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"All This World Is Full of Mystery": The Fiction of Ellen Douglas.

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"ALL THIS WORLD IS FULL OF MYSTERY:"
THE FICTION OF ELLEN DOUGLAS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of English

by
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FOR JOHN,
AND MY MOTHER AND FATHER
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, "'All This World Is Full of Mystery:' The Fiction of Ellen Douglas," provides an introduction to the life of Ellen Douglas (pen name for Josephine Haxton) and a study of the author's major fiction from A Family's Affairs through Can't Quit You, Baby (1962 - 1988). The first chapter gives an overview of Douglas's life preceding her first novel, A Family's Affairs, with a focus on those people and events contributing to the themes and structure of her writing. The subsequent chapters trace the development of her craft, discussing in chronological order A Family's Affairs, Black Cloud, White Cloud, Where the Dreams Cross, Apostles of Light, The Rock Cried Out, A Lifetime Burning, and Can't Quit You, Baby.

In all these works, mystery permeates narrative, as characters portray human beings' basic inability to understand the forces at play both within and outside themselves. On one level, the writer depicts primarily white, middle class people going about their day-to-day activities. On another level, however, she dislodges readers' perceptions of the norm by using the everyday to reveal how unknowable the events and people one takes for granted really are. Underscoring her stories with myth is one way the author implies the large scope of mystery. She draws on comparative mythology, particularly Josephine Haxton.
Campbell's theory of the monomyth and Heinrich Zimmer's "The King and the Corpse," as well as fairy tales and mythic archetypes. She also conveys mystery by manipulating point of view. Irony undermines the validity of the overt story, and she increasingly includes the author as a character to remind the reader of writing's subjectivity. Dreams often lie beyond one's conscious control, and Douglas employs them to emphasize the unknown realms within and outside the individual. Myth, point of view, and dreams all function to underscore the mystery which permeates and transcends human existence in her fiction.
INTRODUCTION

Ellen Douglas, pseudonym for Josephine Haxton, has written seven books of fiction set primarily in the imaginary towns of Homochitto and Philippi, Mississippi. Although some of her novels are not in print and have received minimal criticism, all her writing exhibits a stylistic and thematic sophistication that deserves consideration. In each work the author addresses societal problems, such as race relations, women’s roles, and the elderly’s disempowerment, but all issues point ultimately to the unknowable essence of human existence, that realm outside conscious understanding where the truth resides. Mystery, thus, composes the core of her fictional concerns.

In Douglas’s collection Black Cloud, White Cloud, the character Estella in "Hold On" voices many of the author's beliefs about the impenetrable mysteriousness underlying life. At the beginning of the tale, the white protagonist Anna has gone fishing with her sons and runs into her black former housekeeper Estella. As the two share cigarettes, beer, and stories about their families, their seemingly equitable friendship soothes Anna’s guilt about racial inequality. In response to this easy exchange, Estella feels free to discuss an African American belief in magic. She admits that she did not attend to a boy who broke his leg in Anna's front yard because she was pregnant, and if

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she had looked at him, she might have borne a crippled child.

Anna despairs, recognizing their chimerical closeness as Estella's statement forces her to confront cultural differences (180). When Anna tells Estella her belief is foolish, the woman cites the example of an aunt who had a child with six fingers on one hand and seven on the other because she looked on a two-headed calf when she was pregnant. They argue:

"But that was an accident," she said, "a coincidence. Looking at the calf didn't have anything to do with it."

Estella shook her head stubbornly. "This world is a mysterious place," she said. "Do you think you can understand everything in it?"

"No," Anna said. "Not everything. But I don't believe in magic."

"All this world is full of mystery," Estella repeated. "You got to have respect for what you don't understand." (180-81)

Estella's comments encapsulate Douglas's primary authorial concern. On one level, the writer depicts white, middle class people going about their day-to-day activities, or as she puts it, "ordinary lives in an ordinary world" (Tardieu 126). Her characters do not appear larger-than-life, as do Thomas Sutpen and Willie Stark; rather, Anna, a middle class housewife, takes her two boys fishing at a local lake. On another level, however, she dislodges readers' perceptions of the norm by using the everyday to reveal how unknowable the events and people we take for granted really are.
Why she does so is no mystery at all. Because her family was extremely religious, Christianity permeated her upbringing. She says, for example, about the Bible, "When you grow up in a devout Presbyterian household, you hear it, you read it, you pray it and it becomes you" (Campbell H1). The Bible, I Corinthians, describes a God in heaven whom one can see only "through a glass dimly" (13:12), a being whose mystery requires Jesus's presence to manifest and explain him. A notion of partial knowing composes the cornerstone of Christianity and thus of her family's basic beliefs.

Her mother, Laura Davis Ayres, was a pragmatic person. Her daughter adopted this attitude and, as she began to think for herself at age fourteen or fifteen, knelt by her bed, asking God to strike her dead if he existed (Tardieu 31-32). When God failed to respond, she began to question her parents' faith. A voracious reader from a young age, she turned her attention to texts dealing with spirituality. James Frazer's The Golden Bough, for instance, influenced her thinking when she was sixteen. Douglas reveals the formative nature of both her upbringing and her reading:

There's just no way, having lived in the world I grew up in, that I wouldn't have been preoccupied in one way or another with the presence or the absence of God in the world. I've read compulsively on that subject all my life. Everything from The Cloud of Unknowing to Zimmer's history of Indian philosophy. And I feel very strongly the whole mystery of the universe—not just human experience. But I don't have any particular answers to it as far as one's own life is concerned, other than to try to be as decent as possible. (Tardieu 32)
Her works convey the same spiritual intensity as those by Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy, but they differ in emphasizing life's total inexplicability. Although O'Connor's fiction reveals the bizarre nature of human antics, its base rests on the Christian tenets of sin and redemption. Percy's protagonists wander through the secular world in an existential search for meaning, but he roots them in the image of the Christian sojourner. In contrast, Douglas structures her fiction upon no specific doctrine. On a continuum, her works express sentiments that lie between Percy and O'Connor's Christianity and Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism: Ultimate meaning is not absent, but it eludes human grasp.

Her position is not without American literary forebears. Herman Melville's great white whale embodies the mysterious force human beings try unsuccessfully, and to their own detriment, to tame and know. Nathaniel Hawthorne's scarlet letter remains an enigmatic emblem of the human condition. Douglas shares perhaps the greatest affinity with Ralph Waldo Emerson. Her statement above mirrors his essay "The Over-Soul":

The philosophy of six thousand years has not searched the chambers and magazines of the soul. In its experiments there has always remained, in the last analysis, a residuum it could not resolve. Man is a stream whose source is hidden. Always our being is descending into us from we know not whence. (189)
The United States boasts of being a land of freedom, and indeed it has always contained a variety of beliefs about life's purpose (or lack thereof), from Christians to Deists to Transcendentalists to the God-is-Dead movement to existentialists to Hare Krishnas. Douglas draws upon this pluralism as she departs from the Christian framework of her childhood and undertakes a personal search for meaning, embracing so many beliefs that the certainty of any specific religious dogma eludes her.

The word mystery applies to her sensibility in its most profound sense, as a spiritual awareness people "cannot know by reason alone and that once it has been revealed cannot be completely understood" (Webster 1497). Mystery, of course, also carries a more mundane meaning in reference to detective stories or missing objects like car keys and fountain pens. Rooted in the concrete world, these mysteries are fact-based and solvable. Settling such mysteries carries a good degree of satisfaction because it creates the fleeting illusion that one might also discern the greater mystery of existence. Douglas creates no clear-cut resolution in her fiction, so the latter definition does not apply.

Mysterious, with its Gothic connotations of brooding dark mansions, ghosts, strange people, and fog is also irrelevant. The author does not portray the sensational, but the white middle class who take care of children, play
board games, grapple with racial relationships, and try to understand family dynamics. Any surreal effects stem from mysterious goings-on we all encounter like dreams and fantasies. *Mysterious*, however, is relevant as an adjective for *mystery*’s most serious meaning. *Mystical* is similar to *mystery*, but it suggests and points toward the individual’s *union* with mystery rather than to the mystery itself.

Douglas’s perception of mystery comes closest to philosopher Rudolf Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*, defined in *The Idea of the Holy* as what a person feels but can never fully know. One encounters *mysterium* "in the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures" (*Idea* 13). *Tremendum* alludes not so much to human beings’ fear or panic as their awe when encountering the enormity of the *mysterium* (*Idea* 13). The key to Otto’s theory is the notion that mystery lies outside reason.

William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, assumes the same stance, postulating that "feelings of reality" come not from "learning and science," but "from a deeper level of your nature" than that "which rationalism inhabits" (72-73). Freud would describe this level as the unconscious.

In her fiction Douglas stresses the irrational as a real and important component of life: The elderly Martha in *Apostles of Light* hallucinates giant cats swinging menacingly from trees in her garden; Corinne in *A Lifetime*
Burning sets out to tell the truth in her diary but includes lies; and Cornelia in Can't Quit You, Baby hears the voice of her housekeeper as a living presence in her psyche. Douglas doubts that logic will solve all ills, as the West would like to believe:

We as a society are trying to destroy the world. And certainly I think the scientific explosion and the Industrial Revolution and the predicament we're in has to do with our thinking that we can control the world through knowledge. Clearly, we can't. But I don't know if that means we can control it by some other means! (Tardieu 31-32)

This statement also points to her far-reaching sense of mystery. Forces are at play so large that any petty efforts on our part to control them—whether logical or intuitive—are silly and futile. T.S. Eliot expresses the same view in Murder in the Cathedral: "Only /The fool, fixed in his folly, may think/ He can turn the wheel on which he turns" (25). Eliot's verbs sum up human beings' illusion of power.

Underscoring her stories with myth is one way the author implies the large scope of mystery. She has read comparative mythology with special interest, starting with Fraser's The Golden Bough and continuing with Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Lord Raglan, and Heinrich Zimmer (Tardieu 64). Of these writers, Campbell has had the most impact (Tardieu 56), and his theory of the monomyth—in which a hero sets out on a journey and descends into a labyrinth of darkness (the mysterium tremendum) that leads to spiritual rebirth—underscores mystery in The Rock Cried
Out, "Hold On," and Can't Quit You, Baby. However, Campbell restricts his discussion of heroes to males, forestalling its application to the female protagonists Anna in "Hold On" and Cornelia in Can't Quit You, Baby or even to the androgynous characteristics of the hero Alan in The Rock Cried Out. Literary critics Meredith A. Powers, Lee R. Edwards, Carol Pearson, and Katherine Pope are among those who adapt Campbell's theory for the female hero. Their adjustments provide a framework for exploring Douglas's heroes' journeys.

In addition to myth, Douglas conveys mystery by manipulating point of view. If we are part of something we cannot understand, how can we ever presume to act as if we know what we are talking about, to tell the truth? How can an author pretend she is telling a true story? Douglas uses irony to undermine the validity of the overt story, and she increasingly includes the author as a character to remind the reader that a fallible human being is picking and choosing the composition of plot and character from any number of possibilities. Although her works parallel the self-reflective fiction of much contemporary practice, her use of the author as a character, either to validate or to question the work's reliability, has roots stemming from novels as early as Henry Fielding's Tom Jones.

Maintaining that literature is basically subjective, Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, published in 1961,
provides a discussion that bears relevance to Douglas's insistence on the author's personal involvement in the text. Booth claims that writers are always present in their works, that "the tendency to connect the author's objectivity with a required impersonality of technique is quite indefensible" (83). It is indefensible, he says, because the author does choose particular words, decide which character traits to emphasize and which to downplay, all to persuade readers to respond to the work in a certain way, to make "them see what they have never seen before, move them into a new order of perception and experience altogether" (398). The author tries to get the reader to assume a certain set of values. Subjectivity, not objectivity, is the reality of fiction.

Booth is careful to make the distinction between the implied author behind the text and the actual human being doing the writing. The two are not one and the same--the human being adopts a certain attitude while writing a particular novel, just as personal letters convey different versions of oneself according to the purpose of each letter (71). Further, he says, "In any reading experience there is an implied dialogue among author, narrator, the other characters, and the reader" (155), which can range from identity to complete opposition. Douglas is most aware of this implied dialogue, and looking an analysis of the story "I Just Love Carrie Lee" illustrates how she uses this four-way tension.
From a first person point of view, Emma, the narrator of the story, describes her housekeeper Carrie Lee's devotion and their mutual love. However, the implied author is at odds with Emma, constantly undermining Emma's account by the examples she causes the protagonist to relate to the reader. When Emma visits Atlanta, for example, a friend calls her attention to a magazine picture of sharecroppers in her small town of Homochitto, Mississippi. At first glance, Emma notices how tattered and indigent the family appear as they stand in front of an unpainted wooden shack. When she realizes the family is Carrie Lee's, Emma decides the article is a Northern editor's ploy to make blacks' living conditions look worse than they are: "But the very idea of them as poverty-stricken, downtrodden tenants! I couldn't have run them off Wildwood [their home] with a posse and a pack of bloodhounds" (137). Who is the reader to believe, Emma or the photo? And Carrie Lee never has a chance to speak for herself—what is her truth? Douglas never resolves the discrepancies, leaving the truth a mystery.

Dreams, creations of one's mind, encompass daydreams, hallucinations, perceptual illusions, and visions occurring during sleep. Because they often lie beyond the individual's conscious control, the author uses them to emphasize unknown realms within as well as outside the
individual. In so doing, she also shows how inner and outer spheres interpenetrate.

In The Rock Cried Out, for instance, eighty-six-year-old Noah visits the young adult Alan. Noah’s ancestors had been slaves of Alan’s ancestors, and the two families have continued an association. He tells of his son Sam’s conception, beginning his tale: "Strange, strange. . . . The ways of the Lord is past understanding. . . ." (65). Then he relates how his wife Sarah went through menopause but a year later started another menses. She then had a dream in which she addressed God, and a voice answered that she should not worry, that she was going to have another son. Immediately following, a log in the fireplace broke, making a loud noise that woke her. The timing of the breaking log parallels the end of her dream; inside and outside intersect (65).

The dream bears a marked resemblance to the Old Testament story of Sarah’s pregnancy and childbirth at age ninety (Genesis 18). Noah even laces his language with Biblical expressions like "It come to pass" and "lo" (65). Because the story exists within Noah’s memory, and memories are not accurate, especially at age eighty-six, one questions whether Noah has "dreamed up" this story, mixing Biblical stories he has heard with his own experience of Sam’s conception. Dream connotes a false idea as well as an occurrence during sleep.
In addition, preconceived notions of both men about white and black people may make their whole interaction less than honest. Perhaps Alan, who is narrating the story of his past, assumes the not infrequent white belief that African American people cannot think clearly. He thus would incorrectly hear and relate what Noah said and make his tale more garbled than it was. But Noah, too, may have played the role he believes whites expect, deliberately mixing his wife’s dream with the Biblical Sarah’s and possibly trying in a covert power play to get Alan’s goat. Still on another level, many African tribes name their offspring for a deceased relative they think the child resembles, assuming that the baby will be the reincarnation of her ancestor (Thompson 109). From this stance, Noah’s story makes perfect sense, fitting a pattern extant for generations, since his wife Sarah could be the reincarnation of her Biblical namesake. Nighttime dreams merge with daytime dreams in Douglas’s fiction. Dreams while asleep often parallel waking life, without being waking life itself. Similarly, personal perceptions differ from the object perceived, from the actuality of waking life. They are altered by the perceiver’s beliefs and desires and thus cause a true knowledge of waking life to remain elusive.

Because there is no extended biographical study of Douglas, I begin my analysis with summary biographical information in Chapter One, "We Were a Little Bit More
"Churchy" Than Most People': Douglas' Life." In Chapter Two, "Seeds of Mystery: A Family's Affairs," I trace the author's evolution from writing about her life to creating fiction. This text contains her first attempts at using myth, point of view, and dreams to highlight mystery. Chapter Three, "'The Words Were Only Questions': Point of View in Black Cloud, White Cloud," examines the interplay of author, characters, and reader in the short stories "Jesse" and "I Just Love Carrie Lee." In Chapter Four, "'How Can I Be Sure That if I Wake Up I May Not Really Be Waking into Another Dream?': Where the Dreams Cross and Apostles of Light," I focus on the contribution of dreams during sleep, fantasies, and hallucinations to a sense of mystery. In Chapter Five, "A 'Double Sense of Changing Specificity and Unchanging Type': Myth in The Rock Cried Out," I explore Douglas's depiction of a hero with androgynous characteristics who supersedes Joseph Campbell's definition of the male hero. I return to point of view in Chapter Six, "'I Reach Out to You All': Author, Narrator, and Reader in A Lifetime Burning," showing how the author makes the implied author's presence a vibrant part of the text as she places her first person narrative in diary form. Can't Quit You, Baby is Douglas's most recent and most accomplished novel. In Chapter Seven, "'Inside or Outside, It's All the Same Thing': Mystery's Culmination in Can't Quit You, Baby," I consider the skillful interweaving of myth, point of view,
and dreams. Throughout her canon, from the autobiographical component of *A Family's Affairs* to the rich and complex structure of *Can't Quit You, Baby*, Douglas's fiction maintains a steady focus upon life's mystery.

Notes

1 David Lynch's movie *Blue Velvet* also challenges the audience's acceptance of normality. As it opens, a man waters his yard in a calm, middle class suburban neighborhood. But the camera views him from ground level, looking up, making him loom large and menacing, causing the whole scene to assume an eerie mood. Lynch forces his audience to view what they deem a common, innocuous occurrence from an angle that throws it askew. We expect monsters to be scary, but a pot-bellied man in a T-shirt watering his lawn?

CHAPTER ONE
"WE WERE A LITTLE BIT MORE 'CHURCHY' THAN MOST PEOPLE": DOUGLAS'S LIFE

Looking at the author's upbringing and adulthood until the writing of her first novel, *A Family's Affairs*, reveals the basis of her independent intellect, the religious roots of her interest in mystery, and the impetus of her decision to write. Ellen Douglas is the pen name of Josephine Haxton, born Josephine Ayres, on 12 July 1921 in Natchez, Mississippi. A common misconception is that her parents raised her there. They both grew up in Natchez in families stemming from the eighteenth century, but at Douglas's birth, they were visiting from their home in Hope, Arkansas (Criss F1). Until she was ten, the author lived in Hope, a "little country town" (Tardieu 147), as she refers to it, containing three to four thousand inhabitants. Her mother viewed it as limited in scope, and she was glad to leave not only to be closer to her parents, but also to be part of "a larger and more complex world where [the children] would meet a lot more different sorts of people. And where the schools were better and [the children would] get a better education" (Tardieu 148). In 1931 the family moved to Alexandria, in central Louisiana, where Douglas lived until she left for college in 1939. It was an old town with a population of thirty thousand that included a large Catholic...
population, something unusual in the South, though not in Louisiana.

Although she did not grow up in Natchez, the author did spend her summers there. For this reason and because she has lived in either Greenville or Jackson since 1942, she calls Mississippi home. In a manner reminiscent of Miranda and Maria in Katharine Anne Porter’s *The Old Order*, she heard stories about her refined Mississippi ancestry throughout her childhood. Douglas accounts for knowing her family history, not pridefully, but with typical humor and pragmatism:

> One thing about Mississippi that you may not have taken into account is that nobody had any money. They couldn’t go anywhere. They hardly had enough money to buy a train ticket. Unless they had somebody who worked for the railroad to give them a pass, they stayed at home. And if you stay at home, you know who your grandmother was; she’s still hanging around. And she knows who her grandmother was; she was still hanging around. A great many people, in fact, are still in houses like the one my father’s great-grandfather bought in the country out from Natchez in 1808. (Speir 236)

She also acknowledges that part of the glittering family stories springs from the days when white Southerners felt a need to justify a way of life based on the inhumanity of slavery (Speir 236-37). In Porter’s *The Old Order*, as the young Miranda matures, she learns that her Aunt Amy’s husband Gabriel was an alcoholic and that Amy probably committed suicide, in contrast to her family’s sentimental tale about the carefree, beautiful Amy who was swept away by
Gabriel to an exciting life in New Orleans. Similarly, as a child Douglas heard about her great-great-great grandfather on her father's side, Thomas Henderson, born in the eighteenth century, who wrote the first book printed in the state of Mississippi (Wasson A15). She could use such an achievement to validate her worth; however, Douglas sees through the praiseworthy account to underlying currents not quite so admirable, stating that the book, Tom Paine Confounded, was really a tract, one that attacked Paine's atheism more than his political views. She describes Henderson:

He was a big Presbyterian. He was one of the founders of the Presbyterian church in Mississippi, although he was not a minister. He was a presiding elder. They were very devout, very devout Presbyterians--and slaveholders, of course. His son was one of the people involved in General Wilkinson's attempt to upset the government of Cuba and annex it to the U.S. as a new slave state. So, I judge from that that they were real slaveholding "fire eaters," although that's not true of a great many people in Natchez and various others in my family--because Natchez really was a Whig town. Probably part of the reason it wasn't destroyed was that it really didn't want to secede in the first place, although everybody down there tries to forget that now. (Speir 235)

She reveals an independent mind, describing Henderson not through the rose-colored glasses of family stories but as she sees him.

The author's grandmother, her mother's mother, Katherine ("Kate") Davis, told stories of her own making, writing romance fiction, as well as fairy tales set in
Natchez, for her grandchildren. Douglas says her grandmother influenced her decision to write: "She made me feel as though it's something people do—not an impossibility" (Gandy Cl), becoming a role model for a nontraditional route white women could follow at a time when the only justifiable course seemed to be marriage and childrearing. The author expresses her feelings about women's limited options:

The kind of situation white women found themselves in, in my generation and earlier generations, was an expectation to be something that they weren't, that is, an expectation that they would be pure, that they would never have any evil thoughts, that they would be pleasant while having sex but would not have any real strong feelings about it one way or the other, that they would ignore their mate's behavior if he went elsewhere for sexual conduct, that they were asked to be objects. I mean, that's just a truism. They were asked to become objects for the use of men and to function as the mammas of the men's children. And that made women of my generation and earlier generations have to lie to themselves about what they were, or else break out of it, or else be extremely unhappy. (Tardieu 116-17)

A salient characteristic of Douglas's writing is her characters' attempts (or lack thereof) to uncover lies in their lives, which leads them closer to the truth of existence: that life is mysterious. In her own life, her grandmother showed her how stories could provide an alternative to the lies enmeshing women.

Her mother, Laura Davis Ayres, loved books and read to her (as well as to the other three children, a girl and two boys) tirelessly until Douglas was in her teens (Tardieu
Ayres helped to lay the reading base that furthered her daughter's writing career. In fact, when Douglas currently teaches creative writing, she urges her students to read as well as to write, reading first for pleasure and second for studying writing techniques.

Laura Ayres' maternal grandparents were of a mixed background. Her grandmother's family were English-Irish Presbyterians, while her grandfather's family were Spanish-French-Creole Catholics, coming into Mississippi during the period of the last Spanish and French occupancies. Ayres' great-great-grandfather was Jose Vidal, the last Spanish commanding officer of Fort Concordia across the river from Natchez (Speir 235-236). As a result, a mix of stoic Presbyterianism and more relaxed Catholicism finds its way into Douglas's fiction, through families like the McGoverns and the Andersons in A Family's Affairs and the McGoverns and the Bairds in "The House on the Bluff."

Ayres had "the education of her time and her class, which was eccentric" (Tardieu 148). She grew up on Roseland Plantation, a farm passed down in the family for generations. Since a trip to Natchez was lengthy, most years she did not attend school; instead, her family assigned reading in the library, works by Thackeray, Scott, Dickens, and other nineteenth-century writers. During the years when they had extra money, her parents hired a tutor for her older brother, but because she wanted to learn,
Laura attended the lessons, too, showing a studious bent transmitted to her daughter. When Ayres was approximately fifteen, the family moved to Natchez because of financial difficulties at Roseland. A local ladies' academy offered a scholarship to the woman winning an essay contest on American history. Ayres, entered, won, and loved to exclaim, "And I'd never been to school a day in my life!" (Tardieu 149) She attended the academy for two years and at approximately nineteen began teaching in a one-room school in Louisiana. She also traveled, visiting an uncle in Washington, DC, for example, and she did not wed until she was twenty-six (Tardieu 149). Overall, Ayres had the traditional, sheltered, middle class upbringing of most white women. She did, however, show a somewhat unusual academic determination, and not marrying until twenty-six was approaching spinsterhood in those days. The stories Douglas grew up hearing of her mother's headstrong determination to learn and to kick up her heels a little before she married undoubtedly planted similar seeds of ambition in her daughter.

Ayres became profoundly deaf, beginning to notice a hearing loss one or two years after she married, and by the time Douglas was five or six (and she, about thirty-six), people had to talk to her very loudly. She was never so hard of hearing that she could neither understand nor
communicate with others as long as she had a hearing aid, but she became completely deaf without one (Tardieu 79).

Cornelia, the protagonist in Can't Quit You, Baby, feigns more deafness than she really has in order to ignore anything unpleasant. Douglas says her mother's condition led to the creation of Cornelia's deafness, but she is quick to add that her mother's personality was nothing like Cornelia's: "It was very easy to drop your voice and keep Mother from hearing what you were saying. But since she was a very strong character, you'd better not do it, or the consequences would be severe" (Tardieu 80); again, Douglas bears evidence that she had a powerful female role model.

Devoutly Presbyterian, Ayres had a hierarchical, ordered view of life, with everything in the place God intended (Tardieu 42). Ayres was a formidable Southern lady, sure of her place in society, with a pragmatic approach to life. She passed on this clear-cut, practical attitude to her daughter, which, ironically, instead of helping Douglas to assume a proper position in her mother's hierarchical order, enabled the author to cut through appearances to the hypocrisies and delusions underneath.

The author's father, Richardson Ayres, claimed a Scottish heritage on both sides, the Hendersons and the Ayreses, who both moved into the Natchez area around the end of the eighteenth century (Jones 49). She describes him as "a gentle and unshakable man . . . [who] had seen a lot of
the world" (Speir 235). His background was entirely Presbyterian, which Douglas associates with stoicism, and he was an unusually quiet person. Still, whereas her mother fit people and situations into neat categories, her father allowed such distinctions to blur a little, although he did so from instinct rather than conviction. Douglas depicts his interaction with black male employees:

Now, my father had very intimate friendships with black men who worked for him in one capacity or another over the years. When he got old, for example, the guy who drove him around after he couldn't drive anymore was his dear friend. The black guy was a preacher, and my father was exceedingly devout, and they talked about God and about the church. Then when Father would go over to Natchez, he had a black man who worked on the place with whom he sat on the porch and ate cookies and drank Coca-Colas and talked about the things they both were interested in, which was what was going on in the country--cows and horses and trees and hunting and the like. He had much closer relationships with black men than my mother ever did with black women. (Tardieu 17-18)

He was a pragmatic person rather than an ideologue. For example, when Douglas and her siblings asked him if he had ever attended a Ku Klux Klan meeting, he admitted that he went once in the 1920's, upon invitation. Then he simply added that he never went back because he did not think much of it (Tardieu 145). He did not engage on a tirade about the evils of racism nor about blacks needing to know their place. And just as her mother's pragmatic attitude enabled Douglas to cut through societal hypocrisies, so her father's instinctive tolerance of all types of people helped her to write about characters like Anna in *A Family's Affairs* and
Corinne in *A Lifetime Burning*, who surpass the confines of their environments to embrace a larger, more complex and mysterious world.

But Richardson Ayres was not at all a milquetoast, passively accepting life. He received a civil engineering degree from the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) in 1909, and after graduation, deciding that he needed to learn more about engineering, went to Boston Tech (now M.I.T.) for one year. He did not pursue another degree but took some of the same courses he felt were incomplete at Ole Miss, receiving another B.S. in engineering in 1911. This act was one of a person not hesitant to veer his direction a little from the norm in order to follow his inner dictates. In Hope, he worked for the Arkansas highway department. When the family moved to Alexandria, he was an independent road and bridge builder; however, he had difficulties with the Huey Long administration and left engineering in the early thirties, becoming a wholesale gasoline dealer (Jones 48).

Because Natchez is small and both the Ayreses and the Davises were middle class white people of long-standing, it is no surprise that the two families had strong ties. Richardson and Laura had known each other all their lives, and ten living intermarriages existed among their relatives. In this respect, Douglas's background fits the typical upper class Southern pattern.
In addition to similar backgrounds, her parents shared a complete absorption in their Presbyterian religion. When asked if she thinks of her childhood as sheltered and conservative, she answered yes but added that all middle and upper middle class white girls in small Southern towns led protected lives. She then explained how her family was atypical:

Maybe we were a little bit more "churchy" than most people; we were not allowed to go to the movies on Sunday, for example, or to play cards on Sunday. The only exception for us was in being a little bit more devout--well, than Episcopalians. Everybody knows Episcopalians are not very devout! (Tardieu 43)

Douglas found as early as fourteen that she could not embrace the tenets of a specific religion; instead, she began eagerly to explore the beliefs of many faiths, reading extensively on comparative mythology, Eastern religions, and Christianity (especially Christian mysticism) (Tardieu 31). What she gained from her parents' piety that dominates her fiction is an unswerving devotion to peel back layer upon layer of lies and half-truths in order to get closer to the truth—to discover God’s presence in the world, as her parents would say. But in the process of doing so, what she discovers is not certainty, but life’s ultimate unknowability.

Douglas attended public schools, moving through the early grades in Hope and spending the sixth grade through high school in Alexandria. She was a good student and read
compulsively from her seventh year. Reading has always been, and still is, an important part of her life. As a child, by the end of the first weeks of the school year, she would have read all her textbooks and be looking for more material. All books were stories to her, and she was consumed by the tale each had to offer. She says about her childhood reading: "Reading was like playing. I plunged into it and was wholly taken up with the make-believe. In short, it was very close to being a function of the unconscious" (Douglas, "Time" 286). Her unconscious approach to reading as a girl must have contributed to an adult awareness that people can respond to books intuitively as well as rationally, linking mystery to the reading process itself.

