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Crippling Stagnation: Disability Imagery and the Handicapped South

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CRIPPLING STAGNATION: DISABILITY IMAGERY AND THE HANDICAPPED SOUTH

by

AMBER STICKNEY

(Under the Direction of Caren Town)

ABSTRACT

Southern literature is well-known for its disabled characters due to the proliferation of the Southern Gothic genre. Many scholars have identified these disabled characters as metaphors for the failure of the Lost Cause, but less attention has been placed on how the internalization of the Lost Cause mythology has caused Southerners to become disabled. Hence, this study aims at understanding the relationship between grand narratives and Southerners through a cultural studies approach. This thesis focuses on short stories, specifically Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People" (1955), Breece D'J Pancake's "Time and Again" (1983), and Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" (1982). The research concludes that various iterations of the Lost Cause mythology, including Southern manners and patriarchal ideologies disable all Southerners regardless of race, gender, or class.

INDEX WORDS: Disability studies, Cultural studies, Feminist studies, Southern literature, Southern Gothic, Flannery O'Connor, Breece D'J Pancake, Bobbie Ann Mason

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B.A., Georgia Southern University, 2018

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MASTER OF ARTS

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Electronic Version Approved:
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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Claudia Tulk King (11 Dec 1947 – 20 June 2007)

I am dedicating this to my grandmother, who instilled in me a love for reading and a passion for education. I will forever cherish the endless amount of *Junie B. Jones* books you placed under my pillow and our shared reading sessions that took place after I found them.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

We were not noble, not grateful, not even hopeful. We knew ourselves despised. What was there to work for, to save money for, to fight for or struggle against? We had generations before us to teach us that nothing ever changed, and that those who did try to escape failed.

—Dorothy Allison, *Trash*

Since the Southern Renaissance era of the 1920s, its writers have provided readers with a variety of mentally and physically disabled characters. While readers and writers are fascinated by these characters and morbidly attracted to their defects, many scholars deplore them. For example, Deborah Kent and Heidi Krumland lambast the literary practice of using disabled characters as representations of regional failures. For example, one of the most compelling disabled characters of Southern literature, Benjy from William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), is typically referred to as a failed Christ figure, who illustrates the utter hopelessness of the godforsaken South. However, while it is true that many disabled characters of the Southern canon lack depth, I aim to discuss the Southern authors and works that subvert the relationship between disability and the regional allegory of the Lost Cause. Writers such as Flannery O'Connor, Breece Dexter John Pancake, and Bobbie Ann Mason do not create disabled characters as simplistic metaphors for the disabled South, but rather demonstrate that those who become disabled do so because of their attachment to the region's false narratives.

The South is characterized as disabled because disability and exceptionalism are inextricably related. In its educational context, the term “exceptionality” has replaced its predecessor, “disability.” According to the Florida Department of Education, exceptionalism includes “children who are gifted and children who have disabilities” (Winn). Outside of its educational context, “exceptionality” is defined as “the condition of being different from the norm” (“exceptionality”). The South inhabits both definitions as its social and economic progression is considered abnormal, and its regional advancement is behind its Northern neighbor.

Because of Southerners’ attachment to the South that existed before the Civil War, the South as a region stagnated rather than progressed. Although the South’s identity reached its apotheosis of the Lost Cause myth during the Civil War, the results of the Civil War and the events that followed reinforced Southern identity even further. After the devastating loss, the South suffered from a mass exodus of both blacks and whites, a depletion of agrarian resources, and a pervasive inferiority complex that resulted from fighting on the wrong side of the Civil War. Lawrence H. Larsen argues, “The Civil War hurt all southern cities. Even those that sustained no military damage had to contend with ravaged hinterlands and disrupted commercial connections” (11). These ravaged hinterlands, or rural landscapes, that the lower classes owned were treated as a political pawn rather than as an olive branch. General William Tecumseh Sherman enacted the wartime order, Special Field Orders Number 15, in which freed black families were given previously owned white land and its amenities, colloquially known as “forty acres and a mule.” This wartime order decreased Southern white pride even further. For many white Southerners, land was the only possession they had left, and now newly freed blacks, who

were considered subhuman to many, were inhabiting houses and lands that had been an integral part of white families for generations.

While the order seemed to rectify years of violent oppression towards the black population, “forty acres and a mule” only took place during the war. This time frame allowed black people to inhabit land that whites were not using, but white men left their land only temporarily to participate in the Civil War. Once the Confederate soldiers returned to their homes, black families were forced out, and the government did not interfere by redistributing land. Black families were now on their own without any home to call their own. To Southern whites, President Abraham Lincoln’s successor, President Andrew Johnson, attempted to restore the “rightful” order by quickly reverting land ownership back to its previous white owners. While some black families were able to keep their allotted lands, many others acquired the lowlands of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana from Native Americans through private transactions. Because these lowlands were not greatly sought after due to the harsh landscape, Native Americans were forced to accept little money for their land. Poor soil quality, sparse mineral resources, and abundant natural disasters counteracted attempts at farming. Furthermore, the looming threat of the federal government forced Native Americans to make hasty transactions before they moved west. This switching of land ownership, coupled with the Indian Removal Act, dispossessed both the black and Native populations.

Outside of the lowlands, other black families headed to the cities, including Charlotte, North Carolina. Compared to the country, Southern cities had better race relations and better job opportunities that offered long-term growth unlike the few jobs available in the country, like sharecropping for example. After the Civil War but before the turn of the 20th century, blacks and whites lived in what Tom Hanchett calls a “salt and pepper pattern” (4). The government did

not impose segregation and neither did the citizens of the South. Blacks and whites were not only living together, working together, and enjoying leisurely activities together, but more importantly voting together (Hanchett 9). In 1870, the U.S. Congress ratified the fifteenth amendment, which allowed black men to vote. The black and white working-class alliance controlled states, such as North Carolina, Alabama, and Virginia throughout the late 19th century, but it would not last long.

Similar political alliances between whites and blacks that were occurring during the Reconstruction era of the South devastated the power of the white elites. With the rest of the nation's interest in black rights waning, Southern white elites jumped at the opportunity to regain power by wielding a powerful doctrine of fear coupled with racial superiority. Known as the "White Supremacy," by the Democratic party, the campaign sought to unite whites of all economic backgrounds under the united front of hatred towards black people. The Democratic party's creation of the myth of black domination and sexual predation caused both systemic racism and white violence to increase tremendously in response. Due to this manufactured representation of black people, systemic violence only became worse when Jim Crow laws were enacted in response.

Although poor Southern whites had less in common with the elite class compared to their black neighbors, the elites created a powerfully "imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign... because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 15-16). Because the South suffered from an inferiority complex induced by the results of the Civil War, Southern whites exhibited a "wide range of compensatory responses including the drive for superiority, the striving for recognition, and the

rejection of society” (Maxwell 15). This racial war against black people allowed Southern whites the opportunity to fulfill all three compensatory responses.

Wilbur Joseph Cash explains, “four years of fighting for the preservation of their world and their heritage, four years of measuring themselves against the Yankee in the intimate and searching contact of battle, had left these Southerners far more self-conscious than they had been before, far more aware of their differences and of the line which divided what was Southern from what was not” (104). In other words, the Civil War created a conscious Southern identity that did not exist previously; therefore, perceived threats from those who were supposedly not a part of the Southern identity strengthened Southern pride. Michael Kreyling shows how Richard M. Weaver, a prominent historian of the early twentieth century, conflated the destruction of the antebellum South with the fall of Rome, the dissolution of medieval Catholicism, and the collapse of the Napoleonic era. By pairing the Old South with the great kingdoms of the past, Weaver replaced the reality of the Old South with an idealization of a legendary empire (27). The implementation of Black Codes, which birthed Jim Crow laws, and overt violence from whites onto blacks allowed Southern whites to receive recognition and resignation from black people and provided white Southerners with the opportunity to regain a lost empire.

Black Codes and Jim Crow laws rolled back all of the social and economic progress of the Reconstruction Era. The results of vagrancy and peon laws paralleled the horrors of slavery in many Southern states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee. These broad laws sentenced hundreds of thousands of black people, who were legally but often unjustly imprisoned, to long-term involuntary servitude. Due to questionable charges related to weapon concealment, gambling, alcohol consumption, idleness, and insufficient parenting, black individuals were fined an insurmountable amount

each. A business would then step in and graciously offer to pay the fine in exchange for long-term labor. Once imprisoned through debt, predominantly black men, but sometimes women and children too, were sentenced to various state-sanctioned chain gangs, where they were forced to work in lumber camps, farms, river levees, rock quarries, lime quarries, coal factories, iron factories, and railroad camps (Blackmon 177). Businesses and farmers looking for cheap labor would often employ local sheriffs to arrest black individuals for their labor needs. These local sheriffs would comply for their own economic benefit. By gaining cheap labor, businesses could afford the fine that the courts would charge individuals. The courts would then either keep the fine payment for themselves or share the payment with the arresting officer.

In addition, many landowners, white or black, eventually abandoned their land due to the changing economy of the United States. Larsen contends, “The South entered the 1880s with an agricultural system unsuited to the needs of a free market. Land barons and country merchants presided over a fragmented economy. Sharecropping and crop liens stifled individual enterprise. Temporarily inflated cotton prices were a snare and a delusion. New sources of supply clouded the world price picture, let alone that in the Cotton Belt” (28). In other words, industries that were prominent in the North, such as iron and steel production, electrical power, and petroleum were tremendously growing the U.S. economy. However, the resources that previously sustained the plantation economy, including cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane, were difficult to sustain without a large labor force; therefore, corporations were rewarded over individuals. Furthermore, while the North encouraged immigrants to enter the industrialized labor market, the South fought against the possibility of foreigners entering theirs. Due to the South’s hostility, most European immigrants “showed no desire to migrate to the South [of the U.S.] to become sharecroppers. Rather, they went further west” to seek better opportunities without Southerners labeling them

“socialists or anarchists” (Larsen 34). Due to the South’s diminishing space in the agrarian market, other places around the world replaced its former dominance. Facing a losing battle, small landowners began to surrender their land, which often landed into the hands of bloated corporations, and made the trek to either the saturated cities of the South or the hostile cities of the North. However, those who left the South did not necessarily reap a better fate. Southerners were deemed too independent and were often fired for insubordination (Maxwell 15).

