

AN EXEGETIC OF SELECTIONS FROM *AND WIND WILL WASH AWAY*

By

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(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

Performing an exegesis on two chapters of an original novel composed to convey religious meaning and man's search for understanding. The novel, *And Wind Will Wash Away*, explores the failure of masculine rationality in the face of irrational and chaotic feminine Nature. This thesis covers two of the eighteen chapters of the novel, chapters nine and twelve, presenting them first and then providing an exegesis through critical annotations. The religious content of meaning and reference embedded in the novel's text is explored and explained intra and inter textually.

INDEX WORDS: Religious Literature, Detective Fiction, Myth, Literary Criticism, *And Wind Will Wash Away*, Wind, Mircea Eliade, Atlanta, Space and place, William Tecumseh Sherman, Aztec traditions, Tlazolteotl, Durga, Buddhism, Nirvana, Karma

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: A PERSONAL EXEGESIS

The thesis that follows contains two body sections that are portions of a much longer work of fiction. They are two chapters, Chapters Nine and Twelve, from a novel titled, *And Wind Will Wash Away*. Though the first sixty pages of the book were written before I began my Masters degree at UGA, the rest was completed here in the course of my work and research and totals about four hundred pages. The drafts of the chapters included here may still undergo some changes and edits before this work is published in its entirety, but what is present has undergone several drafts already and retains the integrity of the text in regards to plot, characterization and themes. As a thesis, this stands as an example of my work as a novelist and my work as an academic who finds and explores the religious content in literature. The novel, *And Wind Will Wash Away*, is an application of my studies towards an original artistic creation.

The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate how religious and mythological themes and ideas are transmitted through fiction by providing portions of my fictional work and then detailing the methodology and content in a nonfiction format. After both chapters are presented, annotations will follow to examine the prose, religious ideas, and references there within. The original goal for the novel was to express or refer to in some way all of the religious traditions of the world in the course of one narrative. As that task proved quite daunting, the text was modified to express the religious traditions of each character's beliefs or heritage or the settings in which they find themselves as the narrative progresses. The annotations will show from where the religious content comes and further explain references found in the work. The intention of the fictional work examined is to provide enjoyable and stimulating literary fiction. Although

religious content can appear in the speech of characters, themes explored in presenting the characters and their interactions, and details used in describing setting and characters, it should in no way clutter the plot and conveyance of the story, but hopefully enhance the reader's enjoyment. The method of lacing a fictional work with symbolic content as practiced by James Joyce in his work *Ulysses* is often referred to as "larding," or fattening the text, and is employed in *And Wind Will Wash Away* in regards to religious and mythological themes and representations.

The style of the fiction harkens back to the Golden Age of the Novel found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with a debt to George Elliot, Charles Dickens and especially the naturalism of Emile Zola. From the base of Zola's French naturalism, other influence is drawn from the consciously religious Russian novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy, along with the myth-making, language-loving Southern Gothic work of William Faulkner. These scattered points of literary legacy are brought together to express a timelessly human story in a very specific point of time in the contemporary American landscape of the New South city, Atlanta, Georgia.

The form of the fiction follows the model of the detective story, a device employed in literary fiction since Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and perfected and innovated upon by such great writers as Edgar Allen Poe, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Arthur Conan Doyle, William Faulkner, Raymond Chandler, Julio Cortazar, Kobo Abe, Umberto Eco, and Haruki Murakami. The central religious themes of the whole novel such as rebirth, discovery, the quest for understanding, and the hero myth operate and express themselves naturally within the form of the detective story. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, *The Book of Job* and Goethe's *Faust*, are the three main religious texts from which the detective protagonist is drawn and the religious themes for the whole work. Other religious and mythological influences and sources include, but are not limited to, Franz



Kafka's *The Castle*, Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, William T. Vollmann's *The Royal Family*, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology*, Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, William S. Burroughs' *Cities of the Red Night*, Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Paramo*. These works all stand as models for what I am trying to accomplish in *And Wind Will Wash Away*, as they are not only some of the greatest human efforts at myth-making and religious writing, but present heroes seeking an understanding of the chaotic and irrational nature of humanity and the universe.

The plot of *And Wind Will Wash Away* is also dependent on the detective form and follows the protagonist, Detective Jonathan Wind of the Atlanta Police Department, as he investigates the mysterious death of a woman who was his mistress, Flora. His investigation begins with finding her body burned beyond recognition. Officially, the investigation is closed with the pronouncement of accidental death, but he continues to investigate on his own time. He wants to understand what exactly occurred in Flora's death by understanding what lead her to that moment. He does not believe that the fire was an electrical accident, but that it might be the accidental result of a ritual practice. His independent investigation involves talking to her friends and trying to find out which of the many groups she was involved in was attended on the night of her death. Each chapter shows another step of Detective Wind's investigation as he encounters Flora's friends, a group she attended, and how memory of her affects his own memory and daily interactions with his own friends, family and partner.

Following the two sample chapters are two sections of annotation commentary. The annotations draw from the text of both chapters in turn with the intention of lying bare the

literary structure and devices. References are explained intra and inter textually to show how they fit within the greater scheme of the novel and how they reflect the greater religious traditions or texts that influenced this book. Annotations are presented in essay body format chronologically as they appear with paragraph breaks for organization. Words, phrases, or sentences from the two chapters being examined are bolded with notational criticism following either within the same sentence or directly after. Sources are footnoted and those notes correspond to the works listed on the citation page as tradition dictates. Each of the chapters is titled and epigraphed, as are all the chapters of *And Wind Will Wash Away* and they too are included in annotations.

There might be some question as to the validity, legitimacy, and value of doing an exegesis of one's own work. In this context, I feel that it can only strengthen the work of fiction as I go back and edit more before publication, while at the same time enhancing my own grasp on academic scholarship and religious literary criticism by seeing my own work in a context beyond personal expression. By performing an exegesis as a thesis on a work that I created, I am enacting my own dialectic of art as creator and critic. I am also bridging two separate aspects of myself and my education in the Religion Department at the University of Georgia, artist and academic.

## CHAPTER 2

### FERTILE GROUND (CHAPTER NINE)

“I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world.” Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, page 35-36

“The Fire that we encounter in SHC and allied phenomena is fire which is directed from a clearly definable point of origin, and against a specific victim,” Jonathan Wind read in Michael Harrison’s *Fire From Heaven*, whose title is a reference to how God’s wrath is described in common biblical translations of the episode when Elijah faces the unbelieving Baalimites. That was only page ten and he grumbled to himself reading on, reading how he normally read, rapidly and thoroughly. On page sixty-four, as he grumbled through the sixth chapter, he stopped at the line, “we may now ask the question: is there any connection between the mass destruction by fire of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and the individual destruction, equally complete, of Ms. Euphemia Johnson, sixty-eight, of Sydenham?” Wind did not want to ask that question and he did not want to read any farther to see how the author answered that question. He had sought out the book Fire Inspector Aaron Brennen had mentioned and now he was closing it half read. Before he began reading he had skimmed the whole book, looking at the sources cited at the back, the index, and the titles of chapters, and now he had no desire to read further. Wind understood from where Harrison was coming, in his desire to ally somewhat random looking

phenomena to some sort of teleology. However, in his grief he passed judgment and thought it all to be silly moralizing, beneath even sillier allusions to poltergeists, energy centers and other mystical staples. The book did have some pictures though and detailed accounts of spontaneous human combustion, including eyewitness testimony and interviews with fire inspectors and police reports. The documented cases were of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the black and white photographs showed bodies incinerated, one of which the legs remained crossed and untouched beyond the point of burning. Nothing was as thorough as what he saw in Flora's apartment, nothing so clean. Harrison would have a field day with this case, he thought, it had the appearance of the inexplicable with intention and purposefulness inferable from its definition.

This is no act of god, men bring results upon themselves, effects are from causes, human effects from human causes. Humans are just another part of nature. Jonathan Wind was very clear on all of this to himself. All of the logic and analytic philosophy he had ever studied from Plato to Wittgenstein broke down quite simply, especially in regard to divinity. Situations present themselves and the outcome for man is how man reacts to what is presented to him. One thing grows out of another. In this godless world, nature works on systems and structures and with enough facts, and a great enough view of each situation and all the connecting parts, an understanding can be reached. Especially on our planet, in this world, there are limits, parameters of structure and no outside interfering force of divine intelligence can affect that. There is no connection between what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible, a fictional work, and what happened to Flora Ross, a woman he knew and loved.

Wind rose from his seat at the study table and walked confrontationally towards the stacks before him. The light behind him came west through the tall block windows of the eastern wall of the Central Fulton County Library. Behind him through the window stood the short,

white corner building with the black marble fountain before it next to the Marriot Residence Inn, a little peninsula jutting into the awkward intersection made by Carnegie Way and Forsyth Street colliding together at Peachtree. On his right he passed the concrete crossing stairways leading up one more floor to the fourth and down two more to the ground, but Wind was set on more text with the time he had. When he reached the section of “Occult Psychology Self-Help,” he returned the book to its place on the shelf. The next section of shelves was marked “Philosophy Religion” and he was reminded of the region in which he lived by rows of Christian Bibles in different printings and translations. The Bible Belt. He knew the world that lurked inside of that book well, but it was not his world. He knew it first hand and he knew it as legacy. At NYU, Jonathan Wind took a minor in World Religions along with his other studies. They were easy classes to excel in as his father, Nathan Wind, completed his doctorate at NYU in Religion before moving the family down to Athens, Georgia where he taught Philosophy of Religion at the University of Georgia. For the five years they lived in Athens until his father died, little Wind heard his father prepare his lectures and lesson plans and absorbed as much as his thirsty sponge-like mind could carry of the religious traditions of the world and the philosophy behind them. The world of the father flowed like family blood into the body of the child. Jonathan knew that he was not to complete his father’s work or follow the same career path, but out in the world he was never too far away. His study in the area of religion was for general knowledge and a greater understanding of humanity, which he pitied as mostly compulsively religious, but was most of all to put himself in a space in which he felt close to his father. And he, like his father, investigated mysteries that humans created for themselves.

