5-2021

Intuition of an Outsider: From Nothing to Voice in George Scarbrough's Poetry

William Moore
East Tennessee State University

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

William Rieppe Moore

May 2021

Dr. Jesse Graves, Chair

Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes

Dr. Scott Honeycutt

Keywords: fear, poetic form, stanza, *Tellico Blue*, *Summer So-Called*, and *Under the Lemon Tree*

ABSTRACT

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Long acknowledged as a committed poet of place, this thesis examines tones of outsiderness and alienation that characterize George Scarbrough's poetry. Scarbrough draws on familiarity with his childhood in southeast Tennessee, and from an outsider's outlook, a perspective veritably prompted by the rejection he suffered as a homosexual and lover of language, Scarbrough's poetry addresses the daunting themes of fear and nothingness. Analysis of his poetry also reveals qualities of hope and endurance, a commitment to received forms, and Modern innovation. Through his poetic voice, culminating in the alter ego of Han-shan, Scarbrough provides vital insights into the human experience.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Cherith Jean Moore. Your commitment to excellence has inspired me in my work, and I am grateful for your encouragement and companionship in my academic and vocational pursuits. I cherish your patient support and laudable character.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Jesse Graves, Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes, and Dr. Scott Honeycutt, for their insight and support. I hope that my research has been beneficial in your respective disciplines. Thank you, Dr. Graves, for helping me to stay focused and for directing my attention early to Scarbrough's introductory poems in *New and Selected*. Dr. Holmes, thank you for the considerate recommendations about formatting and how to address sensitive topics. Thank you, Dr. Honeycutt, for your emphasis on Han-shan and encouraging me to stress his influence on Scarbrough's work. All your observations have aided me in organizing and completing my research.

I would also like to thank Micah McCrotty and Seth Grindstaff, who allowed me to share my research while I was hammering out some of my ideas. Mr. McCrotty, thank you for sharing an interest in Scarbrough's rootedness in the Southern Mountains; it encouraged me to expand my research in understanding how he expounded on the theme of place in his poetry. When you took me on a tour of the Tellico Plains area, I gained a fuller appreciation of his work. Thank you, Mr. Grindstaff, for discussing Scarbrough's poetic development with me. Conversing about Scarbrough's various poetic forms while working in the garden helped me sharpen my focus.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

... I never learned to distrust him wholly.

Loving him, I loved being his fool.

-- George Scarbrough, "Sonnet for My Brother Lee"

As the third of seven siblings, George Addison Scarbrough grew up in impecunious conditions in Polk County, Tennessee. Born in Patty Station, Tennessee on October 20, 1915 to William Oscar and Louise Anabel ("Belle") McDowell Scarbrough (Mackin, *George* 15), George Scarbrough would never venture to settle further than Oakridge, Tennessee in Anderson County. Despite being the son of a sharecropper and the first child his mother did not want, Scarbrough's poetry would be marked by his fidelity to family and place throughout his career (Mackin, *George* 32). His father's prominent Cherokee heritage, consequently, heavily influenced Scarbrough's appreciation for his ancestral homeland, and his mother's Southern heritage, as a McDowell, connected him to the cultural and literary influence of the South (Garin 183-184). Though Scarbrough would identify himself as a homosexual, in a letter to David Rogers he discloses, "[w]riting has been one of the two major passions of my life. No, the other isn't sex. It is devotion to family and those I call my own" (qtd. in Mackin, *George* 157). In "Several Scenes from Act One" (*New and Selected*) Scarbrough celebrated aspects of his family that "made [them] different" from his neighbors (148), yet in "Several More Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) he maintains a commitment to "thought-communion" with the people of his region (6). Though Scarbrough would repeatedly express fidelity for his distinct family and neighbors as well as his southeastern Tennessee home, he would later transpose these devotions to the T'ang dynasty persona of Han-shan.

Scarbrough recurrently employed various personas in his first five books of poetry, who were often based on people he knew: Reuben, Hermes, Odoron, Midi, and Enoch. However, the final, enduring voice he incorporated in his work originated in Han-shan, an enigmatic Chinese figure from the eighth century. As Robert Cumming notes, "Scarbrough was introduced to the Han-shan poems in the early 1990s" and in Han-shan's voice, he found "an alter ego to help him say the things he needed to say" (*Introduction* 20-21). The first Han-shan poem published in *Poetry Magazine*, titled "The Garden," appeared in July 1997, and signaled the inadvertent beginning of a series of Han-shan poems that would become the posthumously published book, *Under the Lemon Tree*. Han-shan "literally translates into "Cold Mountain," and Scarbrough seems to have identified with a historical figure, who like himself was defined by the landscape (Cumming, *Introduction* 21). Despite the uncertainty about Han-shan's life, he is often associated with the advantages of societal rejection, Buddhist enlightenment, and homosexual values. Robert Cumming, in the Introduction to *Under the Lemon Tree,* notes Gary Snyder's observation of Han-shan and his companion Shi-te: "They became immortals" (qtd. in Cumming 21). Randy Mackin claims that "Scarbrough allowed Han-shan to be gay so that he could examine his own sexuality (*George* 105). These biographical details and personal stories illuminate Scarbrough's work, yet Scarbrough's poetry also operates self-sufficiently, providing poetic insight into his country and the dominant literary themes of his times.

While an understanding of George Scarbrough's biography allows for a heightened appreciation for his work, Scarbrough's poetry operates in a self-contained manner. Its references to specific people and places as well as metaphors and images provide "a microcosm that represents a world much larger than itself" (Mackin, *George* 20). Though the essayist, Richard Hugo, might classify Scarbrough as a "private poet" due to the sometimes obfuscating

emphasis on language in his poetry, Scarbrough labored to familiarize the average reader with seminal experiences from his youth in memoir pieces like "Several Scenes from Act One" (*Summer So-Called*, *New and Selected*), originally published as a prose piece, and "Several More Scenes from Act One" (*New and Selected*). In his fifth book's title poem, "Invitation to Kim," Scarbrough's speaker claims

> … I know you
> Hide your canvasses in
> A closet, not knowing
> I know. We were share-
> Croppers, Kim. Come in
> Now, and share. (102-07)

These lines demonstrate several qualities about Scarbrough's work. First, Scarbrough's poetry focuses on craft: developing a hospitable wordplay between "share- / Croppers" and "share" as a means to preserve the particular tone of the poem—in this case generosity. Second, the speaker's knowledge that Kim puts his "canvasses in / A closet" (103-04) becomes more important than the familial means by which he gains this understanding. Third, the biographical reference to sharecropping provides the context in which Scarbrough's speaker empathizes with Kim, but rather than limiting relevance, it generates a sense of familiarity through specific language—the universal from the particular. And finally, the inviting theme of the poem indicates that the speaker, though closely linked to Scarbrough's personal experience, possesses lasting qualities of endurance and ascension by which he extends kindness from the established place of the "[s]tones of grace" (90). Because Scarbrough utilizes so many literal details from his own life, his poems present a speaker whose voice ostensibly resembles his own. Even so, the speaker in

his poems should be understood as the primary narrator—a composite figure, whose experiences and observations are provided by Scarbrough though not literally limited by them. As Michel Foucault notes, the "author-function is characterized by this plurality of egos" (1484), which liberates Scarbrough's poems from being reduced to mere biographical sketches. Furthermore, the language in Scarbrough's poetry prevails and guides the direction of the poem, rather than merely attempting to imitate reality. In "Several More Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) Scarbrough notes words cannot always be relied upon "as a means of conveying / meaning" (195-96). Due to Scarbrough's inherent distrust of language as a medium of pure meaning and his habit of allowing language to alter the direction of the poem, biographical references primarily act like points on a compass by which the reader may navigate his poems. Furthermore, though Scarbrough's biography does not define his poetry, it can provide insight into his poems. For instance, while Scarbrough celebrated his private life, he also aspired for interaction with literary figures of his time, especially those who also celebrated their southern culture and history.

A factor that bears significance, especially in his early work, revolves around some of his early literary influences who remained significant as Scarbrough's poetic style changed. As the Southern Literary Renascence came to a close, Scarbrough had already published his first three books, all by E. P. Dutton and Company, a major national press. Despite the ostensible decline of the southern literary movement, a subtle Appalachian literary awakening of its own was taking place among writers such as James Still and Jesse Stuart. While Scarbrough scholarship typically associates him with writers of the mountain south, his unfading respect for the literary guidance he received from writers like Andrew Lytle, a colleague of the Fugitive Poets, provided him with meaningful momentum. Randy Mackin notes that Scarbrough claimed Lytle "loved and respected me [which] was a revelation that has kept me going all the years thereafter" (*George*

25). While enrolled at Sewanee, Scarbrough worked with Lytle, who Scarbrough explains, became "a shining light for things literary to me" (Preface xiii). In correspondence Lytle regularly reiterated that Scarbrough excelled in his poetry, sometimes providing specific guidance: "Madness is a very warm state of mind for summer; I suggest you postpone it till fall" (Lytle letter, 1966). In a letter that seems to have renewed their correspondence, Lytle confesses, "You seem to have lain fallow a long time … let me hear what you are up to," providing encouragement and affirmation to Scarbrough while tacitly regretting the lapse in his work (Lytle letter, 1963). In that same letter he encourages Scarbrough to mitigate compounded similes in the poem, "Summer Revival: Brush Arbor," advice Scarbrough seems to have applied to the poem before he completed the Pulitzer Prize-nominated book twenty-six years later. In a journal entry Scarbrough remembers a chance encounter with Andrew Lytle; Randy Mackin notes that Scarbrough thanks "him for having been a beacon in my life … I've received very little attention, I'm told, as a writer, but [Lytle's encouragement] has kept me at my desk, writing away forty years now" (*George* 25). John Crowe Ransom, a leading figure among the Fugitive Poets, also provided pivotal literary advice throughout Scarbrough's writing career. Although Scarbrough might not have categorized John Crowe Ransom's literary impact on him as a writer with the same affection, Ransom provided him with formative direction early in the young poet's career, saying

> In general, you seem to me a romantic, and that connotes a little of logical vagueness and making a great exhilaration of a special personal effect in some way. I believe you've got to subdue the romantic a good deal further. It's a matter of themes and treatment too. But you have really acquired a lot of technical power. (Ransom letter)

Ransom alerted Scarbrough to sentimental and privatized tendencies in his poetry. And though Scarbrough would proceed to enjoy producing cryptic verse, "both colloquial and arcane," John Lang notes that he seems to have learned to subdue romanticism by refusing "to endorse any sentimental pastoralism" (*Editor's Page* 2). With the guidance of Lytle and Ransom Scarbrough's poetry began to distinguish itself and to prove its own strength. These examples from respectable literary figures providing a sort of apprenticeship proved instrumental in his literary development and the tone of his work.

Even from the outset of Scarbrough's poetic career, his work revealed an outsider's perspective in relation to place, family, and culture, which was largely a result of the rejection he suffered as a suspected homosexual who prized literature. Despite this alienation, he would address difficult themes of fear and nothingness with persistence and force. By skillfully adopting various poetic forms with a sustaining fondness for received forms, Scarbrough's poetry artfully provides a sustaining voice that transforms quotidian realities into sharply realized exaltations.

CHAPTER 2. BEYOND THE EDGE

An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,

In blast-beruffled plume,

Had chosen thus to fling his soul

Upon the glowing gloom.

--Thomas Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush"

As Scarbrough's poetry emerges through adversity, it embodies the tone of disconnection with the perspective of an outsider. Though Scarbrough was intimately familiar with his family and home county, his poems regularly reveal speakers who identify as outsiders. Identifying the significant role of the outsider in Scarbrough's poetry allows for a fuller understanding of family and place in his work. In "Not as a Leaf": Southern Poetry and the Innovation of Tradition," Fred Chappell makes an important distinction about outsiderness in Southern poetry:

> We have a mood, compounded of unequal parts of ancestor worship, enlightened skepticism, communal affection, cozy folkishness, bristly defensiveness, continental sophistication, open generosity, and crossgrained orneriness. … The Southern poet may be nationally recognized, even honored—but he or she will often feel like an outsider in the company of non-Southern contemporaries. (488)

While themes of rejection and lack of artistic accolade appear throughout Scarbrough's poetry, especially in his later work, a more enduring outsider attitude permeates several themes: place, family, culture, and sexuality with religious overtones. In order to contextualize the various themes of place and family as well as culture and sexuality, an understanding of the context in which his books were published becomes paramount.

Scarbrough's first two books, *Tellico Blue* (1949) and *The Course Is Upward* (1951), deal uniquely with the attitude of discordant topophilia, a conflicted allegiance, with which the speaker relates to place and family. *Tellico Blue* (*TB*), initially published on the heels of the Southern Renascence, which Walter Sullivan maintains "ended with World War II" (xi), a war that Scarbrough claimed "broke the old feudalistic system of share-cropping" (*Preface* xi), reveals devotion to yet emotional detachment from the landscape of his homeland in the Tellico Plains. Though Scarbrough had studied at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (1935), the University of the South (1941-1943), and Lincoln Memorial University (1947) by the time *Tellico Blue* was published, the book lacks an academic worldliness. *The Course Is Upward* (*TCIU*) emerged within a year of the death of his father, Oscar Scarbrough, and possesses an uncanny and sometimes sympathetic familial quality, while still referring to the rugged beauty of Polk County, Tennessee. Though the Scarbroughs had already "expatriated by choice" (Mackin, *George* 41) from Polk to McMinn County before Scarbrough published his first two books, they rely primarily on Scarbrough's formative years with the familiarity of his homeplace. Despite this apparent allegiance to the people and landscape that comprised his early life, Scarbrough's poetry paradoxically demonstrates intimate tension with the people—family, culture, and religion as well as the place of his youth.

Scarbrough's third book, *Summer So-Called* (1956), includes an autobiographical sketch titled "Several Scenes from Act One"—a "plangent memory piece" (Justus xvi), which expands the growing cultural and religious hesitancy Scarbrough exhibited in his early poetry. Initially, the histrionic memoir, "Several Scenes…" appears as prose in *Summer So-Called* (*SSC*), but in *New and Selected* (1977) it is published as free verse along with "Several More Scenes from Act One." Published after being hired to teach the "children of Air Force servicemen" in 1952 when

he toured Europe, as Randy Mackin has shown (*George* 25), and after earning an MA at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (1954), *SSC* signifies Scarbrough's willingness to examine new ideas and forms of expression. In "Several More …" (*NAS*), Scarbrough expresses tension in deviating from his culture. He confesses to be "a man who has given up … all / attempts at communication with his neighbors, / close by or afar, even in words" (1-3), yet Scarbrough states that he remains "too deeply obsessed with the idea of / thought-communion to be entirely consistent" (5-6). He notes the failure of religion that "like old Adam putting the animals into words [failed] to read the edict in their burning eyes" (439-41) and reiterates his poetic commitment to "destroy the nameless in the naming (442-43). *SSC* leads Scarbrough's poetry into a more culturally and religiously critical direction, allowing him to experiment with versification, connecting him to what Randy Mackin notes as "the circuits of the world mind" (qtd. *George* 24). In much the same way as *Moby Dick's* Ishmael, who claims, "the whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard," Scarbrough's traveling abroad and working as a teacher were formative experiences (Melville 107). While *NAS* intensifies Scarbrough's deviation from prevailing cultural and religious attitudes, it also reveals an increased willingness for Scarbrough to include references to homosexuality in his work.

