MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XLI

Fall 2013

being a collection of essays on the plays of

Sandra Seaton

by members of

The Society for the Study of
Midwestern Literature

guest editor
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The Midwestern Press
The Center for the Study of
Midwestern Literature and Culture
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1033
2013

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Midwestern Miscellany (ISSN 0885-4742) is a peer-reviewed journal published twice a year (Spring and Fall) by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature.

This journal is a member of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals

In honor of

Sandra Seaton

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The Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature
congratulates

Robert Dunne

Winner of the 2014 MidAmerica Award for
distinguished contributions to the
study of Midwestern literature

and

Naomi Long Madgett

Winner of the 2014 Mark Twain Award for
distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature

These awards will be presented at noon on May 9th 2014 at the Society's 44th annual meeting, Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, May 8-10, 2014.

For registration information, go to the "annual symposium" link at ssml.org

Send your proposal for a paper, panel, roundtable or reading of creative work with a Midwestern emphasis for the 2014 annual symposium to Dr. Margaret Rozga at margaret.rozga@uwc.edu by February 5, 2014.

Call for papers for a panel on Fashion in Midwestern Literature and Culture for the 2014 SSML symposium in May of 2014 and for possible publication in a fashion issue of Midwestern Miscellany: papers on fiction, film, drama, poetry, texts of any kind, and/or authors that deal with fashion in Midwestern literature and culture. Contact Marcia-Noe@utc.edu or call (423) 266-9316 with questions or ideas; send a brief proposal electronically to Marcia Noe at the above email address or a hard copy to her at 535 Elinor Street Chattanooga TN 37405 by January 15, 2014.

RECENT MIDWESTERN FICTION AND POETRY

FICTION

Airgood, Ellen. *South of Superior*. Riverhead Books, 2011. [Michigan]

Attenberg, Jamie. *The Middlesteins*. Grand Central, 2012. [Chicagoland]

Baker, Ellen. *I Gave My Heart to Know This*. Random House, 2011. [Wisconsin]

Beard, Jo Ann. *In Zanesville*. Little, Brown, 2011. [Illinois]

Berg, Elizabeth. *Tapestry of Fortunes*. Random House, 2013. [Minnesota]

Campbell, Bonnie Jo. *Once Upon a River*. Norton, 2011. [Michigan]

Coake, Christopher. *You Came Back*. Grand Central, 2012. [Ohio]

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Marriage Plot*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. [Michigan]

Franzen, Jonathan. *Freedom*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. [Minnesota]

Gass, William H. *Middle C*. Knopf, 2013. [Ohio]

Harbach, Chad. *The Art of Fielding*. Little, Brown, 2011. [Wisconsin]

Harrison, Jim. *The River Swimmer*. Grove, 2013. [Michigan]

Lasser, Scott. *Say Nice Things about Detroit*. Norton, 2012. [Michigan]

Moore, Edward Kelsey. *The Supremes at Earl's All-You-Can-Eat*. Knopf, 2013 [Indiana]

Rhodes, David. *Jewelweed*. Milkweed, 2013. [Wisconsin]

Riekke, Ron. *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works*. Wayne State UP, 2013 [Michigan]

Roy, Lori. *Until She Comes Home*. Dutton, 2013 [Detroit]

Somerville, Patrick. *This Bright River*. Little, Brown, 2012. [Wisconsin]

Thompson, Jean. *The Year We Left Home*. Simon & Schuster, 2011. [Iowa]

POETRY

Heller, Janet Ruth. *Folk Concert: Changing Times*. Anaphora 2012.

Kloefkorn, William. *Swallowing the Soap*. U of Nebraska , 2010.

Knoepfle, John. *Shadows and Starlight*. Indian Paintbrush Poets, 2012

Radavich, David. *The Countries We Live In*. Main Street Rag Publishing, 2013.

Stillwell, Mary K. *Fallen Angels*. Finishing Line, 2013.

PREFACE

This issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* focuses on the dramatic works of Sandra Seaton, this year's winner of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature's Mark Twain Award for distinguished contributions to Midwestern literature. A native of Columbia Tennessee, Seaton grew up on the West Side of Chicago and currently resides in Michigan; seven of her eleven plays are set in the Midwest.

Her first play, *The Bridge Party* (1989), has been anthologized in *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (1998) and has enjoyed several productions, including one at the University of Michigan in 1998 that starred Ruby Dee. Over the past quarter of a century, Seaton has written ten more plays, all of which have been produced, and has also collaborated with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom, writing the libretto for his song cycle, *From the Diary of Sally Hemings* (2001). She is one of nine dramatists discussed in Patricia Young's *African American Women Playwrights Confront Violence: A Critical Study of Nine Dramatists* (2012).

This issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* contains essays by a historian, a journalist, a musicologist, a legal scholar, a theatre scholar, and two literary scholars: eloquent testimony to the wide-ranging appeal and cultural impact of Seaton's plays. In "The Haunted Memory Machines of Sandra Seaton," Ann Larabee gives us an insightful overview of Seaton's work, situating it within the context of Marvin Carlson's theory of theatre as cultural memory.

The next four essays focus on Seaton's masterwork, *Music History* (2010). While Ken Prouty reflects on the function of various genres of music in this play in "A History of Music in *Music History*," Tama Wray-Hamilton argues that the play's coming-of-age story is characteristic of the African American female maturation process in "Coming of Age in Sandra Seaton's *Music History*." John Woodford reflects on the ways in which *Music History* resonates with his own experiences as a young African American during the sixties in "An Embedded Journalist Responds to *Music History*," while Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, in "A Glimpse of African American Life: Sandra Seaton's Rendering of the Civil Rights Movement in *Music History*," shows how the play reflects the realities of life for African Americans during the Civil Rights era and can be useful in sparking discussions of the significant issues of concern both at that time and today, such as double-consciousness, Black authenticity, and social responsibility.

Two more essays round out the issue. In “The Decentered Protagonist in the Plays of Sandra Seaton,” Arvid F. Sponberg notes that a hallmark of Seaton’s dramaturgy is the refusal to focus on one central protagonist, and Mae Kuykendall provides a legal and historical context for Thomas Jefferson’s relationship with Sally Hemings in “Sandra Seaton’s *A Bed Made in Heaven*: Family, Race, and Law in Nineteenth-Century America.”

In this sesquicentennial year of the Emancipation Proclamation that is also the fiftieth anniversary of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, it is especially fitting that we devote this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* to the work of Sandra Seaton, a playwright who continues to engage issues of race and gender as they have helped to shape the America in which we live.

THE HAUNTED MEMORY MACHINES OF SANDRA SEATON

ANN LARABEE

Sandra Seaton is both historian and playwright, and history and theater are thoughtfully entwined in all of her works. Her plays are meditations on preserved individual and collective memories and excavated histories, from free Black landowners of Tennessee during Reconstruction to Illinois sorority sisters coming to awareness of the Civil Rights movement. They perform history through public recitation, music, oral storytelling, gestures that evoke collective memories, ways of speaking, and references to collective trauma. Seaton's community-minded plays are both a contribution to expressive Black culture that has long preserved collective memory and an examination of the multifaceted interplay of the historical past and living memory in individual lives, including that of the audience and the playwright.

As performed on stage, Seaton's plays are sites of memory that, as Pierre Nora writes, have "taken root in the concrete, in space, gestures, images and objects" (286). In what he calls a recent "acceleration of history," Nora makes a distinction between memory as "life" in "permanent evolution" and history as its problematic, static reconstruction (285). History has come to dominate memory in what Nora calls "*lieux de mémoire*": sites that transform memory into the analytic, the static, and the artificial.[1] As Melvin Dixon writes of the Black writer's use of the *lieux de mémoire*: "These sites have been used by many African-American writers not only to evoke a sense of place but, more importantly, to enlarge the frame of cultural reference for the depiction of Black experience by anchoring that experience in memory—a memory that ultimately rewrites history" (Dixon 20). The problematic in Seaton's plays is history's reconstitution within a matrix of cultural recovery and what Toni Morrison has termed "emotional memory" in the imaginative expression of the literary writer (Morrison 119). The self-conscious relationship between history and memory in Seaton's plays carries an uneasiness that erupts in narrative fragmentation, recycling of historical texts, idiosyncratic speech, sudden moments of comedy in the midst of tragedy, and, most importantly, the haunting of collective trauma.

The stage as a site of memory has communal dimensions beyond the literary text, giving the project of cultural recovery a more expansive resonance in performance. Marvin Carlson explains that drama, of all literary forms, is most caught up with the recirculation of history and "cultural memory." Carlson uses "culture" in the sense of the arts: "cultural memory" is the history of gesture, performance and the evolution of theater (Carlson 147). The theater's relationship to history and memory transforms it into a special *lieu de mémoire*, what Carlson calls a haunted "memory machine." First, the dramatic text and repeated performance provide a way of retelling and re-enacting public narratives. The narratives are very condensed to allow audiences quick access through the two-hour window of the stage, and thus these narratives rely heavily on what is already known, what is recognizable. The audience's collective memories—cultural, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, institutional, private and public—provide a reserve for the creation of meaning. In classical theater, conventional stories were repeated over and over, with slight differentiations, fulfilling the expectations of audiences and sedimenting cultural tradition. More recently, the modern aesthetic has required novelty and greater individual psychological expression, but the theater is still haunted by the "re": remembering, restoring, re-enacting (Carlson 2; Diamond 2). We can think of this in the simple recognition of a familiar gesture: the identification with a familiar social practice, such as reciting a pledge, singing a familiar tune, eating a family meal, playing cards, writing a letter, or the casual conversation between men and women in a living room.

Secondly, Carlson writes, the theater scene is haunted by prior performances. Audiences gather in familiar spaces—the downtown theater, the campus auditorium, the church—to witness their fellows take on roles that must be intelligible to some extent, their gestures large and recognizable. Famous actors carry an aura of their past performances and celebrity identities, but even in a more local setting, we can recognize our student or our barber or our lawyer or our teacher take on a role that still carries the ghost of what we know of that person. If we are frequent theatergoers, we may recognize familiar props and stage set-ups. As spectators, we maintain an objective, ironic distance and a more complete awareness of these cultural and historical contexts than we expect from the characters on stage. For this understanding, we bring the ghosts of our pasts, making the theater a collectively haunted space.

Seaton's work has a strongly self-conscious sense of these hauntings. Her narratives are most obviously haunted by a disruptive collective trauma: a lynching, the murder of a civil rights worker, the angry knock of the Klan at the door, a parade of spiked heads during the French Revolution. These events are central to the narratives but take place off stage and are relayed by witnesses, just as most of us have heard of them through the news, through the history textbook, through stories told. Seaton's plays are steeped in the formal practices of history: her gathering of oral histories, her archival research, and her visitations to ancestral graveyards. But a key to understanding her work is the way discursive History, with a capital H, is troubled through the practices of ghostly re-enactments that are themselves haunted by off-stage collective trauma. That's why these works are plays and not written memoirs or scholarly histories.

In Seaton's most purely historical work, *From the Diary of Sally Hemings,* the slave and common-law wife of Thomas Jefferson remembers her childhood trip to France where she witnessed revolutionary violence in the streets: "today, another parade passed by our window. Two men, maybe the same two, came by again. This time their heads on stakes, a bloody shirt perched behind them like a flag" (11). This is Sally's imagined memory constructed from scant historical detail, but also ours, as we fill in what we know of the French Revolution, our facts and impressions. What can we know of the storming of the Bastille, to which Sally lives in close proximity, other than what has been handed down to us through the political and often nationalist iterations of history?

Seaton complicates these moments by reflecting on trauma, memory, performance and re-enactment. What Sally directly witnesses is a parade, a public performance of revolution, and Sally's two sons later play a noisy tune called *Storming the Bastille*, reflecting dreams of freedom on several registers, from evocations of the American Revolution —through the figure of Thomas Jefferson, who has taught the boys to fiddle— to Sally's intense desire for the freedom he will not give her. In this play, the violent trauma is potentially productive. Seaton presents Sally's attempts to storm her own Bastille in the intimate context of the power relationship between slave-wife and master-husband. Sandra's Black characters always have complex relationships with re-enactments, especially American nationalist scriptings, as they can never be fully at home in collective histories marked as white. Seaton's plays are often layered with memories of memories of memories, so that history is scattered and elusive. In Sally, Seaton brings together the known history of Hemings, audio recordings of slaves, historic Black newspapers, insights from Ralph Ellison and Romare Bearden, her intuitive sense of intimate relationships, and her own oral family history that includes stories from Broadway musical theater ("Program Notes"). Her Sally encompasses multitudes.

A song cycle created with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer William Bolcom, *From the Diary of Sally Hemings: Eighteen Songs for Medium Voice and Piano*, premiered in the Library of Congress, the nation's formal repository of its written history. Bolcom explains that when mezzo-soprano Florence Quivar asked him to compose the piece, he was hesitant to take up the historically resurrected, overdetermined and "sensationalized" Sally whom he couldn't accept "as anybody real" (Bolcom 611). It was Seaton's poetic fragmentary writing based in Sally's imaginary diaries—through which "the reader or listener connect the dots"—that persuaded him to pursue the project (Bolcom 611). In other words, it was the participatory nature of the performance space—where audiences could engage text and music with their own feelings and understandings—that would make Sally "real," returning history to collective memory. Cultural recovery is not so much a gathering of data under plausible explanation but a deeply resonant understanding from a vaster story of memory.

Receptions of this work's performance display the historical ambiguity of this specter, Sally, who tells ghost stories of Thomas Jefferson. Journalists covering the performance described the relationship between Jefferson and Sally as "alleged," she is only "presumed" to be literate, and she is said to be an "emotional surrogate" for Thomas Jefferson (Broun C04; Kennicott C05). Although feminist historians have long discussed the difficulties of proving much about intimate relationships, the problem of Sally's truth hovers even over a creative performance. A *Washington Post* reviewer called Sandra's Sally, "a close relative of Emily Dickinson in one of the poet's less lucid moments" (Kennicott C05). Lucidity, DNA evidence, textual evidence—the reviewers reflect a desire to pin this Sally down to a factual history and linear stability, the kind of historical re-enactment one might find in an old pageant or a museum-sponsored documentary. Sally was always ghostly; one encyclopedist mentions "sightings" of Sally in antislavery journals, comparing her to Elvis (McCaskill). Seaton's Sally embraces the imaginary, the ghostly, the traumatic traces, the ephemera of memory and its affective resonances. Theater can not only restage conventional historical narratives but also conjure the ghost to destabilize them, the mezzo-soprano in the shushed halls of national history.

Seaton's troubling of the performances of national history is apparent in *The Will*, when the small tobacco farmer, Cyrus Webster, meets violent white resistance to his annual Fourth of July reading of the Declaration of Independence. The time is Reconstruction, the characters locked in the struggle over acceptance and the inscription of new lives and new identities in a reconfigured America. Collective memory is a key site of that struggle, as white reunion and solidarity overshadow Black demands for inclusion and justice (Blight 1-5). Cyrus's son still wears his Union uniform, proudly bearing the visual memory of war and his participation in national history and liberation struggle. The reading of the Declaration is a national tradition, begun in Boston in 1776 when it was read from the balcony of the Massachusetts State House to a rowdy crowd that proceeded to tear down the national symbols of British power.

Today, the Declaration is read in many places on Independence Day, including an annual production by newscasters on National Public Radio's Morning Edition. The reading of the Declaration provokes little of the original political interest in the text or the revolutionary violence that accompanied it. Indeed, many Americans don't know its contents. And yet, when such a national document is read, it is supposed to inspire the swell of simple, affective collective identification known as patriotism. Reunion trumps justice because justice would have to recognize other emotions, like grievance and dissent, that swell with memories experienced and related through family history.

In *The Will,* at a place called Birney Spring, Cyrus approaches the front of the crowd, as he has done many times, following the crowd's rendition of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a well-known patriotic hymn now played at the Democratic and Republican national conventions and at presidential inaugurations. “Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!” is supposed to swell hearts rather than minds in love of country. But the deep history of this hymn has been lost in these automatic affective repetitions in the national imaginary. *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* was originally a song about John Brown, the violent abolitionist rebel. His ghost haunts this song as at least some of the imaginary crowd at Birney Spring and a few in the audience for *The Will* would surely know from collective memory.

As Cyrus begins reading the Declaration, following a preamble encouraging resistance to oppression and community solidarity, the scene is interrupted by a violent, vocal clash between Cyrus’s son and his white laborer, Tom Garrett, who covets the Websters’ land and has come to the event to cause trouble. Cyrus’s oration becomes fragmented—we hear only snatches of the Declaration. The scene is reminiscent of Jimmy Hendrix’s *Star Spangled Banner* that brilliantly distorts the national anthem with the cacophonous sounds of war. The play then imposes a judgment on those whose hearts swelled at the patriotic hymn and the sounding of the Declaration. It is Garrett—a Confederate soldier whose side has lost and who evokes only negative identification—who tells his father in his own defense, “I love that flag. When I see it—Praise the Lord—I ache all over—more than for any girl” (68). It’s a comic moment. When I saw *The Will* performed in reader’s theater at the State Library of Michigan, the audience laughed, realizing the absurdity of the overblown patriotism in a sad, desperate, mean character.

That is one example of Seaton’s trickster approach to a certain kind of collective performance. As haunted memory machines, her plays churn up these received performance scripts and challenge historical allegiances and expectations. Seaton’s fascination with historical documents, oral testimony and old graveyards can’t really be seen as transparent renderings of the historical moments, as if these plays were docudramas. They have elements of expressionism that outweigh social realism. In *The Will*, the ghostly brushing of hair in an ancestral bedroom is at least as, if not more important than, the somewhat anticlimactic reading of the lost will of the dead, based on Seaton’s discovery of family history on a roll of microfilm. But who writes of hair brushing in history, even though we all recognize the foundational gesture? There is history—the history of war, of national identity, of land dispute, of political struggle; then there is music history, the familiar fragments of intimate memories connected to a larger aural landscape.

I attended Seaton's *Music History* in a small theater in the MSU auditorium. It was a basement space with which I was well familiar: small, spare, and institutional. One expects, at a university, an aura of intellectual engagement with performance, the cerebral sparring with text and event, the application of critical analysis. This is the mind that asks, can we see this play as a window into history through its topics: the history of Civil Rights, of Black sororities, of the 1960s? The students came onto the stage. I recognized them as students—none could have remembered the events they now related or the speech they imitated, spoken at one time by people of their own age and position. Nor could they remember the vinyl discs they put on the record player, the clothes they wore, the old posturing between men and women, the immediate and visceral fear of bombings in an offstage space of deep memory here now re-enacted in gesture and pose. Some of us audience members "of a certain age" remembered some things, some more intimately than others.

