incensed, Mr. Courtney has the intoxicated Yallup ejected from his office: "'You'll certainly owe *me* no favours until you've altered your habits and improved your character!' he exploded in ire, unwillingly sacrificing his reticence to caste" (BUTS 133). That the narrator nudges our sympathies toward Courtney in this scene is significant. The narrator is not reluctant to critque Courtney—we have seen that. Her depiction of Yallup, however, allies the proletariat cause with the worst elements of society. The Marxists who are attacked openly by the narrator near the end of the novel are already, early on in the novel, made guilty by association with troublemakers like Yallup, a drunk, a wife beater, and a uniformly belligerent and untrustworthy character.

As the novel draws to a close, the narrative is brought forward to the narrator's own era. The novel at this point moves from historiographic metafiction to a sort of metafiction straightforwardly critiquing contemporary society. As we have seen, Scott's narrator at times seems genuinely sympathetic toward her Victorian

characters, despite all of their puritanical shortcomings. Indeed, the narrator seems to find in the arising new orders that, as Yeats's "The Second Coming" warns us, "the worst are full of passionate intensity." Ethel's grown sons—Patrick, or Pat Second, as they call him, and Eric—become rhetorical mouthpieces for the differing schools of political and aesthetic thought: Pat a Marxist; Eric, and later Ethel herself, a romantic individualist. Other characters follow suit: Yallup's son, Reggie, a survivor of the Western Front, also becomes a leftist revolutionary under the tutelage of a local ragpicker and wounded veteran of the trenches, Mr. Black. Mr. Black, as his name indicates, is the narrator's darkest Marxist invention. He provides the young Yallup with the vocabulary of hatred he has been seeking, couched more safely, of course, in the rhetoric of world-saving political revolution: "He had been a godsend to Reggie, whose brooding egoism wanted action and a vent for emotions too long unexplained to himself. At last, the Enemy whose existence he had always suspected had acquired a name—*Capital*! And had henchmen to be recognized at a glance—*bosses!*" (BUTS 318). The danger of Marxists like Black, Scott's narrator argues, is their "refusal to admit a common humanity with the bourgeoisie" (BUTS 320). Once again, the narrator comes to the defense of typical Victorians like the Courtneys: "And isn't Mr. Black's exclusive assumption that there is nothing in himself of Philip Courtney (a haphazard example) a bit of a lie about Mr. Black? . . . There's always been some one else's grandmother who had to be murdered for the sake of justice! And invariably some devil has been set up to be exterminated utterly to save the elect!" (BUTS 320-1).

The narrator's distrust of Marxists and Marxism arises not only from the vengeful belligerence of its adherents and the manipulations of its proselytes like Mr. Black but also from her own modernist/postmodernist skepticism: "And 'truth' . . . ? Who knows the truth? Besides . . . . the truth might interfere. . . ." (BUTS 323, Scott's ellipsis). Marxism, in her view, reduces our complex cosmos to simple formulas: "First 'religion' is all 'Freud', now life is all economics" (BUTS 288). The narrator embraces a sort of perspectivism that simply cannot allow her to buy into what she perceives as a Marxist philosophy just as provisional and artificially constructed as her invented Victorians: "What one era called wisdom the next called folly. . . . Marx had brought to light a single sequence of importances. . . ." (BUTS 368). Doubtless, other sequences, she seems to be suggesting, exist: but for Marxists, there is only one "truth"—their own. Indeed, Marxism's certainty of its own self-evident "truth" (that is, in the narrator's constructed vision of Marxism) drives the narrator to her most virulent attacks on the philosophy and its disciples:

> See what the Victorians, with their sentimental vocabulary, managed to do to civilization! Mayn't it be possible that Pat's generation, so little scrupulous with words, is heading again for a predicament as sad as the one from which it imagines it is extricating the race? Isn't his trust in mass decision, mass action, quite equivalent to belief in an over-soul, and mightn't it be good to recognize this? (BUTS 378)

In this passage the Victorians receive a damning critique as well: but somehow, one gets the impression that the narrator expects moderns like these

Marxists to know better, to learn from those who came before them, those whose "gods had proved faithless" (BUTS 293). Not recognizing that no one truth is sure, that worlds are not changed by simply declaring one class the Enemy and sallying forth to annihilate them—these are the failures Scott's narrator sees in the rising tide of Marxism, and that is why she speaks directly to her readers, cautioning them, urging them to resist this sort of one-dimensional answer to the modern waste land: "So I in my cottage, listening to my own small voice of a mouse, which is drowned in advance by the millions of voices that roar—and drowned immediately by wheezing rushes of wind and surf from out doors. . . ." (BUTS 321, Scott's ellipsis). The artist in her cottage, her voice muted by the violent and unruly convictions of those about whom she warns us, strikes a forlorn figure; the voice of the sea, however, that "weirdly indefinite" backdrop to so much of the action in this narrative, washes over both the small voice of the narrator and the roaring shouts of the revolutionaries, and we are reminded again that this clamorous clash of voices ultimately remains undecided, played out as it is on an unknowable terrain that recalls Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain."

This image of the artist adding her voice to the arena of political debate, however, returns us more directly to Scott's metafiction and the role of writing in this text about writing. In fact, the text is characterized not only by an intrusive narrator but by other images and passages that remind us again and again that we are reading a text. We discover early on the importance of books for Tilly—and how she enters into a sort of dialogue with those texts and their authors, a dialogue that seems almost

to hint slyly at Scott's own metafictional frame: "Occasionally the views of the author drew from her an exclamation of disdainful incredulity: 'Why—who *ev*-er! Why—never in the world, they wouldn't!' Things shouldn't be allowed to happen as was narrated here, she decided, enjoying, in silence, her petulant, imaginary disagreement with the inventor of the fiction" (BUTS 20, Scott's italics).

Nature, too, that unknowable universe that encloses the narrator's invented characters, is frequently described as a sort of text: "Somewhere in—was it?—the North Sea, lies the past, inscribed with hieroglyphics which are hard to decipher; and the future before us is a tomb as yet without insignia" (BUTS 190). If writing is, as Linda Hutcheon has told us, one way of making sense of the chaos around us, even the Marxists seek, much like the narrator, to make sense, through writing, of the indecipherable world around them: Mr. Black, for instance, "writes the moral appeals of the Christians and the vengeance of the God of Moses across a text of nature. A text which, without these imposed references, need inspire no man to grieve over economic slavery, or, for that matter, urge retaliation sacrosanctly" (BUTS 319).

In addition, time in this novel is figured in terms of writing: "Thirty years gone in a couple of hundred pages of telling!" (BUTS 271). The years following Bertram's death are similarly described: "Since then, pages have been written" (BUTS 257). Time's effects on the text itself are also considered: "What will it be when, some day, a stranger, thumbing a book with yellowed edges, looks at this—already a mystifying document . . . ?" (BUTS 288-89, Scott's ellipsis). This interplay between time and the text is significant, for the narrator, as any historiographic

metafictionist does, sees her task in terms of other disciplines concerned with the past, disciplines like history and archaeology:

> The historian (the economist, too) acquires material much as does the novelist; though history differs from fiction in representing the majority testimony of many dead eyes instead of depending to such an extent on the use of one pair of eyes that are living. For the historian, the tombs of Egypt and his own contemporary mentality—for me, the contemporary mentality and a few photographs. . . . (BUTS 301, Scott's ellipsis)

But, can the artist by writing recover lost individuals like Tilly? After all, as we have seen, Brian McHale claims that "postmodernist fiction is about death" (231). Or can writing recuperate the history of a culture? Although Scott's text teases us with these sorts of questions, the narrator finally realizes the impossibility of such a task : she is not like Ezekial, who breathed upon the slain and reanimated the dead; the artist, she laments, "can't follow the prophets" (BUTS 393). The novel concludes, nevertheless, on an elegiac note that again draws upon the metaphor of texts and writing, a metaphor that also reasserts the indecipherability of the text of the cosmos: "So there will never be time . . . or not enough until the long time, which you often feel is there before you, when you look across the writless ocean, with its blank, vast sky. . . ." (BUTS 394, Scott's ellipsis). We find ourselves, like the speaker in John Keats's sonnet "When I Have Fears," standing simultaneously on the verge of those two ontological borders that have figured so prominently throughout Scott's

novel: the shoreline of the "weirdly indefinite sea" and the equally shadowy frontiers bordering death itself.

