















*Lynn Marie Houston, continued*

do violence to animals. In the first, kittens are drowned by the speaker's grandfather as she watches, and in the second, a dog is shot after a fatal attack on a sheep. However, both of these become meaningful life lessons, such that the violence is seen as useful, educational: the grandfather tells the young girl "not to give / life to anything I couldn't feed. Your lesson held/ on like moss through the years when I needed it" and then the speaker learns "the order of things" when the grandmother protects the family dog from the grandfather who wants to shoot it ("With My Grandfather Todd the Summer I turned Sixteen" ll. 19–21). The violence in both of these poems set in rural Kentucky has a lesson, a purpose; in Shipley's poetry, the suffering that comes from a hard working farm life is educational, unlike the suffering in the Northeast which takes on no greater purpose in her poetry.

The fact that Shipley does not present a whitewashed image of the South is important to contemporary discussions about the violent and racist legacy of the Southern past, as it separates her from a certain "traditionalist" perspective in Southern literature. Daniel Turner, in *Southern Crossings: Poetry, Memory, and the Transcultural South*, discusses key differences among Southern writers who are writing from outside the South with regard to how they remember the past. He makes a distinction between poets that "preserv[e] a mummified past from . . . cultural transitions" and poets who show "signs of a more jagged nostalgia, one that struggles to come to terms with a transformational South: old times there are not forgotten, but re-viewed with a different, even distrustful eye" (48). Here, Turner offers above an important nuance in deciphering the status and role of memory in Dixie Displaced writing. For Shipley and others, nostalgia — the "jagged kind" that appears in their work — is very much a political act, one that does not try to erase social realities. Turner further writes:

[t]hese poets maintain the importance of region as a site of difference but place it in conjunction and at times in conflict with other means of differentiating subjectivities. They envision the US South as the geographic basis for a circuit of socioeconomic and political exchanges, an ideological space where regional ties constitute a powerful but not exclusive level of social definition. (150)

In her own family history as revealed through her poems, Connecticut becomes the place where she watches her mother and father die, where she has her own death scare when she has to have a brain tumor removed. While Connecticut is the place of death, Kentucky is the place where the sacredness of the earth extends a dignity and stability to life there. While one of the results of this contrast between the Northeast and the South is to glorify Kentucky, the glory of the South clearly lies in the past. The speaker's memories are from her childhood, of people who have all passed on now. As a setting in her poetry, Kentucky is not unconditionally good. It is also a place of shame associated with some of the experiences lived there.



## PATERSON LITERARY REVIEW

*Lynn Marie Houston, continued*

Vivian Shipley's body of work is extensive, spanning four decades of production. Her writing offers itself as a rich example of what is a larger phenomenon: how some of the writing produced by authors who have left the South is informed by common traits that can also be found in the work of other exiled writers in other parts of the world. In this way, analyzing her poetry entails applying many of the same questions asked by those who study the work of transnational writers. Nico Israel, for example, in writing *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*, states goals that are the same as this project: to "acknowledge . . . the mutually constitutive complexity of subjectivity, language, and place, and history" (22).

What seems specific to Shipley's poetic project, and grounded in the dynamic explored here, is that she regularly gives voice to other displaced women. In addition to the poems she writes out of her own life experience, she has written poems of displacement from the first-person perspective of Hitler's sister, Yeats' daughter, a Salem witch, Winifred Benham (the last witch tried in Connecticut), Mary Shelley, James Joyce's daughter, Bronislaw Wajs, the Radium Girls, Cleopatra, and others. She rewrites the Daedulus-Icarus myth as a story about a mother and a daughter. In fact, one of her recent book of poems, *The Poet*, plays with the ruse of the poet as life-writer, in which she imagines the poet in numerous situations which she has never lived, challenging her reader to distinguish the difference and making the point that she is fully capable of writing fine poetry that requires research, not just lived experience. However, the vast majority of the award-winning poetry she has produced is defined by the three traits of Dixie Displacement detailed here.

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