I was sitting behind Sandra's sorority sisters who were all deeply engaged, laughing at inside jokes. This play, in some ways, had been written for this intimate community. This was their youth re-enacted, made both larger in its grand framing of remembered lives observed in history and smaller in that no experience can ever be fully said or shown, since that is the case with memory. These two groups moved toward each other, young students pitching forward into the unfamiliar world of a poignant history, and sorority sisters moving back into the spaces of remembered youth, all woven together by songs that now travel so easily across time through recording technologies.

This was not the easy space of nostalgia, the Hollywood version of the way we were. There are always the admonitions of ghosts in Sandra's *lieux de mémoire*, her haunted memory machines. In *Music History,* Etta talks of attending "that thing" of John Cage, whose daunting, and sometimes unrecordable sonic innovations were tied to his suspicion of ordinary communication in times of violent political upheaval. When Etta's boyfriend Walter is killed by a car bomb, their friend Frank bears witness to the way a habitual gesture—Walter's turning of a car key —can be interrupted by a world-shifting violence.

That's the great strength and subtlety of Seaton's plays: she doesn't simply confirm what we know or what we would like to know or what we recognize. The plays complicate official histories of the American experience with the intimate details of imaginative recreation, lost histories painstakingly uncovered, stories handed down through generations, memories sedimented in the imitation of gestures, and aural landscapes that evoke emotional identification. The power of theater is to draw us into the collaboration of memory, even as Seaton's haunted memory machines suggest that both history and memory are as indeterminate as our ghosts.[2]

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NOTES

[1] Pierre Nora's discussion of the "*lieu de mémoire*" has influenced scholarship on Black literature since its inclusion in Genevieve E. Fabre's and Robert G. O'Meally's edited collection, *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (Oxford, 1994). That volume explored the fraught relationship between a white-dominated history and Black efforts at cultural recovery through literary writing.

[2] My thanks to Sandra Seaton for providing typescripts to her unpublished plays.

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A HISTORY OF MUSIC IN *MUSIC HISTORY*

Ken Prouty

In her 2010 play *Music History*, Sandra Seaton uses music as a way to explore the experiences of Etta Bradshaw, the play's main protagonist, a young female African American student at the University of Illinois in 1963. For Etta, music represents not simply a diverse set of sounds, but a wide world of experiences which take her beyond her own upbringing, first in Tennessee and then on Chicago's West Side, beyond her sorority house and beyond her family's expectations. As Seaton notes in her summary of the play, Etta is a participant in "a Black community that is multi-layered, complicated and constantly changing" (Seaton back matter). In this sense, Etta's experience is certainly not unique to her as an African American, or even an American in general, as music is frequently cited as an important influence on and reflection of the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Etta's world is filled with contradictions, a "cultural chaos" (54) that is reflected in the sounds emerging from the record players, radios, and concert halls that surround her.

Throughout the play, Seaton uses music as a means of reflecting the complexities and contradictions of the worlds of Etta and her contemporaries, including Walter, her jazz pianist/SNCC activist friend; Monica, a rival from her sorority house; her family; and others who drift in and out of her social and cultural sphere. But music is also a character that looms large in her story. Seaton is not content to use music as a background element; instead, her choice of musical characters in the play, ranging from classical composers (Tchaikovsky and John Cage) to pop singers (Johnny Mathis and Ray Charles) to Bluesmen (Muddy Waters) to jazz artists (Miles Davis) reflects a complex and multidimensional world that is enormously attractive and exciting to Seaton's protagonist. If individuals are defined by their choices in music, Etta is a character who largely, and intentionally, defies simple definition.

I want to begin with a bit of meditation on the play's title, *Music History*. In a phone conversation with her mother, Etta expresses a desire to change her major to "music history." Her decision to become a degreed, practicing music historian is a fascinating plot device, particularly within the context of musical scholarship in the 1960s. African American students majoring in music history, or musicology as it is more commonly known in academic contexts, were somewhat rare at the time, and to an extent this remains the case. Even rarer were programs in which the study of music outside the confines of the Western classical canon, and African American idioms in particular, were encouraged. Scholarship in black music was pioneered by figures such as Eileen Southern, whose seminal work, *The Music of Black Americans,* would not be published until 1971.[1] Outside of the core canons of Western classical forms, the only other style of music to receive substantial academic attention was jazz, and even in this case, jazz studies was for the most part in its infancy in the early 1960s. Though jazz education programs had been established in schools such as the Berklee College of Music and the University of North Texas since the late 1940s,[2] it was not until the 1960s that jazz began to grow across college music curricula. Thus, Etta's desire to study "the music of the universe" (32) might not have been feasible in the academic climate of a typical Midwestern university in 1963.

If Etta had waited one more year, she might well have encountered a young professor named Bruno Nettl, who began teaching in the music school at the University of Illinois in 1964. One of the pioneering figures in American ethnomusicology, Nettl's perspectives would have perhaps helped Etta to fulfill her goal. Such appointments, which were occurring with greater frequency in American universities in the 1960s, were in many way a response to the radical social changes that were occurring on and off college campuses of the time. So great were the social pressures on academia, and musical academia in particular, that a 1967 symposium sponsored by the Music Educators National Conference warned that music curricula must be more responsive to the social climate of contemporary youth culture, lest the wall between "ivory tower and flaming ghetto" come crashing down (Murphy 5).

Among the myriad genres that frame Etta's experiences is the Western classical tradition. Etta's expressed interest in the music of symphonic stalwart Peter Illych Tchaikovsky and experimentalist John Cage near the beginning of Seaton's play is highly significant, as it neatly encapsulates the increasingly contested nature of the academic music canon at the time. As central as the music of Western tradition was (and still is) to the music school in 1963, the forces of radicalism were beginning to have a profound impact on the discourses of musical composition. In one exchange later in the play, Etta recounts to Walter a conversation with a professor in which he tells her that "before you get into Cage, better start with a little Tchaikovsky, start with your foundation and work your way up" (Seaton 54). Such a response would seem to reinforce the view that the "great masters" of the Western canon were still the primary force behind music in the academy.

Thus, it is somewhat doubtful that Etta's exploration of music, at least as a major in "music history," would have gone much beyond this canon. As Bruno Nettl himself recounts in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: 31 Issues and Concepts*, musical academia was seldom receptive to new perspectives and voices. Framing his critique of musical academia within the context of a faculty cocktail party, Nettl quotes fellow colleagues as uttering phrases like "I didn't know [American Indians] had music," or "I spent a year in Africa, heard a lot of singing and drumming, but that isn't music, is it?" Another states, "My teenage grandsons play their records all day, but hardly any of them sound like music to me" (Nettl 16). The point of Nettl's critique is to underscore the narrowness of definition with which many in musical academia approached (and perhaps still approach) music within the academy. Nettl's efforts to expand his colleagues' understanding of music hit a metaphorical wall. In such a context, the response of Etta's professor makes perfect sense—one must understand the classics before branching out into the more experimental world of "new music."

Seaton's references to Cage were inspired by a personal encounter with the composer as a young college student not unlike her fictional protagonist. Cage was, to put it mildly, an unusual figure in musical discourse, whose work reflected a rejection of not only the masters of the Western classical canon but also of other European avant-garde trends. While European avant-gardists were still largely following in the footsteps of Arnold Schoenberg and the great serialists of the prewar years,[3] Cage and his contemporaries were questioning the very definitions of music itself. This challenging stance is probably best represented in what is often regarded as Cage's most famous (or infamous) work, *4'33*, which is typically performed as follows: the performer enters the stage, bows, sits at the piano, opens the lid on the keyboard, and proceeds to sit in complete silence for 4 minutes and 33 seconds.[4] At the end of the work, the performer closes the lid on the keyboard, stands up, and takes a bow, presumably, but not necessarily, to the audience's applause.

Of course, the key point to be made is that the performer does not *really* sit in silence; sound from the audience, the lights, the HVAC system, and other ambient noises comprise the soundscape. What seems simple, or even simplistic, is actually a highly sophisticated meditation of the nature of music and sound. As Kyle Gann notes, Cage could still recall, years later, the soundscape of the first public performance of the work, "played" by pianist David Tudor: "What [the audience] thought was silence, because they didn't know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds. You could hear the wind stirring outside during the first movement. During the second, raindrops began pattering on the roof, and during the third the people themselves made all kinds of interesting sounds as they talked or walked out" (qtd. in Gann 4).

Commenting on the reaction to the performance, Cage states, "I had friends . . . whose friendship I lost because of that . . . . They didn't laugh—they were irritated when they realized nothing was going to happen, and they haven't forgotten it 30 years later: they're still angry" (qtd. in Gann 4). When Etta approaches her professor about her interest in Cage, he responds in a manner that is typical of a musicologist who is trained in the Western canon; before she can appreciate the music of Cage, he informs her, she must "work [her] way up to Beethoven, Strauss, Copland, then maybe Cage." Such attitudes underscore a critical point about musical studies in the early 1960s: despite the many changes taking place in the world of music, the Western classical canon was what mattered most within the walls of the music department.

Etta's experience with Cage and the Western canon would seem at first to be diametrically opposed to her interest in the music of Muddy Waters,[5] the legendary Delta-to-South Side bluesman who was critical in the emergence of the Chicago-based urban blues of the

1940s and 1950s. But Seaton's invocation of Waters highlights another point of contention concerning the peculiarities of the musical world in the early 1960s. When Etta's Pi Lambda sister Monica accuses her of "acting white" due to Etta's attending a meeting of the Campus Blues Society, Seaton implicitly underscores a shift in the blues audience at the time; it was becoming overwhelmingly white, moving from, as Francis Davis notes, "the black community to white bohemia" (Davis *History* 237.) One critical exchange highlights this tension; Monica notes that, "I saw you at the Music Building Friday night, partying with those greys. Acting white . . . listening to gutbucket." Etta replies, "Muddy Waters is not white!" (31). This conflation of "acting white" and "gutbucket," a term that references older, more roots-oriented African American styles,[4] seems misplaced at first. But within the context of these shifts in the blues audience, the connection is appropriate.

Ironically, Waters himself was instrumental in this shift, becoming an icon to white audiences and performers in the 1960s; his impact on the phenomenon of "British Blues," in which young British artists such as Keith Richards, Eric Clapton and Robert Plant, to name a few, essentially reintroduced blues to American audiences via the second British Invasion of the late 1960s has been extensively documented.[7] For his part, Waters stated with disdain his belief that younger Black audiences had largely abandoned blues in favor of more popular genres such as rock and roll, and that predominantly older white blues audiences were increasingly common in clubs and at festivals. Sandra Tooze notes that, "[t]o an upwardly mobile generation of Blacks, the gut-bucket blues that harkened back to the Delta was an uncomfortable reminder of a heritage they were struggling to leave behind. With deep sadness Muddy noted, 'Young Negro kids . . . just turn away from the old blues . . . it's the music of yesterday'" (168). Etta's embrace of blues, and her sorority sisters' rejection of it, stands as a stark reminder of the complex nature of African American identity within the context of the Great Migration. Identities based on divergent perspectives on race, class, and aesthetic expression were hotly contested among members of young migrant communities, as Seaton's narrative clearly demonstrates, and once again, music serves to underscore such ideas.

The forms of popular music that had begun to displace blues also have a role to play in Seaton's story. By 1963, new musical approaches such as Motown and Soul had placed a self-conscious yet divergent sense of Blackness squarely at the forefront of the pop mainstream;[8] but even before the 1960s, the dynamics of Black popular music had begun to shift towards a distinction between "mainstream" and "authentic" performers. Seaton employs two specific examples, both played within the context of the Pi Lambda sorority house, to illustrate this point: Johnny Mathis's "Chances Are," and Ray Charles's "What'd I Say." By the early 1960s, African American performers were fully entrenched in the American pop music mainstream, having emerged through the musical siblings of rhythm and blues and rock and roll about a decade before the setting of this play. In the late 1950s, the fire and urgency of rock and roll had begun to be supplanted by the smoother, more accessible sounds of the teen idols whose good looks and saccharin singing styles provided a new generation of teenage girls an impetus to swoon. The use of Johnny Mathis's 1957 recording of "Chances Are" speaks directly to these changes; Gerald Early notes that Mathis was a teen idol "for a time," and that his musical material consisted largely of "middle of the road pop" (Early 59). Though the vast majority of the 1950s and 1960s teen idols were white,[9] Mathis's golden-voiced rendition of this song, with its emphasis on the innocence of romance and its less racially encoded performance practice, placed it squarely within the genre. In the Pi Lambda house, "Chances Are" seems to reflect a sense of upward mobility and sophistication, the way proper ladies (especially those on the lookout for suitable husbands) are supposed to behave.[10]

On the other hand, Ray Charles's "What'd I Say" is something of a throwback to the Black popular music in the late 1940s, specifically the rise of R&B and its eventual retrofit as rock and roll in the 1950s. Released in 1959—at the height of the teen idol phenomenon—"What'd I Say" contains several elements of older "roots" styles. It is in the 12-bar form, common to blues, exhibiting a highly improvisational feel. Ray Charles biographer Mike Evans calls the song a "breath of fresh air" in the context of the music scene in which "rock-'n'roll seemed to have run its course and [when] the charts were dominated by the likes of Frankie Avalon, Bobby Vee and an increasingly watered-down Elvis [Presley]." as well as a "fiery, potent outburst of sex'n'rhythm'n'blues" (113).[11] It was certainly a far cry from the polite, soft sounds of the teen idols like Mathis, and Seaton's juxtaposition of two disparate musical examples again provides a useful lens through which to examine the intertwined worlds of music and race in the early 1960s, most evident when Pi Lambda's Soror Banks (heard through an intercom offstage), demands that the Pi Lambda ladies quiet down when listening to "What'd I Say" (Seaton 23). As Etta dances to the sounds of Ray Charles, Monica teases her, referring to her as "West Side"[12] and a "ghetto queen" (24). In this way, music is used to articulate different perspectives on Blackness and gender at the dawn of the Civil Rights and feminist movements.

Both R&B and Pop contributed heavily to the displacement of jazz as a popular genre by the early 1960s. Jazz was by this point regarded as more of an art music, a style for more serious listeners. Etta's counterpart and co-protagonist, Walter, is older, more worldly, a serious person, and not coincidentally, a jazz fan and performer. Walter seems to have a particular affinity for the music of Miles Davis, whose work is often described as the epitome of "cool," an attribute that is frequently invoked to describe Davis's music through the early 1960s. Indeed, Davis's 1949-1950 Capitol sessions were retrospectively titled *Birth of the Cool* on the re-release in LP format in the 1950s, signifying his impact on this particular approach. Davis's coolness was not confined to his music; it also deeply informed his personal interactions. He rarely showed outright anger, was often silent in the face of questioning and criticism, and constructed a public image for himself that sought to deflect, rather than confront, sometimes going so far as to play with his back to the audience. This was not to say that Davis was not outspoken on the issue of race relations—he was[13]—but that such engagement was often couched in what I would term an aesthetic of minimalism.

By invoking Davis's music, Seaton links the experiences of Etta's boyfriend Walter as a jazz musician with his work in the Civil Rights movement, SNCC in particular. Coolness also can be seen as a significant part of the Civil Rights struggle of which Walter was a part. The use of Davis's music, in particular the album *Kind of Blue,* points to a resonance between the music and image of the legendary jazz trumpeter and the images and strategies of Civil Rights activists, especially those of SNCC.

Davis's penchant for finely tailored suits, which Seaton cites in her initial description of Walter, resonates with the scenes of lunch counter strikers in Greensboro in 1960, of young black men dressed in business suits, projecting an image of professionalism and seriousness that belied the way that many Americans (and not just those in the South) saw Black men. Davis was not content to play the commonly prescribed role of African American entertainer. Turning his back on his audience was not simply an act of elitism; it was in essence a boycott of their own expectations.[14] His son Gregory spoke to this idea in *Dar Magus: The Jekyll and Hyde of Miles Davis*. Noting that "clothes were one of his favorite things" (Davis and Sussman 137), he suggests that his father was a pioneer in using fashion to establish Black male identity as something more that a caricature. He writes: "I credit my father for being the one to make a dark-skinned Black man seem fashionable . . . [he] helped to change that image" (Davis and Sussman 137).[15] Davis's emphasis on looking good made him a frequent presence in leading style and fashion magazines of the late 1950s and early 1960s. For example, he was designated a "fashion personality of the month" by *GQ* in April 1961 (Szwed 200) and was also featured among *Esquire*'s "best dressed" lists (Davis and Sussman 137). In his biography of Davis, John Szwed cites a portion of a press release for Davis's appearance at the Randall's Island Jazz Festival in 1961: "Before his performance, Mr. Davis will wear a single breasted (one-button) beige pongee suit, combining the French and Italian influence on pants and jacket. When Mr. Davis is playing on stage, he will be wearing a double-breasted gray imported silk (two buttons) featuring only two pockets to create an extra slim line. . ." (201).

In many cases, figures in the Civil Rights movement from Martin Luther King Jr. to the sign-carriers on the street and the lunch counter protesters at the Greensboro Woolworth's in 1960 wore conservative business attire in order to portray a professional image. Such fashion choices were, like those of Davis and other jazz artists, consciously made in order to counter prevailing stereotypes of Black identity, to be taken *seriously* by the public and the press. Derek Catsem discusses this emphasis on appearance among protesters in his account of the staging of a Freedom Ride in May of 1961, writing that "Participants were expected to dress 'neatly at all times.' For men, this meant a business suit or sport jacket with a tie; women would wear skirts or dresses; all participants needed dress clothes for meetings" (71).

By contrast, Mary Beth Norton points to the ways in which later protesters departed from the earlier mode of professional, conservative attire: "In direct contrast to earlier, nonviolent civil rights protesters, who had worn shirts and dies or dresses to demonstrate their respectability, male [Black] Panthers dressed in commando gear, carried weapons, and talked about killing 'pigs' . . ." (879). And like these later protesters—epitomized by the Black Panthers and groups such as the US Organization[16]—Davis's fashion sense departed from the professional business suit model by the end of the 1960s as well. At his appearance at the Isle of Wight Festival in 1970, Davis appeared onstage in a red leather jacket and shirt, opened at the chest, revealing several gold chains, accompanied by rhinestone-studded jeans and white shoes.[17] The members of his band, including such stalwarts as Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea, Jack DeJonette, and Dave Holland, were similarly informal in their attire. The shift in Davis's fashion accompanied stark changes in his music; 1970 also saw the release of Davis's seminal album *Bitches Brew*, which pioneered a new rock-influenced approach, jazz fusion, that aimed for a broader audience attuned to artists such as James Brown and Jimi Hendrix.[18] Gone were the aesthetics of restraint and minimalism that characterized his classic period of the 1950s and 1960s; in their place were brash, flamboyant, and technologically mediated sounds that would define much of Davis's later career.

