

# THOMAS MABRY: THE FORGOTTEN FUGITIVE

-

Hannah Johnson

Thomas Mabry: The Forgotten Fugitive

A Thesis

Presented to

The College of Graduate Studies

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in English

Hannah Johnson

May, 2012

Copyrighted © 2012

By

Hannah Johnson

All Rights Reserved

May, 2012

To the College of Graduate Studies:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Hannah Johnson entitled "Thomas Mabry: The Forgotten Fugitive." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.



Dr. Steven Ryan, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and

Recommend its acceptance:



Dr. David Guest



Dr. Linda Barnes

Accepted for the Council:



Dean, College of Graduate Studies



## Statement of Permission to Use

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's degree at Austin Peay State University, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgement of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may be granted by my major professor, or in his absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature H Johnson

Date 1 May 2012

*Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* is the best by far of any published biography, and this paper frequently cites it, especially in Chapter II.

In addition to other biographies, this paper relies on interviews with Mabry's family to provide a more comprehensive overview of his life. His daughter, Susan Menees, was still young when he died, but she answered as many questions as she could about her father's views, actions, and relationships. Her cousin Elinor Thurman, a former librarian at Austin Peay University, was able to fill in many gaps and explain some of the more complicated family connections. An interview with Mabry's cousin, Lawson Mabry, and Lawson's mother, Harriet, also supplied information about family history. Having done research for many years, Lawson's records encompass generations of Mabrys. This entire family is interested in their history, and their research is ever ongoing, ensuring new information about the family, and Mabry in particular, will surface in the future.

By combining biographies and interviews, this paper is able to give an overview of Mabry's life, establishing his views of race and class. A review of his short stories demonstrates how these beliefs shaped his writing and distanced him from the conservative agenda of the Fugitives. While Mabry's life is intriguing, with his numerous relationships to famous artists and tense interactions with conservatives, his fiction deserves the most attention. Mabry is a talented and unique writer for any period, but especially as an author using his fiction to stand against the racism rampant in Southern society in the 1940s and '50s.

## Dedication

To Dr. Steven Ryan, for setting off the chain of events that led me here.

To Dr. Jeanie Randall, for saving me my first semester at Austin Peay.

To Dr. Dwonna Goldstone, for teaching me that professors are people, too.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Mabry family for letting me into their homes. I could never have started writing this paper without the help of Susan Menees. Lawson Mabry, Harriet Mabry, and Elinor Thurman also never faltered in facing my barrage of questions. Lawson even set me loose one afternoon on his numerous boxes and folders of family records, which I greatly enjoyed. I am honored to have had the opportunity to come into the family and learn so much. I also must convey immense gratitude for being fed so well during interviews. For a poor college student, this is no small matter.

Of course, I would never have made it through grad school, let alone written this paper, without the encouragement of Dr. Steven Ryan. He helped with every stage of the writing process for this project and never hesitated to let me barge into his office, even if it was three times in one day.



## Critical Influences

Thomas Dabney Mabry, Jr. has been largely overlooked, even by scholars interested in Southern writers. When his name does come up, it is usually only through his relation to other artists and writers. While his relationships with people such as Walker Evans, Nella Larsen, and Caroline Gordon are an interesting component of his life, he should be examined as an author in his own right. His fiction sets him apart from the more conservative Southern writers of his time, namely the Southern Agrarian group also known as the Fugitives.

The Fugitives, a group of men at Vanderbilt University, were known for their idealization of the Southern, agrarian lifestyle, and they proposed a return to this way of life. Mabry attended Vanderbilt with many of these men and developed lasting relationships with a few of them. His views of race and class differed significantly from theirs, however, eventually causing him to leave the university. Mabry abhorred the racism inherent in the Fugitives' philosophy, and his associations with African Americans at Fisk alienated him within the white, conservative university.

His writing reflects many of the same concerns as writings by other Fugitives, preoccupied with the Southern agricultural lifestyle, yet he also critiques the Southern class structure in his stories, highlighting the ways society condones and perpetuates racism. Mabry's stories have many elements in common with some of his contemporary writers. His protagonists are young males struggling with the pain of growing up, following the tradition of modernists such as Joyce, who wrote about initiation into adulthood. "The Indian Feather," one of Mabry's short stories, also exhibits the New

Critical influence prevalent in modernism. In this way, he shares traits with writers such as Caroline Gordon.

Mabry is especially important as a writer of the twentieth century, however, because of his differences from people like Gordon and the Fugitives. A poststructuralist approach reveals his determination to call attention to the mistreatment of African Americans within Southern society. His stories explore how race, gender, and class combine to oppress, marginalizing entire groups of people. This aspect of his fiction sets him apart from the Fugitives. Like them, he valued the agricultural lifestyle of the South, but he rejected their conservative views and their avoidance of the issue of race, or their outright racism. Mabry acknowledged the South's role in subjugating African Americans through slavery, and furthermore he emphasized the South's continued oppression of them in a class system designed to keep them at the bottom. This aspect of Mabry's writing is one of the most interesting and compelling elements of his fiction, ensuring he is a writer worth scholarly attention.

This paper provides biography on Mabry, as well as a review of his short stories. His biography reveals his influence in the artistic realm of New York City in the thirties and the relationships with numerous famous artists and writers. It also recounts not only how his views of race were shaped, but how these views affected his interactions with more conservative Southerners, such as Allen Tate. Since little attention has been devoted to Mabry, he is only briefly mentioned in biographies about other artists. Biographies on Nella Larsen, Walker Evans, and Caroline Gordon provide the most information about Mabry, but these are often only a few sentences. George Hutchinson's *In Search of Nella*

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Chapter I: Biography .....	2
Chapter II: 1930s and '40s .....	18
Chapter III: Review of the Literature .....	30
"The Indian Feather" .....	31
"The Vault" .....	45
"Another Season" .....	51
"Lula Borrow" .....	56
References .....	65
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography.....	67

## Introduction

In the 1930s, James Weldon Johnson said of Thomas Dabney Mabry, Jr., “I have never met a finer young man than Mr. Mabry, and as a young Southerner, he is entirely unique in my experience” (qtd. in Hutchinson 413). Thomas Mabry’s uniqueness, as Johnson called it, did indeed make him distinct from many other writers, and especially Southern writers, of the 1930s and 40s. In his life and literature, Mabry stood against the tidal wave of racism in a country dominated by Jim Crow laws. His life reflects a liberal and sensitive soul determined to make a difference. He frequently associated with Harlem Renaissance writers, endeavored to help all artists—regardless of race—and even gave up his job at a prominent white school in Nashville to work for one of the first accredited African American colleges, Fisk University.

His fiction also emphasizes his liberal views on race. While struggling with the hardships of growing up, his young protagonists—white, Southern males—are often forced to confront their own perceptions of race. They either discover their own carefully hidden racism, such as in “Another Season,” or become detached from their racist families because of their evolving understanding of humanity, as Wade McFarland does in “Lula Borrow.” Even when race is not at the forefront of the story, like in “The Vault,” the story is carefully constructed to remind the reader of the social order that reinforces racism, as well as to make it apparent that this order is mindlessly accepted. These stories have many autobiographical elements and are all recognizably set in his hometown of Clarksville, Tennessee. His biography reveals how Thomas Mabry, a man ahead of his time, evolved into the writer and Southerner James Weldon Johnson so admired.



## CHAPTER I

### Biography

Thomas Dabney Mabry, Jr. was born July 22, 1903 to Nellie Barnes Runyon and Thomas Dabney Mabry. Mabry's parents met when they were sixteen, but Thomas Senior's parents refused to let them marry so young, and he left Clarksville to travel. He fought in the Spanish-American-Filipino War but later returned to marry Nellie Runyon when he heard she was still unmarried. Tom Junior was the oldest of three children and had two younger sisters, Nellie and Iris, with eight years age difference between each of them. While the Mabry's only had three children, they were part of a large family; Thomas Senior was the oldest boy of 12 children. The youngest was a girl about the same age as Tom, and he grew up playing with his aunt.

Little is known about Tom's childhood or his relationship with his parents, for Tommie did not talk about these topics with his children. His daughter Susan believes his relationship with his parents, especially his father, was a strained one and that this tension possibly shaped the father-son relationships often featured in his short stories.

Records show he graduated Clarksville High School in 1921. Early on he showed an affinity for writing and creativity; he was on the annual staff, possibly at the urging of his favorite teacher, Lucy Bailey. Bailey was an English teacher and mentored both Tom and Robert Penn Warren, Tom's close friend. Caroline Gordon taught him French, establishing a relationship that would last a lifetime and influence his creative writing.

Susan thinks some of her father's happiest days were spent on the family farm known as Poplar Hill, which had been in the family for generations. Tom spent much of his time on the farm with his grandmother, as well as camping with other boys, and Tom and his sisters, possibly the entire family, talked of Poplar Hill incessantly. When her

husband died, his grandmother's children convinced her to move to town, so she would not be alone on the farm through the winters. Though they moved her to a nice house, still standing across from Clarksville Academy and now known as the Forbes-Mabry house, she always talked about her days on the farm.

Though the house at Poplar Hill passed in and out of the family during times of financial hardship, the house and all the surrounding land was eventually acquired by the government for a temporary camp during World War II, around 1942. The land was a prime spot for such a camp, with boiling springs that supplied an endless source of water, and after the war, the military turned it into a permanent fort. In Fort Campbell today, there is still a Mabry family cemetery, as well as a separate cemetery for the Mabry slaves, though most of these graves were moved to another location when Fort Campbell took the land. For years, the family house continued to stand, prompting Tom to visit it one time after the government bought it.

The family farm of Poplar Hill had been in the family for generations, providing an extensive family history that Susan thinks her father felt heavily. John Elliot Mabry owned the farm three generations before Tom was born; his records show the family owned numerous slaves, although many of these were probably inherited and not bought. While the records seem to indicate the Mabry family educated their slaves, as well as insisted on humane conditions while hiring slaves out to other farmers, from a post-slavery viewpoint and to a man of Tom's sensibilities, one can easily see how this history could weigh heavily on him. Thomas Lawson Mabry, John Elliot's son, inherited the farm. His ledger indicates that many of the slaves became sharecroppers when slavery was abolished, such as Harry, who took on the family name of Mabry, a common

occurrence among the newly freed Mabry slaves. Both John and Thomas Lawson Mabry's account books can be found at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Tom's father was a tobacco businessman, buying up the famous Dark Fire tobacco from local farmers. He owned a tobacco warehouse on Commerce Street, called the Mabry Tobacco Company. After Mabry Senior's death, the company left the family but stayed a warehouse for years, eventually became a salvage store, though finally the building was torn down to make way for the student housing University Landing.

Mabry Senior would often travel to local farms and buy tobacco to bring to the warehouse. Tom sometimes went with his father to the farms, learning about the business and how to grade tobacco. In his later years, he said he found that interesting and enjoyed talking to all the different people involved, the owners and workers and sharecroppers.

When Tom eventually moved back to Tennessee from New York to farm, he found that people remembered his father as a man of integrity. Mabry Senior was one of the few tobacco buyers the local farmers believed to be honest and willing to deal with them fairly in his transactions. In a time of tension between tobacco buyers and sellers, this was a rare and valued quality in a buyer, one Tom was proud to discover upon his return to Tennessee. This strife in the tobacco business was so prominent that it plays a role in many works by Southern, and especially Clarksville, writers, including Caroline Gordon and Robert Penn Warren. As an examination of Mabry's short stories, provided later in this paper, shows his works also include the presence of such tense issues.

Tom and his family grew up in Clarksville at 816 Franklin Street, just down the street from his father's tobacco warehouse. The house is still standing, though now it is Foston Funeral Home. While growing up on Franklin Street, Tom's family employed the help of an African American woman named Lula. Tom and his sisters were very fond of



their cook Lula; his affection for her may have helped establish his views on race that make him such a remarkable figure for his time. Although the story seems to be largely fictional, “Lula Borrow” is loosely based on his experiences growing up with a woman who is both a member of the family and distinctly not. Tom and his sisters continued to talk about Lula for the rest of their lives, especially Nellie, who Lula worked for in Nashville years later. Susan remembers her father wanting Lula’s recipes decades after she had cooked for him in his youth.

A lack of information from Tom’s early years stems partly from tension in his relationships with his parents, especially his father. Tom seems to have found his parents unsympathetic with what he desired out of life. As a businessman, Mabry Senior wanted his son to continue in his footsteps, possibly taking over the family tobacco business, but Tom was always creatively inclined and resisted his father’s wishes. Tom rarely spoke of his father; the only time Susan remembers her father speaking of his dad was when they moved to Tennessee and he was pleased with Mabry Senior’s reputation.

Mabry Senior’s sternness towards his son is not surprising. As the oldest son, when his father died in 1902, Mabry Senior was forced to take responsibility for the family, a situation which parallels the young man’s circumstances in Tom’s short story “The Indian Feather.” Mabry Senior married and had Tom soon after his father’s death, but he was also burdened with 11 siblings to help provide for. Perhaps these conditions shed some light on the aspects of Mabry Senior’s character that drove his son away.

His mother, Nellie, was more indulgent, having studied art at the Clarksville Female Academy. She encouraged his artistic inclinations, but their relationship was strained by their difference in temperament. While Tom was a sensitive man, keenly aware of others feelings, he seems to have considered his mother “silly and sentimental.”



