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PETER TAYLOR'S FICTIONAL MEMOIRS

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

Laurence Scott Peeples

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
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Laurence Scott Peoples
Author

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Scott Donaldson
Scott Donaldson

Susan Donaldson
Susan Donaldson

Peter Wiggins
Peter Wiggins

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ABSTRACT

Since the mid-fifties, Peter Taylor has written about half his stories, as well as his 1986 novel A Summons to Memphis, in the form of personal memoirs. As a rule in these stories, an older narrator self-consciously examines a part of his past by writing or telling about it. Taylor's memoirists, who are almost always middle-aged (or older) white gentlemen from Tennessee, tend to use these narratives to defend their self-images and to justify their own behavior. They are often both attracted to and repelled by people whose lives represent alternatives to their own, people whose behavior is less restrained than theirs or who seem to experience more satisfying human contact. The narrators usually respond to these others either by asserting their superiority to them or by participating vicariously in the lives of their "alter-egos."

Taylor's memoir stories suggest that there are healthy and unhealthy ways to interpret one's past and to read interpretations of the past: rather than regarding other people as opposites or alter egos as a way of defining oneself, both storytellers and readers must allow themselves to see the world through the eyes of other people. As one of Taylor's memoirists observes, "it is only then that the world, as you have seen it through your own eyes, will start to tell you things about yourself."

PETER TAYLOR'S FICTIONAL MEMOIRS

For Peter Taylor fiction writing is a way of interpreting the past as it presents itself in personal memories and family stories. He told Jean Ross in 1981,

My theory is that you listen to people talk when you're a child - a Southerner does especially - and they tell stories and stories and stories, and you feel those stories must mean something. So really writing becomes an effort to find out what these stories mean in the beginning, and then you want to find out what all stories you hear or think of mean. The story you write is interpretation. (Ross 489)

In his concern for how people shape their experiences into stories or interpret stories they hear, Taylor illustrates one of the central points Hayden White makes in "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality": that to "narratize," or make stories out of, real events is to imbue them with "the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary" (23). White argues that a "moralizing impulse" guides the shaping of real events into stories. In a history text this impulse may be to promote a particular philosophy or defend a certain regime; in personal narratives a similar "moralizing impulse" is often at work justifying the narrator's behavior or his world view.

In a group of narratives that comprises a large portion of his fiction, Peter Taylor has explored the ways people explain

and justify their lives by "narratizing" their memories. With "1939," a story originally published in 1955 under the suggestive title "A Sentimental Journey," Taylor began writing his stories increasingly in the form of personal memoirs, first-person narratives in which the speaker tells or writes about incidents in his own past. Five of the six stories that immediately followed "1939," all collected in 1959's Happy Families Are All Alike, fit that description, as do thirteen of the twenty-seven stories Taylor has published since Happy Families. Taylor's interest in the "memoir story" seems to have culminated in his 1986 novel A Summons to Memphis, a journey into both the remote and recent past of the narrator as seen in the perspective of the present. /1/ Though Taylor's fictional memoirists tend merely to defend their own well-established views of themselves through these narratives, some are able to see their experiences more clearly in retrospect. Taylor suggests that narrators, who interpret experience, as well as listeners and readers, who interpret narratives, must move beyond their own comfortable perspectives in order to learn anything from the stories they hear and tell.

Taylor's memoir stories often hinge on a narrative irony by which the author separates himself from the speaker. This technique is familiar enough in literature: the author includes details that undermine the narrator's interpretation or suggest a different interpretation. But rather than distancing himself in any obvious way, Taylor often blurs the distinction between

author and first-person narrator. In fact, his "detached" third-person voice is so similar to the voices of his memoirists that critics tend to treat Taylor's stories as if they were all narrated by the same person. When the narrator's perception turns out to be flawed or limited, the irony often rests not only on him but on the reader as well, for the reader has found the narrator congenial, has trusted him, become his confidante.

The fact that Taylor's relaxed, assured narrative voice is so often the focus of critical praise for his fiction suggests either that many reader/critics do accept his narrators' perceptions at face value or that even when one reads their narratives skeptically, Taylor's memoirists remain attractive. They sound like who they are: middle-aged white gentlemen from various places in Tennessee, usually some combination of Nashville, Memphis, and one of Taylor's fictional small or medium-sized towns like Thornton or Chatham. /2/ They are professional men, more than likely academics, and though they tend not to be ostentatiously wealthy, they remember growing up in households with servants and attending society functions.

Although they would seem to have been relatively unaffected by it financially, most of Taylor's memoirists strongly identify their childhoods with the Depression, which provides the setting for their stories of adolescence and young adulthood. They legitimately claim to have grown up during a "simpler time," though they admit that as members of the upper-middle-class their families were not particularly hard-hit by the economic

hardships of the thirties. The narrator of "The Other Times," for example, remembers feeling deprived because he, along with his friends, had to wear hand-me-downs, something "our brothers and sisters, five years before, wouldn't have put up with for five minutes" (CS 86). /3/ The same narrator finds present-day Chatham, his hometown, too "prosperous-looking," and almost wishes he could "buy up the whole town and let it run down just a little" (CS 85). Nat Ramsey is similarly nostalgic in "The Old Forest," admitting that "my Second World War experiences are perhaps what I ought to remember best - those, along with the deaths of my two younger brothers in the Korean War" (33-34), but his memory returns instead to events set in "our tranquil, upper-middle-class world of 1937" (QE 34).

Because Taylor is a Tennessean raised in an upper-middle-class household during the Depression, and because he has been writing in memoir form since he reached middle-age himself, it is not surprising that there is a strong element of autobiography in his work. Morgan Blum has argued that Taylor's fiction is characterized by his "self-limitation" to the "world he has observed, peopled with folk he has observed" (568). Though Blum stops short of calling Taylor's fiction autobiographical (as if that would belittle its value), Taylor has given several examples in interviews of how he has transplanted his own experiences and family stories into his fiction, even stating that in most of the early stories, "there's not a word that's made up" (Thompson 157).

It is no coincidence, then, that Taylor's stories seem to arise effortlessly out of memory. Griffith has identified the "digressive-progressive memoir story" as Taylor's favorite mode (preface). "Like a great actor whom you don't catch 'acting,' he's a great writer you seldom catch 'writing,'" notes Walter Clemons in his review of The Old Forest. "He simply button-holes you and starts telling you things" (74). Robert Towers has described Taylor's method as novelistic in that he "defies the convention of brevity and concentration that we usually associate with the [short story] genre" (26). By telling stories that do not seem to be tightly-knit or focused on a single incident, Taylor's memoirists further the illusion of realistic transparency, as if their narratives referred to the past as it "really was" rather than to stories constructed from past events.

