

LEWIS NORDAN AND THE WATER ARCHETYPE

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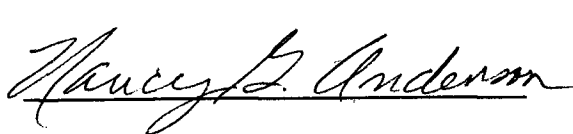
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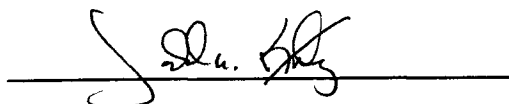
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INTRODUCTION

Water is a source of life and death. Without water there is no life, but the force of water also kills thousands of people every year. Since water covers over seventy percent of the Earth's surface, a large number of people live around water; thus, water has a very powerful effect upon them. The body of water near where they live dictates many, if not all, aspects of their existence including their food and their livelihoods. Riverbanks have always attracted settlers who built villages and towns near rivers. These rivers also brought other travelers and commerce from overland and up and down the river. These river towns prospered because of the water, but with prosperity also came risk.

Many towns that relied heavily upon water have dried up as the river's course changed over time and took away the lifeline of the town. "When water is lacking, life wastes away and is in jeopardy, for vegetables, animals, and man suffer more from thirst than from hunger." Even early man feared being without water for this reason (Wendt 87).

Charles Reagan Wilson's Encyclopedia of Southern Culture looks at the influence of water upon the people of the South: "One must not overlook the influence -- occupational, economic, and environmental -- that the freshwater streams and rivers have played and continue to play in southern life and culture" (356). Some river people even lived on houseboats along the rivers of the South: "these river folk made conscious

choices to pursue lives of freedom and independence" (Wilson 356). Water is these people's lives, but water also has ways of destroying.

Flood waters have had catastrophic effects on great cities and towns and individuals in the past and will continue to do so. The Bible speaks of the destructive force of water. God flooded the Earth and killed most of the life on it. According to Genesis chapters 6-8, the world will end through water. Man has tried to control water, but he cannot. In many instances, man's attempt to control rivers has made the floods, when they finally happen, much worse than they would have been otherwise.

The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture contains numerous examples of man's attempts to control the waters of the Mississippi River. The founders of New Orleans ordered a protective embankment to be built. "As early as 1727 Governor Etienne de Perier reported construction of an earthen wall a mile long and 18 feet wide" (335). Until 1850, it was the responsibility of landowners to build and maintain levees on their shoreline. The poorly built levees led to a great flood in 1844. In 1849, the federal government gave the responsibility for levee building to the states. The state-created levees were also swept away in 1858 and 1859, causing great damage. After the creation of the Mississippi River Commission in 1879, the federal government was responsible for helping the flood problem. By 1912, the levee system on the Mississippi River extended 1500 miles, but great floods in 1912, 1922, and 1927 once again demonstrated man's failure at controlling water. The most catastrophic flood occurred in 1927 and "inundated 26,000 square miles of land, took 214 lives, drove 637,000 people from their homes, and

ruined \$236 million worth of property." A \$300 million project was begun in 1928 to control the waters of the river (Wilson 336). Even today, man cannot control the water.

The Mississippi River continues to flood. From June through August 1993, the Mississippi River overflowed its banks and destroyed communities, homes, and lives in the Upper and Middle Valley. Over 70,000 people were displaced when nearly 50,000 homes were damaged. Fifty-two people were killed by the raging waters that caused \$15-20 billion in damage. Because man continues to believe he can control water, people relax, lose their respect for the water, and put themselves in death's path. In this way, water's physical presence is involved, but water also has a non-physical presence.

People's acknowledgment of water's spiritual presence is found in many cultures and religions. Some ancient cultures believed "that water, the prime source of all life, was the basic substance from which other forms of matter derived" (Wendt 1). In these ancient traditions water was regarded as the very source of life, a belief strengthened by the fact that man and all living creatures need water to maintain life. The idea of water as a life-giving substance has found expression in many religions in the idea of a mystic water or fountain of life. The cleansing property of water also acquired religious significance as a means or symbol of ritual and spiritual purification (Cavendish 229). Many cultures used baptism as a cleansing process to make a person whole again. The spiritually motivated of these non-Christian cultures would be baptized more than once in their lives, and some believed that the water could even restore virginity to anyone baptized.

In one of the earliest known writings, the Pyramid Texts of Egypt, which date from around 2500 BC, water has both a reviving and purifying role. When a king died, he went to the next world and bathed in a lake in which the sun-god Re revived himself each morning. During the ritual of embalming, washings were frequent to cleanse the corpse from death and to revive it. This rite is believed to be based upon the rites performed by various deities to bring Osiris back to life. Evidence of this practice is important because it shows in a single ritual two aspects of water: cleansing and revitalization. The use of both aspects of water is not found again until Christianity emerges, but the use of water in initiatory rites or spiritual rebirth was practiced by the religions of the Graeco-Roman world. In fact, the oldest mystery cult of ancient Greece, the Eleusian Mysteries, practiced the rite of bathing in the sea for purification.

The Hebrews also took part in ritualistic washings after being healed of leprosy or coming into contact with a corpse. According to John 9, Jesus anoints a blind man's eyes with clay and orders him to wash in a pool, after which the man can see. These are examples of the belief in water's ability to remove uncleanness, but more important was the washing in which the followers of John, and subsequently Jesus, took part. Total immersion in water was required to be purified from heathenism and to be accepted into membership in the people of God. John's preaching of baptism and his subsequent baptism of Jesus emphasized repentance for the forgiveness of sins. According to Matthew 28, Jesus instructed his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Around AD 56 or 57, Paul, in his letter to the Romans,

presents baptism as a ritual death and rebirth, much like the ancient Egyptian's belief of the rebirth of the king (Cavendish 229-232).

The power of water is such that, in many people's minds, it can transform a person, wash away the old life and bring on the new. "Baptism is known generally as the rite of initiation into membership of the Christian Church" (Cavendish 229). It is an outward sign of acceptance of God and is also a transformation of the individual. Moreover, the baptized individual becomes a member of the family of God, eligible for eternal life in a better place. His thirst is quenched as he escapes the eternal fires of damnation. Baptism is probably regarded by most people "as originating from the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist, . . . but ritual washing or immersion in water was already an ancient and widespread practice before that time, and various meanings were attached to it" (Cavendish 229).

Not only do many cultures believe that water is a cleansing agent that helps prepare souls for the next life, but some also believe it to be the medium that acts as the barrier between this world and the next. Be it the River Styx or the River Jordan, water separates this world from the next. This belief is found in religious teachings, in myths, and abiding in people's hearts and minds.

Water as a symbol appears in many works ranging from poetry to prose, Dante to Melville, the Bible to modern works. The notion of the use of water for entrance into the next world is an ancient notion. Greek myths tell of a river that carries the souls of the dead to their final resting-places. According to the writings of Virgil, "An aged boatman named Charon ferries the souls of the dead across the water to the farther bank, where

stands the adamantine gate to Tartarus . . ." (Hamilton 39). Dante, in The Inferno, also wrote of an old man who ferried souls across a river into eternal darkness. The destination of these souls was not one of happiness; it was one without God. Christian religions also teach of entrance into the next world through the use of water. Some believe in sprinkling water on the heads while others demand full immersion to be eligible for admission to the next world. All believe that God must be part of the process. Many references are made in Christian writings and songs to crossing the river Jordan to get to the next life.

Such ancient symbolic uses of water can be associated with specific cultures but also have universal meanings. Because water as a symbol recurs in numerous works from different generations and cultures, it can be considered an archetype. Archetypes are, according to Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), primitive, preconscious, instinctual expressions that are universal and that derive from the fact that men always undergo common, essential experiences, the collective life of a race. An archetype is any figure or pattern that recurs in works of the imagination from generation to generation.

An example of an archetype is the image or emotion conjured up in someone's mind when told stories about a person being immersed in water. The story may be about the person cleansing himself physically, but the archetypal images associated with spiritual cleansing will emerge in the mind of the reader, regardless of any feeling about baptism. The use of water for entrance to a life after death is obviously a pattern that has recurred from generation to generation. The use, in literature, of baptism in water to earn

a place in the next world forces the reader to think of baptism images experienced elsewhere and draws upon the emotions experienced in those circumstances to create emotions in the present. According to Jung's concept, these notions are not necessarily limited to what the reader has experienced in his own life.

Jung believed a layer of the collective unconscious lies below one's own personal unconscious. While one's personal unconscious is made up of one's own past experiences that may be buried or seemingly forgotten, the collective unconscious is made up of the experiences of the human race from its evolution and includes not only instincts, but also primordial images termed archetypes, which affect all attempts to understand the universe such as mythology, religion, philosophy, and science (Cavendish 1549). Thus, the notions include pre-existing elements of a universal stream of consciousness that is inside of all people. A writer can use an archetype such as water to evoke these pre-existing notions.

According to Richard Cavendish's Man, Myth, and Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown:

In the creation myths of many peoples water is the substance out of which the world, or the creator of the world, originally emerged. The ancient Egyptians imagined that in the beginning there was only a featureless expanse of water Out of this the primeval hill first emerged, followed by the creator god Atum, who stood on it to begin the work of creating the universe. In Babylonian myth the first gods are produced by the intercourse of the salt waters (Tiamat) and

the fresh waters (Apsu). Later the Babylonian god Marduk . . . fashions the universe out of [the salt waters]. (229)

Many such notions are evoked by the use of the archetype water. According to Richard Cavendish's study of myths, the idea of water as a source of life is inspired by rivers, fountains, and wells that flow seemingly without end. The endless flow of a river may signify the flow of birth-death-rebirth, while to journey to the end of a river into the ocean is to merge with the One, and to go to the source is to return to the One. A winding stream is the course of life, but to cross a river is to leave one realm and enter another. Lakes can be sinister because they do not flow, and deep within lakes there is an illusory paradise that can be shattered by reality (1602).

Water is also a common symbol for the unconscious. When water appears in literature, it may refer to a character being lost in thought or unaware of what is going on. The sea or any large expanse of water appearing in dreams and fantasies is an image of the unconscious, which will give up its contents if attention is paid to it and will transfer the conscious into a fountain of living water (Cavendish 3002).

