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FREE WILL: USES OF TWAIN

Uses of Twain

contour that is radically disordered and disordering—and is called emotion. Sometimes that emotion appears as "terror," as "sterner compassion," or any number of other terms. In every case it is an inclusive, intense, hard-to-name feeling; a passion in the sense of an undergoing, an enduring, so strong it has to be recognized and pondered, but so unnameable that, to the reason, it is dismissible as anything from "an undigested bit of beef" to a neurosis.

The problem for consciousness is to attempt to express this experience in its own terms, to symbolize it more overtly than is possible in the natural, spontaneous symbols—emotions. Here is the heart of Wright's problem of finding a nonreligious contour for Grandmother Wilson's religious emotion. Her master passion is religious because those are the intellectually apprehensible symbols she has contoured it with, the symbols that were faulty for Wright because they were based too heavily on the emotional and the disorderly. Philosophy and art, Wright felt in 1941, can also provide the matter that gets spun around by the force of this passion, making its shape visible. What Jung calls more obvious "psychological" material, the stuff of everyday, conscious, contemporary life (*True Detective* stories, Afro-American folklore, or Invisible Man movies) also lies along the railroad track. All of the images/themes discussed thus far are the material picked up by the whirlwind and indicate its contour. Wright's uses of Surrealism, Stein, and Twain have to be seen in the same way. They are also images that are pulled into the mental air around the passion and so reveal the vision, or, as Burke less grandly calls it, the "point of view" or "perspective."

Most of these themes show up in the contour of Wright's novella in the general way of their involving an outsider looking in, about having to gain a new perspective on a familiar scene or events. In addition to this general involvement in the story's contour, each influence shows up in other ways in the images that delineate in a nonreligious form the essence of Grandmother Wilson's outlook. Stein shows up, for example, in the way in which Wright seems to have written, not trying to censor his flow of words in the various manuscripts. They often read like the pages of sentences that Wright says he turned out in response to Stein's "Melanctha" when he could not write

Wright's personalist starting point is marked positively by "one thing it has in abundance—emotional consciousness, intense emotional consciousness"; it is also described by Wright, mostly in negative terms, as a kind of void or lack. In "Roots and Branches," Wright was later to speak of the real starting point of his writing in similar terms: his characters reach a point of fluidity, of indeterminateness. His own feeling at this "breaking" point is compared to the void created in space by the movement of a speeding train, that pulls up and whirls about it all kinds of debris from along its track. In *The Man Who Lived Underground*, Daniels's contact with the invisible, "monumental ideal" is accompanied by a terror that is typhoonlike. Jung speaks of a wordless, imageless primal intuition as "a whirlwind that seizes everything within reach and assumes visible form as it swirls upward" (*The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, p. 97); the Surrealists write of a "supreme point" within the psyche that is something hoped for, that liberates self, yet produces (or is produced by) a world of haphazard things that are unexpectedly brought together in revelatory lightning flashes.

Each of these descriptions indicates an experience of a psychic reality that is itself somehow intensely still—an eye or an I—not visible or nameable to the conscious mind yet full of a power that manifests itself in a first visible-to-consciousness

sustained narrative. Stein's remark that she wrote "Melanctha" while sitting in front of a Cezanne painting that made her realize one part was as important as another also seems to have some relevance to the concept of organicism that appears in Wright's novelette.

If sentences for their own sake, disconnected from any clear interest in narrative sequence are any indication of Stein's significance for Wright, she certainly shows up in the one clear sentence-for-sentence's-sake that Daniels types in the cave-room on the typewriter he has taken from the real estate office. After Daniels has carried all of his loot back to his cave-room, he turns into something of a symbol-making animal. Having liberated the items in his sack from their aboveground meaning, he proceeds literally to play games with them. On the typewriter, he writes a meaningless sentence: "It was a long hot day." Meaningless, that is, for him; but he keeps typing it until he gets it letter-perfect. No communication is intended; the object is solely the formal perfection of the words. As Fabre has pointed out ("Richard Wright: The Man Who Lived Underground," p. 219), the sentence repeats one that Wright had included in the first paragraph of the first section of the original manuscript. Such a device on Wright's part seems intended to emphasize the symbolic nature of the entire underground portion of the novelette. Like the sentence Daniels types, and like the sentences that Stein wrote, the section means only itself, is not concerned with, as Stein said of "Melanctha," the realism of the setting or people but with "essence," the "value."

Insofar as it does repeat the realistic, pseudo-referential sentence of the first paragraph, it functions again in a Steinian way; it says the same thing, but in a changed context that frees the words from their previous significance and enables them to express something else. Like Wright's grandmother's usage, it changes the meaning of the words even though the grammar and the arrangement of the words remain the same.

The sentence also functions holomorphically; taking the reader back to the beginning of the story, it ties the parts together. In doing so, it becomes a symbolic expression of what Wright is trying to get at in the whole story—the way his grandmother could tie together things that seemed to have no connection.