An essential element in this "transparent" storytelling style is Taylor's diction, which serves as another link between author and narrator. Whether the voice is that of a memoirist or a third-person narrator or Taylor himself in an interview, the diction is formal in a very unforced way, as if it came naturally to the upper-middle-class, literate, basically old-fashioned speaker. Herschel Gower selects a number of phrases Taylor uses in his fiction that are "faintly old-fashioned if not (at times) outright archaic":

They will say "Boarding school" instead of "prep school." Men have their "toddlies" before dinner - not "cocktails." . . . After dinner they play cards in the "sitting room," not the "living room." Their houses

at Monteagle and Beersheba Springs are always cottages - never cabins - no matter how rustic or what the scale. They attend "coming out parties" instead of "debut balls." They regularly say "fetch" for "bring." They "quarrel" but do not "fight." (qtd. in Robison 161)

Furthermore, Taylor's narrators and characters avoid profanity almost completely, and their avoidance seems to be much more a matter of habit than of Taylor's wishing not to offend. Even the schoolboys who taunt the pharmacist in "At the Drugstore" use what might be considered delicate terms when they write on the mirror, "Mr. Conway sleeps with his mother" (CS 129). In A Summons to Memphis Philip Carver shies away even from slang to such an extent that when he refers to certain bars as "dives" or uses the words "cheap" and "tacky" to describe someone's clothes, he points out that he is using one of his sisters' phrases. Speaking of a particular type of bar, he says that "whatever electric light there was, was always kept at a very low wattage" (122), a telling remark not only because of the implied disapproval of dimly lit places but also because Philip uses old-fashioned phrases like "electric light" and "wattage" rather than saying something like, "What lighting there was was dim."

Far from trying to draw a line between autobiography and fiction, then, Taylor exploits the interplay of the two as well as his readers' awareness of it. When asked if another story, "Dean of Men," is autobiographical, Taylor gave this answer:

Flaubert says, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi." How can you write fiction if you can't imagine it? And how can you imagine it if you can't link your psychology to your characters? Writing starts with events and experiences that worry me, and I put them together.

You write a story in which you are the protagonist, but you have to change him for the theme's sake. (McAlexander 119)

The question of how autobiographical Taylor's stories are may seem trivial, but I would argue that Taylor's method of intentionally linking himself to his memoirist/narrator, particularly when, "for the theme's sake," that narrator's perception is flawed, is essential to his narrative irony. The impulse to take what the narrator says at face value is strengthened by the identification of narrator with author. Even if one did not know anything about Peter Taylor, including his name, one would tend to identify the narrative voice of A Summons to Memphis or "The Old Forest" with the "real" author because those voices sound authorial, like the voice-over at the beginning and ending of a movie or television show. Knowing, as most of Taylor's readers do, that narrator and author share large parts of their biographies reinforces the notion that the narrator's vision of the past is really Taylor's, and therefore "what the story means" is what the narrator says it means.

If Taylor implicates his readers by lulling them into a feeling of confidence in the memoirist, he also implicates himself by linking his psychology and his personal experience to his characters. His memoirists have good reason for sounding confident and authoritative. In a society that has traditionally been run by upper and upper-middle-class white males, theirs has always been the voice of authority, though their authority has begun to be challenged in the decades since the Depression.

Taylor invests them with another kind of authority as well, that of authorship, by making them writers or tellers who re-create the past. By suggesting that their way of seeing the world is limited (even limited in many ways by their roles as patriarchs), Taylor acknowledges the limitations of his own vision as an author and as a "well-born" white man in a white-dominated, patriarchal society.

It is appropriate to begin examining these white male interpretations of the past with the provocatively-titled "Dean of Men." The narrator, who has prospered in what he refers to as "the world of men," describes the "quiet, uneventful life" his father led after retreating from that world:

He was an affectionate father, and I rarely saw him in what I would call depressed spirits. Yet how often one had the feeling that he was lonely and bored. I remember sometimes, even when the family was on vacation together - when we had taken a cottage at the shore or were camping or fishing in the mountains - the look would come in his eye, and one was tempted to ask oneself, What's wrong? What's missing? (CS 24)

Significantly, the narrator is speaking to his own son Jack, who at this point may be wondering, if he does not already know, what is missing from his father's life. The story, which in typical Taylor fashion is a composite of three separate but related incidents, has been addressed to him, but it has been told more for the speaker's benefit.

The three stories the father tells his son form an uncanny pattern of betrayal in three generations of the family. The narrator's grandfather, a noted politician, was betrayed by "a

group of young men whom [he] considered more or less his proteges"; his father, the president of an insurance company ruined during the Depression, was similarly "betrayed" by an old friend on the company's board of directors; finally, the narrator's betrayal came at the hands of his fellow-professors, who allowed him to be the scapegoat in the group's plan to keep the supposedly unqualified dean of men from becoming permanent president of the college. All three men took out their frustration on women in their families: the first threw a silver dollar at his wife; his son and grandson both verbally abused their daughters.

The incidents are so similar that one might suspect the narrator of making parts of them up. Not only is each man deserted by another man or a group of men at a crucial moment, but each is deserted in such a way that he must take the fall for the failure of an undertaking he was brought into by the betrayers. The displacement of each man's anger takes place at the breakfast table; the last two both occur on Sunday mornings, and both elicit the same remark from the wife: "I would be ashamed of myself if I were you." The narrator admits, in fact, that the quarrel between his grandparents is something he has imagined, and that "[t]here are many obscurities about the old story that I can't possibly clear up and won't try to" (12). But it seems likely that he has made the stories as similar in his mind as he can so that his own experience as a fall guy will at least have the dignity, and perhaps even the inevitability, associated with

tradition.

James Curry Robison, in a perceptive analysis of the story, argues that "[t]he pattern of betrayal and reaction is so striking that the reader is tempted to let the narrator take his place in the procession of decent and deceived men, but he does not deserve to be there" (81). Robison points out the narrator's "moral weakness" in his resignation from his first position and his later acceptance of a position at another school as, ironically, dean of men. "What he did would be like his father's going to Barksdale and begging for a job or his grandfather's running for office again and asking Lucas for support" (81). Such a reading seems overly judgmental: the narrator's decision may not be particularly admirable, but he did not beg or even ask for help from one of his betrayers (even if Heartwell can be included with the professors). The offer he accepts is not merely a bone thrown to him by Heartwell but a better position than either of the teaching jobs he had had, "at the college where I have since made my most important contribution to the education of American youth" (37). Robison's estimation of the narrator's father as "the only good man in the bunch" is also difficult to accept, considering that his poorly-timed sarcastic remark led to the estrangement between his daughter and the man she wanted to marry, whereas the narrator's snapping at his daughter had only short-lived effects.