The Bird in the Rye

A poem that represents the traditional themes of his early work, "An Indigo Bird in the Golden Rye" (*TB*), also possesses a sense of disillusionment. Despite this airy sense of disconnection, Scarbrough's poem "transform[s] what then passes as prosaic figures and landscapes … into compelling art" (Justus xv). Scarbrough's speaker celebrates the freedom of a bird and mourns the loss of a friend, actions that can occur concurrently in a familiar place where

life and work combine. Wendell Berry notes this synchronicity occurs as "[p]eople are joined" to the land by necessity though wounded by it (*Standing* 73). Scarbrough's speaker also traverses an agricultural landscape:

> I saw as I was passing by,
>
> And life, I found, was in the seeing,
>
> An indigo bird in the golden rye
>
> The bird in the rye was fleeing, fleeing. (1-4)

Referencing a chance observation of a bird, probably a bunting, Scarbrough's poem symbolically addresses life and loss. The reference to the indigo bird in an agricultural context seems to suggest that the cathartic wildness and regalia of the bird supersedes the indigo crop that led to prosperity in the South. This introductory stanza also connotes a sense of detachment indicated by the repetition of "fleeing" in the fourth line. The bird, perhaps startled, seems to jolt the speaker into an unintended wakefulness in which he recounts seeing "life," and in so doing, unconsciously participates in the energy around him. However, jarred back into consciousness, the speaker, who continues to walk by, surreally juxtaposes the body of the bird and the grain by enjambment between line six and seven: "An indigo bird and a basic head / Of yellow, fundamental rye" (6-7). This sort of dovetail between the head and the bird causes the speaker to contemplate the death of Reuben, who Scarbrough claimed was "an idealized form of someone with a different name … who died" in his youth (Cumming, *Death* 2). While the poem begins with a sort of astonished celebration of beauty, it quickly shifts to contemplate distance and loss, and the speaker finds self-consolation, that if death should be remembered amidst this beauty, "[i]t is the way that I'd command / Lost heart, to be remembered too" (11-12). This sort of longing of the "[l]ost heart" paired with detachment and beauty also occurs in "Anachronisms"

(*ULT*), which was dedicated to John Crowe Ransom. The speaker observes the inequities between things like "cyberspace" (5), "modern science" (11), and "a poem on fine rice paper" (8) but ends with the subtle irony of a man's appreciating the naturally pleasing scent of flowers by his window, suggesting the window is open while the world seems distant and metaphorical. The final lines picture "[t]he good agrarian poet" (15), a gentle reference to Ransom, who after visitors have departed is simply enjoying "[r]oses wafted from beyond the plantation / Of pecan trees edging the bottom / Of his herb garden (18-20). This conclusion commemorates a farewell to a more predictable and traditional outlook on the world—a world which has grown accustomed to fragmentation, leaving the agrarian poet, depicted as facing "the South // Window" calmly enjoying what he can (16-17). The odor of "warm / Roses" emerging from "beyond the plantation" suggests that is the direction the agrarian poet looks but is now out of reach. The Southern Plantation, a form of large-scale agriculture inherited by the colonial English, became a system by which plantation owners stood as cultural fixtures of intractability and dominance through enslavement of Africans and profligate land acquisition. In this poem Scarbrough employs symbolism to indicate the demise of colonial-era obduracy: the rose represents domesticity and the pecan plantation signifies draconian order, which both seem diminished as the agrarian poet serenely looks on from the house of Han, a structure raised by Scarbrough's poetry. Han-shan, a persona in Scarbrough's later work, observes the passing of the old plantation order of the South. Though the poem suggests instability between Han-shan and the agrarian poet, or Han-shan and the narrator, a sense remains of what Scarbrough claims in "Several More Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) as communion "with the world in a ritual fury-feast of some beautiful, / outlandish impulse not perfectly understood" (413-14). Scarbrough's work

that deals with nature often addresses the disillusioning effects of death and cultural change, which generates a sense of isolation.

These qualities of disconnection and distance also emerge in "The Field" (*TB):* "I came upon the place and stood / Beyond the edge of Sewee wood" (1-2), producing an eeriness and immediacy. The speaker stands at the edge of a wheat field and a forest, which Scarbrough later describes in "Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) as possessing "cedar waters" (221) with riparian characteristics of the local Sewee Creek. In a sense, Scarbrough's speaker encounters a liminal place between civilization and wilderness, custom and mystery. The gothic setting is intensified by "the sound of feet" (6), while the speaker does not see "what walked the wheat" (8). These lines suggest that the land is haunted by a "what," which presents the possibility that habitation includes animals. Having come to a stranger's wheat crop, which makes the speaker a stranger, an outsider, Scarbrough's speaker resembles the speaker of Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." Scarbrough's poem emanates with an ominous solitude, but unlike Frost's poem, the speaker encounters another presence, stating "I can swear that it was there" (11). However, by the end of the poem, the speaker remains curious about the presence of another character and becomes certain that "[a] man who had owned the field went by" (20) as the speaker acts as an interpreter between the "field" and "sky" (17). By presenting multiple possibilities that the speaker simultaneously hears a human and a non-human presence, Scarbrough demonstrates what Allen Tate calls "genuine talent" (qtd. in Smith 7). Maybe due to Scarbrough's youth as the son of an itinerant sharecropper, experiencing little privacy and lacking a place to call home, a sense of displacement operates in this poem. Randy Mackin notes that the Scarbrough family consistently moved around, looking for "farm work on land always owned by someone else" (*George* 15). There is a strange alienation in this poem, as a gothic

presence seems to bewilder the place the speaker inhabits for a brief sojourn, as a place longed for yet uninhabited. The poem functions symbolically as the speaker takes on the office of interlocutor between the sky—the unknown, and the land—the revealed. While the poem ambiguously concludes with uncertainty about the identity of the man in the field, the speaker does not linger to lament their disorienting status as an outsider, a status that Scarbrough complicates in other poems that tie people to the landscape.

World of the Lost Heart

Scarbrough's "Eastward in Eastanalle" (*TB*) metaphorically alludes to the unmistakable relationship between the people and the land of Eastanalle. Thematic aspects of this poem also resemble lines of poetry from two other prominent authors from the Southern Mountains: Jesse Stuart's sonnet, "I" (*Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow*), which praises "corn and crickets, trees and men and bird," (7), and James Still's poem, "I Was Born Humble" (*The Wolfpen Poems*), which states, "There is so much writ upon the parchment of leaves, / So much of beauty blown upon the winds" (4-5). While "Eastward in Eastanalle" gives hearty praise for the life in the countryside, it also pays particular attention to the conditions of language by which he communicates his unique admiration for his postage stamp of the Southern Mountains. Scarbrough's focus on language allows him to include more meaningful descriptions with compelling emotions tucked in the lines: "gelded flowers in the old valley, pale / As astonished moonflowers in the valley day" (8-9) and "Of green corn waving, or loneliness / Cool and separate in the waving corn (5-6), epitomizing what Rodney Jones calls Scarbrough's "exacting and musically compelling intellect" (viii). By recognizing an emotional apparatus at work in the natural world, Scarbrough's poetry distinguishes itself from Stuart's ebullience and Still's subtlety, promoting a

landscape constructed by a language that blends human and terrestrial elements: "astonished" emerges from yet precedes "moonflowers," and "loneliness" characterizes crowded "waving corn." Scarbrough adopts "Eastanalle" as the formative place of his early poetry, which behaves like the fictional loci of Thomas Hardy's "Wessex" and A. E. Housman's "Shropshire." While R. T. Smith notes that the homophone, "Eastanelle Valley" was "named from a Cherokee word for place of cane briars" (9), Eastanalle also acts as a sort of homonym for "East and all"—away from the madding crowds that settled in middle and west Tennessee, leaving Scarbrough's Appalachian region isolated and overlooked—pinned against the imaginary wall of progress more readily available in the coastal states. Scarbrough claims that the homeland of his poetry "has its roots in reality" (Preface xiii), and he also demonstrates a fondness for the perpetuation of Cherokee terms to his present day, since Eastanalle was what his region was "called locally." This interplay between Scarbrough's appreciation for speech and place "became the physical world from which Scarbrough formed his cosmology," synthesizing to generate his distinctive poetry (*George* 10). Over sixty years after this poem was published, Robert B. Cumming observes in his Introduction to Scarbrough's posthumous collection, *Under the Lemon Tree*:

> For [Scarbrough] "home" was a mental construct as much as a physical place. It was the mythical land he called "My Mesopotamia" or "Eastanalle," the wild land between the Hiwassee and Ocoee Rivers, that embodied for him everything that was of value in this world and everything that was evil. (15)

Cumming avers that Scarbrough drew on his boyhood homeland to generate a conceptual place that includes both terrestrial piety and an honest portrayal of its debasement.

Though Eastanalle may refer to a definite place, Scarbrough's use of it upholds a sense of isolation, both geographic and lingual, as his work labors to convey seemingly ineffable

affection. Rodney Jones notes "Scarbrough's exile is within language that his countrymen reject, in the place that he calls Eastanalle" (viii). Eastanalle also epitomizes his awe and affection for idiosyncrasies that helped to join people to a specific place. In a sense, Scarbrough's poetry simultaneously celebrates and laments the indifference from which his homeland suffers: "World of the lost heart on the edge of finding!" (26). In this poem he celebrates his boyhood homeland while mourning its neglect. Though beginning the poem with "This is the heart's world" (1) and suggesting the morbid beauty of death charged by the "land of clouds as white as skulls" (7), his speaker confesses inadequacy: "And to me / This is the heart's world, too lovely for bearing" (22-23). Scarbrough's poem demonstrates a connection between the heart and soul and a land not characterized by possession, but which characterizes its denizens; it also depicts disconnection with a landscape that possesses beauty too magnificent to be fully appreciated. However, since people belong to the land, the speaker asserts

> … This is the tender land,
> The indiscriminate land, green as corn,
> Ripe as plums, that makes no choice among
> Its people. All who are here, are here
> And are the children … . (15-18)

In this poem Scarbrough reveals the bond between people and the land, a bond both familial and herbaceous, from which people are "identified with the earth" (Miller xv). Another connection Scarbrough makes between land and people becomes alarmingly evident in "On Reaching Twenty-Five" (*TB*, *NAS*):

> … I behold the land's
> High private face and hear the latest news.

Nor do the high cheek bones assemble

The level leaves of fear nor any bough

Of scarlet anger I cannot resemble

More than I resemble anger now … . (19-24)

These lines show that the land possesses human features and vice versa, and the speaker proceeds to express a greater capacity for emotion—anger resulting from "the torrid Cherokee / Time" (4-5) and "the Trail of Tears" (16). However, the speaker concludes, "When I have grown collected as a stone, / With every atom placed, each fiber stayed" (25-26), they will more completely join the landscape. The speaker also identifies the land with "high cheek bones" (29), despite the despairing "ambush" (31), deracination, and disenfranchisement of the preexistent Cherokee denizens, whose physical attributes characterize the land. Scarbrough's imagery, though adumbrating death, allows his speaker to make connections with the terrain that Jim Wayne Miller observes can promote "a journey into the self" and provide "self-knowledge" not otherwise understood" (xv). Furthermore, Micah McCrotty's observation of Miller's Brier persona, who "reflects his surroundings," resembles Scarbrough's link between people and place (43). This poem, though metaphorically connecting people to the land, ends by alluding to the historical disconnection and misrepresentation. A later poem, "Song for a Lonely Man" (*TCIU*), proceeds to defend the countryside, which can even resemble thought and resist qualification: "The terrible landscape is my terror! O / The wild gray emptiness is but my own!" (19-20). The land, symbolically connected to people consciously and unconsciously, evades human characterization and presents troublesome characteristics which seem to alienate the speaker from a strikingly familiar landscape.

The Son Who Must Disclaim

While Scarbrough's poetry intimates the connection and inevitable disconnection between people and land, his poetry also elucidates contradictions, tensions, and failures between family members. Bill Brown notes that "Scarbrough's best poems explore" his sometimes-alienating experiences "with the family and friends whom he loved" (10). Randy Mackin observes "[t]hrough poetry Scarbrough tried to reconcile his ambivalence toward his tyrannical father, explain his life and work to his misunderstanding brothers, and celebrate the lessons of his mother" (*George* 9). However, the themes of hardship and penury wrought from Scarbrough's childhood experiences are both alleviated and intensified by his relationship to his mother. The family hardships addressed in Scarbrough's poetry thematically resonate with "Marvin McCabe," by Hayden Carruth, who was a near-contemporary of Scarbrough's in the Northern Appalachian Mountains. Scarbrough possessed an uneasy relationship with the members of his family, though he celebrated his mother, whose "love of reading and her habit of reading aloud" (*George* 16) helped him learn to read, as Robert Cumming notes, by reading wallpaper: "newspapers pasted onto walls to close the cracks and seal out wind in the primitive tenant houses he cycled through as a child" (*Introduction* 15).

In "To Whom It May Concern" (*ULT*), a sense of familiarity and alienation occur simultaneously. The title reveals a lack of specificity, yet the poem begins with Han-shan's "[w]riting in his day-book" (2) by ironically addressing "Dearly beloved" (1). The narrator cedes the poem's action to the words of Han-shan, who states,

> ["]Take the matter of dress.
> Growing up, I had but two shirts
> And one change of trousers to my name,

Of sheerest simplicity and sparely

Cut and sewn by my mother.["] (5-9)

Having announced at the beginning of the poem, "I am not a man of greatly / Expanded preferences" (3-4), Scarbrough's speaker recounts his impecunious childhood in which he lacked even a brim hat to wear while fulfilling farm chores. Wearing his "mother's slat bonnet" (17), he suffers derisive gestures and words from neighbors and other nearby workers, but Han-shan leaps ahead to the sixth stanza, announcing that he now has a more colorful wardrobe:

["]On ordinary days, I mix colors

To astonish the crows.

On other days, however I go drest

Head to foot in matched complexions

In deference to my mother's

Bleeding fingers." (30-35)

Revealing enjoyment of clashing outfits yet acknowledging his mother's sacrifice to clothe him—even if the clothing resulted in humiliation—Han-shan experiences an emotional paradox. The conflicting emotions of shame and fidelity occur simultaneously by the end of the poem, revealing that the speaker seems incapable of negatively concluding that the mother with "[b]leeding fingers" erred in her provision for her son. The picture of the literary mother, a reflection of Scarbrough's mother, influenced Scarbrough's reflection upon students at Sewanee playfully squandering fruits and nuts during a Thanksgiving festivity: "It was sacrilege to me. … I sat, hardly touching my food, thinking of my mother at home scraping together the makings of a meal for our family" (*George* 20). Furthermore, the mother resembles a messianic figure, whose humiliation-inducing sacrifice seems perpetual, as if she remains with the speaker into his

adulthood. Though Scarbrough's poetry reveals the theme of fidelity for the mother, "Summer So-Called" (*SSC*), confesses estrangement: "I ran from my mother, being the son / who must disclaim all love" (13-14). Despite his affection for his mother, Scarbrough's poetry indicates an attitude of affliction resulting from a mother's care. This sense of a familial curse enlarges in verses about his father, who remained a towering figure in his imagination.

Scarbrough's father, who experienced vocational hardship and penury, often appears in Scarbrough's poems as disparaged and in need of sympathy; this representation method indicates that the speaker in Scarbrough's poem experiences divided allegiance and affection for his father. In a journal entry, Randy Mackin reveals that Scarbrough recalled telling his father about his plans to attend college, and his father rejoined, "'You're going to shit and fall back in it" (*George* 17). This sort of rough-hewn, no-nonsense humor disturbed and angered Scarbrough. Despite his father's aggravating straightforwardness, in the poem, "Triolet for My Father" (*TB*), Scarbrough discovers language to speak of endearing qualities—characteristics that his father's aggressiveness might have customarily obscured:

> He told time by
> Bell's beautiful face:
> A cheek or an eye
> Were the numerals by
> Which he could tie
> The hours in place. (1-6)

Scarbrough observes that the father's affection for Bell allows him to endure hardship, revealing the speaker's fondness for the father's affection. Though Scarbrough often clearly differentiates the voice of the father and the son in his poems, in "Singularity" (*ULT*) he reveals a merging

between the voices of the father and the son, Han-shan. The father notes "[o]ne man makes a poor team" (4), subtly referring to a team of draft animals, and the narrator depicts Han's struggle with "us[ing] plurality / Wisely" (3-4). Though Han-shan has been exiled "because of his / Singularity" (10-11), near the end of the poem, Scarbrough's narrator depicts Han-shan "[r]emembering his father's house as he walks under the trees" (13-14) and concludes with certainty and affection, a conclusion that could be attributed to either the father or Han-shan:

> … "A whole plantation," he says
> "Is beautiful and good to see,
> But a solitary pine jutting out
> From a headland is also fair
> And commendable." (15-19)

Though Scarbrough's poems often reveal sympathy for the father and occasionally identify with him, they also present the father as unyielding and harsh, which intensifies a sense of alienation and contributes to the outsider disposition of Scarbrough's work.