Wright's use of Surrealism functions in a similar manner. In the same section of the novella in which Daniels types the sentence, Daniels begins the construction of another symbolic expression of his life underground as he seems to be trying to come to grips with the meaning of all the events he has witnessed. This time, it is the creation of a literal collage: he glues to the cave walls the money he has taken from the real estate office. Having freed the money from its normal symbolic context, he prepares to give it a new meaning, turning it into wallpaper. Wright assigns Daniels no clear, preconceived idea of just what he intends. He acts on an impulse of "devilish" playfulness. Over a period of excursions out into the sewers and returns to the cave, he completes the collage by scattering diamonds and coins on the floor in front of the money-papered wall and then by hanging the gun, the bloody meat cleaver, the diamond rings and, most significantly, the pocket watches from nails driven into the wall. Described as "blobs of liquid gold," the watches seem unmistakably to make Daniels's entire creation an echo of Dalí's "Persistence of Memory." Even the "yellow-green" color that hangs over the whole ensemble recalls that painting. Not only is this the best known of Dalí's works, its title has special relevance to Wright's work. Daniels's collage "remembers" the aboveground in that its materials are taken from there. In a more particular manner, it recalls the opening part of the story. As Daniels's typed sentence had reverted to the opening paragraph, the collage carries the reader back to, or brings into the present scene, the Peabody bedroom that Daniels had been forced to view. That room's green, blood-smearred walls are reprised in the green money overlaid with the bloody cleaver, which itself repeats the idea of the hatchet that the police suggest was the murder weapon. The Peabody room is bathed in yellow sunshine as Daniels's room is bathed in the yellow light of an electric bulb. The glitter of the diamonds and coins matches the sparkle of the broken shards of glass on the Peabody rug. The money itself, which the police had badgered Daniels about as the motive for the killing, presides over the whole.

Whatever Wright understood of Dalí's picture, he must have seen it as a symbol of his grandmother's outlook: in "Memories of My Grandmother," he compares her mind to a surrealist

painting, with its melange of disconnected items. In light of his own experiences that were recapitulated in the writing of this story, the relevance of Dali's painting to his own mind and the story he produced is also suggested. Perhaps the most important thing this surrealist image reveals about his grandmother's mind-set, however, is that ability of mankind to create a reality that has the power to affect those who perceive them. Wright made no effort in "Memories of My Grandmother" to conceal his disdain of Surrealism as something in and for its own sake. What he did value was its potential for communication by refreshing the expressive quality of words or objects when they were taken out of normal contexts and rearranged. Like the characters in "Superstition," Daniels feels a power emanating, not just from himself or from some invisible force in the underground, but from this collage itself. The whole thing becomes for him the symbol of death, and it is a strong motivational force in his decision to return above-ground. While Daniels's collage is initially undertaken as a game, as something without serious purpose outside itself—like Ellison's view of a work of art-for-art's-sake and like Wright's grandmother's mentality, however seemingly unreflective of the way the actual world is put together—it comes to have an influence on its environment, thereby attesting to its reality. Yet the reality is paradoxical. Daniels feels he can no longer live with merely the images of death but must confront the actual thing. This reaction to a work of art is odd for a writer of fiction to assign to his character, and it may reveal something about Wright's attitude toward literature.

The invisible man image is also quite obvious in the contour. In addition to explicit statements of his invisibility, Daniels is not-seen in a variety of ways. He is, as Fabre has observed ("Richard Wright: The Man Who Lived Underground"), mistaken for what he is not—a store clerk, an apartment house resident, a drunk, a murderer, ghost, or a hallucination. The details concerning an invisible presence working on him may also be seen as variation of this image. Derived from H. G. Wells via Hollywood, the image is altered by the "something" that forms the vortex of the novella. The connection between the movie, a work of the devil in his grandmother's eyes, and her mode of seeing was fostered by the stress she and the whole

of Wright's family put on the reality of unseen beings and forces. In Wright's own puzzlement over what motivated his grandmother, he knew her disposition was based on something invisible, or at least on something that was not clearly, rationally apprehensible; yet it undeniably made itself felt in a practical way. "Reality," as Burke defines it, "is *what things will do to us or for us*" (*Persistence and Change*, p. 22), and Grandmother Wilson's attitude certainly "did" to Wright. It was not until a symbolic expression, from a popular if not a folk cultural origin, greatly stirred his mind and emotions that the connection between the detested familial religious beliefs and imaginative forms revealed to him a new dimension of reality.

This invisible man image and that of Twain's in the essay "What Is Man?" were linked for Wright even before he involved them in the contour of his story. Twain's Socratic "Old Man," who is educating—or corrupting—the "Young Man" in this dialogue, has rationally convinced the youth that "Man" is an autonomous mind that functions quite without any help from the individual will. A supporting argument from dreams is introduced to show that, whether an individual is awake or asleep, the mind acts on its own, according to its own interests and laws. The Old Man asks, "We have wild and fantastic day-thoughts? Things that are dream-like?" to which the Young Man replies "Yes—like Mr. Wells' man who invented a drug that made him invisible; and like the Arabian tales of the Thousand Nights." (*What Is Man? and Other Essays*, p. 67) The mention of *Arabian Nights* also has some significance in light of the passage in *Black Boy* in which Wright recounts the brouhaha raised when his grandmother overheard a boarder telling those tales to the young Richard.

