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## Evelyn Scott : out of southern history

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**San Jose State University, 1994**

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EVELYN SCOTT:  
OUT OF SOUTHERN HISTORY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Michael K. Borgstrom

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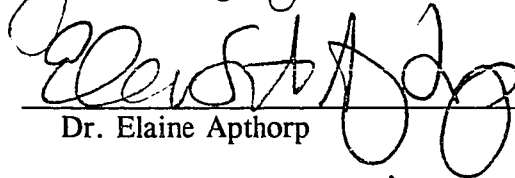
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## ABSTRACT

### EVELYN SCOTT: OUT OF SOUTHERN HISTORY

by Michael K. Borgstrom

This thesis examines the works of Evelyn Scott, a southern author writing just prior to and during the Southern Renaissance of the 1920s. It illustrates Scott's fundamental differences from other southern writers as she neither glorifies the South nor sentimentalizes its history in her fiction. This thesis proposes that Scott's liberal ideology distinguishes her from the prevailing Agrarian view that characterized much southern writing and thinking in the early 1920s.

These views are evident in Scott's first trilogy. By eschewing the elements found in traditionally "southern" fiction, Scott reveals the importance of moving beyond regionalism and regional history to explore themes she regards as universal. This thesis examines, in particular, Scott's use of setting and her depiction of familial relationships as they react against traditionally "southern" notions of a conservative, communal, and tragic vision of the South's history. In advocating a move beyond communal history, Scott ultimately reveals the potential for personal growth that is available to all people.

I.

In order to boost critical recognition for the 1929 publication of William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, a short essay, penned by another southern author, Evelyn Scott, accompanied its release. The publishers presented Scott's essay with these words:

This essay by Evelyn Scott, whose recent novel "The Wave" placed her among the outstanding literary figures of our time, has been printed in this form and is being distributed to those who are interested in Miss Scott's work and the writing of William Faulkner. "The Sound and the Fury" should place William Faulkner in company with Evelyn Scott. The publishers believe, in the issuance of this little book, that a valuable and brilliant reflection of the philosophies of two important American authors is presented to those who care for such things. (On William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" 3)

In 1940, Faulkner was asked in an interview by Don Brennan whether there were any good women writers. Faulkner replied, "Well, Evelyn Scott was pretty good, for a woman" (qtd. in Callard 116). Nine years later, when Faulkner received the Nobel Prize, Scott was living in near poverty in London. Ironically, while Faulkner had become America's most celebrated southern author, Scott's work was all but forgotten--despite the fact that she had published nineteen books between 1921 and 1941, many to great critical acclaim.<sup>1</sup>

Born Elsie Dunn, 17 January 1893, in Clarksville, Tennessee, Scott came from a socially prominent family which had lost most of its money during the Civil War. Because of financial demands, the Dunns were forced to move from the majestic Gracie Mansions when Scott was three years old, but they did not lose their position within southern society. Although she was trained in the graces of the traditional

southern belle, Scott quickly rejected this imposed role and became a vocal feminist at the age of 15.

Because of a deteriorating financial condition, the Dunns moved to New Orleans when Scott was 16 where she entered the Sophie Newcomb College at Tulane University to study art. However, she could not adjust to the strictures imposed by formal instruction and soon left the college to continue her studies alone. It was in New Orleans that Scott met Frederick Creighton Wellman, Dean of the School of Tropical Medicine at Tulane University, who was nearly twice her age. In 1913, because both Scott and Wellman had become increasingly unhappy with their respective family situations (he had been married twice and had four children from his first marriage), the pair ran away to Brazil, changing their names to Evelyn Scott and Cyril Kay Scott to avoid the persecution they knew their act would engender.

They remained in Brazil for six years, through the dire poverty and personal hardship Scott chronicled in her memoir Escapade, and returned to America only when her need for medical attention became urgent. Upon their return to the United States, the Scotts settled in Greenwich Village, naming among their acquaintances some of the most influential literary figures of the 1920s and 1930s: William Carlos Williams, Sinclair Lewis, Hart Crane, Marianne Moore, Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, and Lewis Mumford. During these decades Scott produced the work that received her greatest critical acclaim. Malcolm Cowley, in After the Genteel Tradition, notes that the three "new writers promoted to genius" were "William Faulkner (The Sound and the Fury); Thomas Wolfe (Look Homeward, Angel); Evelyn

Scott (The Wave, her fifth and her only popular novel)" (216, 248).

Scott divorced Cyril Scott (Wellman) in 1928 and subsequently married the British author John Metcalfe. The couple returned to the United States in 1953. Her popularity waned throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and she and Metcalfe spent the remainder of their lives together in near poverty in residence at the Benjamin Franklin Hotel in New York City. In 1963, Scott was diagnosed with lung cancer and was operated on. Released on August 3 from the hospital, she died that night in her sleep beside Metcalfe.

While Scott's work was largely forgotten until recent years, her fiction deserves continued critical study. Her novels reflect her fiercely independent life and champion the individual spirit as it strains against a rigid and unforgiving world. Her early novels, in particular, reveal her concern for the struggle of the one against the social and moral oppression of the many; she began her first novel, The Narrow House, during her self-imposed exile in Brazil at a time when she felt that the South had ousted her from its conservative society by disavowing her individualistic beliefs. In response to her upbringing, Scott questioned the South's economic, social, and personal values. From an early age, she recognized and detested the hypocrisy she believed permeated the South. The hierarchy of social mores that served as the foundation of southern culture horrified Scott, and she insisted that faith in these constructs could lead only to a spiritual death. Scott felt suffocated by what she deemed a rigid, conservative environment; Joseph Flora notes that "Dixie has seldom had a more rebellious daughter" (285-86). Scott believed that her liberal ideas and

rebellious nature had no outlet within the South's confining social structures. When she attempted to rebel against those structures, the South rejected her from its "privileged" society; in response, Scott resolved to expose the damaging effects a southern, conservative mentality could have on the liberal, individualistic spirit.

Though Scott has been called a "southern" writer by many critics, much of her fiction emerges as decidedly un-southern in content, thought, and attitude. Her first three novels--The Narrow House, Narcissus, and The Golden Door--form a trilogy and illustrate Scott's "un-southern-ness." She severs all ties to her southern upbringing here; the romantic South does not exist in this trilogy. Readers find, instead, an unsentimental, relentless narrative gaze intent on exposing universal truths about the human condition, not one limited to a regional perspective. This lack of "southern-ness" distinguishes Scott from her "southern" contemporaries writing during the 1920s and 1930s and demands investigation.

Scott's fiction depicts the need for individual freedom and personal growth. Because she believed that the individual's connection with a conservative society often resulted in psychological bondage and physical and spiritual repression, Scott advocated a move away from the conservatism of her southern background. Individuals who did not slough off this ideology risked spiritual confinement. In her fiction, she demonstrates the possibility of freedom for those very few capable of breaking with social forms and institutions.

Moreover, unlike many southern writers, Scott neither sentimentalized southern history nor glorified that history as tragic. She did not believe that the southern past

was inescapable or unique. Instead, she moved beyond regionalism and regional history to explore themes she regarded as universal. She believed that her views were applicable to readers beyond the South, and her writing reflects this all-encompassing vision. Scott explains her work in these words:

I want to make my universe recognizable to others; I want to communicate my sense of what life is to me. I don't expect anyone to know what my universe is until I'm dead and it has been completed. One book can only be a partial attempt to create, or express, the universe. There is something in each of my books that makes it an integral part of the architecture of the whole and even if, at my death, a turret should be missing, you will still be able to get an idea of the general design--at least I hope so.  
(qtd. in Callard 136-37)<sup>2</sup>

In her fiction, Scott's universe is defined by the struggle of the individual against the political, economic, and social pressures of society. Scott's work, especially her first trilogy, attempts to illustrate how the individual must fight to be free from the bonds that repress the human spirit, rebelling against the social attitudes and personal hypocrisy that she saw as characteristic of the world of "acceptance." In Scott's view, only a thorough and honest evaluation of the self enables the individual to transcend society's prevailing insincerities. To this task, Scott dedicated her life and work.

Not surprisingly, Scott's fiction embraces a more liberal attitude than that of many of her more conservative southern counterparts. Unlike the prevailing Agrarian school of thought that characterized much southern writing and thinking in the 1920s and for decades after, Scott represented a melioristic ideology at odds with the conservative, communal, and tragic view of the South that the Agrarians promoted.

While her earliest novels predate the Agrarian manifesto I'll Take My Stand (1930), Scott reacted against the conservative mentality that was already present when she began writing. The arguments the Agrarians presented in I'll Take My Stand attempted, as its Introduction states, "to support a Southern way of life against what might be called the American or prevailing way" (xix). In their effort to explain the meaning and purpose of a coherent southern culture and its place in history, the Agrarians urged the South to value its past as a way to avoid the personal alienation and isolation they believed characterized liberal, northern culture. This alienation and isolation, the Agrarians claimed, stemmed from the individual's lack of connection to the land, to the community, and to the social institutions that promoted harmony. Because liberalism worked against collectivism, the Agrarians maintained that it failed to provide meaning for the individual's life. Unlike liberals, who championed the individualistic spirit, the Agrarians believed that "any attempt to march to the beat of a different drummer was a threat to the social order that stands between man and the abyss" (Young 433).

As their primary focus, the Agrarians rebelled against the rise of industrialism in modern society. Because they believed that the unending cycle of production and consumption would lead to cultural decline, as industrialism isolated and reduced the individual's role in society to producer and consumer, the Agrarians denounced industrialized society. Just as nearly a hundred years earlier Henry David Thoreau advocated limitations to the individual's dependence on the products available in a modern society, so the Agrarians warned against a similar dependence in the twentieth

century. Yet while agrarianism appeared to champion many of Thoreau's beliefs, most members of the movement strongly opposed a transcendental philosophy. Whereas the Transcendentalists believed that each human being was divine and that individualism fostered spiritual survival, the Agrarians maintained that manifestations of radically individualistic behavior threatened the social order.

To a degree, Scott's views mirror Thoreau's transcendental ideas of individuality and highlight further her fundamental opposition to some tenets of agrarianism. Like Thoreau, she recognized the danger of industrialism in society, and in this principle she agreed with the Agrarian point of view. Her autobiographical entry in Kunitz and Haycraft's Twentieth Century Authors reads in part:

. . . I do not like philosophies that see man's salvation in terms of complete industrialization and a mechanized culture. Both World Revolution and National Socialism seem to me theories without realism in any connection except that of acquiring power for dictators or bureaucracies. The present stressing of economics to the exclusion of everything else will eventually make us all spiritual imbeciles. I believe in the 'middle way': in the human as against the mechanized. (1253)

Scott's adoption of this key axiom of conservative thought highlights an important aspect of her personal philosophy. Just as she avoided an exclusively "southern" perspective in her writing, she also avoided identification with traditionally "northern" sentiments. Whereas the South was identified as communal and agrarian, the North was often characterized as disassociative and industrialized. Scott, however, reacted against industrialized culture not because it typified northern views, but because, like conservatism, it eradicated the spirit of individualism. She was not alone



in her beliefs. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a movement emerged in the social sciences that also integrated a liberal belief of self with a conservative attack on industrialized growth. It is ironic that Scott was born and raised in Tennessee, home to Vanderbilt University where the Agrarians met to formulate the theories Scott so vigorously opposed, for this new expression of Scott's brand of liberalism emerged in another southern state lying east of Tennessee. As the Agrarians advocated a return to the values that emphasized the past, a more liberal view of the relationship between modern society and the traditional South developed in North Carolina at approximately the same time. Under the leadership of Howard W. Odum, who assumed the chair of the Department of Sociology and School of Public Welfare in 1920, several faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill began what came to be called the movement for southern modernization. Closely paralleling the Fugitive-Agrarian movement of the 1920s and 1930s, this group adopted Odum's beliefs as a springboard for discussions on the South that promulgated views substantially different from those of their contemporaries at Vanderbilt. In analyzing this movement's doctrines, William C. Havard summarizes Odum's personal philosophies and professional theories:

He exhibited great confidence, amounting to a secular faith, in man's capacity to use the methods of natural science to gain knowledge of man and society that would enable him, through application to the problems of Southern society, to change that society for the better. The largest of the goals he set was displacing ideological sectionalism, which not only kept the South separate from the nation but erected other barriers against improving economic and social conditions in the South, with a concept of regions based on natural geographic, economic, and social coherence. . . . Odum . . . sought to

combine a socially organic traditionalism with the products of rational change in social structures to create a social order that reflected a complete harmony between the self (or inner being) and the objectively (or outwardly) structured society. (422)

Though Scott was probably not familiar with Odum's theories, his ideas paralleled her liberal affirmation of the individual's capacity for independent growth and knowledge. Odum's theories justify Scott's own relationship to the South; just as he worked to eradicate "ideological sectionalism," she tried to make the "universe recognizable to others." Moreover, the role of industrialism in modern society also prompted inquiry from another faculty member at Chapel Hill. W. T. Couch, an associate of Odum, edited a collection of essays widely recognized as North Carolina's response to Vanderbilt's Agrarians. Titled Culture in the South (1934), it proposed that the Agrarians possessed a somewhat myopic vision of southern culture. Couch claimed that by focusing exclusively on southern life as a moral contest between industrialism and agrarianism, the Agrarians overlooked other fundamental issues relevant not only to the South, but to all cultures. He states in the Preface to this work:

One of the most thoughtful books on the South published in recent years, I'll Take My Stand, reveals clearly the fallacy of expecting a better way of life as a result merely of bigger and better business; but it falls into the even more serious error of interpreting southern life in terms of industrialism vs. agrarianism.