While black Southerners previously threatened Southern whites by inhabiting their land, they now posed a threat in the saturated labor market. The North had a larger population, but it had a more diverse labor market; therefore, jobs were easier to obtain in all fields. Until 1915, ninety percent of black people in the United States remained in the South (“Historical Studies”). Because most Southerners, white or black, had more experience in the rural market rather than in the urban one, Southerners were forced into an unskilled labor market that already yielded low pay even before it became oversaturated. The wealthy quickly took advantage of the struggling South as “they learned that for small initial investments they could pay low wages, engage in exploitive labor practices, buy politicians, charge high interest rates, and realize lucrative profits while reinvesting little” (Larsen 16). Both the wealthy and the working class knew that because city jobs were difficult to acquire, Southerners were forced to choose between little pay or none at all. However, due to the flooding of labor markets in the South, extra low wages and surplus production led to an even earlier Great Depression in the region (Fones-Wolf 12).

Interestingly, public perception also played a part in Southern employment as well. Perception was everything as the South dominated the public eye in the early 20th century. Scott L. Matthews explains:

Convulsions such as the collapse of the South's Southern economy, the migration of more than a million of its black people to northern cities, lynchings, labor strife, sharecropping, and soil erosion, and folk cultures threatened by modernity, among countless other topics, lured sociologists, geographers, folklorists, and ethnographers, into the field in the name of social reform and cultural salvage. (18)

In other words, the South became attractive to scholars in various fields, as the region displayed the effects of poverty, racism, environmental destruction, and cultural dissipation in real time. However, although scholars lamented the state of the South in their studies and hoped that their work would improve the South's social and economic issues, their work did the opposite as it further alienated the South from the rest of the nation. While the rest of the nation suffered from similar issues, such as racial segregation in the housing industry, the Chicago Race Riot of 1919, the Dust Bowl, and the continuous eradication of Native American lands and cultures, the poverty porn of the South always remained the focal point of academic attention. Silent suffering became the South's only refuge.

Although academics sought to increase Southern representation, those who wielded the camera lens dictated how such stories were told. For example, the Tingle family, a poor family from the South, and many others bemoaned the academics who offered to take their picture in exchange for a little money. The matriarch of the Tingle family, Katie Tingle, denounced the photographers who came to visit her family that day due to the photographer's intention of putting her family's "shame and pitiableness" to be jeered at perpetually for all to see (Larsen 64). For the photographers who wished to aid the fight for Civil Rights, Southern black residents "equated the camera with white power and control" (Matthews 210). White liberals presented

black Southerners as either primitive and alluring or pitiable and desperate. Neither presentation aided the black fight for equality.

The desegregation of schools became one of the most important fights for equality. While the decision to integrate schools seemed like a win for Black civil rights, the decision actually served as a political pawn for American foreign policy. Desegregated schools maintained the white upper hand both at home and abroad. Raymond Wolters states, “*Brown* was a boon to American foreign policy” (12). Because of the Russian criticism of American race relations, America feared that those who fought for Civil Rights also secretly fought for the Communist cause. However, by having the Supreme Court, a white systemic power, fix the issue of Civil Rights, the U.S. could then focus on discipline rather than education in school, which would allow the U.S. to still maintain the status quo of white power. For example, Wolters echoes W.E.B. Du Bois’s statements, in which he explained that mixed schools could not end racism because “racial prejudice was so deeply entrenched that it was difficult to find white teachers who regarded blacks as their equal” (37). This unconscious bias, paired with a new focus on disciplinary action, provided only a slim route to success for students of color. Eugene Mornell questions, “Does it not seem reasonable, then, that those who most precisely articulate these dominant values are very often those who are most extensively educated?” (18). In summation, those who are deemed successful by the educational system succeed by reinforcing conformity.

Bell hooks further explains society’s focus on conformity by illustrating the differences between segregated and desegregated schools in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994). She explains that as a student in an all-black school, she experienced educational freedom. Such educational freedom, she says, occurred when black students would participate in “counter-hegemonic” conversations that required critical thinking

to dismantle “white racist colonization” (2). However, hooks laments, “That shift from beloved, all-black schools to white schools where black students were always seen as interlopers, as not really belonging, taught me the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination” (4). Although the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision seemed like a win for Black rights, it actually further reinstated white power by imposing the “very foundation of good citizenship,” which relied heavily on white “cultural values” (Justice Earl Warren). With the anxiety surrounding the Cold War, the U.S. realized the value and ability of such an ideological state apparatus in creating a homogenized America against the Soviet Union.

However, a homogenized America does not equate to a knowledgeable America, even if it is extensively educated. The French philosopher Jean Paul Gustave Ricœur argues that the narrative text is the key to understanding ourselves and the world around us; therefore, great cultural progress lies not in history, nor philosophy, but rather in literature. He integrates the ideologies of phenomenology and hermeneutics:

To conquer a remoteness, a distance between the past cultural epoch to which the text belongs and the interpreter himself. By overcoming this distance, by making himself contemporary with the text, the exegete can appropriate its meaning to himself: foreign, he makes it familiar, that is, he makes it his own. It is thus the growth of his own understanding of himself that he pursues through his understanding of others. Every hermeneutics is thus, explicitly or implicitly, self-understanding by means of understanding others. (101)

In other words, the interpretation of literature allows the reader to become a part of the text despite the reader having a different reality than the world that the author creates. Literary

analysis provides connections to the reader's own life even if the narrative discourse related to the time period, setting, or character growth does not align with the reader's. By struggling to understand something alien, the reader gains a greater understanding of others, as well as themselves.

Southern literature provides readers with the opportunity to learn of others' flaws and their own by portraying disabled white Southerners. Southern novels and memoirs that demonstrate the relationship between white Southern nostalgia and disability include Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), Shirley Ann Grau's *Keepers of the House* (1964), Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993), and Janisse Ray's *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999). However, while novels and memoirs may provide an array of disabled characters, short stories provide a more explicit focus. This specific focus allows the reader to interpret a character and their flaws more deeply while also examining their own.

Because this thesis discusses Southern literature, where a prominent theme is the South's yearning for exceptionality, I will only discuss the short story form because it is predominantly an American literary invention. In *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle* (2001), James Nagel explains the history of the short story arguing, "the short-story cycle is a rich genre with origins decidedly antecedent to the novel, with roots in the most ancient of narrative traditions" (1-2). In the 18th century though, English writers expanded the short story form because of the changing socioeconomic landscape; the English middle class gained increased literacy, free time, and spending money; therefore, the novel became the flagship of the literary era. Because of the relationship between England and the novel, the American literary greats rebelled against their English oppressors by spearheading a relationship of their own, the United States and the short

story cycle or collection. While Nagel mentions other episodic stories, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1392), that existed decades before Washington Irving's *The Sketch Book* (1820), he argues that *The Canterbury Tales* and others like it acted as only influences for "the modern American fiction [that] is patently multicultural, deriving, from ethnic cross-fertilization within the literary community and from a shared legacy reaching back to ancient oral traditions in virtually every society throughout the world, uniting disparate peoples in a heritage of narrative tradition" (5). In other words, unlike the strict structure and plot of the traditional novel, the flexibility of the short story genre allows the author to explore different time periods, social classes, and plot points (1). The short-story collection provides multiple points of view that when combined illuminate the truth, which is significant when traversing the nostalgic haze that lingers over the South.

Lisa Hinrichsen's analysis provides the theoretical context for such a phenomenon. She explains that the South struggles with the "ambivalence about lingering modes of mimicry and mastery" (2). Due to the South's fraught history and the unreliability of memory, the South becomes inundated with fantasy. Many Southern authors seek to expose this toxicity that lies underneath the magnolia trees. In Flannery O'Connor's short stories, she illustrates the fleeting power of Southern whites through the vapid yet dangerous system of codes known as Southern manners and hospitality that reigned supreme in the South during the 1950s. She specifically demonstrates how misguided Southern codes impact relationships between mothers and daughters. These tumultuous relationships feature the misguided expectations of mothers, which cause disastrous effects onto the daughters whom they ironically sought to protect.

Conversely, Breece D'J Pancake navigates how familial and societal expectations impact the livelihood of men. The now failing farms of O'Connor's era are passed on the men who

cannot save them. Despite not wanting the dying lands of their fathers, they do not receive fulfilment from the newfound jobs that are available either. Southern society proposes that men pick a lane and suppress their feelings of discontentment, which only increases the burgeoning mental health crisis of the 1960s and 1970s. Bobbie Ann Mason's short stories pick up where Pancake's leave off in her exploration of the failing marriages of the unfulfilled men of Pancake's literature and the unfulfilled women they marry. There are no dying farms in Mason's works, as she writes of "K-mart realism," where men are truck drivers and women are cashiers at corporate stores, like K-mart, Winn-Dixie, and Walmart (Kirn). The men of the 1980s idealize their respective grandfather's way of life, which is currently unattainable, especially with unwilling wives who are forging their own paths that their own grandmothers could never dream of.

In order to explore these details further, the second chapter in this thesis will examine O'Connors's short story "Good Country People," which is published in her collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955). As a Southern Catholic writer, O'Connor illustrates the grotesque reality of the South by depicting hypocrisy, manipulation, violence, and death. However, O'Connor always presents hope in her stories by providing an epiphanic episode where the protagonist can still obtain grace, or God's forgiveness even while they are undeserving of it. Nevertheless, achieving grace is painful and often occurs near death. By inserting her religious views of the world, O'Connor argues that while the South is insufferable, change is still possible, and the individual can transcend the South's sinful hold by achieving their true purpose, which is a meaningful relationship with a greater power. While O'Connor portrays physical handicaps, like Hulga Hopewell's wooden leg and bad heart, Hulga and her mother's true disability is their inability to understand their reality of helplessness.