The genetic structures of Twain's own invisible man are more widely scattered and more subtly recombined in the contour of Wright's novella than this brief reference suggests. How Twain's essay molds, and is molded by, the "something" Wright is trying to make visible to critical intelligence involves a twofold complexity. First there is the relationship of Twain's ideas to Wright's story; then there is the relationship of that symbolic expression to Wright's grandmother's outlook.

Wright comments, in "Memories of My Grandmother" concerning the relationship of Twain's essay to *The Man Who Lived*

Underground, that he liked Twain's objective point of view on life. He links this quality to Twain's growing up in poverty in the Mississippi valley and he remarks that the starkness of such living must have sparked, even in many white people, a wistful questioning as to just what their lives meant or why they existed at all. This impressionistic response has little specifically to do with what is actually in Twain's essay. There is nothing wistful about it; its tone is more a rueful-to-bored-line-bitter skepticism based on a view of humanness as a kind of perpetual motion, predetermined data processor. Since Twain's view of what constitutes humanness involves ideas about the origins of the mind and its function as a combiner of data, Wright surely saw, as he wrote his story, the further pertinence it had to his grandmother's mind-set. Also, Twain's answer to his title question is at some variance with what Wright seems to have tried to develop in *Fred Daniels*.

Twain's Old Man presents the argument that man's mind is merely a system of meshing mechanisms—feelings, intellect, physical sensation, will—for combining data derived solely from without; it is unable to originate anything. Only gods can do that. It is further determined, in how it can combine data, by individual temperament, the set of possibilities arranged by God. This temperament can be affected by training and by association with certain kinds of people, behavior, ideals; but it can respond to these trainings and associations only to the degree its given, unchangeable possibilities permit. "Born-temperament and an accumulation of multitudinous outside influences and trainings" (*What Is Man?* p. 98) produce what the Old Man calls "the Interior Master," "the independent Sovereign," "the insolent absolute Monarch," or the "Master Passion." Whatever individual differences exist, this Master Passion is always "a hunger for Self-Approval" (p. 99); it is, an appetite for whatever complements, fulfillings, and satisfies the system that was built from temperament, training, and associations. No matter how an individual might try to behave altruistically, whether the individual is awake or asleep, this Master Passion always puts together, sees, or chooses what most gratifies it, regardless of whether it is good for the whole person or for humanity in general, whether it is "good" or not. As the Old Man talks of it, it assumes a kind of existence that is

independent of the individual in which it resides, even though in fact it constitutes as much of an "I" as the individual can be said to have, which according to Twain's Old Man is not much. In its independence, it is, therefore, something like an invisible presence over which a person has no control.

Its invisibility is further enhanced by the "misleading names" mankind has given it:

Y.M. What do you call Love, Hate, Charity, Revenge, Humanity, Forgiveness?

O.M. Different results of the one Master Impulse: the necessity of securing one's self-approval. They wear diverse clothes and are subject to diverse moods, but in whatsoever ways they masquerade they are the *same person* all the time. (p. 18) . . . Compassion, Avarice, Benevolence . . . we attach misleading meanings to the names. They are all forms of self-contentment . . . but the names so disguise them that they distract our attention from the fact. (pp. 28-29)

The portion of Twain's essay that is relevant to Wright's story is contained in this passage. Like Stein and Wright's grandmother, the Old Man is altering language in light of his own viewpoint. Present also is the sense that something exists behind the ostensible form or meaning, just as Wright felt that something existed behind the external forms of his grandmother's religious logic and behind the artistic logic of the Afro-American blues and jazz folk musicians.

Explaining how self-approval is the motive behind these nominally other-oriented virtues, Twain uses an illustration that is particularly applicable to Wright's grandmother. The Old Man tells a parable of an "Infidel" resident in a Christian widow's home. Her little son is ill; the infidel entertains him and uses "these opportunities to satisfy a strong longing of his nature—that desire which is in us all to better other people's condition by having them think as we think" (p. 24). He succeeds in converting the boy and is happy until, at the moment of the boy's death, the boy and his mother reproach him for having taken away a faith that had sustained and gladdened them and their family for centuries. The infidel now suffers a remorse that softens his attitude toward Christianity and leads to his own conversion. As a believing Christian, his remorse over what he had taken from the boy is greater than ever, and

to secure peace, he becomes a missionary. The story then repeats itself in reverse as he converts a dying infidel boy and is berated by the boy and his mother for what he has taken away from them.