Despite these later stylistic developments, Davis's *Kind of Blue* remains perhaps the single most recognized of his recordings, and it also plays an important role in Seaton's play. Recorded in early 1959 and released later the same year, the album is today considered a seminal work in the jazz canon, a perfect example of the intersection of maximal artistic freedom within the context of minimal musical structure. The album is probably best known among jazz fans and critics for its popularization of the "modal" concept, a compositional and improvisational framework in which traditional chord structures are replaced with static harmonic phrases. Put another way, there are long sections of songs that use a single chord or scale. This is an example of the kind of minimalist approach referred to above, that of stripping the music to its essence.

While one might think that such a structure would make it easier to play, modal improvisation is in fact a highly advanced concept, as making sense of a single harmonic center requires a sophisticated understanding of harmony and melody. It is, above all, "cool" in its approach, articulating an aesthetic of restraint and introspection. As Lewis Porter notes, writing on influential tenor saxophonist Davis protégé John Coltrane, "Modal jazz offered freedom, but it also posed a challenge . . . it took greater creativity. As Davis said to [jazz critic] Nat Hentoff, 'You don't have to worry about [chord] changes and you can do more with the melodic line. It becomes a challenge to see how melodically inventive you are'" (161-2). Davis's evolving approach, which was reaching its zenith during the period of Seaton's play, was one that privileged and aesthetic of understatement, even silence; as his groups grew more adventurous, Davis and his collaborators played less and less.[19]

At the risk of reading too much into this, I suggest that sitting in silence, taking abuse and criticism without provoking the abuser, is itself an act of aesthetic minimalism. This is something that King understood; it is easy to respond to violence with violence, to respond to abuse with abuse. *Not* responding, on the other hand, is difficult and requires a much more intricate understanding of human nature. I sense that Walter, Seaton's co-protagonist, understood this as well, which may explain his expressed affinity for Miles Davis's music as well as for the man himself. As a young African American man who is both a jazz musician and a Civil Rights activist, Walter had the ability to see these ideas in action in both worlds. *Kind of Blue* is used by Seaton as our musical introduction to Walter; when Walter and Etta are interrupted by his fraternity brother Frank in the first scene of the play, Walter rushes to hide an album of Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* (which he had recently put on the stereo) with the Davis album. The ruse apparently works, as Frank states upon entering the apartment, "Man, you're always into Miles" (11). *Kind of Blue* makes another appearance in the middle of the play during a discussion with Etta, Walter and Frank about going "down South," Walter's impending trip to Mississippi to register voters, making a clear connection between Walter's SNCC activities and his interest in Davis's music. Finally, it is used to signal his death, as Frank puts the record on the stereo shortly before informing Etta that Walter was killed while on a trip to the South.[20] In each case, Walter's dual identity as jazz musician and SNCC activist is sonically linked to the Davis aesthetic of coolness and minimalist performance practice, both of which resonate with the emphasis on nonviolent resistance that was practiced in the Civil Rights movement.

Hillary Lapedis, in an article on the use of popular music in cinema, points to two examples of films that are closely linked, as is *Music History*, to the 1960s, namely, *The Big Chill* and *Forrest Gump*. Lapedis writes that the use of popular song in *Forrest Gump* goes beyond simply providing a background for the film's narrative. Songs such as Credence Clearwater Revival's "Fortunate Son" are heard as Gump arrives in a helicopter at his Army base in Vietnam. Similarly, Scott McKenzie's "San Francisco"[21] frames his longtime friend Jenny's experiences in the hippie movement. In these examples, music is not simply in the background; it "stands as an image in its own right" (371).

In *Music History*, Sandra Seaton likewise uses many different forms of music, selecting works from classical music, to blues, to pop and jazz, to provide effectively a sonic and cultural commentary for her story. The seeming bewilderment of Etta at the complexities of coming of age at a large Midwestern university in the early 1960s are made manifest by her exposure to and interest in many different forms of music, each with specific ties to various facets of her world. John Cage represents her sense of adventure, Johnny Mathis the upward mobility of the sorority house that she rejects, Ray Charles her roots in historical African American communities, Miles Davis the polished image and cool demeanor that was reflected in the work of Civil Rights activists. But the music in *Music History* is not simply a backdrop, or a soundtrack; as with *Forrest Gump*, Seaton's play utilizes music as a meta-narrator, providing important clues about the world in which its characters live. The universe of music available to Etta at the University of Illinois campus reflects the universe of choices available to her as a young Black woman who is coming of age at this critical moment in American cultural history. Etta's desire to "study it all" (32) undoubtedly reflects her desire to learn about the world outside the confines of her own communities, be they defined by race, geography, class, or gender. By exploring these different musical forms, Etta is doing nothing less than exploring the world itself.

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NOTES

[1] Southern received her doctoral degree from New York University, writing her dissertation on music in the Renaissance. Before her academic career, she was active as a concert pianist. Later, she would go on to become the first black woman to achieve a tenured position at Harvard University, chairing the university's Afro-American Studies department. See Gewertz.

[2] These two institutions established programs in 1946 and 1947 respectively.

[3] Serialism is a compositional approach pioneered by Arnold Schoenberg in the early 20th century. In general, serial composition includes the use of a sequence of tones based on a chromatic scale, comprised of all twelve tones in one octave (thus, serialism is sometimes referred to as "12-tone music"). This approach rejects the harmonic functionality of the western tradition, and is atonal (without a tonal or harmonic center). The movement reached its peak in the 1920s, when Schoenberg and contemporaries Alban Berg and

Anton Webern were active in Vienna; the influence of the serialists, however, was long felt in European, and to a lesser extent American, compositional modernist schools.

[4] One can easily find numerous videos of performances of 4’33” on the Internet. For one example, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTEFKFiXSx4.

[5] Muddy Waters was the stage name of McKinley Morganfield.

[6] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “gutbucket” was thought to have originated as a term for containers, such as buckets or pails, that “caught the drippings or ‘gutterings’” from barrels. Eventually, it became a reference for “primitive, unsophisticated” types of performance.

[7] For an extended and detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Elijah Wald’s Escaping the Delta, in which the author argues, in part, that much of our contemporary understanding of blues, including emphasis on what might be regarded as “primitivism” in blues historiography and criticism, was constructed largely from the intervention of white artists such as those mentioned.

[8] Although the distinction is often somewhat over generalized, Motown has largely come to represent an integrationist aesthetic, while Soul is seen to speak more to a nationalist perspective. The former is characterized by Suzanne Smith as “symboliz[ing] the possibility of amicable racial integration through popular culture” (Smith 18), while the latter “evolved from the ideology of Black Power, which promoted Black nationalism” in the words of Portia Maultsby (in Guillroy and Green 270). The reality is undoubtedly more complex; Motown was, as a Black-owned and operated record label, a model of self-sufficiency prized within the Black Power movement, while major Soul labels Stax and Atlantic were fully integrated.

[9] This was almost certainly a calculated move to increase marketability to a white audience. In his widely read history of American popular music, Reebee Garofalo characterizes this trend as consisting primarily of “a new generation of white, middle-class teen idols” (Garofalo 143).

[10] Many critics of popular music have derided the teen idol genre of the late 1950s for abandoning what was most appealing about rock-and-roll; its sense of rebellion. Garofalo has gone so far as to label this genre as “schlock rock.” (Garofalo 143).

[11] Such was the influence of “What’d I Say” on both Ray Charles's career and Atlantic Records that Ahmet Ertegun, longtime producer for the label, titled his book on Atlantic What’d I Say?: The Atlantic Story: 50 Years of Music.

[12] Seaton makes scattered references in the play to the rivalry between Etta and Monica as reflecting a division between black communities on Chicago’s West Side and South Side, respectively. At several points, the term “West Side” is applied to Etta in a derogatory manner. For her part, Etta takes it as a badge of honor. The rivalry was likely borne from the distinction between the long-established African American community on the South Side and the relatively newly settled West Side, many of whose inhabitants in the early 1960s were recent migrants for the southern United States (as was the case with Etta’s family).

[13] See Monson 86-97.

[14] The notion that Davis would sometimes play with his back to the audience is contested in jazz discourses. His own reactions to these accusations ranged from explanation based on performance practice, noting that he would “play better” that way (“Miles” 27). to outright denial; Jack Chambers recounts an interview in which Davis was quoted as saying “I don’t know anyone . . . who would turn his back on the audience” (Chambers 255). Ingrid Monson, by contrast, places Davis’s back-turning squarely within the context of the politics of race, as an example of “the ultimate refusal of the Jim Crow expectation[s]” of black performers by white audiences (Monson 87).

[15] The discourse of skin tone in African American popular culture has a long and contentious history. In earlier years, when black male roles tended to conform more to stereotypes

emerging from blackface minstrelsy, performers with lighter skins were often forced to "black up," to darken their faces in order to look more authentically black. In more formal contexts, lighter complexions could be seen as an advantage. Thus Davis's combination of dark skin tone and professional attire seems calculated to reject these enduring stereotypes.

[16] The US Organization was a Black nationalist group founded by Maulana Karenga (born Ron Everett) in the mid-1960s. It was, in some ways, a rival of the Panthers; the group (though not Karenga personally) was involved in an incident at UCLA in which two members of the Panthers were killed. It has been speculated that the rivalry between the groups was exacerbated by the FBI as part of the COINTELPRO counter intelligence program (Jones 168-169).

[17] Davis's fashion sense continued to evolve in his later career. Performances in the late 1980s saw him performing in sequined jumpsuits, his extended hair reaching down to his shoulders. Not all critics have been supportive of Davis's transitions, with respect to both music and fashion. Gene Santoro argues that Davis's once refined fashion sense "exploded into [a] near self-parody of oversized sequined tops and balloon-seated leather pants. . . ." in his later career (Santoro 171).

[18] Davis was, in fact, a great admirer of contemporary popular artists. This was especially true for Jimi Hendrix, a point he recounts at some length in his 1989 autobiography written with Quincy Troupe, in which he refers to the guitarist and singer as a "great natural musician" and opines that Hendrix "came form the blues" (Davis and Troupe 292-293).

[19] Davis's seminal group from this period was his quintet that included saxophonist Wayne Shorter, pianist Herbie Hancock, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Tony Williams. Numerous jazz historians have pointed to the extent to which the members of the group didn't play, letting other voices in the group come through. John Szwed, for example, notes that Davis would often encourage his sidemen "not to play all the notes you could play, but to wait, hesitate, let space become part of the configuration" (Szwed 221).

[20] Walter is killed by a car bomb, which Frank explains was detonated when Walter rushed to his car in order to hear "Randy's Record Shop," a program on WLAC in Nashville, sponsored by a mail-order record company in nearby Gallatin, Tennessee. The shop was well known for its efforts in promoting rhythm-and-blues and early rock-and-roll, and the program was extremely popular among young audiences, with its 50,000 watt signal reaching much of the eastern US at night.

[21] "Fortunate Son" presents a scathing critique of the Vietnam War, and the draft in particular. The "fortunate son" in the song's title is one who, by virtue of privilege or political connection, avoids being drafted and sent to fight. "San Francisco" was produced as a theme song of sorts for the 1967 Monterrey Pop Festival, which is generally recognized as the start of the "Summer of Love," which brought widespread public attention to hippie culture and to the counterculture movement in general.

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COMING OF AGE IN SANDRA SEATON'S *MUSIC HISTORY*

TAMA HAMILTON-WRAY

The original American coming-of-age narrative parallels the myth of the United States becoming a nation. Kenneth Millard cites R.W.C. Lewis's concept of the American Adam's story playing out in the American West (the unfettered Garden of Eden), or in innocent pastoral land, as a prototypical narrative theme of the early American bildungsroman (9). American writers, suggests Millard, portrayed their new nation as a rebellious adolescent establishing its identity in contrast to the tainted parent of the European Old World (5). In the twentieth century, the coming-of-age narrative has shifted; the journey of the rugged individual moving into adulthood now involves the protagonist coming to terms with his or her place within the greater social history of America, not within an idealized innocent past (Millard 11; Williams 101). Furthermore, contemporary African American coming-of-age narratives rupture the conventional white American tale of US innocence with the introduction of race, slave history, and racism (Williams 102). In the African American coming-of-age narrative, it is racism that propels the protagonist from adolescence into an all too often abrupt state of maturity. Hence, coming-of-age tales by American writers of color, in addition to female and gay writers, are concerned with "ethical challenges in the context of the politics of the self in contemporary America" (Millard 11-12). For these writers, the coming-of-age narrative has always been intricately tied to an interrogation of American history.

Williams draws on Elenore W. Traylor's concept of "discourse-altering" to explore the strategies that African American female writers employ in their work (100). Black female writers have adopted and adapted the coming-of-age genre such that the protagonists in their narratives survive the coming-of-age journey and the subsequent destruction of innocence through their relationship as part of an African American community, not as individuals separated from civilization (Williams 102). African American coming-of-age narratives, Williams argues, function "as metaphor for the formation of black subjectivity in America" (102). I hold that the subjectivity of the Black female protagonist is influenced and shaped by not only by race and gender, but also by class. The coming-of-age narrative serves to introduce the protagonist to the reality of being female in a white racist, capitalist society where Black female sexuality is often commodified and under threat. Black female writers offer a vantage point for understanding neglected and misrepresented stories, but more importantly they illustrate through their stories how Black women define themselves and find agency between the mirrors of black and white; male and female; and wealth and poverty.

Sandra Seaton's 2010 play, *Music History*, builds on and contributes to the tradition of Black female-produced coming-of-age stories set in the Civil Rights era, such as Alice Walker's novel *Meridian* (1976) and Anne Moody's novel *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968). These stories address and illuminate the double discrimination that Black women faced and continue to struggle with in America. Walker's *Meridian* serves as an interesting parallel to *Music History*. Meridian, the protagonist in this semi-autobiographical story, comes from a humble background. Meridian, like Seaton's protagonist Etta and Moody's Anne, is struggling to realize herself in a world that has narrow and distorted definitions for Black women. As a student at Saxton College, a historically Black college or university (HBCU), closely resembling Spelman College, Meridian hones and practices her budding political position, which is diametrically opposed to that of the conservative college officials and faculty who seek to develop refined middle-class Negro women. In the end, Meridian engages in self-defined activism for poor and disenfranchised Blacks in her immediate Southern community.

Anne Moody's autobiographical *Coming of Age in Mississippi* is yet another take on a young Black woman transitioning into adulthood in the age of the Civil Rights movement. Anne, like Meridian, comes from a poor Southern background and attends historically Black colleges, Natchez College and Tougaloo College. In high school Anne's interest in the Civil Rights struggle begins to blossom, but in college Anne's political and feminist views bloom fully. For a time, Anne is fully committed to the Civil Rights movement, but in the end she becomes completely disillusioned and questions whether there can be any real change for poor Black Southerners.

Music History takes yet another path. Set on the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana campus in late spring of 1963, *Music History* is a coming-of-age tale of a nineteen-year-old African American woman, Etta Bradshaw. The daughter of an upwardly mobile Tennessee family that has settled on Chicago's West Side, Etta is a music education major and a Pi Lambda initiate. Etta's love interest, Walter Daniels, a graduate student, a member of the Kappa fraternity, and a Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist, has been regularly traveling South to do civil rights work. As Etta starts to explore and experiment with other ways of being, she challenges her sorority initiates' narrow definitions of black identity; at the same time, Walter defines American racial politics for Etta through tales of his civil rights work. In the end, Walter's commitment to the Movement and eventual death catapults Etta into adulthood and challenges her move toward a future that is clearly informed by her collective past as a Black woman.

In *Music History*, Etta must participate in highly structured, class-defined rites, as well as commonly shared rites for passage into adulthood. Cassandra Hallie Delaney's cross-cultural study of rites of passage reveals that youth in most societies pass through four stages on their path to adulthood: (1) separation from society (2) preparation or instruction from an elder (3) a transition (in the case of adolescence, from child to adult) and (4) a welcoming back into society with an acknowledgement of the adolescent's changed status (891). Delaney notes that in Anglo American societies, the elder instruction is often absent and instead replaced by peer instruction or instruction by the initiate (894). This lack of adult mentoring stunts the process of development because, as Delaney asserts, "Young people who must initiate themselves . . . do not have any opportunity to gain a view of themselves as part of a greater pattern" (894).

Initially, Etta appears to have embarked on this very path, one of self-initiation, an initiation outside of her community and apart from her elders. Seaton's "discourse-altering," adapts the coming-of-age genre to the unique needs of her narrative. Unlike Meridian and Anne, Etta comes from a middle-class background and attends a white university. In some ways, Etta's journey parallels that of the white protagonist in conventional coming-of-age American literature. However, by the play's end, Etta's journey is characteristic of the Black female protagonist in the African American female-produced coming-of-age literary tradition. She embarks on a "deconstruction of the various versions of [her] identity," much as Claudine Raynaud insists the narrator in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* does (109). Etta comes to face American racism and suffers what Raynaud calls "traumas of the black psyche" (116). These traumas resulting from the blunt impact of American racism rob her of her innocence as she comes to see herself as a racial, gendered being (Raynaud 116).

DEFINING ETTA

In Etta's self-initiation stage, she attempts to construct her identity through the many definitions that others map onto her. In her sorority house, her closest peers are her fellow sorority initiates, Feezie, Monica, and Shirley. In her friends' eyes, Etta is a nonconformist who defies a monolithic black identity. Feezie insists Etta has outgrown her: "Etta's heavy. She's got big plans, ideas, and they don't include me" (42). While Monica claims that Etta is denying her race: "I saw you at the Music Building Friday night, partyin' with all those greys. Acting white" (31). Yet Etta's third sorority sister, Shirley, thinks that she is just plain strange: "She likes weird — unusual things . . . . stuff you've never heard of" (29). Etta's behavior is clearly not that of a typical middle-class Black girl.

To the people outside of the sorority house, Etta's identity is defined in even more contradictory terms. Etta's boyfriend, Walter, calls her "Miss Opposite"and compares her to his headstrong mother. "From the first day we met, you knew where you were headed . . . . You were on a mission," declares Walter (53-4). Frank, Walter's best friend and fraternity brother, insists just the opposite. He defines her as both flighty and uppity: "Miss Seditty. Can't even say hello. . . . Oops. Outer space. Calling outer space. Hey! Frank to Mars. Frank to Mars (58)." Finally, for white students on campus, Etta is the spokesperson for the Black race. Etta recounts to Walter an incident where a white girl asks her, "What do you think about integration?" (13). Etta continues to Walter, "Can you believe that? Everywhere I go. That's all they ask me. You know, that stuff about Mississippi" (13). Etta resists all the many ways others define her; she instead comes to define herself after passing through a series of initiations.

The rites of passage that Etta experiences cross all realms of her life: cultural, social, sexual, and political. By going through these various rites, Etta fully completes her initiation from girlhood into Black womanhood. Both the traditional and alternative rites of passage prepare Etta for the rapidly changing world of the Civil Rights era that serves as the backdrop for the play. Etta's world promises to be vastly different from the expectations of Black assimilation and upward social mobility that her mother's generation offers her.