Sigmund Freud believed that dreams where the dreamer appears in the water are symbolic of being in the womb or of birth. Freud also thought that diving into water or becoming wet is symbolic of sex and coming out of the water is symbolic of birth (vol. 4:227, vol. 5:399, and vol. 7:72). Thus, in literature, getting wet can be a reference to birth and/or sex.

For the characters in some archetypal works, a sexual initiation changes the character permanently. Though we often associate sex and experience with procreating

and maturity, and thus growth, many times the change can be for the worse. Characters can emerge severely damaged from such an initiatory experience. Whenever water's appearance evokes sexual images, characters may encounter challenges, even problems, because sex is a loss of innocence. When a character is tempted to become wet but does not, the character remains innocent. The use of the water archetype in such a situation is very important because it begins to change how the reader views sex in literature. This new reading interpretation can be brought about by a writer leaving a unique stamp on an archetype.

Although Freud and Jung analyzed artists and their work, according to David Burrows,

Freud, when he spoke of art, directed his attention primarily to the artist rather than to the work of art. For Freud, art was the working out of the artist's psychic problems. Jung, by contrast, was primarily concerned with the work of art, for the work expressed an archetype, a typical manifestation of the experience of the race. (xiv)

To Jung, the archetype is an expression of our unconscious life that finds expression in, among other things, myths and art. "And because archetypes are recurrent, succeeding generations are able to be emotionally moved by these archetypal projections of the collective unconscious" (Burrows xiv). Critic Leslie Fiedler agrees that archetypes are representations of any of the numerous responsive patterns of human situations and also adds that literature "can be said to come into existence at the moment a signature [the

uniqueness of the writer] is imposed upon the archetype. The purely archetypal, without signature elements, is the myth" (Fielder 28).

If we accept the idea that the difference between literature and myth, with regard to archetypes, is the imposed signature, then we can look at the effect different "signatures" have in regard to archetypes. We will focus on the particular use of one archetype -- water.

Water as an archetype is prominent in many of the world's religious and literary works. The Bible, with its many literary stamps, makes many references to baptism in water for everlasting life. Also found in the Bible are several stories of water: life coming out of the waters of creation; a flood destroying most life on Earth, symbolic of the power of water and the death it can cause; waters being parted to allow certain people through, symbolic of the notion that only the baptized can reach Heaven; and the River Jordan, the river in which Jesus was baptized and that becomes a symbol of what must be crossed to reach Heaven. In Dante's *Inferno*, water separates the world of the living from that of the dead. Souls must cross the water to reach the world of the dead. The water in Melville's Moby Dick is home to a giant whale, the pursuit of which leads to the deaths of many men. Even contemporary, popular works of fiction may build on archetypal meanings of water. In Jaws, by Peter Benchley, the water lures three men out to sea to chase one of the creatures that inhabit its waters. Although the creature cannot harm those who stay out of the water, it is able to kill those who enter the water. The shark is also safe from those on land until they enter the water. When humans enter the water, there is confrontation. Sheriff Broady is only able to kill the monster after he enters the

water. The use of water as archetypes in these works has influenced the reader's understanding of what each author is trying to convey. Drawing upon the collective unconsciousness, each author is also adding his/her signature to impose uniqueness upon the water archetype.

Similar additions of a signature to the archetype of water can be found in books by contemporary authors. One such author who adds his signature to the use of water as an archetype is Lewis Nordan. Nordan's signature seems at times similar to the signatures of other authors, most notably William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, but Nordan's twist on the use of archetypes is unique. Nordan uses the archetype of water to draw upon the reader's collective unconsciousness to make the reader feel as one with the characters in the works. This oneness with the characters allows Nordan to invite the reader to believe and understand otherwise fantastic occurrences. Nordan's use of an archetype to make the fantastic believable and to make the routine fantastic while altering the universal consciousness is his signature. By using an archetype to create commonly accepted feelings, ideas, and notions within the reader, Nordan is able to take his reader into the world of grotesque and of loss without losing the reader to that world. While on the trip to the world of the grotesque and back, Nordan helps the readers to participate in a change in the universal, and in their own, consciousness.

LEWIS NORDAN AND HIS INFLUENCES

Lewis Nordan was born in Jackson, Mississippi, on August 23, 1939, to Lemuel Alonzo Nordan and Sara Hightower Nordan. As an infant, Nordan lost his father and later his mother married Gilbert Russell Bayles. Lewis Nordan grew up listening to nursery rhymes and songs, which greatly influence Nordan's writing. In Itta Bena, Mississippi, a small Delta town whose influence can be found in Nordan's works, Lewis grew up in a family of storytellers where he embraced his family's storytelling tradition. After high school, Nordan became a journalist in the United States Navy aboard the U. S. S. Saratoga CVA 60 from 1958 to 1960. Upon leaving the Navy, Nordan enrolled in Millsaps College, in Jackson, where he received his Bachelor of Arts in 1963. Nordan married Mary Mitman in April of 1962. Prior to entering graduate school, Nordan taught English in the Brevard County public schools in Titusville, Florida. In 1965, he entered Mississippi State University's graduate school as a teaching fellow and received his Master of Arts degree in August 1966, followed in 1973, by his Ph.D. from Auburn University, with his dissertation entitled The Poetry of Shakespeare's Late Romances. He worked as an instructor of English at Auburn University (1966-1971) while working on his doctorate and as an instructor at the University of Georgia from 1971 to 1974.

Nordan wanted to be a Shakespearean scholar but, as he told Sam Staggs in an interview in 1993, "the truth is I wasn't any good at it. I didn't have the kind of analytical mind necessary to illuminate a text" (50). He worked at various odd jobs but

could not get an academic job so he became a writer. In August of 1974, at the age of thirty-five, Nordan moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he entered the University of Arkansas's writing program the next month. While there, Nordan, according to Richard Howorth's introduction to Sugar Among the Freaks, decided "he wanted to write about love and death in a comic way" (xvi). Nordan dropped out of the writing program after only a year, even though several of his stories were published in literary magazines including The New Orleans Review and the Greensboro Review.

After returning to the university for a couple of classes, Nordan won the University of Arkansas's John Gould Fletcher Award For Fiction 1977, for his short story "Rat Song," and received a National Endowment for the Arts grant the next year. Some of Nordan's short stories were soon published in several prominent magazines. After spending several years teaching at the University of Arkansas (1981-1983), Nordan's first collection of short stories, Welcome to the Arrow-Catcher Fair, was published in 1983. Nordan divorced Mary Mitman in January of 1983 and moved to Pittsburgh to teach creative writing at the University of Pittsburgh. Soon after the move, one of Nordan's sons committed suicide (another had died at birth). Nordan wrote in a frenzy and in 1986, the same year he married Alicia Blessing, published The All-Girl Football Team and continued to publish. Others of his works have also won him much praise. Nordan's Music of the Swamp was named an ALA Notable Book in 1992 and led to his being awarded the Mississippi Arts and Letters Institute Prize (1992). He won the Southern Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction (1994) and the Mississippi Author's Award for Fiction (1994). Wolf Whistle (1993) was named as one of the top fifteen books of the

past fifteen years by the Bloomsbury Review (1993) and named an American Library Association Notable Book (1993). The Sharpshooter Blues (1995) and Lightning Song (1997) were also well received.

Nordan's stories seem to draw upon the works of other writers. William Faulkner and Eudora Welty, both from Mississippi, come to mind. "Faulkner constructed a fictional world populated by southern figures of tragedy and comedy who acted out his major theme of the human heart in conflict with itself" (Wilson 842). Welty is best known for her humorous stories of family relationships full of sensory experiences rooted in a "world of sight and sound and smell, in its earth and water and sky and in its seasons" (Wilson 900). Nordan borrows from these writers and many others, as well as from his family of storytellers to create his own world of *Arrow Catcher*.

Nordan, like his family and many people from the South, is a storyteller. Being from the South, which is a region known for its stories and storytelling, deeply influences Nordan's stories. The South definitely has its share of "folktales, legends, jests, and anecdotes" (Wilson 488). Southern folktales generally revolve around stereotypical characters. "Using the veil of laughter . . . [the folktales] deal with the concerns and tensions of southern society" (Wilson 488). Nordan also uses stereotypes and humor in his stories; in fact, a large number of Nordan's characters are stereotypical poor white trash whose actions place them in absurd circumstances, but it is not Nordan who passes judgement on his characters; it is instead the reader who laughs at the misfortunes of the characters. The characters' misfortunes are so extreme that they could be called tall tales,

another Southern storytelling tradition. Nordan is clearly using his Southern storytelling heritage to create new stories of his own.

Many reviewers, especially those outside of the South, have labeled the subjects of Nordan's works as grotesque, but Nordan explains that "a lot of storytelling . . . is about remarkable events. Death, disease and disfiguration, dwarfism and shrunken mummies" draw more attention in places with a strong oral tradition (Staggs 51). Nordan believes that the grotesque in his work, and in storytelling in general, is "a way of saying, 'This is more remarkable than anything you've seen today; this is even more remarkable than your own crazy family!'" (Staggs 51). Nordan's writing enables the reader to laugh at problems and images that would not normally be laughed at. He blames this dark humor on being Southern: "We still have the lingering attitude: 'This is how bad it was, and this is how we laugh at it'" (Staggs 51). Nordan writes stories where "doom is domestic and purrs like a cat" (Howorth xii). A sense of doom is natural in stories set in the Mississippi River Delta as Richard Howorth admits in his introduction to Sugar Among the Freaks,

The Delta is not a typical river delta. It is an ancient floodplain, a flat crescent of land two hundred miles long and eighty miles wide, incorporating the plantations and crossroads of the great Delta blues musicians and Buddy Nordan's hometown, Itta Bena. As recently as a hundred years ago, it was a vast, swampy wilderness, much of it cleared out first by slaves, then by cheap black labor, . . . a hot humid, mosquito-plagued,

snaked-infested farmland known to kill a dog in five years, a mule in ten,
and a man in twenty. (x)

The Mississippi River is the largest river in North America and was named the "Father of Waters" by the Native Americans. This river has defined the central South both literally and figuratively. "The lower Mississippi over geologic eons built a fertile valley and delta to which it adds even now from a drainage area of 1,245,000 square miles including all or parts of 31 states and two Canadian provinces" (Wilson 385). Since the Mississippi was first seen by Hernando de Soto in 1541, the river has been the site of battles and imagination, and the site of life and death. "Celebrated in fiction, film, and music, the Mississippi was the setting for many Old South stereotypes: of crinolined belles and riverboat dandies, of cheerful roustabouts toting bales to steamboats at the levees, and of colonnaded mansions and cotton fields saved by heroic fights against floods" (Wilson 386).