There is undeniably a measure of truth in this mode of interpretation, but in following it the fundamental issues in southern life, which are much the same as elsewhere, are almost entirely overlooked. . . . The agrarians of I'll Take My Stand are quick to see the weakness in the notion of life as nothing more than a struggle between economic interests; yet they are almost equally facile in their easy reduction of southern life to opposing "agrarian" and "industrial" forces. Life in the

South, as elsewhere, it may well be repeated, is not a simple affair. It is varied from class to class, and is further complicated by wide differences in political, economic, racial, educational, and religious faiths. (vii-viii)

In hindsight, Culture in the South proved to be more of a "corrective supplement to I'll Take My Stand than an adversarial treatise" (Havard 423) since both groups agreed that complete industrialization and material acquisitiveness proved damaging to culture as a whole. Yet while both camps rejected the siren of industrialized growth, the movement for southern modernization acknowledged that the South's concerns were universal; they were not limited to a regional perspective. Scott also recognized this fact and illustrated it in her work. While other writers favored either a complete return to the farm or a complete escape to the city, Scott refused to align herself with either camp. Thus, while much of her fiction emerges as "un-southern" in its celebration of a liberal tradition, it does not promote industrialized, "pro-northern" values. Instead, Scott omits those elements that would label her early fiction as merely "southern" or "northern." In so doing, she fulfills her primary stated objective: to make her universe recognizable to all her readers.

In a sense, then, Scott's fiction realizes Odum's philosophic goals. Just as Odum worked to eliminate ideological sectionalism, so Scott attempts to avoid classification as a regionalist writer. Just as Odum worked to establish harmony between the self and society, so Scott attempts to reveal a similar harmony through the characters of her novels. But a crucial difference between Odum and Scott rests in their mediums for expression. Sociology restricted Odum to what he hoped was a

detached scientific analysis of social institutions. He was therefore unable to move beyond the social and material world to investigate the psychology and ethos of the individual. As Havard states: "[Odum's] analysis of Southern society was comprehensive, demographically and anthropologically, but as a science that deals largely with external phenomena, sociology could not always penetrate to the moral ethos that is basic to a civil culture born of the wisdom of experience" (422). Fiction, however, allowed Scott to penetrate to that "moral ethos," to probe the moral fibers that make each individual unique. Hence, her novels are deeply psychological and focus heavily on the individual and the success or failure of personal expression. Indeed, Scott's ability to penetrate to the moral ethos of the individual is her primary genius.

In her work, Scott exposes the complexities of the human mind as the individual struggles to find harmony between the outer world and the inner self. For many southern authors writing during Scott's era, this harmony was dependent upon the history of the South and on the primary fact of southern history: the Civil War and its tragic outcome. Because of the defeat of the Confederacy, these authors maintained that the South's history must necessarily be chronicled as tragic, deterministic, and backward-looking. Scott, however, refused to romanticize southern history. She felt that this regional expression of a conservative ideological world-view, which adopted a "before the war" and "after the war" mentality, promoted a South that had never existed. She states in her autobiographical Background in Tennessee (1937):

I think no one not reared below Louisville can ever quite grasp how the phrase, "before the war," ran through a southern childhood, re-echoing, and reiterating, a nostalgia for ineffable things. Until it had become the poem not alone of what had been lost through war, but of what had never existed! Until it was a cry after a refurbished, better world! The very plaint of Adam's exile from original Paradise! (122)

In opposition to her southern contemporaries, Scott refused to view the South's history as tragic. Instead of the history-drenched, quasi-romantic atmosphere that came to characterize southern literature, Scott presents, in her early fiction, a deliberately "un-southern" world. She thus highlights the problems individuality faces within any conservative society. The conservative southerner sees the failure of liberalism in the individual's growing isolation from the natural and social world; the liberal view, in contrast, sees the failure of conservatism in the individual's inability to triumph over the stifling social institutions inherent in any culture. In Scott's fiction, the latter--not the former--emerges as the war to be fought by every person.

Because Scott believed that the battle between conservatism and liberalism was not relegated to a southern context, she dismissed the complaints of many southern intellectuals who believed that the South faced specific, indeed unique, problems as a region. Because of the South's supposedly tragic history, these intellectuals maintained that their region had had a different historical experience than the rest of the nation:

[W]here America has known only success and affluence, the South has known failure, defeat, and poverty; where the nation has thrived on its myth of innocence, the South has experienced, in the awful burden of slavery, the reality of evil and a sense of guilt; where the country as a whole has been optimistic and secure in its progressivist creed, the South's historical experience has generated

pessimism in Southerners, an awareness of the limitations of the human condition, and a realization that everything one wants to do cannot be accomplished. (Havard 425)

This tragic view of the South justifies the southerner's inability and unwillingness to change, grow, and act against history's oppressive forces. In her work, Scott reacts strongly against this view; her writing thus emerges as realistic and unrelenting. Her early fiction, especially, depicts the struggle the individual faces within a conservative society. While her characters rebel inwardly against confining social restrictions, they are largely powerless to move to physical or moral action.

But this view does not characterize Scott's work as tragic or deterministic. While happiness and joy are rare in her fiction, Scott chooses to present her characters as fundamentally unhappy for specific reasons. By depicting them as stifled and trapped by their society, Scott forces her readers to acknowledge the personal dangers of succumbing to a prevailing conservatism. What readers dislike in the characters she creates parallels what Scott, herself, disliked in her own upbringing. She states that she "rejected the idea of being a Southern belle like everybody else, and ran away from home" and that "[she] learned, through a geographical remoteness from social stimuli, the full value of self-dependence and an 'inner life'" (qtd. in Kunitz and Haycraft 1252). Thus, by creating largely unlikable characters who are dissatisfied with life, Scott allows readers to see the need for individual escape from constrictive social pressures. As she exposes the personal dangers of adhering to conservative social traditions and institutions which stifle individuality, she simultaneously implies, by negative example, the good that might come of individual action. By severing ties

to the social structures that hamper expression, the individual may grow beyond communal history and personal background.

At the heart of Scott's philosophy, then, exists an intensely unsentimental and realistic vision of liberalism. While she believes that individual action may surmount society's restrictions and limitations, she knows that most people cannot act against these obstacles. Scott illustrates the difficulty of displacing the conventions that have been foisted upon the individual since birth. In her fiction, it is not easy, common, or probable that the individual will succeed in realizing the personal need for action unfettered by political, economic, and social institutions. Instead, Scott demonstrates the ease, even the near inevitability, of succumbing to a dominating conservatism. Because the individual faces societal demands from birth, institutional restrictions become internalized. Thus as each person grows, these demands arise not only from external society but from within the individual. Scott's first trilogy, especially, depicts the struggle of the individual spirit to liberate the self from external and internalized demands. While her characters rarely succeed in freeing themselves, some attempt the fight. Others have so internalized societal restrictions that they do not realize that the choice to fight exists.

However, Scott does not allow her readers to feel sentimentalized sympathy for her protagonists; when these characters fail to discover how the individual can survive in a conservative world, they suffer the consequences of their own ineffectual behavior. By depicting characters choked by convention, Scott allows her readers to see the need for, and potential of, individual action. Her technique is subtle,

effective, and almost insidious. By creating characters that her readers cannot help but dislike, Scott forces each reader to consider her implicit beliefs. Scott's use of negative example thus serves her purpose well; it is a technique that she utilizes even in her autobiographical entry in Twentieth Century Authors to describe her personal relationship to the South:

Altogether it can be said with accuracy that, 'both literally and metaphorically,' I have traveled far from the South of my childhood. But I owe it to the general aristocratic pretensions of the South, that I still prize most, in myself and in others, a man's control of his own spirit and mind--man's self-direction in the development of an inner life. And I owe it to the South that I never did, and do not now, see virtue in any proposal to make other people 'good' by force. The frail Puritan in me has died, and I hope will never be reborn. (1252-53)

By declaiming all that the South has taught her not to be, Scott emphasizes all that she has become. As she states, her liberalism arose in direct opposition to the conservative values that choked her. She attempts to illustrate a similar lesson to her readers in her first trilogy. In these novels, Scott depicts the unfortunate effects of a repressive society. By emphasizing the unhappiness of her characters in this society, Scott implies that a different community--one tolerant of individual expression--would allow her characters to seek happiness and fulfillment.

Scott's first trilogy, started during her self-imposed exile in Brazil, begins with The Narrow House (1921). The action of the novel centers around the Farley family's five adult members as they wrestle with the decision either to sacrifice personal happiness for familial cohesion or to pursue individual goals that would require severing familial ties. Peggy Bach rightly claims that this novel has "no one



central character, no protagonist; all the characters are antagonists" (435). An overwhelming sense of isolation and claustrophobia permeates the novel as Scott depicts each family member's growing dissatisfaction with home life. Despite their evident unhappiness, these characters cannot break from the family's confining structure. Mr. Farley, the entirely ineffectual patriarch of the family, finds personal fulfillment outside the home in an affair with "a certain woman" (Narrow 7), with whom he has had an illegitimate child, yet he cannot leave his established family for this new one. His wife, Mrs. Farley, convinces herself that she must continue to sacrifice her own happiness for the good of her family, despite her knowledge of this affair. Their son, Laurence, and his wife, Winnie, endure a loveless and unsatisfying marriage within the Farley home, and Alice, Laurence's sister, suffers as an unattractive "old maid" whose unrequited love for her employer drives her to the brink of suicide.

As the novel opens, the Farleys are preparing for a visit from Mr. and Mrs. Price, Winnie's parents, who have come to see their ailing daughter. Languishing in her sickness, Winnie enjoys the attention lavished on her, and hopes that this visit will reconcile her parents to Laurence, with whom Mr. Price has previously quarreled over religious issues. Though the Prices disapprove of the Farleys, in part because they are aware of Mr. Farley's extramarital affair, in part because they consider them social inferiors, they are anxious to visit their daughter and their grandchildren, May and Bobby. In counterpoint to the drama between the Farleys and the Prices, Alice succumbs to the intense passion she has for her employer, Horace Ridge, but cannot

bring herself to declare her love. Ironically, though she can see that her parents will be happy only if they separate, she fears and avoids the possibility of her own happiness. Frustrated by her inadequacies, Alice torments her parents, unsuccessfully urging them to divorce to end their unhappiness. As the first part of the novel closes, the meeting between the Prices and the Farleys explodes into open rancor, Alice exposes her feelings regarding her father's affair, and Winnie prepares to leave for an extended vacation with her mother in order to recover her health.