As Robison argues, the narrator of "Dean of Men" has constructed the three-part story to reflect favorably upon

himself by equating his experience with those of his father and grandfather. But ultimately the narrator's mistake is in trying to convince himself that despite all the parallels, his life has turned out better than theirs because he is a different sort of man than they were. Toward the end of his monologue, he tries to make a distinction between his successful, happy life and his father's empty one:

Even with as little time as you have spent with me through the years, Jack, you have seen what a successful marriage my second marriage has been, and what a happy, active life I have had. One sacrifices something. One sacrifices, for instance, the books one might have written after that first one. More important, one may sacrifice the love, even the acquaintance, of one's children. One loses something of one's self even. But at least I am not tyrannizing over old women and small children. At least I don't sit gazing into space while my wife or perhaps some kindly neighbor woman waits patiently to see whether or not I will risk a two-heart bid. A man must somehow go on living among men, Jack. (CS 38)

The narrator's defensive tone implies that he may question the decisions he has made to avoid falling into the same traps as his father and grandfather. He chose to stay out of business and politics, but his experience with the dean of men taught him that he could not avoid either. The colleagues who stand by while he is cheated out of the faculty house tell him that bringing up his problem would have been "most impolitic" at that time, that it would be "a bad business" (35). Now he feels he has avoided the fate of his forbears by continuing to "live among men," or accepting the world on its own terms, but what he has "sacrificed," a list that includes a part of himself, has more

value than he is willing to admit.

Much as the narrator of "Dean of Men" retreats into family history to try to convince himself that his life is more complete than his father's was, the narrator of "The Other Times" delves into his personal past to reinforce the idea that if something is missing in his life, he is better off without it. The narrator recalls his experience with Letitia Ramsey, a "marvelously pretty girl" with whom he narrowly escaped being arrested in a raid on a country tavern. Though he says that Letitia just "happened to be my date that night" when he and two friends decided to try taking some society girls to a roadhouse that sold bootleg whiskey, his remembering her seems to be motivated by his regret that he never did anything about his attraction to her. Twice during the evening of the raid, he sees Letitia give him a searching look, but he does not know how to respond. His inability to act becomes a more obvious shortcoming when the jukebox is unplugged and they can hear the police knocking on the "tourist cabins" nearby: "I just couldn't make myself admit that the raid would be happening to the tavern, too, in about three minutes" (CS 96). In contrast with the narrator is Letitia's uncle Louis, who has Aunt Martha, the tavern owner, hide Letitia and her friends and sacrifices himself to the police so that they will not be caught.

When Louis Ramsey ushers his niece's group into the bathroom to hide them, she gives him a look that expresses "the beautiful confidence she had in him--all because he was an uncle of hers,

I suppose" (100). The narrator knows that there is more to the look than the fact that he is her uncle, and he wonders years later why he didn't know "how to make a girl like her look at me that way" (107). He refers to himself twice in the story as a "worrier," and he tries to explain his tentativeness as a result of his worrying and his worrying as a result of growing up during the Depression. But what does someone like this narrator, "from one of the finest families in the state" (82), worry about? The answer he gives is that he would not make "the kind of living" his father had, but more specifically he worries about becoming someone like Louis Ramsey, whom he considers "the most dismal failure of my acquaintance" (86).

His snobbery toward Louis Ramsey, coupled with his strange interest in him, is apparent from the opening: "Can anyone honestly like having a high school civics teacher for an uncle? I doubt it" (81). He devotes two long paragraphs to the ways other respectable friends of his expressed their shame at having embarrassing relatives, and he is careful to point out that "[l]ots of girls - and lots of boys, too - had families like mine, with nobody in particular to be ashamed of" (84). His disdain for Louis Ramsey may even be what keeps him from letting himself fall in love with Letitia, for although her family was as respectable and as well off as his own, Uncle Louis could be found there on any Sunday afternoon, and Letitia, unlike the narrator, didn't think of her uncle as a disgrace at all. "The point is it was hard to think of Letitia's having this Lou Ramsey

for an uncle" (82), he says, but in his eyes the hard-drinking teacher and coach diminishes her attractiveness and her family's status: "It may not seem fair to dwell on this unfortunate uncle of a girl like Letitia Ramsey, but it was through him that I got a clearer picture of what she was like, and the whole Ramsey family as well" (82).

The narrator knows when he takes Letitia to Aunt Martha's tavern that they will probably encounter "the Ram," but he is "not sure it was not something I hoped for instead of something I dreaded, as it should have been" (89). He even admits that "I would have seen the Ram just as plainly even if he had not been there," a remark that suggests that he could not disassociate Letitia from her uncle and that - consciously or not - he wanted to bring the "issue" of her Uncle Louis to a head, perhaps as a way of bringing to an end whatever romantic interest he had in her. Interestingly, no one else in the story shows the kind of repulsion for Lou Ramsey that the narrator does, and even before he performs the fairly heroic act of saving Letitia and five strangers at the expense of his job, he seems unattractive only through the narrator's disparaging remarks. All that is "wrong" with him is that despite his upper-class background he is satisfied with being a high school baseball coach and that he goes out drinking with his players. The narrator finds him repulsive because as a teenager he liked to do the same things the Ram did, but if staying in Chatham and becoming a regular at places like Aunt Martha's could happen to a Ramsey, it could also

happen to him.

It does not happen to the narrator, of course, but years later the thought of Lou Ramsey still makes him uncomfortable. Unlike the narrator, Lou Ramsey does not seem worried about his place in the social hierarchy, for he is willing to lose even what status he has in order to protect his niece. Perhaps, like the narrator of "Dean of Men," this narrator has sacrificed, or left undeveloped, a part of himself, and that part bears some resemblance to the less class-conscious and more instinctively selfless Lou Ramsey. At the end of the story he still has not fully admitted that the civics teacher behaved with more courage and with better instincts that night than he could have. He ends instead with a diatribe against Letitia, or "a girl like Letitia":

Well, the worst part is when you are back home visiting and meet her at a dinner party, and she tells you before the whole table how she was once on the verge of being head over heels in love with you and you wouldn't give her a tumble. It's always said as a big joke, of course, and everyone laughs. . . . And what it shows, more than any number of half-grown children could ever do, is how old she is getting to be. She says you always seemed to have your mind on other things and that she doesn't know yet whether they were higher things or lower things. Everyone keeps on laughing until, finally, she pretends to look very serious and says that it is alright for them to laugh but that it wasn't very funny at the time. Her kidding, of course, is a big success, and nobody really minds it. but all I ever want to say - and never do say - is that as far as I am concerned, it isn't one bit funnier now than it was then. (CS 108)

His motivation for telling the story has been to reaffirm his identity as someone who is not a Louis Ramsey, someone who can

live without the trusting looks of a Letitia Ramsey. It may not be any funnier now than it was then, but what his narrative shows is that he is still the victim of his own snobbery.

