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**Probing the interior: Style and gender in the fiction of Reynolds
Price**

Jones, Gloria Godfrey, Ph.D.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1994

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PROBING THE INTERIOR: STYLE AND GENDER
IN THE FICTION OF
REYNOLDS PRICE

by

Gloria Godfrey Jones

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine elements of interiority in the fiction of Reynolds Price, using feminist theory, gender studies, and distinctions between masculine and feminine style. Included are all of the novels dealing with male/female relationships.

The first chapter examines the syntax in three passages from A Long and Happy Life to demonstrate how shifts in power in the male-female relationship are forecast and mirrored in what Price maintains are his own unconscious stylistic choices. The second part of this chapter examines the conflicts of three characters in Good Hearts and how Price illuminates their thoughts using a diary, visions, and interior monologues.

Chapter two considers Price's continued emphasis on the internal in his treatment of sex, an act that lends itself easily to external description. Price's portrayal of sex focuses on a spiritual mutuality rather than a catalog of body parts and physical activity.

Chapter three discusses Price's use of dreams in his fiction, suggesting that Price employs them as rhetorical and narrative devices. While all of his characters dream and must make choices based on the information in the dreams, male characters dream more frequently than female

characters--suggesting perhaps that males have more difficulty revealing their interiors than do females.

Chapter four continues to explore the issue of gender, both the author's and the characters'. Price's two first-person narratives--Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun--actually cross gender and genre boundaries. Kate's story is a novel of apprenticeship, the type usually about a male; and Blue's story is a novel of awakening, the type usually about a female.

In the final chapter, Price responds to some of the issues discussed in the dissertation and related subjects in a personal interview conducted on March 2, 1994.

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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INTRODUCTION

Reynolds Price's world view influences his style so completely that it is frequently difficult to separate style from theme. His generous treatment of the fallible in human nature, his unprejudiced presentation of the less than admirable in human behavior, and his successful illumination of his male and female characters' motivations permeate and form his fiction. And these factors determine his style.

Generally, when critics and students of literature attempt to describe the distinctive style of a particular author, they generally rely on observable, concrete elements, an approach which frequently results in an oversimplification of the writer's craft. Consequently, we find discussions of Hemingway's short sentences and non-Latinate diction, Faulkner's long protracted sentences and the absence of conventional punctuation, and Virginia Woolf's and James Joyce's "stream of consciousness" characterized by the lack of tag words to indicate movement into a character's mind. An even more superficial approach is to characterize or classify a

particular writer by the geographic region or setting of his or her works as if the locale determines the subject matter which in turn influences or even dictates the style. (Yeats is the Irish poet. Faulkner and Welty are Southern writers. Frost is the New England poet, and Henry James is an international novelist.)

Then, once writers achieve name recognition, those who succeed them are labeled as being Hemingway-like or Faulknerian, or of the Woolf/Joyce school, etc. Following this trend, early critics of Reynolds Price compared him to Faulkner: both used the South as their setting, and Price's long sentences are thought to mimic in rhythm and length those of the recognized master of Southern fiction. Several early reviews focused on his alleged similarities to Faulkner, a view that Price says he has spent too much time refuting.

Others have called Price's style "mannered or contorted" (Kaufman, Conversations 21) and "highly pronounced, unusual, and quite often difficult" (Rooke, Reynolds Price 12). Even Price, when pushed, gives it a label and characterizes it as "paradoxically baroque plain-style" (Rooke, Conversations 152).

It seems that anyone who has become attracted to Price's work feels compelled to attempt to label or name what it is that he does with words, and I am no exception.

Several years ago, I was asked in a graduate class to choose one word which would characterize Price's style. After some thought, I said "poetic" and demonstrated the validity of this term by selecting three passages from works of fiction, arranging the words so that they looked like poems, and including a fourth piece that was actually a Price poem. I then asked the class to choose the actual poem. Only one student was able to do so. Consequently, I thought I had my label.

Further reading and study has convinced me, however, that what Price does is much more complicated and sophisticated than that. His concern with the interior lives of his characters influences all aspects of his writing, from the syntax to the devices he uses in exploring their interior lives, and their reactions to external stimuli. All of these are frequently influenced by the complex inner workings of the characters' and author's gender and Price's attempt to overcome the stereotypical limits traditionally imposed by gender.

I would now like to propose that Price's style is "feminine," a term which slips into literary criticism with varied applications because students and critics use it to describe a writer, a writer's perspective, the manner of presentation of characters, an examination of the social and/or cultural milieu of the work and the

implications in the finding of such, and the writer's style. Perhaps no other literary term (except style itself) has so many meanings and yet is so difficult to define. It "implies, on the one hand, consciousness of feminine properties and on the other, assumptions about these properties which may not be definite" (Appignanesi 1). Consequently, characterizing and classifying become difficult. But perhaps some background on the evolution of the term "feminine style" will justify its application to Price.

In her essay "'Dressing the Unknowable in the Garments of the Known': The Style of Djuna Barnes' Nightwood," Carolyn Allen discusses the problems associated with trying to define a "woman's style." She suggests that the difficulty stems as much from what feminist critics mean by "style" as it does from their attempt to attribute specific elements of "style" to women's writing alone. Identifying Virginia Woolf's statement "that Dorothy Richardson had invented 'a psychological sentence of the feminine gender'" and Woolf's comment that this sentence "'is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex,'" Allen argues that Woolf's emphasis is more on

psychology than on "formal characteristics of the sentence" (106).

There are, however, feminist critics who do concentrate on linguistics to delineate the differences between male and female writing. Julia Stanley and Susan Robbins identify what they call the "conjunctive style" of women writers as they look at specific sentence construction (Allen 107). And Annette Kolodny points to specific "thematic concerns and image patterns" found in women's fiction as well as "'often-repeated sentence constructions'" and "'stylistic devices'" although she does not identify what they are (Allen 107). Allen also reviews Josephine Donovan's essay "Feminist Style Criticism" and notes that "Donovan speaks of the repeated tendency of women novelists to have as their primary interest the 'inner, under-the-surface life of the heroines'" (106).

While many modern critics who examine writing by and about women still rely on content or theme to reveal the social or cultural views regarding the significance of women, their placement in the hierarchial structure, and the balance in male/female relationships--perhaps because these elements are concrete and definable--the problems associated with style still exist. But as Elizabeth Abel points out in her "Introduction" to Writing and Sexual

Difference, a single ideology or methodology is not necessary or desired (2). In the same volume, Elaine Showalter supports this view by quoting Annette Kolodny, whom she calls "the most sophisticated theorist of feminist interpretation" and champion of the pluralist approach:

All the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and, at the same time, her right to choose which features of the text she takes as relevant because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it. In the process, she claims neither definitiveness nor structural completeness for her different readings and reading systems but only their usefulness. (quoted in Showalter 12)

One of the beneficial side-effects of this pluralist approach has been the expansion of the term "women's style" to the term "feminine style" so that the texts of male authors whose writing shares characteristics with female authors also merit examination. The purpose of this study is to examine the fiction of Reynolds Price-- specifically those works about male-female relationships-- and demonstrate how Price's priorities are similar to those previously mentioned.

In Chapter I, I focus on two novels--A Long and Happy Life and Good Hearts--both about Rosacoke Beavers (nee'

Mustian) and Wesley Beavers. The section on A Long and Happy Life focuses on Price's syntax (choices that he maintains are unconscious) and how it parallels the shifts in power in Rosacoke's and Wesley's relationship. Rosacoke moves, syntactically and actually, from subordinate to independent. The section on Good Hearts looks at how Price's conscious choices--the use of a diary, visions, and interior monologues--give readers access to his characters' interiors and explanations for their behavior.

Chapter II looks at Price's characters' "inner, under-the-surface" response to physical sex. Neither males nor females, are explicit about the physicality of sexual activity. Instead, both focus on the spiritual or mental responses, emphasizing the mutuality of the experience.

In Chapter III, I examine Price's willingness to use dreams to explore the unconscious inner life as argument for action and a method for revealing motivation. While dreams certainly tell the reader something about the psychological make-up of the character, Price uses dreams to reveal what fear, reluctance, ignorance, or gender prevent a character from articulating.

Chaper IV discusses Price's subtle approach to gender. In Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun, Price overcomes

not only the limitations traditionally associated with his own gender in creating believable but not always typical female characters, but he also presents male characters whose behavior and responses transcend stereotypical expectations.

The final chapter is the transcript of an interview with Reynolds Price, conducted on March 2, 1994. In the interview, Price responds to issues discussed in the dissertation and to other matters relating to style and gender.

CHAPTER I

FEMININE STYLE IN A LONG AND HAPPY LIFE AND GOOD HEARTS:
REVELATION, MOTIVATION, AND RESOLUTION¹

Although critics have identified several modern male writers as "feminine," most have been somewhat reluctant to define the term or explore its implications. In her book Femininity & the Creative Imagination: A Study of Henry James, Robert Musil & Marcel Proust, Lisa Appignanesi explores the attempts by various psychologists to define feminine characteristics and builds on Helene Deutsch's tempering of Freud's identification of the feminine with passivity. Deutsch discards the term "passive" and instead creates the phrase "interiorization of sensibility" (8). Applying this to literary style, Appignanesi presents her distinction between masculine and feminine writers:

The predominately masculine writer has a tendency to see the importance of events in terms of the collective: he will externalise activity and judge it by collective, transpersonal standards. The predominantly feminine writer has a tendency to internalize activity. . . . (24)

This internalizing could refer to stream of consciousness exploration rather than physical action to achieve resolution of conflict between characters, and the term could also mean that we should attend closely to the less obvious elements of style in interpreting "the importance of events." Consequently, we must rely on more than content or theme as the primary medium to reveal the social and cultural views regarding the significance of women, their placement in the hierarchial structure and the shifts in power in male/female relationships. Indisputably, content does illuminate such relations. But as Domna Stanton points out,

women's oppression, or more precisely, our repression, does not merely exist in the concrete organization of economic, political, or social structures. It is embedded in the very foundations of the Logos, in the subtle linguistic (my emphasis) and logical processes through which meaning is produced (74).

In order to discover what "the subtle linguistic and logical processes" disclose, we need to narrow our focus and look specifically at all the elements of what we call style--imagery, alliteration, metaphor, diction, rhythm, and syntax--to determine how "feminine" writers "internalize activity," both in the consciousness of their heroines and heroes and in their own conscious and

unconscious stylistic choices. To demonstrate how these elements support and mirror content and how skillfully Reynolds Price illuminates his female character's point of view, I will initially examine three passages from his earliest novel A Long and Happy Life, a work that centers on the changing relationship between a male and a female-- a relationship which begins with a dominant male and a tentative, unsure female but one which culminates in equality. Price's syntax and diction in these passages reflect, by his own admission, choices that are largely unconscious on his part. (See Chapter V) Consequently, in dissecting these three excerpts, we see not only the interior of the character's mind, we see also the unconscious workings of the author's. The second part of this chapter deals with Good Hearts, Price's 1988 sequel to A Long and Happy Life. Once again the diction and syntax reveal much about the inner lives of the characters. But because this novel focuses on motivation, conflict, and resolution--and for the first and only time in a Price novel, violent, psychopathic behavior--Price more obviously probes the interior, under-the-surface justification for externally unjustifiable behavior.

The selected passages from A Long and Happy Life come from the beginning of the novel, the middle, and the end. The first one is the opening paragraph of the novel:

Just with his body and from inside like a snake, leaning that black motorcycle side to side, cutting in and out of the slow line of cars to get there first, staring due-north through goggles towards Mount Moriah and switching coon tails in everybody's face was Wesley Beavers, and laid against his back like sleep, spraddle-legged on the sheepskin seat behind him was Rosacoke Mustian who was maybe his girl and who had given up looking into the wind and trying to nod at every sad car in the line, and when he even speeded up and passed the truck (lent for the afternoon by Mr. Isaac Alston and driven by Sammy his man, hauling one pine box and one black boy dressed in all he could borrow, set up in a ladder-back chair with flowers banked round him and a foot on the box to steady it)--when he even passed that, Rosacoke said once into his back "Don't" and rested in humiliation, not thinking, but with her hands on his hips for dear life and her white blouse blown out behind her like a banner in defeat. (3)

Syntactically, the most obvious feature is that one sentence constitutes the whole paragraph. The phrases, varying in length, are strung together with commas, a single set of parentheses and one dash. Most of the phrases that describe Wesley begin with present participles--"leaning," "cutting," "staring," "switching"--and are concrete, visual and physical. The only present participles used to describe Rosacoke are semantically negated--"thinking" by "not" and "looking" and "trying" by the idiomatic phrasal verb "given up," which implies a resigned abdication of the action of "looking" and

"trying." The use of subordinate clauses which modify Rosacoke--"who was maybe his girl," "who had given up . . ."--further portrays her as submissive, not in control on this ride. The only word she speaks--"Don't"--is a plea, requesting cessation of Wesley's action, but "said once into his back"--not loud, not forcefully and with no successful results. Even the verb for which Rosacoke is the subject--"was laid"--is passive both in voice and in meaning. And her vulnerability is underscored by the archaic Germanic construction which resembles a past participle--"spraddle-legged"--a phrase that, by itself, has sexual implications, implications that are intensified by the earlier use of "laid" and "sleep."

These two words are part of the first metaphor that characterizes Rosacoke--"laid against his back like sleep." There is physical closeness between these two, but emotional closeness is called into question, first by the "maybe" in "who was maybe his girl" and then by the phrase "rested in humiliation," containing one more verb emphasizing passivity. The words "sleep" and "against" set up a kind of dichotomy. In sleep, we are unconscious, not in complete control, and we lie "on" something not "against" it. So what we sense is an almost unwilling and unwilling pressing against his back--one made not by

choice but by circumstance. Moreover, the circumstance is not a joyful one, as the final metaphor characterizing Rosacoke tells us--"her white blouse blown out behind her like a banner in defeat." This particular metaphor is straight out of a 1928 poem by Robinson Jeffers entitled "Hurt Hawks," which narrates the events leading to the death of an injured hawk. In it, the hawk's broken wing "trails like a banner in defeat." Whether Price's echo of this line is conscious and intentional, unconscious, or simply coincidental does not matter.² Anyone who has read the poem would see the parallels between the injured hawk and Rosacoke. Neither is in control of events; both are at the mercy of someone else. And both depend on an outside agent for resolution. The hawk awaits intervention to end his life, and Rosacoke "not thinking" places "her hands on his hips for dear life."

Wesley is the one in control here, and this control is signalled in the initial phrases. The limiting word that begins the paragraph is not tentative in meaning like the "maybe" in "who was maybe his girl." "Just" defines and emphasizes the physicality of Wesley's movement--"Just with his body,"--and the metaphor that follows--"from inside like a snake"--is bifurcated in function. It describes both the movement of Wesley's body and the movement of the motorcycle "cutting in and out of the slow

line of cars." And the animal imagery introduced with "snake" continues with "switching coon tails" and even Wesley's last name--"Beavers."

The initial phrases also establish the rhythm of the paragraph, a rhythm that is sustained by the generative nature of the sentence. Phrases and clauses of varying lengths build upon each other, moving us forward. The alliteration in "sheepskin seat," "side to side," and "laid . . . like" accelerates the rhythm while the repetition of b in "blouse," "blown," "behind," and "banner" slows it down. Both the syntax and the diction sustain the movement. We see the body leaning with the motorcycle, controlling and aiming it, but the vision is of the man and the machine as one--smoothly, snake-like, going forward. And we go forward, searching for the name of this man described, but anonymous, for six lines. We anticipate a subject and verb; but we must hang on, along for the ride, until we get them. It is as if we are propelled toward our syntactic destination just as the motorcycle cuts "in and out of the slow line of cars to get there first." Even the visual interruption of the parenthetical information on the truck and its contents does not break the rhythm. It is sustained by the continued use of participles, both present and past-- "lent," "driven," "hauling," "dressed," and "banked" and

is tied to the main passage by the repetition of "passed" in the phrases immediately preceding and immediately following the parenthesis--"when he speeded up and passed the truck" and "when he even passed that"

There is an intensity in this first paragraph that forces us to question what is going on between these two people. Wesley emerges as a dominant, physical, almost animal-like, controlling force; Rosacoke is submissive and tentative. And even though the point of view is technically third person, the perspective is Rosacoke's: she questions whether or not she is Wesley's girl; she is the humiliated one--the one who gives up. Rather than simply mirroring or supporting content, the syntax and attendant elements of style create and broaden our sense of Wesley's supremacy.

However, Wesley does not remain dominant throughout the entire novel. A second passage, one from the middle of the novel, illustrates how Price conveys stylistically and linguistically the shifts in balance that begin to occur in the relationship.

But Wesley didn't need any light. He started above her and even if the sun had poured all over him, she couldn't have seen the one thing she needed to see, which was down to where he was locked already at the center of what she had started, where he was maybe alone or, worse than that, keeping company in the dark with whatever pictures his mind threw up--of

some other place he would rather be or some girl he knew that was better. But he didn't speak to tell her where he was. He only moved and even that was a way he never had moved in all the evenings she had known him--from inside the way he did everything but planned this time fine as any geared wheel, slow at first and smooth as your eyeball under the lid, no harder than rocking a chair and touching her only in that new place, but soon taking heart and oaring her as if he was nothing but the loveliest boat on earth and she was the sea that took him where he had to go, and then multiplying into what seemed a dozen boys swarming on her with that many hands and mouths and that many high little whines coming up to their lips that were nothing like words till the end when they came so close they broke out in one long "Yes," and what he had made, so careful, fell in like ruins on them both, and all she had left was her hands full of broomstraw and one boy again, dead-weight on her body, who whispered to her softer than ever, "I thank you, Mae" (which wasn't any part of her name) and not knowing what he had said, rolled off her and straightaway threw his flashlight on the sky. (104)

In doing "close readings," we look for repetition of key words or phrases, perhaps used with variation, to signal us that a change or shift is transpiring or will do so. In this passage, there is again reference to the way Wesley moves, once more "from inside the way he did everything." But there is a difference here. No longer is his movement instinctive and animalistic--"like a snake"; it is now planned and mechanistic--"fine as any geared wheel." And while the imagery in the first passage characterizes Wesley's motion with visual, physical verbs --"cutting" and "switching," the imagery in this second passage is tactile, with the motion being metaphorically

described as "smooth as your eyeball under the lid" and "no harder than rocking a chair." The "just" in the first passage is replaced by another limiting word--"only"--again setting boundaries on how.

The very first sentence takes us back to an image in the first passage. Rosacoke, because of the speed and movement of the motorcycle, "had given up looking into the wind." Consequently she can not see. In this passage, Wesley's dominance is again revealed--"But Wesley didn't need any light." Rosacoke, however, even with blinding illumination,--"even if the sun had poured all over him, . . . couldn't have seen the one thing she needed to see." She is still without the sight; and as a result, she is again dependent upon Wesley.

Since the event being detailed is that of making love, we are somewhat prepared for the language of touch. And although the "geared wheel" metaphor is somewhat unusual, the participle "oaring" completely surprises us. Not only is the use of this word as a verb somewhat rare, it is completely outside the lexical field of sexual intercourse. It is a transitive participle with "her" as its object. Once again Rosacoke is not in control; Wesley is manning the oars. This nautical imagery continues but doesn't play out to a logical conclusion. Wesley becomes the "loveliest boat on earth and she . . . the sea that

took him where he had to go." But again, Wesley is the moving object, and Rosacoke is the substance upon which he operates.

The next two participles used to describe Wesley's movement are also outside the lexical field of love-making--"multiplying" and "swarming." The mathematical "multiplying" does not modify a stated noun or pronoun; it conveys the verbal image of a concept--the way Wesley moved--the sense that he (or his hands) becomes more than one--he "seemed a dozen boys." Wesley becomes plural; he is "swarming on her." But we note that even though the noun "boys" is masculine, it is not adult masculine, perhaps a hint of a change in dominance. The metaphorical use of "swarming" calls up visions of numerous bees, certainly more than a dozen, buzzing around Rosacoke, lighting and retreating and lighting again, making "that many high little whines," sounds that "were nothing like words." And throughout this, Rosacoke remains the recipient, not an active participant.

The use of these present participles contributes to our perception of Wesley as the dominant force in this passage. He is "touching," "taking," "oaring," "multiplying," "swarming." But the final participle describing Wesley in the excerpt is negated,--"not knowing"--reminiscent of Rosacoke's "not thinking" in the

first passage. For the first time in either of these two passages a negative modifier refers to Wesley, a signal that the tenuous balance in the relationship is about to shift. No longer is Wesley in control; Rosacoke has knowledge that he does not, and it is this knowledge that precipitates the shift. Until this point in the passage, the negations have semantically reinforced Wesley's dominance--he "didn't need any light"; one in charge can function without it. He "didn't speak to tell her where he was"; "he only moved," subjugating her without words. "Knowing" is the first participle referring to Wesley that is non-physical, signalling us that he is not in control in the internal world. The use of parentheses to set off what it is that Rosacoke knows further isolates Wesley. It physically removes these words from Wesley and is to the reader much like an aside to the audience in a Shakespearean play. We now know what Rosacoke knows and what Wesley either does not know or does not realize he has said. Unlike the first passage, when the parenthetical information is an embellishment, purely description, these seven words--"(which wasn't any part of her name)"--are as important as any in the paragraph. And because he is not knowledgeable, Wesley can only continue to be physical, so he "rolled off her and straightaway threw his flashlight on the sky."

His calling Rosacoke "Mae" sends us back in the paragraph to the phrase "where he was maybe alone," indicating the possibility that Rosacoke was not connected to the activity in his mind, that there was some girl "he knew that was better." But the "maybe" here recalls the use of the word in the first passage, where it questions Rosacoke's relationship to Wesley--"who was maybe his girl." Its use here and the answer to the implied questions in both instances--was she his girl? was he alone?--forces us to reassess what has preceded it in the text and to view what follows in a different light. In a sense, we read both sequentially and recursively.

Unlike the first passage which was only one sentence, this paragraph consists of four. But like the first paragraph, its syntax also parallels in rhythm the event being narrated. The initial one sentence paragraph is much like the motorcycle ride; it moves and weaves, imitating the action. This passage begins with a short sentence, one of only six words. The second sentence picks up speed, layering subordinate clauses within subordinate clauses and mimicking the complexity of Rosacoke's thoughts and emotions. The third sentence is short by comparison, only ten words. And then a single sentence, more than twice as long as the three preceding sentences combined, makes up the rest of the passage.

This sentence builds rhythmically, relying on present participial phrases to sustain the movement--"rocking a chair," "touching her only . . .," "taking heart," "oaring her," "multiplying," and "swarming." It surges forward, reaching a pitch with Wesley's "one long 'Yes,'" and then slows down, with no more present participles except the negated "knowing." All of the other verb forms in the last part are either past tense or past participle--"had made," "fell in," "had left," "whispered," "wasn't," "had said," "rolled," and "threw." The movement of the sentence parallels the activity of sexual intercourse; it builds, reaches a pitch and then slows down. Even the diction signals a change--"fell like ruins on them both." And for the first time, Wesley is not moving and active; he is "dead-weight on her body." What begins as a passage with Wesley still physical and in control ends with him inert. And there is a significant shift in this passage in point of view. The first passage partially reveals Rosacoke's consciousness. This middle-of-the-novel excerpt is completely from Rosacoke's perspective. Wesley surely would not describe himself as "multiplying" and "swarming," but Rosacoke's state of mind permits no tender descriptions of the love making. The shift in dominance is subtle, actually hinted at stylistically rather than blatantly stated.

The final passage I would like to examine is the next-to-last paragraph in the novel. The first word-- "She" signals a change; Wesley is not the first identified as he was in the previous two selections.