Phil Ochs, a "Yankee who grew up on Southern music," wrote a song in the early sixties entitled "Here's to the State of Mississippi" that included the following verse:

For underneath her borders the Devil draws no line

If you drag her muddy rivers nameless bodies you will find

And the fat trees of the forest have hid a thousand crimes

And the calendar is lying when it reads the present time,

Here's to the land you've torn out the heart of

Mississippi find yourself another country to be part of. (Applebome 272-273)

The Mississippi Delta is not just the stereotypes; it is a land of water, music, labor, and death. Nordan recognizes this fact and allows one of his characters to comment on the Delta, the river that runs through it, and the people who live on it.

In "Welcome to the Arrow-Catcher Fair," the lieutenant governor of Mississippi, who is drunk, stands before a crowd at the Arrow-Catcher Fair and gives the following nationally-televised speech:

Hernando by-God de Soto . . . Hernando bugging de Soto, . . . great spic founder of this solemn state . . . led a band of eccentric white men through this stinking buckshot and gumbo shithole that tries to pass for the real world and began, . . . by mating with the abominable Chickasaw and Choctaw to people our solemn shores with lunatics, made these alluvial fields and pastures and piney woods and swamps and bearcats and all our abominations of geography America's first and last rich stronghold of lunacy and feeble-mindedness and dwarfism in a proud and unhappy land . . . proud of our individualism in Mississippi . . . individually, man for man, woman for woman, child for child, the most individually obscene and corrupt populace and geography, save only Los Angeles and Gary, Indiana, in an entire obscene civilization . . . proud . . . of our individualism, proud of our pain, we are proud of our neurotic romanticism and our feelings of inferiority, proud of our pathetic apologies and our pathetic failures to apologize, proud of the bloody stains of our guilt, we are proud of our psychotic rage never to question or wonder and always to justify and create . . . proud . . . to have become inhabitants of this blessed land of

perversity, founded by an insane Spaniard in his insane and successful discovery of the mightiest of insane rivers, insane father of insane water, potent puissant pregnant pointless pissant stream! That very snakish flood in which God's own unholy self of the Holy Ghost resides, yea verily I say unto you, even unto this day in the form of an alligator gar, molded from the Mississippi clay by God's own mighty hand upon Christ's eternal wheel in prescient anticipation of our present governor's mind and soul and face, I have a dream . . . I have a dream . . . of the scaly, snouted garGod and life-giver and life-destroyer of all Mississippians submerged in the bloody rivers of our lands and hearts . . . eternal sustainer of our inherited alluvial madness . . . Goddam this very Delta earth beneath our feet, . . . goddamn these spreading trees, goddamn these matchless Mississippi blue skies. (Sugar Among the Freaks 130-135)

The lieutenant governor, who is carried away forcibly by troopers after this speech, is voicing what the inhabitants of the river banks have been afraid to admit: they live next to a river that demands respect but is also ridiculed. The scenery is beautiful, but it is also dangerous to live there. The inhabitants of Mississippi are forced to take the bad with the good or lose the good with the bad. The lieutenant governor tells his audience to damn it all. This is a good summary of the feelings of several of Nordan's characters.

Nordan's early writing are many times considered "cartoonish" and "unbelievable," set in a "magical landscape just askew of the real, historical universe" (Staggs 50). In this aspect of his works, James Thurber and DC Comics, such as Superman, are Nordan's main influences. His stories are set in Arrow Catcher, a mythical town in the Delta modeled after Itta Bena. Arrow Catcher is full of magic and is much like a comic book. Events impossible in our world happen there, and the reader does not question them. Arrow Catcher, definitely not Metropolis from Nordan's favorite comic Superman, is a rural town separated from the rest of the world. Its inhabitants exhibit freakish tendencies that border on absurdity, but at the same time are as real as members of our family are. The characters talk about elves living in the forest, but they do so in such a convincing way the reader accepts the notion that elves live in the forest as much as they accept the fact that raccoons live there. Although parrots and dolphins do not usually live in Mississippi, Nordan places parrots and dolphins in his stories set in and around Arrow Catcher. The reader should question this inaccuracy, but Nordan's narrators offer logical reasons why parrots and dolphins live in the Mississippi swamp and why no one in the stories questions why or how they come to be there. Other abnormal events also occur in Arrow Catcher. At first glance, it seems unbelievable that a father would encourage his son to dress up as a girl and act like a cheerleader for entertainment. Yet this event takes place in Arrow Catcher and, as Nordan leads us to believe, also takes place in our world. It is even harder to believe that the boy would enjoy being a girl, but many readers know someone like that; some readers are like that. It is true that much of what goes on in Nordan's stories may not be believable to

everyone, but some people can vouch for Nordan's realistic portrayal of "freaks." Nordan also adds to the believability of the "freaks" by including the strong presence of alcohol along with characters possessing little education. If nothing else, the reader can put off all of the strange occurrences on a world in which they think they will never be forced to live, even though they really do.

Nordan continues to add his signature to the Southern tradition with his use of water. Although Nordan has not addressed the subject of water and water as archetype in any published interview, it is present in his work physically and as a complex pattern of imagery that draws upon water's archetypal connotations. Water has to be present in stories set in the Mississippi Delta, but, in Nordan's stories, water is present in a way that goes beyond the physical presence of the river. Perhaps water is so prevalent in Nordan's works because of Nordan's study of Shakespeare, who also used water as a major archetype, or because Nordan grew up in the Delta where water is a huge part of life. Water has also played an important part in Southern literature from Faulkner to Ernest Gaines. It is within this tradition that Nordan is writing and to which he adds his own signature and works.

Nordan has published two collections of short stories and four novels. The two collections of short stories, Welcome to the Arrow-Catcher Fair (1983) and The All-Girl Football Team (1986), are a mixture of stories generally about the same people and places as the four novels, although specific details may not be consistent or may even be contradictory. All but three of the stories from these two collections are also collected into Sugar Among the Freaks (1996).

Music of the Swamp (1992) is a novel made up of short stories that flow together. It is a transitory piece for Nordan as he begins to take the step from short-story writer to novelist. Many of the short stories contain the use of water as an archetype. It is also a further development of Nordan's settings and characters, especially the character of Sugar Mecklin.

Wolf Whistle (1993) is a novel of great loss involving a boy's death and its effect on others. Nordan wrote this book during a time of loss in his own family. He returned to Mississippi and "grieved anew for the death of his father, his stepfather and his own two sons," and for the loss of Emmett Till, a black child lynched in Mississippi in 1955 (Staggs 51).

The Sharpshooter Blues (1995) is also about loss, but it is also about the attempt to overcome loss through water. A boy drowns himself after being raped. His father's love cannot save the boy who feels he has lost everything. The lure of the water and the promise of what is on the other side are too much for the boy so he tries to save himself by drowning. The novel also deals with the effects that water and the boy's death have on the people of the area.

Lightning Song (1997) is the novel of a boy, Leroy Dearman, who is going through the growing pains of adolescence while living on a llama farm with his sister, his mother, and his father, who has one good arm and is called Swami Don. The boy's life is changed when his father's brother arrives in a white convertible. When Leroy's mother is sexually attracted to his uncle, Leroy's life is turned inside out. The novel moves away from some of the patterns of Nordan's earlier works. Not much water appears in the

novel, and the water that is present does not conjure up the archetypal connotations present in the other works. Rather, the symbolism usually takes the form of lightning instead of water. The sense of total loss found in the other novels is also missing. Because the loss is not as strong, the overcoming of that loss also is not as great.

American author Lewis Nordan uses the archetype water in his fictional works to evoke universal feelings including hope and hopelessness, a sense of loss, love and hate, of wonder and confusion, and also to evoke the notions of death and of life. By using this archetype, Nordan is able to draw the reader into his work where he, as author, is in control. Once the reader is drawn in, then Nordan can work his magic and weave a wonderful tale that controls the readers' emotions. Nordan's works are full of sorrow, but "he reminds us, however, that amid the sorrow and unrest, all is not lost. Nordan reminds us to catch a glimpse of hope along with his characters in his animated world of music . . . and mayhem" (Christian 1).

Although many of his fictional writings refer to water, Nordan's use of water as an archetype will be examined only in Music of the Swamp, Sharpshooter Blues, and selected short stories. The early short stories will be discussed because they contain the first examples of Nordan's use of the water archetype and because they lay the foundation for the novels, which contain richer, more complex uses of the archetype. Water appears in most of the short stories found in Sugar Among the Freaks, where the water is not used as an archetype, but only as physical water. Wolf Whistle is not included because in that novel Nordan uses the water as a physical presence instead of as an archetype.

WATER IN SUGAR AMONG THE FREAKS

Sugar Among the Freaks is made up of short stories selected from Welcome To the Arrow-Catcher Fair (1983) and The All-Girl Football Team (1986). The stories are not necessarily intertwined, but are generally set in Arrow Catcher or a similar location. The characters are not always the same, but they are very similar, as though Nordan is experimenting with different aspects of a character that he is trying to create. This character finally materializes fully as two characters who are similar, but still unique: Sugar Mecklin in Music of the Swamp, and Hydro Raney in Sharpshooter Blues.

Aspects of these two characters appear in Nordan's short stories, but the characters in the short stories are not fully developed and are often inconsistent. Sugar appears in only one story in Welcome To the Arrow-Catcher Fair: "Sugar Among the Freaks," which is a story Nordan admits was misplaced in that collection. According to Howorth's foreward to Sugar Among the Freaks, after writing "Sugar Among the Freaks," Nordan realized "he had turned a corner of some kind" (xxiii). With Sugar's appearance in "Sugar Among the Freaks," Nordan has a fully rounded character that continues to appear in his writing. Sugar appears as himself or in a disguised form in most stories in Welcome to the Arrow-Catcher Fair.