What, then, if anything, can writing accomplish? "[E]ven if I fail," the narrator explains, "I shall have been faithful to the artist's intention—the only one I know in which lurks no will to consolidate and uphold powers that must coerce" (BUTS 389). All of this returns us, of course, to the realm of the political. Writing, in part, is freedom in this novel; or, better, perhaps, writing is resistance to tyranny: the tyranny of time and death that destroys individuals like Tilly; the tyranny of war that destroys individuals like Bertram, Patrick, and Mr. Courtney; and the tyranny of political authoritarians like the Marxists who would "'attempt to regulate life completely—inwardly!'" (BUTS 363). This inward domain the Marxists would regulate is, among other things, the artist's workshop into which Scott's narrator has welcomed us. And the act of welcoming us into that workshop through the metafictional frame of her intrusive narrator allows the novelist to assert through her art a direct political statement: "words good enough for men of action" (BUTS 394).

The strident tones of Scott's antiMarxism in this novel, as well as in Bread and a Sword and in other lesser publications and personal letters, have led biographers to blame such political diatribes for the neglect she suffered in later years. White claims, for instance, that Scott's efforts to reform those whom she considered misguided zealots, especially "the Communists around her," "had made a shambles of most of her relationships" (200) and alienated her from "the educated and progressive people who were her colleagues, publishers, editors, and audience"

(201). Thus Evelyn Scott's efforts to engage politically through her art may actually have helped usher Scott out of the canon. Whatever the case, one of the ironies of American literary history in our century must be that a work such as Breathe Upon These Slain should be dismissed by many as an overly difficult and politically naive (or perhaps politically unfashionable) fictional oddity when some six decades after its publication, a similar type of politically didactic metafiction (though driven more by liberal than libertarian sentiments) has come to represent the definitive contribution of postmodernism to the canons of both American and British fiction.

With Breathe Upon These Slain, Scott's experimentalism brings us to the threshold of postmodernism. But her bold exploitation of narrative techniques was not yet finished: with Bread and a Sword, Scott constructed a multilayered narrative design intended to demonstrate the interplay between conscious thought and unconscious or subconscious impulses and impressions. She explains the complex narrative style in her preface to the novel:

> I have used italics to indicate stress; and by these, and the employment of occasional parentheses, have attempted to represent internal conflict. I want it to appear that various facets of personality struggle against each other for ascendency. Reflections set down in ordinary type are those most instantly acceptable as conscious conclusions. The italics not bracketed are resisted fragments representing associated thought, rising to the consciousness whether or no. Bracketed italics indicate, sometimes by a mere allusive phrase, sometimes with a more

> lyrical paraphrasing of mood, sometimes in visions of things involuntarily remembered, emotional conflicts and emotionally founded decisions determinedly ignored. (vii-viii)

Bread and a Sword also, however, like Breathe Upon These Slain, is a profoundly socio-political novel. The text presents a scathing critique of the publishing industry, demonstrating how art and commerce are at loggerheads in a mass market, capitalist economy, and an attack on socialist aesthetics, which, Scott asserts, seek to restrict the free expression of the artist. Much of this criticism is stated explicitly in Scott's lengthy preface, which continues Breath Upon These Slain's attacks on Marxism, especially the Party's view, as she saw it, that art must serve the revolution: "The gravest of all mistakes seems to me the confounding of dialectical materialism with a philosophy of aesthetics" (ix). Although, as we have seen, Mary Wheeling White and others see Scott's attacks on Marxism as a tiresome pursuit that may have soured her critical reputation, it is worth noting that exactly these sorts of concerns mark the work of some later noted novelists: Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook (1962), for instance, a groundingbreaking early postmodernist novel, deals at length with the conflict between the Marxist insistence on an art that furthers the cause of world revolution and the need for the artist to pursue autonomously his or her own aesthetic ends.

Bread and a Sword is Scott's last significant published novel. The Shadow of the Hawk, a story of a young man's disillusionment with the society around him after his father is wrongly accused and convicted of murder, is judged by most Scott

scholars as a failure.[7] Despite Robert L. Welker's valiant defense of the work as a study in "amoral and immoral disorder" comparable to Franz Kafka's The Trial (584), the book, in truth, is disappointingly ordinary, even dull, in its realist treatment of the narrative, particularly as it follows on the heels of two of Scott's more interesting experiments, Breathe Upon These Slain and Bread and a Sword. Nonetheless, two elements of this novel are important indicators of what is to come in Scott's work: the turn to a more realist mode of fiction and the sense of foreboding and doom suggested by the title, The Shadow of the Hawk. The latter point is an especially critical leitmotif: the shadow cast over young Angus Pettigrew after his father's imprisonment and subsequent death (he succumbs to tuberculosis while in prison) colors the narrative with a sense of betrayal, of malignant forces—both personal and impersonal—beyond the ken of the individual, threatening freedom, individual autonomy, even life itself.

The shift toward despair articulated in The Shadow of the Hawk likewise shapes the most coherent of Scott's two unpublished novels, "Escape into Living." Indeed, the title of this novel must be read ironically, for little chance of escape is available to the protagonist of Scott's unpublished work, Katie Sirmon, whom Scott envisioned as an ordinary woman. Scott characterized the novel itself as the story of such a representative woman, done in the spirit of Sinclair Lewis's Main Street (White 215). If Katie's life is to be regarded as typical, however, then Evelyn Scott's

[7] Daniel Francis Pettigrew, the wrongfully accused father in this novel, is a different sort of creative consciousness than the narrator of Breathe Upon These Slain: he is an inventor rather than an artist.

vision at the end of her novel-writing career is at its darkest. This novel, in fact, shows Scott's canon coming full circle, for, in many respects, "Escape into Living" is Scott's most troubling work since her first novel, The Narrow House.

Chapter Five

"The Victim of a Shackling Muteness": "Escape into Living"

Evelyn Scott's career as a published novelist ended with her series of "artist" novels: 1941's The Shadow of the Hawk was her last major work to see publication. Scott continued to publish poetry, reviews, and essays into the early 1950s, including several pieces for the British magazine Poetry Review in 1951 (White 214). However, her career as a major American novelist and a recognized contributor to modernist experiments in narrative form was over by the beginning of the Second World War: thus, if we date the heart of the modernist period as the decades between the wars, as a novelist, Scott's time in the literary spotlight corresponded closely to the high tide of modernist experimentalism in fiction. Interestingly, however, Scott, like William Faulkner, essentially would "write [herself] out of modernism in the 1940s" (Weinstein 11)[1] with her final major published work as well as with her two unpublished novels, "Escape into Living" (completed in 1947) and "Before Cock Crow," her much anticipated but ultimately stillborn French revolution epic.[2] Even as

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[1] I am here appropriating Philip M. Weinstein's description of the latter stages of Faulkner's career: "He is surely the supreme American novelist to write himself out of modernism in the 1940s as decisively as he had written himself into it in the twenties" (11). Scott's career follows a notably similar course.

[2] "Escape into Living" exists in two different forms, a shorter version completed in 1947 and a longer one finished in 1951. The version discussed here is the former, now part of the Evelyn Scott Collection at the Special Collections Library at the University of Tennessee. This shorter version was submitted to and rejected by Maxwell Perkins at Scribner's in 1947. According to Mary Wheeling White, in 1951 Scott sent the longer version, over 900 typed pages, "to Luise Sillcox at the Authors' League of America in New York, hoping for help in finding an agent to place it" (214-5). No agent, she was informed, would handle such a massive text uncut and unaltered, and she was unwilling to allow either (White 215). Thus, the shorter version of "Escape into Living" is the only one to receive

her audience, her critical champions, and her supporters in the publishing industry dwindled in numbers, Scott continued to write, working in the shadows of contemporaries and competitors—primarily Faulkner—ranked in previous decades as her inferiors in talent and consequential output.