At first, her favorite books were fairy tales like Anderson and Grimm; then, stories of heroic children, princes, and outlaws like Robin Hood and Oliver Twist, which were followed by Gothic tales and jungle adventures like those by Edgar Allan Poe and Edgar Rice Burroughs (Douglas, "Time" 286). Her childhood fascination with stories, coupled with her family's ancestral tales, no doubt influences the emphasis on storytelling within her fiction. Characters often relate tales that weave into the main plot: Jesse, as an adult, in Black Cloud, White Cloud tells Anna the story of being left at age ten with an infant sister who died; the children Anna and Caroline tell each
other adventure stories in *A Family's Affairs* and "The House on the Bluff" that contrast with the adult world around them; Corinne in *A Lifetime Burning* adds to her narrative the story of her affair; and Tweet in *Can't Quit You, Baby* gives Cornelia the gift of her stories, tales meant both to amuse and to jar her employer out of her complacent vacuum. Douglas's reading of fairy tales, combined with her grandmother's innovative telling of these stories, also probably accounts for her decision to write *The Magic Carpet and Other Tales*.

At about age eight, she started writing poetry, poems based on ballads and the hymns she sang in church (Douglas, "Time" 286). She also wrote plays for her friends and sisters and stories, which she read to her mother. Again, she experienced writing as a largely unconscious act, as something similar to the way she played and read (Douglas, "Time" 286). By the time she was in junior high school, she had started writing short stories, which she continued doing throughout high school and, because of increased academic demands, to a more limited degree in college.

At age fourteen or fifteen, Douglas began to ponder seriously the major issues of her life and to question in earnest the hypocrisies she saw in her environment. For example, she confronted her father about prohibition, exclaiming, "You're always telling me about the law. What are you doing with this bottle of whiskey in the kitchen?"
... How can you talk about the law if you live in a world in which the law is consistently broken--by you, by everyone?" (Speir 235) In the same vein, she could not understand how people professed the Christian ideals of loving one's neighbor and keeping the Sabbath holy while the black cook worked in the kitchen, preparing Sunday dinner (Speir 234-35). Indeed, the seeds of her parents' honest, no-nonsense views sprouted in their daughter's determination to label her world as she saw it.

During this time, her approach to reading changed, becoming no longer the unconscious absorption of myth and fairy tale, but a conscious endeavor to understand the depth of human experience. She describes the transition:

At fifteen I read one day Milton's "On His Blindness." I suppose I must have had to read it for a high school English class--along with "Thanatopsis" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and As You Like It and Gray's Elegy, none of which moved me deeply at the time. They couldn't compare with John Carter, Warlord of Mars. But the Milton sonnet hit me like a ton of brick. I don't know why. I sometimes think it may have been because my mother was deaf and I lived every day a witness to her stoicism and resourcefulness. But I don't remember thinking of her at the time. What I thought was about what it is really like in the real world to be blind. It is about human fate. Tarzan and John Carter and "For-the-love-of-God, Montresor," the Little Mermaid, and Robin Hood receded into the mists of childhood. . . . Books, the books that I love above all else to spend my time with, are the great tools for understanding one's life and the lives of other people. ("Time" 287-88)

Her high school years were also important in her social development because she started a pattern of behavior still...
extant: she outwardly followed the traditional route, while inwardly her open-minded intellect took her in directions that would shock most straight-laced people. She was attractive, had a boyfriend, edited the yearbook; outwardly, she adhered to the conventions of adolescence. She did not leave the confines of the South to become a soulful writer in Paris; she did not develop into an alcoholic; she did not lock herself in her room and refuse to see people. But she did choose friends who shared her intellectual interests, friends who read and thought about spiritual and political concerns. She states:

I was aware of the labor struggles that were going on in the country when I was in my middle teens in the thirties. And I was going out with a young man who thought about those convulsive events in an inquiring way, as well as about literature. I was lucky to meet lively, bright people when I was in high school, and it changed the way I thought about the world. And I kept on reading and listening. (Tardieu 44)

Because of her burgeoning intellectual curiosity, she joined the debate team, in which she had an enthusiastic coach who took the students to tournaments throughout Louisiana. This experience forced her to examine all sides of an issue and to embrace new ideas. For example, during her junior year, she debated the public ownership of utilities. In taking positions both for and against the issue, she discussed the positive and negative aspects of socialism, reflecting the great debates the Huey Long era generated among the populace.
She also had a good English teacher who encouraged students to enter a contest in the *Times Picayune* called "Biggest Issues of the Week." They could win a prize if they wrote the best essay about recent news events. Both debate and the newspaper contest made her more aware of politics. This interest, coupled with her moral upbringing, influenced an emphasis on the complexity of social problems in her fiction: from race relations to the problematic care of the elderly to restrictions on women.

While in high school, she wrote a short story that won third place in a *Scholastic Magazine* contest (Gandy C1). Just as her reading had become more purposeful, so had her writing. In the story, an old black defines himself by his magical ability to predict the ebb and flow of the river. When he loses this power, he drowns himself, singing, "Ole Man River, he don't say nothin' . . . ." Her first story contains many elements that figure in her adult works, including mystery. Douglas said recently:

> I guess when you start writing a book after you've finished another book, what you always think is, "Well, this time I'm going to do something different. Now, what can I do that's different? And explore something radically other than what I was thinking about in my last book." And then you end up writing the same book again! (Tardieu 133)

Her high school story proves this statement true.

She started to read Faulkner when she was sixteen, and what impressed her was his ability to describe the human condition not in Milton's England, but in her immediate
world. She could identify with Southerners' obsessions about their ancestors and with hot, humid settings and with disturbing racial interactions. Because he wrote so well about her world, Faulkner was the first author she consciously tried to imitate. However, she realized she had her own way of telling stories as her narrative voice developed into one not gothic, doom-filled, and larger-than-life, but one exploring the nuances of everyday life (Tardieu 126).

Douglas's family required that each of the female children attend a small liberal arts college for the first year; after that, they were free to go wherever they chose. More than one motive probably prompted this rule. First, the Ayres daughters were young women venturing out into the world from a sheltered background, and their parents may have felt the transition from such a protected environment to life at a major university would be jarring. Also, Presbyterians traditionally value education, and her parents were no exception. They undoubtedly wanted their children to begin higher education with a firm base, which they felt the smaller classes at such colleges afforded. During her freshman year, Douglas attended Randolph Macon College, a women's school in Lynchburg, Virginia, before transferring to the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss).

She hated Randolph Macon (Tardieu 6). Quite possibly she found too much tradition and too little liberal thought
for her taste. Ole Miss, although conventional, still contained a variety of people and left room for more individual expression. At Ole Miss, again, the surface of her life fit the norm. She joined a sorority, Chi Omega, of which she eventually was president, and went to fraternity parties and other social functions. She also continued to be a serious student, majoring in English and sociology; at graduation, she was awarded the Taylor Medal for a consistent 4.0 grade point average.

According to Douglas's recollection of her college years, she was an atypical female in her emphasis on intellectual inquiry. Most women at the time attended Ole Miss solely to get a husband. In 1981 when she spoke at the University of Mississippi for the opening of the Sarah Isom Center for Women's Studies, she described the seriousness with which women pursued men: "Grades didn't matter as much as having a date for all hours of the day. . . .

Datelessness was not permissible then. You had a date at 10 a.m. for coffee, at noon for lunch, at 2 p.m. for a swim or a movie, at night for supper, later for Jim's Cafe to drink beer" (Stead C1). Near the end of her speech, she referred to sorority life as an "empty social whirl," welcoming the women's center as an alternative to that lifestyle, one that authorizes women today to have a choice about their futures instead of the "narrow, limited mistress, wife, mother, nothing else" role of the past (Stead C1).
Douglas says that her mother coached her in how to retain her intellect and still be a Southern belle, a strategy the author modified to suit herself:

When I was young, my mother said to me, realistically, you can't let men see that you're intelligent or you'll not be able to find a husband. You'll be a threat. And so, therefore, you must conceal your intelligence, and these are the ways that we take care of men and help them to be what they need to be. They're very fragile creatures who need women to tell them how smart they are and to support them. And my reaction to that was to look around far and wide to find a man that I didn't have to do that with. It occurred to me that life would be pretty rough if you did that. She didn't really mean that I should do that, either. What she meant was: Unless you make yourself appear to be what men expect you to be, you'll never get to the places where it's essential for you to get in order to find a man who won't expect you to be that. . . . And that was true to a degree in that world. (Speir 245-46)

At Ole Miss, she met her future husband, Kenneth Haxton, a musician, an ardent reader, a fraternity member, and a person with whom she did not have to hide her intellect.

In January 1942, during World War II, Douglas graduated from college. Kenneth was in the Navy, and she worked at various jobs during the next three years. When he was discharged, they married. During the war women easily obtained work since so many men had left their professions to join the armed forces. First, she went to business school in Alexandria, where her parents lived, to learn typing and shorthand, as she says, "in order to get a job. Having finished college, you know, you can't get a job"

(Tardieu 8). She then went to work for the Social Security
board in Alexandria as a file clerk, a position she found exceedingly dull. Leaving there, she became a disc jockey, a job held by men during times of peace, at KALB in Alexandria and then in Natchez, where she lived with her grandmother. There, she began seriously to write short stories for the first time since high school. While records played for a half hour, Douglas was free to write fiction.

Since she was not actively pursuing a career, she did not hesitate to skip around from job to job. She moved on to a position at the induction station at Camp Livingston near Alexandria. After that, deciding she wanted to see a different part of the country (and possibly influenced by her mother's example of traveling before marriage), she went to New York City, working for Gotham Book Mart for four months. Gotham was the avant-garde book store, so she often sampled works unavailable to the general public, and even met controversial authors like Henry Miller.

Another reason for being in New York was that Kenneth was stationed nearby. They left the city in late 1945 when his stint in the military ended, married in January 1946, and settled in Greenville, Mississippi, Kenneth's home. Douglas took her husband's name; she moved to his hometown instead of hers; she took care of the house and raised the children while he worked. That is what women did in the late forties, unless they were overt rebels, which Douglas was not. Also, she says that the time immediately after
World War II was one in which notions of feminism were weak. Women who had had husbands or fiancés in the service for several years were so glad to have them home alive that they wanted to assume traditional roles, to reestablish the safe lives they had led before the war (Tardieu 10).

She had three sons—Richard, Ayres, and Brooks—in the early years of her marriage, and she concentrated on raising them, waiting until her youngest was in kindergarten, when she was in her mid-thirties, to start writing regularly. With typical candor, she admits that part of the reason she waited also stemmed from her sheltered upbringing: "I was inexperienced in the world. I didn't think that I was equipped by my life to have very much to say about the extremes of human emotion, about the world at large" (Speir 240-41). However, she says she knew wanted to do "something besides raise children and play bridge and belong to the garden club. That just certainly never interested me. And so I was always casting around for what I was going to do once my youngest child was in school and I had the day to myself" (Tardieu 10). She considered nursing or running a farm, but when she began to write, she decided that was for her. Also, helping Kenneth edit his fiction during their early marriage gave her the confidence she needed to form her own opinions about creating character and plot.

Until she had the time to write, she participated in a fertile intellectual environment. In addition to his
fiction, Kenneth wrote musical scores and read voraciously. He ran the family clothing business of Nelms and Blum, turning one corner of the store into a bookshop for which he bought large quantities of texts. Douglas read many of his selections, such as the Bollingen series on Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud's works (Tardieu 56-57).

Greenville itself is a Southern town with a legacy of racial tolerance and noted authors. Perhaps the most famous of its fiction writers were William Alexander Percy and Walker Percy. Walker Percy lived there during the first year of Douglas's residence, and the Haxtons used to get together with him and another Greenville resident, author Shelby Foote, to read plays (Jones 51). Douglas and Kenneth both talked about books frequently with Shelby Foote, who became a close friend. Hodding Carter, whom the Percys had brought to Greenville to edit the local newspaper (because of his belief in racial equality and justice), was a distant relative of Douglas, and she became friends with him and his wife, Betty (Jones 52). For several years, the author was a research assistant for Carter, who was working on The Angry Scar, a book about the Reconstruction. She read extensively about the social, political and economic climate of the South during that time, an activity which must have added depth to her understanding of regional issues.

In discussing her reading, she says that after discovering Milton and other literary stalwarts, she delved
into Faulkner. After Faulkner, the writers who had the most impact before and during the writing of *A Family's Affairs* were Dostoevsky, Mann, Flaubert, and Conrad, whom she says appealed to her because each had

an extraordinary synthesizing power—a capacity to write specifically and dramatically about human passion and tragedy in such a way that the individual life expressed truly some part of the significance of human lives in their time and place. For me, too, the writers I've cared most for—these and others—are great storytellers. I care about stories. (Jones 55)

Henry James also influenced her during this time, not so much for his vision of the world as for what Douglas learned about construction.

Other works important to her included Andre Malraux's *The Metamorphosis of the Gods* and Rainer Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. She was interested in comparative mythology, reading, in addition to Fraser and Campbell, Heinrich Zimmer's *The King and the Corpse*, Lord Raglan, and Mircea Eliade. She read the Christian mystics, including Simone Weil, Julian of Norwich, St. Augustine, and *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In this spiritual search, she also examined Eastern religion, studying such books as Heinrich Zimmer's *Philosophies of India*. Other texts include Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, and William Maxwell's *The Folded Leaf* and *Billie Dyer*. Douglas says *Billie Dyer* made an impact because Maxwell emphasizes the real writer and the
fictional form (Tardieu 29), which is a position similar to Wayne Booth's view.

A writer whom she studied for characterization and vivid description is Joyce Cary, author of *The Horse's Mouth* as well as a collection of essays on writing. She particularly liked his description of the God-infatuated English people who attend chapels rather than the more formal and higher class Church of England (Tardieu 55). Quite possibly his works influenced her portrayal of Lorene's pentecostal religious fervor in *The Rock Cried Out*. While in Greenville, she also read Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, and *The Human Condition*, which appealed to both her political and philosophical interests, as well as George Steiner's *Language and Silence* and works by Edmund Wilson and Wayne Booth. She reread the entire Bible. And she pored over short stories as they came out—those of John Cheever, Frank O'Connor, Flannery O'Connor, as well as the fiction of Eudora Welty, Katharine Anne Porter and, later, Walker Percy. Kenneth bought Jewish writers' books as they were published, which Douglas also read—Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Cynthia Ozick.

Douglas also read theorist Susanne Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key* and *Feeling and Form*, books that have influenced how she thinks about art. In fact, Langer helped
her to clarify an understanding of creativity she had reached on her own. After he moved to Covington, Louisiana, Walker Percy and Douglas had a desultory correspondence, exchanging letters from time to time. In one letter, Percy suggested that she read Langer, and she did. Douglas explains her ideas about writing, which draw on Langer's theory of art:

I think we write about our concerns, about our vision of the world, trying to make clear to whoever's going to read it what the world seems like to us. I don't necessarily think that I will succeed in working through a personal problem by writing about it or about some symbolic version of it. Not at all. It's dangerous for a writer to think in that way. I'm always trying to create a world, to make what Susanne Langer would call a virtual world, an as-if world, which is what I think the maker of an art work does. He makes a symbol, whether the symbol is a complex one like a novel or simple like that cut-out above the mantelpiece, Matisse's. [Over Douglas's fireplace is a Matisse print from his jazz period.] It's taking the real world and giving it a heightened symbolic form and putting it out there for people to look at or hear. I'm almost afraid--I mean, I think it sometimes can be destructive--to generalize. As soon as you begin to generalize, then what you create is characters who bear out your generalizations instead of symbols that make a world. (Tardieu 26, 53)

By "virtual world," Langer means that a work of art is not to be mistaken for the sensible, phenomenal world. When an artist paints a picture of a landscape, for example, the painting is not the trees and grass and sky contained within it. It is a piece of canvas with different colors of paint; but it is a canvas with paint arranged in a way that resembles what we see in the actual world. It is unique:
it is unlike anything found naturally in our environment, yet it resembles it. It also embodies the artist’s feelings, making it an outward manifestation of her inner reaction to its form, not a mere objective, factual representation (Langer, Form 374), expressing an artist’s perception of the world—a virtual world.

The word virtual now primarily refers to computer-generated "virtual reality," and similarities do exist between that computer world and Langer’s theory of art. Both enable the participant/reader to take part in a made-up world resembling real life. Douglas is adamant that readers not mistake her fiction for a realistic, definitive picture of life since she believes the world and one’s experience of it are anything but objective and complete.

Langer’s description of a piece of music illustrates another aspect of the variance between actual and virtual worlds. For the most part, we are aware of the linear aspects of our lives--past, present, and future. We experience a moment and then move to the next. However, we cannot, because of our constant motion and the bombardment of sensations at any point in time, be aware of all that is happening. Music stops the moment, so to speak, slows it down so that we can experience all layers of feeling taking place within it. It resembles the actual moment, but is constructed in such a way that it enables us to grasp it more fully than we usually can (Langer, Form 27-28).
Literature functions in the same vein. To Langer, it resembles memory. When people relive an event in their minds, they pick and choose incidents, sensations, others. Just as they cannot perceive all the layers of a given moment in time, so they cannot seize every nuance of a past event. That is one reason they mull over previous experiences repeatedly. What fiction conveys is "felt life," with all of its ramifications, with layers that escape us in actual waking experience (Langer, *Form* 374). It is a virtual world, a felt life, that Douglas wishes to express, and the more layers she identifies, the more mysterious human beings' existence becomes. *A Family's Affairs*, her first novel, marks a transition from her personal life to the virtual world of her fiction.

Notes

1

The children Anna and Caroline in Douglas's stories remind me of Miranda and Maria in Katherine Anne Porter's *The Old Order*. When I asked Douglas about my observation, she said she could see a correlation, although she had not consciously been aware of it. She added that she identifies with Porter's fictional world more than Welty's, even though she wishes could write as sparkingly as Welty (Tardieu 60).

2

CHAPTER TWO

SEEDS OF MYSTERY: A FAMILY'S AFFAIRS

Published in 1961, Douglas's first book, A Family's Affairs, is a straightforward, autobiographical novel that describes events and people from the author's childhood and youth. She says about it:

I think each project has its own reasons, so that the reason you do something is because it works in that project, in that piece of work. I also think it's true, though, that you're influenced by what you read and by the world that you live in. When I started writing, I was reading some experimental fiction, but mostly the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century novelists. My goal, my intent, was to write a realistic novel when I wrote A Family's Affairs. I hadn't thought very much about other possibilities. Henry James and Flaubert were the gods of my world, you know, and Dostoevsky and the like. And then as I moved along through my writing life, I got interested in a whole bunch of other things and wrote in a different way. (Tardieu 26-27)

She began the book by chance. Her youngest son Brooks had started kindergarten, leaving her some free time. One night, she, Kenneth, and a friend bet on each writing a short story. Douglas followed through on the bet, composing what is now the chapter "Oh, To Die For Love" in A Family's Affairs. Her appetite for writing whetted, she composed a novella and realized that it, coupled with the short story she had just written and another completed before marriage, constituted a novel (Jones 56). The text was also published by chance. She gave the manuscript to her friend, the writer Charles Bell, for critical comment, and Bell entered
it in a Houghton Mifflin-Esquire contest without Douglas's knowledge. When contacted about entering the competition, she was unsure, feeling the book needed revision. It was not until Houghton Mifflin representative Craig Wylie told her she had already won, which would result in the novel's publication, that she decided to participate (Jones 59-61).

Douglas states of the novel: "It's very closely based on my own childhood and the lives of my aunts and grandmother. That complex of connections was what I was writing about and how that impinged on the child [Anna] and what came out of it" (Tardieu 100). Although not every event mirrors her early life, many are exact descriptions.

Charlotte travels to Homochitto (a rough fictional equivalent of Natchez) to give birth to Anna in July 1921 (Douglas's actual date of birth). Anna's father, Ralph, comes from a pious Presbyterian background, while her mother, Charlotte, also devout, has a Presbyterian and Catholic heritage.

Some passages in the novel supplement statements Douglas has made about her early life. For instance, she has admitted being shy (Tardieu 23), as well as studious. A description of Anna provides additional information:

To begin with [each year in grammar school], the new grade was a nightmare, a threatening world where everyone else had the skill and self-confidence in human relations that she lacked. Shy and inarticulate among strangers, she suffered for days and weeks in silence; the effort to make friends, to step outside herself, was beyond her. Then the teacher's kindness drew her slowly out of
the nightmare, charmed away her self-obsession, and opened a new door to her. . . . She was never the teacher's pet, because she was too quiet, too dull. But she was "smart." The more she loved her teachers, the harder she studied, all the while vaguely hoping they understood that the perfect lessons were a gift. She knew no other way to make them love her back. (186)

By high school, Anna has internalized a love of learning, and her portrayal contributes to understanding Douglas's development: "She worked and studied harder than ever, not only because she loved the work, but because it made the weekdays pass more quickly. She was a senior now, and she had commitments and responsibilities that she took seriously" (199).

The most revealing autobiographical scene occurs at the novel's close when Anna reacts to her upbringing. Self-contained, her family believes all they need is each other to confirm their identities. Anna acknowledges this trait at her grandmother Kate's funeral:

Every one of them [the family] sees in every other, in me, his own heart's desire, his own creation, sees the whole world through his own band of the spectrum. As if he might be looking through green glasses and said to you, 'But your face is green, green.' And lighted up so strangely, you look in the mirror and say, 'But that's not my face.'

But there! There's the answer. If there are enough of us. Yes! She looked around her at them all, each in his separate self mourning as she mourned, each one his own loss. Yes, and there are enough. So that they must look through all the bands of the spectrum and the light is mingled, and the color vanishes in radiance, and one sees oneself whole. Everything is realized at once, and one gains oneself. (438-39)
Ultimately, Anna supersedes her family's self-enclosed definition of wholeness to embrace all life's inexplicable interconnection:

But let none of us be outside at last. Let not one man be outside another's pale. Let the inside be opened instead. Let me take in humility all they give, and give in return all that I have. Let me accept even exclusion, and say Yes to all the human world... Oh let me now and all my days bless every life that quickens under the hand of God. (442)

These excerpts point to Anna's [Douglas's] family legacy and to her broader perspective from that base. Douglas grew up in a devout Presbyterian household but as a teenager reached past the limits of her parents' Presbyterian sphere to embrace all religions and creeds.

The final scene of Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding is similar, when Laura, surrounded by family, opens her arms to the night, a gesture both encompassing and surpassing her relatives. Douglas restates her conclusion:

I think it's true of Anna... in A Family's Affairs that at the end, her impulse is to move out of a world in which everything is judged in terms of family loyalty into a world where she can say, "Bless every life that quickens under the hand of God." That's her prayer for herself, that she accept the larger world with all sorts of other kinds of human beings in it. (Tardieu 76)

Welty's and Douglas's emphasis on family reflects a historical legacy, one vividly mirrored in Alan Tate's description of the South of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

The center round which the Southern political imagination gravitated was perhaps even smaller

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than the communities of which the South was an aggregate. In the first place, the aggregate was not a whole; and in the second, it would follow that the community itself was not a whole. The South was an aggregate of farms and plantations. . . The center of the South, then, was the family, no less for Robert E. Lee than for the people on Tate's Creek Pike. (533-34)

During this period, so much land separated farms that families had no choice but to rely on themselves for their identities as well as their livelihood.

In general, reviews of *A Family's Affairs*, although favorable, fail to take into account the novel's profundity, focusing instead on its familial depictions, on the verisimilitude of Southern "ordinary lives in an ordinary world." Laura D. S. Harrell in the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* hailed it as one of the few novels portraying Southern life without distortion, one which should delight its readers with moments of recognition "for both sights and sounds, people and places . . . of the every-day life of everyday people" (H1). In summarizing good first novels, Miles A. Smith names it as "a smoothly presented chronicle of a family and town as they changed over the years" (E1). Disregarding Anna's ultimate desire to reach past family, L. Moody Simms says *A Family's Affairs* accurately "treats the timeless, unchanging traditions of family loyalty in a small Mississippi town" (69).

The *New York Times* critic Orville Prescott, who chose the book as one of the five best novels for 1962, comes closest to grasping its full import. Although he labels the
book as one "about a Southern family and the life of a Southern town," he concludes by saying that, more importantly, it is "about change, time and the continuity of human experience" (18). Later, when the author stresses her sense of mystery more forcefully, critics acknowledge the full depth of her work.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of reaching past region and relatives to embrace life more fully, Douglas compares Anna's realizations about family to the act of writing:

And all of it, every word they said to one another, rested lightly on the mysterious base of shared experience, layers and layers, hundreds and thousands of years of shared experience, changing imperceptibly from generation to generation like the mysterious changes in a living, growing language, the ambiguous liveliness of words that hold in their roots and affixes, in their very concrete appearance, in their shifts of position and meaning, the whole mysterious, trembling, changing life of a nation. (254, my italics)

In equating the family's "mysterious base of . . . hundreds and thousands of years of shared experience" with the roots of language, she shares the views of numerous language theorists. Robert Graves, for example, in the White Goddess provides painstaking evidence that ancient pagan people believed a unique spiritual force imbued each letter of the alphabet. Reflecting some of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's thought, Langer maintains that people use words as symbols both of ideas and of objects not physically present because they can conceive of a "'Beyond'
filled with holiness" (Philosophy 41). John Crowe Ransom, one of the founding New Critics, writes similarly in a book published in 1941 (within a year of Langer's Philosophy in a New Key):

Art seems to permit us to predict only some order of unpredictability. But principles of this sort are ontological. The world of predictability, for example, is the restricted world of scientific discourse. Its restrictive rule is: one value at a time. The world of art is the actual world which does not bear restriction; or at least is sufficiently defiant of the restrictiveness of science and offers enough fullness of content to give us the sense of the actual object. A qualitative density, or value-density, such as is unknown to scientific understanding, marks the world of the actual objects. The discourse which tries systematically to record this world is art. (293)

Such ideas were not restricted to literary theorists. When Austrian Wolfgang Pauli won the Nobel prize for physics in 1945, Einstein called him his "spiritual son" (Laurikainen 4). Carl Jung greatly influenced this scientist (and he, Jung) (Laurikainen 10). Becoming interested in metaphysics, Pauli came to believe that the best way to describe reality was through symbols because symbols best fit our inner perception of the world. People, he thought, comprehend reality not through rationality, but through intuition and irrationality (Laurikainen 21-22).

His discoveries in physics duplicated his metaphysical beliefs when he added to the theory of causality an emphasis on probable causality. He said that science can only give probabilities for what will take place, an average that
suggests when a phenomenon will happen. When observed, for example, most particles of a given group follow a path based on the average behavior of that group. However, science is not making the statement that in every instance a particle travels the same route; there are always aberrations, particles that act in an irrational manner. Thus, Pauli says that the irrational is an integral part of every occurrence; a particle can follow either a rational or an irrational path. He ended up believing that spirit, linked with the irrational and unconscious, and matter, linked with reason and fact, are not opposites, but two basic complementary elements of being.

Pauli's theory of the irrationality of reality parallels Ransom's definition above: "Art seems to permit us to predict only some order of unpredictability"; and the physicist's view of the interrelatedness of spirit and matter blends with Langer's emphasis on words used as symbols to convey "a 'Beyond' filled with holiness."

Ontological theories overlap disciplines often viewed as separate, creating a basic philosophical underpinning in society that forms our view of life probably more than we know. Douglas has an acute sensitivity to this underpinning, as her statement about the mysterious essence of family and words proves.

The very abstract aspect of words that Langer says enables the reader to experience a holy realm, the post-
structuralists allege make language unable to pinpoint the reality of anything. For example, Jacques Lacan believes the child acquires language at the same time she realizes she is no longer one with the mother, the union with the mother representing a fluid oneness, a state of innocence before the fall. Language, rather than uniting us with a transcendent oneness, reflects our separation from it. Douglas gradually moves more in Lacan's direction in her thought and writing although she never disavows the spiritual dimension, declaring as late as 1993:

I think of my life as having been grounded in a world of devout Presbyterianism, myself as having been reading and looking and thinking about all that, but I haven't had the experience of the descent of God's grace on me yet—that I've noticed ... . I guess I'm in that secular world, even though I keep looking around for someplace else to be. (Tardieu 90)

She tries to discover that "someplace else" through her fiction. There, she endeavors to embrace through her own symbols a "Beyond' filled with holiness," even if she does become increasingly disillusioned with that likelihood.

Although A Family's Affairs is her most realistic novel, it does contain mythic components. Myth does not ostensibly follow Joseph Campbell's monomythic pattern of the hero's descent into darkness, merger with the divine, and re-entry to the world. Instead, myth centers around family and Christianity; in fact, the two intertwine. The McGoverns, one branch of Anna's family, honor the divine dictates "Judge not that ye be not judged" and "Thou shalt
not" by focusing on virtue and refusing to see any family sin (38). The Andersons, on the other hand, leave the decision of who is elect and who is damned in God's hands. They realize sin is unavoidable, admit it within their family, and with their "pride of clan" take the stance, "Right or wrong, an Anderson is an Anderson" (40-41).

Literary critic Carol S. Manning states that Anna has the last word on the primary importance of family. Manning concludes that Anna's thoughts about family at her grandmother's funeral provide a summation of the book's major message (122). Anna muses:

Whatever you say about them, . . . however far you may go away, your reasons for going would never include the one that they were ignoble. . . . And what could they have given me--what could anyone give a child--more precious than the habit of moral consciousness, the conviction that one . . . must look after his own, must undertake, must dare . . . (438)

However, Manning ignores Anna's subsequent thoughts, reflections that include family but also surpass them, acknowledging the mysterious interrelationship of all life. As Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams state in a discussion of the novel, "At the same time that Anna's thoughtful presence at the funeral reaffirms family ties, her loyalty to her husband breaks those ties. Anna has married an outsider, a Jew, in a determination not to be 'baked' by the family recipe" (50).
In the final scene of the book, the Presbyterian minister leading the funeral reads from the book of Romans: "'Whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified. . . . What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?'" (440). Anna has to force herself not to shout in response:

"No! That's not the way it is. . . . But suppose we weren't yours? What about all the poor bastards who are only human beings, predestined—yes, to joy and death; and justified only in their own humanity. Isn't God, can't you be for us all?" (440)

Anna shatters the family's limited vision of isolated grandeur.

This sentiment echoes a similar view explained in the Biblical study The Origin of Satan by Elaine Pagels, Harrington Spear Paine Professor of Religion at Princeton. She maintains that the Gospel writers between 60 and 70 A.D. shaped their stories to unify the Jewish converts to Christianity. Although the Gospels stress Jesus's teachings of love, they parallel this message with one describing the enemies of Jesus, those who threaten tribal unity, as incarnations of Satan, with a God and Satan, Us and Them typology. In reviewing the book, David Remnick says Pagels believes that "this second story, in which the Gospel writers create a psychology of cosmic war, has influenced the course—the tragic course—of Western history" (56), during which the West thought, because God was on their
side, they could trample the rest of the world. Anna voices the same despair about the Biblical Us and Them mentality. Although her family members root themselves in Christian certainty, throughout the plot's development Anna undermines their foundation by questioning their exclusive stance.