The same might be said of Mr. Charles Varnell, who narrates most of "There." In this story Taylor makes it easier than usual for one to distance oneself from the storyteller, because here the original narrator, a man from Mr. Varnell's hometown, is also the listener: in his introductory paragraphs the reader gets a chance to lock into the listener's perception of Mr. Varnell before encountering Varnell's perception of the people and the place he refers to only as "there." In effect, the reader is allowed behind the scenes to view Taylor's fictional memoir strategy. Here the narrative frame warns us as we should warn ourselves when reading any of Taylor's memoir stories: these experiences are being reconstructed through memory, through the storyteller's subjective interpretive mechanisms, and through someone else's (here, the first narrator's and the author's) rendering of the narrative.

Mr. Varnell, like the narrator of "The Other Times," is haunted by the memory of a girl he loved when he was a young man, and though he acted on his desire, his snobbery and her defense of the townspeople he disdains kept them apart. Mr. Varnell begins his monologue by scorning the eccentric behavior of the town's leading families. His reminiscences about the Busbys' not washing themselves and the Jenkinses' chronic obesity are humorous, but Mr. Varnell, like his counterpart in "The Other

Times," doesn't think they are one bit funnier now: he "told these anecdotes about the Busbys with never a smile and with but little discernible relish for the details he brought forth" (CS 367).

Varnell confesses that "[e]ven when I was an adolescent I used to wonder how I could ever really fall in love with a girl who came from one of those families" (370). He does fall in love with a girl from his hometown, but being singled out as an exception to the town rule of grotesqueness does not allure Laura Nell, who identifies herself with the town and objects to Charles's critical nature. Like Letitia Ramsey, she has no intention of disowning a part of her background her prospective lover abhors, in this case not just an uncle but the entire provincial town. Charles Varnell knew when he was courting her that Laura Nell specialized in designing practical jokes to expose members of her family to their own prejudices, but he refuses to see the point of the "joke" she plays on him, poignant and eerie as it turns out to be. Laura Nell tells him that her family has an unpardonable trait, "worse than obesity or dirtiness" (384). If Charles could discover the trait without asking other family members, she would "forgive him everything" and, he presumes, marry him. Her intention must have been for Charles to give up on discovering the "trait" for himself, which he does, and by asking another family member, learn that it is a reference to a grim joke of their grandfather's: "[T]he Morrises were all alike in at least one respect: they all had to die some

time or other" (387). Perhaps it would then dawn on Charles that he simply expected too much from people, that even the girl he idolized was only a mortal, and that neither she nor he was really "better" than anyone else. The joke turns out to be much more grim than Laura Nell intended when we learn that the grandfather's quip was told to Varnell when Laura Nell, still a young woman, lay on her death bed.

Griffith notes that "Varnell's mature sophistication enables him to recognize certain foolishness in his early point of view" (150), but snobbery still pervades the older man's interpretation. Though he wanted to "save" Laura Nell by getting her away from there, Laura Nell knew that their hometown was nothing one needed to be saved from if one had a reasonable sense of humor and didn't mind what one's place in the world was. Varnell does mind, and the fact that most of the inhabitants of his hometown choose to stay "there" makes his supposedly higher position as a man of the world seem more secure by giving him people to look down upon. Though he remembers Laura Nell's last words to him - "Probably it is just as well always to run away from it" - it still does not occur to him that he may have run away from an important and valuable part of himself when he tried to disassociate himself from his hometown.

Charles Varnell and the narrator of "The Other Times" are both fascinated and repelled by individuals who are distinctly different from themselves; along with the narrator of "Dean of Men" they would like to distance themselves as much as possible

from ways of seeing and experiencing life that they have rejected. Other memoirists cling to lives that are different from theirs as a way of filling some void in their own experience. The narrator of "Daphne's Lover" asserts very reasonably that to live vicariously through the experiences of other people is actually healthy:

I tell myself nowadays - whenever I find myself thinking too much about my friends, my children, or my students, wondering about the details of their lives, their love life, their sex life - I tell myself that a healthy imagination is like a healthy appetite and must be fed. If you do not feed it the lives of your friends, I maintain, then you are apt to feed it your own life, to live in your imagination rather than upon it. (Miro 130)

Robison sees a marked absence of irony here: "the narrator does see the truth of his situation"; he "is not frustrated or resentful, only mildly dissatisfied and aware that people tend to have too much or too little of something, seldom just enough" (76). True, this narrator does not undercut his interpretation of the past by inadvertently revealing his own prejudice; in fact, he is more analytical concerning his tendency to feed his imagination on Frank Lacy's life than he is concerning the memories themselves. But does the fact that he is honest and straightforward make him right about the healthiness of living vicariously through his friends? Could it not be seen as a way of living in his imagination without really contemplating his own life? All he says about his wife, for example, is that from the age of fifteen he knew he would marry her; he never says how he

knew or why he wanted to marry her. His admission that "from the time of my meeting Mary my interest in Frank's romances seemed greater than ever, somehow" (130) is a loaded remark that does not speak well for his "not unhappy domesticity" (112).