The third chapter will analyze Breece D’J Pancake’s short story “Time and Again” from the collection *The Stories of Breece D’J Pancake* (1983), which includes many of his stories that were published posthumously. Pancake illustrates the towns of West Virginia, which he came to know and love despite their bleakness and hopelessness. In his works, Pancake describes white characters who mirror such bleakness and hopelessness not because of their poverty and immorality, but rather because of their paradoxical relationship with the land they hail from. In “Time and Again,” the unnamed narrator is a veteran turned serial killer, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. The narrator mainly preys on hitchhikers, which symbolizes the narrator’s disdain for mobility. Despite his unconventional pasttime of murdering people, the narrator’s life is rather mundane. Pancake’s writing techniques, including the first-person point of view and the narrator’s lack of identifying characteristics, allow his readers to superimpose themselves onto the narrator. Although many questions are left unanswered at the end of the story, the lack of resolution provides realism to such a sensational story. Pancake reveals that the South’s suppression of vulnerability coupled with a focus on work leads to further disablement rather than empowerment.

The fourth chapter will explore “Shiloh,” from Bobbie Ann Mason’s 1982 collection of short stories *Shiloh and Other Stories*. “Shiloh” showcases many different facets of Southern identity, specifically the paradoxical yearning to both leave and stay in the South. The prominent theme of precarious identity is first seen in Mason’s most anthologized work, “Shiloh.” Leroy, a recently disabled former truck driver, seeks to rekindle his marriage by building a log cabin for his wife, Norma Jean. However, Leroy’s domestic fantasy conflicts with Norma Jean’s independent interests. Norma Jean represents the new woman of the South who is not fulfilled with only domestic life. Although Leroy wishes to remain Norma Jean’s life partner, he is

physically restrained by his idealization of a Southern patriarchal figure; therefore, Leroy's role as a husband is deemed deficient.

In this thesis, I aim to discuss the disabling effects of Southern exceptionalism. While the previous chapters discuss the various Southern myths that many characters cling to, and in turn suffer from, the conclusion will show that Southern literature is still worthy of study. By examining the early categorization of Southern literature, I will show that Southern literature differs from its regional counterparts. While Northern writers focus on the American Adam and his Edenic environment, Southern writers focus on Adam's flaws and the barren lands underneath him. By focusing on the freakish, Southern literature encompasses another genre, the Southern gothic. However, while Adam's hypocrisy is scrutinized, Adam's race and sexual orientation are rarely explicitly mentioned in early Southern literature because of the invisibility of whiteness and heterosexuality. My thesis focuses on white, cisgendered authors and their characters because of the ignorance of their race and sexual orientation, which is disabling. Nevertheless, there are several queer authors, as well as authors of color who are expanding the Southern canon to fulfill the points of view that were missing in the previous literature.

CHAPTER TWO

The Disabled Person: Disability and “Good Country People”

I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn't convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature. In any case, it is when the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement that he attains some depth in literature.

—Flannery O'Connor, “Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction”

Flannery O'Connor published her widely anthologized short story “Good Country People” in her 1955 collection *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. The time frame surrounding the publication is significant because of the momentous 1954 United States Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which began brewing in 1952. The decision desegregated schools across the country, but especially in the South. While there were some white Southerners who supported the decision, like newspaper editor Ralph McGill of the *The Atlanta Constitution*, Mississippi governor Hugh White, and even O'Connor herself, the fear of losing the Southern code of manners, including the racial hierarchy, and the threat of violence that upheld such racial hierarchy, remained a pressing issue even amongst the most liberal Southerners. Although “Good Country People” highlights white characters and their struggle for power over other white

characters, the race question lies underneath their motivation. “Good Country People” demonstrates that power and identity are inextricably related, and when power is revoked, a loss of identity occurs. For many Southerners, their unstated but understood code of manners differentiated themselves from their Yankee counterparts. However, social reform began to chip away at the once revered Southern social code. Although O’Connor inserts overt Christian imagery to demonstrate the sinfulness of those who still abide by the racist conventions of the South, Jesus Christ is not the solution to the South’s identitarian anxiety. Using O’Connor’s quote: “it is the freak who can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement,” I argue that because all white Southerners contain a freakish identity due to their sinful beginnings, that is what differentiates them from their Northern neighbors.

In “Good Country People,” the protagonist, Hulga Hopewell, contains the most recognizable “freakish” characteristic due to her wooden leg and heart condition. However, her physical disability does not cause her unfortunate end, but rather her misinformed conceptions about her own identity. While Hulga yearns to differentiate herself from her mother at every turn, the characteristics of Hulga and her mother become indistinguishable by the end of the story. Like many of O’Connor’s pseudo-intellectual characters, Hulga wields her higher education as a weapon. Nevertheless, without worldly experience, Hulga’s education is rendered useless. For example, when Hulga verbally attacks her mother after Mrs. Hopewell spits another platitude about a smile never hurting anyone, Hulga employs a 17th century French philosopher, Nicolas Malebranche. The philosopher’s surname, Malebranche, foreshadows the name of the traveling Bible salesman and con-artist, Manley Pointer. Both names act as obscene puns on human nature’s fleshly desires. Although Malebranche’s philosophical worldview is theistic, Hulga attempts to manipulate his arguments to portray her supposed nihilistic tendencies, and yet

like the other public personas of Mrs. Hopewell and Manley Pointer, Hulga's philosophical leanings also become subverted by the end.

Hulga spouts a nihilistic philosophy to differentiate herself from the religiosity of the South, as well as suppress her own theistic worldview. After her mother annoyingly implores her to smile, Hulga frustratingly exclaims, "Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God!" (276). While her final exclamation initially reads like a sign of exasperation, if the whole quotation is read like a question followed by an answer, then Hulga is trying to convince her mother that she is not God. Hulga's second quote to her mother during the same heated conversation, in which she explains, "Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!" further illuminates her actual philosophy, which is entirely different from the philosophy she portrays (276). Malebranche uses Augustine's quote, "we are not our own light," to defend his theistic philosophy during a philosophical debate with Antoine Arnauld, who argued that logic stems from the mind and can exist independently from God (Wahl 561). Malebranche deeply disagreed with Arnauld's philosophy and used Augustine's quotation to show that God exists in everything that we do and perceive. By pointing out her mother's blindness, Hulga accidentally reveals her own.

Hulga's reiteration of a quote cheapens and deconstructs her nihilistic façade. This deconstruction reveals her inner desire to believe in something, which to her dismay, integrates her with the community she attempts to distance herself from. For example, after her mother calls for her, she responds "here I am—" (*KJV*, Isa. 6.8), which is the response that God's greatest followers utter when they willingly offer themselves unto God's will (274). While Hulga uses the phrase rebelliously, the phrase connotes the desire to be accepted. Even though Hulga displays her true self sporadically throughout the story, she clings to another disability, her

“achieved blindness,” to avoid accepting her own reality, which is that she is not in control (273).

While Hulga attempts to achieve independence from her mother, she actually does the opposite. Hulga does not act for herself, but rather against her mother; therefore, Hulga’s rebellious identity is heavily dependent on her mother’s. For example, Mrs. Hopewell struggles with her daughter’s name change, lamenting, “Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed” to Hulga, which reminded her of a “broad blank hull of a battleship” (274). Mrs. Hopewell contrasts her daughter’s “beautiful” given name with her legal name, Hulga. According to Mrs. Hopewell, her daughter should lean into her femininity, like Mrs. Freeman’s daughters, Glynese and Carramae, whom Hulga refers to as Glycerin and Caramel, mocking their overtly feminine sweetness. After Mrs. Hopewell mourns the loss of the name, Joy, a short and pithy statement follows: “Her legal name was Hulga” (274). In this statement, the narrator makes the distinction between a given name and a legal name. For Mrs. Hopewell and Southerners alike, the law does not represent the South. Using various social issues related to women’s rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights; and voting rights, James D. Willets argues:

The deference of a significant block of Justices to the legal policies created by hundreds of years of racial oppression is reflected not only in these Justices’ defense of historical Southern exceptionalism from the legal norms of most of the United States, but also in the hostility to international and comparative law in general, and specifically those norms that contravene Southern Exceptionalism. (141)

In other words, once the South began to inhabit the wrong side of the law regarding social issues, the South began to become hostile towards the law. From the rumblings of the Civil War, Southerners felt like the law was working against them, therefore they no longer cared about it.

For Mrs. Hopewell, her daughter's name change is only relevant in the eyes of the law, and like Mrs. Hopewell, Southerners who have "achieved blindness" refuse to see the law.

Hulga relishes her new identity because she identifies with its ugliness, claiming that the name represented "the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called" (275). For Hulga, the Roman allusion of the disabled Vulcan provides her with the hope of retaining power despite her lack of "normal" physical characteristics (274). Monica Carol Miller explains, "Although we typically associate beauty with privilege... O'Connor's Joy-Hulga... demonstrate[s] that ugliness also functions as a marker of privileged wealth and other resources" (438). Because of Hulga's disability, her mother and other "good country people" infantilize her and disconnect Hulga from beauty (274). Therefore, for Hulga, ugliness becomes more attainable than beauty, and ugliness equates to power, whereas beauty only leads to a shallow existence followed by pain. Beauty has a shelf life, as Carramae demonstrates as a pregnant fifteen-year-old, but intelligence is extratemporal. By transforming into ugly by appearance and attitude, Hulga gains power. In the following sentence, Hulga becomes so empowered that she goes from identifying with a Roman god to the biblical one: "One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga" (275). Hulga's quote mirrors the book of Genesis, in which God creates man from the dust of the ground (*KJV*, 2.7). Hulga merges the Roman allusion to the blacksmith god, Vulcan, and the biblical God, God the creator, to show that she is also a creator of her own identity, making her a god herself. However, Hulga's pride coupled with her blindness ultimately leads her to her own downfall.