I began this study by suggesting that a tension or conflict marks much of Scott's major works—a struggle between Scott's insistence on the integrity of the individual self—an almost romantic sense of the autonomous individual—and a sort of naturalistic strain in her work that suggests that such freedom is illusory: one of her characters in Eva Gay, for instance, broods over this very contradiction, cherishing the fiction of autonomy even as, deep within himself, he recognizes "[t]he fine illusion of free will" (EG 700, my emphasis). The quotation from Eva Gay actually indicates to us the eventual outcome of this duel played out through so much of Scott's fictional canon. Indeed, in the artist novels that conclude Scott's career, we see an increasing sense of despair over this very issue. In fact, in her unpublished novel, "Escape into Living," we find Evelyn Scott, who, both in her idiosyncratic canon of works and in her public persona, consistently took vocal stands against virtually every variety of authoritarianism—political, familial, patriarchal—seemingly conceding defeat. Despite her long commitment to individualism, a

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any consideration by a publishing house. "Before Cock Crow," parts of which Scott claims were stolen in manuscript form in Canada (White 210) and, thus, had to be rewritten from notes and memory, exists in many variant states.

commitment testified to again and again in her life and work, Scott concludes her career despairing of the possibilities of individual freedom.

The "artist" novels that constitute the final stage of Scott's career indicate a growing sense of hopelessness, as I mentioned, and this comes to its fullest flowering in "Escape into Living." As we saw in the last chapter, Breathe Upon These Slain, in part, is an effort to achieve a measure of freedom through writing—or, actually, an effort to resist—again, through writing—the forces that intrude so strenuously upon the individual's desire for freedom and autonomy. The novel that preceded Breathe Upon These Slain, Eva Gay, examines the limits placed on individual freedom by marriage and by the entanglements of erotic love, much as the Farley trilogy explores the dangers posed by the entrapping family structure. Bread and a Sword extends the theme of the artist surviving in modern society—the artist being, in Scott's view, the epitome of the freely acting individual, for as in Breathe Upon These Slain, Scott's narrator considers the artistic imagination to be the only center of power not inherently authoritarian and coercive. The Shadow of the Hawk indicts the American judicial system, among other targets, but overall lampoons the American social fabric in general as a fragmented patchwork of often crackpot interest groups intent upon reshaping American society in terms anathemic to any notion of individualism. And as I have suggested, an atmosphere of betrayal envelopes the novel, an atmosphere that carries over into "Escape into Living," shrouding that text, too, with a sense of foreboding, of lost possibilities, of dashed dreams shattered by ominous realities. This unpublished novel, in fact, continues themes and concerns from many of Scott's

most significant published novels, and an examination of "Escape into Living" allows us to pull together the divergent strands of Evelyn Scott's major prose works, and thus reassess the primary foci and the most significant accomplishments of her catalogue of autobiography and fiction.

"Escape into Living" chronicles the life of Katie Sirmon, an average upstate New Yorker who comes of age during the formative years of the twentieth century. The novel follows Katie from her childhood in rural upstate New York in the 1890s through her brief but successful theatrical career to her often difficult marriage to Earl Braun (the son of German immigrants) during World War One and the tumultuous era between the wars. The narrative closes in the years immediately before World War Two, when, as a woman in her forties, Katie witnesses the rise of Fascism and Nazism as the clouds of yet another global conflict gather over Europe. The novel, naturally, presents Katie as the center of consciousness, but the narrative also focuses attention on the most important influences on Katie—the people, especially the family, around her. This survey of influences is reflected in the narrative's structure: the novel is partitioned into six books, only one of which, Book IV, is dedicated wholly to Katie. The others are Book I, entitled "Gram and Gramp," concentrating on Katie's maternal grandparents and their children (Katie's mother and aunts); "Mama and Papa" (Book II), examining Katie's parents closely while also relating Katie's preparatory school experiences; "Mama" (Book III), focusing primarily on Katie's mother while also fleshing out our picture of the maturing Katie; "Earl" (Book V), acquainting us with Katie's husband, a German-American some twenty

years her senior whose family sees Katie as an outsider; and "The War (1914-18)," relating the war years and their effects on Katie and her German in-laws.

The time frame reflected in the novel is significant. First, it closely parallels Scott's own life up to the point of Scott's composition of this unpublished work, which she completed in 1947. Katie, then, is not just a representative Everywoman but, in fact, a woman typical of Evelyn Scott's own generation. Second, the time frame provides a larger historical parallel to the process of disillusionment Katie endures in her first four decades of life. The first half of the twentieth century is an era marked by dramatic advances in technology, striking shifts in the composition of American society, a terrifying rise in totalitarianism, and the advent of warfare on a scale of scope and ferocity previously unimagined. Such a troubling historical background echoes on a vaster scale the sort of disillusionment Katie experiences, as one after another of her family members, friends, casual acquaintances, and professional colleagues betray her. So pervasive is Katie's despair that it seems to her, by the conclusion of her narrative, that the universe itself has betrayed her, that life has delivered her into the hands of belligerent forces of uncertain origin.

The story is told from an intriguing perspective. Although the style is largely realist, a very intrusive and very political (in a general sense) narrative voice relates Katie's story, a voice that comments at length and in some detail on the social, political, cultural, scientific, and economic milieu surrounding Katie's life. The narrator slips into a less intrusive mode throughout most of the narrative but flickers into view during certain moments in the storyline, especially at the beginning of

major sections of the novel. The early passages of each book, for instance, commence with a philosophical and historical commentary that illuminates the socio-historical backdrop of the tale. The final section of the novel, "The War (1914-18)," seems initially to be less a continuation of Katie's story than an opportunity for the narrator to discourse at length on the historical events and social upheavals contemporaneous with what we call the modernist era.

In fact, to call this commentary a mere backdrop diminishes its true importance in the novel. The narrator consistently connects her protagonist to what is happening in the larger cultural context enveloping Katie's life. In a letter to Robert L. Welker, which Welker quotes in his dissertation, Scott outlines her aims in "Escape into Living":

> Escape into Living has some technical features I think have not been tried before. These are my method of conveying the thoughts of a woman of more than middle-age about herself and, as an underpinning to these, the author's views on her era or on a series of eras, which represent the character's development. I suppose it could be called a "time devise" [sic]; though I don't like the phrase much. . . . (627-8, Scott's emphasis and ellipsis)

Significantly, we learn that Katie herself is largely incapable of making these connections, although there is a sense in the closing sequences of the novel that Katie has become increasingly aware in her mature years of the seemingly malignant forces thwarting her autonomy at every turn. Scott's reference to a "time devise" is also

important, for time and memory play critical roles in this novel, in a sense serving as yet another malignant force entrapping Katie.

Moreover, the structure of the novel is particularly revealing. Like most of Scott's novels, "Escape into Living" is a massive text, the shorter manuscript being some 749 typewritten pages. As we have seen, this sprawling narrative is constructed of six books, each consisting of several chapters and each named for a central character except for the final book, which is entitled "The War (1914-1918)"; thus World War One achieves the status of a sort of character in the novel, much as the Civil War does in The Wave. Interestingly, the book named for Katie is the shortest of the six and, in addition, occupies the center section of the narrative. Perhaps the central position of this book is an appropriate textual location for the segment devoted most fully to the central character. But the positioning of Katie's book, flanked as it is by books bearing the names of other characters (including the war), may suggest a sort of entrapment. For, indeed, each of the other characters for whom books are named asserts a powerful shaping influence upon Katie—what we might even regard as an entrapping influence on her. That her chapter is the shortest further underscores her diminished position in this panoramic narrative—ostensibly her narrative—as if these outside influences actually overshadow whatever core self Katie can retain. Finally, as I have mentioned briefly already, time and memory are central players in this text, and the influence of Henri Bergson's philosophy is evident in several key passages. The past, in particular, which Bergson claims is always with us in the form of involuntarily retained memories, is an especially potent force in Katie's life,

imprisoning her, essentially, in a network of past betrayal and disappointment that colors her sense of self, her sense of others, her sense, finally, of the entire unkind "Universe" (EIL 749).