From the start, Douglas sabotages her characters' credibility because the implied author is often at odds with them, creating what Booth calls "unreliable narrators" (Fiction 160). She also portrays "reliable" characters, those with whom the implied author agrees, to heighten the contrast. On a family trip to Homochitto, for example, Anna tells herself an adventure story. The tale, her sister's comments, and the implied author contrast Anna's fantasy world to her actual experience:

Anna felt for the square mirror in its tissue paper case that her mother had thrown away and that she had put in her pocket for the trip. . . . She tore off the paper and squeezed the glass until she felt the sharp edges cutting into her palm.

"You can't come out, yet," she said in a whisper. "It's too early." She began to tell herself a story. . . . A scream of mingled rage and admiration broke from a thousand throats. "Kill, kill," they screamed, and, throwing down their weapons, began to dance wildly around the fire.

But through the hellish noise she had heard faint sounds in the jungle, sounds that told her Carlyle and his men were on the way. The old war cry, the signal to attack, broke from her lips. "Ah-eeeeee-eeee."

"Mama, I can't stand it," Katherine said. "I can't stand it. . . . She's been going on like that for miles and now she's screaming in a whisper" (84).
The implied author describes Anna with a tone of benign amusement, remembering the earnestness of childhood fantasies. An older sibling, Katherine, reinforces the implied author, not only by using the word whisper, thus repeating the author's choice of words, but also by adding to the humor and irony when she refers to Anna's "screaming in a whisper."

As readers of adult fiction, we can easily connect with Katherine and the author's point of view and laugh at the scene. In contrast, Anna's complete absorption in her fantasy world makes detached humor impossible. Mikhail Bakhtin maintains that humor functions to upset our perception of an orderly life by keeping us from taking our observations too seriously, especially the humor of "ordinary people in ordinary situations" with whom most of us identify (4-5). We have to admit that we are not so profound as we imagine ourselves to be. Humor lets us know that we, at least most times, miss the mark of honestly reflecting reality, which always eludes us and remains a mystery.

Often, humor targets those with power over us. Jokes always abound about the current President and the First Lady, for example. This humor equalizes the hierarchy; by poking fun at those over us, we are saying, "They are not so powerful, after all." In a novel, the author supposedly has power over her text; she is the one who determines the
course of events. Douglas uses humor to remove some of her authority as a writer, to create a rift between her and her characters, thereby making readers see that other viewpoints exist besides hers. This crack in the narrative flow enables them to step back from the book and evaluate it. They then perceive that there is more than one way to tell the story, that the author is not an omniscient being revealing a plot set in stone, but someone who has surveyed a number of possible routes before deciding on the one in the text.

From a slightly different vantage point, Anna's act of composition is part of the larger story, just as Douglas's writing is a part of her life and the audience's reading of the novel is a part of their lives, all intermingling. The author underscores both the difference and the interrelatedness of the story-within-the-story by putting Anna's adventure in italics and then placing the word stand in italics in Katherine's comments in the "real world" immediately following. By thus using stories-within-stories, she calls attention to life as a story that contains stories, making it difficult to determine what the ultimately true story is.

Similar to the story-within-a-story, Douglas's inclusion of journal entries and letters intrudes upon a linear narrative flow. She separates them from the main text with smaller print, and this format itself draws
attention to a world within the world of the novel, just as the book is a world within the actual world. Transitions between different narrative forms highlight this emphasis. For instance, an entry from Anna's adolescent journal has just described her boyfriend Taylor's return after a wanderlust. When the text resumes, Douglas writes, "Taylor came back, as Anna had written, around the corner by the honeysuckle fence, past the bishop's cloister and garden, grinning and swinging his arms" (217). Just as Anna had written, so Douglas has written, as the author infers by calling attention to the act of writing itself. She reminds her audience that her literary work is not the real world, but something different. Conversely, by including letters, which almost everyone has written, and a journal, which many have kept, she also points to the connection between her creation and life. One begins to wonder where to draw the line between what is actual and make-believe.

Nighttime dreams and fantasies appear in *A Family's Affairs*, although Douglas does not weave them into the text as smoothly as she does in subsequent works. Italicized reveries interrupt the narrative, creating a jerky, somewhat confusing pattern, especially when the author includes several characters' thoughts within the same scene. Orville Prescott in his *New York Times* review applauds the book as a "triumph of characterization, . . . with nearly a dozen major characters" (18) and a number of minor ones.
Similarly, Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams state that part of the book's "strength lies in its artistry of characterization" (48). Douglas's portrayals are not weak, but the sheer number of characters produces a blurring of focus and a vagueness that does not seem deliberate.

The McGoverns go to church, for instance, and while the preacher gives his sermon, various family members drift into and out of daydreams. First, Douglas depicts the background activity of the church service itself in two manners, one descriptive and the other dramatic. This pattern continues throughout the religious ceremony, usually switching between a description of the congregation and dramatic bits of the actual service:

When the children were seated, Aunt T., the last one in, closed the door of the box pew, settled herself and pointed her ear trumpet (which she used only in church where it was important not to miss a word) at Dr. Falkner, as if signaling him to begin. Sure enough the choir in the loft at the back of the church began to sing:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts;
Praise Father, Son and Ho-o-o-ly Ghost.

Outside, parked in the shadiest spot he could find, Julius [the chauffeur] sat patiently behind the wheel of the black Cadillac and waited.

'I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord . . .'

The organ sighed and the music swelled out again.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son-- (134)

This fluctuation provides the backdrop for a vacillation between the thoughts of Anna, her grandmother Kate, Aunt T., and her aunt Sarah D., all within the span of a few pages. For example, Anna's fantasy, in which she is lost in a secret passageway with her imaginary friend, gives way to Aunt T.'s thoughts as she strains with her ear trumpet to hear the minister. Then a shift occurs between the preacher's sermon and a character's thoughts:

"An honest man of his honor? Why, my friends, why askew dewey thus perfect God's will?"

Askew dewey? Ah: Why, I ask you, do we? But I've missed some. (139)

Until the last sentence, it is unclear whether Anna plays around with the preacher's enunciation or Aunt T. hears insufficiently. Either way, Douglas's humor disrupts the text's credibility: "Askew dewey thus God's perfect will" highlights the less than perfect hearing and piety of Aunt T., the self-importance and gravity of the minister, and the presumption of the text itself to resemble an act of worship, leaving any profound meaning out-of-reach.

Nevertheless, Douglas's ambition is admirable, and her efforts result not only in smooth transitions among fantasies, dreams, and waking in later works, but also within A Family's Affairs when it functions at its best. A sleepy Ralph McGovern, for example, sits by his father's deathbed, acting out what Carol S. Manning says is the
novel's main theme: the individual's responsibility to the family (119). Ralph, the sole focus, inhabits that twilight realm in which one's surroundings enter one's being in a dreamlike manner:

The doctor stood by the door, his hand on the knob, and his low-voiced instructions to the nurse and her brief replies rattled against Ralph's ears as if the drum were full of pebbles, falling, falling, as the drum turned. Whoo-oom, whoo-oom groaned the drum as it turned and turned.

I dreamed I was inside a drum when I had my appendix out. I was inside the drum then, and someone was pounding on it, he said to himself as he slipped into the area between sleeping and waking where dreams act themselves out on a stage before one's eyes, but one is still conscious enough to cut them off at will. (66)

Ralph's reverie blends perfectly with his surroundings, with the uncomfortable sterility of a hospital room containing a father teetering between life and death and a sister reciting Psalms in a voice "serious and quavering, rising so unnaturally in the quiet sickroom" (66, my italics); all is otherworldly. In contrast to the jerkiness of the church scene, all parts work to create a whole.

Overall, this novel is a complex, moving account of a girl's maturation. Explicit personal references in A Family's Affairs, even though the author might now see them as writing weaknesses, give us a strong sense of her upbringing, the basis of her writing. Although composing a realistic work, she cannot avoid her natural inclination: to show how all the forces within and around us form a pattern so complex that we can never completely unravel it.
In *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, her next book, she embraces the world outside family, the one Anna reaches toward at the end of *A Family's Affairs*.

**Notes**

CHAPTER THREE
"THE WORDS WERE ONLY QUESTIONS": POINT OF VIEW IN BLACK CLOUD, WHITE CLOUD

Black Cloud, White Cloud, a collection of two short stories and two novellas, was selected by The New York Times as one of the five best works of fiction in 1963. Anna, the same Anna who appears in A Family’s Affairs, now embraces the world outside family in complex and often upsetting relationships with black domestic employees in the novellas "The House on the Bluff" and "Hold On" and in the short story "Jesse." In contrast to Anna’s agonized recognition of unbridgeable racial gaps, Emma, the narrator in the short story "I Just Love Carrie Lee," maintains a determined denial of any racial turmoil. Douglas’s emphasis on the intricate relationships between blacks and whites reflects the increased racial awareness prevalent in the South at the time of the text’s publication. Ultimately, the gaps between blacks and whites in the book transfer to human beings in general: it is hard, if not impossible, for each person to break through his or her unique perspective and truly share in the reality of others.

Throughout the work, point of view functions as it did in A Family’s Affairs to highlight that no person’s comprehension of life, including the characters' and the
implied author's, is capable of capturing the entirety of existence; that remains a mystery. Douglas's management of point of view in "Jesse" and "I Just Love Carrie Lee" illustrates her technique for conveying the subjectivity of perception. Wayne Booth says that writers can create implied authors who are either detached or involved, depending on the need of a specific work (Fiction 83). In "Jesse" and "I Just Love Carrie Lee" the author maintains primarily a detached position, with no consistently reliable narrators to reflect her own views, thus creating a climate of uncertainty. The illustrator of the 1989 version of the text, Elizabeth Wolfe, remarks upon the book's tentative quality: "I'm very impressed with her stories' honesty and their probing and the time in which they were written. . . . I feel like they're asking a lot of questions--that she is asking herself a lot of questions" (Myers E6).

In "Jesse," an adult Anna tries unsuccessfully to bridge the differences she feels between her and her son's black guitar instructor, Jesse. Anna tells the story from a first-person point of view, and, guilt-ridden about racial injustice, she tries so hard to rectify years of discrimination that she misses the actual dynamics of their relationship. In a talk with the former editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Ralph McGill, author Carson McCullers expresses how guilt about racial inequality restricts the reliability of whites' perceptions:
There is a special guilt in us [whites]. . . . It is a consciousness of guilt not fully knowable, or communicable. Southerners are the more lonely and spiritually estranged, I think, because we have lived so long in an artificial social system that we insisted was natural and right and just—when all along we knew it wasn't. (McGill 217)

Sensitive and thoughtful, Anna experiences an anguished "special guilt." Through her unwitting denial of the different vantage points from which she and Jesse view the same events and from her distanced storytelling, the protagonist makes the truth of her encounters with Jesse, and of the short story, oblique and elusive.

Although she is unreliable (at odds with the implied author's views) throughout most of the story, Anna actually fluctuates between unreliable and reliable narration. Usually, the implied author highlights the naivete of Anna's desire for an equitable friendship with Jesse through the narrator's first-person renditions of their conversations.

In her telling, the juxtaposition of the different perspectives from which she and Jesse experience the same events points to an underlying irony that the reader cannot miss. However, Anna's ardent desire for reconciliation blinds her to any ironic underpinnings.

She tries, for example, to establish a camaraderie with Jesse by asking him if he had known Bud Scott, once a famous musician in Mississippi, whom she says she had gone to hear once when she was a teen-ager. Jesse says that he had known Bud well, even playing with him and his son on numerous
occasions (99). Anna had ventured into the black community one time to hear Scott play; in contrast, Jesse lived in that neighborhood and culture. Ignoring this blatant difference, Anna goes on to let Jesse know that she remembered that Scott's son, Bud, Jr., had been playing at a Natchez black nightclub, "hung with Spanish moss, dry as tinder and flitted with some inflammable insecticide to get rid of the mosquitoes" (100), the night it burned to the ground. She says to the reader:

> It was the worst thing that ever happened in our part of the country. I suppose it has been forgotten everywhere else; so many people have been killed since 1939. But it will be a long time before our Negroes forget it. . . . There was scarcely a Negro family in Natchez that didn't lose a child. Even in Philippi, a hundred miles away, we felt it. Everyone had connections with someone who died in the Natchez fire. (100)

Although the fire does not have any direct meaning for her, she assumes that it must for Jesse since he is black. Douglas also causes Anna to describe the conversation she and Jesse had, instead of transcribing their actual talk, heightening the distance between her narrator and these events. "Jesse told me that he just missed playing with Bud Scott, Jr., that night" (100) imparts a more remote sense of the event than Jesse's direct statement would. It also leaves Jesse voiceless, a somewhat less than real presence to Anna, in actuality. Anna continues, in vain, to make an equitable connection, refusing to admit the gap between her
and Jesse that the author makes clear to the reader; thus, she remains an unreliable narrator.

The truth is that Jesse and Anna's spheres of existence overlap only slightly. What William Alexander Percy writes in *Lanterns on the Levee* describes Anna's situation:

> It is true in the South that whites and blacks live side by side, exchange affection liberally, and believe they have an innate and miraculous understanding of one another. But the sober fact is we understand one another not at all. Just about the time our proximity appears most harmonious something happens . . . and to our astonishment we sense a barrier between. To make it more bewildering the barrier is glass; you can't see it, you only strike it. (299)

Anna keeps striking that glass barrier, but because she cannot see it, she tries to deny it.

As Anna's relationship with Jesse progresses, however, she cannot continue to close her eyes to the distance between them, and as she admits it, she becomes a reliable narrator, one in agreement with the implied author's views. A reader might expect such a transition to resolve the story's conflict, but Anna's straightforward reckoning leaves her only with questions, encircling the basic nature of her relationship with mystery. When Jesse tells Anna that at age ten, after his mother's death, he was left alone in a house to take care of a two-year-old baby sister who also died, he forces her to acknowledge the disparity of their life experiences, and her zealous attempts at friendship stop. In discussing Jesse's account of his childhood, literary critic Carol S. Manning says that he
narrates "this incident with his own convincing language" (123). However, Manning overlooks that Anna tells the story from the first person point of view, which bars Jesse from ever speaking directly in "his own convincing language." Manning grants a definition to the two characters' encounters that a first person point of view prohibits.

Because Jesse continues to give lessons drunk, Anna and her husband eventually fire him. Thereafter, she has a nightmare about him. When the dream awakens her, she writes down two sentences that seem important and falls back to sleep. In the morning, eager for answers, she reads the sentences and responds to them:

"There are those of us who are willing to say, 'I am guilty,' but who is to absolve us? And do we expect by our confessions miraculously to relieve the suffering of the innocent?" ... I had thought in the night that if I could remember those words, I would understand everything. But the words were only questions. (117)

Consciousness only takes human beings so far, the answers lying beyond their rational reckonings, or even beyond their dreams.

In a study of Douglas's fiction, Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams write about the primary concern of "Jesse": "Douglas asks how decent, sensitive Southern whites can reach out to blacks without pride . . . or patronizing" (52). The author does ask that question, but she is not able to answer it. Also, Douglas beckons the reader to assume that writing itself falls short of
unraveling life's mystery since all that Anna writes from her dream are questions. The author veers in the direction of literary theorist Jacques Lacan as she doubts language's ability to expose the unity of meaning underlying existence; instead of transmitting her to Langer's "Beyond filled with holiness," words leave her in doubt.

Jesse adds another dimension to unreliable and reliable narration. Because Anna relates the story from the first person point of view, the reader never witnesses Jesse's words and actions directly; and because Anna's observations are often unreliable, she calls into question her rendition of Jesse. However, most of the time, Jesse is a reliable narrator. Whereas Anna, especially at the beginning of the story, is not aware of the ironic naivety of her conciliatory efforts, Jesse is all too conscious of the separating gulf, thus aligning himself with the author. He plays along with Anna's charade, but he never loses sight of the incongruity inherent in her references to shared experiences.

Anna asks Jesse, for instance, if he has ever heard the songs "Natchez Fire Blues" or the "Philippi Pearl Street Blues," bad songs, she tells the reader, that were played on the radio merely to sell hair straighteners. Jesse knows the songs and their writers, and he asks her if she has ever heard "Greenville Smokin', Leland Burnin' Down," written by one of the same musicians. When she asks about it, Jesse
evades her question, saying only that white men in Leland and Greenville would probably "think nothing of shooting any nigger they heard singing that song" (101). Just as the spirituals sung by slaves often contained encoded messages to help each other escape, so Jesse intimates that these songs contain meanings not meant for white ears; he hints at the opposed perspectives from which he and Anna hear these songs but will not express his views directly. In contrast to Anna, who inadvertently lies, Jesse lies blatantly to protect himself.

Jesse's role is the traditional one blacks have adopted with their white employers (or owners) through fear, one of agreeability with whatever whites say, one that hides, or masks, their true responses. Whites have power over blacks, economically, politically, and socially. To survive, slaves learned to acquiesce to their masters; otherwise, they faced physical punishment and even death. It was, and is, easy to adopt such a role: Since whites never visited blacks in their homes to experience first-hand their cultural dynamics, they never knew how these people acted in their natural environments and were thus less capable of distinguishing authentic from unauthentic responses. Anna does not spend time with Jesse at his home on Pearl Street, but Jesse does come to her home for at least an hour each week; he knows her more intimately than she knows him. W.E.B. DuBois first drew attention to blacks' assumption of
bland agreeability with whites, often called "wearing the mask," in The Souls of Black Folk, published in 1903:

The Negro is . . . born with a veil, and gifted with a second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. . . . One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)

One of the best depictions of this "twoness" occurs in Ralph Ellison's novel The Invisible Man, published in 1952. The young, ambitious narrator is nameless, reflecting how white people view even aspiring blacks in stereotypical terms. He graduates from high school as valedictorian, succeeding, he believes, according to white society's dictates. Looking forward to college and a promising future, he goes to a white men's club to receive a scholarship. However, before they will give him the money, the drunken men blindfold him and his friends and make them fight a boxing match for the club members' amusement. Then, the men throw coins on an electrified rug and tell the graduates to retrieve them, so that they can witness the stereotypical idea that blacks will do anything for money. Finally, they bring in a naked blonde and howl in glee at the boys' discomfort, convinced that black males want nothing more than sex with a white woman. In the end, the white men give the battered, angry, and humiliated narrator his scholarship. Because the donation is his only hope for

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further education, he realizes he must hide his true feelings and feign gratefulness.

In contrast to Ellison's narrator's adopted thankful attitude, which he hopes the white men will perceive as genuine, Jesse wears the mask in a manner that calls attention to its falsity; he exaggerates it to such an extent that he makes a caricature of whites' stereotypical reactions to blacks. In so doing, he jars Anna from any notions she might have of true communion with him and moves her closer to reliable narration. For example, he plays the piano for Anna and her husband Richard and performs terribly. Anna describes his apology:

He got up and bowed and scraped his foot to Richard with exaggerated servility. "I try it for you again one day soon, Bossman," he went on. "I work up a coupla pieces good."

Richard looked astonished and horrified as if someone had slapped him. Bossman, indeed! That was a little too much for him. And there was no reason, no excuse either of us could think of for servility. Richard had said nothing that could be interpreted as expecting or requiring it. Jesse just saw a white man and went into his act—like a firehorse at the clang of the alarm. (103)

The presence of Jesse and Anna as reliable and unreliable narrators heightens the story's irony. It is ironic that Anna's eager attempts to create racial harmony only pinpoint discrepancies and ironic that Jesse's lies uncover the truth. Morton Gurewitch's comments on European romantic irony apply equally to Douglas's use of irony in "Jesse." Gurewitch maintains that irony does not work in the interests of stability but refers to "a universe
permanently out of joint. . . . The ironist does not pretend to cure such a universe or to solve its mysteries" (13). Indeed, rather than attempting to explain the nature of relationships between blacks and whites, Douglas merely points to the mysterious gap lying at the heart of their (and all human beings') interactions.

Also narrating from the first person point of view, Emma, in "I Just Love Carrie Lee," ignores racial injustice so that she can hold on to the traditional white Southern myth of the genteel, harmonious co-existence of blacks and whites. Her attitude places her in the company of the white, condescending Southern narrator of Peter Taylor's "What You Hear from 'Em?." Carol S. Manning candidly describes Emma as "a shallow bigot rather than a sympathetic character who grows in awareness of the complexity of racial relations" (125), but, at the same time, there is a certain pathos in a person like Emma who so totally ignores her actual circumstances. Anna also blinds herself to irreconcilable racial differences, but she has a different motive: she hopes to heal the racial inequality of which she is painfully aware.

Anna and Emma's accounts reveal two components of the overall story of black and white interaction. One can view the whole book Black Cloud, White Cloud as different versions of the same story, as a composite that gives a more complete picture of relationships between the races than any
single piece alone. Similarly, *Black Cloud, White, Cloud* is another version of Anna's life that was begun in *A Family's Affairs*. From this perspective, varying points of view stand not in opposition to each other but as complements of a whole never fully realized. John T. Irwin, in *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge*, a study of Faulkner's fiction, talks about retelling stories in an attempt to get to an elusive underlying story:

> To speak of the elements of the structure [of Faulkner's fiction] is simply to speak of various limited perspectives as a whole, . . . and it is precisely the impossibility of seeing the structure from all sides at once that allows us to take a further step, allows us to see why structures always virtual, always to-be-known, or more exactly, always to-be-inferred. (6)

In other words, comprehension of a story in its singularity remains a mystery. Douglas's placement of "I Just Love Carrie Lee" immediately following "Jesse" emphasizes the multifarious dynamics that operate between blacks and whites in the South, and between all people, and she suggests that no one story (or point of view) can express the complexity of people's interactions.

The main way the narrator Emma blinds herself to the injustice inherent in her relationship with Carrie Lee is by clinging to racial stereotypes extant in white Southern culture and literature since slavery. In *The Last Gentleman*, Walker Percy says a Southerner feels that she knows African Americans in her world personally, but she only really looks at a black twice: when she is a child and
first sees her nurse and when she is dying and looks upon a black attendant once again nursing her (194-95). Emma adheres to Percy's observation, refusing to see her housekeeper as a real human being.

Trudier Harris, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Susan Tucker, Roseann P. Bell, and Minrose Gwin are among those scholars who agree that whites have traditionally placed a black woman in two primary stereotypical roles: as a Jezebel, a lascivious harlot, or as a mammy, a loving child raiser and dedicated housekeeper. To Emma, Carrie Lee is a mammy who raised both her and her children, one who offers kind words of encouragement and who, even after she is too old to work, bakes a cake every Sunday and brings it to Emma's home.

Douglas stresses the depth, and irony, of Emma's self-delusion by writing the story from the supposedly intimate and self-revelatory first person perspective. Even when speaking directly for herself, Emma will not relinquish a stereotypical perception of her housekeeper. In placing the story in the internalized mode of first person, Douglas's text bears a resemblance to autobiographies and diaries. Minrose C. Gwin maintains in Black and White Women of the Old South that in white women's nineteenth-century autobiographical writings "real black women often became impenetrable stereotypes whose humanity eludes their creators" because they feared admitting, even to themselves, the repercussions of facing the truth of an
inhumane system (81). By using the first person point of view, Douglas places Emma within this literary and historical tradition.

Emma remains a consistently unreliable narrator. Broughton and Williams state that the story is "Douglas's first experiment with an unreliable narrator" (52). The author does choose continuous unreliable narration for the first time, but in addition to its appearance in "Jesse," it earlier surfaces in A Family's Affairs, as discussed above regarding Anna's "screaming in a whisper" on a childhood car trip.

With a self-approving smugness similar to the duke's in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," Emma's insistence on the wonderful relationship between her and Carrie Lee ends up revealing the inequitable, unfair, and somewhat distant nature of their affiliation, making the whole story ironic. The story's title, "I Just Love Carrie Lee," sums up the attitude Emma tries to convey to the reader. At the beginning of the narrative, Emma explains, "The truth of the matter is I couldn't tell you what Carrie Lee has meant to us. She's been like a member of the family for almost fifty years" (123).

The examples Douglas chooses to illustrate her statements, however, betray this glowing familial bond. Emma relates that one day, as soon as Carrie Lee came to work, the cook, Bertie, began to giggle. When Emma asked
her why she was laughing, Bertie said Carrie Lee had gotten married. Completely surprised, Emma exclaimed, "'Well Carrie Lee! . . . My feelings are hurt. Why didn't you tell us ahead of time. We could have had a fine wedding—something special'" (131). Then she explains to the reader, "I was disappointed, too. I've always wanted to put on a colored wedding, and there, I'd missed my chance" (131).

On the one hand, it is hard to imagine an intimate family member not talking about getting married, suggesting that Carrie Lee does wear the mask with Emma by pretending more love and sense of belonging than she actually feels. On the other hand, Emma dons her own mask, implying in her statement to Carrie Lee that she felt a friendship betrayed, when her true feelings were disappointment in missing the novelty of planning a black wedding. Fear leads both Carrie Lee and Emma to pretense: Carrie Lee must lie to ensure a job and to protect her privacy, while Emma's false allegations of close friendship are an attempt to perpetuate the illusion of racial harmony in the face of her housekeeper's obvious desire for a separate, non-dominated existence, a stance which threatens Emma's high position in the social hierarchy.

Another time, Emma sees a picture of Carrie Lee and her family in a magazine that shows them in tattered clothes standing before their weather-beaten shack, which belies Emma's refrains about her housekeeper's familial bliss.
Emma scoffs at the photo, saying that it shows the prejudicial eye of a "Northern editor" (135). Conversely, Carrie Lee did not share much about the circumstances of her life with Emma, so her employer was left only with her false images of her housekeeper.

As befits Emma's stereotypical portrait of her domestic employee, she primarily quotes Carrie Lee directly when Carrie Lee offers the children advice on how to wear a mask. For example, Emma's son Billy was the youngest boy in the neighborhood, and the other children used to torment him. When he returned home one day in tears, Emma says Carrie Lee told him: "'Honey, they bigger than you. If you wants to play, you gits out there and eats they pudding. If you don't like it, you holds it in your mouth and spits it out when they ain't looking'" (124). The reader concludes that, most likely, Carrie Lee follows her own advice at work, agreeing overtly with everything Emma says and "spitting out" her disagreement in private. Because both Carrie Lee and Emma lie, their true personalities remain obscure, and the actual nature of their relationship is veiled.

In "Jesse" and "I Just Love Carrie Lee," the first person narration both screens and reveals the way the narrators lie to themselves and find themselves trapped by their limited perceptions. The truth of their relationship with their employees surpasses both their willingness and ability to comprehend it. Just as a dream enables Anna to
grasp the extent of the mystery surrounding her
relationships with blacks, dreams function in Douglas's next
two novels, Where the Dreams Cross and Apostles of Light, to
show the illusions governing characters' lives.

Notes

1 To depict this time of volatile social upheaval,
Douglas wrote A Long Night in 1962, a nonfictional account
of a young friend's unintentional involvement in the violent
mob resisting James Meredith's admission to the University
of Mississippi.

2 A vivid example of an ironic relationship between
author and character is the protagonist Celie, in Alice
Walker's The Color Purple (New York: Washington Square P,
1982), who talks about how stupid she is while Walker shows
the reader she is wise and knowing. Similarly, Huck in Mark
Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (San Francisco:
Chandler, 1962) says he is wicked while Twain praises his
virtues.

3 Richard Wright's description of a fire in a moss-laden
Mississippi nightclub, the Grove, contrasts with Anna's
account of the same event, illustrating the varying degrees
of involvement blacks and whites have in a commonly
acknowledged situation. Although written in the third
person, Wright's rendition is more immediate than Anna's, as
is fitting, since the main character, Fishbelly, witnesses
the fire and loses a loved one, Gladys:

He was running wildly toward the Grove before he
knew it. A mountain of billowing smoke gushed up
and out of the dance hall from all sides, then a
sheet of red flame erupted and where the Grove had
stood was now an immense column of leaping fire.
He sprinted to the Grove's back door, through
which Gladys had vanished. He stopped, gaping.
The door was open, but jammed with human bodies,
piled one atop the other. Their faces were
distorted and their mouths were open. But they
were making no sounds. (223)

4 In his novel The Sound and the Fury (New York:
Vintage, 1929), William Faulkner tells the same story from
four different perspectives, illustrating his preoccupation with a single story’s inability to capture the whole.

CHAPTER FOUR

"HOW CAN I BE SURE THAT IF I WAKE UP I MAY NOT REALLY BE WAKING INTO ANOTHER DREAM?": WHERE THE DREAMS CROSS AND APOSTLES OF LIGHT

Mystery defies logical explanation, and Douglas uses the irrational quality of dreams in Where the Dreams Cross and Apostles of Light to underscore realms beyond conscious awareness, those both within and outside human beings. Just as dreams often resemble waking life, without being waking life itself, so perceptions fall short of objectively apprehending the world since people's beliefs color how they view their surroundings. Currently, even the scientific community acknowledges the mysterious complexity of perception: in addition to Wolfgang Pauli's theory of the "irrationality of reality," quantum theory maintains that the mere presence of an observer alters the nature of the object observed. In philosophy, Immanuel Kant argued that knowledge of the outside world depends on one's mode of understanding.

Frances G. Wickes, one of Jung's students, explains the intricacy of perception:

Our concepts of life are combinations of objective reality and subjective attitude. In this way our world becomes peopled not by human beings as they really are, but by images of our own conceiving. Two daughters may describe a mother in such varying terms that you feel they must be talking of two different individuals. They have described not the parent but a parental image. (10-11)
Perceptions, then, are a kind of waking dream since one super-imposes pre-conceived, often unconscious and irrational notions onto the actual world.

In *Where the Dreams Cross* the honest protagonist Nat Hunter Stonebridge finds herself immersed in the false perceptions of the residents of Philippi, Mississippi, a town in which, as literary critics Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams state, "men learn Sunday school pieties while shooting ducks and women define tragedy as having a daughter not pledge Tri Omega" (55). *Apostles of Light* emphasizes the dream quality of waking life in a retirement community. Howie Snyder, who runs the home for the elderly, exhibits a false piety and concern that only the inhabitants, old, weak, and powerless, discern. He puts forth the dream of a compassionate, well-managed home that is in reality callous, disorganized, and cruel. The reader gradually sees that the elderly's bizarre dreams and hallucinations are closer to the truth than are surface appearances.