Etta's Social Initiation

Seaton employs Etta's social initiation to explore issues of social class and the distinctive role class plays in Etta's coming-of-age journey and in Black social life. Etta's social initiation into the Black middle class is signified by her affiliation with two exclusive African American institutions, the Pi Lambdas and the cotillion. The Pi Lambdas, the African American sorority Etta aspires to join, and the cotillion, a social coming-out ceremony that Etta and her fellow initiates had likely completed in high school, are strong markers of social mobility and middle- to upper-class status. The Pi Lambdas are a thinly veiled version of the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority, the most elite Black sorority. Association with this group of educated and refined women, like Etta's mother and aunt, would assure Etta access to a successful career, a network of beneficial relationships, and a full Black social life. The cotillion, a tradition adopted from the white elite by the Black upper-crust Southern society just after emancipation, served as a rite-of-passage ceremony where young women were formally presented to Black society. Again Etta's participation in the cotillion would smooth her passage into adulthood as a member of the Black middle class and position her to marry a Black man of the same socio-economic status. These formal, established, and exclusive rites of passage squarely align with the Black middle-class aspirations and values of Etta and her Black classmates. However, Etta begins to question and even reject her prescribed social initiation.

At the play's commencement, Etta's social initiation is occurring in the Pi Lambda house. She and the three other initiates are only days away from "crossing the sands," an event that would officially mark their transition from initiate to full membership. Etta's fellow initiates instruct her on specific cultural taboos, such as no pants and no blues music. However, they also instruct her on the social taboo of no premarital sex. Etta must adhere to a strict moral code as part of the Black elite social initiation.

> FEEZIE: Pi Lambda women don't do that stuff.
> ETTA: What stuff?
> FEEZIE: You know.
> MONICA: Stuff.
> SHIRLEY: Pi Lambda women. In by ten. (Seaton 33)

Etta's sexual virtue is carefully guarded by her sorority sisters and even by her mother, though she is many miles away in Chicago.

The social initiation reserved for Etta concerns the type of food she eats. The women of Pi Lambda eat gourmet soul food culled from the recipes in *Ebony*: salmon croquette and black-eyed peas. Traditional soul food, like the mixed greens and hot water cornbread Walter is offered in the Mississippi homes of those who host Freedom Riders and Civil Rights workers, is not on the menu at the Pi Lambda House.

This social initiation provides Etta with the behaviors, tastes, values and expectations of the Black middle class, and it also prepares her to join Dubois's talented tenth. With her elementary education degree, Etta understands that she is part of a wider Black uplift project. Etta and her fellow initiates are fully aware of the privileged tradition they belong to, even as they mock its representation on the pages of *Ebony* magazine:

> MONICA: (grabs magazine from underneath Feezie) Eeekkk, she fell asleep on my *Ebony.*
> ETTA: Her *Ebony* (Picks up *Ebony.* Directs comment to Monica.) She's reading "Ten Ways to Trap a Man." (Shirley grabs magazine.)
> FEEZIE: First of the First, the first Negro jet pilot from Oklahoma. Oooh. (they gather around the magazine)
> SHIRLEY: (grabs magazine) Date with a Dish. Black eyed peas and salmon croquettes.
> FEEZIE: Hey, wait a minute, (grabs magazine) A new chapter of the Links . . . cotillions, cotillions, cotillions. (Seaton 26)

Etta feels the push and the pull of these Black middle-class traditions. However, she refuses to participate in the social initiation into the Black elite; she leaves the sorority house and walks away from the expectations others have of her. Etta's rejection of this prescribed social initiation prepares her for the cultural initiation that she embarks on as part of her self-initiation process.

ETTA'S CULTURAL INITIATION

The second rite of passage that Etta meets is her initiation into the white cultural world, a world that Etta is determined to understand and reign so that she can straddle her many ways of being and benefit from all the world has to offer her. Etta's innocence will not allow her to recognize any boundaries. Through her upbringing, Etta has been exposed to the markers of Anglo-defined middle-class society. She has grown up on European classical music. Etta tells Walter: "At night, in high school, I'd listened to Brahms and Beethoven and Bach . . . . Tchaikovsky" (17). She is well read in the Western classic literature as she rattles off to Walter. "I was in high school! Fourteen. No questions asked! Dumas, Yerby . . . the esses, I didn't think I was ever going to get through the esses "Shellabarger, Slaughter . . ." (5). She continues later: "Then in college I moved on to Lawrence Durrell, How does he say it—Montolif—James Joyce, you know experimental, Walter . . . oh and Henry Miller . . . Henry Miller!" (6). As a student at a majority white Midwestern university, Etta extends her exploration of dominant white culture.

Set on understanding the cultural proclivities of her white counterparts, Etta adopts the dress of the avant-garde crowd and takes in jazz, blues, and experimental music scenes. Etta yearns for the carefree "experimental" lifestyle of her fellow white students, so much so that Monica accuses her of "studying white folks" (32). Etta literally tries on the white identities through her style of clothing. She begins to dress like the beatniks who wear all black and look as if they stepped off the pages of *Elle* (29), instead of the pages of *Ebony.* Etta declares that with her new clothes, she is merely expressing her new experimental self. When her sorority sisters tell her that she'll get punished for wearing slacks, Etta snaps back, "This place is driving me crazy" (28). Aware of the expectations of her role as a Black woman in the racial uplift project, Etta feels pinned in.

Etta's cultural initiation expands beyond her clothing, dictating her new musical tastes, which she declares to Feezie is: "The music of the universe . . . . It's big. Huge. You think I can study one or two people? A bunch of white guys from the 18th century? I have to study it all" (32). The avant-garde music of John Cage excites Etta, especially the thought of Cage scratching a tissue across a microphone and calling it music (15). She reveals to her sisters that she was the "only one" (that is, the only Black person) at a recent blues concert she attended. Her open appreciation for blues music, which by the 1960s was drawing all-white audiences at concert venues, brings disapproval from her sorority sisters. Not only had young Blacks 'moved on" to Soul music, but middle-class Blacks also regarded the blues as, according to Monica, "gutbucket" (31). Ironically, Etta's cultural initiation, in a sense, was about finding a new appreciation for a musical style from Black culture.

ETTA'S SEXUAL INITIATION

The strict moral code for young Black women in the 1960s and the great concern with protecting and restoring Black female sexuality is firmly rooted in United States history of slavery, Jim Crow, and institutionalized racism. For hundreds of years, Black women suffered under the threat of sexual violence. Hence, the prescribed moral code for young Black women represented but one response that Black people had to this violence. Specifically, African American society dictated that single Black women be modest and virtuous. The institutions and practices, such as Black women's social clubs, solely devoted to the project of protecting and restoring Black female sexuality, were very much tied to middle-class status (Hines; Hines & Townsend). Etta's sexual initiation puts her in direct opposition to this moral code. Her actions disrupt expectations that her mother, her sorority sisters, and the greater African American society have set in place for her chastity.

Etta's behavior is partially driven by her innocence; she equates sex with romance. Having grown up on best-selling historical fiction and racing to the "good parts," Etta is primed for romance (63). When Walter calls Etta "Virgin Mary," (60) she lies to him and suggests that she is sexually experienced. "I've been around," she flaunts (61). Etta tries on the role of a sexually experienced woman as she tries on other roles. Etta's actual sexual encounter with Walter serves as a rite of passage in that it launches her transformation into adulthood.

Etta and Walter's flirtatious relationship starts off innocently; they discuss their literary and musical tastes. Walter slips in stories of his experiences as a Civil Rights worker in Mississippi, but initially Etta is unable to hear them, much to Walter's frustration. Etta is too engrossed in her own narrative of becoming Etta. Walter tells her, "I'm trying to have a conversation with you. I'm trying to talk!" (16). Over time, Etta begins to hear and understand Walter. She embarks on an exploration of her sexual identity and her initiation into womanhood simultaneously.

Etta's clothing becomes a signifier as part of her sexual initiation. Seaton cleverly reveals to the audience that Etta and Walter have slept together through staging and costume. The scene opens with Walter wearing pajamas and talking to his parents on the phone. Etta then enters the stage, also wearing pajamas; playfully, she begins to distract him. A second scene shows Etta and Walter sitting on his bed and again both don pajamas. Walter studies Etta's body as she talks about the romantic bits of Dostoyevsky, Shellabarger, and Slaughter. These scenes not only mark Etta's loss of sexual innocence, but also allude to consensual intimacy between Etta and Walter.

Within one of these intimate moments, Walter tells Etta he is returning to the South, and it becomes apparent that Etta's political awakening is very closely linked to her sexual initiation. Etta selfishly wants Walter to stay with her, but Walter sees himself as part of the larger movement. He also must go, he tells her, for those who can't. Etta resists Walter's mission because it conflicts with her identity of the "lone ranger" (55). "Life! It's up for grabs," she says, "It's about my individuality" (67). Etta, who is not yet able to see herself as part of a community and a larger history, declares to Walter, "You're not responsible for every black man in America" (65).

Initially, Etta is unprepared to reveal to her mom that she has broken the strict sexual moral code of the Black middle class. When Etta talks to her mother on the phone about leaving the sorority house, she lies and tells her mother she is staying at the YWCA. Ultimately, this prepares Etta for her political initiation. After Etta finally embraces her adult behavior and feelings, she is able to be truthful with her mother about all aspects of her life, including her desire and plans to serve as a Civil Rights worker. By breaking the sexual moral code, Etta frees herself from others' expectations and definitions.

ETTA'S POLITICAL INITIATION

Etta's final initiation is in the political realm. Etta's transition through this rite prepares her to fully enter adulthood as an African American female in 1960s America. She accepts this new stage as an active participant in the Civil Rights movement, a change agent in the struggle for racial equality and authentic freedom. Numerous times throughout *Music History*, Etta refuses to acknowledge the racial boundaries within which others accept and operate. She operates as an innocent young woman, ignorant of the history of racism and its legacy.

Etta's political rite of passage forces her to confront racist attitudes and actions, recount memories of racist encounters, and process the barriers others have put in place for her. Seaton reveals the complexities of racism through several incidences that Etta encounters. The first is Etta's experience while looking for a room to rent. The second incident involves Etta listening to Walter and Frank's conversation about their work for SNCC and the things they witnessed, such as white supremacist terrorism committed against Blacks who dared to practice their voter registration rights. The third occurrence involves Walter sharing a story with Etta about a young Black female who was a victim of a racially motivated sexual assault. The last incident is when Etta learns about Walter's death. With each of these four experiences, Etta "crosses the sands" bit by bit into her full initiation.

Upon moving out of the Pi Lambda house, Etta's innocence leads her to hunt for a room for rent in the predominantly white college town. Etta resists Shirley's reality check, "Listen to this ad. 'Room, pleasant, convenient to campus. (emphasis) Whites only'" (42), and Feezie's dire warning, "My Cousin Lula got bombed out back home, bought this house in Trumbull Park. Zoweee! Phizzzz . . . All she had left was a set of cup towels and her station wagon" (42). Etta's answer to her friends' caution is sarcasm and willful ignorance, "I'm only interested in going where I'm not wanted" (46). As Etta and her loyal sorority sisters, Feezie and Shirley, head out with her on a room-for-rent search, they are subjected to racial hostility. A woman at the first residence where Etta makes an inquiry threatens to call the police; a woman at the second residence where Etta makes an inquiry becomes hysterical at the sight of the three Black girls on her doorstep. Etta's personal encounter with racism and systematic oppression takes her one step closer to her political awakening.

Etta first becomes exposed to the racist political workings of the Jim Crow South while listening to the first-hand accounts of SNCC workers Walter and Frank; they recount both the tremendous fear and bravery of Black Southerners living under American Apartheid. It is Walter's story of a woman forced to answer impossible questions on a voter registration test that particularly impacts Etta. "Counting watermelon seeds. That's a good trick," she remarks (60). Here, it is apparent that Etta's perspective is beginning to shift from concern with self to identification with community. She is then prompted to recall a childhood memory of a racist advertisement and its negative effect on her mother. Etta had desperately tried to suppress these memories during her period of self-initiation: "When we moved to Chicago, my mother saw this big billboard with this little black child, big eyes, wearing a big straw hat, eating a humongous piece of watermelon. She never took another bite . . . . I'm trying to get a handle on this. On what it means to be white. [John Cage] doesn't care about any of it. Black. White. He's so experimental" (60). Etta's youthful innocence allows her to imagine a life free from racism, a freedom she recognizes in John Cage. However, as Etta's memories resurface, she knows that that freedom is not yet for everyone.

In a phone conversation Walter reiterates to Etta the real and present danger he and, more importantly, the Blacks living in the South face daily. Walter goes on to recount the story of a headstrong girl much like her who refuses to acquiesce to the white racist authorities. The girl's act of defiance is answered with sexual and physical violence.

> WALTER: That woman? The woman who took the test 11 times? They put her daughter in jail last night. They wanted her to strip. Do it with them . . . . Etta? You still there? Etta?
>
> ETTA: Did they?
>
> WALTER: They tried. They tried everything. Everything they could to break her.
>
> ETTA: She wouldn't let them. (not a question, a declarative)
>
> WALTER: I could hear her screaming. Somebody would say "can't you say yessir, nigger. Can't you say yessir, bitch" and she'd say I can, but I don't know you that well. And they'd beat her again, her screamin all the time. They beat her till she passed out. Blood everywhere. Saw them draggin' her back to her cell. (73-4)

When Etta questions Walter about his individual response to the abuse the girl and her mother suffered, Walter explains that he is part of a collective body seeking change. Etta truly hears Walter, something she had been resisting. Her political awakening continues. She begins to understand that she can be the voice for the girl whose voice is silenced.

Walter's murder is the final rite that helps Etta make the transition into responsible adulthood. Before learning of his death, Etta has already decided to go Mississippi. She has told her sorority sisters about her decision. She fully discloses everything to her mother and talks to her as a responsible adult with nothing to hide. Etta has resolved to join the Movement and the SNCC family (82). She is no longer "fighting this all on [her] own" (55). When Frank tells Etta that Walter has been killed, Etta lapses into the memory of a conversation she had with Walter; she then picks up her suitcase and heads off to her chosen destiny.

Etta's political rite of passage brings her fully into Black citizenship with its rich heritage of resistance, resilience and rebellion. Etta suffers a loss of innocence; however, she comes to understand that all of her and Walter's education, cultural enlightenment, and privilege cannot save them from the deeply entrenched racism of the United States. These realities point to the daily danger, oppression, and sometimes death that Civil Rights workers and Southern blacks face. Etta recognizes that danger could take the form of sexual violence, physical brutality, or psychological oppression.

Throughout the play, Etta is attempting to define herself and exert her independence, so much so that Walter calls her Miss Opposite. For Etta, independence means freedom from what others have prescribed for her. Etta equates her declaration of independence with adulthood. Her expression of independence can be seen in the series of decisions she makes: changing her major, leaving the sorority, moving in with Walter, and finally sleeping with Walter. However, it is not until Etta makes her final decision, to go south and join the Civil Rights movement, that she truly crosses over into adulthood. This decision is not made for selfish reasons, but out of a new sense of collective responsibility and purpose.

In the end, the coming-of-age tale of Etta Bradshaw is a metaphor for the coming of age of the history of the Civil Rights movement. Using discourse-altering, Seaton creates a vehicle for looking back, but through twenty-first-century eyes that know how the future unfolded. Etta provides a prototype for Blacks living in the postmodern world who are able to negotiate many identities, appropriating those things that give meaning to the modern experience and engaging in the struggle to free all oppressed people.

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AN EMBEDDED JOURNALIST RESPONDS TO *MUSIC HISTORY*

JOHN WOODFORD

Watching Sandra Seaton's play *Music History* awakened a lot of memories, starting with the set, a quintessential college room of that era, but also the music and politics, the philosophical topics, the cultural and linguistic practices. This powerful play provides a true microcosm of an important period in United States history and, especially, the African American experience. As I sank into the play, I felt more like an embedded journalist than an audience member, not embedded in a war per se but in my past. What Sandra Seaton's characters were experiencing on the University of Illinois campus in the first years of the 1960s resonated with my memories of my own high school and college days.

I have lived and worked in Chicago, home of Etta Bradshaw, the protagonist of *Music History*, but I grew up in the small town of Benton Harbor, Michigan, a circumstance that affected my initial response to Sandra Seaton's wonderful play. Right off, I couldn't help pondering a seemingly irrelevant question: has Champaign become blacker than Urbana? I'm referring to the relative proportion of African-American residents. When I was growing up in the fifties, the twin-city home of the University of Illinois was always identified as Champaign-Urbana, as it is in the play. But now I always hear Urbana-Champaign, and that stimulates my antennae—call it my *race-dar*—that some sort of socioeconomic or status shift has occurred. Benton Harbor has a twin city (perhaps twin town would be more apt)—St. Joseph. When I was growing up, Benton Harbor was always mentioned first. Benton Harbor was bigger than St. Joe, had a better high school, more cultural attractions and so on. It also came to have many more Black residents, so now, after Benton

Harbor has lost most of its industries, jobs, wealth, and more than half its population and has become a 90 percent African American town, the twins are always referred to as St. Joe-Benton Harbor. That history conditions my responses to several episodes in the play. *Music History* brings a lot home to me.

When I heard the characters use the term "greys" for white people, it was like getting a whiff of one of those odors that sent Proust into deep remembrance. I suspect that was a regional term. We certainly never heard it in Benton Harbor, nor had I heard it anywhere in my youthful travels until I got to Harvard. A classmate from Springfield, Illinois, Kent Wilson, introduced us Black freshmen to the term "greys." I suspect that it derives from the Confederate uniform. Another linguistic touchstone: several times we hear the phrase "captain of the ship," a phrase taken from the famous lines of William Ernest Henley's "Invictus": "I am the master of my fate/I am the captain of my soul." People clasp many lines of poetry to them and hold them as talismans. They may even switch the words around, but we hear and understand Etta's declaration of personal, even existentialist, freedom and individuality. It's like an unformed personal manifesto. She will be her own captain, her own master, and her decisions may sometimes be brave, when she resists conformity, but also self-serving, when she denigrates the first wave of SNCC volunteers.

Very early on, Etta tells her boyfriend, Walter Daniels, about her high school reading habits. She mentions authors of historical novels one rarely hears of today: the successful Afro-American writer Frank Yerby, Samuel Shellabarger and Frank Slaughter. For decades I had never thought about those big potboiler books that Etta cited, but I could remember going through similar big historical adventure-romances and, just like Etta, looking for the thrilling parts: "Oh my God, a bodice was ripped," literally, or watching a slit proceed up the thigh of a damsel's tight skirt. They didn't have sex education in class or in most homes in those days, so those novels served an important purpose. When the audience meets Etta, she's already graduated from bestsellers to Henry Miller, a sure sign that college has marked a significant personal and generational transition for her.