The book before him was no mystery. Within its black spine were just black marks on sheets of bone white, a text like any other. Its contents were to him verse, verse and artifact, and

it contained no more meaning than the humanity he valued in the best poetry. He knew where he could find all of the mentions of the fire from heaven that the wrathful god used to punish with and he had reviewed them all recently. To his mind now came the Book of Job where the fires from heaven destroy faithful Job's flock. Wind sighed and shook his head at the notion of a God, who though omniscient, must test the merit of the faithful. His head continued to shake for he knew that this was considered the wisdom literature of the Bible, but there were those many people that he pitied for taking such a tale literally. Even as a story with a moral, an example of Hellenistic-Semitic thought, characterized by the notion that it just makes sense to obey God, he could not understand it as a place for belief. While man is at the whim of a god who tests, how is he to live while enduring his tests, like a stone with patient strength, with bronze flesh? Wind knew Job's words well. Should the faithful continue to suffer to no end, trusting, loving, and not questioning? And Job is faithful, he never gives up his faith in his god, never rejects or curses, he only wonders why. Why him? Why should his god bother and care to bother about the strength of his belief? For why else would bad things happen to good people, than for people to suffer the challenge of faith? Though that is the end result of the story, there is the grand *deus ex-machina* climax where God is nothing but swirling hot words out of swirling hot wind as he appears to Job. This is where Jonathan Wind respects the figure of Job, for this is where he asks the big question, the big Why? Is it not mine to wonder why, more than just to do and die? And it is that question, and that asking that threatens the whole universe, its hierarchy, for it enrages Job's god in such a way that he pretty much answers with a "How dare you question me." The smile is ever quick to come to his face as Jonathan Wind pictures that bombastic primitive deity flying off the handle at a man plagued, yet standing before him and asking why me, why should you bother,

why should you care what something as comparatively small as me feels, but the gusting whip of godly words never really answers, he merely boasts and blasts.

Wind is confident and secure that he has a clear method for making sense of the story: do as we have done since the cleansing light of the Enlightenment, and all the way back to the rational Greeks before then, remove the divine from the story. If people are fighting over what a god said then remove that uncertain, unreliable variable from the equation and the solution is human, real, and attainable. Without some father, there on his sad height, to refer to, people are going to have to get either far more creative or far more honest. Then it becomes time to look at history. Wind was comfortable with all of these thoughts, they were not unfamiliar and they were how he naturally operated. He took a materialist view similar to that of Tolstoy but with a deeper belief in freewill, a good ole' American Pragmatist by self-definition. Wind knew the stories of religions as the fictions they are and yet he still felt a little guilt at shaking his head at the belief of others and held back from shaking his head at his own guilt as he stood from his crouched position before the Bibles and suppressed his guilt nonetheless. He was surrounded by man's collective history, marked on the page and on everything else he could see around him. That is all we are, he mused, descendants. People reacting to the reactions of the past, backward *ad infinitum*; lost without prime origin. A well of history we drag behind us by the bucketful as we try to climb free. Lao was right; we cannot build on the old with new without understanding what went before. Back to the Bible, not destroying but completing. We must understand where we are and what was there before us. For I too am a transplant here, in this place, this city, this state.

Wind turned back towards the stairs, his sure-footing, quick eyes and muscle memory directing him through the labyrinth of stacks, reading their white cards with labels and Dewey's decimals counting upward, unfazed and unfettered by the noise and bustle across the great room,

citizens using the computers, surfing the net, socializing, staying out of the sun without having to purchase anything. With few turns he was alee the rows of American history and after one false start he walked down the aisle going up on the left and down on the right where the ends would meet at the period around the Civil War. This was where Wind knew he could find the beginnings of Atlanta history, Atlanta's destruction and becoming. It was a city born true and anew out of conflict, but the land was old and as sad as Lao made it out to be. He turned to his left and there were volumes on colonial Georgia surrounded by books of this country's beginning. Lao told him to listen to the land, but that was hard to do considering how thorough the conquerors were. Lao spoke of the Mississippian tribes that roamed this region and left mounds and shards and spirits when they went and Wind knew they were well to rest for behind them came the Cherokee, from the word Tsa-lagi, the people of Kituhwa, as they called themselves, their minds always on the ancient city of their past. Written history, written by invaders, remembers them of their original lands as fierce and bellicose, pinned in by colonizers and pitted against other tribes, but they were true to the land and took nothing without asking. The mound-builders' memories were tucked in respectfully by the Cherokee, as the lands were retained and used again and anew, a process that he remembered the psychic, Tia Maite, related about her Aztec ancestors at Teotihuacan, a process she said she and her people were enacting again here in Atlanta.

If there was anything that could sadly shake the head of Jonathan Wind, more so even than foolish belief, it was the dark history of his country of birth and its treatment of its indigenous inhabitants. Wind knew much of these people already, all that these books could offer, but his knowing has done nothing, and here is where his sadness lay. The Cherokees had completed what had been left by the mound-builders, a legacy of land and worship, veneration,



and now they are gone, most to the next world, many to Oklahoma. The Cherokee were not without their own beliefs. They are a people of balance and their cosmology recounts a beginning with only sky and water, where all life crowded in the sky that was not aquatic until land was drawn up and it was dried and someone powerful fastened that land to the sky by rope at each compass point so it would float and hang in harmony with what is above and below. That powerful someone made man and woman after animals inhabited the dry land and a sun and moon were drawn from behind the rainbow in the sky. All was going well until the European man came, they had balance with nature and operable balance with their neighbors. Fortunately, their cosmology contained an eschatology and it has been understood that the European man is the harbinger of imbalance, for it is his coming that will clip those four ropes resting each corner to the sky and all will be submerged leaving the earth as if it never was. Sometimes this was not that unattractive a notion for Wind, after a workday where he is consistently reminded that humans will never change nor disappoint him in their capacity for bestial acts.

Would Lao attribute this city's history to a metaphysical or spiritual imbalance, Wind wondered. Would Lao, a confessed poet and prophet, explain and contain Flora's death by and within that restless darkness? As Wind looked further at the history of his location he saw a city carved out of the wilderness, created in fear of the dark; a history he was provided with on one level in Georgia public schools and on another by participation and empathy. First, it was Fort Gilmer, then Fort Peachtree, an outpost on the Chattahoochee River, aiming musket barrels at the shadows flitting behind the pines, leery of the red savage in the Cherokee settlement of Standing Peachtree, yet securing the northlands for the rest of the state. The 1820's saw surveyors and the early 1830's saw few settlers. From such humble beginnings in primal fear and defense, a city grew, on whim and ambition, slowly at first, but with the momentum of enterprise, a contrived

metropolis amassed to sustain transit, for the capital was Milledgeville in central Georgia and a connection was required with Chattanooga, Tennessee. By the end of the 30's the southern end of a rail line was established in what was then called Terminus, after Colonel Stephen Harriman Long drove a stake in the ground for the line's zero point less that a mile down Peachtree Street from where Wind now stood. As line was laid, the only obstacle in the northern expression of this lust to connect points of commerce were the Cherokee, living cautiously on a land they never thought of as their own. Easily and efficiently enough, they were moved, all neat and legal like for the state. As any good reader, history was alive to Jonathan Wind and bitterly he recounted the Trail of Tears of 1838-1839 when the federal government graciously gave armed escort to the Cherokee population in helping them move to their brand new home on a reservation in Oklahoma. 1,500 accidentally died before the move, as due to drought, about 13,000 people were hospitably protected by the federal government from the adverse weather conditions at a military stockade. Over the long, hard walk another 4,000 perished, but the rail line finally reached Chattanooga and supplies could effortlessly attain points north from points south and vice versa. The sad trail from Georgia to Oklahoma is marked by a *rosa laevigata*, or the Cherokee Rose, and they bloomed from the falling tears of Cherokee mothers, a sign of hope nourished by sorrow recording their history in nature: white petals for their pure tears, gold center for what drove the land-lust of the invaders, and seven leaves per stem for each branch of the Cherokee people. In 1916, in the ultimate act of appropriation or as a sick joke, the Cherokee Rose was named the state flower of Georgia from the support of the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs.

It was a place not to be, but a place to move through, a crossroads, this Terminus, and those that stayed were tough and raw. They were railmen and mechanics, laborers and

merchants, investors and profiteers, and they all felt entitled to this frontier that they had carved themselves, dressing up their prize like a painted pig with drinking holes, brothels and gambling houses. A change of name would be a nice little porcine polish and in 1842, Governor William Lumpkin leant his daughter's name to the burgeoning depot town making it Marthasville, a feminizing departure from the Latin word for boundary, an ill-fitting name for a city free from confinement, growing steadily outward from its zero-point day after day in a circular pattern like a fungal growth. Only three years did the name last, when the opportunity was taken to honor the true inspiration behind the young city of commerce, the railroads that lured opportunists to its black, scorched and scarred railroad earth. The tale went for Wind that the Western & Atlantic line gave the inspiration for the new name, which was once again softened and feminized and thus she was dubbed Atlanta. She was already an important city out of step with the rest of the south due to the speed of her growth when the state seceded fourth in line from the United States to the rebellious Confederacy. In this new fragile country, born of insolence and pride, her position of significance could never be surpassed, and her basic function as crossroads and center for industry ready to transport made her the jewel and hope of a young country grappling with identity in the shadow of its former governing body.