This notion of betrayal is certainly one of the structuring themes of "Escape into Living." Various forms of tyranny urge the narrator of Breathe Upon These Slain to attempt to write her way to a sort of freedom. Betrayal is "Escape into Living"'s counterpart to such tyranny, for betrayal seems to take myriad forms in this text. Significantly, however, these forms usually wear an all too familiar human face. Of particular interest is the portrayal of family in this novel. Much like The Narrow House, "Escape into Living" paints a troubling portrait of family life. The unpublished novel lacks the Goyaesque grotesqueries of Scott's Farley narrative: the family members are less viciously predatory than the Farleys; there are no self-mutilations, no attempted suicides. Nonetheless, family is a trap for Katie, and some of her most painful memories emanate from treacheries committed by those closest to her.

Katie's grandfather, Gramps, her childhood idol, is the first and, in some respects, the most haunting source of treachery. Although the first book is titled "Gram and Gramp," Katie's grandfather is the real focal point of this section of the narrative. For Katie, Captain Perry—her Gramp—a seasoned seaman who has settled into a successful tugboat business, is a larger than life character. To his daughters, Gramp is a draconian martinet, but to Katie, he is an indulgent and exciting figure who, when she visits his country house, allows her to "tomboy" around the rural

surroundings of Ilium, New York, with a freedom he never allowed her mother or aunts.

Gramp is described as a tall, lean pioneer-type, a man, self-made and of some importance locally, whom Katie reveres. This vision will decline, though. The veneer is first cracked by Gramp's awkward bucolicism during a brief stay with Katie and her parents: "Gramp's expedition to the city had provoked in her, an unwilling feeling of superiority; which, if fortunately transient, had, nonetheless, disturbed her deeply; and she had been, paradoxically, positively grateful, on visiting him, again, to see him reinstated, in his old authority, and still worthy of her unalloyed worship" ("EIL" 31-32).[3] Out of his element, Gramp appears diminished and even intimidated by the city. This first small disillusionment foreshadows other, greater ones to follow.

In particular, Gramp's bitter competition with another local businessman, Gus Potter, initiates a downward spiral in Katie's opinions of Gramp. Initially, Katie is certain "that Gramp's munificence was unassailable" ("EIL" 34), but "Potter plots and counter-plots" ("EIL" 55B) begin to wear on the captain, and Gramps becomes increasingly despondent as locals he has known for decades begin investing in Potter's cement company, the accompanying freight docks of which will drive Gramp's small tugboat concern out of business. Indeed, with the help of the state

[3] Scott's manuscript contains numerous spelling and punctuation errors. To aid reading, I have added two commas, enclosed in brackets, in two different passages. Otherwise, I have preserved her idiosyncrasies.

legislature, including members of Gramp's own beloved Republican Party, Potter and several of his fellow financiers begin converting Ilium into a "'railroad town'" ("EIL" 95F), bringing in rival transport systems that spell doom for Gramp's small operation. The result prefigures the shadow of betrayal that follows Katie throughout this novel: "It would eventually be plain to Katie that all these were things that had preyed upon his mind . . . [T]he world's ingratitude could not have been more poignantly re-stressed, than in his worsting, after years of championing Republicans (as above free silver and such theoretic issues)[,] by a 'leading light' among the State politicians of the very party he had defended loyally, almost ever since its formation" ("EIL" 95G).

Gramp's own sense of betrayal by others directly results in Katie's sense of betrayal by him. Katie begins to perceive a new vindictiveness in Gramp aimed at those around him. When Gramp embarks on a tirade against his daughter, Katie's young Aunt Lou, Katie grows concerned over his vocal rage, and Gram's efforts to reassure her are unconvincing: "'Taint nerthin' ter be skeered urv! Yer Gramp's riled with yer Aunt Lou, an' he's er dingin' at her—that's all!' But Gram's anxious air betokened a concern not expressed in her comment" ("EIL" 96). The final blow to Katie's opinion of Gramp, however, involves his violent reaction to her climbing a prized pear tree: shouting angrily, Gramps shakes the tree until Katie falls to earth—then administers a form of punishment he had never applied to her previously: "Gramp's calloused palm smote her a stinging blow" ("EIL" 109). The moment is a dark epiphany for Katie, who immediately perceives "an emotional poverty between them, such as had not, hitherto, existed, and subtly changed their relationship" ("EIL"

109). This moment of betrayal is crucial: it is a memory that will return to haunt Katie, as will so many other moments of betrayal: "Gramp hit me! she had marveled; and the phrase had gone on dinning at her brain, until it became the cipher-sum of an all-enveloping vacuity; and a stone lodged in her breast, she would discover there, again, unmelted, in nineteen-seventeen. . . . [N]othing between Gramp and herself, or the others in the old house, would ever be the same" ("EIL" 111).

Katie's relationship with her mother, Nan, is problematic, as well. Nan is a flighty and impulsive woman who often, in Katie's eyes, places her own desires, and even those of others outside the family, before her daughter's needs. Upon the death of Katie's father, Katie and Nan live together intermittently until Katie's marriage to Earl Braun shortly before World War One. The years between Papa's death and Katie's marriage are generally marked by economic hardship for the two women. Having returned to The Marvin hotel in New York, where the Sirmons had lived in earlier years, Katie and Nan find the hotel and its clientele in decline. Here Nan displays an economic recklessness that endangers not only her own well-being but that of her daughter as well. She insists on loaning money to fellow boarders and indulges the hotel staff with extravagant gratuities and gifts, rapidly depleting the two women's financial resources: "'You may call it your funeral,'" Katie accuses, "and think you have a right to cat [sic] that way, without telling me, but it's mine the same as yours! It would be like you to have hunted up every maid and bell-boy in the whole shebang, and every waiter in the restaurant who ever served you a meal, and tipped them, too!'" ("EIL" 278, Scott's emphasis). Nan's "festal shopping-tour"

during the Christmas season of 1899 tranforms into a "contagion of spending" which actually threatens Katie's opportunities at Kirkleigh, a local business college, forcing her to scramble to pay her tuition "before it could be squandered" ("EIL" 295B) by her mother.

Nan's financial myopia leads to more reckless pursuits as well: "as a gambler," we are told, "Nan was incorrigible" ("EIL" 297). Frequenting the Saratoga tracks, Nan falls in with the horse racing set. Although Nan is generally a successful bettor, Katie is disturbed by the insecurity of such an income. Moreover, Nan's friendship with the Kiddles (Mr. Kiddle is a hard-drinking horse trainer) leads finally to disaster. When Mr. Kiddle "petitioned Nan, with a humility almost to grovelling, to become a co-signer, with him, of a promisory note" ("EIL" 402), Nan agrees, again placing not only herself but Katie in financial jeopardy. Katie's response echoes her earlier plaints: "'Strikes me, after worrying as much as you have, about the 'Lucys', and 'Mames', and 'Mays' and 'Teds', you might take time off for a little worrying about me!'" ("EIL" 404).