She looked to Wesley. There was nowhere else to look. He was kneeling tall back of John Arthur Bobbitt with his face and his eyes on her, having offered his duty and with nothing to do but wait for her answer so he could plan his life, still not frowning but not glad, smiling no more than her father when he was a boy before he changed, in a tan photograph on a pier by the ocean with another boy blurred beside him. She stayed facing him. He held her like a chain. Then she drew one breath, hard, and said what she suddenly knew--to herself--what he had showed her, "Wesley knows me. After all Wesley knows me." And she knew that was her answer, for all it meant, the answer she would have to give when the pageant was over and Wesley drove her home and stopped in the yard and made his offer again--" Are we riding to Dillon tonight?"--because it was her duty, for all it would mean.(195)

Immediately, we notice that Wesley is no longer the dominant figure. The paragraph affirms the shift in balance that began in the second passage. Both of the other paragraphs start with Wesley--the first with the power in his movement, the second with his visual acuity. But "She" (Rosacoke) is the first word here. And for the first time, she is able to see--"She looked to Wesley." Her looking is not negated either syntactically or semantically, although it is qualified by the next

sentence--"There was nowhere else to look." However, on a figurative level, the qualification expands rather than limits. While it could simply mean that Rosacoke's vision was blocked by other things, it could also reveal her coming to terms with their relationship. I favor the latter and believe the word choice in the first sentence encourages such an interpretation. After all, Rosacoke does not look "at Wesley"; she looks "to Wesley." Looking "at" is simply a viewing; looking "to" implies anticipation and hopeful expectancy. And the "nowhere else to look" foreshadows her acceptance of Wesley as her future.

However, the most important revelation in this paragraph is Rosacoke's decisiveness, a decisiveness evidenced by the verbs used--"She looked," "She stayed," "She drew," "She knew." There are no more subordinate clauses describing her; there is awareness and determination. And the diction indicates a balance in the awareness--"She suddenly knew . . . 'Wesley knows me.'" Although the metaphor "He held her like a chain" sounds negative, it does not mean submissive bondage. The chain here goes in both directions, as Price's word selection illustrates. A chain is a circular interlacing of elements that can be connected at each end. Syntactically, this passage does exactly that with words.

In the third line, we find the phrase "having offered his duty." In the last three lines, these words are repeated again--"made his offer again" and "because it was her duty." The word "answer," used twice in line thirteen echoes its use from line four. The words "for all it meant" referring to Rosacoke's "answer" are repeated as the final words in the paragraph, once more with reference to Rosacoke's "answer," but this time in the present tense with the modal "would"--a look to the future, and bringing us right back to the first sentence--"She looked to Wesley.

The repetition of these words not only works syntactically to augment meaning but also contributes to establishing rhythm. The sentence length is more varied in this passage than the other two we have examined. It begins with a very short sentence of only four words. The second sentence is only somewhat longer with six words. The third is much more lengthy, relying on participial phrases--"having offered," "still not frowning," "smiling no more"--to sustain the movement. Following this sentence are two more exactly like the first two--four words and six words each. A somewhat longer and then a shorter sentence come next, preparing us semantically for the revelation and resolution that unfold in the final and most lengthy sentence in the passage, a sentence that ties

together all the verbal threads that loop throughout the paragraph.

The repetition of key words and sentence patterns sets up a kind of balance that parallels the equilibrium finally achieved in Rosacoke and Wesley's relationship. Rosacoke is no longer subordinate--syntactically, semantically, or actually. Price gives us hope that Wesley's dominance, revealed verbally in the first passage and continued and eventually undermined in the second, no longer exists.

When I chose these excerpts, I had no idea how interconnected and tightly woven they would turn out to be. I knew that I agreed with Constance Rooke's assessment that there is an "extraordinary density of images in this novel," and I completely concurred that certain "subtleties of theme . . . emerge from those image patterns" (36). I did not, however, imagine the elaborate tapestry that would materialize from weaving this imagery into syntactically protracted sentences that mirror, foretell, and underscore the events being described in the text. Making the effort to penetrate Price's remarkable design is, however, rewarding. What is revealed is not just that meaning, character, and plot are illuminated by such an examination, but also that the stylistic elements --imagery, alliteration, metaphor, diction, rhythm, and

syntax--are an intergral part of the text and serve as much more than just embellishment. They are indeed the primary medium through which the delicate shifts in power between Wesley and Rosacoke are revealed. And Price subtly illuminates his female character's mind as Rosacoke moves from being subordinated and object to independent and subject both semantically and syntactically.

Having achieved independence and made this conscious decision to marry Wesley, even though her pregnancy dictates the deed and the timing, Rosacoke whispers "yes" to Frederick Gupton, who, playing the part of the baby Jesus, lies asleep in her arms. She silently wishes him, and herself, "a long happy life." Had Price left Rosacoke and Wesley here--with their future together planned but not seen--we might have assumed that this wish would be fulfilled. But he didn't, and it wasn't. When we meet them again in Good Hearts, published in 1988, twenty-eight years of married life have elapsed, twenty-eight years which have produced only the one child and a quiet companionship between Rosa and Wesley. Early in this novel, Wesley redefines his "duty" and takes off, feeling that emptiness and failure constitute his existence. Once again Price presents us with the changing relationship between a male and a female--changes that begin with Wesley's departure and balloon with Rosa's rape and

Wesley's cohabitation with a young woman named Wilson in Nashville.

Wasting no time recapping the twenty-eight years between A Long and Happy Life and Good Hearts, Price moves swiftly into current events: Wesley is gone by page five, and Rosa is raped by page thirty-one. She begins a diary on the second night after Wesley's departure, and through it we get Rosa's reactions to Wesley's leaving, the assault, the past twenty-eight years, and the events as they occur in this work. But the novel is as much Wesley's story as it is Rosa's, and Price allows him to tell it from his own perspective. Because both characters must exorcise individual private fears and determine the prospects for a continued life together, each pursues resolution independently. And even though Rosa is as alone and perhaps more traumatized than she was upon discovering her pregnancy, she is not submissive either syntactically or semantically. An early passage from her diary surely reveals her hurt and confusion at Wesley's desertion; but it also shows action, not retreat into inertia.

But now I'm clawing at my own eyes and lips. I never was that good at manure eating, mine or others'. It starts my eyes watering, and I'm not going to try tears on you, even in writing. Words were what I used to try to drown you with. As much

as any Holy Roller at an August revival, I've had the permanent gift of tongues. And now here again are all these words. There're for me--you well know--much as you. They're to keep my mind from melting in the heat of all I think and wonder about. You may not ever have to read one word, but they're helping me put one foot down firmly and then the other--without yet needing to scramble and run.

I won't try further to picture you this minute where you are, alone in a motel watching football with no more company than a cold pizza-box or with some better person. I didn't try to call or see your mother for fear you might be there with her, though I knew you wouldn't be. Knew? What's left that I know now?--not you, never did. Whatever I thought. (26-27)

Immediately obvious is the number of first person pronouns; the word "I" appears eleven times. While this is not unusual in a diary, it indicates that Rosa's focus is on herself, even if she does question Wesley's motivations in leaving, his whereabouts, whom he might be with, and how well she really knows him. But the questions do not appear until the end of the passage, and what leads up to them are concrete statements of action, not abstract delvings into self-pity or indications of submissive giving up.

The passage begins with a metaphorical activity, "clawing at my own eyes and lips." This reveals not only the extent of Rosa's pain but also the almost animal-like instinct to deal with it. "Clawing" is a verb regularly employed to describe animal activity; and if it is used with humans, it usually indicates self-defense or an

attempt at self-preservation. And this is exactly what Rosa is doing--both defending and preserving self. The animal referent continues in the next sentence with the word "manure." Since "manure" most frequently means excrement of some age, Rosa's word choice is appropriate. She indicates a hesitancy to dredge up past offences, hers or anyone else's, and an unwillingness to assume culpability for them, regardless of the source. Nor is she inclined to play the whimpering female and "try tears" on Wesley. Instead, she will "try to drown" him with words, emphasizing that they are as much for her as for him.

Nowhere in this passage does Rosa appear subordinate or as object. There are numerous grammatical objects, but they are significantly mostly infinitives, with the verb being one of action--"to try," "to keep," "to drown," "to scramble," "to picture," [to] "put," "to call." All of these refer to what Rosa will do, refuses to do, or did not do. But it is she who is making these decisions; and even though Wesley's departure is the catalyst which necessitates them, he is not dictating her behavior.

However, we must not assume that this activity--the writing of these words in this diary--is easy for Rosa. She herself tells us "They're to keep my mind from melting..." It is, in a sense, the mental activity that

she is trying to control--"to keep my mind from melting in the heat of all I think and wonder about." The usually transitive action verbs of the previous main clauses and the infinitives give way to verbs indicating mental activity--"think," "wonder," "picture," and finally "know," and "knew." The fact that Rosa says "I won't try to picture you this very minute where you are," and follows this with a highly concrete image--"alone in a motel watching football with no more company than a cold pizza-box" proves that she is doing exactly what she is attempting to avoid. She pictures Wesley very clearly--including what he had for dinner and its remains. But most significantly, her statement that she won't imagine him "with some better person" carries us back twenty-eight years earlier to the scene of their first love making where Rosacoke speculates that Wesley was "keeping company in the dark with whatever pictures his mind threw up--of some other place he would rather be or some girl he knew that was better" (my emphasis). All these many years later, Rosa is again questioning her significance to and relationship with Wesley.

In an attempt to answer this question, Rosa explores the boundaries of her knowledge--"knew? What's left that I know now?--not you, never did. Whatever I thought." This passage about what she knows or doesn't know reminds

us of the next-to-last paragraph of A Long and Happy Life, where Rosa affirms her knowledge--"she suddenly knew... 'Wesley knows me. After all Wesley knows me.' " Perhaps he did and still does, but Rosa's certainty about her knowledge diminishes with Wesley's departure.

This excerpt which begins with statements of concrete action that Rosa will or will not pursue ends with non-physical, mental, internal activity. Actually the action described in the early part of the passage is Rosa's attempt to forestall the thoughts and questions presented at the end. Both Price and Rosa revert to internality. Rosa does so as she moves from action to thought, with the sentence stating she "won't try to picture" him--which is negated by the very act of her statement--serving as the transition between the action and the thought. And although the selection contains simple, compound, and complex sentences at the beginning when action is presented, it deteriorates into fragments at the end when we enter Rosa's mental grappling.

These paragraphs reveal two things--one about Price and one about Rosa. If we accept Lisa Appignanesi's definition of masculine writers as ones who externalize activity and feminine writers as ones who internalize it--and I think it is a useful one--then we see Price once more emerge as a feminine writer, or an author with a

feminine style. His "internal" choices--sentence construction, diction, metaphor--are, if we take him at his word, unconscious, truly "internal." (In an April 19, 1993 presentation at UNC-Charlotte, Price stated that writing, for him, was an unconscious act, that he truly was not aware of patterns that emerged and that he was always surprised when someone pointed them out to him). Actually, this passage from Good Hearts is a recapitulation of Price's writing process. He, like Rosa, has "the permanent gift of tongues" and may "try to drown" us with words. But the physical act of writing is the path to the internal, unconscious search for resolution, both for the writer in the way he presents and develops his characters and his plots, and for the characters in the way they unravel conflict.

The selections from A Long and Happy Life demonstrate how Price's linguistic and stylistic devices "internalize activity" by subtly revealing the shifts in power between characters as thoroughly as the content does. From another perspective, the passage from Good Hearts exhibits how a female character turns from external activity to internality to work through crisis. However, Price also presents his male characters in Good Hearts from a feminine perspective. They do not judge events "by collective, transpersonal standards." (Appignanesi 24)

Neither Wave Wilbanks, Rosa's rapist, nor Wesley, Rosa's husband, predicates his behavior or interprets its consequences from anything other than a personal viewpoint, one that is frequently at odds with conventional, generally accepted mores.

It is imperative, at this point, to remind ourselves of two things: (1) we are addressing aspects of feminine style, not doing a feminist reading, and (2) because of this focus, it would be distracting and extraneous to fixate on Wave's victims. Accepting instead the generally held conviction that all rapists are psychopaths whose actions are dictated and motivated by skewed or aberrant perspectives and personalities, it is illuminating to look at the language--how Wave justifies his behavior.

A few brief selections from the seven pages of Wave's sexual history convince us that this man constructs his own reality and analyzes and justifies his "knowing" of women as both a gift he must share and a service to his chosen. With the sexual act, he believes, "would come an end to need and then a return flow of thanks and kindness from the woman" (205). And initially, he has no evidence to refute this view. Christine, the female with whom he has his first sexual experience, welcomes and enjoys their intimacy and seeks additional encounters. But Wave loses interest because Christine becomes predictable:

"She'd lie back and watch in the cool while he fiddled with her, got her twitching and yipping like a wind-up toy He could foretell every move she'd make the instant before she made it." (206)

His subsequent partners, his dramatics teacher and a librarian, responded less enthusiastically than Christine; but his description of events is so internalized, so personal that we might even question whether or not it is a rape that is being recounted:

"Forced was hardly the right word for what he accomplished with them. He knew that, out of loneliness and hunger, they mostly cooperated. But the way they obeyed his orders for silence and stillness and just lay back and watched him proceed, the way they almost never yelled or struck him but cried gently at the end--all those signs told him to believe what he hoped: that Waverly Wilbanks had won precious knowledge through his own strong force.
(207)

This passage begins and ends with the verb and noun form of the same word--"forced" and "force." But a transformation occurs in Wave's mind (and almost in ours) that causes the verb which has a negative connotation in the lexical field of sexual activity to achieve in the noun form the positive connotation of an affirming endowment. Somehow, Wave's victims become recipients of his gift; and their reticence, passivity, and tears represent, for him, their gratitude rather than their

fear, remorse and/or anger. Absent are words of violence. Instead, as he describes it, he honored their skin; "he attended to them." These words are the words Wave would use. And Price allows us to view these incidents from Wave's perspective although his authorial voice interrupts and comments at least once, as if Price needs to assure us that these words reveal Wave's convictions--convictions that the author neither accepts or condones: "He listened in stillness, heard their private needs and filled them. Or so he believed" (my emphasis). This phrase, obviously from Price, bridges to the next sentence which gives one more piece of evidence from Wave justifying his behavior-- "And didn't his safety, his freedom from jail or the fear of capture, prove him right?" This and Wesley's absence in the days before the New Year's assault affirm for Wave that his attention was both "wanted and right." Somehow he equates Rosa's aloneness with a desire, on her part, for him. And having convinced himself that the need is mutual, he cannot accept her rejection of him:

What had ruined him ever since New Year's was, he hadn't really finished. Out of all the women he'd really been near, Rosa was the only one who cried out and stopped him. She'd somehow lied in all those smiles and misled him badly. (210-211)

The fact that Rosa had passed him on campus, had smiled as almost anyone would at a passing stranger in the intimate confines of a college community, encouraged Wave to believe that she was drawn to him, that "the two of them had a world to give each other." And for the first time, Wave thought he saw a woman who could give him something rather than just someone who needed his gifts:

Somewhere behind her wide blue eyes, she guarded closely what Wave suspected was a big grand secret. This time, it was a secret that she herself understood; it was the rest of the world she was hiding her answer from....And her rare smile said "Waverly Wilbanks, I can give you rest." (209-210)

But not only has Wave misread her impersonal friendliness and its meaning, he has also misread her facial expression. Rosa issued no invitation; she possessed no private knowledge for him, other than the fact that she did not desire him nor would she welcome physical intimacy with him. But because Wave internalized her actions and interpreted them, or misinterpreted them, from non-transpersonal standards, he enters her house on New Year's in the early morning hours and assaults Rosa. Her retelling of the attack avoids almost all physical description of the action, eschews sexual language, and mentions no body parts other than her back--her position

when she awoke to find the strange male on her, her arms-- which instinctively encircled this man's neck, and her hips--the violent movement of which dislodged her attacker.

Her description of the rape itself does not focus on the physical either. All Rosa says is that "The lower half of his body was working, but it felt more like a dry bumping duty he had to accomplish than any fun or meanness to me." Once again, Rosa wants to rely on words--"At first I thought if I just heard his speech, then I'd understand and could talk him down. But all I got was his main word help. If he said help once, he said it fifty times." However Rosa doesn't know, and neither do we, who was to help whom. Is Wave providing aid to her, as he thought he was his earlier partners? Or is he asking for her help, asking her to share the secret knowledge that she possessed that he desired? Because both internalize the incident, as it is occurring and afterwards, neither is completely sure what happened. Wave doesn't understand Rosa's behavior, and Rosa is not even sure if what transpired can be called a rape. When she confides in her brother Milo, she asks him to define "rape " since he thinks she isn't angry enough; for him, her reaction does not match the stimulus. He responds to her question, "It's when a guy holds down a woman against her will and

comes inside her body." Rosa justifies her confusion, "All right . . . That's what I mean. It was a man. He held me down long as he could, and against my will, but I'm not sure he came--not inside me at least." (100)

While Rosa may be unable to classify what happened well enough to suit a judge, she does know that she has been violated and damaged. Even though no physical evidence indicates unlawful entry or sexual assault (she sought no legal or medical verification), she still writes in her diary:

Nowhere in the backyard was there any sign of footprints. The place at least had not been damaged. There was just the big hole in the air that man had made when he slammed through me. (37)

Recalling Rosa's confession of fondness for words, we expect a certain precision in her diction; and we are not disappointed. Her choice of verbs is revelatory. For the first time she refers to her assault in language connoting violence--"There was just the big hole in the air that man had made when he slammed through me" (my emphasis). All definitions of "slam" contain the words "violence" or "with great force." Her choosing this verb confirms for us that whether or not she can technically ascertain the commission of rape signifies little; she has been harmed

regardless. And the built-in modification "with great force" that is inherent in the verb "slam" recalls for us the passage containing Wave's justification of intercourse with the librarian and his drama teacher. While Wave dismisses "force" as his *modus operandi*, Rosa's use of "slammed" affirms his actions as exactly that. Ironically, "the big hole in the air" left by Wave's attack corresponds to the feelings of doubt that Wave experiences as a result of Rosa's "one mighty roll" of her hips. Her interruption of the sexual act, accompanied by Rosa's one verbal utterance, an order--"Get out of here. I'll give you one minute"--with no silent tears, compels Wave to assess his behavior, for the first time and only for a moment, by "collective, transpersonal standards" (Appignanesi 24). However, it is only Rosa's brother Rato's watchdog-like presence and Wesley's return which prevent Wave from completing his New Year's intention and drive him to both an onlooker status and a brief, new perspective on his actions:

So now Wave stood in the midst of night on the street outside her house, her room, her simple brother, and now this husband who couldn't deserve her. He suspected, even now, that he might be crazy. He'd read enough books, seen enough television, to know his kind were pitied and feared and dreaded by all. He himself might better off be locked in a cell, or hanged or gassed, than left out here on the streets to roam. Yet he knew one thing more urgent

than all--he was not a member of any common kind. He was a man in possession of a talent.

Surely what he had--a kind sweet gift that women seldom got, for all this pain--more than earned him room and air, the right to roam in darkness and strike where his hands knew best to strike. (211)

What begins with an awareness of how he might be judged by the "collective" reverts once more to a personal review of his endowment. For a instant, Wave describes himself with verbs others might use--"pitied," "feared," "dreaded"; and he speculates on the appropriate consequences for people such as he--"locked in a cell," "hanged," "gassed." But almost immediately, he hedges, and begins his next thought with "yet," a word which in this context could easily be replaced with the phrase "despite all this" or "disregarding all this," and he refutes his place among those that perhaps should be "pitied," "feared," "locked in a cell," "hanged," or "gassed." Not being "a member of any common kind," he cannot be judged by "collective . . . standards" because his "gift" both sets him apart and also guarantees his privilege. However, Wave (or Price) undercuts the positiveness of this assertion with the last phrase of this passage--"the right to roam in darkness and strike where his hands knew best to strike." The verb "roam" implies an aimlessness, a wandering without purpose, but Wave surely has a purpose: to bestow his "gift." Or it

also suggests an animal-like search for prey. This latter possibility fits well with the only other verb in the phrase, a verb used twice for emphasis--"strike." This word has no positive connotation at all and insinuates violence both in intent and consequence. Is this a word Wave would choose, having once again defended and sanctioned his behavior? Or is this word Price's condemnation of Wave, signaling us that, Wave's justification notwithstanding, a rapist's actions are deplorable? Either option reveals an unconscious, internal choice. Wave would not purposefully refer to his activity with such an aggressive word, and Price would not intentionally employ a word with such prejudicial capabilities, having practiced, until this point in his treatment of Wave, what Keats identified as negative capability. Price has, in fact, been so non-condemnatory that many readers might be put-off or offended by his presentation of Wave. What we must remember is that we, for the most part, see Wave through his own eyes, not the eyes of his creator. Price allows us to enter Wave's head, and even though we assess his conduct "by collective, transpersonal standards," he does not and neither does Price. It is Wave's private perspective that guides his actions, just as it is another major male character's internal torment that governs his.

In the first few pages of this novel, Wesley acknowledges his suffering:

Wesley, though, at fifty was in real pain. It had been part of him all his adult life, a way of walking into a day with a sense of happy blessing only to come up at four p.m. with his nose flat against a blank wall of defeat. Nowhere to go, no way back, no other human to turn to for help, nothing more awful than now except the risk of death. When those ambushes happened, he could never say why. So he blamed nobody but himself. (3)

This passage follows Rosa and Wesley's saying "good-night" to one another and a one paragraph overview from the author recalling the circumstances of their union, their appearance after twenty-eight years, and a comment on their apparent comfortableness with each other's physical closeness. Price even addresses the reader as "you" in these early pages, informing us what we might see had we been present. And it is his authorial voice that provides the first hint that what we see reveals only part of the reality--"And their visible ease with one another's bodies was also misleading, a dangerous illusion shared by Rosa." However, Rosa's contentment, fueled by her illusion, allows her to slip into sleep and dreams while Wesley struggles toward sleep, wrestling with private thoughts.

These thoughts are revealed in the passage quoted above, which contains six negative words or phrases-- "nowhere," "no way," "no other human," "nothing," "never," "nobody." If we question the source or nature of the pain mentioned in the first sentence, the repetitious use of these negatives confirms it as emotional or mental anguish. And while there are seven abstract nouns in this passage, five of them have negative connotations--"pain," "defeat," "risk," "death," "ambushes"--providing further corroboration of Wesley's state of mind. Adding to his pain is the fact that he can identify no specific source, certainly no outside agent. Even Wesley says the feeling "ambushes" him. Beginning each day "with a sense of happy blessing" and encountering "a blank wall of defeat" by 4 p.m. confound him, and the negatives come in the three sentences following this description. There is not a place, a path, or a person that can furnish solace or answers. His torment is so great that he identifies death as the only thing that could be worse, and so personal that he blames "nobody but himself." His attempt to work through these feelings by telling himself, "This is just one night, not the end of the earth. Get calm and wait" might have been successful had the emotions not been compounded by a dream in which he sees himself as a young man condemned to failure because he has nothing to offer

the world but a fine body, and this dream followed by a voice that he hears the next day as he puts his hand out to grasp a tool telling him, "Death is what you just reached for." Caught between the belief that only death could be worse and the perception that his current life offered a living death, Wesley responds--with no notification to Rosa, but with no premeditation either--almost instinctively:

So Wesley was all but shocked as she when, . . . he found himself leave work one afternoon, stop by the bank, and draw two hundred dollars from the stainless-steel computer treasure . . . Then he nosed through traffic to interstate 40 and didn't stop for coffee till five hours later on the far outskirts of Asheville in chill black mountains. (61)

And thus Wesley, in leaving, set in motion a series of events that constitute the plot of Good Hearts: Rosa's rape, Wesley's moving in with Joyce Wilson, Rato's arrival to protect his sister, Rato's subsequent friendship with Wave--unknown to him as Rosa's rapist, and Wesley's eventual return. No external force prompts Wesley to leave. We are told that he has no conscious memory of the dream. But he has internalized the disappointments of his life; the fame from high school baseball was not replaced by recognition in the Navy and being "the best damned

mechanic since Henry Ford" was not the "something the world would love, and discovered it had always yearned for." Wesley's life had not met his expectations, but he never shared his dreams. In fact "Nobody'd ever known a word of this" (67). He lived inside his mind as a man who made a difference and outside his mind as a mechanic. And because he cannot reconcile the two, he leaves. His remembered dreams of anticipated success and his forgotten dream of predicted failure, internal though they both may be, provide the impetus for his flight. Price himself alerts us to the importance of the unseen, that which exists below the surface of the seen, in the early pages of the novel when he addresses the readers and sets up the dichotomy between what is observable and what is hidden by darkness, both the physical darkness of the night and the darkness of Wesley's conscious but unrevealed thoughts and his subconscious.