Seaton signals how important music is to *Music History* when she says in her introduction, "The playwright prefers that productions use the music listed in the script." And that, of course, includes Ray Charles's "What'd I Say," released in July of 1959, a recording that in retrospect was an anthem paving the way for the cultural changes of the sixties. I can testify that it was a sonic bombshell that created a major shift in mass culture. At the end of the play Walter's fraternity brother Frank tells Etta how much Walter liked to listen to the "gutbucket" music broadcast from Randy's Record Shop, heard over much of the country at night via clear-channel WLAC-AM in Nashville. The sounds of Ray Charles and his peers, uniting blues, gospel, and country music, were in the end more powerful than the violence that ended the life of the fictional Walter Daniels and real-life counterparts like Medgar Evers.

Although Etta and her Chicago fellow students all must live in segregated housing, some of the South Siders look down on the West Side, where Etta lives. I first became aware of the distinctions and conflicts between the South Side and the West Side when I moved to Chicago in 1965. Freud thought that such disputes over trivial matters were an expression of the "narcissism of small differences." My father was a physician in Benton Harbor, Michigan, only ninety miles from Chi-town. He knew a lot of doctors from the South Side, which, thanks in part to the University of Chicago, was considered more "bourgeois" than the West Side. I didn't even know there was a West Side until I actually moved to Chicago. You'd hear that the South Side had all the culture, the better restaurants, nightclubs and such, all the richer folks. But I think that Walter is right when he declares that there wasn't really a significant difference between them. In the sixties there was the Black P-Stone Ranger "Nation" on the South Side marauding, and on the West Side, their counterparts and enemies, the Black Gangster Disciples, marauding on their own turf.

I got to know the leader of the Disciples, Doug Andrews, after I returned to Chicago in 1968 and joined the staff of *Muhammad Speak*s after a second stint at *Ebony*. (When Etta somewhat satirically referred to an *Ebony* magazine article about the first Black jet pilot from Oklahoma, I recalled my time on *Jet* and *Ebony* where I was quite familiar with that particular staple of articles. We didn't publish just that kind of article, of course, but we usually had at least two "first Black this or that" in some form or other.) I was hired for *Muhammad Speaks* by Richard Durham, a great writer of radio plays, movie scripts and the first Black soap opera and also an editor supreme. Durham was mentoring Doug Andrews, hoping he could turn him into a revolutionary who would put his organizational genius to good political use. He was trying to instill political consciousness and conscience into Andrews (something Durham was also attempting, with a bit more success, with Muhammad Ali). Andrews would come into the *Muhammad Speaks* office on West 79th Street dressed like a businessman, but he turned out to be an unreformable thug and crook.

Etta tells Walter that many of her status-obsessed sorority sisters resort to cutting bargain store labels out of their clothes. That comment swooped me out of the sixties and into the 1980s and Ann Arbor. After Benton Harbor's economic collapse, very few of its high school graduates got accepted by the University of Michigan. In the eighties I was editing a U-M alumni publication, and I kept my eye out for home boys or home girls. One year I met a bright sophomore from a working-class Benton Harbor family. She told me that her Black roommates from slightly better-off economic backgrounds teased her about her underwear—not because it was soiled or ragged but because it had the K-Mart label. They were "sorority types," she said. Seaton's play shows us that Etta was not a typical "sorority type," and neither was my home girl. She told me she noticed that the people who made fun of her underwear never had money to attend any campus cultural events, nor did they tear themselves away from their TV soap operas to attend any of the many free lectures or symposiums that make university life special. "I have money for those things,"she told me, "because I don't waste it on underwear, cosmetics and hair-straighteners." Nevertheless, like Etta, she had to deal with static from her own in-group as well as with the obvious multivalent stressors from the surrounding racism.

The role of women in the Civil Rights movement also comes up in the dialogue. Someone describes their function as menial and, indeed, Etta seems to think they are only handmaidens of the males. That's a popular impression, and many in the audience may nod their heads, content in their ignorance. But later on, we get Walter's description of the Black mother in the South who was studying to pass the racist voting test and her daughter, who was tortured and terrorized by the establishment. Is that the fate of handmaidens? Not that Etta was entirely wrong to be suspicious. Instances of what one might call male chauvinism or misogyny could be found in organizations throughout the Civil Rights movement, including the Black Panthers and even, as Ella Baker has testified, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Walter's trip through the South sent me back to the 1940s and early fifties, when my family drove from Benton Harbor, Michigan, to Tuskegee, Alabama, once, and once through Texas to Mexico. Our parents never told us why we were traveling the way we were—not staying in motels but with families we barely knew. We were accompanied by that prosaic but necessary artifact of Jim Crow—the Piss Jar (a term I learned only much later). When we returned to Tuskegee when I was entering high school, our parents told us that if we wanted to go to the movies with the local children, we'd have to sit in a certain area. My twin sister and I decided not to go, so I didn't consciously experience Jim Crow then.

In 1959, when I was about to enter college, I met up with a couple of my white high school friends, Don Payne and Rocky Miller, in Washington, DC, during a family visit. The three of us decided to go to a local amusement park. It was lucky I did that, because otherwise I would have been even more naïve when I got to college. The park was in Virginia and the guards barred entry to me. We did the whole, "Is this the USA?" thing, and then my friends did the, "If he can't get in we're not going, either!" thing, expressing truly righteous indignation. Because of that experience, when I went to college at Harvard that fall I was more acutely sensitive to what was going on in the South than I would have been otherwise. Our class was part of an experiment at Harvard. We had sixteen Black men in our freshman class of 1963. Through a grant and spurred by sociologists defining topics for research, Harvard added a sizable group of guys from the South. During our years in Cambridge we wondered many times about the effect on our individual identities of our knowledge that we were being defined and observed by persons unknown sitting figuratively behind an opaque laboratory wall. (In the study, we sixteen were termed "The Shadows in The Yard." The Harvard faculty seems to have had a deaf ear to linguistic nuance.)

My roommate, Travis Williams, who died of alcoholism-related ailments in his mid-twenties, came from an excellent Black high school in Durham, North Carolina. Travis shared a lot of qualities with Seaton's Walter Daniels. This was in the immediate wake of the McCarthy period, and many of our classmates, Black and non-Black, had been told by their parents, "don't sign anything; don't join anything" that involved dissident political action. Doing so would supposedly ruin your career prospects forever. When the sit-ins began, Travis and I nevertheless picketed the Harvard Square Woolworth's and joined other similar efforts, such as distributing "ban the bomb" petitions. Later, I went to Mississippi in 1964 and taught incoming freshmen in Tougaloo's summer school, teaching with other Harvard alums, all Whites and Jews except me. Mississippi was scary. That was the summer the three civil rights workers were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi. *Music History*'s Walter Daniels is emblematic of such martyrs.

Music History presents the viewpoint of Walter and Etta's parents, concerned above all with their children's survival and success. The young people carry with them their parents' expectations and ambitions for their children to succeed, natural and nurturing feelings, to be sure, but feelings that can sometimes also be smothering. Seaton is sympathetic to the parents' impulse, an impulse that Lorraine Hansberry also dramatizes successfully in *A Raisin in the Sun*. The conventional wisdom is: "If you don't conform, you can't succeed." But in certain fraught circumstances in a violent and racist society, what success may denote is just sheer survival. Walter's fate shows what can befall the nonconformist. Etta's schoolmates and parents would impose on her their notion that she must accept life as laid out by Links and cotillions. I take this to mean that in their view, freedom is whiteness, freedom is a luxury, if you're trying to be free, you're trying to be white. This is probably the most damaging and debilitating absorption of racist ideology that Black people have ever bought into. The flip side of this concept is that if you're fighting to desegregate institutions, that means your goal is assimilation and/or integration. These are notions that should not get jammed together. They're not the same thing.

Etta's encounters with racist rental practices, when she seeks an off-campus apartment, exactly matched my own and my roommates' experiences in the early 1960s in another supposedly liberal college town, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Etta meets a landlady who asks her if she is foreign or an Indian. That reminded me of the incidents in the South in which Black college students in the 1940s and fifties would don African robes if they wanted to eat in a segregated restaurant or motel. The proprietors would ask, "What are you?" "I'm Ghanian," they'd reply. "Oh, well, all right, then."

There is a seductive notion that you have an identity that is imprinted upon you, that's imbued in you by the place, time and circumstance of your birth; and that you're sentenced to, or condemned to, that identity, like it or not. "We're all you got, like it or not," as a character in *Music History* tells Etta. The prospects for Black identity seem negative and inelastic in such a view. Walter Daniels, Etta's lover, is both a SNCC activist and an early reader of Philip Roth, a combination that seems impossible to a white friend who asks, with obvious incredulity, "How do you know about Philip Roth?" That is the flip side of "What are you?" It's a restatement of the challenge to the identity of the Black person who wishes to resist being pigeonholed while also struggling not to deny his or her ethnic heritage. I'm not sure what it is about Philip Roth that makes him the focus of so much intriguing controversy, but the focal point of the question is less relevant than the subtext: "You act as if your mind is free, so it must mean that you think you're white."

The confusion Walter Daniels—and Etta—make for those who insist on pigeon-holing reminded me of a similarly confusing character from my hometown, a fair-skinned Black dentist named Hadley Cox. He often won the city tennis championship, was an accomplished pianist and dancer, dashing dresser and reputed ladies' man married to a beautiful, dark-skinned wife. He had a large practice with patients from all backgrounds. One day, one of his white patients, as he leaned back in the dental chair, suddenly said, "Doc, guys at work were talking about you, and they said I should ask, uh, just what *are* you?" "Well," Dr. Cox replied, "I have ancestors from many places. I'm part Indian, part Irish, part Scotch, part African. I think of myself as a conglomerate." The patient exclaimed with satisfaction, "Oh, a conglomerate! I told them you wasn't no nigger!"

Now I come to the touchy subject of Black Greeks, the collegiate sororities and fraternities that mark and mar so much Black academic life and figure so prominently in *Music History.* Nationalism is yet another entity with two souls, a vigorous, progressive, unifying form and a stagnant, reactionary, isolating form. The latter sort is in evidence when one of the Black Greeks comments to Etta after she has criticized the irrelevance and absurdity of much of their doings: "We're all you've got, whether you like it or not." Seaton has laid the two aspects of nationalist solidarity before her audience in a dramatic crucible: there's the solidarity of Greek clubs, the Elks and so on one hand, and on the other, the solidarity presented by Walter and his SNCC comrades. In this fine play, the playwright projects or activates two tendencies, two ideas before you and makes you perceive and hold both in your mind simultaneously. This results in an interesting tension that makes the work especially dynamic. It's a juggling act that Seaton sustains throughout the action, introducing more elements to be suspended as she proceeds. We encounter, for example, the beatniks, the freedom seekers, the nonconformists like John Cage and feel their appeal for Etta. But she's also a keen admirer of classical composers like Tchaikovsky. She's open to everything, to both sides of any contradiction. She is their resolution: no theorizing or critical wordplay needed to explain the trick.

What I began to feel as I went through the choices faced by the protagonists of *Music History*, Walter and Etta, is that they work like flip sides on records. The record industry in its vinyl heyday placed one recording on the A side, the one that promised to attract more buyers and airplay, and then put another piece, one with less apparent promise, on the B side. It was a two-fold relationship but not a contradictory one. Sometimes—and musical historians love to toss up examples—the B side wound up gaining more critical and commercial success than the A side. If there's a contradiction involved between the two, it's a dialectical one, not an antagonistic one. That is, it's a contradiction that can take us, in Jackie Wilson's words, "higher and higher." What's the upshot? What I take from this play is what I hope younger audiences will take, too: that we must continue to refuse to accept any limits on the range and focus of our expressions of what it means to be free and what it means to be Black.

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"A GLIMPSE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE": SANDRA SEATON'S RENDERING OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN *MUSIC HISTORY*

PERO GAGLO DAGBOVIE

> *No one person holds the rights to the story about the African American experience . . .* Music History *presents one of the many stories about a multi-layered, dense, and complicated community . . . It is my hope that* Music History *provides a glimpse of African American life that will add to and enrich the understanding and perspective of all members of the audience.*
> —Sandra Seaton, "Playwright's Note," *Music History* Program (2010)

Set on the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana campus in the spring of 1963, Sandra Seaton's *Music History* revisits the Black experience during a pivotal year in what historians have conventionally called the Civil Rights movement.[1] In particular, Seaton intimately portrays the experiences and worldviews of a diverse group of African American university students, highlighting the ways in which they were profoundly impacted and transformed by the struggle for civil rights. *Music History* belongs to a tradition of African American plays whose subject matter occupies a crucial place in African American historical memory and culture. According to Harry J. Elam Jr., August Wilson is "the key practitioner of this theatrical return" to the African American historical backdrop: "Wilson's plays focus on the experiences and daily lives of ordinary black people with particular historical circumstances. Carefully situating each play at critical junctures in African American history, Wilson explored the pain and perseverance, the determination and dignity in those black lives . . . . Wilson's characters' personal stories are inextricably linked to the history of African-American struggle and survival in this country" (Bryer and Hartig 5-7). Elam's discussion of the Black historical drama genre that blossomed during the 1980s and 1990s and his perspective on Wilson's "Century Cycle" plays are both relevant when considering Seaton's plays, especially *Music History.*

Between 1989 and 2013, Seaton has authored eleven plays; this body of work constitutes a rich and wide-ranging exploration of African American history and culture. Her first play, *The Bridge Party* (1998), is what Judith L. Stephens has called a "lynching drama" (4). In the years since her debut play, Seaton has explored other epochs and significant subject matter in African American history, including black life in Tennessee during the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction; the thought-provoking relationship between Thomas Jefferson and his bondswoman Sally Hemings; and everyday life for African American university students during the modern Civil Rights movement, the focus of *Music History*. Further, in more than a few of her plays, her characters' "memories of the past" constitute key features of their identities. Seaton has remarked that her sense of history can be traced back to her early years; she was especially influenced by her maternal grandmother, who appreciated Black art and Black history. "I knew about my family history from the time I was a little girl," Seaton reminisces, "Later, I majored in English but I almost had enough credits for a history major. I loved history" (Seaton Interview 2013).

In addition to exposing us to the sacrificial life of a studious, focused, and committed twenty-four-year-old Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activist, Walter Daniels, and the independence, cultural curiosity, intelligence, strength, and understandable naïveté of nineteen-year-old Etta Bradshaw, in *Music History* Seaton delves into numerous important, overarching themes in African American history and culture during an apex of post-World War II Civil Rights activism, many of which, as is the case in the plays of August Wilson, resonate in the present. They include nondysfunctional young Black love (Walter's and Etta's relationship); generational conflicts (Walter's disagreements with his mother and father and Etta's clashes with her mother); notions of respectability for young Black women ("Remember ladies, stockings and pumps on the main floor" [35]); the intricacies of Black sorority and fraternity culture; the enduring nature of W. E. B. Du Bois's notion of double consciousness (with Etta, who balances living in two worlds culturally and physically; with Walter, who is highly educated and lives grassroots-style in the deep South); the development of African American university students' social consciousness; the ambiguous nature of Black authenticity and social responsibility; racial profiling and de facto segregation in the North; the reality of what historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries refers to as "racial terrorism" (34) in the Jim Crow South; and class and intraracial divisions (the "you so ghetto" jokes, "gut bucket" references, and the "South Side" vs. "West Side" dichotomy).

This essay focuses on *Music History* as a point of departure for contemplating the meaning of history to African American university students during the 1960s; the experiences of activists, especially those in SNCC, who were routinely the victims of violence; the profound influence that the Civil Rights movement had on African American students who came of age outside of the South; segregation in the North; and women's roles in the Civil Rights movement.

Seaton touches on the ways her young characters perceive the meaning of Black history. For example, in act one, scene three, Etta shares with her friends and fellow sorors information from the March 1963 issue of *Ebony.* Seaton's reference to *Ebony* is intriguing. Founded in 1945, *Ebony* routinely featured a history section in its issues mainly from the 1960s through the 1970s and 1980s. According to Benjamin Quarles in *Black Mosaic* (1988), "the popularization of black history in the mass-circulation monthly, *Ebony,* particularly the writings of its senior editor, Lerone Bennett, Jr., left a deep imprint on hundreds of thousands of readers hitherto unresponsive to the call of the past" (181). Seaton's reference to *Ebony* offers a mild critique of the type of history that *Ebony* exposed its readers to in a dialogue between Monica, Etta and Feezie:

> MONICA: Eeekkk, she fell asleep on my *Ebony.*
> ETTA: She's reading "Ten Ways to Trap a Man."
> FEEZIE: Firsts of The First, The first Negro jet pilot from Oklahoma. Oooh. (26)

Ebony, as well as *Jet,* did indeed include dimensions of African American history before, during, and after the early 1960s. Yet this history-telling was often packaged as shallow praise songs to African American "firsts" (Etta herself is a "first," the self-proclaimed "first black native of Delphi, Tennessee" [22] to attend, against her family's wishes, a large, predominantly white Northern university); instead of the more introspective and critical portrayals of the Black past in magazines that were widely available in 1963 like *The Negro History Bulletin* or *The Negro Digest*. Etta, the newly declared Music

History major, is interested in the "history of Muddy Waters" (32) and blues, an African American music genre dating back to the late 1800s and early twentieth century.