Like her daughter, Mrs. Hopewell suffers from her own achieved blindness. However, unlike her daughter, Mrs. Hopewell perceives the world as inherently positive. Her name parallels the empty platitudes that she parades as philosophical truths. She “hopes well” that mimicking baseless phrases, such as “Everybody is different” and “It takes all kinds to make the world” will induct her into the category of “good country people” too. However, Mrs. Hopewell’s later actions show that Mrs. Hopewell actually feels superior to “good country people” (273). Mrs. Hopewell fears that Hulga’s higher education will cause her to become indistinguishable in the homogenized north, where she will become a “scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same” (276). However, Mrs. Hopewell wishes to indoctrinate Hulga into a Southern woman because Mrs. Hopewell does not fear assimilation but rather assimilation into the wrong hivemind (276). Mrs. Hopewell “thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had ‘gone through,’” meaning Mrs. Hopewell yearned for her daughter to find a partner while in school perhaps, but she had “gone through” too far, which according to Mrs. Hopewell, suppressed her femininity (276). Instead of praising her own daughter for achieving such a feat, she berates her by stating “You could not say, ‘My daughter is a philosopher.’ That was something that ended with the Greeks and Romans,” even though both mother and daughter use their respective philosophies to alienate each other and falsely understand the world around them (276). Mrs. Hopewell further alienates her daughter by idolizing Mrs. Freeman’s indistinguishable daughters, Glynese and Carramae as “the finest girls she knows” because of their Southern femininity, which Hulga cannot and does not want to emulate (272).

The misguided philosophies of Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga converge when they each interact with Mrs. Freeman. The story opens with Mrs. Hopewell’s tenant farmer, Mrs. Freeman, and like Mrs. Hopewell, her name has symbolic significance. She wears three expressions,

“neutral,” “forward,” and “reverse;” remains “steady and driving;” “never swerves left or right;” and “[comes] to a complete stop” when retracting a statement” (271). Like a car, Mrs. Freeman must work with machine-like precision in her occupation, which includes farming, as well as navigating Mrs. Hopewell’s harsh judgements. Mrs. Hopewell explains, “Mrs. Freeman was a *lady* and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet... they were not trash. They were good country people” (272). Mrs. Freeman and her family are the first to receive the moniker “good country people” because Mrs. Hopewell desperately “hopes” that the only applicant she has is “the salt of the earth,” which means simplistic, honest, and hardworking (279). It is in this dichotomy where Mrs. Freeman parallels her opening description. Mrs. Freeman’s ability to see things for what they are allows her to manipulate the ones who cannot; therefore, she becomes both the symbolic representation of a car, but also the driver, or the “the wheel behind the wheel,” which is especially apparent in the framing of the story as she begins and ends the story (273).

Although Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga dismiss the Freemans due to their supposed simple-mindedness, Mrs. Freeman becomes free despite her occupation and lack of representation throughout the story due to her enhanced perception. Mrs. Freeman is frequently described as “looking down” onto the Hopewell family, which shows that Mrs. Freeman is literally and metaphorically above the Hopewell family due to her increased sense (275). Through contrasting senses, O’Connor presents two parallels throughout her story, Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga, and Mrs. Freeman and Manley Pointer. Like Manley Pointer, Mrs. Freeman also has a fascination for the freak. Hulga complains, “It was as if Mrs. Freeman’s beady steel-pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some fact” (275). Again, Mrs. Freeman is compared to a car as they both contain steel. Like a car, Mrs. Freeman can reach places that the average person

cannot. Mrs. Freeman finds and appreciates the secret and the hidden, including “infections,” “deformities,” and “assaults upon children” (275). She revels in discussing Glynese’s sty and neck popping, as well as Carramae’s pregnancy-induced nausea. However, luckily for Mrs. Freeman, Hulga contains all three of her interests. She is infected with a superiority complex and has a deformed leg due to a presumable adult “blast[ing]” it off during a hunting accident (275). In a sexual hunt gone wrong, Hulga’s leg will be removed again, but this time due to Hulga’s blindness, and in turn her inability to perceive the “infection” that lies within “good country people.”

Mrs. Freeman and Manley both put on an act of simple-mindedness to hide their “steely” eyes that can root out the ugly truth (289). While Mrs. Freeman reiterates Mrs. Hopewell’s trite sayings, Manley creates a façade of “dull[ness]” (282). Manley’s façade is so believable that Mrs. Hopewell refers to Manley as “good country people,” and Hulga becomes convinced that she can seduce the supposedly simplistic Bible salesman despite her recognition of the leery stare that Manley gives her, like that of Mrs. Freeman’s leery stare (279). Nevertheless, Hulga dreams about seducing him, and in turn teaching him philosophy, and yet, her senses are dulled compared to Manley’s heightened senses. She cannot smell his stupidity, like she can of other men (276). Hulga’s dulled senses allow Manley to manipulate her into giving up her glasses as well as her artificial leg. It is in this spiritual conversion, where “she surrender[s] to him completely” and “los[es] her own life and find[s] it again, miraculously, in his” (289). During her conversion, dust floats over and onto Hulga, which represents Hulga returning to dust. The identity that Hulga created for herself is eradicated and she returns to her previous self, awaiting a new identity to be formed from dust.

Because of her blasphemous conversion, Hulga learns that she is morally and spiritually blind. She receives grace through an atypical medium, a freak, like herself, and yet, Manley is also the quintessential biblical figure, as he is shown walking on water like Jesus himself. Despite embodying Jesus, Manley points out their similarities when she incredulously asks if he is good country people by replying, "I'm as good as you any day in the week" (290). While there were initially two parallels between Hulga and her mother, and Mrs. Freeman and Manley, Manley's contemptuous statement towards Hulga parallels them both, which amalgamates the four main characters of the story. By having all the characters mirror each other, O'Connor demonstrates that all Southerners contain freakish characteristics due to their belief systems pertaining to religion and power.

By unearthing the freakish characteristics of each character, and revealing Manley's collectables, O'Connor shows how disability becomes the representative of the South. When Manley and Hulga begin their date, they move upward from the open space of the hillside into the central core of the barn's second story. Their geospatial journey is the mechanism to move into the interior space of the psyche, as well as the South. Once they are upstairs, Manley opens his valise, where he then offers Hulga a hollowed-out Bible that contains liquor, pornographic cards, and condoms. He specifically puts the condoms that read, "THIS PRODUCT TO BE USED ONLY FOR THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE" into her hands (289). However, while they never engage in sexual intercourse, she gives up her body for his taking, which acts as a symbol for both religious conversion and sexual intercourse. The unused box of condoms and Manley's other bodily trinket, the glass eye, show that disease is prevalent throughout the South. O'Connor argues, "To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological"

(871). The religious conversion at the end of “Good Country People” shows how spiritually diseased, and in turn disabled, Southerners are.

O'Connor uses the disabled protagonist, Hulga, from “Good Country People” to show that an education does not equate to the knowledge of the world. The story ends in typical O'Connor fashion by alluding that Hulga will suffer due to her inability to physically and metaphorically move within the social hierarchy. The only way that Hulga knows how to get ahead in society is by exploiting others, and when she fails to do so, she is left with the void of what her leg used to fulfill. The parallels between Hulga and O'Connor are telling. As a disabled white woman whose intellectualism is seen in her creative writing, O'Connor fulfills the two roles of the oppressor and the oppressed. Hulga and O'Connor “demonstrate that it is possible to be of two minds—indeed, of several minds—at the same time, particularly when it comes to an issue that cuts close to the bone, as the civil rights movement did for southerners” (O'Donnell 6). By demonstrating the inadequacy of portraying one single mind, O'Connor successfully obtains “the real” that readers and herself yearn for.

CHAPTER THREE

Piggish Behaviors: Violence and Vindication in “Time and Again”

I'm going to come back to West Virginia when this is over. There's something ancient and deeply-rooted in my soul. I like to think that I have left my ghost up one of those hollows, and I'll never really be able to leave for good until I find it. And I don't want to look for it, because I might find it and have to leave.

—Breece D’J Pancake, a letter to Helen Pancake

In 1977, Breece D’J Pancake began to make a name for himself as a writer when *The Atlantic* published a few of his short stories. In 1983, his whole collection of twelve short stories was published posthumously. It was an immediate success, garnering critical acclaim and a nomination for the Pulitzer Prize in fiction. By pairing gritty realism and the Southern gothic with hauntingly beautiful places and characters, Pancake illustrates Southerners’ paradoxical yearning to both stay in and leave their native homeland. His stories are littered with hardened laborers whose lives are blighted by failing farms, decreasing economic opportunities, and a bleak landscape, and yet they still cannot separate from their dying roots. Pancake specifically focuses on the impoverished whites of Appalachia, whose handicaps are worsened by their stagnation. Southerners who cannot separate themselves from their nostalgia become disabled in their atemporality. In “Time and Again” the narrator’s inability to part with the past disables him from improving his current situation, which is symbolized by his mental handicap.

The unnamed narrator of “Time and Again” is a World War II veteran who suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder; and, like many of the men who returned from war during the

20th century, he remains undiagnosed and untreated. Although the Greek root in “trauma” translates to “physical wound” (“trau-”), the word has evolved to encompass the mental and emotional pain that lingers on despite the origin of the wound no longer existing (“trauma”). One of the most common side effects of PTSD includes flash backs that cause the sufferer to relive the traumatic events as if they were happening for the first time. For the narrator, the similarity of the snow in West Virginia and France causes him to relive the violence of his days as a paratrooper by murdering hitchhikers and feeding them to his pigs. In a tense conversation between the war veteran and his next possible victim, “a polite boy,” he relays his experience in France in 1944 (85). He reveals that his “platoon took a farmhouse without a shot” by snapping their necks and subsequently watching their bodies fall into the sty (87). The World War II veteran uses a pig sty grave for both Germans and hitchhikers alike.

Using the similarities between pigs and humans, Pancake conveys psychological and environmental confinement. Often paired together as slang, the phrases, “never trust a pig farmer” and “long pig” are used to insinuate that humans look like long pigs, and because pigs are omnivores, and even cannibalistic, a pig farmer can get rid of the evidence of a human body by having his pigs eat its remains. While it is not unheard of for pigs to eat each other in the wild, it is far more likely for pigs to eat each other in confinement (McGlone, Sells, et al. 69). Like the pigs in the sty, the nameless narrator is confined to the psychological torment he endured during his time in World War II.

After World War II, psychiatrists were inundated with an influx of American soldiers who suffered from mental illness related to combat. During an annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in 1946, psychiatrist William Menninger, disclosed that more than three and a half million soldiers were either admitted into an army hospital, rejected from military

service, or discharged from the military due to a neurological disorder (Staub 20). Furthermore, military psychiatrists Roy R. Grinker and John P. Spiegel, noted that soldiers' stress does not originate from killing others, but rather from the helplessness and guilt that stemmed from the environment around them. Michael E. Staub explains, "Once a man passed his limit, he experienced what the psychiatrists labeled 'operational fatigue,' which meant that all his accumulated fear simply overwhelmed him and he became unfit to fly" (21). Grinker and Spiegel also theorized that such psychological confinement would extend into civilian life, but their theories as to how war veterans would cope outside of the battlefield remained undetermined. For men like the unnamed narrator of "Time and Again," work became a misplaced refuge to regain control because the capitalistic work system disables workers rather than heals them.