After graduating high school, Tom left to go to Harvard in 1921, and his trip north forever changed his life. In a letter written to Walter White many years later, Tom recalled the events that shaped his views of race. Before this incident he admits he subscribed to the Southern racism he had absorbed growing up, but stopping in Chicago on his way to Harvard, he attended *The Emperor Jones*, a play by Eugene O'Neill, and to Mabry's "horror and dismay," he realized he was seated next to two African American men (qtd. in Hutchinson 410). He demanded a change of seats, but the action of the play, in which an African American escapes from prison, sets himself up as emperor of an island, but is forced to run from a rebellion against him, as well as the talented lead actor Charles Gilpin, captivated Tom. His letter to White states, "Suddenly the absurdity of my position as a human being flashed over me and I was profoundly ashamed" (qtd. in Hutchinson 410). This experience stayed with him, leading him to contemplate the issue of race.

Mabry graduated with his BA in 1925 and spent much of the next few decades of his life in the North, though he also spent time overseas and visited in the South. In 1926, he was in Paris at the same time as Walker Evans, though they did not meet; these two men would eventually become close friends, with Mabry helping Evans to establish himself as an artist through gallery exhibitions and book contracts (Rathbone 28).

He was also forced to stay in a sanitarium in Switzerland for a year in 1928. The doctors thought he had tuberculosis, but it turned out to be an injury from skiing. His sister Iris made him a photo album while he was in the sanitarium, called *A Day in Mother's Life*. This album begins with his mother's morning routine, starting well before eight o'clock and includes pictures of the family throughout the day.

Tom split his time between New York and Tennessee until his father died in 1929 (Hutchinson 412). A clipping from an obituary for Mabry Senior, tucked away in Lawson Mabry's records, cites heart problems as the cause of death. Elinore's mother recalled his wife Nellie saying that when he died, she died because she adored him so much, although she did not physically die until 1937. Nellie had a disease that involved paralysis of the spine, leaving her unable to move from the neck down and resulting in a painful death.

Tom graduated from Vanderbilt University with his masters in 1932. At Vanderbilt, he came to know Allen Tate and other members of the Southern Agrarians though he was several years younger than most of them. As a group that longed to return to the agricultural lifestyle they felt the South had lost, Tom shared their love of agriculture but differed significantly from them when it came to views of race, separating him from the group that had trouble untangling their idealization of the old plantation South from the issue of slavery.

Tom worked at Vanderbilt after his graduation but would eventually break with the institution after a confrontation with Allen Tate over an interracial gathering Tom had planned. When Tate objected to the inclusion of African Americans in a Southern social setting, the men exchanged heated words. This conflict and Vanderbilt's conservative views on race led Mabry to leave Vanderbilt to work instead for Fisk University as an assistant to James Weldon Johnson (Hutchinson 418). He also taught English classes for the two years he was there. Tom was likely the only white professor at Fisk University during this time.

Before long he moved to New York and became the Executive Director for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). He already had experience working with artists;

Walker Evans's biographer, James Mellow, states that Mabry worked as the assistant director of the John Becker Gallery, which is where Evans and Mabry met (241).

According to George Hutchinson, Mabry held this position after his father died in 1929 (412). Another of Evans's biographers claims Mabry was the gallery assistant to Julien Levy when he moved to New York (Hambourg et al. 100). Regardless of previous work experience, his job at MoMA enabled him to help launch careers for artists such as Walker Evans. He worked there from 1935-39, until he was fired, seemingly for not reprimanding a colleague that offended the new president, Nelson Rockefeller.

Tom met his future wife, Ethel Haven, at the MoMA; Ethel was on the Junior Advisory Board when it was just getting organized in the 1930s. She was an aspiring artist, painting water colors and landscapes. Ethel sold some paintings and had a show at a gallery in New York City, but after her marriage, she only took up painting occasionally as a hobby.

With the advent of WWII, Tom tried to get into the military but was rejected because of his back injury, so he moved to Washington D.C. and became involved in the war effort. In 1941, he was in Public Relations, in charge of opening the national art gallery, though by 1942, he was in Educational Relations. From 1942-45, Tom was Assistant Chief of the Graphics Division of the Office of War Information. He got some of his friends, such as Ben Shahn and other artists, involved in making posters and other propaganda to be dropped out of planes over Europe. After running into Walker Evans in September of 1943, he tried to get Evans a job in the graphics department, but according to Evans's biographer, Evans did not actually work with Mabry (Mellow 460).

Although he was working in Washington D. C., Tom married Ethel Haven in Trinity Church on Wall Street around 1942. Because of the war, it was a small affair, but



Ethel's sister did throw them a party at her house to celebrate. Within a year or two after their marriage, Tom and Ethel moved back to New York.

When he returned to New York City, he began to work at Time Inc. While he worked there, Mabry also concentrated on writing fiction. He met with his former teacher and lifelong friend, Caroline Gordon, to discuss a novel he was apparently working on, but he left this session "white and wan" (Waldron 272). Nevertheless, Gordon continued to influence his writing, including his short story "Indian Feather," which demonstrates Gordon's influence with its distinctly New Critical quality.

Tom and Ethel's first child, Susan, was born in 1944, with their second daughter, Eliza, following soon after in '46. When Susan was one year old, the family lived in an apartment in New York with Ethel's father. Because of the war, it was difficult to get an apartment, and Susan recalls the one they finally obtained was so large she could ride her tricycle in the hallway. Ethel's father died before they moved out of the apartment.

The family moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in 1948 to a house Ethel owned before she married. Tom was still working at Time Inc. and would take the train back and forth to come home on the weekends. He was also trying to write at this time. The old, colonial house the family was living in had a stable, one section of which Tom converted into a study. His young daughters were not allowed to disturb him while he was working there, and Susan remembers she could smell cigar smoke reeking out of his study.

Although Tom had been anxious to leave the South as a young man, the short stories he wrote while he was in Massachusetts center on distinctly Southern issues and can be easily identified as set in Clarksville, Tennessee. The detailed and accurate descriptions of Clarksville sights and roads are impressive. All of his published works were written while he lived in Stockbridge, and all seem to point to a yearning for the



Southern way of life he experienced growing up, including its tensions and complications.

Although he was apparently preoccupied with the South, he also loved the Berkshire countryside. In an interview for a newspaper article, he discussed his family's negative reaction to him leaving the South to go to school at Harvard, an action his grandmother "considered absolutely disgraceful," though if he had not left Clarksville, he maintained, "I would not have discovered the hills of Berkshire County, which I have grown to love almost as much as my family loves them" (Bass). For Tom, the way of life in Massachusetts was different from Iowa, where he was living and teaching when this interview took place, and he missed being able to walk the countryside freely, since in Iowa City heavy traffic made it dangerous and he felt walking was "looked upon with great suspicion" (Bass). Despite writing about the South, he apparently felt that Berkshire County was a home for him.

He also worked on his novel while he was in Massachusetts, with the help of Caroline Gordon, but he never finished this work. Even after several years, he was never satisfied with it. Susan believes it was about race relations and based on actual people he knew, with incidents between black and whites that he was elaborating. Although it survives in manuscript form, the family has had trouble locating it.

The Mabry home in Stockbridge frequently saw visitors, such as Caroline Gordon. She might stay and help him with his writing, or one summer they began to work together on a play about André Gide. As her letters to Allen Tate show, they also went to Jones Beach during this same visit with the Mabry family; Gordon's letters detail how she viewed the beach as "divine" (qtd. in Waldron 301). Although this particular trip did not include Allen Tate, he often accompanied Gordon on her trips. Despite some tension

arising from Tate and Tom's experiences at Vanderbilt together twenty years earlier, Tate was welcome to stay with the Mabrys.

Gordon was not the only one to regularly visit the Mabrys, for Walker Evans did so as well. When traveling to New York, Evans often stayed with Tom and his family. Their second daughter, Eliza, was Evans's godchild, and he sometimes "read her passages from *Alice in Wonderland*" (Rathbone 229). Some of his collections of photographs include pictures of Eliza, such as her on the beach striving to get out of her dress or her organized bedroom stuffed full of dolls and neat rows of ponies. Eliza was even one of three heirs to his estate in his final will (Rathbone 293). Evidently, Susan and Eliza grew up in a household where it was commonplace to have well-known writers and artists stop by for a visit.

Family members also frequented the household, though sometimes this still meant the presence of an artist. While Tom's sister Nellie had moved to Nashville, his youngest sister, Iris, was a dancer in New York. Iris worked with Martha Graham for a while and tried to organize her own ballet company, though she wrote home that a negative comment from Graham had seriously undermined her chances of success in that endeavor. She married Ralph Gilbert, who composed all of the music for her dances. Although she had many performances, a streak of bad luck, such as twisting an ankle before a show or a prop falling on her, prevented her from rising to fame. This bad luck created money problems for her and Gilbert, which in turn produced tension between Iris and her brother Tom when she frequently approached him for help.

In 1952, Tom was asked to teach a Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa for the winter semester. He moved to Iowa and rented a house, temporarily leaving his family behind to avoid infection from a polio outbreak. Eventually the girls received their

shots, and Ethel Mabry felt comfortable following her husband to Iowa with their two young daughters. Susan recalls this as a fun time in her life, such as when her mother took them to a dude ranch in Arizona for spring break, although in a newspaper interview from around this time, Mabry declared, “My two young daughters . . . ask me every week, at least, ‘How many more weeks before we go back to Massachusetts?’” (Bass). While their stay in Iowa may have been pleasant, the family preferred to live in Stockbridge.

Tom returned for a second semester of teaching at Iowa the winter of the following year. The family stayed in a house near a park and a pond, and Tom taught his daughters how to ice skate that winter. A university student skating on the Iowa River had recently been essentially beheaded when the ice broke, so he carefully kept his daughters on the safer pond near the house. Susan remembers hearing the adults talk about the incident, causing her to have nightmares, though now she fondly recalls the time spent with her father.

Teaching these workshops may not have been such a pleasurable time for Tom, however. In *Close Connections*, Caroline Gordon’s biographer Ann Waldron relates Gordon’s disapproval of the way the workshops were organized. She did not like that they “spent two hours discussing a story by a student. Not one word—or hardly a word—of what might be wrong or right with it, just round and round about what his ‘meaning’ was” (297). Tom agreed with Gordon’s assessment of the class’s structure but was teaching the workshop with two other teachers. According to Gordon, Tom felt “these sessions just drive him crazy and he can’t stem the tide all by himself” (qtd. in Waldron 297).



After his second year teaching workshops, Tom and his family moved back to Stockbridge, where they stayed until 1958. Tom had wanted to buy a farm in the South for many years, and he began the search for their future home well before his family left Massachusetts. In the mid-1950s, he made multiple trips to Clarksville and its surrounding areas, hunting for property. He would have dinner with family in Clarksville often as he looked at practically every farm in Tennessee and Kentucky. He even moved his family south while he continued to search. Ethel and the girls lived in Nashville for two years while he looked for a suitable property.

Finally a friend showed him a farm right over the border into Kentucky. The house was in bad shape, with plaster falling down and crumbling columns on the front porch, but it had beautiful woodwork that his wife fell in love with. There was a “boy’s room” that was a separate part of the house they could not enter. Susan remembers her excitement with her sister Eliza as they imagined a wealth of treasures hidden in this room. When the Mabrys finally knocked a hole in the wall, the entire room was filled with chicken manure.

The move could not have been easy for Tom and Ethel. They were already in their fifties, moving into a house that needed a lot of work, on a farm that would naturally require constant attention. Ethel was also a New Yorker having to adjust to a drastic change in lifestyle. Susan remembers her mother panicking at the sight of a “cow-patty” when they first moved to the farm.

While writing and creativity had partly defined his earlier years, farming seems to have become a passion. Tom did not write much after moving south again; the farm required most of his attention. He did join a literary group near Hopkinsville, the Athenaeum Club, when they first moved and also helped write a few speeches for



Edward Breathitt when Breathitt was running for governor of Kentucky, but Tom never sat down to write any more novels or short stories.

A single incident depicts the change of mindset farming caused in Tom Mabry. One day after the family had moved down to this farm, Robert Penn Warren was visiting some family in Guthrie, so he stopped by to visit Tom. Their former English teacher from Clarksville High, Lucy Bailey, happened to come to visit while both of them were there. Considering her profession and their passion for writing, she was expecting an interesting literary discussion, but they began talking about the fancy hogs Tom had just bought instead. They discussed the hogs at length, until they went to look at them. She did not see either one of them again that afternoon.

Hogs were an important part of the Mabry farm. When they first moved, Tom bought some Danish Landrace hogs, which had an extra rib and provided more meat. This meat was used to help pay the sharecroppers that worked on the farm, along with coal and living quarters. Tom named the three sows Camelia, Amorelis, and Mary Francis, after his first three girlfriends. Apparently, they were none too pleased when word of this reached them in Clarksville.

The hogs were sent to a neighboring farm for slaughter, although Tom's short story "Another Season" makes it clear he was quite familiar with this aspect of farm life. He was never one to become insensitive, however; after one of the piglets was abandoned by its mother, he brought it to the house to raise. Susan recalls little Henrietta as a wonderful pet who was convinced she was a dog. This compassion for animals was characteristic of Thomas Mabry; he could never stand to see suffering, a trait that helped to create his disgust of the racial inequality rampant in America.

Susan was sent to boarding school in Virginia soon after they moved south, and her sister was sent to school with her two years later. Consequently, they missed much of the day to day action of their parents' life on the farm, except for during their school breaks. Most of their time at home was during the summer, when they helped with small chores, such as watering the plants and weeding the vegetable garden. Otherwise, they spent much of their time outside, playing and walking.

Some of Susan's fondest memories of her father are of picnics. He would take them to a big spring on the property and cook a breakfast of bacon and eggs. Even during their winter vacations, they would put hot soup in flasks, wrap up, and go sit by the creek. The girls also played hide and seek with their father, or chased him around the yard. As a man in his late fifties, he spared no energy as a doting father. Aside from picnics and games, a regular day on the farm required Tom to manage the daily necessities, seeing what the hands needed to get them started on the day's work.

