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Jess's Search for an Understanding of Truth in Fred Chappell's Kirkman Tetralogy

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

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May 2015

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ABSTRACT

Jess's Search for an Understanding of Truth in Fred Chappell's Kirkman Tetralogy

by

Alex L. Blumenstock

In Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, narrator Jess Kirkman synthesizes a multiplicity of perspectives for understanding the nature of truth. Blurring the distinction between art and life, Jess's narrative structure mirrors the imaginative reconstruction of experience; the novels are largely non-chronological emotive interactions with and reflections of his most salient memories and imaginings. Synthesizing an impressive cacophony of voices, Jess's stories both describe and apply the wisdom and tales Jess acquires from and with his family members. Each story informs the prior and the next, and the rhizomatic interaction between language, narrative, and reader explores Jess's numerous identities and understandings as narratives venture through space, time, and imagination.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy expresses concerns of authorship, identity, ontology, and epistemology often neglected in popular styles of fiction. Chappell calls the tetralogy's "unreliable narrator" Jess Kirkman an "addled quester after truth" ("Too Many Freds" 265). His narratives are imaginative reflections on his most salient memories and imaginative interpretations. Each story blends into and informs the prior and the next, constructing Jess's shifting understandings of truth.

Jess takes many approaches to understanding the world and finds that truth is a trickier concept than he initially imagines; no truth seems stable, even that of his own identity. Within the metanarrative of the tetralogy, Jess publishes the novels using the pseudonym of "Fred Chappell," a move which relieves Chappell of responsibility for the novels' incongruities, which are instead posited as slippery aspects of Jess's autobiographical accounts. Although Chappell has expressed misgivings with his surrender of the tetralogy's authorship, he notes that the metafictionality "makes explicit such problems as authorial responsibility, the relative importance or unimportance of the artist's materials, the concept of the willing suspension of disbelief, the notion of truth in art, and a number of others" ("Too Many Freds" 264). The move allows for an analysis of the novels as autobiographical reconstruction of identity and quest for personal values; my own analyses thus recognize Jess as author and generally neglects to mention Chappell.

Echoing a historical thinking derived from the fields of psychology and philosophy, Chappell's tetralogy espouses an idea of the self as changing with the accruing of experiences and the resulting reassessment of values. The tetralogy, written by a mature Jess, recounts the

experiences of "young" Jess, creating a "bridge" between selves separated by at least fifteen years. I often place the adjectives "mature" and "young" before "Jess," more for ease of clarity than accuracy, since selves undergo near-constant reevaluation, a process that alters the content of autobiography and its reflected values. Chappell agrees that "Autobiography is changed by events and impressions contemporaneous with its composition" ("Too Many Freds" 257) and is "untrustworthy" (258), leading readers to question how authoritative mature Jess can be when describing the developments of his younger selves, as his mature perspective shades his depictions of earlier perspectives.

Psychological research, too, posits that external influences, in addition to temporal influences, render the self dynamic. Considering the written self in her article "Memories Under Construction," cultural psychologist María Cabillas notes that

Despite the fact that, as activity, writing takes place at the present of the inscription, the temporalities that it activates are open to past, future, and as our material manifests, different positions in the present. This psychological dynamics correspond [sic] to the inner realm of an individual, and yet they are intimately connected to historical and cultural influences. (324)

Throughout the tetralogy, Jess attempts to trace the influences that mold him into the author and poet that he becomes. He recognizes that his younger selves possess notions of identity and understanding that stem from largely uncontrollable contextual circumstances, and he also demonstrates various attempts to use his authorial identity to unify the various perspectives of his multiple selves. However, incongruities persist, and his identity never achieves unity.

Furthermore, the self as a socially defined construct carries implications for reader interpretation. Having denied the tetralogy the ability to function as truly autobiographical for

Jess or Chappell (because their identities have shifted since their inscription), the onus of interpretation falls upon the reader, and in some sense, the tetralogy acts as the reader's autobiography. Chappell writes

I put as much autobiography into my poems and stories when I write them as readers do when they read them. If my experiences did not contribute to the composition of the works, I could not write them; if my readers' experiences did not contribute to their reading, they could not comprehend these products of shared imagination. ("Too Many Freds" 262)

The novels demonstrate a concern with transmission of values and the discovery of shared truths, which relies on the sharing of imagination; the stories of the tetralogy accomplish the feat of shared imagination by contextualizing truths of experience in narratives in ways that imitate self-conceptualization.

Contributing to the impossibility of a unified identity, memory is imaginatively reconstructed in fragments, a process reflected in the novels. As Bizzaro notes in "'Growth of a Poet's Mind' and the Problem of Autobiography" when discussing *I Am One of You Forever*, the stories in the tetralogy "are selections only, chosen from many that might have been told" (87). Jess suggests numerous times in the tetralogy that his concerns encompass salient memories only, thus providing readers with a mere glimpse of his formative influences. In the psychology article "The Narrative Construction of the Self: Selfhood as a Rhizomatic Story," Sermijin, Devlieger, and Loots note that when the self is read as a story, it is

a patchwork of infinite, never-ending narrative constructions about oneself.

Through time, the stitching of the patchwork quilt takes on a course that connects

certain elements, providing a time-limited embroidered piece that, however, could never account for the entire self. (642)

Although Sermijin, Devlieger, and Loots warn that they cannot remain entirely consistent with the theory as originally posited, they suggest the possibility of a "narrative self" as rhizomatic.

The convergence of shifting identities, reconstructed memories, and somewhat fragmented narratives interact in the tetralogy to create meaning in a manner that resembles the rhizome, a root structure. As envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*, the rhizome is a structure that "has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle.... A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus" (21). While the novels' narrative structure is not entirely rhizomatic due to the central continuity of the author's voice, the rhizome model accurately describes Jess's process of conceptual mapping. Deleuze and Guattari describe a rhizome as "open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group, or social formation" (12). Although linear narratives comprise the novels, their arrangement is largely nonlinear and non-chronological; many provide numerous points of entry. The opening line of the first novel, for instance, begins in the middle, with "Then there was one brief time" (1). Language, too, can be described as a rhizome, a process neatly captured with Derrida's concept of "différance," which posits that the meaning of language is never fixed—the meanings of language change over time and must be created by oppositional designations. The rhizomatic interaction between language and narrative describe the reader's construction of Jess's identity as well. The conceptions readers form of Jess undergoes constant reevaluation, as plateaus form in the act of reading that suggest

concreteness before dissolving into numerous states of consciousness, all identified by the name "Jess."

Relying on the multiplicity of perspectives suggested by Jess's narrative, my analysis of the tetralogy explores some of the numerous understandings of reaching truths that, momentarily, he seems to endorse.

CHAPTER 2

NOT IDEALS: ISOLATING TRUTH IN *I AM ONE OF YOU FOREVER*

The first novel of Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, *I Am One of You Forever*, explores narrator Jess Kirkman's boyhood attempts to understand the world. Attempting to find truth with his narrative, Jess uses a fragmented non-chronological approach, guiding the reader from a point in the beginning of the novel in which he is alienated from his family to a point at the end in which he considers whether he finds acceptance. Assessing the dichotomy of alienation/acceptance, Jess imaginatively reconstructs his memories to interpret his understanding of absolute values. Most scholars argue that in the final section of the novel Jess's alienation resolves into acceptance and support their argument by pointing to the book's title. The novel explores rather than resolves Jess's alienation; throughout, Jess's narratives consider and ultimately reject the absolutes of dichotomous ideals as models of understanding.

Narrator Jess Kirkman functions as author Fred Chappell's alter-ego; the character publishes his novels under the pseudonym of "Fred Chappell," a technique of attributing authorship that blurs the distinction between biographical truths and fictions. Written and narrated by a mature Jess, *I Am One* details the events of about twenty years earlier, when Jess is about nine years old (134); the thematic selection and non-chronological arrangement of anecdotes explore Jess's anxiety of alienation without resolving the anxiety. Jess's narrative technique allows him to interject qualitative value judgments from perspectives both young and mature, and these judgments are further informed by interactions between presented narratives and experiences that occur between related events and the time at which they are written. Mature Jess frames young Jess's feelings of alienation as a struggle with absolute dichotomous values to reflect young Jess's model of knowledge, a model mature Jess demonstrates as insufficient by

never acceding to a binary in framework or judgment. Although Bizzaro notes that the characters of young and mature Jess "are not always in agreement" (83), mature Jess acknowledges the value of young Jess's voice as most immediate to the experiences that mature Jess narrates; with his greater breadth and depth of experience, mature Jess provides insights regarding young Jess's experiences. Mature Jess never fully endorses one perspective as truth, instead seeking understanding through the interplay of his narrative voices.

Jess often straddles the boundary between accuracy and inaccuracy in the Kirkman tetralogy, but he remains focused on truth. Truths for Jess, however, do not necessarily entail empirical facts; Jess suggests that the impact of an experience and its shading by other experiences are more important than their accurate representation. In "Chappell's Aesthetic Agenda," Abowitz notes that "[f]rom the first sentence of the first chapter in *I Am One of You Forever*, Chappell subtly warns us that Jess's narration is not to be fully trusted," giving two examples of Jess's narrative ambiguities: Jess says that his father Joe Robert and his adopted stepbrother Johnson Gibbs fight the first time they meet, but later says that they instead have fought the next day. Also, Jess says that his Uncle Zeno always starts his stories a certain way, then later says that he instead starts stories without preamble (Abowitz 148). As memory is imperfect, these are rather minor details not central to the profundity of the experience in Jess's personal recollection and are thus glossed over unnoticed by the observer; as Jess says in *Farewell I'm Bound to Leave You*, "What you forget ain't worth remembering" (40). The details of experiences do not strike Jess as important compared to the meanings signified. Furthermore, Jess values the malleability of memory as a means of aiding his interpretive process; when telling a story, he uses imaginative constructions and organization to emphasize details that convey his intended meaning

Ignoring chronology in favor of an experience-centered approach, Jess re-orders the past in a way that reflects his process of growth into an author and poet. In "Metanarrative and the Story of Life in the Kirkman Tetralogy," Spencer Edmunds notes this ordering is "a narrative that is more like the unpredictable, helter-skelter story of life than the artificial construct of Realism" (93). Focusing on the salient details of his experiences and the understandings that informed them, Jess's novels express his process of achieving truths. Chappell notes that "we all hear truths only when we are off-guard, when our defenses are down. . . . to disarrange the surface of reality in some fashionably weird manner will kill his purpose, for [the artist] is after home truths" ("Two Modes" 339). Writing in a mode that more closely resembles oral traditions rather than formal literary movements, mature Jess freely makes connections that map the developments of his conception of knowledge and discoveries of truths.

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome proves useful for considering the issue of alienation in the novel. The novel that mature Jess writes consists of ten chapters, with italicized sections at the beginning, middle, and end (the same structure employed in all of the tetralogy's novels); despite its immaculate ordering, the novel conveys little sense of a beginning or end to events, suggesting that Jess's understanding of his experiences change significantly over the years. Each chapter constitutes a stand-alone story informed by the experiences recounted in other chapters and elsewhere in the tetralogy (and experiences concealed from readers). The dimensional blending of distant narrative voices and interjected value judgments suggest mature Jess's interpretation as nonlinear and in a process of constant re-evaluation, always in the middle of construction yet never complete.

Jess uses a rhizomatic approach to explore his earlier attempts to map knowledge upon dichotomous representational concepts, binary oppositions such as truth/fiction,

perfect/imperfect, divine/ordinary, and alienation/inclusion. Truth for young Jess is an ideal knowledge validated by shared experience. While he does not mention the words "perfect" or "divine" in the novel, he and his family represent these concepts with Helen of Troy and God, respectively; young Jess presumes both truly exist, alluding to them in contexts in which he believes they represent truth. Throughout the novel, Jess attempts to secure mutual understanding of ideal concepts with shared experience, but his failures to do so increase his feelings of alienation; he feels that everyone has the truth except for him. The novel's attempt to move from alienation at the beginning to inclusion at the end represents the approach that young Jess takes to understanding; he believes that the understandings he does not share with his family exclude him. However, mature Jess relies on a model of a multiplicity of understandings; mature Jess insightfully recognizes that dichotomies, including alienation/inclusion, inadequately describe most understandings. Restricted to his own limited experiences, young Jess cannot share the ideals he imagines; likewise, he cannot grasp absolutely the ideals of anyone else, a process that would permit absolute inclusion. Thus, by novel's end, Jess is neither alienated nor included, but somewhere between. However, mature Jess does not use a continuum to represent his paradigm shift, either. Rather than finding contentment between alienation and inclusion, mature Jess's nonlinear structuring and unreliability suggest a rhizomatic mapping of his unconscious conceptions. Experiences past and present alter his descriptions of events, and his process of re-evaluation dynamically alters his perception of the intensity of his alienation based on the dimensional and contextual salience of the stories and details he describes. He reconstructs experiences of both extremes of the alienation/inclusion dichotomy, which his narratives reveal to be unstable interpretations linked to the intensity of dimensional fluctuations rather than absolute truths.

In the first italicized section of the novel, "The Overspill," Jess establishes the alienation he feels from his parents by using a dream sequence. Jess helps Joe Robert build a small bridge for his mother Cora. However, the bridge is washed away when the local paper mill releases water and causes a small flood. Cora returns from a trip just in time to see the bridge being washed away. A tear streams down her cheek. The tear initiates Jess's dream-like sequence in which the tear expands to encompass both him and his parents. Jess recalls that he swims clumsily toward his parents, but he never reaches them. The image acts as a metaphor for Jess's alienation; although he remains in the same tear—the same experience—as his parents, he cannot absolutely share the experience with them.