The hostile neighbor to the north of the Confederate States of America would not allow another revolution for independence to shatter the union created by the last revolution for independence and committed all of its might to returning the new nation to its south to the original union they once established together. Atlanta played her own glorious part in the struggle, becoming the nexus of the supply lines for the nebulous battle lines around the Confederacy and her borders. She gave everything she had in all four directions as the wind blew, labor, arms, her sons and daughters ready in a minute to serve in hospitals or fields of

battle, tightening her every belt, prohibiting that which corrupts, securing all persons of suspicion, and committing the rest of her populace to martial law until she met her end, giving all that she had left to give to the miles of consuming flame that took her glory, beauty and hope up into nothing more than an additional stain in an already black sky. Her enemies too, understood her throne of steel and what she so facundly represented both materially and symbolically for her country.

The recollection of her burning took Jonathan Wind to the end of the aisle before such titles as *Ordeal By Fire*, *Atlanta 1864*, *The Atlanta Campaign*, *The Battle of Atlanta*, *Season of Fire*, *The Siege of Atlanta*; all of which told him, as a seasoned resident of Atlanta, nothing new. Everyone knew how she burned, how nothing remained standing but about thirty buildings. His visuals on one level were like everyone else's, contrived from tragic retellings full of northerly-directed hate, the tour guide's battle narration at the Cyclorama, an Atlanta attraction that contains the world's largest oil painting built into a three-dimensional diorama, and of course footage from the movie *Gone with the Wind*. The Technicolor of his memory is at once made more vivid and darkened at the edges by his own readings, specifically about the man that is regarded as the Devil himself who set those hellfires down upon the Confederacy's precious flower, violating that Southern belle like only a barbaric, ungracious Yankee could.

Jonathan Wind had always been intrigued by the distinct figure cut by William Tecumseh Sherman. He was an Ohio man who when the call had come, made a career out of war, yet always stayed clear of the distasteful world of politics, even though his brother was a Senator. A man who rose to every occasion, doing what must be done to get the job done, making the most of what was before him and at his disposal. He was a man full of contradictions that he resolved in his time: named in tribute to the Great Uniter of the Indians of the Ohio Valley, yet he became

the Great Divider of the post-war west, conquering and relegating tribes to reservations; a failed banker in New York, yet a beloved superintendent of Louisiana Seminary of Learning; a hailed graduate of West Point, yet in the War of Sedition he lead an unruly volunteer army; a man who's name was leant to a method of rail-line mutilation, but who later enabled the building of the intercontinental railroad with his military protection; a chivalric figure who encountered Generals Johnston and Hood on the field of battle, but when war had ceased he dined with them and help their careers in the government and military of the reunited country. William Tecumseh Sherman was described in papers as insane during the war and when one of his subordinates complained to President Lincoln on one of his visits to camp, the honest President told the man not to argue with the stern general, if he threatens to shoot you, believe that he will. Total war was the method of the industrious "modern" general, preferring to drive back Johnston's forces throughout the summer of 1864, from Chattanooga down into Georgia, flanking and cutting off lines of supply and communication, challenging them to a fight on open ground all the while bent on finishing Atlanta militarily and economically. General Hood was in control after Johnston, and Sherman beat down his forces, laying siege on the city for a month until it was his. He knew that once the will to fight was conquered, so was the fighting body. Responsible for much destruction in his life he wrote and spoke unrelentingly against war as a crime against humanity and the embodiment of Hell. Still, it was his job and he did it well and thoughtfully, weighing the highest good in his conducting of total war.

Wind remembered that in Sherman's famous letter to Atlanta Mayor James M. Calhoun in September of 1864, he followed up his order to evacuate the city with a restatement of the order and a declaration of military complicity for the whole city. He saw no innocence in a city built around the industry of war and shipping war goods. Atlanta's destruction was a necessary

deed to prevent the loss of more lives, this center of commerce would not be allowed to hold under his control and from that implosion, he saw everything else falling apart. Here he acknowledged the inherent cruelty in war and that the only way to bring about the peace that he so desired was to hit hard, fast and thorough and leave no possible recourse on an enemy's side. Only with flames could the machinations and spirit for war be burned out and only with flames could a people understand that the war they brought upon themselves was truly Hell on Earth. This was the action of William Tecumseh Sherman in regards to Atlanta. She was just another victim of a war he did not start but that he would sacrifice anything to end. His order for fire, along with his zealous, unruly volunteers lit her up like a celebration and the evacuating rebels threw in their own share of spiteful incandescence. Left standing after the smoke cleared were few buildings compared to what once supported the town of 20,000; mostly what remained was City Hall and such churches as, Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception, St. Philip's Episcopal, Central Presbyterian, Second Baptist and Trinity Methodist.

The man of action and the man of rationality came together in Cump, as he was affectionately called by his friends and respectfully remembered by Jonathan Wind. That synthesis was what the detective sought in his investigatory police work, to be more than a mind, but a mind put to use in solid actualities, to leave his tower of text and abstraction and find some outer truth, though at times he felt compelled to inaction by the weight of learning. Looking at the books present on Cump, Wind found such titles as *Sherman's Battle for Atlanta*, *Sherman's March*, and *Sherman's Horsemen* but his favorite he could not find, *The White Tecumseh*, by Hirshson, a fellow Yankee who gave the world a detailed and sensitive biography of the man bare, not the military tyrant of legend. It was this book that solidified the kinship Wind felt for Cump. Jonathan was a Yankee by birth and heritage and only moved to the south at the age of

two. He lived in this state always feeling like a transplant as his parents reminisced on their lives in the north. At eighteen he left northward and eventually made his return, but would go back to visit, his self-perception and identity split across a geographic line. This passage back and forth he saw in Cump, who once visited Marthasville years before the war and even stopped at the Etowah Indian mounds on his way north because they reminded him of the mounds in Ohio he saw in his youth. Cump lived for a time in Louisiana and traveled extensively, he was the Yankee who returned again and again to the south musing on the differences before that fated return burned in the history of the place forever.

Wind identified and understood the care that went into Cump's decisions about Atlanta, and wondered if this understanding could help him in any way, for here and now he was faced with his own fire. A fire that he believed was not of his own making, though he felt a responsibility towards it. In his work, he drew connections between data to establish truth and strayed from thematic generalizations, but in the presence of towering rows of creative history, all fictive in their own subjective ways, he allowed his mind to play with the idea of history repeating. Here was an inconceivable act directed towards a feminine body, scorched beyond recognition, another horrific burning in Atlanta. If at least by thematic coincidence Flora's fate was tied to that of the city she called home. Wind could see how easy it was to interpret the first burning in a moral way beyond the causality of politics and military. Atlanta burned for its sins, the sins of lust, corruption, greed, appropriation, rebellion, and slavery. Atlanta burned to purify its civic soul. The infernal act of aggression defined the young city, branding it the Phoenix, the municipal symbol and epitome of resurrection and resurgence.

Wind was familiar with the Phoenix. He grew up reading the stories from his father's books and encountered its image in the neighboring metropolis to the west of quiet Athens. Two

generations of Wind-men would whisk into Atlanta on weekends to visit museums, bookstores, Piedmont Park and so the earlier generation could do research at Emory. Around town they traveled, exploring the sites of note and historic record where they were constantly faced with the city seal, its circle broken by the wings of the burning, unburned bird, its head raised in a mighty cry and its base all aflame. Above the mythic figure read the Latin word “Resurgens” and on each flank were the dates 1847, the year of the city’s first charter, and 1865, the year she rose mythically from the settled ash. Upon returning home, father Nathan would recite like a prophet from the histories of Herodotus to his young son, leading him on the path of discovery into myth as the great Greek recounted what he had heard of the Egyptians and what the father said they had received from farther east. The inquisitive boy would follow the trail towards the universality of myth and belief with this example as with all the others that his father taught him on and of. In Vietnam, the Phoenix was Phoung, in the Chinese version it was Feng Huang and for them both it performed works for mankind, helping the world progress and return to the heavens. The Japanese have in their tradition Ho-Oo adapted from the Chinese, who is a dual aspect bird of masculinity and femininity and represents fire, justice and obedience. On the Arabian Peninsula, the bird is Cinomolgus and her nest is made out of cinnamon, a common spice associated with its mythos, as were myrrh, frankincense and ginger; items that tie it in with the Christian resurrected god-man. Bennu or Benu, it is known in Egypt, its home in Heliopolis, and at times, it is understood as the soul of Osiris in flight, another resurrecting god. To the peoples of this land beneath his feet the bird has taken many forms. Some tribes saw the tricksterly Raven as fire-born blackened by flames. Many others revered the Great Thunderbird who ruled the sky with bombast and combusting lightning under its control. Closest to home was



the Tlanuwa of the Cherokee, a great hawk with magical abilities of speech and shape shifting that meddled in the affairs of men.

The West has been fascinated by the scintillating figure at a safe distance from Hesiod to Herodotus, from Pliny the Elder, who has Senator Manilius try to rationalize the fantastic phenomenon in his history, to Sir John Mandeville, in whose travels the story is reiterated Christianly, with three days of death for the great bird on an alter to God, an act he proclaims a miracle. Jonathan Wind shared this fascination and cataloged what he knew in a way that would make both his father and Flora proud if they were both not gone from him. He remains alone to transport knowledge in a way that they both used to, but now from him he did not know where it should go next. The phoenix is a dense semiotic intersection, at once a masculine symbol of the sun that dies and is reborn daily and a feminine one that creates the situation of birth, her own birth and eternal transmission. A confusing image perfect for an area that when Cherokee, viewed the sun as feminine and the moon as masculine and now has turned that world out of balance with a western tradition that reverses those roles.