The first story to be examined, "John Thomas Bird," the third story in Sugar Among the Freaks, contains neither Sugar nor Hydro. In fact, the characters in this story do not appear in any of Nordan's other works, but Nordan's use of water in "John

"Thomas Bird" fits part of the archetypal pattern of water that Nordan uses later in his writings. This story shows water primarily as an agent of positive transformation without fully introducing water's negative qualities.

The main character in "John Thomas Bird" is a girl named Molly, whose aunt has introduced her to a lieutenant named John Thomas Bird, known as J. T. Set in Gulfport, Mississippi, this story includes water as a wondrous backdrop. Molly, who is ashamed of her body because she is overweight, is not ashamed in the water where she feels buoyant and forgets about her size.

When a lamprey, a creature not usually found in Mississippi, attaches itself to J. T., the boy thinks the lamprey is a snake and passes out. The girl is not afraid of the creature because she knows that as long as she does not stop moving the lamprey will not attach itself to her. The water and its creatures allow the girl to prove herself. She saves the young man from drowning and then pulls the lamprey off of his leg.

In literature and in life it is more commonly expected and/or accepted that a man save a woman and not the other way around, but Nordan writes a scene to the contrary. Here we have a girl who has no self-confidence swimming with a male egomaniac. The girl must save the boy and, in the process, she undergoes a somewhat sexual experience. In many works of literature, a woman's liberation from her oppressive surroundings and society is intimately connected to a sexual act. In The Awakening, by Chopin, Edna Portellier must enter the ocean and drown to free herself. In Nordan's story, clearly a woman need not drown to be free because Molly is able to free herself simply by undergoing a change into a new self-confident woman.

Molly and J. T. both enter the water in this story. The image of the two entering the water has erotic overtones. The characters never have sex, but Molly experiences some feelings that are many times associated with a sexual relationship gone bad. Prior to entering the water, Molly thinks that J. T. is wonderful and overlooks his many otherwise obvious drawbacks such as his being boring, self-centered, and egotistical. Because she sees herself as unattractive and awkward around boys, Molly is overwhelmed when J. T. wants to go swimming. It is hard for her to believe that he would be with someone like her. Although Molly never admits it, J. T., who mostly talks to himself, exercises, and reenacts plays in a baseball game while with Molly, barely acknowledges that he is there with anyone. Once they start swimming, Molly forgets her weight. She is having fun and is happy.

J. T., a supposedly expert swimmer, cannot make it to shore without Molly's help. But he does not thank Molly; he just passes out, leaving Molly to deal with what has happened. Molly could, like many women who idolize the person they end up with, blame herself for the accident and feel guilty. Rather, she embraces the experience and realizes that not only is she a better person than J. T., but she is also a new person. The swim has changed her. Molly, no longer ashamed of her body, bares herself for the world to see.

By saving the young man, Molly destroys the myth that J. T. is too good for her. The water pushes him off of the pedestal Molly had allowed him to place himself upon. Molly bares her breasts and hopes that she does not embarrass John Thomas too much by saving him, where before she has been embarrassed even to be seen in a bathing suit.

Molly realizes that J. T. is not as impressive as she first thought. The water provides Molly rebirth. By showing Molly that J. T. is a coward in love with himself, the water forces Molly to realize that she is a better person than J. T. The ability of water to bring about change is an important idea in Nordan's works.

Sexual images, which are also important in Nordan's works, are evoked in the reader's response to Nordan's use of water in the story. The reader's experiences as well as the collective images of the race are added to the text to create images that are not otherwise there. Nordan's use of water to generate these images is an example of the archetype water in Nordan's work. For example,

At last J. T. stood up and, without speaking, he walked out into the water. Molly watched him as if in a dream. She watched each step. The water seemed to sink beneath his foot like a pillow. And then the other foot, the same . . . Molly followed him into the water, and her legs became suddenly warm, too warm . . . She dived behind him and felt the water swallow her up warmly. Swimming behind him, with her face down in the water, she pulled two strokes and turned her face out to the side for a breath and pulled one, methodically reestablishing her rhythm. (39-40)

The water is seen as a positive force in this story. The two characters do not have sex. They are not tainted by the water. J. T. does not sin by entering the water. Any flaws in J. T. that appear in the water are brought with J. T. himself. The water does not tempt J. T. in any way to do something that is not good. Water's negative aspects do not appear in this story. Nordan adds this side of water in his later stories. In "John Thomas

Bird," there is no yin and yang of the water. Nordan adds the missing half of the water's power in "Wheelchair."

In "Wheelchair," the tenth story in Sugar Among the Freaks, Winston Krepps is partially paralyzed, the result of a jump from a bridge into a lake. The lake is in the Mississippi Delta and is very similar to Roebuck Lake, the lake outside of Arrow Catcher, Mississippi, which is the setting of other of Nordan's works.

Currents move a submerged boat from its resting place, leaving it under the bridge from which Winston leaps. The tragic flight is not an attempted suicide but only a carefree attempt to be released, for a moment, from the pressures of the world. The leap is just a child trying to have fun. Instead of hitting the refreshing water, Winston hits the boat and breaks his neck.

In "Wheelchair," Winston's attendant leaves him alone for a long time. As time goes by, Winston becomes worse: the bags that hold his waste need changing, he begins to dehydrate, and he has three muscle spasms that force him to "see" his tragic flight from the bridge. Winston also "sees" the force that moved the boat into his path and caused his paralysis, which is the same force that touches baptized children and drowned men, which Winston also "sees." Winston sees how water can kill by drowning and save with the power of faith, and he realizes that even though he has been paralyzed by the actions of the water, water also does much good. The scene of a child's baptism touches Winston. Soon Winston begins to see how hopeless his friend Jesse's life is.

Jesse, a beautiful, outgoing boy, believes his life will never amount to anything. When Winston sees this belief of Jesse's, he wants to explain to Jesse that he can shake

Jesse's doom. Once, Jesse and Winston built a table together. Both were very proud of their accomplishment and were very happy for a while. Winston realizes that because Jesse had built a table and was able to share his happiness in what he had built, Jesse is not hopeless. Winston has a new reason to live. He wants to help his friend realize that all is not lost, but Winston does not get a chance to talk to Jesse before the ambulance takes Winston away. As he is taken away, Winston "sees" Jesse and himself standing together in a world "with red trees and red rivers" (176) where the small things of Winston's life fly through the atmosphere.

In this story, unlike "John Thomas Bird," Nordan examines the opposite forces of water. The water in this story takes a boat from its resting place and places it, submerged, under a bridge. Winston would not have jumped into the water if he had seen the boat below. Because the water covers up the boat, Winston is lured into a false sense of safety and jumps. As he enters the water, his life is changed.

Winston will never be the same. His entrance into the water breaks his back. "It was the day real life had ended, he thought" (163). Winston thinks that his entrance into the water has removed him from the real world and that his world is just a shadow of the real world where there is happiness. In fact, the only happiness in Winston's world lies in his memories, but they make Winston happy only for brief moments because the memories end up forcing Winston to see what he can never have again or at all.

Winston's only way to take part in the real world is by typing on his typewriter, which he operates with a stick held in his mouth. Typing allows Winston to feel "genuinely alive,

an inhabitant of a real world," where he is able to get the girl and be happy, but this will not happen today, Thursday, because Winston dropped his stick Monday (167).

Because Winston is left alone for so long, he is dehydrated, which causes the spasms. When the spasms hit Winston, they force him to realize that he is not ready for death. Winston sees, through a magical eye created by the dehydration, the power of the "force" and knows that he must help Jesse. This eye, much like the eye that Emerson writes about, allows Winston to see what he could or would not otherwise see. Winston has always looked away when his visions started, but now that he believes death is near, Winston faces the visions and decides that he does not hate his body or Jesse. In fact, Winston realizes that his body is real and worthy of love. Winston also understands that if he can love his deformed body, then he can love Jesse. All of the memories that had become symbolic of all Winston missed in life become only what they are: memories. Hope returns to Winston's life, and he wants to show Jesse that Jesse's own life is not doomed.

Winston changes because the dehydration causes him to come to many realizations. As Winston's entrance into the water changes his life into one of hopelessness without the chance for love, so does his loss of water force him to see that there is hope for his life and that there is love in his life.

Nordan shows the opposing powers of water that must work together to make a whole. Water moves the boat and causes Winston's paralysis and lack of hope; lack of water causes Winston to realize he is not hopeless. In between the images of water and lack of water, Nordan touches on other aspects of water by giving the reader glimpses of

drownings, baptisms, and hints of sex, which conjure up many different images in the reader's mind. The glimpses include language highlighting the water archetype, which strengthens the images in the reader's mind. The archetypal notions generated by such writing emphasize how water can change a person -- through sex, death, and/or rebirth. The story culminates in the miraculous change of Winston from a broken-down, hopeless handicap to an energetic, hopeful savior with the power to change others.

Nordan allows his character's dehydration to be a positive transformation. Instead of dying, Winston is reborn. In Christianity, it is the baptism in water that saves. Nordan reverses that notion. Winston finds only pain when he jumps into the water. He is paralyzed and believes his life is over, a reversal of the Christian notion of entering the water in baptism and rejoicing. Winston finds happiness only after he loses water to dehydration. It is the seemingly apparent reversal of the Christian ritual that makes the story powerful. It paradoxically turns out, though, there is no reversal because the story does follow Christian teaching. In Christianity, some unbaptized individuals, like Winston when he is in need of water, are able to see the wrongs in their lives and desire to make them right. They need only the power of water through baptism to begin life anew. Winston not only sees the problems in his life, but he also receives water that gives him a chance to correct the wrongs he has seen. Without the water he dies. Yes, there is baptismal power in the water, but it does not work for everybody, especially if baptism is not understood. A desire to change must be present. Other characters in Nordan's works see the problems in their lives, but they never make an effort to change;

they never come to the water, an important revelation in Nordan's works, especially those that contain Gerald Mecklin, Sugar's father.

"Sugar Among the Chickens," the eleventh story in the collection, has little water present physically, but it is examined because the whole story revolves around a character's deprivation of water and what that deprivation forces the character to become. Sugar wants to fish, but his mother will not let him go near the lake alone. To overcome this restriction, Sugar fishes for chickens.