"The Overspill" also demonstrates young Jess's understanding of inference as a means of interpretation, though it is not yet a skill for which he possesses aptitude. Joe Robert "gestured toward the swamped bridge and the red ribbon fluttered in his fingers" and "understanding came into [Cora's] face, little by little" (6). Cora infers much from little. Similarly, demonstrating the malleable subjectivity of memories, the tear that falls across her cheek may have been inconsequential in anyone else's mind. However, in Jess's recollection of the event, Cora's tear grows to encompass him and his parents; Jess imaginatively creates meaning by connecting details in his memory, a process he repeats throughout the novel. The memories that Jess relates are some of the earliest that he can recall having an influence on him, but Jess's understandings of his memories require an expanded range of reference that he does not possess until he matures. Bizzaro notes that

We see the young boy's unwitting insight that it will take the distance of time and place for him to truly understand that "in crossing the bridge I was entering a different world, not simply going into the garden." We recognize this as the voice

of young Jess and understand that the implied author, mature Jess, Jess reflecting on this experience across time and space, now recognizes the significance of this bridge to his growth. (87)

The flattening of memory that occurs with the passage of time ensures that events are never recalled quite as they have occurred, in exactly the same order, with the same pervading feelings and sentiments that they carry at the time of their occurrence. Joe Robert's death in *Look Back All the Green Valley*, much like Johnson's death in *I Am One*, gives Jess constant pain, but the intensity of pain varies: ten years after his father's death, Jess says "my sense of loss had diminished and the vividness of his memory had dimmed. But lately, both had returned with fresh force" (60). Mirroring Jess's implied understanding of alienation in *I Am One*, Jess understands pain in *Look Back* as a constant shaded by the salience of other memories, experiences, and feelings, rather than conceptualizing it as binary. Furthermore, regarding his father's death, Jess says he "was pursuing the image of his spirit, a diminishing image, through a wilderness of time-tangled shadows" (*Look Back* 79); as intensity diminishes, accurate representations become lost, recoverable only by reflection and reconstruction. While mature Jess offers many qualitative analyses of his experiences, many of his discoveries are implicit in his narrative, connections he glimpses by sifting through cumulative memories.

In contrast, young Jess often assumes that an authority dispenses truth and that truths may be easily shared. Young Jess discounts the necessity of experience and reflection. However, his family members sometimes exclude him from information they share with each other, such as when Johnson observes a peep show through a "binocular contraption," that Joe Robert confiscates from Jess (*I Am One* 32-33). Jess assumes that he is excluded from truths known and shared among others, which increases his sense of alienation from his family:

When I was ninety-nine years old and sitting on the porch in a rocking chair combing my long white beard, some towhead youngun would come up and ask, "What's it mean, grampaw, what is the world about?" And I would lean over and dribble tobacco spit into a rusty tin can and say, "I don't know, little boy. The sons of bitches never would tell me." (33)

Jess's view that shared understandings of experience forms the basis of inclusion is further established when Joe Robert, who exerts considerable influence over him, comments that the reason he likes Johnson so much is because "because he thinks exactly like I do. He even talks like me, a little bit" (92). Ironically, the bond of shared understanding that exist between Joe Robert and Johnson alienates Jess because he lacks, and desperately seeks, such a bond with Joe Robert.

Jess presents an instance in which he attempts to obtain a shared understanding with Joe Robert in chapter three, "The Beard," when Jess's bearded Uncle Gurton visits the Kirkmans, and the family is "thrilled at the prospect of viewing the legendary fleece" (48); however, the beard represents an inaccessible truth. Jess speculates that what his Uncle Gurton's beard looked like, "only Uncle Gurton and the almighty and omniscient God could say" (50). The experience of Gurton's beard is divine, knowable only to Gurton and God. Nonetheless, the desire to experience the beard tucked into Gurton's overalls festers in Joe Robert; he says, "I'm bound and determined to see that beard, every inch of it. I'll never sleep easy again till I do" (54). Joe Robert implicates Jess in a scheme to view the beard. After slipping a sleeping draught into Gurton's food, Jess and Joe Robert sneak into Gurton's room and unleash the beard. Chaos ensues as the beard fills the house. Emphasizing the divinity of the beard, Joe Roberts says "My God" three times (59). Jess and Joe Robert realize that they have made a mistake; direct receipt of the divine

truth proves incomprehensible. Jess narrates, "I realized, maybe for the first time, that my father wasn't always the safest protection in the world... I was ready to leave, figuring Uncle Gurton was just one too many for us" (56-57). By contextualizing his memories within other memories, Jess realizes that this is the moment when he begins looking to sources outside of Joe Robert in order to understand his experiences. Thus, the authority of his father fails to provide Jess with a truth, and the shared experience of the beard likewise fails to provide any ideal of divine truth; instead the beard's unveiling suggests the impossibility of truly knowing another. Similarly, in "Irony and Allegory in *I Am One of You Forever*," Sally Sullivan suggests that the beard is an allegory for Jess's anxiety about the injustice of invading Gurton's privacy (123). If divine truth regards the injustice of privacy invasion, surely that is not the ideal of divinity Jess has in mind; the experience is an impetus for the revision of Jess's ideals of divinity and inclusion.

Jess further explores the nature of shared truths in chapter four, "The Change of Heart," when Joe Robert confronts a religious man named Canary who believes he possesses knowledge of divine truth, but despite wanting to share his supposed truths, Canary cannot convince anyone because his truths lack experiential proof. In "Tracing the Hawk's Shadow: Fred Chappell as Storyteller," Karen McKinney posits that "Canary's "stories fail; they have no effect on their audience except irritation because there exists no shared truth between storyteller and audience" (222). Joe Robert pokes fun at Canary's position of extreme subjectivity; Joe Robert picks up a meat cleaver and professes to have had a vision that "Canary is not to be trusted" (66). However, when Jess's grandmother Annie Barbara learns of the incident, she chides Joe Robert for "Making fun of somebody's religion" (67) and tells him that he "wouldn't know how to hear" God (68). Although Annie Barbara is religious, the difference between her and Canary is that she does not attempt to push her religion because, for her, truths are discovered through reflection.

Jess says "Many questions came into my mind to ask her, but I knew she wouldn't answer. She would just tell me to spend more time on my knees at my bedside" (68). Movement occurs in multiple directions, as the temporally plural Jess agrees with Annie Barbara about the need for truth to be discovered on one's own, even though he decides that overall "her information about this subject was faulty. . . . I came to find out over the years that much of her wisdom was unsound" (68). Perhaps the reason her wisdom is unsound is because it is subjective, but unlike Canary's version of truth, her wisdom is private. Her relationship with the divine is one of knowing "how to hear" (68); perhaps she does not attempt to translate her private truths into language because her private conception of divinity is incommunicable.

Later in the same chapter, Jess believes that he shares a divine experience with Joe Robert and Gibbs when Jess hears the Voice of God in a storm, but Jess feels alienated when he realizes the subjectivity of his interpretation of divinity. The empirical facts of the storm are similar for each of the men, but their interpretations differ. Evoking the concept of divinity, Joe Robert says "Oh Lord" (69-70) three times before the storm begins, then just before the storm he says once more, "Great God Almighty" (71). Johnson agrees, "Yes, you got it right" (71). The meanings Joe Robert and Johnson intend are unknowable; perhaps they merely mean to exclaim their excited sentiments rather than evoke divinity. To Jess, however, the moment is an experience of shared truth, a glimpse of the divine ideal; the moment transcends the barriers between individual experiences, and the Voice of God speaks to them. Searching for meaning in this experience, Jess attempts to discuss the Voice with Joe Robert and Johnson, but neither of them act as though they have had the same experience; Joe Robert decides that the Voice has said that "Canary is a worthless no-account son of a bitch" (74). Familial authority fails to aid Jess's understanding. Even Jess's attempts to recreate the words the Voice has spoken fails to

capture its actual expression. Jess says the moment that should not be discussed, "to lessen it and cheapen it with clumsy words" (72). In Jess's mind, ordinary language cannot accurately convey a divine truth, and such truths have become subjective

At the end of chapter five, "The Furlough," Jess's family bids Johnson farewell as he returns to his military training; when contextualizing this farewell within his other experiences, Jess questions the possibility of immutable ideals as a mean of understanding. The moment becomes profoundly important to Jess upon reflection because, unknown to his family at the time, it is the last time they see Johnson. Reflecting on his processes of acquiring knowledge, Jess notes that

I had learned, maybe without really knowing, that not even the steadfast mountains themselves were safe and unmoving, that the foundations of the earth were shaken and the connections between the stars become frail as cobweb. I believe that all of us felt these thoughts just now at the moment of Johnson's departure, and our thoughts were so awesome to us that no one could speak a word. (92)

Whatever impact the moment has on the rest of his family, Jess's reflection of the event is shaded by his other memories of Johnson, and Jess contemplates the impermanence of his interpretive connections. In "The Kirkman Novels: First and Last Concerns," Peter Makuck states that "[a] mature Jess Kirkman would. . . underscore the importance of imagination or of the fiction that makes one see the truth" (170). Thus, throughout the novel, Jess reevaluates and reconstructs memories to unearth new perspectives; he recognizes truth as the dynamic, imaginative understanding of experiences.

In "The Telegram," the second italicized section, Jess experiences and understands a difficult truth in reflection rather than with the aid of an authority. A telegram arrives stating that Johnson is dead. Jess and his family each approach the telegram independently to make it go away. Sullivan observes that "[b]ecause of their denial of reality, each member of the Kirkman family sees that reality everywhere; it follows them, it will not be destroyed, it will not go away until they face it. Once they face it, they can grieve, and the symbol of their loss can transform itself" (122). Seeking a divine understanding, Jess prays to remove telegram without success. As with his other attempts to understand knowledge through ideal representations, the knowledge signified by the telegram pervades the whole of Jess's experiences (with varying degrees of intensity) rather than one particular moment. Physically removing the telegram proves impossible. Rather than removing, ignoring, or repressing the loss signified by the telegram, Jess must internalize the loss. To understand it, Jess welcomes the painful experience of confronting Johnson Gibb's death. He stares at the telegram until it "began to change shape" (95). After the telegram disappears, Jess narrates "I was able to rise, shaken and confused, and walk from the room without shame, not looking back, finding my way confidently in the dark" (96). No one else can share with Jess an understanding that eases the difficulty of interpreting the experience; he faces the challenge in isolation. His triumph of ascertaining a truth by himself instills the confidence necessary to navigate "confidently in the dark," a metaphor for creating subjective understanding through experiences rather than looking for ideal or external understandings; the truth of his reality resides in the intersections of his experiences. Likewise, he recognizes that the rest of his family "had to undergo this ritual" (96), demonstrating a movement away from dependency on others' understandings; instead, he realizes that they all have to create their own understandings rather than relying on others to share. Despite having completed the ritual in

isolation, its emotive power forms a bond of shared experience between the family members; Jess notes that "I think we each saw the telegram take a different transformation before it disappeared, but we never spoke of that" (96). The ideals of divinity consistently fail Jess's interpretive process, but imagination proves valuable for discovering shared truth.

In chapter six, "The Storytellers," Jess relates a visit from his Uncle Zeno, whose fictional stories appeal to Jess because they suggest an imaginative means of attaining truths by imitating experience. Zeno's stories often start and end abruptly, and reflecting life experiences, rarely conclude satisfactorily. Jess muses that "Sometimes, walking in the country, one comes upon an abandoned flower garden overtaken by wild flowers. Is it still a garden? The natural and artificial orders intermingle, and ready definition is lost" (97). The stories demonstrate to Jess how storytelling gives order to memories and aids understanding. As Edmunds observes, "the story of life is a series of narratives—like Zeno's—that intermingle, overlap, are discontinuous, repeatedly and unexpectedly start and stop, do not often consider their audiences, and do not always answer questions" (117). Zeno's stories bear such uncanny similarities to experience that Jess posits a theory that the stories "did not merely describe the world, they used it up" (113). Mirroring the unconscious, they rely on a broad range of connections in a model that resembles a rhizome; Jess notes that "Zeno had no discernible purpose in telling his stories, and there was little arrangement in the telling. He would begin a story at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end; or he would seize upon an odd detail and stretch into his stories in two or three dimensions at once" (98). Zeno's seemingly random manner of storytelling seems to have informed the structure of the entire novel, as Jess also frequently interjects value judgments and loose connections that enrich and broaden his range of reference.

The multi-dimensional movement of Zeno's stories contrast Joe Robert's preference for a linear tale with a clear purpose, a beginning, and an end. A largely rational and scientific man, Joe Robert seeks concrete understanding of authentic reality. Discounting jealousy, Joe Robert cannot appreciate Zeno's stories because he doubts their authenticity. Joe Robert believes that he knows a character in one of Zeno's stories; he says to Uncle Zeno, "I can drive right to his house. That's what I'm going to do, Uncle Zeno, and check your story out" (107). However, Joe Robert "couldn't find the least trace of him" (111). In contrast to Zeno, Joe Robert bases his understandings on his ideal of reality, that interpreting authentic and concrete knowledge is the only way to reach truth. He even uses props to illustrate the story of Helen of Troy; Jess notes "that was the trouble with my father's storytelling... [he] must always be seizing objects and making them into sword, elephants, and magic millstones" (103-04). These concrete items remove much of the need for imagination to understand his stories, and depth of his stories suffer; Jess found the story of Helen "confusing" despite Joe Robert's "excitement" (103). Joe Robert's stories disclose truth, but the range of reference becomes too narrow to allow the application of imaginative interpretation. As McKinney posits, "wisdom is... meditations on life's complexities, as is the act of storytelling itself" (223). By relying on "violent gestures intended to startle his audience" (104) and props rather than considering the context and presentation of his content, Joe Robert fails to recognize the elements that make Zeno's stories such effective conveyors of truth despite being, in some sense, less true.

Chapter ten, "Bright Star of a Summer Evening," recounts Jess's discovery of near-divine reverence for shared experience, regardless of whether others understand the experience in the same way. The chapter regards a visit from Jess's musically talented Aunt Sam. Jess narrates that "The evening before [Aunt Sam] was to leave we all gathered in that sacrosanct corner of the

house, the musty sun parlor" (177). Jess's description of the corner of the house as "sacrosanct" again evokes the ideal of divinity. Annie Barbara, who rarely plays music, plays an unremarkable song with Aunt Sam, but

In the middle of a chorus Aunt Sam stopped singing and fiddling and all the music was my grandmother's harmony chords with so many notes missing. She played on, hesitant but unfaltering, and those wistful broken chords sounded like the harmony that must lie beneath all the music ever heard or thought of—tremulous, melancholy, constant. (178)

The music is imperfect, and yet it is a perfect moment—an allegory for the perfect beauty that can sometimes be glimpsed amid the movement of experiences. The allegory could also be extended to the whole of the narrative itself. Each note of the song, each experience in life, each event in the novel cannot stand alone and produce the same meaning. Understanding has to occur with movement. Interpreting one note from Annie Barbara's song is impossible, but when all of the notes are considered together, a song forms that is imperfect yet beautiful, a song that holds meaning for Jess. Despite the empirical fact that the song does not fulfill the ideal of a perfect song in the same way that Helen is presumed to fulfill the ideal of beauty or God is presumed to fulfill the ideal of divinity, the song nonetheless has a profound impact on Jess. As young Jess discovers that the movement of music creates meaning within the context of shared experience, mature Jess learns that movement of experiences create meaning within the context of their imaginative recreation.