For workers like the narrator, workplace isolation leads to further disablement rather than empowerment. As a snowplow operator, the narrator lives an isolated life that triggers his PTSD, which leads him to commit violent crimes to regain control again. The narrator implies that he has killed his own wife and fed her to his pigs, which has caused his son to run away. After he reveals that his wife has died and his house is "empty," he agonizes, "I told him not to go and look, that the hogs just squeal because I never kill them. They always squeal when they are happy, but he went and looked. Then he ran off someplace" (83). The loss of his family paired with his lonely job severely isolate the narrator, which leads him further into madness. Besides his hitchhiker victims, the narrator's only human interaction is with his boss, Mr. Weeks. However, their interaction only consists of work-related run-ins in their respective snowplows and terse phone call conversations about work. The narrator states, "we are not friends. We don't come around each other at all. I don't even know if he's got family" (84). However, one of the first things he asks the hitchhiker after learning where he is headed is whether he has family,

which immediately forges a closer relationship with the hitchhiker he just met than with his boss that he works with on a regular basis (84).

While the narrator murders hitchhikers due to untreated PTSD, he also murders them because he is jealous of their mobility. When Mr. Weeks does not call him into work, the narrator spends his free time writing letters about the whereabouts of his missing son (83). However, while a few write him back without a definitive answer, most letters return to him. These letters symbolize one-way conversations that fail to deliver the sociability that he desperately yearns for. Before he leaves for work, he leaves the light on in the house, hoping that his son will return to him. This fixation on his past life with his son prevents the narrator from living in the present. He cannot accept that his son has moved on from him to achieve a better life. The narrator's untreated war trauma has caused him to further traumatize his own son, therefore his trauma begins to accumulate when he loses his family as well. Without community, "he is unable to fly" (Staub 20). He can only self-medicate, which entails mundanity related to habitual chores and assigned snowplow routes, as well as controlled homicidal mania. The narrator's dangerous snowplowing job gives the narrator plenty of opportunities to kill "fools" (87) on the road who drive too recklessly by the narrator's snowplow, and yet the narrator "don't want to cause any accidents" (86). The narrator chooses to only murder hitchhikers.

The two murdered hitchhikers that are revealed include a soldier and a developmentally disabled man. Both victims represent parts of the narrator, and yet both are attempting to leave the place that the narrator cannot. Susan Wendell explains that "social factors can damage people's bodies in ways that are disabling in their environments, including (to mention just a few) tolerance of high-risk working conditions... low public safety standards, the degradation of the environment by contamination of air, water, and food, and the overwork, stress, and daily

grinding deprivations of poverty” (58). In other words, the narrator’s impoverished lifestyle forces him to focus on his dangerous career as a snowplow operator, rather than on rehabilitation. However, this misplaced priority disables him further as his career as a snowplow operator includes carefully navigating icy roads that if not dealt with properly could seriously injure or even kill himself and other drivers.

The narrator painstakingly and obsessively plows through every section of snow while nervously admitting, “I want to do a good job and get all the snow” (86). While it seems ironic that he is preoccupied with maintaining snowplow safety as a serial killer, the inaccessibility of physiological and communal needs paired with high stress culminates into a coping mechanism that yields control, which for the narrator has only been achieved through violence. Like the narrator’s pigs who could become cannibalistic during periods of poor diet and high stress in a confined space, the narrator kills his own, and more specifically the people who embody the same characteristics as he does. For the narrator, these victims represent parts of himself as he is a veteran who suffers from a mental disorder, PTSD. The narrator’s mindset will remain stagnant without rehabilitation; therefore, the only way to escape psychological torture is to eradicate parts of himself that cause it.

Nevertheless, the narrator does come close to a rehabilitative experience when he picks up his latest hitchhiker, who reminds him of his son. The action of picking up hitchhikers allows both the driver and the passenger to share their individuality and vulnerability with each other. The narrator and “the polite boy” participate in a topical conversation about their families, World War II, blue collar trades, pig killing, and town gossip related to the narrator’s homicidal antics unbeknownst to the hitchhiker. While the conversation is only as long as the twelve-minute trek from Chimney Corners to Gauley Bridge, the shared humanity gives the narrator an identity that

he did not have previously. As a nameless narrator, it is evident that the greater community only recognizes him as a cog in a machine, rather than as an individual.

Florina Dumitrascu argues, “in the interaction between the individual and the social environment, the name is not an option but a necessity, constituting an essential element of identification, registration and interconnection” (205). Hence, without a name, the narrator paradoxically blends into and excommunicates himself from his community due to his lack of individuality and belonging. Even without a name though, the hitchhiker reinvigorates the narrator’s lost humanity by using slang, like “stinks,” that reminds him of his son, and inviting him to discuss his specific experiences in the war (85). However, the narrator’s newfound belonging, individuality, and vulnerability are fleeting as they last only as long as the drive, and then once the narrator drops the hitchhiker off at his stop, the narrator must return back to the mundanity of homogeneity and anonymity.

Instead of prolonging the pain of untreated PTSD and isolation with another homicide, the narrator resorts to an act of selfless suicide. Before the narrator picks up the hitchhiker, he expresses concern for the pigs’ diet. He states, “I ought to feed them better than that awful slop, but I can’t until I know my boy is safe” (83). The narrative insinuates that the pigs are barely fed until the narrator murders someone on the job. He then feeds his pigs their body when the hitchhiker fearfully relays, “rest of them, they just find their bones” (87). When the narrator does not return with a murder victim, the pigs end up eating each other due to starvation (84). By murdering versions of himself, including the soldier and the developmentally disabled man, the narrator subconsciously believes that he is keeping his boy safe. Once the narrator picks up a boy that reminds him of his own, and almost murders him as well, the narrator becomes “way too tired” to beat him to death (87). After the failed murder, the narrator is “almost too tired” to drive

home (88). For the narrator, his disability, work life, and home life are exhausting to traverse. While the narrator could never embody a Christ figure due to his role as a serial killer, this sacrifice allows the narrator to obtain grace by attempting to embody a Christ figure.

The narrator is “Christ-haunted;” therefore, the narrator knows that he must act like Jesus but does not know how (O’Connor 68). While Pancake does not explicitly explain whether the narrator feeds himself to his pigs or not, the narrator’s earlier statements insinuate that his last action is sacrificial (88). In the beginning of the story, the narrator wishes he “could rest...,” so that he “could feed him his best meal and leave the gate open” (84). In this statement, the narrator fantasizes about what would happen if only one of his pigs remained in the pen. However, he interrupts his own fantasy by declaring, “but that will most likely not happen, because I know this stretch of Route 60 from Ansted to Gauley, and I do a good job” (84). The narrator cannot rest because he performs his role as a snowplow driver too well. This leaves the narrator with only one option: he must sacrifice himself to his pigs to stop his psychological torment, his snowplow operator job, and his serial killer ways. This action selflessly ensures that his son maintains the anonymity that the narrator could not reconcile with in his own life.

Pancake uses the Southern Gothic genre to illustrate the reality of the Christ-haunted South. Peggy Dunn Bailey explains that Gothic elements include “thematic and stylistic characteristics that suggest the inescapability of the past and of inheritance (via both blood and culture), the workings of obsession and monomania, and the naivete or outright falsehood of foundational tenets of American society” (271). Using Bailey’s definition, Pancake’s fiction encapsulates the hypocrisy of Southern religiosity that is passed down from generation to generation. The South’s obsession with religion is not due to its inherent morality, but rather because of its desperate need for grace. Pancake demonstrates that while obtaining grace is

necessary, it painfully illuminates the “achieved blindness” of untreated trauma and its effect of stagnation (O’Connor 273).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Angel of the Schoolhouse: Domesticity and Disability in “Shiloh”

I’m not mad at you, Mama. But people don’t have to do what they
don’t want to as much now as they used to.

—Bobbie Ann Mason, “Old Things”

Moving away from the rural farmlands of Flannery O’Connor’s and Breece D’J Pancake’s fiction, Mason depicts the modern South of the 1970s and 1980s that still exists today. Bobbie Ann Mason began her rise in popularity when *The New Yorker* began to publish her stories in 1980. In 1982, her collection *Shiloh and Other Stories* elicited universal praise, which led to various award nominations, as well as the PEN/Hemingway award. Often categorized as “K-mart realism,” Mason’s work frankly highlights the not-so romanticized concrete jungles of apartment complexes and shopping malls, as well as contemporary music and television shows, blue- and pink-collar work, the changing expectations for men and women, and the rising divorce rate (Kirn). To symbolize those who cannot contend with the present, Mason pairs disability imagery with ambiguous endings to demonstrate that the changes that the South is experiencing do not necessarily reap a positive resolution. For the men and women navigating broken marriages in Mason’s short stories, Mason details a future that yields poignant loss and painful introspection.

In “Shiloh,” the disabled Leroy Moffitt attempts to salvage his dissipating marriage with Norma Jean, but his attachment to a falsified past rather than his bad leg disables his marriage and future. Leroy becomes physically disabled due to a truck driving accident, which ironically further emotionally distances him from his wife although he is physically closer to her now that

he is on disability leave. Although his name means “the king” in the French translation, Leroy never embodies “the king” of his household because he was previously rarely home due to his job as a truck driver, and now that he is, he does not and cannot successfully connect with his wife (14). Leroy reveals that “after fifteen years on the road, he is finally settling down with the woman he loves” (5). However, Leroy’s stagnation causes his wife, Norma Jean, to become unsettled. Throughout those fifteen years, Leroy regularly took long trips away from Norma Jean to earn a living, therefore both Leroy and Norma Jean grew accustomed to living alone.