One memory of betrayal from Katie's childhood foreshadows these later ones from her adult life. In fact, we are told that Katie "would achieve something close to parable in the vague yet persistent significance she attached to an episode concerned with a velocipede she had coaxed from Gramp, one summer, when these toys were new" ("EIL" 166). Exhibiting her skills on the new conveyance to the family, Katie endures a harmless but terrifying sequence: "on happening to glance over her shoulder, as she started off, she had been aghast to see a garter-snake entangled in the

spokes of a rear wheel and revolving with it" ("EIL" 167). Horrified, the child pedals faster, which only creates the impression that the snake pursues her more frantically: "with every look behind, she beheld the flat, swaying head of the snake, at one instant approaching, and the next receding . . . its dull eyes malignant with what she interpreted to be an implacable animus, directed against herself" ("EIL" 167-8). Part of what disturbs Katie about this memory is her mother's reaction to the child's panic: while two other adults watching her rush to her aid in genuine sympathy, "Mama (who, had she been 'motherly' according to the standard pattern, might have been expected to exceed the other two in solicitude) had seemed merely disgusted, by such a show of slow wits" ("EIL" 168). But, as the narrator's suggestion of a parable-like quality to this episode indicates, something more pervasive, perhaps more sinister seems to emanate from this "simulacrum of pursuit" ("EIL" 168), and we will return to this scene momentarily.

Betrayal hounds Katie even in her marriage to Earl Braun, when she becomes entangled in the sort of anti-German prejudice that proliferated around the time of America's entry into World War One. By the summer of 1917, American society and industry are beginning to focus themselves into a unified war effort. Prominent German-Americans like the Brauns are also becoming targets in the public eye. While it is true that Katie's in-laws are still consummately German—some of her male in-laws have returned to fight for the Kaiser—Katie is nonetheless surprised at the level of anti-German sentiment: obscene graffiti mark the walls and stables of the Braun homes, as well as those of other German-American families. This general

atmosphere of anti-Germanism climaxes for Katie and the Brauns when the family, but especially Earl's father, becomes the target of scurrilous newspaper articles and editorials. Particularly treacherous are the articles appearing in a newspaper owned by some family friends, the Frys. While enjoying a drink at a fashionable New York restaurant, Katie and Earl encounter Thelma Fry, one of the newspaper's owners. Earl's drunken harangue initiates a raucous scene, but rather than urging her husband to desist, Katie leaps to the fore in her in-laws' defense: "'You should be ashamed—you damned, slippery double-crosser! Earl and me 'ull sure never make another date with you—or Jimmy, either!—you dern snake-in-the-grass! You—you—why, you're nothing but a dirty blackmailer!'" ("EIL" 692). Katie's cliched epithet—"'you dern snake-in-the-grass'"—inevitably recalls the garter snake that seems to Katie emblematic of something ominous but unnamed. We see in Thelma Fry's treachery another kind of betrayal, this one at the hands of a family friend rather than a family member, that further underscores the consistent pattern of such betrayal that characterizes Katie's life. Given a history of such betrayals, Katie's deeply cynical world view expressed at the end of her narrative is not surprising: she is seized by "a conviction that average people, once regarded, by her, as her friends, were, at bottom, cold, merciless and vile; and that the presiding gods (whom she had originally thought no worse than indifferent to the sufferings of mortals) were designedly brutal, cruel, treacherous and wicked" ("EIL" 748). Clifton Fadiman attributed a Dreiserian atmosphere to Scott's last published novel, The Shadow of the Hawk. "Escape into Living" seems to confirm Fadiman's claim. In fact, Scott's narrator describes the

older Katie as looking back derisively on the sentimental cultural tastes of the 1890s with a "disdain . . . [that] would exceed Mr. Dreiser's; though she would never have heard of him" ("EIL" 260)—although the narrator nonetheless compares Katie to Jenny Gerhardt of Dreiser's novel, both of whom regard the popular ballad "The Baggage Coach Ahead" as "a touchstone of emotion" ("EIL" 260). Clearly, this unpublished text suggests that Scott is returning to the naturalistic Weltanschauung that characterizes much of her earliest work—namely, Escapade and The Narrow House. And, indeed, the closing sequences of "Escape into Living" articulate a sense of despair that reminds us, in tone and atmosphere if not in style and form, of Scott's powerful Farley tragedy:

> And if an unkindness in the Universe, which made of it, to her, a riddle, was rendered endurable, by having Earl with her; she was, nonetheless, re-embittered, on perceiving how empty-handed she was, now, at the last; when, in her original approach to other men and women, she had spilled over with good will. ("EIL" 749)

The "simulacrum of pursuit" the velocipede episode represents for Katie is significant on another level. The betrayals Katie endures remain ever present for her through the medium of memory. And, as I have suggested already, both memory and the obviously related notion of time are critical elements in this narrative. The passages quoted above show Katie's coming to some troublingly dark realizations by the end of the novel. There are indications earlier in the narrative, however, that the accumulations of Katie's experiences will lead her to such a despairing perspective on

human nature and the nature of life itself. The older Katie apparently is particularly disturbed that she did not anticipate such disappointments:

> Though Katie was never to trace Gramp's defects accurately, to their source in his faults of character; these, nonetheless, became to her, as she grew older, so obvious, she was aghast, whenever she pondered his decline, to think that, even as a child, she could have misinterpreted, as she had, everything significant, in his behaviour, which might have forewarned of his breakdown. ("EIL" 55B)

This looking backward, this living and reliving of the past is crucial in "Escape into Living." And although Katie is not always capable of realizing and articulating how time and memory are shaping her consciousness, Scott's intrusive narrator is always present to keep us oriented toward these issues.

Stephen Dedalus's nightmare of history, Quentin Compson's watch, Clarissa Dalloway awash in the leaden circles of Big Ben's chimes—modernist novels are obsessed with time and its tyranny over human affairs. And, of course, for the modernist novelist, whose project, in large part, is "'to place everything in the mind'" (Stevenson 17), the intersection between time and the individual consciousness becomes the staging area for much of modernism's most provocative dramas. "Escape into Living," of course, is not in any formal way a modernist work; yet it deals in a currency familiar to readers of modernist fiction, for like so many of those works, the tyranny of time is foregrounded in this text. The tyranny of time in "Escape into Living" is perhaps best understood in terms of Henri Bergson's notions

of time and memory. I am not suggesting here a carefully wrought application of Bergsonian philosophies of time in Scott's novel but rather a "Bergsonian tinge" to Katie's relationships with time and memory. In fact, Scott's narrator makes that connection for us—and quite clearly: "time, for Katie, began to undergo a fantastic accelleration [sic], and her mental fumblings (though she was unconscious of it) assumed a faintly 'Bergsonian' tinge" ("EIL" 170). And certain other critical memories, the narrator explains, will remain "of import in the indefinable way of the incident of the snake and the velocipede" ("EIL" 170). The Bergsonian tinge of Katie's mental processes becomes clearer when we turn to Bergson's theories.

Bergson argues that memories of the individual's past persist in the mind, shaping the consciousness of the individual's present. In fact, to think of memory as purely past is, for Bergson, a mistake, as A. R. Lacey explains: "they [memories] exist (timeless present) in the past, but they generate memory images, which are present phenomena. They live in their effects" (134). Bergson himself puts it more succinctly: "I believe that our whole psychical existence is something just like this single sentence . . . I believe that our whole past still exists. It exists subconsciously," and, moreover, consciousness "has but to remove an obstacle, to withdraw a veil, in order that all that it contains, all in fact that it actually is, may be revealed" (56-7).

Closely related to the notion of memory is that of time, and Scott's narrator is profoundly concerned with how her characters perceive time. The novel begins with a Hardyesque moment that, in a sense, recalls the timeless eternity of the sea in Breathe Upon These Slain. Here, however, Scott's narrator looks back in time not to

the hieroglyphic text of the North Sea but to the lush valley of the Hudson River, the landscape that would one day beget Katie and her family. In doing so, the narrator considers the "primitive" human consciousnesses of the "solitary Indians" who people this ancient land ("EIL" 1). Of particular importance, moreover, is how this consciousness develops a sense of time concomitantly with a sense of self, a sense of an ego as an entity separate from the surrounding natural world: "The world of the savage, not yet reduced, by definition, to the collection of fragments the civilized re-assemble to savour, was emotionally whole. . . . [W]hat he felt, as he regarded it, was absolute: a thing-in-itself, not qualified by comparative happenings" ("EIL" 2). In such an unselfconscious state, the human individual existed "[b]efore time <u>was</u>" ("EIL" 3, Scott's emphasis), but as a sense of self-awareness grew, the narrator asserts, a sense of time, of memory, of the past as somehow always present began to assert itself, though the primitive human consciousness was not fully cognizant of this process:

> [A]s the savage took stock of all things as ephemeral, and of his own mortality; time was inaugurated, for him, in that past he formerly believed discarded as he left it behind; though he had unknowingly retained it, and it was gradually disclosed to him as integral with his very person; it [sic] equally inescapable antithesis, a future not hitherto confronted and seen, as it was faced, to be compounded of a mingling of his retrospects with his hopes. ("EIL" 3).