Ethel's life on the farm was a little different. Although she had to do housework, a substantial job by itself considering the size of their house, she also had help. The family employed an African American woman, Sally, to come and cook for them. While Ethel made good fruit pies, Sally was an excellent cook, who made the best fried chicken, biscuits, peach preserves, and chocolate cake. Susan still misses her cooking, wishing she could copy Sally's recipes, sounding reminiscent of the way Tom talked about Lula. Indeed, Susan believes Sally reminded her father of Lula; she became an integral part of the family and took care of them all.

Otherwise, Ethel spent time reading and had friends visit from Nashville. The Mabrys frequently went to visit friends in Clarksville and Nashville, as well. Ethel was often sick, prompting the Mabrys to hire an English nurse. While this woman helped raise

the girls, providing the discipline and watchful eye necessary, the Mabrys always took time to nurture their daughters. Tom and Ethel read to the girls every night, Susan recalls, even once they got old enough a bedtime story was no longer strictly necessary. Grimm's fairy tales, *Charlotte's Web*, and *Stuart Little* were some of the their favorites, though Susan, always "horse-crazy," begged her mother to read the *Black Stallion* books over and over again.

Tom did not try to control his daughters' ambitions, refraining from urging them to take creative writing classes or to go into one particular field. He did become excited when Susan took English lit, but accepted that she was more interested in biology than English. He was critical of her writing, though, and suggested she read E. B. White's *Elements of Style* to help her with clarification.

In his later years, Tom Mabry did become more conservative and less tolerant than he had previously been. Although he had spent time with African Americans earlier in his life, they were professors and writers, educated people interested in the welfare of their race. Working with African American sharecroppers on the farm was more difficult and trying, however, and Tom quickly became exasperated with the level of incompetence he encountered.

Although they sometimes made him laugh, he was more frequently irritated. He tried to be patient, but sometimes felt like they were taking advantage of his generosity. One sharecropper, Morris, was frequently so drunk he would try to shoot his wife. Another man, Ernest, who sometimes worked for them, ended up in Western State Hospital in Hopkinsville, possibly for drinking, and would send letters to Tom asking for help; Tom would go get him, but the man would usually end up there again. While his views were shaped more by the person than the race, and not all sharecroppers were



African American, most were, causing him to shift his views to a more conservative conception of race in his later years.

Having fought with depression for years, Thomas Mabry killed himself on September 29, 1968. His depression was compounded by heart problems; Tom had already seen a few doctors and an upcoming surgery was a distinct possibility. Taking care of the farm was also burdensome, and Susan believes it all accumulated until it was too much. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, his lawyer and a best friend were at the house for dinner, and during the desert Mabry excused himself to go upstairs where he shot himself. Although Mabry may or may not have been aware of it, suicide ran in the family. His great-grandfather, John Elliot Mabry, had killed himself in a similar manner, while people were present for a party in his home.

After his death, Susan and Eliza had to take over the farm, though some of Tom's local friends also helped. Susan was working on Wall Street and Eliza was at New York University when their father died. Within a year, they had both moved back to the farm. Harriet recalls their mother, Ethel, lamenting the necessity of it; the girls, around 24 and 22 years-old, were working all hours of the day, lifting fifty pound bags of fertilizer, and operating heavy machinery.

Thomas Mabry is buried in the garden on the farm as he requested. Ethel, who died in 1989, is buried next to him. Susan still lives there, taking on the full-time job of keeping up the house, as well as the farm.



## CHAPTER II

1930s and '40s

The thirties were an exciting time in Thomas Mabry's life as he interacted with many artists in New York City, relationships established in the later twenties. Most of those relationships continued into the forties. Some artists, such as Walker Evans, would remain lifelong friends. He was not just friends with writers and artists; his job at the Museum of Modern Art placed him at the center of the artistic world and allowed him to help some artists further their careers.

Mabry had already left the South once, for upon graduating from Clarksville High School he moved north to attend Harvard. He then decided to go back to the South but would eventually tire of the conservative politics and return to the North. This back and forth movement helped shape and reflects his liberal views. After graduating from Harvard, Mabry spent time abroad and also worked at the John Becker Art Gallery (Hutchinson 412). In a letter to Walter White, Mabry revealed that in 1931, writing a review of *I'll Take My Stand*, the Southern Agrarians' manifesto, drove him to return to the South.

The Agrarian manifesto, written by men such as Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, states the group's principles in the introduction, which pits "Agrarian versus Industrial" (ix). They believe a true agrarian is "opposed to the industrial society" and call for a revival of the agricultural lifestyle the South had lost (xviii). Admitting the need for industrialism, they nevertheless want the South to be primarily agricultural, claiming "the theory of agrarianism is that the culture of the soil is the best and most sensitive of vocations, and that therefore it should have the economic preference and enlist the maximum number of workers" (xix). Although Mabry grew up in a farming community

and eventually became a farmer himself, the Agrarian manifesto disturbed him. The Agrarians, also known as the Fugitives, ignore the injustices of segregation as they call for a revival of the old southern ways, conveniently forgetting that the “maximum number of workers” during the time they are idealizing were slaves.

In his letter to Walter White, Mabry wrote “I felt impelled to make a stand against the reactionary selfishness of the New Agrarians. I decided to return South” (qtd. in Hutchinson 412). In his return, he would choose to dwell in the very center of the Agrarian group, Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He was granted an assistantship there and began working on his Master’s degree.

His manner of returning to Tennessee shows how opposite his opinions were to the Southerners who prompted him to return. Having met Nella Larsen in New York City, possibly at James Weldon Johnson’s home, Mabry travelled to Nashville with her, where she wanted to join her husband, who was teaching at Fisk University. Her biographer Thadious Davis reveals that on the drive south “she pretended to be white whenever they arranged hotel accommodations, Mabry’s race enabl[ing] them to carry out the deception without difficulty” (424). Mabry had no objection to traveling with an African American woman for days at a time or to the idea of her passing as a white female.

Mabry’s difference from the conservatives at Vanderbilt would quickly become apparent and eventually drive him to leave the school. When James Weldon Johnson moved to Nashville to teach creative writing classes at Fisk, Mabry was excited to incorporate his friend from New York into his circle of Nashville friends. Mabry invited Johnson to a party of his, set for January 23, 1932, extending the invitation to the visiting Langston Hughes; the invitations also encompassed his friends from Vanderbilt,

including the Agrarians, as well as some of his professors (Davis 403). This incident would explode with conflict, providing a dramatic reminder of racial prejudice for Johnson and Hughes and a wakeup call to Mabry.

Allen Tate's reaction to his invitation was decisive. He wrote Mabry a letter, responding to the invitation to "bring a pretty woman" by writing a letter stating "the most beautiful woman he knew was his colored cook but her 'sense of decorum' would prevent her from coming" (Levy 327). His issue was not with Johnson and Hughes *per se*; he felt they were both "very interesting writers" and "would like to meet them," assuming this meeting take place in New York or Paris, but in the South "such a meeting would be ambiguous" (qtd. in Hutchinson 410). In the letter, Tate goes on to expound his "theory of racial relations," insisting "there should be no social intercourse between the races unless we are willing for that to lead to marriage," a theory which he claims to have gotten from "the colored man who milks [his] cows" (qtd. in Hutchinson 410). Although he states that he regrets these "unfortunate limitations of the social system," he did not feel inclined to "'expend any effort' to change the situation" (qtd. in Hutchinson 410; Levy 327).

Mabry did not shy away from confrontation and wrote a letter back to Tate, criticizing both his views and his argument. The circumstances in which Tate claimed he would meet Johnson and Hughes are nothing more than "nauseous parties certain foolish people give," Mabry wrote, "where negroes are invited merely because it is considered smart" (qtd. in Hutchinson 410). He goes on to say that he does not go to such parties because any person who respects African Americans knows that this is demeaning. For Tate to "defend an economic and social domination upon the idea of respect for the subject race" is "an inexcusable bungling of words and emotions" (qtd. in Hutchinson



410). Mabry was offended that Tate would try to pass his racial prejudices off as respect for a race that wanted to be kept separate.

Tate responded to Mabry's letter, admitting to "moral lassitude," but claiming that he also had wanted to "spare both Hughes and Johnson any humiliating experiences in their encounters with whites" (qtd. in Levy 327). He also wanted to remain friends with Mabry (Hutchinson 410). Although this exchange would have some serious consequences for Mabry, he did remain friends with Tate, more or less, throughout the rest of his life, though his attachment was primarily to Caroline Gordon, Tate's wife. While Tate and Mabry never saw eye to eye on these kinds of issues, they were at least able to have interesting discussions.

Tate was not ashamed of his "theory of racial relations," for he also passed a copy of his first letter around the department and sent it to a New York magazine editor for publication (Hutchinson 412). Indeed, there did not seem to be a reason for him to be ashamed, as people who had already accepted the invitation began to cancel, even those who had previously known Johnson and Hughes would be there. The head of his English department even told Mabry that "he could under no circumstances recommend me to a position anywhere if I persisted in having Mr. Johnson come to my house," and that the party should be called off without telling Johnson the real reason (qtd. in Hutchinson 412). Mabry wrote that he was suddenly "the center of a whispering campaign," undoubtedly causing him to feel isolated in the midst of "white" Nashville (Hutchinson 412).

Mabry did not refrain, however, from telling Johnson and Hughes the real reason the party was cancelled. They all discussed the incident, Mabry even showing Johnson copies of the letters. Johnson's reaction was to calmly state "all the correspondence



makes a curious and very interesting file” (qtd. in Levy 328). His biographer Eugene Levy points out that this statement probably hid his resentment, for in 1937 Johnson told the president of Fisk University that Tate would not make a suitable lecturer at the school because Tate was so “antagonistic towards blacks” (328). Hughes did not hide his reaction, which was similarly resentful, writing, “The south as an Institution . . . can sink through the bottom of the pit of hell” (Rampersad 231). Mabry told his friend Muriel Draper about the whole thing, stating he “was goddamn sore” (qtd. in Hutchinson 409). Though he did not directly lose his job over this incident, it led to Mabry eventually transferring his allegiance from Vanderbilt to Fisk.

The following summer the president of Fisk, Dr. Jones, offered Mabry an assistantship working with Johnson. Vanderbilt had also offered him a job. Mabry wanted to work for both schools in order to have enough income to live off of, but this went against Vanderbilt policy and the head of his department told Mabry, “Holding the ideas you do, you would have to go the whole way, in a social sense, if you do any work [at Fisk]” (qtd. in Hutchinson 412). Vanderbilt would make no exception and it was all or nothing as far as they were concerned. Mabry chose Fisk, leaving Vanderbilt’s conservative policies behind him. His position at Fisk was not immediately taken up, however, possibly because they could not offer him enough for him to live on, if he was only helping Johnson with his classes.

Several admirers of Mabry began to try and help him find a position, including Johnson and Walter White. Johnson wrote that he wanted to help Mabry “because of [a] deep personal regard for him” (qtd. in Hutchinson 413). Johnson tried to get him a job at Smith College, in Massachusetts, but Mabry was determined to work with Johnson (Hutchinson 413). Eventually Mabry began to assist Johnson with two of his classes and

also began teaching his own class; the pay was miniscule, but Mabry's money issues were relieved when an opening in the department provided him with another job at Fisk to pair with his assistantship (Hutchinson 418). Ethel Gilbert, the Director of Publicity and Finance, submitted her resignation, choosing to extricate herself from a potentially embarrassing situation, for Gilbert had been having a prolonged affair with Elmer Imes, Nella Larsen's husband, and now that Larsen was living in Nashville, Gilbert wanted to distance herself from the uncomfortable circumstances (Hutchinson 418).

Between assisting Johnson and taking over Gilbert's position, Mabry was able to make a living at Fisk University. His work also required him to travel, and he often visited New York City, stopping by to see Nella Larsen when he was in town. By this time, Larsen had divorced her husband and moved back to the city. A letter written by Larsen's friend Dorothy Peterson, dated February 23, 1934, declares that a romantic relationship between Mabry and Larsen was a distinct possibility (Hutchinson 434). Edward Donahoe, however, was also vying for Larsen's affections, but Peterson thought Larsen's indecisiveness would lead to both men giving up on her. Her prediction evidently came true, for some time after the summer of 1934 her friendship with both men dissolved (Hutchinson 439). Donahoe and Mabry were able to remain friends, though by the sixties Donahoe was writing letters from Mexico, only asking about Larsen's wellbeing; apparently by this time he no longer cared for Mabry, dismissing him as "not being a true friend" (Davis 431).

In March of 1935, Mabry became Executive Director of the Museum of Modern Art, a position that would give him the ability to help artists, especially Walker Evans, rise to fame. Although some artists did not become as famous as Evans, Mabry gave many of them exciting opportunities to showcase their work at the museum. The

photographer Louise Dahl-Wolfe took pictures of limestone sculptures by William Edmondson, an African American born only a decade after slavery was made illegal in the United States. When Dahl-Wolfe showed the photographs of Edmondson's work to Mabry, Mabry approached the director Alfred Barr about an exhibit, which took place from October through December of 1937 and consisted of 12 limestone sculptures by Edmonson (Pillai 27).

Mabry wanted the museum to showcase unknown artists, as well as already famous ones, to provide the public with a diverse cultural experience. Mexican folk art exhibits might open within weeks of shows that included works by Leonardo da Vinci and Picasso. Regardless of the type of art, Mabry strived to ensure each exhibit included the finest examples. For the 1938 MoMA exhibition of American art at Jeu de Paume, Paris—a show that the museum organized but would travel to Paris—Mabry urged artist Florine Stettheimer, one of the only two women include in the exhibition, to participate in the show when she originally declined. He wrote to her declaring, “I write this only because I want the exhibition to represent our best painters. We would lose much if none was in it by you” (qtd. in Bloemink 213). Mabry's position at MoMA allowed him to offer “the best,” as he saw it, to the public.