Rising, he walks his creaky legs to the end of the aisle and, allowing the blood to flow freely, turns left and up the rows of ancient Greek and Roman history. How did all of this help him, was it just good for his mind to play and freebound, a way to wait out the day until evening, or was it a preparation for drawing greater connections in dealing with a situation that might be drawing from its own greater esoteric religious connections? There was no way of telling in matters regarding Flora and what mysteries she might have discovered in this city. Hopefully tonight will sweep away more of the inessential debris and trivial clutter that lay before him, obstructing his clear view of sight to Flora's most recent past like so many leaves concealing a path leading back home through the woods.

Wind followed the trail of his thoughts up through ancient history, but the burning thread he has followed in his mind and into this aisle found no end on the rows he scanned alongside himself. His thoughts, as they blended, were on Ovid now and the blending metamorphosis of time and narrative. On careful footing, he turned right at the intersection of another cross-aisle, reading titles and Dewey Decimal numbers, abbreviated categories, until his labyrinthian ways deposited him before the right rectangles bearing Ovid's name in the section labeled World Literature. Passing over the Loeb Library editions, housing the original Latin, but often yielding dated translations, he found the nice paperback Horace Gregory translation of *The Metamorphosis* he had at home. Comfortable in his hand, he flipped to where his mind had lead: Book II; its beginnings on page fifty-seven; set in the Palace of the Sun. The hours, seasons and divisions of date majestically stood in flanking throng of blinding light and beauty, all royal purples and golds, as a worried boy met his father for the first time and requested proof of patronage. Appearing as an act of one that thinks he is undeserving, it is understandable that a father would wish to deny the poor boy nothing; guilt also a motivating factor, even for a god. However, the boy, to the point of advantage and abuse, indulges that desire of the father, as if in vengeance for all the years of absent parentage. Any request is offered; one request is made. The boy will not relent, he wants all the father holds dear, he wants his defining honor; he wants to drive the sun. Good to his word, the father relents and past his warnings and words of concern he hands the boy the reigns. Phaeton, half-mortal, took the power of a god, his father Apollo, into his young, brazen possession. Headstrong, yet weak in understanding, the poor boy was quick to dispel all of his father's advice and admonition. He tried to be more than himself, more than his stature, more than his mortality, and the result was of loss and destruction. Phaeton dropped the reigns, never in control of the blazing steeds anyway, and could do nothing to prevent their

erratic path scorching the Heavens and the Earth below. In this time, as the day made its way, across the sky and sinking low, everything took cover, as there was no place without fire. Moist Earth steamed, hiding herself and her within herself, and screamed out in fear for the power on high to put an end to the searing that threatened all life as the incandescent chariot streaked ever closer. Apollo watched on as her cry was answered and fire was fought with fire, as Jove cast his forked lightning bolt down to the chariot, shattering it all and letting the boy fall like a burning star to the ground. There was no light from the sky as a father wept and the charred Earth's embers cooled.

This is what Wind had come to think of, a father making reparations for his absence and a rebellious son thinking only of himself. He now for the first time saw this story in the history of this city. The Seditious were sons of the Union, southern children of the greater host, headstrong, brazen and insurrectionary. Their prideful irreverence for the greater body and desire for self-government, whether legal or not, was the prime cause for the resulting destruction. Would this make Cump Jove or simply the lightning bolt, he wondered? Does this fit the causal moral logic he considered earlier, the acts of seditious rebels bearing responsibility for the fire that took Atlanta's body away, burned away as fire, washed away as ash by wind? Was there any sense in inferring redemption through fire as many did? Cump saw its purpose expressed in its end-all nature and for him ends mattered more than means. Many have used hindsight to find good in the bad, roll with the punches and standby their teleology. Wind would have to suppose far too much cosmology to apprehend spiritual purification resulting from a world turned to ash and this slash and burn moralizing was what he knew many would see in what happened to Flora, for good or bad. He suspected that Tia Maite perceived a positive process of purification by what she had said and he knew the negative sentiment that someone like Sonny's mother

would bring to the matter. Here were two women from very different worlds and very different worldviews who can use the same phenomenon to support their own distinct beliefs. Flora's death was a semiotic sign of the same density as the Phoenix, as useful as myth for those that had use for such things. Jonathan Wind did not want to find in Flora's death another reflection of the world as he saw it. He did not want to find again what he always expected, what he always looked for. He wanted to find the truth, but he stopped himself before he could explore the paradoxical notion that he was always looking for the truth and in his quest for an objective reality he has still never escaped the subjective.

With the book in his right hand, he turned the pages slowly with his left, scanning and skimming. Was he too a rebellious son, and what would he ask his own father as proof of love if he stood before him ever again? From any guidance that his own father had given, he did not believe he had strayed, but here he was, uncertain in a world of information, cleft in ways outstanding from those that he loved: physically from Flora; spiritually, sexually, and emotionally from Monica. His sister, at whose apartment he had left a message everyday since he received his mother's postcard, he could not find and recently they did not spend much time together. His mother was gone away, but her present physical distance added very little to the great emotional one that he had felt for over a decade now. Jonathan's self was splintered in the displacement of his love and this quest for understanding was the only center on which to hold. There was the urge inside to move from this place, from the book he held, as if in that action he could change the emotional direction his thoughts were heading. Unless he was going to act upon these interpersonal relationships, which presently was not possible, he found no purpose in thinking about them. Before letting the book close in his hand he remembered another path of mind that lead him to this place, Ovid also employed the Phoenix. Turning to the back of the

text, where the moral of resurrection through the changes of time was well laid out, Wind scanned through the middle of Book XV. The great bird was Ovid's unattainable ideal for it was born again in the same form, though it still changes like everything else, following a cycle. This view of cyclical time is very comforting to many, thought Wind, and he had studied a great deal of dialectic time from Plato, Vico, Hegel, Marx, Joyce and countless others. Still, he always felt the most secure with the mentoring words of Lao when at the age of nineteen his older friend attributed the positing of cyclicity to an impotent fear or linearity.

Jonathan Wind found that cyclicity was like the promise of the afterlife, it was a solace for those afraid to live life in the present. There was a broken spirit of the south that he saw perpetuating itself on an expectation of return. The south will rise again is the pitiful cry, the death-rattle echoing out of a misunderstood dream that Wind has heard so many times all over this city and especially on its outskirts, often emanating from tilting porches and red pickup trucks, emblazoned by the flag of the Confederacy and beer cans, peopled by sad old men with bitter pinched faces full of misdirected anger and angry young men full of nothing but anger. To them, fostering the rebel's heart a century and a half too late, stoking a fire that was extinguished so long ago that no one knows anymore what they would do with their own separate country, to them Jonathan Wind can only ever respond that the south will not rise again, not that way, not like it was, not ever again.

But alas, the south has risen again in some way, Wind was quick to check himself. Atlanta, at least, is a towering marvel, finally actualized as the jewel the military politics of the Civil War once made her out to be. This building in which he stood was a testament to that actualization as well as the view out of each window. Through such easy local brand names to ramble off as Coca-Cola, Delta, UPS, Georgia-Pacific, Home Depot and Turner she has become

the economic and cultural center of the south-east with industry supporting growth and growth supporting an expanding population and that new population supporting the arts that are funded by resident industry. The Center of Disease Control alone figures her as some last hope in several potential post-Apocalyptic future scenarios. Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, one of the busiest airports in the world, makes Atlanta the crossroads again that it once was for train transport to such a degree that jokes are made that one must layover there on the way to the afterlife. After the Civil War, the motto of the “New South” was reconciliation fueled by competition though it seemed the citizenry of Atlanta saw success as the best revenge. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was entered strong and the mobilization for and in support of the Second World War took local industry to a greater level with General Motors, Bell Aircraft, Lockheed, and Ford. The Atlanta that Wind knew was independent of any of the facts he had learned. It was a home; a place of memory, overlapping memories attached to a location that were always there for him. Moving to the city 1984, a young Wind was able to grow up and watch his surroundings change and explode into a monstrosity of development and urban renewal from the late 80’s into the prosperous 90’s until now where he constantly finds a part of town altered beyond his last recollection. With the population of metropolitan Atlanta exceeding four million and the city geography swelling to include twenty counties Jonathan was not alone in seeing his residence reaching the ranks of any such urban behemoths as Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles or New York. Now when he travels or when Monica pins him down into watching cable television at her apartment he understands another way that Atlanta has grown into a capital among capitals: Hip-Hop. He has heard on the local streets his city referred to as Hotlanta, the ATL, Phatlanta, the Dirty South, the Dirty Dirty, and A-town, but to catch those epithets in passing on the streets of New York City or to see rappers such as Usher, Ludacris, Bone Crusher, Killer Mike, Lil’ John

& The Eastside Boyz, Outkast's Andre Benjamin and Big Boi, J-Kwon, and Germaine Dupree on MTV give a shout-out, holleration, or otherwise represent his adopted hometown, he cannot but feel pride along with the understanding that that Phoenix has risen and its wings are spread far and wide.