Etta's decision to major in Music History is very unusual for the time. While her sorors accuse her of "acting white" (31) because she attends events about Black music history, such as meetings of the Campus Blues Society, which are predominantly frequented by white students, her mother is understandably disappointed with her daughter's choice not to major in elementary education, a popular, feminized major that appealed to Black professional women in the early 1960s, like social work, nursing, and library work. "You're majoring in what? Music History? Playing what, where? Is it listening to LP's?? What kind of job is that?" Etta's mother responds to Etta's decision to pursue Music History (40). Etta's mother is perhaps more shocked by Etta's decision as a legacy to go against her family's history, to defy the historical traditions established by her female predecessors. Etta's pledge sister Shirley sides with Etta's perplexed and protective mother, as the following exchange reveals:

> ETTA: That was my mother. Shirley, I've never seen her like this. She was beside herself. Said this was my chance to make some thing of myself. She says if I leave the house, I'll ruin my life, maybe even end up in jail.
>
> SHIRLEY: If I told my mother I was leaving the house . . .
>
> ETTA: Then I mentioned I was not going to major in elementary ed . . . .
>
> SHIRLEY: And changed my major from Accounting to Music History. She'd come down here. . . . .
>
> ETTA: . . . I thought she'd understand.
>
> SHIRLEY: Understand? Understand her only child leaving the sorority two weeks before initiation? A mother's dream? And a legacy to boot? (40-41)

Etta's decision to abandon a major to which Black women had historically gravitated impacts her in other ways. Etta often laments to Walter and her pledge sisters that she feels isolated being "the only one," that is the only Black studying Music History, in addition to being one of the less than four hundred Blacks at the University of Illinois. As a token Black representative, Etta is routinely asked by her white classmates "What do you think about integration?" (9, 13). If she had planned to take her studies further, she would have been entering a masculinist discipline in history. In 1940, for instance, Marion Thompson Wright became the first Black woman to earn a doctoral degree in a historical field, and by 1963 there were less than a dozen Black women who were professional historians. When Etta decides to drop out of Pi Lambda, she further alienates herself from a supportive Black female cultural network that has roots dating back to the early twentieth century.[2]

The historical consciousness of Etta's sorors appears to be quite shallow. It seems they are most concerned with being able to memorize and recite "the entire in depth history of Pi Lambda. 1900 to the present!" (35). Soror Banks, the house president, talks about history only as it relates to Pi Lambda. "We're about to make history. That's right, ladies. History." Soror Banks shouts to the pledges, "In case you haven't heard, we've been chosen by the DC office, given the special honor of hosting a visit by our National president" (23). In response to Etta's decision to drop out of Pi Lambda, Monica invokes her personal history that probably mirrors Etta's:

> My whole family came up through Pi Lambda. My mother. And my mother's mother. All sorors. Sorors. That's right. Pi Lambda is everything to me. My heart, my soul. You can't leave now. We're getting ready to cross the burnin' sands. Do you know who you are? Look at you. You're the captain of the ship. You're locked into this. (45)

Early in act one, scene one, we are introduced to Walter's activism. It is clear that he is not simply a part-time, summer vacation activist—the type of activist that Etta's mother says that Etta will be when Etta tells her she is going down South at the end of the summer. Etta's mother tells Etta in a scolding manner: "You go down there. Slam bam. Summer's over. You're gone. Your Aunt Rose has to live there, Etta. Teach school. Go to the store. Everyday things you don't have to do. You go down there, start trouble, then leave . . . They'll have to deal with it when you're gone" (83-4). Walter probably became an activist when he was about twenty-two years old (Seaton informs the audience that he participated in the Freedom Rides in 1961.). In several exchanges with Etta, he reflects on his participation in the May 1961 Freedom Rides and the voter registration drives, when the house he was living in was bombed by hostile whites.

> WALTER: Not one day goes by, not one out of 365. I can see it. Just like yesterday. After we got off the bus, wherever we stayed, I'd never sleep in the bed . . . You couldn't get me to sleep on a bed,

> couldn’t afford to . . . I’d doze off, every hour or so I’d run to the window, catch a car going by . . . back to the sofa.
>
> ETTA: You were careful, that’s all.
>
> WALTER: Careful? Careful. Whatta you know about being careful. You think I was at the Chicago Public Library? I was in Greenwood, Mississippi. And I was scared. Look behind you. Run to the window. Again and again. One night . . . I was staying at this house outside town. A car comes by, stops. You could hear a pin drop. Here comes this loud noise. Me and my boys, we started yelling and screaming. “Move it! Hit the Floor!” We knew enough to duck.
>
> ETTA: A bomb?
>
> WALTER: Crash! Right against the side of the garage. (9-10)

Warning her that she would not be able to survive in the Civil Rights battlefields, Walter says to Etta (Miss Opposite): “You think I go to bed, get up thinking about some cracker trying to blow me away? Stuff happens all the time. If something happens, it won’t be to me.” (14). Etta comes to love Walter for his activist nature, maturity, change-the-world mentality, and fearlessness, not to mention his Miles Davis demeanor. Like Davis, Walter’s “main man” (12), Walter possesses a “defiant swagger” and is “not afraid to be himself.”[3] Etta is also defiant: she makes bold decisions, challenges familial traditions, attempts to defy de facto segregation, problematizes what it means to be Black, and even exhibits an eclectic sense of style and fashion. It is also important to note that Etta is nineteen and Walter is twenty-four. Etta most likely reveres him because he represents something new, atypical, and unpredictable, an exciting alternative to life in Pi Lambda. They share a common worldview: both are critical thinkers, confrontational, intelligent, avid readers, and music lovers. In an argument with Monica (Etta’s pledge sister who claims to be “kicking it” with Walter), Etta indirectly expresses why she is attracted to Walter: “Walter’s into politics and SNCC and things like that . . . Walter Daniels is a very deep thinker” (33).

Etta is increasingly radicalized during the play. Perhaps her first major influence as a university student away from home is Walter. In a quest for self-discovery, she strives to emulate him. She learns from his activism, experiences, and not-too-distant personal history; she also learns through her own personal experiences. Etta, the rebel (“Miss Opposite” in Walter’s words), disregards the dress code of her sorority, decides to move out of the Pi Lambda house, and finally drops out of the organization. She justifies her moving off campus by telling her pledge sister Feezie that "plenty of people live off campus. Walter Daniels has his own place . . . fixed up and everything" (44). More than a few of the advertisements for the vacant apartments that they read emphasize "whites only" (42) and "no colored applicants appreciated" (46). Etta's sorors as well as an elder NAACP member warn her of the dangers of challenging the limits of segregation. "Etta's a test case," Feezie jokes (46). When Etta and her pledge sisters go out looking for a place for Etta in Champaign-Urbana, they confront racism in housing. As Etta, Feezie, and Shirley visit one potential landlady, after she notices the three Black women, she screams: "Out, out, get out, damn you! Or I'll call the cops!"(47). Another possible landlady who previously interviewed Etta and approved her, Mrs. Hurley, discovers that Etta is "colored," panics, and slams the door in their faces. Seaton's portrayal of race relations in Champaign in the early 1960s is consistent with the historical record. According to historian Joy Ann Williamson, the rural city of Champaign paralleled southern cities' segregation patterns, and even the University of Illinois had a sketchy pattern of not properly enforcing fair housing practices for students off campus.[4]

There were clear divisions in gender roles during the Civil Rights movement, and when Black women were the key movers and shakers, it was usually behind the scenes. Rejecting this supportive-role status, Etta lets Walter know that she is not willing to fulfill the often prescribed or stereotypical position of Black women in the Civil Rights movement. In an exchange with Etta, Walter tells her that women are active as a support network in the voter registration movements in the South like "our mother in Greenwood" (72), who houses and feeds Walter and his SNCC co-workers. Etta, the budding feminist, conveys to Walter that she is not willing to follow the orders from the men in the movement. The following conversation reveals Etta's beliefs about women's roles in the Black freedom struggle.

> WALTER: Looking for culture with a capital C. I don't know how you do it, Etta.
>
> ETTA: You try showing up uninvited. See how you like it. You don't know what it's like to be left out of things!
>
> WALTER: The women are doing a lot down South. Going door to door. Showing up at the meetings.

> ETTA: You don't understand anything about me. Not one single thing. I am not in Mississippi. I'm in Champaign-Urbana. I'm not like the women down there. I can just see it, while they're doing the chores like good little girls, making coffee, fixing sand wiches, you're handling all the manly things. I'm not the Avon lady. Okay? Going door to door. What's that got to do with me? (56)

Getting back at Walter, Etta also questions, in passing, Walter's relationship with white female SNCC activists after Walter tells her that she kisses like a white girl. Etta retorts, "How would you know???!!!" (60). Intimate interracial relationships, especially between Black men and white women, were not uncommon during the voter registration drives and Freedom Summer.

Armed with his training in political science and copies of the Mississippi Constitution, Walter returns to Mississippi in 1963 to help folks register to vote with SNCC. Founded in 1960 as a byproduct of a series of student meetings spearheaded by Ella Baker held at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, SNCC soon developed into a grassroots organization with many supporters in the North who helped raise funds to support SNCC's work in the South. Many young, college-educated freedom fighters actively worked with SNCC on projects in various states in the South. They were known for their brand of "radical" politics (vis-à-vis some of more the elderly, "conventional" Black Civil Rights leaders). SNCC played a crucial role in the sit-ins and freedom rides, the 1963 March on Washington, the Mississippi Freedom Summer, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. SNCC's most enduring contribution was its hands-on field work and organization of voter registration drives all over the South, especially in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. In his autobiography, *The River of No Return: The Autobiography of a Black Militant and the Life and Death of SNCC* (1973), Cleveland Sellers observes:

> The reason SNCC became a major civil rights organization after the Freedom Rides is rather simple: it was the only action-oriented civil rights organization in the South prepared to absorb the brash young militants who joined the movement because of the Rides. . . . Despite the trumped-up prosecutions, the long jail sentences, the brutal beatings, and the constant threat of death, SNCC organizers refused to be run out of Mississippi." (46, 51).

Walter is clearly one of those "brash young militants." In a conversation with Frank, Walter reflects on the struggles that Black people in Mississippi went through when simply trying to vote. Seaton sheds light on the outlandish voting tests that people were forced to take, like being asked how many seeds were in a watermelon. "This woman took the registration test 11 times before they let her pass" (59), Walter recounts. This unconstitutional trickery was very common during the era of Jim Crow segregation and the early 1960s. The vast majority of voting age Blacks were not voting in the South in 1963, two years before the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In 1964, for instance, only two million of the South's five million voting-age Blacks were officially registered. The tactics that whites in the South were using to prevent Blacks from registering and voting were the same ones employed in the immediate postemancipation period during Reconstruction and beyond.

Anti-Black violence was a defining feature of the Civil Rights struggle. White resistance to calls for integration and Black demands for social justice were so strong that they were regularly manifested in blatant, overt, and savage violence against African Americans—a type of violence that was reflective of the Progressive era or "the nadir" of Black life from 1877-1920 when lynching was common. Historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries's observation about the dangers that SNCC activists faced in Lowndes County, Alabama, is applicable to SNCC activists in Mississippi. "[A]cts of racial terrorism were acceptable to both state and federal officials because their participation gave the impression of order and legality," Jeffries underscores, "Violence, of course, was the key to maintaining the racial hierarchy" (34, 36). In act two, scene four, Etta is hurt when Walter goes down South suddenly without informing her, especially since recently she had implored him, her "first," not to return to Mississippi. They talk over the phone and Walter discourages her from entertaining the idea of coming to Greenwood:

> Etta, you know you're just talking . . . The woman, the woman who took the test 11 times? They put her daughter in jail last night. They wanted her to strip. Do it with them . . . I could hear her screaming. Somebody would say, "Cain't you say yessir, nigger, Cain't you say yessir, bitch." And she'd say I can, but I don't know you that well. And they'd beat her again, her screamin all the time. They beat her and beat her till she passed out. Blood everywhere. Saw them drag-

> gin' her back to her cell . . . You'd make those guards so mad. They'd kill you. You wouldn't last a minute down here. (73-74)

Horrific situations like this were not uncommon. It is very similar to what happened to Freedom Summer activist Fannie Lou Hamer and countless other Black women. On June 9, 1963, Hamer was returning from Charleston, South Carolina, with other activists from a literacy workshop. In Winona, Mississippi, the group was arrested on a false charge and imprisoned. Behind bars, Hamer, as well as some of her fellow activists, was beaten viciously. She called it "the mos' horrifying experience I have ever had in my life" and testified that "every day of my life I pay with the misery of this beatin'" (Lee 52, 53).

Walter's death is the most shocking example of "racial terrorism" in *Music History*. Its dramatic impact is all the more powerful because its effect on Etta is left for the audience to envision for themselves. It is Frank who brings the terrible news to Etta. Earlier Frank had told Etta about being stopped at gunpoint and being threatened with death in Greenwood. Walter himself, warning Etta against joining him and Frank, had told Etta about the brutal, prolonged beating of a young woman in jail. Etta had responded by making plans to drop out of school and join the SNCC volunteers in the South. She had decided to be with the love of her life and take part in the struggle to which Walter was wholeheartedly committed. As she is packing, however, Frank returns from Mississippi to clean out Walter's apartment and tell Etta what has happened. The play does not diminish the finality of death by ending on a heroic gesture from Etta but instead closes with a reminiscence of a conversation between her and Walter. What Etta will do next is left uncertain. The audience is left to ponder anew the human cost of the struggle for civil rights.

> FRANK: He's gone. Walter's gone. He left the scene. Split. Finito. He was in a hurry to get to the car . . . I could see him. He opened the door, then he turned on the ignition. The same way he always did. I was coming around the corner. Before I could get to the car, the bomb went off. You wouldn't recognize him. Not now. (92)

This final scene of the play is heartrending. This play can be read as a tragedy of some sort. Walter joins a river of Black men—all too often the victims of "racial terrorism"—who have been murdered in the United States since the nation's founding. He is a martyr, one who is not afraid to die for the cause. He knows first hand the challenges that he faced in the South by participating in the voter registration drives but still decides to take part in it. The ending of the play parallels the ending of Du Bois's short story "Of the Coming of John." Du Bois's John (the African American one) left the South to attend a Northeastern college. He then returns to his Southern hometown and becomes an activist by teaching his students to think critically about America's racial history and hierarchy and to question their second-class citizenship status. John realizes that he is putting his life on the line, that he could be killed for his acts of defiance against the racial status quo. John kills a white man for attempting to "ravish" his sister. He not only willingly sacrifices his life for the masses of his disenfranchised miseducated people, but he courageously faces the mob that lynches him. John and Walter view their lives as vehicles for the Black struggle for Black advancement and liberation. In Walter's words, "It's not about me, about what I want personally" (66).

The end of the play leaves many questions unanswered. Does Etta resolve to venture to Mississippi or elsewhere in the South to participate in the Civil Rights movement? Does she pursue Music History and become a scholar-activist? Does she rethink her decision to drop out of Pi Lambda? How does she cope with the death of her mentor, intellectual sparring partner, and soul mate?

That Seaton's main characters range in age from nineteen to twenty-four is important and timely. I attended the premiere staging of Sandra Seaton's *Music History*; after the performance members of the cast testified about the ways their involvement in the play impacted their perceptions of the Civil Rights movement, a period of US history that is oversimplified by American history textbooks and memorialized in "divergent and often contradictory ways" (Raiford and Romano xiii). Overall, they seemed to have been challenged to think historically. Members of the millennial hip hop generation, especially those young African Americans who have been socialized during the twenty-first century, can learn a great deal from reading and/or viewing *Music History*. During recent years when films such as *The Help* (2011) and Lee Daniel's *The Butler* (2013) dominate popular portrayals of episodes of African American history during the 1960s, *Music History* is a refreshing and imaginative dramatization of an important aspect of the African American historical experience.

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NOTES

[1] When I use the term "Civil Rights Movement" throughout the essay, I am referring to a particular period in the Black freedom struggle, approximately the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s. In part sparked by an essay by Jacquelyn Dowd-Hall—see Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1264—historians have been abandoning the once conventional belief that the Civil Rights Movement was a mainly post-World War II phenomenon. It is now common to extend the periodization of the twentieth-century Black struggle for Civil Rights as being part of the *long Civil Rights movement*. For an excellent critical analysis of the approach to envisioning the Civil Rights movement, see Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History,* 92 (Spring 2007): 265-288.

[2] For discussion of the significance of sororities, as well as fraternities in African American culture, see Lawrence C. Ross, Jr., *The Divine Nine: The History of African American Fraternities and Sororities* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2000); Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks, and Clarenda M. Phillips, eds., *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2005).

[3] For an interesting discussion of Miles Davis, see Gerald Early, editor, *Miles Davis and American Culture* (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 2001).

[4] For a brief history of African Americans at the University of Illinois, see Joy Ann Williamson's "The Snail-Like Progress of Racial Desegregation at the University of Illinois."*Journal of Blacks in HIgher Education*. No. 42 (Winter 2003-2004): 116-120.

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THE DECENTERED PROTAGONIST IN THE PLAYS OF SANDRA SEATON

ARVID F. SPONBERG

Ever since Aristotle suggested in his *Poetics* that the best kind of tragedies dramatize the "change from good to bad fortune" of a certain kind of protagonist—"the sort of man who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just"—and stipulated that the change "must not be due to villainy but to some great flaw in such a man" (47), critics and audiences have typically understood plays as stories primarily about the fate of a single character. Frequently this understanding is correct. Aristotle based his analysis on plays like the *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles; while it is true that Creon and Jocasta are important characters in that play, the central character is surely King Oedipus, as the title of the play declares. In Shakespeare's plays many characters come on stage, but the titles of his most famous tragedies—*Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, Macbeth*—make clear even before the play opens that the play has a protagonist whose fate is at the center of the drama. More recently, plays from Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* to Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* to Margaret Edson's *Wit* and John Logan's *Red,* whatever their innovations in other ways, have continued to tell stories centered on a protagonist. Despite the prevalence and prominence of dramas centered on a single main character, there is also a significant body of dramatic works in which the protagonist is either missing or decentered. In these dramas the fate of a single main character is not the focus of the story; instead, the play's action concerns the futures of several characters. The drama does not focus so much on the consequences of the choices of an individual; instead, it enacts the consequences for its characters of a society's political past. Such plays typically complicate the audience's awareness of an off-stage society. Indeed, the play takes pains to causally link on-stage actions to off-stage social forces. Good examples of plays with a decentered protagonist are Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun,* August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*, Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play*, and Lynn Nottage's *Ruined.*

Sandra Seaton's plays continue this alternative tradition. Her first play, *The Bridge Party*, dramatizes the response of a group of African American women when their weekly bridge club meeting is interrupted first by news of a lynching and then by white men going door-to-door confiscating guns from black homes in order, they say, to forestall racial violence from the black community. Emma Edwards may be considered the protagonist of the play. All the action takes place at her house, and her moral authority is recognized not only by her three daughters but also by the other members of the bridge club. It is through her "mother-wit" that the newly deputized whites leave the house without the guns they came looking for. Yet the fate of Emma Edwards as an individual is not the focus of the play; she is only one of a number of characters that convey the human meaning of African American life under segregation. *The Bridge Party* does not encourage its audience to speculate about the future of Emma Edwards herself but rather to gain new insight into the African American experience and American history as a whole in light of the events of the play. The play ends with a speech by Marietta Edwards, one of Emma Edwards's daughters, who declares that, while she is uncertain about the possibility of racial violence, she is certain that "we're going to get justice sometime. We're gonna get it, sure as day and night" (96). Emma Edwards may be the protagonist of *The Bridge Party*, but her character can more accurately be described as a decentered protagonist.

Seaton's *Music History* also features a main character, Etta Bradshaw, who is another decentered protagonist. An African American college student at the University of Illinois in 1963, she confronts what she calls "cultural chaos" as she embraces both the "new music" of John Cage and the blues of Muddy Water. Accused of being "whitey-white," she confesses to uncertainty about her identity: "I'm not. Or maybe I am." (54). By the end of the play, Etta Bradshaw's choices remain open. Whether Etta will remain in school at the University of Illinois or follow Walter to the South and the struggle for civil rights is unclear. Although Etta's inner conflicts are important elements in the play, they are not its core. *Music History* ends with two events, in neither of which Etta Bradshaw participates. Her sorority sisters finally succeed in gaining initiation into the African American sorority Pi Lambda and Walter Daniels is murdered while working for SNCC in Greenwood, Mississippi. Etta has not committed herself to either Pi Lambda or SNCC, but the play does not leave the audience wondering about Etta's future so much as it leaves one reflecting on the human cost of great historical movements like the struggle for civil rights.