The final section of the book, "Helen," related immediately following this musical event, further supports an idea of the imaginative creation of meaning relying on movement and context. On a hunting trip, Jess rests in a cabin with Joe Roberts, Johnson, and Uncle Luden.

Sullivan notes that "instead of pursuing quarry, they themselves are pursued in their dreams by ideal beauty" (121). This section reflects the struggle to achieve perfection when seeking understanding based on ideals, and Jess ultimately concedes that ideal representations of knowledge are impossible. Even Helen herself is not represented perfectly, as Joe Robert murmurs her name imperfectly "...lhn..." (182). In *More Than One Shape: Unity Among Fred Chappell's Varied Literary Works*, Courtney Piver notes that this section "employs several kinds of narrative structures – the traditional story of Helen, Jess's dream, and Jess's written memory of the dream within the novel – to bring Jess to a conclusion about himself and his budding adulthood" (39). While most critics reason that Jess's conclusion is "I am one of you forever," this cannot be the case; no evidence of dichotomous resolution presents itself in the final section. Instead, ambiguity abounds. The setting, a cabin "near the Tennessee border" (180), characterizes the section's liminality. After the men talk in their sleep, they "stared open-eyed and sightless... staring and not seeing" (182). Jess sits up, "straining to see" even though he "had no desire to" (182). Jess is uncertain that he sees Helen, "but if I had seen something, then it was her" (182). Nothing is absolute; Jess remains between dichotomies, none of which find clear resolution at the novel's end. However, from Jess's aggregate perspective, the men's experiences converge in a glimpse of perfection, as was the case in the storm with his male companions and while enjoying music in the sun-room with his family:

They remained sitting, all three, breathing hoarsely, staring and not seeing.

I couldn't see them. I couldn't see anything, but I knew what they were doing. I too stared forward into the room, straining to see. . . what? I knew I couldn't look into their dreams, I had no desire to. But the tension caught me up, and I tried to sculpt from the darkness a shape I might recognize.

Little by little—yet all in a single instant—I saw something. I thought that I saw. Framed by glossy black hair, a face appeared there, the features blurred by a veil and yet familiar to me, I fancied, if I could remember something long ago and in a distant place. Then there was no face. If something had actually appeared, it lasted no longer than an after-image upon the retina. But if I had seen something, then it was her, Helen, I had glimpsed. (182)

His perception of the ideal is riddled with ambiguities, and the intimacy of the shared experience proves subjective. The next morning, the men "were as open and careless as ever before," and Jess felt himself "at a distance from them, left out" (183). His imagination merges his experiences, and his understanding of experiences; outside of his mind, the ideal moment proves solitary rather than shared. In the final lines of the novel, Johnson stands in the doorway of the cabin and asks "Well, Jess, are you one of us or not?" (184). The question remains unanswered and unresolved at the end of the novel. Jess glimpses an ideal merging of experience and understanding. However, the form is illusory and ungraspable; meaning remains ambiguous.

Helen, the ideal of beauty, proves "men's ruination" (179); she is unattainable. Likewise, divinity proves unknowable; even religious Annie Barbara "was not privy to the mind of God" (68). In the cases of both of these ideals, imaginative subjective interpretation proves more fruitful for achieving understanding. Mature Jess writes in reflection to discover his development of overcoming the dichotomies and continuums that restrict his interpretive ability, yet his alienation remains unresolved at novel's end; he can never "be one of" his family nor can he be anything other than a member of his family. Using storytelling as his framework, he embraces ambiguity and broadens his range of reference; rhizomatically mapping his unconscious, he

imaginatively recreates and enriches his experiences, embracing dynamic and imperfect understandings.

CHAPTER 3

SHARPENED IRONY: VIOLENCE AND IDEOLOGY IN *BRIGHTEN THE CORNER WHERE YOU ARE*

The second novel in Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, *Brighten the Corner Where You Are*, consists almost entirely of an imaginative retelling of Joe Robert's adventures over the course of a day. Joe Robert's son, narrator Jess Kirkman, appears only rarely as a character, in the first and middle italicized sections, yet he remains an essential voice. The novel echoes the issues on trial in the infamous Scopes trial of 1925, science and tradition, especially religious tradition. However, in *Understanding Fred Chappell*, John Lang notes that "[w]hile firmly anchored in a particular region, the Kirkman tetralogy is anything but provincial in outlook or scope. Like *Midquest*, these novels frequently employ allusions and archetypal motifs that broaden the tetralogy's range of reference" (204). Throughout the novel, Jess imaginatively applies numerous ideological perspectives and archetypal frameworks, inviting readers to do the same; he demonstrates especial concern with the relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and imagination. The novel's three italicized sections contextualize the novel's action and express Jess's understanding that ideologies, rather than generating indisputable truths, create conflicts due to the experiential and physical attributes of individuals; in the final section, Joe Robert attempts to resolve the tenuous relationship between truth and ideology with a cryptic joke that suggests the impossibility of universal ideological truths.

In the first italicized section, "Moon," Jess imaginatively relates the tension between the opposing ideological frameworks of science and religious tradition, represented by his father Joe Robert and his grandmother Annie Barbara, respectively. In Jess's view, the differences between the frameworks stem largely from conflicting understandings of wisdom and knowledge. Annie

Barbara "believed that knowledge and wisdom were two separate things entirely and not even closely connected; she thought it possible that knowledge could sometimes be the bitter enemy of wisdom" (7). In other words, some knowledge is wisely left unknown due to the consequences entailed in its acquisition. Joe Robert, on the other hand, understands knowledge and wisdom as mutually constitutive rather than at odds. For him, "knowledge was the necessary precondition for wisdom" (7); by collecting and analyzing knowledge he believes inherent in nature, Joe Robert seeks the wisdom of truth.

Joe Robert projects an almost reckless disregard for any separation between the two modes of understanding, venturing so far as to remove the moon from the sky, only because, he says, "If I didn't do it, maybe nobody ever would" (7). In other words, bent on collecting knowledge, Joe Robert considers traditional precedents of restraint as unwise because they are not constructed by from reasoned analysis of empirical knowledge. As Jess mentions in *Look Back All the Green Valley*, Joe Robert believes "in a wisdom taken directly from nature" (62); Joe Robert's understanding of wisdom borders on fanatical scientism. He is the "champion of reason and science, but somehow he had gotten mounted backward on his noble charger, and his shining armor clattered eerily about him like a tinware peddler's cart" (7). By attempting to obtain scientific understanding by dispensing with traditional wisdom, he invites violent opposition, hinted in the militaristic language of his mounting "on his noble charger." Joe Robert believes that science will provide truths, but he fails to acknowledge that in doing so, it negates the truths professed by other ideologies and confirmed by the experiences of other individuals. Ultimately, his scientific perspective proves merely another competing ideology, an imposition of empirical values divorced from the understanding achievable through other forms of experience.

Jess employs symbolic metaphors of light and darkness in his analysis of the tensions Joe Robert attempts to collapse with his scientific perspective. The moon orbits so close to the earth that it knocks off Jess's cap. "There is too much moon," Jess says, and Joe Robert replies that "[w]hen it gets as large as this, it's impossible to handle" (4). When Joe Robert takes the moon—a symbol for imagination—from the sky, science offers no value judgment, as the ideology is concerned only with the knowledge of possibilities. In "The Flashing Phantasmagoria of Rational Life," Warren Rochelle argues that "[t]his capture of the moon is, for Joe Robert, an experiment. . . . He is ruled by reason, but integral to his being are the emotional, the appetitive, and thus the imaginative" (192), and Rochelle further remarks on the necessity of "both lunar magic and the clear rational light of stars" (192). After Joe Robert removes the moon from the sky, Jess notes that "there were more stars" (5); the stars—reason—become knowable only with the imaginative decision to remove the moon, and learning about them yields more knowledge than they "had ever imagined" (5). However, despite the valuable knowledge gained through the experiment, Jess laments that "even in the early days we felt a sense of loss and this feeling worsened as the months went on" (5), suggesting that the empirical perspective offered by science furthers knowledge but requires the impetus of imagination.

At the end of the episode, Joe Robert accedes to the wisdom gained from the sensational experience when he releases the moon; the physical absence of the moon—imagination—constrains his rational thought in an undesirable manner. Although Joe Robert proves that he can perform this incredible feat, Jess notes that "we were lonesome for the moon in the sky; it was no use at all in the little room there off the kitchen" (5). Instead, the moon belongs in "its proper roost in the solar system," and when Joe Robert returns it to that place, "customary forces" take hold (6). These customary—traditional—forces of the natural order result from the history of

human experience and form the foundation of traditional wisdom because they are well-established as credible through the proofs of experience.

This opening allegory's reliance on symbolism demonstrates an important but limiting function of tradition. Joe Robert, a man of science, attempts to overcome the symbolism inherent in the moon and stars to learn something new, yet he cannot escape the influence of "customary forces" nor the necessity of imagination in attaining rational understanding. The acquisition of some knowledge yields conflict due to pre-existing values associated with that knowledge. Jess's allegory suggest that some values are deeply entrenched in the human condition, or at least within particular cultural traditions, and archetypical wisdom serves as a valuable guide for navigating experience, albeit with the side-effect of limiting understanding.

In the middle italicized section, "Shares," Jess relates a memory of how he was compelled to violence due to constraints of subjective experiences and physical conditions. Despite Joe Robert's desire for an unambiguously reasonable understanding of truth, the episode demonstrates the impossibility of a unified ideological system free from internal contradictions. While ideologies suffice to explain some sources of conflict, their wisdom is limited to particular perspectives and environments; many ideologies offer only descriptions rather than means of eliminating conflict through willpower, knowledge, or wisdom. Marxist ideology, especially, offers an apt critique of the physical and ideological power structures that generate conflict in this section.

"Shares" begins with Jess noting that Joe Robert and his tenant farmer Hob Farnum "found one point upon which they enjoyed perfect agreement. They both hated and passionately despised the system of tenant farming" (103). Despite their ideological agreement, they are both compelled to exercise the very practice they despise due to their physical conditions within the

economic system; the system offers no alternative. In *The German Ideology*, Karl Marx notes that "the division of labour [sic] implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals" (185), an illusory division in the case of the tenant farmer. Jess claims "We had no choice" (104); the Kirkmans need the tenants just as much as the tenants need work.

The relationship between the Kirkmans and their tenants reveals further contradictions. As Marx argues, "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (181). In other words, the physical conditions of being are a primary factor in determining ideological beliefs and other aspects of consciousness. In a clear case of physicality impacting perception, Jess's describes Joe Robert's conception of identity: "The farther he drove from school, the less he was a school-teacher; the closer he got to home, to our farm, the more he was a farmer" (201). Like Jess and the Farnums, Joe Robert experiences a firm psychological link between his labor and his identity.

In contrast, Hob's labor gives him no fulfillment in terms of identification; there are few benefits of being in the Farnums' position. When describing the relationship between his family and the Farnums, Jess admits that the tenant "gets nothing" and "has to borrow again from the owner" (103). Hob Farnum's provisional position alienates him from his product. In "The Communist Manifesto," Marx contends that "the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for his maintenance" (251), and in his 1844 manuscripts Marx argues that, alienated from the product of his labor, the worker is thus "degraded to the most miserable sort of commodity" (85). Without a reason for laboring outside of labor itself, Jess too notes that the exploitative labor system "breaks [Farnum's] pride. Turns him mean" (104). Thus, when Jess accidentally "flicked the shoulder" of Hob Farnum's

son Burrell (105), Hob uses this minor accident as an excuse to berate Jess and provoke the two boys to fight each other.

Trapped in a dehumanizing cycle of labor, these characters' emotions are compressed due to the systemic conflicts inherent between physicality and consciousness, narrowing the characters' concerns and perceptions of personal freedom. Informed by recent psychology and the history of philosophical thought on happiness, Daniel Haybron's book *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* offers insights into compression as it relates to some of the characters' actions in "Shares":

Compression appears to be a response to oppressive circumstances. . . . There appear to be at least two basic sources of compression, each yielding a different form of the phenomenon (which is not to say they cannot combine). First is *imposition* or repression: that is, being in circumstances in which one's functioning is dictated by forces other than one's own nature. Social pressures demanding conformity are an obvious case here. . . . Second is *threat*, which exerts pressure in a different way: not exactly dictating what one does, but requiring one to assume a reactive and wary stance, anxious and vigilant. In fact all forms of compression seem fundamentally to involve a reactive stance: one's functioning reflects external demands too much, and one's own nature too little. (120, italics Haybron's)

Emotional compression explains Farnum's "angry narrow energy" (104), and Haybron's notion of "imposition" seems what Joe Robert had in mind when he warns Jess against starting fights with the tenant farmers' children because they already have enough problems. Jess feels driven to fight Burrell due to conditions similar to those that compel Joe Robert and Farnum to practice

tenant farming despite detesting it. Within the system of tenant farming, Joe Robert does not deny that much is unfair and that the system causes difficulties. However, the larger economic system marginalizes farmers, and thus he feels he has no choice but to use the labor of tenant farmers, who would likely otherwise be in even worse situations (due to the same system). From this ideologically rationalized perspective, avoiding conflict seems an easy choice. However, within the tenant farming system, few opportunities exist for metacognitive reflection. Besides, systemic constraints offer few options for reform. Within this system, alienated labor, fixed hierarchies, and resulting emotional compression reduce a laborer's perceived range of actions, leaving little alternative to conflict.