Published in 1968, *Where the Dreams Cross* tells the story of Nat Hunter Stonebridge, a rebellious woman who returns to the traditional home of the people who raised her, her aunt and uncle, Louise and Aubrey Hunter. Recently divorced, she has no money and nowhere else to go. Her arrival is not a sentimental reunion; rather, Nat, like...
Mary in Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Hand," views home as "'the place where, when you have to go there,/They have to take you in'" (38). As Broughton and Williams write, "Outspoken, thin, suntanned, sexy Nat fits into the patterns of genteel Mississippi living no better than she fit into a conventional, sentimental, but brutal marriage" (55). In Philippi Nat confronts her own dreams, as well as the townspeople's, about appropriate and meaningful behavior.

Central to the book is the protagonist's sincere and agonized effort at a definition of self more genuine than the roles men prescribe for women. Through Nat, Douglas gives voice to previously unarticulated women's concerns. The women characters' negative reactions to Nat's nonconformity are not overblown. She taps a latent, unspoken knowledge of their unfair and unequal positions in a male-dominated world, a fearful awareness that if manifest would disrupt their seeming complacency.

At a conference on autobiography, Douglas described the friend who lived "a life without compromise" (Douglas, "Found" 12) upon whom she based Nat. The author went on to state: "For Nat Stonebridge . . . the most frightening of compromises were the small lies that made life comfortable--possible--for so many women of my generation. For her these lies turned the real world into a nightmare" (Douglas,
"Found" 12). Nat, for example, tells her cousin Wilburn about the feeling she sometimes gets while dreaming:

"I'm asleep and something is happening--some terrible thing like drowning, maybe, and I think: I have to wake up. And then I think: How can I be sure that if I wake up I may not really be waking into another dream, and maybe it'll be worse than this one? And when it's very bad, Wilburn, I do wake up."...

"Is that why you always tell the truth?" Wilburn said.

"What? Yes! Lies scare me too much. You can't make them stay still. I never, never tell them except for practical reasons, you know, when it's absolutely unavoidable." (43)

The lies the white middle and upper class women of Philippi tell themselves center around the assumption that the only acceptable route for a female is to marry a man with a responsible job and respectable family background. She then should have and raise his children and provide a comfortable home. These Philippi women turn out to be, as Carol S. Manning writes, "frivolous narrow-minded Southern ladies" (128). They have to lie, convincing themselves that they do not want to pursue their own dreams and ambitions or hold responsible positions in society, but to assume roles secondary and inferior to their husbands'. Nat's honesty leads her to reject the self-negating stance of most women.

Henry David Thoreau proposes in Walden that most people live on the surface of their lives, not knowing where they are. And besides, he says, they are asleep about half the time, and even so, pride themselves on the order they have created on the surface (2010-11). Nat feels a need to probe
the surface, to have an honest existence, to be awake. Yet her undertaking is solitary and difficult as she tries to forge a genuine identity out of the morass of societal dreams and illusions. Her journey parallels the complex courses taken by protagonists Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Jeannine Lewis in Rebecca Hill's *Blue Rise*, and Janie Crawford in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

In *Writing a Woman's Life* Carolyn Heilbrun maintains that women, in the actual lives they develop, as well as in the lives they create in literature, "must stop reinscribing male words, and rewrite our ideas about . . . a female impulse to power, as opposed to the erotic impulse which alone is supposed to impel women" (44). She believes the way for women to do this is in telling the truth to each other, stating emphatically, "I do not believe that new stories will find their way into texts [or lives] if they do not begin in oral exchanges among women in groups hearing and talking to one another" (45-46). Unfortunately, Nat has no women friends with whom she can exchange the truth, and as she tries to define herself, she confuses male-dictates with self-definition.

As a girl, Nat liked disguises, dressing to fit an imaginary part for any family outing; she realized on some level that adults donned their own disguises on a daily basis. One day, for example, Louise instructed her that she
needed to go with her to brass-polishing day at the church, and Nat put on a disguise as an Indian girl. Louise ineffectually reprimanded her, attempting to enforce the male-prescribed role: "'Nat, dear,' Louise had said, 'you know it isn't proper for a little girl to go around all the time in disguises. You're old enough to be a little lady like other girls.'" Nat retorted: "'You've got on your Christian disguise'" (179). Even as a child, she saw that an adopted role is not synonymous with the real person.

Wilburn thinks about her childhood: "She was . . . molding herself to conform to some mysterious notions of a woman that she had in her own head. . . . And I suppose even then she heard hollow echoes behind every wall she knocked on" (63).

As her life progresses, because Nat cannot clearly see a viable option for womanhood, she decides to turn "false reality into real make-believe" (64), assuming the disguise of the sex-crazed woman, the male-dictated obverse image of the traditional woman's innocent virtue. Wilburn thinks about her image: "She makes flesh and blood into a work of art, and then it's as if the Naked Maja were hanging in Miss Louise's parlor. Slightly embarrassing. . . . You can't put a live picture in the attic or paint a respectable dress on it" (64). Dreams cross, as Nat's visionary dream of a self-determined woman gets caught up in a male-prescribed role.
In their study of female creativity and its effect on nineteenth-century literature, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar make an observation that sums up Nat’s difficulty in creating a self:

For all literary artists, of course, self-definition necessarily precedes self-assertion: the creative "I am" cannot be uttered if the "I" knows not what it is. But for the female artist the essential process of self-definition is complicated by all those patriarchal definitions that intervene between herself and herself. (17)

Nat reveals her inability to reconcile her inner self with her outer appearance when she says, "'It's kind of hard to make anybody believe it, because of this . . .' She ran her hands over her bosom down to the slim waist and patted her hips. 'But I don't really like going to bed with anybody'" (148).

Broughton and Williams find Nat’s persona questionable:

Even more improbable [than Wilburn] is the sexy but frigid Nat, who trades on her body’s appeal but wants to attract a man who "never pesters me to jump in the sack" (86). . . . Nat may not be erotic but certainly is autoerotic. That implication is not, however, pursued in Where the Dreams Cross, for Nat’s self-love seems to be only a matter of image-maintaining (she claims that she would "disappear" (148) without makeup). (56)

What Broughton and Williams overlook is that the crux of the novel is Nat’s struggle between "image-maintaining" and a more genuine identity. Douglas describes for the reader Nat’s sexy "disguise" or image that bars more unaffected self-expression:

At thirty-six she still had the figure that had made her a legend at seventeen (when the math
professor at Miss Howell's Episcopal Academy had tried to persuade her to run away with him to South America)—long tanned legs with small elegant knees and ankles, small high breasts above a flat stomach, tiny waist, and round hips. ("Not a brick out of place," had been the caption under a picture of her in a college humor magazine back in 1940.) Today, to drive all day through the heat of late summer, she had on a pair of brief white shorts, a boy’s white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and the tail tied around her waist, and brown thong sandals on slender, scarlet-tipped, bare feet. Her fine thick hair, dyed a shining black, hung loose almost to her shoulders, curving under smoothly at the tips. Her green-flecked eyes (She had always thought they were too small.) were carefully made up with too much eye shadow and mascara. From her figure, she might have been twenty-five . . . but her face, haggard, netted with sun wrinkles . . . gave her age away. Striking she was, in a sexy, but at the same time almost ugly way—any man could see that. (13-14)

Part of the ugliness stems, no doubt, from the threat she poses to men in flaunting an image before them that they believe they should encounter only in secret, illicit rendezvous. This passage also points to a salient feature of the text: Douglas laces the narrative with parentheses, more than in any other novel, and thereby suggests that what a person states—be it an author in the process of writing, a character in a story, or a human being in real life—does not reveal the entire truth; additional information always lies beneath the surface.

Nat shows her confusion about self-definition when Wilburn tells her she would look fine without make-up. She answers: "'I wouldn't. I'd disappear. I can't even see myself before I put on mascara and eye shadow'" (148). Seeing herself only as the fallen opposite of a traditional
housewife, she does not gain clarity about who she is "without make-up" until Floyd Shotwell, a beady-eyed, deeply troubled man, rapes her, showing her the nightmare of the male dream that enmeshes her: women are mere possessions to be used as men see fit.

The Camus quotation that opens Where the Dreams Cross describes the complete robbing of self Nat experiences and, paradoxically, her eventual broadened self-knowledge: "All of us, among the ruins, are preparing a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism. But few of us know it." Nat plummets into a nihilistic state as Floyd begins to rape her:

She knew, with one piece of her mind, that his hands were still on her arms, unmoved by her struggles. But at the same time, in another part of her, she felt herself to be inside a drum that turned with a sickening roar, over and over, separating her very inmost self from all reference points in the universe, so that there was no pain, no light, no room, no Floyd, no gravity even, but only a terrible flying darkness. (204)

After Floyd leaves, Nat sits silently on the edge of her bed and a new understanding dawns: "At the center of her flesh had been uncovered a stone— or seed— on which was written: The world is both real and evil" (207). After this realization she utters her first words since the rape, "I'm not dreaming" (207). She goes to Wilburn's motel room for solace, where she stays for several days, sinking "through layers of pain toward a center of darkness of which he [Wilburn] had not knowledge" (209). Just as Marlow feels
impelled to travel to a core of darkness in Joseph Conrad's \textit{The Heart of Darkness}, so Nat allows herself to experience terrifying depths. When Wilburn despairs about her days of immobility and suggests that she resume an active life, she responds, "'Oh, Wilburn, . . . you're nothing but a--an--optimist'" (212).

Nat's experience parallels exactly that of William James's "healthy-minded" and "sick" souls in \textit{The Varieties of Religious Experience}. The healthy-minded (like Wilburn and Louise), he says, look at life in a positive manner, focusing on the good and avoiding confrontations with evil, while the "sick" soul (Nat) delves into evil and darkness. However, James goes on to evaluate these attitudes from a wider perspective:

There is no doubt that healthy-mindedness is inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses positively to account for are a genuine portion of reality; and they may after all be the best key to life's significance, and possibly the only openers of our eyes to the deeper levels of truth. (137-38)

Nat is honest and lies scare her; her willing immersion into the depths of evil shows her absolute sincerity in wanting to know the truth. After she accuses Wilburn of being an optimist, she says about herself:

"While I--now . . ." She seemed to be trying to think exactly what she wanted to say. "I want--now . . . Maybe I want to tear everything to pieces. And I hardly know why. But I won't," she added in a low voice. "I'll find something better to do." (212)
Just as Marlow refuses to remain in the heart of darkness, so Nat decides to find an integrity acknowledging, but also surpassing, the evil she now knows.

Nat's experience of delving into darkness takes her out of the patriarchal dream for women and puts her in touch with the profound mystery of existence itself. Such an awareness allows her to tap a reality that is at her core but that also transcends her self, and this knowledge enables her to envision a life of interconnectedness with others. What Mircea Eliade in *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* says about religion reflects Nat's plunge into darkness and her re-emergence. He maintains that the religious experience is an encounter of "existence in its totality, which reveals to a man his own mode of being in the World" and that existential crises equal religious experiences because they bring "once again into question both the reality of the world and the presence of man in the world. The crisis is, indeed, 'religious' because, at the archaic [pre-industrialized] levels of culture, 'being' is fused together with the 'holy'" (17). He adds that every religion, including the existential crisis, so-to-speak, is an ontology that reveals "that which really is," and being in touch with "what really is" allows a person to experience her most fundamental self, which is the sacred. On the other hand, this deep self-awareness, because it is sacred, is supremely "other" than human beings, transpersonal and
transcendent, which allows one to embrace something larger than self (18, my italics).

Jung talks about this same occurrence in terms of individuation, a process that combines the conscious with the unconscious, which thereby leads to the assimilation of the ego (the identity created in one's conscious) in a wider personality (the unconscious, which includes the collective unconscious, or total awareness of all humanity) (Collected 292). In fact, the major religions of the world refer to human experiences such as the one Nat undergoes as supreme human attainments. The Bible, for example, states: "For whoever would save his life will lose it" (Mark 8:35). The Upanishads teach that there is but one Reality, the Brahman, which also composes the individual's soul, and a knowledge of this personal essence takes one past self to the "very self" of the gods (Parrinder, Faiths 41).

When Nat resumes her life, she is changed, extending her larger sense of self to those around her. Someone has stolen her Uncle Aubrey's special washing machine, an invention he thought could make the family money. He suspects Morris Shotwell, Floyd's father, in addition to the gambler General Pershing Pruitt. Louise asks her niece:

"What are we going to do, Nat? What on earth are we going to do about everything?"

A new expression crossed Nat's face, alert, attentive, bemused, as if she might be listening with astonishment to the beating of her own heart. "I'm going to help you," she said. "I reckon you'd better tell me every single thing you can
Floyd offers to hand over the machine if Nat will have sex with him for six weeks. In a gesture of self-sacrifice, Nat agrees. Although Floyd continues to take advantage of her, now the decision for sexual encounters rests with her, a shift that connotes a big change.

In *Female Pastoral: Women Writers Re-Visioning the American South*, Elizabeth Jane Harrison says that male pastoral fiction, which focuses on rural life and the natural world, typically associates women with the pastoral, the land, because both women and nature are the property of men. Thus, the loss of property is often associated with rape (6). Floyd first realizes the total loss of his "property" Nat when she drunkenly calls him "Wilburn," and he rapes her. Harrison maintains that women writers use "land or nature as a means of liberation from an oppressive society" (13), and by refusing to equate the female with the land, the woman protagonist gains autonomy, thus altering the rape scene in the male pastoral tradition (13). In *Where the Dreams Cross* Nat's decision in rural Philippi to sleep with Floyd reveals not so much her subjugation as her determination to embrace a humanity larger than self in spite of male suppression.

After they recover the machine, she explains her feelings for her aunt and uncle to Wilburn and his wife, Sunny:
"Aunt Louise is old. You— you forget about it, but she is; and something happened to me about her and Uncle Aubrey this trip. I couldn't keep myself from feeling sorry for them. I tried—I really did. But somehow they seemed—real to me." Her eyes filled with tears. "And helpless—as if they had never known before that the world was a jungle—that they were going to be eaten by tigers—if not today, tomorrow. I hadn't really ever been able to know that terrible thing about tigers, either, but then, all at once I did know it—about them and myself and everybody." (299)

Embracing evil allows her to acknowledge its threatening menace to her and those around her, to grasp more fully her actual existence.

In discussing the interpretation of dreams, Freud says that the psychologist should begin by asking the dreamer what her dream means (Introductory 100). In Where the Dreams Cross Douglas asks what the dream of the traditional role for women means through her character Nat Hunter Stonebridge's honest realization of self. At the end of the novel, Anne Farish, Nat's sister, is thinking about putting Louise and Aubrey in a nursing home because their infirmity worries her. The text concludes: "And who knows what kind of trouble Nat will make if Anne Farish does decide to put Louise and Aubrey away? She never has liked to think about being shut up in little bitty places—with no way to get out" (303). Douglas's next novel, Apostles of Light, takes place in a nursing home. Unfortunately, unlike Aubrey and Louise, who have Nat to direct them through their misfortune, the elderly in this book must decide for themselves what is dream and what is real.
Published in 1973 and nominated for the National Book Award, *Apostles of Light* tells the story of Martha Clarke, an elderly woman who, after the recent death of her sister Elizabeth Griswold, lives alone in the old family home in Homochitto, Mississippi. The family decides to invite Howie Snyder, a distant cousin in his middle sixties, to live with Martha and to look after her well-being. Still energetic and ambitious, Howie soon turns the house into a nursing home. The dreams cross, as Howie, his employees, and Martha's family, both consciously and unconsciously, perpetuate an illusion of love and self-sacrifice to mask their true motives of greed, selfishness, and convenience. In place of the vigorous Nat Stonebridge, Douglas chooses the disempowered, weak, and often confused old people's insights, nighttime dreams, and hallucinations to expose their caretakers' false perceptions and outlandish actions.

Reviews of the book were positive, stressing for the first time meanings and associations that stretch beyond a verisimilar Southern life. Quite possibly this shift resulted not so much from a drastic change in critics' perceptions or Douglas's style as from the more modern era about which the author writes. Many of the characters are a newer generation of Southerners who follow the American Dream of wealth and comfort rather than specifically regional aspirations. Howie, for example, wants to franchise a chain of nursing homes across the country.
Peter S. Prescott, for example, omits any reference to the South in his review in *Newsweek:*

Besides its concern with self-serving ruthlessness, "Apostles of Light" is a novel about the way people scratch at survival, about the way they live with the knowledge of death and about the importance of learning how to die. . . . It is a fine, strong novel about fundamental human conditions. (86)

Similarly, Louis Dollarhide, a Mississippian, states: "The very truth of Miss Douglas's book is the source of its pain. . . . Human voices are heard when characters speak, and human motives seen in their actions" (*Jackson Daily News* 8G). He never mentions that those voices and actions reflect the South.

The novel opens with the following Biblical passage:

> For such are the false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
> And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

This description of "ministers of righteousness" fits Howie without doubt. His looks and actions conform to the stereotypical ministerial role: "There was a priestly quality about him as he went about his business, always dressed in an ill-fitting, dark suit and narrow dark tie. He came into a room officially, as if he might at any moment raise his hand and bless the congregation" (25). He carries a dark notebook that bears a resemblance to a prayer book,
and he always smiles: "Perhaps he did have a secret and perhaps it was of a religious nature; or perhaps his relationship with the Almighty kept him always smiling" (26). When scrutinized, however, Howie's demeanor is unsettling: "There were, indeed, people in Homochitto who professed to feel uneasy in Howie's presence" (26). Further, he is a rusty color, with rusty hair, rusty mustache, rusty skin, and hairy, animal-like hands—a red, bestial man who calls to mind an image of Satan.

Howie craves power and money. Americans often pursue prestige, wealth, and a comfortable life: "the American dream." Modern literature reflects this longing, in texts as varied as Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Like many in the United States, Howie creates the illusion of wanting to help others, of following a Christian path, in order to disguise his true motives of selfishness and greed.

He resembles John Buddy Pearson in Zora Neale Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine*: what he preaches and how he lives are two different things. When the family first talks with him about moving into the house with Martha, he describes himself with an impassioned preacher's intonation:

"I'm a reconciler. A reconciler! . . . A man who likes to see people get along with each other. . . . I can make smooth the path, so to speak. Widen the gate. And I ain't like the bad steward in the Bible. I don't bury my talent in the earth. I use it—any way I can find to use it." (39-40)
This false apostle espouses his compassion with such vehemence that he seems, at least half-way, to convince himself. (If he admitted fully the darkness and evil of his acts, he would probably experience an epiphany similar to Nat's.)

In another instance, Martha and her friend Lucas Alexander, a retired doctor, are walking in the yard. Howie approaches them and asks them to curtail their activity since other patients might see them, try similar exercise, fall, and break their hips. He says: "'It'd be a big help if you'd kind of slow down. I'm just trying to keep everybody happy'" (81). When Lucas answers that walking would be good for the residents' circulation, Howie replies, "'Well, that's a thought, Doc. But it might take more supervision than we can manage'" (81). If a subtext of Howie's true response were present, it might read: "Who cares how they feel? I just don't want them to bother me--simply let me make money while they stay out of my way."

Broughton and Williams note that as the novel progresses, "cracks appear in Howie's armor of piety" (58). As he tires of listening to the elderly's accounts of pain and discomfort, for example, Howie decides to silence them with strong tranquilizers. He depersonalizes them into zombies similar to the drugged characters in Walker Percy's The Thanatos Syndrome. Carol S. Manning finds Howie an overblown caricature, stating that his "lasciviousness and
manipulative actions are all too easy to deplore" (129). However, Douglas does not make a two-dimensional devil, but a complex person who almost believes his compassionate posture.

The nursing home's decor highlights its artificiality. Howie replaces Martha's worn Oriental carpets and antiques, which reflect the residents' age and wisdom, with cheap new items: "Motel lobby furniture lined the walls in stiff groups; and several large artificial philodendrons and rubber plants . . . filled the empty corners" (84). Also, the trite name of the nursing home, Golden Age Acres, presages an establishment that refuses to allow its residents their individuality. Advertisements from suntan lotion to cereal to graham crackers use the word "golden." And "acres" for an institution connotes the "Happy Acres" insane asylums in television and movie comedies. Parallels do exist between Apostles of Light and Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Both expose the distressing situation of the disempowered (the elderly and the insane, respectively), who are drugged and abused by those in authority.

From still another perspective, the name carries great irony: The Golden Age in Greek and Roman legend refers to a happy time at the apex of cultural achievement. Instead of enjoying their "golden age," the residents become mere objects that Howie uses for profit. Additional irony exists
if one thinks of the American Dream as a golden age, or apex of happiness and accomplishment; in reality, this dream proves empty as people become selfish, greedy, and immoral in its pursuit. Howie hopes Golden Age Acres will lead him to his own golden age of prosperity.

Instead of rescuing Martha from Howie and Golden Age Acres, her relatives put themselves in collusion with him. They possess similar dreams of money, power, and an easy life that make them "apostles of light" in their own right. Not wanting Howie's supervision of the elderly to inconvenience them, they ignore signs of the immoral misdoings in his "happy" home. Douglas's remarks about the novel characterize the attitude of Martha's family:

> It seemed at the time I wrote it that a nursing home was a kind of paradigm for what people do with their problems in the last third of the twentieth century. They put them behind walls and draw the blinds and don't think about them anymore. . . . It's quite possible to do that, . . . and all the time you're doing it, say you're doing something else. (Deep Delta 31)

The family keeps insisting their aunt's welfare matters most when their true concerns center around their own selfish aims.

Newton, Martha's deceased sister Elizabeth's adopted grandson, for example, is a lawyer active in the Republican party, with political aspirations. He has a stalwart appearance, like Howie, although he resembles a Canadian mountie more than a minister, "a tall, sandy-haired young man with the long, big-chinned face that one sees in
advertisements for expensive whiskey or British shoes" (2). And, like Howie, his looks mask the selfishness and greed that keep him from any honest encounter with others. Lucas shares his response to Newton with Martha: "'He's one of the most self-absorbed young men I've ever had dealings with. A glaze comes over his eyes when you try to communicate your intentions to him and, before you know what's happened, he's talking about politics or shooting turkeys'" (72).

Recognizing their similar concerns, Howie chooses to share his ideas for a chain of nursing homes with Newton, and once Newton sees how Howie's scheme can benefit him, Howie has a firm ally. Lucas discovers some grave misdoings, such as a nurse who burns residents with cigarettes and substitutes water for their pain-killers so that she can use the drugs for her own enjoyment. The doctor shares his concerns with Martha's family, who hesitate to believe him instead of the younger, more robust and confident Howie—who, of course, disavows any unethical activities. Newton gets into an argument with his father (who thinks Lucas might be telling the truth), glossing over the problem to suit his own ends:

Daddy, you're not being reasonable. . . . You heard what Howie was saying before Lucas got here—his plans for the future. Good plans. And plans that we are already deeply involved in. We're going to be furnishing a service to old people—you now how desperately needed it is—statewide. Especially if we get accredited for Medicare and Medicaid. Look how fine it will be for black
people. They need these homes. And (not, of course, that it should be a deciding factor) it is not going to hurt the Republican image for me to be involved in a worthwhile project like this. . . . Got to avoid scandal." (212-13)

In this passage, instead of providing secondary information, the words in parentheses ironically reveal the basic truth.

One of the most bone-chilling scenes occurs when Martha turns to her family, whom she assumes loves her and will try to help her, to tell them of her imprisoned, abusive situation. They do not believe her, causing her to realize that no one with power will come to her aid. Newton says:

"Aunt Martha, . . . I'm your lawyer. Your conservator. I'm bound by law and by my own scruples to look after your interests--your best interests." He paused, and it seemed to her to his credit that he found it difficult to get the next sentence said. "... Besides, I... love you. We all..."

It was that curious word, "conservator," that drew her up short, filled her with cold caution. (244)

Martha realizes the distant perspective from which Newton views her.

Elderly people, because their bodies and minds deteriorate, do not have the same sense of control and order that they had in their youth. Douglas uses this condition to make the same point T.S. Eliot does when he says: "Only/The fool, fixed in his folly, may think/He can turn the wheel on which he turns" (25). Old people have no illusions (unlike Howie and Newton) that they are able to "turn the wheel," to make their lives happen the way they want. Thus,
they can discern the superhuman forces at play that younger people, "fixed in their folly," overlook.

Martha's perceptions, nighttime dreams, and hallucinations reflect the wisdom and knowledge beneath her confusion, and they also suggest that meaningful insights lie in deeper, more mysterious regions of our psyches than the structures that our biased and self-serving perceptions create. Martha feels sometimes that her whole body was vibrating with shock—even more shock than pain—as if someone had thrown a rock and struck her in the temple and she were now in the moment of falling. She found that she could think quite clearly about all the circumstances of her life up until the rock was thrown, but that "afterward," extending indefinitely into a confusing future, continued to elude her efforts to bring it to order. (13, my italics)

Nevertheless, Douglas goes on to describe Martha as lapsing "into the inward clarity and confusion of her thoughts" (14, my italics). Because she can no longer participate actively in the social order, her distance from it gives her a certain lucidity.

The Griswold and Clarke families, for example, think of Howie in terms of a social role, as a cousin—"with the usual assortment of virtues and vices that cousins have" (26). Martha, on the other hand, replies simply, "I never cared for Howie Snyder. . . . He shot the birds [as a boy]" (24). Martha recognizes Howie's basic callousness and cruelty in a way that escapes her more "reasonable" family members who catalog him with other relatives. Also,
even in her youth, Martha had not followed the prescribed female role of marriage and children, living instead with her sister, teaching school, and maintaining a relationship with Lucas (out-of-wedlock, which caused great scandal). This attitude complements the position outside the norm she occupies in old age.

In many ways, Martha resembles the shamans of pre-industrialized countries who have periods during which they leave consciousness and enter withdrawn states. Mythologist Joseph Campbell says that Western technological societies often view these states as mental disturbances, when they are actually preludes to enlightenment (*Primitive* 252). As the family first visits Martha, before Elizabeth's death, they see her sitting

in a cane-bottomed rocker drawn close to the cold fireplace. . . . Most of the time this morning, she sat with her head bent and looked at her lap. Her skin was brown and leathery—the skin of one who has spent her life outdoors in the sun and wind. . . . Her hair was snow white—strikingly beautiful against the blue eyes and dark skin—and, even sitting still, she held her sturdy body tensely, as if nurturing a reserve of energy and passion that might yet still be put to all kinds of uses. Her lips moved in silent conversation with herself.

Newton, as if to draw her into the general talk, said, "Yes, Aunt Martha?"

But she did not reply. (10)

Martha's withdrawal makes Newton uneasy, and, assuming something is wrong with her condition, he tries to force her to join the others' discussion. He fails to see the beauty, vibrancy, and potential wisdom latent in her static repose.
In addition, like Martha's life in the "sun and wind," shamans feel a special connection with nature (Campbell *Primitive* 240); so strong is Martha's tie to the earth that she continues to plant a garden in Golden Age Acres, hiding it behind a shed so Howie will not destroy it. Further, shamans retain their individuality, standing in contrast to societal structures that suppress any deviancy. Martha refused to follow the societal role for women, raising scorn among members of her community, and she finds herself in old age alienated from her family and living arrangements. Campbell writes about such people:

> There have always been those who have very much wished to remain alone, and have done so, achieving sometimes, indeed, even that solitude in which the Great Spirit, the Power, the Great Mystery that is hidden from the group in its concerns is intuited with the inner impact of an immediate force. (Primitive 240)

Shamans receive visions that impart this knowledge, often in the form of dreams. The images in Martha's dreams reveal the truth beneath Howie's platitudes.

One night, Martha dreams that her mother and sister are merged into one person who is dead, lying in a bed downstairs, and no one is there to bury the body. She thinks of calling the children for help, but she is paralyzed, lying in her own bed. Still, the smell of death drifts up the stairs. Newton and one of the staff come into her room, take out the bed, dresser, and chairs, and begin to paint furniture on the walls in a very convincing manner.
Martha keeps saying, "'Help me, help me, please. Somebody has to see about the body'" (76), but no one pays any attention. The scene shifts, and she is downstairs with the body, which is real but lying on a painted bed. It is bloated as if it died of starvation, and the flesh has fallen away from the head. Martha compares its appearance to the pictures of the people released from Buchenwald at the end of World War II (76).

The dream is what Jung would call a "big dream," one that carries a significance larger than the dreamer's particular life; such dreams occur most often in transitional stages of development, the last of which is an awareness of death's imminence (Collected, v.8 291). Her dream shows the plight not only of herself, but of all the elderly trapped in inhumane institutions: people who live in a completely artificial environment (represented by the furniture painted on the walls) that depersonalizes them.

Newton (and others with power) tries to convince them that their lives are genuine as he refuses to let them fill their most pressing need: to make peace with themselves about dying. Martha's dream portrays her devastating circumstances. Lucy, one of the employees, comes into Martha's room immediately following her dream. Later, Martha tries to tell Lucas what happened:

"She [Lucy] came in, and I must finally have gone back to bed—that part is all mixed up in my mind. But the dream! It's not mixed up a bit—but as real as us out here walking right now. It won't
let me alone. I keep thinking and thinking of it and seeing it. And the most disturbing part is that I couldn't--almost still can't--convince myself it was a dream." (77)

Campbell says that shamans, because of the intensity of their dream visions, tend to confuse dream reality with daytime existence (Primitive 245), and such is the case with Martha. The old woman shows how tapping unknown realms within sheds light on one's outer environment, and vice versa. The Semai, a Malaysian tribe placing an emphasis on dreams, speak of "valid" dreams, those that add insight about daily existence and that the tribe should take seriously. Such dreams may even form the basis of religious beliefs (Dentan 83). Through its profound relationship to waking life, Martha's dream is indeed one meriting solemn consideration.

Martha's hallucinations function in the same way as her dreams, bridging the ultimately mysterious realms of waking and sleeping, falsehood and truth. At the book's denouement, Martha and Lucas realize that they are trapped, unable to escape their terrifying circumstances. Martha has learned that she can no longer depend on any of her family. In her garden she has a hallucination that pictures both her imprisonment and her longing for release. She looks into the trees and sees

vague bird shapes darting, hesitating, flickering against the brilliance of the morning sky... Fall, fall, a cardinal whistled from far off, and, Winter, the grackles rustily creaked. Winter, coming.
All right, she said. I still know the seasons change—Lucas and I. Everybody else is shut up inside that airless, changeless climate of the tomb. (270, 280)

As she looks at an oriole, she feels a cat rub against her leg. Birds begin to screech cries of distress as more and more cats appear and threaten them. Martha picks up a stick and hits a cat, and as she does so, feels a rush of blood in her head as she has a stroke. Then she sees Howie fling open an upstairs window and offer to come help her, as "the sun glinted in the reddish hair on his forearms" (285, my italics).