Although it might be somewhat accurate to describe what Wesley is experiencing as a "mid-life crisis," that is much too simplistic. Actually in juxtaposing the seen and unseen, Price illuminates the opposition between mind and body, and the entire novel explores the consequences of a failure to reconcile the two. Leslie Veach Sadler, in her article "'Small Calm Pleasures': The Mustians Revisited in Reynolds Price's Good Hearts," acknowledges

this opposition as a unifying thread that ties the work together thematically.³ While all that Veach points out is there, she stops short by just identifying the "chain of body-mind images that runs throughout" (78). The body-mind, seen-unseen oppositions are actually synecdochic for the external-internal juxtaposition of action. By internalizing the action, Price practices Appignanesi's definition of feminine style as he demonstrates how the private, personal vision of each character provides the motivation and justification for behavior as well as the means to resolution of conflict both within the individual and between and among the characters.

NOTES

¹ A slightly altered version of the A Long and Happy Life section of this chapter was published as "Gender, Power, and Style in Reynolds Price's A Long and Happy Life" by CEA Critic 56.1(1993): 77-85.

² In a 1966 interview with Wallace Kaufman, Price is discussing man's relationship with nature and the antural world. He suggests that we really need some significant voices calling for change. He asks this question, "And wouldn't it be healthy to have a good poet around saying things like that?--a better Robinson Jeffers; is there one?" (Humphries, Conversations 29). Obviously Price has read Jeffers and is familiar with his work.

³ Other examples that she refers to in a note in her discussion:

The Beavers' "visible ease" with their bodies is a "dangerous illusion (4). Rosa tells Wesley: "Not one single cell, outside or in, is the same as when we met and drew at each other. But in me at least the cells of my mind still look for you" (25). Of the rapist, she says" "I think though that what worked, and is still working, in me is the sense that my man was out to harm my mind. My body was just something he was knocking at, hoping to find my mind and bruise

it, plow it up and leave the picture of him in the middle of my mind and life for the rest of the time I'm given. And he may have managed that" (38; also, 79-80). She claims to know little "about men--what they truly think in those calm-looking minds" (58). The "bones" of Wesley's mind are pulverized by thanks for Wilson's goodness (153), and it is his mind at one point that will not allow his body to reach climax (58). (Sadler 78-79)

CHAPTER II
REPRESENTATIONS OF SEXUALITY

Price continues to explore the mind/body dichotomy and again emphasizes the internal in his treatment of sexuality even though, unlike writers from the turn of the century through the fifties, Price has the option to be more physically explicit. As students of literature know, several factors influence how a writer treats sex in his or her work. One of these is surely the prevailing attitude of the time in which the work is written. During the last hundred plus years, American literature has moved from Howells' admonition that nothing should be written which would bring a blush to a young woman's cheek to Norman Mailer and Henry Miller's explicit catalogs of body parts and sexual activity. One need only compare Howells' A Modern Instance with Miller's Sexus or Mailer's An American Dream to discover the huge swing in what is permissible and publishable in American fiction.

Even with this apparent latitude, heightened awareness of the implications that lie in a chosen presentation exerts a certain pressure on writers. The publication of Kate Millett's Sexual Politics in 1970

introduced and confirmed the idea that sexual portrayals in literature reflect attitudes adopted and behaviors practiced in society. And since then, critics suggest that literature also perpetuates the attitudes represented. Images of women as objects, as passive receptacles, as victims of penis envy, as mere sexual organs pervade literature in the twentieth century providing a glut of material for feminist critics. For as Maurice Charney points out, "sexual fiction is created primarily by males . . . with masculine values" and "the overwhelming interest in these books is in the representation of female sexuality" (164). The sexuality usually represented, however, is that of the female as object rather than an exploration of the mutuality of sexual relationships. Even the few attempts by female authors--most notably Erica Jong in Fear of Flying--usually just change the gender of the protagonist. Jong's Isadora presents, as Maurice Charney points out, a mirror image to Roth's Portnoy: both use sex to find "the good life" (113). And neither is satisfied in the search. Charney suggests that there is a very legitimate reason for their failure:

Everywhere in the two novels the demands of the mind and the body are set against each other in a rigid and irreconcilable dualism. Perhaps sexual

fiction, by its insistence on physical pleasure, is almost necessarily committed to this dualism. (114)

It follows then that a reconciliation of the mind and the body--an attempt to portray both the emotional and physical aspects of the sex act would lead to a very different kind of sexual fiction. There is, however, a third possibility: the writer may choose to limit the physical descriptions of sex and concentrate on the mental/emotional/spiritual perspective. For the most part, this is exactly what Price does. In his fiction that is concerned with adult male/female relationships, Price again eschews the external, physical aspects and attempts to portray the internal--the character's feelings and attitude during or following the sexual union. Body parts are rarely mentioned; and with the exception of Wesley's masturbation in Good Hearts, no common or slang anatomical terms appear.

This continued emphasis on the internal in an act that lends itself easily to external description further reinforces classifying Price's style as "feminine." Not only do we have Appignanesi's definition of feminine style as "the tendency to internalize activity" (24) but also support from two centuries earlier. According to Elaine Baruch, Madame de Stael argued then

that women have been discoverers of the interior self. They have been pioneers of the inner frontier. The more literature retreats from the interpretation of an external world; the less it rests on the conscious processes of the mind, the more women both as writers and characters become important. (165)

Baruch acknowledges that some men have been experimenters with this "feminine" style and cites Proust, Eliot, and Joyce as examples. She suggests that both the male and female practitioners of this exploration of the interior are more interested "in the texture of experience rather than its range" (165). And the "texture" of the sexual experience is exactly what Price portrays.

Price himself explained when and where explicit sexual descriptions--details related to externality rather than internality--are appropriate in an address to a 1972 gathering of the N.C. Writers' Forum at UNC-C (summarized later in The Charlotte Observer) and again, at greater length, in the August 1973 issue of Esquire. Asking in both instances for a given distinction between novelists and pornographers, Price argues that writers can now write what they wish as long as they "portray sexual behavior, as opposed to advocating it" (Esquire 88). He then looks at several novels whose effect would have been greater had the sexual scenes been more explicit. In this group he includes Madame Bovary, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and E.

M. Forster's Maurice. He argues that these three novels are all works about sex--stories "of sexual discovery and response: of self confrontation, self understanding and finally communication through sexual relation[s]" (144). In Price's view, the authors err by not being more sexually explicit. However, in works like Anna Karenina, Wuthering Heights, and The Turn of the Screw, where the subject is not human sexuality, the authors succeed by not being explicit. Price concludes:

sexual behavior can be useably made explicit only when sexuality is the subject of the story, when a character's sexual nature is the chief index to his needs and destiny (usable as something other than pornography, though it may be possible to find new uses for passages which attempt sexual stimulation on a reader--one more means of compelling a reader to re-enact in his own life, his own clock-time, the emotions and gestures of a fictional character).
(Esquire 146)

Significantly, Price addresses in this excerpt what occurs in the mind and what the body does in sexual activity--"the emotions and gestures"--and indicates the active role of the reader in the reading process. In the same essay, Price gives the reader insight into his own practice when he says:

some serious men will invent good uses for this new chance to face and record the emotions, internal and

external, of human sexuality; that some of the uses will give readers pleasure and stimulation which may in turn cast light, compassion, toleration and laughter on a broad band of human experience. (146)
[emphasis added]

Once again, Price comments on the effects on the reader of the author's putting this new freedom in sexual expression into practice.¹

Price clearly recognizes the dualism implicit in human sexual activity: the mind and the body--the internal and the external. And he acknowledges that writers today have a freedom that those of years past did not enjoy. Given this recognition and acknowledgment, readers might expect to find a more balanced portrayal of sex in his fiction than that which we actually do find. However, with only a few exceptions--those dealing with masturbation--Price relies much more heavily on the mental experience than on the physical in his treatment of both heterosexual and homosexual activity, even when the subject is a character's newly awakened sexuality. A brief review of the sexual activity of the characters in Price's better known fiction will demonstrate his emphasis on the internal--an emphasis that surfaces even when Price thinks he has presented the opposite.

In a 1986 interview with Jefferson Humphries, Price again addresses how changing standards grant a "freedom

now to explore the secret and public sexual needs and expressions of literary characters" (24). He then explains that such an exploration is exactly what he has attempted:

I certainly, from The Surface of Earth on, have tried to use that freedom richly and responsibly in both fiction and in the more personal poems that I've written simultaneously. Kate Vaiden, herself, though to a large extent a woman of her time in what she will or will not describe, is rather free in her description of what sexual contact has meant in her life. (240)

Price may believe that what Kate reveals is determined by the time in which she lived; but Kate was born after the free-wheeling twenties, had her first sexual experience during the second World War, and was still a young woman during the sexually liberated sixties. In addition, she tells her story in retrospect in the eighties. She has the option to be explicit. However, while Kate does admit at fifty-seven, "With all my badness, I've enjoyed myself"--letting the reader know that sexual contact has been pleasant--Kate is not "rather free in her description" as Price indicates. While this is a comment on what sex has meant to her, she is no more explicit when she describes the activity.

Her retelling of her first sexual experience, when she was thirteen and Gaston sixteen, reveals little about the physical aspects of the event. Kate does disclose her lack of development--"This was some years before bosoms came into their own, mine or anybody else's (and since mine were hardly more than bee-stings by then, it was lucky for me)" (91). And she remarks that although Gaston's "hands were callused as antlers, they felt smooth and kind and in no big hurry" (91). The rest of the description has to do with feelings--with what was going on in Kate's head:

I was being as good to myself as I could. Better than anybody else had been. I was giving myself this long steady gift And I pictured my face overhead in beech leaves--normal size and nobody's raving beauty but a firm open face that could meet you unblinking with a likable smile. It said you will never be gladder than now if you live to be ninety. (92)

All we have to do is compare this to any sexual intercourse passage from Henry Miller to see the difference in result between exploring the internal and external aspects of sexual activity. Kate and Gaston's union demonstrates what is true about sex in most of Price's fiction: the act is mutual and there is a joining of minds or spirits as well as bodies. Even in her youth

and limited experience, Kate tries to explain the phenomenon:

So naturally I thought about love, dawn to dark. Or Gaston--I doubt I called it love. To me it was nothing but the way he looked and the gaps he'd leave for me to fill in with hopes and guesses. I didn't go wild, inside or out. Nobody else seemed to notice I knew him. But you could have counted on a new baby's hand the minutes of the day I didn't think about him and wish he was there. That may be as much of love as I ever understood--to this day, I mean--but it brought me to life, fast, in little ways I never planned. (95)

What Kate emphasizes is the emotion, not the physical sensation. Price might argue that the lack of physical description is appropriate since "sexuality is not the subject" (Esquire 146). But long after Gaston is dead and Kate begins a physical relationship with Douglas Lee, where sexuality is--at least momentarily--the subject, Kate refrains from explicitness:

He took a polite and quiet care not to hurt me or leave me stranded and cold. And that night, in his quilted bed, he said worlds more about what we were doing than Gaston did in years--how he'd dreamed of this so long and how I'd been sent (since Douglas was an atheist, I wondered who by?) But he never said he wanted more than one part of me. (190)

. Kate attempts to explain the difference between her joining with Douglas Lee and her union with Gaston,

demonstrating--at least metaphorically--how the former was much more an act of the body than an act of the mind and body:

And looking back now I can see Gaston--feel Gaston on me, in me like sun on my hide through days and night. Douglas seems more like a light cotton-spread thrown over my legs for a short nap, then folded forever--or a shovel of coal. (190)

Even though Kate recognizes and articulates the difference in the two relationships, her mode of description does not change. The difference for her is emotional engagement, but the less emotionally charged relationship is no more physically explicit. She relies on metaphor to make the distinction, rather than a listing of hers or Douglas Lee's techniques or specific actions.

Price suggested, in the Esquire essay, that there are situations when such detail is not only appropriate but also desired. And he is rather graphic in outlining what the reader should have been told concerning Emma's first adultery with Rodolphe in Madame Bovary:

Don't we really require to know--if we're to follow his full design and yield him the desired response--the size and performance record of Rodolphe's equipment, the amount of carefully programmed dalliance employed (as opposed to hungry lurching), the exact degree and form of resistance, the degree of nudity, the positions chosen? In short, doesn't

the story require a merciless graph of the confirmation or frustration of Emma's illusions about sex? (80)

I propose that Kate's circumstances are not very different from Emma's. Kate's only previous sex has been with Gaston, and theirs was a long-term union with a degree of commitment. Kate's experience with Douglas Lee was a joining of bodies, purely for physical satisfaction. Even though Kate was fond of Douglas Lee, her first loyalty was, and should have been, to her cousin Walter who both knew would be deeply hurt by their behavior. It would seem, then, that Kate (or Price) would be more precise, if not to justify her actions by the pleasure involved at least to distinguish more clearly the difference between the two experiences.

Perhaps Price indeed believes that he is allowing Kate to be as specific as her gender and her time would allow. I think, however, that her gender and the dictates of society are not the controlling factors. Price is simply more concerned with the internal happenings than the external ones. An examination of a male perspective of a sexual union provides further proof.

In The Surface of Earth, the first work that Price cites in the Humphries interview as benefiting from his conscious effort "to use that new freedom richly and

responsibly," the first instance of sexual intercourse occurs very early in the novel. Forrest Mayfield, a thirty-two year old male virgin, and his sixteen year old virgin new wife, Eva Kendal Mayfield, begin their sexual life together in the early morning hours the day after their marriage:

And when he had drawn their long-joined hands from the covers and thanked them with slow dry kisses and had slowly uncovered his body, then hers--all but stopped by the simple plainness of the answer this new sight promised to all his needs--and had knelt above her in the space she offered between smooth knees and bent to the work he craved since birth, then she welcomed him. Had shut her clean eyes and with two hands powerful as ice in stone had implored him into the still-sealed door of her final solitude, final secret--only looking outward again at the instant of violation when she smiled and drew herself further around him and he said, "You must know: it's as strange to me as you."

All was shared space now, shared news, shared messages freely exchanged of gratitude, trust. (10)

Even though the narration is third-person, the perspective is Forrest's. Readers might attribute the modesty to his somewhat advanced-age virginity. Or perhaps Price, by not being more precise in his physical descriptions, is confirming that the subject is not sexuality. Whatever the reason, the result is again an emphasis on the internal rather than the external. In fact, Price's metaphors almost obscure the event taking place. He does

not use any slang terms for body parts, nor does he call them by their anatomical terms. Eva's vagina is "the still-sealed door of her final solitude, final secret," and the act itself is called "the work he had craved since birth." The last sentence affirms the emotional aspect of the union, underscored by the repetition of "shared" and the abstract nouns "gratitude" and "trust" as the final words. Nowhere in the passage do we find eroticism in the physical sense.

Forrest does, however, present a much more sensual description of their love-making a bit later in the work, although the union occurs only in his imagination. Shortly after Eva returned to her home following her mother's suicide, "Forrest took her in his head" (46):

But now in his head, he accepted her offer; and kneeling above, bent to hunt with his mouth--in her dry hair, across the waiting planes of her face, her placid neck, the close breasts (looseheld fistsful of nurture), the high flat belly, the core beneath (barely garlanded) rank with the fragrance of its own demand. By then the instrument of his own search was ready; and again, as generally from the first, with strong hands she pressed him quickly in and, with strong heels crossed in the small of his back, locked him in place. (50)

A comparison with the previous passage shows the difference in the two, even though no one would classify this description as highly erotic. The most obvious

distinguishing factor is the specificity. Here, body parts are named: her face, neck, breasts, belly, heels. Price does not, however, abandon metaphor. Eva's "still-sealed door" becomes "the core beneath." And the two metaphors characterizing this "core" complement each other-- "(barely garlanded)" and "rank with the fragrance"--and appeal to the reader's senses. Both call up botanical images, but contradictory ones. The first is of a wreath of flowers; the second of an offensive aroma.

The detail in this passage is significant in an equally contradictory way. This sex never happened; it occurs only in Forrest's mind. There is no mutuality here, no joining of spirits as well as bodies. In a sense, the whole episode recalls the once joined bodies and spirits; but Eva's absence requires recollection of physicality to recreate the event. It follows then that when the union is actual, Price accepts the duality of body and spirit as a given and enters the character's mind to explore the importance of the act. But when the event occurs only in the character's mind, Price relies on physical detail since the significance is implied by the act of its creation.

This is exactly the case in what may be the most sexually explicit passage in Price's fiction. In The Source of Light, shortly after Rob discovers he is dying

of cancer and begins his visits to loved ones past and present, he dreams in his dead father's room in Richmond. The dream is of a nearly perfect woman whom Rob encounters in an otherwise empty house. They walk silently through the house together and enter a room with one bed:

When they stopped in the center of the room, he turned and carefully but quickly began to undress her. She still didn't face him, but she let him work with no resistance; and when he had her entirely bare in unflawed beauty, she set her own small hands on his wrists and drew him to the bed, neatly opening the covers. Rob opened her. Once bare himself against her--she did fill all his adjacent emptiness--he found that he wanted to open and eat her. He left her face and arms and slowly made way down the length of her body, honoring the skin itself with the only tribute he could offer--silent kisses on her firm pooled breasts, the trough between, her flat belly plush with fine blond hair that took the light from a single window, the patient powerful bone of her left hip. He kneaded that with his stubbled chin, her legs moved apart, he thought he could hear her say "Rob. Now." He wondered how she could know his name, but he wouldn't speak to ask. He obeyed both her voice and his own delight in a hunger on the verge of perfect food. He rose to his knees and slid to the small space she'd offered in her fork. His hands went under her knees, her legs lifted, he bent to the gift. In long laps he spread the tiers of leaves that covered his goal, led by the clean salt stench of her blood and welcoming oils. Then he devoured her. Or thought he devoured. He licked down easily through layers of happiness. (87)

Price is no less metaphorical in this passage than in the previous one. This woman's vagina becomes a "gift," and Price again uses botanical imagery in "the tiers of

leaves." And once more, he employs a noun with a negative connotation indicating aroma--"stench." The major difference between the two excerpts is the specificity. Price names the face, the breasts, and the belly in both passages, but he lists more parts of the body in the second passage. The explicitness extends also to the verbs. Here, the narrator is the initiator. He "kneaded," "rose," "spread," and "devoured." In the first passage of imagined sex, the narrator is led: Eva "pressed him quickly in . . . and locked him in place." And the verbs in the second passage leave little doubt about the activity taking place. Clearly, both of these excerpts demonstrate that Price is more explicit when the sex occurs only in the mind. The purely mental activity addresses one aspect of the duality and allows Price to emphasize the body.

Examining these four examples surely demonstrates a leaning toward presenting the mental/emotional responses to sex, particularly when the occurrence is actual. One not familiar with all of Price's fiction, however might suggest that the first two examples are atypical since the two narrators are sexually inexperienced. Both are virgins and represent two extremes in age--13 and 32. Under these circumstances, it may seem natural for them to concentrate on the emotional. But not all of Price's

characters are virginal and/or inexperienced. When he first meets Luna Absher, Blue Calhoun is a thirty-five year old married man with a daughter who admits to having known "several women" in his youth and breaking his "marriage vows more than once" (19-20). However, there is no description at all of their first sexual experience together. In fact if a reader put the book down between Blue and Luna's conversation in the car and Blue's returning home to find his wife sewing seed pearls on their daughter's May day dress, she would never know infidelity had occurred. It is only after Blue lies down beside his wife and his mind starts reliving the event that confirmation comes:

. . . I lived through every instant again of Luna Absher taking me in. A virgin woman that showed how near she was to childhood by all she did and said to please me--watching me every move of the way in near full dark, then asking politely if that was right or if this felt better, done this way? And when I finished, hadn't she said the strangest thing I'd ever heard at any such time--"I'm glad to oblige"? Had she obliged me? God knew she had--to the dry hid sockets. But was it for life? And hadn't I broken in quick and bloody on too young a girl and marked her forever? Had I fed my soul one more mean drug, finer than liquor or any pill since, that I'd never quit? (28)

This is about feelings. Blue had "fed his soul"; Luna had reached his "dry hid sockets." Blue says nothing about

their bodies, how Luna's looked, how they fit. Just before dropping off to sleep, Blue thinks to himself and borrows a line and a concept from the less experienced Kate:

I was gladder than I'd ever been in my life. A girl I wanted like clean sunlight had reached inside my chest just now, dark hours ago, and gripped the cold remains of my heart. (29)

Like Kate, he was "gladder" than he'd every been, and he compares Luna to sunlight just as Kate compares Gaston to sun on her body. Blue also makes a comment on the bodily sensation, but only in connection with the mind. After he and Luna have been together for six weeks, he attempts to explain the totality of their sexual encounters:

I'm trusting you--if you're full grown--to understand this much at least: that brand of joy, all down your skin and through your mind, can have you under its spell in no time. (77) [emphasis added]

Even as he addresses the duality of the experience, he does so in terms of an abstract concept--"joy"--not a specific physical sensation.

There are a number of passages in this work where Blue relates specific instances of their sexual relationship. Obviously it is significant for him. And

yet, he never separates the body and the spirit, and he never describes just the physical aspect. Two short passages demonstrate how consistent Blue is in linking the two facets:

Fine as our first few private hours together had been, near Raleigh in the old motel, the deeds we managed between us in our home on wheels were finer still.

Without being raving wild on the subject, like I said before, I'd known more bodies than one till now. No other body--and no soul in it--ever laid a finger anywhere near Luna's. If God himself gives classes in Heaven on Blending souls, he'll have one girl that won't need to learn. (157) [emphasis added]

And way in the night when I had lain in the dark awake for maybe five hours, Luna turned towards me from her deep sleep and--with no more words than a tree can speak--she showed every piece of my mind and body how she also knew we were quitting cold. (289) [emphasis added]

In these two situations, one when things are well with them and the other when they both recognize the futility of continuing, Blue articulates similar sentiments. He emphasizes the effect on his soul of their union. Although the activity is physical, the significance is emotional. He specifies body and soul/mind in each revelation, but no other human feature. Unlike Portnoy or Jong's Isadora, Blue filters the physical experience through his mind and appreciates it the more for it. The

reader never doubts that the import transcends the external/physical and resides in the internal/mental.

All of the preceding examples have dealt with adult male/female relationships, and all but one are about sex between two people committed to one another legally or emotionally. But Price also presents homosexuality in several of his works, even though there are no long-term same-sex unions in his best known fiction.

The fact that Price includes homosexuality is not specifically a result of the new freedom accorded author's in the twentieth century because this subject matter has roots in both our oral and written literary tradition. Plato's Symposium suggests two theories of love. One is heterosexual which can only satisfy the body--give sexual pleasure. The other is homosexual which seeks to expand the mind and satisfy the body. Although this is a great simplification of the arguments presented, Plato seems to use "homosexual love as the starting point for the development of his metaphysical theory of love" (Bergmann 77). Although there are hints of same-sex attraction in literature between Plato's time and now, even in works like Shakespeare's Twelfth Night (Bergmann 104), homosexual love has for the most part, been treated as perversion. The Greeks' tolerance toward homosexuality, demonstrated not only by Plato but also by their attitude

toward Sappho's poetry which contained many lesbian poems, is the antithesis of Freud's theories explicated in the Three Essays on Sexuality (Bergmann 206). Freud defines homosexuality as a form of perversion. His work, the Biblical admonition against same-sex unions, and the preoccupation with propriety prevented most serious writers from addressing this issue in their works for years. There was, however, "an underworld of books like the anonymous Telemy (1890), which had detailed descriptions of homosexual acts, presented in alluring style" (Cockshut 164). The "underworld" flourished, and some books like Walter Pater's Marius the Epicurean (1885) hinted at homosexual love. But Frederick Rolfe (1860-1913) was the first novelist to focus on the homosexual theme and attempt to discover a "spiritual dimension" in it (Cockshut 166). Unfortunately, Rolfe did not write very well and lacked insight. The same cannot be said for E. M. Forster; and his work Maurice, which Price cites in the Esquire essay, explores the homosexual's dilemma with sensitivity but not with much explicitness.

The freedom that Price attributes to the modern age has produced significant fiction that deals with same-sex relationships, most notably works like Djuna Barnes Nightwood and Lisa Alther's Kinflicks. And although Price himself has produced no well-known work with homosexuality

as its central theme, he does include intimate male relationships in several novels and hints at intimate female ones. Significantly, however, his treatment of homosexual intimacy remains as inexplicit as his treatment of heterosexual intimacy. Again his concern is with the emotional, the internal.