Sugar uses a cane pole, later an open-faced reel he wins at the picture show give-away, and a kernel of corn on a hook to fish for chickens because his mother will not allow him to walk to the town pond by himself. Sugar even dreams of catching chickens with his fishing gear, and soon he dreams of catching the red rooster that is as tall as Sugar. When Sugar does finally hook a chicken, his mother says that she is "such a big failure in life she didn't see why she didn't just go off and eat some poison" (184).

Every evening, after work, Sugar goes with his father to feed and water the chickens. Sugar sees the joy his father finds in being around the chickens and knows that his father is a man to be respected when it comes to feeding and controlling them. Sugar wishes his mother would watch his father with the chickens and each day thinks that if his mother would just see his father with them, "she would stop thinking she was a big failure in life" (186). Every day when Sugar thinks about his mother watching his father, the rooster attacks Sugar and Sugar remembers what he forgot everyday: that he should watch out for the rooster. The rooster attacks Sugar, and like on every other day, Sugar's father kicks the rooster away and saves Sugar. If it were not for the intervention of

Sugar's father, the rooster would hurt the boy. Sugar must rely on his father for protection.

One day when Sugar wins a rod and reel at a give-away at the picture show, he goes fishing for the big rooster. The rooster catches the bait in its beak and flies farther than it ever has. It then returns and lands on Sugar's head, digging its claws into the boy's scalp. Sugar screams as the flames of pain erupt from his head. He knows that the force of water from a hose can ease his pain, but he cannot get his head under the faucet and the hose is too far away. His daddy arrives and offers to save Sugar from the rooster, but Sugar does not want his daddy's help this time. He realizes that he must face the pain without his father and without the water if he is to become a man. It is important that Sugar not use the water to overcome his pain, but instead overcomes the desire to use the water for relief. (The resistance of the desire to use water is a pattern that Nordan will follow in other stories.) At this point in his life, Sugar does not give in to the temptation of the water. The water can take away the immediate pain the rooster causes, but Sugar will not overcome the lasting pain that reliance upon the water will cause: living in fear of the pain and knowing that it is the water and not he that overcomes it. Because Sugar overcomes the pain without the water, he is able to stand tall.

At last Sugar can walk proudly around the yard with a rooster on his head and "blood and chickenshit" dripping down his face. His life is not ruined. Sugar's parents are proud because their son has proven that the place of one's birth is not ruination. A "man who has worn a chicken on his head . . . would never be a fool to geography or marriage or alcohol" (198). Being a fool to geography, marriage, and/or alcohol is a

recurring issue in Nordan's works where the worst fate for a living individual is to marry white trash, stay in Mississippi, and drink to escape. For Sugar, the pain of a rooster's claws is nothing compared to a life of ruination.

While Sugar's parents have much hope in their son, it is inevitable that Sugar will be a fool, like his father and grandfather before him, to geography, marriage, and alcohol later in his life, as evident in "The Sears and Roebuck Catalog Game," another story in Sugar Among the Freaks. It may be absurd to think that a boy that does not give into the temptation of using water to relieve the fiery pain of a rooster's claws would give into the temptation of water when he grows up, but he does.

Sugar, like most people, changes as he grows up. It is not an immediate change, but eventually the temptation of what the water stands for will make Sugar a fool to geography, marriage, and alcohol. Sugar will eventually give in to temptation, and then his life will fall apart, but today he is innocent and proud.

This story, like the previous two, is about a life-changing experience. Like Winston in "Wheelchair," Sugar's deprivation of water changes his life. Sugar is a different person because he does not give in to the temptation of water. The reader brings preconceived notions of the power of water to relieve pain. The reader knows the feeling of cool water on a wound. The reader also has preconceived ideas of the notion of baptism. Nordan violates our expectations, our universal sense of water's meaning. He does not allow Sugar to use water to cool his physical wounds. Instead, Nordan allows Sugar to heal his emotional wounds by not using the water. Sugar overcomes his fears and inadequacies by bearing the pain, by not sticking his head under the water. The

notion of sticking one's head under water is clearly reminiscent of baptism. Nordan purposely toys with the archetypal notions of water regarding baptism, but does not allow his character to be baptized, which is important in this story and even more important to his later writings. In fact, none of Nordan's main characters are ever baptized, even though they all are surrounded by religion. However, none ever understand it. Sugar does not stick his head under the faucet and, therefore, overcomes his emotion problems; his emotional self is "saved," but, as readers see in later stories about Sugar, his spiritual self is not. At the time of the story, Sugar needs no spiritual healing. It is only in the future when he gives in to the temptations of water that his spirituality suffers. At that time he needs to stick his head under the faucet (be baptized), but Nordan does not give Sugar a faucet to use.

In Sugar Among the Freaks, Nordan implements the water archetype in several ways. Water acts as an agent of change both physically and spiritually. Literature has long included examples of the use of water as an agent of change, and Nordan continues that use in "John Thomas Bird," but he also evokes mythical notions by giving the water in "Wheelchair" the power to affect people's lives as though of its own accord. Giving water the ability to play an active a role in the lives of humans is Nordan's first attempt to leave a signature on an archetype. He is trying to turn an archetype into literature. Nordan begins to use water as both an agent of change and as a way to another world (in "Wheelchair" the world is only a dream). This use of water becomes more prominent in other works as Nordan plays heavily on water's archetypal qualities and as he begins to

write more in the tradition of tall tales, fantasy, and dark humor that will become his signature.

In "Sugar Among the Chickens," Nordan has written a tall tale filled with dark humor that contains what at first appears to be an anti-archetypal writing, because Sugar, who is in terrible pain and sorrow and is in need of the relief of water, bears the pain without any help. Nordan uses water in the story to allow the reader's experiences to create an expectation of something that does not happen. As a child, Sugar does not get wet in the stories. He does not sin, so he does not need purification. The reader may see it as a great way of life -- do not sin and there is no need for religion/myth -- but Nordan shows the reader that religion/myth is necessary. In later stories Sugar still has no religion, but has sinned. He is lost. No one can go through life without sinning. Without religion to guide Sugar to baptism and purification, Sugar is lost. Other Nordan characters face the same problem.

WATER IN MUSIC OF THE SWAMP

Music of the Swamp is made up of chapters that are more like short stories that almost flow from one into the other. In the opening chapter of Music of the Swamp, water is present in a situation that clearly is about the unconscious. Sugar Mecklin dreams that as he stands on the shore of Roebuck Lake he sees a mermaid holding "a mirror as dark and fathomless as the mirror-surface of Roebuck Lake" (Nordan Music 4). Upon waking, Sugar hears the voice of Elvis Presley on the radio singing to him, "you'll be so lonely you could die" (4). Sugar "believed that this was a special day and that something new and completely different from anything he had ever known was about to jump out at him from somewhere unexpected . . . [and] it would be transforming . . ." (3). Sugar hugs his dad, and almost says, "Don't ever leave me, Daddy, I'll be so lonely I will die." Instead, Sugar says, "I love you, Daddy," something that is seldom said at the Mecklin house (5). This is to be a special day indeed.

Sugar skips Sunday school and goes to Roebuck Lake. When Sugar looks to the spot where he had seen the mermaid in his dream, Sugar sees a different, yet still "magical" and forceful scene. A cow stands in the water near where a baptism is taking place. The choir sings of "Jesus who would take away loneliness," of gathering at the river, and of loneliness and its defeat (7). Indeed, the water can defeat loneliness, and Sugar understands this power. This realization is the happiest moment Sugar has ever experienced, but his powerful moment of realization of the spiritual power of water is

broken by the appearance of another boy who brings news of water's physical power. The boy, Sweet Austin, has found a man with his legs sticking straight up out of the water. The same water that brings life to the young woman Sugar watched being baptized has caused the death of the man. Nordan shows how water can bring life and death. Sugar loses some of his innocence just by seeing the man's feet sticking up out of it. No longer can he deny that the water is dangerous.

Sugar is also faced with another realization when he sees the dead man. According to Sigmund Freud, anything protruding from water can be a symbol of sex. The man's feet poking out of the water is a sexual image that is also part of Nordan's scene of death. Sugar realizes that death and sex are the same. He could not explain that having sex causes innocence to be lost, nor that baptism is the only way to regain innocence and thus come back to life and away from death and sin, but Sugar subconsciously understands and is able to come to this conclusion because of the two scenes that he witnessed on this important morning of his life. He keeps this information hidden within him and tries to use this information to protect his innocence during his life. The attempt to stay innocent becomes a lifelong battle for Sugar as he faces the temptations of life that Nordan represents in his works with water.

Later in the story, Nordan allows the reader to glimpse the negative effect sex can have upon a person. Sweet Austin's mother works in a bar. Sometimes she sleeps with the piano player just to ease her blues. Sex does not make her blues go away; Sweet Austin's mother still goes to sleep sick and lonely because Sweet Austin's father, if he really is his father, has left Sweet's mother.

The dangerous lure of water appears again when Sugar and Sweet go tell Mr. Mecklin about the dead man. When the boys get to Sugar's house, Gilbert Mecklin is drunk and is listening to a recording of Bessie Smith, a singer who died in a car accident on her way from Memphis to Clarksdale, Mississippi, in 1937. Her chosen art form, the blues, "reflected not only the social isolation and lack of formal training of its creators but also their ability to make do with the most basic of resources and to survive under the most adverse, oppressive circumstances." It "dealt with everyday life and met its subjects head-on in an open-ended celebration of life's ups and downs" (Wilson 995). Mr. Mecklin calls "his Bessie Smith records his wrist-cutting music," because Bessie Smith's music reminds Gilbert of his miserable life and also because one of Smith's songs was playing when Gilbert stuck an ice pick in his chest (17). The music calls out to all that hear it, "*muddy water 'round my feet muddy water in the street . . . muddy water in my shoes, rocking in them lowdown blues . . .*" (23-24). The song is reminiscent of Delta life. "The music played, and Bessie Smith sang on, and the Delta was bad, bad, she was saying, and it was magic, it hypnotized you, you couldn't resist it even if you tried, and now it was calling her back" (21). Once the muddy waters of the Delta are embraced, they will not let you go.