As she looks at the house, she sees a cross-section in which the residents walk past furniture painted on the walls, and she warns them not to come to the garden. She shuts her eyes, and when she opens them, Lucas is with her in her hallucination. He explains that the cats belong to Howie. Martha says to her friend: "'I am winding down. The spring in my heart is broken. They think it's all in my head. Not so. Even though the needles are probing at my brain, everything is clear to me. But my heart--probably this time it won't mend'" (286).

Next, she swings her stick to ward off a multitude of attacking cats, but hits an oriole instead, which falls to the ground. She realizes she cannot win and decides to hide. Howie finds her and tells a cat to jump on her head, which it does, digging its claws into her scalp. She falls,
goes to sleep, and when she awakes, the garden appears as normal.

Martha in many ways taps levels that lie beyond waking consciousness. The Jungian psychologist Joseph L. Henderson writes about symbols of transcendence, especially those that release a person from any "confining pattern of existence, as he moves toward a superior or more mature stage in his development" (146). Such symbols allow the unconscious to enter the conscious mind. For the shaman, the most fitting symbol of transcendence is the bird because the shaman can travel to unknown realms and "is capable of obtaining knowledge of distant events--or facts of which he consciously knows nothing--by going into a trancelike state" (147). Some transcendent travels are dream images of an excursion that acquaint the participant with the nature of death, death as "a journey of release, . . . presided over and fostered by some spirit of compassion" (150). The flight of birds and wandering into the wilderness are the most common symbols for such a journey (147, 150). From this perspective, the birds are an extension of Martha's psyche, moving her toward a "more mature phase of development," which in her case is death.

Similarly, the birds in her hallucination tell her that it is fall and that winter, the time of death, is coming. Unfortunately, the bird telling of winter chirps "rustily," "rustily" hinting at Howie and his promise of an inhumane
demise. Cats also stand between her and a death of compassion. One could think that cats should help Martha instead of harm her, since legend traditionally associates them with witches. Many believe witches were actually women who, in spite of Christian persecution, held onto the rites of the fertility cults worshipping the natural world (Donovan 76) as Martha does.

However, Douglas here uses cats more in the medieval sense of the Ages of Man, which associates an animal with each of ten chronological stages (McLerran 5). The tomcat represents the seventh stage, for males ages 60-70, which fits Howie perfectly. (This system never associates females with cats.) In the hallucination Howie instructs a cat to attack Martha violently, the assault causing her to "moan in pain and terror" (287), to fall, and to sleep. Sleep is often a metaphor for death; thus, Martha's death in Howie's hands proves to be traumatic. Her dreams and hallucinations reveal her deepest awareness of death as her next step, but the experience promises to be callous and violent rather than compassionate and dignified. Lucas attempts to help others, as well as himself, escape a merciless death when he euthanizes some (who have consented) and sets fire to the house. Although Lucas reaches his apocalyptic end, Newton rescues Martha, and as the novel closes, her future stands uncertain. As in "Jesse," Douglas leaves the reader with
questions as dreams lead to an upsetting and perplexing reality.

In both *Where the Dreams Cross* and *Apostles of Light*, dreams function to emphasize how little people really know about the process of living. The assumed beliefs which order most people's lives in *Where the Dreams Cross* turn out to be false perceptions that mask a deeper and more meaningful level of being. When Nat returns to Philippi, the women around her adhere to the male-prescribed role of domesticity, a position demanding duplicity and self-denial. Nat cannot lie, but in trying to find more genuine self-expression, she assumes the role in opposition to the traditional white woman's dream of innocence, that of the wanton woman. It is not until her companion Floyd rapes her that she realizes the total depravity of self that results from following any patriarchal dictates. This awareness allows Nat a visionary insight that leads to a fuller and more compassionate response to herself and others.

In *Apostles of Light*, the elderly Martha Clarke watches the transformation of her old and stately house into a nursing home filled with motel furniture and plastic plants. She witnesses the institutionalization of herself and others, a disorienting process that involves mental and physical abuse. No longer sure of her ability to reason, Martha's dreams and hallucinations show that supposed control of thought, for her and for all human beings, holds
second place to the wisdom stemming from uncovered depths of being. In both novels, dreams reveal the fragility of any order humans try to impose on the powerful currents of life. In her next book, *The Rock Cried Out*, Douglas highlights the mysterious forces shaping human lives through an underlying mythic structure.

Notes

1

Reviews were positive, although they tended to emphasize the book's fidelity to Southern culture, overlooking its more serious statements about women's restrictive roles and the dreams that delude us all. The novel preceded the feminist movement of the early 1970's by several years, and, quite possibly, its focus on women's confining circumstances was somewhat premature. For example, the editor's note in the *Jackson Daily News* refers to the reviewer as "Mrs. Joe H. Daniel," and not surprisingly. Feminist implications escaped Daniel's observations:

With "Where the Dreams Cross," [Douglas] seems firmly established as one of the authentic literary voices of the South today. The question arises: What makes Ellen Douglas authentic? The answer seems to be . . . that she reveals in her choice of descriptive words and in her dialogue very nearly perfect pitch. She has an ear for the nuances of Southern speech . . . . The plot . . . revolves around Nat Hunter Stonebridge, a sometimes haunted, sometimes gay divorcee. (24)

Douglas realized the reviews' inadequacies, stating in 1980: "I always had a very soft spot in my heart for *Where the Dreams Cross*, because it focuses on difficulties of a woman living in the 30s, 40s, and 50s [sic]. It has never received the attention it deserves as a woman's novel. . . . [It] might have been ahead of its time. [And] perhaps it was pigeonholed as a 'Southern' novel. But it deals with realities, it is not propaganda, it presents no easy solutions." (James, *Delta n. pag.*)

2

In a discussion taped for Mississippi ETV, transcribed in "Deep Delta," *Delta Scene Magazine* 4.2 (1977): 27, 30-35,
Douglas talked about the origin of her idea to use furniture painting:

One thing I read when I was working on *Apostles of Light* was a book by George Steiner called *Language and Silence* and there's a little section in it about concentration camps in Germany. I was particularly smitten by the description of the railroad station where the Jews were unloaded for, I don't know whether it was Bergen Belsen or Buchenwald, and the station had a clock painted on the wall (it didn't have a real clock) with the hands on quarter to three. And it had window boxes painted outside the windows. The whole thing was a fake front like a Hollywood movie set. That, it seems to me, is an arresting statement of the kind of thing that it's possible to do if you pretend like you're doing one thing while you're doing another thing." (31-32)

3

Many scholars write about the connection between myth and dreams. Joseph Campbell, for example, in *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Viking, 1969), describes the Arandi of Australia:

All life on earth is to be recognized as a projection on the plane of temporal event of forms, objects, and personalities forever present in the permanent no-where, no-when, of the mythological age, the *altjeringa*, "dream time," when all was magical, as it is in dream: the realm that is seen again in dream and shown forth in the rites. (89)

Similarly, Mircea Eliade, in *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (New York: Harper, 1960), states: "It has also been shown that the categories of space and time become modified in dreams, in a way which to some degree resembles the abolition of Time and Space in myths" (16).
CHAPTER FIVE
A "DOUBLE SENSE OF CHANGING SPECIFICITY AND UNCHANGING TYPE":
MYTH IN THE ROCK CRIED OUT

In 1976 Douglas received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts to complete *The Rock Cried Out*. Upon its publication in 1979, the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters presented her with an award for literary accomplishment, and the Book-of-the-Month Club named it as an alternate selection. Much of the novel's excellence stems from its characters' profound search for a meaningful selfhood, which Douglas emphasizes through myth. In a book about Mississippi authors, James B. Lloyd responds to the depth in Douglas's fiction, saying that her works increasingly "transcend the specificity of time and place in order to remind us of the universal stresses and demands of the human condition" (141).

The "universal stresses" of being human stem from people's basic inability to know and express the profundity of their lives on earth; existence remains a mystery. By its very nature, myth points to this mystery. Eric Gould, in *Mythical Intentions in Modern Literature*, states that myths deal with ultimate questions about being and are expressed through particular events and with words, both of which fail to grasp totally what they are trying to express (6-7). He goes on to say that myth, nevertheless, serves
an important function in human beings' realization of mystery: "Myth . . . is, if nothing else, the history of our inability to authenticate our knowledge of Being, and yet it is at the same time a history of our attempts to understand that inability" (10).

Just as dreams in Where the Dreams Cross and Apostles of Light highlight the tension between societal roles and a deeper, ultimately mysterious self, so the mythic elements of The Rock Cried Out point to realities beneath surface appearances. According to Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, both myth and dreams carry keys from the unconscious "that open the whole realm of the desired and feared discovery of self" (8, my italics). They lead human beings into previously unknown, mysterious regions of themselves, into Rudolf Otto's mysterium tremendum. The characters' fundamental self-reckoning creates a novel that is both "powerful and disturbing," as critic Jonathan Yardley writes in the New York Times Book Review (24).

In a study of myth and folktales, Stith Thompson offers a basic, rather well-agreed upon definition of myth: "Myth has to do with the gods and their actions, with creation, and with the general nature of the universe and of the earth. . . . We find myth sometimes applied also to the hero tales, whether those hero tales deal with demigods or not" (173). The Rock Cried Out centers specifically upon
myth as hero tale, with the narrator Alan McLaurin as its hero.

Joseph Campbell offers a fundamental definition of the hero:

The hero . . . is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought. Hence they are eloquent, not of the present, disintegrating society and psyche, but of the unquenched source through which society is reborn. (19-20)

Campbell, who has greatly influenced Douglas's thinking (Tardieu 56), maintains that all heroes follow the same basic pattern: they receive a call to adventure and leave their societies to enter the unknown realm of darkness and death. There, they undergo arduous trials during which they wrestle with demons or dragons and receive supernatural aid. Finally, their struggle results in a union with the essence of being, which expands their consciousness. Heroes experience a rebirth as they return to society with a boon for the world's restoration (245-46). Although Campbell's general definition of the hero includes both sexes, in reality he focuses on the male hero only, with women serving as tormenting demons or spiritual guides during the man's journey.

Much subsequent research, however, has centered upon the female hero. Lee R. Edwards, for example, in *Psyche as Hero: Female Heroism and Fictional Form*, cites the Greek
myth of Psyche and Amor as a paradigm of female heroism. Psyche undergoes trials successfully, descends into the underworld, and re-emerges to claim her love, Amor. She promises a new order as she has a daughter, not a son, to start a family with a foundation of love and community to replace the male societal base of war and hierarchy. Psyche shows that heroism need not be restricted to military conquests or extreme physical prowess; any action that confers knowledge is heroic. Since both sexes can acquire increased wisdom, Edwards maintains that heroism is asexual (10-12).

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope in *The Female Hero in American and British Literature* maintain that on the archetypal level, the quest leading to self-discovery is the same for both male and female heroes, consisting of the departure, initiation, and return (vii-viii); however, the nature of the actual journey varies because women, in addition to other trials, must wrestle with the dragons of male-prescribed restraints. Other distinctions surface, too: the woman's journey tends to be more complex and less linear; and rather than attempting to subdue nature, she strives to understand herself as part of natural processes (viii).

Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland explore the female *bildungsroman*, or novel of maturation, in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. Their
definition of the bildungsroman resembles Campbell's hero's journey because both emphasize descents into "the dissonances and conflicts of life . . . as the necessary growth points through which the individual must pass on his [her] way to maturity and harmony" (5-6). In her study of the female bildungsroman Esther Kleinbord Labovitz in The Myth of the Heroine maintains that because women must reject patriarchy's definitions in order to obtain a genuine definition of self (which is hard to do, as Nat Hunter Stonebridge in Where the Dreams Cross illustrates), novels about such women reverberate with questions still to be answered (252).

All studies of female heroes agree that the purpose of the hero, male or female, is not so much to ascertain the exact nature of societal gender roles as to discover more fundamentally what it is to be human. Even Campbell maintains that heroes realize a realm surpassing gender as they unite with the "source of all existence" (44), which has the "androgynous character of the Bodhisattva" (152), although his heroes return to society to assume their male positions of power (217-18). In contrast, those writing about female heroes stress the need for androgyny not only at the climax of the descent, but also in the world. Mary Daly writes about women's liberation that the goal for humanity is androgyny, not male or female domination, but transcendence of sex roles to being totally human (26).
Similarly, Pearson and Pope state: "Freeing the heroic journey from the limiting assumptions about appropriate female and male behavior, then, is an important step in defining a truly human—and truly humane—pattern of heroic action" (5).

Douglas shares this sensibility. She has stated that she does not like to be labeled either a Southern or woman author because she considers herself simply an author (Speir 244). Further, in a newspaper interview Douglas said that "she doesn't consider herself a woman writer writing about women's issues, but rather as a 'human being'" (L. James n. pag.). In The Rock Cried Out, the protagonist is male, the only male protagonist in Douglas's canon, but the author responds to the basic humanity underlying gender by creating a hero with both masculine and feminine traits. Douglas links him to females, for example, by placing him in a youth movement that marginalizes him in a patriarchal society and thus gives him a position similar to that of women. In fact, it is precisely the battle within Alan between characteristics associated with female heroes and those ascribed to males that causes him to descend into darkness and re-emerge with greater understanding.

Still, the narrator is a man in a patriarchal society, and, assuming the male option of independence in 1971, twenty-two-year-old Alan leaves his girlfriend Miriam West in Boston, returning to the rural family home in Chickasaw
Ridge (Homochitto County), Mississippi. He holds the male view of a woman as property, as something either to prize for her purity or to scorn for her corruption. In 1964 in Chickasaw Ridge, at age fifteen, he had become infatuated with his seventeen-year-old cousin Phoebe Chipman, whom he made into an icon of female purity, "the embodiment of my dreams" (44). Later, in Boston he chose Miriam for a girlfriend because she looked like Phoebe. However, he leaves Miriam because he cannot accept her inability to live up to Phoebe's supposed purity: "He wanted to forget in her some minute human imperfection that made her unworthy of the poet [Alan]; and . . . therefore there were times when he found it unpleasant to think about her" (58).

Alan flees Boston in the spirit of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," idealistically "dreaming of solitude and inviting my soul" (10) while he lives in a rural family home. Such a stance matches the profile of Campbell's hero, who chooses a "willed introversion" that "drives the psychic energies into depth and activates the lost continent of unconscious infantile and archetypal images" (64). Alan also fits the American male image of the rugged individual, as he lives alone and works hard every day, hammering and sawing to make a nearby house once again liveable.

His "willed introversion" in Chickasaw Ridge, however, makes him so self-absorbed that, before his heroic journey, he can see neither himself nor those around him (especially
women) clearly. In retrospect, he says about the time, "It was 'being right' (or blindness, or self-absorption--take your choice) that made me fail that winter to try to fit what was going on around me into the pattern it cried out for--a pattern I hadn't put my attention on" (12).

In addition to displaying traditional male attitudes and actions, Alan shows female traits heightened by his recent involvement in the youth movement of the nineteen sixties. The "hippies" labeled themselves as "anti-establishment" and "counterculture" because they opposed the corruption and dehumanization they perceived in patriarchal society. They shouted the slogan "Make love, not war" and condemned capitalism and its attending consumerism. Still, unlike women, male hippies, including Alan, always had the option of resuming positions of authority whenever they chose.

In studying the sixties' "counterculture," Morris Dickstein concludes that utopian religious thinking became a secular humanism that

encourages us to make exorbitant, apocalyptic demands upon life and tells us that we can break through the joyless forms of everyday existence toward a radiant communality and wholeness. It insists that we and the world we live in are more malleable, more alive with possibility, less restricted by circumstance, than society or the notion of original sin would have us believe. (vii)

As a result of their idealism, instead of "heroically" volunteering to fight in wars, these young men avoided the
draft. Alan, for example, is a conscientious objector, choosing menial labor in a mental hospital to fighting in Vietnam. Because of his distaste for war and his own unpleasant experiences with death (especially Phoebe's fatal car crash), Alan is able to say emphatically, "I was not going to kill anybody" (55).

Lee R. Edwards, in defining the female hero, states that women stand in opposition to Western society's male heroes as "military leaders: commanding, conquering" (4), and, although male, Alan fits her description. He returns to Chickasaw Ridge precisely because he longs to discover not combative prowess, but innocence and peace, a "country peace," as reviewer Philip D. Carter phrases it (n. pag.). His appearance and attitude resemble King Arthur at the height of his idealism:

He [Alan] thought himself pure, . . . he believed purity to be possible. He thought he could pay his dues from time to time and live, by the light of his convictions, an untroubled, perhaps even a heroic, life—a not uncommon belief among young men of twenty-two with deep-set silver-blue eyes and wide bony foreheads. (53)

Alan considers himself a sensitive poet, a role many men consider effeminate, who wants to live according to his inner dictates for purity.

Alan also reflects the "anti-establishment" movement's desire to replace materialistic, technological male-dictated society with a simple, basic existence in nature. The narrator scoffs at his uncle Lester Chipman's offer for a
managerial position at J. C. Penney's, which Lester considers, as literary critics Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams describe it, "the ultimate haven, a secure polyester fortress that offers protection from loss and want" (60).

Instead, Alan chooses a life at subsistence level closely tied to the natural world. In adapting Campbell's model for the woman's quest, Pearson and Pope describe the female hero's stance: "An exploration of the heroic journeys of women--and of men who are relatively powerless because of class or race--makes clear that the archetypal hero masters the world by understanding it, not by dominating, controlling, or owning the world or other people" (5). They add: "Often, the female hero is in tune with spiritual or natural values that the society advocates but does not practice" (9). Alan shows his sensitivity to "natural values," when he goes out on his porch to look around him one night before bed:

> While I watched, a meteor drifted down and vanished behind the line of pine trees. I walked to the east end of the porch and, leaning out over the banister there, ... saw the Lynx followed by Perseus around the sky. I heard the trees moving in the wind. (27)

Alan's reference to the constellations underscores the book's mythic component. Also, the young hero chooses to participate in natural processes instead of subduing them, just as Ishmael rejects Ahab's maniacal desire to control nature in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.
Seasons play a significant role, as the novel begins in January and ends in April, linking Alan’s journey of death and rebirth with nature. And Douglas further emphasizes the cyclical through the structure of the book. Alan tells his story in 1978 about his trip to Chickasaw Ridge in 1971 when he reviewed the summer of 1964, each time span lasting seven years. He states:

Our high school biology teacher once told us that all the molecules in the human body are replaced every seven years; so I am not the same man I was then—not just seven years older, but wholly different. Maybe now this new man can make sense of all the tangled events of that winter, can make peace with his younger self. (And make peace, too, with a still earlier time, an earlier self. . . . All that I want to think about, to write about, began for me when I was fifteen—the summer of 1964.) (10)

The process is never-ending: Alan dies to be reborn a new person and will die to be reborn again. Douglas stresses this particular death/rebirth sequence by having Alan, narrating the story in first person in 1978, refer in the third person to the free-spirited Alan of 1964 or 1971, who reflected Walt Whitman’s passionate idealism:

I have a story to tell . . . about the young man who went home to Mississippi, to Chickasaw Ridge, to the deep woods, and invited his soul; about what happened to him and what he learned that year; and about what had happened in the past to people he knew and cared for. (12)

In addition to progressing in a chronological pattern as he moves from child to adolescent to adult, Alan grows in a cyclical manner because the past continues to die and be reborn: additional discoveries about his past alter his
past self as well as changing how he sees himself in the present. For example, in 1978, Alan says about himself in 1971:

Now—now [1978], as I said, I am not the same man. But I would like to imagine myself back into his shoes, his skin . . . ; and I suppose the reason is that, molecules or no molecules, he is still important to me. I'm stuck with him, have to make myself over every day out of memories he hands me. (12)

Douglas portrays the heroic journey of death and rebirth as an internal mirroring of natural processes that overlap, like waves tumbling to their death on the shore, only to flow back to the ocean to be reborn and tumble again in new configurations. The author's intentions resemble Virginia Woolf's in *The Waves*, in which characters' voices surface, disappear, and resurface anew. Traditionally, literature associates women with nature's rhythms because of their menses and childbirth, but in *The Rock Cried Out* Douglas structures Alan's journey as a male in the traditionally female pattern of natural cycles, reinforcing his androgyny.

Alan's hero's quest begins when he returns to Chickasaw Ridge, and his growth is gradual, as he incrementally gains insight about his past and present. Near the end of the novel, he makes a transformational descent into the inner depth and darkness of the water, and of his psyche, into what Broughton and Williams call the realm of "pain and loss and evil" (60). Both Campbell and those writing about female heroes agree that the hero's trip is more of an
internal reckoning with self than a physical undertaking.
Campbell states: "The passage of the mythological hero may
be over-ground incidentally; fundamentally it is inward--
into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long
lost, forgotten powers are revivified" (29). Similarly, the
editors of The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development
note that stories of the female's maturation require
conditions that will guide "the young person from ignorance
and innocence to wisdom and maturity" (6). Alan's innocence
is thinking that a complete self equates with purity. His
descent shows him, however, that he must merge the real with
the ideal, the evil with the good, before he can reach a
state of wholeness.

Several factors lead to his descent. While he is at
Chickasaw Ridge in 1971, he thinks often about the summer of
1964 and his love for Phoebe Chipman. The two spent all
their time in nature--walking, horseback riding, boating.
The name "Phoebe" reinforces the book's mythic structure
since it is another name in Greek mythology for Artemis, the
earthly form of the moon-goddess who is the lover of the
woods and the wild chase over the mountains (Hamilton 31).
"Phoebe" is also a derivative of "Phoebus," or the Greek god
Apollo, whose name implies light (Webster 1100). Alan's
idealization of Phoebe obscures any associations with the
night as he makes her into an image of light and purity.
For example, he remembers watching her, with long blonde
hair and graceful limbs, dance to a popular song: "She shook her hips and shoulders as if her bones were made of music, while I lay in the hammock watching, filled with yearning—not just for her, but for joy, adventure, beauty: for the world" (43). In his fantasy she embodies the innocence he longs for.

A friend from Alan's childhood, Dallas Boykin, also contributes to his journey. While Alan works on his house, Dallas stops by occasionally to help him. In contrast to Phoebe's associations with light, Dallas embodies the violent qualities Alan fails to acknowledge within himself. Alan senses the complementary attributes of his friend:

Silence—that's the quality in him that has always struck me first. As a child I felt called upon to chatter, to entertain, to ingratiate myself. . . . He was poised where I was awkward, a master of himself in the woods; and, although he was only a few months older, I sensed in him a precocious sexual maturity that filled me with envy. (70)

In contrast to Alan's height, blonde hair, and blue eyes, Dallas is small and compact, with dark hair and brown eyes. Dallas is sensitive to nature, but mainly uses it to hunt and fish, whereas Alan abhors game sports. Further, Alan learns in 1971 that Dallas joined the army and fought in Vietnam in contrast to his own conscientious objection. Dallas tells Alan, "'When I got out [of the army],', . . . 'I liked to kill people. I thought I might want to be a cop. Or a narc, maybe'" (75).
In his study *Twins and the Double*, John Lash states that although we think of twins as similar, if not identical, etymologically, "twin" denotes both "a union and a separation" (6), and this basic definition fits the relationship of Alan and Dallas. In some ways they are the same, even though they seem to vary in most respects: they shared formative childhood experiences, they love Chickasaw Ridge, and they feel a bond with nature. Dallas is a *doppelganger* presence embodying the version of an "Alan-that-could-have-been" if he had stayed in Chickasaw Ridge and chosen to develop only the male side of himself, just as Spencer Brydon's double in Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" hints at an alternative self. When Alan and Dallas descend into the water, Alan achieves a union with both Dallas and his own violence that leads to his maturation.

Near the end of the novel, Dallas can no longer hide the secret of his past, and he rides around the back country in his truck, telling his story from a CB radio to all who will listen. Literary critic Carol S. Manning objects to Dallas's narration, maintaining that it is "artificial" (130), a contrivance to give the reader information lying beyond the scope of Alan's first person narration. However, if one takes into consideration Dallas's motivation for talking over the CB, the sequence blends in perfectly.

Throughout the novel Dallas has been too terrified to speak of the truth of his tormenting past. It makes sense
that when he can stand withholding his secret no longer, he, still frightened, chooses to relate it over a CB radio rather than face-to-face. Through sharing his secret, which has overwhelmed him with guilt, he hopes to reconcile himself with his evangelical Christian God by confessing his evil wrongs. He desires to recognize more fully his purity and goodness, and his attempts, ironically, help Alan to admit the evil within himself.

Dallas’s wife, Lorene, solicits Alan to keep her husband from self-destruction. While Alan pursues Dallas, he listens to the CB and discovers another bond with his friend: both had loved and idealized Phoebe. As Alan listens to Dallas’s story, he is able to move past his self-absorption enough to hear another’s truth: In 1964 Dallas’s father forced him and his brother to attend Ku Klux Klan meetings. He put the two boys at a post on a hill to record license plate numbers at a voter registration drive. Looking through the sights of his gun, Dallas watched a car as it ascended the hill, in which Phoebe rode in the passenger seat next to Sam Daniels, a strong black man whose family had worked for the McLaurins for generations. When he saw Phoebe touch Sam’s arm, he went into a jealous rage, and before he knew what he was doing, he shot through the windshield of the car, causing a wreck and Phoebe’s death. At this point, Dallas realized the dark, destructive forces within him.
As Alan hears the end of the story, he comes upon Dallas and, enraged, tries to strangle him, forsaking his goals of purity and nonviolence. Conversely, Dallas, remains passive, putting his life in God's hands. The two end up in a deep pool of water, and Alan starts to drown his friend. Dallas finally decides to fight, not for his own life, but for the sake of his son. At this time, Sam, who is upstream, releases a dam valve and unknowingly causes water to surge over the two. Swept along the bottom of the pond, Alan resurfaces to see Dallas unconscious, a huge gash on his head. Thinking Dallas dead, Alan pulls him to the shore where his aunt, Leila, rescues them with Sam's help.

During their struggle, Alan becomes enraged beyond reason, and this descent into irrational fury leads him to a rebirth as he realizes the evil within himself. Campbell says that the regions of the unknown, of which deep water is one manifestation, are "free fields for the projection of unconscious content" (79). And it is in the water that Alan tries to drown Dallas and thus discovers his own destructive drives. (Even before his fight with Dallas, Alan nonchalantly refers to water as "the destructive element" (211), suggesting not only a natural threat but a deliberate reference on Douglas's part to the force of his unconscious knowledge.)

According to Campbell, when the hero begins his descent, he encounters a threshold guardian "at the entrance
to the zone of magnified power," who stands for "the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond [him] is darkness, the unknown, and danger" (77). From this perspective Dallas is Alan's threshold guardian, a presence with whom he must struggle before he can gain new awareness, a presence that embodies unacknowledged attributes of Alan's psyche. In essence, Alan wrestles with himself, fighting the violent part until he rescues it and claims it for his own. Campbell states: "The hero . . . discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self). . . . One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable" (108).

Ultimately, Alan reaches the point at which he realizes good and evil as equal parts of being, as components of what Campbell calls the World Navel, "the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time. . . . And since it is the source of all existence, it yields the world's plenitude of both good and evil" (41, 44). Campbell also maintains that the hero and his ultimate god—when they meet in the World Navel—are "the outside and inside of a single, self-mirrored mystery, which is identical with the mystery of the manifest world" (40).

Douglas makes this meeting even more immanent by personifying the essence of the World Navel in Alan and Dallas. The two physically meet, as Alan's "good" wrestles
with Dallas's "evil," which leads both to greater wholeness. The author makes the descent a complex one, reflecting Pearson and Pope's observations about female heroes' paths. Alan does not merely dive into the water, tackle a monster, and return to benefit society, as Beowulf does with Grendel. Dallas, the "monster," experiences his own growth toward selfhood in the process. He embodies a stage described by Lee R. Edwards in which "villain and hero are each other's shadows" (7). Dallas tries to remain totally nonaggressive, praying, "'Lead me in a plain path, O Lord!'" (287). However, Dallas's "plain path" turns out to be more complex than he envisions. He thinks the "plain path" is to let Alan kill him, to let someone rid the world of his evil. However, he surpasses the narrow parameters of good and evil that he finds in his Christian faith when he reaches past himself, past his obsession with self-hatred, in order to live for his son. In so doing, he embraces an awareness that both surpasses self and is the essence of self, the World Navel, "the source of all existence."

The novella "Hold On" in Black Cloud, White Cloud provides a situation that, in terms of gender, parallels Dallas and Alan's descent. Looking closely at the story's mythic dimension reveals an approach to myth in The Rock Cried Out that was incipient in the author's early writing. In "Hold On," the protagonist Anna wrestles in the water with her black domestic employee Estella, almost drowning.
her in the process. Anna struggles to travel beyond gender (and race) into the World Navel, but her journey is not easy. She has internalized male mandates about the acceptability of "masculine" traits and the unacceptability of "feminine" attributes. Estella retains African beliefs in magical phenomenon that defy logic, embodying the irrationality that white Western men disdain and associate with women. Because Anna has unknowingly adopted this male attitude, she cannot abide Estella's beliefs.

Before they struggle in the water, Anna responds to Estella's assertion that helping a boy with a broken leg could have marked her unborn child:

With a few words she [Estella] had put between them all that separated them, all the dark and terrible past. Anna was filled with a horror and confusion incommensurate with the commonplace superstitions that Estella had stated in confident expectation of understanding and acceptance. It was as if a chasm had opened between them from which there rose, like fog off the nightmare waters of a dream, the wisps and trails of misted feelings: hates she had thought exorcised, contempt she had believed rendered contemptible, the power that corrupts and the submission that envenoms. (182)

Anna's thoughts include racial considerations, but her inner fight between male dictates for women and her own sensibilities also predominates. Estella bears a marked resemblance to a fertility goddess, a reigning female deity. Huge and golden, she wears a dress covered with flowers that looks "like a robe that some tropical fertility goddess might wear" (162). In contrast, Anna has "a strong, boyish
figure, narrow-hipped and flat across the buttocks" (161). Meredith A. Powers in her book on Western female heroines maintains that women should try to return to the chthonic segment of the goddess cycle, that which existed before Greek myth, because the chthonic defies differentiated consciousness, its dominion being irrational and primordial.