Frank Lacy is, as Robison observes, the narrator's "alter ego," and the term is appropriate in a broad psychological sense. The narrator remembers coming home and "more than once" finding Frank on his bed (106); the two boys have even exchanged keys to their houses. "I never made use of mine to his house, but for several years I continued to feel that there might be some circumstance when I would want to do so" (111). Just as he never uses his key to Frank's, the narrator does not play a role in Frank's life comparable to the one Frank plays in his by acting out the narrator's fantasies. The narrator's anecdotes revolving around Frank take place when the boys are in the midst of puberty; it is, in fact, when they are "fourteen and fifteen" that "Frank spent a lot of time at my house" (105). Naturally the stories concern girls, who find Frank irresistible. The narrator's vivid memory of how the little copper-haired girl looked may indicate that jealousy motivated him to yell the word "whore" at her in front of Frank, the object of her embarrassing displays of affection. And it is Frank who physically conquers Irene Kincaid, whom the narrator has worshipped but has been afraid to touch. The scene in which Irene teases Frank and then runs into his arms during a game of fly-ball is more than a little dream-like:

Irene was caught between us. We closed in on her, but Frank carefully threw above her head. At last, at a moment when I had the ball, she turned toward Frank and ran full-force into him. As they met, a shout or a scream or a shriek - some kind of noise - came out of my throat, but I believe neither of them heard it. I stood watching them with my mouth hanging open. It seemed the most natural thing in the world the way he took her in his arms, bending her backward over his right arm, with his right foot set forward a little, and kissed her directly on the lips. It seemed to me they held that kiss for several minutes. . . . Strange to say, the game of fly-ball was taken up again almost immediately - and with none of us making any reference to the embrace. (129)

There is little to suggest that Frank Lacy is merely a product of the narrator's unconscious desires, but it is hard not to feel that the narrator, through his storytelling, has somehow transformed his friend into a superhero version of himself. Robison identifies "Daphne's lover" as the narrator, who "finds Daphne's permanently chaste condition a consoling idea" (75). But as Daphne's lover the narrator is also linked to Apollo, who is frustrated in his efforts to capture Daphne as a living person. The narrator must settle for second-hand experience: at least part of the reason he is attracted to any image of Daphne is that he associates it with the "real" Irene Kincaid. He fulfills his true desires through works of art and through the semi-mythological life of Frank Lacy, not to mention the lives of other friends, children, and students. There may be nothing tragic or uncommon in the narrator's need for vicarious experience, but it does suggest that something real is missing from his "not unhappy domesticity."

"The Gift of the Prodigal" presents a narrator who is more

obviously, and it would seem more pathetically, dependent upon another person's adventures in order to have any semblance of personal fulfillment. He realizes the truth about his relationship with his hell-raising son Ricky completely: "For Rick [coming to see me] must be like going to see any other old fellow who happens to be his boss and who is ailing and staying away from the office a few days" (QE 2); "He was only hesitating down there because he dreaded seeing me" (17). Ricky comes to see his father when he needs help, and grudgingly his father gives it. But as the title suggests, Ricky gives his father something in return: the stories that explain why he needs his money or influence "this time."

For most of the narrative, which is less a memoir than a shifting between past-tense accounts of Rick's exploits and the narrator's thoughts on the morning of the present visit, the father scorns the son's behavior and pretends to want to avoid the interview, which is "sure to send my blood pressure soaring" (16). When Rick comes up to his father's room, they quarrel, as if out of habit, until Rick says, "You don't need to hear my crap," and his father, "bewildered," answers, "I do . . . I do" (20). His admission that their relationship "is not, after all, such a one-sided business" reconciles them; his son, who now looks at him "in the most compassionate way imaginable," is grateful that he can give something to his father.

Ricky's father does not try to justify his emotional dependence on his son with the argument that it is healthy to

feed his imagination on someone else's life rather than one's own. He admits that it is "all anyone in the world can give me now - perhaps the most anyone has ever been able to give a man like me" (20). There is still something sad in his being "wild with anticipation" of his son's latest irresponsible and probably illegal activity; and his remark that, despite the affection he has always gotten from his wife and his other children, "it seems this was all there ever was" (20) hints that his dissatisfaction with his own life may be more than just the result of old age and its infirmities. As a widowed father he needs to have someone need him, and Ricky is apparently the only child of his who does. As a respectable, wealthy man he needs some decadence in his life, and Ricky provides that as well. At least the father does not have to reshape Ricky's experience to make use of it. He is, after all, the listener, the one who receives Ricky's stories pre-packaged, and though he has been the teller of his son's stories through most of "The Gift of the Prodigal," he ends by joining the reader as the hearer of Ricky's latest exploit:

As Ricky begins, I find myself listening not merely with fixed attention but with my whole being. . . . I hear him beginning. I am listening. I am listening gratefully to all he will tell me about himself, about any life that is not my own. (21)

This tension between the lives these men have chosen (which are to some degree chosen for them) and the alternatives they see in other people's lives is the motivation behind their narratives. Though their stories differ considerably, they all

seem to lack satisfying human contact. The narrator of "Daphne's Lover" is perhaps the best example, but the same could be said of Charles Varnell and the narrator of "The Other Times." Contrasting with the narrators are people like Lou Ramsey, Frank Lacy, and Rick, who possess a vitality and sensuality that both attracts and repels men who have rejected that part of themselves for the sake of respectability and status. Confronted with memories of "lives that are not their own," Taylor's memoirists either define themselves in opposition to those other lives or participate in them vicariously, or both. In the case of Ricky's father someone else "makes" the stories, but the others all shape the raw material of their experience so that they can reconcile their lives with what their lives are not.

This need to create a past that defines one's present self is exemplified by Philip Carver in A Summons to Memphis. Like the narrator of "Daphne's Lover," Philip defines himself in terms of his alter ego, though here the roles are reversed: it is Philip who lives the self-consciously "free and independent sort of life" in Manhattan while his friend Alex, married and settled, teaches English at Memphis State University. Philip imagines that his life sometimes gives Alex "vicarious satisfaction":

There is a certain serenity about the free and independent sort of life I live here that a Memphis family man cannot fail to envy, living, as I do, with a woman some fifteen years younger than myself and having for my friends intellectual people who have no more involvement with the dull, practical problems of domestic life than I do. (57-58)

Yet Philip admits that he is not in love with Holly Kaplan, the

younger woman; and his independence is coupled with an emotional detachment from his family and from other people in general.

Philip has rejected the kind of life Alex has embraced, and he continues to talk himself out of making his life less "free and independent" throughout the novel. It is therefore convenient for Philip to contrast Alex's life, his opinions, even his perception with his own, and he does so largely by identifying Alex with the "small, old world of Memphis" (60). He belittles Alex's ingenuous praise of Betsy and Josephines's indulgent attitude toward Mr. Carver: "Ah, Alex, you and your provincial Memphis love of a simple truth!" (89) Memphis, Alex's lifelong home, may be a young, new-money city when set against old-fashioned, genteel Nashville, but it becomes for Philip the epitome of the provincialism that he, like Charles Varnell, wants to leave behind. Philip will admit that when he and Alex were younger "we seemed to be very much of the same temperament and sensibility" (118), but he believes that he was actually a very different sort of man and that he proved it by moving to New York. "The major difference between us now would seem to be that Alex continues to regard himself as of the same species as that of people like my sisters and my father, and I on the other hand do not continue quite to regard myself so" (119).