While the remaining three parts of the novel provide resolutions to these issues, no satisfactory sense of closure emerges. Ridge leaves the country and eventually dies, thus depriving Alice of the love she desperately needs; Mr. Farley decides that his first obligation is to Mrs. Farley, despite his inability to give her the love he shares with his mistress; and Mrs. Farley, her martyrdom steadily increasing, resigns herself to her unloving marriage and consoles herself with meaningless household tasks. Through a dangerous pregnancy which results in her death, Winnie escapes the confines of the family, but her presence continues to invoke guilt, shame, and unhappiness in Laurence. Their daughter, May, despite her desperate pleas for attention, is ignored by the family, and Laurence realizes that only Bobby has the potential to lead a healthy life; as an infant, he has not yet been poisoned by his family. The novel ends with universal failure and despair; despite their desire to escape from the confines of loveless family ties, the characters cannot break from the dominating traditionalism that sustains their dysfunctional family and that has been internalized in each of their minds and hearts.

The family's tale continues in Narcissus (1922). As in The Narrow House, Scott forces the reader's attention to character, not plot. Indeed, initially nothing happens. Her characters attempt to arrive at a sense of self-knowledge as they integrate their personal responsibilities with the outside world of social conformity. Laurence has taken a new wife, Julia, and the novel follows Julia's desire to "find herself" within the context of her society. As an educated woman who is both a scientist and a civic leader, Julia is distinctly different from the simpering, doll-like Winnie. However, she too is Laurence's wife and defines herself in that role. Because Laurence treats her as a child, Julia takes a lover, Dudley Allen, who is also attempting to discover himself. But Julia loves only herself. Only by hurting others, specifically Dudley, is she able to experience feeling and define her sense of self; otherwise, she remains emotionally dead. Dudley, too, can only relate to other people by draining the life from them. He must be the dominating force in his friendships with men, and he fears all women until he can possess them sexually. Thus, Dudley and Julia are an oddly suitable match: he must possess her in order to feel powerful, and she must hurt him in order to feel anything.

As the novel progresses, Julia finds herself pursued by Charles Hurst, the husband of her friend, Catherine. Charles no longer finds his wife attractive and is looking now, in middle age, for the woman who has the "guts to love him" (Narcissus 158). For Charles, Julia represents an unattainable goal, a challenge to the personal crisis he faces. Thus he uses Julia to authenticate his sense of self; his affair with her validates his desirability and sexual prowess. However, while Julia submits to his

advances, she is not seduced by him. Julia uses this affair, like her affair with Allen, to define her emerging sense of self, to force herself, through guilt, to feel something. Because Julia does not know who she is, she deliberately does something "wrong" in order to gain identity.

Her husband, too, attempts to redefine and validate his life, but because he refuses to acknowledge outwardly his emotions, his life remains unsatisfying. Throughout the novel, Laurence looks upon his wife's activities with a bemused, condescending detachment. Though Julia reveals her affair with Dudley, and though this information hurts him, Laurence does not permit himself to act on his anger and instead resolves to accept Dudley's insistent attempts at friendship. In retaliation for the hurt Julia has caused him, Laurence detaches himself further from her desperate attempts to receive forgiveness for her affair. Only as Julia forces a reconciliation at the end of the novel does he acknowledge the pain he has felt and move beyond it.

As subtext to her parents's relationship, May, now 15, is experiencing her own love affair with Paul Mercer, an 18-year-old liberal idealist. Julia fascinates Paul, for in her social obligations, committee meetings, and dinner parties she embodies the social hypocrisy that he detests. While Paul struggles to convey his ideals for an intensely individualistic world, he cannot act to express these ideals. Trapped by his youth, he deflects his frustration onto the innocent, naive May. Because she is so personally vacuous, May seems to remind both Paul and Julia that her inaction mirrors their own, and hence she suffers their displeasure. While the rest of the characters in the novel actively, though ineffectually, work to define their respective personalities,

May accepts her life as it is. Her brother, Bobby, in contrast, asserts his individuality and, at the novel's conclusion, is sent off to school where Laurence hopes his son will continue to grow beyond his family. Thus while Narcissus remains less oppressive than The Narrow House, there again exists no sense of resolution. The characters struggle to define themselves, but ultimately are unable to move beyond the confines society imposes on them.

The trilogy's final installment, The Golden Door (1925), depicts May's marriage to Paul Mercer. In his attempt to escape from society, Paul moves his wife and infant son to a remote farm where they exist in almost complete isolation from the rest of the world. In this life, both Paul and May are lonesome and unhappy, though neither will admit this fact. In order to survive and to provide help for their ailing son, May secretly accepts money from her step-mother, Julia, an act that Paul would never condone. In her visits to her step-daughter's home, Julia displays her evident disgust with their living conditions and urges May to reassess her loyalty to Paul; in Julia's opinion, May's primary responsibility lies in providing adequate care for her infant son. Julia also introduces the couple to Mr. Mathews, an admirer of Paul and a fellow idealist. Throughout the novel, Mr. Mathews acts as a touchstone for the other characters as they assess their individual struggles with the prevailing norms and institutions of conservative society; in this, he is unlike any other character in the trilogy.

Also introduced early in the novel is Nina Gannett, a friend of both May and Paul. While her past relationship to the pair remains somewhat ambiguous, she is

welcomed at the farm, on vacation from her job in the city, and settles comfortably into the Mercer family's home life. Eventually, however, the peace within the group is broken as Paul and Nina begin an affair and subsequently ask May to allow Nina to remain as Paul's lover. Not wanting to appear narrow-minded, May agrees to the arrangement, though internally she rebels against Nina's intrusion in her life. Eventually, Nina returns to the city, realizing that this living arrangement hurts May. In response, Paul blames May for driving Nina off and suggests that May's traditional values hamper his own individualistic spirit.

As she returns to her life in the city, Nina questions her intrusion upon Paul and May's legal marriage. Though she realizes that she loves Paul, she is not convinced that acting on her own emotions warrants hurting May. To test her responsibilities to her own feelings against her responsibilities to May, she consults Mr. Mathews. At Nina's prompting, he reveals his belief that the "halo of pathos" (Golden 127) that exists within all human beings blinds them to the real truth of mankind. He does not explain this intriguing remark, but Nina interprets his words to mean that she should follow her heart. Thus, she returns to the farm.

Upon Nina's arrival, May leaves for her father and step-mother's house in the city, taking her baby with her. Paul makes no attempt to stop her, and Nina moves into the Mercer household. Though she is angry with Paul, May reiterates her love for him to her step-mother. Despite Julia's urging, May refuses to divorce her husband; she feels that Nina, who would likely marry Paul should May decide to divorce him, is not good enough for him. In an effort to express her anger toward

Paul, May writes him a letter denouncing his actions. Although this letter causes Paul a momentary sense of confusion, during which he questions some of his unconventional views, he refuses to send Nina away, and deflects any blame onto May. May thus begins divorce proceedings only because she believes that this is what Paul desires.

To secure evidence for May's defense in court, Mr. Mathews visits the farm to verify Nina's presence. Though at first Nina inwardly celebrates this affirmation of her position in Paul's life, she comes to question her judgment and returns to the city. At this news, May and Julia pay a visit to the farm where May again restates her love for Paul. Paul realizes that he loves May, too, and while he inwardly rebels against this challenge to his overt individuality, there remains, at the end of the novel, a dim hope for reconciliation between the two.

Throughout her trilogy, Scott depicts characters as fundamentally unhappy in their isolation and alienation from one another. However, Scott is not advocating a return to family or to the land or to community and history to alleviate this dissatisfaction with life. Rather, these characters are isolated and alone because of their relationship to family, for as they function within the family they become antagonists in their inability to grow, change, and heal their unhappiness. A return to the Agrarian tradition is not the answer to this personal angst and failure. This discovery becomes apparent when the trilogy is viewed as a whole; the paralysis, claustrophobia, and relentless pressure developed in Narcissus and, especially, The Narrow House comes to a head in The Golden Door when Paul and May make their

literal "return to the land."

Here in an Agrarian setting, the members of this "family" find themselves unfulfilled, unhappy, and isolated. Not only are they alienated from the world, they are unable to connect even within their now enforced individuality. Only May realizes this condition and attempts to remedy her unhappiness. She realizes that she must act within her world instead of against it; unlike Paul, she understands that the world will not change for her. Ironically, it is May, at heart the most conformist of Scott's characters, who teaches Paul, Scott's most individualistic character in this trilogy, the meaning of personal responsibility and individual fulfillment. May decides to take personal action and leave Paul because she sees that they cannot escape from their problems either by returning to the land or by secluding themselves from the world. One choice advocates a return to the Agrarian tradition, the other illustrates an exaggerated example of individuality, but neither illustrates Scott's view of liberalism, which emerges in these novels not as an exclusion by the individual of everything else in the world, but as a sense of self-satisfaction and self-definition in harmony with the rest of the world. Like Odum, who in his movement for southern modernization, wished "to create a social order that reflected a complete harmony between the self (or inner being) and the objectively (or outwardly) structured society" (Havard 422), Scott desired a similar peace. While she maintained that the conservative world damaged the individual spirit, she also realized that society would not change. The challenge, in Scott's view, was to discover how each person could survive within society, for she believed that the liberal and liberated spirit was capable of survival. Thus the



possibility for real change is hinted at in Paul and May's potential reconciliation, but Scott is too honest to propose that this reconciliation will become reality.

## II.

In exposing the potential for change, Scott works to eradicate the "ideological sectionalism" against which Odum also reacted. She thus removes all references to the South in her fiction for a specific reason: to react against the conservative South is not her ultimate goal; rather, she wishes to expose the dangers of conservatism in any setting. She deliberately removes traditionally southern elements from these early fictions in order to place her story in a neutral, "middle" ground. But by eliminating "southern" detail, Scott does not necessarily promote a "northern" perspective. Instead, she places her novels in this "middle" ground to illustrate the continuing battle between conservatism and liberalism inherent in every culture. By so doing, she makes her lessons applicable to any society.

To create a "middle" ground, Scott never explicitly names the region, era, or background of the Farley family. The Farleys may live in the South or the North. They may function in Scott's own era or in a somewhat earlier (or later) one. Past generations may have influenced the present family's views, but no mention is made of them. In short, Scott's trilogy exists in large measure outside of place, time, and history. Because she has often been classified as a "southern" writer by critics, these facts are startling. Unlike her southern contemporaries, Scott writes by eschewing the

elements found in "traditional" southern fiction. To illuminate her "universe," she eradicates the "South" from her work, whereas for most "southern" writers this act would be unimaginable. Andrew Lytle comments specifically on this point in his essay on Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust:

There is for any Southern writer of imagination an inescapable preoccupation with his native scene and especially with its historic predicament. He can no more escape it than a Renaissance painter could escape painting Her Ladyship the Virgin and the Court of Angels. He has been made to feel too sharply his uniqueness and the uniqueness of his society in the modern world. His self-consciousness does for him what blindness did for Homer. He has been forced to achieve aesthetic distance. (132)

In Scott's first trilogy, however, she is anything but preoccupied with her "native scene" or its "historic predicament." Because she is primarily concerned with character and its development, she removes all information regarding specific place and history from her trilogy. This methodology differs distinctly from traditionally "southern" writing where history and setting are inextricably linked. Frederick J. Hoffman notes:

The importance of place in Southern literature begins with the image, the particular of the Southern scene, a quality of atmosphere or a simple human detail. Its specific Southern quality may be simply an eccentricity of genre; it may be . . . a detail of idiom or manner which used to be labeled "local color." Place builds out from it; it is made up of a cluster, or a mosaic, or an integrated succession, of images. The significance of place argues some accepted history or co-ordinated memory which is attacked, defended, or maligned (it is never ignored or merely set aside). (21)<sup>3</sup>

In Scott's fiction, however, both place and history are "ignored" and "set aside." Indeed, history only emerges within these novels as it is created within the

trilogy itself. Unlike other southern authors, Scott's concern lies not with the past and its external manifestations, but with the present and its internal struggles and possibilities. Her fiction reacts strongly against the stasis exemplified in southern literature as "the ceremony of living and of the fact that living acquires certain habitudes if it persists evenly in time" (Hoffman 17). It reacts against the South's tendency "to develop historically in a slow accession of patterns which accommodate to the atmospheric and biological qualities of setting" because these tendencies allow the region "to remain static, to be self-protective, and to encourage fierce loyalties to its condition of being" (Hoffman 17). To Scott, these attitudes fostered deterministic, reactionary, and tragic philosophies. Because she wants the individual to take action against damaging social institutions, in her fiction she highlights the negative aspects of adhering to these institutions. In placing her trilogy outside of an exclusively southern setting, Scott thus illustrates the damaging effects conformity has on people in any region.