The Old Man develops the point of the story:

in both cases the man's *act* gave him no spiritual discomfort . . . he was quite satisfied with it and got pleasure out of it. But afterward when it resulted in *pain* to him, he was sorry. Sorry it had inflicted pain upon others, *but for no reason* . . . *except that their pain gave him pain*. Our consciences take *no* notice of pain inflicted upon others until it reaches a point where it gives pain to us . . . many an infidel would not have been troubled by that Christian mother's distress . . . many a missionary, sternly fortified by his sense of duty, would not have been troubled by the pagan mother's distress. (p. 28)

The fact that self-approval can be considered another symbol for the "something" behind Grandmother Wilson's bizarre (to Wright) religiously framed linkages is brought out by the following passage and its bearing on the dragon/furnace scene excised from *The Man Who Lived Underground*:

OM . . . we ignore and never mention the Sole Impulse which dictates and compels a man's every act: the imperious necessity of securing his own approval, in every emergency and at all costs. To it we owe all that we are. It is our breath, our heart, our blood. It is our only spur, our ship, our goad, our only impelling power. . . Without it we should be merely inert images, corpses; no one would do anything, there would be no progress, the world would stand still. We ought to stand reverently uncovered when the name of that stupendous power is uttered. (p. 29)

The borderline sado-masochistic, threatening tone and the religious imagery relate this passage to Daniels's experience in the theater basement. That experience, in turn, reflects the above passage in that Daniels derives an ultimate self-approval from the experience: he comes to realize that reality and worth are within him, to the extent that his notion of superiority acquires a vague tinge of divinity. Grandmother Wilson's idiosyncratic combinations, as well as those achieved in other Afro-American folk expressions, are assertions of self-approval understood in this manner, an approval or confirmation of Self that the objective world does not provide. The hunger remains;

but Wright's grandmother formulates a world on which she confers a reality, an "objective" world that conforms to her, reflects her vision, her reality, and hence confirms her existence.

The dangers, the less sanguine aspects of such self-approval, were recognized by Wright and will be discussed later.

Differences exist, however, between Twain's Master Passion that is constructed from an unchangeable, predetermined disposition of possibilities called temperament, actualized only by influences from outside the individual, and what seems to be motivating Daniels. However, even these differences bring into further relief the nature of the "something" that Wright is attempting to express. Wright seems to want his image of Man to be much less mechanistic than Twain's. He uses the concept of organicism and, in several places, forms of the word itself, in both the novella and "Memories of My Grandmother," to indicate the nature of relationships. To be sure, the behaviors he describes are often difficult to distinguish from the mechanically motivated behaviors discussed by Twain's Old Man. In addition to the organicism Daniels perceives as characterizing the relationship between himself and others, an organicism that is the essential thrust of Wright's entire story and is expressed by him as characteristic of his experience while writing the story, Daniels is presented as more than a victim of circumstances. He, like most of Wright's protagonists and Wright himself, seems much less passive than an outlook such as Twain's would encourage. Wright's pre-civil-rights-era, Afro-American experience in both the southern and northern United States, as well as his sympathy with communism and his plain common sense, did not deny the role of external influences, however much his grandmother might have resisted them. Yet Daniels does not act solely in response to what comes from the outside. His normal life aboveground has subjected him to traditional notions of responsibility. Wife, child, job, church, all imply something outside himself to be lived up to and, conversely, the feeling of guilt if he does not. He also knows that as a "Negro" he has additional responsibilities placed on him from without, expectations he must live up, or down, to but that impute guilt whether or not he behaves as a "Negro." The way Wright depicts him in the first part of the

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novella, his temperament would seem to have the possibility, as Twain would say, the interest or susceptibility, to receive the training extended to him. He does normally live up to, find satisfaction and self-approval in all of the expectations, all the values derived from associations with others aboveground: he does try to be a good husband, good church member, good worker, even a "good Negro." The reception of the training shows up in his longing to go "home" to his normal life, as the police beat him and even after he enters the underground. He does, in fact, experience at least twinges of guilt when Rachel/Lily berates him for not being with her in her time of need and when Murphy complains that he has caused the policeman a great deal of trouble, however ironically Wright intends both. Just as Twain's essay does not indicate that outside influences need be narrowly oriented to a specific effect—a worldly warrior can become a great saint through the mischance of a broken leg—so Wright's story does not permit the impulse to go into the sewer to originate full blown in Daniels's head. It is related to the accident of a rain storm that caused overflowing water to dislodge a manhole cover. Going back further, the treatment he receives from the police activates his desire to hide, a behavior that would not have come into his mind spontaneously from his own resources. Underground, Wright has him muse on the ease with which people accept guilt, as though they were predisposed by something they had done so long ago they could not remember what it was. The training in guilt is extensive and deep in Wright's story.