In The Source of Light, homosexual feeling is acknowledged for the first time in Price's fiction. There is evidence that Hutch's mother, Rachel, and her friend, Alice, were lovers. And Rob writes to Hutch that he and a male friend of his youth "stayed steamed up about each other through that whole summer, all fumbling hands" (102). Whether or not we consider Hutch's parents' behavior a legacy or at least a suggestion that bisexuality is more prevalent than generally thought, we can surely attribute the open references to homosexuality a sign that Price is practicing the new freedom in presenting sexuality that he previously proclaimed. Hutch himself has two homosexual experiences while he is in England, but neither incident is lengthy in its presentation.

The first is with Lew Davis, Hutch's cabin mate on the journey to England. They plan to meet and travel after Lew has visited his family in Wales. Their sexual experience occurs on one of their excursions and is

seemingly spontaneous although initiated by Lew. As the two friends are discussing Lew's selection of their destination, Lew asks if Hutch knows why he chose the remote Scillies:

Hutch knew now he did. Their outward flights could cross only here, in unwatched solitude. He wanted him to and, in the next minute, that chance of intersection become all he'd wanted--or at least a seam worth gambling on to close the tear through which he felt his whole life wasting. He rolled to his left side, facing Lew, and laid his hand on the cool lean belly.

Lew lay still awhile, then turned toward Hutch till the hand rode his hip. "You sure?" he said.

"I'm sure."

So Lew reached out in one accurate line and took him where he was thoroughly ready.

For more than an hour, they met one another in all the ways two bodies can meet--released from time at the west edge of Europe . . . generous and gentle, happy and used. (134)

Price summarizes the total physical experience in one clause--"They met one another in all the ways two bodies can meet." Actually there is less specificity in this passage than in any of the others examined. And the four adjectives that conclude the excerpt emphasize the emotional feelings about the experience, evaluating both the technique and the state of mind afterwards. Price does not mention the mind/soul dimension in words, but the implication of this aspect emerges by the use of these final words.

Hutch does, in his second homosexual liaison, address the body/mind duality. After an old student/friend Straw joins him in England, the two get a little drunk during a night of confessions. When Straw returns freezing from a nocturnal swim, he climbs into the warm bed with Hutch who

lay facing Straw and, never quite waking, accepted for what seemed hours the gestures of pure blind service--mouth and hands, anointment and soothing, no word of request, no feeding gaze. The pleasure was strong as any Hutch had known, maybe stronger because of the silence and dark. He climbed through its spaces in a blindness of his own but safe, well-led. No eyes to thank, no debt to pay. Even Lew had begged rescue. He thought of Marleen's [the prostitute he visited] kind competence a moment, but gratitude quickly returned him here. He was happy here, one actual room. So, mind and body, he stayed for the rest. (177) [emphasis added]

Hutch again comments on technique--"pure blind service." And he acknowledges what is missing, mostly demands, as much as what is present. While Hutch reveals the element of physical pleasure, he admits to feeling gratitude and happiness--the two emotions that keep him in place.

Hutch never mentions his homosexual liaisons to Ann or to anyone else, nor does he dwell on them or express any guilt. As Constance Rooke points out, his reticence could indicate either complete self-acceptance or deep repression (141). I suggest that there is also another explanation. Since this novel contains Price's first

literary exploration of homosexuality, perhaps he didn't wish to dwell on it. He chose to use the new freedom but not liberally.

In the 1988 novel Good Hearts which appeared seven years after The Source of Light, Price allows Wesley Beavers to recall several homosexual experiences, but Price expands no more than he did seven years earlier. Wesley's first memory takes no more than three paragraphs from start to finish.

After meeting a young man in a bar while he was on a weekend pass, Wesley joins him for several drinks in his motel room, even after his new acquaintance had confessed that he was "as queer as Uncle Harry's husband":

Wesley's later memory was that he'd lain on his back looking down through the hours as, by dim light that filtered through a crack in the bathroom door, the guy prowled and grazed over Wesley's body like something gentle but almost starved. Wesley estimated that he'd met the guy's every hope and need; the guy had anyhow kept saying "Incredible. Absolutely incredible." Wesley also knew that he personally had never been more thoroughly or skillfully pleased and honored than by that particular stranger's hands, that timeless mouth.
(141-42)

The reader can only imagine what actually transpired. While there are clues, Prices provides no specific details. The animal imagery in verbs like "prowled" and

"grazed" is off-set by adjectives like "gentle" and verbs like "pleased" and "honored." These final verbs articulate Wesley's feelings--surely a result of the physical sensations but not a recounting of them.

Wesley recalls two other incidents with males while he was in the Navy. He comments only on the fact that they happened and that they had been pleasant enough to prevent him "from joining his working mates throughout the years in their meaner queer jokes" (142). Wesley does, unlike Hutch, provide after-the-fact commentary on these experiences. As pleasant as they were, they were not something that turned him away from women--"women were the natural target of his aim--the natural harbor of his trip" (142).

Wesley, of all Price's characters, seems to be the one most concerned with or aware of his physical sexual needs and his body. The Mayfield men openly admit that they are cursed with the need for human touch. Their need is psychological, and sex becomes a way to address it. On the other hand, Wesley is the only one of Price's character's who acknowledges the priority of his physical needs:

But from his early discovery of the unimagnible treasure installed just south of his belly, he had been a desert saint of desire and performance. (63)

Some of his desire had to be satisfied by his own performance: Wesley frequently masturbated and admitted that "masturbation had been at least half his sex life" (63). While this in itself may not be surprising given Wesley's preoccupation with physical satisfaction, the language that Price uses to describe the act surely is.

After Wesley has left Rosa and before he moves in with the woman he meets in Nashville, he nightly tends to his own physical needs. As Price says, "So midnight after midnight he returned to his motel, renewed his reservation, honored his cock, and tried to sleep" (65). This is one of the few times that Price uses a slang or common term for a body part rather than a fresh metaphorical or anatomical term. But almost shocking is the verb coupled with "cock." "Honored" is so far removed from the lexical field of masturbation that pairing the two words seems almost oxymoronic. "Honor" is a concept, and a somewhat elevated one; "cock" is a street term. In using these two words together, Price--even in masturbation--emphasizes the internal rather than the external. Had he said "Wesley masturbated" or "Wesley jerked off," the acts would have been purely physical, purely external. But by choosing instead the verb "honor," he moves the act from the physical plane to an

emotional one. Wesley's feelings about his physical self become evident.

Wesley is by far the most physical of Price's characters. While many of them, both male and female, have active sexual lives inside and outside marriage, none approaches sex as Wesley does, nor do they treat it as openly as a physical need which must be met. In this way, Wesley is as much like a Hemingway character as anyone Price has created. Because of this similarity and because Price admits that Hemingway influenced him early in his writing, it might be revealing to examine how both writers examine and give voice to the sexual lives of their characters.

Rod Cockshutt, in a 1971 interview with Price, asks him about writers he has read who impacted his writing.

Price responds:

I read Hemingway fairly early, as most people did. I was absolutely bowled over in about the ninth grade by A Farewell to Arms, largely bowled over at that time by what seemed to be its extreme sexual daring. And still, now, I look at Hemingway with a lot of tremendous respect and affection, although my work couldn't be more different from his. (33)

And for the most part, Price couldn't be more correct. Even Wesley who views sex as a necessary aspect of his life, seeing sexual activity as an integral part of the

whole, is very different from someone like Rinaldi in A Farewell to Arms. Rinaldi enjoys sex; he admits to Frederick that other than his work, "I only like two things; one is bad for my work and the other is over in half an hour or fifteen minutes" (170). For him, life is work, drink, and sex. The key is to avoid emotional involvement, to "never think" (167). As Charles Glicksberg points out about Hemingway:

The characters he presents are intensely concerned about their instinctual urges. The myth of romantic love as passion spiritualized, is debunked Complete fulfillment in sexual love is what counts; the rest is the product of illusion and neurotic evasion. (93)

This is why Catherine has to die. This is why Jake and Brett cannot marry in The Sun Also Rises. This is why Margot sleeps with Wilson in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" and why, in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry thinks--after telling Helen that he loves her:

But when he no longer was in love, when he was only lying, as to this woman, now, who had the most money of all . . . ; it was strange that when he did not love her at all and was lying that he should be able to give her more for her money than when he had really loved. (11)

Like Harry, most of Hemingway's characters fight "against the lure of love" (Glicksberg 95). Even when they do love

they come to it first through the experience of sex. It is only through the senses that the spirit knows the bliss and the bondage of love. (Glicksberg 94)

This explains the major difference between writers like Hemingway and writers like Price. Hemingway is no more explicit than Price. In fact, the reverse is probably true. Price even comments in his interview with Jefferson Humphries that "Hemingway suffers, free as he seemed to be for his time, from an inability to be sexually candid in his work" (240). Hemingway does reveal through Harry's perspective that Helen "had a great talent and appreciation for the bed" and that she had "good breasts" and "useful thighs." There is no mention of what goes on between Margot and Wilson or Brett and Romero. Catherine and Frederick's sexual unions are summarized or implied. But the dissimilarity stems more from attitude toward sex than explicitness in portraying it. Hemingway's characters avoid acknowledging the duality of sexual relationships. They do not pursue the emotional/mental/spiritual connection. And even when feelings sideswipe them, come upon them despite their not seeking such a connection, even then "Hemingway's love,

even at its most idealistic, is almost always related to sexual intercourse" (Killinger 95). Sexual intercourse precedes emotional attachment if emotional attachment grows and is sustained.² But even for someone as physical as Wesley Beavers, it's not just the sex he seeks. What he wants is connection and affirmation. Sex is never disconnected from feeling.

This search for connection causes him to leave Rosa and later move in with another woman. Their physical relationship precipitates their emotional one, but a description of one of their sexual unions demonstrates the mutuality that exists and the emotional bonds that have grown:

She bent and set her mouth to say in a silent prowl up and down his limbs, his torso, the sweet white bowl of his thrusting hips, that no one man of all she'd known (and she'd know some) had come anywhere near matching the way he made her know she mattered on the crowded ground like a rare snow leopard or the shining dove.

Wesley lay flat and let her speak, meeting her silence every three or four minutes with honest thanks--aloud in words and more hot tears. Dark as it was, he knew he was climbing again and upward in her strong light. (85)

This passage relates not just the experience of physical sex. The emotions surface immediately, as they are the impetus for the act. Wilson begins because she

wants to show Wesley how he makes her feel, and the excerpt ends with Wesley's feelings about her actions. Spiritual renewal comes from the mutuality of the experience.

For the most part, mutuality forms the basis for sexual relationships in Price. But the mutuality springs not just from a joint search for physical satisfaction. Because it does not, we find both aspects of sex presented--the mind and the body--with an emphasis on the mental/emotional. Even when Price is most physical, most explicit, the emotional/mental dimension dominates. While he details some specific acts and enumerates some body parts--through frequently metaphorically--the language is not street language nor is it heavily anatomical. The words that appear consistently in the least physical and the most physical passages have to do with emotional responses or emotional evaluations of the activity. A quick review of just the passages here reveals the reoccurrence of words like "gift," "glad(der)," "offered/offer," "honor/honoring," "body/mind (soul)," "generous," "gratitude," "gentle," and "pleasure/pleased." This not the language of simply physical sex; this is the language of a spiritual union. The sexual act becomes a means of connection. Making connections the focus forces Price to enter the internal realm and allows him to

fulfill his own prediction. Price himself has "record[ed] the motions, internal and external, of human sexuality" and has consequently "cast light, compassion, toleration, and laughter on a broad band of human experience" (Esquire 146).

Notes

¹ Price's emphasis on both the reader's role and the effect on the reader in responding to fiction containing sexual activity is significant for two reasons. Because his language is not physically explicit, the reader must fill in what is missing. She, in effect, practices Wolfgang Iser's theory that meaning is produced in the space where the text and reader collide. This "filling in" allows the text to become as erotic or overtly sexual as the reader wishes it to be. In addition, as Price reveals in the March 2, 1994 interview, his concern has been not to offend but to provide understanding of the importance of sexuality in the human experience.

² Because Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes cannot have any physical relationship, they are exempt from this. But they are also unable to sustain a permanent relationship since physical intimacy cannot be part of it. Jake must sit by and watch Brett's escapades.

CHAPTER III

DREAMS: ACTS IN THE DARK

". . . the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares."

Joseph Conrad Heart of Darkness

In order to explore fully and make known the interior of his characters, Price, like many other writers both past and contemporary, uses dreams in his fiction. He perhaps employs them more consistently and with greater frequency than most other modern American authors, using as many as twenty-two dreams in one novel--The Surface of Earth--¹and composing far fewer works of fiction without dreams than ones with them. However, it is not just the number of dreams in Price's fiction that sets him apart from other literary dream practitioners; it is also the use that he makes of them, a use that is frequently determined by the gender of the dreamer, since his male characters dream more than his female ones. While surely the dreams in his fiction give the reader some psychological insight into the dreamer, Price does not include them solely for this purpose. More significantly he employs them as rhetorical and narrative devices: the

dreamer must make a choice based on the information in the dream, or the reader gains knowledge that expands and propels the plot, knowledge that has not or cannot be revealed verbally because either the character does not consciously know it or is unable to articulate it because doing so is too difficult. Once again, Price relies on internality--this time the workings of the unconscious mind--to present and resolve conflict and develop his story lines. How different Price's approach is can be demonstrated by a brief review of the history of dreams in literature and how practitioners, critics, and psychologists have used and viewed them.

Actually, dreams in literature are as old as written literature itself. According to Bettina Knapp, "The oldest extant dreams recorded on clay tablets date back to the time of Hammurabi (1728-1686 B.C.) (8). Even the Greeks did dream analysis. Hippocrates, in the 5th c. B.C., was the first to use the term "dissociation" in relation to dreams. He believed, like Price as we shall see later, that dreams forecast future illness (Knapp 12). Even Plato in his Republic and Aristotle in On Divination commented on the nature and function of dreams with Aristotle warning doctors to pay attention to the dreams their patients revealed to them (Knapp 12). Perhaps the most familiar early works containing dreams are the Iliad,

the Bible, and the Epic of Gilgamesh. Familiar as these may be, they represent only a fraction of the dreams that have been incorporated into works of literature through the years. Stephen Brook collected and categorized hundreds of dreams and comments about dreams drawn from five centuries of literature in his work The Oxford Book of Dreams. Mr. Brook made no attempt to interpret or analyze his selections, but the sheer number demonstrates the importance of dreams in literary works. And although Freud is the name that comes first to mind in a discussion of dream interpretation, he was not the first to practice such in volume. The Greek Artemidorus (134-200 A.D.) wrote a book on dream interpretation, the Oneirocritica, in which he tried to explain three thousand dreams and the symbols he saw in them (Knapp 13) and in which he refers to earlier books on the same subject (Brook ix).

Freud, however, became and remains the most recognizable authority on dream interpretation. And as Ronald Thomas points out, Freud's book The Interpretation of Dreams is as much a part of our literary tradition as it is our scientific one (3). Perhaps this is because his "dream theory was based upon the realization that all we can know about our dreams is rooted in the language in which we express them" (Thomas 1). This realization explains why Freud treated dreams as texts and attempted

"to recuperate the fragmentary experience of human life by imposing a 'plot' upon the seemingly random and insignificant" (Thomas 20). For Freud, the dream experience was not, however, "insignificant." If further proof were needed that Freud embraced the idea that dreams deal with current problems in life, we could find such support in Alexander Grinstein's On Sigmund Freud's Dreams, a book which presents Freud's remarks on his own dreams (Porter 4).

Although Freud confined most of his dream interpretation to the dreams of real people, he came to believe that dreams created by authors in literary texts could be analyzed in much the same way as real ones, even though no actual person was around to be questioned (Porter 7). And this has been the focus of the majority of the criticism in this century concerned with literary dreams. Critics have looked at dreams in novels (Edgar F. Shannon, Jr.'s analysis of Lockwood's dream in Wuthering Heights), in short stories (Darlene Harbour Unrue's work with dreams in Katherine Anne Porter's short fiction), in drama (Simon O. Lesser's essay "Macbeth: Drama and Dream"), and numerous books on specific genres in a given time frame.² There is no dearth of scholarship on the literary dream; however, a quick review of the titles of articles and books reveals that the modus operandi is

Jungian or Freudian analysis. Even those scholars who do not rely heavily on either Jung or Freud still approach the dream symbolically or archetypally, demonstrating how the content of the dream reveals important psychological information about the dreamer.

Although this psychological approach is valuable, productive, and abundant, it is not without its detractors. Laurence Porter summarizes Gerard Genette's reasons for disparaging psychological interpretations. Genette argues that it is useless to try to figure out the feelings and motivations of literary characters since their feelings are not real and have only a "fictional, linguistic existence." If we insist on this kind of examination, we end up analyzing the author or the reader. "In other words, one is examining the connotations of the text as it reverberates outside the domain of its own discourse" (Porter 6). We cannot question the characters for confirmation. Even Freud emphasized "how impossible it is in general to understand a dream till the dreamer has given us his information about it" (quoted in Porter 7). Surprisingly, Jung supported this view although he frequently stated that the dream is its own interpretation. Contradictory as this may sound, what Jung meant is that we must "obtain the dreamer's associations to each detail of the manifest content"

(Porter 7). We should not, however, look for associations to the associations since this takes us away from the dream itself.

I suggest that in literature and particularly in Price's fiction, we do have access to the dreamer's associations. We are privy to the context--the life--in which the dream occurs. Consequently, I will concentrate on the aspect of Jung's theory that argues every dream is concerned with the situation in the present life of the dreamer--even though a particular situation "may concern infantile wishes seeking expression in the dreamer's life at that particular time" (Faraday, Dream Power 119) and may be consequently reflected in the dream. By focusing on the dreams as acts which reflect present concerns, I will demonstrate how Price uses dreams as both rhetorical and narrative devices.³

Ronald Thomas summarizes the ways in which dreams can be used in the novel. They may serve as "a convenient fictive frame device" or as "an embedded narrative that reveals psychic complexities and conflicts unknown to the character." A dream frequently allows the author "to relay an indirect commentary on a character or a veiled meditation on some social or philosophical issue." It can also "foreshadow plot development, provide sources of mystery, contribute to an atmosphere of doom or confusion,

and suggest some other reality" (4). Each of these possibilities contains a narrative aim or contributes to a narrative resolution. And Price employs dreams for each one of these narrative purposes. However, he also allows his characters to use dreams in the way that Jung suggests that we employ them--as a springboard for future action. Dreaming a dream is itself an act of interpretation and bears a burden that the dreamer may either carry or reject but can hardly ignore. Dreams can offer insight or they can confuse, but they are rarely neutral or without purpose. As Laurence Porter points out

Dreams, although involuntary, are a creative mental process arising from the interplay of compulsions and strivings for self-realization. They provide an imaginary theater in which unacceptable or even disastrous potential responses to life's problems can be acted out without material risk. (xiv)

This is surely true for people in real life, but it is equally true for characters in fiction. The major difference between the real dream and the literary dream stems from the use its creator chooses to make of it. And for Price, the key words are "act" and "action." Incorporating a dream is a creative act on his part, but the dream itself is an action that then requires a response--further action. The number of dreams in Price's

work is staggering, indicating the significance that he attaches to them. After A Long and Happy Life which surprisingly does not contain a single dream, Price integrates the waking and sleeping thoughts of his characters in much of his fiction. He even titled a short story in the collection Permanent Errors "Good and Bad Dreams."

In a 1983 interview with Terry Roberts, Prices both justifies his use of dreams and explains their importance:

Dreams are primarily interesting to me, in my life and work, as the acts I perform during that third of my life in which I'm asleep. A hell of a lot of one's life is spent in a state which is not really unconsciousness but another kind of consciousness. In my daily activities, I go around speaking to people, touching people, being alone, watching television, eating meals. I write about these things. Why should fiction not be able to comprise also those acts which I commit when I am in the dark? Those acts are dreams, and I've tried in novels to indicate what the continuing lives of characters are like during that very crucial third of their lives. Also I'm enough of an old-fashioned "Egyptian Book of Dreams" fan to suspect that dreams are constant attempts on our part to communicate with ourselves, with other people, and with God. I understand dreams primarily as actions, interesting things we do. (182)

In other words, the dreams are events--happenings. And as such they are narrative episodes. They should not provide any more occasion or necessity for psychoanalyses than any other incident.

In a 1976 interview with Price, William Ray questioned him about whether or not the dream sequence in the short story "The Names and Faces of Heroes" needs a "Freudian analysis, a Freudian explanation?" (106). Price responded, again equating dreams with "things we do" and at the same time dismissing the need to examine the dreamer's subconscious for repressed fantasy or wish.

I certainly wouldn't have thought it did. There are a great many dreams in my new novel, [The Surface of Earth] for instance, as there are a number of dreams in Love and Work. But I think they are dreams which are not meant to have any heavy drugstore Freudian meaning pressed upon them. On the contrary, I don't think that even Freud was able to read many people's dreams. I think that dreams, insofar as I understand anything about dreams at all, are primarily interesting or revealing as events in our own lives.
(106)

Dreaming, as an event, is not an activity reserved just for adults. In fact, what I believe to be the first dream in Price's fiction is the one referred to in the William Ray interview--the dream of a young boy named Preacher. While the content of the dream--a father's imminent death, the hand of the son (a grown man in the dream) on the dying father's groin forming a bond that the son cannot break without tearing flesh--presents more than adequate material for the Freudians, Price rejects seeing anything

hidden in this account. In the same interview with William Ray, Price says,

When I came to invent that sort of dream, that sort of precognition for Preacher, the young boy in "The Names and Faces of Heroes," I simply gave him a dream which is a fairly literal account of my own father's death. No I wouldn't ask a reader to place a heavy reading on the dream; I would only ask him to see the dream as just another event in the narrative of that story. (106)

Issuing this mandate, Price prescribes how we should view dreams in his fiction and releases the reader from delving past the manifest meaning of the dream. Both Price and his young character Preacher recognize that this dream is about the passage of time, about aging, about mortality, about the transfer of the family line from one male to another--the continuation and continuity of life.

However, because we know the association--the dreamer's thoughts and state of mind prior to the dream--because we know that Preacher's thoughts, as he lay in his father's lap traveling home after accompanying him on a sales trip, have been both hostile and loving and fearful--fearful that his father would leave him--it is perfectly natural that a dream in which his father does leave him, in death, should follow. Dr. Ann Faraday, a contemporary dream researcher and therapist, echoes Jung when she says,

It is important to remember that dreams reflect something in or on our minds at the time of the dream. Even when they reveal deep, long-standing problems, or touch on higher transcendental issues, they always show how these things are hitting us now, at the present moment in time. And to understand a dream properly it is necessary to see how it relates to some event or preoccupation of the past day or two. (The Dream Game 15)

Preacher had contemplated his father's death in the time prior to dozing off, had awakened alone in the dark, unmoving automobile--not knowing that his father had gone into the woods to urinate. His dream is much concerned with the events preceding it, as is Thomas Eborn's in Price's novel Love and Work.

Eborn's dream which occurs early in the novel (page 2) reveals the protagonist's internal conflict and establishes the theme for the novel. Eborn explores the tenuous relationship between love and work, believing that the two can never coexist. His dream reveals this belief and exposes Eborn's choice--work and alienation. In his dream, he awaits the arrival of friends whose names and faces he cannot remember. When they arrive, he recalls the faces, now bloodied in an accident, but not the names. The hotel lobby setting becomes a hospital, and he searches for his friends and news of their conditions, still unable to call their names. A phone call from one

tells him that they had been separated; and Eborn wakes, cut off from this group of friends, realizing that he alone is uninjured.

The memory of the dream intrudes as he begins his work for the day--an essay whose deadline looms. But a phone call from his mother, answered by his wife but overheard, further interrupts his writing; and a sense of duty forces him to drive the thirty miles to check on her. What he finds is an empty house and quick news from his mother's best friend Ida that she is in the hospital. Ida expresses her gratitude that Tom somehow knew to come; and Tom, on his way to the hospital, recalls again his dream and interprets it for the reader:

His dream of course--approximate knowledge, parallel metaphor. Destruction on his friends, sent on them by him however deep asleep. And beyond destruction--separation, free lives for all, himself free at last, room to turn. (30)

In his thoughts about his own need for solitude in order to work, Tom recognizes the responsibilities thrust upon him by others--his wife, his mother, his friends and his students. His dream springs from this preoccupation and preshadows what he writes the same day in an essay for the college magazine. Eborn's thesis is that "Arbeit Macht Frei"--"work makes free." Part of this freedom is freedom

from personal entanglements, personal relationships, personal responsibility to other humans. His dream is the event which gives voice and image to his preference for separation. Its intrusion into the discovery of his mother's illness and subsequent death brings into focus the conflict that Eborn wrestles with for the remainder of the novel: Can human relationships offer the same self-fulfillment and satisfaction that work does? Are the two mutually exclusive as Eborn suspects?