Integrated into the system with the Farnums and faced with a lack of means to construct identity freely due to systemic restrictions, Jess uses archetypes to construct his identity in relation to the Farnums; this particular construction, as with others, negotiates between the rational and the imaginative. Whereas archetypal understandings often prove useful for categorization, their strict adherence, like that to any ideological system, restricts imaginative freedom. After Jess beats Burrell in a fight, he says that he wishes he were bigger so he could also beat up Burrell's father:

Burrell stared at me wide-eyed. He knew that he was looking at a crazy person.

But I knew what I knew. The thoughts were as sharp in my mind as pistol shots: I wish I was grown up now already and owned me a farm with some poor folks on it. I wish I had me some tenants on a farm. I'd whip their ass three times a day.

(114)

That Burrell "was looking at a crazy person" suggests that Jess was, in fact, being irrational, something Jess acknowledges in retrospect as the narrator. His instinctual irrational release is

founded by his imagination; he imagines himself in a position of dominance rather than being forced to conform to a system that restricts his imagination and compresses his emotions. Jess desires a greater sense of freedom and fulfillment, but due to Haybron's notion of "threat," he instead he feels compelled to conform to a violent cowboy archetype due to his physical position in a restrictive ideological system; Jess's perspective offers few options. Haybron mentions that compression leads to a "hindrance of self-expression or self-fulfillment" (120). Despite often reiterating his lack of desire for a violent conflict, Jess feels driven to violence anyway because, as Haybron notes, "functioning reflects external demands too much, and one's own nature too little" (120). Jess's physical condition limits his intellectual autonomy, and he thus conforms to a system plagued by inherent contradictions. Jess attempts to apply Joe Robert's rational approach without success, then attempts to take a more traditional, archetypal approach, also without success. Unable to acquire the imaginative freedom necessary to mediate between the two, he resorts to violence.¹

In the final italicized section of the novel, Jess crafts a narrative in the imaginative liminal landscape of Joe Robert's dreams, attempting to resolve the tension between science and tradition. Joe Robert is anxious throughout the novel about his school board meeting regarding

¹ The episode in which Joe Robert debates with Socrates further explores the relationship between the physical and the ideological. Socrates challenges his students to question their most fundamental beliefs, making him dangerous to defenders of tradition. While Socrates' framework proves a useful tool for critical thinking, and one that Joe Robert admires, Socrates bombards Joe Robert with questions that challenge his deeply entrenched beliefs in the truths of science. Joe Robert concludes that in person, Socrates "is a windy old crank whose only real talent is just to aggravate people out of their minds" (166). Although Joe Robert likes the man's ideas, he does not like the man; Socrates' physical presence challenges Joe Robert either to accept the possibilities Socrates' questions imply or to refute them. Long dead, Socrates represents an ideology, but in person he represents a threat to existing ideologies. Socrates' questioning of the accepted truths of science offends Joe Robert to such an extent that violence seems the most applicable means of refutation. Thus, Joe Robert threatens to give Socrates "a fat lip and a black eye and a bloody nose" (166); he is compelled to violence because he faces a physical threat to his ability to conceptualize truth without the traditional constraints of scientific ideology.

his teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution, but the meeting ends anticlimactically when the board requires no convincing before siding with Joe Robert; the final section recontextualizes the trial. Ironically, Darwin's theory causes much of the strife that it describes: evolution is a description of a violent process of natural selection, by which weaker species are culled and only the strongest species survive. In the world of the novel, the philosophy of evolution itself seems to be in danger of being culled. Mirroring the rest of the novel's tension between Darwinism and religion, Joe Robert dreams that Darwin is on trial for his ideas. With a noose around Darwin's neck, Joe Robert unsuccessfully defends him against the school board, and Darwin hangs. Joe Robert wakes up giggling and nudging Jess's mother Cora: "Did she understand? Did she get the joke?" (212). The joke is problematic, as there is no clear referent. Lang posits that

it appears to derive, at least in part, from the fact that Darwin was not among history's martyrs. Unlike Socrates, he was not condemned to death, and the Scopes trial had already vindicated teachers of evolutionary theory even in the Bible Belt South. (242)

However, Lang's explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Although Lang's point about ideological martyrdom is apt, the Scopes trial was an enforcement of ideology via law, which is itself a joke because law is a consensus-based system of rules that lacks the authority to validate the subjective experiential truths of ideology; authority does not equal truth (though authority's manipulative language and violent ideological enforcement mechanisms often create the appearance of truth). Furthermore, the swift "execution" of anti-Darwinian sentiment via the Scopes trial was not the end of resistance to Darwin's ideas in Appalachia; this lack of law's ability to defeat ideology is another implication of the joke.

In his defense of Darwin, Joe Robert explicates a tension between subjective understanding and ideological understanding. On the one hand are individuals who "escaped from the influences of prejudice" (209) caused by zealous adherence to ideologies and who consider humanity's "long progress through the past a solid reasonable ground of faith in his attainment of a brighter future" (209-10). On the other hand, he says,

The more favorably I speak of our species, the more its history gives me the lie. The briefest glance at our record discovers us to be steeped in blood and reveling in it. We have enjoyed naming compassion weakness and have murdered with full public assent the wisest and most humane of our teachers; we have imagined a monstrous God who regrets that he must torture certain numbers of us during the whole compass of eternity; we have embraced an idea of justice that glories in bloody retribution. We choose war as the final arbiter among political philosophies, and wage it against our civilian populations, our children and our parents. The best of our ideals we have made into excuses to kill our own kind and the other animals along with ourselves. (211)

Thus, on one hand, humans are "thoughtful persons" (209) who reflect on history as ideas and perspectives synthesized to attain truths and enhance understanding of the interactions between consciousness and everything else. On the other hand, as Joe Robert argues, humans are traditionalists who subscribe to singular truths and resist synthesizing knowledge that conflicts with pre-existing understandings. Jess notes that Joe Robert has felt this division of perspectives to be "a Truth" (211). However, that Joe Robert assumes that he expresses "a Truth" constitutes another part of the joke because his expression is his own subjective interpretation of history. Joe Robert's fanatical exposition dismantles the notion of history as history as progress by

recontextualizing evolutionary history in terms of the Biblical Fall; his ideological synthesis represents his sensational understanding yet remains constrained by ideologies such that "he was no longer the author of his own words" (211). Joe Robert's version of truth is preceded by an indefinite article, but he recognizes it with a capital "T," indicating that it as an immutable element of his understanding of history rather than the carefully objective synthesis he initially favors and believes science provides. He asserts his perspective as a universal truth, but in doing so, Joe Robert is fallible to the very criticism he makes of other ideologies. Jess notes that "He had wanted to say everything differently, something cheerful and original. But it was too late" (212). Despite the best application of his understanding, his ideological perspective proves inseparable from his subjectivity; no truth can exist objectively, without interpretation from an individual consciousness informed by its physicality.

Joe Robert believes he can argue the correctness of his perspective via the rhetoric of rational discourse. If his categorization is correct, that some people attempt to learn from history while others remain mired in tradition, then his cause of subverting tradition is the very occurrence that traditionalists wish to prevent. Regardless of whether tradition ultimately changes over the course of integrating subjective experiences and physicalities, any rhetoric that offers a swifter path to defeating tradition by direct opposition is bound to face resistance because the dominant ideologies already provide widely understood truths. Attempting to synthesize a new version of truth destabilizes old truths, challenges accepted understandings of reality, and thus generates conflict. Recontextualizing Biblically based beliefs using scientific and philosophical discourse, Joe Robert argues for a synthesis of the traditional truth of the fall of humankind with a variety of perspectives on achieving understanding. Joe Robert says, "We began as innocent germs and added to our original nature cunning, deceit, self-loathing,

treachery, betrayal, murder, and blasphemy" (211). In other words, each triumph of ideological progress, in contributing to human understanding, generates division and thus violence.

Beginning from a theoretical position of no knowledge, the items Joe Robert lists are impossible. However, with the inception of ideologies (and competing ideologies), treachery, betrayal, and blasphemy become possible. With the advent of language and concepts, cunning, deceit, and murder become possible. With the application of archetypal understandings of selves in these ideologically and linguistically defined contexts, self-loathing becomes possible, as the example of Jess's self-loathing in "Shares" illustrates. The very mechanisms that generate intellectual progress also work against that progress.

Another aspect of the joke is that even though Darwin is executed by the school board in Joe Robert's dream, Darwin's execution does not alter the validity of his theoretical perspective. The school board rejects Darwin's ideas via the power of law and popular consensus; they use violence as a means of asserting their correctness in the face of ideas for which they can formulate no other response. Like Jess in "Shares," they are not contextually autonomous. The school board's rational and imaginative processes face the constraints of the ideological contexts of their physical experience. In "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," Friedrich Nietzsche somewhat humorously notes that intellect is "an aid supplied to the most unfortunate, most delicate and most transient of beings so as to detain them for a minute within existence" (764-65). Whereas a tiger uses claws to defend against stimuli perceived as aggressive, humans are equipped only with ideological understandings; when Darwinism threatens the universal validity of the traditional religious perspective in Appalachia, instinct reacts in ideological defense. Rather than attempting a synthesis of truths approaching understanding, the school board perceives a conflict between truth and its antithesis. In Joe Robert's words, "It is the nature of the

human animal to subject its earnest seekers and most passionate thinkers to humiliation, degradation, imprisonment, and execution" (211-12). He tells the school board that by condemning Darwin, "you shall be guilty of nothing more than your own most ordinary humanity" (212). Thus, the joke is that, given this particular set of conditions and responding with violence, the school board performs the very act of instinctual violence that Darwin's theory describes; they attempt to eliminate a perspective without assessing or diminishing its validity.

Throughout *Brighten*, Jess uses numerous anecdotes to posit a theory regarding the conflict inherent in exclusive ideological adoption. First, however, he establishes that ideologies have much in common; in "Moon," he shows that ideologies share many archetypal assumptions and rely on common applications of imagination to obtain knowledge and wisdom, but the interactions between these elements may be understood differently by different ideological frameworks. In the central section, "Shares," Jess demonstrates the importance of the physical and its impact in shaping perception; even within the same ideology, conflict is inherent due to subjective experience and physicality. With the final section, "Darwin," he explores the joke of peaceful and universal ideological synthesis.

CHAPTER 4

THE FLUIDITY OF EXPERIENCE: EMPATHY AND INTUITION IN *FAREWELL, I'M BOUND TO LEAVE YOU*

The third book in Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*, differs from other novels not only because it focuses on the women who shape Jess's development as an artist but also because the novel's stories disconnectedly explore the emotive responses and multiplicity of perspectives necessary for transmitting truths. The novel resonates with the fluidity of time and the ephemerality of life. Like the wind motif that so evidently pervades the novel², personal and communal truths move variably through experience and time, momentarily seized upon by careful listeners upon reflection. The narrator of *Farewell*, Jess Kirkman, explores the qualities of artists, who attend to the vivid ephemeral moments in life, who contextualize their own experiences within the harmonious multiplicity of experiences shared with others, and who explore and reflect upon emotional aspects of understanding, like empathy and intuition, rather than repressing emotions or relying on strictly rational understandings of truths.

Numerous qualities of *Farewell* suggest a rhizomatic approach to exploring notions of understanding, perhaps even more so than *I Am One of You Forever*. Unlike the other three novels in the tetralogy, chapters are not numbered. The stories in *Farewell* are also the most episodic of the tetralogy's novels. Lang suggests that the motif of wind accounts for "the greater looseness of structure in this novel" compared to the rest of the tetralogy (244). As in the other novels, Jess establishes a distance in *Farewell* between his young and mature selves. Jess's

² Each of the novels in the tetralogy is themed with one of the four Pythagorean elements: *I Am One of You Forever* is water-themed, *Brighten the Corner Where You Are* is fire-themed, and *Look Back All the Greed Valley* is earth-themed.

experiences, from his perspective, are flattened to some extent, and their time becomes perhaps less relevant than the intensity of their impact on him. The motif of wind also represents Jess's synthesizing of a multiplicity of voices. Lang suggests that wind possesses "a range of meanings, including its associations with the breath of life. . . with poetic and divine inspiration, with passions of various kinds. . . and with music" (244). Most objective means of categorization would not lump these unlike types of experiences together, but Jess is unafraid to use a multitude of categorizing schemes to seek understanding.

However, in *Farewell*, Jess acknowledges that his tendency to systematize his search for truths is sometimes problematic, and he relies heavily on the insights he has gained from his mother Cora and grandmother Annie Barbara. When Jess asks Cora how, despite not being present for the events she describes, she knows so many details about Earlene's adventures in the chapter "The Fisherwoman," Cora says "I put myself in her place so I could tell the story to you. That's what storytellers do" (100). The stories of Jess's female family members transmit skills of empathy and intuition, which Jess employs to develop greater understandings of shared experiences and the roles he plays in them.

Empathy and intuition provide Jess with a more complete understanding of himself and his relation to others than he previously has had, since as psychologist Roy Baumeister argues in the article "Self and Identity," which draws on a history of philosophy, "the self is nothing by itself and only exists in a world of relationships" (54). Annie Barbara reflects these sentiments when telling the story of "The Silent Woman," noting that "You'd be surprised how much we change in the company of others, how we stand different and talk different and think of ourself [sic] in a different way" (65). By empathizing with one another and intuiting norms, interlocutors adjust their identities. Writing roughly fifteen years after Annie Barbara's death, Jess recognizes

the importance of narrative, too, in understanding himself and his relationship to others; these relationships extend into the past, even before his birth. His recollection of the events of *Farewell* are, in part, his attempt to cope with this unattainable past; in parallel, the events of *Farewell* also reflect the same concern—Jess's inability to exist without history, which Annie Barbara calls "old folks and past times" (135). The history that creates and contextualizes his individuality, partially encoded in the stories Annie Barbara and Cora tell him, encourages him to consider his reliance upon communities to construct his identity. He says that, "I had begun to feel that Time Past contained secret messages meant for me" (135). In contrast to the stories typical of the other Kirkman books, those in *Farewell* are more evidently purposeful, designed to convey cultural values, concerned with the construction of identity and the role of the individual, especially the artist.