In the ostensibly scathing poem, "Daddy, You Bastard" (*ItK*), Scarbrough employs a moniker that seems to match his father's rough-hewn speech, reinforcing the wedge between father and child. Scarbrough's speaker remembers inspirational yet confusing qualities of his father. The father's hands achieve an almost mythopoeic quality while they are "holding a match flame / in a gray winter wood" (24-25), which adumbrates that the father is the keeper of a mysterious source of life that provides a susceptible and diminutive light. However, the speaker laments "[t]oo short on love too long, / I am still short on love" (55-56), suggesting the lack of affection has stunted his growth, an affection for which he still yearns. Furthermore, the symbolic hands also seem disturbingly real: "Your hands were golden, / bone-streaked cups of

wrath" (33-34). The lines, "I grew up in a striped suit" (49) and "never exceeded the cut of my clothes" (56-57) produce effective figurative language: the adjective "striped" and the anthimeria "cut" are both deverbals that refer to the violence of the father from which the speaker suffered. An allusion to the last line of Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," Scarbrough's poem echoes Plath's theme of child abuse. Whereas Plath's speaker attempts suicide in order to regain a deceased father, Scarbrough's speaker acknowledges a deficiency of love as a result of the father's cruelty. However, in "The Sharer" (*ItK*), a poem dedicated to his father, Scarbrough's reveals that the father also suffered in a vocational purgatory:

> Old work-whore,
> Cherokee slave blood
> Manumitted
> To serfdom:
>
> Free to choose master
> Yet bound to be chosen,
> Roving the county
> In annual unchoosing … . (1-8)

This poem depicts the father as a serf in a labor system despite having been "[m]anumitted" in a time nearing post-agriculturalization. Without the benefits of industrialization in which people choose their own bosses, the father is a "work-whore," the speaker seems to possess a sympathetic tone for the patriarch. The speaker, following in his father's "broken trail" (22), claims the father grows "[r]esentful" (17) and "[i]mpertinent" (18), though in a sort of grotesque humor pictures him "[a]mong strange outhouses / Swinging his lantern" (19-20). The father also

possesses characteristics, though he experiences perennial displacement, that connect him in a needful way to the land with "an eye to autumn" (12). By the end of the poem, Scarbrough's speaker attests to the father's gothic amplification despite his repression as "[a]micable and dangerous" (29), who seeks his payment before the diminished landowners he has worked for. This gothic amplification also occurs in "The Lost Logician" (*TCIU*, *NAS*) in which Scarbrough's speaker seems to sympathize with his father, who "looked like a great sad bird / on the far side of a stream, / a bitter bittern standing in strange water" (2-4). Scarbrough's speaker proceeds to hear the father speak:

> … like me, stand one-footed in the damp
> among the swift crayfishes standing back
> into the orifices of heaven's floor,
> who got here, not knowing logic's name. (36-39)

Occurring near the end of the first section of *The Course Is Upward*, which Scarbrough published after his own father's death, the emergence of the father's voice reinforces the distance between the "sad bird" (2) and the son, the "logic lover" (10). The father attests to his precarious position in a mystical portal between "the damp" and "swift crayfishes … of heavens floor" and implies that "knowing logic's name" might restrict access to the gothic realm the father seems to be entering with an otherworldly confidence. While Scarbrough, through his speaker, attempts to appreciate the determined figure of his father, he remains on the outside of his father's business as a collateral member of the broken trail.

Give Me an Answer

Though not alluded to in "The Sharer," Scarbrough's poetry depicts siblings who were also collateral members of the broken trail yet remain disconnected from the speaker in Scarbrough's poetry. Critical aspects of sibling disconnection emerge in the poem "For a Young Brother Leaving Home" (*TCIU*, *NAS*). Scarbrough's speaker remembers the seasonal heat as "an acre / Of arrows planted in the small golden wound" (1-2), leading him to recount, apparently to his brother, "[t]hat wound was in / Your back, boy" (3-4). The poem also draws a parallel between the people and the place, despite its "baneful, bitter beauty" (13):

> Hearing the creek run and seeing the mist
> Begin its building of streamy architecture
> Upon Starr Mountain, I remembered those summers
> And I remembered the golden waste … . (10-13)

The speaker seems to recollect a time of golden waste, which the brother might recall from one of their many shenanigans, yet the end of the poem generates a sense that after the brother's parting, the speaker remains unequipped to endure the loss of the presence of the brother. The speaker confesses that he will not be able "[t]o walk before you with the warmth, and be / Challenger of rain and merry with mountains" (22-23), creating an emotional vacuum for the speaker, which is augmented by "ancestral loneliness" (15).

A similar emotional vacuity emerges in "Letter to Spencer" (*TB*, *NAS*); a great distance seems to separate the speaker from his sibling:

> … I am grown from last year's leaving
> Into this man whose youth is past believing;
> I have been old before, but never before so old.

Today, brother, there is little news to be told

Except the wheat is heavy and the corn is young,

And Reuben came crying in the morning that he was stung … . (15-20)

The speaker seems compelled to update the brother with the family news: Reuben's dilemma, the quality of the wheat crop, "Lee married, Edith grown" (9), as well as elegant and enigmatic descriptions like "earth is a bright, dun mule biting a wood" (8). While Scarbrough's speaker seems relieved to share stories with his brother, he also knows his brother has "resented twice" the counsel he offers (30). The final lines, "Give me an answer when you have time to spare / And tell me how the earth turns for you there" (33-34), further reveal a shared appreciation for the earth, yet they possess a yearning to reconnect echoed in the end-rhyme. In his quotidian portrayals of the people and land of his youth, Scarbrough's poetry revisits attitudes and themes of fidelity and abandonment, affection and disconnection. Allan Tate claims, "The task of the civilized intelligence is one of perpetual salvage. We cannot decide that our daily experience must be either aesthetic or practical—art or life; it is never, as it comes to us, either/or; it is always both/and" (512). While Scarbrough's poems attempt to preserve and renew his connection to his family and Eastanalle, disconnections endure that also present themselves in how Scarbrough's poetry addresses the prevailing culture and religion of his region.

Damn Your Vegetable Ethos

Scarbrough's "Calf's Death" (*TB*) was first published in *Harper's Magazine* in May of 1942. It fittingly epitomizes the ironic, critical, shiftily trochaic, and stunningly swift music of his metaphorical language: "Bright was the calf's blood after the saw had cut / Cleanly the horn, bright as a scarlet flower" (1-2). Scarbrough received criticism from his Judeo-Christian

neighbors for indicating that the calf had a soul (Cumming, *Death* 2), even though sacred texts often address metaphysical sympathy for animals and the kinship of all living things: "O Lord, You preserve man and beast" (Ps. 36.6). Scarbrough's poem advances the notion that agricultural methods which resort to the influence of industrial economics of quick returns lack affection for animals and, in so doing, it condemns "[i]ndustrialism … as the regulating god of modern society" (Davidson 50). In this poem, Scarbrough illustrates the resistance to death that all living things possess: "The calf kept to its polished feet and thrust / Its willow-knotted legs against the wet" (6-7). Even though this calf had likely been raised for slaughter and consumption, the tone of the poem reveals that its slaughter lacks human sympathy. Much like Scarbrough's "Still Life: Dead Mule" (*NAS*) in which the mule becomes, "[h]imself the structural paradigm / Of what was true of us and him" (7-8), the calf's treatment reveals human cruelty more than it depicts an animal. Scarbrough's poetry seethes with the presence of the grotesque, suggesting excessive violence in "Return: August Afternoon" (*NAS*): "We used to go in the summer, among all those / Flies, and great clots of blood so black / We couldn't see the flies until they moved" (3-5). Though the "slaughterhouse" (2) seems amended in close proximity to "where the roses are" (1), in much the same way that Hawthorne's rosebush in *The Scarlet Letter* seems to improve the ominous prison door. Scarbrough appropriately depicts the slaughterhouse as a den of flies camouflaged by dried blood to indicate that the slaughter of animals in this manner is excessive and depraved. Scarbrough also suggests dissatisfaction with the seemingly respectable aspects of food production. In "Post-Operative Ethereal Journey" (*SSC*, *NAS*), Scarbrough's speaker articulates an agricultural disdain for seemingly admirable things: "O damn your vegetable ethos" (19), directing the imprecatory declaration to the inner self while experiencing loneliness and isolation from the world that "is a frozen turnip" (20). Scarbrough's work depicts speakers

denouncing cultural norms along with decadent cruelty, which intensifies a sense of separation from a way of life and estrangement in a numb world.

Furthermore, in "Calf's Death," Scarbrough forcefully includes gothic lines that humanize a speechless farm animal: "Only its eyes inquired, / Only its eyes asked questions of the dark" (9-10) and "Knelt softly, softly on the shining ground, / And came to rest the head above the half- / Stopped heart. Eye-questions ceased. There was no sound" (14-16). Scarbrough's speaker observes that the creature possesses emotions and a means to reveal distress. This theme of animal suffering from human machinations also occurs in James Still's "Leap, Minnows, Leap" (*The Wolfpen Poems*), which depicts wildlife perishing in the shadow of a dam: "A thousand eyes look, look, / A thousand gills strain, strain the water-air" (8-9). As Zoë Hester notes in "The Powerful Presence of Dams in Appalachian Poetry," dam-building represents power "disguised as progress" (3). By identifying cruel tactics practiced in animal husbandry, Scarbrough's poem reveals that the calf's inhumane treatment is its own judgement against a culture increasingly characterized by mechanization and indicates a disconnection between the speaker of the poem and the culture of the people. Though Scarbrough's poetry reveals a distancing from culture and the people of it, the speaker of "In Our Sad Fixity (*TCIU*) claims, "[b]ut we are something beautiful to me" (8) while "[o]ur faces vary" (2). Additionally, "The Census-Taker" (*ULT*) depicts Han-shan taking special care to celebrate his neighbors. He considerately and energetically observes his idiosyncratic neighbors, many of them outsiders like himself: "[o]ne male cross-dresser" (17), "a small brown man" who "babbles … country Spanish no one understands" (28-29), a black "man slim and tall / As a blue pine" (35-36), and "[o]ne judge who likes pansies" (49). The judge in particular reveals an ambiguity; a justice of the peace, often associated with rigidity and determination is suggested as possessing a level of

tender affection. While Scarbrough's poetry exhibits critical consideration of culture, it also commends those who are often culturally marginalized, reifying an outsider sensibility in his work. This outsider's perspective also emerges in Scarbrough's treatment of religious matters.

Hell's Writhing Proof

Scarbrough's expression of facetiae and sincerity regarding a Judeo-Christian afterlife is evident in "Scenes from Act One" (*SSC*, *NAS*): "[S]hould I ever get into Heaven / at all, it will be by ritual and not by hard / cognizance of the baptismal fact" (217-19), revealing his appreciation for nature and his rejection of orthodoxy. In "Hermes" (*NAS*), Scarbrough's speaker cynically encounters Enoch, a religious zealot, who espouses commonly held dogmas of the Judeo-Christian tradition, prevalent in the Southern Mountains of southeast Tennessee. Enoch proceeds to prove the veracity of his words and faith by handling rattlesnakes:

> "These creatures in my hands
> Are Hell's writhing proof I have
> Not put my faith in faithlessness,
> Have not betrayed original trust,
> And so remain whole and unharmed
> Among these happy, crawling things … . (111-16)

Enoch's mainstream theology allows him to impeach women for the loss of Eden, a loss he seeks to restore while setting "springes // Set to catch a sinner in" (140-41). However, Scarbrough's speaker departs with others, unconvinced: "unleashed / From spells" (147-48) and reaffirmed to understand the world as a prelapsarian, albeit bewildering, "garden of green" (150). While Scarbrough's work proposes a post-superstitious attitude toward religion, in "Invitation to Kim"

(*ItK*), he still capitalizes on religious imagery. Scarbrough transforms ecclesiastical imagery into literary allusions: "The spirit that escapes / The law" (38-39) alludes to the Apostle Paul's teaching in the epistle to the Galatians; "[boxes] are the hasped / And hinged covenants / I am secure in" (50-52) parallels housewares to the presence of Yahweh in the Arc of the Covenant; and the "house / Upon the lean, glazed / Stones of grace" (88-90) indirectly refers to Jesus's teaching about building on a firm foundation. Though Scarbrough also includes a Greek mythology reference to "Juno" (67), his willingness to borrow from religious tradition expresses an awareness of the literary value of religious symbolism. While Scarbrough's poems include biblical referents, they also challenge and modernize iconic biblical doctrines. "Two Poems for My Other Father: II" (*TCIU*) reveals a speaker who opposes the doctrine of divine love:

> So pride I have, and will not stoop to do
> The suffering of Love imposed on love,
> But will abey the Lover till he sue
> With blandishments his own sweet suit to prove,
> And lift from love the Lover's agony … . (9-13)

Claiming pride over love, the speaker spurns God the Father, who punishes his children: "In this sweet world most misery is bestowed / Because of love upon those who are his" (2-3). Scarbrough's willingness to depict overt religious renunciation ironically promotes the humanization of biblical characters. The third poem in a series dramatizing the members of the Holy Family, "The Son" (*SSC*, *NAS*) personifies the psychology of Jesus. In the poem, a young Jesus accredits Joseph, the woodworker, with fine craftsmanship: "fingers are forests giving gold emanations / Into the air, digitally dreaming God" (6-7). Of his mother, Mary, he says that the path of love that she is on "is long, and hers / Will be leavened by learning" (32-33), inspiringly

referring to her iconization as the Mother of Sorrow. Because Scarbrough chagrins the regnant Judeo-Christian religion of his region, he is able to reveal its weaknesses, depict honest opposition, expose its exploitative aspects, and enjoy creative portrayals.

Scarbrough poetry expresses aversion for the otherworldly dogmas of Judeo-Christian religion, and Robert Cumming notes that Scarbrough's alter-ego, Han-shan, also rejected the Buddhist and Taoist verities of his home region in Tenienti Mountains (*Introduction* 19-20). Since Han-shan became such a prominent historical figure with whom Scarbrough identities, the nature of his religious subversion becomes increasingly important. In "Shi-te's New Year Prayer" (*ULT*), Scarbrough reinterprets worship and seems to provide a materiality for otherwise abstract religious doctrines of the afterlife:

> Lord of all patches and gardens
> And rows taking root under
> Beneficent eaves, let not the savors
> Of paradise be too sudden … .(1-4)

Through Shi-te's voice, Scarbrough reveals a pious appreciation of nature, which is its own "paradise" and a corrective function in nature that can "modify the untampered / Dulcitudes of heaven" (11-12). Scarbrough's opposition to religious verities of his region, much in the same way of Han-shan, deals primarily with the alienating and dismissive aspects of the dogmas. In an interview with Robert Cumming, Scarbrough identifies with animism (*Conversation* 122), yet his focus on corporeal experience coincides with what John Lang observes as the tradition of Appalachian poets: a "resistance to the excessively otherworldly emphasis of the religious denomination in which they were raised" (364). Although Scarbrough's work prefigures poets from the Southern Mountains like Robert Morgan, Fred Chappell, and Maurice Manning, his

poetry joins with Jesse Stuart's and James Still's in its emphasis on the "natural world [as] the principal locus of the transcendent" (Lang 364). Scarbrough's emphasis on the body, on the physical, "becomes another means of connecting human and nonhuman elements of nature and of resisting a dualism that privileges soul or spirit or mind over matter" (Lang 365). Moreover, Scarbrough extolled the sanctity for nature that his mother instilled in him. In "Several Scenes …" (*NAS*), he claims that she "served to instill / in me a love of the ritualistic that goes beyond / reason" (215-17). His memory of his mother drinking from a spring where "some old trees were / blinding white against the hot blue sky" (201-02) became a "consummation" in which Scarbrough's imagination was consecrated for the work of celebrating the physical world (204). This emphasis on the tangible and visible promotes elements of sensuality and physicality in Scarbrough's poetry, a stress that characterizes how Scarbrough addressed homosexuality.