Even aboveground, Daniels is motivated to resist this imputation of guilt, even when the training gets as forceful as the beating he receives from the police. He feels the weight of the accusation bearing down on him, but his whole drive is to avoid it, get out from under it. Once underground he almost immediately perceives all of the guilt in human life—the crime of not looking in the right place for the self-approval that all crave—but rejects it. He is free, and his sense of freedom is repeatedly stated by Wright. All are guilty, but all are innocent because no one has told them the truth, no one can tell them the truth; there is no one or nothing that can provide that degree of compassion, such approval as is needed. No one, it

seems, except themselves, as he comes to understand in the theater basement.

Nothing in the story indicates Daniels has had any training that would activate any potential to act differently from what the outside world urges on him. Wright seems to insist that Daniels's initial assertion of self is not derived from any experience until he encounters the dragon/furnace, and that experience does not in its exterior components contain any elements that speak to him directly of self. It could even be said that the experience does not give him his sense of self; it clarifies this sense through terror. In addition to repeated references to Daniels's treachery, Wright underscores the self-initiated quality he wishes to give Daniels's experience by having him sense that he cannot give this intensity to anyone else. Each one has to come upon it on his own. The experience is enclosed. It begins and ends with Daniels, giving him a self-sufficiency, as though nothing else could even happen to him. Even later, when he has the experience of organic oneness with the church group and with all people (in the earlier manuscripts that retain the dragon/furnace episode), he is vaguely aware that this experience, rather than coming from the church group, owes its power to the intensity that is the self that he had contacted earlier.

Wright also indicates a sense of the primacy of self-priming in two episodes dealing with what seem to be external causes that motivate Daniels. While Daniels does not feel that the intensity he has experienced can be handed over bodily to other human beings, Wright shows what the experience creates, the expressive forms it gives rise to. Daniels's second satori reveals to him his unity with mankind, a unity made veritable in and by his intensity. This conviction is immediate, with "an assertion of personality," in the form of an undeniable urge to "go forth and devise some means of action by and through which he could convince . . . people of the death-filled quality of their lives. . . . He had to tell them because he loved them, because his life was theirs, and theirs were his."

While it is of great interest that the only means he devises is himself—he is his statement, he thinks—and his action is finally the death that literally fills his own life, the point here

concerns what occurs during his first foray aboveground after this illumination. Sitting on the floor of the grocery store, watching people pass by in the dying daylight, he feels a remembrance of this urge to go out to them. Then it strikes him that "his compassion toward them was not as full and generous as it had been when he had imagined the reality of their lives . . . the collective futility of their lives—of their hopes. Now, as he looked at them in the flesh, he was bewildered. Why had he felt with such tenderness toward them?" He realizes again that what is really pushing him to return aboveground is something within himself, not emanations from the people that lure him.

What finally propels him outside is, in the earlier manuscripts, the collage he has constructed. As he stands looking at it, he first has a kind of vision that is itself a mental collage, composed of his own remembrances: disconnected images of all he has encountered underground; as he looks again at what he has put together, the reader becomes aware of a symbolic transmutation of the remembered images, themselves unrealized symbolic expressions of external reality impinging on Daniels. "Those four walls were holding him prisoner; those baleful watches winking their round eyes at him; those glittering diamonds mocking him; those glints from the floor taunting him; that gun defying him with [its] evil sheen, challenging him. . . . He had to get out of here or be crushed by these images of death; he had to get out into the open and wrestle with them, fight them, spread the word of their menace."

It is not, of course, the material reality of these items that is crushing him but the value with which he has imbued them. This passage reiterates, while fulfilling, the promise in Daniels's earlier experience of his own creative work: "other forces . . . stemming not from his body . . . but from without, from the yellow light, these shimmering coins, these fiery walls, this bloody steel . . . he felt that the identity of these forces would slowly reveal themselves not only to him but also to others." The reality of these forms—whether they are purely mental convictions or external, materialized conceptions—a reality derived from the self, is greater, more compelling than any reality exerted by merely physical humans. Yet later, in an ironic statement that will be explored later, Wright has Daniels

convinced that the return to the aboveground to which he is impelled "satisfied the deepest passions of his body, blood, brain, nerve, and bone." There is no doubt that Wright, like Byron, feels that "in creating we live a being more intense." In fact, as he says in "Personalism," images and symbols can lift "the warring, conflicting, paralyzed, and frustrated impulses" of daily life and make them into "a new, fortifying and positive experience" by means of an imaginative "exaggeration, informity and manipulation."