Instead of the static world characteristic of much southern fiction, Scott creates a fast, relentless pace in her trilogy. While her plot lines are relatively simple, she probes deeply into the psychology and ethos of her characters and allows their interior monologues to advance her story. Unlike traditionally "southern" authors, Scott uses setting not as an extension of regional history but as a tool to emphasize the struggle between the individual and society. The external world exists only to absorb and reflect the feelings of the individual in these novels; indeed, outside of its ability to mirror these characters's emotions, setting does not figure prominently in the trilogy.

Peggy Bach rightly claims that "Scott's characters experience what begins inside the character, and they psychologically impose that experience on the outside world" (449). Central to these psychological "projections" is the "halo of pathos" Mr. Mathews describes in The Golden Door (127). As it reflects each character's overwhelming dissatisfaction with life, this "halo of pathos" alienates these characters from their environment and prevents them from achieving harmony in life. Because these characters's lives are dominated by this "halo of pathos," they cannot see a similar "halo" in any other person's life, and thus they are unable to express feelings of pity or compassion for any other person. Their lives, therefore, are necessarily narcissistic as they see and feel pity only for themselves. But beyond merely defining each character's suffering, "pathos" also defines the feelings of pity, sympathy, and compassion aroused for those characters trapped within their respective "halos." While few of Scott's characters are overtly sympathetic, Mr. Mathews's statement suggests that those surrounded by this "halo" are deserving of sympathy because of the sense of pathos they engender in others.

Ironically, this "halo" ultimately emerges as both a prison and a source of salvation for these characters, for when they do see their respective "halos" and move beyond them, they become closer to others and allow others to become closer to them. In these novels, true personal fulfillment emerges only when the individual feels compassion and sympathy for others by moving outside of a prescribed personal "halo" and recognizing that a "halo of pathos" surrounds all people. Because a sense of harmony between the self and the world can only emerge when each person moves

beyond this "halo of pathos," Scott illustrates the importance of dissolving this "halo" which can surround the self and separate it from the world. Throughout the trilogy light imagery, in particular, illustrates the effects of this "halo" as it emphasizes the "separate-ness" of each character. Instead of uniting the individual with the world, light separates the individual from the world by exposing each character's feelings of alienation and isolation. The psychological "projections" mirrored in the trilogy's setting often appear against light--reflective, perhaps, of a literal "halo of pathos" that surrounds these characters and makes them "different" from the world.

From the outset of the trilogy's first installment, The Narrow House, the decay and disintegration of the family is reflected in descriptions of the Farley home:

The hot, bright street looked almost deserted. A sign swung before the disheveled building at the corner and on a purple ground one could read the notice, "Robinson & Son, Builders," painted in tall white letters. Some broken plaster had been thrown from one of the windows and lay on the dusty sidewalk in a glaring heap.

The old-fashioned house next door was as badly in need of improvements as the one undergoing alterations. The dingy brick walls were streaked by the drippage from the leaky tin gutter that ran along the roof. The massive shutters, thrown back from the long windows, were rotting away. Below the lifted panes very clean worn curtains hung like things exhausted by the heat. (Narrow 7)

Not surprisingly, the Farley home is the one not undergoing renovations. This image of decay foreshadows the deterioration of the family itself. To underscore the overwhelming anxiety which permeates the novel, Scott depicts a tension-filled atmosphere that engulfs and is a projection of the characters most affected by the family's problems. As they strain against the confines of both their society and their family, these characters deflect their emotions to influence the setting around them.

As the character who rebels the most against her confined life, Alice invests the atmosphere with her own inner turmoil. Filled with anxiety and tension, the setting exposes her unhappiness because it is a projection of it:

In the early morning the cloudy air had a texture like wet wool. The sky radiated colorless heat like a pool of warm water which one saw into from the depths. Work had not yet begun on the corner house, but in front of it dangled platforms suspended from pulleys. The vacant windows smeared with paint gave the house the look of a silly face smeared with weeping, an expression of tortured immobility. (Narrow 60)

With this description, Alice leaves her home for work. Just as the house next door faces an existence of "tortured immobility," so does Alice. The frustration she feels in her home life and in her unspoken desire for Horace Ridge builds within her. As she returns home from work, the setting reflects her empty life and frustrated desires: "Late afternoon. There was no sun. Below the blank gray sky, the long blank street. . . . At the corner house work was over for the day. The abandoned platforms of the painters dangled loosely on the long ropes. Through the smeared windowpanes you saw empty rooms blank as the faces of idiot women waiting for love" (Narrow 71). As her love for Ridge remains unrequited, these "empty rooms" reflect Alice's loneliness and despair. To alleviate her despondency, she channels her anger and frustration with her own inadequacies toward her parents, urging them to divorce to end their own unhappiness.

The atmosphere reflects the tension of Alice's planned confrontation with her father as a storm brews in the distance: "The rain that made the air sharp had not yet fallen and the dim curtains against the open windows shook now and then as with

sudden palpitant breaths" (Narrow 75). Only as Alice confronts her father with his extramarital affair does the storm finally break. However, this confrontation does not alleviate her unhappiness. Because she fears and avoids her own gratification, her frustrations and inadequacies continue to manifest themselves in the house's oppressive atmosphere: "The curtain flapped. Staccato fingers of rain tapped on the pane. In the room it was dark. The narrow dark. The walls of the room drew near. She felt herself pressed between them" (Narrow 82). Although she cannot act against her confining life, Alice consciously realizes that she and her brother have been trapped by the family. She exclaims to her parents, "'The atmosphere of this moral cellar has ruined mine and Laurie's life'" (Narrow 121), and urges them to sever the family's unhealthy ties. Because her mother refuses to express anger at her husband's affair, Alice focuses much of her rage upon Mrs. Farley and her inaction. In retaliation, Mrs. Farley elevates her self-sacrificing nature even higher. Indeed, she relishes her martyr-like role, and when the novel focuses on her its atmosphere and setting reflect this attitude. In one of her trips to the neighborhood bakery, for example, a wall holds "a large clock marked six, the hands, on the stark white dial, rigid as the limbs of the crucified" (Narrow 124). This image recalls Mrs. Farley's own martyrdom within her family. Similar trips to the market are fraught with anxiety and tension, yet she continues to fulfill her domestic duties to her family because she enjoys the guilt her suffering creates.

Mrs. Farley is uncomfortable in her relations to the outside world and finds peace within stasis, within an unchanging world. In her "narrow" house, she exerts

her personality only over the inanimate "things her touch could dominate" because she is afraid of human beings "who would speak some terrible word of love or money to destroy their permanence" (Narrow 102). She finds assurance in the mundane and praises the natural world as a "place" that never deviates from its routine:

A last streak of sunshine filtered through the clouds and came over the back yard into the room. There were some tumblers in a tray on the sideboard that caught the specks of light that were like bubbles of fire in the colorless glass. Each day the sun touched the same spots with the same light. There was assurance and finality in the undeviating rays of the tired sun. (Narrow 101-02)

Change threatens Mrs. Farley. Indeed, when she leaves the market for home she believes that the "wind blowing against her [comes] from the direction of her home--chill wind of strangeness" (Narrow 126). Alice's talk of divorce upsets Mrs. Farley because it forces her to act outside of her established domestic world. In response, she delves even more furiously into cooking and cleaning for her family, allowing her own clothing and appearance to disintegrate. The external world reflects Mrs. Farley's inaction and stasis as "each day the sun touched the same spots with the same light" (Narrow 102). The setting thus mirrors her fundamental passivity since it exists only as an extension of her personality. Indeed, just as Mrs. Farley and the other family members cannot move to action, the setting cannot exist independent of these characters's emotions.

Mrs. Farley's son also faces personal crisis in his own unloving, unhealthy marriage. Unlike his mother, though, Laurence craves escape from his present life. During Winnie's sickness, Laurence simultaneously welcomes and refuses her



impending death. The atmosphere reflects the struggle between life and death that rages within him:

Laurence went out of the room, out of the house. A pale fiery mist rose up from between the houses and filled the wet morning street. . . . Women going to market passed slowly before him with their baskets. Pregnant women walked before him in confidence. The uncolored atmosphere threw back the sky. . . . On the concrete pavements, washed white as bones by the storm of the night before, were rust-colored puddles. Dark and still, they quivered now and again, like quiet minds touched by the horror of a recollection. The reflections of the houses lay deep in them, shattered, like dead things. (Narrow 66)

Between the "fiery mist" of life and the darkness of the puddles which reflect the houses like "dead things," lies the colorless atmosphere. Just as Laurence remains trapped between action and passivity, the setting remains neutral and unchanging. The anxiety and confinement he feels reaches its climax on the evening of Winnie's death as "the moonless night, as if choked with quiet, crowded up from the empty street" (Narrow 173). With Winnie's death, Laurence experiences a sense of relief and release. To reflect this change, the graveyard in which Winnie will be interred is described not in traditionally somber tones but in starkly beautiful imagery:

Above the hard twinkling slope of grass, the sky was a cold, pure blue. Pine trees, tall and conical, were flaming satin, dark against the flat white burning disk of the sun.

In a shining tree the white sun burnt innocently, like an enormous Christmas candle. There was happiness in the strong, bitter smell of the pine trees warmed by the sun.

The light that floated thin between their branches was sprayed fine from the circle of heat, like the stiff, hot hair of an angel, burning harsh and glorious as it floated from a halo. (Narrow 189)

Because he sees promise in the future, Laurence invests the setting with his new outlook. Thus, rather than provoking images of decay, the graveyard appears

almost noble in its strong colors and landscape. The graveyard's setting evokes a severe beauty in contrast to the ugly, unhappy, and hopeless life found within the Farley home. Death has proven an escape for Winnie, and the possibility for change remains open to Laurence. However, because he realizes he ultimately cannot surmount society's internalized demands, Laurence tempers the graveyard's beauty with his own angst, and the "halo of pathos" that surrounds him emerges literally in this environment where the light between the branches of the pine trees is "sprayed fine . . . like the stiff, hot hair of an angel, burning harsh and glorious as it floated from a halo" (Narrow 189). The setting thus reflects his attitude in its simultaneously harsh and glorious tones; this is imagery not of happiness and hope but of apocalyptic vision. But finally, Laurence remains trapped by his family's confining ties. He must remain at home. Upon receiving this information, Mrs. Farley permits herself a small smile; her desire for stasis has been realized for her family. But that stasis, like the setting and atmosphere reflecting it, is filled with despair.

As the family's tale continues in Narcissus, so Scott continues to reflect her characters's emotions in her depictions of setting. However, the setting in Narcissus is even more sparsely drawn than in The Narrow House as the characters become more reflective and their interior monologues dominate the entire novel. As its title suggests, Narcissus focuses heavily on each character's self-image, and because these characters's lives are fundamentally empty, the paucity of description and setting reflects this condition. Again, no sense of local or regional history or of family or personal background exists in this novel apart from the information given in The

Narrow House. These characters are absorbed in their present search to "find" themselves, and the setting of the novel--the almost total eschewing of temporal or spatial description--reflects the futility of their efforts.