We Bleed Over Wine

Though Scarbrough's poetry does not provide an autobiographical rendering of his life, the topics of homosexuality and a love for words emerge in his poems amidst rejection, secrecy, and clandestine satisfaction. A connection of these topics emerges in "Retrospect" (*ULT*), an apostrophe in which Scarbrough's speaker addresses Han-shan and indicates a lack of interest in "women to wile me" (1) having chosen "what books promised" (8). Along with Scarbrough's sexual attraction to men, his love of literature fostered Scarbrough's status as an outsider. However, Scarbrough's depiction of homosexuality and verbophilia reveals a level of personal apprehension about the subjects, potentially the result of the abuse he sustained as a child. As late as two thousand and seven Scarbrough claimed that during his brief teaching stint in Europe, he met a girl in Holland and fell in love with her. However, he decided not to marry her, because

he "would have hated to see her work like his mother did" (*George* 27). Essentially, Scarbrough's sexuality, and ultimate homosexuality, seems more complex than a society can understand, a society which operates under a rigid binary understanding that people either have sexual attraction for the opposite sex or same sex. Scarbrough's treatment of his regionally rejected homosexuality mirrors Gloria Anzaldua's depiction of the ambiguity status of the mestiza in the face of the West's reductive categorization:

> She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good he bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (2100)

This theme of embracing conflict to achieve a sense of coherence appears in "Vacation" (*NAS*), in which the speaker seems to accredit the reader with "my only uncorrupted tension, / My one unimpeded vision" (81-82). Though he would identify himself as a homosexual, Scarbrough experienced multiple sexual dispositions in his life. However, by the age of seventy-eight, Scarbrough becomes more established in his homosexuality. In correspondences with Randy Mackin, Scarbrough states, "I am gay … I haven't written 'gay' poems, not ostensibly. All my poems are gay poems, all my religion has been gay religion, every breath I've ever drawn has been a gay breath" (*George* 4). While reaffirming unconventional notions of religion, Scarbrough celebrates and intensifies his identification as a homosexual, yet he also indicates that he avoids writing ostensibly "gay poems." Scarbrough's homosexuality appearing in his poetry could be analogized to an astronaut-poet's work—even if a poem does not overtly address outer space, it is still marked by the firmament. Furthermore, "Scarbrough had real concerns that … people would remember only that he was gay, not that he wrote literature of merit" (*George*

35). While Scarbrough focused on his craft, he increasingly addressed the culturally forbidden yet satisfying aspects of homosexuality.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition of Scarbrough's southeastern Tennessee upbringing, homosexuality was considered deviant. Scarbrough's status as a homosexual poet with Cherokee heritage, having defected with the religion of his region, resembles Anzaldua's depiction the mestiza in a state of conflict: "Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war" (2099). "Odd One In" (*ULT*), addresses the marginalization and disgrace that results when homosexuality is forbidden. When the father talks of the ostracized child, who is depicted as a "[c]owbird in cuckoo's nest" (7) that "has shat in the flax" (19), he does so with "a note of caution in his voice" (6), saying "[h]e's somewhere about reading a book" (16). The speaker suggests that the ostracization of their youth has paradoxically intensified an allegiance to family while diminishing appreciation for cultural practices: "I went to all the funerals. / I avoided all the churches" (22-23). Even in this poem the cause of the speaker's disgraceful treatment remains veiled, revealing a trend of hiding homosexuality in Scarbrough's work. However, though Scarbrough treats the theme of homosexuality in particular and sexuality in general as an artist rather than an activist, he occasionally champions it. In "Winemaking in Oakridge" (*NAS*), Scarbrough's speaker claims "I am ready for Kevin now" (111) after having "diverged from my son" (31), which refers to their psychologically crude former self. With language like "we bleed over wine" (59) and "son born again / Under that cometary influence" (92-93), Scarbrough's poem suggests danger and renewal resulting from the homosexual eros that characterizes the speaker's experiences with "Kevin at my side" (92):

I stilled to new summer heat

And somnolence beside his birth,

Begging under the hot blue

For what happens eventually

To be what I have begged for. (94-98)

While Scarbrough did not conceal his discordant affection for family and place, for much of his writing career, he disguised and limited referencing to his homosexuality in his poetry. However, in his later work, he represents homosexuality as obvious and viable. "Revenant" (*ULT*) proposes that even though Shi-te has died, the two men had shared a legitimate, domesticated sexual relationship: "Han-shan tries to confine his / Lover's absence to the bedroom" (1-2). The poem concludes by introducing a renewed agrarian vision of a gratifying homosexual relationship: "Han spies Shi-te in the morning, / Scattering handfuls of broomseed / Among the flock of white hens" (16-18). Though the arc of homosexuality in Scarbrough's poetry travels from forbidden to satisfying, a hiddenness pervades his treatment of homosexuality in his work.

Largely due to his culture's rejection of affection for those of the same sex as well as its antagonism for a fondness for reading, Scarbrough's poetry often depicts homosexuality and verbophilia as things that need to be veiled or kept secret. Though Scarbrough primarily interested himself in producing credible poetry, the rejection of his homosexuality presented concerns that pressed him to compromise his craft. He claims, "I used a woman's name in a poem that was addressed to a man" causing him to feel "cheap" (qtd. in *George* 36). This compromise of sexual identity seems to emerge in "Poems for Midi" (*TCIU*, *NAS*). In poem "VI" (*SSC*), Scarbrough's speaker suggests a tryst "at the heart of the wood" (1), where the speaker's lover was "like a bleating child, / Stammered and stalemated by the animal vision / Of the bull entering black in the blanched forest" (7-9). Scarbrough's speaker goes on to indicate the lover's

betrayal: “You did not fall out of love with me to see the idiot” (18). Ultimately, the poem possesses symbolism and suggestive language, yet veils homosexuality in rural images. Furthermore, Scarbrough also reveals the theme of secrecy regarding reading and books. In “Moving Day” (*ItK*), the speaker is given the task to care for a “knotty sea-conch” (3) during his family’s relocation “in the back of the wagon / among the pitchforks and ploughs” (12-13). “He knew from the book / surreptitiously hidden” (20-21) that the conch shell made “the sound / of his own blood running its salt tides” (23-24), indicating that the book not only separates the speaker from his family that threatens to “burn that goddamned book” (67), but it also ostracizes him as deviant. The way Scarbrough handles themes of homosexuality and verbophilia eminently reveals discordance with his family and place and contributes to the secretive manner in which he reveals the themes as both forbidden and celebratory.

Scarbrough’s sincere affection for the environs of his youth—his family and the culture of southeast Tennessee—also evoked disappointment that emerges in his poetry. The symbolic and physical disconnection Scarbrough felt for his homeland as well as for members of his family provided him with an outsider’s perspective and an insider’s intimate understanding. His lingual journey allowed him to use his poetry to develop a distance between the family and place that he loved so that he could address their troubling qualities from a removed vantage point. As Richard Hugo notes in his essay “Triggering Towns,” a person’s “hometown provides so many knowns that the imagination cannot free itself to seek the unknowns,” Scarbrough’s perspective toward his homeland comes to resemble that of someone who is foreign to it, so that he possessed little to “no emotional investment in the town” making “it easier to invest the feeling in the words” (Hugo). Although Scarbrough’s poetry enjoys cultural identity and religious imagery, incredulous attitudes and tones create distance between Scarbrough’s speakers and their

cultural and religious heritage. As distance grows between Scarbrough's narrating voice and the certainty of place and family, it becomes clear that a journey of discovery is taking place, which epitomizes Lao Tzu's words in "25": "To be great is to go on, / To go on is to be far, / To be far is to return" (12-14). As Scarbrough engages in this poetic journey, he also addresses the difficult topics of nothingness and ineffable fear while developing the formal parameters that would establish his poetic voice.

CHAPTER 3. NO MORE THAN ANOTHER NOUGHT

... Hope

then to belong to your place by your own knowledge

of what it is that no other place is

--Wendell Berry, "VI: [It is hard to have hope …]"

Having established a poetic style with the attitude of an informed outsider, Scarbrough, who himself felt isolated on account of his homosexuality and verbophilia, examines themes of fear and nothingness. Growing up in the heart of the Southern Mountains, Scarbrough became intimately acquainted and familiar with the cultural practices of his homeland. These enduring themes pervade Scarbrough's poetry and indicate psychological unease and confusion. Carl Gustav Jung recounts an experience of emptiness and subsequent fulfillment that ensued after a moment of ecstasy:

> Towards evening I would fall asleep, and my sleep would last until about midnight. Then I would come to myself and lie awake for about an hour, but in an utterly transformed state. It was as if I were in an ecstasy. I felt as though I were floating in space, as though I were safe in the womb of the universe – in a tremendous void, but filled with the highest possible feeling of happiness. (139)

Though not predicated by a rush of ecstasy, the visions of dread and oblivion in Scarbrough's poetry emerge in everyday occurrences. Like Jung's "womb of the universe," Scarbrough's poems seem to produce a lingual barrier of protection in which he explores the "tremendous void" of nothingness and fear and reveal an "imagination confronted either by nothingness or nightmare" (Manning 4). Scarbrough navigates these themes of dread and vacuity by exploring

several aspects of each: fear of an indefinite figure, fear of failure, despair derived from absence, the state of incompletion, the sense of hollowness, and the accursed lack of fulfillment. However, the attitudes of assertiveness and perseverance succeed in Scarbrough's poetry to catapult a voice through the "tremendous void" to the coveted position of acceptance and detachment.

Scarbrough claimed his home in Polk County, Tennessee, as the place from which his poetry flourished. In this county his poetry established "its roots in reality" (Preface xiii), yet he would further specify his cherished locus: "'[a]bove the mountain' was not my part of the county" (xii). However, he confessed, "Rather than Appalachian, I've always considered myself Southern" (qtd. in Garin 184); Scarbrough also admits, "As for being a part of Appalachia, I am, though more ancestrally than personally" (183). Because Scarbrough seems to have identified himself as a Southern poet, William Faulkner's Nobel Prize acceptance speech would have resonated with the young poet. In the speech, Faulkner addressed, "a general and universal physical fear" that branded the northern hemisphere during the Cold War (Crowley 723). Faulkner would go on to claim that the duty of the poet is to overcome fear "to help man endure … by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past" (724). In his preface to the fiftieth anniversary publication of *Tellico Blue*, Scarbrough neglected aspects in his later home of Oak Ridge like the "Atomic Museum," which signified nuclear warfare; favoring instead "the visible world seen with the naked eye," his poetry assails fear by addressing it in more human terms than those suggested by potential nuclear holocaust (xii). As Scarbrough addresses ineffable fear and jeopardizing nothingness, his poetry signifies the importance of courage and acceptance, determination and empathy.

In much of his early work, particularly *Tellico Blue* (*TB*) and *The Course Is Upward* (*TCIU*), Scarbrough's poetry reveals numinous and inexplicable fear. The fear primarily originates in a nameless, pursuing menace and the possibility of failure. Though the theme of nothingness occurs in his early work, it possesses characteristics of inevitability that acceptance, which are tones he would more fully develop in his later work. While Scarbrough's early poetry portrays a rhythmically lighthearted mood, it also reveals a Gothic dark humor that lacks flippancy or frivolousness. The circumstances may seem dire, but the poems' persistent flow and cheerful tone countermand the foreboding themes. Scarbrough's poetry gradually deviates from the fear motif, yet it still emerges in *Summer So-Called* (*SSC*) and *New and Selected* (*NAS)*. Originally published in *SSC*, the histrionic memoir, "Several Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) validates the theme of fear in Scarbrough's poetry. In this longform free verse poem that Daniel Cross Turner mislabels a prose poem (186), Scarbrough's speaker recounts woods at dusk "all the darker / because of the added fear in the trees" (2-3), which produces "a unique quality to the fear I felt" (11). Though Scarbrough's earlier poetry radiates with a fascination for fear, *Invitation to Kim* (*ItK)* and *Under the Lemon Tree* (*ULT*) more forcefully lean toward the topic of nothingness. In this later period, Scarbrough insistently treats dark themes with a flippancy consistent with the twentieth century cynicism of his time. Furthermore, by the time Scarbrough published *Under the Lemon Tree* (*ULT*), he reconciles dread and oblivion with desire and imagination, addressing the concept of nothingness with humor and indifference.

Not Being Seen

The fear of a nameless menace emerges in the mystical, Gothic references in Scarbrough's poetry. Oftentimes Scarbrough allows the origin of the speaker's ineffable

apprehension and fear of being pursued to remain ambiguous and unanswered. "Presence" (*NAS*) epitomizes the speaker's response to uncertainty and fear: "In certain hours / something comes close / behind me" (1-3), causing the speaker to identify a visceral response to fear in his neck hair. Scarbrough's speaker states

> What, I ask myself,
> turning clockwise,
> is there
>
> so terrifying
> about this world
> of hill rock … . (16-21)

Instead of answering the question, the speaker quips that he will return home "crying out to the unseen one" (29), whose affection he welcomes. Though Scarbrough's speaker questions the absurdity of their indescribable fear and attempts to turn it into farce, the speaker, intimately aware of perils associated with life in the Southern Mountains of the mid twentieth century, seems acquainted with the dread of an "unseen one." Though comparable to fear of the unknown, the speaker's fear more closely resembles the dread of a formless entity. In "The Train" (*TB*), Scarbrough's narrator depicts a young boy, who dreads the locomotive coming "for the first time" on "Twin rails shimmering in the sun of Dead Man's / Cove" (11-13), and shudders when he realizes "[s]omething from out there was coming / in" (26-27), posing a threat to the old, familiar landscape and introducing a new and exotic structure that seems unstoppable. This sense of being threatened or pursued also occurs in "Early Autumn" (*TCIU*), a poem narrated in the third person, which describes a boy who hears something claim, "Ah, I / see you"

(4-5), so the boy "[r]an as he had never run in all his life / Before" (10-11). However, by the end of the poem the narrator reveals, "Behind him there was Nothing – in the field, in the road / Anywhere under the sun. And the boy ran from the terrible, / Horrendous presence of Nothing" (34-36). Though the boy's fear seems unnecessary, it becomes intensified by the horrific potential that "Nothing" has addressed the boy at the beginning of the poem, and the boy has run from nothing: "The boy ran from fear toward fear; and the field / And the tree were alone. The road was alone too, / Under its veil of boy-disturbed dust" (28-30). Though the object of the speaker's fear is not physically embodied in the poem, the narrator associates it with many things in the boy's rural environment: "[w]alnuts" (1, 14), "echoes" (6, 18), "the road" (29, 34), and "tree and stone and earth and sky" (18). Scarbrough's poetry presents the possibility that nothingness surrounds the boy, who must learn to accept the disillusioning effects of overwhelming fear. "Catch-All" (ULT), later explores the frightening sensation of falling in the context of a dream:

> Han-shan often dreams of falling
> Off cliffs and rooftops and into rivers,
> Always quite conscious of never reaching
> Bottom. (1-4)

Though Scarbrough's narrator reveals that Han-shan comforts himself with the knowledge that "[t]he earth—far, far way, on the other side— / Is the world again" (5-6), and if he falls out of human society the physical earth will break his fall and "will catch me" (8). Though consoled by the notion of the "catch-all" earth, a dread endures as Han-shan acknowledges the "straw mattress" (10) is all that stands between him and "elsewhere" (11). While Scarbrough's poems explore the dread that results from inexplicable sensations, they also address fear of failure.

Through the persona of Han-shan, Scarbrough examines the threat of not succeeding in his craft, having been sentenced to Exile Mountain. In "A Hole in a Cloud" (*ULT*) Han-shan admits to the possibility of becoming "no more / Than a tramp along the highway" (9-10). He also surmises that his labor has been a failure: "Here on Exile Mountain I've built / A nest in a hole in the cloud" (11-12), an ironic and metaphorical claim that implies deficiency. However, Scarbrough's references to nothingness as a result of a sense of failure, especially in *UTL*, might also be a sense of irony that John Crowe Ransom observes, produces "a comic sense" and "a comic effect" as a "relief mechanism" (*Introduction* xix). The fear wrought from work that is under-appreciated also emerges in "For Two Laborers" (*TB*), in which the speaker attempts to shield his hay-cutting from the other worker, because he claims, "he would only count my presence trouble / And figure all his work to do again" (3-4). Because the speaker feels unappreciated in his labor, he concludes, "I know that I must keep / Myself away, must work not being seen. Must stand a white flint knoll always between" (12-14). Having acknowledged that the other laborer derides his work, he hides himself and his cutting as if "not being seen" would atone for his failure to properly cut hay.

A similar concern with fear of incomplete work emerges in "On Reading *The Man with the Bull-Tongue Plow* While My Roommate Slept" (*TB*). The speaker, who resembles a student eager to make an impact, a composite persona of Scarbrough, addresses Jesse Stuart, the author of the book he reads "embarrassed" and wakeful" (9), while his roommate sleeps. The speaker claims "there is one particular star to clear my eyes / Of that deep nothing there where Laurence lies" (2-3), suggesting that Stuart's book of poems acts as a "star," which he claims "Lights me at last" (12) while he avoids the "deep nothing" of slumber in order to be productive (3). The state of the roommate symbolizes more than desynchronized sleep; it also represents the absence

of imagination, a lack of vision. It is against this sleep that the speaker concludes, "I'm up to see / The flesh and blood I am not, yet might be" (13-14). Scarbrough reveals a speaker who acknowledges the nearness and potential for nothingness yet strives for the self-understanding and actualization that comes through work, possibly at his own peril.

As the significance of the sensation of fear recurs in Scarbrough's poetry, so does the haunting proposition of a lack of physicality. This Gothic sense of something's no longer being, which combines the two themes of fear and nothingness into a composite sensation, emerges in "The Field" (*TB*). Scarbrough's speaker senses "I did not see what walked the wheat. // At least the thing was not in sight" (8-9) and claims "I stood and heard its feet go by" (15). Scarbrough's speaker seems threatened by the absence: "then again was nothing there" (16) and insists "[a] man who had owned the field went by" (20), suggesting the man has passed away and has reverted to "nothing there," which produces a haunting effect at the end of the poem, augmenting the sensation of fear. Despite the dark and frightening mood of a disembodied presence in the poem, Scarbrough's poem demonstrates a reverence for invisible and frightening forces both nearly palpable and inchoate.