Mature Jess demonstrates his young self's ability to intuit by considering history when checking jars of preserved food for spoilage with Annie Barbara; Lang notes that this "affords a homely emblem of the quest for truth" (248). While conversing with Annie Barbara, Jess picks up a jar in which "lumps of vague shadow swam in a blue-pink murk," and Jess is able to determine that the jar contains beets (25). Thus, with few clues, Jess reconstructs the truth. Rochelle notes that "Time, which changes any story, has changed the appearance of the jars' contents so much that sight alone isn't enough to discern the truth of what is inside. . . . truth is a matter of perspective, of discovery. Truth is also a matter of the imagination" (194). All of the stories related in *Farewell* are the product of multiple voices and perspectives, but each seeks to arrive at a shared notion of truth, mediated by the shifting interpretations inherent in the advancement of time.

The death of Jess's grandmother frames the relatively disconnected narratives of the novel; the narrative of her death emphasizes the novel's, and the tetralogy's, concern with the natures of memory and shared experience. In the first italicized section, "The Clocks," Jess, his father Joe Robert, and his sister Mitzi sit in his grandmother's living room. Down the hall, Cora sits with Annie Barbara, who lies on her deathbed. Joe Robert laments Annie Barbara's impending death, professing that "time is getting ready to stop . . . for our family at least" (4-5) and that if she dies, "a world dies with her" (5). Joe Robert's utterance suggests that time is perceived experience rather than an empirical measurement. The unsteadiness of time acts as a metaphor for the subjective interpretation of memory and the ways in which memories lose their clarity and order. Annie Barbara's performance of time, of her stories, has kept time steady. Those who tell traditional stories and stories of their experiences are the keepers of time; storytellers maintain a tradition of shared values. However, in this sense, time is flexible. Stories are remembered, retold, reconstructed—the death of a storyteller is the death of a chain of experiences, a way of understanding the world through an array of transmitted cultural values. Of course storytellers are individuals with dynamic values, but individuality is the product of communal existence. Communities and their traditions, composed of numerous voices, are ephemeral, and shared values are as dynamic as the voices that express them. When a voice is lost, the values that voice has expressed are lost, and the community that voice has belonged to is altered. The Kirkman family members define themselves through each other, and each of their shared experiences is a shared understanding of the world.

One of the most prominent narrative techniques Annie Barbara and Cora use to transmit cultural knowledge is gossip; each story in the novel is either related by multiple storytellers or concerns events from which the storyteller has been absent. In "Gossip as Cultural Learning,"

psychologists Baumeister, Zhang, and Voh suggest that "gossip goes beyond educating the hearer about social norms; it also affirms them. The very act of repeating a particular story implicitly signals that the teller regards it as significant, and this significance is often elaborated further insofar as the teller comments on the behavior as proper or improper" (113). Reflecting the novel's elemental theme of wind, each narrative expresses the values of a multiplicity of voices, and these voices are further manipulated by mature Jess's writing in reflection of young Jess's experiences. Jess says, "For thirty years I've carried conflicting versions of many stories in my mind and have come no closer to discerning the truth than when I was fifteen" (28). By synthesizing archetypal narrative forms with truths of experience, the poet works within the bounds of tradition while simultaneously subverting it. The retelling of stories and the recycling of patterns insures both the transmission and dynamicism of cultural values. Thus, each tale synthesizes aspects of numerous perspectives and consequently allows for the relation of experiential truths. Baumeister, Zhang, and Voh suggest that "gossip constitutes a form of social information that uses narratives to communicate rules. In this, it is not unique. Aesop's fables, Jesus's parables, Buddha's stories, and many other famous stories accomplish the same end" (114). For example, Annie Barbara uses gossip and empathy to warn Jess against promiscuity: "Wouldn't you hate to be some old buzzard that had to drag home shamefaced to his wife after a rowdy time with Lexie Courland? You'd feel as low and gloomy as a red worm. I hope you'll remember that Jess, in your days to come" (68). Jess can only vaguely relate to the scenario, yet he is prompted to identify with the details with which he can relate; nonetheless, the lesson clearly remains with him since he records it much later in life.

Although Annie Barbara has been neither linguist nor philosopher, her intuition leads her to conclude that language is a powerful tool for cultural transmission, evidenced not only by her

stories, but by her statement that learning Hebrew is "something to admire, because it's so close to how Moses and Jesus and Paul spoke in the Bible" (32). Annie Barbara indicates that the constituents of language carry meaning in much the same way that a complete work would, suggesting that the messages conveyed through language are incomplete and require interpretation, or intuition, to understand. Throughout the novel, she tells stories concerned with the behaviors of others, and her stories are nearly always secondhand accounts. In "Social Curiosity and Gossip," Hartung and Renner suggest that "the interest in those around us and the pleasure we derive from gossiping and transmitting information might ensure a continuing learning and adaptation process across the lifespan" (8). Attempting to overcome the slipperiness of language, Jess notes that Annie Barbara "was chary of ungrounded generalizations and insisted upon concrete examples. If there was someone we knew who embodied a salient virtue, we should examine this paragon. But we should pay even closer attention when some unfortunate acquaintance was discovered to be in thrall to a horrid vice; this specimen deserved the most minute examination" (178). Baumeister, Zhang, and Voh support Annie Barbara's intuition, suggesting that "With respect to gossip, stories about norm violations may be more informative than stories about actions that conform to norms" (114). While Annie Barbara's conclusions as to precisely how language transmits culture are vague, by following her intuition, she nonetheless finds a way to use it to that end.

In the chapter "The Helpinest Woman," Annie Barbara uses gossip to provide an example of both a paragon and a norm violation when she impresses upon Jess the virtue of charity, demonstrating that separating the "good" from the "bad" is not always done easily. The Helpinest Woman, Angela Newcome, is so helpful that she becomes a nuisance to the people she helps because they feel indebted to her. The embodiment of the virtue of charity, she lacks the

"common sense" and tempering provided by empathy and intuition. If she had possessed more empathy and intuition, those she helps with charity would appreciate her more; she would empathize with how her help makes them feel obligated and intuit reasonable bounds of helpfulness. As Annie Barbara says, "there's such a thing as too much charity" (181). The vice of Angela's virtue is that she does not consider experience from multiple perspectives; her willingness to help others stems from a sense of duty rather than empathy.

Angela spends a great deal of time helping a farmer named William McPheeter after he is maimed in an accident. Annie Barbara says "Some might call it slaving, but such a thought was never hers" (185). At first McPheeter is "the bitterest angry person you could imagine" (183), but with Angela's patience and charity, he "had transformed for the better and began to feel a great debit of gratitude" (185). Eventually his burden of gratitude becomes so great that "if he saw Angela perform one more act of charitable goodness, he would find a way to hang himself" (186). When empathy becomes impossible, understanding becomes impossible, and misunderstanding is the only possibility, whether it is in the form of conflict, resentment, or violence.

Angela's fervently virtuous passion for charity makes her lack of empathy impossible and prevents her from understanding others; she cannot empathize nor synthesize a multiplicity of perspectives. She understands duty, not people. Annie Barbara emphasizes the importance of empathy throughout the story, saying "I know how I'd feel" (185-186), but Annie Barbara has difficulty relating with Angela's "saintliness of character" (186). No one can empathize with Angela, so instead she is resented.

Emphasizing the skills this story conveys to young Jess, mature Jess notes a contrast between the way that his father Joe Robert and his grandmother Annie Barbara reach

understanding. When Elsie Twilley becomes widowed, Angela understands taking care of Elsie "as her born duty" (187). Soon, Elsie dies as well, and Angela is found dead with her. Young Jess protests that the story is unfinished. Annie Barbara smiles and notes that Joe Robert's stories, "leave me hanging," so she says "we don't want to be copying Joe Robert with our style of storytelling" (191). Joe Robert's stories typically attempt to concretely convey facts about the world. However, Annie Barbara's stories leave gaps that require their listeners to use intuition and empathy to connect with the stories' truths. In other words, Annie Barbara provides an outline but leaves room for the listener to imagine or reflect, whereas Joe Robert's "violent gestures" (*I Am One* 104) and props remove any opportunity for the listener to co-create. In this instance, overcome with empathetic emotions for the two women whose story she tells, Annie Barbara creates suspense because Jess, too, empathizes with their plight and wishes to know what happens next.

The chapter ends with Angela's death as she empathizes with Elsie's death. It is unclear whether her death by empathy represented a shift in her character or was simply another instance of her selfless sense of duty. Of the conclusion of the pair's lives, Cora says her "mind has gone round and round about. Finally I saw it happen in just one way. I closed my eyes and watched it play out in my thoughts. Why don't you close your eyes and try if you see it the way I do?" (193). Without all the facts, upon Annie Barbara's and Cora's urging, Jess is able to use empathy and intuition to share an experience with Elsie and Angela. He says "I saw nothing but blank dark as chilly shadow began to creep over all my skin and sweat bathed the roots of my hair. I smelled a breath on my face as cold as frosty glass. Then I opened my eyelids so fast, they must have clicked" (194). Empathy is so powerful that even an experience as lonely as death becomes something to which one can relate.

In the chapter "The Silent Woman," Annie Barbara tells a story intended to impress upon young Jess further lessons of knowing through empathy and intuition. The story features both a character who embodies "a salient virtue" and one "in thrall to a horrid vice"; Selena, who is mute, embodies empathy and intuition, while Lexie Courland is a woman who loudly speaks her mind and who "liked to rake up coals just to see the sparks fly" (67). Lexie hurls insults at the mute Selena the first time they meet. However, when they make eye contact, "Lexie understood that she was *known*, her body and spirit understood for the first time in her life" (70). However, Selena's expression "was never lively; her mouth would only hint at a smile or her forehead suggest a frown and that would be enough. Just those little traces of expression spoke volumes" (63). Likewise, Lexie notes that "it didn't take long to pick up slight signals and that if anybody else would observe her friend attentively, they, too, would decipher them" (72). In addition to cultural values, the narrative constructions of Jess's mother and grandmother instill in Jess the ability to interpret traces of truth to discover more complete truths.

Selena's ability to communicate much with only "traces of expression" demonstrates to Jess the power of shared understanding, as Selena's emotive connection prompts a perceptive shift in Lexie, changing her understanding of herself and the world. Annie Barbara says Selena's empathy "flooded [Lexie's] mind with strong amazement to understand that she had a chance to be happy and leave off toying with those puny-spirited men that were but as chaff in the wind" (71). The pair moves in together, and their shared understanding deepens. Lexie and Selena discover that "Silence itself had a deep mystery in it. Many mysteries, in fact. And these she and Selena explored together, sitting side by side in their chairs, never exchanging a word" (73). When Selena dies, she murmurs her first words to Lexie, "Goodbye, my dove" (74). Jess's grandmother prompts Jess to practice empathy, asking "can you think how she must have been

feeling?" (74); again, Jess shares an emotive and imagined understanding of an experience he with which he has had no experience, death.

Empathy and intuition convey messages beyond the possibilities of mere words; they convey a purer form of experience. Lexie says of Selena, "I believe there was something she wanted to say but didn't trust any words she knew to say it for her" (75). Lexie describes a time when she and Selena closed their eyes together and a "picture" came into her mind of "some green-faced creatures" who abuse a child (76). Rather than drawing a connection to Selena and the grandfolk she lived with as a child, both of whom had "a greenish face" (64), Lexie shows restraint: "You've heard my last. No use in asking" (77). The sensation of the evoked picture speaks for itself; the picture, like Selena's tombstone that has her first and only name on it, "speaks libraries" (74).

Both "The Helpinest Woman" and "The Silent Woman" demonstrate to Jess the importance of empathy and intuition, demonstrating how shared understanding is possible only by imaginative reflection. Although stories may guide their listeners or readers, any truth within them must be discovered on one's own, as truths vary between individuals due to their experiences. In some sense, people may also be read as stories. Initially, Lexie's identity claims to represent loud and obvious truths about herself, much like Joe Robert's stories; however, based on only a few actions from Lexie, Selena reflects that Lexie's rowdy disposition functions to conceal truths. Selena, too, seems a mystery until her silence and actions are reflected upon and their causes imaginatively and empathetically intuited. Likewise, Angela's commitment to duty and virtue so overwhelms her understanding of others that she is blinded to the notion of interpreting others through empathy. In a reversal of roles, her death with Elsie suggests that Angela may have finally acquired empathy, but that she may have understood it as a duty much

as she understood charity, leaving no room to understand herself as she had previously left no room to understand others.

The central italicized section, "The Wind Woman," in which Jess and Cora make "duty calls" on various acquaintances, helps explicate the novel's pattern of understanding others. Recognizing that her son has an interest in understanding truth, Cora aids his journey in accomplishing the pursuit. Cora tells Jess, "I saw the other day that you were writing poetry in one of your notebooks. . . . [Y]ou must meet the Wind Woman, for you'll never write a purposeful word till you do" (104). Cora recalls how she "used to write poems. They were about the affections of my heart. My heart was always selfish. . . . When my heart was foolish and untamed, I wrote many poems" (104). Unable to capture passion true for anyone but herself, she lost trust in her creative voice. She reveals that she destroyed the poems she wrote, and when Jess consoles her, saying "I'll bet they were real good poems" (105), she responds by pulling over, getting out of the station wagon, and "weeping in the road for a long time" (105). However, after being overcome with passionate weeping, Jess "could tell she felt better" (105), her weeping serving as a cathartic period of reflection on repressed passions. Cora tells Jess, "There's a difference between a young woman writing lines of affection and a poet writing true things to be known and seen in the world" (105). Cora thus makes a distinction between personal passions and shared passions, noting that "It is passionate affection or sorrow that makes most of us poets, and when those feelings are smoothed down by the hand of time, we all become like one another again and only see and know the same things" (105). Repressed passion loses its sharp characteristics and no longer evokes feeling; tempered by the rhythm of daily life, it ceases to allow one to "see all things more furiously" (105). Cora says "Passion must feed on something, Jess, and a poet's passion must feed upon truth" (105-06). Their reason for visiting the Wind

Woman is to turn Jess's passions toward the purpose of writing truths. Attempting to capture truths of experience, the story emphasizes the genre of poetry perhaps because poetry relies on metaphors and other imaginative devices that ordinary language neglects.