She adds: "The knowledge of this irrational aspect of life . . . is repugnant to the heroic ideals of male heroism. Rational man-centered culture has attempted to deny it" (153). Anna has identified with the dominant male culture's tenets--even to the point of looking male--and she must fight to realize a self lying beyond societal gender dictates. Pearson and Pope observe that external figures whom the female hero encounters sometimes represent in physical form the hero's internalization of "the outer society's negative messages of self-worth" (64). Patriarchal society has taught Anna that any irrationality within her is a weakness, and so she must struggle to embrace Campbell's "intolerable" realm in order to grow, to reconcile the female with the male.

Both Anna and Alan approach self-knowledge as they move past limiting roles to reach an androgynous state of wholeness. Ironically, Anna must embrace what society deems "female," and Alan, "male," in order to do so. Both begin their journeys in attempts to follow their inner dictates, Alan striving for purity, and Anna, for a genuine friendship.
with someone society deems "beneath" her. Even though initially misdirected, their sincere efforts lead them to discovery. As Thoreau writes in *Walden*:

I learned this by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him. (2010-11)

In "Hold On" and *The Rock Cried Out*, the "new, universal, and more liberal laws" include a self-realization transcending gender.

Various minor characters throughout the novel also travel heroic paths at different times, reinforcing the book's cyclical, feminine dimension and pointing to a sense of shared humanity and community, which some feminist scholars note as the culminating effect of the heroic undertaking. Pearson and Pope maintain that because heroes attain a sense of wholeness and autonomy, they are able to experience "the joy of this new community of one" (230). This autonomy, or lack of dependence on others for one's identity, leaves others free to embark on their own journeys of self-exploration. The authors conclude that "the true hero--whether male or female--moves past hierarchical ways of interacting with other people to recognize everyone's true heroic potential" (251).
Douglas reflects Pearson and Pope's views, since Alan's narration, which happens after his heroic journey, includes the heroic journeys of others. Lindsay Lee (Dallas's brother), for example, descends into the truth of another man's story, which forces him to admit realities he has hidden from himself. And Sam descends into the depths of prison where he receives spiritual insight.

Another intricacy is Leila's rescue. She appears androgynous when she prepares to save Alan and Dallas from the water, straddling a log, "heavy and solid as a man, her legs wrapped around it, her feet locked together, reaching towards us as we swept down" (292). Leila, who has undergone her own journey of self-realization, has reached the identity surpassing gender toward which Alan and Dallas are moving.

Douglas also writes that she has "a face as round and pale and lovely as the moon," and that she is "a night person" who loves to stay awake until the early hours of the morning (84). In discussing Greek and Roman myth, Edith Hamilton speaks of the moon goddess's three forms: Selene in the sky, Artemis on earth, and Hecate, the Goddess of the Dark of the Moon. Hecate is associated with deeds of darkness, and she is the Goddess of the Crossways, ghostly places of evil magic. Hamilton writes about Hecate: "In her is shown most vividly the uncertainty between good and evil" (32). Leila, associated with both night, or darkness,
and the moon, assumes Hecate's position, thus balancing darkness with the light of Phoebe, linked with Artemis and Phoebus, and underscoring Alan's reconciliation of good and evil. When she, with the help of Sam, pulls Alan and Dallas out of the water, they join her "community of one," as Pearson and Pope call it, with their own newly discovered sense of wholeness and autonomy.

The editors of Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction provide a general description of women novelists' vision that precisely describes the mythic element of Douglas's fiction:

They [women novelists] have exaggerated the worst attributes of the "male" and the "female" enemy so that they become laughable, paper dragons. They have provided us moments of epiphany, of vision, when we can feel rising from our depths a quality that altogether transcends the gender polarities destructive to human life. . . . They have made of the woman's novel a pathway to the authentic self, to the roots of our selves beneath consciousness of self, and to our innermost being. (178)

Alan's mythic journey begins when he travels to Chickasaw Ridge to "invite his soul" and climaxes when he tries to strangle Dallas. As the dam's roaring water scrapes him along the bottom of the pond, he embraces his violence and anger. He emerges from the experience more nearly whole, uniting the peace-loving, gentle part of his psyche, labeled by patriarchal society as "feminine," with his more aggressive "masculine" side.
When Alan re-enters the world, he is changed. Retaining his sensitivity to nature, he notes that spring has replaced winter, that new life has come from death since "the woods are burning with life" (301). Now he realizes that complete purity is impossible, stating, "I knocked off being pure the day I strangled Dallas" (295). Blending idealism with realism, he learns the craft of welding to make a living and combines an industrial job with leisurely periods of writing and contemplation.

He forsakes the "purity" of his poetry to write "stories and this record" (296). Like the narrator in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Marlow in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, and Janie in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, Alan feels compelled to tell the story of his descent into darkness to the world; his story becomes his boon to humanity. He also realizes that he will never complete his narrative, that it will continue to die and to be reborn:

My papers now are spread around me in neat stacks and I am adding a sentence here, a paragraph there, trying to put in everything, to ask and answer as many questions as I can. I can't help feeling the urge of the storyteller to tie up loose ends, to write, "And everybody lived happily (or unhappily) ever after." Plus the urge of the moralist to make his point, of both to give the tale a shape. But the shape is still changing. Only the finished--the dead--have a finished shape. Not even the dead, crumbling to earth... Next year the dead will be flaming in the April trees. (302-03)
Knowledge of one's work and of oneself remains ultimately a mystery, a never-ending process of discovery. The quotation above concludes the book; it is set apart from the previous text, and the narrator is so reliable, to use Wayne Booth's terminology, that the line between author and protagonist nearly disappears. Douglas expresses the ever-evolving nature of all storytellers' tales, tales whose meanings will continue to evolve as future readers, whether of lives or of fiction, provide new interpretations and as authors view their previous work from new perspectives. Douglas further develops her sense of the tenuous demarcation among author, reader, and character in her next novel, *A Lifetime Burning*.

Notes

1 All subsequent references in this chapter to statements by Joseph Campbell refer to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.


3 The hippies' insistence on the merits of a simple life in nature and the debasement of lives immersed in technology resembles the stance of the Southern writers called the Agrarians, who wrote a manifesto of their beliefs called *I'll Take My Stand*, published in 1930. For a discussion comparing the Agrarians and Ellen Douglas, see John L. Grigsby, "The Agrarians and Ellen Douglas's *The Rock Cried*


5 A similarity exists between Douglas's description of Estella and Gloria Naylor's portrayal of Miranda, a conjure woman steeped in the African traditions of healing and magic, in *Mama Day* (1988. New York: Vintage, 1989). Both authors tie their characters to nature's patterns. Naylor writes about Miranda: "Under the grayish light her skin seems to dissolve into the fallen tree, her palm spreading out wide as the trunk, her fingers twisting out in a dozen directions, branching off into green and rippling fingernails" (255). Douglas says of Estella:

She stood over the pool like a priestess at her altar, all expectation and willingness, holding the pole lightly, as if her fingers could read the intentions of the fish vibrating through line and pole. Her bare arms were tense and she gazed down into the still water. A puff of wind made the leafy shadows waver and tremble on the pool, and the float rocked deceptively. Estella's arms quivered with a jerk begun and suppressed. Her flowery dress flapped around her legs, and her skin shone with sweat and oil where the sunlight struck through the leaves, across her forehead and down one cheek. (169)
CHAPTER SIX

"I REACH OUT TO YOU ALL": AUTHOR, NARRATOR, AND READER IN A LIFETIME BURNING

A Lifetime Burning, published in 1982, is a diary novel, the narrator Corinne's description of her thirty-year marriage focusing on her husband George's extramarital affair. Carrying over the first-person point of view from The Rock Cried Out, Douglas expands its function. Because of the diary format and female narrator, Corinne's first-person account operates not only to heighten her intense self-scrutiny but also to emphasize the thin veil separating the protagonist and the author. Eudora Welty says of the novel: "Doors in its telling open to other doors which open in turn and the mystery of ordinary life as it reaches a certain point is hair-raisingly and most satisfactorily present" (Campbell, S. H1).

In The Rock Cried Out Douglas had already "opened a door" by creating a hero who surpasses gender. She unlocks an additional door in A Lifetime Burning by utilizing point of view in a manner lying outside patriarchal mandates for 1 authorship. In The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar maintain that traditionally the author has resembled God the Father, assuming the stance of the "paternalistic ruler of the fictive world he has created" (5), of one who completely owns the text and

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dictates its direction from lofty, omniscient heights. Such writers perpetuate the male-dominated, hierarchical structure of society through their authorship, or "authority," as Gilbert and Gubar describe it. However, Gilbert and Gubar find even in nineteenth-century women's literature "a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and society" (xii).

In A Lifetime Burning Corinne expresses concern about exercising absolute control through her diary:

I awakened last night from a dream of which all that was left was a voice in my head saying, "Where art rules, the artifact is a source of power." . . .
I am not, then confessing, not at all, not making myself known, but creating an object that will yield power, children, George, over your imaginations, will transform and distort your lives.
Can it be that instead of love I am insatiable only for power?
That voice in my head, I remembered later, was no part of me, but the voice of Frederick Karls in his biography of Conrad. I had been ready to claim as my own so neat an aphorism, but I can't. (209)

Calling readers' attention to a dictatorial desire to govern her text gives them an opportunity to disagree with her stance. Her comments "not making myself known" and "insatiable only for power" suggest how trying to rule others through writing steers the author away from subjectivity by undermining honest authority.

Corinne also negates absolute control by giving credit for the adage to another writer, thus sharing authoritative
power. She points to the interconnection of readers and
writers that forms a complex pattern in which books
influence authors' lives and vice versa. An interlocking
web of meaning, a respect for the shared responses of the
author, reader, and characters, replaces any sole governing
authorial position.

Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams write
of Douglas's fiction that A Lifetime Burning "takes more
risks than Douglas's earlier novels" (63), or as Douglas
says about the book: "I simply look with more obsessiveness
and more intensity into the life that I've always been
looking at" (Speir 237). In so doing, she provides her own
rendition of what Wayne Booth calls the "implied dialogue
among author, narrator, the other characters, and the
reader" (Fiction 155).

The word "implied," in reference to the writer, points
to the distinction between the author writing a particular
narrative and the totality of that person's being: In A
Lifetime Burning Douglas refers to one aspect of herself, to
the stance she assumed when she wrote the novel. Or, as
James Olney says in writing about autobiography, another
form of writing about the self:

Because one did not . . . know the T.S. Eliot of
Monday and Tuesday existence, it is necessary to
hold to and emphasize a distinction between the
merely personal personality of T.S. Eliot and the
artistically transformed personality of the [autobiographical] poem [Four Quartets]. (262)

Booth, too, explains this dynamic:

Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works. (Fiction 71)

The implied author in A Lifetime Burning, Douglas's "air," as Booth says, is a writer who reaches out to her audience, one who wants to give her readers a genuine story but who feels she is unable completely to do so, thus forsaking male notions of author-ity.

One way Douglas expresses this position is through the diary format, which is a long-standing mode of female expression. Because they have not often been able to express themselves honestly and openly in society, women have traditionally kept diaries. In A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to the Present, Margo Culley writes:

From well before the American Revolution to the present, large numbers of women have kept regular written records of their lives. With the major exception of black women's lives under slavery, virtually every aspect of women's experience finds expression in their diaries. (xi)

Women have turned inward in response to male oppression, discovering themselves through private writing.

What Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope state about the female hero's departure from society also describes women's decisions to keep diaries: "The withdrawal from life may
also be a desperate bid for freedom, and a retreat into an inner world. The female character who experiences years of brutalized feelings, dismissal, and disapproval retreats from the messages of her unworthiness" (47). Broughton and Williams observe that the diary allows the narrator in A Lifetime Burning to express the rage she feels resulting from "years of brutalized feelings." They maintain that the novel "suggests that beneath the quiet domestic surface, women may lead lives of raging imaginative obsession" (64).

Douglas does not write a diary per se, however, but a diary novel, depicting her view of female author-ity in fiction and embodying her search as author for the same truthful expression that her characters seek. Lorna Martens writes in The Diary Novel: "The diary form is mimetic of what could be a real situation. No other form of narration can achieve comparable closeness between the narrator and the narrated world without being identifiably fictive" (6).

In addition to continuing a legacy of female writing, Douglas most likely chose the diary form because it makes the reader question the line between life and fiction, to ask, "If fiction is made up, but mirrors life, how much of life is made up?" Douglas reflects this sensibility when she states:

I've just gotten more and more interested in what's true and what isn't true and how impossible it is to recognize the truth or to tell the truth or to read a book and know it's true. And that's become one of my preoccupations in writing. It was certainly the case in A Lifetime Burning, and
It was the case in *Can't Quit You, Baby.* (Tardieu 27)

She shares Martens' conclusion that "fiction is inevitable" (31).

Douglas' characters, as we have seen, want desperately to know truths underlying surface appearances. Anna, for example, in *Black Cloud, White Cloud* strives for a meaningful relationship with Jesse; Nat in *Where the Dreams Cross* struggles for a genuine identity unencumbered by male dictates; and Martha and Lucas in *Apostles of Light* fight to expose the injustices done to the elderly under the guise of compassion. In *A Lifetime Burning* Douglas addresses for the first time the author's efforts to get to the truth beneath appearances, adding complexity to her writing style. Author and poet Adrienne Rich in her reflections on women, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence,* writes about the interrelationship of truth and complexity:

In speaking of lies, we come inevitably to the subject of truth. There is nothing simple or easy about this idea. There is no "the truth," "a truth"--the truth is not one thing, or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. The pattern of the carpet is a surface. When we look closely, or when we become weavers, we learn of the tiny multiple threads unseen in the overall pattern, the knots of the underside of the carpet. (187)

Douglas realizes that part of her "weaving" underneath the "carpet" of her fiction is her presence as author.

Martens says that it is hard to distinguish between first person fictional and nonfictional literature,
especially in the intimacy of the diary form (31). Douglas uses the first person in *A Lifetime Burning* with just this concept in mind. With the following triangles Martens expresses the complex relationship between diary novel and writer, between the point of view of the narrator and of the implied author:

**DIARY**

```
  diarist
   \_________/
   \       \  
    \     \  
  \_________/
     \   \ 
      \  \ 
       \  
        \ 
```

