This Moon is Very Full

This short story by Linda Hogan, “Aunt Moon's Young Man,” is one of many levels. On the one level, it is very much a tale of Bess Evening, whom our young female narrator, Sis, has nicknamed Aunt Moon. Bessie comes to find love, healing and the promise of new life after tragedy when a young Indian named Isaac Cade comes to town and woos her. At another level, we become aware of our naive narrator and her coming-of-age within this small Indian town. Underneath all this are the lives and interactions between the narrator's mother and the townspeople. There is mystery, romance, mysticism, and many thought-provoking images in this surprising story.

One statement from Bess Evening (Aunt Moon) is particularly interesting, "The United States is in love with death. They sleep with it better than with lovers. They celebrate it on holidays, the Fourth of July, even in spring when they praise the loss of a good man's body" (206). This statement pinpoints the divining contrast in beliefs between the Native American’s love of life and harmonious living, and our own society's prevalent Judeo-Christian view that life is only a prelude, that the real experience begins after death. The Christian celebrates the freeing of Christ's spirit, and his or her own, because of the redemption realized through Christ’s death; in stark contrast, the Indian mourns the loss of Christ’s "good man's body."

The spirit of celebration is very much alive in “Aunt Moon’s Young Man.” The subject character finds much to celebrate and embrace, despite great personal tragedy and lingering grief. The narrator, too, finds out how to celebrate her own life and impending womanhood despite the small-town mindlessness and learned helplessness of its womenfolk that threaten to strangle her.

The author, Linda Hogan, is a Native American who celebrates her heritage. Despite the many losses her people have suffered, the rich traditions and celebrations live on. She says of her work:

> As a Chickasaw Indian writer, I remember my grandparents in 1950s and early 1960s Oklahoma. No automobiles; they used horses and wagons for transportation. I remember the sky and the land, and all of my work is a part of that early landscape and the influence it worked deep inside me. (320)

The deep workings are all here in her finely-crafted short story. Of her heroine she says, "And I love Aunt Moon. For me she is one of the courageous female heroes and adventurers I have seldom seen in stories" (320). The strong woman figure is one of the most intriguing and appealing features of her tale because Aunt Moon is a powerful and empowering role model, not only for Native Americans, but for the rest of us as well.

The story takes place in an Indian village just as the Korean War is breaking out, and the author's depiction of this setting is very real; I could taste the dust and feel the tension. She writes, "A storm was brewing on the plains, and beneath its clouds a few people from the city drove dusty black motorcars through town, angling around the statue of General Pickens on Main Street" (195). More than one storm is brewing here; the Korean conflict is an ever-present undertone, reaching into the heart of the country and serving as a foil for the real thunderstorms that roll mightily through the landscape.

The plot involves the resolution of Aunt Moon's distressing grief over the death of her only child, Willow, who was "…the light of that woman's eye.” She remains true to herself and her inner directions in spite of the reactions of the townspeople. The women shun her because she openly loves a much younger man and is having his child, though unmarried. Our narrator relates, "When Bess appeared, the women stepped away" (204). She does what is right for her; not necessarily what is "right" in the eyes of other women and men. Our narrator summarizes her actions and thus reveals Bess Evening/Aunt Moon’s philosophy:

> Aunt Moon with her second sight and heavy breasts managed to break all the rules. She threw back her head and laughed out loud, showing off the worn edges of her teeth. She didn’t go to church. She did a man’s work, cared for animals, and chopped her own wood. The gossiping women said it was a wonder Bessie Evening was healthy at all and didn’t have female problems – meaning with her body, I figured. The small woman inside her eye was full and lonely at the same time. (205)

Not all of her troubles are resolved at the end of the story; she still has new crises to deal with, but the story ends with a hopeful note.

The subsidiary plot, which takes us through the narrator's growing up and away process, has a satisfactory conclusion in her going away to college. She begins the tale as a naive and somewhat compulsive adolescent (she counts things to take her mind off uneasy feelings), but at the end she has become more self-assured and has implemented the first major step toward her desired independence. As she is leaving to begin her new life, she says, "I had Aunt Moon's herbs in my bag, and the eagle feather wrapped safe in a scarf. And I had a small, beautiful woman in my eye" (215). The reference to the Indian idea of the soul, the "woman in the eye" is especially poignant.

The format for unfolding the story is essentially chronological and takes place over at least a year's time. We are introduced to prior events through the narrator's recollections, or through her conversations with other characters in the story.