One of the artists Mabry considered “the best” was Walker Evans, a photographer. Mabry's hard work and loyalty to Evans helped secure Evans's fame as an artist. Evans met Mabry when Mabry was working at the John Becker Gallery (Mellow 241). Mabry was instrumental in initiating projects that made Evans popular, such as MoMA's “American Photographs” exhibit in 1938. His experiences working with Evans reveal Mabry's dedication to and belief in Evans, as well as his sharp eye for artistic ability.



Mabry first helped Evans get a job with MoMA taking photographs of the museum's African sculpture exhibit. Opening in the spring of 1935, the show was a major step towards acknowledging the artistic worth of African crafts instead of presenting them simply as novelties. The show consisted of around 500 pieces, including objects ranging from masks and weapons to utensils and carvings from various materials, such as wood and gold (Rathbone 99). The museum curator, James Johnson Sweeney, encouraged by the director Alfred Barr, wanted to prove this art was not "the mere untutored fumbblings of the savage," and emphasized the influence such art had had on European art (qtd. in Hambourg et al. 68).

Evans's job was to photograph all the pieces in the show and make several sets of prints for each photograph, and Mabry intended to share this exhibit with more than museum visitors. From his time in the South, Mabry was aware of the African Americans' "lack of a tangible cultural history," and wanted to provide access to such an important exhibition to more than "a privileged urban museum audience" (Rathbone 100). Evans was commissioned to create multiple sets of the exhibit photographs so six of these sets could be donated to African American colleges, including Fisk University (Hambourg et al. 69). The project took Evans weeks of nighttime shooting to avoid museum crowds, but by May he finished photographing the objects and began creating the portfolios that the museum would donate.

Although Evans was not solely driven by money, his financial situation improved after the completion of the project; the museum paid him 400 dollars for his work (Mellow 268). Mabry soon helped his friend again with another business proposition: "a series of postcards printed from carefully selected details of [some of] Evans's photographs for the RA," which he had already taken (Hambourg et al. 85). The museum



advanced Evans money for the project, but Evans and Mabry had difficulty deciding which prints to use, and Evans eventually lost interest in the project (Hambourg et al. 85). Although Evans was intrigued by some of the work that came out of this task, he never completed it; in 1937, Mabry wrote Evans to remind him that if the project was not completed, the museum “by contract was entitled to 25 of his photographs for its permanent collection,” and the next year, Mabry insisted Evans give the museum his photographs (Hambourg et al. 97).

In February of 1938, Evans gave the museum 26 photographs, which in turn led to a project that “so firmly—and so completely—established Evans’s reputation as a documentary photographer that he found it difficult to shake the limiting image” (Mellow 367). Mabry used an opening in the schedule of exhibitions to suggest a show devoted to Walker Evans’s photographs, which would be the “first one-man retrospective of a photographer at the museum” (Mellow 367). The exhibition was set to open as one of the first shows for the fall season and would be accompanied by a book with an introduction by Lincoln Kirstein.

This book was a vital part of the project. Mabry and Frances Collins, who was in charge of MoMA publications, “aimed to give [the book] a prominence equal to the exhibition itself,” trying to ensure it “reach[ed] the widest possible audience” (Rathbone 158). Mabry approached the exhibit itself in a similar manner, organizing an “aggressive publicity strategy” that involved a “whisper campaign” relying on word of mouth, as well as publications in literary journals, magazines, and Sunday newspapers about Evans’s show (Rathbone 157). Mabry used this publicity to do more than alert people to the upcoming exhibition, however. He felt it was necessary to emphasize Evans’s importance as an artist, separating Evans from the other photographers Mabry did not believe were as

talented as Evans, while making it “clear the exhibition was of equal importance to all other artists’ retrospectives the museum had undertaken and the first to honor a photographer” (Rathbone 157).

Mabry’s criticism demonstrates his sharp eye for artistic ability. He was not helping Evans launch his career purely out of loyalty to a friend; he truly believed Evans was a unique and talented photographer. In *Harper’s Bazaar*, his review of the exhibition asserted that Evans “possesses perhaps the purest ‘eye’ of any photographer of our generation” and that, though at first glance a person may miss the value of Evans’s photographs, upon another look these photos “electrify” (qtd. in Mellow 390). He went on to say “Through the intensity of [Evans’s] vision, our ordinary world appears invisibly changed into its ultimate and classic form” (qtd. in Rathbone 165). Mabry’s praise of Evans draws a distinct line, as Mabry sees it, between artists like Evans and other “documentary” or “lyric” photographers whose work Mabry view as “little better than the baby pictures in a *Herald Tribune* photography contest” (Mellow 376). Unlike such photographers, Mabry saw an “American . . . character uniquely its own . . . a quality of spirit, half squalid, half unbelievably beautiful” within Evans’s photographs (qtd. in Mellow 390).

The “American Photographs” exhibition ran from September 28 to November 18, 1938 and included 100 photographs, providing a “portrait of American society” through pictures of the “sites and relics that are the tangible expressions of American desires, despairs, and traditions” (Hambourg et al. 97). Mabry’s aggressive promotion of the exhibition did its job; Evans received much critical attention after the show opened and the exhibit, as he remarked later in his life, became a “landmark,” functioning “like a calling card” as “it made [his career]” (qtd. in Mellow 370). Evans insisted that both

Lincoln Kirstein and Mabry were extremely influential in the success of the exhibition, claiming they “sort of rammed it into the museum” in their determination to help him (qtd. in Mellow 370).

Mabry’s opportunities to ensure Americans become familiar with who he felt were talented individuals and artists would be cut short, however, when he was fired from his position as Executive Director at MoMA. The museum was just opening its new, more modern building, and the new president of MoMA, Nelson Rockefeller, had organized a ball for May 10, 1939 to celebrate the opening. Frances Collins, who had helped Mabry with the book to accompany “American Photographs,” took offense at the “snobbish affair” because some of the staff members had not been invited, and she created her own invitations with the motto “Oil that Glitters is not Gold” and noted “Better dresses 5<sup>th</sup> floor” (Mellow 420). When Rockefeller was shown one of these invitations, he gave Collins the “official kiss of death” at the party that night and soon insisted Mabry fire her (Mellow 420). After being forced to fire Collins, Mabry was also dismissed, presumably because he did nothing to stop the circulation of invitations that had so offended Rockefeller.

When Mabry began working in the Graphic Division of the Office of War Information in 1942, he once again was able to provide jobs for his artistic friends. He recruited friends, such as Ben Shahn to help make posters and pamphlets. In September of 1942, Walker Evans happened to see Mabry as Evans searched for a job in Washington D. C.; Mabry tried to get Evans “some poster work from the graphic arts department,” but Evans did not end up working there (Mellow 460).

As Evans’s biographer, James Mellow points out Mabry may also have had some “unspecified involvement” with Evans’s exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago,



opening in November 1947 (509). The show was closely associated with Time Inc. because many of the photos in the exhibit were taken from work Evans had recently done for *Time*, and the magazine also covered the exhibition in December (Mellow 508). Mabry was working for Time Inc. around this time, leading some to the conclusion he probably had some connection with this exhibition. This show also included a photo of the dining room of Ethel, Mabry's wife, for, at this stage in his career, Evans liked to "intrude on the artist or the heiress or the friend with a country house" (Rathbone 253). The Mabry home in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, housed both an artist and a close friend in Tom Mabry.

## CHAPTER III

## Review of the Literature

"The White Hound," a collection that includes Mabry's four short stories, was published by the University of Missouri Press in 1959. It also includes stories by Ward Dorrance. Having known both writers, Caroline Gordon wrote an introduction for this collection. She had helped Mabry with his fiction throughout the years and, therefore, was able to give a critical, if brief, review of his works. She praises both writers for their skill in writing about the regions in which they live, while still bathing their subjects in the "light of the universal" (xi). Although Mabry's four stories included in the collection deal with particularly Southern issues, they are no less applicable to the country as a whole. Indeed, having grown up in the South and setting his stories in the South allows him to wrestle intimately with the nationwide racial conflict, yet his stories can still touch readers on a personal level. These stories reflect the pangs of growing up, the heartbreak of disillusionment, and the lifelong struggle for identity.

While his stories are tied together thematically, they reveal a variety of approaches to writing, all highlighting the importance of Mabry as a writer. The short story, "The Indian Feather," demonstrates his affinity for New Criticism. An in-depth analysis of this story shows Mabry's ability to create a self-conscious construction of an artistic piece in which imagery and the tight structure work together to elevate local material until it reaches the Joycean level. The influence of Modernism, especially of Caroline Gordon, is clear. The rest of his stories, however, are looser in style, though thematically connected to "The Indian Feather." Besides detailing the pains of adolescence and human existence, his short stories also examine the intricate web of race,

gender, and class in the South. His investigation of the social structure of the South highlights the racism this structure reinforces. All of his stories challenge the South's social order to some degree, prompting readers to consider their place in this order. Mabry's short stories are impressive and unique in their style and treatment of race, attesting to the need for more critical attention to his works.

"The Indian Feather," which won the 1954 first place O. Henry Award, centers on a young man's experiences squirrel hunting. J. D., the son of a tobacco warehouse owner, heads down to the river with Mr. Batts, his father's manager, to shoot squirrels. J. D.'s father is sick; the story opens as he bids farewell to his parents for the day, creating a sense of foreboding as the mother urges her son to stay with his ill father, although at this point the danger of the father's condition is unclear. J. D. and Mr. Batts float down the Cumberland River as Batts shoots squirrels from the boat. J. D., who never discharges his own rifle, is left with the task of hopping onto the land to gather the bodies. One of these times, he finds a blue feather underneath a dead squirrel and keeps it at the prompting of Batts. The final time he gets out of the boat, he encounters a cottonmouth and is paralyzed with fear until Batts shoots the snake from the boat. J. D. is unable to thank Batts, and the men act as if nothing has happened.

Upon returning home, J. D.'s mother reveals that his father is not going to recover and J. D. will have to take up the burden of responsibilities. After walking away from her, J. D. eventually visits his father and takes his father's keys to check on the factory down the road. After arriving there, he finds Batts awaiting a tryst with one of the female employees. Their interaction is tense until the girl shows up and Batts melts into the



darkness, leaving J. D. alone to search for the blue feather he has dropped but cannot find.

Of Mabry's four stories, this one exhibits the strongest influence of New Criticism. Its themes are emphasized by the imagery and symbolism prevalent in virtually every word. Guilt, responsibility, and mortality all intertwine to highlight J. D.'s initiation into adulthood, a common theme among modernists and one reminiscent of James Joyce's "Araby." Growing up comes with a price: pain and disillusionment, either with one's self or with one's heroes. J. D.'s initiation into manhood is complete at the end of "The Indian Feather," as it is inseparable from his disillusionment with Mr. Batts, the man who had saved his life only hours before. The story builds to this final moment of loss, with every detail underscoring its tensions and contradictions. Batts is both J. D.'s hero and (dis)abuser, his superior and inferior. J. D.'s initiation is intrinsically linked with the development of Batts's character, and the ambiguities of Batts's nature further demonstrate the pain J. D. faces upon entrance into the male-dominated world of adulthood.

Batts's character also reveals another aspect of this story that contrasts with the more typical New Critical approach. Through Batts, Mabry offers a dark critique of a patriarchal, racist society. The South, with its emphasis on agriculture, has a hierarchy that reinforces class and racial differences. "The Indian Feather" examines this class structure, subtly undermining it through Batts's complex placement within it and his ambiguous nature. The text does not require J. D. to overtly question this hierarchy, though his emergence into adulthood places him in the middle of a tense, unspoken battle for a position of dominance. J. D., though uncomfortable, is only beginning to see Batts

abuse his authority. Mabry ensures that the reader, however, is quite aware of these sinister undercurrents. After an analysis of the theme of initiation, an investigation of class and race in this story will be fruitful, for it demonstrates Mabry's uniqueness as a Southern writer of his time.

The overarching theme of initiation cannot be separated from the issues growing up entails. Responsibility necessitates that J. D. mature quickly. Before J. D. leaves the house to go hunting with Batts, his duties are light. J. D. asks if he should go to the factory, but his father, J. J., dismisses this idea, saying there is "no sense in your sitting around down there on a Saturday afternoon" (81-2). His father does charge him, however, with looking after Batts, who is prone to drunkenness. At this point, J. D. is encouraged, by his father at least, to do as he pleases, with only a minor mention of obligations to the warehouse. His father speaks of J. D.'s responsibility in a future, conditional tense; he will be needed on Monday if it rains, but not today. J. D. is unsure of how sick his father truly is but hopes to avoid this concern. He prays for a lack of rain so his help will not be required Monday. Having to take over the incoming seasonal tobacco for his sick father would only illustrate to J. D. the precarious mortality of his ailing parent.

His father's mortality is linked with his own development into adulthood. With his father well enough to encourage him to go hunting, J. D. is free to escape the house into the afternoon sunshine. In the event of J. J.'s death, however, J. D. will no longer be free but will be burdened with responsibilities to his mother and his father's business. After hunting with Batts, J. D. returns to the news his father is dying and his mother immediately reveals the consequences. "You will have to take over responsibilities," she grabs him to whisper, and when he asks what those burdens are, she responds, "Many"

(96). She gives him no time to process the impending loss of his father, for J. J.'s death and J. D.'s responsibilities are linked in her mind. He turns away from her revelations, just as he had guiltily avoided her disapproving glances before leaving to go hunting.