The result of this correlational growth of self-awareness and temporal awareness is a dire one: "And with this conclusion, he was helpless in the grip of 'Time'" ("EIL" 4).

A similar kind of helplessness grips Katie, for the tyranny of time holds sway over her, as well. Significantly, Katie's experience of temporal tyranny is not unique but, like Katie herself, representative of how we all experience time's grip on our consciousnesses: "With Katie, as with everyone else, time took on, as the years passed, a more and more foreshortened and telescopic effect; until, toward the end of her life, when events she could prognosticate were so few[,] she seemed, often, to confront a blank" ("EIL" 166). And the narrator's description of this "grip of 'Time'" itself takes on a "faintly 'Bergsonian' tinge," a sense of the past as continually infiltrating and redrawing the borders of the present: "she was to feel retrospects co-existant [sic] with the contemperaneous [sic], in a strange simultaneity, defeating to any sense of progression; and would carry with her a haunting, never-quite-articulated conviction of time as altogether illusory" ("EIL" 166). Illusory or not, the past is made to feel quite real to Katie, real enough to change her experience of the present: "the effect, on her, [was] one of living backward, extra-dimensionally (though the term was not a part of her vocabulary), amidst the happenings of her earliest youth" ("EIL" 166). And, of course, we have seen much about these critically influential "happenings of her earliest youth"—Gramp's transformation from mythic hero to fallen idol, Mama's flippant response to the terrifying velocipede episode, painfully disappointing experiences that will have their counterparts in her adult years.

Time on a larger scale, however, time on the historical scale, is an equal partner in the temporal tyranny gripping "Escape into Living." This feature emerges most clearly when the narrator steps into the text to examine and discuss the socio-historical canvas upon which the narrative is drawn, particularly in the final book named, significantly, not for a character but for a historical event: "The War (1914-18)," a segment of the text that considers in some detail the tyranny of historical time and, moreover, "the millions history entrapped (and Nan, Earl and Katie were included)" ("EIL" 659).

History is, in fact, a trap in this novel—more specifically, enormous historical processes such as war and political conflict. As we have seen, Scott's narrator is careful to plot out the major historical conflicts and events that occur during Katie's lifetime. Every stage of Katie's life is historically contextualized by the narrator: thus, a personal tragedy such as the death of Katie's father is placed within a broader historical environment: "'Had McKinley been assassinated, when we lost Papa, '" Katie asks Nan at one point, "' or was it the Boer War that was going on, then?'" Katie's question initiates a lengthy passage of mutual recollections between the two women, replete with references to when "'ole Queen Vic died in nineteen-one,'" "'King Edward's Coronation,'" and "'ther scrap bertween Japan an' Russia'" ("EIL" 259A).

Within these discussions of historical context, however, there lurks a parallel conflict to the tension we have seen figuring in Scott's major prose works, for it is the individual's place within these larger historical processes that is of particular concern

for Scott's intrusive narrator. In The Wave, John Wilkes Booth broods about the individual's tenuous position in history: "his insignificance in the end was as sure as death itself" (W 589). Such concerns shape Scott's unpublished novel as well.

The final book of "Escape into Living" confronts these issues squarely, issues that, in various guises, have figured prominently in works like The Wave and Breathe Upon These Slain. In Book VI, war becomes the embodiment of the vast historical processes which have been considered as powerful shaping influences on Katie's life throughout the novel. In these concluding sequences, the significance of history, which previously has served as the role of backdrop, moves to the forefront, clearly becoming a central figure in the action, just as "The War" seems itself to become a sort of character in the narrative. Much like The Wave, "Escape into Living" considers the fate of the individual caught up in the inexorable currents of the historical process: "Individuals, during wars, are ignored, to an extent tantamount to an attack on the integrity of ego" ("EIL" 602). In fact, the first few pages of Book VI read like a commentary on The Wave: in a sense, Scott's narrator seems to be explaining the main themes of that earlier text, telling us, in essence, what was shown us in The Wave. During war, Scott's narrator explains, "most people (deprived of the control of their own lives, and of self-dependence and initiative, and coerced, even as to their personal thoughts and feelings) are, as a rule, stunned by what transpires" ("EIL" 602). Particularly in modern "'mass action' wars," the individual is reduced to a pawn whose fate is decided by a "'blue-print'" ("EIL" 603).

Significantly, however, individuals like Katie seldom realize that they are "entrapped by history." Katie, for instance, seems unable to recognize or comprehend how "her future, like the futures of millions, was being prescribed, according to convenient political formulas" ("EIL" 548A). Katie's inability to realize her circumscribed destiny is significant. Earlier in the novel, we are told that Katie suffers from a sort of inarticulateness, which seems to be a common condition among individuals, Scott's narrator explains. The primitive consciousness depicted in the opening sequences of the novel is similarly inarticulate: "he continued the victim of a shackling muteness; unable, with the paucity of words at his disposal, to communicate to anyone the beginnings of the tragic plight afterward to be realized as that common to all civilized men and women" ("EIL" 2). Furthermore, this primitive consciousness desperately seeks freedom from this "shackling muteness": "the need of the individual (only a little less estranged from it before) to speak out, and so relieve himself of the recollections weighting him, was frequently sharp with an intensity beyond keenest hunger" ("EIL" 3). As I have suggested, just such a muteness shackles Katie—and, indeed, those around her: Katie "had been further all but martyred by her own inarticulateness; which, at crucial moments, was scarcely less than that of Gramp and Gram" ("EIL" 748).

We have seen thus far how a range of issues familiar to readers of Scott's major prose works have figured prominently in this novel—the family as a sort of trap, or, in Katie's case, the entrapment of disturbing family memories; the irresistible force of socio-historical processes such as war; and, finally, the place of the

individual in this web of entrapment. One concluding point, however, remains to be considered, a point that connects this unpublished novel with the works that immediately preceded it, the artist novels. "Escape into Living," in part, is a novel about the arts. Like The Shadow of the Hawk, the artist novel least directly related to the arts (the imprisoned father is an inventor rather than a writer), "Escape into Living" considers the question of the arts at only selected junctures in the narrative. Nevertheless, what is said about the role of the arts is revealing, not only about the generic function of art but about Evelyn Scott's aesthetic project as a whole. The early segments of the novel which concentrate on the primitive human consciousness describe that consciousness developing into the modern sense of self, which promptly shatters into a "collection of fragments" which requires reassembling ("EIL" 2). Thus, the need of the arts, of writing, in particular—writing provides a method for reassembling these fragments of experience, of bringing order to chaos, as Linda Hutcheon has said. "Without the arts to assist perception through universally satisfying forms," Scott's narrator asserts, "individuals would be strangers to one another, the qualities of each inscrutable to any save himself" ("EIL" 129E). The gulf of inarticulateness silencing the typical individual can be bridged, the narrator suggests, the shackling muteness that enchains average men and women like Katie Sirmon overcome—through the arts, through writing:

> And were it not for the fine arts, in particular, the essence of actualities unduplicatably specific, would be incommunicable; and men and women as inarticulate respecting their inner lives, and those

> happenings in which they participate with individual minds and emotions, as are dumb brutes; their interpretive range restricted to rudimentary sounds associated with a few animal wants. ("EIL" 129E)