The Democracy of Snow

Scarbrough's most self-effacing and satirical collection of poems, *Under the Lemon Tree*, consistently connects the themes of fear and nothingness. Han-shan, the prevailing persona in *ULT*, is a historical Chinese figure, who adopted his name from the place to which he was banished, called Cold Mountain. Robert Cumming notes, "Scarbrough was introduced to the Han-shan poems in the early 1990s in a 1962 translation by Burton Watson" (*Introduction* 20). While the historical figures, Han-shan and Shi-te were appreciated by "beat generation writers"

as fugitives, expatriated for their homosexuality, Gary Snyder notes, "[t]hey became immortals and sometimes you run into them today in the skidrows, orchards, hobo jungles[,] and logging camps of America" (qtd. in *Introduction* 21). Despite the historical significance of Cold Mountain, Scarbrough named the region of Han-shan's displacement, Exile Mountain. This intentional modification of Han-shan's locus suggests that Han-shan acts also a surrogate persona for Scarbrough, whose poems reveal emotional and psychological turmoil as a result of cultural and vocational alienation. Throughout the book, Han-shan dreads a sense of failure and hollowness. In "Predestination" (*ULT*) Scarbrough's narrator notes Han-shan's vocational limits: "Plowing is past his power. / Wood-chopping impossible" (27-28), and Han-shan later claims "I was meant to be a poet, / And a poet I will be" (50-51), which demonstrates his commitment to his craft and intimates the unspoken fear of failing to succeed. The tragic possibility of poetic failure prominently emerges in "Spring Festival Day" (*ULT*) and "The Festival" (*ULT*). As poems re-formed from a similar experience, they provide different clues into the fear of failure. "Spring Festival Day" reveals Han-shan vacillating between memory and oneiric chimera: "[he] drowses, sleeps, / Dreams, wakes, drowses, / "Sleeps, and dreams again" that he walks the "Imperial Road" (4) where "[m]usic is playing" (10):

> Buyers and sellers make bets
> On who will win the Poetry Prize.
> A young man called Cold Mountain
> Is among the favorites. (19-22)

The theme of gambling, which possesses an air of irony, suggests that Han-shan's ambitious notions of literary fame are marked by winds of instability and chance rather than fate and destiny. And though Scarbrough includes the notoriety in Han-shan's self-prescribed moniker,

Cold Mountain, in "The Letter" (*ULT*), Han-shan confesses his isolation where "no climber / Has dared the head-high drifts that bar / Access to Exile Mountain" (8-10). In "The Festival," Han-shan ironically and deferentially exclaims, "What a place of kindness the world is" (50), after which Scarbrough's narrator discloses that Han-shan is not hungry: "His round belly purrs like a cat. / When he curls around it, / It becomes a security pillow" (52-54). These lines picture Han-shan serenely embracing a secluded and vacuous state, which he "curls around." The tone of the poem, like many in Under the Lemon Tree, reveals a sense of detachment, an attitude that is also evident in "The Dead" (*ULT*). After Shi-te's death, Han-shan visits his burial site while the countryside is "growing nameless now / In the democracy of snow" (13-14). When Han-shan reaches Shi-te's grave, he "hears the snow falling faintly / Throughout the universe," threatening to cover and un-name all that he knows (59-60), yet the calm depiction seems to indicate Han-shan's growing non-attachment despite the intensifying isolation that results from the loss of his lover and partner. While Scarbrough consistently addresses the presence of nothingness and the fear of failure in *Under the Lemon Tree*, he reinforces the importance of the themes in his other works.

Out of Dark Nothing

Scarbrough's willingness to address the distressing topic of fear and the dark notion of oblivion also emerges through themes of un-becoming and non-being. By addressing these uncomfortable topics, Scarbrough reaffirms the notion that "the proper concern of poetry is also to purify and vivify and renew the language, to enlarge the possibility of consciousness by enlarging the capability of speech" (*Imagination* 129). This "possibility of consciousness," along with a heightened awareness of self, radiates in Scarbrough's poetry by confronting themes

related to nothingness. “Poems for Midi: XI” (*TCIU*) poses an oneiric image of affection that appears susceptible to vagaries. The speaker avers “the intricate nature of our love” is like the nature of his vision with Midi: “paleness laid upon paleness, / A white breath breathed out of a face of whiteness” (11-12). In these lines charged with eros, paleness symbolizes instability, and the white breath combined with the white face produces the image of blankness, which threatens to undo both Midi and the speaker. Scarbrough’s poetry further demonstrates a person in a state of incompletion similar to the speaker in “On Reading *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* While My Roommate Slept.” In a later work, “A Death in the Family” (*ItK*), an allusion to James Agees’s memoir, the speaker appears enamored with his brother’s slingshot skills and marble-playing:

> I followed, to his bitterness,
> he handling me past hedges, through fences,
> galloping over fords,
>
> his adoring incubus … . (4-7)

The speaker identifying as “his adoring incubus” denotes that he admires and burdens his brother, but it also connotes that the speaker identifies himself as an unfinished being, a being formed in the process of following. Near the end of the poem when the speaker incredulously witnesses the dead brother’s hands “bunched in a suit that dwarfed his size” (125), his family members “went out of the house” (130) to the “sedge-bound road into the cedars. / I followed” (134-35), revealing the speaker’s persistence on his journey of becoming, despite the loss and confusion.

A sense of oblivion originates through the neglect and a feeling of being overlooked and treated with indifference in “Early Schooling II” from *ULT*. The speaker remembers “public /

Opprobrium. In his dreams / The master still bawls his number" (16-18) and defacingly concludes that he is "No more than another nought in / His already threadbare coat" (20-21). This dramatic connection to poverty and nothingness accentuates Han-shan's concern about fading to irrelevance, an insignificance experienced in the schoolhouse of his youth. This disregarded condition is echoed in "The House Where Rivers Join: Confluence of Ocoee and Hiwassee" (*NAS*) in which the speaker admits, "I have always been a / brilliant shrimp of a boy" (84-84) and proceeds to claim, "nobody minds now what / we love," revealing a status of neglect (88-89). Furthermore, the speaker notes that the house on the "upswing of earth" (26) resembles "a vari-colored *O* reflecting / the rivers' joining" 33-34). The italicized "*O*" stresses that the house possesses a hollowness at its core, causing its displaced existence to merge with the land, land best characterized by "the rivers' joining." Scarbrough's speaker proceeds to claim, "Being was what I sought, / the indestructible I" (127-28), revealing that the metaphorical "room" (129) of existence allows for both the order and chaos necessary for self-realization. Although the speaker also claims a desire for "[c]omfort" (137), Scarbrough employs a simile that allows the speaker to understand that the room of existence is "a series of enclosures" (141) resembling "a nest of Chinese boxes" (143), which suggests that an understanding of self remains elusively distant like words in the rings of an echo. An earlier poem, "Ballad for Odoron" (*TCIU*), reiterates that bewildering sense of hollowness. The speaker, Odoron, addresses his mother: "for the O's / In my name were round as the moon and streamed / In faultless circles in the blue atmosphere" (2-4). Though Odoron identifies himself with the physical body of the moon, he encounters the abstraction of "worlds in motion … spinning like conduits of air / Out of dark nothing" (5-7) and seems to become "Absent till dawn before [the moon] came" (22). Though Odoron would celebrate his "beautiful letters" as an "addled wight," a sense of uncertain identity

and hollowness remains as the end of the poem. This sense of hollowness appears in "Nothing of the Sparrow" (*SSC*) in which the speaker embraces nightfall as

> The moon hypothesizes
> On a tapering tree
> Death like a white gourd
> That is sparrow free:
> But nothing of the sparrow
> Is in me. (37-42)

Scarbrough's speaker recognizes that the "tapering tree" is dead, and Scarbrough uses a simile to communicate that the tree possesses a hollowness similar to a gourd. Furthermore, the speaker concludes that they also feel the emptiness of the tree, since both the speaker and the tree lack sparrows. The nothingness communicated in this poem derives from hollowness and a state of oblivion.

Scarbrough expands his treatment of nothingness to include condemnation and unfulfillment. In a later poem published in *The Southern Review*, titled "Lesson," Scarbrough's six-year-old speaker remembers his father's words: "You know nothing. Nothing at all," an imputation that stays with the speaker like a curse. Regardless, the speaker contemplates that he "*could* do more" by choosing a different path to pick "flavrous winesap" apples (20) and reveals an intimate knowledge of "[h]ow the high spring flowed down and across / The meadow to the swamp of cattail and / Calamus where we always stopped" (12-14). However, as Randy Mackin observes, "the father's influence proves to be the stronger" (*George* 59), so that by the end of the poem, the young speaker concludes that when he grows up he will be "Nothing. Nothing at all"

(39-40). The accursed state of the young speaker in "Lesson" resembles the condemnable state of the speaker in "Absence" (*ULT*) in which Han-shan sees his reflection in the mirror:

> "You," he says, "are a nonesuch:
> Lending your only good shirt
> To a passer-by and sharing your
> Supper crust with a fellow-traveler.["] (4-7)

Though Han-shan maintains a high ethical standard, serving those in need with kindness, he shrinks from his own reflection by condemning himself. In "The Census-Taker," Han-shan identifies a neighbor as "'one total nonesuch … Plus his feathered henchmen'" (33-34), yet instead of denigrating his neighbor, as he does when he contemplates himself, he seems to celebrate each of his neighbors' respective idiosyncrasies. The tone in "Drouth" (*UTL*), in which Han-shan observes the "Postman … leaving nothing" (10-12), parallels the lack of fulfillment that occurs in nature: "All day the raincrow has cried for rain" (15). Furthermore, the name of the poem indicates that both the landscape surrounding Exile Mountain and Han-shan long for the fulfillment of rain, adumbrating that cursed things resemble things that lack fulfillment. In "Still Life" the narrator observes that Han-shan longs for fulfillment: "There being nothing lovelier / Than something with something / In it" (2-4) stressing the importance even for an inanimate object to be filled. Later in the poem Han-shan finds "a dead mouse / In the well of a chalice" (11-12) and concludes "'How wonderful of nature / To abhor a vacuum as much as I do'" (14-15). Scarbrough's poem subtly reveals "intense feeling" and proves him to be an "artist [that] keeps it alive by his ability to intensify the world to his emotions" (Eliot 59). Han-shan longs for fulfillment and suffers from the denigration of feeling worthless yet still takes opportunity to quip, heightening the speaker's aversion for unfulfillment.

I Am I

Though Scarbrough's poetry addresses the unsettling topics of fear and nothingness, he also celebrates personal identity and self-awareness. In "Letter from Boston" (*TCIU*), Scarbrough depicts a speaker (a writer like himself) who confronts the isolating forces of indifference and responds with an attitude of infuriation and contempt. The letter that the speaker receives states, "Remember your barren acres are not all // And life is not so narrow" (20-21) to which the speaker notes

> The mangled marshes of hurt pride enclosed me
> And made me fume against my friend and Boston,
> Charging the city narrowness against them both,
> The historical come-upness and the unimpeachable mind
>
> And manner of New English invariables! (25-29)

The speaker's friend, and by the speaker's emotional association, Boston, do not possess the capacity to embrace the speaker's "barren acres" or the "green heart of a farm washed / By the gleaming shoals of Sewee River" (49-50). Upon realizing the reductive nature of the "unimpeachable mind," the speaker prays to his "Golden Country" (53), imploring it to "Receive the heart returning from the rest / Of the world" (54-55). The catalyst for the speaker's happy return to his homeland occurs in the tenth stanza:

> Becoming myself again, the man with a name,
> One in a multitude of names, and living
> In one of a multitude of places, seeing the larger
> Word over the parapet of my corner. (37-40)

This conviction emerges slowly through the poem as the speaker encounters disappointments and seeks self-understanding. When he initially sees the letter, he claims "I am I" and proceeds to more completely understand its meaning. In this poem, Scarbrough enjoys what James Justus calls, "the cultivation of words for their own value" (qtd. in *George* 62) and stumbles upon a biblical allusion, expanded and redefined. The biblical allusion coupled with the verbal reiteration of "I" reveals that Scarbrough expands on the idea that "every creature participates in, represents, and speaks for the I AM of creation" (*Imagination* 130), while simultaneously and insistently asserting his unique identity. The emphasis on meaningful and material identity in Scarbrough's poetry countermands the recurrence of themes like fear and nothingness, allowing his work to possess an attitude of endurance and concreteness that emerges from hope.

How Hopeful Is the Bird

While Scarbrough's poetry examines the potentially stifling realities of nothingness and fear throughout his long writing career, his work perseveres to discover a language for understanding and unique expression. "How Hopeful Is the Bird" (*TB*), a quatrain with the rapturous rhythm of lines alternating between trimeter and dimeter, seems to anticipate Scarbrough's willingness to portray difficult matters. Though this appears as the first poem in his first book, it would not be collected in *NAS* twenty-eight years later. The language of the poem is predictably ebullient and romantic; it confronts the unknown and uncertainty with excitement and metaphorical possibility. The entire poem is an apostrophe, addressing the mother, whom the speaker tells

The bird, is ghost

Of heart gone wide as air

And returned as feather

And crooked feet to walk

Where none may gather

Except those birdly ones

Whose tattered speech

Will drag me out one night … . (8-15)

The speaker indicates that his heart is drawn to the ominous, phantom-like bird, whose "eyes / As red as wine" (37-38) entice him to "[t]he footless air" (19). Though the speaker admits that gathering with the "birdly ones" may result in unpredictable treatment and transmogrification, they acknowledge the isolation as an opportunity to acquire a uniquely rhapsodic speech. The speaker also claims, "I shall be too / Such a calm and cradled thing," asserting that his life as a bird in which they "wandered free / In feathered silk" (31-32) will prove more nourishing than the care the mother has provided. Moreover, the ghostly bird that the speaker celebrates seems to be the bird which the speaker will transform into:

Bid him to watch the song

A small gray linnet

Will sing above his head:

With sweet tears in it,

Yet not as though I wept,

I shall send him word

From the foolish, hopeful heart

Of one new bird! (73-80)

Scarbrough addresses the complications of familial separation, indifference of nature, and the threat of going "[b]eyond the reach // Of human arms" (16-17), yet the poem sustains an ecstatic hopefulness that the speaker will find his song as "one new bird." By utilizing these Gothic aspects of dark humor, Scarbrough's speaker suggests the metaphorical possibility of trans-species life; a suggestion that also occurs in "Robbing the Bees with a Gas Mask" (*TB*), in which the speaker takes on characteristics of the honey bee:

Loping north in the sun

To his own plateau,

Remembering his pun

In the gothic glow. (37-40)

While these early Scarbrough poems resemble the exuberance and confidence of youth, depictions of dark and ominous settings like "the gothic glow" appear in various forms throughout his work. "The House Where Rivers Join…" (*NAS*), addresses the "mountain gothic / of my mind" (195-96) and "the gothic underglow / of old trees" (199-200), suggesting a psychological and primeval nature to the glow; and "Troll Poem" (ItK) depicts the cellar: "A rare doom color / like ink and milk fusing / in a cup of water" (81-83), revealing a room with a sinister ambiance in which the speaker attempts the difficult task, "to know who I am" (74). These later examples reaffirm the hopeful, yet stark, proposition found in "How Hopeful Is the Bird": "the leaves start // On the darkening tree with / A little shiver (48-50). The speaker remains determined to discover the self despite the gloomy and foreboding Gothic conditions in which the self is thrust; this indominable spirit endures throughout Scarbrough's work while his

poetic tone and techniques evolve. The importance of developing and discovering a distinct voice emerges in “How Hopeful Is the Bird” and parallels the value Scarbrough held for voice in his own poetry—a voice he would achieve through formal development and the adoption of poetic personas. Scarbrough’s development of poetic voice, though repeatedly addressing difficult topics of fear and nothingness, endures through hope, a hope characterized by belonging.

CHAPTER 4. THE WORD SPRINGS

To the tally of my soul,

Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,

With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night

--Walt Whitman "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed"

Elements of poetic form, tone, and versification all contribute in establishing Scarbrough's unique poetic voice. Scarbrough's conventional style, autonomy, and technique establish the groundwork upon which he honed his poetic craft. Patricia Wilcox notes Scarbrough's work reveals an "exalted distress … a voice and a live-kicking animal, arrogant yet regularly humiliated" (vii). The voice at work in Scarbrough's poetry ranges from confident to beleaguered, radiant to irate. Furthermore, Robert Cumming notes that unity and variability recur in Scarbrough's poetry: "no two of his poems look alike, his voice is unique … in its diction and music" (*Death* 1). Though Rodney Jones notes that Scarbrough's poetry "is of such a precise focus that it does not seem to represent any place so large as a region" (viii), the influence of literary figures like his regional predecessor, Emma Bell Miles, remains evident. To compare their biographies reveals that both Miles and Scarbrough encountered displacement and privation in southeast Tennessee (Milton 10-11) and possessed a fondness for iambic meter, the classic ballad, and end rhyme. Miles's book of poems, *Strains from a Dulcimore* (1930), also possesses themes that center around the eminence of nature and the human tendency to waste, two themes Scarbrough explored from the perspective of an outsider. Scarbrough's early work, especially, reveals an appreciation for forms often associated with quaintness, yet he deviates from picturesque portrayals, producing a "language [that] was always too exuberant to be easily

contained within rigid forms" (*Introduction* 18). Scarbrough's poetry qualifies traditional, free verse, and page poetry forms; it embodies bold tones, and harnesses vitality from various voices.