The novel's opening images are cold, unhappy, and bleak. As Julia Farley prepares to leave for Dudley Allen's flat she sees:

[T]he long street which appeared sad and deserted in the spring sunshine. Under the cold trees, that were budding here and there, were small blurred shadows. In the tall yellow apartment house across the way windows were open and white curtains shook mysteriously against the light. Above a cornice smoke from a hidden chimney rushed in opaque volumes to dissolve against the cold glow of the remote sky. (Narcissus 4)

While Scott is describing a spring day, she forces attention not onto traditionally life-affirming images of light but onto the darker images that appear against the light, reflective, perhaps, of the "halo of pathos" which also surrounds Julia. This type of negative reflection appears throughout the novel and underscores the narcissism of all the characters, each of whom is obsessed with self image and the external reflections of that image.

Julia, for example, admires the ability of her home to reflect her image back to her:

A neat mirror was set in the wall of the white-paneled vestibule. Here she saw herself reflected dimly. Everything about her was rich-colored in the afterglow that came through the long glass in the niches on either side of the entrance. The polished floor was like a pool. Julia felt that she had never seen her house before and this was a moment which would never come again. (Narcissus 12)

While this is certainly not the same home found in The Narrow House, it nevertheless

reflects a similar feeling of emotional sterility; indeed, Julia loves "the annihilating quality of whiteness" that is found within her "narrow kitchen" (Narcissus 13) and throughout her home. Childless, she invests her time in civic causes and social events but realizes that her life remains static. The description of her personal sitting room reflects this condition wherein "the atmosphere intensified the very immobility of the furniture" (Narcissus 40). Unlike the characters in The Narrow House, though, Julia actively works to bring change into her world.

In her efforts to "find" and define herself, she reacts against convention and involves herself in affairs with men whom she finds neither attractive nor interesting. Because these affairs are loveless and emotionally hollow, her life remains empty and vacuous. This condition reflects in and is reflected by her environment. Musing on her relationship to Dudley Allen, for example, she notices the dreary landscape outside her window: "Through the tall, open windows of the dining room, Julia . . . could see the dull line of the roofs in the next street, and the dreary sky shadowed with soiled milky-looking clouds" (Narcissus 62). This dismal atmosphere is further described as Julia agrees to meet Allen at the park. Because she perceives him as betraying her in his friendship to Laurence, the park's setting reflects her bleak mood:

White clouds filled with gray-brown stains flowed over the hidden sky. Here and there the clouds broke and the aperture dilated until it disclosed the deep angry blue behind it. In the center of the park the lake, cold and lustrous like congealing oil, swelled heavily in the wind, but now and again lapsed with the weight of a profound inertia. The trees, with tossing limbs, had the same oppressed and resisting look as they swung toward the water above their dying reflections.  
(Narcissus 64-65)

The "profound inertia" found in this personified and eye-like setting mirrors Julia's own sense of stasis. The confines of her society force her to attempt to define an identity that has been obliterated by social institutions and conventions, to define an identity which is trapped within her own "halo of pathos." But because her affairs are unsatisfying, they reinforce the emptiness and immobility she dreads. The setting reflects her condition and highlights her inability to recall the significance of personal satisfaction. Moreover, the eye-like and mirror images Julia invests into her surroundings highlight further her inability to see beyond her "self." Her individual gaze restricts her to a solely narcissistic perspective. As she escapes with Charles Hurst to his lakeside cottage, the description of the surrounding landscape further exposes her conceit:

It was a still cloudy day, and the lake, choked with sedges, had a heavy look, like a mirror coated with grease. There were pine woods all around that, without undergrowth, seemed empty. The still trees were like things walking in a dream. Julia felt them, not moving, going on relentlessly and spurning the earth. It seemed as if everything in the landscape had been forgotten. It was a memory held intact that no one ever recalled. (Narcissus 218-19)

Despite her attempts to gain satisfaction in her life and to react against stasis, Julia remains firmly entrenched in the conventions that surround her. She acknowledges, finally, that she must accept her life as it is; she realizes that to work against a dominating conservatism requires a strength she does not possess.

Julia thus represents a middle ground between her step-daughter, May, and May's beau, Paul Mercer. While May passively accepts her life, Paul attempts to rebel against society's institutions and expectations. Julia understands Paul's need to

rebel against conformity but knows that May's acceptance of life is ultimately the more realistic attitude toward the world. In their youth, Paul and May embody innocence and naivete, and this is mirrored by the atmosphere their interaction creates:

A vase of flowers was on the table, and the shadow of a blossom, rigid and delicate, fell in the bar of sunshine that bleached the polished wood. There was pale sunshine on the chess board at which May and Paul were playing. Light took the color from the close-cropped hair at the nape of Paul's neck, and, when May glanced up at him, filled her eyes with brilliant vacancy so that she looked strange. (Narcissus 44)

May absorbs Paul's own "halo" as the light reflecting the color of his hair fills her eyes with a "brilliant vacancy," making her different and "strange." As Paul's "halo" thus obliterates May's personality, it not only possesses the power to separate human beings from their environment, but to separate them from each other. While May accepts her youth, Paul feels trapped by his immaturity. He detests the hypocrisy that he feels infuses the institutions of society, but he remains powerless to effect change. Even more frustrating to him is his simultaneous attraction to Julia's beauty and his repulsion at her willingness to succumb to society's expectations. His confusion becomes manifest in his sexuality; he cannot drive Julia from his mind and wonders if his desire for her is making him mad. The atmosphere mirrors his confused feelings as he walks home after kissing May for the first time: "On either side of the infinite street the houses were vague. The trees were like plumes of shadow waving above him. The stars in the sky, that yet glowed with the passing of the sun, were burning dust" (Narcissus 48).

Whereas Paul's emerging sexuality confuses him, May finds her attraction to

Paul beautiful, serene, and almost tragic. She sees the night sky not as vague and clouded, but as "a square . . . like green silk. The moon, laid on it softly, was breathing light like a sea thing, glowing and dying" (Narcissus 49). Unlike Paul, May invests the atmosphere that follows their first kiss with clear and distinct imagery. However, because Paul neglects her after they first make love, her image of human relations changes. She no longer remains innocent and naive, and the atmosphere mirrors this change:

May walked through the park between rows of flowering shrubs. Here the grass had died and the petals of fallen blossoms were shriveled ivory on the black loam. Overhead the treetops swung with a rotary motion against the rain-choked heavens. The heat of the clouds gathered in a blank stain of brilliance where the swollen sun half burst from its swathings of mist. . . . A clump of still pine tops glinted with a black fire, and behind them the sun became a chasm of glowing emptiness, like a hole in the sky, from which the glare poured itself in a diffusing torrent. (Narcissus 196)

Before Paul entered her life and made love to her, May felt content within society and within the world. Now, as she experiences rejection and despair, she faces an emptiness created by his absence. She thus projects her own "halo of pathos" onto the environment as the sun becomes a "chasm of glowing emptiness, like a hole in the sky, from which the glare poured itself in a diffusing torrent" (Narcissus 196). Like Julia, May now feels oppression and pain. Like Julia, she now feels isolated from the world.

The trilogy's final volume, The Golden Door, chronicles May's growing isolation and her attempts to heal her unhappiness. In this novel, the characters try to flaunt convention not through relentless self-examination but through intense personal

relationships and through removing themselves from the gaze and restrictions of society. But because their relationships are often confused and muddled, and because their physical removal proves to be chimerical, the characters again discover that their attempts at self-definition are futile. They find that the individualistic spirit must be both strong and, ironically, selfless or it stands no chance of survival against the dominating conservative world.

As in The Narrow House and Narcissus, Scott first provides a brief introduction to the setting surrounding her characters. While the first two novels are placed in some unidentified, undefined, and generic early twentieth-century city, in this novel May and Paul's home clearly exists in a rural setting. Where this rural region may be, though, is entirely unclear, except that it is near some ocean. As May stands by her kitchen window washing dishes, she surveys the land around her:

There were morning glories on the back fence. In the damp cold wind that blew from the sea, thin lilac petals glowed, trembled, and relaxed. There was a potato field beyond where a group of cedars were rocking massively among the clouds that swept through the grey light of the sky. The bay was like green marble. Pale lines of foam moved across it toward the dark land. (Golden 3)

While this image of the Mercer farm appears almost beautiful in its tranquility, May's comments to Paul quickly point out that not all is idyllic in their rural setting. As Paul enters the house to feed their infant son, May says to him, "'You'd better move. Every time the rain comes up it leaks there where you're standing'" (Golden 4). Clearly, their escape from city life is not trouble-free. Though they live on the farm, the couple cannot prosper in their new setting. Rural life antagonizes rather than



accommodates them, and this is reflected even in descriptions of the farm's animals:

The pigs were in a dark shed. When May carried the feed in to them there was a snuffling and rushing forward, a press of shadowy forms against the sides of the pen. . . . May made out the huge form of an old sow, the moist, black glisten of her flattened, mobile snout, the angry fixity of her small eyes staring through the cracks between the boards that fenced her in. . . . The pigs had always frightened her, and the sour smell of the sty made her feel ill. (Golden 10)

This rural world exists in contrast to the urban settings depicted in the trilogy's earlier novels. However, the farm is not situated far from the city where the rest of the Farley family resides. Though Scott provides no geographic location for the farm, Julia can drive to visit her step-daughter. It seems, also, that May and Paul's physical distance from the city proves immaterial to their happiness; their sense of isolation and claustrophobia only grows in this rural setting. May experiences a keen sense of seclusion as she observes the land and the immense sea in a walk through the woods. Her feelings of isolation and alienation manifest themselves in the atmosphere that surrounds her:

There was no sun. The cedars, swaying in the dead afternoon light, were like dark green fires above her head. The grass blades, in moist thin flames beneath them, pierced the loose black earth. An horizon filled with empty shadows of light showed through the trees. When she came out of the woods and stood on the edge of the paved road, she saw the cold sea beyond her. Heavy with dull metallic color, it rose like a moving plain across the vacant line of the sky. (Golden 38)

The sea simultaneously entrances and horrifies May throughout the novel, and she never ventures near the coast to test its waters. Paul, in contrast, identifies completely with the sea and observes it from his fields with an almost prideful attitude:

He enjoyed the stillness. When he lifted his head he saw smooth, heavy

water, blank with light. Far off the sea made an edge of black steel against a lifted sky. When he was tired he walked down to the beach toward the waves stiffening as they moved to meet him, rushing against the land, and sinking, with a hiss of despair, on the damp, crisp sand. (Golden 8)

Paul's feelings of isolation and despair seem mirrored in the sea's motion. Like the waves that rush to the shore only to be repelled back into the sea's vast body with a "hiss of despair," so Paul experiences a similar defeat as his puny individualistic actions are reabsorbed by the uncaring and unchanging body of society.

Paul's primary attempt to defy convention emerges in his relationship with Nina Gannett. Nina's arrival on the farm and subsequent inclusion in the Mercer family's home life intensifies May's growing isolation. Her feelings of alienation become manifest within the farmhouse and reflect the tension Nina's presence invokes:

In the nickel base of the lamp the reflection trembled and shivered itself in wiry rays. A cracked mirror caught the glow obliquely. The dim room in the mirror would never escape itself. Paul's old hat hung forever on a nail beside a kitchen door. A strange baby lay forever in a far white crib. May was afraid of the room because Nina was in it. She felt as if Nina and she were closed in there and could never get out. (Golden 53)

The lamp was on the table in the midst of greasy, disheveled plates and inert knives and forks. Staring at it, May found herself the small point of terror in which the rays of silence converged. She was the silence of the black stove on the other side--a stove somber with purple reflections. She was the silence of the broken-backed chair in which Paul had sat. . . . May could never move. (Golden 87)

Because she has been rejected from Paul's life and because the farm offers no sense of personal satisfaction, May feels despair and loneliness. She becomes the point in which "the rays of silence" converge; her isolation is complete and all-

encompassing. She is unable to move beyond the stasis engendered by her "halo of pathos" which, in her case, consists of a small point of terror, surrounded by silent and therefore incommunicative rays. Yet in her alienation, May comes to realize that Paul and Nina's expression of individuality is empty, and that she, unlike Nina, possesses the ability to see things as they are: "There *was* something in herself Nina wasn't capable of. Nina couldn't *see* things like that. Nina's imagination was just nothing" (Golden 106). With this realization, May assumes control of her life and leaves Paul.