The book was closed and returned to its ranks to stand with the other upright volumes like stone soldiers in a tomb waiting for a call to action that may never come. Under the buzzing glow of the florescent lights, the colorful spines of each erect volume blurred together like static between the hazy institutional shades of the carpet, shelves and walls. Weaving through the granite gray of the stacks, Wind headed for the center of the room, no longer experiencing this maze as a trap. Passing down the great criss-crossing concrete stairway, he made his way across another computer-laden research room before going down the side stairs walled to one side by windows, out which he could see the Carnegie Building, for that family too had money in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century growth of this town. On the ground floor, he eased through the turnstile while people to his left were hassled emptily by the security check as they entered, flashing the contents of their backpacks and purses. Through the front door, he broke from the air-conditioning and the cool concrete smell into a day in full fire, bright to his squinting eyes, which he lowered to the sidewalk. North to the left, he stepped, clean away from what remained so late in the day of the awkward shadow of the building, its design like a great block with missing sub-blocks to draw in natural light. Designed by Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer, the library, or "Peoples University" as the slogan goes, was dedicated in 1980, a small avant-garde nod in a relatively staid downtown environment. Crossing Carnegie Way towards the Peachtree Center MARTA station, Wind was not yet ready to dip down into the subway and inhale more processed air and that same cool concrete smell. Onto Peachtree Street, he turned and walking

north, he let the breeze and afternoon sun wash away his scattered thoughts. He knew quite often his mind was just a big game or toy with which to amuse himself. He inputted data and watched it work, sorting, referencing, cross-referencing, breaking down repetitions and spiraling off even more connections from what was broken down. On the job or with other motive, he can control the break down and arrive at the most basic connections from assorted information. Directionless hours like how this afternoon was spent, full of waiting and thinking, he let his mind run wild, sweeping noisily through whatever he took in or whatever he had been mulling.

As had been his daily routine this week, he drew his mobile phone with the intention of calling his sister Astrid's apartment. Wednesday when he called, he spoke to her roommate Kerri who had not seen Astrid, but that was not rare, they are on different schedules. Kerri told him that Astrid was working Thursday night at Zappoli's but when he called there the next evening they said she had not shown up and someone was covering her shift so he left another message on her home answering machine. Dialing Sonny's mobile phone number, Wind was moving further into action. He was familiar with his sister's lifestyle and no stranger to tracking her down, but still this time he worried because of his mother worry. Over the last few years, he had been trying to give her as much freedom as she needed. She had never cried wolf, but it seemed like his filial concern had made such a cry on several occasions where she proved able to take care of herself. Nevertheless, she had not called him back all week.

"Yeah, Jon, what's up? How's your vacation been? You calling to see how I'm doing on your cases? Can't stop thinking about work, can you? Don't think I can handle it all without you? Ha, ha, what's up, man?" Sonny answered his phone sounding sincerely happy to hear from his partner. Wind could also tell by the background noise and Sonny's speech patterns that he was answering while driving.



“That car lonely without me there next to you getting nauseous from your driving? You know I had enough of that stop and go cabby crap in New York.” Wind matched his partner’s mood.

“Yeah, well, I’m crying myself to sleep at night. So, how you doing? What’s up?”

“I am alright, I just need a favor from you if you don’t mind helping me out?” Wind continued briskly up Peachtree Road past the Hard Rock Cafe on his right and the Westin Peachtree Plaza on his left, careful of the precarious reception his mobile phone managed downtown in between these buildings, heading for the sun beyond the shadows.

“You name it, buddy. What you got?”

“I need you to check up on my sister. Speaking to her boss and roommate, no one has seen her all week and I haven’t spoken to her in a while but I have been leaving messages. It’s been over forty-eight hours, but I don’t want to fill out a report yet. You know what she’s like, but still I was hoping you could check around. Run her name with the usual places, morgue, hospitals, arrest reports at the other counties, you know. Maybe even send a patrol by her apartment.”

“What do I do if, when, I find her?”

“Well use your judgment based on the circumstances, but I trust you. Call me any time and let me know what is going on before you do anything?” Wind was quickening his pace to get past the white Southern Company building to his left and cross Baker Street, to feel the sun again and happy to walk through the slight grounds of Hardy Ivy Park, a place named for Mr. Hardy Ivy, a South Carolina man remembered as the first permanent resident of Atlanta. Peachtree Street angled to the right giving the park a little room before straightening out again in front of Max Lagers American Grill at the corner of West Peachtree Street.

“Alright, don’t worry I will take care of it. I will call you after I know something and before I do anything. Is there anything else, are you okay? I mean is there something else going on? I never figured you for a spontaneous vacation guy.” The voice on the other end crackled in and out giving Wind an easy exit.

“No. I am fine. Everything is fine. I just need you to check on my sister, that is it. It is probably nothing. She is probably just doing drugs with some guy somewhere. Hey, you are breaking up, so I will say goodbye before I lose you.”

“Okay, call me if you need anything and man, take care of yourself,” said Sonny, and Wind responded to his partner’s goodbye with one of his own and closed the mobile phone with both hands.

His eyes went to the ground before his feet as both hands moved, the left slipping the phone in his pants pocket and the right fishing in the other for Pez. Dazedly he walked up to the marble arch before him, a square frame of four triumphal arches “erected and dedicated to the advancement of learning”. The area above the arch in view read “The Advancement” in deep engraving with the name “Carnegie” below. The other sides bore the names “Dante,” “Aesop,” and “Milton” below their respective portions of the commemorative phrase. Sucking on the orange Pez candy that he had drawn from the Ulysses S. Grant dispenser and once again returned to his right pants pocket, Jonathan Wind wandered up the steps into the space between the columns. Looking down at the brickwork in the monument’s center, he read the names of the nine local institutions of higher learning, each in its own circle surrounding a smaller bare inner circle.

“Hey! Yo! Yo! Hey! Hey! Yo! Yo! Hey!” Came loud from behind the next column and a kick hit Wind on the left shin.

Wind, startled, stepped back, jerked his leg and reached reflexively for his sidearm, patting at his bare hip and looking up with scanning, examining eyes trying to read the figure emerging from behind the marble. Hunched over with bulbous back and nose, a man with long, stringy brown hair of indeterminate age rocked low and edgy before Wind. The investigator recorded the shape of the man, his ruddy face and squinty eyes, the oversized, striped shirt once favored by skaters and baggy cargo pants above work boots. For a moment they both hovered nervously on the balls of their feet but before Wind could speak the bent man did.

“With long-forgotten woe my spirit groans, I shudder at the load of mortal ill. Here she is lodged, behind these clammy stones, And all her crime an innocent blind will. You shrink to seek her in this place, You fear to meet her face to face! Delay not! Else may death his doom fulfill. Goethe said it once before and you must bear it ever more!”

Wind was ready to react with a quick barrage of short questions such as: who sent you, does this have to do with Flora Ross, what happened to her, why Goethe; but after the gruff and jittery man let loose his prepared speech, he unchained his insecure footing and turned to jump down the short flight of steps from the arch, hop a few feet and then jump down the next flight of steps to land alongside the brown brick building where he darted around its corner, bounded over the low brick wall and sprang into the green dumpster. Wind made a step to lean on the column, looking where the hunchbacked emissary went and staggered a moment on his left leg from the pain in his shin. A resonant metallic bang rang out and Wind could see the swing of the long greasy hair as the figure flung itself back out of the dumpster and went skipping like a wounded gazelle across the parking and down Simpson Street.

Deeming the expenditure of effort to pursue the man who already had a two-block head start impractical and pointless, Jonathan Wind hobbled down the opposite side of the monument

towards Peachtree Street sending over-the-shoulder glances down Simpson. The hunched and hopping form was long out of sight and the shock of the experience, so strange but now so familiar, had the limping investigator in an exhilarating haze. Gone was the liberating daze the sun brought in the freedom from the stuffy library. He was cerebral again, turned inward, comparing what the hunchback had said to what he remembered from the little person. It seemed to be the same passage from Faust but in a different translation, neither the one he had at home. He crossed West Peachtree and passed the door to Max Lagers as late lunchers came out and early happy hourers went in. A dark-skinned woman with thick jheri curls parted far on the left side of her head passed by to his right wearing a black t-shirt reading in erratic and urgent colored lettering, "Relax, God is in Control." Wind barely registered the content of the slogan beyond the comprising letters, as he drifted by the woman, lost again in thought.

### CHAPTER 3

#### MAHA-ATLANTA (CHAPTER TWELVE)

“The world does not require to be reformed; nor are its laws to be disregarded. All of the various planes of manifestation of the absolute can be beheld in a dispassionate spirit. The solid, the liquid and the gaseous states of the one substance, under differing conditions, producing differing effects, are accepted without moral or emotional preference.”—Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, pg. 574

Driving east through downtown Decatur, through the chic little shops and cafes, he had been on Ponce De Leon Avenue since his home on Highland. Past the Hare Krishna Temple on his right and then the Coptic Church on his left, he had been enjoying the late afternoon under the canopy of trees along parks and refined brick homes in the most elegant neighborhood of Dekalb County. Over the phone, Sutra Diamante had given Jonathan Wind directions from the proximity of the most well known Decatur landmark, The Dekalb County Farmers’ Market. She would meet him less than four miles away and these were the most straightforward directions she could conceive if he was coming from Ponce. The scenery became more industrial and before the Farmer’s Market he turned, as prescribed left, onto Dekalb Industrial Way and followed that until it merged and blended into Lawrenceville Highway presenting him with the familiar strip malls of the area and making him realize he could have found his own quicker way to this same location. Watching the street names at stop lights he turned left onto Harcourt Drive into an older residential neighborhood typical for Dekalb County and looked for Mount Olive Drive to find Shamrock Middle School, tucked up on his left at the top of the hill. The front of the school was

as quiet as a Saturday should be, but when he drove around to the side, he saw several cars being loaded by people in colorful dress, families rooted in the sub-continent of India, moving in clusters, children orbiting like car satellites, mothers reprimanding, carrying trays covered in aluminum foil and cellophane, while fathers and sons held coolers by each end.

He nodded hello to no one in particular and passed the side door from which they all came and walked around to the front of the building towards the figure on the bench he had passed as he drove in. Sutra, he called to her back to make his approach known, and she stood and said hello and he walked around the bench to her.

“Hello, I am Jonathan Wind. Thank you for meeting with me. I didn’t get to really tell you what this was all about on the phone.” He put out his hand and she shook it with hers, soft and narrow with long fingers, her palm more yellow than the deeper honey-kissed yellow of the rest of her visible skin.