Wright's emphasis on the auto-derivation of this self-approval dovetails with the characteristic of imperiousness that Twain ascribes to the Master Passion. In Wright's scheme, this imperiousness is the reverse of resistance to a superior power. Although Twain's references to it as "insolent absolute Monarch," "Master," and "Sovereign" indicate an enslaving, dominating quality exercised primarily over oneself (as Daniels feels it in the basement), Wright must have responded to it as also saying something about his grandmother's attitude toward him. The irresistibility of the experience, of its ultimateness, its certitude—especially when, as in Wright's view, it owes nothing to anything or anyone outside one's self—gives rise to a form of aggressiveness and makes clear its amenability to totalitarianism. On the one hand, as Wright had said in "How Bigger Was Born," this experience of primal reality is the source of religious ecstasy, which is a form of abject surrender of self. One who has had the experience is led, as Daniels marvels, to a humility so deep that he is thrown speechless to the ground. Twain's essay also advocates a humility, but on the basis that anything of any merit that man possesses is, after all, given him by God and not self-originated. Any pride in self is, therefore, a decking of one's self out in false plumage, but Twain's essay also says that this appetite for self-approval is "blind, unreasoning . . . cannot and does not distinguish between good morals and bad ones, and cares nothing for results to the man provided its own contentment be secured." (*What Is Man?* p. 99) When given sight—the forms determined by the person's temperament, in and through which its satisfaction is achieved—it has "the Truth." If an individual, or rather his Master Passion, should find Truth or fulfillment "in the proposition that the moon is made of green cheese nothing could ever

budge him from that position." (p. 75) He will defend it against all challenges, with a bludgeon if necessary, sacrificing everything and everything that this form of self-satisfaction be preserved, usually satisfying self under the guise of bettering other people's condition by having them employ the same form. Wright gives Daniels, especially as he is consciously experiencing a sense of something greater than himself, such an awareness of his own dignity and worth that he knows he will never grovel before anyone or anything again. Daniels's self-approval at first finds satisfaction in the form of underground life, as Grandmother Wilson's found it in her religion. Midway, he toys with the idea that "any action any man took to satisfy himself—theft—murder—robbery—was a fundamental right." This imperiousness also shows up in the callousness to individuals that Wright saw so characteristic of his grandmother's behavior and that he wrote into Daniels's attitude toward the night watchman. He at one moment pities him for his life wasted guarding meaningless baubles, and at the next, he entertains the fond notion that he has power over the man's life, can with impunity put a bullet into the watchman's head and so end his empty existence. Wright's grandmother would have killed him, he says, if, from her perspective, such an action would have saved his immortal soul. At the end, Daniels is determined to take others underground with him so that they too can see "the Truth." This is just as Grandmother Wilson imposed her abstract religious views on everyone; as the church and government, in Wright's eyes, urged themselves on the people in fascist Spain; as the Japanese admired by Bigger urged their truth on the Chinese; as Wright's letter to Nkruma so strikingly urged militarism on the Ghanaians; and, perhaps, as Stein imposed her will on language. In the area of Wright's poetics, this aggressive quality of the experience of intensity appears when Wright, in "Personalism," states that the theory he is propounding promotes artistic expression as a weapon of attack: "Beauty will consist in the power of a given work to influence. The greatest novel will be that one which will turn the world upside down." In this story, Wright's emphasis on the greater activity of the individual and his ability to impose meanings not derived from experience on phenomena implicitly asks the same questions he had explicitly

asked earlier: if external conditions do not account for this norm of attitude and behavior, what does? He also seems to want to give the same answer: that which lies at the heart of all black human folk values.

If the contour Wright gives to the "something" at the heart of his grandmother's attitude, the contour that is his story, alters Twain's ideas concerning the totality of the individual's determination by outside forces, it undoubtedly retains the general issue of Twain's concern with the relationship of the individual to what is outside. In another shift from Twain's idea, away from Twain's insistence on the mechanical structure of humanness to a view of it as organic, Wright reintroduces the influence of the outside, making it not only internal but innately so.

Twain's proposal that Man is only an arrangement of juxtaposed systems, like so many gears meshing, not only diminishes the human individual's self-powering capability but totally and explicitly eliminates the "I," the personal center. When the Young Man complains that the Old Man's "elusive terminology" divides a person into a number of separate personalities, each with its own "authorities, jurisdictions, and responsibilities"—unlike his own reference that is always to a man as "*the whole thing in one*," to "a common property, an undivided ownership, vested in the whole entity"—the Old Man replies for two pages, concluding that

We all use the "I" in this indeterminate fashion. . . . We imagine a Master and King over what you call The Whole Thing, and we speak of him as "I," but when we try to define him we find that we cannot do it. The intellect and the feelings can act quite *independently* of each other; we look around for a Ruler who is master over both and can serve as a *definite* and *indispensible* "I" . . . but we have to give up and confess that we cannot find him. . . . Man is a machine, made up of many mechanisms, the moral and mental ones acting automatically in accordance with the impulses of an interior Master . . . a machine whose *one* function is to secure the spiritual contentment of the Master, be his desires good or be they evil. (pp. 95-96; 98)

The Master Passion is not the unifying center; it is found only in the subsystems, each acting to achieve its own satisfaction. Since one of the Old Man's tenets is that machines can

originate nothing on their own, themselves presumably included, Twain readily has him posit a God as the ultimate fabricator of, the ultimate influence on, this technological marvel. The center is, as it were, displaced to the outside.