While Scarbrough benefited from received forms like the quatrain and sonnet used by poets like Emma Bell Miles and Jesse Stuart, he grew increasingly aware that confidence often emerges from tradition. In "Avuncular Visitation: Sleep" (*NAS*), Scarbrough writes, "One also accepts surety / in whatever form" (106). Though his work enjoys the confidence generated by received poetic forms, he also tends to incorporate obscure language and indirect expression. While Scarbrough exploited his homeland of Polk County in particular and east Tennessee in general, the lyrical quality of his poetry compelled his imagination to spring from his "emotionally invested" experiences, which, Cumming notes, allowed him to convey an "almost mystical relationship with nature and the land" (*Introduction* 16). However, Scarbrough began to focus more on language rather than his region. Moreover, Randy Mackin notes that Scarbrough made a "transition from being in love with language to having a love affair with the written and spoken word" (*By Way* 15), an emphasis on uncommon expression that may have contributed to his "underrecognized" status (Gander 13). As an extension of his obsession with language, Scarbrough produced an increasingly cryptic poetry that used words to dream his place in much the same way that Appalachian poets like Still and Stuart used place to dream in words. This theme of the connection between language and dreams emerges in "Bedbugs" (*ItK*): "The dictionary gave me dreams" (54). Due to his differentiating emphasis on language, Scarbrough avoids the dangers attendant to what Daniel Cross Turner calls a "restorative dimension of the [S]outhern past." While Scarbrough "exploited traditional verse structures," he also utilized free verse as "an endless experimenter" whose "poems display a spectrum of different styles" (186). Categorizing Scarbrough's poetry into three distinct periods promotes a better understanding of

the formal progression of his work: early period (*TB* and *TCIU*), middle period (*SSC* and *NAS*), and later period (*ItK* and *ULT*). Examining the stanza as a formal device in Scarbrough's poetry allows a better understanding of what Robert Haas calls "[t]he way the poem embodies the energy of the gesture of its making" (3), that is, a poem's formal qualities incarnate the source of the poem's inspiration. Analysis of poetic form in Scarbrough's work lends itself to a more complete comprehension of his work.

The range of forms in Scarbrough's books published between 1949-2011, shows an enduring commitment to traditional forms and an rising interest in innovative poetic forms (see fig. 1).

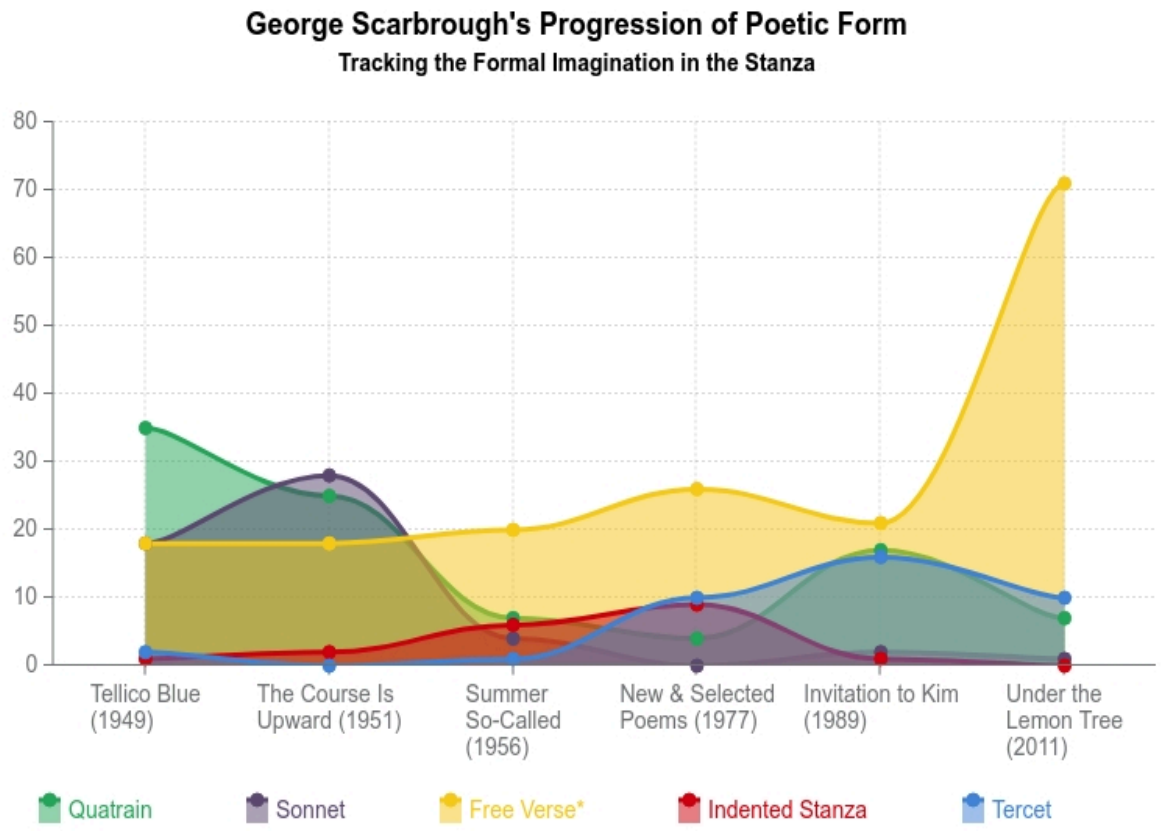

Fig. 1. George Scarbrough's Progression of Poetic Form: Tracking the Formal Imagination in the Stanza from William Rieppe Moore; "Intuition of an Outsider: From Nothing to Voice in George Scarbrough's Poetry"; East Tennessee State University thesis, 2021.

a. Free verse or vers libre is a poetic form that is strongly connected to stanza length but is not limited to it. In sorting Scarbrough's poems into this category, if poems were in non-traditional stanza lengths like sestets or triolets (i.e. "Lines for an Aunt" in *TB*), they were not categorized as vers libre, even if they lack traditional meter and rhyme. Poems that utilized traditional forms like regular end-rhyme or metrical fee were not counted as vers libre, even if they appear as standalone stanza poems (i.e. "Grandma Walden" in *TCIU*). Seemingly free verse poems that contain "embedded ballad" stanzas are not counted as free verse poems. Poems like "The Old Man" (*ItK*) that have qualities of both an irregular sonnet and a free verse poem are not counted as either. Neither "Several Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*), which originally appeared in *SSC* as a piece of prose, nor "Several More Scenes from Act One" (*NAS*) were included in the categories of figure 1. The vignettes between sections of *Invitation to Kim* are not included, either.

I Have No Sonnet in Me

Though Scarbrough utilized received forms like the quatrain in varying degrees throughout the course of his writing career, the sonnet played a significant role only in his early period and had virtually vanished by his middle period. While the sonnet appears less frequently in Scarbrough's work, his use the free verse form intensified. The "energy of the sonnet … can be thought of as an intense gaze at a subject" (Haas 122-23), yet Scarbrough's sonnets still possess a sense of spontaneity, as in "Sonnet for John" (*TCIU*): "And earth was spinning on a silver dime / And all things stable broke into a run" (3-4). Scarbrough's poems return to themes of family mistreatment, cultural dissent, and discordant topophilia; in "Roots" (*ULT*) he writes: "Consciousness is the first hurt / The word springs from the wound" (1-2), alluding to an extemporaneity present in both his sonnets and free verse poems. Though Scarbrough would deviate from the sonnet form in favor of free vers reveals what Donald Hall calls "the cool of whit": writing that results from linguistic mastery, producing "exquisite phrasing" and "the happy fulfillment of formal demands" (61). While Scarbrough's poetry exhibits a commitment to the structure of the sonnet, it also lends itself to deviations.

The emergence of the sonnet in Scarbrough's poetry experienced many variations. In his early period (1949-1951), Scarbrough primarily utilized the Shakespearean sonnet and occasionally the Spenserian sonnet. After the sonnet had almost entirely faded from his work, it resurfaced a few times as unrhymed or in a fifteen-line format, signaling its obsolescence. In *Tellico Blue*, Scarbrough wrote eighteen sonnets, but spiked to twenty-eight in *The Course Is Upward*, revealing his penchant for economic craft and skill with iambic metrical feet. Scarbrough favored the Shakespearean sonnet, which was likely a result of the influence of Jesse Stuart, whose work Scarbrough titled one of his *TB* sonnets after. The sonnet, "I Have a Lonely Heart" (*TB*), possesses an echoic refrain as the speaker mourns wearisome labor, which exemplifies the self-contained and isolated form coinciding with the themes of lethargy and loneliness. Though Scarbrough's sonnets mostly embody a neatly finished structure, he occasionally reveals the insufficiency of a single sonnet. For instance, in poems like, "Three Sonnets for Reuben" (*TB*), "Three Sonnets for Wild Madden" (*TB*), and "Sonnets for the Third Party" (*TCIU*), Scarbrough employs multiple sonnets to provide a more complete representation of a landscape, a psychology, or an experience; even in the twelve-part poem "Poems for Midi" (*TCIU*) seven of the parts are sonnets. "I Have No Sonnet" (*TCIU*) appears in section IV of *The Course Is Upward*, consisting of thirty-five poems, seventeen of which are sonnets. The context of this sonnet subtly indicates that though Scarbrough possesses aptitude as a sonneteer, the form lacks the substantive art of nature. Scarbrough also demonstrates contradiction and irony to signify the limits of the sonnet form, depicting the clash between art and nature. Exposing this clash aligns Scarbrough's poetry with the work of artists like Paul Cezanne and William Carlos Williams, who Wendell Berry notes "did not merely copy or 'plagiarize' nature, but rather made

a work of art newly imagined" (*Poetry* 37). The irony that the speaker cannot replicate nature is also an implicit irony that is mirrored by the form:

> I have no sonnet in me now at all
>
> That speaks improbable sweetness half so well
>
> As this deep morning light sent to forestall
>
> The day's deep weariness. Before it fell,
>
> The night was welcome, yea, so very so … . (1-5)

Although the sense of the first line seems to indicate ineptitude in the speaker, the second line reveals a more complete sense: the restrictions imposed by the form inhibit Scarbrough from conveying the "improbable sweetness" (2) of the "deep morning light" (3). The sonnet concludes by addressing "dead accumulations in a man's name" (11) as the speaker fruitlessly yearns for contradictory things: the "early sweetness" of sunrise in nature and the "long ago" of history (14). Themes of contradiction and insufficiency riddle Scarbrough's sonnets, yet his sonnets also reveal a neat construction.

While Scarbrough demonstrates commitment to the traditional rhyme scheme and metical pattern of the sonnet, even in his early period, his sonnets strain out of the mold—a trend that would intensify as the sonnet faded in his middle and later periods. For instance, in "Two Sonnets for a Black Bull: I" (*TB*), the metrical feet betray the classical iambic meter: "Great is the black bull in the five-wired lot, / Great is the tawny head and great the shoulder" (1-2). At the beginning of both lines Scarbrough uses troches, which can awkwardly be read as iambs. Furthermore, the two hard accents in "black bull" introduces another troche in the middle of the first line, extending an awkwardness which pervades the sonnet. Finally, the final iamb of the second line possesses an added unstressed syllable in "the shoulder," moreso a seemingly

accidental occurrence of feminine meter than an intentional amphibrach. During his middle period (1956-1977), a sort of impatience with the sonnet form emerges in the first line of "That First Spring" (*SSC*): "If on a morning of that first spring" (1). In this line Scarbrough both interrupts the iamb with an anapest in the third foot and disrupts the rhythmic flow of the fourth and fifth metrical feet with a single-syllable in "first." Scarbrough more aggressively utilized the irregular sonnet in his later period (1989-2011), as "Sonnet for My Brother Lee" (*ItK*) brazenly demonstrates. For instance, the first line possesses flawless iambic pentameter and sets the regular pattern of a classic sonnet, yet Scarbrough introduces a complication in the second line with the colloquial phrase, "That brother of yours" (2), which includes an anapest in the second foot of the line and limits the fifth line to iambic trimeter. An extension of this irregularity and a veritable farewell to the sonnet in "Delusions: II" (*ULT*) in which Scarbrough's narrator reveals Han-shan's concern about rejection and notes, "[t]he history he / Recounts is not his own" (7-8). Despite the ostensible disqualification that this poem is not a sonnet, because it occurs in fifteen lines, the second half of line seven and the first part of line eight, possess a simulacrum of the sonnet's iambic pentameter, though interrupted and divided by a line break. Furthermore, the tone in the irregular sonnet adumbrates an emerging attitude of resentment toward a falsifying restraint that has compromised Han-shan's memory and serenity. The final three lines of this irregular sonnet utilize irony to lampoon the cause of Han-shan's disquiet. While lines thirteen and fourteen employ free verse meter, the final line contains a complete instance of iambic pentameter, controversially including a remnant of the sonnet's form, even amidst Scarbrough's later period, in which he seems to turn away from this easily recognizable traditional poetic form.

As a creature of the twentieth century, Scarbrough utilized free verse throughout his writing career, yet in the early period, the free verse poems emerge more as a relief from the confines of traditional structure rather than as a mastered form. In "Drought" (*TB*, *NAS*) the spoken quality of the poem correlates to the *vers libre* focus as an enriching alternative to the rigidity of a received form:

> We were cliff dwellers that summer, after
> We stopped plowing in the field and took
> To the high white walks of the cliff to wait.
>
> The women brought out dinner in hot pails,
> And jugs of water the color of quince juice,
> Saying the hogs were out and fighting in the spring,
> And they dipped where they could, knowing the temper of hogs. (1-7)

This free verse excerpt reveals an indulgence in language as well as a characteristic colloquial nature, as if the speaker, ad-lib, recounts a difficult period of life. Scarbrough's *vers libre* poems spring from the oral culture of his family's region in the familiar landscape of his homeplace, yet they possess a contrarian quality, which coincides with the emphasis of the free verse form. D. H. Lawrence notes, "Free verse tows no melodic line, no matter what drill-sergeant … . We can get rid of the stereotyped movements and the hackneyed associations of sound and sense. We can break the stiff neck of habit … . [F]ree verse has its own nature … . It has no satisfying stability" (qtd. in Haas 348-49). Scarbrough's poetry exploits this unstereotypical movement in "Reinterpretation" (*SSC*, *NAS*), which uses enjambment to break up similes and introduces the

hyphenated line end—a feature that figures prominently in his indented stanza form. "Troll Poem" (*ItK*) reveals Scarbrough's aptitude for concise lines and dense syntax in which his speaker needs to enter the "root cellar" (1), but sees "trolls" (22) behind "trapdoors" (24):

A potato lies,
suspiciously toothed,
brown as a paper sack
on the gray dirt floor.

I need to go in.
But have been promised,
among other things,
a meeting with God. (6-13)

These lines embody what Wendell Berry calls, "an exacting sense of enough" (*Poetry* 90) by condensing language and epitomizing the lines' sparse sufficiency. This sense of enough both thematically and syllabically resembles William Carlos Williams' poem, "The Term," which reveals his influence on Scarbrough. "A rumpled sheet / of brown paper" (1-2) is crushed yet resurrects "Unlike / a man" (15-16). Though Scarbrough's poem revisits the "mountain gothic" (195) theme of boyhood superstition introduced in "The House Where Rivers Join…" (*NAS*), "Troll Poem" presents a tone characterized by a blunt title and condensed lines. The poem centers around the lines, "Who will have the tools / will have the door" (17-18), which reveal three things at once: a coded phrase, a resolution to the problem of fantasy, and what Robert Haas calls the "profoundly mysterious" juxtaposition of syntax and structure (353). While

Scarbrough's free verse poems employ juxtaposition, they also allow for verbosity, especially in his middle period, in which Scarbrough generates exuberant, longer lines of poetry.