“That is only because I wouldn’t let you. I am sorry if I seemed enigmatic. I stopped you because I don’t like talking on the phone. I don’t trust it for first meetings or most interactions at all. It’s too impersonal for me, and I can’t stand email, don’t get me started. I thought it would be better face to face, anyway. Moreover, I actually wanted to meet you.” Her eyes were still serious, but she smiled. “I have always wanted to meet you. From what I have heard about you, I always thought we would have a lot to talk about. I like meeting interesting people and Flora said you weren’t like other cops, you read too much to be like other cops. I was lead to assume that if more cops were like you we wouldn’t have a lot of problems we do in this country. It is a shame she never introduced us before, that we never all three got together, that would have been fun and some good conversation, but I guess she brought us together in the end here.” Her arm returned to her side and her posture was straight and narrow, her thin body angular with grace,

like she was posing for a temple painting, moving from one tableau to another. Her face was long and thin, her hair straight dark and parted down the middle, and on her forehead she wore an orange bindi coiling upwards like a flame or a double helix with a green gem at its bottom and silvery sparkles up the thinning coil. High round breasts held tight against her chest by a cropped skin-tight orange blouse beneath the wrap going over her shoulder of a sheer chiffon orange saree with a silvery woven border of paisley and rose-shapes. Orange pants with the same border near the cuffs covered her legs beneath the wrap of the saree.

“Thank you. The sentiment is mutual, she referred to you as her best friend and coming from her, I always supposed that meant a lot. She mentioned a lot of people in the stories she told, but your name came up the most. That is why I wanted to talk to you, if anyone, maybe you knew her the best.” He paused and then looking at her, he looked back down at himself. “I feel a little underdressed here,” he said, standing in brown boots, blue jeans, a black t-shirt and his barn jacket.

“It’s okay, we are actually done here, we ended at five. That is why I asked you to meet me at five-thirty. They are just cleaning up inside and I slipped out.”

“What was going on here today? I thought it was kind of odd that you asked me to meet you at a middle school, but since the parking it has made a little more sense that there was some sort of Indian festival going on.”

“We book the cafeteria here, since we are a community group, the Bengali Association of Greater Atlanta. But I actually went to middle school here, my parents still live off of Lawrenceville Highway. This weekend is the Durga Puja, it has been going on since Friday night. It is a celebration for the Goddess Durga, she is a pretty big deal in Hinduism, especially the Bengali community.”

“Yes, I have heard of Durga. I have read that Durga is one of the oldest recorded names for a goddess, comparable to the Greek Gaia.”

“I’d heard that too, I am sure that we have read a lot of the same things. Today is the last day, Dashami, and this morning we sent the Goddess away to where Shiva lives in the ritual of Bisharjan. Then we have a big lunch with all the families of our community and talk about what’s going on in the community. And thus ends the festival for another year, not that there aren’t other festivals that come up.”

“Are you a strict Hindu?”

“I am not a Hindu at all really, but in my love of my parents I have a certain respect of their feelings and practices. It took me a long time to get here to be like this. I also respect their community and like to help out if I can. It doesn’t hurt me or conflict with any of my beliefs to make them happy at the same time as acknowledging a little pluralism.”

As if on cue, the front door to the school opened up and a small brown skinned girl in a teal and lavender saree came running out towards them, her eyes on only Sutra, so similar in face that they would easily be understood as family.

“Sati, Sati,” the little girl called out in her high child’s voice and reached her arms up from her low height to Sutra, a motion showing that she desired to be lifted which was instantly understood and obeyed. The girl hid her face in the shoulder of Sutra and peeked at Wind and hid again to whisper in her carrier’s ear.

“This is my sister, Kamalika. She is shy around men and most people she doesn’t know. That is why she is whispering,” said Sutra turning the girl so she would have to look at Wind. “This man is my friend, Jonathan, do you want to say hello to him? Huh, do you want to be



polite and say hello?" She addressed the child, but Kamalika would turn away from however she was positioned and not look at him.

"She was sent to get me. And to tell me that my family was ready to go. I would have invited you in to check it out but I thought we could talk better at this time and now there is really nothing for you to see inside. Do you have anywhere to go now? I expected you would have some time since you said we could meet where ever and whenever I designated."

"Yes, I am free, I have no where to go. I came to see you so, as I said, whatever is fine. I just need to talk. What do you have in mind?"

"Kamalika, tell Mommy and Daddy that a friend came to see me and that he will give me a ride back to their house later, okay?" She kissed the child and put her down. Half way back to the front door the little girl turned in a colorful swirl of her saree and waved at Sutra and directly at Wind and then turned back to go inside.

"She must have liked you, she waved at you. That is a good sign, for you."

"Thanks. She is very cute. She looks just like you. She called you Sati. Is that as a term of endearment? I wondered if Sutra was your real name or not. It was what Flora always called you, but in her world there seems to be a lot of name changing or aliases."

"You are deductive, I guess you are a detective. I was born Sati Patel, you can't get a more common Indian name than that combination. I didn't become Sutra Diamante until I was eighteen, in college, when I changed my birth name. That is my legal name, this is who I am now, it is not just some Goddess name that I dance around with once a week. It is what everyone calls me, except as you just saw, my family. It would really be too much of an uphill battle to get them to change, and though I am not one to run from a battle, believe me, I just left it alone. At this point, it would confuse Kamalika. Where is your car, we should go."

She walked towards the parking lot and he tried to lead her while still keeping close enough stride to pursue questioning. Wind found her of the type that wants to give more information than she lets on but needs it drawn out by others. She is not scared to talk, to give, but must know it is asked for, desired. Maybe she likes the attention, but seeks to deny such a joy. At least that is how he found her in this particular situation.

“Why did you change your name, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“Oh, I don’t mind, not at all. I am proud of my choices and make them without fear of them being shared with the whole world. I find no purpose in dishonesty or deception, a life lived in shame is a life half lived. I know that *you* must find some way to justify deception, but I can not.” She spoke with such confidence and assurance as if he was an intimate relation or a student in her charge to be lectured.

“Hum. You really cut right to the point, don’t you? Alright. Good. I have nothing to hide from you and I’m glad we don’t have to mince words here. It’s that one, the Honda Accord.” His words steered her at the last minute and then they got into his car. She told him to head back to Decatur the same way he came. Then she resumed where she was in the conversation.

“That is what I do though, cut to the point, sharp and indestructible like a diamond. Most of the problems in this world are from people lying to themselves and then others. I know who I am. I pride myself on my honesty and wish others were more like me. I lead by example. Flora appreciated it, she was not a big fan of lying, but of course in her work she understood discretion, which does walk the line at times.” She was giving him another jab, keeping him on his toes. She spoke this way naturally, carrying in her tone that this was she, and if you cannot handle it then fuck you. “The story of my name change is the story of my awakening to life in my family and other such hypocrisies. My birth-name is fraught with problems, I mean, Patel is

like Smith or Jones in India, East India, at least. So common, I was lost in that name, it said nothing for me or of me. My father was born here, first generation, but his family was from East India, near Calcutta. He was raised a good Hindu and took the traditions like any other son of immigrant stock would being raised in America, land of the free, tv, and the all you can eat buffet, he pretty much ignored it until a crisis of faith or a moment of weakness brought him back to it. Meeting my mother was that for him. She also was first generation here, but it was more complicated than that. He saw her from a distance, at a supermarket actually. It's really that corny, that is the way I have always heard it. He saw her and she was beautiful with long straight black hair, curry-colored skin, eyes of green and some other flavor to her that he could not denote and he was sold, head over heels. That was it for him, without even speaking to her, sold, love. But he went over to her and spoke to her, asked her out, she said yes, and it was only when getting her number that he noticed an odd lilt in her accent.

“He called her and they got together for their first date and it was finally then that he had his great humbling moment of his life. He had spent the day talking about this amazing Indian woman he had met, he was sure she was even Bengali, there was a spice to her. With great excitement, he picked her up and immediately in the closeness of the car when they started talking he realized that she wasn't Bengali or Indian at all, she was Mexican. He must have felt like such an idiot and as much as he strayed from the traditions of his parents, he knew this would not be well accepted, he had crossed the line. But he still loved her, it was really love at first sight, or so they say. I often suppose stubbornness is hidden behind love at first sight, but anyway. The only thing he could think to do to make it all right for everyone was to marry her, and fast. That would prove his seriousness in his feelings and if he got her to convert and had a real Hindu wedding, he could win his family over. And that is what he did, it all went as he

planned and it was like his re-conversion, his return to the path. My mother, bless her sweet subjugated soul, being a better wife than Catholic, converted for him. They had a very nice and traditional Hindu wedding. Her family practically disowned her, only now is there any contact with them and that is through me alone, but she didn't care, she was happy, she had a man, a husband. They both practically said screw her family and traditions in all of this." She took a breath for pacing only, very used to speaking with such wind, and proceeded, paying no attention to the very familiar scenery of Lawrenceville Highway passing around them.

"I was soon on the way and he confirmed his faith again by giving me one of the most common Hindu girl names there is, Sati. As I grew up and my eyes opened, I bore that name with shame. It is such a typical name for girls because it means 'good wife.' That was the first problem, I was not going to be labeled and identified as nothing more than a good wife like my mother, as something in relation to something else, especially not a man, a husband, a keeper. The second problem gets into why that name means good wife, what it was to be a good wife historically in India. It even goes all the way back to the *Rig Veda*, the story of Sati, the wife or consort of Shiva. I can understand how it is seen as a story of devotion and an act of dignity from a loving wife who was defending her husband to her own father. That was something earlier on that I related to, as a child, when I first heard the story. An act of vengeance and insurrection against my father that I always cherished some relation towards, like it was expected and therefore okay if I finally couldn't take him anymore and burned myself, got out of the home situation by jumping into a fire. But to make a model out of it for wifely duty is sick and sad. Even in Indian culture it was a right extended only women, men couldn't really self-immolate legally. But I am glad the British outlawed it in 1829, even if it was just some colonial power-play, white men protecting brown women from brown men. Fuck a culture that plays with

women's minds in that way, conditions them that way. I don't mean the whole culture, there is a lot of female goddess representation in Hinduism and as with all things certain areas gravitate to what they want from a tradition, pick and choose. But that is not for me, any of it. I have sympathy for the women but want no part in any of that, especially not the bearing of the name for the practice.