Wright's novella quickly dispenses with the notion of any efficacy attributable to such a quarter. While his terminology may at times be as reminiscent of deism as Twain's, the "something" that motivates his grandmother and that he felt he could define or contour is definitely something he surmises as being within her. Even if Wright's antipathy to conventional religion was not known from other sources, details in this story—from the ineffectuality of Daniels's church membership in his dealings with the police to his attitude toward the church congregation, his thoughts when confronted with the dead baby and the corpses in the mortuary, and his whole response to death, whose only consolation comes from the cold ground—make it amply evident. Daniels's experience of the reality that is self may be immediately tied to his experience of being in a greater presence, but Wright makes it explicitly clear that, even though Daniels retains a sense of invisible presence, this greater is not God in the usual sense but is mankind.

Wright's principle of organicism as it occurs in his original version of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, like the "God is dead" theology that was to come in the 1950s, secularizes the "old man in the sky" conception of the deity, humanistically relocating him in the human entity. Images do occur in the story which suggest a physical basis for the unity Daniels comes to intuit as existing between him and other people: for instance, his contemplation of the "primeval" slime from which he imagines the human form taking shape. Elsewhere the unity is implied as existing on a more cosmic plane: Daniels is glad to return to where he can hear the water rushing in the sewer because "the musical rustling at his feet brought him back to the free but measured swing of planets, to the vast but charted course of the stars, to the wild but orbit-bound glide of solar systems."

While Wright indicates biological and physical roots to this organicism, roots that will be discussed more fully later, he makes Daniels aware of his oneness with others primarily on a

psychological level. Early in Daniels's underground sojourn, Wright ascribes to him intimations of the unity of the phenomena, and he observes: "All these things meant one and any one of them meant all." The meaning, however, and hence his organic awareness, eludes him. It is in the realm of feeling that his oneness with all comes through to him.

Jung's description of a primal experience summarizes what Daniels goes through in the theater basement as he is led to organic awareness. Jung starts with a definition that would have delighted Twain's Old Man, a definition of the "collective unconscious . . . a relatively thin layer immediately below the threshold of consciousness" composed of the archetypes and instincts; it is "a potentiality handed down to us from primordial times in the specific form of mnemonic images or in the anatomical structure of the brain." The archetypes, "inborn possibilities," are the "psychic residual of innumerable experiences . . . in our ancestral history." Under normal conditions, this unconsciousness never becomes conscious nor does it even exhibit a tendency to do so; like a river that has etched a deep canyon in the psyche, the waters of the life it contains usually flow along "in a broad but shallow stream." "Whenever that particular set of circumstances is encountered which over long periods of time has helped to lay down the primordial image," this unconsciousness, in the schema of the archetypes and in whatever form imagination may give them, "swell[s] into a mighty river": "The moment when this mythological situation reappears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were struck that had never resounded before, or as though forces whose existence we never suspected were unloosed . . . we suddenly feel an extraordinary sense of release, as though transported, or caught up by an overwhelming power. At such moments we are no longer individuals, but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us . . . transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind." (Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, pp. 80-82)

Wright's own description, both in the novella and in "Memories of My Grandmother," is more convoluted, involving not only the two stages of Daniels's experience but also the intermediary of a symbol as the agent of the second stage. His

emotional unity with others is revealed to him as he listens to the church ground singing. The words they sing are joyful:

Glad, glad, glad, Oh, so glad
I got Jesus in my soul.

What he responds to is the music, in which he finds a profound emotion, melancholy. Several of the manuscripts contain the title "Secret Song," either as the title of the entire story or as the subtitle of the section in which this episode appears; that, plus the fact that Wright kept the image of the singing girl in the final, published version, indicates the expressive, symbolic importance he attached to the episode. Like Stevens's woman on the beach at Key West or Wordsworth's solitary reaper, this girl sings meanings that her conscious mind does not know; eventually the whole congregation is doing likewise. The point here is that it is not an abstract conceptualized meaning that is symbolized by words to which Daniels responds, but a more immediate intonational music, a symbol more immediately related to the self as impulse, as assertion. As subjective and uncommunicative as this sounds, Wright effectively establishes Daniels's sense of communion.

While other passages in the manuscript indicate that Daniels feels that music in general is the only thing that bridges the gap between what he has come to know underground and the aboveground "truth" (he is listening to a waltz on the radio), Wright does give this kind of priority to the spirituals and the blues, even though Daniels has rejected them earlier as merely distractions that white people allow blacks to keep their minds off the real problem, the meaninglessness of their lives. This efficacy, attributed to the symbol music, reiterates the underlying note in the story: that human constructs can incarnate the active, expressive nature of the self. This attribution of such an efficacy to symbols also forms a bridge between what Wright seems to imply about the meaning of organicism in the story and his discussion of what, in "Personalism" and "Memories of My Grandmother," he calls "tradition" and its relationship to what *The Man Who Lived Underground* is contending.