The burden of guilt is introduced into the narrative from the first page. Sensing the serious nature of his father's illness, J. D. is torn between staying at the house and hunting. His mother, desiring him to stay home, silently reproaches him for leaving. He avoids her looks that tell him "if you had any consideration for me you would not be going off somewhere" (81). Trying to pretend he does not understand her, he edges towards the door, momentarily standing on the threshold of their bedroom and the hallway. J. D. is caught between his mother's influence and his desire to escape the dim room that blocks out the spring sunshine, an image that embodies his father's decline. His father, disconnected from the light of the outside world, can only "turn his head toward the curtained windows and the unseen spring trees" (83). J. D., however, can flee into the sunlight, albeit with a shadow of guilt that follows him to the river.

His parent's bedroom emphasizes the concept of mortality, but the natural world embodies life, and it is on this hunting trip with Batts that J. D. truly begins his voyage into manhood. To become disillusioned with Batts, J. D. must first see Batts as a hero, and the events on the river demonstrate Batts's positive qualities. It is significant at this point that J. D.'s idealization of Batts is prominent. He is still an adolescent, though he stands at the cusp of adulthood. J. D. is impressed with Batts's revelation that he built the boat they take out on the river and enthusiastically thanks Batts for suggesting they build J. D. his own vessel. Batts also displays his prowess as a hunter. J. D. self-consciously realizes that Batts has killed three squirrels, while J. D. has not even fired his rifle.



Of course, squirrels are not the only animals Batts's exceptional aim dispatches, and his final target cements Batts's position as J. D.'s hero. Hopping out of the boat to retrieve one of Batts's squirrels, J. D. becomes paralyzed by fear when he sees a copperhead dangerously close. Unable to speak, he is frozen by the "obsidian stare" that "doomed his warm and vulnerable flesh" (93). Before the snake can strike, Batts shoots it from the boat. Thereafter, both agree to return home, trying to act natural. J. D. knows he cannot thank Batts for saving his life, for he cannot "thank a marksman for his aim" or "for the casual tone, for the grey embracing eyes" (94). Grateful for Batts's easygoing silence after the incident, J. D. "swear[s] a silent oath to learn to shoot like that," so he can one day repay the favor (94). This promise to himself reveals his intense respect for Batts, making his moment of disillusionment at the end of the story more painful.

The presence of the snake strengthens the relationship between J. D. and Batts, but it also becomes a symbol of evil, equated to death and darkness. The moment in which the snake causes J. D.'s "exploding heart [to freeze] him to stillness" contains Biblical overtones (92). Embodying the conflict between knowledge and evil, the snake references the fall of man as the beginning of death, which this poisonous snake could inflict on J. D. This is "the evil so often warned against" which J. D. must now confront, though Batts is the one to dispatch it with his rifle (93). The encounter causes J. D. to consider his mortality, as he pictures his mother and dying father while the "Courthouse clock . . . strike[s] the slow deliberate hour" (93). The clock represents mortality, linking J. D. and his father to the threat of death posed by the snake, the origin of sin. The snake functions as an opposing symbol to the feather J. D. finds, forming the conflicting forces of good and evil. Although he kills the copperhead to save J. D., Batts ironically is

associated with the snake as the sinister power pushing J. D. into the awareness of knowledge and evil necessary to mature into adulthood.

While Batts is not distinctly associated with the snake until that night at the factory, Batts's quality of character is suspect from the beginning of the story. J. J. alludes to Batts being an alcoholic, and although the reader does not see this side of the man until much later, aspects of the man's darker side arise before J. D. and Batts even make it to the river. After dropping Batts's daughter off at a corner of town, a man stops them before they can drive towards the river. The man, a tobacco farmer, says little, but Batts warns him to "class that tobacco clean" or Batts will "dock" him until he cannot afford to give "his old lady a sack of candy" (84). The farmer's angry reaction is tightly controlled, though he tells Batts, "You can't take nothing from nothing" (84). When they leave the man in the distance, Batts immediately begins to scoff at how much he believes the farmer has saved away. Later on the river, Batts returns to this subject of "cheating farmers," but J. D. recalls watching Batts dock the price of the tobacco the farmers are selling until they begin to unload the tobacco "in bitterness and hate" (89). Although J. D. will continue to idealize Batts until later that night, his sinister qualities are quickly apparent.

Batts's character is complex, both heroic and debased. Batts saves J. D.'s life but also reveals his callous treatment of local farmers. Furthermore, his cruelty is emphasized when he reminisces about gathering blue bird feathers as a young boy. J. D. shows him the feather he finds next to one of the dead squirrels, and Batts laughs at remembering how he named them Indian feathers and would kill "a couple of bluebirds and make a whole Indian hat out of them" (90-1). While hunting is evidently a popular sport—they

are having this conversation while shooting squirrels—Batts had previously killed blue birds not to eat, but purely for the fun of it. He entertained himself as a boy with slaughtering multiple birds to get something he wanted, and as a man he continues to enjoy this memory. His nature is complex, but he has not yet become the strangely demonic, sinister character that will leave J. D. in a state of despair later that evening.

Despite Batts's grotesque use of "Indian feathers" in his childhood, the blue feather J. D. finds becomes one of the main symbols in this story. Similar to his experience with the snake, when J. D. goes to retrieve the second squirrel Batts killed, J. D. discovers this squirrel's "open sightless eyes fixed" on the blue feather as if its "last faint throb of energy had been spent to reach the bright immaculate blue" (90). The squirrel's reaction to it in its final moments of life establishes a quality of transcendence in the feather, as if it truly had power. The feather's description as "immaculate" also gives it a purity and innocence. J. D. shows the feather to Batts but is about to discard it when Batts suggests he keep it. For the rest of the story, the feather provides a link between Batts and J. D., a link created while J. D. still innocently idealizes Batts. In this way, the feather is associated with J. D.'s childlike state. When he becomes disillusioned with Batts at the end of the story and drops it in the dark, the loss of the feather symbolizes his painful initiation into adulthood.

To reinforce this symbolism, the feather and J. D.'s relationship with Batts are again linked with J. D.'s innocence when he visits his father later that night. After finding out his father is dying, J. D. sits in the dark bedroom with J. J., who begins to prepare his son for the future in which J. D. will have to "take charge of things for a while" (98). J. J. sets Batts up as his son's mentor in taking over the warehouse, for J. D. can "ask Batts



anything you want to know" (98). Immediately after his father's statement about Batts, J. D. becomes aware of a lump in his pocket and pulls out the cap with the Indian feather still stuck in it. It is slightly damaged, and J. D. "smoothed out the rumpled blue" (98). By this time, J. D. understands his father is dying and his mother has insisted he will have to take on many burdens; consequently, the blue feather, the symbol of his childlike state, has been spoiled. The damage is not beyond repair, just as his entrance into the pain of maturity is not complete, but the process has begun.

One of the main ways he begins this process is to shoulder some of the burden of responsibility for the warehouse. While visiting his father, J. D. tries to tell him about Batts's heroic actions, but his mother interrupts, and J. D. volunteers to go "see if the doors are locked up all right" at the factory (99). This action is more symbolic than necessary, as J. D. is essentially proclaiming his determination to slide into the role his family requires of him. His father encourages this, telling him to get the keys from the dresser. The keys symbolize responsibility and they will weigh down J. D.'s pockets in his encounter with Batts at the factory. J. D. must extract the keys from his father's watch, a symbol of mortality. The entanglement of these physical objects emphasize that J. D.'s responsibility spawns from his father's demise. It also suggests that the entrance into adulthood brings one closer to death.

When J. D. arrives at the factory, he is still clearly idealizing the reality of his situation. Smelling the tobacco in the dark, he smiles, firmly believing everything "would be taken care of properly. He and Mr. Batts would see to that" (100). He accepts Batts in the role of mentor and clings to his admiration for the man who had saved his life earlier that day. Walking through the factory, J. D. proudly imagines he will "surprise even Mr.

Batts with his knowledge" of the tobacco business, hoping to impress the man he respects (101). His romantic notions flee, however, when he peeps through a window only to confront a distorted image oddly reminiscent of the deadly snake from the riverbank with its "fatal stare . . . boring into the center of his brain" (101). J. D. relaxes when he discovers that it is only Batts, but his relief does not last for long, for their encounter soon becomes uncomfortably tense.

Batts, a married man, reveals he is there to meet one of the female employees, the "little high yaller" woman who sorts tobacco (102). His revelation immediately complicates his character. Not only is he lurking around the factory at night for an extramarital affair, but he is also meeting one of his employees. This fact coupled with her mixed blood, which her "yaller" skin makes clear, alludes to sexual coercion. Though the woman is never seen and it is unclear how their relationship began, as an employer he has the potential to force her into a sexual relationship and he certainly has authority in such a relationship. His position of power is also reinforced by her skin color, embodying the generations of sexual abuse the system of slavery endorsed. J. D. uncomfortably feels the weight of the keys in his pocket, unsure of how to handle the situation after taking responsibility for the factory's security. He tries to lighten the mood by referring to his father, telling Batts J. J. had confirmed the very sentiments Batts had expressed on the river—that J. D. would make "a good tobacco man" (102).

J. D.'s conversation does not ease the tension like he had hoped; instead, Batts begins to show his crude nature by teasing and challenging J. D. Feeling threatened, Batts first resorts to mocking J. D.'s sexuality, pulling out a cigar purposely shaped like a phallus, asking J. D. if he had ever seen "one of these here things," which the female

employees make (102). Blushing, J. D. uneasily asserts that his father does not want him to leave the doors unlocked, causing Batts to challenge J. D., "I guess you think you're looking after things around here now" (104). Batts, the supervisor of the warehouse, carefully defends his dominance over J. D., yet he knows that J. D. will surely take over the business from his father, and so Batts cannot outright challenge him. Instead, he can only belittle J. D. by heckling him.

When J. D. declares he must lock the doors, he is trying to supersede Batts's authority with his own, and Batts responds by telling him that he better check the windows as well. Batts plays on J. D.'s inexperience; J. D. is not familiar enough with the factory to know if Batts is telling the truth or not and can only respond uncertainly that his father had not mentioned the windows. The mean-spirited joke is immediately exposed, however, for Batts tells J. D. that they have "been needing locks all year" (104). Batts is only trying to throw J. D. off balance and possibly keep him busy, since J. D. obviously cannot check locks that do not exist. When the girl suddenly slips into the factory, Batts decides this confrontation is not worth it and immediately begins trying to get rid of J. D.

Batts's sexuality further demonstrates his debased nature, until he becomes almost demonic. At the girl's appearance, he begins to grin "queerly" and rushes to assure J. D. he will see to the windows and the doors, his eyes "glittering with impatience" to get rid of the boy (104). Once again, his eyes reveal his corrupt nature, just as their "fatal stare" had previously linked him with the snake, the symbol of darkness and evil. Although Batts had been a beacon of hope for J. D. when he first walked to the factory, this late-night encounter had degenerated from a conflict of wills into a confrontation of



immorality. Before J. D. can even agree to leave, Batts slips into the dark, tauntingly calling J. D.'s name while he starts to make love to the girl.

J. D. is momentarily distracted by the torrent of rain falling outside the factory. He notes that it was "raining on the whole town" from his parent's house to the "Negro houses across the alley" to the little boat down at the river (105). Most significantly, it also rains on the bluff where Batts saved J. D.'s life earlier that day, earning Batts a respect that had just completely disintegrated. This moment is likely a deliberate allusion to the final scene of James Joyce's "The Dead" in which the snow falls all over Ireland, symbolically bringing both the living and the dead together, and the allusion serves as a tribute to Joyce, who established this type of New Critical story-telling in *Dubliners*. It also asks the readers to think in terms of the universal, that all humans are connected; J. D. is far from the only one to experience the pain of growing up.

As the story concludes, J. D.'s initiation into manhood is complete. He can hear Batts and his lover laughing and a burst of wind slams the outside factory door shut, blowing the feather out of his cap. J. D. tries to catch it, but it is lost in the darkness. As he frantically searches for the feather, feeling "only nails and bits of wood and broken tobacco stalks," Batts calling his name from his position in the dark with his lover echoes in J. D.'s mind (105). The feather is lost to him, as is his innocent state. His disillusionment with Batts, a hero to him hours before, painfully drives home his entrance into adulthood. Now he is confined in the darkened factory, trapped by the heavy burden of the fate his parents have decreed for him.

Batts's character does more than cause J. D.'s disillusionment, for he also serves as a critique of the patriarchal Southern society. In this story, Mabry, a Southerner

familiar with small town politics, investigates the class structure that attempts to keep everyone in their proper place, causing men like Batts, whose position in that structure is complex, to resent and challenge change. While the story does not overtly deal with racism, the examination of class cannot be separated from the issue of race. Mabry is well-aware that the Southern class structure forces African Americans to the bottom class. "The Indian Feather" does not give these African Americans a voice because their position in society did not afford them one.

On the surface, the class structure should be a simple one in this story. J. J., a wealthy business owner, is in the upper class, with numerous employees beneath him. As his son, J. D. has the same class advantages and will inherit his father's position of authority. Batts, the supervisor at the factory, is in a lower class, since he works for J. J. and also rents a house from his employer, yet his experience at the factory gives Batts a certain level of power, for he is above the common laborers at the warehouse who unload and class tobacco. These lower level workers have no control and must simply do as they are told to keep their jobs. If class were arranged so easily, J. D.'s disillusionment may not have been so complete, for his place at the factory would not have threatened Batts's own position.