**DIARY NOVEL**

```
  author
   \_________/
   \       \  
    \     \  
  \_________/
     \   \ 
      \  \ 
       \  
       \ 
      \ 
     \ 
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The framed communicative structure of the diary novel makes the distinction between author and narrator blur. For example, as the story opens, Corinne (whose lack of a last name points to the personal nature of the text) explains how
she has put off writing in her diary by watering the lawn and hauling wood. Then she states:

But, as you see, I am now back at my table writing, the blue thread of ink raveling across the page.

This observation may be true: Even writing may be a way of putting off. I don't know what to write and I put down whatever word comes next into my head.

I want to say everything at once, to understand, to accept, to stop striving. Also, I want to say—nothing. Or, to put it another way, I want to explain everything truthfully and at the same time to be always right, always charming, always lovable, always beautiful. Is that too much to ask? Especially when I'm doing the explaining. (4-5)

Corinne's writing at a desk parallels what Douglas is doing at the same moment, making a distinction between author and character questionable, especially because of the first-person narration. Does "I" refer to the author or the character?

H. Porter Abbott points out in Diary Fiction: Writing as Action that every time the diarist uses "I," the act alters the writer, "rather than, say, confirming the writer in his or her ways" (9). When the diarist writes "I," she objectifies herself; the "I" on paper cannot be the same as the flesh-and-blood person doing the writing. Similarly, when an author writes "I" for a first-person narrator, she must experience a feeling of some reference to self, however slight, since she uses that pronoun for herself in everyday life; however, at the same time, she realizes that she is not the character. "I" becomes a slippery pronoun. If it
does stand for the diarist within the text, it does not
denote the same "I" at the beginning of the diary as it does
at the end since Corinne's storytelling changes her
perspective. If it refers to the author, the person who
wrote the book in the late seventies is not the same Ellen
Douglas of either the sixties or the nineties; she, too, has
changed.

Diaries have an immediacy that strengthens this mimetic
and irresolute situation. On a specific date, the writer
can talk about how she is at that moment. This immediacy
brings the author into consideration, who is also writing at
that moment. The form of the passage above in which Corinne
speaks of the "blue thread" of her writing bears witness to
the "now" of the writing: It is choppy, stopping and
starting with short paragraphs. And the content of
Corinne's entry furthers the confusion between author and
character because the narrator is writing about starting to
write. When Corinne writes, "I put down whatever word comes
next into my head," the reader must wonder if that is also
true for the author. In contrast to the latent presence of
the author in "Jesse" and "I Just Love Carrie Lee" in Black
Cloud, White Cloud, the writer breaks through into the
narrative of A Lifetime Burning.

By stressing the affinity between author and character,
Douglas reflects writer Doris Betts' observations of female
authors: "Many of us women writers seem more willing than
men to admit to practicing that very partnership we used to read off the cover of a typical high school textbook, *Literature and Life*" (259). Given Douglas's reluctance to label herself as a woman writer, her aim was probably not so much to join the ranks of other women authors, as to look for an honest means of self-expression, which, paradoxically, because she is a woman, lies outside the parameters of patriarchal literary dictates.

When Corinne asks if it is too much to be both truthful and "always right, always charming, always lovable, always beautiful," the answer of course is "yes." Aunt Louise in *Where the Dreams Cross* illustrates that it is. Now, however, the narrator directly questions the impossibility of both intentions. Conversely, Corinne raises the possibility that, because she is the one constructing her diary, she could make herself into someone both truthful and the epitome of virtue and beauty when she writes: "Is that too much to ask? Especially when I'm doing the explaining." Since one cannot always be lovable and virtuous, Corinne's saying she can make herself so suggests that she can create an artificial character, someone unlike an actual person. By implication, Douglas reminds readers that the author has the power to shape characters into any form she wants.

Douglas further undermines authorial power by drawing attention to the writer's tendency to distort what she creates. James Olney, in discussing the complex
relationship between artist and created object, maintains
that any picture of reality,

any poem or painting or piece of music that one
might create, must derive its integrity-coherence
from one's own integrity-coherence, for external
reality certainly, in its raw state, brings
nothing of this singleness or completeness. . . .
It is by the power of metaphor that we compact the
multifarious world of objects into the emotional
configuration of the subject eye and by the same
power that, in reverse perspective, we expand the
form of the percipient eye to cover the extent of
the natural world. (34)

Douglas is aware that her "subject eye" orders the world and
that she imposes this order on the text; however, she also
differs from Olney's description of the creative act. The
author states about crafting the novel: "Maybe I felt that
I had hit upon a very strong metaphor for the doubling back
on itself of the ego, that irresistible need for self-
justification, and the battle between self-justification and
the need to reach out honestly toward other human beings"
(Speir 243).

The ego's desire for self-justification resembles
Olney's description of a person's ordering her world in
terms of self. But reaching out toward others refers to a
yearning to surpass self, to embrace the interconnectedness
of self, others, and nature in their continuing patterns of
death and rebirth. In addition, Douglas says that she made
the book symmetrical (with paralleling diaries, for example)
to stress that human lives have organic forms, that

they exist in time with beginnings and middles and
ends and crises and repetitions. . . . The forms
of novels and the forms of stories are not arbitrary. They are deeply rooted, or so it seems to me, in the organic forms of human life, the way human beings live their lives. (Speir 243)

Douglas succeeds in her efforts to show both self-justification and a desire to reach out to others, combining the ego's structuring with more natural rhythms. One way she does so is through a self-conscious patterning of recurring words and phrases. On the one hand, repetitions of phrases remind the reader that an ego, the author, orders her world in a certain way. Viewed from another perspective, however, these repetitions mirror the cyclical pattern of nature. Douglas repeats phrases both within the text and in reference to previous works.

Corinne, for example, writes about George's response to her accusations of an affair: "A curious thing happened to his face, an indescribable expression crossed it, as if he moved deeper within himself to a place where I could not possibly follow him" (78). Later, Corinne supposedly reports verbatim what her son's roommate, Janice, told her about a television interview. But when she quotes Janice, Janice uses almost the identical phrasing Corinne had used for George, calling attention to the fact that the narrator's (and author's) presence resides with every characterization: "'When he [Johnny Carson] asked Eugene [a singer] a question, I saw an expression cross his face--Eugene's--indescribable, as if he retreated into some deep place inside himself" (107). Corinne projects her own life
experiences and perceptions onto her characters, and, by inference, so must Douglas.

On the other hand, in stressing the author's presence, the implied author negates the writer as omniscient "God," showing instead that the text is only an expression of one person's perception of the "integrity-coherence" of the world, an expression whose rhythms resemble others' statements and the repetitions in nature—not separate and above, but a part of. Similarly, Corinne includes a fabricated grandmother's diary she pretends is genuine. When she transcribes the "diary," which she made up, the grandmother states, "Here I am" (144). In the last sentences of the diary novel, Corinne says, "Here I am" (212). If the grandmother's diary was artifice, is Corinne's? Is Douglas's novel? Yes, of course, and the author undermines any godlike omniscience while, at the same time, drawing attention to human beings' shared desires and responses.

The same repetitions occur between texts. For example, the last sentence of The Rock Cried Out, "Next year the dead will be flaming in the April trees" (303), is recalled in Corinne's 23 July entry, "The leaves on the poplar trees leap in the wind like green flames" (143). The last sentence of her previous novel doubtless was still in Douglas's mind as she wrote A Lifetime Burning; describing leaves as flames is a vivid, memorable simile. Repeating
the phrase, she draws attention to herself as author. Also, at the end of "Jesse," the protagonist Anna remembers only two phrases, laden with meaning, from a dream, just as Corinne at the conclusion of A Lifetime Burning recalls from a dream only the serious words, "Where art rules, the artifact is a source of power" (209).

In Douglas's life, repetitions also occur between author and character. Douglas divorced her husband in 1983, a year after the publication of A Lifetime Burning, and she, like Corinne, has three children. One wonders how much of the novel is the author's reckoning with her own experience. Douglas, like Corinne, has a son living in California who is a musician (Tardieu 21). Corinne is sixty-two; Douglas was sixty-one when the novel was published. Part of the original manuscript of the novel burned in a fire in California when Douglas was visiting her musician son, Richard (James, S., "Diary" n. pag.). Of course, the diary novel is not a rendering of Douglas's life; it is fiction. Still, knowing about the author's circumstances reinforces the complex interplay of the writer and her work, the "digressions within the digressions," as Corinne says (13), the stories within the stories.

In addition, we have seen how reading Frederick Karls's biography influenced Corinne's thoughts about the world and her own writing. At one point, she enters in her diary:

Other people are nobler than I. Other people use their wills to produce the acts that form their
lives. Other people leave—rather than wallow in their own weakness, their own treachery, their own ruin. I know this is true. I have seen them do it. I have read about them in books. I have invented and dreamed other lives for myself. (202)

Other people contribute to how she thinks about herself; what she reads shapes her views; and her fantasies are a part of who she is. And as all of these influences change, so her perception of herself, her books, and her imaginings shifts in a never-ending cycle. She never reaches a psychic destination but mimics nature's rhythms in her continual psychological deaths and rebirths, the golden ring of the truth about herself, a mystery always beyond her grasp.

Douglas shows how the author's ever-changing existence influences what she writes in her construction of Corinne's diary, which again undermines her absolute author-ity. She does not discount the planning, the rationality, that are part of composition, but she also views writing in terms of Coleridge's organic process of a narrative going through its own deaths and rebirths in discovering its true form, just as human beings do ("Mechanic" 500). The diarist, like the author, has the option of reading previous portions of her text, and reading these segments can influence what she writes in future entries. Emerson reflects this phenomenon: "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series" ("Circles" 214).

For Douglas, too, the narrative is never ultimately finished (to which the conclusion of A Rock Cried Out bears
witness). The diary provides the perfect structure for this cyclical approach because of its loose form. It does follow a rough chronology since the diarist dates entries, but that is where all linearity stops. Diarists write about whatever they think that day, whether or not it pertains to what has immediately preceded it. Consistent people, events, and themes run throughout, but they surface and resurface in random order, just as one lives one's life. Eudora Welty in *One Writer's Beginnings* explains the overlapping nature of lives and stories:

> The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order, a timetable not necessarily—perhaps not possibly—chronological. The time as we know it subjectively is often the chronology that stories and novels follow: it is the continuous thread of revelation. (75)

Corinne's writing adheres to this pattern, although she tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to follow patriarchal norms for linearity. For example, she writes: "What I must do is proceed methodically, chronologically into this desperate enterprise, proceed morning after morning—perhaps even truthfully" (68). She makes this resolve after beginning her entry:

> You can see by the date that I've been away from my desk for almost a week.
> Where am I? Where are we?
> Or, and here I feel as if I may be slipping into a waking dream, how can I be sure what happened next? Time has passed. A year? Two Years? Maybe I've changed the order of events, even the content of events inside my own head, thinking, I'll put off telling about this until
Corinne thinks she should progress chronologically, but that is not the way she operates. Again, the line between author and narrator is thin. The reader must wonder if the implied author has also been away from her desk for a week. Has she, too, put off writing about an event until later? Writing mimics life and characters mimic authors in a complex mosaic.

In the Afterword to the 1989 edition of *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, what Douglas says about questions raised in "The House on the Bluff" receives direct attention in *A Lifetime Burning*: "Is this true [that stories have no form to them]? Don't lives shape themselves like stories? Or, aren't stories the imitations of the shapes of lives?" (231) Does the narrator of this novel imitate the implied author? Does the implied author imitate the real author? Do all imitate life? Douglas raises such questions.

A desire to know and express the truth (or to hide from it) is one of the novel's major themes, which Douglas heightens through point of view. As she starts her diary, Corinne writes:

I would like to find a way to tell the truth. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth . . . ." etc.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave . . . ." etc.

God knows that's the truth. The problem is, how not to deceive--oneself, everyone. (11)
Perhaps the best examples of the intricate relationship of truth and lies center around the stories of The Toad and the grandmother that Corinne includes in her diary. Women have an especially hard time telling the truth about themselves because of the roles handed to them by patriarchal society, as we witnessed with Nat in Where the Dreams Cross. Nat is a woman devoted to being honest who, in her struggle to break free from male constraints, can only define herself as wanton, as the obverse patriarchal image of a lady.

Corinne realizes her difficulty in being honest but still remains devoted to uncovering as many truths as she can: "God alone knows what's going on with me now (Oh, whatever happens, I commit myself to the truth, etc., etc., in the midst of this thicket of lies)" (47). Both stories of the Toad and the grandmother turn out to be lies of Corinne's making, but they also are stepping stones to her admission of truths that scare and embarrass her. As she says, she wants to tell both the truth and to look good, and the two do not always go together. Corinne makes up lies that embody her true feelings, which, in turn, help her to describe herself when she does not "look good."

For example, rather than admit George's relationship with a young man, she makes up the story of "The Toad," a squat, ugly, stupid woman with whom George has an affair. In discussing this segment of the novel, Carol S. Manning maintains that Corinne can tell The Toad's story because it
is more conventional (131). Men had affairs with women, but homosexual encounters were more often kept secret. Douglas depicts Corinne as sliding into her lie, almost unknowingly, making slight alterations in the truth to cast herself in a more favorable light. When she first tells the reader of the affair, she writes: "He didn't want a divorce--he was still fond of me, although he loathed me [sexually]--and neither did she, it was to everyone's advantage to keep the affair under wraps" (15). The pronoun "she" makes the lover into a woman so subtly that the reader would not likely assume otherwise.

When Corinne talks about George's loathing her, the next logical step would be to explain why he loathed her: he loved men. She realizes the next step, and the dash shows she hesitates as she debates whether or not to go on telling the truth. She decides to alter the circumstances and substitutes a female lover. But in the act of admitting an affair--even if she modifies the facts of it--Corinne works her way to the truth.

The next entry begins: "Here is a possible version of what happened to George and me and The Toad" (29). She obliquely lets the reader know that she is not telling the whole truth, but one version of it. Rather than taking the male implied stance of I-know-exactly-how-this-narrative-should-progress-from-beginning-to-middle-to-end, she points
to the many possible routes a text could pursue, each containing its own variation of the truth.

In this "version" Corinne follows George and The Toad into a church and eavesdrops on their lovemaking. She writes: "Let me say here that I used to be a reasonably decent person" (33). Her lie has allowed her to admit that she is not always "decent." After immersing herself in the truths embedded in her lie, she finally can admit what she has done:

   I can't, after all, make up a true lie. That's what I thought of my story of The Toad as being—a true lie. A waking dream that would bring its gift of meaning to us all. I would use it to tell about our crisis, our distress. I would save his privacy. My . . .
   My what? A few shreds of my pride? But is this lie, after all, one that presents me in a good light?
   And then, what did I intend to do after I had finished slandering The Toad?
   I don't know. I don't know. I didn't think. I can't think. (46)

The truth lies outside reason and conscious thought, as do lies, with an intentional desire for truth leading Corinne, hopefully, in the right direction. Melvyn New, in editing a collection of seven fictional essays, defines "telling lies" in a manner that reflects Douglas's view of "true lies":

   "Telling lies," a phrase that can look two ways: first, toward those constructions of untruth we label art, politics, societies, morals, reality, and second, toward the significance ("tellingness") of those untrue constructions to the process of living. (6)

The "telling lie" of The Toad brings Corinne to an admission of what is "significant," that is, of George's homosexual
affair. Throughout the diary, Corinne expresses concern that she is insane; on the contrary, allowing herself to tell true lies that lead to formerly suppressed truths is a step toward wholeness. The alternative would be to keep ignoring the truths underlying surface lies, which does lead to insanity, especially for women who lie to themselves about their suppression. The journalist in Charlotte's Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is such a character; she ignores the oppressive reality of her existence until she comes to believe that she is a figure on the wallpaper in her bedroom.

Corinne had always heard stories of George's courageous grandmother, Rebecca Adams, who raised four children and ran a farm single-handedly after her husband's death. The family tales about her--"the intrepid horsewoman, the lovely bride, the courageous widow" (23)--are as glowing as the anecdotes about cousin Amy in Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality." Corinne finds diaries of the grandmother that she includes in her diary, which reveal the truth about the grandmother's life: her husband raped her repeatedly, reminded her of woman's subjugation by man (as condoned in the tract The Proper Conduct of Christian Wives), and otherwise ignored her. She hated him, welcomed his death, and turned to a woman for companionship. As Broughton and Williams write, the diary "presents a grim picture of male brutality and female subjection" (63). After including the
grandmother's diary, Corinne admits that it is false, another "true lie" to express both her legacy of female domination and her rage against George: "In spite of myself, I couldn't help pouring all the old devastating pain, all the ancient love and hate, into George's poor helpless dead grandmother" (76).

Deborah Wilson in "'Re-inventing the Record': Ellen Douglas's A Lifetime Burning as An/'Other' Southern Narrative" refers to the merging of narrator and character in this passage: "Her [Corinne's] admission identifies her with the life of this woman, who is also her ancestress as well as George's, and blending their voices and emotions into one text creates a bond between the women" (76).

Further, the grandmother's diary concludes as she addresses other women: "Who could invent a tale dreadful enough to be equal to the real perfidy, the heartlessness, the hypocrisy, the self-righteousness of real men?" (150)

When she began her diary, Corinne wrote that she could not leave George after so many shared years, "even if he seems profoundly unaware of [my] rage and anguish and bafflement" (13). George's insensitivity reflects the grandmother's husband's obliviousness to her feelings. Writing the grandmother's diary leads to Corinne's admission of a frustration with men, especially George, and of Corinne's consequent affair with a woman. She states about the grandmother's tale:
Yes, her story came easily—like automatic writing—just as The Toad's story did. But oh, believe me, not just at the beginning, but with every word I meant to tell the truth—a truth. I began, I wrote on, and in some secret part of me, some hollow hidden even from my own probing, I must have known the writing would lead us here.

I sit staring at the paper. (153)

The narrator again mirrors the author's writing process, implying that the author, too, tells "true lies" in her text in attempting to reach the truth. What Douglas says about her writing process reinforces her link with Corinne. Like the narrator, her life experiences provide the background for the true lies of her fiction. Douglas states:

I'm not sure where things come from. I mean, when I sit down to write, everything that I've read and everything that I know and all the experience of my life is behind whatever it is that I end up writing. But what makes it come together and makes this work and that be thrown away, or what makes this idea pop into my head, that's a mystery. (Tardieu 67)

Corinne's diary vacillates between The Toad's story and the grandmother's story, and these stories have sandwiched between them still other stories that "pop up," the structure of the stories themselves duplicating the process involved in composition.

In her attempt at non-hierarchical writing, Douglas includes readers with the author as a viable component of the narrative, but she also reminds them that they are separate from the text. Readers do participate in the text, and the writer does imagine an audience. However, when the
author wrote her narrative, it was impossible for her to envision specific future readers—Jane Cheney in Richmond, Virginia, for example, who is presently reading her novel and whom the author does not know exists. Douglas is aware of this interplay, this additional strand in her web of truth and lies, and she addresses it directly. For example, as Corinne begins her diary, she writes: "My friend—I'm talking to myself now—you didn't cherish yourself tenderly enough in those days, you know it?" (6). Diaries are personal, written in private, as Corinne admits when she addresses herself; however, the very fact that she feels compelled to clarify to whom the word "friend" refers shows, on the other hand, that she is aware of an audience. When readers first see the words "my friend," they can easily identify with the appellation, just as they do with all authors' direct address, from Henry Fielding's "my sensible reader" (26) in Tom Jones to Harriet Jacobs' "reader" in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (335).

Douglas will not, however, let the reader assume a close bond with the author; instead, she immediately disrupts the reader's assumption of being the diarist's friend by having Corinne point out that she does not refer to the reader, after all, but to herself. Thus she makes the reading audience give up an inclination toward Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" (Biographia 452), that is, toward pretending for the moment that they
are actually part of the story. Instead, she allows them to realize that they are reading the text and in that sense are a part of it, but that they are also separate.

She continues this pattern of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, Corinne does address a general audience two days after the comments to herself above: "My children seem nowadays to look at me with kindness and pity in their eyes— I'm never quite sure why" (14). On the next day she ends her entry speaking solely to women: "Yes, daughters, granddaughters, lovely girls with smooth faces, downy faces, as you get older, you get those [chin whiskers], too" (17). The subsequent entry, written nine days later, flips back to the general audience: "As you can see by the date, more than a week has passed" (17). Then, the following day, she shifts again: "And now, my children, although up to this point I have been addressing, and perhaps will again address, the world, a friend, myself, George—now I am talking to you" (21). Such direct references to a shifting audience force readers to acknowledge both their actual and illusory involvement. Additionally, by identifying the precise audience she has in mind, the implied author gives readers knowledge about how she went about constructing the novel, including them in her writing process and again shattering hierarchy within the text.
In her study of women's diaries, Margo Culley explains the dynamic relationship between author and reader in the diary's creation:

The importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated. The presence of a sense of audience, in this form of writing as in all others, has a crucial influence over what is said and how it is said. Friend, lover, mother, God, a future self—whatever role the audience assumes for the writer—that presence...shapes the selection and arrangement of detail within the journal and determines more than anything else the kind of self-construction the diarist presents. (12)

In her "self-construction" Corinne tells her audience what she might write (which she never does), including them in the process of the "selection and arrangement of detail," and she even gives them ideas about creating the text for themselves:

There may be a segment in this account, like the chapter in Tristam Shandy devoted entirely to punctuation, into which I will put all the sexual fantasies, all the explicit sex—get it out of the way.

Read on, then, anticipating. When you come to it, if you don't like explicit sex, you can skip it. If you do, perhaps I'll arrange the pages so they can be clipped out and moved around to the appropriate places and reinserted.

It just occurred to me, I might include an additional challenge, the element of a puzzle: Which episode goes where? (67)

The implied author spells out for readers how malleable a text is and how their reading of it, what they skip and what they pore over, contributes to its formation.

In other passages, she shows how the questions she imagines the reader asking cause her to write what she does.
For example, Corinne envisions the questions her children might ask:

"Here's another thing," James says. "Corinne [daughter] is irritated because you've got her folding diapers, but what about me? For your convenience, you've simply banished my wife, haven't you? It's too much trouble to say whether she's here or elsewhere. You haven't even given her a name."

"I don't object to standing on one leg for you like a parrot and eating a mango," William says, "but there it is, our lives have very little to do with any of this. We have our own problems, our own memories to struggle with." (162-63)

Imagined readers become characters, emphasizing the close affinity between audience and text, and their active presence contributes to the narrative's course. Further, Corinne reveals how much imagined readers stem from her own perceptions when she answers: "Ah, children, I know you would never, never say these cruel things to me. Never. The questions, the comments, after all are mine, not yours" (163). Her response both includes and excludes her audience once more.

When Corinne contemplates her connection to George, readers can easily identify with her direct question because of its immediacy, as if the author is addressing them and, by extension, all humans: "And what is the force that binds us to each other, enwraps us like a web of steel and nylon, a gill net for catching channel cat, a line, a hundred-pound test, strong enough to land a swordfish, a shark, a dolphin?" (134) No matter how hard one tries to explain, the web that binds character to author to reader remains a
mystery. Douglas insists on this position, refusing to assume the stance of an all-knowing "God the Father."

Lastly, Douglas's construction of the book warns the reader not to trust blindly where the author leads and to read carefully. Douglas says about her intention with the stories of The Toad and the grandmother:

> Lie after lie and screen after screen is put up and then withdrawn. . . . I was walking a tightrope. I wanted it to seem to the reader at first reading to be genuine, but then, looking back at it, the reader would be able to say, "Oh, yeah, I see this is a fake." (Tardieu 91)

She succeeds in her goal. After admitting that The Toad story is false, Corinne proclaims that she wants to tell the truth. She goes on to relate the real story behind The Toad about George's affair with a man. As she tells the truth about the affair, she admits becoming obsessed with finding letters written between George and his lover. When she is looking in a storage area for the letters, she finds the grandmother's diary. The reader can easily assume, since Corinne has told the truth about The Toad and proclaimed that she will remain honest, that she is now telling the truth about discovering the grandmother's diary. Or, if readers are wary, they still question whether the diary is fictive simulation purporting to be reliable or a simulation purporting to be deceptive.

If they are trusting, they must start to question the author's sincerity when they find out the grandmother's account is false. Douglas forces readers to see that the
stories they read do not capture the entire truth, that they are "true lies," perhaps, but not the truth. Conversely, when readers learn the narrator has duped them and when in retrospect they pick up on hints within the grandmother’s diary about its falsity, they realize how much they miss in their own reading. Not only can they not trust the narrator or the author, they cannot trust themselves. In a sense, Douglas follows Martens’ concept of the diary novel's complex interplay among the author, narrator, and reader, but she collapses Martens’ triangle; no longer holding omniscient authority at the top, the author joins the reader and the narrator as they move together through a morass of lies and revelations. Douglas provides layer upon layer of interaction within and outside the text as if all form one intricate organism, always shifting and growing.

The implied author ultimately maintains that what matters is not telling the exact truth, which one can never do, but reaching out sincerely to others, which is what Corinne does. As the novel ends, Corinne imagines her children reaching out and saying:

"Never mind your motives, Mama," one of you says. It doesn’t matter which one speaks, for it seems to me that you are acting as one. "Never mind your character or, for that matter, ours, or Daddy’s. What can we do, any of us, except reach out to one another, stay within reach?" (211-12)

Corinne answers: "Ah, children, ah, George, here I am, then, and here is this. Waking and dreaming, I reach out to you all" (212). With Corinne’s final words, the line
between author and narrator is negligible. Both the implied author and the narrator could say the words, "Here is this" since the author has completed her novel as Corinne has finished her diary. Similarly, either could say, "Waking and dreaming, I reach out to you all." "Waking and dreaming" points to the total giving of self, of the conscious and the unconscious, of deliberate lies and unintended truths, of sincere revelations and involuntary deceptions.

Douglas says that she took the words "here I am" from the biblical story of Samuel and Eli, and the reference shows the profundity for which she aims. She states:

That last word in A Lifetime Burning, Corinne says, "Here I am." I guess what's under that is the suggestion of a much more famous statement by a mythical or biblical character, that is, Samuel as a child to Eli. Samuel thinks he hears Eli calling him and he gets up, and Eli says, "No, I didn't call you." And he goes back to bed. And of course God is calling him. And finally he says, "Here am I," that is, "Here am I, at your bidding." Not to Eli, but to God... [Corinne is saying,] "Here I am, God, and the world. This is the best I can do." (Tardieu 137)

The author realizes that although life's mysterious essence eludes her and her audience, paradoxically, it is also what binds them together, what motivates them to reach out. Emerson expresses this dynamic in "The Over-Soul": "Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons tacit reference is made, as to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; is God"
In acknowledging this "third party," the author negates the patriarchal notion of absolute authority by referring directly to the intangible essence that connects author, character, and reader, not in hierarchy but in equality.

Philosopher Martin Buber addresses this concept in his book *Between Man and Man*:

Community is the being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons. And this multitude, though it moves toward one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from I to Thou.

Buber uses "Thou" to denote the sacred mystery that exists when people interact with others. In Alice Walker's diary novel *The Color Purple*, the narrator Celie expresses this relationship when, first, she addresses her entries to God and then to her sister Celie, suggesting the sacred nature of human contact.

In reviewing *A Lifetime Burning*, Panthea Reid Broughton finds its ending not constructed as well as it could have been, maintaining that Corinne's transition from rage and lying to sincere outreach is too broad. She states: "Is Corinne's hostility to George . . . consistent with her plea for love and forgiveness? If sane human behaviour is never
wholly consistent, is it ever this inconsistent?" (Times 791). Shelby Foote regards the novel's uncertainties in a different way, however: "It is entirely possible to read the book and not be sure if the narrator is lying all the way through or not. It is that very ambiguity that makes this book good, serious literature" (Campbell, S. H1). Perhaps the book's tentative, non-hierarchical quality makes readers used to patriarchal author-ity uneasy, leading them to reject its inconclusiveness.

The novel's construction and content make manifest ideas about authorship latent in Douglas's fiction from the start. Thus, she enters into a new level of development, and she continues this author-ity in her next book, Can't Quit You, Baby, in which she forsakes the diary format for a third-person narrative. In his study of diary fiction, H. Porter Abbott finds that authors frequently write diary novels when they are going through a stage of development. He states that writing diary fiction has the capacity, for the author, "to generate a new departure in craft (or, conversely, to prevent its coming into being). Though the real author is out of sight, she is nonetheless implicated . . . experimenting with her art in what amounts to a kind of laboratory" (53). Douglas uses this "laboratory" not to prevent her style from coming into being, but to express herself more fully.
In *Writing a Woman's Life* Carolyn Heilbrun urges women approaching retirement not to become rigid. At sixty-one, Douglas proves in *A Lifetime Burning* that she has no notions of settling for complacency; instead, she does what Heilbrun urges for all women: "We should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular" (131). Douglas infuses *Can't Quit You, Baby* with the intense interaction among author, character, and reader that characterize *A Lifetime Burning*. In fact, *Can't Quit You, Baby* represents the author at the apex of her career, blending point of view, myth, and dreams in a rich portrayal of life's mystery.

**Notes**


2. Douglas's increased ability to probe patriarchal female roles may be attributed to her age and experience. Douglas explains that a shift to more internalized fiction is partially due to the "practicalities and limitations of age" (Tardieu 134) that restrict involvement in society. Because of the more limited activity that comes with age, turning inward is a natural progression. For example, in the diary novel by Rainer Maria Rilke *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, the aging narrator devotes himself to mastering the inner life, to discovering God and love working through him.

3. The book abounds with examples of the author's sincerity and her limitations. For example, "The way to do
it, I believe, is to tell as straight as I can what’s been happening. Where shall I begin? That’s the question" (12). Or, "If I used a word like 'inconsolable,' it would sound as if I meant to be ironic—to suggest that his predicament was somehow comic. I mean no such thing" (122).

4

CHAPTER SEVEN

"INSIDE OR OUTSIDE, IT'S ALL THE SAME THING": MYSTERY'S CULMINATION IN CAN'T QUIT YOU, BABY

Published in 1988, Douglas's most recent novel, Can't Quit You, Baby, is her most accomplished piece of fiction, one which, as Panthea Reid Broughton and Susan Millar Williams observe, "pulls together brilliantly the strengths of her previous work" (64). By seamlessly weaving dreams, myth, and point of view into a story of two Southern women, she makes mystery an inherent component of ordinary lives that both unites and separates the characters.

The vivid dreams in Can't Quit You, Baby, which reinforce the characters' interior states, reflect the intensity and intimacy of A Lifetime Burning. The novel is the story of a white employer, Cornelia O'Kelly, and her black housekeeper, Julia (Tweet) Carrier. In the beginning of the narrative, Cornelia resembles Aunt Louise in Where the Dreams Cross, adopting the patriarchally determined dream for white women of homemaker and mother. She, like Louise, spends much time in her kitchen and prides herself on her orderly existence, even if it causes her to lie to herself about her restrictive circumstances.

Cornelia's deafness points to her unwillingness to tell the truth, and she often purposefully turns down her hearing aid to block out any uncomfortable comments or activities. What poet Adrienne Rich says precisely describes Cornelia:
It is painful to acknowledge that our [women's] identity has been dictated and diminished by others. . . . This idea still meets with resistance. . . . Resistance may take many forms. Protective deafness—the inability to hear what is actually being said—is one. (195)

Even as a young girl, before she could use deafness to deny her actual circumstances, Cornelia exerted a willful refusal to acknowledge anything unpleasant in her life:

Cornelia's mother is switching her legs—hard. She feels the sting of the blows, looks down, sees red welts rising on her legs, a drop of blood furrowing down (she has thin skin to go with that lovely chestnut hair), looks up, sees the fury on her mother's face. She stands without moving, her hands hanging loosely at her sides, a kindly smile on her face. Her face—it's as if during the switching her face acquires its poised, grown-up expression. She is in control and she intends to stay in control. This absurd occasion is something first to ignore and then to blot out. (40)

In discussing the novel Charles Fister points out how easy it is for Cornelia to slip into her numbing role:

Because she was born into a particular race and class, Cornelia does not have to search and struggle for answers. She can easily accept a stereotypical role within the dreams played out by the southern society of manners. She can continue to play the part and mouth the scripted lines of an unquestioning icon who is deaf to the needs of others. (105)

The preceding passage from the book, however, denies a facile acceptance by Cornelia of "a stereotypical role" for southern women. Cornelia's mother is cruelly teaching her a lesson about proper conduct. And the daughter exerts an iron determination to assume the "kindly" and "poised" role
of an adult woman, not with ease, but in the face of pain, adversity, and self-denial.

Even though Aunt Louise in *Where the Dreams Cross* and Cornelia are similar in their adoption of the male dream for women, Douglas handles them differently, extending the notion of author-ity she developed in *A Lifetime Burning* to Cornelia. For example, at the beginning of *Where the Dreams Cross*, she describes Louise's relation to cooking:

To Miss Louise Hunter, Nat's visits, like those of everyone else in the family, are always resolved into terms of food... She has a recipe for oysters Rockefeller as good as Galatoire's, and everybody in Philippi follows her directions for making okra gumbo and jambalaya... Whenever she hears that Nat is coming for a visit, Miss Louise goes to the kitchen to talk things over with Clakey Morrison, who has been cooking for the Hunters since 1925... "Look, Clakey."... "Here's a jar of last summer's fig preserves."... "You know she never did have no sweet tooth. You might as well not waste fig preserves on Nat." (7-8)

Douglas's description of the aunt's actions and words is objective, her authorial presence unacknowledged.

Additionally, Louise is at odds with her cook Clakey. Clakey knows the real Nat, who does not like fig preserves, while Louise holds onto the image of the Southern woman's tastes and applies it to her niece.

*Can't Quit You, Baby* also begins with an employer, Cornelia, and her housekeeper, Tweet (whom Cornelia insists on calling "Julia"), making fig preserves. In this instance, however, Douglas emphasizes both the women's
opposition and unity more forcefully than she did with Louise and Clakey:

The two women are sitting at right angles to each other at the kitchen table. . . . They are making preserves.

Did you know Wayne Jones died yesterday? the white woman says.

The black woman looks pleased. Serve him right, she says. . . .

Julia!

I hadn't told you I worked for him when me and Nig first come to town?

These are beautiful figs, the white woman says. . . .

Of all the preserves they make together, the two agree that figs are the most delicious, the most aesthetically pleasing. (30)

An element of opposition exists between the women: they sit at right angles; one is black and one is white; one is blunt and one evasive. However, Douglas undermines their opposition with unity: she begins the novel "the two women," and she does not give them names, suggesting universal, non-specific identities. Also, the white woman shares some local news with the black, and the black adds a personal comment, pointing to an intimacy that transcends cooking. And, unlike Clakey and Louise, "the two agree" that fig preserves are best. As Linda Tate observes, this scene "sets the novel's defining tensions in motion: the women share a creative bond but are also placed against each other" (52).

Literary critics Charles Fister, Jan Shoemaker, and Linda Tate stress the importance of race and class, arguing that they form a significant, if not primary, component of
Tweet's and Cornelia's identities. More pertinent to a discussion of mystery, however, is what these societal constructs say about the human condition. Douglas reflects this stance when she says about racial components of her fiction: "[I'm] applying complications and ambiguities to the relationships between races, but there are always layers between individuals, and the writer uses that predicament to illuminate what may be really a human predicament" (Tardieu 22). Author Toni Morrison makes a similar observation in her article, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature": "To read imaginative literature by and about us [blacks] is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the 'raceless' one with which we are, all of us, most familiar" (9). It is the human predicament, with all its separations and unities, that both bars and includes human beings in life's mystery.

Also, both in the passage above from the book and throughout the novel, no quotation marks appear to indicate dialogue, additionally blurring the distinction between characters--and the distinction between the author's and the characters' comments. Douglas says about her motivation for omitting quotation marks:

There are so many quotes within quotes in Can't Quit You, Baby because Tweet so often is telling the story to Cornelia. So Tweet's talking, and she's saying what somebody else said--sometimes even quotes within quotes within quotes--so that the pages began to look like somebody sprinkled
black pepper on them. And it just seemed like visually it would work better if I got rid of all those quotation marks. (Tardieu 74)

Although she does not state that an omission of quotation marks tends to merge thoughts with words, character with character, author with character, inner with outer, the omission nevertheless operates in that capacity. Finally, opposition exists within harmony, harmony within opposition, reflecting a major theme of the novel and complicating the roles the women have adopted.

As the narrative progresses, the reader sees that although Cornelia follows a conventional role of homemaker and mother, she carries within her seeds of rebellion that eventually result in her attempt to escape her confining existence. In contrast to A Family's Affairs, in which Douglas carefully separates dreams from the narrative with italics, dreams, myth, and point of view form such an integrated whole in Can't Quit You, Baby that it is impossible to speak of one without touching upon the others. Douglas underscores, for instance, Cornelia's dream of womanhood with the fairy tale (or myth) of Rapunzel. References to Rapunzel reinforce the traditional side of Cornelia, but they also point to the rebellion that surfaces following her husband John's death (after her "prince" dies and she must save herself). At the beginning of the novel, the author writes:

Yes, until now—until her middle age (not always, but ever since the day she married), everything in
Cornelia's life has gone extraordinarily well. It's as if she was born under a lucky star, as if a fairy godmother bestowed on her the gifts of beauty, brains, and good luck. (12)

The courtship leading to Cornelia's marriage parallels the story of Rapunzel. Like a fairy tale maiden, Cornelia has a controlling mother who requires her "to limit her engagements to men who brought letters of introduction from relatives or acquaintances in other cities" (70-71). The family lives in a late-Victorian house with a tower, the third story of which is Cornelia's bedroom. She sits in the tower, looking out the window and combing her luxurious hair. When World War II comes, like other young women her age, she dances, in a "speechless and dreaming" (75) mood, with the indistinguishable soldiers who are in town.