The dream-like vision that Eborn sees in the final pages of the novel of his parents as young people who "have faced one another only, static in ecstasy, sealed in their needlessness, one another's goal--won at last and for good" shows him that perhaps he can make love his life's work if it is not too late. While work requires and results in some degree of isolation, Eborn must revolve his perceived need for isolation, exposed in this early-in-the novel dream as desired and willed.

Thomas Eborn, however, is not the only one of Price's character's who believes that separation from family and its attendant obligations provides the only route to self-fulfillment and escape from stagnation. Unlike Eborn, Wesley Beavers in Good Hearts is no intellectual, no scholar. He is instead "the best damned mechanic since Henry Ford" (35). And his conflict is not as clearly

perceived and defined as Eborn's. However, Price again employs the narrative techniques of both a dream and a vision to disclose Wesley's discontent and give it concrete form.

Wesley's dream, like Eborn's, occurs early in the novel--on page four. In it, he is young again and in a room of strangers where he could see his whole body in a mirror although he didn't feel naked. The strangers watched him through "glassy eyes" shaking their heads as if to say "'Anybody with nothing but this to offer should quit right now and not crowd the world'" (4). Even though Wesley knew he was dreaming, he could not wake himself and interrupt the dream. Unsettled and panicked, Wesley experiences a vision at work the following day that reiterates the message of the dream:

He'd just been working that afternoon and reached for a metric tool from his bench when his hand stopped in midair. Those clear five fingers seemed no more his than the car he was tuning. They paralyzed completely and would not draw back when his mind called them in. An instant's panic, then the hand hit his side, and blood recommenced.

But in another minute a voice in his head said "Death is what you just reached for." He laughed out loud, then realized the voice was not his. Wesley had no truck with brands of religion that deal in voices and unknown tongues. Still he couldn't shake the certainty that what he'd heard was a version of God's word, a true message. What did it mean? (62)

Price himself answers the question in an autobiographical short story entitled "The Golden Child" which appears in his 1993 The Collected Stories. After relating two dreams that he had while recovering from his spinal surgery, Price confesses,

In general, I'm readier than most of my friends to share the ancient human belief that some dreams may well come from outside us, as warnings or omens or practical aids from whatever made us and watches our lives. (413)

Wesley views the dream and the vision as warnings. They then become, for him, rhetorical: If he remains where he is, doing what he is doing, then he might as well be dead. Wesley has a choice. He can either reject the message of the dream and vision, or he can accept the warning and take action to alter his stagnate state. He chooses the latter and leaves home and Rosa that very afternoon.

Using the dream as a rhetorical device with narrative consequences, Price establishes one element of the plot line. Actually, Wesley's leaving generates the rest of the action of the novel--action that is filled with more dreams from all the characters. At the beginning of a mid-novel dream, Price reveals Wesley's recognition of the rhetorical aspect of his dreams. Viewing them as "real as

a normal day," Wesley had "counted on dreams to help him onward" (129).

Many of the characters in Good Hearts experience dreams that serve as warnings, which if recognized as such, move them forward. Rato, Rosa's brother, dreams on the night that she is raped that Rosa is in danger. He calls her at first light to check and in so doing opens the door for her revelation and establishes himself as her protector. But not all of the characters recognize their dreams as opportunities for action and change. Rosa, who dreams the first dream in the novel (page 2-3), fails to understand it as a mandate for action and change. In her dream she recalls a poem that she had written for Wesley early in their relationship before physical intimacy and commitment. She remembers two specific lines: "I ought to try to say what you gave me--/Didn't we know the darkest brightness that can be?" (3).

Rosa no longer possesses copies of her poems since she burned her diaries and scrapbooks the first time Wesley disappeared after their marriage. She does not connect her motive for destroying them with anything in her present life. Nor does she, a self-professed lover of words, consciously grasp the timeliness of her recollection of these two particular lines containing the apocalyptic oxymoron "darkest brightness."

The narrative technique of juxtaposing Rosa's and Wesley's dreams allows Price to reveal much about these two people immediately. The dreams establish the dichotomies that exist in the marriage: the content and the discontent, the static and the dynamic, and the verbal and the physical. Price actually uses the dream as the initial and initiating action in both Good Hearts and Love and Work, demonstrating how effective this device is at moving the reader rapidly into the conflict. However well the dream works as a spring board from which the plot develops, it works equally well as the final element in a piece of fiction.

"A Fare to the Moon," the first of the three long stories in The Foreseeable Future, concludes with a dream. In this story, Kayes Paschal leaves his wife and fourteen year-old son, Curtis, to move in with a light skinned black woman for six months. Filled with loyalty toward his mother and a bit of hatred and fear toward his father, Curtis attempts to deal with his father's desertion and possible death as Kayes has been drafted during World War II. The final action of this fictional work is a dream, one which Price introduces as a narrative with a purpose:

Five hours later, home from the picture show and asleep, Curtis told himself the night's first story,

a dream to mend as much as he could in his own cut mind. (65) [emphasis added]

In his dream Curtis and a friend are on a hill in the woods as the day ends. Fear of not being able to find their way once darkness settles prevents them from staying to watch the sunset. However, darkness overtakes them before they reach the bottom, and Curtis can no longer follow in his older friend's footsteps, nor can he hear his voice or his footsteps or even remember his name. In desperation, he calls out his own name as loud as he can. In response, something tugs on his hands, and he looks up to see an image--a person--above him in a fire-like light. This person changes from his friend to his father and Curtis reels him in, kite-fashion, so that Kayes can lead him home.

In this dream, Curtis and his father were reunited; and even though Curtis knew that he was dreaming, he recognized the message of the dream even as he slept:

Even as the dream threaded Curt's mind and drew him on, in a cool room of his understanding, he saw he was dreaming, saw he was easing himself ahead with childish hope. Yet in that same room, he had watched Kayes soar and wished him luck. From the ground Curt even shouted his thanks to the arms that worked in pure dark now--or so he trusted. At the least, that sight of a useful father let Curt sleep till Sunday daylight, clear and dry with slow church bells, the first whole day of his grown man's life. (66-67)

Although asleep and knowing that he is dreaming, Curtis responds to the rhetorical aspect of his dream. Rather than thinking, "This is just a dream, and I can ignore it," he accepts its message--"saw he was easing himself ahead with childish hope." Not rejecting the message does indeed move him forward--to a re-acceptance of his father and a consequent clear passage into manhood. His dream confirms Jung's and Faraday's theories about dreams being concerned with present problems, but it also fulfills Price's: It is both an "action" and a "practical aid" that move Curtis into the future.

There are additional dreams in the two other novellas in The Foreseeable Future which function in much the same way as the ones in Good Hearts, Love and Work and "A Fare to the Moon." The final selection, "Back Before Day" also concludes with a dream which Price once again introduces with the character "telling himself an old story." From a narrative perspective, these dreams, used sparingly but significantly, present conflict or achieve resolution of it. In some of his other fiction, however, Price uses dreams as a narrative technique in much the same way as Joyce uses "stream of consciousness" or Virginia Woolf employs free indirect style. The reader enters the characters' minds regularly and becomes privy to their

most intimate thoughts and preoccupations. The major difference between what Joyce and Woolf do and what Price does is that the latter signals the readers that we are entering the characters' minds. However the action of the dream propels the plot forwards as effectively as the other two techniques.

In The Surface of Earth, most of Price's characters dream, and they dream frequently--twenty-two times according to William Singer's unpublished master's thesis. Singer argues that the "dreams are revelatory messages" (11). I agree, but suggest that they are much more: the dreams present a moral argument and as such are rhetorical. Each character must choose what action to take. And some initially choose to reject the obvious message of the dream.

Eva Kendall Mayfield, the first dreamer in the novel, either does not understand the message of her dream or chooses not to accept it. Having run away from home to marry her schoolteacher, Eva dreams on her wedding night, before consummating her marriage, of her family left behind. In her dream, her father lay

this same night, in their sleeping house, flat on his back beside her sleeping mother in their high black bed, his face tilted slightly forward in the total dark, eyes wide open and straining to pierce the floors and wall between his room and Eva's. When the

eyes succeeded and for whole minutes ransacked the empty side of the bed (beyond sleeping Rena), he shut them and slowly rolled his huge body leftward till he lay full-length on her sleeping mother--who remained asleep as he fastened his open mouth over hers and drew up each shallow breath she exhaled till she lay empty, dead. Then he rose and walked in the dark--no help; he was competent in darkness --to the next bedroom and performed the same smothering theft on Kennerly, who could have refused but--awake, his own eyes on his father--accepted the death. Then up the stairs to Rena, who fought him uselessly until her whole head and body vanished under his, not only drained of breath and life but absorbed into him, food for his need. Then he rolled over off Rena's vacant place and lay on his back in the midst of the bed and stared up again--in darkness still, through plaster and lathing--and said "Eva. Now." (11)

Not wishing to practice what Price calls "heavy drugstore Freudian" analysis, I suggest that the manifest meaning of this dream is relatively obvious: Eva's father wishes to consume her life. Eva either chooses to ignore this message, misunderstands it, or understands and sacrifices herself out of guilt for having abandoned her family. Regardless, the dream presents a scenario which Eva must act upon. Even ignoring the warning in the dream, which Eva initially does, is a choice. However, a dream which Eva has about one-hundred pages later influences what action she takes.

Eva returned home after her mother's suicide and remained because her infant son became ill. This dream follows her father's request that she remain there with

him, saying, "I have had all the leaving I can bear this year. I am asking you, politely as I can, to stay" (104). Even though Eva is angry at her father for sending back, unopened, Forrest's package containing Christmas gifts for her and son Rob, she does not pack and leave. That night, she dreamed:

Dreams were uncommon to her; and when they came were mostly credible amusing stories made from the lumber of her daily life (she'd forgot the dream of her wedding night, though it was hardly total invention). But this had been strange and entirely new, a discovery. Light--the main sensation was light, a clear warm sun filtered in and gentled by tall broad windows. The windows were set in a large building. The building was neither a house nor a store. Have I ever, she actually asked in the dream, been in a building which is not intended for sleeping or selling? She could not remember but went on wandering through many floors of light-washed rooms, past silent happy people at tables working or reading or looking out windows. No one spoke to her; but she did not mind, did not feel unwelcome or invisible. All that troubled her nearly perfect sense of place was a straining forward of her whole clear mind; she felt it in the dream, probing forward to a point, straining to discover the use of this place, the purpose of all these quiet workers, the name of their work. The strain had all but brought her to grief--her steps had quickened, her face gathered tight--when she saw one man at a distant table poured over by sun, watching neither his work nor the sun but her. He was nearly her age, more nearly a boy; so it did not occur to her to ask him the meaning. And he was not smiling. Yet as she took the last step past him, he stood in place and said to her "What?" She stopped and turned and, in the effort to recognize him (he now seemed familiar, maybe kin), she also did not smile. No more name would come for him than the place, so she said "Where am I?" He said "In the school." She said "Which one?"--"The only one."--"How did I get here?"--"By needing to come." She

stood and thought. Then she nodded and said "What must I learn?" He could finally smile--"You must learn that too." He put out his hands, personal bafflement; the hunt would be hers. In the instant, she accepted and was flooded with joy like the room with sun. Her smile asked it for her of its own accord--"Then tell me your name and I'll begin." He faded to gravity, his hands dropped down, his head shook twice. "That is part of what you have lost and must learn." (105-106)

Because of this dream, Eva commits to stay with her father. While the reader might interpret the dream to mean that Eva should learn about life with her husband and son, she does not. Instead, in the conscious minutes after the dream, she chooses "his [her father's] house, her room, her dark deep bed" because "the few things she had learned, she'd learned in these walls" (106). Eva's decision to stay and care for her father supports Ann Faraday's premise that a dream is correctly interpreted if it makes sense to the dreamer in her present life situation and causes the dreamer to change her life (Dream Game 68). Eva's interpretation "makes sense" to her as the previous short excerpts demonstrate. And the dream presents a rhetorical situation for her--what she sees as a moral argument to remain at home rather than to return to her husband.

Price uses this dream as a narrative device to reveal Eva's motive for abandoning her husband. Her decision, then, expands the possibilities for plot development. No

longer will the action focus simply on Forrest's and Eva's life together. Eva's choice leaves Forrest free to find and spend time with his father, to establish relationships with another woman and his Black half-nephew Grainger. But Eva's action also deprives him of being part of Rob's life and forces Rob to grow up in a house full of women.

Actually, Forrest's forced abandonment of Rob recapitulates his father's abandonment of him: Neither Forrest nor Rob understands the reasons, and both go in search of their fathers as adult men. The theme and act of abandonment, particularly the one relating to father and son, become almost type scenes in The Surface of Earth and, in turn, give rise to another scene begun as Forrest's dream but becoming reality for Rob and his son Hutchins.

After Forrest has finally found his dying father, visited with him, heard Rob Sr.'s story, and met the woman who will later become his own companion for life, he returns to his home in Bracey, Virginia. On the night of his departure, he dreams:

he was sleeping well in his bed at home, restorative sleep though which he sank like a stone in the sea, no fear of bottom, no fear of morning or the duties of day; but then he was stopped and dredged toward light, gently, slowly but against his will. Wakened by his father who stretched above him, full weight on his body and rode there calmly as if on that deep

water or a dream, a dream of his own. Yet his face seemed needful, open eyes and lips. So Forrest said, "Father, what are you after?" But his father stayed on him, still as gall on an oak; and at last said, "I've taken it. Never you mind. I take what I need." (131-32)

This dream serves narratively to set up two similar scenes between Rob and Hutch. In the first of these, Rob places himself atop a sleeping fourteen-year-old Hutch, an action which Hutch recalls as happening also when he was four or five. The second re-enactment of Forrest's dream occurs the next day as Hutch and his father talk on the beach, having traveled to Norfolk together for a few days. At the end of a conversation about whether or not Rob should remarry, Hutch, unhappy at the prospect, rolled down the sand dune

and stopped against Rob. Then he raised himself on straight arms and moved above Rob. Then he lay full-length, full-weight, the way Rob had lain on him many times--most recently a day ago at Eva's in their room: the room where Rachel and Rob had made him. (435-36)

Forrest's dream introduces a ritual which the Mayfield men practice, but the dream also reminds us of Eva's dream of her father, prone on each member of his family sucking the breath from their bodies. However, the Mayfield dream and subsequent ritual is more narrative

than rhetorical: it demonstrates the neediness of the males in this family--a theme that permeates both The Surface of Earth and its sequel The Source of Light.⁴ The strangeness of this physical behavior emphasizes the unusual, sometimes aberrant, relationships that exist between the men in three generations.

Hutch's first dream in The Source of Light illuminates his unconscious effort to escape the seemingly inherited inability to sustain normal productive relationships, an effort which forms the focus of the whole novel. Early in the work, Hutch, who is asleep beside his sweetheart Ann, experiences a dream from early childhood. In it, Hutch is underground in a tunnel that is just the size of his body. He cannot see and must inch "himself forward only with the strength of his nails which he knew to be bleeding" (20). Hutch whimpers and jerks in his sleep while Ann watches him, knowing that a person should not be awakened suddenly from a dream.

This "tunnel" dream reveals two important narrative facets of the novel: this work will be concerned with Hutch's attempt to free himself from his father's, grandfather's and great-grandfather's curse, and it indicates the role that Ann (and various others) will play in the effort. There is also a rhetorical aspect to this dream: Hutch has a choice; he does not have to escape

from the tunnel. The difficulty of doing so will inflict pain, but Ann's presence and her offer of herself to an awake Hutch prove that she wishes to help in the struggle.

A later dream also shows that Hutch will not be alone in his effort; he will, in fact, have a guide:

In his own room at four . . . he saw himself enter a sizable building the walls of which were solid glass. He felt it was England, [his destination in six hours] but the indoors was warm; and the man who came down a hall to meet him was certainly Rob, by look and voice. He said a short welcome, though he gave no sign of recognition or special relation. Then he led Hutch forward on inspection of numerous rooms and yards--all empty as robbed graves, flooded with light; no picture on the walls, no place to sit. More and more, as the man named off the rooms, Hutch wondered if he'd somehow changed past knowing; and he hoped for a mirror but no mirror came. Finally as they rounded back to the entrance, Hutch thought he would call the man Father when he left. But he wasn't leaving. The man put his hand out, smiled very broadly, and said, "I'd worried that you wouldn't show up. More than one said you wouldn't. But you kept your word. You're here and I'm thankful. It's safe in your hands." When he'd pressed Hutch's right hand warmly and firmly, he walked out the door into light even brighter than the prismatic rooms. (60)

Narratively, this dream functions like Preacher's in "The Names and Faces of Heroes." It symbolizes the passing of one generation and the rise of the next. Rob is dying although Hutch does not know this. In his dream, Hutch receives the burdens and blessings of the Mayfield line from the man whose life has been more of a struggle with

the burdens than a quiet acceptance of the blessings. What the dream tells the reader is that Rob recognizes Hutch's readiness and positive possibilities even if Hutch does not yet do so. The dream also presents Hutch with a choice: to accept or reject part or all of the Mayfield legacy. When Rob says to Hutch in the dream, "It's safe in your hands," Hutch does not have to take whatever "It" is. However, even though he wakes "afraid," Hutch makes his choice. He prays "for strength to do what he should--this day and later" (60). He does not reject or ignore the dream although it frightens him. And perhaps it should frighten him since it might be all of the things Price suggested dreams could serve as: warning, omen, and practical aid. It surely warns Hutch that his father may be need to pass something on to him although there is nothing in the dream to indicate that the reason will be his death, unless we connect the bright light that Rob walks into with dying. The dream is also an omen--an image that change is coming, but not one that frightens Rob. And it is a practical aid--assuring Hutch that his father thinks he is capable of caring for and handling whatever comes.

In a letter from Rob to Hutch--just seven pages later in the novel--Rob reveals his belief that Hutch is the only one in the Kendal-Hutchins-Mayfield line to escape

"having whatever worm gnawed us" (67). The neediness of the Mayfield men--the desire to be needed and the craving for human touch and connection--has tortured and directed the lives of Hutch's father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Rob communicates to Hutch, in the dream and the letter which follows, that Hutch is an appropriate caretaker, that he is free of the curse.

The rest of the novel is an attempt to fulfill the prediction disclosed in Hutch's narrative dream: his readiness to keep things safe. Along the way, he experiences other dreams that "may well [have] come from outside . . . as warnings or omens or practical aids from whatever made us and watches our lives" (Price The Collected Stories 413). He dreams of his mother Rachel who died giving birth to him. In the dream, he finds her in the woods, knows her immediately, and asks her to wait while he fetches Rob. But she is gone when they return. His dream provides one of the narrative threads that ties the two novels The Surface of Earth and The Source of Light together. Ann interprets this dream for Hutch telling him that it means that Rachel wanted Hutch all along, even before she met Rob. The dream also reinforces the theme of abandonment which is the focus of both novels.

Hutch also dreams twice about the child that he conceived with Ann although he has no conscious knowledge of its existence, nor does he know either time about the termination of the pregnancy. Significantly, the second time he dreams of the child, he is keeping a death watch at his father's bedside. Simultaneously, Rob dreams of being in a room with Hutch and an unnamed girl--of being in this room with them forever. The dream obviously is a narrative for Rob; he even names it "Reward."

Both of these dreams reveal the readiness of the two men to meet what is coming. And Rob's final dream--the dream he has moments before his death--narratively connects the earlier two simultaneous dreams. In this dream, Rob finds an old house on a hill, enters with confidence and searches for the center of the house. When he locates it, he discovers a young woman in labor. She acknowledges him but continues her efforts until the child is born, where upon she immediately takes the child to her breast to nurse him. Rob recognizes that the girl is his mother, and he is the child. At the moment of death, Rob rewrites the story of his birth--the revision containing no pain, no near-death for his mother Eva. Reliving his birth as he dies confirms for Rob a fresh beginning and re-introduces and emphasizes the continuity of life. The dream brings both narrative closure and narrative

expectation as the reader anticipates Hutch's fulfilling of his father's prediction of readiness.

This dream is not the last of the twenty dreams in The Source of Light, but it and the others discussed here serve as excellent models to demonstrate how Price uses dreams rhetorically to present conflict and choice and narratively to reveal necessary information about the characters. Most of the undiscussed dreams function in the same manner, and all of the major characters dream. Significantly, however, the male characters experience more dreams than the female characters. Because males do much more dreaming, one could argue that it is Price's method of having them get in touch with and/or reveal unconscious feelings, fears, desired and undesired actions. Since verbalizing such concerns is not traditionally considered a masculine trait, the author presents and the reader views these internal actions by entering the sleeping character's head.

Males are the central characters in the two novels The Surface of Earth and The Source of Light. And none of them are emotionally healthy. Each either abandons someone significant or is abandoned by someone significant. Their needs and neediness, while rarely openly discussed, form the subject matter of much of their dreams. Their concerns are internal ones--ones relating

to emotional, mental health--and not external ones--ones relating to financial well being, physical safety, location, living arrangements, or social activities. The masculine prohibition against verbalizing the former concerns juxtaposed with a plot line that explores the journey to autonomy poses a difficult task for the author: how to expose the problems and conflicts that the characters are addressing. Price chooses dreams as his vehicle. If my count and William Singer's count are correct, there are forty-two dreams in the two novels. Narratively, they give us historical information, present-day concerns, and insights into motivation; and rhetorically they present personal and moral arguments and justification for later behavior. Without the dreams, the reader would have much less pertinent information about the characters because they do not readily reveal or examine these matters, through conversations. When we compare these novels to a confessional like Kate Vaiden, we can more readily understand the limitations imposed by the stylistic choice of third person narrative coupled with masculine central characters. Dreams allow Price to probe the interior of these characters in a manner that seems more intimate, more revelatory than having a third person omniscient narrator reveal what a character is

thinking. The reader directly enters the unconsciousness of the dreamer.

The fact that Kate Vaiden is a first person narrative certainly influences what the reader knows. But more salient is the type of first person narrator Kate is. Were she reticent or secretive, Price might have had to rely as heavily on dreams in Kate Vaiden as he did in The Surface of Earth and The Source of Light to reveal her thoughts and conflicts. However, "masculine" as her behavior may be, her confessional style is feminine. She tells us everything--what she is thinking, what she is doing, and the motivation for her behavior (if she knows it). Any conflict Kate has, she faces head-on and shares it with the reader. Dreams about loss or misconduct do not disturb her sleep. Quite the opposite is true. Right after she and Gaston make love for the first time, Kate wonders if she will dream of her dead parents and be punished in the dream for her activity with Gaston. Her sleep is undisturbed--"Pure cool healing rest" (93).

There are, however, five dreams in Kate Vaiden. These dreams follow the Jung/Faraday prescription of being about present day concerns; and they are all about males, but none of them are sexual. The first of these dreams occurs after Gaston has been killed, and Kate is struggling with the pain of his death:

So I stayed asleep as much as I could, and the dreams I'd feared just never came. Not once did Gaston, in any shape or form, ever pass through my rest. What did was my father, time after time. Not in any awful way, mad or bleeding, but alive and well. I'd walk in the store and ask for a comb or five pounds of flour, and then I'd hear somebody say "Dan." I'd turn and there Dan would be, playing checkers, with Marvin Thompson's hand on his shoulder to prove he was real. I'd think "Now wait. Did I get this wrong? Dan Vaiden is dead." But I'd ease over there and stand by the game; and after some brilliant move where he'd jump six other men and win hands-down, he'd look up and meet my eyes but not speak. It was always that--Dan rescued and active but not recognizing me anymore. (124)

Kate avoids the Freudian interpretation of this dream by not acknowledging the possibility that Dan is a substitute for Gaston. Instead, she accepts the manifest meaning that Dan did not recognize her and carries this to what she sees as its logical conclusion: Dan didn't want to recognize her because she was responsible for what happened to Francis and him. Immediately the dream becomes rhetorical for Kate. She extends her culpability to include responsibility for Gaston's death and draws the conclusion that she ruins people's lives. Once Kate makes this deduction, it influences her behavior and her decisions for years. Her philosophy rests on this tenet: "Leave people before they can plan to leave you" (219). The rest of her life is a series of "leavings."