Batts's place in this class structure is more complex, however, when J. D. enters the scenario. Ideally, J. D. would take over the factory when he is older and has more experience. As it is, he has only been helping at the factory after school. While Batts and J. J. both praise J. D. for his quick learning, Batts clearly thinks of J. D. as an inexperienced youth. On the river, Batts compliments J. D., relating that he recently told J. J. "you've got a boy what'll make a better tobacco man than you and me both" (87).

Clearly, Batts only thinks of J. D. as a boy, one who will take over the business in the future. He is not threatened by J. D. until J. D. is forced to begin shouldering responsibility for the factory. J. J.'s imminent death compromises J. D.'s relationship with Batts when it complicates Batts's position at the factory.

As an employee, Batts is J. D.'s inferior but feels he is J. D.'s superior because of his experience. J. D. does not know enough about the factory to take over, as exemplified by his uncertainty about checking the windows; J. D. can only do what his father tells him to do. Batts, intimately familiar with the everyday workings of the factory, resents having to listen to an inexperienced boy, yet he has to tread carefully to avoid risking his job. His reaction to J. D.'s appearance at the factory reinforces the problematic nature of the stagnant Southern class structure. The hierarchy does not leave room for these complex situations. As a member of the upper class, J. D. is Batts's superior, regardless of experience, for J. D. does not have to earn this position; society takes for granted it is already his. Batts's only option is to express his resentment in a manner that will not jeopardize his job.

Race is inherently bound up in class structure. J. J. is in the upper class as a wealthy white male, with Batts, a poor white male, a step beneath him. Although Batts is a white employee, he is in a management position. Below him are the other white workers, both the workers at the factory, as well as the white farmers and sharecroppers. Batts has authority over these men, for he is able to dock pay at his own discretion. His interactions with the farmers reveal his abuse of this power. Even the white farmers have some sense of control, however. They are able to decide if they will take Batts's pathetic pay for the tobacco or load it back on the wagon. The African American sharecroppers



have no say in the matter; they simply load or unload the wagon as they are told. These sharecroppers and the African American employees at the factory are at the bottom level of the class structure, and their lack of voice in the story reinforces their lack of social mobility in the racist South.

Likewise, gender and race are inseparable concerns. The Southern class hierarchy is not only racist, but it is definitively patriarchal as well. J. J. is head of the household, just as he is the boss at the factory. When he becomes sick, J. D. must take his place because society requires a man to lead the family, and the similarity of their initials, J. D. and J. J., emphasize the patriarchal role of ownership and control that society expects to continue. His mother reveals the necessity of J. D. taking over responsibilities in an odd, Freudian moment. She "intimately whispers" to him while grasping his arm with her nails. The patriarchal society reinforces the oedipal dimension, for J. D. must be willing and capable to take his father's place in the home. Similarly, Batts, lower in the male class structure than J. J. and J. D., holds the position of authority in his own house, shouting orders at his daughters "without looking back" (83).

Once again, Batts's character emphasizes the social structure, though as it pertains to gender he shows its static nature, not its complexities. Batts holds dominion over the females in his house, as he also does at the factory, providing him ample opportunities for sexual exploitation. Batts's association with his lover contains an oedipal element, as his handkerchief smells of both whiskey and his daughter's perfume, linking his affair with alcohol and his daughter. The women at the factory are African Americans, highlighting the inextricable nature of race and gender. Female workers are of the lowest class and afforded even less protection as both women and African Americans. Their position in

society greatly differs from that of J. D.'s mother, a wealthy, white woman, and even Batts's daughters, poor, white women. Significantly, Batts's affair is with a "yellow" female, a woman both African American and white. Like Batts, she is in a complex position. She is both superior to other "blacks," but inferior to whites. Her skin color offers her no consolation, however, for it makes her more desirable to men, such as Batts, while her status as a poor, female worker further alienates her from authority over her own body and her place in society.

"The Vault" does not exhibit the same attention to the New Critical style as "The Indian Feather." Its structure is more relaxed, with less emphasis on imagery. It does, however, deal with many of the same concepts and themes as "The Indian Feather." Like J. D., the protagonist of the story must learn to navigate the tensions and pains of entering adulthood, a process further strained by conflict with an older male. "The Vault" also contains autobiographical elements similar to those in the rest of Mabry's stories. The story's namesake, for instance, is based on an actual vault in Riverside Cemetery in Clarksville, Tennessee. The strained relationship between father and son may also reflect Mabry's experiences as a young man with his own father. Furthermore, all of Mabry's stories, as well as his life, reveal a dedication to reflecting and therefore improving the plight of African Americans.

"The Vault," published in the *Best Short Stories of 1949*, is told in the first person perspective of a young boy whose relationship with his father is rife with tension. Purposely mysterious, the story alludes to a secret that it never states. This secret, which supposedly has the potential to make the boy crazy, drives a wedge between the boy and his father. While the mother is indulgent, insisting the boy take piano lessons and be

allowed to practice, the father seems to believe his boy is a “sissy,” sternly chiding the boy for what he perceives to be unmanly weakness (117). Eventually this drives the boy to sneak out of the home at night and raid a vault in a nearby graveyard which is rumored to have jewels in it. He believes by giving his father this treasure, the father will respect and appreciate him more, or at least leave him alone. The boy, of course, finds no jewels, but as he contemplates the need to return to the house before his absence is discovered, he thinks on the possibility of earning respect by simply meeting his father’s eyes “man to man.”

The tense relationship between father and son dominates this story. The boy struggles with feelings of rejection as his father constantly insists the boy is doing something wrong. The story tracks the boy’s attempts to cope with feelings of shame and guilt that arise from his father’s treatment of him, for his father does not believe he is “manly” enough and criticizes his every action. The boy’s plan to rectify the situation, by raiding a cemetery vault late at night, is unsuccessful, but he still feels a momentary revelation in which he believes he can face his father as a man and set everything right. This epiphany is questionable, however, for the prevalence of guilt and tension in their relationship is overwhelming. The story provides little hope for a transformation, paralleling the presentation of race in “The Vault.” Race seems to play a minor role in this tale, but Mabry reveals minorities’ fixed position in society, unable to offer African Americans even the brief hope of change for the better.

The friction between father and son generates from the father’s condemnation of the boy’s character and actions. He worries that his son is not like other boys, criticizing him for “want[ing] to stay in the house all the time” and play the piano (110). The boy



overhears his father say his habit of always practicing the piano is “making a damn sissy out of him,” claiming he might “grow up into another Henry Harrison and be making doll clothes next” (117). His mother, as indulgent as she is, assures her husband that they will not let this happen, implying her indulgence only stretches so far; she is not willing for her son’s actions to extend past a certain age or into the community. He can be different at home, playing the piano instead of playing outside, but at some point he will have to conform to his father’s idea of masculinity.

The father seems to take offense to the boy’s character at every turn, insisting he stop acting like a child. Stern looks ensue when the boy stifles laughter at the dinner table after sharing a private joke with his sister, and the father resents the boy’s pride in being able to play the piano. When his business associate, Mr. Wooters, visits for dinner, the father is embarrassed by the boy’s manner when performing for the visitor. The father even criticizes him for believing the legend about the vault containing treasure, asking “How can you believe such a story?” (109). The boy’s every move encounters disapproval from his father.

One action in particular triggers his father’s censure, though the story never names this action outright. Both father and son allude to this source of conflict. The father only addresses his son about it once, but the boy frequently thinks about this issue. While urging the boy to stop playing the piano and go outside, the father refers to the boy “stay[ing] up there in your room” all the time, which supposedly gives the boy pimples (111). This is the only reference the father makes to a conversation they had obviously already had, but the boy obsesses about this encounter, arguing mentally with his father about the issue. He insists that he has not “been doing *it* for a long time,” for he “had

tried to stop" by repeatedly writing in his Algebra book "It will make you crazy" (111, emphasis added). Returning to this idea while doing homework that evening, he again asserts "Papa was wrong" and that he had not been doing this thing for months (115). The numerous times the boy reverts to mentally arguing with his father about this issue demonstrates the pain his father's disapproval causes him.

The story does not reveal the action the father condemns, but it provides ample contextual clues. The father insists it gives the boy pimples and that it will drive the boy insane, two popular myths to prevent masturbation. The boy does have pimples, for he looks at his reflection in a window and thinks it appears "better than it did in the mirror" (111). At times he also seems mentally unstable, with awkward or disturbingly physical reactions, such as his response to his father's stern disapproval of finding the boy under the parent's bed. The boy stands in his room claiming, "I filled it to the corners, I squeezed out against the bureau, against the desk . . ." (119). His pimples and often his thought process confirms the myths surrounding masturbation, reinforcing his father's criticisms. This seems a separate issue entirely from the father's complaint of the boy's lack of masculinity, but still contributes to the friction of their relationship. It also makes the boy obsess over not being crazy, further undermining his mental stability.

The boy's reaction to his father's disapproval is one of shame and guilt. He cannot confront his father and say he no longer masturbates; instead, he argues with his father mentally, too ashamed to speak to him directly about this conflict. As a way to alleviate his guilt and repair their relationship, the boy latches on to the idea of repaying his father for the piano lessons. Although his father's displeasure with the boy taking lessons is a symptom not a cause of their problems—the father is concerned with his

son's lack of manliness, which is exemplified by playing the piano—the boy convinces himself money will resolve their disagreement. This seems a strange solution to the problem, but the father also resorts to monetary resolutions. When the boy cries after hearing his father voicing his disgust with his son, the father simply hands him a dollar to quiet him. The boy leaves this dollar behind when he sneaks out of the house to search for treasure in the hopes of finally gaining approval, or at least a reprieve, from his father. He convinces himself that money is the main cause of his father's coldness, leading him on the midnight raid of a tomb.

This raid is distinctly gothic in tone as he desperately searches deeper in the coffin for hidden treasures. The detailed description of him combing through the tomb is ghoulishly sexual. He gropes his way through the “dust and trash” to find the bones, trying to discern where the hands are located (122). Assuming they are “folded like I'd always heard they folded dead people's hands,” he “dug [his] fingers down into that place” but found nothing (122). He pushes deeper, searching more thoroughly, but he fears pushing the rings further into the dirt. Switching tactics, he searches along the sides of the tomb, but his “sweating fingers [get] all stuck together” (123). This eerie exploration of a corpse correlates to his masturbation but becomes something much darker and disturbing. Mabry's use of the gothic is contained to this section, however, and he transforms this element to serve the realistic situation of the boy's rejection by his father.

His reaction to this rejection is the desire to escape. When Mr. Wooters, a European businessman, compliments the boy on his piano playing before dinner, the boy yearns for Wooters to take him back to Europe. He hopes to escape the tense relationship



with his father, trying to impress Wooters with an after-dinner performance to gain the key to his deliverance. Wooters represents an alternate life for the boy in which he would no longer be censured by a disapproving father; Wooters's approval of his piano playing contrasts starkly with his father's opinion, prompting the boy to fantasize about leaving with Wooters. Dejected after realizing this provides no means of escape, he concocts the plan to find money.

When he gives up on finding money in the tomb, he once again returns to the idea of escaping, this time through a more sinister longing. He desires to stay in the tomb and "sleep the deep sleep of revenge where Papa could never reach me" (123). This boy is not alone out of Mabry's protagonists to crave escape from a painful situation; in "Another Season," Paul consoles himself with the idea of running from the site of his pain, as well. "The Vault" offers a more disturbing version of this desire for escape than going off to college, however, for this boy sees death as a more appealing option than growing up under the rule of his stern, remote father.

His yearning for death abates when he convinces himself he can rectify the situation on his own. He seems to experience an epiphany, with the night rushing in on him in the tomb as he pictures riding his bicycle through a "thousand speeding mornings and I always awake" (124). No longer craving the "deep sleep" from moments before, he plans to speak to his father, to "take his hand" and "look into his eyes," which he pictures as a moment of liberation, leaving him to speed "through the endless . . . miles, saying Papa, Papa, accept all happiness from me" (124). The story has left little hope for this optimistic ending; instead, the boy seems unrealistically confident that he can change his father's perceptions of himself with a look and a handshake. His "speeding mornings"

designate no destination, for he is running from something, and possibly only into nothingness. This ending is one of despair, reinforcing the childlike state of optimism in a boy with a father determined to grind the child out of him until he becomes a man.

Mabry is not solely concerned with the pain of this boy's experiences, however, for this story also contains a criticism of the racist social structure of the South. Race is barely mentioned, and only once does a character stop to consider race at all. When the family leaves the cemetery that morning, the mother claims the nicotine factory has "ruined" that section of the town, but the father asserts it was already spoiled by the "nigger cabins and white trash" that lived on there (108). This statement is accepted by the rest of the family without comment. The boy never questions racial segregation, simply accepting the concept of "nigger houses" down by the river, even as he invades this side of town to search for old jewelry in tombs. Mabry subtly illuminates a static social order that no one examines in the story. Race determines location, which in turn regulates class. The characters are not interested in analyzing social structure; they are content to label people "trash" because of living conditions created by their skin color. Familiar with whites who had no interest in changing the social climate of his day, Mabry reproaches this type of attitude in "The Vault."

"Another Season" also creates a criticism of racism in an intriguing way. The story begins with two boys waking up on a farm in the early morning hours. It is quickly apparent that Paul, a boy visiting from the city, feels he does not belong there, and that Homer, a young man running the family farm, probably feels the same way. As the story progresses into one of pain and bloodshed—its hog-killing season on the farm—Paul regrets his decision to spend the night. Homer is rough and crude, impatient and quick to

yell at the sharecroppers, mostly African Americans. Paul alone among the workers is unused to the messy business of killing hogs whose fear and hunger overwhelm them and make them easy targets. Paul appears to be a sensitive boy, out of place in this setting and more delicate in feeling than men such as Homer, until he prepares to leave. Two of the African Americans on the farm request a ride into town with him. Uncomfortable with the situation, Paul politely refuses, earning the scorn of Homer, who looks down on Paul's racial prejudice. The story ends quickly, leaving the reader to question the characters that had previously seemed so easy to define.