The characters are very real, and it is easy to believe their actions. Aunt Moon is portrayed as wise and knowledgeable about the ways of Indian healing and what is truly important in life. Our narrator says of her, "Aunt Moon was special. She had life in her" (198). She is "centered" and at ease with the actions she takes, and they remain consistent throughout the story, as she remains true to herself.

The story is told from the point of view of the narrator, who is secondary to the main character, Aunt Moon. She reveals the events through her observations and senses; hearing, sight, smell, and touch. We know what is happening through events passed through her filter, and by taking that point of view the author has chosen to narrow and define how we know the events and characters. The narrator's thoughts and conclusions become our coloring for the carefully observed dialogue and actions of the people and events surrounding her.

Our first-person female adolescent narrator rings true as well. Her thoughts and feelings reveal how she does and does not want her life to unfold. The compulsive behavior she resorts to when confronted with uncomfortable or unfamiliar situations gives depth and dimension to her character. She says of the women of the town, "The rest of the women were cold in the eye and fretted over their husbands. I didn't want to be like them" (201). Her determination to control her life and fulfill a better destiny is skillfully woven into the threads of the drama unfolding around Aunt Moon and her young lover.

The tone of "Aunt Moon's Young Man" seems warm and loving. The principle characters are treated kindly, even though the observations are often stated in a neutral way. The affection and growing understanding our narrator feels for her "Aunt Moon," her mother, and Isaac, are revealed by how she portrays their actions. In this revealing passage, the narrator reveals much more about Aunt Moon than relationship or way of moving. Sis says, "Bess, Aunt Moon, wasn't really my aunt. She was a woman who lived alone and had befriended me. I liked Aunt Moon and the way she moved, slowly, taking up as much space as she wanted and doing it with ease" (197). Sis is seeing Aunt Moon as a role model and wants to emulate her. Aunt Moon's movements are a metaphor here for how she lives her life. Sis, the narrator, wants the same grace and ease for herself.

The theme of the story is brought out in the context of conflicts both the narrator and Bess Evening have with the prevailing attitudes and lifestyles of their people. Like the hero in the Disney series, "Davy Crockett," Aunt Moon seems to have adopted the motto, "Be sure you're right, then go ahead." That simple phrase best sums up the basic theme; we must take what we know to be best for ourselves and act on that inner knowledge. Our narrator observes the sadness and hopelessness of the women in her town, then she reveals the differences between how she wishes she could act and what the "proper" actions of the Indian woman would be.

In contrast to the town's womenfolk, our narrator enjoys her feminine status. She says, "Aunt Moon made me proud of my womanhood, giving me bags of herbs and an old eagle feather that had been doctored by her father back when people used to pray instead of going to church" (207). When given her chance for freedom and a choice of how to live, she takes it and goes off to the city for a job and more education. The theme holds for both Aunt Moon and Sis. Both of these characters go against the traditional Indian values of remaining at home and marrying for security.

Bess Evening as Aunt Moon is also very much her own woman and in tune with the ancient Indian ways; she retains her independent spirit and makes choices about how she will live and with whom against the conventional Christian church or tribal doctrine. She defies the new "civilized" traditions, and in defiance provides an example to our young girl narrator, Sis. It is this example, as well as her mother's good counsel, which finally enables Sis to leave and find her own life

.

Work Cited

Ravenel, Shannon (ed.). (1989). *The Best American Short Stories, 1989*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.195 - 215, 319 - 320.

Verbally Visual Journey

The renowned poet, critic, and teacher John Ciardi states in his introduction to How Does A Poem Mean?, "The purpose of analysis is not to destroy beauty but to identify its source. There is no such thing as a beautiful object without characteristics" (Ciardi & Williams xx). The poem "Pied Beauty" by Hopkins (Ciardi 143) takes the reader on a pilgrimage that is indeed beautiful. The stations are varied and subtly integrated. Hopkins' primary imagery is visual; that is, the pilgrim needs to be sighted, or to have been able to see at one time, to fully comprehend and enjoy the poem's intricacy. He also invites the traveler to engage the senses of touch and taste to enhance appreciation for the journey.

The author generously uses skillful alliteration and rhyme as conveyances that enable the wanderer to fully experience the countryside. The departure line contains the "g" sound echoed in the initial phrase "Glory be to God..." Thus, the journey begins with worship as the ticket-theme and uses rumbling sound-symbols that provide richness and resonance. The combination of these two elements sets up a worshipful ambiance for this discursion.