By employing the free verse form, Scarbrough's poems possess a weighted quality and an agility. Utilizing free verse throughout all his books allowed Scarbrough's work to benefit from what Fred Chappell calls "that elder American art form, the sampler" which produces a "variety of forms … to suggest a kind of melting pot American quality" (*Preface* ix). Though traditional forms may have come as second nature to Scarbrough, by using free verse he successfully demonstrates a connection between content and container, form and function. Using free verse with iambic characteristics of blank verse helps his work to resemble "speech or prose" (Corn 80) and allows for a "music [that] is more complicated than its statement" (Manning 8). A poem from Scarbrough's middle period, "Letter from East Tennessee to America" (*SSC*), produces a Delphic rant with a heavy reliance on iambic meter and headless metrical feet, exposing stereotypes of Southern mountaineers and indicting an American audience that provides "clichés" instead of "education" (72) and augments "formal confusions" (76):

> There are no Don Quixotes in our hills
> To ride the giants of progress down. Each man his squire
> Turns from the silly sight of cap and bells
> And holds remembering and muddles on.
> Pity us now the mangled mess of our manners. (67-71)

Scarbrough aptly uses free verse to allow his speaker a wide berth for their tirade, a diatribe that includes multiple instances of alliteration, blank verse lines, and free verse lines. The poem also indicates an antipathy for insuperable elements of "progress," a seeming digression from the form of the poem. By repeating "pity us" the speaker indicates that their folks have become more

pitiable as a result of progress: "No longer do we go / To paradise up through a well of hills / Holding at the other end a handful of stars" (85-87). The repeated line also exploits consonance and persists as an ironic indictment against the sneering apologists of progress, "who," Scarbrough seems to suggest, "held us in contempt down here" (qtd. in Garin 184). The agility of this free verse poem promotes a weave between alternating metrical patterns and suffusive diction. The free verse poetry from Scarbrough's later period evades consistent rhyme and meter and indicates the resultant cloying from unrestrained allegiance to a rhyming form in "Monday" (*ULT*):

> Han-shan loved churning day—
> the bashing clashing dashing lashing
> mashing smashing nattering battering
> pattering spattering splattering
> neaping leaping sweeping heaping … . (1-5)

The first stanza continues in a playful manner to suggest the obsolescence of rhyme and meter, while sonically imitating the sound of butter-making. The following stanzas possess end-rhyme, but the stanzas exhibit sufficient brevity that Wendell Berry says, resembles "a machine" with "no redundant parts" (*Poetry* 90). Though the first stanza mockingly gorges on rhyme, it remains a necessary measure to convey a sense of displeasure with an emphasis on rhyme. Because "Monday" is the sole poem in *ULT* with any semblance of traditional forms like rhyme and meter, it signifies that Scarbrough's poetry elects free verse. Furthermore, other than "Monday" (*ULT*), which Scarbrough re-forms from "Winter Bread" (*NAS*), *ULT* possesses no works re-formed from past poems, indicating an imagination loosed from the unforgiving hasps of youth. Free verse becomes Scarbrough's favored form, but the fluency with received forms figures vital

throughout his career. Scarbrough observes, “In a sense all the other books that I’ve written have their origin in *Tellico Blue*. It is the fount and font of all my later writings” (Preface xiii). And though figure 1 demonstrates the hockey-stick spike toward free verse in Scarbrough’s later period, the relevance of the quatrain and tercet remain notable.

Among the Subversives

In Scarbrough’s early period, he regularly utilized standard received forms like the quatrain. Robert Haas notes that the ballad stanza was “one of the earliest” four-line forms (85), and in *TB*, especially, Scarbrough’s poetry recurrently adopts the classic ballad 4-3-4-3 rhythm and ABCB rhyme scheme. However, Scarbrough’s quatrains also showcase ingenuity. Like Robert Frost, Scarbrough exploits the familiarizing effects of meter and rhyme chosen in an impulse of creation, while simultaneously establishing the pulse of the poem. Scarbrough’s quatrains come to life and clarify the terms of their existence. Robert Haas notes that the importance of groups of four emerged in “preliterate cultures” around the world “based on the points of the compass. Plants, animals, clans, numbers, genders, weathers, colors were associated with the four directions” (85). “Christmas of the Flowers” (*TB*), an orderly quatrain with an AABB rhyme scheme in iambic tetrameter, reveals an early dedication to rhyme and meter that has an oral quality:

> On Christmas day, as like as not,
> The little flowers will go to pot
> The truth is that on Christmas Day,
> The flowers will make a sad bouquet. (13-16)

In his early period, Scarbrough's quatrains also employ extended lines that lack regular meter while still utilizing end-rhyme, which is apparent in "Cutting Sod-Land" (*TB*):

Under the disc the frog's blood was much brighter,

In sod-land rested five years, farmed in one.

I must confess my heart was something lighter

Before the harrow brought the frog's blood gleaming in the sun. (1-4)

Scarbrough's poetry also reveals a penchant for the rhyme scheme of the classic ballad, though eschewing the 4-3-4-3 iambic metrical pattern. "The Flowers That Got Mixed In" (*TCIU*) exemplifies the application of the classic ballad rhyme scheme with a syllabic effusiveness that contravenes the classic ballad meter:

And sutured with death and deep in raze and resin

Under the bleating blade, but otherwise

Only a fill of hay, except for the Susans

Who died with a passionate patience in their eyes! (13-16)

Of the ninety-five quatrains that appear in Scarbrough's books, fifty-five percent of them possess variations of rhyme and meter; and of that fifty-five percent, ninety percent occur in his early period, indicating that though Scarbrough's poetry favored the use of the traditional form throughout his career, by the middle and later periods, it had ceased to utilize the traditional feature of end-rhyme. However, Scarbrough's commitment to and adaptation of the four-line stanza reveals a connection to a longstanding human tradition and a willingness to make modifications based on poetic trends.

While Scarbrough's use of the quatrain in the middle and later periods reveals metical variability and a lack of standard rhyme, it also subtly reveals loyalty to traditional poetics. As a

self-attested Southerner (Garin 184), Scarbrough demonstrates an unwieldiness. Fred Chappell notes, "Whatever the prevailing fashions in poetry … no matter what current popularities are in the breeze, the Southerner turns upon them a skeptical gaze while clothing favored subject matter in language that sets it prominently forth without disfiguring it with neon" (*Not* 487). The Modern application of the quatrain in Scarbrough's middle and later periods reveals a focus on the form, "without evoking the effects of meter" (Haas 99). Scarbrough seems to have always had a sense of Modernism, even though he clearly attached to traditional forms early in his career, despite the avant-garde poetic influence of the early twentieth century. The influence of Eliot and Pound, who reverted to the quatrain as an antidote to a "*vers libre* movement" they judged was "descending into sloppiness" (Haas 88), emerges in Scarbrough's sustained interest in the quatrain. "Country Mosaic: The Locust Cried 'Pharaoh'" (*SSC*), a pseudo-mythic, reimagining of a biblical story, possesses a heroine, a "buoyant lady" (5), who resembles "an inverted Moses" (11). This poem begins with a traditional quatrain ABAB rhyme scheme but switches to a classic ballad rhyme scheme in the final stanza and both exaggerates and condenses the line, which reflects the complicated task of retelling a familiar story. Paul Ramsey notes that "Scarbrough's poetic aesthetics invades and hobbles his forms, but his best poems unite vision and form into wholeness" (55). While the form of the ballad and the quatrain prove seminal in Scarbrough's work, his poetry also subverts formal expectations. In "The Carpenter" (*SSC*, *NAS*), Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, sardonically contemplates "[s]tar directives, astral ultimatums" (2), which have pitted him against the Judean authorities and "Mary reading":

> But who am I to lose love and sit
>
> Among the subversives? A word

In the community good for smiles, a man

Simple and spraddling after the grand tour,

No colossus in these roads, (20-24)

This apocryphal, persona poem reveals Scarbrough's poetic tone growing increasingly enlightened, anachronistic, ironic, and humanistic. The four-line stanzas reveal a shortening affect and possess anthimeria, enjambment, and iconoclasm. Despite Scarbrough's contrariness, his quatrains undergo adaptions common to Modernism. For instance, in "For All Partakers" (*NAS*), the line seems halved, which mirrors the theme:

Part of the tree

is cordoned off

with a piece of rope.

The fruit hangs in slivers … . (1-4)

Daniel Cross Turner notes that Scarbrough's shortened quatrain lines "simultaneously cut and spill into one another," and "they connote separation as well as connectedness" (187). The terse line is also evident in "Postcard Woodcut" (*ItK*), in which the sentences build the line in much the same manner that patches comprise a crazy quilt:

Black trees writhe. A white spire

Topples. The tempest runs round.

Carelessly, it meets the runners coming.

The man sleeps on. (9-12)

Scarbrough's middle and later periods include a protean spectrum of quatrains. While these modernized quatrains depart from rhyme and meter and adopt the truncated line, thematic juxtaposition, and a growing tone of irreverence, they cannily maintain a greater commitment to

the familiar form of the four-line stanza, a commitment that allows for the application of a countervailing form in the three-line stanza, while preserving and perpetuating traditional forms

A Countervailing Form

Scarbrough increased his use of tercets while inventing new methods to incorporate more traditional stanzaic forms like the quatrain. While Scarbrough includes only two tercets in *Tellico Blue*, his work does not begin to indicate a growing interest in the three-line stanza until later in his middle period (*NAS*), yet it eventually emerges as a significant form. Scarbrough's use of the tercet, which increases during a slump in the production of quatrains, becomes the counterpoint to the order represented by the more traditional four-line stanza. While Robert Hass observes, "[t]here is something of imbalance and excess in threes" (53), Scarbrough's rare tercets from the early period seem to be seeking equilibrium. However, tercets in Scarbrough's middle period promote an increased brevity of line, exemplified by "Still Life" (*NAS*): "twilight marauder / whose beak went / snicker-snack" (13-15). Reveling in an economy of form, this tercet poem encourages pause that compliments a brief experience about discovering a "luna moth" (5) in the "yard grass" (2), an occurrence which looms large on the page due to the modern form Scarbrough employs. By the later period, Scarbrough's three-line poems celebrate a lack of "the evenly balanced support felt to be present in either the couplet or the quatrain" (Corn 81). Two poems that exemplify this growing asymmetry both appear in *Invitation to Kim*. "Thomas Jefferson," a poem dedicated to William Carlos Williams, examines the contradiction of Jefferson, who "was too beautiful for wilderness" (5) yet possessed a "divided mind" (15): "Now I labor my point to say / His failure was mine. I too am / A prince of fashion in a strange land" (19-21). The juxtaposition of the incriminating twenty-first line reveals the ease with which

Scarbrough infuses the concerns of the speaker into the limited space of the ternary form. In "Luna Moth," Scarbrough's speaker reflects on the indifferent stars "passing" (18) overhead: "those bright, / casual haberdashers, / button me" (19-21). In this tercet, Scarbrough uses brevity to generate a sense of suspense. It also demonstrates facility with astounding metaphors, which seems to exceed the carrying capacity of the poem, as if the already lopsided stanza might overspill its bounds. Of this excessive tendency, Alfred Corn notes the propensity for tercets to "roll forward into the next stanza … rather like the continuous belted traction of a tank or earth-mover" (81). The brevity, imbalance, and dynamic nature of Scarbrough's three-line stanzas reveals the poet's facility with modernizing poetic trends and underpins the importance of stanzaic forms in Scarbrough's poetry.

On a few occasions in *Summer So-Called*, a book which subtly commemorates the turn of Scarbrough's poetry to a more saliently Modern style and tone, Scarbrough carefully embeds a form of the classic ballad. The occurrence of this "embedded ballad" demonstrates that Scarbroughs seeks to incorporate traditional forms into his rapidly emerging longform free verse poems. Although the imbedded ballad doesn't occur with the 4-3-4-3 iambic metrical pattern, "For the Boys Who Swam in the Place of Baptism Before the Saints" (*SSC*, *NAS*) incorporates a classic ballad rhyme scheme of ABCB in the midst of a poem with a non-descript stanza length:

> For public amenity, God grant it so!
> Let comfort be multiplied and plural,
> And sustenance for saints supplied;
> As well, hold haven for the swimmer who
> Leans with a lilting sense upon the tied;
> And those who watch be gentle too

To them as heavenly flocks and flowers grow

Into this Sunday land so hardly rural. (17-24)

Rhyming occurs throughout the poem in the stanzaic structure of an ABCDCDAB scheme, yet lines eighteen through twenty-one (BCDC) reveal a veiled version of the classic ballad rhyme-scheme: ABCB. The embedded ballad feature also emerges in lines twenty-one through twenty-five of "The Source Is Anywhere" (*SSC*), and lines nineteen through twenty-two of "A Word to the Other Side" (*SSC*). Furthermore, the imbedded ballad emerges in "Bedbugs" (*ItK*). In the last stanza, the speaker concedes to the bug infestation, a resignation that shimmers with music:

Under a minikin moon,

Thin peeling of October light,

I lay on my ghostly bed

And waited for dreams to bite. (55-58)

Rather than an unintentional phenomenon that randomly occurs, the embedded ballad provides a resolution and relief in some of Scarbrough's poems that strain for direction and evidence a commitment to traditional form perpetuating in Scarbrough's work. To a lesser degree, the free verse poems in *Under the Lemon Tree*, with alternating tercets and quatrains, demonstrate a potentially inadvertent acknowledgement that a "poem should find its own rhythm" and "its own stanza pattern" (Haas 346), yet must have a foundation from which to deviate. Even in *Tellico Blue*, Scarbrough's poetry evidences an early leaning toward an intermingling of stanza forms, which is evident in "Descriptions of Spencer Trouble Coming Home from New York" (*TB*, *NAS*). The free verse poem, "Dreams" (*ULT*) demonstrates the balance of the quatrain stanza in juxtaposition with a tercet stanza:

Now, when Han-shan's father comes

Into his son's house, he asks:

"What place is this?

Have I been here before?"

He leafs through a book,

Gazes at a picture on the wall,

Parts a curtain at the window. (156)

Despite the oneiric setting, the quatrain allows the father two questions after two lines of context leading to the tercet stanza with the necessary space for the action of verbs like "leafs," "gazes," and "parts," accenting and accentuating disquiet. In the final stanza of the poem—a quatrain, the speaker offers his father a "cup of moonlight / From the crystal bowl he keeps / On the windowsill" (15-17). In this stunning moment of grace, Scarbrough's poem demonstrates his mastery with the blended free verse form, which exploits interchanging tercet and quatrain stanzas. It also demonstrates Scarbrough's knack for invention. While Scarbrough's free verse poems with alternating tercets and quatrains capitalize on the sometimes-jarring shift between forms, they also demonstrate a careful fusion of the two stanza forms: adoption of the increasingly popular, uneven tercet combined with the more balanced, traditional form of the quatrain.

The Hideous Impracticality

While Scarbrough remained committed to traditional and adapted verse forms, he also experimented with indented stanzas and revealed a willingness to create a poem form as it appears on the page. Through the nine-line indented stanza in particular and indentation in

general, Scarbrough complicates and camouflages quaint themes of rural life, employs line-end hyphenation, and loads the line by dividing and condensing language. In "Several Scenes from Act One" (*SSC*, *NAS*) Scarbrough addresses the theme of conflict with quaint, nostalgic allegiance to familiarity:

> … sick again in heart
> and mind, as I have been many times in between
> at the hideous impracticality of my own
> romanticism. (124-27)

Scarbrough's nine-line indented stanza acts as a defamiliarizing form, while still addressing those things to which his poetry remains so devoted: family and place. Though the graph in figure 1 does not seem to indicate the prominence of the indented stanza during its emergence in Scarbrough's middle period, the form still figures prominently. For starters, the introductory poem, "Dedication to the Book," specifically employs the invented form of the nine-line indented stanza. While indented stanza poems in *New and Selected* are a larger category than the nine-line indented stanza, it comprises fifteen percent of the new material in the book, which is a prominent figure, especially considering the fact that four longform free verse poems account thirty-six percent of the new material. "The Private Papers of J. L. McDowell, M.D. [Mountain Doctor]" (*NAS*) provides a quintessential example of the indented stanza:

> soft and sweet, the hills
> heavy with health. Lusher materia medica
> I have not seen. One hour this morning,
> I espied angelica, mandrake,
> elecampane, witch-hazel – all

in one small valley. Add sarsa-

parilla for taste, honey for vehicle, heal-

all pure corn whiskey

for menstruum … . (136-44)

The succession of lines with proximate and protracted syllabics, the crowded status of each line, the intensification of the language through hyphenated line-breaks, and grammatically rich inventories all succeed in producing a stanzaic form with hypnotic and reverent qualities. R. T. Smith notes that "The Private Papers…" possesses "semantic traction" (8), a phrase that could be applied to the other nine-line indented stanza poems. While a measure of disproportion presents itself through the nine-line indented stanza's off-balance appearance, Scarbrough generates an unexpected structure that belies its appearance on the page. The three poems that embody this stanzaic form: "Dedication to the Book," "The Private Papers…" and "Pied Beauty" possess the same indentations. The first, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth lines are all indented one tabulation; the ninth stanza is indented with a double tabulation; and the second, third, and seventh lines are all justified to the left margins. Poems like "Indiana: Love in Polyphonics" (*SSC*) and "Materia Medica" (*SSC*, *NAS*) exemplify early, middle period page poems that work toward the indented stanza, yet do not achieve the steadiness of the nine-line indented stanza. While the appearance of this stanzaic form on the page may initially suggest disproportion and a sense of instability, it remains ripe with balance. Like a pitcher with the side of its base slightly hanging over the edge of the table, the right amount of fluid will prevent it from being too light to maintain a stable position and so heavy it capsizes itself. Scarbrough's nine-line indented stanza is a pitcher with the right amount of fluid. Incidentally, Scarbrough's nine-line indented stanza also stands as a rejection of the meticulous formalism of the Spencerian stanza in favor of his curious invention.