Perhaps it is Seaton's play *The Will*, however, that provides the best example of a play with a decentered protagonist. Setting the action in a small town in Tennessee around the Fourth of July in 1866, Seaton places the audience in the middle of a black family's struggle to survive in the "new normal" following the Civil War. *The Will* braids two large themes. First, what is the significance of the concept of a legal will to a person, a family, a community, an entire nation? At a high level of dramatic conflict in the play, the will of one man, Cyrus Webster, stands in stark relief against the promises of natural justice made in the "will"of a nation—the Declaration of Independence. Webster's will stakes a claim for himself and his family to a right taken for granted by whites: the right to pass his property to his descendants, a right implied in the Declaration of Independence. Webster believes the claim of universal equality and dignity has been validated by the victory of the Union in the Civil War. The play dramatizes the ways that claim may be invalidated in the uneasy peace that follows the military victory. While Cyrus Webster prepares his annual recitation of the Declaration for the local celebrations of the Fourth of July, two of his long-time white employees, a father and his son, scheme for his destruction.

Second, what is the significance of historical change to a person, a family, a community, an entire nation? Seaton explores the ironies abounding when memories of Then—how people lived before the war—conflict with plans for Now—how people intend to live after the defeat of the Confederacy. Now, though slavery has been ended, the equality before the law promised in the Declaration remains elusive. The war has ended, but the struggle remains. Cyrus Webster tells his son Israel: "For a black man . . . there's not much difference between war and peace. . . . When I don't have to worry about whether I can pass on my land. When my word's as good as a white man's. When I can write a will just like a white man, then there'll be peace" (act 1, scene 5).

Above these two broad themes in the bass clef of *The Will,* Seaton harmonizes narrower themes that precipitate the choices of the characters and dominate the audience's attention. Rich ironies emerge. An important achievement of *The Will* as a work of historical interpretation is its dramatizing of Reconstruction's continuing of the Civil War by other means. In doing so Seaton compels theatre to perform one of its most important functions: giving us moving, breathing perspectives on the struggles of our own time. Through her characters' conflicts within themselves and with each other, Seaton excellently entwines battles for cultural domination that in one form or another continue into the twenty-first century.

Let's look briefly at some of these conflicts. The most obvious is one of blacks against whites—Garretts against. Websters. The struggle between the Websters, middlingly prosperous owners of a large tobacco farm, and the Garrets, their white employees, forms the preeminent conflict of the play. Parenthetically, Seaton's choice to write about an African American family like the Websters marks, all by itself, an important milestone in American theatre and even American culture at large. As far as I know, no other American work of drama or prose fiction creates as protagonists a pre-Civil-War, free Black Southern family. Effortlessly avoiding the stereotypes employed so often even by well-meaning depictions of African American life, Seaton offers us a family that is not dysfunctional, one in which the father is not absent and the mother is not a matriarch.

Grudgingly content to work as laborers for the Websters so long as they could cling to their social and political prerogatives, Henry Garrett and his son Thomas find the postwar "new normal" confusing and terrifying. One year after the Civil War, young Israel Webster's Union uniform and soldierly swagger stink in the nostrils of Thomas Garrett, Israel's old boyhood playmate. Tom continues the War of the Rebellion on the tight little battlefield of Delphi, Tennessee. His successful persuasion of his father to join the Klan's campaign to steal the Websters' land forms one of the plays most intense moments. Tom tells his father, "Cyrus Webster don't have no business with all this. Sooner or later we got to have that land." When his more cautious father warns him that "[t]he Feds'll get you," Tom assures him, "They can't run this town forever." Acknowledging that Israel Webster "did fight a white man," Henry Garrett reluctantly agrees to go along with his son's plans: "Alright, alright, damn you. You win" (act 2, scene 3).

Set against young Thomas's angry vision of white supremacy enforced by lynch law and the Ku Klux Klan is Cyrus Webster's contrasting vision of a society in which the full humanity of African Americans is finally accepted. He sets about fulfilling what he sees as his most important obligations, erecting a monument to his mother, discharging his impending annual duty to recite the Declaration of Independence at the July Fourth celebration, and disposing of his worldly goods via the play's eponymous document. Seeing to it that his mother has a proper gravestone is in its own way a rejection of segregation and white supremacy, because the monument will state in stone that Cyrus's mother was the "consort"—the word Cyrus insists be carved on her gravestone—of a white man. To Cyrus, the monument, the recitation, and the will are three acts in his own personal drama. Answering the objections of his wife, Eliza, he says, "After I see to her memory in a manner befitting the high esteem in which she was held . . . I'll make a place for all the Websters . . . A free man can write his own will . . . Cyrus Webster's free to say what he wants to say" (act 1, scene 3).

The play dramatizes a struggle between the ideal of equality under the law and the reality of a country where free competition between blacks and whites is unwelcome. The land and its tobacco are the source of wealth for the Websters and a cause of envy for the Garretts; the vision of the tobacco glowing in the sun contributes to Henry's submission to his son's pressure to punish Israel Webster. Some of the play's action concerns harvesting the tobacco crop and taking it to market. Here Seaton links on-stage actions to off-stage social forces. Rather than rewarding efficient production and customer service, the Delphi tobacco market aims first to preserve white privileges. White tobacco farmers claim the right to sell their crops early on market day when the buyers are flush and ready to deal. Black tobacco farmers cannot sell their crops until all the white-raised tobacco has been purchased. But as the play opens Cyrus hears reports that his son, Israel Webster—clearly a disruptive innovator ahead of his time—has been among the first in town to buy and trade. Israel's transgressions accumulate throughout the play. Whether he will remain in Delphi and take over the farm or whether he will head North where his passion for disruptive innovation will find more fertile soil forms a major dramatic question of *The Will*.

Another conflict, one not as bitter as those already mentioned in the world of the play but that resonates in our own time with equal and, in some contexts, even greater force is that between the partisans of high art and popular culture. The younger Webster son, Simpse, has returned home from the war with his fiancee, Patti Bradshaw, a music student from Nashville with a lovely soprano voice. Simpse loves her and wants his family to respect her as a person and admire her as a singer, but his tender concern for the care of Patti's voice immediately causes problems. His mother, Eliza, the soul of practicality in a house full of visionaries, naturally wants to know if Patti's voice lives up to Simpse's hype. Why can't she sing *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, Eliza asks, naming a favorite that she and Cyrus briefly hum together in the second act. Why can't she sing songs that everyone knows the words to? Even Tom Garrett maliciously joins in, demanding that Patti "Sing *Dixie*!" (act 1, scene 1).

But Patti's trained voice suits the words and music of Mozart and Verdi better than those of Dan Emmett, who wrote *Dixie*. Three times in the play Patti sings operatic arias, chosen from the repertoire available in 1866. What should we make of this? Some observations come to mind. First, Patti's artistry represents something entirely new to Delphi, the Websters and the Garrets. Her presence among them, while not directly affecting their choices and actions, communicates in an oblique way the extent to which their lives will never be the way they were before the war. Second, there is an irony in Patti's presence. Her artistic ambitions pull her toward the cities of the North, but racial bigotry has shriveled any hope of getting profitable engagements, of creating a career as a singer. The nation will have to wait another seventy years for Marian Anderson to fulfill Patti Bradshaw's promise. Although Seaton leaves the choice of arias up to individual directors, she does specify that the choices should be historically possible options. For example, arias from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, which premiered in 1853, were chosen for one production. In that production Patti expressed her love for Simpse Webster and her fears for his safety obliquely yet powerfully by singing arias in which Verdi's Leonora declares her doomed love for Manrico, the *trovatore* (troubadour) of the opera's title.

Although Cyrus Webster is surely the protagonist of *The Will,* he is a decentered protagonist. The play is not ultimately about Cyrus Webster, but about his family and about the larger history embodied in their story. The last scene of the play takes place a year after the death of Cyrus and immediately after the death of his widow. Simpse and Patti, now married, have become the owners of the land that

Cyrus cherished and guarded with such determination. His will has been honored and his legacy has been passed down to a new generation. It is not a conventional “happy ending”; Israel has not been heard from after escaping from Delphi in women’s clothing, and no one knows whether he is alive or dead. Cyrus did not live to see Israel take his rightful place in Delphi, but his work was not in vain. Simpse and Patti will take possession of the family farm according to his will, and they will continue to watch for Israel and hold for him “five hundred dollars” and “one trunk packed with tobacco, as full as it will hold on a damp day,” as Cyrus specified in his will. Victory in the Civil War ensured the end of slavery, but it did not lead to full equality for African Americans. Families like the Websters, however, have not surrendered the footholds they have gained, and they will continue the struggle for full equality in their daily lives as well as in the more dramatic events recorded in histories and textbooks.

This brief essay deals only with some of the larger elements in Seaton’s play. I have not commented on her strong, interesting, fully formed characters, her supple and vigorous language, the apt occasions she provides actors for humor that subtly points up her themes without distracting from the play’s aims. By selecting a few large elements, I’ve argued that compelling drama about experiences and ideas that really matter up and down the scale of modern life—from the personal, through the familial, to regional and national communities—requires a kind of imagination and writing that achieve their full potential in plays featuring a decentered protagonist.

Throughout its history, Western drama has exhibited a preference for plays that are centered on a single individual, the protagonist. This claim applies yet more strongly to American drama from its beginnings until about the middle of the twentieth century. Since about 1950, however, an alternative tradition of works involving a decentered protagonist has grown in significance. American drama has been enriched by a series of masterly theatrical works by Latino/Latina, Asian, and, especially, African American playwrights. August Wilson now stands with Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller as the playwrights most likely to represent twentieth-century American drama to future performers, audiences, and scholars. Had she lived and continued to write, surely Lorraine Hansberry would stand with them. Suzan-Lori Parks continues to write, and expectations for her work could not be higher. These writers generally exhibit a preference for plays with decentered protagonists. To this series Sandra Seaton has contributed *The Bridge Party, Music History,* and *The Will*. Her plays are excellent companions to the works of Hansberry, Wilson, and Parks and join theirs in carrying to all audiences the richly composed stories of lives inaccessible to us except through the miracle of great art.

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SANDRA SEATON'S *A BED MADE IN HEAVEN*; FAMILY, RACE, AND LAW IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

MAE KUYKENDALL

Sandra Seaton's *A Bed Made in Heaven* is the product of extensive archival research, playwriting skill, and imaginative insight about a cast of characters located in the complex emotional setting of hierarchical nineteenth-century personal relations. Seaton's sensitive re-creation of a world of racial and gender ties that both bind and wound those enmeshed within them calls up a bygone world that is, however, not without connections to the twenty-first century, connections that can be grasped if we employ an empathic understanding of the traces of caste in our own lives.

The characters are the third president, Thomas Jefferson, and his secret partner, Sally Hemings; Sally's mother, Betty Hemings; Thomas Jefferson's daughter, Patsy (Martha Jefferson Randolph); Sally's brother, James; a job seeker and gossip monger named James Callender; and the implicit, hidden characters of public opinion and Virginia law. Sally Hemings is the half-sister of Thomas Jefferson's deceased wife, Martha. Sally and Martha are both the children of John Wayles—Martha by Wayles's legal wife and Sally by Betty Hemings, a slave. Hence, Betty Hemings is part of Patsy's "blended family" and important to her as the "step-mother" to her mother, Martha, who died when Patsy was ten years old. In a twenty-first century family with the same ties, Sally Hemings would be recognized as Jefferson's sister-in-law.

Sandra Seaton imagines the home life of a suffocatingly intimate collection of blood ties and legal and cultural emotional blockages constructed by longing, unbreakable loyalties, and pride. Using her research at Monticello and a playwright's capacity to animate the dead, Seaton puts before us the possible emotional dynamics of a slave society in which a structure of permanent oppression was erected with the use of law and social distance defined by ideas of racial superiority and glossed over by claims of Christian stewardship (Davies 72; Fox-Genovese and Genovese 506-565). Despite the barriers established by law and custom, human connections magnified by sexual love and sexual aggression were a presence among the slave-holding class and a force to contend with for those held in bondage (Fox-Genovese 325-26). The love that grew among members of a household was real, but Southern ideas of gentility and honor carried with them a "dark current in Southern society" (Fox-Genovese 200-01).

Plantations contained families (Fox Genovese 24-27). There were Black families subject to arbitrary disruption, with husbands unable to marry wives or protect them from the harsh claims of ownership. There were Black mothers whose children were taken from them for sale and Black mothers of children sired by the slave owners. There were slaveholders who viewed themselves as the head of one dependent group of women, children and slaves, i.e., the master's family (Oakes 217). These children were classified by law as slaves. Any child born to a slave was deemed to be Black and hence also a slave (Pascoe 12). And, it seems, there were Black "wives" of plantation owners, who functioned as wives, received respect as wives, but nonetheless had to bow to a law and culture built to rationalize slavery. Since that law and culture rendered such a wife and her children slaves, their presence in the master's home yielded a family reality of affection and resentment and a public void controlled by silence and evasion.

Most of us today lack the literary imagination required to project ourselves into the family structure created by ties of blood and barriers of law and culture that deny legal status or recognition to families. We possess some understanding of our own silences, evasions, and dysfunctions in today's "blended" or informal families, but we cannot transfer those forms of knowledge to the blended families of slave owners. Most of us are only prepared to imagine white male exploitation of defenseless Black enslaved women. We cannot imagine the strength, used in private as the counter to a public legal conceit, of a Sally Hemings, negotiating the complications of nineteenth-century white male power over her and her sisters in a world of slavery. Succeeding even partially in such negotiations was undoubtedly unusual, but it was not altogether impossible. The patriarchal rhetoric of planters, claiming to identify "the happiness and protection [of] the slave as a member of his family" gave a Sally Hemings the means of appealing to a public and home-centered stance of honor (Oakes 217).

Seaton, gifted with the playwright's knowledge of the unseen and unheard from the past, imagines the following exchange between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson on the birth of their daughter, Harriet. The dialogue condenses the themes of private affection and white male power to protect and conceal, to love and to evade:

> Sally: We'll shout from the mountain top. This babe belongs to Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson, and no one dares say otherwise.
> Jefferson: Hush, Sal. No need for shouting. This is no one's business but ours.
> Sally: No one's?
> Jefferson: These are family matters. We're safe here, on our little mountain.
> Sally: You'll protect her? From all the cruelty and pain a young girl might suffer.
> Jefferson: From everything. She heard us. Look, she's awake now—ah, she must be greedy for her mother's milk.
> Sally: And her father's love. She's looking right at you.
> Jefferson: She is, isn't she? Such joy. How could there be any hatred in the world?
> Sally: It's all around us, but I won't let it near her.
> Jefferson: Rest now, Sally. (act one, scene two)

Seaton's dialogue, in which Jefferson intimates to Sally the need for secrecy while Sally proclaims her child's purchase on humanity, which must carry recognition with it, prefigures a movement in the plot that is of critical significance. In Seaton's reconstruction of a human settlement, a turning point occurs when Jefferson agrees to Sally's demand that he not disown her in public. Such a refusal would, and in history did, cost Jefferson politically. Later in the play Sally reminds Jefferson of a bargain made in France: she would come home with him on the condition she was free to leave. Sally insists that he not publicly deny their relationship, or, she warns, she will leave her "owner" and her future President, taking their child with her. Jefferson wavers but ultimately agrees to her ultimatum. And indeed the historical Jefferson never did issue a public denial of his relationship with Sally Hemings, despite political pressure to do so. The historical Jefferson's refusal to speak about the relationship may not have been heroic or noble, but at least he did not deny Sally Hemings in any public statement.

For less prominent white men than Jefferson, the private moment of conspiracy might become an open life as family. For such men, the secrecy was reclaimed by the culture, which refused to see what was open to the world and insisted on reading open love as private exploitation and thus permitted by law and custom—but only on the terms of exploitation and betrayal, never on the basis of the honor accorded to marriage in the culture of the nineteenth century. A white man might seek to be honorable in his love of a Black woman so long as law provided for, and even mandated, an ultimate betrayal.

In the words of Jefferson's most recent biographer, "the first half of the 18th century was a thrilling time to be young, white, male, wealthy and Virginian" (Meachem 4). A white man of Jefferson's stature, in Virginia and in the nation, was enmeshed in the webs of family, secrecy and connection that the slave culture of law and custom created. The sexual access of slave owners to Black slaves renders virtually unreadable for twenty-first-century interpreters the spectrum of moral meanings of intimacy between masters and slaves, either generally or in a particular instance. A contemporary inquirer must read sex between masters and slaves as coerced, either with violence or misuse of power. Yet one also necessarily understands, and Seaton's play affirms, that love is a presence among human beings and the complications of perspective and gender and class and legal order alter their meanings as cultures construct and re-construct hierarchies, taboos, and secrets.

Two people, alone together in a locked room, are always conspirators against the proprieties of public spaces. Lovers' conspiracies claim a world, for a time, made of secrets that are theirs alone. Their wondering conspiracy radiates from that room into revelations, shared understandings, accommodations, ambivalence, resentments, socially shaped secrets shorn of the intimacy of collaboration, public misreadings, and betrayals. Every lover risks emotional disaster. Sally and Thomas risked all that either had.

After the Civil War, when white men died intestate or even with a will, other white men intervened to claim land that by operation of a law without relation to color would have belonged to the African American widow. The white claimants argued that whatever the known facts describing the Black woman's presence in the home of a white man and his open treatment of her as men treated wives, the only social or legal reading possible was as that of a servant still seen as a slave (Pascoe 19-27, 38). No fact could possibly alter the cultural meaning of a Black woman's presence in a white man's home.

Yet the privilege of the white male pointed another way, too: if there was good evidence of his intention regarding the disposition of his (material) property, the standing of a white male as the master of his domain meant that his intentions should be honored (Pascoe 25, 36). Further, after the ratification in 1868 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which provided that no person shall be denied the equal protection of the law, some judges began to interpret the Amendment to mean that marriages between the races had to be treated on equal terms with marriages between whites or between Blacks (Pascoe 39).

In Seaton's play, we learn of the subtle interplay of "family" as our intimates with whom we share a private life, a familiarity, knowledge, a kinship and a history and "family" as culture and law define it for public meaning and private power and pride. We learn of the unstated, and partially stated, rules about privacy and silence—what we may know but may not say, what we can do but must hide, how our lower-case family can quarrel about our upper-case family and pride. One can imagine the answers with Sandra Seaton as she explores the themes of race, slavery, and family and, with them, emotional autonomy and moral choice.

We see, in the contrast between Sally's purchase on a life and her brother James's bitter alienation, that women might be sheltered from the rough public world of male competition, but a Black male could not be given safe internal passage into a bargain about domesticity, the privileges of class in private, and the indignities of public silence. In contrast to Sally, then, Seaton gives us an angry James, brother of both of Thomas Jefferson's "wives," cynical, bitter, and unwilling to bargain about the nineteenth-century reading of manhood.