During the retelling of these escapades, Kate relates four other dreams. Each of these is narrative in function, but all have rhetorical consequences. Each depicts a possibility--either of what could happen or what might have already happened. The first concerns a rather peripheral character, Cliff, who is the sweetheart of Kate's friend Daphne. In the dream, Cliff is chained and drowning, and the two women swim toward him with blood pouring from their lips. Even without doing a thorough psychological interpretation of this dream, the reader can see that it reinforces Kate's feeling that long-term male-female relationships are damaging. This belief does not, however, keep her from exploring the possibility in a dream, which she does in the second of the remaining dreams in the novel.

This dream occurs after Kate has left cousin Walter's home, pregnant with his friend's child. The taxi driver, Tim, who rescued her on her arrival in Norfolk has once again been called into service. Napping at his home, Kate

dreamed an entire life. It included Tim and, as we moved on through places and years, he kept getting young till he equaled me. Then I told him about the baby I'd hidden from him, and he asked to see it.
(210)

This dream presents a positive argument for Kate--a picture of what could be. But Kate rejects the possibility pictured and leaves again.

Kate's final two dreams are about her son Lee and what might have happened to him. In the first, he and Kate are in a room together; and although he talks to her, she cannot understand a word he says. In the second, she and Lee are on a mountain but cannot reach each other. She walks to safety, and Lee dies of starvation. Both of these dreams reflect Kate's feelings of being unworthy of establishing a relationship with the son she abandoned. Both come to her when she is fifty-seven years old, struggling with illness, and anxious to find Lee. Consequently, she rejects the argument that she is unworthy and takes a chance. Narratively, her refusal to be dictated to by these dreams demonstrates her growth. For the first time, Kate is willing to seek connection rather than run. Her avoidance of connection makes her very different from Blue Calhoun whose whole life revolved around establishing relationships.

Although the two novels Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun are very different in many respects, they share many common characteristics. Both have first person narrators who are telling their stories from the perspective of time. And both of the narrators reveal their thoughts and

fears honestly. Consequently, we find the same paucity of dreams in Blue Calhoun that we found in Kate Vaiden.

Characters mention dreams, frequently as something wished for--"See, it's just my dream--music lasting all my life" (22) or as a wish fulfilled--"I dreamed it was you" (20). Once, Blue tells us that fourth of July firecrackers ended his dream, but he doesn't relate the content. There are, however, four dreams in the novel which the dreamer does make public.

The first two occur within two pages; and although the dreams appear to different people, they are connected by content. The first dream is Blue's, a long narrative which he tells with detail, prefacing by commenting that Luna had never appeared in his sleep before. In this dream, she locates Blue at a carnival to tell him she had finally found "her." Blue believes she means his almost blind mother, but it turns out to be his daughter Mattie, on the merry go round, with

every cell of her face . . . ruined. She'd been burned out in that one part by some flash fire that left her nothing but a skull with a few scorched rags of skin, two dry eye sockets and teeth that were trying to smile. (176)

That same afternoon, Blue's daughter Mattie summarizes the dream she had while napping: "I dreamed your face had melted off, and I had to fix you" (178).

Blue takes these similar dreams as "a secret message between" the two of them, even though he tells us that he "never put much weight on dreams" (176). However this dream is persuasive enough to convince him to return home to his wife, Mattie's mother. Blue sees this dream as a warning of what could happen to Mattie should he continue his extra-marital relationship with Luna. Consequently, the two dreams become the impetus for a reunion with his wife; he makes a choice and follows the choice with action.

The detrimental effects of Luna and Blue's relationship are the subject matter of the third dream in the novel. Having taken up with Luna again after the death of his friend Bob, Blue hears Luna's mother's summary of her dream: "I had this awful dream--she was killing you" (278). Blue rejects this and says, "Not Luna--she's brought me nothing but sweetness" (278).

Narratively, these three dreams reinforce the substance of the novel: the pain brought down on each character by Blue's indecision--vacillating between his wife and child and his young lover Luna. Rhetorically, they present the symbolic consequences of choosing Luna.

Each of these dreams reveals to Blue his choice, and he makes one--though not the same one--with each dream. These dreams also illuminate the fear shared by three different people of the same situation.

It is also fear that brings on the final dream in the novel. The present day concern of having discovered his son-in-law and granddaughter in suspicious circumstances suggesting inappropriate physical intimacy leads Blue to announce his intention of taking her from Germany back to the states with him. The evening that he confronts his son-in-law Dane, Blue tells what happened as he lay down to sleep:

Colder still I took my shoes off, lay in the dark staring up at the ceiling and grinding my teeth till I somehow went unconscious awhile, planning our hard trip home tomorrow through all my dreams (I remember your body kept sliding away in the packed airport like mist through my fingers, that you couldn't speak, your eyes couldn't cry and I couldn't understand or use a word of the language that crowds of strangers were babbling at us while the planes roared off and left us dumb). Trapped in those hot useless stories, I stayed asleep too long to guess what happened next in the actual world eight yards away through a plywood door. (365-66) [emphasis added]

This dream reveals the difficulty Blue foresees in removing Lyn from her current circumstances and the fear that he would not be successful in the attempt. But Blue

himself calls the dreams "stories," and woven into the retelling of them is a hint as to why he may not succeed: something has happened or will happen which will change the circumstances. Narratively, the dream and Blue's last sentence of its retelling prepare the reader for the discovery of Dane's suicide. The dream serves as a bridge between Blue's confrontation of Dane and Blue's discovery of Dane's body.

Price himself recalls a personal dream that functions much as Blue's final dream--a dream whose meaning is not immediately clear, but one which foreshadows the future. In Naomi Epel's collection of twentieth century American fiction writers' reactions to dreams, Writers Dreaming, Price again emphasizes the importance of dreams both in his writing and in his personal life. Price reveals that he frequently dreams what his characters might dream and then incorporates them into the text. But he also explains why he believes dreams act as warnings or omens of things to come. Relating a personal dream which he turned into the poem "The Dream of a House" (in the collection Vital Provisions), Price demonstrates why he believes strongly in the power of dreams:

In the dream I'm this mysterious solitary person and there is some kind of guide beside me. I'm being led through this incredibly beautiful house by a man who

keeps saying, "Well this is yours, this beautiful place; and in it are all the pictures you've ever wanted, all the books. It's all here; you've got this." Then I say to the guide, "Well, this is fantastic. Am I going to be alone here?" And he says, "Oh no. Come with me," and he opens this closet in the front hall. It's a normal closet with nice new clothes in it and hats. Then he pulls the clothes aside, and there's this human being who's literally been crucified in the closet--this man who's been obviously terribly beaten and mutilated, and he's hanging on a cross. The guide just says, "This is yours forever. This will be yours forever."

At the end of the dream I felt very happy. I woke up and thought, My God! What kind of weird religious fantasy is this? That was probably in the late 1970s, around '76 or so. It was 1984 before I found out that I had this weird thing hanging up in my spine that was ultimately going to become a torturing companion for the rest of my life. Certainly I've looked back on this dream as some sort of premonition. (Epel 203-04)

Because his personal experience confirms the significance of dreams, it follows that they would be significant for his fictional characters also. In the final paragraph of this same essay on dreaming, Price concludes

. . . our dreams are unquestionably attempts on the part of some deep faculty of our brain to communicate a discovery to us. Either, you'd better stop doing so and so; or you'd better do so and so. (Epel 208)

This passage summarizes the "why" and the "how" of Price's reliance on dreams in his fiction. He explores the interior--the stories in the mind that argue for action

while the body sleeps--so that these "acts in dark" reveal to the reader and frequently to the dreamer the necessity for and the path to change.

NOTES

¹ William Merritt Singer, in an unpublished 1977 Master's thesis at UNC-Chapel Hill, counted and categorized all the dreams in The Surface of Earth and suggests that each of them are revelations as grace.

² These examples represent only a small amount of the work done on dreams. Ronald Thomas in his book Dreams of Authority: Freud and The Fictions of the Unconscious focuses on dreams in nineteenth century autobiographic, Gothic, and detective fiction. Laurence Porter concentrates on The Literary Dream in French Romanticism. Bettina Knapp in Dream and Image explores the use of dreams in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth century French literature.

³ Jung also believes that feminity is related to the unconscious while masculinity governs consciousness and intellect. Price's use of such a large number of dreams is also further support for calling his style "feminine" as opposed to "masculine."

⁴ William Singer suggests that Eva's and Forrest's dreams reveal a symbolic castration of each. This action by both male parents "renders them impotent to sustain a long term relationship with anyone other than their fathers and that causes them to make an error of choice" (24).

CHAPTER IV

KATE VAIDEN AND BLUE CALHOUN: CROSSING THE GENDER AND
GENRE BOUNDARY

Two of Price's recent novels, Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun, present us with the lives of two central characters, one female and one male. Both explore the history of several generations of family, the pain wreaked on each family member by the title characters, and the attempt at resolution and/or pardon made by each protagonist in later life. Because both are first person narratives, we could clearly classify them as "confessionals." I suggest that they are also modern Bildungsromans although somewhat atypical. Kate Vaiden is an apprenticeship novel--the type usually about a male, and Blue Calhoun is a novel of awakening--the type usually about a female. Consequently we must address questions of gender as we assess these works, both the author's and the protagonists', and ask how and if the gender of the two subtly informs the development of the characters, the choices they make, and our perception of and reaction to these choices. Because Kate Vaiden is the earlier of the two and because it is Price's first reversed gender novel (Price's term), I shall begin with it.

In 1986, when Kate Vaiden won the National Book Critics Circle Award, some of the praise accorded the work stemmed from the success with which Price presented his female protagonist, his first central female character since Rosacoke Mustian in A Long and Happy Life more than twenty years earlier. But more significant than the appearance of a female protagonist is the mode of presentation. Unlike A Long and Happy Life, the narrator of Kate Vaiden is not a third person/intimate observer. Instead, in Kate Vaiden, Price assumes the first person female narrative voice.

In a 1986 essay entitled "A Vast Common Room" and in an early April 1986 interview with Jefferson Humphries, Price addresses two issues related to choosing this female voice. Price refers to the original essay written for the New York Times Book Review which the publishers titled "Men Creating Women" (Price, "A Common Room" xii). The essay appears later, under his chosen title, "A Vast Common Room" in A Common Room: Essays, 1954-1987, 371-377. In this essay and in the interview, Price discusses the trend in recent years of what he calls "the ghettoization of the genders in American fiction" which he argues has occurred because men only write about men and women only write about women. He reminds us that some of the most memorable women in our Western literary tradition

were created by men--Emma Bovary, Hardy's Tess, Tolstoy's Natasha--and that one of the earliest forms of the novel was the "female first-person memoir written by a man--Moll Flanders by Defoe, Clarissa and Pamela by Richardson" (Humphries 207). But in the last thirty years, our concern with "exotic sexual behavior," sex-change surgery and homosexuality coupled with AIDS has given rise to a "growing fear of blended genders" (Price, "A Vast Common Room," 372).¹ Even before these later barriers arose though, Price notes that the creation of numbers of believable male characters by female writers has been the rarer of the reverse gender novel. Blaming this on cultural factors, he argues that males spend the early part of their lives surrounded by females--mothers, grandmothers, aunts, female teachers--and consequently gain some insight into the female perspective. Daughters do the same; and as a result, they do not spend significant time with adult males and have less information on which to model characters (Price, "A Vast Common Room," 373-74).

In support of this thesis, Price discusses his "first eighteen years . . . in the steady company of women" ("A Vast Common Room 376). Because of this and speculation about the interior life of his own mother, a woman whom he describes as "noted for youthful rebellion," Price

responds to voices in his own unconscious and creates his second central female character:

So I sat down and began with little forethought to write in a female voice, one whose atmosphere chimed in my ears with the timbre of my mother's lost voice, which I no longer remember. The story the voice told--of a woman born in North Carolina, residing there and in Virginia from her birth in 1927 till 1984--grew in ways that moved far from my mother's own constricted path. But however far my Kate ventured in rebellion and independence, she achieved in her voice and in all her acts a credible expression of my mother's own spiritual potential--a life whose courage and headlong drive I might have awarded my mother had I been able and were it not a life with even more pain than hers. ("A Vast Common Room" 376-77)

Price's life at this time had its own share of pain. In May of 1984, he was diagnosed as having a malignant ten-inch tumor on his spinal cord which was removed in early June of the same year. Writing Kate Vaiden became a kind of salvation for him despite the interruptions and consequent lengthy composition time:

The job took more than two years--years which, for other reasons, were unusually complicated--but I never relished work more, never felt my daily life more enriched by daily work. It's traditional for writers to lament the wretched solitude of their calling. I've mostly loved those parts of my life spent on paper, arranging a destiny that (once I look up) I cannot alter. But this time there was an unexpected saving benefit. Not only was I mining the dark shafts of my mother's mind; but in the face of complications, I was entering my office each morning

and becoming someone else--not only another human being, with another name and other troubles, but another gender: one with similar eyes for the gathering of light, though with subtly altered lenses. ("A Vast Common Room" 377)

As Price reminds us in his essay, males writing in a female voice is not a new undertaking; it has a long literary tradition. In this century, however, female writers, and a few male ones, and feminist critics have addressed both the appropriateness of and the problems inherent in a male author's choosing the first person female narrative voice. In her book Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades, Anne Robinson Taylor presents a modern historical overview of response to males writing as females. She cites Virginia Woolf's suggestion that men write as women because they need "a mirror, someone to reflect back to themselves but bigger and greater" (Taylor 1-2). Taylor also includes comments by males: Oscar Wilde argues that man reveals more about himself when he adopts another voice: "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth" (quoted in Taylor 2). This raises the question, however, of just whose truth is being told, the author's or the character's? About Defoe's female characters, Dickens once remarked, "Defoe's women . . . are terribly dull commonplace fellows without

breeches; and I have no doubt he was a precious dry and disagreeable fellow himself (quoted in Taylor 2). Perhaps the difficulty in males' assuming a female voice rises from the fact--suggested by both Taylor and Mary Ellman in Thinking About Women--that "femaleness" refers to a particular mind set, a way of perceiving and reacting to the world much more so often than "maleness" does (Taylor 6, Ellman).

Psychologists, such as Carl Jung; feminists, such as Simone deBeauvoir; and linguists, such as Robin Lakoff all use terms associated with passivity, vulnerability, emotionalness, powerlessness, sexual non-assertiveness and dependence to describe the attributes of "femaleness." And we see these characteristics contributing to the distinctions made between the two categories of Bildungsroman--the male novel of apprenticeship and the female novel of awakening. Susan J. Rosowski in her essay "The Novel of Awakening" states that the novel of "apprenticeship is defined by its theme" and quotes Holman's definition in A Handbook to Literature to support her assertion:

It is "a novel which recounts the youth and young manhood of a sensitive protagonist who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and 'the art of living.'" (quoted in Rosowski 49)

The novel of awakening is also about a protagonist who is trying to learn the "nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and 'the art of living.'" The major difference is that the protagonist must discover these things as a woman and that

The subject and action of the novel of awakening characteristically consist of a protagonist who attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage. The direction of awakening follows what is becoming a pattern in literature by and about women: movement is inward, toward greater self-knowledge that leads in turn to a revelation of the disparity between that self-knowledge and the nature of the world. The protagonist's growth results typically not with "an art of living," . . . but instead with a realization that for a woman such an art of living is difficult or impossible: it is an awakening to limitations. (Rosowski 49)

We need to keep both of these definitions in our minds as we examine Kate Vaiden. If we remove the gender designating noun from the definition of the novel of apprenticeship, it will apply to this novel. Kate does not try "to find value in a world defined by love and marriage" as female protagonists in novels of awakening do. She never marries although she does bear a child. Nor is her life defined by limitations imposed by her gender. Instead, at a young age, she strikes out on her

own and remains basically a solitary individual with brief stays among family and people met along the way.

Kate is fifty-seven when she introduces herself on the first page of the novel--"a real middle-sized white woman that has kept on going with strong eyes and teeth for fifty-seven years." She confesses "the best thing about my life up to here is, nobody believes it." Preparing us with this statement for what follows, Kate also justifies with two reasons her decision for speaking up now:

Nobody in my family loves for long, and last week I found somebody I'd lost or thrown away He hasn't laid eyes on me since he was a baby and I vanished while he was down for a nap. (1)

With this introduction, Kate begins her story, encapsulating her first eleven years with her parents Frances and Dan into fewer than ten pages and describing her "childhood memories . . . [as] the happiest of anyone's . . . and the earliest" (7). But the year Kate is eleven, things change. Taswell, her mother's cousin, is killed in a motorcycle accident; and Frances and Dan argue all night about Frances' desire to return home for the funeral. Kate's description of the intensity of the argument alerts the reader that more is going on here than

Dan's displeasure at being left alone for a few days. The argument, Kate's revelation that "Frances knew he had little use for her people, the men anyhow," and Kate's previous statement in the summing up of her early life that her parents were "calm and trustworthy . . . until the last three days; and they didn't come for eleven more years" prepare the reader for significant--perhaps catastrophic--events. And these events occur--beginning with hints of an unusual relationship between Frances and her cousin Swift, continuing with Kate's spontaneous, intuitive though unjustified dislike of Swift, climaxing with Dan's unexpected arrival the night after the funeral when Frances and Swift have gone back to the cemetery, and culminating with Dan shooting Frances and then himself.

While these events initiate the theme of abandonment that Price weaves throughout the novel and also establish the framework for Kate's solitary life, what Kate does on the train on the way to the funeral is significant also: she decides to pretend that she is a boy. Remembering that she had once swapped clothing with a male neighbor when she was five (but knowing that they "were playing") and that her father had told her that "if you kissed your elbow, you turned into your opposite," she this time doesn't "pull any silly contortions" but says:

I sat stock still on the seat by Frances and slowly turned into a boy named Marcus. He was red-headed, taller than me but thin; and he had elaborate braces on his teeth (I'd always wanted braces, though my teeth were straight as walls--braces seemed like a complicated hobby you could run). He owned a gray pony, wanted no friends, but was envied by all for eyes so pale blue they barely appeared. Nobody on earth had ever hurt his feelings, though many had tried. And he often took long thirsty hikes in the hills with only dry rations, never writing to his parents who were forced to wait and pray. (my emphasis) (14)

Kate reveals in this retelling of her conscious mental transformation both a justification and a pattern for her later behavior. Her concern for the consequences of her parents' argument leads to the creation of a persona invincible to pain, and perhaps she saw escape-- "long thirsty hikes . . ., never writing" as action easier for a male than a female. Surely her mostly unencumbered life is previsioned by the invention of someone who "wanted no friends."

Kate does have friends, however, although the best she "can manage seems to be unplanned periodic flight and reappearance on the doorstep of anyone who promises comfort, then flight again whenever the threat of permanence begins to suffocate her" (Brown 40). It is Kate's fear of permanence that causes her to seem more masculine than feminine. As Nancy Chodorow states in defining the masculine/feminine difference, "The basic

feminine sense of self is connected to the world; the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (169). And although Kate has numerous opportunities for long-term connections, she breaks them before they become too binding. Present and consistent throughout the eight years following her parents death--the time period that is the major focus of the novel--is her Aunt Caroline who, along with her husband Holt, take Kate in just as they had Frances upon her parents' death. But Kate leaves them after a hurtful conversation with Swift which closely follows the death of her first lover Gaston.

Actually Gaston represents the closest Kate comes to a substantial relationship with anyone. What begins as a purely physical union grows into something more. But from the beginning, Kate delights in her sexuality, even though she is only twelve and some months. Describing their first intercourse, Kate says:

I was being as good to myself as I could be. Better than anybody else had been. I was giving myself this long steady gift. The gift wasn't Gaston exactly or the feeling but the whole bright day, well-made as a gold watch and much less predictable. And I pictured my face overhead in beech leaves--normal size and nobody's raving beauty but a firm open face that could meet you unblinking with a likable smile. It said you will never be gladder than now if you live to be ninety.

I'm thirty-three years from ninety still, but the face didn't lie. I won't claim the day was the peak of my life. With all my badness I've enjoyed

myself. But right to this day, I can see us there in that mossy furrow--every mole on the patches of skin we showed. And I feel Gaston Stegall toiling gently as a hot boy could. Three separate times he told me to tell him when anything hurt. I never said a word--pain is not the same as hurt--and both of us felt so relieved when it ended (so proud and surprised), we dozed off for some minutes right in place Just before I slept I wondered if I'd dream of my parents someday, and be punished at once. But no, I didn't. Pure cool healing rest. (92-93)

Unlike other protagonists in female novels of development, particularly those in nineteenth-century fiction whose brief sexual relations outside marriage guarantee punishment (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 8), Kate anticipates but find none. Nor does Kate have to

chart a treacherous course between the penalties of expressing sexuality and suppressing it, between the costs of inner concentration and of direct confrontation with society, between the price of succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive "normality." (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 12-13)

Kate is far different from someone like Chopin's Edna Pontellier who is unable to reconcile her awakened sexuality with the limits imposed by society. Kate had no limits imposed on her by society, family, or herself. The only warning voice came from Noony, the family's feisty, sharp-tongued Black cook, who asked Kate, "That Stegall child taking wise precautions?"

With no other prohibitions, Kate and Gaston continue until Gaston joins the Marines shortly after his graduation. Kate confesses, for the only time in the novel, the pain she felt at his leaving:

Don't let any human being ever tell you that a female child, just turned sixteen can't hurt as hard and deep at a crossroads in eastern North Carolina as a one-eyed leper in the dust of Judah. She can; I did. I'll leave it at that. (112)

This takes us back to Kate's statement on the train when she turns herself into Marcus about "Nobody on earth had ever hurt his feelings." This time, she is unsuccessful at warding off the hurt. But she tries to fill her time after Gaston's departure and spends much of it with Fob Foster, an old bachelor neighbor, who befriends her, gives her money, a mare, his time and companionship. In one of their visits, as Fob reminisces about his experiences, Kate says, "Fob, you've had a grand life. I want one like it." And Fob responds, "I have. I'm glad you notice. But Kate, you're a girl. Your chances are slimmer than a newt's in the fire" (113).

Fob's life has been independent, solitary--except for one Black man who helps out--and self-reliant. Fob does pretty much what he pleases and answers to no one. He maintains "the basic masculine sense of self [that] is

separate" (Chodorow 169). Kate's wish for a life like his does not remain unfulfilled. When news of Gaston's death reaches her and is followed closely by her cousin Swift's verbal meanness--suggesting both his intimacy with Kate's mother and his knowledge of Kate and Gaston's intimacy--Kate flees, beginning what becomes a series of exits and entrances into the lives of those who offer love. As Kate tells us early in her story, "I more or less chose to tramp" (10)--not a choice usually taken by females.

Without informing Caroline or Holt, Kate takes off for Norfolk to stay with their son Walter who welcomes her into his home. It is here that Kate meets Douglas, an orphan whom Walter has taken in, who subsequently becomes her lover and the father of her child. But Kate doesn't stay in Norfolk long either--only long enough to conceive a child and hurt Walter who evidently loves Douglas. Returning home to have her baby, Kate abandons not only Walter and Douglas but also Tim, the taxi driver whom she met on her arrival in Norfolk and who offers himself and sanctuary when she leaves Walter's home.

The birth of her son, Daniel Lee Vaiden, holds Kate in place for a few months during which Douglas--having also left Walter--writes, visits, and asks her to join him in Raleigh where he has a job driving a blind piano tuner. But the baby's illness prevents an immediate reunion; and

when Kate does travel to Raleigh, Douglas has skipped town after attacking and wounding the piano tuner and leaving unpaid debts behind him. Kate recognizes that she and Douglas have no real prospects for a life together, characterizing the two of them as "not good enough magnets to hold even parents."

While Kate seems to attract people to her--almost everyone she meets offers her a roof, comfort and honest caring--she chooses to react to her "steady fear--Leave people before they can plan to leave you" (219). She takes over Douglas's job as driver for Whitfield Eller, the blind piano tuner, and remains until Douglas kills himself in Eller's tub. Shortly afterwards, Eller suggests permanence by proposing to Kate, and she leaves him stranded at his sister's mountain home and returns briefly to Walter in Norfolk. From Norfolk, Kate travels to Greensboro where she and her parents had lived before their death, hunts down her old teacher, finishes high school and works for awhile, only to take off again before settling finally in Raleigh for the next thirty-plus years.