Philip derives his identity largely from disassociating himself from Alex and from his own family. He has, in fact, built a mythology around his father and his family's move from Nashville to Memphis. His mother feared that her children would

feel they were being driven from their ancestral home (though the family's roots are in Thornton) and warned them not to turn their move to Memphis into the Cherokee's Trail of Tears. But Philip does just that, not by crying at the time of the move but by seeing the rest of his life in terms of that one decisive event. He insists more than once that he has learned to repress or forget the wrongs he suffered at the hands of his father and, less directly, Lewis Shackelford, but he returns to them often enough that Holly has accused him of being "absolutely obsessed" with his family (73), and his narrative, which returns repeatedly to events surrounding the move to Memphis, is evidence of the accuracy of her assessment. On the plane to Memphis, Philip descends back into memories he "had long since learned to repress" and describes his father in terms opposite to the way he sees himself:

I had relived all the wrongs done me by my father, even those he had unwittingly done and those he had done merely in order to enable himself to go ahead with his own life. I knew that he could not possibly have been aware, when he faced the very real necessity for himself of removing himself from the unhappy scene in which Lewis Shackelford had betrayed him, could not have imagined then that for the thirteen year-old boy in his household the removal would constitute a trauma he would in some way never recover from. His experiences and mine were so utterly different at that moment in life! . . . How could he understand the disappointment and shock the boy would experience at having the important transition of puberty and adolescence so abruptly interrupted? How could he have known, being the sort of man he was or not being, rather, a more intellectual or perceptive man than he was, not a man, that is, who could look back on his own adolescence and by so doing comprehend what his son was experiencing? (147-48)

Philip's efforts to forgive and forget only compel him to "reopen [his] notebooks" as he does after the first eight chapters. He casts his father as the "protagonist" who forced his family to share his ordeals, but Philip sees himself as a protagonist as well, with his father as the adversary he must forgive and Lewis Shackelford as the sinister force behind his father's wrongs. "And I cannot resist," writes Philip, "this opportunity to point out how the evil that men like Lewis Shackelford do . . . has its effect finally not merely on its immediate victims (in the moment of killing or deceiving or cheating) but also at last upon myriads of persons in all the millennia to come" (15).

Philip's one great love affair with Clara Price is thwarted by Mr. Carver, as are his sisters' most promising relationships with men. Though his story of his father's maneuverings (which is supported by evidence from Alex Mercer) makes it difficult to see Mr. Carver as merely a scapegoat for Philip, the affair itself seems highly idealized, like an episode lifted from an Edgar Allan Poe tale. "But suddenly there came a change and an awakening for me," he writes of his first seeing Clara. They spend their time together reading Romantic poetry and picking four-leaf clovers, and he delights in finding presents for her, though "it pleased me that she never responded by making any sort of present to me in return" (106). Though from their first love-making they "imagined ourselves bound to each other for life" (105), Clara complies with the wishes of their fathers to break

off the relationship, and she does so without even a word of explanation to Philip. But Philip, decades later, still regards her as his one true love denied him by his father.

If the narrative of A Summons to Memphis is to be seen as an introspective journey for Philip Carver, what he finds in his search is for the most part the image of himself he has built up over the years: a victim of his father and Lewis Shackelford, but a secure, independent man nonetheless. One of the most important questions the novel raises is whether he achieves any new understanding of his father and of himself in the course of the narrative; if he does, it comes in the last fourth of the novel, which he refers to as a "postscript" (171). Philip and Holly debate whether it is necessary to forget the injuries one's parents have inflicted, as Philip tries to do, or, as Holly argues, to believe that no forgetting is required, "that fathers were bound to be right in all disputations so far as their own children were concerned" (201). Perhaps Philip is right in assessing both arguments as nonsensical; still it must be Holly's influence that leads him, in the period following their reconciliation, to "imagine more about my father's life than I had in the past had any conception of" (176-77):

He aspired to an individuality that could not be accounted for in the components of his own character and his own identity. He aspired to otherness than what he was by accident of birth in any sense of the phrase. At some point in his maturing into manhood this yearning and this longing and this aspiring became a craving. (180)

Philip now regards his father as a hero, "like a character

in a book," and claims to admire him for "his very oppositeness from me" (197). Yet he and his father are very much alike; his father's "oppositeness" comes mainly from succeeding where Philip has so far failed, in becoming something other than what he was born to be. Philip, too, has aspired to individuality and otherness, defying his father in going to New York much as George Carver defied his father in going to Vanderbilt. But Philip was never able to overcome his past as George Carver was, nor could he leave Memphis behind the way George Carver ultimately left Nashville behind. Now, like the other memoirists, Philip must deal with what his life is not, and he does so by reassuring himself that his life is one other people must envy, that he is not like his sisters and Alex Mercer.

His new appreciation for his father, coinciding with Lewis Shackelford's death, leads to what appears to be a true reconciliation between father and son in Philip's mind. But if anything changes Philip's outlook on his family history, it is his father's heretical reconciliation with his betrayer. Philip resists accepting his father's renewed friendship with the man "whose mistreatment of Father had been the cause of all our maladjustment," but finally, remembering Holly's doctrine that whatever parents do is necessary for themselves and their children, he accepts it, to the point of taking Lewis Shackelford's place as his father's long-distance telephone companion (231). Because the reader sees George Carver only through Philip's eyes, it is difficult to determine to what

extent Philip really understands him, but there is something positive in his more sympathetic interpretation of his father's life and character toward the end of the novel.

Philip's understanding of himself and his own experience is more questionable. Like Taylor's other fictional memoirists, Philip's reconstructions of the past contain coincidences that suggest considerable narrative license. The dinner scene in which both Lewis Shackelford and Clara Price reappear presents a strange enough coincidence in itself, but the way Philip links those two larger-than-life characters demonstrates his unwillingness to take responsibility for the shortcomings of his own life:

I could think only that indirectly at least it was this Lewis Shackelford who had affected my life so that I had become a man who would find it so difficult to fall in love with a woman that it could only happen once in my life. I felt my narrowness and cowardice was all due, inadvertently or other wise, to my father's treatment of me and Lewis's treatment of my father. (214)

It is difficult to believe that either Philip's doctrine of forgetting or Holly's doctrine of parents being right by necessity will wipe out the mythologizing with which Philip has explained why he has such a difficult time loving--not just Holly but also his sisters, his father, and even his best friend. Philip concludes with the reassurance that his life with Holly is "serene," that in the aftermath of their fathers' deaths "we have put Memphis and Cleveland [Holly's hometown] out of our lives" (233). But the reader knows better than to accept

Philip's statement at face value. Taylor's typically ambiguous ending leaves room to question whether Philip's writing this notebook novel constitutes a catharsis, after which he can really leave Memphis and Lewis Shackleford and Clara Price behind, or a symptom of a way of thinking that will never allow him to have an unselfish relationship with Holly or anyone else.