Sugar's father has been trapped by the Delta and knows it. Gilbert wants to warn the boys "that there was just so much death in the Delta, it was everywhere, [and] he didn't know how a child could stand all of it . . .," but between these large doses of Bessie Smith and alcohol Gilbert is unable to help the boys (20). In fact, Gilbert decides that he is glad he is so drunk that he does not "have to tell these two scared boys what it meant to

have chickens in his back yard," nor does he have to tell them about his own father, who spent all of his family's money on "shoes made of kangaroo leather" and for cigars and then beat Gilbert and Gilbert's brother and "then, worst of all, went blind for spite and had to be waited on hand and foot for the rest of his life" (22). Gilbert will not leave the waters of the Delta.

Sugar's mom also will not leave. "She dreamed of trains crossing frozen landscapes, she made up stories of escape, using models in the Sears, Roebuck catalog for characters to represent herself and her fictional friends . . ." (25). Mrs. Mecklin, like her husband, knows there is a better life away from the Delta but will not leave. Like Bessie Smith, her "*heart cries out for muddy water*" (27).

Now Sugar is himself facing the possibility of being seduced by the muddy waters of the Delta. If he gives in to the song of the Delta, he will be trapped like his father and mother; like them, Sugar will go through life knowing there is a better life away from the Delta, but will be unable to leave. Luckily, Sugar is still too innocent to hear the full temptation of the song of muddy water. Because Sugar has not sunk into the mud, he does not see the misery of his parents' lives as they do.

Many times during his lifetime Sugar is tempted to get wet, but for now, Sugar does not enter or leave the water. He never gets wet because he has no desire either to return to the womb or to have sex. He looks to the future. Sugar retains his innocence by staying out of the water. He does not take part in sex, which is a loss of innocence, so he does not need to be baptized. "The world was not the way Sugar Mecklin wanted it to be,

but he had to admit, this particular day had turned out even better than he expected . . ." (27).

In the chapter entitled "The Cellar of Runt Conroy" in Music of the Swamp, water is prevalent, but Sugar never enters it. "The only house in the Mississippi Delta with a full basement was a rambling many-roomed tar-paper shack owned by Roy Dale's daddy, a white-trash gentleman named Runt Conroy" (89). Runt, who dug the cellar, is the father of one of Sugar's friends, Roy Dale. Sugar is interested in seeing the cellar because he thinks that cellars must be interesting. The "word itself impressed" Sugar. In Sugar's eyes, "The cellar was the one detail of the Conroys' lives that almost rescued them . . . from the charge of white trash" (92). To Runt's wife, Fortunata, the cellar "was proof positive that their genes and chromosomes were tainted. A billion dollars, a college education, and new teeth would not save a family from white-trash chromosomes if they were the only family in the Mississippi Delta with a cellar" (93).

One day in April, Sugar comes to the Conroys' to spend the night. That same night, Runt decides "to correct the smell in the basement" (94). Runt's cellar smells of cat urine, a fact that Runt's wife constantly brings to everyone's attention. The smell is a constant reminder to Fortunata that her husband is an alcoholic with a bad job, and is, according to Fortunata, an adulterer. The smell in the basement must, therefore, surely also be Runt's fault. Runt believed this as much as his wife, so he tries to clean the cellar.

Runt cleans the cellar with hot water and "a dollup of Parson's pine-scented ammonia" (94). Because the water is mixed with ammonia, Runt's efforts make the

cellar smell worse than before. Fortunata enters the house and says, "This place stinks to high heaven!" Fortunata is right. The house "stunk worse than cat piss. It stunk worse than architectural mildew. It stunk as if an ammonia bomb had been exploded in a pine tree" (97). Runt does not understand the power of water. Water, with enough effort from Runt, would have made the place clean without the awful pine-scented ammonia smell, but Runt has never been exposed to the cleaning power that water possesses (in Nordan's *Arrow Catcher*, water's power is limitless). Runt relies on a manmade product to take away the problem, but it does not work. Runt pollutes the water and makes it lose its pure qualities just as he pollutes everything he touches.

Sugar does not help Runt clean the cellar with ammonia. If Sugar were to take part in the pollution of water with ammonia, he would lose his innocence. He would enter into a new world where he, like Runt, would be blamed for things he never did. Sugar would become a white-trash male if he were to mix ammonia with water and try to clean up piss. Sugar does not mix anything with water. He is pure, not because he understands the power of water, but because his innocence keeps him from relying on manmade products to solve his problems. But, Sugar's innocence will not last forever.

Later that evening Sugar is tempted to lose his innocence when he sees Dora Ethel, Roy Dale's pretty sister. Sugar falls in love with her as she tells him he is cute. It is raining outside. "There was a prophet's voice in the rain. It said: *You will grow up to marry a white-trash girl*. Water stains were broadening across the ceiling" (104). She leaves to shoot rats with Grease Hodges in the rain, where she gets soaked. Sugar is attracted to this girl, but he does not become entwined in her net. He never tries to sneak

in her room after she comes home "dripping wet" (106). Even though he probably could, Sugar does not sleep with the girl. Sugar does not get wet, because he knows he would lose his innocence if he were to get wet. He thinks to himself that if Dora were to wake up, she might break his heart. The voice in the rain foreshadows Sugar's loss of innocence and utter loss in marriage to a white trash girl, but for now Sugar's innocence is intact.

After Dora leaves, again the water/sex image appears. Sugar and Roy are naked and the "yard outside . . . was a lake" (106). The boys talk about how many women Runt has slept with and about putting rubbers on their heads. It begins to rain. The sound of rain makes Sugar feel alone. The boys share a humorous moment and then sneak downstairs where they see water. The cellar is flooded in four or five feet of rainwater: "It was an interior sea, an indoor elementary mystery as dangerous and filled with evil meaning as any cavern, any water-filled cavity of the underworld" (110). Sugar imagines mermaids and hears their song, but before giving himself to the fantasy, Sugar realizes in horror that the mermaids are really rats. The scene, like impulsive sex, at first appears to be beautiful, but is really dangerous. Beautiful mermaids are dreamed of, but rats are the reality. If Sugar wades into the flooded cellar, he will have to deal with the swimming rats. If Sugar sleeps with beautiful Dora, he will have to take on the problems of her life. Her white-trash life would infect him as disease-carrying rats infect those with whom they come into contact. Sexual experience here would be the loss of Sugar's innocence, but he is only tempted. He does not get wet and therefore retains his innocence.

The boys return to bed, lie naked next to each other, and as they listen to the rain, draw close to one another. Sugar thinks of all the garbage the rain will wash out from under his house, including the effects of his family's life that no one is supposed to see, especially the ice pick Sugar's father stabbed himself with and the towels he later bled into. The water brings these hidden memories out where everyone might see. Sugar ponders the effects of his family's life as he moves his body closer to Roy Dale. The image of innocent children holding each other tight stands in strong contrast to the image of the pain of family life washed out into the street. The two boys are only trying to protect themselves from being alone in the world where water can lure a man into destruction and then bring the reminder of his destruction into the streets for everyone to see. They are "not blameworthy for any sin and not even victims of the sins of . . . sad fathers, but, only that moment, in love with what is and what has always been or what might forever be" (114).

In "Porpoises and Romance," the next chapter in Music of the Swamp, Sugar again resists the water, even though he has the chance to immerse himself. Sugar travels with his parents to the Gulf coast after a hurricane when rent is almost free because of the hurricane damage. Sugar's parents decide this trip will be their second honeymoon.

Sugar's parents go to the beach to fall in love all over again. "The little coastal village where Mama and Daddy rented the house was a ghost town. Everything was full of sand from the hurricane, even the trees, the ones that were left standing" (116). The water has destroyed the coastal town; nevertheless, the Mecklins hope the power of the water will work to save their marriage.

It becomes apparent to Sugar that his parents are not falling in love all over again. They definitely try; it is just not working. Sugar's dad "was trying so hard to be in love, so desperate now that he knew he was not" (118). Mr. Mecklin's only chance is to change himself. He must become a new person to fall in love.

The water begins to have such an effect on Sugar's dad that he regains his innocence, an innocence such that "no one on this earth ever was so innocent except him." Mr. Mecklin, who, according to Sugar, is a "man who scarcely said hello on all the other days of the year . . .," actually says, "Listen to the deep voice of the sea tonight," surprising even himself (118). The Mecklins walk on the beach in the moonlight and agree on many things. Mrs. Mecklin becomes convinced that they may find love, but Sugar's father's innocence is quickly lost as he confuses love with sex.

Sugar's parents play some fantasy games based on a magazine Mr. Mecklin has read. Sugar, who has also read the porno magazine, thinks of suicide when he finds four silk ties dangling from his parent's bed posts "like dogs with their tongues hanging out . . ." (119). The games do not bring the couple together because they are based on sex instead of love. Still, Sugar's dad keeps trying.

The porno magazine then convinces Sugar's daddy that he needs to find a metaphor for romance. He looks for a sign from God and believes at first that the sunrise is to be his metaphor, so Mr. Mecklin tries his hardest to make the sunrise bring love. Mr. Mecklin gets up early with his wife to view the sunrise that will give them love, but he is "too sleepy and cranky at that time of the morning for anything to have worked" (123).

Next, Gerald gets "it into his head that if he could spot a porpoise, then the love that he and [his wife] had once shared and now had lost would have swum back to them, alive and renewed in its gentleness" (124). Mr. Mecklin fell in love one time with some woman, perhaps his wife or not, watching dolphins while riding a ferry to Ship Island, so he begins to look for dolphins. In contrast, Sugar does not look for dolphins and love, seeing instead the dead fish and animals constantly washed up on the beach. So much death begins to eat at Sugar. He does not want to look for dolphins that symbolize love, or any other symbol of love. Sugar only wants to go home where death is not washed up on the shore. Mr. Mecklin accepts all of the death as part of the world they live in, seeing death as common place. His innocence is almost gone, but, for once, Mr. Mecklin is not aware of it. He thinks that he is innocent and happy because he has hope, so much hope that he will love his wife that he has not had any alcohol since he left home.