It is the function of the arts—of the artist—"to communicate experience itself," "to amplify the circumscription of individual imaginations" ("EIL" 602), to give voice to those "inarticulate" individuals "circumstantially unable to protest their sufferings" ("EIL" 602). Writing in "Escape into Living," then, as in Breathe Upon These Slain, becomes a tool by which the individual self can be extricated from the entrapment of history, from the shackles of our own muteness. And, indeed, in a brief metafictional moment, Evelyn Scott flickers into existence in her own text: perhaps sensing her own increasingly marginal position in American letters, Scott actually writes herself into literary history, counting among the important avant garde writers of post-war New York figures such as Edna Saint-Vincent Millay, Djuna Barnes, George Cram Cooke, Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, Bernard Shaw, and Evelyn Scott ("EIL" 732). However, there lurks in these final pages of "Escape into Living" a feeling that, in the end, this effort to write one's way out of entrapment, to write one's way into history, is futile. Like Katie herself, Scott's narrator betrays a sense of despair, of a struggle lost—which forces us, of course, to consider how successful any effort to write a self into history can truly be in a world given over to "brute negation" ("EIL" 749), in a world in which, as the narrator in Breathe Upon These Slain laments, "there are too many machines . . . !" (BUTS 394).

What remains at the conclusion of "Escape into Living," then, is not a real freedom from the shackling muteness which imprisons Katie as surely as do her memories of betrayal, as surely as do the powerful forces of history that darkly shape her destiny. Perhaps the most disturbing betrayal of all, in fact, is the betrayal of the arts, for no matter how desperately the writer attempts to rescue individuals like Katie from the traps of time and history, what we are left with is a much more ominous reality that, in the narrator's eyes, cannot be averted: "a disturbingly increasing ascendency of evil over good" ("EIL" 749) which no individual, indeed, no writer, not even Evelyn Scott, can ever hope to resist.

Conclusion

Recovering a Context

In many ways, "Escape into Living" is a summing up of Evelyn Scott's lifelong literary project. The same "cultural, aesthetic, political, and economic forces" Robert L. Welker identified as Scott's primary nemeses continue in this novel to threaten individual freedom and autonomy (Introduction vii). The disturbing and explicit conclusion of "Escape into Living" projects a triumph for those forces over any hopes of individualism and free selfhood. Thus far, I have strenuously avoided overtly biographical discussions of Scott's canon—which is, frankly, counter to the trend in Scott scholarship to date. Welker's project is a literary biography, with a strong emphasis on Evelyn Scott's family background and her connections to her southern cultural heritage. Mary Carrigg's study focuses on the central women characters in Scott's autobiography and fiction, unabashedly intent on isolating the "Evelyn" characters—autobiographical in origin—which, in her view, frequently people Scott's narratives. The only two book-length studies published to date are both biographies. And even many of the shorter pieces, such as those published by Peggy Bach and Ashley Brown,[1] lean heavily on biography. Scott's life, for better or worse, has indeed enjoyed more attention than her work.

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[1] See, for example, Bach's "Evelyn Scott: The Woman in the Foreground" in The Southern Review (18.4 (1982): 703-17) and Brown's "Evelyn Scott in Brazil" in Selected Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Annual Mountain Interstate Conference (Greenville, SC: Furman University, 1987, 61-69).

What I hope to urge by this study is a redressing of this trend, a focus on the work—which should be, after all, the locus of our attention when we consider an artist and her achievement. Indeed, in the works we have discussed, we see Scott contributing to several of the major movements in twentieth-century literature. In fact, her work is frequently in the vanguard of such movements. Her early efforts are marked by a strain of naturalism which, in one form or another, continues to inform her later novels. That naturalism, however, is only one element in the complex tapestry of experimental techniques from which works like Escapade and The Narrow House are woven. Certainly, there are few autobiographies more challenging to our received notions of that genre than Escapade. The Narrow House sustains a level of unsettling intensity that at times matches Faulkner. In both of these works, too, we begin to see Evelyn Scott's concern for selfhood and the individual emerge from the powerful conflicts—social, cultural, sexual, interpersonal—embracing these texts.

Scott's move into fullblown modernist experimentation coincides with her efforts to work through what Harry Salpeter calls her "comedie humaine of the United States" (282): Migrations, The Wave, and A Calendar of Sin. Salpeter's 1930 essay on Evelyn Scott in The Bookman focuses primarily on her historical trilogy. In an effort to describe comprehensively Scott's overall aims in these historical fictions, Salpeter labels the trilogy a comedie humaine, thus placing Scott alongside the great European historical novelists such as Balzac and Tolstoy. Perhaps Scott's aspirations outdistance even these continental masters of the historical novel, however. In her historical trilogy, Scott's thematic ambitions of capturing all America on a panoramic

narrative canvas are accompanied by an equally ambitious battery of experimental narrative tools. Scott's literary vision in these works indeed begins to resemble in scope and intent the philosophical fictions of Leo Tolstoy and Feodor Dostoyevsky, though filtered through the prism of modernist aesthetics. In the hands of Evelyn Scott, then, the modern novel was being reconfigured into radically new forms.

Narrative experimentation coupled with heavily philosphical themes also marks her proto-postmodern novel, Breathe Upon These Slain. As with Scott's other later novels, Breathe Upon These Slain examines the broad social, political, and historical milieu through which its characters move, asking again the questions which trouble her characters throughout her canon: what importance, if any, can the self enjoy in a cosmos whose workings seem to operate above the ken and control of the individual? That cosmos, of course, is furthered complicated by the plurality of discursive worlds in Scott's metafictional novel. But we also see Scott attempting to use her fiction as a platform for engaging politically with the world around her, a move we now commonly associate with writers of postmodern histriographic metafiction. If Scott's collectivist history of the Civil War in The Wave effectively refutes many Marxist critics' attacks on the dehumanizing solipsism inherent in modernist narratives, certainly Breathe Upon These Slain further demonstrates the efforts of at least one modernist writer to produce an art that is indeed "engaged," to use Jean Paul Sartre's term from Literature and Existentialism (76). To be engaged, for Sartre, is, in part, to be active politically within the literary medium, to seek "to achieve the most lucid and the most complete consciousness . . . [and to encourage

oneself] and others toward the reflective" (Literature and Existentialism 76). When writers ignore the political context of literature, they are complying implicitly with any oppressions they refuse to address. Sartre is speaking here from a Marxist perspective, a position Scott clearly opposes in her later, more politically conscious novels. As Scott explains quite explicitly in her preface to Bread and a Sword, her principal quarrel with Marxist aesthetics is its demand that all art should aim toward advancing the socialist cause. In taking such an openly anti-Marxist stance in much of her later fiction, however, Scott seems to violate her own aesthetic standards that art should not serve primarily political ends. Much like her effort to give voice to the individual in much of her work, an effort that itself seems finally to fall victim to a "shackling muteness," Scott's desire to keep the realm of art free from political agendas finally fails: her desperate attempts to stave off a politically driven approach to aesthetics leads her into the trap of writing politically driven narratives.

Unlike her other later works, "Escape into Living" is less obviously and specifically concerned with politics and socialism, but it is certainly concerned with entrapment. This novel, although unpublished, presents a confluence of themes examined in Scott's earlier fiction, focusing a critical eye on the family, much like The Narrow House, and examining larger social and political concerns, much in the manner of The Wave and Breathe Upon These Slain. The novel, too, concerns itself with the individual, the typical woman of her day, Katie Sirmon, and how those larger social and political forces shape Katie's life in ways unimaginable to her. Of course, as we have seen, "Escape into Living" returns us to the enveloping sense of

entrapment that we experience in the claustrophobic confines of The Narrow House. Whatever hopes for the individual The Wave or Breathe Upon These Slain may have suggested have fallen victim to the rising tide of "brute negation" surging through the final scenes of "Escape into Living."