Mabry uses his characters to reveal the possibility of hidden racism, as well as the drastic difference between racist words and actions. Through the characters of Paul and Homer, Mabry presents two young men seemingly easy to classify. For almost the entire story, the reader is lured into identifying with Paul, for he seems a sensitive, morally superior young man when compared to the crude farmer Homer, a member of the southern aristocracy instead of the lower-class worker. In the final few pages, however, Mabry subverts this assessment of the characters, revealing Paul's deep-seated racism. This disruption of the readers' expectations is jarring, prompting the readers to question their affinity with Paul, possibly leading readers into an examination of their own beliefs about race. Readers must quickly readjust their perceptions of Homer, viewing him as the more appealing of the two characters. This social disruption seems to separate Mabry from the more conservative Fugitive position.

At first, Homer appears to be rough and callous. He "saw[s]" through the necks of pigs emotionlessly, shooting one in the head despite the fact this only makes it run "[a]round like a dizzy child" (195). Immune to this slaughter, he does not relish the gore



as some of the other men do; he only shouts orders and indifferently slits pigs open. During the hog-killing, he sneers at the "no-good tenants" who he believes to be "just as trifling as niggers," indicating his racist views of African Americans (194, 198). These tenants believe him to be impatient, losing the true pleasure of agrarian traditions in his eagerness to get a task accomplished. They lament his insistence on carving the hog carcasses the same day as the killing, instead of the next day after they are cold. Homer ignores their comments, abrasively dismisses them, or retorts with a grin, "I like my piece of meat hot" (200). His actions throughout the entire day reinforce the perception of Homer as crude and offensive; the story reveals that he comes from hired-hand stock, placing him culturally beneath Paul, yet moments before Paul leaves another side of his character is revealed.

Conversely, Paul's sensitivity is obvious during the hog-killing. Having heard his grandmother talk for years about living on a farm, he insists on going home with Homer to help him kill hogs but discovers he is ill-prepared to participate in events. He pretends to help at first, though he knows he is useless, until he sits down, feeling as if "he were standing witness to an enormous carnage" (197). Paul is disturbed by the animals' mixture of fear and hunger that makes them easy to kill and the men's laughter at a bloody scene to which he is unaccustomed. His innocence surfaces when he asks while they carve pig carcasses what an organ is, only to learn it is "the sack with young pigs in it" (199). The women giggle at his ignorance, creating a contrast between Paul's naïveté and Homer's sexual innuendos. Paul is continuously depicted as Homer's moral superior, more sensitive and civilized. He is both fascinated and repulsed by Homer, unsure if he

wants the pigs or Homer to win during the hog-killing, but as a character Paul is more appealing, enticing the reader to identify with him.

The reversal of the characters at the end reveals Paul's racism and Homer's surprising acceptance of differences. With the backseat full of pork for his family, Paul refuses to give a ride to both Frank and his wife, feeling "to be seen with two niggers squeezed in beside him on the front seat, with the back seat [appearing] empty . . . would look ridiculous" (202). He offers to give one of them a ride, claiming to not have room for two. Frank silently walks away, knowing he and his wife could both fit but that the young white man does not want to touch them. Homer disturbs Paul by telling him, "You act like a Yankee," and when Paul asks if Homer does not agree that "two's a little too much," Homer states, "I wouldn't know . . . I live with 'em all day long" (202-3).

This statement offers an interesting view on racism; Homer calls the workers "niggers" while shouting orders, but Paul refuses to help them to avoid appearing "ridiculous" to people in town. Homer's interactions with African Americans is less racist than Paul's, as Homer offers to give Frank and his wife a ride into town later, further shocking Paul. This racism is so ingrained in Paul that he is unaware of it, and Homer's actions confuse him. He cannot understand what has just transpired but leaves with the feeling of "something gone vitally wrong" (205). Homer's criticism of Paul as a "Yankee" also contrasts the Northern and Southern views of race in an unexpected way, but ironically of a southern aristocrat. Mabry seems to be implying that southerners are less racist because they are more accustomed to working with African Americans, yet southern whites only work with them in the prejudiced social structure his other stories condemn.

Paul's experiences at the farm make him yearn to escape, a longing he seems to feel whenever he is confronted with a situation he cannot emotionally handle. During the hog-killing, disturbed by the violence and blood, Paul silently sits apart and watches while telling himself "this time next year" he "won't be anywhere near Montgomery County" (197). Intending to leave for college, Paul removes himself from coping with emotions with the plans of physically removing himself from his hometown. He manages to dismiss "a sickening at his heart" from the slaughter with thoughts of escape, "a bleak and lonely triumph" but one that "would be his only victory" (197). Paul creates an illusion of power for himself from the plan to renounce his home, believing "his absence would destroy them all," when evidence suggests that Homer, at least, will not care (197).

Paul's reaction to Homer's rejection is similar to his turmoil during the hog-killing, and he returns to the same idea of escaping. He tries to convince himself that his experience on the farm does not matter, for when he leaves for college "he [will] feel no weight on his chest, no chains on his legs; no fear or hunger in his heart" (205). This fantasy prevents him from having to truly examine his own actions or perceptions that drove Homer away, reinforcing his racism and lack of awareness of this part of himself. Perhaps he believes he can leave the experience behind entirely, but of course one cannot leave one's racism behind. This aspect of Paul will follow him to college, where he will either have to face it again or foster it in an atmosphere of ignorance. It will not cease to exist, for the experience on the farm has utterly changed him. Although he tries to console himself with thought of leaving, "no image of gaiety came to his mind" and "the future which had beckoned like a bright refuge, appeared as desolate and obscure to him"



as his day hog-killing (205). He is no longer moving towards the future; he is now running from the past, trying to leave behind something he cannot: himself.

“Lula Borrow,” published in the *Best Short Stories of 1957*, reveals a young man trying to find himself and succeeding through his relationship with an African American woman named Lula Borrow. This work is by far Mabry’s longest story, encompassing the life of Lula from the age of fifteen, when she gets a job working for a white family, to her death decades later. It traces the relationship between Lula and the son of the white family, Wade McFarland. Wade’s preoccupation with Lula leads him to know her not as a servant but as a person, their interactions evolving from conflict to teasing to a secret understanding when he accompanies Lula home one evening to protect her from her abusive husband. He is the only one in the McFarland family to know anything about her life—the husband she ran away from, the child she gave up to protect.

Eventually Wade grows up, however, and this secret which brought them closer pushes them apart. He goes to college, Lula gets fired, and years later when they meet again, Lula is trying to support herself by selling candy on the streets. Her constant diet of this candy has made her sick, and she dies hours after her encounter with Wade. Their relationship, although unromantic, is so intense Wade feels it defines him. As he looks on Lula’s body, prepared for her funeral, he finds himself asking questions about the meaning of life and his own identity. Ultimately, even in death Lula’s existence helps him find answers to these questions, further shaping his character.

“Lula Borrow” concentrates on this relationship between Wade McFarland and Lula. His friendship with Lula has a profound effect on Wade, an effect that shapes his entire life, even when he has not seen Lula in years. His experiences with her help form

his view of the world, distancing him from his family, as well as the town. Through Lula's life-story, Mabry explores how race and gender affect Lula as an African American woman, an aspect just as important as Wade's reaction to Lula. Although as a young boy Mabry's family employed a cook named Lula, this story is more fictional than autobiographical, allowing him to investigate the influence of an intense platonic relationship between a young white male and African American woman.

Wade was fascinated by Lula when she began to work for the family, prompting him to smear snot on her as an experiment. This incident establishes a "secret intimacy" between them that evolves into the deeper secrets they share when Wade is older (127). The influence on Wade of the typical Southern perception of African Americans is obvious at first. He orders Lula to do what he wants, believing he has an "authority" he can use to make her obey (129). She frequently surprises him with her responses, however, as she does when she tells him she "ain't *got* to do nothing but die," negating his supposed power (129). Likewise, he is "piqued" that she does not view his home as her own; he cannot conceive of her having a life outside of working for his family, and his fascination with this other life leads him to insist on accompanying her home one day (137). This experience changes his perceptions of Lula and himself, for it made his "old conception of her suddenly valueless" (142). By entering her home and learning of her life before working at the McFarland's, Wade begins to see Lula as a human being, not simply a servant or an African American, creating an "aware[ness] of his commitment to Lula" (140).

This commitment leads him to try to protect her from her husband, an action that pushes him into adulthood. When her abusive husband finds her in Mount Ashton, he

insists on walking her home and lingering outside for protection until he feels his duty is done. In retrospect, he believes "his own life seemed to have begun" that day, and "he knew at least that his childhood was ending with it for it was a journey into the knowledge of evil" (144). His sheltered life was shattered by the awareness of Lula's dangerous situation, yet this incident also drives them apart. The same sense of "secret intimacy" Wade had felt with her as a boy returns, causing him to avoid speaking of the incident with her, which only convinces her that he is "ashamed of her" (148). Their interactions, though intensely influential on Wade, "[led] by a curious alchemy towards their separation and ultimately their estrangement" (150). Wade has already grown apart from Lula when he leaves for college, but she continues to have an effect on him, one emphasized by his disconnection from his family.

Lula's main impact on Wade causes him to distance himself from his mother and sister, for he is conscious of her humanity in a way they are not. His experiences with her as a young man teach him to see beyond her skin color, a view his family is unable to comprehend. The difference between his mother's perception of Lula and his own is exemplified by their interactions with her after she has been fired and resorts to selling candy for a living. Mrs. McFarland encounters Lula unexpectedly and laughs at her occupation but does not offer to buy any; instead, she criticizes Lula for never having told her about Lula's child, though Mrs. McFarland had always disapproved of servants with "close family ties" (135). Mrs. McFarland is only concerned with herself, and how their relationship fits into her self-image as a woman generous to her employees, although she does not think to help Lula by purchasing her divinity fudge. She is too self-absorbed to



realize Lula needs income, and since she would only pay for something she wants, she does not give Lula any money.

Wade, on the other hand, immediately understands Lula "has to make her living someway" and when she offers to give him a piece, he insists on buying a dollar's worth of candy without any intention of eating it (174). He knows it is too sweet to eat, but he also recognizes Lula's need to support herself, even if he is unaware of how precarious her situation is. His estrangement from his family is further highlighted by his reaction to his sister's dismissal of Lula and her candy. Scoffing in disgust at a piece of candy, his sister tosses it out the window, causing an explosive response in which Wade pulls her out of the car and "gives her a hard smack . . . on the buttocks" (175). The candy is linked to Lula, to her life and their former intimate relationship, and his family's disregard for the divinity fudge equates to an indifference to Lula, striking deep-seated emotions. He feels as if "they had acted as though they wanted to destroy Lula" and that by "striking at Lula they were striking at him" (175). Even though he has not been physically close to Lula in years, she plays a significant role in shaping his views of himself and the world, causing him to want to protect her as he would protect himself.

When he returns to Mount Ashton, Wade is still struggling with his own identity, a concept his interactions with Lula had initiated, and her death prompts him to once again search for answers about his existence. After walking her home one evening, he reflects that "it had changed more than the world he lived in; it had changed him" (144). For the first time, he cares about another person enough to be curious and worried. Anxious over Lula's safety and future, his perceptions of others as human beings deepen. Returning home from college an older, but still young man, he is more concerned with

his own identity as a human being. Finding some of Lula's furniture collecting dust in his family's carriage house, he begins to question his own existence, asking "What am I?" (178). He searches for answers, but is unsure what his questions truly are, wondering "What am I here for?" but also "What am I trying to find out?" (178).

He finds these answers as he stands over Lula's dead body in her coffin. Before arriving at the funeral home, Wade believes he is going to tell Lula goodbye, but when confronted with her body, he must acknowledge the "inadequacy of such a thought, the banality of it" (184). Instead, he realizes, he has come to find the answers to his questions about himself and the meaning of existence, having experienced a "tremor of the answer" upon hearing of Lula's death (184). The transformation of Lula's body into a "pigmy" corpse leads him to reflect that "Lula was not *here*" in the coffin (184, 185).

He needs answers to what and where she is after her death, knowing he is the same as Lula; her fate is his own, and through his understanding of her lies self-comprehension. Sensing her as a "white ineffable lightness . . . surround[ing] him," he believes she is free, no longer "locked away from him in the body she once wore," but "dispersed into the air" (185). She experiences her own freedom in death, seeing Wade and her daughter entwined with her in their immortal souls, and Wade senses this transcendence. Lula's death convinces him of a deeper meaning to life, an existence outside of bodily form, just as she had provided profound insight into himself and others while alive. Her influence on him will continue, for now "she was closer" and he "would find her wherever he went," and feeling her in the very air in his lungs, he "breath[es] in love" (185).

By showing this deep connection between Lula and Wade, Mabry questions the perceptions of race prevalent in his lifetime; he also undermines racist views through Lula's character, as well as other characters' reactions to her. Mabry provides a detailed look into Lula's life, highlighting her misfortunes and suffering caused by her race and gender. Her struggles as an African American woman reveal her determination and strength, as well as her intense spirituality. Married at thirteen to an abusive husband, she resolves to leave him when he begins to beat their twin babies. Although he presents many difficulties to her escape, eventually causing one of the twins to die, she manages to walk thirty miles, find a foster home for her daughter, obtain a job, and support herself. Lula even buys and sells the McFarland's discarded clothes and furniture in order to give money to the woman raising her daughter.