The next day Sugar and his parents watch hundreds of dolphins approach the shore in a beautiful display of the inhabitants of the waters of the Gulf. Sugar's parents hold hands and watch as these symbols of love splash in the water. Perhaps love is possible for Mr. and Mrs. Mecklin, but Sugar does not see the dolphins as having anything to do with love. "God knows what dangerous creatures with scales lay beneath the Gulf waters" (126-127). It becomes apparent that the beautiful scene is full of death, for the dolphins are attacking a school of bluefish that have no chance against the dolphins that destroy them. Blood and death are everywhere. Moreover, the dolphins are frightening when seen up close. "They were eight feet long, nine feet, some of them . . . They had a jillion teeth, sharp and dangerous" (128). After turning away from the scene

of death, Sugar's parents try to say that they love each other but cannot. Sugar's dad, who saw death as something commonplace in the Delta but not the ocean, looks for love in the waters of the Gulf but finds only misery and death. He asks his wife if she loves him. She replies, "Yes. I mean, no. I mean, I don't know" (129). Sugar's parents base their renewed love on a symbol. When the symbol proves to be nothing more than a symbol, and a bad one at that, their love falls apart.

Sugar never sees love or lust in the waters, but recognizes the ocean as being full of death so he never enters it. Sugar's innocence remains intact except for what he loses by seeing so much death, by learning his parents have sex, and by reading his dad's porno magazine.

Even after the fiasco with the dolphins, the Mecklins do not go home. They stay on the coast for a while and spend a lot of time driving along the beach. Sugar's parents do not try to fall in love anymore. There is no talk of romance or metaphors, but there is a lot more talk between Mr. and Mrs. Mecklin. Gerald even talks of the future as he and his wife begin to enjoy being around each other. Clearly, the family is happy near the water. They are not forcing man-made ideas on a relationship; they are just letting love work on its own. Love was always there; it just needed to be rejuvenated. The problems of Mr. and Mrs. Mecklin's lives needed to be washed away. The trip to the ocean cleanses them because they allow the cleansing to happen instead of forcing it. It is like baptism, in which one must be called to the water by the spirit. Baptism cannot work if the individual forces the baptism.

Sugar's dream about a mermaid is symbolic of Sugar's search for the future and foreshadows Sugar's experiences with love, baptism, and death as well as water's inclusion in those events. While Sugar is in a state of unconsciousness, his mind conjures a symbol of unconsciousness (a lake) out of which comes a dangerous fantastic female creature (a mermaid, which leads sailors to a watery death in myths) holding a water-colored symbol of the future (mirror). The dream shows that there is a woman in Sugar's future that will cause him to drown. The drowning is really sin. Sugar will sleep with a woman that will lead to his demise through loss of purity. It is purity that can be overcome by baptism, but Sugar is not baptised. He is lost because he has no religious background or inspiration to lead him to baptism.

In Music of the Swamp, there is mention of Sunday school, which Sugar skips, but the main characters hold no real religious beliefs. A few flat characters hold religious beliefs, such as the girl being baptized in Roebuck Lake, but Sugar's family does not lead a religious life. Sugar recognizes the power of the water/baptism while watching the girl being baptized, but as he grasps the importance of being baptized, he is disturbed by news of death, which is also caused by water. The images of baptism, sex, and death are generated by Nordan's prose as well as the water archetype, which generates its own pattern of recurring images. If a person sins, that person must be reborn or be lost.

When Sugar's parents try to repair their lives, they do not try religion. They know they must do something to revive and purify their relationship. The Mecklins try water to save their marriage, but it is not the water of baptism. There is much death along the waters of the Gulf when the Mecklins go on their belated honeymoon. Mr. Mecklin

regains his innocence by the shore of the water, but because religion is not involved, it is quickly lost as he and his wife try games of lust to revive their marriage. They then look not to the water for purification, but for a symbol. That symbol is of death. Life can only be found in water if there is belief in religion/myth. When the Mecklins abandon the notion of fixing their relationship, their innocence and love begin to be restored. It is as if they are baptized into a family, without even knowing it. If they were to embrace a religious belief at this point, they could be saved. Because they are not purified, their relationship soon crumbles, and they return to their miserable, lonely existence.

WATER IN THE SHARPSHOOTER BLUES

Although Sugar Mecklin does not appear in The Sharpshooter Blues, the novel is a continuation of the themes of Music of the Swamp and of Nordan's use of the water archetype. Nordan uses the main character of The Sharpshooter Blues, Hydro Raney, in much the same way he used Sugar -- as a character who has, until now, retained most of his innocence in a world full of water and of temptation. In The Sharpshooter Blues, Nordan uses the water archetype to underscore his themes of loss and overcoming loss, especially the loss of innocence. Nordan also uses water's physical qualities to continue writing in the Southern and fantastic traditions.

The Sharpshooter Blues is written as a novel that moves back and forth through time and contains much loss and the efforts to overcome loss. Some characters are able to survive loss while others are destroyed by it. Hydro Raney tries not to let loss destroy him, but continues to experience loss until he must escape it through water.

Hydro, whose name means water, lives with his father at their fish camp on an island in Roebuck Lake. The island "was a strip of high ground far out in a strange bayou, the vast, unbounded backwaters of many lakes and rivers, from underground, somewhere, salt water, brackish at least, mineral salts, filled up the swamp and broadened it far across the Delta" (1). Nordan describes the water as seemingly limitless, "a black mirror, colored by the tannic acid that seeped into it from the knees of cypress trees" (1).

Hydro's mother died when Hydro was young so he does not really remember her, but he feels her death anyway. Hydro's father, Mr. Raney, tries to fill the loss with tales about his wife and stories of the swamp, but the stories do not take away Hydro's sense of loss.

Hydro also has never had a chance for what many consider a normal life. He was born with hydrocephalus, a swelling of his head that puts pressure on his brain, also called "water on the brain." As a result, the twenty-three-year-old Hydro's mental capabilities are below normal. Hydro is aware that he is missing out on a normal life but tries to overcome his problem. He works at a grocery store, William Tell, and collects comics, but these are not enough to overcome the loss he experiences.

One night Hydro is working at the store, which is way out in the country, while his friend Louis is reading comics in the pantry, when a boy and a girl hold up the store. These two robbers become known as the "lovely children." While staring down the barrel of the gun the girl holds, Hydro thinks he sees his mother. Not only do these "children" rob the store (Hydro does not even realize he is being robbed), but the girl takes much more when she forces Hydro to have sex with her. Before raping him, the girl asks if he knows what sex is. Hydro replies, "A grave" (50). Hydro loses his virginity to a young, boyish girl with tattooed lipstick. He cannot handle what has happened and carries the loss to its unavoidable conclusion as he sees it. As his father drives up, Hydro shoots and kills both the boy and the girl. Later that night, Hydro kills himself.

Although he loses his mother at his birth and has hydrocephalus, Sugar retains his innocence until he is raped. Hydro is, in fact, completely innocent -- he is as a baby

without sin. Hydro is so innocent that he does not even recognize the wrongs around him, but he does know that having sex with the girl will "ruin" his life (209). When Hydro is raped, everything changes. Unlike in earlier writings where Nordan hints at and/or evokes images of sex in the reader's mind, The Sharpshooter Blues has scenes containing sex. In the case of the rape scene, the sex is not consensual. Hydro does not choose to lose his innocence, but has it taken from him.

The scene with the rape contains no water nor water references. The lack of water during this scene highlights the act by showing how unnatural it is. Hydro does not truly lose his innocence through the rape, but only thinks he does. He does not get wet or commit a sin. There is no water around, but Hydro cannot separate rape from consensual sex. Water and consensual sex are natural occurrences, while rape is not. A sin is only committed through a consensual act. Although, in Nordan's writings, loss of innocence or having sex leads to the characters having problems, the choice to have sex is important and defines the character. The characters can always choose to be redeemed through water, but because Hydro does not choose to lose his innocence he cannot choose to be redeemed through water. There is no need for Hydro to be saved, because he did not sin. Later in the novel, Hydro makes a conscientious effort to escape his problems by entering the water in a way that would be enough to save any other character in Nordan's writings, but, because Hydro did not lose his innocence through becoming wet, he drowns when he tries to be baptized. Hydro does not need redemption, but instead needs understanding and something to believe in.

Hydro thinks that he has lost his innocence when he is raped because of the sexual experiences of those around him. Just that day, Hydro has listened to Leonard Reel confess to having sex with a truck driver he had picked up at the Shell station. Hydro has heard Leonard make similar confessions after sleeping with a man he saw taking a shower. "It was a pretty good confession, first few times you heard it, but then it got tiresome after a while. That was Hydro's opinion, anyway." Hydro realizes that Leonard always felt miserable after having sex. In fact, Leonard "usually wanted to kill himself after sex" (23). Although Mr. Raney has never explained sex to Hydro, he has sung to Hydro numerous songs, their lyrics full of sexual innuendos. These songs have given Hydro the impression that sex is bad. Because Hydro has no mother to show him the effects of love between a man and a woman, other than that women can die in childbirth, Hydro has no impression that sex is anything but loss.

After being raped, Hydro looks for salvation even though he does not need it. In The Sharpshooter Blues, Hydro sees hope in the water around him. He does not think about its physical qualities, but only sees water as a different world. Hydro thinks that the water is a world where he belongs.

While riding with his father after he has killed the "lovely children," Hydro thinks "it might be a good idea to jump in the water and drown . . ." (2). He then thinks of the men who, during the Civil War, had fought and "died in the swamp for reasons that must have seemed good at the time . . ." (3). Hydro wants to "slip over the side, into the black water, through the looking glass" so he can be with the dolphins and the "lovely children," who would explain love to him. He wants to be happy. Hydro truly believes

that he could be happy if he had a normal-sized head so that he could be smart. No one would call him names, he thinks, if his head were not so big and he were not so slow. He would be happy in "the excellent world on the other side of the mirror of the lake" (3).

Hydro believes that there is only loss in this world. He tries to find something to show him that there is a way to overcome such loss -- "the secret that might save him from this pain" (13):

Far across the swamp Hydro listened for the sound of some voice that would tell him the secrets that others must already know, the whispered words that would explain . . . about life and death and hope for the future, of which he believed there was none, or even African animals, and treepeople, which he wasn't so sure he believed in neither. (15)

There was no comforting voice to explain to Hydro that he was not alone, that he was not just "a motherless child," as he believed (16). Hydro dreams that his mother does not even reply to him. In the dream, he tries to holler out, "I am all alone in the world, Mama," but the words get all scrambled up in his head and so what comes out of his mouth is, "Cork is an export product of India" (17). His mother does not reply. Hydro believes that he is hopeless, that no one is there to help him make it through this world and into the next. God and baptism have not been explained to Hydro, and since nothing answers his call, Hydro believes he has to do what he thinks is best.