In fact, it is difficult to avoid a sense that the intrusive narrator of "Escape into Living" is somehow speaking for Evelyn Scott herself. Wayne C. Booth's cautions notwithstanding, the despair gripping the final scenes of "Escape into Living" seems all too relevant for a writer whose career is passing into obscurity before her very eyes, a writer whose career is essentially over by her fiftieth year, a point when many of the great writers are hitting their strides and finding for the first time a broader audience. Throughout our discussion of Evelyn Scott's canon, I have suggested, in a general sense, a connection between Scott and the romantics, and like many of her nineteenth century predecessors, Scott's best work seems to have come in the flush and rebellious energy of youth. That she actually reinserts herself into the canon in the concluding pages of "Escape into Living" is at once a bold and poignant move. While Scott's star was rapidly fading in the 1940s and '50s, that of her contemporary, William Faulkner, was ascending with equal swiftness.

Scott's literary career is rife with ironies. Her auspicious start and early success, for example, belied gradual decline to near anonymity in the field of American fiction. Another such irony, perhaps even more striking, is her unusual relationship with William Faulkner, the writer who, in a sense, usurped her position as one of the foremost writers of experimental fiction in America and certainly one of

the foremost southern writers of such fiction. For Evelyn Scott scholars, one of the most infamous junctures in Scott's career came very late in that career, on the verge of her decline in reputation, with William Faulkner's remarks about her in Dan Brennan's 1940 interview with him, included in Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-62. Brennan's piece is not strictly an interview but actually an essay recalling conversations with Faulkner. Among the subjects discussed are women writers—and Evelyn Scott, in particular: "What did Faulkner think about women novelists? Were there any good ones?" (49). Faulkner's reply is succinct but complimentary, though perhaps, to a feminist reader, unfortunately worded: "'Evelyn Scott is pretty good," he said, "for a woman'" (49). To the chagrin of most Scott scholars, D. A. Callard chose Faulkner's perhaps unintentionally sexist remark for the title of his 1985 biography. However one reads Faulkner's observation, though, clearly he admired Scott's work: Brennan records no mention by Faulkner of any other women novelists. Scott herself had powerfully and eloquently endorsed William Faulkner's work in 1929 with a short essay, "On William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury," published in limited numbers by Cape and Smith, publishers of both Scott and Faulkner, not only as an accompanying introduction to Faulkner's difficult narrative but also as a promotional device, Scott, at that time, commanding considerable respect as a writer of bold new fictions that were reshaping contemporary definitions of the novel.

To look over Scott's essay in the late 1990s, after decades of Faulkner scholarship, is to look into what we might well label the Ur-text of that scholarship.

The standard readings of Faulkner's characters are all there in Scott's pages: Benjy as the Christ figure; Quentin as the haunted heir to a lost culture; Jason as the cynical, crassly materialistic philistine of the New South; Dilsey as the centering consciousness, offering a bulwark of stability against the chaotic narratives that precede her section of the novel. Scott clearly understood what Faulkner was about in The Sound and the Fury—perhaps we should not be surprised, then, by the significant parallels between her work and William Faulkner's.

Indeed, in any discussion of Scott's place in American literary history, the inevitable link is made to William Faulkner. Their paths are, indeed, although divergent, oddly parallel. D. A. Callard has suggested that the Farley family saga of The Narrow House and its sequels offer a provocative foreshadowing of Faulkner's examination of familial disintegration we see in The Sound and the Fury. In fact, the tortured consciousness of the near suicidical Alice might be seen as prefiguring Faulkner's exploration of the troubled consciousness of Quentin Compson: in both cases, the disturbed broodings of powerfully anguished minds offer provocative avenues for examining the issues of self and consciousness while radically reshaping the possibilities of narrative form. Both take on the question of American history—for some, the central event in that history, the Civil War—in their most important works. Both, as we have noted, are writers who explore the frontiers between modernism and postmodernism. Of course, the controversial, if apocryphal, stories surrounding their strangely similar late novels—Scott's ill-fated French Revolution novel, "Before Cock Crow," and Faulkner's Pulitzer Prize winning work, A Fable—

live on, relegating Evelyn Scott all too often to a mere footnote in the academy's continuing fascination with Faulkner.

A strong case can be presented, in my view, for offering Evelyn Scott as a countervoice to Faulkner—and an important one. Typically, discussions of British or international modernist fiction balance the dominant figure of the modernist novel, James Joyce, with contemporaries such as Virginia Woolf. William Faulkner's dominance of the American modernist fiction canon might be similarly balanced against the work of Evelyn Scott, whose literary project challenged the limits of novel writing as boldly as did Faulkner's. The often striking parallels in their canons certainly present fascinating possibilities for contextualizing Faulkner's indisputably canonical works against those of a contemporary who was considered by the leading literary lights of the 1920s and '30s Faulkner's equal, if not his better. This, of course, opens up all sorts of questions about the complex business of canon formation, about why Faulkner's work persisted while Scott's drifted to the margins of obscurity.

Much has been made, too, of the absent voices, the silences, in Faulkner's fiction—the silences of Caddy, for instance, or of Dilsey. It is typically argued that our classroom approaches to texts like Adventures of Huckleberry Finn should be balanced by an equally thorough examination of texts that fill the gaps left by Twain's narrative. A common response to Jim's voicelessness in Huckleberry Finn is to include discussions of African American texts that feature a powerful black voice—Frederick Douglass's slave narrative, for instance. The study of Scott can

provide such a counterweight to the prodigious presence of Faulkner's work. Three areas suggest themselves for study in this regard. Their use of the Civil War as a resource for narrative may be the most fruitful subject for comparison. As we have noted, Scott's Civil War in The Wave is a kaleidoscopic vision, one that offers a bewilderingly broad and diverse sampling of perspectives on the war. Faulkner's treatment of the war focuses on a much narrower front. Both Absalom, Absalom! and The Unvanquished provide a particular history of the war which, while told from the perspective of the defeated and occupied South, nonetheless fits certain privileged criteria—a white, male, southern, cavalier version of the war. As we have seen, Scott's version of the war provides a voice for virtually every marginalized faction Faulkner ignores. Once again, this seems to locate Scott's work in a strategically important position for interrogating Faulkner's canon, a position from which we can, as Jean Radford has encouraged, ask new questions of and provide a new context for texts that may sometimes seem exhausted from too much scrutiny. The two writers' experiments with proto-postmodernist metafiction also beg for comparison, particularly since Faulkner's postmodern moment in Absalom, Absalom! is so important for postmodern scholars such as Brian McHale when, as we have seen, Evelyn Scott's novel Breathe Upon These Slain mobilizes a metafictional technique two years before Faulkner's work and decades before the term "metafiction" was even coined.

"Evelyn Scott's public rebellion," as Robert L. Welker has described her life project, is a rebellion played out most powerfully in her autobiography and fiction,

particularly the remarkable texts we have examined in detail. The sense of despair that marks "Escape into Living" indicates, however, that Evelyn Scott may have apprehended the final failure of that rebellion, a failure marked by silence, by marginalization, by critical and popular neglect. Ultimately, then, Scott's faith in the romantic self falters—perhaps when her own career as a writer seems to fail. Nevertheless, in defiantly insisting on the integrity of the individual, and by voicing that insistence in her art, Scott left a solid legacy of strikingly original literature, including a core of texts—Escapade, The Narrow House, The Wave, Breathe Upon These Slain—as powerful as that of the more canonical authors of the modernist period. In her recent biography of Scott, Mary Wheeling White boldly asserts, "Rereading the life and works of Evelyn Scott forces us to reexamine the historical construction of American modernism" (6). And, indeed, such a recuperation of Scott's canon seems to be under way in the 1990s as new editions of Escapade and The Wave have preceded White's biography into print. In addition, two new anthologies of southern literature include Scott's work, and several dissertations and critical articles are in progress or forthcoming (White 5). As Jean Radford urges us to ask new questions of old texts and search out new voices in the modernist canon, Evelyn Scott's innovative but long neglected corpus of work provides a compelling opportunity to do both.

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