While the indented stanza surges in Scarbrough's middle period and fades away in the later period, it still indicates a mastery of line invention that would contribute to the perpetuation of free verse and quatrain forms as Scarbrough refined his poetic voice.

Half of Any Art

Throughout Scarbrough's writing career, he employed various personas as speakers for his poems. Robert Cumming observes that Scarbrough "spent much of his life in the passionate search for resonant voices" (*Introduction* 18). "Poems for Midi: V" (*TCIU*, *NAS*) lends credence to the theme of searching for consonant voices: "Each man is made of two, and so I seek / The other one as ceaselessly as wind" (1-2). While Scarbrough scholarship attests to prominent personas like Odoron, Reuben, and Enoch, Scarbrough's poems also include a variety of other less-recurring speakers, whose experiences seem distinct from and analogous to his own; from these voices Scarbrough's work explores empathic expression, allowing for greater empathy for others and for himself. In "The Story Ruth Told" (*TB*), Ruth is the speaker, who discloses her dueling affection for Carl and Charles. Moreover, in "For Two Laborers" (*TB*), the speaker's voice belongs to one of the laborers, who claims, "I know that I must keep / Myself away, must work not being seen" (12-13), revealing the subtlety with which a speaker's voice emerges in a poem. Scarbrough's poetry also explores alternatives to a customary application of personas. "Night's Rest in the Second Person" (*NAS*) reveals a method by which Scarbrough could address his experiences "deep in the back- / water near the / beginning" (9-11) without the irritating perpetuation of the first-person pronoun that Robert Cumming notes Scarbrough he grew "so tired of" (qtd. in *Introduction* 21). The persistence of personas in Scarbrough's poetry leads to the discovery of a sustaining voice.

By the time that he began drafting *Under the Lemon Tree,* Scarbrough had discovered Han-shan, a historical figure from China in the eighth century, who lived a hermitic life. Robert Cumming notes that through Han-shan, Scarbrough wrote "simple direct, and frank" poetry, "never failing to call attention to the flaws in society" (*Introduction* 20). Though the hermitic tone emerges forcefully in *ULT*, Scarbrough's poetry had already addressed reclusiveness in his early and middle periods. From his early period, in "Dark Grows the Valley" (*TCIU*), the themes of darkness and epiphany coincide; discoveries emerge in remote settings and belong to their denizens:

> And in the lightest places, darkest drifts
> Roll with the wind, comparable to reason
>
> Only in their depth and wideness, so
> The more revealed is more enclosed from view … . (7-10)

Scarbrough advances an understanding of the hermit's role in "The House Were Rivers Join: Confluence of Ocoee and Hiwassee" (*NAS*). Drawing on his experience as a young man from a remote county, Scarbrough develops a speaker who ironically celebrates an "epochal existence" (302) in a "mountain gothic" (195) landscape:

> I have drawn the breath
> of a mazed, enraptured anchorite,
> couched in the elegant care
> of my county mind. (431-434)

By revealing that the speaker possesses "my county mind," Scarbrough indicates that an aspect of removal has already occurred. Moreover, a level of bewilderment and ecstasy simultaneously

grips the speaker, who claims to be "a mazed." The proximity of "mazed" to "enraptured" connotes a sense of ecstasy while highlighting the actual state of the speaker's disembodied sense of disorientation. Scarbrough expands the theme of remoteness with themes of obsolescence and indifference, which recur in *Under the Lemon Tree*. In "Upon Opening His Gifts on Christmas Eve" (*ULT*) Han-shan claims, "My new poems will again have / To be written over last year's pages" (20-21), an act that reflects resilient privation yet adumbrates overpainting. In a sense, the sustaining persona of Han-shan at the end of Scarbrough's later period suggests that Scarbrough's prior work is the underpaint that provides the foundation upon which the overpaint of Han-shan's voice becomes more resonant and radiant. Furthermore, "Han-shan Fashions a Myth" (*ULT*), a poem included in *The Poetry Anthology: 90 Years of American's Most Distinguished Verse*, states, "Proper / Location … is half of any art" (10-11), which suggests the vital role of voice in poetry. This poem also embodies an urge in Modern art to merge the mythopoeic and the quotidian with a sense of irreverence:

> In the egg-yolk light of his lamp,
> He sees universes scintillating in blue
> And gold like his beloved Saturn,
> And hears, from close by roosts, the dry
> Clattering of galaxies being re-arranged.
>
> And then the cry of damnation comes:
> He sleeps and dreams of starfalls
> And all the rumpus of dragons. (14-21)

Through the use of irony in "damnation comes," the poem seems to increase in humor rather than an expectation of peril. In the midst of this irony, Han-shan "sleeps and dreams of starfalls," which produces an oneiric mythology. This poem exemplifies Scarbrough's masterful use of irony. By adopting intermittent use of irony, especially in his later work, Scarbrough seems to amplify a modern, skeptical tone. Through the persona of Han-shan, Scarbrough's poems maintain a clear voice, embrace hermitic insights, reinforce the foundation of his earlier poetry, and utilize irony for comic effect, yet introduce a complication of identity.

Despite the success Scarbrough enjoyed by utilizing personas in order to give his poems a characteristic voice, he seemed to strain under the weight of the voices he accumulated in his verse. In the penultimate poem from *Under the Lemon Tree*, titled "The Gift," Scarbrough comes dangerously close to crossing the veil between the poem and the poet speaking, between the thing created and the creator. The poem begins with "old George" talking, and like George Washington Harris' character, George, or Cormac McCarthy's character, Suttree, Scarbrough's George fills the office of "interlocuter" yet with more "amusement" than "carnivalesque" (Luce 209). Old George claims, "Doubtless, I encountered / *Tertium quids* in depicting / Han-shan's life as mine" (4-6), conceding that "a third something" emerges that is neither Han-shan, the persona, nor George Scarbrough, the poet. Old George goes on to admit, "All journeys end at the beginning" (17), and the omniscient narrator reveals George's thoughts, "Marveling over the chromatics / Of extravasated blood" (54-55), which indicates that old George has experienced a transfusion of his literal life to the voice of Han-shan in exchange for the advancement of his poetic voice. The persona of Han-shan became a sustaining source for Scarbrough's poetic expression. Discovering Han-shan in his later period, Scarbrough acquired "an alter ego to help him say the things he needed to say" (*Introduction* 21), and Scarbrough even claims, "I am

finding that I can be, well perhaps, more truthful hiding behind Han-shan" (qtd. in *Introduction* 21). While Scarbrough's work demonstrates a sense of belonging and acceptance through the persona of Han-shan, it also reveals an absence of sustained connectedness, what Fred Chappell calls a "longing to belong to some settled, established, and humane order of existence" (*Longing* 23). Han-shan provides Scarbrough's poetry with a surrogate voice that promotes reconnection with self yet sustains an attitude of disconnection with the world.

As Scarbrough's poetry adapted, persisted, and evolved, it also demonstrated several key principles. His work, especially the early period, reflected an abiding interest in traditional forms that Scarbrough inherited from Southern and regional poets. Moreover, Scarbrough's imbedded ballad reinforced his commitment to established forms in conjunction with the increase of less traditional free verse poems. The formidable presence of *vers libre* in all three periods revealed a comfort with modern influences of experimentation and extemporaneity. Furthermore, Scarbrough's invention and repeated utilization of a recognizable indented stanza reaffirmed the relevance of his work during the innovative period of poetry in the twentieth century. The emergence of sustaining voices in his poetry produced a humanizing element in his poetry. Throughout his career, the persistent emanation of poetry from Scarbrough, proves A. E. Housman's comments on the craft: "The production of poetry, in its first stage, is less an active than a passive and involuntary process … . I should call it a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion like the pearl in the oyster" (qtd. in Laird xi). Scarbrough's work also aligns "with the ancient meaning of poet as maker" (Green 20), to the extent that for Scarbrough, making poetry, in all its various forms, came as naturally as exhaling. While other prominent features of Scarbrough's work, like longform voice, line breaks, paired fractals, and figuration would contribute to a clearer understanding of his poetic

legacy, analysis of Scarbrough's stanzaic form and poetic voice reveals the durability and adaptability of his poetry. As Scarbrough's poems originally indicate his acceptance of received poetic forms, they seem to emerge with instinctive resolve and mastery. With the foundation of traditional form, his work transitions through increased use of the tercet and the indented stanza, and the steady adaptation of free verse allowed Scarbrough to develop a sustaining voice that addressed both the ordinary and subliminal aspects of life.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

We, who have lost our simplicities, salute

You, O World, from the purple hollows:

Let it be said that we are about to die.

-- George Scarbrough, "Traitors and Lions Were More Easily Faced"

The legacy of Scarbrough's poetry is twofold. Firstly, Scarbrough's work is often considered ambiguous, which possesses a knack for bewilderment. Because of its uncertain nature, Scarbrough's poetry may seem to be riddled with contradictions. While the post-structuralist literary critic may attempt to exploit any ostensible textual disunity, the fact remains that Scarbrough's penchant for unusual expression often isolates his readership. Secondly, while his work firmly grounds itself in experiences from his homeland of Polk County with his family, it primarily deals with the realm of the emotional and theoretical. As both literary critics and poets from the Appalachian region search for literary figures as torch-bearers, Scarbrough is often overlooked for authors like James Still and Jesse Stuart, later Robert Morgan and Fred Chappell, and more recently Ron Rash and Maurice Manning. Poets and critics from the Southern Mountains gravitate to several elements: Jim Wayne Miller notes that Still's work possesses a "concreteness" (xvii), Rita Sims Quillen praises the "world outside" (64), and John Lang values the elevation of the "commonplace" (368). While Robert Cumming claims Scarbrough "was a consummate author of place," Scarbrough also depicted his homeland as "a mental construct as much as a physical place" (*Resonance* 15). This propensity for the conceptual life appears as a conflict in "Long Division" (*TB*): "Why, in the name of God, was I the one / Whose body, picked to harbor such a mind" (1-2), revealing an emphasis on the

abstract with a qualifying reference to the physical "body." Scarbrough's propensity for abstraction and love of language combine to promote a poetry that James Justus says possesses "exotic diction" and what Sara Henderson Hay says is a "tendency to be impressively oblique or obscure" (qtd. in *George* 62). However, Scarbrough's fidelity to his family and place endures in his work.

Examination of Scarbrough's poetry benefits from an understanding of his complex and often estranged relationship with his family and the denizens of his region, which contextualizes the outsider perspective of his poetry. The son of a sharecropper, Scarbrough experienced both belonging and estrangement not only from the Polk county country of his birth but also from his family. Though the speaker in "Impasse" jadedly claims "I remember whistling / under my breath" (9-10) in order to quell his "father's narrative" (12), the poem reveals affection for his family in the face of fear as in "Morning" (*TCIU*). Scarbrough's poetry embraces the paradox of simultaneous affection and discord for family. This paradox is evident in William Faulkner's novel, *Absalom, Absalom*! in which Quentin Compson claims: "I have had to listen to too much, too long" (254). While Scarbrough listens to his past, a past marked by familial disappointment and loss that he revisits through the imagination, he evokes a language for renewed understanding of family and self. As a homosexual, Scarbrough also experienced distance from his family and culture, a separation acutely evident in "Sonnet for Donna": "To leave all love and go my separate way, / Law to myself at table, in bed or town" (6-7). Through the paradox of family ties as well as sexual orientation, Scarbrough broadened his status as an outsider, which accentuated his insight and allowed him to see his world in a detached fashion.

Scarbrough's attitude toward the dominant Judeo-Christian religion of his region also provided him with a unique perspective. It is through the rejection of aspects of one's culture that

may permit a more complete participation in it, and Scarbrough's rejection of religious verities allowed him to literally and artfully cherish "mortal beauty rather than eternal love," which can generate an abstract and arbitrary relation to the world (Sullivan 119). This attentiveness to physical realities rather than the Judeo-Christian shibboleths provided Scarbrough with an outsider's perspective regarding his region's predominant religion; this distance, which is "[t]he secret of all art" allowed for the preservation of the past in which "memory is purified and embellished" (Milosz xix). Scarbrough's ambivalence for established doctrine also allowed him to develop a quasi-animistic appreciation of the natural world. In "Though I Do Not Believe" (*ItK*) Scarbrough's speaker observes that the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, "God the Father's Other Emissary / Spooky as milkweed down / As a dandelion's uneasy head" (76-78). Furthermore, in "Letter from East Tennessee to America" (*SSC*) Scarbrough indicates that religious instruction hinders people from going "[t]o paradise up through a well of hills/ Holding at the other end a handful of stars" (86-87). Scarbrough's poetry insists that a supranatural life radiates the natural world. This insistence allowed Scarbrough to "compose" what John Gatti calls "earth-centered poems expressing love for Creation and a spirituality thoroughly embedded in the material world" (qtd in Lang 365). Despite his poetry's awareness of the link between the supernatural and natural, Scarbrough's work acknowledges the "difficulty in merging with nature" (Milosz 31). As Scarbrough's poetry identifies the value of the natural world, it also reveals the reality that art is not a mirror of nature, but is an emphasis on the language of his poetic craft.

As Scarbrough's writing career advanced from his earlier work, his form changed, and while his emphasis on family and place remained, the tone of his poems became more direct. James H. Justus notes that Scarbrough's poems "were rendered richer by a mode and manner that plunged far beyond the comforting couplets and sonnets of his earlier verse" (xvi). Even in a

formally structured poem like "Sapphic Problem" (*SSC*) Scarbrough's language radiates with a richness and freedom despite the reference to death: "To remember the lunatic lark in the wheat / Throwing his gifted voice in the direction of death" (1-2). It is toward this death or from this death that Scarbrough trains his poetry and fashions a "theater of sound" that borders on the ecstatic (Gander 16). Though much of Scarbrough's early poetry derives from conventional poetic forms like the sonnet or quatrain stanzas, in which he incorporates looser metrical patterns that allow for colloquialism, his later poetry would still utilize the quatrain form. He also adopted greater use of the tercet to indicate imbalance and free verse to allow for increased variety of expression. However, Scarbrough's commitment to received forms remains dominant as in such poems from his later period, "The Mill on the Cheshua" (*ItK*) and "First Frost" (*ULT*).

Through the development of multiple poetic forms and an explicit adoption of personas, Scarbrough was able to advance his work and refine his voice. In *Invitation to Kim* Scarbrough employs terse line-breaks and a more assertive tone. In the posthumously published *Under the Lemon Tree,* the persona, Han-shan, provides Scarbrough with "a kindred spirit" and an alternative to the "rejection, isolation, solitude" that Robert Cumming notes allowed Scarbrough to re-envision "ever present rural county concerns" (*Introduction* 19). This liberty that Scarbrough enjoyed with Han-shan's persona emerges in "Inspiration" (*ULT*) in which Han-shan brazenly proclaims, "'Let / Fall what will" (10-11) and "It's all the same in the end," revealing detachment and resignation (13). Moreover, much like the Tao Teh Ching man who possesses a disdain for "excessive organization and mechanization" (Hummel xii), Scarbrough's Han-shan finds himself in "Revenant II" (*ULT*) enjoying "a good / laugh at the moon," which is also a laugh at societal constructs that demean and degrade people (8-9). Through Han-shan, Scarbrough expands his enduring poetic voice, from its earliest commitment to traditional forms

to its later resonation with bright energy.

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VITA

WILLIAM RIEPPE MOORE

Education: M.A. English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2021

B.S. Humanities, Columbia International University, Columbia, South Carolina, 2006

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of Arts and Sciences, 2019

Teacher, Principia Center; Columbia, South Carolina 2010-2011

Publications: Moore, William Rieppe. "[Springtime's good to those who can afford]," "My Forebear's Feats Set My Proud Blood on Fire," "Zephyr's Plea." *James Dickey Review*. Volume 36 (December) 2020.

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Moore, William Rieppe. "Against Nature: The Pursuit of a Symbiotic Vision in Wendell Berry's 'The Clearing.'" Kentucky Philological Association Paper's Conference. Pikeville, Kentucky. March 1, 2019.

Honors and Awards: Honorable Mention, Poetry Society of Tennessee – Northeast Chapter, Fresh Breath poetry competition, 2015

Finalist, *Jasper Magazine*, One Book One Poem poetry contest, 2012