In May's return to the city, she realizes that, contrary to Paul's beliefs or those of other characters in the trilogy, the city does not embody only oppression and tension. Her relationship with Mr. Mathews highlights this new knowledge. Though an inhabitant of the city, though a liberal idealist like Paul, Mr. Mathews reflects the contentment he feels in his life onto the city that surrounds him. For the first time in any of the novels, a character evokes pleasant imagery in his surroundings.

The asphalt roadway had been recently washed and now the lamps threw cold lights in the puddles that were left. . . . Behind the steam on the plate glass windows of shops glowed lights fringed with auras: green neckties, gloss of yellowed green satin . . . a confectioner's exhibit, mounds of glossy cakes enameled in brown and pink and decorated with twinkling wreaths of white sugar, clouds of flowers in a florist's case. . . . The automobiles went hush-hush through the pools of water, and the shattered images of the lamps made fires of spray like fountains playing. (Golden 190-91)

Unlike the other characters who see reflected empty, vague, colorless images in their surroundings, Mr. Mathews invests color and warmth into the city. Instead of the cold, separated light the other characters project into setting, Mr. Mathews's presence

invokes colorful auras which overlap and diffuse the environment. He realizes that the "halo of pathos" which surrounds human beings may prevent them from achieving harmony in life as it separates them from the world; therefore, he rejects this "halo" insofar as it represents solipsism. Yet it is fitting that the other characters in the novel use Mr. Mathews as a gauge for their own ideas and beliefs, for in his realization that a "halo of pathos" surrounds all human beings, he reveals his ability to feel sympathy and compassion for those characters who come to him for advice. In this way, the "halo" becomes an instrument of love. He gently prods these characters toward their own harmonious existences with the world and away from a confining "halo." Unlike most of the other characters of the novels, Mr. Mathews realizes that he must act within his world instead of against it, and his subsequent contentment with life is thus reflected by the external world. This lesson becomes especially important to May.

After contemplating Mr. Mathews's relation to his world, May identifies with his views and returns to the farm to attempt reconciliation with Paul. She knows that his idealism has failed and that he must learn to act, as she does, in harmony with the world. To Paul's surprise, he finds that he still loves May. His evolving awareness of his relationship to his wife, and to the world, emerges in his connection to the sea. Though previously he has invested the ocean with dark, foreboding imagery, he now sees the ocean and shore crisply defined, reflective, perhaps, of his own enlightenment:

He walked down to the beach. The moist sand had a burnished glisten that hurt his eyes. . . . All the verdure of the shore looked polished and brilliant. The dry twigs of bushes were lustrous, like mouse-colored

satin. The dark expanse of blue water, hard under its coruscated surface, angrily reflected its black light into the clean pure sky. . . . When he turned on his back and opened his eyes to the sky, it broke in light upon his face. He stared into the swift blueness above him. To watch it, made his heart vast. . . . The waves ran forward and, dissolving against the sand, slipped in frothy transparence over his feet. He drew away, rose, stumbling, and walked back through the twilight toward the house. (Golden 273-75)

In this final scene, it is once more clear that setting in Scott's trilogy is dependent not on geographic location or historical detail, but on psychological significance. The setting reflects Paul's changed attitude as the "halo of pathos" which has surrounded him gives way now to a twilight that infuses the landscape. Like Mr. Mathews, Paul seems to realize that he must work with the world instead of against it. Though he has been previously unable to feel compassion or sympathy for anyone, his walk "back through the twilight" (and toward May) suggests that he too can now feel pathos for other human beings. He is now able to move beyond a confining "halo" to accept his life. Thus, as he walks back toward his house, the possibility of reconciliation between him and May remains open. Yet as in the trilogy's previous two novels, Scott provides no definitive sense of closure for either the novel or the family. Just as the family's history seems to have no beginning, it appears to have no end. As the trilogy exists outside of a defined place, a stated time, and an outlined history, then, it embodies Scott's goal to make her "universe" recognizable to all people. In allowing her characters to exist in such an unspecified world, Scott illuminates problems and possibilities for a wide spectrum of readers. She illustrates in these novels her vision of the epistemological connection of the

individual to society and to the world. Since individuals can, and must, project themselves in the world--since they "see" the self in the world--they must recognize both the primary significance of the self and the need to integrate it with the world, or the two will constantly drag each other down. They must move past a restrictive "halo of pathos" toward the indwelling light of transcendentalism which lights the way to knowledge of both self and others. The battle between Scott's brand of liberalism and the conservative world thus emerges not only in an examination of these problems in external society, but in an examination of these problems as they become internalized within the individual.

### III.

The primary obstacle Scott's characters face in their battle for individual expression is the pressure to conform to society's dictates. Beyond the societal demands manifest in the external world, these characters confront even more damaging and pressing restrictions that have been internalized since birth. In Scott's fiction, these restrictions become internalized within the individual primarily through familial relationships. Because the family reflects society's values in its own structure, and because Scott questions traditional social values in her fiction, she depicts familial relations as confining and restrictive. Scott sees the family imposing society's mandates onto the individual, and because she believes that these values are personally damaging, she denounces the relationship between family and society. In

so doing, she reacts against the "southern" view that tends to idealize this bond.

Traditionally, southern literature sees an ideal society as one that exists as an extended, all-encompassing family. Richard H. King comments on this relationship:

[T]here was a strong strain in Southern thought which saw society as the family writ large. . . . [T]he society-as-family was the ideal toward which Southern society should strive. Individual and regional identity, self-worth, and status were determined by family relationships. The actual family was destiny; and the region was conceived of as a vast metaphorical family, hierarchically organized and organically linked by (pseudo-) ties of blood (27).

As a region dedicated to preserving its ties to historical tradition, the South reinforces these familial relationships because they promote "roles" that exist through successive generations. Southern literature thus focuses on the habits of family living because these habits reflect an awareness of the past. Hoffman addresses this correlation:

It is impossible to speak of the South as place without discussing it as a region possessing a uniquely clear and responsible memory of its past. The psychological consequences of the Southern endurance in time have led to the use of the South as a pattern, an economy that has become a "way of life." Much is made in Southern literature of the ceremony of living and of the fact that living acquires certain habitudes if it persists evenly in time. . . . The forms are derived from habits of family living through predictable generations, and from the symbolic values implicit in inherited and inheritable particulars. (17-18)

Specific familial roles emerge within this ideal of society-as-family. But because the family structure reinforces societal limitations in its ties to these established "roles" and accepted "norms" of behavior, it does not foster independence or action. Familial relationships thus promote stasis as each person is forced to act out a prescribed role within an expected mode of conduct. As the demands of society and the demands of

familial "role-playing" become internalized, they are accepted and expected by each individual. In describing these roles within what he terms the southern "family romance," King points out that a tragic vision of the South's past is central to understanding the fundamental nature of this "family romance":

At the center of the family romance, in its patriarchal expression was the father. . . . As the romance emerged in the post-Civil War years less emphasis was placed upon the Cavalier per se. The "father" came to be the gracious, courteous, but tough planter of the pre-War years who had led the heroic and collective struggle against the Yankees. He was the "presiding presence" in the romance; and, as he faded from the scene, the grandsons in the early years of the century idealized the great hero of the romance even more. . . . Further, though many Southerners embraced the gospel of progress in the post-Reconstruction years, this optimistic stance was shadowed by the strong suspicion that the age of heroes lay in the past. Decline was an integral part of the Southern family romance. (34-35)<sup>4</sup>

Scott explodes the notion of a southern "family romance" in her trilogy precisely because of its preoccupation with the past and with decline and defeatism. Whereas in traditional "southern" literature the family provides a way for each person to define the self in time, place, and history, Scott forces her characters to define themselves outside of this "southern" construct--there is nothing even remotely "romantic" or historical about the decline manifested within the Farley family. Scott rejects the notion that societal institutions and familial "role-playing" help each individual to avoid chaos and personal villainy. Indeed, she takes the opposite view--institutions create chaos and selfishness in these novels. Because Scott places her trilogy outside of a stated time, a defined place, and an outlined history, and because familial relationships figure negatively within these novels, her characters must search



for self-definition outside of the family. But the struggle to find personal satisfaction is neither easy nor uncomplicated.

Because none of its members can break from the Farley family, this institution immobilizes individual action and renders each character's attempt at independence futile. Steven T. Ryan notes that family ties here "become chains as the bonds between parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife are based upon obligation, habit, and antipathy" (37). Because these characters resent their familial ties, yet find that they cannot sever them, tension dominates personal relationships. Despite each character's attempt to gain independence through individual action, the family bonds in these novels ultimately repress individuality as personal identity is sacrificed to a group construct. While many of these characters refuse to give up the fight for personal fulfillment, they are unable to escape the family and their attempts at self-expression are forced inward; their respective "halos of pathos" become prisons of narcissism rather than avenues of compassion and sympathy. As a result, negative reactions to institutional restrictions become manifest in narcissistic behavior that emerges as a twisted form of self-definition. Thus, while the Farleys live together, they never connect as a family. Rather than promoting peace, harmony, and self-definition, the Farleys reflect a sterile, passive mentality that highlights the stasis Scott fervently rejects.

Throughout the trilogy, nearly every character's narcissistic qualities lead to profound martyrdom. Confined within their self-constructed "halos of pathos," these characters rebel against their "obligations" to the other members of the family by

revealing, with very little prompting, the degree to which they sacrifice their selves for those around them. Rather than giving freely of themselves to others, the Farleys place conditions on each of their individual actions; each character feels personal satisfaction within the family only when invoking guilt and contrition within others. Thus the family functions not as one unit devoted to promoting fulfillment for all through communal effort, but as an aggregate of individual, narcissistic actions that promotes egocentrism under the guise of communal responsibility.

In The Narrow House, only Alice recognizes this distinction. She realizes that the family crushes the individual spirit necessary for personal growth and action, and she takes it as her duty to expose the hypocrisy that lies within her family. Because her family refuses to face its problems, Alice believes that the "house at night was a monstrous phlegmatic beast half drowned" and that "its inmates were sightless parasites" (Narrow 154). She sees her family trapped, imprisoned within its inability to face, accept, and move beyond the problems that plague it. Because she views her parents's dysfunctional relationship as central to the entire family's unhappiness, she urges them to divorce. She exclaims to her father at one point: "'I can't stand the atmosphere here. If you and [Mrs. Farley] don't find some way to talk it out you'll drive Laurence and me insane'" (Narrow 142).

Upon confronting her father with his affair, Alice also confronts him with his martyrdom: "'You make me sick about being just to Mamma. . . . Whom was she ever just to? What about being just to yourself'" (Narrow 77). When Mr. Farley states that he could never take "'any joy which came through a sacrifice of other

people's happiness'" (Narrow 77), Alice responds: "'Why don't you kick out of this? Why don't you find somebody with some self-respect who means something to you, and go off and be happy? Some people may admire you for all this giving up your soul and allowing it to be spit on, but I don't'" (Narrow 78). Yet Mr. Farley will never "kick out" of his marriage because, in truth, he needs the self-sacrificing martyrdom that results from his extramarital affair. Only through narcissistic self-denial does Mr. Farley find identity:

Mr. Farley liked to do hard things. If his resolution hurt him he kept it and was not afraid of it. He was comfortable in the bare cheaply furnished dining-room because he felt that if he had desired happiness he might not have been there; and as he was very punctilious in his duties toward his wife he was able to relieve the oppressive sense of sin which he had carried with him most of his life. (Narrow 26)

While he contemplates Alice's suggestion of divorce so that he might begin a new life with this other woman, Mr. Farley realizes that the self-sacrifice he feels in denying himself this new life is more important to him than his mistress:

He tried to think things out, but he had nurtured his self-esteem on the verity of abnegation and it was hard for him to accept as a blessing the thing which it had given him so much comfort to do without.