In the 1970s, truck driving became a good job for men, as it paid favorably compared to other jobs in the unskilled sector. Not only were the monetary benefits attractive, but so was the job itself. With little regulations for truck drivers, truckers were able to act as their own employer. Earning money by the mile, truckers were paid for every minute they stayed awake. While truckers, like Leroy, often used speed to avoid sleeping, the benefit of a paycheck was hard to pass up. However, disabling big rig accidents, like the one Leroy suffers from, curtailed many truckers’ dreams. Nevertheless, truckers created their own brotherhood, which included freely driving on open roads, communicating with each other on Citizens Band (CB) radios, and ducking “smokeys,” or police officers, off highway exits. The July 1974 cover of *Overdrive* (Mike Parkhurst), a magazine for truckers, features a young woman wading in a creek alone with a big rig behind her. Above the image, trucking is compared to the declaration of independence. Furthermore, outside of trucking circles, billboard hits such as “Convoy” (McCall) and blockbuster movies like *Smokey and the Bandit* (Hal Needham 1977) had Americans rooting for truckers and opposing police officers. Southerners romanticized the independent and rebellious trucker lifestyle, thus “trucker culture” became an integral part of Southern culture. Plaid shirts and trucker hats, as well as CB slang, became the uniform and language of not only truckers, but

also of the general public. Truckers came to represent modern American pioneers, who were exploring cross-country roads that many Americans would never come to roam themselves.

However, around the time of *Shiloh and Other Stories*' publication, trucker culture waned. In 1980, the *Motor Carrier Act* deregulated the trucking industry as a whole, which allowed more trucking companies to operate. The influx of trucking companies made it more difficult to unionize, so the trucking industry quickly became de-unionized and demoralized as a result. With more truckers and a lack of unions, trucker pay dramatically decreased as well. Furthermore, CB radios were replaced with cell phone technology in the 1980s, so truckers no longer kept up with each other like they used to decades earlier. Coming out of the trucker glorification era, Leroy becomes isolated and lonely. He attempts to connect with hitchhikers, but he fails to ever forge a meaningful connection on the road.

While loneliness is disabling, as the unnamed narrator in Pancake's "Time and Again" demonstrates, so is the actual job of truck driving. Like the narrator's snowplow in "Time and Again," a semi-truck is similarly dangerous, as it is often referred to as a "widow-maker" (4). The semi-truck is called a widow-maker because it separates couples for long periods of time and can also be a death trap for the driver. While Leroy's big rig does not completely embody a widow-maker, it does cause him to suffer from a disabled leg. The aftermath of the big rig accident includes "a steel pin in his hip," as well as an ongoing "frightened" state despite his almost healed leg (4). Both the unnamed narrator of "Time and Again" and Leroy suffer from a job-related experience. However, instead of the homicidal mania that Pancake's narrator evinces, Leroy attempts to regain power by fortifying his marriage.

The intentions behind Pancake's characters are different than the intentions of Mason's due to their respective genders. While male authors tend to focus on violent escapism, female

authors often portray the reality of domestic space. Since their wedding day, Leroy has promised Norma Jean that he would build her a new house, but she repeatedly rejects the idea. Leroy's misplaced focus on building a log cabin for Norma Jean does not bring them closer, but rather farther away. Currently, Leroy and Norma Jean are renting, but Leroy is desperate to build a home that he can call his own. Historically, a log cabin represents patriarchal power. As the provider, a husband would build the house for his family, and his wife would serve as what the 19th century poet Coventry Patmore described as the angel of the house. Patmore explains that the angel of the house would serve her husband and raise their children. Traditionally, the house would be passed down to the son of each passing generation. Leroy is referring to an earlier, 19th century version of masculinity and femininity that no longer has a place in the modern world.

Initially, Norma Jean is the angel of the subdivision. She delivers their son, Randy, who quickly dies of sudden infant death syndrome, and she serves Leroy his favorite foods when he is home in the beginning of their marriage. However, once Leroy returns home indefinitely, their marital roles are destabilized. Leroy stays home, where he builds things from craft kits and sews pillow covers. When Mabel Beasley, Norma Jean's mother, learns about Leroy's domestic activities, she jeers, "That's what a woman would do!" (7). Not only does Leroy perform "womanly" duties, but he regresses to child-like behavior. The loss of Leroy's patriarchal role arrests his development. He acts like a child, who is unable to differentiate fantasy from reality. He falsely compares playing with Lincoln Logs to building a large-scale log cabin. Conversely, Norma Jean constantly leaves the home to perform activities that are traditionally viewed as masculine. For example, she works outside the home, participates in body-building classes, and attends college classes. For Norma Jean, leaving the home provides more fulfillment than staying

in the home. On the contrary, for Leroy, it is more fulfilling for him to stay inside the home, even though society frowns upon men without a job.

When Norma Jean is home with Leroy, she can barely stand to be there. Minrose Gwin argues, “for the Southern daughter in the patriarchal house, place and identity become compounded and conflicted because place/identity equals powerlessness” (419). In other words, Southern women, like Norma Jean, feel like their identity is threatened when domesticity replaces their individuality. Norma Jean’s distaste for domesticity is revealed when Leroy fails to meet her eyes while they are in the house together. Leroy recounts, “when she chops onions, she stares off into the corner, as if she can’t bear to look... Norma Jean closes her eyes... in bed. She wants the lights turned out. Even then... she closes her eyes” (9). By shielding her eyes from cooking and lovemaking, Norma Jean not only renounces her domestic role, but also retains her individuality. If she does not reveal her eyes, and in turn her emotions to Leroy, then she can maintain the secret identity that she has built for herself while Leroy was away. Greg Bentley explains, “by closing her eyes while she and Leroy have sex, Norma Jean physically blocks him out; more importantly, by closing her eyes during sex, Norma Jean figuratively emasculates and even annihilates Leroy” (146). After Leroy asks if he is still the king, Norma Jean answers, “I’m not fooling around with anybody, if that’s what you mean,” which is not a reassuring answer (14). Although Norma Jean is not cheating on Leroy with another man, she is still living a secret life that he will remain unaware of. Leroy’s injury prevents him from working outside the home, so he turns to domestic tasks, which emasculates him initially. Then, when his wife starts taking on more “masculine” roles, which is alien to him, he feels emasculated even further.

The origin of Leroy’s name and the reasoning behind Norma Jean’s name further parallels their broken marriage. Anthropologists trace the name “Leroy” to the Middle Ages,

while “Norma Jean” is a relatively new name, based in the last century. When Leroy asks Norma Jean about her name, she reveals that “it was Marilyn Monroe’s real name” (15). While Mabel named Norma Jean after the starlet, Marilyn Monroe, Norma Jean reclaims her name, and in turn her identity. Unlike Monroe, the icon of femininity, Norma Jean rejects traditional femininity and spearheads a new femininity that embraces traditional masculinity for the modern woman.

After Norma Jean explains who her mother named her after, she tacks on another lesser-known origin of her name: “Norma comes from the Normans. They were invaders” (15). Historically, the Normans were the last people who successfully invaded England. The Norman Conquest significantly changed England’s language and culture, as well as its relationship with France. By linking her own name with the Norman invaders, Norma Jean signifies her contentious relationship with Leroy. For Leroy, whose name is French, Norma Jean feels like a rival rather than a partner. Norma Jean’s newfound identity feels like an invasion of the home. However, for Norma Jean, Leroy’s newfound place in the home feels like an invasion of the female space.

The large timeline between the origin of their names shows the differences in their values. Leroy yearns for a traditional family that resides in a log cabin while Norma Jean pursues goals that align with liberal feminism. Instead of imitating the past, like Leroy does with his craft kits, Norma Jean aspires to create her own future. Previously, Norma Jean cooked the same foods, “fried chicken, picnic ham, [and] chocolate pie,” and played the piano tunes listed in *The Sixties Songbook*, but now Norma Jean creates new things of her own (9).

For example, she writes paper outlines that turn into personal narratives, like “Why Music Is Important to Me” (13). Although Norma Jean tries to involve him in her new endeavor, he rejects it due to his confusion. He does not understand it because he cannot understand

forming something out of an idea. His idea of a log cabin does not go past the blueprint stage. After Norma Jean explains her writing process to Leroy, he becomes defensive. He mumbles, “I never was any good in English... Driving a rig, nobody cared about my English” (12-13). The same year that “Shiloh” was published, 1981 was also “the first time that women received more bachelor’s degrees than men” (Matias). Leroy knows that Norma Jean, and women like her, are outpacing him, but to avoid introspection, Leroy fabricates another reason for disliking Norma Jean’s progress. Although Leroy complains about the topic of Norma Jean’s essay because she “doesn’t play the organ anymore,” Norma Jean responds to Leroy using music, but he is too self-absorbed to realize (13). After Mabel catches Norma Jean smoking in her own house, Norma Jean begins to fret and cry about it to Leroy. However, Leroy does not know how to properly comfort his own wife. Not knowing the right words to say, he once again inserts his log cabin fantasy into the conversation. Leroy fails to realize that the home is Norma Jean’s source of pain, as she is constantly monitored inside of it. Norma Jean quickly retorts, “Don’t start in on that again” and begins to play “Who’ll Be the Next in Line?” (11). The Kinks’ song reveals Norma Jean’s inner turmoil, as it repeats the lyric, “Who’ll make the same mistakes I made over you?” (:19). Norma Jean articulates her wants and needs in multiple formats, but Leroy is unable to communicate his in either speech or writing.

When Leroy drove a big rig, he could fantasize about his one-dimensional angel of the house, but now that he is home, he is unable to comprehend that his wife is much more complicated than he had previously ever known. Norma Jean not only yearns to differentiate herself from Leroy’s expectations, but also from her mother’s. Like Mrs. Hopewell from “Good Country People,” Mabel imposes traditional gender roles onto her daughter, despite her lack of experience with them in her own life. Like Monroe, Norma Jean did not have a father figure for

most of her life. Although Mabel raised her daughter mostly on her own, Mabel polices the gender roles in Leroy and Norma Jean's home. She criticizes Norma Jean's cleanliness and Leroy's aimlessness, but also encourages their marital intimacy by gifting them a dust ruffle for their bed.