"I could think of a few things worth dying for, but certainly not some dead husband... nor, come to think of it, for some patriarchal God waiting expectantly in the afterlife. I am sure you've read Josephus, his *Jewish Wars*, at the end of the Battle of Masada, when Eleazer is trying to get everyone to follow him into the backwards dignity of suicide and mentions that they should be as brave as the Indians who have philosophy and stoically self-immolate at the end of life. I mean, what crap is that? My copy of the *Jewish Wars* has a footnote to this that says that Josephus got the idea from Aristotle that the Jews were descendents of the Indians. I don't know where Aristotle, or Josephus, got that but I find no glorious self-immolation in India's past except for the wives and that was just an awful tradition of male insecurity in action, that whole if I can't have her in death than no one will in life thing." She was really getting heated now and took a breath that was more than just pacing but necessary to regulate her breathing.

"In Buddhism, the Sanskrit word sati can be used to mean mindfulness, as in the right mindfulness of the Eight Fold Path." Wind interjected hoping to both calm her and return her to her train of thought. His eyes darted to her in sending his comment her way, but as he was not sure where they were going, he drove slowly and carefully making certain to backtrack the exact way he had coming waiting for her to warn him before any alterations on the path.

"Yes, it is. Samma sati, right mindfulness, that's the Pali expression. It is just a word, it is not all bad, it was just given as a name to me in a certain context. That does bring me back to

where I was going, as I am sure you intended. Your point illustrates mine. My name change was a clear move from the Hindu origins of my father, the product of someone else's karma, to an act of my own doing, my own karma, and a fuller sense of how I see myself. I mean other than reading Hesse's *Siddhartha* in high school and buying music of bands that wanted to help free Tibet, I did not get into Buddhism and become a Buddhist until college. There I was, eighteen, out of my parents house, far enough away in Athens that no one was dropping in on me and I was free to do whatever I wanted, as long as I kept my HOPE scholarship. Out of that situation and I didn't even have to light myself on fire. My freshman year, I came in with such ideas of political science and woman's studies and doing something with social action and I really wanted to avoid anything as fluffy and exploitive as religion, something that so many people hide behind like my father, but I was drawn to taking a religion course despite my hatred of it. Maybe because of my hatred, so I could mock it, tear it down and seem superior.

“My great mistake in taking the class, considering my hatred, turned out to be my great fortune in the end. I wound up burning away part of myself. I picked a high level Buddhism class, and maybe my choice was equal parts curiosity and spite, since Buddhism was such an Indian thing to me from my limited awareness, yet my very Indian father and his family never spoke of it. The very first day of the class was amazing, I was bought and sold. The professor, Dr. Phil Ruen—isn't that great, Dr. R-U-E-N, pronounced ruin, I'm finally comfortable calling him Philly now, like his friends do—scared half the class away that first day. A few of the kids got up and walked out as he spoke. He encouraged them to, actually. He asked which of them was a theist, who believed in God. Then he told them that they would be studying the thought of a figure who considered theism to be, not only foolish, but probably a disease and if they couldn't handle that kind of attitude towards what they believe then just leave. And they did, it

was great. By the end of the semester, I was a religion major, fully committed to this work in multiple disciplines. Not only did the class and Dr. Ruen convince me to study religion, and I did so on a Comparative Religions track, but to practice Buddhism.

“That year, still a freshman, I began attending the Zen center in Athens and meditation groups with Dr. Ruen. On this new life, this path that was there all along but only now was visible to me, I decided that if I were to leave the Hinduism of my parents I must also leave the Hindu name they set upon me. Taking my karma consciously in my own hands I exerted my rights as an eighteen-year-old and had my name legally changed to what it is now. I admit that my actions were reactive ones, rebellious ones but they were still what I felt was right and comfortable. Sati Patel was no longer, I paid my surcharge and from then on Sutra Diamante existed. She really had existed all along, I just didn’t know it. The name choice was a very careful one for me, I do not do things lightly, even the times when I am rash I really commit to them. The Buddha in his time was a rebel, an iconoclast, breaking with tradition. That sat well with me. I loved his criticisms and deconstructions of the flawed Brahman Hinduism of his day. Especially his problems with religious structures and hierarchies that always turn out oppressive and unbalanced. In my study of Buddhist history and tradition, I found this sense of political rebelliousness of the Buddha against Brahmanism again in the split from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism. As a good populist, I easily sided with the Mahayana stance, the Great Vehicle anyone could climb on, their belief in anyone’s ability to achieve awakening in the normal walk of life without having to adjourn from the world to a monastery. So elitist, not everyone can fit on that Small Vehicle, that doctrine of the elders. Other than the Buddha’s life itself, this became my favorite time frame, the Mahayana split, it cut right to the heart of the teachings, cut its own middle path in the world. That is where I found myself, while reading the

Diamond Sutra, translating it from the Sanskrit, finding such crystalline truth without any flourish. I saw synchronicities with the tradition and my own life as well as with the etymology of the word sutra itself, meaning to bind or tie things together, the root of our word suture. That is what I was doing at the time, tying things together. Not only was I comfortable with the name, but it was me for so many rational reasons.

“The renaming I was doing also gave me a chance to declare my own expression of my mother and her culture. Diamante sounded better in Spanish than just diamond in English and now I have a Spanish last name as my mother once did; I have always felt more for her than my father, though most often sadness. And from then on through the next three years of school I made sure all the transcripts were changed to my new name and that whenever I had to fill out an official form, I no longer put Indian as race but other and choose to not fill in what that other was. The religion department was deeply supportive, especially Dr. Ruen who was constantly trying to push us out of the comfortable nest of institutional learning and into the world to really learn and experience. I hope that was a satisfactory answer to your question, longer than you expected but real questions have real answers. I think I deserve better than something simplified and false to be polite, and I will go out on a limb and suppose that you deserve better too.” She smiled matter-of-factly with a cock of her head to close her lecture.

“I appreciate that. I too wish we could have met under better circumstances. Especially with how long it seems to have taken us to get through the introductions.” He remained looking forward while driving but quickly flashed her way the easy smile he commanded when the need to charm was at hand, a smile for women, usually tough women. “I’ve liked hearing about your education and your confidence of identity. We have some similar tendencies in our backgrounds. You definitely live up to the approbation our mutual friend held towards you. As you might have



guessed, though, I was hoping to talk to you about Flora's death." He kept his eyes on the road, deadpan, waiting for her to proceed.

"Oh, Bhikkhus, all is burning, all the world is on fire, but it's all just sensation," she said shaking her head as if it was just her way of sighing after a pause of thought.

"To Carthage then I came, burning, burning, burning, burning, O Lord Thou pluckest me out, O Lord Thou pluckest... burning." Eyes straight he delivered, still deadpan, waiting for her to react, feeling her out, suppressing a breath of chuckle.

She looked at him after he began to speak, her brow darkened by furrowing, not an angry expression, but one slightly confused and surprised at her own confusion. He noted her confusion and responded to it.

"That is T.S. Eliot, it is how the 'The Fire Sermon' from *The Waste Land* ends. He was referencing what you were referencing." His laughter fully suppressed, he kept his own expression staid, the way he handled himself, not only in interrogating, but also in dealing with someone unfamiliar.

"Yes, the Buddha's 'Fire Sermon' from *Samyutta-nikaya*. I am not used to being shocked by people, nor impressed, especially by men. More so, by a cop. You almost seem to be a contradiction, a well-read cop, its like military intelligence."

"I see no contradiction. Just because I know Eliot and the Buddha does not mean that I do not believe in law and upholding law to run a safe and orderly society. Laws protect people. I deal in hard objective realities. As a Buddhist, you've got to respect that. I investigate crimes and figure out exactly what happened, no metaphysics, not lofty speculation. I just bring to light the concrete world how it is." Wind didn't mind what she was saying and was not offended. He was very familiar with this attitude toward police officers as he had a diverse group of acquaintances

and some very radical friends. He knew many cops who were dangerously ignorant regardless of their education on paper and he knew of others who were wise open-minded people who would never crack a book unless to save their lives. Part of him relished the process of blowing her mind in regards to his badge, it felt good that she would take that away with her, but another part understood that she was someone who might easily prejudge until actually proved wrong making a moment of reeducation not so big a deal and besides he was by now already used to blowing minds in this fashion.

“Woh. I might start thinking you are a Buddhist, if you keep talking that way, a Buddhist-cop, like a bad tv show, Buddhist-Cop.”

“I am no practitioner, I have just read a little. I am only an investigator, a detective, so our areas of investigation and inquiry might overlap sometimes, me and the Buddhist, but I claim no faith.”

“That is too bad, your lover, our mutual friend claimed almost every faith, but I guess then in a way she really claimed none. A perfect couple, you are a religious eunuch and she was a religious polymorphous pervert, to misuse a little Freud. Here I am mixing sex and religion in metaphor just like she did in life. She is not around, but that wheel of karma just keeps on turning, nothing really dies.”