Taylor's narrators are rarely unperceptive to the point where their interpretations must be read as flatly ironic; more often they are perceptive in some ways and unperceptive in others. This, I think, is the case in "Dean of Men," "Daphne's Lover," and A Summons to Memphis. Perhaps the best example of a memoirist who tries to be honest with himself but whose story has implications he does not see is Nat Ramsey in "The Old Forest." Nat knows that his nostalgia causes him to skip over the more dramatic and terrible events of his life and return to his coming-of-age story set in the thirties. He does not refute his future wife's charge that he does not understand the "loneliness and depression and bravery" of girls like Lee Ann Deehart. He tries to understand it, though, and by recalling what Caroline told him during their drive through West Tennessee he implicitly acknowledges the truth in what she says about having to save herself by saving him. He even understands what she does not state explicitly about her longing to be something other than what she is, not to have been born into a society where as a woman her power and freedom would be so limited:

And it occurred to me now that when Caroline said go as fast and as far as you can she really meant to take us

all the way back into our past and begin the journey all over again, not merely from a point of four days ago or from the days of our childhood but from a point in our identity that would require a much deeper delving and a much more radical return. (QE 77)

Like the narrators of "Daphne's Lover" and "The Gift of the Prodigal," Nat Ramsey is aware of the limitations of his experience and perception, but just realizing those limitations does not erase the problems created by them. Nat believes that as a member of polite society and later as a college professor he has either not been able to comprehend the world around him or has comprehended it only intellectually. He suspects that "the moment of my great failure was when I continued to sit there in the car" when Caroline confronted Lee Ann (73). Does he mean that going into the house would have led to breaking his engagement to Caroline and pursuing Lee Ann, who had "come to represent feelings of mine I did not dare comprehend" (72)? If so, then the failure he refers to lies in passively abiding by the conventions that forbid both his marrying out of his class and Caroline Braxley's experiencing the independent life of a "town girl" like Lee Ann. Even though Nat probably could not have stopped the unofficial search party of city fathers, he continued to be a part of it even when he knew Lee Ann was safe and just wanted to be left alone. And by going through with the marriage, he and Caroline resign themselves to their own "not unhappy domesticity," a life that is as different from Lee Ann's as their parents' lives are.

Nat is older and truly more perceptive now, but still there

is a crucial irony in his final comments. He seems to believe that his silence and his understanding on the afternoon Caroline "found" Lee Ann were so appreciated by his wife that she has been making it up to him ever since. At least in regard to his decision to give up a lucrative business in order to go back to school and eventually become a college professor, he feels that "the firmness with which she supported my decision, and the look in her eyes whenever I spoke of feeling I must make the change, seemed to say to me that she would dedicate her pride of power to the power of the freedom I sought" (82). Nat was able to remake himself to a great extent by this career change, but in the forty or so years of their marriage, Caroline apparently has been resigned to living through him. If he understands the story he has just told and its implications for his wife, why has he let that happen?

Whereas Charles Varnell and the narrator of "The Other Times" only saw how they themselves were affected by the incidents they described, Philip Carver and Nat Ramsey at least try to understand other points of view: George Carver's and Caroline's, if not Alex's and Lee Ann's. Consequently, their success in understanding their own narratives is mixed. Walter Shear has concluded that in Taylor's fiction "[t]he encounter with the other leads inevitably back . . . to the discovery of the self's seemingly permanent relationship with society" (62). To make any discovery about themselves and their relationships with their societies requires that they not regard other people as

more than opposites or alter-egos. It may only be Taylor's desire to stay psychologically close to his narrators that makes all these memoirists successful, middle-aged (or older) white men, but he may also be suggesting that their position in this traditional Tennessee society has allowed them to become too self-satisfied and self-centered, and that they need to broaden their vision. To make such judgments of Taylor's narrators is, in a sense, to become one of his narrators by interpreting them as they interpret Frank Lacys and Alex Mercers. Thus as a reader one is implicated in the act of narratizing whether one identifies with the narrator or resists the narrator's perspective to the point of questioning everything he says. Taylor suggests a solution for both memoirists and readers in two stories in particular: "Promise of Rain," in which the narrator comes to understand another person's experience on its own terms; and "1939," in which Taylor's acknowledges the limits of his own perspective.

Shear acknowledges that "[Taylor's] characters do occasionally seem to come to a greater sense of themselves after an encounter with what is different or alien in others" (56). In "Promise of Rain," the story he cites as an example, Will Perkins reflects not on his own Depression-era boyhood but on that of his son Hugh Robert. For most of the story Mr. Perkins appears to be living through his teenage son's less-than-admirable activities in a manner similar to the narrator of "The Gift of the Prodigal." /4/ "It was as though Hugh and I were drifting about

through two different cities that were laid out on the very same tract of land" (96), he says, acknowledging both that he was spending his days in a grown-up version of Hugh's idle wandering around town (as a result of the Depression) and that, similar as their activities might have seemed, Hugh simply did not see the town in the same way his father did. But the narrator's close observation of his son at home, his repeatedly crossing paths with him somewhere in town, and his fear of the idea of Hugh Robert's leaving home suggest that Mr. Perkins finds his son's experience more interesting than his own.

But Mr. Perkins does not continue to live vicariously through his son, nor does he reject his son's behavior as something completely foreign to him. When he sees that Hugh's apparently narcissistic concern over his appearance and the sound of his own voice were actually part of a sincere interest in broadcasting, he finally gives his son credit for finding himself and acknowledges the value of seeing the world through someone else's eyes as a way of putting one's own view in perspective:

I was fifty, but I suddenly felt very young again. As I wandered through the house I kept thinking of how everything must look to Hugh, of what his life was going to be like, and of just what he would be like when he got to be my age. It all seemed very clear to me, and I realized how right it was for him. And because it seemed so clear I realized the time had come when I could forgive my son the difference there had always been between our two natures. I was fifty, but I had just discovered what it means to see the world through another man's eyes. It is a discovery you are lucky to make at any age, and one that is no less marvelous whether you make it at fifty or fifteen. Because it is only then that the world, as you have

seen it with your own eyes, will begin to tell you things about yourself. (QE 109)

Another memoir in which the narrator's vision clears in the aftermath of the events described is the almost completely autobiographical "1939." In another, more fictional memoir, Taylor's narrator might have clung to his resentment of the two girls who "jilted" him and his roommate on a Thanksgiving weekend in New York. But here Taylor chuckles at the two young writers' undergraduate attitude toward their pursuit of "life's deeper and more real experience" (CS 336) and their ideal, intellectualized visions of their girlfriends in New York. And unlike most of his other memoirists, Taylor's persona in "1939" does not provide any overt interpretation of his past or try to rationalize his behavior. He and his roommate Jim Prewett had hoped their writing talents were developed enough that "mature and adult experience" was all they lacked. What they discover in their weekend-long pursuit of this experience is the answer to the unspoken question, "Are we ready to be mature, adult writers?" or as Robison states it, "Am I grown yet?" (48) The answer comes not through self-serving interpretation but from the sound of the train wheels that the narrator recalls at the end of the story: Not yet, not yet, not yet (359).