However, Norma Jean defies the exaggerated femininity that her mother endorses. She does not wear a girdle like her mother because she does not want to accentuate her soft curves like Monroe's; she instead wants to harden and strengthen her body and mind. At home, she "lifts three-pound dumbbells to warm up, then progresses to a twenty-pound barbell" (1) and "eats a cereal called Body Buddies" (9). Even through working as a cashier in the cosmetics department at Rexall drugstore, Norma Jean is constantly gaining strength and learning. She explains to Leroy that she can stand up throughout her whole shift due to her "strong feet" despite her bad genetics (8). Furthermore, she discusses the three stages of complexion care to Leroy, which entails "creams, toners, and moisturizers" (4). The skincare routine attracts Norma Jean because it includes shedding skin through the application of toner and renewing the layer of skin underneath through the implementation of moisturizer. Norma Jean renews her own life by shedding the parts of her life that serve no purpose to her anymore, which includes her relationship with Leroy. She then renews her life by participating in the activities that give her purpose.

While Leroy thinks that the parts of his rig connect with Norma Jean's skincare routine, the state of their bodies say otherwise. Norma Jean's skincare routine acts as a symbol for her active lifestyle outside of the home, which includes work, school, and fitness. However, Leroy and his big rig remain unmoving like "a bird that has flown home to roost" (3). After the deregulation of the trucking industry, the retail industry began to boom because of decreased

prices. Leroy's role as a husband and a truck driver is no longer irreplaceable, therefore Norma Jean can survive without a husband. Unlike a roosting bird, Norma Jean represents the migratory goldfinches that "fly past their window" because she not only can leave the home but can succeed while doing it (9).

Before Norma Jean's identity could form, Norma Jean became pregnant and married at eighteen. While Mabel encouraged Norma Jean to use her feminine wiles to attract a man for safety and support, she also criticized her for getting pregnant before marriage. Mabel spitefully claims that the death of Leroy and Norma Jean's son, Randy, is fate's way of mocking Norma Jean. Due to Norma Jean's unplanned pregnancy, Norma Jean and Leroy have a shotgun wedding. However, three months after Randy's birth, Randy dies from SIDS while Norma Jean and Leroy are at the drive-in movie theater during the *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick 1964) showing.

The subject matter of the movie coupled with the death of Randy foreshadows the crippling of Leroy and Norma Jean's marriage. When recounting the death of their son, Leroy also reveals that they missed the second feature film, *Lover Come Back* (Delbert Mann 1961), which foreshadows that the former lovers, Norma Jean and Leroy, will never come back to each other. Laurie Champion portrays the somber scene as a "strange love" because although "Leroy cannot hope for Randy to return... he does hope to renew a 'strange love,' [to] bring his lover back" (97). *Dr. Strangelove* is a film that satirizes the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. For Mabel's generation, the home provides protection from nuclear war, but for Norma Jean, the nuclear war is happening inside her own home. Elaine Tyler May explains that Mabel's generation idealized domesticity because "the home seemed to offer a secure, private nest removed from the dangers of the outside world," (1) but Norma Jean's generation

“rejected the political assumptions of the cold war, along with the domestic and sexual codes of their parents. This generation brought the twentieth-century birthrate to an all-time low and the divorce rate to an unprecedented high” (7). In other words, Norma Jean’s generation realized that marriage and children did not offer the protection that their parents promised that they would.

Like the nuclear bomb, “Little Boy,” SIDS destroyed her nuclear family, and Randy was the only thing that linked Norma Jean and Leroy together. The name Randy, which is short for “Randall,” is a medieval name meaning “shield” (“Randall”). Acting as a shield for the reality of their marriage, Randy was the only thing that connected Leroy and Norma Jean. After his death, Leroy and Norma Jean rarely discussed the trauma that threatened their marriage. On the contrary, they talk around his death when Mabel makes another spiteful comment towards her daughter’s loss, or they suppress his memory completely. For example, after Mabel catches Norma Jean smoking, Mabel talks about a dachshund who “chewed [a] baby’s leg off” (11). She continues, “the mother was in the next room all the time... they thought it was neglect,” which insinuates that Mabel thinks that Randy’s death happened because Norma Jean neglected him (11). After Mabel leaves, Norma Jean explains that her mother told them that story because she is trying to “pay [her] back” for not correctly performing her domestic duties, which includes not smoking and child rearing (12). However, Leroy acts like he does not know what Norma Jean is referring to.

Mabel’s story and the aftermath of it is the closest that Norma Jean and Leroy get to discussing their dead child. While Leroy wants to discuss Randy, he never finds the courage to do so. Instead, he hides Randy’s memory and his own true feelings, like he does with “things under the bed” (7). While Leroy attempts to “start all over again” with Norma Jean, he fails to address the issues that lie underneath their marriage (14). While lovemaking is a private activity,

the desperation to have it is repeatedly discussed through the story. Leroy's failed genealogical line is hinted at, Mabel makes a dust ruffle for their nuptial bed, and even though Norma Jean reassures Leroy of her faithfulness, he wishes that "she would celebrate his permanent homecoming more happily" (4). Atle Dyregrov and Rolf Gjestad discuss their study on the differences between men and women following the loss of a child. After interviewing women who lost a child, Dyregrov and Gjestad discovered that "women linked the grief to their body... the women's negative perception of their own body decreased sexual activity and pleasure... several women stated that they did not feel 'whole,' that something had happened to their whole identity and capacity as a woman" (311). This analysis shows why Norma Jean shuns sex with Leroy and why she focuses instead on changing her body through physical fitness. Conversely, Leroy's focus on building a log cabin and having sex silences the issues that lie underneath the home and their nuptial bed; and, if those issues are never discussed, then their marriage is doomed.

In a last-ditch attempt to fix their marriage, Leroy takes Norma Jean on a trip to Shiloh, the quintessential city of the Lost Cause. Shiloh was both the first major battle in the Civil War, and the bloodiest battle in America's history until that point. Furthermore, the battle acted as a precedent for what was to come later in the Civil War. Neither Leroy nor Norma Jean are particularly interested in Shiloh, but Mabel manages to convince Leroy to take Norma Jean there. Mabel romanticizes Shiloh due to her elopement there and her connection to it as a member of the Daughters of the Confederacy. Like Mrs. Hopewell of O'Connor's "Good Country People," Mabel idealizes the false saviorism of the Old South. However, Leroy does not know the history of the battlefield as well as Mabel does. When Leroy sees a real log cabin, he dismisses it. He concedes to Norma Jean, "That's not the kind of log house I've got in mind" (15). However,

since no other log cabin is presented, log cabins are then relegated as only historical artifacts not contemporary infrastructure. Not only does Leroy not understand the present, but he does not understand the past either.

Lydia Gayle Johnson Gillespie argues that “Leroy’s ignorance of history bodes badly for his relationship, symbolizing his own misunderstanding of his wife’s desires” (103). Leroy’s ignorance is revealed when he is taken aback by Norma Jean’s blunt statement: “I want to leave you” (16). The battleground of Shiloh symbolizes the battleground that is Leroy and Norma Jean’s marriage. Although the city of Shiloh is enshrouded by its beautiful landscape, and its citizens capitalize on its false historical mythology by selling Confederate flags, the bloody reality of the city lies underneath the “subdivision” of cemetery markers (16). Similarly, for Norma Jean and Leroy, trauma, resentment, and diversion lie underneath the apparent marital bliss of sharing a picnic together. This time Leroy’s eyes are closed, as he is unable to face Norma Jean’s expectations of himself that he cannot reach.

After Norma Jean’s tells Leroy that she is leaving him, she walks toward the Tennessee River, where he attempts to follow her. Leroy “gets up to follow his wife, but his good leg is asleep and his bad leg still hurts him”; therefore, he is unable to reach her (17). His failed attempt to catch up to her foreshadows their end. David Bolt uses the starfish paradigm to explain Leroy’s plight. Bolt defines the starfish paradigm as a concept that dictates that those who have an impairment can only achieve success by curing themselves of their disability (12). Bolt analyzes Leroy and explains that his plans to build a log cabin only become moot when society disparages his idea; therefore, Leroy ultimately disposes of his idea. Bolt states, “for much of the story Leroy resists the starfish mentality... [but] disabling barriers are erected by Leroy’s counterparts, his community, the agents of an ableist society” (14-15). These barriers include his

wife's emasculation of him, his mother-in-law's ridicule of his interests, and his drug dealer's dismissive conversational responses. However, it is actually Leroy's misplaced priorities that cause his role to become obsolete, not society's ableism. Leroy's preoccupation with building log cabins, and in turn fortifying the antebellum South disables him rather than the community's rejection of him. Leroy relegates himself to a defunct role through his idealized version of Southern life.

Nevertheless, Norma Jean's body language at the end of the story symbolizes a possible reconstruction for them both. The ending of "Shiloh" parallels the beginning as both scenes highlight Norma Jean exercising. While the opening scene shows Norma Jean "working on her pectorals" (1), the ending scene portrays Norma Jean as possibly "doing an exercise for her chest muscles" through the waving of her arms (17). While Norma Jean dismisses Leroy's begging to "start all over again. Right back at the beginning," the similarities between the opening and ending scenes do just that (16). After Norma Jean tells Leroy that she is going to leave him, Leroy has an epiphany. He realizes, "that building a house out of logs is similarly empty—too simple. And the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him" (17). Although Leroy struggles to ascend to where Norma Jean is on the bluff of the Tennessee River, he still attempts to, which is more than he ever did previously. Leroy rejects the rigidity of place and traditional gender roles and embraces the liminal, which is represented by both the Tennessee River and the ambiguous future of Leroy and Norma Jean's marriage. While Leroy yearns to understand his wife, the sky is described as "unusually pale—the color of the dust ruffle Mabel made for their bed" (17). While this may be an ominous sign that Leroy and Norma Jean's marriage will fail like their marital intimacy, it could also be optimistic. Now that the dust ruffle encompasses the whole sky above them, all uncomfortable topics, including their own

identities can no longer be hidden underneath the bed. Everything is exposed, and openness is the only path to healing.