Safe in the conviction that there would be no end to his sacrifice, he had allowed full abandon to his mystical and repressed nature. (Narrow 140)

The ability to sustain and define himself through martyrdom becomes more important to Mr. Farley than personal happiness; indeed, martyrdom becomes his personal happiness. To Alice's frustration, he admits his "incapacity for change" (Narrow 184) and succumbs to the hypocrisy that dominates the family.

Mrs. Farley also gains satisfaction in self-sacrifice, and her husband's affair

provides an excuse for her to develop further her martyr-like role. As her mother delves furiously into the daily cooking and cleaning for her family, Alice remarks: "'What would Mamma do if we forgot for one day to object to her working so hard'" (Narrow 38). Alice continues to question her mother's sacrificial nature throughout the novel and eventually confronts Mrs. Farley directly with the issue. Her mother responds that she "'take[s] no interest in anything but work'" (Narrow 80) and that she has "'sacrificed [her]self for what [she] thought best and it's nobody's business but [her] own'" (Narrow 82). In her role as care-giver within the family, Mrs. Farley wields the most power when invoking guilt within the other characters. Because she enjoys the attention her self-sacrificial actions create, she continually exploits her self-denial. Alice, however, will not allow her mother to languish in self-pity, and when Mrs. Farley makes a half-hearted attempt at suicide, in a gesture of ultimate martyrdom, Alice negates the importance of this action:

"I'm not going to pamper you by arguing with you. If I seriously thought that you wanted to end your life I should consider that interference was none of my business, but --"

"And yet you expect me to live! None of your business! Oh, my God!"

"But as you have no real intention of killing yourself you have no right to subject me to a scene like this. I want a little peace."  
(Narrow 130)

Frustrated by Alice's unwillingness to take her suicide attempt seriously, Mrs. Farley speaks ironically of her "vileness" in an effort to extract some sympathy: "'I know I'm vile. Guilty of all manner of vileness. It was vile of me to slave and work as I've done and take all of the responsibility off Laurence's hands and slave for Winnie

and the children'" (Narrow 132). Alice will have none of her mother's martyrdom, though, and continues to urge her to divorce Mr. Farley to sever the family's unhealthy ties. While Mrs. Farley agrees to this action, in a moment of overheated emotion, the divorce never materializes, and Alice's frustrations with her home life continue to mount.

Her family's inability to move beyond its confining structure, as well as her own feelings of inadequacy in her unexpressed love of Ridge, drive Alice herself to the brink of suicide. But because she realizes that she could never commit suicide, Alice feels ashamed by her own inaction: "She did not believe in death. She could not hurt herself enough. She felt herself grow mean and hard and withered in her unbelief" (Narrow 205). Though she realizes that each family member needs to take personal action to battle the crushing passivity engendered by family, Alice finds that she cannot act. Thus even as she denounces the martyr-like behavior of her kin, Alice's passivity underscores her own martyrdom. Though she rejects her family, she sacrifices personal fulfillment because she cannot accept or create her own happiness. Because she cannot act, she must remain with her family.

Her brother also believes that personal action stands no chance against the family's stasis, and thus he never attempts to rebel against his family's confining structure: "[Laurence] analyzed the family and told himself that it was a monster which fed on pain" (Narrow 191). Instead of outwardly rejecting the self-sacrificial role as Alice does, Laurence accepts it. Though Alice tries to "wrench something from [Laurence's] huge mass of bitterly desponding flesh" (Narrow 155), like his

parents he finds self-definition only within his ability to sacrifice himself for others. This emerges, for example, as Laurence muses on his relationship with his wife, Winnie: "When he ceased to give of himself he would admit equality, and he could not do that. His pride bound him to endless obligations. Against Winnie, he obliterated gladness in himself and denied his acquisitive spirit. She should have him all and he would be nothing" (Narrow 154). Like his parents, Laurence relishes his martyr-like role. Like his parents, Laurence wants to sacrifice personal satisfaction for the imagined happiness of a spouse.

In her own role as martyr, Winnie provides ample opportunity for Laurence to realize his self-sacrificial character. Languishing in her sickness and impending death, Winnie emerges as the most overtly narcissistic character in The Narrow House. Her introduction in the novel highlights her conceit as she looks into the "heavily beveled mirror in the old bureau, and her rapt, tragic face became even more voluptuously tragic as it contemplated itself" (Narrow 13). Winnie loves her sickness, her tragic appearance, and, most importantly, her insecure, dependent, and attractive self. Rather than express interest in her children, husband, parents, or in-laws, Winnie concerns herself with her own appearance at all times. In preparing for her parents's visit to the Farley home, for example, she contemplates how she can present herself in the most interesting light:

Winnie was not sure that she wanted to look pretty. She was a little ashamed of the feeling but she would have liked to create with her parents the impression that the Farleys had not treated her well. This was from no desire to injure the Farleys but rather from an intuition as to what kind of story of the past years would please Mr. and Mrs.

Price most and present their daughter in the most interesting light.  
(Narrow 14)

Winnie uses her sickness to invoke pity for herself in the other members of the family. To Laurence, she presents herself as "frail and plaintive" and presses herself against him so that he might "stiffen against her softness. She loved herself wistfully, her eyes lifted to his face" (Narrow 19). With her impending death, Winnie reaches the apogee of her narcissistic behavior as she demands that the other characters become conscious of her "performance" as the long-suffering, tragic, and doomed invalid: "Voluptuously, she was conscious of her weakness. With infinite and exquisite contempt, she loved herself" (Narrow 163). Finally, in death, Winnie escapes the confines of the family while highlighting its narcissistic qualities. As the funeral wreath is hung upon the front door of the Farley home, the house itself becomes acutely self-conscious as the family's grief is presented to the outside world. Indeed, the wreath serves as a symbol for the confining "halo of pathos" that dominates the entire Farley family:

The house now stood out from other houses. What the family had wanted to conceal like a shame was revealed to the world. Their grief no longer belonged to themselves. When they went to a window and looked out their differentness separated them infinitely from the people in the street. They were crushed by their consciousness of separateness. (Narrow 183)

Though Winnie's death effectively closes The Narrow House, the narcissism which pervades the members of the Farley family continues in the aptly-named Narcissus. Narcissism here becomes manifest especially within Julia, Laurence's second wife. The first paragraph of the novel depicts Julia at her dressing table,

gazing into her mirror, and admiring her long, white hands that "made her in love with herself" (Narcissus 3). Julia's self-love and interest in "finding" herself dominate the novel, and her attempts at self-definition constitute its plot.

In an effort to define herself outside of her role as Laurence's wife, Julia takes a lover, Dudley Allen, who is also attempting to "find" himself. Their relationship, though, remains unloving, uncaring, and, finally, narcissistic. Indeed, Julia realizes that "she saw [Dudley] only as something which contributed to her experience of herself" (Narcissus 10). Like the family relationships depicted in The Narrow House, Julia's relationships with others, including Laurence, are superficial and self-serving. Even in her attempt to find satisfaction outside of the home, and outside of the family, she remains totally self-absorbed and unable to move beyond her own preoccupation with her personal stasis. Even though, unlike the other Farleys, she moves in social circles and dedicates herself to civic causes, Julia engages in these associations only to make herself aware of her "self." For example, after she gives a well-received speech to a local women's group, she finds that her interest in this organization is relegated only to her involvement in her own performance:

Her speech intoxicated her a little. When she stepped to the floor amidst small volleys of applause, the room about her grew slightly dim. For an hour the discussion went on, back and forth, one woman rising and the next interrupting her statement. After Julia herself had spoken, nothing further seemed to her of consequence. The other women were hopelessly verbose, or, if they argued against her, ridiculously unseeing. (Narcissus 26)

Julia's concern lies only with herself and her own attempts to achieve "significance beyond the limits of her personal problem" (Narcissus 27), namely, her husband's



negation of her self-worth in his condescending attitude toward her and her own profound narcissism. Julia demands recognition of her "self" and thus requires "some assurance of dependence on her from those she was associated with" (Narcissus 27). Since she cannot find personal satisfaction from within, she demands it from those she encounters.

Eventually, Julia recognizes that others will not provide her with the validation she desires. Hurt at first by the growing friendship between Dudley and Laurence, she realizes one day that "both these men were strangers to her, that she loved and wanted only herself" (Narcissus 58). But because she still craves Laurence's attention and approval, she realizes that she needs validation from her husband. Reacting against Laurence's antipathy, Julia attempts to invoke emotion in him in order to authenticate her sense of self; if she can create emotion in him, she believes she can negate the emptiness she feels within her life. She thus waits, at one point, "to experience the reproach of his face. Without naming what she waited for, as a saint looks forward to crucifixion, she looked forward to the moment when he should condemn her" (Narcissus 17). Like Winnie, Julia believes that if Laurence reacts to her, in any way, he will validate her importance in his life and, hence, her importance in general. However, while Winnie never realizes the futility of this belief, Julia sees, at the novel's conclusion, that Laurence himself is narcissistic: "He was [more of a person] than she, because he would not take her and become her. Love could not annihilate him" (Narcissus 260). Because his narcissism manifests itself in his need to sacrifice himself for others, and because his own restrictive "halo" prevents him from

feeling pathos for others, Laurence cannot express emotion at Julia's affairs--to do so would be to admit his weakness: "He wanted the strength to keep her out of his life forever. When she exposed her misery to him, it was as if she were showing him breasts which he did not desire. . . . Laurence, self-entangled, was ashamed to defend himself. He hated her because he loved her" (Narcissus 261).

Laurence explains his behavior toward Julia in a relentless examination of his own narcissism:

What he suffered through compunction was to him the pain of virtue. He hurt Julia in order to convince himself of her depth of feeling. . . . Her agony was his, but it showed him that she was not callous and indifferent to the consequences of her acts. He could not yet allow himself to express any love for her. He would not even admit his desire to do so. . . . When would she accept, as he did, the recognition that there was nothing, that there could be nothing, he would not be afraid to give himself. (Narcissus 224-25)

Like his mother, Laurence wants only to give of himself to others and to enjoy the satisfaction this self-denial provides. He recognizes his role within personal relationships, and, in an act of profound introspection, he sees the ties that bind him with his family and thus anticipates the future of his children:

He wanted to enjoy uninterruptedly the relaxation of self-loathing. . . . Laurence decided that he was relieved by the failure which separated him from the pretensions of success.

He recalled the unhappiness of his first marriage, and the depression he had experienced with his baby's death. It pleased him that he seemed doomed to fail in every relationship.

Alice and I are strangely alike after all. He took a grandiose satisfaction in the delayed admittance that he and Alice were alike. Wondering if Julia would ultimately leave him, he told himself that he was the one who ought to go away to save Bobby from the contamination of such bitterness.

Of May somehow he did not wish to think. (Narcissus 102-03)

Though Laurence prefers not to think about May's future, it is her life that concludes the family's chronicle in The Golden Door. While narcissistic self-love and self-loathing has characterized every relationship in the Farley family throughout the trilogy, ironically it is May, arguably the most passive of Scott's characters, who breaks from the pattern of narcissism and martyrdom that has dominated the family. While she may not achieve total success in her rebellion, her actions provide a dim hope for the family's eventual healing through successive generations.