Gradually, she wakes up at these dances (paralleling the way in which she increasingly wakes up in the novel) and falls in love with John O'Kelly, a young soldier. Cornelia rebels against her mother, who adamantly rejects John because of his working class background. "Far too strong and self-willed to accede in maturity to her mother's wishes" (71), she repeatedly sneaks away from home to meet him. In a desperate attempt to control her daughter, Mrs. Wright locks her in the tower. Alfred Uhry in The New York Times Book Review colorfully describes her act as one of a "Mississippi witch, doing everything in her power to thwart the course of true love" (13). However, Cornelia is undaunted, and when John tells her to pack a suitcase and
wait until he returns, she follows his instructions, blatantly disobeying her mother's wishes. John fastens a pulley between a nearby tree and her banister, and the young woman fearlessly swings to him.

On the one hand, Cornelia follows a patriarchally determined dream for women by moving straight from home into marriage and domestic life, adhering to the basic female fairy tale that Karen E. Rowe describes as "acquiescent females who cultivated domestic virtues in dreamy anticipation of a prince's rescue by which the heroine might enter magically into marriage--her highest calling" (69). Or, as Jan Shoemaker says about fairy tales for beautiful maidens like Rapunzel: "These stories were first told when males owned literature and as such are cultural constructs, but they still silence women like Cornelia who accept them as precepts for happiness" (91). Linda Tate maintains that although Cornelia seems to rebel when she elopes, she ends up making John merely a substitute for her mother, another figure to determine her role as a woman (55).

On the other hand, however, Cornelia does defy convention by disobeying her mother and marrying someone "beneath" her. Before her elopement, when Mrs. Wright asks her daughter through the locked door if she is hysterical, Cornelia answers, "No. . . . I was thinking of Rochester's mad wife and how long he had to keep her locked up. But that's no laughing matter, is it? After all, she set fire
to the house" (91). Cornelia reveals a latent awareness of the suppressed power and rage in women, although she does not begin consciously to realize it until John's death.

Some months after his demise, she goes alone to New York City. There, she meets a workman who helps her when she falls, and she, not he, initiates a sexual encounter. Douglas writes: "Curiously, Cornelia is filled with the same reckless confidence she felt on the long-ago day in the tower when she said to John: I'm not afraid. I've been climbing trees and swinging on ropes all my life" (224). The italicized words are a direct quotation from Cornelia's comments to John just before her escape. Cornelia awoke at age nineteen from Mrs. Wright's dream of marrying her daughter to a socially prominent man. At forty-five, she wakes from the dream of devoted mother and wife as she strives to be fully present, to admit negative as well as positive factors in her life. By having the protagonist awaken twice during the novel, Douglas insinuates that Cornelia (as all human beings) continues to awake from illusionary dreams throughout her life; she progresses to greater levels of awareness, but she never wakes up completely.

Throughout her canon Douglas uses myth to underscore narrative, pointing to the mystery at the core of stories and life. Although mythic archetypes and themes appear in every book, they are most evident in The Rock Cried Out and
Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth gives pattern to the protagonist Alan's development. However, instead of adhering to Campbell's depiction of male heroes only, Alan surpasses gender-restricted conventions by displaying androgynous attributes.

In Can't Quit You, Baby Douglas not only mixes dreams and myth, but she also enlarges upon the notion of an androgynous hero. Androgyny does exist: Tweet uses her grandfather as a role model, and the child Cornelia plays with guns "like a boy" (72). But more prominent in this novel is the importance of another's (Tweet's) living presence in the hero's (Cornelia's) psyche during the process of self-realization. In addition to male and female traits co-existing in a person, other people's voices surface within the individual.

Douglas emphasizes the illusion of separation from others that vanishes when one taps the actual mystery of being at the "World Navel," as Campbell calls it, at "the umbilical point through which the energies of eternity break into time" (Hero 41). By the end of the novel, she makes clear that the power Cornelia eventually attributes to Tweet is really a projected part of her psyche; what is outside oneself becomes a mere manifestation of one's inner state. The author not only continues the implied author's dialogue with her audience, which she developed in A Lifetime...
Burning, she expands the internal interaction to include characters’ relationships within the text.

By intertwining Cornelia and Tweet, Douglas points to the mysterious whole that encompasses seeming oppositions—good and evil, black and white, inside and outside, self and other. In discussing the Hindu myth "The King and the Corpse," upon which Douglas patterns the mythic movement of the novel, Heinrich Zimmer applies the idea of opposites as part of a whole to the different facets within an individual that the individual then projects onto her environment. He explains the interaction of the main characters in the myth, a king and a beggar ascetic (who correspond to Cornelia and Tweet):

The wardrobe of Destiny is filled with all kinds of costumes in which to confront us, and just this one [the beggar ascetic] had to be selected for the meeting with the king. The king had elicited it; indeed, he had woven and tailored it himself. . . . Out of the negative silk of his unkingliness--the failures of his judicious eye . . . --the robe of this impostor had been shaped. The unmonkish monk comes before the king as an incarnate analogy to his own counterfeit of omniscient wisdom. . . . Wherever we step, a portion of our unknown self steps before us significantly, mysteriously fashioned and projected. (221)

Because she refuses to admit any negative elements within herself or in her life, Cornelia, throughout most of the novel, projects any negative, or evil, components of herself onto Tweet.

Zimmer’s book, The King and the Corpse: Tales of the Soul’s Conquest of Evil, which includes the story mentioned
above, is a study in comparative mythology. Zimmer was still working on the book when he died in 1943, and Joseph Campbell edited his notes, compiling the present text. The work bears the mythologist's stamp, from its reflections on the monomyth to Campbell's characteristically enthusiastic and repetitive writing style.

In the myth, "The King and the Corpse," each day when the king holds audience, a beggar ascetic enters and silently offers him a fruit, asking for nothing in return. The king routinely passes the fruit along to his treasurer, who tosses it out the window into the treasure house below. After ten years have passed, a tamed monkey leaps into the hall just after the ascetic has left his fruit. The king gives the fruit to the monkey, and when the animal bites into it, a precious jewel drops out. The king orders the treasurer to retrieve all the jewels from the rotten fruit in the treasure house, and the next day, he tells the beggar that he wishes to speak with him. As they converse, the ascetic tells the king that he needs a hero to assist in a magic undertaking. The king decides to help him, and the mendicant tells the ruler to meet him at the next full moon in the funeral ground where citizens are cremated and criminals hanged.

As the king approaches this spot, he observes ghosts and carousing demons. The beggar draws a magic circle on the ground and instructs the king to go to the other end of
the cemetery, cut down the corpse hanging from a tree, and bring it to him. The king cuts down the corpse, which is inhabited by a ghost who offers to tell the king a tale to shorten the journey. As he finishes the tale, which turns out to be a riddle, the specter asks the king to solve it, adding, "'If you know the answer and do not reply, your head will burst into a hundred pieces'" (206). Since he believes he knows the answer and wants to save his head, the king provides the solution. Immediately, the corpse groans and returns to the tree, forcing the king to cut him down again. The process continues, with the corpse offering a riddle, the king solving it, and the corpse going back to the tree. The specter offers twenty-four riddles, and the king can answer all but the final one.

In the last tale a chief embarks on a hunting expedition with his son. They come across two sets of footprints, one large and one small, and their hunting expertise tells them that the footprints belong to a queen and a princess. The son suggests that his father marry the woman with the larger footprints, since she must be the queen, and that he will marry the other. The chief agrees. Ironically, the daughter turns out to be the one with the larger footprints, so the king marries her and the prince marries the queen. Each woman then has a son. The riddle: How are the two male babies related? The king cannot answer, because the children would be "living paradoxes of
interrelationship, both this and that: uncle and nephew, nephew and uncle, at once on the father's side and the mother's" (212). Then the ghost warns the king that the beggar ascetic is really an evil sorcerer who plans to sacrifice the king as a victim; he tells the king how to kill the sorcerer and save himself, which he does.

Within Can't Quit You, Baby Douglas makes direct references to the myth. For example, she distinctly parallels Tweet's daily appearance at work with the beggar's visits to the king:

Every weekday morning at nine-thirty Julia appears at the door of the room where Cornelia prefers to hold court. Cornelia is an accomplished cook and the kitchen is her throne room. . . . Julia, when she arrives, is usually bearing a gift. . . . tomatoes from her garden . . . Or she fills the house with song. . . . Or she tells a tale out of her life.

At the beginning when Tweet produced a tale (often long and complicated, with an ambiguous moral or circumstances that seemed unacceptable to Cornelia), she, Cornelia, listened with distant courtesy--condescension, even--that might have put off a less committed storyteller. (6-7)

Cornelia, formerly the youthful princess Rapunzel, has grown into the queen of her domestic domain. Like the king with the beggar, she fails to realize the jewels buried in Tweet's gifts of stories.

What keeps Cornelia from a heroic reconciliation of herself with the world is her complete identification with the role of homemaker, in which she reigns supreme, in which she listens to Tweet's stories with condescension, not letting herself know, as Zimmer says, that "this king and
his specter are linked by a deeply hidden enigma of the soul" (213). To ensure order and calm in her "queendom," she turns her hearing aid low to avoid Tweet, her family, and the world's intrusion. Douglas writes about Cornelia:

To carry oneself in a regal manner, to accept the responsibilities and perquisites of one's position, is not to see oneself anyhow. It is rather to act. And Cornelia is one of those people . . . who draw back, almost as if it might be a sin, from examining the causes and consequences of their acts . . . . Perhaps she fears that if she did . . . she might find herself sinking, falling. (65)

It is after her husband John's death that Cornelia loses a firm grip on her life and embarks on a journey of self-discovery. Her descent reaches its most profound depth when she travels alone to a friend's apartment in New York City. This trip is the first time she has gone anywhere by herself. Always before, she had been "a queen borne up from dawn to dusk by attendants who never allow[ed] her foot to touch the earth" (183). In New York her superior role as queen disintegrates, and she realizes her affinity with others, of all races and classes.

Some critics regard this development of the novel as flawed and unconvincing, finding Cornelia's departure from the South to be a break in the momentum of the story and a bigger step than Cornelia could take. Rebecca Hill in The Atlanta Journal-Constitution says, for example, "The double exigencies of plot used to force Cornelia's character into action may be the only heavy touch" (10M). Alfred Uhry in
The New York Times Review of Books states, "It is as though Ms. Douglas, like Cornelia, is losing her grip. Out of the blue Cornelia acquires an old friend with a little roosting place in New York. . . . Where is that black-and-white 'boogie' Ellen Douglas knows so well?" (14)

New York City, however, is a fitting destination when viewed symbolically in the context of the hero's journey. The hero sets out to explore unknown territory; Cornelia's unexplored realm is the person who lives apart from the surface role of southern womanhood. Traveling to a different part of the country matches the internal development of her psyche. Charles Fister reflects this view when he writes about Cornelia's trip to New York City: "Outside the confining stage directions of a southern cultural script, she [Cornelia] learns to ad lib" (105). Out of her prescribed role, Cornelia gains such an acute awareness of her interconnection with others that she experiences her seeming opposite, Tweet, a poor black woman, as a living component of herself.

At first, Cornelia's mother's voice reverberates in her head, stating, "Go upstairs. And come down slowly like a lady" (189). When Cornelia refuses to listen to her, a psychic "companion" (190), not yet identified specifically as Tweet, answers, "If you don't listen, . . . your head will explode" (190), echoing the specter's words in the myth. Surely, abandoning a secure role can make one feel as
if her head might burst. Later, Tweet's voice clearly replaces Cornelia's mother's. When Cornelia imagines telling Tweet that she felt as if her head might shatter, Tweet answers:

I notice you don't hardly every ax a question. . . But where are all them words, if you don't ax, don't tell, don't answer? They might be out here in the world. Or they might all be shut up in your head, waiting, making your head swell up. You thought about that? . . . Sometimes it ain't hold on, it's let go. (194-95)

Cornelia ends up relying on Tweet's voice. She does not object to Tweet's ungrammatical constructs but humbles herself to truly hear her words. Tweet appears as that part of Cornelia's psyche lying outside her queenly realm, outside her sphere of order and "respectability." As Shakespeare's Hamlet says, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (2.2.259), and Cornelia begins to know the truth of this phrase as she embraces elements of herself she formerly thought of as "bad." The author, for example, uses repetition as Cornelia remembers the day of Martin Luther King's death, mentioned earlier in the text, when she visited Tweet. Before, all she noticed was the house's clutter. This time, she recalls the disorder, but it is "pierced through with sorrow and mystery" (202); she sees deeper than surface appearances to the essence of her surroundings--and of herself.

Cornelia finally pays full attention to Tweet's stories as they reverberate in her head (the same ones she half-way
listened to earlier in her kitchen), and she relives shared experiences. Throughout her stay in New York, she reminds herself, "Inside or outside, it's all the same," (199), and this memory reinforces her new sense of connection with the world. Further, she remembers an incident at Tweet's house she had forgotten. She had helped Tweet turn a dying man on his bed, and the two acted "as one, their intimacy and understanding . . . perfect" (202). She realizes that all is whole, and the individual is all, that only her thinking makes her believe in compartments, in separation, in oppositions.

"The King and the Corpse" is an Indian myth, and it embodies Hindu doctrines. Zimmer says the king received "the supreme revelation" when

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\text{Shiva, the Supreme God, lifted for him the veil of ignorance. . . . Shiva is the Lord of Destruction. . . . Shiva is the Lord of Creation. . . . The space that separates the two [the king and Shiva] is itself only the illusion prerequisite to the ephemeral spectacle of creation. Beyond it there is no place for twoness. . . . The worshiper and the sacred image then are one. . . . There comes the immediate knowledge that we—not only we, but all the "thou's," also, of our surrounding night and day—are so many avatars, disguises, masks, and playful self-duplications of the Self of the world. (234-35)}
\]

Cornelia re-enters society with a new wholeness that, according to the monomyth, will benefit the world. Her first human encounter in New York City shows that she has surpassed her queenly image. She falls on the ice, and a workman, who reminds her of a beau from adolescence, helps
her up. She invites him to her apartment and sleeps with him—even though he is married and a laborer. She turns up her hearing aid, determined to grasp all life around her. When Tweet's daughter calls to tell her that Tweet has had a stroke, Cornelia goes home, completing the journey. She now encounters in person the Tweet of her psychic wanderings, and she learns that the complete union she experienced in New York City is not possible in day-to-day life.

Instead, she finds an ever-fluctuating cycle of union and separation, of shared humanity and personal, class, and racial divisions. Cornelia visits Tweet's house daily trying to help her recover. The story ends as it begins, with the two sitting at right angles to each other, even though Cornelia is now at Tweet's house: "Cornelia is sitting on the sofa. Tweet on a straight-backed chair. They look at each other across the bowl [filled with Mardi Gras beads and a gold barrette that belonged to Cornelia]" (252). Finally, Tweet admits she stole the barrette.

Cornelia asks her why, when she would have freely given it to her. Tweet answers:

Hated you... I hate you all my life, before I ever know you... I hate you, I hate you, I hate you. And I steal that gold barrette to remind me of it, in case I forget. She laughs. Sometimes I forget. (254)

The two fight, Tweet saying that Cornelia's claim that her housekeeper was with her in New York is a lie, that Cornelia "ain't never seen me, heard me in your entire life
and you talking that shit" (255). Cornelia retaliates, "Fuck you, then" (255), abandoning her ladylike stance. Tweet reminds Cornelia of her past, which is still part of the present, and of societal constraints; in response, Cornelia's fear causes her to defend herself. Douglas says about Cornelia and Tweet's ability to reach out to each other: "I didn't really think of the issue as being settled for either Tweet or Cornelia" (Tardieu 77). Indeed, the two are at right angles from this vantage point.

The underlying unity expressed by the myth never leaves the two characters completely, however, even at their most consciously antagonistic moments. The main way Tweet is able to communicate her thoughts since her stroke, for example, is by singing them in a repetitive rhythm. By the end of the story, she also gains the ability to talk occasionally, which she does when she speaks in anger to Cornelia, denying that she was with her employer in New York. However, during their argument, Cornelia adopts Tweet's usual singing response, revealing the unity between the two in the midst of antagonism. Cornelia, insisting that Tweet was with her, chants, "Yes you were. Yes, you were, Yes you were. . . . You were there, yes you were" (255). Tweet immediately adopts Cornelia's singing response, even though she answers in anger, "Shit, shit, shit" (255). As Cornelia leaves, Tweet sings after her: "Oh, I love you, baby, but I sure do hate your ways. . . .
That's how the song goes, she calls to Cornelia" (256).
Linda Tate expresses the unity and separation of the two
when she writes, "Tweet and Cornelia acknowledge the eternal
barrier that divides them but also the deep bond that
connects them" (59).

Douglas ends the novel with the following line: "Sing
it, Tweet. Yeah. Sing it, Cornelia. Sing it" (256).
Harmony and opposition: Singing includes a harmony of
sound, but the final sentences are short and choppy,
emphasizing separation. Also, Douglas addresses the two
women separately, accentuating their individuality. On the
other hand, these sentences, when read together, are
rhythmical. And the last phrase, "Sing it," addresses the
world at large, including but surpassing both Cornelia and
Tweet.

Just as she broadens the scope of myth, Douglas expands
her use of point of view in Can't Quit You, Baby by making
the implied author an actual character in the novel. The
writer's values have always either undermined or validated
characters' perceptions and actions, reminding the reader
that human beings (including the author and characters) are
fallible, that they adopt one viewpoint from many
possibilities. Increasingly, Douglas abandons the male
notion of the author as God the Father, replacing it with
the writer as a vulnerable peer of her readers and
characters. Douglas's notion of author-ity reflects Wayne Booth's view in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* when he writes:

> The artist must, like all men, wrestle constantly with the temptation of false pride. Hard as it may be for him to accept the fact, his private vision of things is not great art simply through being his. It is made into great art, if at all, only by being given an objective existence of its own—that is, by being made accessible to a public.

> But of course as soon as the vision is made accessible, it subjects itself to being judged; one of the nicest ironies is that of the writer who loses more and more stature the better we understand him, because the better we understand him the more of his egotistical weakness we see untransformed in the work. (394)

In *Can't Quit You, Baby*, Douglas exposes her "egotistical weakness" by admitting within the text, through the words of a character assuming the role of author, the subjective manner in which she creates scenes and characterizations.

In making the author into an actual character, she demolishes the thin line separating author and narrator in *A Lifetime Burning*.

At first, the narrative seems more traditional, more in the patriarchal vein of the omniscient author guiding the story from afar. She opens the novel with the pared-down third-person objectivity of Ernest Hemingway: "The two women are sitting at right angles to each other at the kitchen table on a sunny July morning in the nineteen-sixties. On the stove behind them a pot of boiling syrup scents the air with cloves and cinnamon. They are making preserves" (3). However, Douglas has set readers up,
allowing them to assume their accustomed belief in the omniscient author, only to disrupt it.

After a few pages of objective description, the author enters the text:

There is no getting around in these stories of two lives that the black woman is the white woman's servant. . . . The white woman had to choose to sit down to set the tone of their connection.

But--servant? Mistress? They would be uneasy with these words, and so am I. The servant might quote the Bible: And the last shall be first, Lord. Yes. As for the mistress, the sexual connotation might drift across her mind--she's still happy to be her husband's lover, his only mistress. Of anything else she'd avoid the implications.

So, let's settle for housekeeper and employer. Yes, that's better. (5)

The reader gets to see the actual mental process the implied author goes through in the creation of a detail as small as the exact titles for the major characters. She brings up discarded possibilities, "servant" and "mistress," reminding the reader that other, possibly more appropriate appellations exist, but that they make this particular author "uneasy," stating outright that the personal preferences of the writer determine the nature of the story. Also, she uses the subjunctive mode "might" for both Tweet's and Cornelia's imagined thoughts about these names, granting the author's perception of the characters' personalities a tentative quality. Both of them, too, like the author, are uneasy with "mistress" and "servant," reminding the audience
that the characters are extensions of the implied author's perceptions.

In the last paragraph the author includes readers: "So, let's settle for housekeeper and employer," showing them that her imagined audience exists in her psyche as she writes, making their own contribution as extensions of herself. At the same time, she makes readers wonder if she perceives them correctly: they must stop to consider if, indeed, they think those are the best words. Multitudinous possibilities replace the simple surety of the opening paragraph, as author, characters and readers participate together, not hierarchically, in the creation of the text.

The quotation above demonstrates how smoothly Douglas has come to craft her fiction, from specific wording to overall structure. The housekeeper's possible comment is in a distinguishable voice, "And the last shall be first, Lord. Yes," said with a rhythm and punctuating "yes" typical of exclamations made during many African American church services. In contrast, the author speaks for the employer in an objective manner, Cornelia having no voice of her own. These nuances of speech, apparent to the careful reader, become major elements of the novel. Of the six alternating sections between Tweet and Cornelia, Tweet tells stories in her sections from the first person point of view because she has a sense of who she is. The author, however, relates
Cornelia's segments in the third person, suggesting that Cornelia has no sense of self comparable to that of Tweet.

Although almost all of Cornelia's narration is third person, when she undergoes her journey in New York City, she begins to break into the text and speak for herself. For example, she starts to replay a story Tweet has told her in her head, and the author begins, as usual, to speak for her; however, now Cornelia wants to take responsibility for her own involvement in the tale:

It was then that Tweet . . .
Yes, I know, Cornelia said. (209)

The author goes on to use the third person to speak for her, but Cornelia did find a voice, albeit short-lived.

At one point, the author explains to the reader her difficulty in conveying Cornelia:

You can see that writing about someone like Cornelia imposes its own restrictions. I am unable to record for you what she says about herself during those long hours she and Tweet spend companionably together. She says almost nothing about herself. To her it is almost unthinkable to speak to anyone, even herself, of her feelings. . . .
I am left therefore with surfaces, with scenes. (66)

Later, the author admits her error in presuming to know how any person would speak:

Do you recall that a long time ago I wrote, "I want to remember that every act in a human life has layer upon enfolded layer not only of imagining, but of circumstance, beneath it?" I was thinking then not of Tweet or of myself, but of Cornelia. . . . Now--now that Cornelia seems willing to look, now, as I struggle with my own difficulties, with the near impossibility for me
of grappling with these events—I think that perhaps—no, certainly—I . . . cannot acknowledge or express the complexity of all those layers of circumstance and imagining—in all our lives, but particularly in Tweet's. (239)

Douglas addresses readers directly with "you," including them in the novel and taking them into her confidence by explaining her difficulties in character formation. In an interview with Shirley M. Jordan, she explains her reluctance to place the author as an omniscient intelligence:

After all, I'm not up in the clouds. I'm a sixty-eight-year-old Southern white woman who has lived in this world and seen injustice and been a party to injustice, party to blindness, party to deafness all my life, and the temptation of the writer, it seems to me, is to gloss over what's unpleasant, not to tell the truth. Using the narrative voice as I did in Can't Quit You, Baby was really a device to say to the reader, "Look, this is a hazard you face when you read my book. It's not a book by an abstract creature out there floating on a cloud." (58)

The implied author has such an aversion to asserting hierarchical authority, which she ultimately must do as creator of the text, that she writes in the final pages:

Can't someone else search for the end of this story? Discover where it is leading us? No. It has to be me. (250)

As Leslie Petty writes about the author's presence in the novel, "Ultimately, the tale-teller must acknowledge that complete escape from the straitjacket of her own life is impossible" (128). She, too, vacillates between union and separation.
Perhaps the author best states her view of human beings' attempts to understand the mystery of existence when she describes Cornelia's son Andrew:

Does all this make him sound like a cold-hearted, self-centered man? He is not. Rather, he is very young and he is caught like us all in the web of his time, struggling, acting according to his lights and the needs of the moment, not cold-hearted, no, and no more self-centered than the rest of us. (133)

The author, like Andrew and "the rest of us," wrestles with her "stake in the story" (215), with her own self-centeredness that keeps her from seeing and expressing fully the mysterious web of life. In his review Alfred Uhry refers to the implied author's direct statements as "high-handed first-person interjections" (14). Perhaps part of his response stems from male outrage (even if unconscious) at a woman daring to rebel against patriarchal dictates. Sharon Sloan Fiffer in the Chicago Tribune agrees that the devise is "a risky technique," but concludes that Douglas "handles [it] with great skill" (8). Rather than being "high-handed," the implied author's presence in reality is an effort at greater equity. As Rebecca Hill writes:

This frank presence does not displace the characters nor jar the reader (as John Fowles' sudden and rather cavalier intrusions did in The French Lieutenant's Woman) but seems to come about as a matter of courtesy, the way a person listening on the extension to a telephone conversation would be obliged to make her presence known. (10M)

In final analysis, Douglas does emerge as "courteous," respecting her characters and audience by refusing to place
herself above them. The author uses point of view in Can't Quit You, Baby, as she does dreams and myth, to leave no doubt about the characters' vacillation between an immersion in self that bars them from the world and a transcendence of self that lets them experience their mysterious unity with every living thing.

Notes

1 Douglas recounts the story of Rapunzel in her collection of fairy tales The Magic Carpet and Other Tales (Oxford: UP of Mississippi, 1987).

2 Douglas mentions some archetypes from fairy tales and myths in her fiction:
   The old grandfather is certainly deliberately a type of the wise advisor that you see in fairy tales, the wise old man or the wise old woman. The mother in Can't Quit You, Baby is the type of the evil parent, who's usually a step-mother, but in this case it is Cornelia's mother. And of course the wicked father, who's the father instead of her step-father, is a bad guy. And I think Alan and Sam and Leila are all to some degree individuals who have a kind of type underpinning their individuality. And I suppose as early as A Family's Affairs, the grandmother Kate is a type, the good witch, the wise old woman. And, certainly, the relationship of Cornelia to Rapunzel is not just implicit; it's spelled out. The rescuer is the prince. What else? Those are the main ones I think of. (Tardieu 139)

3 Douglas describes her decision to have Tweet sing: When I got into Can't Quit You, Baby, I knew that something bad was going to happen to Tweet that would be the impetus toward both a confrontation and a reconciliation, of sorts, between Cornelia and Tweet, but I didn't know what it was going to be. I hadn't decided. And then I was thinking already about Tweet having either a stroke or an aneurism--I read an essay of Oliver Sack's in The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat about the use of music with aphasic patients, how a person can

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communicate with song where speech is impossible. And I thought that's how Cornelia and Tweet could make a connection. (Tardieu 71-72)
CONCLUSION

Ellen Douglas had the traditional upbringing of a middle class woman of her generation, one that taught her to value manners, a suitable education, pride in family heritage, and marriage. The author states that her family deviated from the norm only in being "a little bit more churchy" (Tardieu 43) than most people. Always an avid reader with an independent spirit and a questioning mind, she responded to her parents' religious dedication by reading a broad range of theological and philosophical texts. Such a preoccupation with the ineffable translates in her fiction into a pervasive insistence on life's mystery. Her sense of mystery most closely approaches Rudolph Otto's definition of mystery as *mysterium tremendum*: People feel a force which fills them with fear and awe, but they can never fully know it. Mystery is that part of life lying beyond reason and understanding.

Dreams—whether illusions, hallucinations, or dreams while sleeping—lie beyond one's conscious control. Douglas uses them to emphasize the unknown realms that exist within as well as outside human beings, with each realm reflecting the other. Night dreams resemble waking life, without being waking life itself; similarly, personal perceptions color what people observe, capturing part of life but obscuring its total comprehension. In *A Family's Affairs* a sleepy
Ralph McGovern sits by his father's hospital deathbed, where he enters a reverie between sleeping and waking, his surroundings penetrating his being in a dreamlike manner:

The doctor stood by the door, his hand on the knob, and his low-voiced instructions to the nurse and her brief replies rattled against Ralph's ears as if the drum were full of pebbles, falling, falling, as the drum turned. Whoo-oom, whoo-oom groaned the drum as it turned and turned.

I dreamed I was inside a drum when I had my appendix out. I was inside the drum then, and someone was pounding on it, he said to himself as he slipped into the area between sleeping and waking where dreams act themselves out on a stage before one's eyes, but one is still conscious enough to cut them off at will. (66)

In her early fiction Douglas uses such italicized passages to denote various states of being (like dreams or fantasies) or different forms of expression (like diaries or letters) in order separate them from the major plot in the narrative. As her confidence both in her writing skill and her readers grows, she abandons italics and other forms of demarcation for a more streamlined text, culminating in her complete omission of quotation marks in Can't Quit You, Baby.

In Where the Dreams Cross the author depicts how human beings' subjective perceptions, which are either unconscious or deliberate lies, cause illusions in waking life that make it assume the character of dreams. The protagonist Nat Hunter Stonebridge says to her cousin Wilburn:

"I'm asleep and something is happening--some terrible thing like drowning, maybe, and I think: I have to wake up. And then I think: How can I be sure that if I wake up I may not really be waking into another dream, and maybe it'll be
worse than this one? And when it's very bad, Wilburn, I do wake up."

"Is that why you always tell the truth?" Wilburn said.

"What? Yes! Lies scare me too much. You can't make them stay still. I never, never tell them except for practical reasons, you know, when it's absolutely unavoidable." (43)

Nat tries to escape the dream for womanhood that she encounters but has a hard time doing so. She wants to break out of the prescribed patriarchal role for women as mothers and housewives (in which women must lie to themselves about their subordination to men in order to find any degree of contentment), but her limited perceptions restrict her. Instead, she adopts the obverse image of domesticity, the patriarchally defined role of a wanton woman. When Wilburn tells her, for example, that she would look good without so much make-up, Nat answers, "'I wouldn't. I'd disappear'" (148), revealing her inability to accept herself as she is. However, after her male companion Floyd rapes her, in a symbolic enactment of what patriarchal society does to women, she moves beyond patriarchal dreams to claim her basic humanity and thereby to be united with others.

Douglas focuses on the elderly in Apostles of Light, using their dreams, not as illusions (as in Where the Dreams Cross) but as verifications of the outlandish actions of their caretakers. Howie Snyder, who runs the home, always dresses in a coat and tie and enters a room "officially, as if he might at any moment raise his hand and bless the congregation" (25). The truth, however, is that Howie wants
to make money and cares little about the residents' welfare. The elderly Martha Clarke has a hallucination in her garden that shows the ruthlessness underlying his seeming compassion: Birds screech when cats begin to attack them, and Martha's friend Lucas tells her the cats belong to Howie. In reality, Howie instructs his employees in cruel attitudes and behaviors toward the residents. He is a cat attacking helpless birds.

In Can't Quit You, Baby, Mrs. Wright, Cornelia's mother, expects her daughter to marry a man of prestige and wealth. Cornelia escapes from her mother's dream when she elopes and marries John O'Kelly, a man with a working class background. Cornelia then, however, proceeds to follow the patriarchally dictated dream for women of motherhood, establishing domestic tranquility and order by denying anything unpleasant in her life. After John's death, she wakes from the calm domestic dream by admitting negative as well as positive factors in her existence. Douglas replaces the isolated dreams of characters in A Family's Affairs with layers of dreams within a single character that are an integral component of the narrative. Cornelia continues to awake from illusionary dreams throughout the novel, but she never fully awakes. Such an awareness is impossible, cloaked in mystery.

Douglas also points to the mystery inherent in both fiction and life by underscoring her narratives with myth,
most notably in *The Rock Cried Out* and *Can't Quit You, Baby.* In *The Rock Cried Out,* Joseph Campbell’s theory of the monomyth gives pattern to the protagonist Alan’s development. Instead of adhering to Campbell's depiction of male heroes only, however, Alan surpasses gender-restricted conventions by displaying androgynous attributes. For example, Alan rejects the usual societal norms for men to pursue technological or corporate jobs, choosing instead a simple, basic life closely tied to the natural world. In adapting Campbell’s model for the female hero, Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope describe the woman's heroic stance:

> An exploration of the heroic journeys of women--and of men who are relatively powerless because of class or race--makes clear that the archetypal hero masters the world by understanding it, not by dominating. . . . Often, the female hero is in tune with spiritual or natural values that society advocates but does not practice. (5,9)

In aligning himself with a typical female hero’s stance, Alan's journey assumes an androgynous character. Additionally, literature traditionally associates women with nature's rhythms because of menses and childbirth, but Douglas structures Alan's heroic quest in a cyclical manner, thus linking him to the feminine and pointing to an evolution that transcends gender.

In *Can't Quit You, Baby,* Douglas continues a focus on androgyny, as the protagonists Cornelia and Tweet display both female and male characteristics. She takes the hero’s journey a step further, however, when she underscores Tweet
and Cornelia's interaction with Heinrich Zimmer's "The King and the Corpse," a Hindu myth stressing the unity and opposition inherent in all life. Instead of focusing on a single hero as she did in *The Rock Cried Out*, Douglas associates two characters' personalities with myth by making them correspond to figures in "The King and the Corpse." In so doing, she points to the fluctuation between unity and separation that occurs not only in an individual's psyche, but also in humans' relationships with each other.

In later works, Douglas becomes more sophisticated, too, in manipulating point of view to depict the complex, and ultimately unresolved and mysterious, interplay of author, character, and reader. *A Family's Affairs* provides both reliable narrators (those characters in agreement with the author's values) and unreliable narrators (those at odds with them), to use Wayne Booth's terminology. Having two types of narrators allows the reader see that there is more than one way to view a situation. On a family trip to Homochitto, the unreliable narrator Anna's fantasy world of bravery among hostile natives—which she takes seriously—is undermined by the reliable older sister's protest, "'Mama, I can't stand it. . . . She's been going on like that for miles and now she's screaming in a whisper'" (84).

In "I Just Love Carrie Lee" in *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, the implied author is at odds with the narrator Emma, constantly undermining her first person account through the

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protagonist's examples of her housekeeper Carrie Lee. For instance, when Emma is in Atlanta, she sees a magazine picture of Carrie Lee that shows her in tattered clothes standing before a shack. Emma discounts the photograph, saying it is a distortion, that she knows Carrie Lee is happy, well-fed, and comfortable since she gives her an adequate salary and numerous hand-me-downs. Who is the reader to believe, the photo or the narrator? Since Emma tells the story in first person, Carrie Lee never has a chance to offer her opinion. Douglas does not pretend to provide a clear-cut answer to Carrie Lee and Emma's complex relationship; the truth remains elusive.

In *A Lifetime Burning* Douglas directs the reader's attention to the implied author's active presence in the story, making sentiments latent in previous fiction more pronounced. First person narration and a diary format blur the line between narrator and author. When Corinne writes, "I am now back at my table writing" (4), the reader must mentally glimpse the author also writing at her desk. In addition, the novel portrays through Corinne's fabricated stories of the grandmother's diary and The Toad the notion that all writing is "telling lies"; the most it can do is capture a portion of a story's truth, never the entire truth, which remains a mystery. Douglas also both includes and excludes readers in the text by having the narrator address a general audience (with which readers can identify)
and then switching to specific readers, like her children or husband (which excludes them). She reminds the reader that he or she, specifically, is not known by the implied author and that the exact nature of their involvement in the text is uncertain. Ultimately, the implied author suggests that the most meaningful thing human beings can do—readers, characters, author, all people—is reach out to each other from the morass of certainties and uncertainties, truth and lies, knowledge and ignorance in which they find themselves. Corinne's final words (and by inference, the author's) are, "Ah, children, ah, George, here I am, then, and here is this. Waking and dreaming, I reach out to you all" (212). She has done her best to reach out honestly from her limitations.

Instead of implying the author's presence in the novel, Douglas makes the writer an actual character in Can't Quit You, Baby, manifesting the mysterious interplay among reader, character, and author, in which subjective perception replaces objective knowledge. The author, for example, interrupts the story of Cornelia and her mother, saying, "How can I tell you accurately about Mother? In fairness to her, I should say that I don't like her, so my report may be distorted by personal bias" (73).

The author also changes her mind during the course of the novel. In describing Cornelia in the beginning pages of the book, she reminds herself not to view Cornelia as
superficial but to remember that "every act in a human life has layer upon enfolded layer not only of imagining, but of circumstance beneath it" (41). Later, she calls attention to those words and admits that she has realized that they are more pertinent to Tweet than they are to Cornelia (239). She identifies herself with the reader, as well as with Tweet and Cornelia, when she states, "[I] cannot acknowledge or express the complexity of all those layers of circumstance and imagining--in all our lives" (239). Character, reader, and author are connected by shared "layers," but precisely what connects them is also what separates them since there is no way to know all those "layers." The core of existence remains a mystery, something one can feel but never fully know or express.

The mystery which permeates and transcends existence is the paramount focus of Douglas's fiction. Mystery engages not only the child Anna in *A Family's Affairs*, as she reaches past the unifying force of her family to the unknown beyond, but also the adult Anna in *Black Cloud, White Cloud*, who looks to a dream for answers only to find questions, and the sexy Nat in *Where the Dreams Cross*, who longs for an identity outside male dictates for women that will genuinely connect her with humanity. Similarly, Martha's unknowable, bizarre hallucinations in *Apostles of Light* contain more truth than the apparent order of her surroundings. Alan struggles alone to discover his basic human identity in *The
Rock Cried Out. Corinne reaches out to others from a morass of lies and truth, pride and compassion in *A Lifetime Burning*. And finally all—author, readers, and characters—in *Can't Quit You, Baby* share only partial understanding. As the character Estella says, "'All this world is full of mystery. You got to have respect for what you don't understand.'"
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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Mississippi Department of Archives and History in Jackson, Mississippi, has a vertical file on Douglas which includes comprehensive newspaper reviews, as well as announcements of readings, book signings, and award presentations. John Griffin Jones' original interview is also there, along with copies of several of Douglas's poems.

When asked about the location of her manuscripts in my interview of 5 November 1993, Douglas said:

The University of Mississippi is kindly letting me store a bunch of them [original manuscripts] there. They're in boxes somewhere in the library there, but I haven't given them to Ole Miss. I just didn't have room for them in this apartment, and the library there said I could leave them with them. But that was six or seven years ago, so now there's a lot more stuff, which is here. (81)
VITA

Elizabeth (Betty) Wilkinson Tardieu was born September 25, 1950, in Richmond, Virginia. She moved during her childhood to Florida, Alabama, and Georgia, as her father ministered various Presbyterian churches and her mother wrote study material for the denomination and served on Presbyterian and ecumenical governing committees. Betty graduated from Agnes Scott College with a B.A. in English in 1972. Wishing to experience something different, she moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1974 and lived there until 1983.

In 1983, she moved to Mobile, Alabama, and within the year to Fairhope, Alabama. She received a B.S. in Language Arts (secondary education) from the University of South Alabama in 1985. After surviving teaching English in middle school, she returned to the University of South Alabama and received a M.A. in English in 1990. In 1996 she received a Ph.D. in English from Louisiana State University. She plans to teach English at the University of Mobile and currently lives in Fairhope, Alabama, with her husband and three cats.
DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

Candidate: Elizabeth Wilkinson Tardieu

Major Field: English

Title of Dissertation: "All This World Is Full of Mystery:" The Fiction of Ellen Douglas

Approved:

[Signatures]

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination: April 17, 1996