Before visiting the Wind Woman, Cora stops at the houses of two other women; the first is Aunt Priddy, who represents the vivid ephemerality of experience. Compared to a hummingbird, which is known for its striking yet brief appearances, Priddy's name is also a homophone with "pretty." Jess recalls that "She ushered us into her shiny-floored front room and perched us on the hard edge of a yellow settee," where she serves tea and cake that is "sweet and flavorsome but had no more substance than the perfume of the tea" (106). Each item is vivid yet lacking in any quality except immediate sensation; the section that relates the visit with Priddy is likewise short, less than a page long. Similarly, Priddy's garden is filled with flowers Cora deems "all-out gorgeous" (106); Cora asks if the flowers have "begun to sing yet," to which Priddy replies that they "sing only once, late in the season, when they begin to wilt and shrivel. . . . it is a sad occasion. Their final, only song attracts the crows to come and they tear them all apart" (106). The flowers' song, like any, can be experienced only by participating in its brief existence before it is immediately lost; the image serves as a metaphor for experience itself: rare moments of beauty, filled with vivid details, destroyed as swiftly as they are created. The poet's job is to recall and render the passion that creates these sensational moments and contextualize them to restore the vividness of their experience so that others may recognize them as true and project their own meanings upon them.

After visiting Aunt Priddy, Cora and Jess visit the Happiest Woman, who represents the continuity of tradition and individual embeddedness in its context. In contrast to Priddy's bright front room, the Happiest Woman's "front room was dim but looked comfortable; in fact, it

looked comforting" (108). The description of the room suggests depth and the possibility of discovery, mirroring the murkiness of the traditional and familial contexts individuals are born into and must learn to navigate. In contrast to Priddy's hard settee, "There was a cushiony wine-colored sofa with frilly doilies on the arms and across the back. There were footstools aplenty and wooden chairs worn smooth and two hooked rugs" (108). The room is comforting and inviting, a place where people linger for long periods of time, much as people remain in families and communities.

As with Priddy, music plays a part in the visit with the Happiest Woman as well, where it suggests a division in spheres of understanding. In the holder of a harmonium, Jess notices a music book "titled in a language I could not recognize" (109). Connecting the unfamiliar language of the music book with the instrument and the women, Jess says he "stood looking at the harmonium while the women talked" (109). The women communicate in an exclusive way; Cora and the Happiest Woman, perhaps due to their physical, biological, and social traditions in their culture, empathetically share experiences and notions that Jess can never fully comprehend. Jess says "I didn't feel unwelcome, only unnecessary, and so I decided to go back outside and sit" (109), where he dozes off. Between sleep and wakefulness, he says "my mind was brought back to itself by strains of music. . . . the sound was surprising. . . . the parts must have been interchangeable. . . . I was uncertain which voice was my mother's" (109). Like music, shared experiences compose traditions of understanding over time, blend passions, and as Cora mentions earlier, makes members of the community "become like one another again" (105). Jess understands hints of the music, and he "decided," or intuitively, which voice is his mother's without knowing for certain (109). He loses track of time, uncertain how long the music lasts. Like the "world that dies" with Annie Barbara, the music, and the tradition it represents, proves difficult

to measure objectively; the music is knowable only as it is experienced or performed, and its experience requires the participation of the imagination. As Jess and Cora drive away, the music leaves him "little by little" (110). The music and the sensations associated with it are bound to leave him and its tradition unless he can remember, imagine, and transmit it.

Finally, Cora takes Jess to visit the Wind Woman, whose cacophonous harmony of voices represent the poet's necessity of embracing passion and reflecting on the understandings possessed by both one's self and others in order to reach truth. Attempting to reach the Wind Woman's abode, Jess and Cora ascend a windy hillside on foot. Jess says "We bent into the wind as if we were leaning over the edge of a pool to see our reflections in the water" (112), suggesting a connection between knowing of one's self and struggling against the dissonant "mutterings" (113) of the wind. Jess's mother cannot make it up the hillside, and Jess continues alone. The Wind Woman's cabin is "unsteady-looking," and when Jess steps inside he must wait for his "sight to adjust to the dimness" (113), suggesting ambiguity; perhaps the understandings the cabin represents is often reshaped by poets who can bear to synthesize the wind—thus, the cabin represents an archetypal narrative form, whose internal construction, although containing some details, leaves many to be illuminated by interpretation. Jess says the cabin "was as empty as I had expected," but contained a "mandolin," and "maybe two dozen renowned volumes" of poetry (114), all of which Jess draws upon and refers to throughout the tetralogy. He closes his eyes and listens to the wind, which forms a "commotion" of voices, sounds, and music (114), and "in the midst of it all, like a pallid queen in a silver throne raised above a clamoring multitude, the great round silence of the moon" (115). The episode acts as a metaphor for how Jess becomes receptive to the various means of encoding and interpreting knowledge. The moon, which represents imagination in the tetralogy, rises above the disharmonious symphony of influences,

establishing the importance of imagination in developing cohesion between the various sounds. Due to the "silent tone of the moon," he thinks, "Now I understand," and realizes that the Wind Woman "will teach me how to lay out these sounds in proper fashion" (115). Jess learns that he must be unafraid to listen and reflect on understandings and experiences both of his own and of others. He cannot merely repress the disharmonious voices and perspectives of others; he must explore them imaginatively and express them in an orderly fashion to transmit them so that they may be interpreted imaginatively and remain true.

Although a limited amount of order can be projected upon related experiences, vivid recollections of sensation generate points of emotional relation between storyteller and recipient and thus work toward the revelation of truths, but for the truths to be more than merely subjective, or "selfish" as Cora says, they must be related in a manner that allows a recipient to imaginatively interpret and transform messages to reflect his or her own perspective. Edmunds posits that the Wind Woman chapter is "a metaphor for the writer's transformation from an inability to hear to a state of patient and dutiful listening for the stories that surround us. Such a listener, Chappell seems to suggest, learns how to sort through a cacophony of sensory stimuli and, ultimately, to write creatively about the nature of human experience" (107). Jess's narrative voice exists in many different places on the temporal spectrum; while he frets over history's influence on his understanding of experience, he also considers music's influence on his feeling of experience. He considers not just how moments came to be and how to consider moments upon reflection, but how to live moments as they occur.

In the chapter "The Madwoman," Jess recounts an incident in which he fails to understand the emotive power of music and thus despite intuiting much, fails to empathize how to properly respond within a social context. Annie Barbara relates a story of how Aunt Chancy's

lover sang "O Shenandoah" to her shortly before his untimely murder by Chancy's husband, Uncle Dave Gudger. Learning that Chancy's husband Gudger disappears after her lover does, Jess intuitively Chancy has murdered Gudger to avenge her lover. Afterwards, according to Annie Barbara, Jess's musical Aunt Samantha visits Chancy and notes that Chancy's laugh "had changed into a crazy cackle and her singing voice that had lifted up one verse and one version only of 'Oh Shenandoah' had become a howl" (132). When Jess says he'd like to hear Samantha play "Oh Shenandoah," Annie Barbara reprimands him as a "keen scholar" with the "common sense of a wall-eyed mule" (133). Jess fails to intuit the lesson of the narrative she has conveyed and to accurately empathize with his Aunt Samantha, who would likely be disturbed by the song due to the experiences it evokes for her. Linguist Ray Jackendoff argues in his book *Patterns in the Mind* that "Just as the child obviously starts life unable to speak and ends up speaking a language, the child starts life with little or no social or cultural capability, and ends up being socialized" (205). Young Jess does not yet understand that music evokes memories and emotional responses, but his grandmother's story and reprimand instill in him this knowledge.

The novel's final chapter, "The Remembering Women," regards a visit from ethnomusicologist Dr. Holme Barcroft, and the voice of mature Jess connects experience with the co-creative performative aspects of narrative and music. Jess notes that Annie Barbara and Cora often return to the story about Barcroft, "sometimes touching it only lightly but at other times piercing it deeply, like hummingbirds at the blossoms of a trumpet vine" (196-97), connecting the fleeting image of Aunt Priddy with a dimension of depth knowable only when set in motion. The story of Barcroft's visit is an amalgam of stories, each informing the other, each told and retold within the story and afterwards by numerous tellers. Jess says "I hear it in my own memory as a kind of music" (197). Jess notes that the story has "four tellers," including

himself, and he likens the voices of himself, Barcroft, Cora, and Annie Barbara to different sounds within the melody of the story. The vivid details remain most salient in memory, but the gaps between them leave room for imaginative interpretation, maintaining the story's adaptability and relevance.

Barcroft's story is not the first time Jess compares memory with music. For instance, when Annie Barbara and Cora tell the story of "The Silent Woman," Jess recalls that "The smell of the apples rose about us like a strain of ancient music" (61). Although rarely the primary focus of the Kirkman tetralogy, music pervades the novels—for instance, the titles of three of the novels are derived from song lyrics, and important musical scenes conclude three of the novels. Each of the tetralogy's musical scenes functions to create unity of experience and transcend strictly rational conceptualizations of reality. Jess notes that "stories have a hundred motives and a thousand sources, some as recognizable as tiger lilies, some as hidden as secret mountaintop springs" (197), evoking an image of the Wind Woman and her lesson of imaginative synthesis. Whereas ordinary language often fails in its unifying attempts, the language of stories and of music can serve a more unifying, universally emotive function.

Barcroft attends a traditional Appalachian dance and becomes immersed in the music; the music acts as another form of language, which conveys meaning by evoking sensations and emotions. Jackendoff argues that "language is not splendidly isolated among human mental capacities. All its basic characteristics are mirrored in our ability to understand music" (171); much as concepts are evoked in us by language, "feelings are emotional responses evoked *in us* by the sound waves" (170, italics Jackendoff's). Music provides an experience and evokes a response, but the meanings listeners create from the experience of the music move with its interpretation, remaining fluid rather than fixed.

Although an outsider, Barcroft empathizes with the culture; in the musical moments of his experience he glimpses a universality that transcends any particular tradition. Barcroft feels "he was involved with a place and a people, with a time and circumstance. . . . in a pattern that lay just barely beyond the edge of comprehension" (215). Music helps generate the emotional content necessary to create vivid sensation of shared experience and connect otherwise disconnected identities. Barcroft "felt that an individual personality would feel itself comfortably and joyfully a part of this pattern simply by giving in to the current of the dance, this small current being but a streamlet of the larger current that poured through the world and everything that was in the world and beyond it" (215). Music creates shared experiences that transcend spatial and temporal distance; Jess notes that, for Barcroft, "Distance seemed not to lessen the volume of the music" (217). Jess narrates Barcroft's story, and his own, from a distance of considerable time, but the rhythm of the story imaginatively connects its recipients with the events because it expresses vivid and common sensations yet leaves ambiguities to be interpreted with imagination. Barcroft mentions the tetralogy's symbol of imagination, the moon, several times during the dance, and he notes that the symbol of reason, starlight, "was washing away" (218); a reasoned analysis of the community cannot yield a complete understanding because its individuals are bound together by shared emotive experiences. Extending this metaphor, Barcroft notices that the house "had begun to turn like a wheel upon a vertical axle as the silhouettes of the dancers raced past window after window" (218). Immersed in the music, focusing on commonalities more than differences, Barcroft becomes aware of the many individuals sharing the experience, yet the dancers glimpsed through the windows become concrete for only a moment before becoming obscured again, a metaphor for the co-creative process of the dance and its dancers, of the community and its members. Only by participating in the performance

does the experience become understandable; communities cannot be understood without their members, but their members cannot exist without their communities. Narratives, like experience or music, cannot be reduced to a single note or truth; rather, interpretation must occur with movement.

Recounted in one chapter and two italicized sections, Annie Barbara's death and its impact lingers throughout the novel; in the first chapter, "The Traveling Women," Jess is not present in the room where Cora sits with dying Annie Barbara, yet demonstrating he has learned empathy, he is able to account imaginatively for what occurs. Unlike the humorous and heavily embellished imagining of events he attributes to his father in *Brighten*, he presents a somber and insightful scene. Jackendoff suggests that "much of our behavior, starting from the principles behind our use of language, is 'irrational,' in the sense that we can't explain it consciously. Nevertheless, such 'intuitive' behavior is governed by an unconscious logic of its own" (219). Because this chapter occurs after most of the narratives he recollects in the novel, Jess is informed by those narratives he has collected about Annie Barbara and mother; thus he is able to reconstruct, as accurately as possible, knowledge of events he did not witness.

On her deathbed, Annie Barbara attempts to have a conversation with Cora, but every attempt to speak fails. For instance, while conversing in thoughts rather than speech, Annie Barbara thinks about how "they say Uncle Dave Gudger killed a man one time" (11). Then, Annie Barbara imagines Cora's remembering Uncle Dave, that he has looked mean "when he'd hold a match to light his pipe" (11). She inadvertently says "Light" aloud (11). Cora is confused and asks if she wants "the light turned on" (11). The conversation she intuits is the one with meaning; each time Cora and Annie Barbara speak, their language either doesn't facilitate communication or they unintentionally impose unintended values upon reality. In this case,

language only confuses, a problem that empathy and intuition overcomes. Whereas Jess imagines language failing to achieve its intended goal in each attempt, he envisions intuition as able to fulfill language's intended purpose. Thus, as Annie Barbara lies dying, she and Cora share a stronger connection by empathizing with each other and intuiting a shared reality—"Jesus Jesus O now Jesus, they said or thought, now show Your sweet face" (6). Jess suggests that reality is most meaningful when silently and imaginatively shared rather than linguistically imposed. Annie Barbara says to Cora that "No matter how much you are with me, I am still alone" (6); her death is a reality that only she can experience. Yet Cora empathizes, and together they share an understanding that can exist only with empathy and intuition.

In the final italicized section, Jess emphasizes the importance of shared experience as his narrative returns again to Annie Barbara's deathbed. Jess imagines that he hears Annie Barbara and Cora thinking/singing "O Shenandoah." He then comments, "'Now they are thinking or saying the same thing,' I told my father. 'Sometimes they split off from one another like a little creek up high in the mountains that will divide around a big rock and then come back to meet itself'" (227). The music underlying the moment binds them together, and the metaphor provides an image that allows for subjective interpretation, and thus the ability to understand the sentiment as true. Joe Robert notes the breakdown of language and the primacy of shared experience, despite any small differences, as they all begin sharing the same feelings and thoughts: "'We only know what they are thinking or saying. We are not hearing with our ears. . . . It is the way of families,' he said. 'But only at special times'" (227). By sharing the experience, the family becomes dependent on one another for understanding; they are bound by shared emotional content. By participating in the experience, Jess intuites the details of Annie Barbara's and Cora's interactions, and at book's end, Jess and Joe Robert intuit Annie Barbara's death and

Cora's need for companionship. Joe Robert says, "She's going to need us," and Jess replies "We're going to need her too" (228). Empathy for one another allows the Kirkmans to intuit each other's needs, and the cohesive performance of their experiences ensures that they are bound to one another by ties of shared experience and bound to leave one another by the ephemerality of their experiences.