Kate comments on her life and the nature of her relationships during these years, revealing again her enjoyment of sex and her reluctance to establish permanent connections:

It included men of course. I have liked men, no way around that. And I think I've been right. One thing about men--you know where you are; they can't hide a thing (unless you've run up on Jack the Ripper).

That's not to say I was loose or easy, even in the eyes of men back then. Every man I've touched in a private way has been good-hearted, quiet in public, and pleasant-looking at the very least. I thought several times that I'd fallen in love. More than one of the men felt the same and offered me rings. But at the last minute, I'd always balk. (345-46)

Kate offers the reader two reasons for her balking-- the first related to choices she made:

One obstacle was, I couldn't tell my story again. I'd told it once too often lately. I'd come round to seeing it was just one tale men couldn't believe or, worse, couldn't bear. Fathers can walk out on whole nests of children every day of the year and never return, never send back a dime--that's considered sad but natural. But an outlaw mother is the black last nightmare any man can face. (346)

Aside from pointing out the two standards by which human behavior is judged--expectations being different for males and females--Kate confesses her awareness of how un-female-like her behavior has been. She aligns herself with males who can and do "walk out on whole nests of children every day." She recalls knowing only two other women who walked out on their children. One was a lesbian; the other, a drunk. Kate was neither but says:

All I could think then, and all I understood, was I did not want him. I never once doubted that those four words were awful as any a person could say. But I knew they were true. (324)

Even though Kate recognizes and admits that society accepts child abandonment from males, she does not make a gender distinction in this particular case. Instead, she states that these "four words were awful as any a person could say," indicating her recognition that a failure to commit is a human fault, not one reserved for males or females, regardless of how society judges.

Her second reason for shying away from a permanent relationship stems from what happened to her and its consequences rather than from what she caused to happen by her choices:

Beyond my awful story though was one more problem. I'd had this vision of what could be--me and Gaston in the daylight, years of that--and nobody else, however strong and kind, quite promised me as much. I'd draw back and say "Kate Vaiden, wake up! You're asking for Heaven. This is Earth, live on it." But then I'd say no, one more hard time. And one more chance at a human team would walk on away. (346)

Kate doesn't spend much time speculating on how different her life might have been had Gaston lived; nor should the reader. Kate reiterates too many times that

her life has been her choice--"Years later I more or less chose to tramp" (10), "I've chosen which feeling I have for each face" (298)--and when she neglects to accept responsibility for her lurches into and out of people's lives, Noony slices through Kate's excuses--"People choose everything, grown people anyhow" (275).

And what Kate chooses is the kind of life generally reserved for males, a somewhat vagabond, unencumbered existence--one not limited by society's gender standards. Further evidence of her difference from other women can be seen in her comments about her employment:

Also of course I've worked in a men's world. The average woman in my generation didn't know any men outside her family. Through the years I've known my bosses well, and I met every man that entered their door. (349)

Perhaps her experience in "a men's world" contributes to her views on both the practicality of and the necessity for the women's movement. It is significant that her perspective reflects her own life experience and demonstrates little sympathy for the movement in any area other than the work world:

. . . my own hands had scratched my freedom out of granite rock, before I was old enough to drive (much less vote). So I couldn't get deeply riled for the

sisters that had managed to grow up and still not notice where the hard laws of marriage and motherhood were gouged on the sky in mile-high letters.--Take it or leave it but don't expect improvement till babies are all manufactured in bottles and men aren't therefore raised by women. I wish my wages fairly matched my skills, and I wish men's peters were connected to their brains. Otherwise I don't claim pity as a woman. Any woman that does--one that's been beat or starved of human food--gets my real regrets. And I hope not to die till I've seen a woman president, a woman with children. Beyond that I've got no big hopes, except that women who work in public will get their tear glands under control. Maybe it's because tears don't come easily when I feel cornered. Still a lot of us meet all problems with water; and that's crooked dealing, no other name for it. (351)

Evidently, Kate did notice the "mile-high letters" giving the "hard laws of marriage and motherhood" although she chose to reject both even when the opportunity for marriage and the biological reality of motherhood stared her in the face. And perhaps because Kate did not attempt "to find value in a world defined by love and marriage" (Rosowski 41), she finds it easy to say ". . . I don't claim pity as a woman." Kate's disdain for what she considers a typical female reaction to strong emotion--tears--further distances her from others of her biological gender. Her repeated decisions to separate herself from permanent connections with others make her seem much more masculine than feminine. As Jean Baker Miller states, "Women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and

relationships" (83). Kate tries very hard to do just the opposite.

There are surely some readers who might argue that Kate's final choice--a decision to contact her son, Lee--stems from her being diagnosed with cervical cancer and a desire for pardon as she looks at possible death. I suggest instead that Kate, having been told that treatment was successful, wishes to pass on her legacy of choice:

. . . I'd tell my story one final time, the whole thing, in writing. Not because I believed it would shake the stock market or raise the moral standards of the poor but because again it was what I'd made. It also could be my introduction--Lee Vaiden; Kate Vaiden, your mother, her life. I'd start tomorrow night. I could finish by fall (Norfolk's best in the fall). I'd make myself known. Lee would have all the facts. He would be free to choose. (376)

If we go back to Price's words about the motivation for and incubation of this novel--"a credible expression of my mother's own spiritual potential--a life whose courage and headlong drive I might have awarded my mother"--we surely see that what he wished for her was choice, the potential for a life not exactly like Kate's but one not defined or limited by love and marriage. In creating Kate, Price redefines the female Bildungsroman and demonstrates that at least one of the "men creating women" can present a non-stereotypical female who explores

her potential rather than remaining trapped by her limitations. Kate reminds us regularly of society's expectations and standards for female behavior in her conversation with Fob, her comment on mothers' deserting children, and her evaluation of women in the work place. But she also tells us that gender never dictated to her:

(One small thing I'm proud of--not one time, in all I've done, have I ever asked mercy for being a girl. I've meant to be strong. Strength comes in one brand--you stand up at sunrise and meet what they send you and keep your hair combed). (107-08)

If readers find Kate an unbelievable character, think that no woman would really act as she does, and that Price--as a male--has failed completely at representing a "woman's mind," perhaps this is because Price goes beyond the traditional Images of Women in Fiction (Susan C. Cormillon's title). Kate is neither the "Good Mother" nor the "Bitch Goddess." In Price's creation of Kate, we "discover almost a conspiracy to overthrow all the nice comfortable patterns and associations of a previous (and, for the most part, male-dominated) literary tradition" (Kolodny, "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'" 81).

Price accomplishes an "overthrow [of] all the nice comfortable patterns" not only in Kate Vaiden but also in

his 1992 novel Blue Calhoun.² Also written in the first person with a strong confessional element, this work presents a male character who, like the female protagonist in a female Bildungsroman, "attempts to find value in a world defined by love and marriage" (Rosowski 49).

Like Kate, Blue tells his story from the perspective of age; he is 65 when the novel begins. And like Kate, he is explaining his life in a letter to a family member--his granddaughter Lyn. But unlike Kate, Blue is asking for pardon for the pain he has caused.

While Kate's story is mostly concerned with the first eighteen years of her life--especially the time between ages 11 and 18, Blue's story begins at age 35 when, as he says, "that one day fell down on me from a clear spring sky, no word of warning" (5). In the explanatory section of the letter that precedes his retelling of the events of "that day," Blue summarizes his previous existence:

I'd been stone sober for nineteen months--the longest ever up to that point--and as it turned out, I've stayed sober the rest of my life to this night now. I worked the best job I'd had in years; and to my knowledge, no part of my life was starved or frozen. I didn't stare off at sunsets and grieve. I thought I cherished my only spouse, born Myra Burns, a friend since childhood and your grandmother that you have prized.

We'd been married for fifteen years, and Myra had tried her absolute best. As you well know we had a daughter that I near worshiped named Madelyn (called Mattie or Matt from the day of her birth,

according to how we felt at the moment). Matt was the finest influence on me of anybody yet. I owed her the world and was aiming to give it, minute by minute from here on out--upright kindness and every decent thought and act I could see she needed. But then that day fell down on me from a clear spring sky, no word of warning. It tore the ground from under my feet, and everything round me shook the way a mad dog shakes a howling child. (5)

Blue appears, in the first part of this passage to be a man who finally "has it all together." He has given up alcohol, likes his job, recognizes the value of his wife, and is committed to his daughter. Had the last two sentences been omitted, the reader might envision a fairy-tale ending to these lives. But in the final sentences, Blue reveals his awakening--an awakening in the form of a sixteen year old girl, Luna Absher, whose existence directs his behavior for the next year and impacts his life until the moment he begins this letter some thirty years later.

As Abel, Hirsch, and Langland point out in their "Introduction" to The Voyage In,

First the protagonists grow significantly only after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation that they will marry and live "happily ever after." Because it frequently portrays a break not from parental but from marital authority, the novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery. Second, development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments. (12)

In this passage, the authors are describing the elements of a female novel of awakening. However, Blue Calhoun fulfills all the criteria.³

The first of Blue's "brief epiphanic moments" occurs when Luna and her mother, Rita, enter the music store where Blue works. Recognizing Rita as a high school acquaintance, Blue helps them buy an autoharp for Luna, who has an outstanding singing voice. But in this seemingly innocent encounter, Blue finds himself drawn to this young woman and describes his reaction in terms appropriate for an epiphany:

I'll have to say I never felt so caught before. Not trapped but held. My whole body felt like a child a-borning, pushed helpless down a dim long tunnel towards strong new light. (10)

Recognizing but fighting against the pull of this "strong new light," Blue tries to maintain normalcy. He goes home after work, visits with Myra and Mattie only to find himself restless. In an attempt to quell his agitation, Blue goes, as he frequently did, to the all night newsstand downtown to buy some magazines. But after making his purchases, Blue discovers that he is no longer in control:

Once I cranked the engine and aimed the wheels, the car took over and moved itself at legal speed through streets that were stranger than they'd ever been . . . Maybe the car went a roundabout way, or maybe some other hand entirely was holding me back in hopes I'd cool. (17-18)

Blue still tries to resist and thinks as he passes a phone booth, "Call Myra and tell her you'll be back directly." Even after he stops the car on Luna's street, Blue asks himself

"What in the name of Christ are you after? Though as I say, I was far from believing, I seldom used Christ's name in vain. It was not in vain now; I was that concerned.

I even thought find a drink--anywhere, any kind. Back out of here, son, and steady your nerves. (18)

However, Blue doesn't leave, realizing that "tonight . . . drink meant less than God, who was thoroughly gone." The language here convinces the reader that Blue, like Emma Bovary, is trying not to give in. In Diana Festa--McCormick's essay "Emma Bovary's Masculinization," she quotes Alison Fairlie who suggests that "between the origins and the fulfillment of passion may come the stage of resistance" (227). And Blue resists. Even as he walks up to Rita and Luna's porch, he tells himself, "Go home; you're grown. Your life's back on its own two rails and aimed for home. Go home, son--home." Reaching the porch,

he says silently, "You're not gone yet. You're on the safe side." But when Luna speaks and tells him, "I dreamed it was you," Blue confesses. "I knew I'd waited all my days--and double my nights--for that one message from that one throat."

Their physical intimacy begins that same evening, but the fact that there is no description of it clues the reader that the physicality is not as important as the emotions. Consequently, Blue evaluates the intensity of emotions and, in his alarm over its possible consequences, confides to Myra in the early morning hours after his clandestine meeting with Luna, "I'm scared as hell."

She acknowledges that she is aware that something is wrong, suggests that he is "lonesome again," and pleads with him to "be glad of what we've got." Blue's silent response to her request reveals that what he experiences in the confines of marriage is not enough; it is an awakening to limitations:

I'd understood since age maybe twelve that any man whose fed and warm and dry at night and lives near a woman who likes his presence is a miserable baby to cry for more. I wanted to say it out for Myra--"I'm thoroughly glad." But then I knew a worse thing still. There that instant awake in the night, I was gladder than I'd ever been in my life. A girl I wanted like clean sunshine had reached inside my chest just now, dark hours ago, and gripped the cold remains of my heart. I hoped I'd done the same for

her. And I meant to keep that steadily happening all the rest of my and her days. (29)

Tension produced by the reality of Blue's life and the desire for a different life grow as Blue attempts to be a responsible husband and a caring, attendant father. Unlike most masculine protagonists, Blue's "sense of self" is not "separate" and he tries hard to "maintain affiliations and relationships" (Miller, 83). It is, in fact, this struggle that creates Blue's inconsistent behavior. His sense of responsibility to Myra and Mattie coupled with his obvious devotion to his daughter pull him in one direction, while his love for Luna tugs him in the other. And there is also the prospect of "direct confrontation with society" (Abel, Hirsch, Langland 12), as Blue pursues a relationship outside marriage. While people in the 1990s may excuse marital infidelity, adults forty years ago were not as likely to do so. As Blue explains to his granddaughter,

What might be more worth noticing here is all that's happened in America since the 1950s. The thing I'd done had a one word name back then--adultery. That's nothing but grinding your hot body with someone else's when you've sworn a vow to keep yourself clean and aimed at your mate. You may recall it's Commandment Seven in a short list of ten. In America back in my boyhood and right till the seventies, adultery was still as low a crime as any offense but torture and murder. (67)

Added to the societal condemnation of adultery in Blue's mind is the complication presented by Myra's Catholicism. Since divorce is not an option, Blue has three choices--none of which is good. He can give up Luna and remain where he is, he can leave Myra and Mattie and go off with Luna, or he can stay with Myra and Mattie and sneak to see Luna. Presented with this dilemma, Blue does what many female protagonists in novels of awakening do: he shares his situation with his mother ("Introduction," The Voyage In 12).

In the midst of a very frank conversation with her, Blue realizes her powerlessness to help him:

What help can your half blind mother be when a middle aged man has failed himself, and everybody around him is likewise helpless to break his course? (51)

What Blue does recall during their visit is a night when he had "been drinking for two weeks and was raving." His mother supported his head while he retched and finally, in desperation, produced a pint of bourbon from somewhere in the house. Unable to hold the bottle in his shaky hands, Blue asked his mother to hold it while he "sucked a drink." In her ignorance, she replied, "Oh darling, just smell the cork."

Blue understands that she is equally powerless to help him now. After he arrives back home after their visit, he describes his frustration:

All I could think of now as I walked through the cool wet yard was Mother again upstairs in this house, telling my desperate mind to please just "smell the cork." What else has anybody ever said to me but "Sniff at the lid, wait at the door, don't come in the room"? Christ, I want the room and all the goods, the whole nine yards. (61)

But the desire for "all the goods" does not alter Blue's three options, and none is without its consequences. Unable to choose, Blue tries all three at some time during the following years. He and Luna meet secretly until she goes off to music camp for the summer. After she leaves, Blue moves into a motel alone, visits Luna for one night at camp, stays awhile at his mother's, and then moves back home. When he goes to ask Myra if she will let him move back in, he tells her that he desires to do so for "Matt and you and common decency." Marital and parental responsibility limit Blue's choices and influence his behavior. But as hard as he tries, Luna keeps entering his life.

Bob, Blue's old friend since childhood, is dying of leukemia and needs physical help at the same time Rita, Luna's mother, reappears and asks Blue's assistance in

finding a job for her son, Luther, recently released from prison. Luther moves in to help Bob; and Luna, his half-sister, frequently joins him. After Bob's death, Luther leaves and Blue and Luna bond once and separate again. But when Luna ends up pregnant with Luther's baby, Blue is called upon for help once more--this time at his mother's insistence. Once the abortion is completed, Blue tries to return home, only to be rejected by his daughter who tells him, "I don't want to see your face," and that she wants him to go "Forever."

From Christmas through Easter, Blue and Luna live together at Bob's place. Significantly, on Easter Sunday, Mattie asks Blue to come home and Luna tells him he needs to go.

And way in the night when I had lain in the dark awake for maybe five hours, Luna turned towards me from her deep sleep and--with no more words than a tree can speak--she showed every piece of my mind and body how she knew we were quitting cold a place and a dare at some new life that we could never try again, however long we lived or hoped or begged to return.

At the end I told her what I hadn't said for months, "I'll love you every minute I breathe."
(289)

So Blue, like many of the female protagonists who define their lives within marriage, returns home. Luna, Luther, and Rita disappear from sight but not from memory.

Blue and Myra watch Mattie graduate and go off to college. And then Blue sits helplessly by as Myra dies of breast cancer.

With only one exception, the final events of the novel are equally tragic: Mattie--a grown woman, wife of Dane, mother of Lyn--also dies of breast cancer. Dane, having been discovered in a suspiciously incestuous situation with Lyn, commits suicide; and Lyn blames her grandfather Blue for his death. Rita dies, but her death brings Blue and Luna together again--one hopes for the remainder of their lives.

If the reader views Blue's life in retrospect, she will see how his existence has been defined by relationships, both those inside and outside the framework of marriage. Unlike Kate, who made a career of leaving, Blue can't leave anyone. He is a man governed by his emotions at war with his sense of responsibility--which for him is also an emotional bond.

Price allows us to experience the full range of Blue's emotional responses. If we compare Blue to someone like Jake Barnes in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, we see to what extent we have been privy to the working-out of Blue's internal conflicts. In his essay "The Masculine Mode," Peter Schwenger notes that Jake Barnes "observes the changes in his emotions with as much detachment as he

observes the weather or the lay of the land, and with somewhat less detail" (104). This is not the case with Blue. Price presents his protagonist with none of the "masculine reserve" associated with writers who practice "the masculine mode" (Schwenger 104). Perhaps a further example from Schwenger will demonstrate the antipathy between Price's "feminine style" and Hemingway's "masculine" one and also their different agendas.

In "Indian Camp," the first of the Nick Adams' stories, Nick learns an important lesson when his doctor father ignores the screams of a woman on whom he was performing a caesarean. Her husband, however, is not able to ignore her pain and slits "his throat in despair." What Nick learns is that "those who feel emotion die; those who reject it are practical men" (Schwenger 104-105). Unlike Hemingway and Nick, neither Price nor Blue rejects emotion. It follows, then, that if reserve and emotional detachment are masculine, then the display of emotion must be feminine.

However, allowing Blue to share the scope of his emotional life is not Price's only accomplishment--remarkable though the presentation of an emotional male may be. If we return to Price's essay "A Vast Common Room" and recall his dissatisfaction with "the ghettorization of the genders in American fiction," we see

that Price has taken a significant step toward correcting this. In Kate Vaiden, not only does Price assume a female voice and give us a rich, believable female character, he also steps across thematic and genre gender lines and presents a female who refuses to be confined by traditional sex-prescribed cultural limitations. She is a female who makes these choices and who does not do so under the "guise of weakness and passivity" (Taylor 5).

In Blue Calhoun, Price creates a male--a husband and a father--who, in his response to life is much more feminine than masculine, who measures his life by his ability to form and maintain relationships. He is a male who makes mistakes in his choices, who tries to walk a tightrope between responsibility and desire and is frequently "helpless" in the process--a much more stereotypically feminine than masculine state. Actually Price has presented us with a female (created by a male) character who is actively, "positively" masculine and a masculine character who is actively, "positively" feminine.

In the final part of his essay "A Vast Common Room," Price addresses whether or not he has been successful in crossing gender lines in Kate Vaiden:

I may, of course, have deluded myself. I may not have earned a place among those writers who entered the vast room of their androgyny and calmly generated a large portion of literature's enduring characters--characters who have taught us a large part of what we know about love and tolerance in the actual world of sight and touch. If my own attempt fails, still I assert the original claim. The most beautiful and fragile of our birth-gifts is an entire humanity, an accessibility to all other members of our species--all shades of gender and private need. The gift lies not primarily in our sexuality but in something simpler and more complex--an early comprehension of the means of human life, packed as they are so lovably, transparently, delicately, frighteningly in bodies and minds called male and female but deeply kin. It's in our power--writers and readers--to take the next step, back and forward, to a common gift: our mutual room. (377)

In creating the characters of Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun, Price has done more than "take the next step." In ignoring his own gender limitations and in creating characters whose actions cross gender lines and go beyond prescribed and accepted gender behavior, Price enters and fills his metaphorical "mutual room."

Notes

¹ Even though Price discusses much of this and what follows in his interview with Humphries, I will cite his essay as the primary source since it is devoted exclusively to a discussion of the gender and writing issue.

² An interesting side-note is that Blue Calhoun is the name of a real person--but a woman, not a man. Price revealed in his April 19, 1993 presentation at UNC-Charlotte that he heard the name years ago, thought it would make a great name for a character, and filed it away. When he began this novel, he called her and asked permission to use her name. Since the publication of this novel, several people have mentioned knowing her, as she teaches in a southern college.

³ Included in this volume is the essay "The Novel of Awakening" by Susan J. Rosowski. One of the novels that she explicates is Madame Bovary, a novel that Price identifies in several interviews as early and significant reading for him. These are, I think, marked similarities between Blue and Emma.

CHAPTER V
REYNOLDS PRICE RESPONDS

On March 2, 1994, Reynolds Price and I talked by phone for about an hour. He had previously requested a copy of my dissertation. The following is a transcript of our visit.

Jones: You stated in a May, 1993 presentation at UNC-Charlotte that for you writing was pretty much an unconscious act. Can you comment on this in relation to style?

Price: I would say that style is something that I absolutely never think about as a goal or even a method. Style, if there's any style to my work, that style is simply what's generated automatically as my mind tells me and produces the story that I write down. Then, of course, I obviously, having written the first draft, I work on that draft fairly carefully over "X" number of weeks or months, but my aim in working it over is always clarity of definition and clarity of communication. So I literally never

stop and think, "Does this sound like Reynolds Price's style?" Because that's just simply never a consideration.

Jones: I guess that raises this question. How were you, or were you even aware at all of the fact that the syntax in A Long and Happy Life really did mirror Rosacoke's progression from this rather submissive young woman in that first sentence to the end where she is very decisive?

Price: Well I think that was one of the fascinating things you discovered, but it was news to me. It's not surprising news because I would hope that I'm a born writer and that a born writer like a born dancer or a born anything else has what athletes call "muscle memory" or "muscle intelligence" or thinking where really the unconscious faculties go ahead and do it, and that there's very little conscious strategy involved. I mean I was very aware obviously--made notes for a couple of years before I wrote A Long and Happy Life, but they were not notes which were directed toward trying to plan a syntactical strategy. They were really notes in the direction of trying to understand a particular character's emotional

evolution and progress. Though in so far as you find that syntactical progression, then the progression is something that simply came along in the wake of charting out and perhaps understanding and really imitating with her as she developed that growth of her own.

Jones: Well it was absolutely fascinating, and it was not planned, you know when I looked at those passages, and it was fascinating what I discovered.

Price: I think it's hardest thing, and I'm very sympathetic with it. It's the hardest thing for a non-writer to understand. I mean I have literally this week been trying to do my income taxes, and my brain will simply not do numbers.

Jones: Mine doesn't either.

Price: And I watch mathematicians do it, and mathematicians do it instinctively beyond a certain point, you know. Their brains are wired to work that way, so I hugely envy them; but I know my brain when my brain does something like this, it does it about ninety percent unconsciously.

Jones: That leads to this, and I don't know whether this is something that you do when you go back

and work on the draft; but you do use some words in very unusual ways--for example "oaring," and "oared," and "gentled" as a verb.

Price: Yeah, I remember you pointed that out.

Jones: Now how conscious is word choice for you?

Price: Well, there obviously are times when I produce a noun, or a verb, or an adjective that I feel is imprecise or for whatever reason--generally for reasons of tone or rhythm--is the wrong word for the particular context. And then I will, you know, rack my brain or go to a thesaurus or whatever, but I would say again that ninety percent of the time, the words simply arrive. And they get, you know, sort of polished and trimmed and fitted in the numbers of revisions that I do, but again, there's not a kind of military--there's not a kind of battlefield general strategic plan involved. Maybe the battlefield--maybe the great generals also operate largely instinctively--I suspect they do.

Jones: I think so too.

Price: But, you know, I will not stop and think, "Would it be better here to say "tamed down," or

"calmed," or "gentled." The word "gentled" would simply arrive.

Jones: To what degree when you write do you imagine your reader, or do you?