Mason's short story "Shiloh" reveals that the attachment to a falsified history is a greater disability than a bad leg. The amalgamation of the Lost Cause of Shiloh and the idealization of Leroy and Norma Jean's marriage shows that fantasy and nostalgia only breed stagnation. Mason's short story collection shows the negative effects of the falsified Southern narratives in the modern era. The relationship between the racialized Southern code of manners in O'Connor's "Good Country People" and the toxic masculinity of the Southern patriarchal figure in Pancake's "Time and Again" culminate into the failing Moffit marriage of Mason's "Shiloh." In each short story, the key to progress is introspection, and while introspection is painful, it is the only way for society to truly progress.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In the short stories of Flannery O'Connor, Breece D'J Pancake, and Bobbie Ann Mason, these authors place characters who suffer from a mental or physical disability at the forefront. However, these Southern writers demonstrate that disabled characters reap negative consequences not because of their disability, but because of their yearning to not get lost in the modernity of social change. These characters falsely determine that difference is power. While diversity is beneficial in a community, these characters use the wrong aims, which include stereotyping, violence, and patriarchal ideals to achieve control. Using falsified narratives of the South related to the Lost Cause mythology, each character fails to achieve domination; therefore, they concede to a subordinate role instead.

While O'Connor's "Good Country People," Pancake's "Time and Again," and Mason's "Shiloh" are set in various decades throughout the 20th century, their respective protagonists fight for control in a world in which they feel powerless. However, their inability to connect with their community causes their paralysis of fear. In "Good Country People," Hulga, who has a wooden leg and a heart condition, desperately wants to detach herself from her mother's hold on her. Eager to differentiate herself from the Southern belle archetype, Hulga wields her intelligence as a weapon. To maintain control in other facets of her life, Hulga hopes to overpower what her mother calls "good country people." However, Hulga's impractical intellectualism fails her when she faces the supposedly innocent and simple-minded country salesman, Manley Pointer. The unnamed narrator of "Time and Again" suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but instead of finding healing in his community, he attempts to gain control of his unbearable loneliness and anxiety by murdering innocent hitchhikers. In an

epiphanic moment, where he almost killed a boy who favored his son, the narrator sacrifices himself for the benefit of the community. Similarly, like Pancake's narrator, Leroy suffers from PTSD, and like Hulga, Leroy also has a bad leg. Having to return from Western Kentucky due to his big rig accident, Leroy must face his marriage with Norma Jean, which is falling apart. He also fears that he does not belong in the homogeneity of subdivisions and societal expectations of how a man should live. By hearkening back to a supposedly simpler time, Leroy hopes to find belonging and fulfilment in a patriarchal role. Furthermore, "patriarchy" is defined as "rule of the father," and since Leroy does not have a child, he is unable to rule as a patriarch ("patriarch"). When Leroy's weaknesses are finally exposed, he painfully realizes that he can only achieve progress by foregoing the past and accepting the indeterminable future. While only Hulga suffers from a physical heart condition, all three characters, Hulga, Pancake's narrator, and Leroy suffer from a metaphorical heart condition, which symbolizes their tumultuous relationships with family and community.

While the South as a region is more comparable to the rest of the United States due to modern technology, Southern literature is still worthy of differentiation and examination. Leroy may fret about the homogeneity of roads, subdivisions, and concrete jungles, but the South still contains what O'Connor calls a "freakish" underbelly that does not exist elsewhere. The problematization of mythmaking and nostalgia through the gothic genre is particularly Southern. The hauntings of places, spaces, and people are an integral theme throughout various forms of Southern literature. O'Connor, Pancake, and Mason are all white authors who recognize the ghosts that haunted their ancestors and which continue to haunt them, too. They discover them in the places that are dying: religion, social hierarchy, rural hinterlands, community, and the domestic space.

While white Southern authors predominantly discuss communal disability through religious imagery and metaphorical terminology, Southern authors of color discuss disability through an intersectional lens. Although these writers are not discussed in my thesis, some of their preoccupations are connected to the writers I discuss. For example, in her novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Zora Neale Hurston demonstrates through her protagonist, Janie, that blackness, the female gender, and poverty are all inextricably connected to disability. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson explains that “women and the disabled are portrayed as helpless, weak, vulnerable, and incapable bodies. Women, the disabled, and people of color are always ready occasions for the aggrandizement of benevolent rescuers, whether strong males, distinguished doctors, abolitionists, or Jerry Lewis hosting his telethons” (8). Because Janie internalizes her blackness and female gender as a disability, she thrusts herself into three marriages.

Ironically, these marriages cause her more strife than her singledom. While Janie stands up for herself against her third husband, Tea Cake, she must use a gun, a phallic object, to do so. Furthermore, the paternalization of the U.S. Justice System must act as her “benevolent rescuer” now that Janie no longer has a husband. Nevertheless, Janie finds true happiness in the wildness of the Everglades. The Everglades mirror her own pear tree of fertility, femininity, and sexuality. Janie finds that “here is peace” (193). Janie is no longer the receiver of advice, but rather the giver. In a conversation with her friend, Pheoby, Janie claims that there are “Two things everybody’s got tuh do fuh themselves. They got tuh find God, and they got tuh find out about livin’ fuh themselves” (192). Hurston uses black vernacular English to give Janie and other black women a voice in the patriarchal environment that considers them mute. Because this thesis analyzes the relationship between the false grand narratives of the South and white Southerners,

works like Hurston's are not included. However, Hurston and writers like her still play a significant role in the writers and characters I discuss because authors of color provide a better understanding of disability in the South.

In contemporary literature, Natasha Trethewey discusses another form of disability that is missing throughout canonical Southern literature of the past: systemic and domestic violence. Trethewey pens a cultural elegy through her poetry collection *Native Guard* (2006) to connect and heal from this shared trauma. Using *ekphrasis*, Trethewey briefly turns to her mother's missing gravestone in "Graveyard Blues," to fulfill the missing contextual information that is crucial to understand the story of her mother and in turn her black lineage. In a 2007 interview, Trethewey reveals that her mother does not have a gravestone because it felt wrong to put the last name of her mother's murderer on the gravestone, as well as her biological father's whom her mother divorced previously (96). Trethewey recalls the dilemma of her mother's missing gravestone in the rhyming couplet of the poem: "I wander now among names of the dead: / My mother's name, stone pillow for my head" (13-14). Although Trethewey does not mention her mother's missing gravestone explicitly, she mentions the "names of the dead," (13) which are typically inscribed onto gravestones, as well as the "stone" (14) that gravestones are typically made from, therefore such descriptions imply that Trethewey is discussing the gravestone that her mother does not have. The uncomfortable "stone pillow" of her mother's missing gravestone prevents Trethewey and her mother from experiencing rest as there is no longer any acknowledgement of her mother's life. Trethewey pairs the names of the dead with her own mother's name because like the Black Lives Matter protests, which proclaim, "say his/her name," Trethewey revitalizes the memory of the dead in her remembrance.

Trethewey further parallels the previously forgotten dead with her mother by connecting the oppressive landscape that engulfs them all. Trethewey first relays the weather during her mother's funeral when she recalls, "It rained the whole time we were laying her down; / Rained from church to grave when we put her down. / The suck of mud at our feet was a hollow sound" (1-3). The rainy weather at her mother's funeral mirrors the deadly forces that erased both the victims of hurricane Katrina and the black Union soldiers. Although there are multiple monuments dedicated to the victims of Katrina, the context of who the hurricane directly affected is missing. A cultural elegy for the black victims of hurricane Katrina is still missing, and there is still only one small monument in Louisiana that is dedicated to the black Union soldiers. Du Yinyin explains, "Her mother is just like the black soldiers, for whom there is no monument. In a way, she and those soldiers were both erased from the landscape" (294). However, like the victims of hurricane Katrina, neither a gravestone nor a monument will properly reinstate their memories. It is not enough for the name of Trethewey's mother to be present on her gravesite as the surnames of her father and stepfather erase her mother's identity just as much as the landscape does; therefore, Trethewey takes to the page. Trethewey builds a monument, and in turn pens a cultural elegy, for the amalgamated deaths of her mother and those who came before and after her.

Hurston and Trethewey demonstrate that the future of Southern literature includes subaltern voices, scriptotherapy, and environmental studies. Contemporary Southern authors are weaving communal disability and environmental degradation for healing and renewal. For example, in her memoir *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999), Janisse Ray uses foliage and her people's names interchangeably as they both share the same space in her heart. The community and the land that engulfs her community both carry the great pain of loss and

hopelessness due to the paternal thread of mental illness and generational poverty; and yet, Ray does not ignore this communal pain to fill the void of loss but accepts it as her own and dedicates her life to heal it for future generations. Jesmyn Ward also uses natural elements to make a statement about disability in her novel *Salvage the Bones* (2011). Ward portrays the monstrous Hurricane Katrina while connecting her pregnant teenage protagonist, Esch, with her brother's dog, China, as well as the Greek enchantress, Medea. By linking canonical Greek literature with an impoverished black teenage girl, a fighting dog, and Mother Nature, the stories of the marginalized ascend to the forefront of our cultural canon. Similarly, in his poetry collection *The Tradition* (2019), Jericho Brown waxes poetic about the disability of race, as well as queerness, which culminate into police brutality. Furthermore, he merges intersectionality with environmental degradation using the canonical sonnet form and the ghazal form, which is not a well-known form in the U.S. Using these seemingly disparate elements, Brown demonstrates the multiplicity of black identity and its relationship to disability. While white Southern authors previously portrayed the freakish underbelly, contemporary Southern authors, especially Southern authors of color, portray the whole body.

In all of the texts analyzed in this thesis, each text demonstrates that all of Southern society is disabled one way or another. Hurston, Trethewey, Ray, Ward, and Brown identify society's conflation of disability with blackness, poverty, the female gender, and queerness. Contemporary Southern authors are expanding the literary canon to explicate that, despite society's dismissive labels, the disabled South still has tremendous worth. While contemporary Southern authors discuss how intersectional experiences compound on each other to create disability in the eyes of society, Southern white authors of the past discuss how white Southerners are still capable of becoming disabled despite their racial privilege. Southern white

authors insert physical descriptors of disability into their works to exhibit how cultural narratives are disabling and to also designate disability despite the invisibility of whiteness. While contemporary authors show the debilitating effects of internalizing society's categorization of the other, O'Connor, Pancake, and Mason show that whites are also negatively affected by the internalization of the false cultural narratives surrounding the freakishly absurd and flawed social structure of the South.

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