Seaton's play in recreating the emotional temperature at Monticello during slavery, performs an imaginative reconstruction paralleling the attempts of the courts after the Civil War and the commitment to legal equality embodied in the Fourteenth Amendment to come to terms with the complications and possibilities of love between the races and the sexes. After the war, some judges read a text of equality as meaning that sexual love between a white man and a Black woman assumed the standing of marriage, given the normal indicia of marital status in "holding out" as married over time (Pascoe 39). As Pascoe recounts, one Alfred Foster, a slaveholder in Texas, had emancipated his five mixed-race children before the war, and, after the war, left his property to the now freedwoman, Leah Foster, whom he could acknowledge, implicitly, to be his wife (18). Unlike Alfred Foster, Jefferson used extralegal as well as legal means to free his children by Sally Hemings. (Madison and Eston Hemings were freed in Jefferson's will, while Beverly and Harriet were allowed to leave Monticello.) Foster and his family had the good fortune to straddle two eras of legal construction and social code. Before the war, the human heart might read equality into a relationship that had to be denied in public; but what, exactly, besides a sexual bond, was in the heart of each member of a family bonded by blood and divided by the law and culture? We can allow writers like Sandra Seaton to instruct us on the hearts of the Fosters and Jeffersons, Black and white, of their eras.

Seaton brilliantly presents us with the intuitions that the present day may obscure for those less gifted with the playwright's empathic knowledge. In flashbacks, James rails bitterly about his deal with freedom in America, while Sally is hopeful that she can live as the wife (as she was the daughter) of a powerful white man, trust Thomas Jefferson to honor his legally void moral pledge to her, and provide for her children's safety and future welfare, despite yielding, inevitably, to the social imperatives of the time:

> Sally: I go to James and tell him what the Mister has promised. (Sally imagines James in the room.) James, don't go. James . . . He swore to me. I will have extraordinary privileges. No work to stain my tender hands, the run of the house. My own gloves, gowns, robe *a la française,* skirts draped *a la polonaise*. James, I love him.
>
> James: And he loves you, his slave? His white—no—his near-white slave. Master Jefferson—a generous man. An oh so-generous man. He serves you the crumbs while he dines at the table. Girl, have you lost every bit of the sense our good mother gave you? Love? What could you know about love?
>
> Sally: We will be as husband and wife. (act one, scene five)

Why are they so different? For James, the loss he suffers in America after his time in France as a free man is total. In appearance, he is virtually a white male. He has the refinement of a child of

Monticello and the knowledge of the world vouchsafed to Martha Jefferson's brother. He should be empowered in every way—culture, gender, appearance—but he lives in a culture that defines him legally, and culturally because of the weight of law, as lacking all power. James is male and white of skin, but none of it counts. Thomas Jefferson, another male who imagines he has compromised principles and preferences within the constraints of culture and law, even as his compromise involves the prevailing claim of white males to rule a private domain, disapproves of his de facto brother-in-law, James.

James lacks grace and insists on trumpeting the claims of liberty, claims eloquently articulated for all Americans by his "kin," Thomas Jefferson. James's story, for James, is that of race and injustice and nothing else. There is no compensation imaginable and no saving grace that Thomas Jefferson can claim and share with him. Made legally free by Jefferson, James faces the prose of life in America, where racial boundaries are everyone's concern. For Jefferson, life is compromise, accommodation—for a white, male, wealthy Virginian, and for his plantation kin, confined firmly within the bonds of racial law and culture. Seaton imagines the family talk between Thomas and Sally when they learn of James's suicide:

> Sally: James is a man.
> Jefferson: Was.
> Sally: He can go wherever he pleases. Can't he?
> Jefferson: He could, at one time. He was spoiled.
> Sally: Spoiled!!
> Jefferson: Spoiled here. Spoiled in France. Why did we bring them here? He should have gone back.
> Sally: Back? Back where?
> Jefferson: Back to Africa. (Sally lets out a painful cry.) There's no place here for a free black man.
> Sally: James? But how would anyone know? Only the sharpest eye could see his blackness.
> Jefferson: Plenty of men make it their business to know. (act one, scene seven)

This passage alludes to Thomas Jefferson's lifelong belief in the colonization solution to slavery. It was a common belief among supporters of gradual compensated emancipation that removing Black people to Africa would create a free society planned as a society without slavery or "the unwanted presence of blacks" (Foner 17).

Jefferson's idea was to purchase and deport all newborns; he viewed humanitarian concern about separating infants from their mothers as "straining at a gnat" (Foner 18). Seaton subtly weaves into the family dynamic Jefferson's cold-hearted sense of how to solve slavery even when the idea was contrary to family ties and sentiments. Thus, he tells Sally that her brother had need only to leave his country and family and go to a country not of his birth with which he had no connection.

In the play, Sally mocks Jefferson for blaming the King of England for the problem of slavery and of his family. The historical Jefferson abdicated any hope that his generation could succeed in its efforts to ban slavery from any territories the US might acquire and thus begin to extricate the country from the moral complications of a deep connection to a race exploited by, disdained by, and yet made part of the American family. He descended into a public silence on slavery (Feherenbacher 46-7). Seaton's domestic Jefferson is loyal to those whom he loves, but also dense and in denial about their needs. He hopes each of them will somehow find forms of accommodation that will shift the greater burden of ambiguity from him to them. As a public figure, he hoped that Blacks not of his flesh and blood might bear the burden of the bad choice for which the King of England alone bore responsibility.

We see a claim on privacy as the property and cultural asset of a white male: Thomas Jefferson, insisting to Sally on obedience to the rules for practical reasons (they cannot be public because of who he is). We see his white daughter Patsy serving as the voice of white male power and public opinion, speaking about white male sexual power as a private domain, accepting the power within that domain, but chafing at the loss of public face that a white wife would give up to allow her husband both private power and public prestige. We see Patsy expressing private affection for a family connection that is inconvenient for her aspirations to all the incidental privileges that her father, with his white male power intact, could bestow on her in public settings. Patsy loves Betty Hemings, her mother Martha's "step-mother," but she also requires the acceptance of white society in her Virginia and Washington set:

> Betty: You wanted to be first.

> Patsy: The first one to climb up in Bett's lap. (Patsy starts to fuss with her hair, looks in mirror.) My hair's so hard to take care of these days. Remember, Bett, when I was a little girl, the way you dressed my hair. After Mother died, we fought over you. Sally and I, we'd come dancing over to you, twirling, holding hands. You'd dress mine first, then you'd dress Sally's. I was first. I've always been first, Bett. Haven't I? (Betty doesn't answer.) Bett, Bett? All my friends want to know about Monticello. All of it. (act one, scene three)

Patsy frets with Betty Hemings again, the very woman who stepped in to act as a mother to Patsy, after her own mother died:

> Patsy: I'm not talking about your stories now. All the ugly rumors . . . Why can't they be more discreet? Bett? You understand. I was hoping he'd get over it, but no. You heard her. "The Mister." A married woman's name for her husband. Now that he's president, in the public eye . . . she was talking about my own father. It's bad enough her staying here, but a woman her color? You see things my way, Bett. Don't you? (act one, scene three)

We see and hear Thomas Jefferson, the proponent of liberty and the change to which each generation is entitled, arguing for privacy and secrecy, which carries with it male sexual power. We see the expositor of liberty trapped within his culture and making claims grounded, legally, in white male privilege but pressed upon Sally by a private Thomas Jefferson as verities about grace in appearance and the conventions of class. We see a male family member, exempt from the cost of racial hierarchy, lecturing his family to be flexible, like him: "I could never handle James. He had everything here. He knew that . . . Always running off somewhere" (act one, scene eight). Families today may recognize such lectures from a family member, dense about differences that persist in social bargains, pleased with his own imaginary compromises, and repeatedly asking family members to be more like him.

The loveliest grace we see resides firmly in Betty Hemings, always steadfast and loyal in all her affections and dispensations. And we see a touch of grace in the plot movement when Jefferson, because Sally has a power over his heart and perhaps his honor, helps her evade the snares of a legal and cultural fiction that made her life a constant negotiation over those things we all hold most dear: for Sally and other enslaved women in pre-Civil War South, their children above all, and their right to sexual autonomy and the comforts of love. Enslaved women lived within a fiction that remitted their sexual lives to the secrecy of the master's home or to the confines of a slave cabin that housed a family with no legal rights, recognition, or power of any type, legal or social. Such families could be disrupted by the auction block or by a master's sexual demands (Fox-Genovese 325-26). Sally chose a family that could be disrupted by silence, evasion, or her own choice to return to freedom in France. In Seaton's play Patsy frets, but Sally finds a version of comfort and Jefferson manages at least a pale imitation of honor:

> Patsy: You're right, Papa. Now everywhere I go. It's all I hear. At church, at tea . . .
>
> Jefferson: The rest of the world has nothing to do with what happens here.
>
> Patsy: Even my own servants. No matter where I am, I hear all the whispering about Monticello.
>
> Jefferson: There's nothing to know. (act one, scene two)

In one speech of Patsy's, after drunken men spoil a party with a vulgar ditty about Sally and Thomas, Seaton perfectly captures Patsy's mixture of love for Sally as family and concern about public opinion:

> Patsy: Did you weep? For your babies, your little ones? I wept for you, Sally. For you and your babies. The most evil songs.
>
> Sally: They'd all been waiting for months, to ridicule us.
>
> Patsy: Politics is one thing. His allies up in Washington city, they want what's best for his party. Turn the country over to the Federalists? No one wants that. But this—to see the way we're ridiculed here in our own home. (Sally tries to speak.) Enough. I said enough. No one loves you more than I do, Sally but understand one thing. This family will survive. It's really very simple . . . Father must deny all this publicly, but that won't be enough. Not any more. As long as you're here, Sally, they'll never leave the poor Jeffersons alone.(act two, scene four)

For Sally Hemings, the comparisons of what is and what might be were less stark than for her brother James. Her love for Thomas Jefferson provides a saving grace, despite James's bitter denial that such love has any purchase on the Real. Sally is a female in nineteenth-century America. One must never slight the meaning of slavery, yet the rules for women in marriage were sufficiently harsh that feminists of the nineteenth century often compared it to slavery (Hartog 24).

Sally's choice—one between the bondage of legal slavery and a life on her own without means—was either to remain in France and exist within the upending of cultural norms that mattered to her as a child of Virginia and Monticello or to return to Virginia, her original home, with the man who had become her beloved and accept the constraints of the time on her gender, magnified by her race and slavery. So, for her, the comparison was a complicated mix of race, class, and law. And one can imagine that her hopes for change for her children could be informed by Thomas Jefferson's writings and beliefs that were of greater moral force than his precepts about personal grace, as manifested in Seaton's creation of his domestic chatter. Why should not Thomas Jefferson's wife in all but law believe, as Martin Luther King affirmed much later in his "Letter from Birmingham City Jail," that "the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be as a people, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America" (301).

Hendrik Hartog explains that, "Law was not everything, in a marriage." Love, lust, hatred, duty, friendship, respect, affection, abandonment, commitment, greed, and self-sacrifice, all the feelings and practices that made up a nineteenth-century marriage, were not primarily legal. . . . [L]aw was there when a husband and wife struggled or negotiated over the terms of power between them . . ." (24). For wealthy white wives, coverture, which subsumed the wife's legal personhood into that of the husband, was not so harsh as the law on the books might suggest. The law would conclude that women of means may not be treated according to the full logic of coverture. Men were not to be arbitrary in the exercise of their power. For poor women, the law considered men's violence to be their lot, as simply the ways of the poor. The private domain of the wealthy assumed a certain level of civilized conduct to be the real-life premise (and law could find a way to confirm the premise), while the private domain of the poor was thought to be insecure and brutish. The idea of class constrained the behavior of men, and the full force of the legal presumption of an entire male power within marriage was generally not made a presence in the lives of wealthy women.

Sally was “married” to a politically prominent plantation owner, so her salient comparison would be with the married women of means, who could share some of their husband’s status and privilege. Yet without her connection to Thomas Jefferson, she could fall in class and find herself a poor woman married to a poor man, with few comforts and the cultural hazards attendant on coverture for poor women, with little recourse to the law as protection. Her protection, such as it was, could come only from “the habits of the upper class,” habits that might have the cultural hold to guide the conscience of a white slave owner who wrote of revolution and freedom. Like legal wives of the day, Sally negotiated with her “spouse” “the terms of power between them” (Hartog 24) but with fewer of the social resources of legal wives.

Jefferson, in pre-Civil War Virginia, ironically used the conventions of a slave society to give something better than a sexual bargain to a strong woman, dear to him through family connection but with no public power or family prestige of any kind. In using the materials of modern life to imagine the intimate life of Thomas and Sally, Sandra Seaton claims dignity for a strong Southern woman, allied with Jefferson in love and kinship, and capable of private power in a family bound by blood and frustration. Seaton imagines a softening of the harsh logic of the power of a master over a servant whom he may claim as property. Sally could trust Jefferson’s honor to lend force to his promise to protect her and her children. Sally believed in a personal promise by Jefferson not to deny her or her children because that was the bond of dignity and honor that she could enforce. The vulgarity of japes aimed at her by cruel outsiders could be withstood. Those who jeered at her had made no promises and had no standing in the covenant she had made for her family and for herself. For Patsy, in contrast, the voice of public opinion pervades her life. For Sally, it’s a din of vulgarity that Jefferson pleads with her to ignore. Sally has reason to understand public opinion as irrelevant to the moral dimensions and dignity of her family life, and Patsy has reasons to give it substance. For Sally, public opinion is a bedrock of her enslavement, and for Patsy, “polite usage” is her path to high status in a white-dominated society. Jefferson works to keep Sally convinced that public opinion is of no import to her, even as he bows to it by keeping his family a secret.

> Sally: Poems, Mister Jefferson? I am reading poems. John Quincy Adams' book of poems. About Monticellian Sally!
>
> Jefferson: Alright! Father in Heaven! Help me. Please. You don't rest, do you? These fools don't know you. (act two, scene five)

Later Seaton gives us an echo of Callender, the mocking voice of opinions outside the room where lovers conspire, a voice combining agreement among the vessels of Northern and Southern public opinion and validating both the pessimism of Sally's brother, James Hemings, about the possibility of real love between a slave owner and a slave and the desperate view of Patsy that calls for bowing to opinion and seizing the advantage of marriages into "the finest families."

> Callender: A slut as common as the pavement. Keep her in your house, Jefferson. Raise her bastards. They'll take over. They'll destroy everything we've fought so hard to preserve. We'll have nothing. Nothing. Do you hear me? Keep it up. Mate with her. Every one of us . . . our whole country . . . we'll lie in ruins. (act two, scene five)

Before the Civil War, one aspect of the culture clash between North and South was the brazenly unashamed claims of Southern slaveowners that slavery was beneficial to the slaves, especially in contrast to the allegedly heartless, voracious exploitation of workers in the North. John Calhoun, perhaps slavery's most determined champion, argued that labor necessarily had to be bought at the cheapest price and extracted from reluctant workers, or, in more elemental terms, the "stronger [would] always monopolize all the advantages for itself and . . . transfer all the burthens to the weaker" (Fox-Genovese and Genovese 670). Slaves in the South, theologians of slavery claimed, had a better deal than Northern workers. Slaves had masters who clothed and fed them and cared for them in their old age. Southern masters gave their "property" the security of bondage; the slaves' deal was set. By contrast, Northern workers had no promises from capitalists; they worked in harsh factories and could be fired at will. They were, theologian James Henley Thornwell said, no more than slaves petitioning for a master (Freehling 67-68).

One of the many important elements neglected in Calhoun's account was the sexual exploitation of Black women by white slave owners. The portrait of gentlemanly duty to lesser beings could not include the facts of slave female vulnerability and white male abuse. Yet there was also social access, of a hazardous kind but in a context of shared places and connected lives of Black women to white men, on terms surely initiated by the sexual desires of men but capable of transcending the worst readings public opinion would impose upon them. Let me hasten to note that this possible outcome of the bonds of love in slavery times between races, one lover empowered by law and gender and the other without the protections of civil existence, was surely fragile and rare. Privacy was, of course, a shield most of all for white male power. Yet Sally and Thomas were drawing upon some part of the Jeffersonian ideal of human liberty, serving as pioneers by drawing upon a private autonomy superior to a legal construct. Their blended family, contained within the walls of Monticello, gives Seaton the playwright ample room to explore the complications and experimentations with the American family as it had evolved from the beginnings of the Virginia colony on Jamestown Island.

Seaton's generous imagination gives a story of love, a believable portrayal of two people rescuing from a culture of oppression and denial the human instinct for tenderness and trust. They must fight to hold onto the lover's conspiracy that begins in a locked room. Sally and Thomas contested one another, white family members, enslaved family members, and the vicious power of public mockery. Did they prevail? In *A Bed Made in Heaven*, Betty Hemings directs her daughter, as well as those of us today who try to imagine with Sandra Seaton the shared life of Sally and Thomas, to the heavens for the answer: "The Lord judges" (act two, scene eight).

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SALLY HEMINGS-THOMAS JEFFERSON GENEAOLOGY

THOMAS JEFFERSON AND MARTHA WAYLES JEFFERSON

Thomas Jefferson's parents: Peter (1708-1757) and Jane Jefferson (1721-1776)

Martha Wayles Jefferson's parents: John Wayles (1715-1773) and Martha Eppes Wayles (1712-1748)

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) married Martha Wayles (1748-1782)

Children*: Martha Jefferson Randolph (also known as Patsy) (1772 -1836)

Mary or Maria Jefferson Eppes (also known as Polly) (1778-1804)

*Survived to adulthood

ELIZABETH HEMINGS AND JOHN WAYLES

John Wayles 1715-1773) —-Elizabeth Hemings (1735-1807)

Children: Robert (1762-1819)

James (1765-1801)

Thenia (1767-1795)

Critta (1769-1850)

Peter (1770-after 1834)

Sally, also known as Sarah: (1773 -1835)

SALLY HEMINGS AND THOMAS JEFFERSON

Children: Harriet I (1795-97)

William Beverley (1798-?)

Unamed daughter (1799)

Harriet II (1801-?)

James Madison (1805-78)

Thomas Eston (1808-1856)

Note: John Wayles was the father of both Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson's wife Martha Wayles Jefferson.

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THE PLAYS OF SANDRA SEATON: A BIBLIOGRAPHY AND PRODUCTION HISTORY

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The Will. Directed by Andy Callis. St. Stephen's Community Church, Lansing, Michigan, 2013.

Sally. Directed by Robert Gainer. Elaine Langone Center, Bucknell University, 2012.

Music History. Directed by John Lepard. Arena Theatre, Michigan State University, 2010.

A Chance Meeting. Directed by David Wolber. Arthur Miller Theater, University of Michigan, 2009.

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The Bridge Party. Directed by Mary Job. Arena Theatre, Michigan State University, 2000.

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