Price: I don't imagine a specific person sitting at "X" number of feet or yards away from me. I think I, because I grew up like you in a Southern family where communication was something that was valued in the family and in which the family's whole emotional life was largely conducted through speech to one another, I think that from my mother's womb I've been concerned to communicate, to be as clearly communicative with a reasonably intelligent other human being as was possible to be. But I don't ever have in mind a particular kind of human being. There are certain things that I write, and I just realized, that for reasons of their emotional, or intellectual, or whatever complexity of the actual story I'm telling, or of a character's thought process, I will realize that this is getting pretty complicated, and I can't honestly make it any simpler. And then realize that I'm losing the basic person who's going to read this on the subway or on the bus driving to New York,

and that I'm probably, you know, limiting myself to someone who is really a very committed reader. That's not my usual audience. I usually would like to be as accessible as I could to as many readers as possible, but I don't set out to say everybody who's got a sixth-grade education is going to be able to read and understand this. I don't have any specific mark set--just as clear and as accessible as I think the material can be made. And there are certain kinds of material that simply can never be got totally lucid and totally communicative to a relatively inexperienced reader.

Jones: What kinds of material are you talking about there?

Price: Well, I think there are--I'm trying to think. Just to put it in a very small focus. There's you know--I can't even recall at the moment the name of the group--those little sketches, in The Collected Short Stories--in Permanent Errors and in The Short Stories--about my parents, and their courtship, and both their deaths, and my finding the record of my father's voice after. And those were pieces that came out very close

to the time of their deaths. And, as I'm sure you know from your own experience with your mother's death, there was just a lot of emotional intensity, a lot of grief, deep memory involvement going at the time that I wrote those pieces, so they came out under heavy emotional pressure. And I was aware at the time that they were much more nearly prose poems than they were prose narratives. And I realized that the language was complex in a way that was honest to the feeling that accompanied them, to the feeling that produced them, and I didn't want to try to homogenize or simplify that language to a point that I felt would not represent the conditions which produced the language. Generally in novels I really do try to push through that sort of complexity and get the prose as lucid as I think the material allows for, because I think the novel is just a much harder job for the reader anyway than a two or three page prose poem is. If you start on page one of Finnegan's Wake, you just think, "Oh my God, this thing is two inches thick, and I'll never get through it." But if Joyce had handed you one page, you might have thought, "Okay,

I've got an hour between jobs, and I'm going to sit here and do this. When you see it--it's like four hundred pages long--you think, "This is only for graduate students and James Joyce."

Jones: And not even all graduate students!

Price: Not even all graduate students.

Jones: Keeping all that in mind, to what extent do you think a reader's gender would determine or influence his or her response to a certain passage or a work, or do you even think about that?

Price: I don't think about that. Uhmmm. Well, let me not be too fast about that. I'm trying to think of an instance where I might have thought of gender. I do remember, for instance, in the very first novel I ever wrote, A Long and Happy Life, I do remember thinking that one of the things I wanted to try to achieve as early as possible in the work was to make both Rosacoke and Wesley as physically attractive to any reader as I possibly could. I wanted the reader--female, male, child, whatever--to have as nearly a sense of erotic attraction to, response to a real, you know, physical magnetism coming off those two characters. I wanted the

reader to be able to share the magnetism that Rosacoke and Wesley exerted on one another. And so that was the sort of idea in my mind that obviously controlled the themes and the language that came out. Again, I don't ever recall sitting down and thinking, "What do I need to do to this sentence to make Rosacoke more magnetic or Wesley?" Again, I just have these kinds of over-riding ideas that seem to generally affect the way the work arrives in my head. But as to seeing any particular piece being directed toward a male or female reader, I don't really think I do that. I mean, I think any fool can see that a book which is called Kate Vaiden may well attract more female readers than a book called Blue Calhoun. But it hasn't been my experience that that's the way it has worked out with my readers.

Jones: No, I don't think it has either.

Price: No. And so I've never felt that I have written a woman's book or a man's book. You know if I wrote a book about hunting grizzly bears in Alaska, I might think, "Well, this is probably going to be a man's book." But I've never felt that about any particular thing of mine. I just

always--you know Saul Bellow talked in an interview several years ago about how there were only two kinds of writers. He said that there were "small audience writers" and "big audience writers." And I've always wanted to be a "big audience writer." Not because I want crowds, or necessarily gigantic fame or huge amounts of money, but because I would like my work to reach as many people as possible. Period.

Jones: Okay. Even though you write frequently about the pain in human relationships, you rarely write about violent behavior.

Price: No.

Jones: What lay behind the creation of a character like Wave Wilbanks? Even though he's not violent in the "Johnny got his gun" kind of violence. What lay behind the creation of somebody like him?

Price: Well, I think I was--I think he's a product again who arrives--he arrives really, as I recall, in the short story that I wrote before I wrote Blue Calhoun. Wait, wait, Wave Wilbanks is in Good Hearts.

Jones: Right.

Price: Wave. Where did I get Wave? I don't know. I just thought, I mean I knew that when Wesley

left home, Rosacoke was going to get raped. And a rape implies a rapist.

Jones: Right.

Price: And I had, uhmm, I've had a couple of female friends through the years who have been raped and who have either known when it happened or learned later the identity of the rapist. And I was very fascinated in trying to understand their response to actually knowing or winding up in the same place, the same courtroom or the same building with this person who had violated bodies. And I suppose, in so far as I can identify it at all, Wave must have been generated out of that sense of the charge that exists between a person and that person's aggressor. Now it's been a very long time since I've read Good Hearts. Rosa never consciously recognizes Wave, does she?

Jones: No, she does not.

Price: But there is a certain charge between them, right?

Jones: Yes.

Price: When he finally turns up at their house?

Jones: Particularly at the end when he leaves.

Price: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Jones: And he's going out and he has sort of a recognition himself.

Price: Exactly. Yeah. So I think it was again my mind sort of playing on that whole phenomenon of the person who's been violated moving into the force field, a second time, of the violator. I remember I went through an awful period in the 1970's of having my house broken into about five or six times and the sheriff said, "Generally people know. If we could find out who did it, you would find that you knew the person."

Jones: Oh, wow.

Price: Perhaps rather casually, but it might be, you know, somebody at the filling station or the whatever; and I remember being fascinated by that and obviously being horrified by it. And again thinking, "Who the hell would have done this to me and why?" And what if I arrived here when they were in the process, and so forth, so I can't point to a specific thing that generated the relationship between Rosacoke and Wave or Wave's character. I just also, I'm always very, very interested in psychopathic people. I'm always a little unnerved to find out how much I enjoy reading books about the Boston strangler,

the Menendez reports on TV and so forth. And I'm very fascinated by what it is that pushes those people beyond a point that most of the rest of us would cut off at. And I think finally, so far as we know, it is an unsolved mystery. We just don't know what makes somebody become the Durham strangler, and somebody else who perhaps grew up under similar circumstances not at all responding that way.

Jones: But I think you did an amazing job of entering Wave's mind and giving his justification which is very bizarre.

Price: Yeah. Yeah.

Jones: But, that leads me to this. As a feminist, and you are, and I think you are, and you've said you were

Price: Absolutely.

Jones: How would you imagine that your female readers would respond to Wave?

Price: Well, I seem to recall that there were one or two reviews that I saw in which women objected to the fact that they felt the author was somehow forgiving Wave or letting him off light which was certainly not my intention whatever. But conversely, I've also never been a writer

who was interested in arresting people at the ends of my books and matching them off to prison. You know, I don't feel that that's my task. I feel my task is to understand people if I can and leave the awards or the arrest up to the designated law official. I was just really, I think, trying to find out what it might feel like to be somebody who would break in someone's house at night and subject a person to violent sexual intercourse against their will and then also be able to come back later for Sunday lunch.

Jones: Yes, and sit down with husband and brother.

Price: Exactly. And the world is full of such people. And I've talked, as I've said, to a couple of female friends of mine who have undergone situations not quite as bizarre as Wave, but pretty incredibly bizarre. I mean, it happens every day, and date rape is a phenomenon we've learned a lot more about just since Good Hearts was published, that there are a number of people who are raped by an acquaintance. So I don't feel that Wave receives an atom of admiration or consideration, but I do think that I made the best effort I could at understanding at least

one kind of bizarre person who might have produced this action.

Jones: In your essay "A Vast Common Room," you discuss your imaginings of your own mother's interior life as a source or inspiration for Kate Vaiden. Can you comment on Kate as a typical or non-typical female character?

Price: Umm. I think Kate derives from my mother in one chief respect. I mean, there are things like her growing up in Macon and her being an orphan and being reared by an aunt and so forth that also bear resemblance to the skeleton of my mother's life, but the actual actions of Kate's life are very unlike my mother's life. My mother got married when she was twenty-two years old and stayed married until my father died. And it was as good a marriage as I've ever known any two people to have. But all through my life, and really all through my life with her, and everyone else who knew my mother, I think, picked up a sort of transmission from her of a kind of, as I think I've said elsewhere, of a kind of outlaw nature. That she was an outrider; she was an early radical feminist, though she wouldn't have known what the words

meant. Her nickname was "Jimmy"; she was called a boy's name, and she'd always been looked upon as a great tom-boy in her childhood. And she wanted not to live the life of the Southern Christian white lady. She wanted, she wanted something else, and I think a lot of what she wanted was a kind of, I think she wanted the sort of intense loyalty that any child expects and longs for from an ideal parent. And I think she never got it. And one of the reasons she probably never got it was first of all, her mother died when she was five or six, I can't remember exactly and before that time her mother had been the proprietress of a busy household with a lot of other children. And Mother was the youngest child, the baby, and she probably never got all the attention she wanted as a very young child. And then her mother died. Her father died shortly thereafter. She was reared by an aunt who was tremendously kind and loving, Aunt Ida, who was Weebie's grandmother [Weebie is Price's cousin and a friend of mine], but the fact of the matter was that it wasn't her mother and it wasn't her father; and they were gone. And I think it always, I think those are at

least visible and logical looking causes for that sort of outlaw atmosphere that she generated around her which was such a great part of her charm to her fiends. Though she never exploited it; I don't think she was even conscious of it herself. If she had exploited it, she would have been giving a kind of tough guy performance which would have been cynical and not worth watching. But I think it was her nature to be intense in her emotional expectations, her expectations of loyalty and absolutely uncalculating in her huge emotional generosity. I mean, both she and my father would give you absolutely anything they had that you lacked, no matter how precious it was to them. They were just hapless givers. That was commented upon about them when they were alive, and it one of the most precious memories the rest of us have about them now that they're dead: What tremendously magnanimous people they were. But within that magnanimity Mother had this kind of, she gave off this kind of air, that you might wake up tomorrow and she'd suddenly be gone which she never was. But there was always that . . . uh

Jones: Possibility?

Price: Exactly. That she might finally find what she was looking for elsewhere.

Jones: Well, do you think then, Kate does not seem to be bound by the same kind of restrictions, limitations, whether or not it was economic, regional, her gender, her times, whatever. So in a sense Kate has the opportunity to do everything that your mother did not?

Price: I think she did. I think she had a lot of those opportunities. I think that my mother would have taken, had she for whatever reason, not had a husband and children, I think Mother would have had a very different kind of life, perhaps a life more like Kate's.

Jones: But of course Kate did have a child.

Price: Kate had a child whom she abandoned.

Jones: Right.

Price: Which my mother could never have dreamed of doing.

Jones: Well, in that sense, Kate's behavior is untypical by the standards that society sets.

Price: And, Gloria, the only criticisms I've ever gotten of the character of Kate from women readers, you could probably guess. I've had

women come up to me after readings, I've had women write me letters and say, "I like everything about it, but I can not believe a mother abandoned a child." And I just write back and say, "Go to your nearest social agency and find out that on every street in America at least one child per day is abandoned by its mother." I think we're all so used to hearing about the father who goes out for the quart of milk and never comes back.

Jones: Well, there's probably also not a mother alive, if she were honest, who wouldn't say that at least one time . . .

Price: That impulse crossed her?

Jones: That she hadn't wanted to walk out the door and never come back.

Price: Absolutely.

Jones: I mean, that's just the nature of it. Okay, sort of related to a gender kind of question, you have discussed at length in interviews and in essays, the importance of dreams both to you personally and in your writing; and several people--William Singer and others--have commented on the number of dreams in your fiction. My observation is that your male

characters dream more frequently than your female ones. Why do you think this is true?

Price: I never thought of that. I wonder, and this is shooting from the hip, I wonder if it has to do with the fact that in The Surface of Earth, I set myself a challenge which was that nobody in the novel was going to have a dream which I hadn't had. I would often embellish the dream or slightly alter the dream in some way, but I thought it was--you know the trick about dreams in novels is that it's mighty easy to make up a dream for somebody that reveals who they are in a fairly easy way. And I somehow wanted all the dreams to have that sort of stubborn opacity and obscurity that dreams have, where you can't ever quite put your finger on what's going on in the dream or what you're trying to figure out for yourself or teach yourself, so I said I'm not going to invent from out of whole cloth any one of these dreams. And since I, a man, was dreaming them, I may have attributed them to men more often for that very reason. But as I said, that's shooting from the hip, but I doubt I could ever come up with a truer answer anyway

cause I don't really know. I wasn't aware that I had done that.

Jones: Well, even in some of the other books, men dream more than the women, even though there're very significant dreams by women in The Surface of Earth and The Source of Light, but it seems to me that the men dreamed more; and I wondered if perhaps you were using it as a technique to probe the interior of characters who were somewhat reluctant to open up on their own?

Price: Or less articulate?

Jones: Or less articulate.

Price: Like your average American male tends to be. That very probably is also a component of it. I was using them especially in The Surface of Earth and The Source of Light as in really all the novels, I'm trying to use as many devices as possible for getting inside peoples' heads, which is one of the reasons I use letters so much.

Jones: Yes!

Price: I think people of those generations would often say things in letters to you that they wouldn't dream of saying in the room with you. And incidentally, they would not also dream of

saying it over the telephone to you. I think that's how we've lost so much by abandoning the letter and going strictly to the phone call, because there are a lot of things that two people with any respect for each other won't say to each other over the phone because one of them might suddenly have hysterics and hang up. But you'll say it in a letter because you know it's going to be five days before it gets across the miles and you're not going to be there when your mother opens it and reads it; you don't have to take the sight of the tears. So I used poems and letters and diaries, any form of interior communication that I can get my hands on for these people because as you say not much of anybody, even in a culture as endlessly talkative as the American South, not much of anybody is ever a very serious communicator. In terms of making the connections, many people try and don't make the connections more than fifty percent of the time. But my characters, they do try. There are very few people in my work, I would bet, who are really very content with silence or mostly silence.

Jones: I think you're right.

Price: Yeah.

Jones: So in that sense dreams allow you, as you say, to enter the interior of males and females?

Price: One more--one more way of getting in.

Jones: About twenty years ago in the Esquire article, you discussed the freedom that writers now have in presenting sexuality.

Price: Right.

Jones: How would you characterize your use of this freedom?

Price: Ummmm. I'm thinking. In A Long and Happy Life, when I wrote it from '58 to '61, and at that point, there was still a kind of unofficial ban on the explicit description of sexual acts in American fiction. There were occasional exceptions, but it really wasn't done very much. In fact, it was roughly at that time that the famous court battles were fought about publishing Lady Chatterly's Lover in the unexpurgated form, and that was one of the very crucial cases for a writer's saying anything he or she wanted to say and being able to get it out to a large audience. So I never was conscious at least of wanting to say more than I could because I think I've always been aware of

the dangers of slipping over into pornography are always there lurking, waiting. Obviously, if you describe squeezing an orange, somebody's going to get turned on by it. There's going to be somebody out there who is going to have a fetish for oranges. But when you actually get down to human bodies, you really do know that you're in majority territory, where virtually every reader fairly quickly is either going to be repulsed by this, or horrified by this, or is going to be sexually turned on by this in a way that makes them cease to be a good reader and become themselves a sexual animal or sexual thing. And I personally have no great complaint against pornography as long as it leaves children alone. But it hasn't been my particular concern to try to write it.

Jones: Right.

Price: I'm obviously fascinated by the way that people want, and seek, and use sexual love in their lives, and I guess that like most everybody else around in American fiction in the last thirty years, I've gradually taken more and more advantage of the freedom available, but I wonder really if looking back over the whole spread of

it that there's been a big difference in my use of actual sexuality or sexual acts from the beginning until now. I'd have to take a much closer look at it. But I'm not conscious that there is; there may be.

Jones: Well, I'm not conscious of it either. I think it may be--you tell me--a matter of having the freedom to include this aspect of the human experience.

Price: Yeah.

Jones: Rather than simply affecting your manner of presentation.

Price: Well, I can think right now, for instance, that the notes that I kept for A Long and Happy Life, and I can remember very clearly writing down to myself in those notes sort of arguments about Rosacoke's and Wesley's sexuality. Is she or isn't she? And once she does, what's it like? And how does she perceive it, and how does he perceive it? And what actually occurs? And I can remember definitely saying I want this to be an act which is attractive to the reader--is not repulsive to a healthy reader--because I want the reader to share Rosacoke's and Wesley's feelings about it, though after that first

occurrence Rosa is pretty stricken. But what she's largely stricken by is her own extremely mixed motives in going through with it anyway.

Jones: And being called by another woman's name didn't help.

Price: Right. Exactly. Uhmmm. I was very conscious then, and I started making those notes when I was twenty-three, twenty-four years old, so from the very beginning of my professional career, I was very aware that erotic acts are both a wonderful boon for a writer but also an extremely charged force field and one that the writer has to calculate as carefully as he possibly can what the effect is going to be. I think I'm probably much more careful when I approach the area of a character's sexuality--I think I'm probably much more conscious as a writer when I approach sexual acts--than I am at any other point in a given narrative because I'm aware that you can lurch the wrong way and lose or gain readers in ways that you don't want to.

Jones: In following up on that, in many of the incidents of sexual intercourse or sexuality in a wide range of your novels, some of the same words reoccur--words like "gift," and "offer"

and "offered," and "honor," and "generous," and "gratitude." These words seem to imply an emphasis more on the emotional experience than on the physical one. Would you comment on that? Do you think that's true?

Price: I would just say that I think those are probably the responses of a helpfully, sensitive, intelligent lover, of either gender. We have our stereotypes about the brute male who hacks away and gets up or rolls over and goes to sleep. But I think that there are some mighty fine male lovers out there in the world and there are some very fine female ones--I guess I've just never been interested in the brutes very much. They've been handled in a lot of other people's work and in a lot of movies; and none of my characters, with the exception of poor psychotic Wave, has ever really approached sexuality in that way. I think Wesley, like Rob--like young Rob in The Surface of Earth--are perfectly capable of taking a sort of uncomplicated sexual enjoyment out of an encounter with a near stranger or a rank stranger. But I think when they get in the presence of someone for whom they feel

protective and emotions of tenderness and desires for a relationship of some duration, then I think their own abilities to refine their responses prove available to them.

Jones: Yes, in fact the language that describes these things is not physical at all but takes on almost a spiritual dimension.

Price: Yeah. Well, I would say that I think that's intentional. I don't have a little book that says, "Use these adjectives when you're talking about sex," but it doesn't surprise me to hear you say that certain words recur because I think those are qualities that I would attribute to what I call good sex.

Jones: All right. Now, if we define--and I know how you feel about labels, and I feel the same way-- if we define a writer with "feminine style"....

Price: Right.

Jones: As one who internalizes activity, somebody who is more concerned with interiority than with exteriority, how do you think this categorization does or does not apply to what you do in your work?

Price: I think the category, I think the words "feminine" and "masculine" are unfortunately misleading.

Jones: Yes, I think so too.

Price: Because our culture has so many other qualitative judgments about what those words mean, and the culture despises a masculine female and despises a feminine male; and so I think the words are unfortunately unsatisfactory for that reason. I would certainly think that yes, I feel that my work is ninety-five to one hundred percent about the insides of people's heads, and what the emotional weather inside their heads does literally to the organs of their bodies--their hands, their eyes, and their genitals, and their feet, and their legs, and everything else. And I've never been very interested in a fiction or narrative of appearances, of exteriors. I think it may be one of the reasons, for instance, that I gave up trying to be a graphic artist when I was in high school. I just, after years and years of thinking I was going to be a painter, somehow I got dissatisfied with the way things looked--with just the way things looked. Maybe

this is a highly sophisticated response of a sixty-one year old man to something that didn't seem that complex when it happened. But I think, you know,--I think it's interesting to notice, for instance, how many writers, poets and novelists, have started out doing a lot of drawing and painting and have ultimately put it aside or at least put it on a very side table and gone on with the more central thing, which is really an attempt to excavate as deeply as possible into human nature. And I think that's been my great interest. And it was my interest as a little child. I mean I remember very much wondering why "X" was doing "this" and why "Y" wasn't doing that. As a child, obviously being the total narcissists that children are, I always wanted to know why they were doing it to me or not doing it to me. But the older I got, I think I cast my net a little bit further afield, you know, than the one-on-one hunger to know why "X" is behaving in a certain way to me.

CONCLUSION

What most distinguishes Price's fiction is his effort to "excavate as deeply as possible into human nature" (Interview). And I think the key word here is "into." Price rarely concerns himself with external events alone. He acknowledges that external, observable consequences surface as a result of the "emotional weather" of his characters, but the focus of his work is "ninety-five to one-hundred percent about the insides of people's heads" (Interview).

In order to reveal the motivation and consequences of characters' choices, Price probes the interiors of their minds, consciously employing devices that provide access to their inner lives. His characters dream and then take action based on their dreams. They experience visions that provide resolution to conflict or impetus for action. They keep diaries and write lengthy letters. Or as Kate Vaiden and Blue Calhoun do, they write book length autobiographical epistles to relatives to explain and justify their behavior and ask for pardon and acceptance. In his effort to explore all aspects of human nature, Price presents the reader with both a rapist's and a

victim's perspective of an assault. Rosa's diary reveals both her physical and emotional response to the attack. But Price's treatment of Wave is more complicated. Without condemning or condoning Wave's behavior, Price enters Wave's head to explore the "why" behind his actions.

One other significant way that Price reveals the "emotion weather" of his characters is by his selection of first person narration, which is above all a stylistic choice. It shapes every perception that the reader has; and in the attempt to answer the "why" behind certain behavior, this choice can raise as many questions as it satisfies, particularly if the author's gender differs from the character whose voice is assumed as is the case in Kate Vaiden: Would a woman really respond in this manner? How would a male know the workings of the female mind? And even though Price writes as a first person male in Blue Calhoun, Tongues of Angels, and several shorter works, his choice of the first person female narrative voice reveals a way that he probes and responds to his own interior voice--a wish to explore the "spiritual potential" of his mother's life.

All of these devices--dreams, narrative voice, visions, interior monologues--represent conscious attempts on Price's part to delve beneath the surface, to present

something more than a "fiction or narrative of appearances, of exteriors" (Interview). A close reader, however, will discover less obvious ways that Price mines the interior, frequently in ways that reveal much about the workings of Price's mind. By his own admission, writing for Price is basically an unconscious act (1993 UNC-C presentation and 1994 Interview). The analysis of the three passages from A Long and Happy Life (Chapter I) clearly demonstrates that syntax and diction mirror Rosacoke's progression. Yet Price says this was not conscious on his part. He simply wished to understand and present her "emotional evolution and progress" (Interview). This desire to reveal the "emotional evolution and progress" of a specific character informs all of Price's fiction, whether the character is male or female. Price's treatment of sexuality demonstrates, perhaps better than any other approach to an aspect of human behavior, his preoccupation with "the emotional weather inside people's heads" (Interview). In portraying an act which begins and ends with external, observable, physical activity, Price turns from depicting the obvious and focuses instead on the internal--"the emotional weather." The language is erotic, but not often physically explicit. Instead, words with spiritual connotations recur. The participants "offer" and "honor."

They receive a "gift" and feel "gratitude." Price's language forces the reader to begin with the internal and supply the external, if he or she wishes, rather than the reverse.

The committed reader of Price's fiction must recognize one other thing: deep digging necessitates a two-pronged instrument. Not only should the reader be aware of Price's consciously employed devices for illuminating the inner, under-the-surface lives of his characters; but she must also look closely at Price's own, under-the-surface, unconscious choices which emphasize his focus on interiority as much as his conscious ones. Two interiors, the writer's and the reader's, fuse to present fictions that are much more than narratives of appearances. He truly does "excavate as deeply as possible into human nature" and give us characters who inspire us to reassess our own lives.

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