The second line contains the alliterative words "couple-color" and "cow." The "k" sounds are followed by variations on the vowel "o," and the juxtaposition produces rich mellow tones and slows the reader's pace. The mood is thoughtful. The traveler is perfectly situated to reflect on the varieties of meaning subtly placed within the phrase. He not only hears the mellow fullness in his head but also conjures a richer variety of images and impressions because the pace ensures time for the formation of the necessary mental pictures.

Line three makes generous use of the consonant "s" in the words "rose-moles" "stipple" and "swim." Although not strictly alliteration, the term "rose-moles" allows the rambler to pause, reflect, and play with color and shape combinations. Anyone privileged enough to have seen brightly colored trout or salmon on their way upriver can appreciate the author's vivid imagery here. The less-traveled wanderer, as yet unfamiliar with the sights of such spawning runs, will still be able to appreciate the idea. The sojourner arrives at Hopkins' meaning by imaging and associating pictures recalled for "rose" (blushing velvety petal-leaves) and for "moles" (spotted soft roundnesses).

The passenger experiences the opulence of shimmering coloration in the fourth line, which is rich with "f" and "l" sounds in the phrase "Fresh-firecoal chestnut falls; finches' wings;." The phrasing once again allows the explorer to ramble a bit and to allocate time for thought and reflection.

The participant is introduced, in line five, to the machinations of man through his manipulation of the natural landscape "plotted and pieced--fold, fallow, and plow;." Where before the natural world was traversed to allow inspection, now a new and differently scenic landscape becomes terrain for the wayfarer's perusal. The author appears to be saying, "Look at these works and marvel on them." The human dimension is further broadened in line six, where Hopkins specifically details man's works in the line "all trades, their gear and tackle and trim." He uses another technique to accelerate the pace here by eliminating stops in the second half of the phrase. Where the previous line paused through the use of commas, line six allows rapid movement. Hopkins wants reflection here but wishes to avoid the formation of pride by rushing through the township of mankind's achievement. The focus remains on God's glories through His manifestation in man's works.

The seventh line begins the second journey-leg by shifting gears from the specifics of human works back to the sweeping wonders of God's wider world. Hopkins calls attention here to "All things counter, original, spare, strange;." This shift prompts thought on the unusual out-of-

orderliness of life's wonders. The terms are each to be considered as individuals. They are not rhymed or alliterated specifically but held separate and apart by commas. Each one is an oases for slowed thought and solid imagery.

Line eight signals the return to echo sounds with use of the words "fickle, freckled," and proffers the essential question for consideration "(who knows how?)." Hopkins' switch back to the original thought hints at more to come and allows the journeyman to again focus on the author's purpose.

The use of contrasts in the poem's last lines ensures continued interest in the changing scenery. In line nine, Hopkins conveys the adventurer through regions rife with contrasts and alliteration: "swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;." The observant cannot help but feel and taste and see these evocative opposites. Hopkins has involved three of the five senses and sprung between the extremes of all three within the space of six words. The clever choices and juxtapositions jolt the trekker along to the next line. Here the author reminds the participant of God, the wellspring of all inspiration. "He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:" Here Hopkins also sets the stage for the action he desires the reader to take.

The last line contains the clarion call to act. It is not enough to merely observe the scenery along the way. There is an implementation to be made at journey's end. "Praise him," is certainly a request, almost a command, a succinct destination after a flexing and reflexive sojourn.

By acting as a guide through unique and unusual images, Hopkins has shown them to the world as the truly special wonders they are. If his purpose was to make the wayfarer pause, reflect, and praise God for world-wonders, then I believe he has succeeded. The passenger comes to appreciate the unique visions of our world as he travels Hopkins' tracks. "Pied Beauty" is indeed a beautiful psalm-trip.

Pied Beauty

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Glory be to God for Dappled things--
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced--fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

Work Cited

Ciardi, John and Miller Williams. How Does A Poem Mean?. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.

(NOTE: YOUR PAPER MUST BE DOUBLE SPACED! READ THIS FOR CONTENT.)

Savior… or Executioner?