Hydro believes that he will be happy when he goes to the next world. The only force that keeps Hydro from entering the water to ensure his passage to the next world is his father. Hydro "missed his daddy when he was away from him too long" (27). While

riding home, Hydro grows tired of waiting for his trip to the next world. "He wished his daddy would fall out into the water and drown. He imagined this, hoped for it, so that finally everything would be lost, there would be no more waiting" (4). Hydro, who is neither comforted by nor understands love, asks himself if he has "ever loved anyone, even his daddy" (4). He finds comfort only in the knowledge that water will provide his exit from this world of loss and entrance into the next world where Hydro will be happy. Hydro drowns himself to escape the loss of this world.

Hydro wants to become something else in this world. He wants to become what he could have been under different circumstances. Hydro believes that he could have a normal life if it were not for the water in his head. Nordan allows us to see what Hydro becomes once the water in his head is gone. In the next life Hydro is known as Ramon Fernandez, and he has a normal-shaped head and speaks Spanish phrases. It turns out that Ramon Fernandez is the name his mother picked for him. She took the name from "The Idea of Order at Key West," a poem by Wallace Stevens in which the narrator cries out to Ramon Fernandez to tell why the lights "mastered the night and portion out the sea" (Stevens 1155). Ramon hangs out at Chez Jesus with his mom and is happy there. Occasionally people of this world such as Mr. Raney, Louis, and Morgan can see Ramon until he catches a train that pulls up at the church during his funeral. The train takes him and some other dead characters, including Sugar's grandfather, away.

In the aftermath, the entire town believes the local sharpshooter, Morgan, to be the killer who saved Hydro and Louis. Morgan, who is a midget and the son of a gypsy, is even sent to jail over the matter. Morgan lost his own identity by creating his present

one. By passing himself off as a sort of outlaw who stole a truck from a Mexican and convincing himself that he could be happy with Dr. McNaughton's wife, Morgan denies himself true happiness. After being arrested, Morgan begins to see that he can be happy.

Other characters that are faced with the loss caused by sex in their own lives are able to overcome that loss in the wake of Hydro's death. Dr. McNaughton, the father of Hydro's friend Louis, believes he is losing his wife, Ruth, to Morgan, her lover. Ruth McNaughton is trying to lose herself to alcohol, which offers the promise of relief, but, unlike water, with a price. The McNaughtons' son, Louis, is losing his parents because they are so caught up in the effects of extramarital sex that they ignore him. Louis makes up a story that places the blame on Morgan for the deaths of the "lovely children," to get back at Morgan for sleeping with Louis's mother. The sheriff is afraid of losing his wife to show business, and his wife is afraid of losing her husband, the sheriff, to his job. Mr. Raney still must deal with the loss of his wife, and he, like the rest of the town, must also deal with the loss of Hydro.

The novel becomes not a story just of loss, but also a story of overcoming loss. Hope helps get the characters through their losses. In many instances, that hope comes in the form of water. The other characters do not have to drown to save themselves, because they are saved by Hydro's death. Only after Hydro gives himself to the water do the characters of the town realize that they too can overcome their losses. Because of the death of one, the lives of many can be redeemed. Hydro's death by water offers the other characters salvation on Earth.

The day after the shooting, after Louis tells his story about Morgan killing the children in cold blood to the crowd at the Arrow, Dr. and Mrs. McNaughton feel transformed. Dr. McNaughton feels as if "a fountain bubbling with cleansing waters might as well have been pouring gently over the sins of his past, and his wife's past as well, even last night," when Morgan and Mrs. McNaughton made love in the kitchen while he watched television in the next room (118). Mrs. McNaughton is also beginning to believe in forgiveness. As she watches the waters of the toilet wash away the alcohol-induced vomit, Ruth thinks of the happiness she has had with her husband in the past, including the time they bathed under a woodland cascade (117-118). She wants to get over the current problems of their marriage. She is at peace with the sound of the water going down the drain. Ruth and her husband forgive each other and fall back in love with each other.

Morgan is also able to put his life back together. Hydro's death forces Morgan to realize that he neither wants nor needs Ruth's love, because she cannot make him happy. Once Morgan realizes that all he does need in this world is happiness, he packs his few belongings, convinces his adopted mother to go with him, and sets out to start a new life in Texas.

Nordan uses the water archetype to focus the reader on the loss and eventual prevalence over the loss. By placing the story in a semi-mythical swamp on the edge of reality, the reader is able to experience the characters' loss and resurrection without the situations becoming too serious. Like other mythical stories that seem all too real, the events cannot really happen -- or can they? Once a reader can accept that dolphins and

elves live in the Mississippi Delta, or at least in Arrow Catcher, the reader is also able to believe that the death of one person can save many and that water has a power beyond its physical properties.

Nordan casts doubts on what the reader thinks is true. Hydro asks his dad, "What is Kentucky?" His dad replies, "Nobody knows . . ." (10). Once there are doubts in the reader's head about reality, Nordan uses the water archetype to suggest a new reality that includes seemingly mythical qualities. While Hydro is being raped, Mr. Raney is cleaning fish scales and guts off his dock. Nordan shows how easy it is to use water to clean up a mess. The juxtaposition of this scene with the rape scene suggests that water can wash the rape away, which is an archetypal use of the water by Nordan.

Unfortunately for Hydro, it is the lovely children and not himself that need baptism.

Before Hydro drowns, when he is searching for "some voice that would tell him the secrets that others must already know . . . about life and death and hope for the future . . .," he hears an ancient noise in his head (15). It is the same noise that Louis hears at the funeral, but Louis is able to recognize the noise, which Nordan describes as "a great rushing, as of waters, rivers and rains and spillways, even oceans sucking sand off the beaches and carrying them far away," as a voice (258). Louis hears

that there is a great river, the streams and pools whereof make glad the city of God, and the lake where his grandfather drowned, and where Hydro took his own life, and the Delta rains, like a monsoon, that could wash the birds right out of the trees, and even the blood that blew backwards out of the heads of the two lovely children into the groceries on the shelves of William Tell, and the

swelling in Hydro's head that caused the atrophy of his brain, and the cancer that clouded the eyes and finally killed Pap Mecklin were all the same water -- they were the multitudinous streams of the great river whereof the City of God is made glad, no one knows how. And the roaring in his head, this rushing of elements older than life, older than death, as old in fact as God, went on . . . (259)

Louis, unlike Hydro, is able to understand the ancient noise. Louis, who appears to be the only character in the novel that truly believes in God, hears a voice from heaven say, "Write this: all who die are blessed, for they rest from their labors" (260). Out of the watery noise comes the voice of God, just as from water comes life.

Nordan uses the images of water to generate a sense of oneness and of hope. By combining the archetypal qualities of water with its physical qualities through writing that evokes mythical attributes, Nordan places his signature on the Southern tradition of writing about loss.

THE WATER ARCHETYPE, NORDAN, AND THE SOUTHERN TRADITION: WHY BOTHER AT ALL?

By evoking the water archetype, Nordan focusses the reader's attention on the points he is trying to make. In Nordan's world of mythical Southern reality, there are two overwhelming facts: loss is everywhere and is important, as the Prince of Darkness says to Webber, "Loss is important . . . the most important things that ever happen to people" and sex without love is harmful, as shown by the words and actions of the majority of the characters (The Sharpshooter Blues 81-82). Nordan strives to show that there is also hope. If people reach out to each other and believe in something, there is enough hope in the world for them to make it through. Nordan points out that the consequences of loveless sex can only be overcome by love and meaningful baptism.

Very few, if any, of Nordan's early characters have any hope because they have no understanding of hope, love, or religion. As Nordan's writing develops, the characters have a better understanding of love and, in the end, Nordan's message is one of hope.

The feeling of hope that Nordan creates is summarized in a message from the ancient noise that is God's voice and sounds like the rumbling of water, to Louis in The Sharpshooter Blues: "all who die are blessed, for they rest from their labors" (259). Nordan is using the water archetype to convey his message. When God speaks to Louis, it is obviously a message of hope in spoken words, but the numerous other images of hope are generated in the minds of the reader by Nordan's use of archetypes. Water as

the source of life is an ancient notion found in numerous cultures from different times and places. The life cycle can be signified by the endless flow of rivers. Nordan portrays the cycle of life in the Mississippi Delta, beside the largest river in the country, as the journey of someone going to the end of a river, which is to merge with the One. Hydro, in The Sharpshooter Blues, reads in a comic book about a dead Korean soldier floating away down the river to a peaceful rest and even tries to merge with the one by drowning in the hope of floating away (207-208). According to Richard Cavendish's study of myths, within lakes there is an illusory paradise that can be shattered by reality (1602). Hydro sees the paradise in Roebuck Lake, as does Sugar, who sees mermaids and miracles. That paradise is shattered when Hydro drowns and Sugar cannot handle the reality of what life eventually becomes, but both of these characters have hope and by their actions give hope to others.

Not all of Nordan's works include the water archetype, especially his early works. It seems that over time, as he has grown as a writer, Nordan has increased his use of the water archetype, until his most recent work Lightning Song. This novel, which is not as good as his others, tries to continue in the same vein of writing with the same type characters and themes, but the power of the water archetype is missing. Lightning plays a large part in the novel, but it is more melodramatic and less powerful than the water. Nordan's Wolf Whistle does contain water, but the water is not used as an archetype.

By studying Nordan's use of the water archetype, we see his unique signature. Nordan creates images in the readers' minds with the archetype such as a baptism, but juxtaposed with a scene of death. Sugar experiences the wonder of a baptism as his

friend finds a dead body. Nordan's juxtaposition of images adds to the universal experience. By using the water archetype while writing in the Southern tradition, Nordan specifically evokes the collective experience of the South. The South is what Nordan knows, so it is what he writes about. At the same time, Nordan is writing about universal experiences of loss and sin, of love and hope. The water archetype focuses the reader's attention on these experiences.

Nordan's novels and stories add to the Southern tradition and to the water archetype for his readers. The images that Nordan creates in the minds of his readers will reappear in their minds when they read other works with water archetypes. Their collective experience is broadened by reading Nordan. By examining the water archetype, we can better understand how Nordan adds to the archetype and to Southern humor, gothic, and fantasy.

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