Lacking any form of support, she demonstrates her resourcefulness as an African American woman, a status which restricts her options. To leave her father, she marries at thirteen, with her only choice of men consisting of poor farmers. When he becomes abusive, she has no one to help her; society does not concern itself with the plight of lower-class workers, let alone African American women. Her sister serves as an example of how white society manages such a problem, for Alice is quickly sent to prison when she stabs her abusive husband, and she dies there. Having fled from her husband and on her own at fifteen, Lula has few job opportunities, mostly as a servant in a white household. In this servile position, she must subject herself to condescending women like Mrs. McFarland, aloof Mr. McFarland who only saw her when she was serving his food or while paying her, and young Wade who is temporarily convinced of his "authority"



over her as a white male (129). In *Lula*, Mabry creates a strong female character to undermine racial and gender stereotypes used by people like the McFarlands.

Besides Wade, who can appreciate her as a resilient woman, other characters' reactions to *Lula* further illuminate the racist views plaguing the South. Mrs. McFarland's callousness towards *Lula* emphasizes the disdainful opinions held by wealthy, white women towards their employees. Although Mrs. McFarland is decently kind to *Lula* while she works in their household, her "disapproval" usually "touched with good humor," her consideration of *Lula* quickly abates after Wade leaves for college (147). Mrs. McFarland writes Wade that she fired *Lula* because *Lula* "had begun to take religion entirely too seriously," causing her to become "too uppity to stand" (156). Mrs. McFarland feels no obligation to help *Lula*, but discards her when *Lula* no longer pleases her employers. Significantly, despite their close bond, Wade feels this "appeared reasonable enough," demonstrating how deep this indifference to the wellbeing of African Americans is rooted in society (156).

After firing *Lula*, Mrs. McFarland's concern for her diminishes even further. Not only does she ignore *Lula*'s poverty, refusing to purchase candy from her, but she also indifferently insults *Lula*'s way of life. Wade is shocked to hear his mother say *Lula* has "greatly deteriorated," for "any woman, black or white, who spends her time on the streets all day is looking for trouble" (173). She coldheartedly passes judgment on *Lula*, essentially condemning her as "asking for it," instead of sympathizing with *Lula*'s ruin or analyzing her own part in *Lula*'s condition. Her insensitive and racist views have obviously transferred to her daughter, who laughs at her mother's description of *Lula* and scornfully tosses *Lula*'s candy out of the window. Their lack of concern for *Lula* mirrors

the reaction of the town to Lula; the white residents condescend to buy her candy once and then, finding it too sweet, refuse her after their initial purchase. Like Mrs. McFarland, they only care about their own desires, ignoring the needs of the poverty-stricken woman on their doorsteps. Only Wade shows Lula any compassion in the McFarland household, for he views her as a human being, not simply by her race, class, and gender.

Similarly, the nameless white woman who lets Lula live on her property is the only townspeople to care for Lula. The woman's difference from the racist views prevalent in Mount Ashton is emphasized by her status as an outsider; no one knows her name, including the eminent Mrs. McFarland. Her outsider status underscores the racism in this southern community. Even though Lula never knows the woman's name, she insists on getting Lula a doctor when she is sick, telling Lula, "Don't you worry. . . I'll take care of you" (170). Indeed, Lula dies in this woman's arms. The woman informs Wade and his mother of Lula's death, having heard Lula talk about Wade "up till she died" (180).

Her attitude towards Mrs. McFarland is aloof, suggesting she knows Mrs. McFarland has been less than kind to Lula. Declining to tell Mrs. McFarland her name, the woman ignores her unspoken question, simply "eyeing her speculatively," only "glanc[ing] back once more" before she walks down the street (180, 181). The woman knows Wade was important to Lula, but she rebuffs Mrs. McFarland as another white woman who was not charitable to Lula. Wade and this nameless woman are the only two people in the town to truly care for Lula, emphasizing society's indifference to the suffering of a poor, African American woman.

This indifference or outright prejudice emerges in all of Mabry's stories, highlighting the patriarchal structure that reinforces racism in the South. Mabry reveals how class distinctions perpetuate the oppression of African Americans, rigidly containing them within a lower-class. Some of his protagonists recognize the racism inherent in the southern social order, while other protagonists never question these distinctions, mindlessly accepting the mistreatment of an entire class. Although his characters do not always transcend the preconceived notions of their own superiority, the flawed social structure of the South surfaces as his protagonists struggle to find their own place within this class order. Their painful entrance into adulthood parallels the unjust position of African Americans in society. These characters must grapple with their identities, either embracing the class structure that subjugates an entire class of people, or wrestle with their own accountability for the continuation of this system. Mabry's treatment of these issues of class and race emphasize the differences in his views of Southern society from those of the more conservative Fugitives he associated with.



- Bass, Milton R. "Stockbridge Writer Takes First Prize in 1954's O. Henry Memorial Awards." *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* 11 February 1954. Print.
- Bloemink, Barbara J. "Florine Stettheimer: Becoming Herself." *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*. Ed. Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003. 111-29. *UC Press E-Books Collection, 1892-2004*. Web. 30 March 2012.
- Davis, Thadious M. *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994. Print.
- Dorrance, Ward, and Thomas Mabry. *The White Hound*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1959. Print.
- Hambourg, Maria Morris, et al. *Walker Evans*. New York: Princeton University Press in association with Museum of Modern Art, 2000. Print.
- Hutchinson, George. *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Print.
- Levy, Eugene. *James Weldon Johnson*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973. Print.
- Mellow, James R. *Walker Evans*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Print.
- Mabry, Lawson, and Harriet Noland Mabry. Personal Interview. 29 March 2012.
- Menees, Susan. Personal Interview. 10 February 2012.
- . Personal Interview. 5 April 2012.
- Menees, Susan, and Elinor Thurman. Personal Interview. 13 September 2011.
- . Personal Interview. 5 March, 2012.

Pillai, Sudha. "Second Reaction: Various Opinions on *I Heard God Talking to Me*." *First Opinions, Second Reactions* 3.2 (September 2010): 26-29. *Purdue e-Pubs*. Web. 29 March 2012.

Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume 1*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.

Rathbone, Belinda. *Walker Evans: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995. Print.

Twelve Southerners. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930. Print.

Waldron, Ann. *Close Connections*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1987. Print.

## APPENDIX A

## Annotated Bibliography

Davis, Thadious M. *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1994. Print.

Davis's biography of Nella Larsen provides information about the relationship between Larsen and Thomas Mabry, concentrating on their interactions during the 1930s. The biography does not go into detail about many of the events of which their relationship consisted, but it does help place Mabry at certain locations during specific years. Davis also discusses an instance of "passing," in which Mabry and Larsen travelled as two "white" companions; this event helps demonstrate Mabry's liberal views on race that make him distinct from many other Southern writers. The biography also addresses the incident of racial tension between Vanderbilt and Fisk University that caused Mabry to quit Vanderbilt to work at Fisk. This is not the most detailed account of this incident, however, and offers little exclusive information. Overall, Davis's biography supplements some aspects of this paper, but it is not the most significant source.

Hutchinson, George. *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line*.

Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Print.

Hutchinson's biography of Nella Larsen is one of the most significant sources for this paper. Although Hutchinson's topic is Larsen, he extends his biography to include the most information about Mabry that any published biography offers. This biography quotes extensively from letters written by and about Mabry, offering information that can only be found numerous collections of letters held by multiple universities and archives.



One letter in particular helps establish the development of Mabry's views that influenced his relationships with whites and Africans, which in turn shaped his literary works. Furthermore, Hutchinson uses letters between Allen Tate and Mabry to create a vivid account of the Vanderbilt-Fisk fiasco, providing one of the most complete versions of this incident. Through Larsen's biography, Hutchinson details Mabry's relationships with various prominent artists of the 1920s and 30s, such as James Weldon Johnson and Nella Larsen, which in turn helps establish Mabry's movements throughout the years. Hutchinson received some of the information for the section of the biography from Mabry's daughter, Susan Menees, but his work is far more extensive than interviews. His use of letters from Mabry's contemporaries delivered a wealth of information for this paper.

Mellow, James R. *Walker Evans*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. Print.

Walker Evans and Mabry worked closely together throughout the 1930s.

Mellow's biography describes how Mabry's position at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) allowed him to help Evans launch his career as a photographer. Beginning with the commission to photograph an African Sculpture collection to the 1938 "American Photographs" exhibit, this biography provides extensive detail about the working relationship between Evans and Mabry. In the process, it also illuminates Mabry's opinions on art and photographs, as well as his dedication to help a man he considered a great artist. The second section of this paper consists largely of Mabry's years at MoMA, and this biography was essential in expanding on Mabry's experiences during those years.

Mabry, Lawson, and Harriet Noland Mabry. Personal Interview. 29 March 2012.

Lawson Mabry is a cousin to Thomas Mabry, though too young to have known him. His mother, Harriet, married William, the son of Thomas Mabry Senior's younger brother. The age difference between Mabry Senior and William's father was drastic; consequently, Harriet did not know some of the older members of the family very well. Both Lawson and Harriet have been interested in the extensive Mabry family history for years, however, and have gone through numerous letters and records. They are familiar with the family history for generations back.

Lawson and Harriet provided the information on the family that helped create the Mabry history for this paper. In this interview, which took place in Lawson's home in Clarksville, Tennessee, Lawson and Harriet discussed family legends and tales, as well as the acquisition of the family farm known as Poplar Hill. They also talked about how the family owned slaves and what information about this fact can be gleaned from family records. Lawson was able to clarify certain aspects of this paper, such as Mabry Senior's ownership of the tobacco company and how he died. One should note, however, that their research is always ongoing and new facts about the Mabry family may surface.

Lawson also offered access to any family records he had available at his home. These records ranged from the Anna Marrast Mabry letters, which details life on the Poplar Hill farm during the 1800s, to newspaper articles and clippings. He also had the ledgers of John Elliot Mabry and his son, Thomas Lawson Mabry, which help illuminate the family's ownership and treatment of slaves. Copies of these ledgers are also available at the Tennessee State Library and Archives. The newspaper clippings, consisting mainly of obituaries and wedding announcements, often confirmed dates and facts. While

Lawson and Harriet are able to impart a wealth of knowledge, most of it pertains to family history and not specifically to Thomas Mabry.

Menees, Susan. Personal Interview. 10 February 2012.

This was the second interview that took place with Susan Menees, Thomas Mabry's daughter, at her home in Todd County, Kentucky. This is the same home her father bought in 1958, when the family moved from Stockbridge, Massachusetts. While this was the second interview, it was the first one in which Eleanor was not present, and a few months had passed between this interview and the first one. Susan answered every question as best as she could, but lamented that she was too young to think of asking her father questions about his life, opinions, and stories.

The bulk of this interview concentrated on establishing her father's personality. She discussed her favorite memories of him, her knowledge of her father and mother's relationship and everyday lives on the farm, and the few times she remembers her father speaking about his own parents. Her memories reveal him to be a fun, caring parents, who rarely spoke of his own experiences with his mother and father. This meeting also established Mabry did work on a novel he never published, though Susan is unable to find it.

---. Personal Interview. 5 April 2012.

This interview with Susan Menees was the final one for this paper. Like all the other interviews, this meeting took place at Susan's home. It mostly consisted of fact-



checking and a few questions that came up in the process of writing the paper, but it also dealt with the death of her father, an event she did not talk about in the other meetings.

Menees, Susan, and Elinor Thurman. Personal Interview. 13 September 2011.

This was the first interview for this paper. It took place at Susan's home, at the kitchen table. Elinor was originally not present, but Susan called her to invite her after a few initial questions. Elinor, a former librarian at Austin Peay University, has an excellent memory and extensive knowledge of family history and lore. Many members of the family rely on Elinor to explain how the multiple family lines—Mabrys, Dabneys, Runyons, and Merriweathers—intertwine. Elinor's mother and Thomas Mabry were first cousins, and Elinor remembers family dinners with him when he was visiting Tennessee every weekend from Massachusetts to search for a farm.

This meeting covered a lot of facts very quickly. Susan and Elinor discussed the general timeline of Thomas Mabry's life, filling in holes and providing information whenever necessary. They offered as much information on Mabry's childhood as they could and speculated about his tense relationships with his parents that prevented him from talking about them more often. Much of the information about Mabry hunting for a farm came from this interview, as well. The next interview, which Elinor was unable to attend, did not take place until months later.

---. Personal Interview. 5 March, 2012.

This interview took place in Susan's living room. Susan and Elinor were both present, though Susan was temporarily preoccupied with preparing tea and cookies. They

had compiled their stores of family photos to help create the collection of photos for this paper, though they did not make copies of the photographs at this time. Elinor answered some questions that had arisen in the last interview, which she had been unable to attend, and Susan discussed the winters her family stayed in Iowa.

Elinor went through Mabry's stories, revealing what she knew to be autobiographical elements. This comprised most of the meeting. Some of it was speculation, but Elinor was able to confirm certain places and people existed in what she called "Old Clarksville." Although many of the names of people were changed, some were not, and she emphasized that the street names and placement were accurate.

Rathbone, Belinda. *Walker Evans: A Biography*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995. Print.

Rathbone's biography of Walker Evans is useful and supplements Mellow's book, but some of her information is inaccurate. Her description of Thomas Mabry as a dancer, as well as his job at MoMA, is questionable, at best. Only a few small details seem to be problematic, however, and she provides enlightening information about Mabry's relationship with Walker Evans. Her biography continues to discuss their friendship, revealing Evans's reaction to Mabry's death and his persistent grief years later. None of the other biographies about Evans that supplied information for this paper continued to address their relationship past the years Mabry worked at MoMA.