CHAPTER 5

JESS THE LIAR: LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN *LOOK BACK ALL THE GREEN VALLEY*

In *Look Back All the Green Valley*, the fourth book in Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, narrator Jess Kirkman seeks a solution to the problem of burying his parents together according to their wishes. Jess's father Joe Robert has been dead and buried for ten years, but the adjacent burial plot, although reserved for Jess's mother Cora, becomes unavailable due to a mistake. Jess interviews a number of family friends who have offered his parents a resting place on their lands, but their generosity presents Jess with the problem of choosing among them. In the final chapter of *Look Back*, Jess hosts a picnic for everyone who has offered a gravesite. He proclaims that he will choose among them via lottery, and everyone places his or her name in a hat. However, prior to the picnic, he chooses where his parents will be buried and thus does not uphold the integrity of the lottery; when he pulls a slip of paper out of the hat, he announces the name he desires rather than the name he reads.

Although Jess's lie at the end of *Look Back* is an act of dishonesty, the utterance serves a different function within its context. The contextually subjective meanings of various symbols throughout the novel establish his utterance's acceptability, and linguistic theory supports his decision to lie in a way that ethical theory may not. If the lie is interpreted strictly as a speech act that performs a deception, it certainly fails Kant's requirements for a categorical imperative since deception could never be considered to be an act acceptable in all circumstances. However, as in the tetralogy's other stories, the context of the speech act lends additional meaning to his utterance, which transcends surface instrumentality and enters the imaginative realm of metaphor. Although interlocutors must conform to the communicative norms of their "speech community," considerations of self-identification and the unknowability of objects outside the self further

complicate communicative acts; "lies," another name that Appalachian people sometimes give to their stories and legends, invite empathetic interpretation, and through their telling also propagate culture and values. Throughout *Look Back*, Jess attempts to reconcile culture and identity through communication and contemplation; although he resigns the truths of both as relative concepts situated between language and imagination, he finds artistic expression adequate to share understandings of experience.

Although inadequate at times, language is perhaps the only means of communication between individuals, a process further complicated by the slipperiness of signs, which vary in meaning and expression across speech communities. Interlocutors must agree on the meanings of arbitrary signifiers that symbolically substitute signified concepts; relying on shared cultural knowledge, speech communities approximate an agreement of signifiers' meaning. For instance, Jess and his wife refer to their yellow Toyota as "Buttercup" (18). However, this term acts as more than a mere substitution, as it also connotes fondness for the vehicle. Referring to their Toyota as "Buttercup" to an uninitiated party would thus confuse without appropriate contextual cues. In this instance, then, Jess and his wife function as a speech community, a concept which describes linguistic features shared within a community. The concept was further developed by Dell Hymes in *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* to include pragmatic and ethnographic considerations (53-62, see Appendix A), and Muriel Saville-Troike builds on these conceptions of speech communities in *The Ethnography of Communication*, emphasizing the importance of culture in defining a speech community. Saville-Troike offers a concise definition of the term: "The essential criterion for 'community' is that some significant dimension of experience be shared, and for 'speech community' that the shared dimension be related to ways

in which members of the group use, value, or interpret language" (15). Shared experience creates a specialized language within a community, a language largely inaccessible to outsiders.

Even when utterances are etymologically grounded and accepted in the broader speech community, context remains vital for understanding what a sign designates. Jess's obsession with translating Dante emphasizes the importance of context in constructing meaning. He attempts to transfer the original expressions into English, but "looked with despair upon [his] attempts" (20). Despite his literal translations, the verses he writes make no sense to him. In part, the problem is that he divorces the language from its context and movement. Likewise, much of the language expressing Jess's experiences with his father is contextually dependent. Reflecting on Joe Robert's death, Jess remembers that his father has referred to his television set as a "visiscreen" (7). While the prefix "visi" is akin to "seeing" in its original Latin, the term "visiscreen," although uncommon, is etymologically sound, and the root "screen" is likewise easy to place (the term "television" is etymologically akin to "distant seeing"). However, semantic meaning is beside the point; context renders the utterance suitable (otherwise it may be interpreted as a specialized type of viewing screen, as it is in the *Isambard* episode in the chapter "Into the Unknown" later in the novel—again, demonstrating the relevance of context). Joe Robert's subversion of the broader speech community's norm with his own demonstrates that communities can bend the overarching rules without breaking them. He shows that he can reconstruct language to suit his own purposes, and that by using context, he can create meaning within his speech community of family and friends.

By creating specialized meaning in particular contexts, speech communities create social identity. Hymes notes that "communities may hold differing ideals of speaking for different statuses and roles and situations" (46). The speech community of the Kirkman family constructs

a group identity based on their history of particular usages of arbitrary signs, a habit perhaps most encouraged by Joe Robert, who is known for challenging convention. Joe Robert refers to himself as "Dr. Electro" when he visits his workshops (25) and ideologically influential members of the community as "the benighted" or "our local medievals" (26). Demonstrating the flexibility of arbitrary signs, Mitzi refers to her father as "Professor Electro" (27) without any confusion within her speech community of herself and her brother as to whom she is referring. These flexible signifiers blend subjective experience with imagination, displacing the broadly accepted signifier. Rather than designating an unmarked concept, a speech community uses its shared experience to mark concepts as possessing particular characteristics using a reappropriated sign or inventing a new sign that is understood exclusively by that community.

Cultural knowledge and shared experience are often essential for establishing understanding within a speech community; as Hymes notes, "communicative boundaries between communities cannot be defined by linguistic features alone" (47). Jess and his sister Mitzi are planning the arrangements of their mother's burial, but they have decided not to reveal to their mother many of the difficulties involved. What Jess refers to as "conspiracy," Mitzi refers to as "sensible planning" (19), though which term is more applicable is a matter of perspective. Their reason for keeping their mother ignorant was because "if she knew all the facts, she would complicate matters so thoroughly that we would never get untangled" (19). The process of acting on her behalf is made easier by simply excluding her from certain facts that would serve only to make Jess and Mitzi's task more difficult. Introducing her into their speech community would require a fitting disposition acquired from a context or set of experiences that are inaccessible to anyone aside from Jess and Mitzi.

Likewise, when Jess reflects on the community he shares with his deceased father, he imagines his memory as an experience consisting of shared understandings exclusive to him and Joe Robert. The *Isambard* space ship fantasy Jess describes in chapter nine, "Into the Unknown," demonstrates how blending contextually dependent signifiers with experience and imagination constructs subjective understanding largely inaccessible outside of its speech community. In an interview, Fred Chappell explains that "Jess has concentrated on his father and has thought about him so much and with such devotion that he's actually able at one point to enter his father's universe" (Hovis 74). A Jess who is considerably distanced in time from the events he describes narrates the events of the fantasy, so the empirical account of what occurred is blurred by the imaginative reconstruction of faded memories. Likewise, the clock shop owner Dilly Elden recalls that day of the fantasy, noting "It's like a memory and not like a memory. Like something I might have imagined" (55). The inaccuracy of memory necessitates reliance upon imagination to interpret forgotten gaps, of which the contents and intensities shift with identity; James Kirkland, in "Tales Tall and True," notes that "we return imaginatively to the past whenever we attempt to recreate it" (252). Longing to ease the pain of Joe Robert's loss, Jess fills the gaps in his memory with the fulfillment of his desire. Jess employs his father's use of the specialized language of the science fiction speech community to imaginatively reconstruct how his father creates an adventure aboard the spaceship *Isambard* for the Kirkman family, a fantasy to which Jess imagines his younger self subscribing as reality. However, the rest of his family's "exasperation" (211) and "halfhearted" (223) participation suggests a less willing acceptance of the fantastic world the language constructs. Yet for Jess, reflecting and writing about the imaginative experience provides him with a new perspective of his relationship with his father and his father's process of achieving understanding. Because he and his father share the

assumptions and knowledge constitutive of the science fiction community, they share an experience, real or imagined, that the rest of his family can participate in only tangentially.

Coherently and cohesively defining the identity of a community as small as two people may be difficult, but the task becomes even more difficult with larger communities due to the inherent gaps in knowledge and experience. The inaccessibility of communities, even of his own family, is the source of much of Jess's anxiety throughout the novels. He attempts to resolve the tension between the knowable and the unknowable through imagination, metaphor, and storytelling. In his experiences, no single explanation can suffice as truth. In *Farewell*, Jess notes that "I'd understood from listening closely that the various stories I heard about specific events didn't always match; sometimes, in fact, they were totally contradictory" (27). For instance, the story of how his mother Cora and father Joe Robert bonded as a result of flying a kite exists in two contradictory versions (and a third loosely connected version in *Midquest*). The different versions shade Jess's perception of his familial community differently, demonstrating how multiple voices can appropriate and enrich traditional narratives to achieve unique expressions. The common element in these stories is that while both of Jess's parents were teachers, Joe Robert "didn't have any cloth to make a kite with" (55), so Cora offered to let him use an old petticoat. In one version, Cora makes the kite and sews firecrackers into it to make it explode while flying; in another version, Cora's mother Annie Barbara helps her dye the petticoat bright red before giving it to Joe Robert, and Cora shoots his kite down with a shotgun. James Kirkland notes that one of the most important lessons Jess learns in the tetralogy is that "truth is relative and meaning ultimately indeterminate, for the very nature of orality is that whatever circulates primarily by word of mouth varies in transmission, creating a different representation of reality each time the story is told and heard" (252). Reappropriated by the Kirkmans, the story has its

basis in Benjamin Franklin's kite-flying story; each variation lends greater depth to the story, each community adding new details and shades of meaning. Jess describes one version that his grandmother Annie Barbara relates, and he describes another that the clock shop owner Dilly Elden relates. Both storytellers belong to the same speech community, but they also share membership in entirely different speech communities. Each version gives him a different context for understanding his parents' relationship; when Dilly asks him if the story is true, Jess says "she was requiring me to measure the amount of historical truth in a myth. So I ducked the issue. 'I think it's true enough for its purpose,' I said" (56). Each version contains truth, with recognizable commonalities due to their shared speech communities, though none may be empirically true. Jess often suggests truth as dynamic, fragmented, and variously represented across speech communities.

Because he cannot firmly pin down the true nature of others and communities, Jess also expresses a concern with their representation; for instance, he expresses distaste with Hillbilly Heaven, an eatery that claims to represent Appalachian culture to some degree. To Jess, the restaurant's representations of Appalachia do not express the "genuine" culture, but perhaps it never intended to, as presupposing a "genuine" culture assumes that culture can be static and can ignore rather than synthesize outsider representations.

Rather than representing the broader Appalachian community, Hillbilly Heaven acts as a symbol for it. In a sense, it preserves Appalachian culture in a way that the other eateries do not. It may be absurd to ask whether his other nearby choices, which include "Bojangles', Hardee's, Kentucky Fried, Long John Silver's . . . Red Lobster and Golden Dragon" (93), are more genuine representations of Appalachian culture. By making a claim to represent the culture, Hillbilly Heaven acknowledges that it functions as a symbolic representation of the culture, whereas Jess's

other choices of eateries only function to normalize a broader consumerist culture in Appalachia. Hillbilly Heaven, too, intends to appeal to this broader consumerist culture, but it also intends to appeal to the imagination, an important function for overcoming the cultural and linguistic barriers between communities. By creating an imaginative and accessible context, much as Jess does at the picnic later in the novel, the Hillbilly Heaven is able to "lie" about the nature of Appalachian culture in an acceptable manner. In other words, the context significantly alters the interpretation of the content; the context is given meaning based on Appalachian caricatures known by the broader speech community, which in turn shades the meaning of the language the establishment uses.

Jess makes several disparaging comments about Hillbilly Heaven's menu, speculating that "some well-paid assassin of language had slung [the menu] together while nibbling bagels in a Madison Avenue deli" (94). The restaurant is undoubtedly a "caricature" (93) of Appalachian culture, but it is a means of disseminating culture that is otherwise opaque and unknowable to outsiders. Saville-Troike notes that "shared cultural knowledge is essential to explain the shared presuppositions and judgments of truth value" within communities (19), and the components of cultural knowledge include "social structures," "values," "schemata," and "enculturation processes" (20, see Appendix B). Hillbilly Heaven uses imaginative appeals to communicate its culturally symbolic reality to the broadest possible speech community; otherwise, by demanding communication from communities lacking the proper schema, the eatery ceases to be a vessel of cultural transmission, or of any communication. In his essay "Too Many Freds," Chappell argues of his own work that

if the general outlines of character and story are true, readers will accept unfamiliar details as important, but not absolutely essential, parts of a narrative

and will attend more closely to those parts that do match their own lives and careers. The unfamiliar works along with the familiar to achieve a recognizable broad picture. (261)

Regardless of how truly Hillbilly Heaven represents the details of Appalachian culture, its linguistic representation of the culture creates a narrative that invites readers/diners to identify with it, an act that otherwise proves difficult for outsiders. Consider, for instance, Jess's opinion of "genuine" Appalachian culture and its inaccessibility and unsuitability for transmission:

My mother would delight to see me rise and pull out Mitzi's chair to seat her at the table, but it was only one of those reflex actions that are supposed to distinguish southern gentlemen from the lower animals. But since I am Appalachian by heritage, I don't consider myself a southern gentleman and don't particularly desire to be set apart from animals wild or domestic, which are never so low as to clothe themselves in bedsheets and burn crosses. (21)

Jess conceptualizes "genuine" Appalachian culture as a construction of highly specific, largely undesirable, and inaccessible schemata. Thus, despite being "phony" (95), the experience Hillbilly Heaven offers actually acts as an accessible enculturation process by appealing and fitting into the schema of Appalachian outsiders in a way that "genuine" Appalachian culture cannot. Furthermore, despite his dislike of the restaurant's depiction of Appalachian culture, Jess's comment about how he does not "desire to be set apart from animals wild or domestic" suggests that he values the sensational experience of existing in the culture more so than its concepts and ideologies, which he presents as divisive. Thus, he is in line with Nietzsche on this point, since Nietzsche suggested that "Everything which distinguishes human beings from animals depends on this ability to sublimate sensuous metaphors into a schema, in other words,

to dissolve an image into a concept. . . . which now confronts the other" (768). In Jess's view, Hillbilly Heaven, despite its broad appeal, loses an essential aspect of the uniqueness of Appalachian culture by diluting the sensations of the culture into a concept.