In "Personalism," Wright introduces tradition when he attributes the flawed denouements of much proletarian fiction

in part to "the attempts of [writers] to ignore their own tradition." In that essay, tradition is implicitly linked with "those defeated impulses of the collective individual consciousness." The expressive forms for these "impulses" also have a collective origin; the impulses are to be "resolved"—heightened and transmuted—in "readily accessible images, images taken from the common life of the people." According to this theory, the ability of the personalist writer to experience this tradition in himself provides one of his chief "sources of strength."

In "Memories of My Grandmother," tradition shows up in contexts that expand Wright's meaning. Fairly early in this essay, as he is beginning to analyze what went into the novella, he states that a writer has to assume many things. What is assumed he speaks of in the same terms he uses to discuss the basal rhythm that serves as the reference point for all of the incidents, images, and metaphors that ride on the surface of the story. What is assumed without explanation is the same as the underlying emotion, the "something" he wants to contour. Creating variations on that emotion—contouring, expressive formulations—spawns an extremely intellectual and emotional compactness and a resulting tension. Wright then provides a context that equates tradition with the idea of a collection of individual psyches and a less-than-full consciousness. In a rather circular fashion, he has to assume what he is trying to make visible, the "something" that is characteristic of a racial, cultural way of viewing reality, of doing things—that is, tradition in the deepest sense.

At one point, he compares Daniels's way of seeing events to the religious rituals of unindustrialized cultures. He then compares both what Daniels does and the transformational effect of these religious rituals to what takes place at sports events or political rallies, where individual enthusiasm adds to, and also draws from, the emotional whole, increasing the individual emotional force. What permits this translation and transformation is an unconceptualized grasp of a commonality of purpose or of acceptable, permissible, even expected behavior. In the same passage, in somewhat lyrical prose that contains some of the ambiguity of poetry, he compares tradition to dreams, both in the sense of phantasies or imaginings and of sleep versions. Without them, people cannot be in touch with

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their history and hence lack the springlike tensity that makes for the kind of action—including, one presumes, symbolic action such as writing—that brings about the future. Tradition is for Wright not so much a set of specific actions but a mindset, all those unspoken, often unrecognized assumptions that undergird a culture, so pervasive and invisible that they seem inevitable, that they form a second nature that seems a natural commonality.

Referring to tradition as a dream, Wright also indicates that normal consciousness is not aware of, although colored by, it; it can be reached only when consciousness is somehow altered. Especially in a post-King era, a black American's calling it a dream can only reinforce the sense that only action can make it meaningful. Wright's meaning is revealed later in the essay when he writes about ritual, which he equates with an incongruous condition of wide-awake dormancy. What he means is that, in such ceremonies, the past, in its preservation as tradition, is vitally reanimated: the symbolic expressions—images—of the past, as it is experienced in the feelings of the people, received yet a new significance from the presently forcefully experienced "something" in the celebrants. All of the old, the now, and the new come together, are unified by this "something," which is the reality of, and gives it to, the tradition.

Insofar as tradition and its symbolic enactment—ritual—are the combination of past and future in the present and yet are none of these separately, they are other versions of that core of reality that is a process, a movement, a "now" common to all, a present energy or dialectic that bonds the myriad possibilities Daniels experiences in the dragon/furnace episode. It is also a point of constant, continuous decision-making or willing, as symbolized by Wright in Daniels's hanging between the two worlds and his sense of having to choose between them. As such an energy, it is similar to what Jung calls an archetype, with perhaps more emphasis on an active or actual element than on the purely potential quality speculatively assigned to it by Jung. It is also the energy that the music (not the static words) of the black church singers images. In Wright's grandmother, this inner "something" is expressed in the archetypal symbol she formed, the seemingly odd linkages

with which she bound phenomena and clothed them in the religious garb that was available to her consciousness.

In the novella, this meaning of tradition is presented in the image of "guilt." Daniels's being accused of murder and having the accusation repeatedly drummed into him became a bass line. The novella is no more a story about guilt than, as Jung says, the historical or mythical events that Dante and Wagner employ are their real subject matter: "Guilt" is not what Wright sees behind his grandmother's behavior or that of other Afro-American folk. Similarly, Wright considered it a mistake to see the kind of God his grandmother envisioned. What she really was expressing was an archetypal process, a tradition—an active sustaining of possibilities in the face of all external actualities. Unlike Twain's idea of temperament, this assumed, unproven, accepted tradition or "something" at the heart of Wright's poetics needs no external God. Mankind passes it on to individuals, culturally through symbols and/or, as Daniels feels it, in bone, blood, nerves, and brain, which in turn give rise to the expressive symbols and patterns that, in an endless cycle, reimpose the pattern in the psychic potential of individuals.

The core of subjective reality, actively pressing it outward and becoming the essence of human creativity, is thus also a core linked essentially to what is outside the individual as well. Unlike Twain's passively determined Master Passion, Wright's central reality is as active and determining as the reality that comes to it from without. Objective and subjective are points on a loop that has no beginning or end, no divisions of cause or effect. Wright undoubtedly found support for his modification of Twain's notion of man in what he learned from Kenneth Burke's theories, which also played a role in the development of Wright's poetics.