Louise Erdrich's use of the water monster, Misshepeshu, seems to serve dual purposes in her novel, *Tracks*. To the heroine, Fleur, as told by old Nanapush, he is her jealous and protective personal totem; to the Anishinabe population as depicted by the narrator Pauline, he is a feared enemy. His duel personas in the text are closely related to the actions and intents of the characters themselves. To those who would hold on to the land and the old ways, Water Monster is a friend; to those who are foolish and turn to the ways of outsiders, Water Monster is the bringer of death and misfortune. The two roles of Misshepeshu serve to illustrate the conflict between the two ways and the effects of the wrenching changes caused by this conflict. Erdrich's theme stresses the hope, resilience and creativity of the individual human spirit when faced with the inevitable destruction of a people and culture through colonialism.

The reader's first encounter of Misshepeshu comes very early in the text and occurs immediately after the introduction of conflict, deprivation, and death. From the beginning, he is juxtaposed and closely associated with death and misfortune to those who would help the outsiders and further the splintering and demise of the tribe. Old Nanapush, in his narration of the people's saga to his granddaughter, says, "Many were determined not to allow hired surveyors, or even our own people, to enter the deepest bush. They spoke of the guides Hat and Many Women, now dead, who had taken the government pay" (Erdrich 8). The association of death with government payment for surveying the land is cleverly done here. Erdrich doesn't have her narrator tell us their deaths were the result of their actions, but rather hints at the relationship and allows the reader to read the signs and draw conclusions.

In the very next paragraph, Nanapush ties conflict, death and the lake man together. He says, "But that spring outsiders went in as before, and some of us too. The purpose was to measure the lake. Only now they walked upon the fresh graves of Pillagers, crossed death roads to plot out the deepest water where the lake monster, Misshepeshu, hid himself and waited" (8). The juxtaposition is another signal to the reader; a track to be read and interpreted in context with others.

The next sign on the reader's trail is provided by the alternate narrator, Pauline. It is interesting that, where Nanapush is clearly speaking to a person in the text, Pauline seems to be relating the tale to the reader directly; she is talking personally to us outsiders as peers. In her telling, the heroine Fleur is tied in with the deaths of the guides and with Misshepeshu, thus adding another layer to the tale and another set of tracks for the reader to decipher. Pauline tells us, "Men stayed clear of Fleur Pillager after the second drowning. Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself" (11). Fleur is quite content to let the men go on believing their conjecture because they leave her alone.

The role of Water Monster in traditional Algonquin mythology has been that of selfish evil-doer (Erdoes & Ortiz 181, 511). It is interesting to note that the Ojibway Algonquins in the tale who are trying to cling to the old ways have adapted him to suit their purposes in a contemporary setting; he appears as both champion to further their cause, and as traditional enemy when the new ways of the outsiders are taken on by many in the culture. Just as other Native American peoples used the land and adapted their tactics in battle according to the terrain, the Ojibway Fleur is using her most powerful available resource, Water Monster, to fight a battle to maintain her ways and lands. Her true enemies would seem to be her own people who stray off the path and follow the ways of the outsiders.

The culture clash grows and intensifies as the narrative unfolds, and the reader is whipsawed between narrators and viewpoints throughout the tracking of the tale. Fleur is set upon by her own people as well as by outsiders, and yet seems always to come out the stronger. She is careful to foster others' belief in the benevolence of her supposed lover, Water Monster, but she does this with subtlety and with few direct references.

Pauline, a consummate and consistent liar, is Fleur's unwitting accomplice. The citizens of the community are eager to believe Pauline and blame their misfortunes on Fleur, and on Misshepeshu through Fleur, because they are experiencing such awful deprivations and require a scapegoat. Nanapush says of these people, "There are some who say Pukwan and I should have done right and buried the Pillagers first thing. They say the unrest and curse of trouble that struck our people in the years that followed was the doing of dissatisfied spirits" (Erdrich 4). The loss of a way of life demands an explanation, and thus one must be found within the context of tribal lore and tradition.

Nanapush sees clearly, however, and lays out the truth when he further narrates, "Our trouble came from living, from liquor, and the dollar bill. We stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step" (Erdrich 4). The ending of the trail is revealed at the beginning, but the telling is convoluted and tortuous, much as the journey into the 20th century was for the Anishinabe, or Ojibway, people. Throughout, the strong and true Fleur, aided by her champion Misshepeshu, struggle valiantly to keep what is rightfully theirs and to claim their birthright. Even though the reader knows at the outset this cause is lost, it is impossible to give up the tracking. The reader is held fascinated by the twists and turns of the quarry; a mystery as intriguing as any ever written, and a story as old and inevitably tragic as the changing of civilizations.

Works Cited

Erdrich, Louise. *Tracks*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

Erdoes, Richard and Alfonso Ortiz., eds *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.