Though the story's portrayal of the New York girlfriends is hardly sympathetic, Taylor does make some effort to do justice to them, or to their real-life counterparts. Nancy Gibault had seen Manhattan since she had last seen him, but "[t]o be fair to

her, though, she had seen something more important than that. She had, for better or worse, seen herself" (343). He devotes a paragraph to qualifying his rather negative portrayal of Carol Crawford:

How unfair it is to describe her as she was that Thanksgiving weekend in 1939. Ever since she was a little girl on a dairy farm in Wisconsin she had dreamed of becoming a writer and going off to live in New York City.

. . . Through all those years she had had but one ambition, and yet I could not have met her at a worse moment in her life. Poor girl, she had just learned that she was a writer. (352)

Those explanations were most likely motivated by Taylor's knowing that the story would be read by the real-life counterparts of its main characters, and despite the disclaimers, Robert Lowell (Jim) and Jean Stafford (Carol) were angered upon first reading it (Robison 45). /5/ But beyond trying to preserve friends' feelings with disclaimers or qualifications, Taylor calls attention to the autobiographical nature of this story to tell his readers plainly what happens when experience is sifted through memory and made into narrative:

I stand before the class as a kind of journeyman writer, a type of whom Trollope might have approved, but one who has known neither the financial success of the facile Harvard boy nor the reputation of Carol Crawford. Yet this man behind the lectern is a man who seems happy in the knowledge that he knows--or thinks he knows--what he is about. And behind his lectern he is saying that any story that is written in the form of a memoir should give offense to no one, because before a writer can make a person he has known fit into such a story--or any story, for that matter--he must do more than change the real name of that person. He must inevitably do such violence to that person's character that the original is forever lost to the story. (339)

The reader, now sitting in Mr. Taylor's classroom, gets a lesson that Taylor has illustrated through his more distinctly fictional memoirists: that not only the Carol Crawfords but also the uncles, grandfathers, sons, and best friends who appear in one's stories are not the "real people" the narrator knew but whoever the narrator wants or needs them to be. The passage quoted above is in fact strikingly metafictional in its suggestion that narrative does violence to the people, and by extension to the experiences, being narratized. Thus the old question of whether a narrator is "reliable" or "unreliable" becomes a moot point in Taylor's fiction: even when he removes his shield of irony and addresses the reader directly in "1939," he must make a distinction between reality and reality-as-portrayed-in-memoir. Supporting White's assertion that the act of narratizing necessarily involves grafting the writer/storyteller's morality onto past experience, Taylor reminds the reader that there is something artificial in any story, no matter how "non-fictional" it may be.

Taken as a group, Taylor's memoir stories reveal a possible "moralizing impulse" of their author, but it is hardly a self-serving impulse. He suggests that there are healthy and unhealthy ways of interpreting one's past: to see the world through another person's eyes as Will Perkins does in "Promise of Rain" is a valuable capacity; the alternative, egocentric view of the narrator of "The Other Times" leads to continued self-delusion. The same principle applies to Taylor's readers. To

disregard Philip Carver's or Charles Varnell's point of view, to dismiss their questionable interpretations as "examples of Peter Taylor's irony" is a way of falling into the same trap as those narrators. For as listeners or readers, our interpretive mechanisms are at work in much the same way as the memoirists'. Like the father in "Promise of Rain," we eagerly await the story of another life that is not our own. Taylor's fictional memoirs suggest that the reader, like the storyteller, must learn to see the world through another person's eyes. "Because it is only then that the world, as you have seen it through your own eyes, will start to tell you things about yourself" (QE 109).

Notes

1. A Woman of Means, Taylor's first novel (or novella), is written in first-person, but it is not a memoir in the sense that A Summons to Memphis and the stories discussed in this paper are; that is, the narrator does not call attention to his being older now, looking back on his childhood with an older person's perspective.

2. Taylor has written through the perspective of women in many stories, but rarely in first-person. "A Spinster's Tale," one of his first published stories, is written in past-tense, and its title refers significantly to the first-person narrator, but it does not have the reflective, self-conscious tone of the later memoir stories. It is, however, a notable exception to Taylor's stories narrated by middle-aged white males. Another early story narrated by a woman, "A Walled Garden," is atypical of Taylor's fiction. Griffith likens it to the dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson (particularly Browning's "My Last Duchess" --116); its condemnation of the speaker, who has taken out her own frustrations on her daughter, is uncharacteristically obvious for Taylor.

3. CS denotes The Collected Stories; Miro, In the Miro District; and OF, The Old Forest and Other Stories.

4. It is interesting that though "The Gift of the Prodigal" was originally published twenty-seven years after "Promise of Rain," the two stories are very similar not only in theme but also in style. Collected together in The Old Forest, they serve as an example of how, despite his renewed interest in plot since the early sixties and his experiments with narrative free verse in the seventies, Taylor has changed his methods and his thematic concerns very little over the years.

5. James Curry Robison describes Robert Lowell's reaction: "When Lowell read this story in 1955, he was moved to anger, then envy, and wrote to Taylor, with whom he maintained a lifelong friendship. 'At first I was, how shall I put it, surprised and hurt . . . but since then I have [had] so many compliments--nothing I have ever written myself has gotten me such attention. . . . [I] thank you with grudging bewildered incomprehension. But were we really quite such monsters?'" (45)

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VITA

Laurence Scott Peeples

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, June 25, 1963. Graduated from Middleton High School in that city, June 1981, A.B., Georgetown University, 1985. Taught English at Sea Island Academy, John's Island, South Carolina, 1986-88. In August 1988, entered the College of William and Mary as a graduate assistant in the Department of English.