At the outset of The Golden Door, though, May defines herself solely as Paul's wife. Because Paul's narcissism is so evident throughout the novel, his actions dwarf and absorb May's own attempts at self-awareness. Though his child is obviously ill and needs medical attention, and though May is obviously dissatisfied with her life on the farm, Paul's narcissism prevents him from realizing that his actions affect those around him. He remains preoccupied with thoughts concerning himself and his relation to the world:

It was the Truth that he was fighting for, he told himself. Truth was a sick word, however, and could not defeat his enemies. Unconsciously, he hated laughter and lightness--perhaps because he wanted so much to laugh. He had a weak, terrifying envy of people who were happy. He wanted to rebuke them with love, with "understanding," with his exquisite conscience. He felt that suffering must have some beautiful significance. He wanted to find a word for it. (Golden 8-9)

Though Paul reaches toward some ideal goal for which he might sacrifice himself, he remains unable to define that goal. His inability to explain either his profound "understanding" or how suffering can have a "beautiful significance" highlights his

immature view of the world. While he wants to "rebuke" happy people, he does not know why he feels he must do so; he only knows that his "exquisite conscience" holds the unstated answers to these questions.

Paul's narcissism also manifests itself in his relationship with Nina Gannett. While he clearly sees that May is uncomfortable with Nina's inclusion in their family, he justifies his actions by convincing both himself and Nina that their affair embodies a true, natural, and unselfish love. Because she does not want to appear narrow-minded, May passively accepts, yet inwardly rebels, against Nina's presence. Because she fears she will lose Paul's love should she denounce his affair, she resolves to adopt a passive, martyr-like role: "I can't give him up. I belong to him, whoever he loves, wherever he is. Nina hasn't anything to do with that. May now allowed herself the intoxication of her own recklessness. She triumphantly relinquished everything to *them*. They should never come to the end of her humility" (Golden 73). May wants to be "thoroughly abused" (Golden 90) by Paul and Nina; she wants to retain some significance in Paul's life, even a negative presence, to preserve a semblance of her marriage.

Despite May's evident unhappiness, Paul convinces himself that by acting on his "true" emotions he rightfully transcends the conventions he believes keep May from fulfillment. Thus, he convinces himself that his narcissistic behavior saves him from the societal limitations he detests. May's feelings, he believes, play no part in his decision to love Nina, nor should they. In a letter to Nina, he writes:

My darling, I feel that the deepest bond between us is our desire to

know what truth is. . . . I want you to find yourself where you can, in any way you can, for I know there is that in you which lifts you above the heedless crowd about us. I know you are not afraid to seek reality. . . . Every man has to live for himself according to his own conception of what is right. Remember that you owe nothing to the weakness of others and everything to your own strength and the determination of both of us to live honestly without the cant and concealment which the world usually demands of people.  
(Golden 110-11)

Paul believes that "inward peace and tranquillity is more a question of how much we love others than of how much work or possessions we can get out of them" (Golden 119), but, ironically, he works against this principle in his own martyrdom. In actuality, Paul loves only himself; his preoccupation with his self-sacrificing role highlights this condition. He believes that "experience which reached him from the outside overpowered him and carried him inward where there was only the meaningless sense of life and suffering in his own heart" (Golden 109). While Paul may think that he derives personal satisfaction in helping others, he only experiences fulfillment in the self-denial and suffering such acts create. At the height of his self-perceived martyrdom, Paul identifies himself with another martyr, Jesus Christ:

His suffering was like the secretness of the water that hid itself under an open sky. He had never made a more sincere effort to be "honest." Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives. That had nothing to do with it. They offered him gall and vinegar on a sponge and he refused. (Jesus of Nazareth, *King of the Jews*.) Paul imagined that he had a duty to both May and Nina. Paul imagined that if he could only tell people certain things about himself, they would become better, more "understanding." (Golden 144-45).

But instead of using his martyrdom to promote love and understanding in the world, as Christ did, Paul twists the crucifixion into an example of narcissistic self-pity. As

May finally confronts Paul with her anger at Nina's inclusion in their life, he feels "nailed to the cross, but glad he could not move from it" (Golden 159). At this, the apex of his narcissism and martyrdom, Paul welcomes the pain his suffering provokes.

May reacts strongly against Paul's refusal to involve himself in their fight. He comments: "I wish you would go, May--that is, for a while, at least, while we feel like this. At least I wish you wanted to. I don't want to force anybody to anything" (Golden 159). Following this statement, she finally tells Paul how she feels: "I think you are the most cruel brutal man I ever saw. Everybody says you're a monster to treat me the way you do, and you are. It's all very well to talk of loving humanity. You can't love anybody--you. You don't care anything about how much people go through for you. I hate you" (Golden 159). While these direct and honest words do not miraculously reveal to Paul his skewed and narcissistic martyrdom, they provide an outlet for May to express her feelings as she exposes the profound problems created by using a "halo of pathos" to exclude rather than include the world. She finally realizes that how she feels is important, and that in order for her to love anyone she must first love herself. While May remains willing to sacrifice herself for Paul's happiness, she does so because such temporary sacrifice might ensure her own future happiness. Rather than twist self-denial into a martyr-like pleasure, May breaks from Paul. She does not know if her choice to leave the farm is a wise one, but she hopes that her action will illustrate true sacrifice. In her desire to be "'different' from 'Aunt' Julia, from [her] Father, from Paul's uncle and aunt" (Golden 155), May refuses to immerse herself in narcissistic pleasures. For the first time in the trilogy, a

member of the Farley family realizes the meaning of positive self-love and the possibilities such love creates. She denounces Paul's actions in a letter written to him from her father's home in the city:

The views of both of you are abhorrent to me. I don't believe anybody was ever meant to go through as much as this. You make yourself unhappy just the same as you make me. You say I'm selfish, but I'm not. . . . You will hate me when you read this, but I want you to hate me. I'm not afraid of either of you or what you can do to me because my conscience doesn't hurt me. I am just going to wait until you come back to your senses. You'll thank me afterward. (Golden 204)

In her effort to break from both Paul and her family's pattern of twisted, narcissistic self-denial, May's action represents a turning point in the family's history. Because she is unwilling to continue to sacrifice her personal ideals to those of Paul, and because she is unwilling to contort the possibility of fulfillment into unsatisfying narcissistic emptiness, May embodies the potential for change in the Farley family. She thus breaks from her own "halo of pathos" into the halos of others; selfishness and misery becomes true pathos. While May's actions physically illustrate how complicated and difficult it is to arrive at personal fulfillment, Julia explains the process her step-daughter has undergone. She informs Paul of the important obstacles May has overcome:

When people develop real fineness they realize that human beings struggling with circumstances and with their own natures are fighting against such hideous odds that one moment of comfort to a concrete human thing is worth all the sacrifice you can make to this Moloch of the Ideal--all the more hideous your god is because he doesn't exist. Don't you think that poor little May with her child is closer to the ugly-beautiful meaning of life than you, in your intellectual experience, ever will be? (Golden 265)

Because Julia identifies with Paul's struggles, having gone through similar ones herself, she explains the importance of May's actions in words that he will understand. It is necessary that he understand, accept, and follow May's example because, as the father of her unborn child, his inclusion in her life suggests that a healthy generation of the Farley family may finally emerge. May's example of individualism--one that allows for personal satisfaction in harmony with the often harsh dictates of the rest of the world--breaks the dysfunctional pattern of the Farley family as personal action finally replaces stasis. Though the struggles these characters endure to liberate the self from external and internalized demands span three generations (and three novels), the possibility for harmony between the self and external society exists only at the end of the trilogy. Scott's most conservative character, May, and her most individualistic character, Paul, have grown and learned from one another to arrive at the potential for future happiness and fulfillment. Though this peace has yet to be fully realized, its possibility and potential are imminent: "He drew away, rose, stumbling, and walked back through the twilight toward the house" (Golden 275). Scott's "universal" vision thus emerges at the conclusion of The Golden Door as Paul struggles to his feet with his newly-found acknowledgement of love for May. With this, the final image of the novel, the potential reconciliation of Paul and May speaks to the possibility of inner peace and harmony; the individual spirit has broken free from societal constraints, self-loathing, and narcissism, and the potential for liberal action has finally emerged.



## IV.

Taken as a whole, Scott's trilogy emphasizes the difficulty the individual faces in realizing personal fulfillment through action unfettered by political, economic, and social institutions. As her characters move within this trilogy, she demonstrates the disquieting ease of succumbing to a dominating conservatism. And while Scott herself reacted against such restrictions, she realized the difficulty of displacing the societal demands (both external and internal) that have been foisted upon the individual since birth. While her characters may not free themselves from these demands, many of them attempt the fight--and the fight is what is important to Scott. These novels thus represent a movement that chronicles that battle: from a "narrow house" whose setting and familial relationships constrain individual expression, to the narcissism engendered in each individual by these repressive constraints, to the door (a golden one) that may allow the self to emerge and face the world, still aware that it must live in the "narrow houses" of both society and self.

It is fitting, then, that May emerges as the character to wage and, perhaps, triumph in this battle. Not only is she the only character in the trilogy to grow and mature literally (from childhood to adulthood) as the novels progress through time, but she is the only character found within each novel. Though May's voice is scarcely heard in The Narrow House, she matures throughout Narcissus to voice her convictions resolutely in The Golden Door. Because she experiences the oppressive atmosphere of her grandparents's "narrow house" as a child, and because she becomes self-reflective and even narcissistic in her adolescence, the possibility of her personal

fulfillment which ends the trilogy highlights Scott's conviction that the journey to personal satisfaction is a difficult, but not an impossible, one to achieve. Through May, Scott illustrates the possibility for any individual to exist in harmony with the rest of the world while keeping a sense of self-satisfaction and self-definition intact.

May's growth also underscores the "un-southern" nature of Scott's trilogy, for May could be any young child, living in any region, who slowly matures to liberate the self from external and internalized demands. Thus, in creating a character who rebels against restraints found in any society, and who still maintains harmony with that society, Scott fulfills both her primary stated objective and her fundamental belief in personal action: not only does she make her universe recognizable to all her readers, but she demonstrates the need for individual freedom and personal growth. With the final scene of The Golden Door, in its suggestion of a reconciliation between Paul and May, Scott offers her readers a dim hope, a sort of halo, if you will, for the triumph of the individual spirit against the dominating conservatism of the world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Precipitations (1920); The Narrow House (1921); Narcissus (1922); Escapade (1923); The Golden Door (1925); In the Endless Sands (1925); Ideals (1927); Migrations (1927); The Wave (1929); Witch Perkins (1929); The Winter Alone (1930); Blue Rum, as Ernest Souza (1930); A Calendar of Sin, two volumes (1931); Eva Gay (1933); Breathe Upon These Slain (1934); Billy the Maverick (1934); Background in Tennessee (1937); Bread and a Sword (1937); The Shadow of the Hawk (1941).

<sup>2</sup> Scott's statement is also quoted in Peggy Bach, "Evelyn Scott: The Woman in the Foreground," The Southern Review 18.4 (1982): 703-17. Neither source attributes this comment.

<sup>3</sup> For other important discussions on southern history and southern setting, see: Jay B. Hubbell, The South in American Literature: 1607-1900 (Durham: Duke UP, 1954); George Core, ed., Southern Fiction Today: Renascence and Beyond (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1969); Lewis P. Simpson, The Dispossessed Garden (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975); Richard Gray, The Literature of Memory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977); C. Hugh Holman, The Immoderate Past (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1977); Richard H. King, A Southern Renaissance (New York: Oxford UP, 1980); Louis D. Rubin, et al., The History of Southern Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> The role of family in southern literature is also discussed in: George Core, ed., Southern Fiction Today: Renascence and Beyond (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1969); Lewis P. Simpson, The Dispossessed Garden (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1975); C. Hugh Holman, The Immoderate Past (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1977); Anne Goodwyn Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1981); Louis D. Rubin, et al., The History of Southern Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985); Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, Daughters of Time (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1990).

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