After Jess learns that his waitress is from Ohio and he expresses his dislike for how Hillbilly Heaven represents Appalachian culture, she "jettisoned her Hillbilly Heaven accent and now her personality began to gleam through the façade" (95). With this act, the delineations between speech communities become evident: in one community, the waitress is "L'il Liza Jane," and, in another, she is "Janet" (95). However, a question necessarily arises as to whether one identity is more valid than another when context is considered (or even whether "Janet" is any more representative of the waitress's personality than "L'il Liza Jane," both of whom converse with Jess in the context of a monetary transaction). In each context, she conforms to norms that best facilitate the expectations of the other interlocutor; she "code-switches" in an attempt to communicate as well as possible. At Hillbilly Heaven, she assumes one mode of communication; elsewhere, she assumes another. Nonetheless, her experiences in both modes inform one another; there is no abandonment of her "true" identity, only a contextually dependent switch in communicative techniques. Similarly, Janet notes that even Appalachian locals seem to enjoy the symbolic representation of their culture (95). Jess, too, code-switches in his narrative when describing his offense, wondering "how low in the regions of the Inferno" Dante would place those responsible for writing a particular menu item's description (96), a sentiment unlikely to resonate with most members in what he conceives of as the genuine culture. Rather than considering realities, Jess considers ideals, and thus he has difficulty articulating the cultural role of Hillbilly Heaven. Additionally, much like how the language of Hillbilly Heaven creates a structure of symbols representative of Appalachia, Jess imposes his own imaginatively symbolic

structure of Dante on the culture of Hardison County. Thus, identity changes based on its context; despite the appearance of a stabilized "true" identity or culture, these concepts constantly shift, avoiding concretization.

Application of language and the concepts it signifies alters perception by constructing context, and thus it follows that language should also have a performative component. Expanding on the work of J. L. Austin, John Searle further developed the notion of a "speech act," noting that "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts" and that language is not simply the encoding of symbolic messages, but it is "the performance of the act," including its context (16). The language employed by *Hillbilly Heaven* not only encodes consumerist and cultural messages, it performs the act of inviting patrons to constitute the world the language creates. Thus, when Jess asks Janet questions such as her name, where she lives, and "What are you doing down here, so far from home?" (95), he is not asking out of mere curiosity; rather, he is performing the act of inviting her to code-switch. Similarly, when Jess code-switches between his literary and rural Appalachian modes of communication, he abandons any notion of self as objective and independent of context; instead his rhetoric acknowledges his acceptance of contextual norms and his role within them. For instance, when talking with the Ireland family, he says "Yessum" and "This is mighty good" (205), expressions that perform important speech acts, but that he would be unlikely to utter in the university of his employment because these expressions would perform a different speech act in that context.

Cultural context can make the discovery of the appropriate speech act for a given community difficult to discern. For instance, *The Ramblers*, the band Jess enlists to play at the picnic, frequently have long conversations heavily predicated on cultural knowledge and norms of their speech community and thus find themselves to be the only speaking participants in

conversations, even when others could potentially participate. Likewise, Jess finds it difficult to participate in the speech community of the Ireland family. He notes that "I could discern that strong concentration was required to follow the Ireland manner of discourse. They treated conversation as if it were hopscotch played without the benefit of markers for the squares" (202). He attempts to fit the conversation and its context into his projected values of order, his speech community. He thus experiences "a genuine moment of relief" upon the departure of one of the twin brothers simply because, with both "there was an impression of clutter" (203). Throughout the episode with the Ireland family, Jess expresses anxiety of communicating with such an inaccessible community. Operating within a particular communicative context, with its own set of arbitrary signifiers and cultural knowledge, the specialized knowledge shared by members of a tightly knit community can complicate communication with an outsider.

The inaccessibility of some speech communities, like Appalachia to outsiders or the Ireland family to Jess, demonstrates the need for broader a schema to facilitate communication. When gaps in cultural knowledge render linguistic signs insufficient, successful communication between communities requires imagination. Much as *Hillbilly Heaven* relies upon a broad cultural schema in an attempt to facilitate communication by increasing the accessibility of the narrower Appalachian cultural schema, Jess attempts to do the same with his picnic, especially the "lie" he tells when announcing his parents' gravesite. *Hillbilly Heaven* "lies" about aspects of the community it represents, but it nonetheless conveys a likeable image of the culture by adding its own imaginative twist, by telling a story with broad appeal. Abbey Mabe, in *The Appalachian Other*, suggests Jess feels "that he does not even share a common language" with the people gathered at the picnic (55). Jess lies about aspects of the community he represents, that of his family, but like *Hillbilly Heaven*, he conveys a likeable image nonetheless. He is anxious as to

how to bridge the gaps between so many unknown and unknowable speech communities in a way that will please all of them, noting that "I could tell there were as uncertain about my identity as I was about theirs" (252). Thus he relies on the most accessible schemata to facilitate communication without offending anyone. His gesture of the picnic and the hat-drawing are symbolic, just as Hillbilly Heaven's caricatures and costumes are symbolic. However, that common symbolic schema allows for communication in an accessible and effective in a way that would otherwise be unattainable. These conceptual symbolic schemata are constructed by language, which is already a metaphor in a Nietzschean sense. When Jess lies at picnic, he sees it as the most practical means of using language to bridge the gaps between speech communities and construct a shared understanding. For him, the language on the slip of paper is irrelevant; it designates a possibility that he rejects as "phony." Fixed by the utterance's temporally and spatially defined function, truth value becomes slippery and must be interpreted in the movement of signifiers and context. Jess already knows where his parents will be buried; the lie acts merely as a means of sharing this truth.

The picnic episode Jess relates, like the rest of the Kirkman tetralogy, is a constructed context in which Jess expresses reality in its myriad forms. Nietzsche argues that "The intellect, that master of pretence [sic], is free and absolved of its usual slavery for as long as it can deceive without *doing harm*," and he further states that it is art that grants this release from pretense (772). While Jess's immediate experience is a slip of paper with the "wrong" name on it, his prior experience informs his future experience, which he has already imagined and affirms with the story he tells the audience, the story that the paper contained the "correct" name. Although it would be absurd to call all lies "art," when a speech act conceptualized as a "lie" performs a function beyond mere deception, it transcends its conceptual categorization of dishonesty. After

all, if we are to believe Nietzsche, "every concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent" (767); in this case, equivocating lies with artistic performance. If Jess is nothing more than a liar at the picnic, then he has been a liar throughout the entirety of the Kirkman tetralogy, which is infused with imaginative "lies," another term for "tall tales" and "stories" in Appalachian culture. At each point when Jess "lies" in the Kirkman novels, by imaginatively relating his or others' experiences, he instead attempts to express understandings that more closely align with his interpretation of his aggregated experiences than with the possibilities conveyable by ordinary language. Instead of attempting dishonesty with his lies, he actually attempts to reach truths, a process language both aids and obstructs.

At the picnic, Jess uses language in various forms, including writing, speech, food, music, and other symbols, to create a context in which the speech act of the "lie" imaginatively transforms the experienced reality into art that aligns with the attendees' sentiments. In transforming the experiences of the picnic attendees and the readers to whom he relates the experience, Jess uses art to challenge common conceptions of reality, at least as Nietzsche would define reality: "the waking human being is only clear about the fact that he is awake thanks to the rigid and regular web of concepts, and for that reason he sometimes comes to believe that he is dreaming if once that web of concepts is torn apart by art" (772). For the moment of his "lie," Jess is able to transcend the rigidity of language and enact metaphor that "can deceive without doing harm" (Nietzsche 772), which in Nietzschean terms is no more a lie than language itself.

Regardless of the validity of Nietzsche's argument, it may seem odd to consider a lie as art, despite the fact that the entire mode of fiction is essentially lies, especially since "lies" serve important functions in transmitting Appalachian culture and its values. Jess could have conveyed to his audience his intended gravesite in any number of ways, many of which could have been

performed without a lie. Perhaps a perfect "ideal" solution exists, but its unknowability precludes it as an option. On the other hand, Jess devises a solution that bridges the gaps between speech communities, making everyone feel as though the decision is fair. The lie, however, is not the means to an end. Jess created art, not just with the lie, but with the picnic, the hat with the papers, the music, the food; in short, the context and the performance he enacts in it constitutes art. In "Why Write?" Jean-Paul Sartre suggests the work of art "*does not have an end*; there we agree with Kant. But the reason is that it *is an end*" (1204). Jess had researched and logically chosen the gravesite before the picnic and his performance there; he even informs the person whose land he decides to use of his decision prior to the picnic. The picnic's lack of purpose left no "end" for it to accomplish outside of creating a shared experience. The picnic, the lottery, and the lie, all serve, as Sartre argues, "to recompose the beautiful object beyond the traces left by the artist" (1204). The experience Jess creates for the attendees expresses his anxieties with his parents' lives, their enormous social impact, their deaths, and the task of burying them together; the picnic recreates experiences using deception without harm—imagination that expresses sensation.

While the "lie" Jess tells at tetralogy's end negotiates differences between interlocutors, that Jess encodes his experience in writing invites abstract criticism from readers. Oral transmission of "lies" invites interaction between selves present in the same moment, but when written, the meaning of stories are distanced from the author to imaginatively reconstructed by readers. Sartre argues that "the novelist's universe would lack depth if it were not discovered in a movement to transcend it. . . . the more disposed one is to change it, the more alive it will be" (1210). In other words, there can be no meaning without the reader to interpret the symbols encoded on the page—each word is defined in opposition to the other, without pragmatic

features or the physical presence of the author to define them. Thus, the picnic episode invites readers to apply the interpretations of their own speech communities to discover meaning and question and validity of Jess's actions. Writing is, as Sartre says, "an act of confidence in the freedom of men," both of the author's and the reader's freedom to contend with ideological prejudices and the impossibility of overcoming the rigidity of language in order to escape its tyranny (1211). In Jess's case, he challenges the tyranny of the essential concept of a "lie" and attempts to imaginatively circumvent the near-insurmountable boundaries between individuality and speech communities. Jess's "lies" constitute his understandings of himself and his culture, and he invites readers, regardless of their cultures, to discover the fleeting truths shared in the experiences of interpreting his "lies."

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

So many threads run through Fred Chappell's Kirkman tetralogy, and so many aspects of Jess narrate and participate in its stories, that finding distinct meanings becomes an impossible task—each time truth seems concrete, it fades away into abstraction. Jess gives us ways of thinking about and ordering the threads he presents to us: sensations, metaphor, narrative, music, concepts, ideologies, and others. However, meaning does not remain fixed. If it did, Jess's stories would not ring true. In the performance of the text, by leaving the gaps and ambiguities in the novels and rejecting concrete definitions, Jess leaves his readers room to apply imagination to identify, to empathize, and to discover meaning true to experience.

In *I Am One of You Forever*, Jess posits that Uncle Zeno's stories "use up the world," and this conception of storytelling holds true throughout the tetralogy, if not in the sense that young Jess initially describes, then in the sense that the tetralogy requires the performance of readers to animate and interpret it. Zeno's appearance throughout the tetralogy, and at its end in *Look Back All the Green Valley*, suggests that stories are inseparable from the world, and that new meanings are continually constructed, dismantled, recontextualized, decontextualized, deconstructed, and reconstructed. . .

Unlike Uncle Runkin's obsession with death, stories do not reach a point of perfect completion after they are "finished" being written down; numerous gaps remain to be filled by readers' imaginations, and new connections await discovery. Stories are slippery, perhaps like any concept that we attempt to communicate with language, and readers' interpretive performances will always find new ways of understanding. Chappell considered keeping a journal describing the process of his writing. He says, "This, I thought, might have some value in

showing the progress of an idea from the impalpable to the palpable state, from ideal purity to grubby actuality," but "I could not easily locate and describe the compromises (if that's what they were) that I was making" ("Too Many Freds"). I suspect that in the mind of some reader, negotiating the grubby actuality of compromises, Jess will finally glimpse the understanding he seeks. . . briefly, before it is lost again.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

HYMES'S SPEAKING MODEL

Hymes revised Chomsky's notion of *communicative competence*. Hymes's SPEAKING model, which he explains in *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (53-62), accounts for contextual and ethnographic variables of communication:

Setting and scene: physical and psychological circumstances of speech acts.

Participants: speaker, addressor, hearer, and addressee.

Ends: purposes of communication; outcomes and goals.

Act sequence: message form and content.

Key: tone, manner, or spirit of speech acts.

Instrumentalities: codes, varieties, dialects, and idiolects of speech.

Norms: communicative norms of a community.

Genres: formally-recognizable characteristics of a speech acts.

APPENDIX B

SAVILLE-TROIKE'S CONCEPTION OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE

Saville-Troike emphasizes the importance of *cultural competence*. In *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction* (20), she suggests three categories of shared knowledge:

1. Linguistic knowledge

- (a) Verbal elements
- (b) Nonverbal elements
- (c) Patterns of elements in particular speech events
- (d) Range of possible variants (in all elements and their organization)
- (e) Meaning of variants in particular situations

2. Interaction skills

- (a) Perception of salient features in communicative situations
- (b) Selection and interpretation of forms appropriate to specific situations, roles, and relationships (rules for the use of speech)
- (c) Discourse organization and processes
- (d) Norms of interaction and interpretation
- (e) Strategies for achieving goals

3. Cultural knowledge

- (a) Social structure (status, power, speaking rights)
- (b) Values and attitudes
- (c) Cognitive maps/schemata
- (d) Enculturation processes (transmission of knowledge and skills)

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