“Is that what you believe? Is that what you feel about her death. The circumstances of her death leave me feeling very unresolved to say the least. I will not give up my own capacity of understanding to a God or a cosmic wheel so I was hoping that you could tell me something, give me a little help at enhancing my understanding of what could possibly have happened to a person we both loved very deeply. I will not settle for answers that involve such vague excuses

using terms like accident or supernatural phenomenon or act of God, and I don't think Gotama would go in for any of that either, that at least is my reading."

"Do you know what nirvana means?"

"Yes, unbinding."

"Yes. Again, I am impressed. I guess I should get over it already, but you didn't say anything flowery or western about ecstasy, serenity or some enlightened state or paradise like promised land. The word itself in Sanskrit originally—although the Buddha would have said nibbana in Pali—is from the prefix and root *nir* and *va*, roughly *blowing* and *out*, blowing out. Unbinding is good, some of the best translations use that. My mentor Dr. Ruen is doing a new English translation of the Dhammapada and he always translates the word nirvana, never just leaves it in the Sanskrit and he translates it to unbinding. The word itself was used as an expression for, or a metaphor for, a fire being extinguished. For Indians at the Buddha's time their physics of fire was pretty advanced. I come from a clever people, I'll give them that. Unbinding works well though, not being bound to life, the world. Experiencing without being attached to the experience. The experience rises and when it passes it is gone like a flash of light or a clap of hands. To not be attached there is no fuel for suffering, that is what attachment is, the fuel of suffering. If you are a wick in wax and there is no more oxygen to bind that spark in agitation to you, then it passes, it goes out. Sparks flash like lightning or a clap of thunder, but they only burn you, only stay burning on you in the tension of their condition, their balance of fuel. It makes a lot of sense, the word roots, the metaphor. Attachment to the impermanence of all things in life, since they all are impermanent, is the cause of all dukkha, all suffering. And it is not like a flame even ceases to exist. It just relaxes from its state of agitation. The Brahmins understood a flame like this and the Buddha knew his audience would get the reference.

Attaining nirvana, experiencing nirvana, is an act of freedom, the flame is freed from its state of unrest, as is a person from suffering, or really the attachment to suffering.”

Wind was about to speak, about to question why she would be explaining Buddhist concepts after he had asked for more information about Flora’s life and death, why she thought this notion of nirvana was relevant in this situation, when a face banged against the driver’s side window. The car idled in the left lane at the intersection of Dekalb Industrial Way and N. Decatur Road, a red light hanging and keeping the cars in their directional flow at a state of tension, ignited but stopped. Wind’s eyes were on the light as he slowed to stop and his mind was on Sutra’s words, both attentions keeping him from noticing the approach of the figure. Through the empty oncoming lanes he must have come, but what Wind first saw was his face pressed against the glass, mouth open and lips in a wide circle like a suction cup. When Wind and Sutra looked in the direction of the bang, the lungs of the man exhaled and filled the pressed mouth, inflating the cheeks against the window like a blowfish.

The man’s eyes rolled wildly in circles and comical patterns while his tongue danced, exploring the space of his distended cheeks. His head was shaven poorly in patches and clumps and he beat on his bare chest in his squatted act of puffing. Wind lowered the window and the buffoon unstuck his mouth and blew a gust of garlic air into the car. Wind turned his face for a moment from the blast and the buffoon slugged him in the right shoulder and shouted “A horror, long unfelt, comes o’er me, and Man’s collective woes o’erwhelm me, all. She dwells within the dark, damp walls before me, whom better feelings made a criminal! What! I delay to near her? I dread, once again to see her? On! My shrinking only brings her death the nearer. Goethe said it once before and you shall bear it ever more.”

Wind reached out to grab the man, but the buffoon jumped backwards, tottering on the line between the lanes and as the light had just changed from red to green, the line of cars behind Wind had begun to honk their horns. Reluctantly, Wind drove on, casting glances back at the buffoon who waved from his precarious spot before bounding through the traffic and off into the Walgreens parking lot.

“What the hell was that? That was bizarre. Do people often strike you, rant, mention Goethe, and run away?”

“More often than you would think.”

They sat in silence for a few minutes, her waiting for him to say something more about the experience and he thinking about the buffoon, the hunchback and the little person, about how they all appeared to have been reciting the same passage but in different translations. He calmly wracked his brain about every aspect of each interaction, and from the wracking he brought order by creating quick mental Venn diagrams and flowcharts of the cataloged information he had compiled without letting any of the internal bustle break the surface of his face or demeanor. At this point he had to assume that he was closer to something, as whoever was delivering this message to him was getting much better in their timing of his location and if they were following him they were doing it very carefully. With his unfazed coolness after the startling visit he was testing Sutra, sitting there next to him, equally unfazed after her initial comment and he was hoping to read something in her slight movements. This was the first messenger that someone else had witnessed and that made him wonder further if she had any connection to this most cryptic aspect of his rogue investigation. He had mulled on many occasions over how they could always know where he was and be there ahead of time but in this instant he had been following her directions. He listened to her as she looked out the window, glass keeping her eye safe from

the windy world behind and he could hear that she was listening to him. He moved back to questioning, taking control and taking her back to where they were before the intrusion to see if what she has to say is any different now from how she spoke earlier.

“I am sorry, you were talking about nirvana, about the flame metaphor, and how the translation as blowing out is fitting for the ending of attachment to suffering before we were interrupted. I think you were relating that to what happened to Flora.” He spoke kindly and with a warm tone, warm and assuring, a tone he used when checking his facts back to suspects so that they believe that he is listening and think that he is believing. From there, he can attempt to lead them.

“You had asked about Flora’s death and I was sharing some applicable metaphors. From my own life perspective, it is easy to see things in such a way, or think towards such things. I can get a little didactic in any conversation, Dr. Ruen at UGA let me lead some classes and employ that very Buddhist and Socratic method of learning by interaction and questioning. My point it that I don’t know exactly what happened to Flora, there are so many factors that go into everything, so much you don’t know about someone else and their life, their karma. However, I do not believe that anything ever dies, not even the Buddha was released from his karma, otherwise there would be no Buddhists, to name one problem with the notion of him entirely breaking the cycle, even after experiencing nirvana. Karma in the Buddhist usage is just action, the interplay of cause and effect. It is the cause and it then is that effect because that effect just becomes another cause. Even after death, causes one created before death still create effects after. In some ways karma is all that we interact with others through and that does not end so easily. Flora is physically dust and, look at you and I, she has set in play our actions through her own. Some people call this morphic resonance, the traces of our interactions, but in Buddhism, it

is often called dependent-origination. This is why compassion is common sense, because all things are connected.” Here he could tell she paused for effect in her lecture and seemed on such comfortable ground in this line of dialogue that it appeared she had forgotten all about the buffoon.

“See, I was not talking about some abstract absolute impersonal wheel of fate or some awful judgmental prick-god directing traffic from heaven when I bring up a notion like karma. We are nothing but something that originates anew every moment from the circumstances around us, and the circumstances that we were born into, not only our own karma, our own actions, but the actions and karma of others too. Dependent-origination makes a lot of sense, especially in looking at death. It is just an effect of so many causes, everything is impermanent, everything breaks down. We project what we want to unto death since no one really understands it. It is like anything else, a zero point for us to project all of our own experiences onto. It just seems like a very personal zero point because we value others so much and feel that it is so necessary to be attached to them. In Buddhism, in some texts, in my namesake for one, there is the Sanskrit term *nimitta*, which means sign, as in a symbol or a referent point, something that stands in for something else. It can also mean a false perception, since a representation of something is not the thing itself. To me, that is what death is, for that is what we do to death, as the non-dead, ignorant onlookers, we make it a sign and create false perceptions. My sutra says that we should be acting in the world openly and generously and from a place not supported by a sign, or the notion of a *nimitta*. This is the greatest illusion and deception, that our suppositions and artifice we use to describe the reality that we do not understand is actually real. Well, any more real than any other dream, thought or sensation. So I don’t know what happened exactly to Flora, and I don’t believe I can ever know, all I can know is what she and her death mean to me.”

“One of the main points that you did not really emphasize is that of choice. We make our own karma, other than that which we are born into, but we have the power to choose. Even in dependent-origination, even with a finite set of choices we have the ultimate power, that finite set of choices is pretty large,” he interjected.

“That is true. Flora made many choices that I can never know about, and I will say that she made the choices that resulted in what happened to her, in some way, some how.”

“Many wouldn’t agree with you, it was deemed an accidental death, but it seems that your world-view allows no accidents.”

“No, no accidents at all, I will agree with that insight of yours, Jon.” She smiled.

“I was hoping you could fill in some blanks for me though. I do not believe in accidents either, I try not to even use the word. I am trying to find the path of karma that lead Flora to a point of immolation in her apartment that night. I am trying to tie pieces from her life together and look to place her death in that framework. I have been to the group that she was attending for the last time over the summer but I believe on the testimony of others that she was had been involved with something else for over the last couple of months. That is what I was hoping you could tell me about. I believe that she went somewhere earlier in the night she died and I was hoping that you could tell me about that, where she was, whom she was with. She never told me, over the last few weeks it never came up, it was a side of her life that only came into our conversations with reason. Maybe she was telling me all along or references were coming out of her speech, but I don’t have enough context to read allusions and references into the last many conversations we had. Do you know where she went, can you help me?” Towards the end of his request, his words were as honest and sincere as they could be. It was in part still a tactic, but he



truly was asking for her help and had to be vulnerable and open to receive it; she was too strong and set in her ways for anything else.

“I feel good about helping you. You are asking me for something and I would like to give it to you if I can, and as long as I do not hurt or betray any others in the process. See I am using right mindfulness in this, Samma sati. All actions harm someone, I just want to harm as few as possible. I will see what I can find out, and I give my word that I will do all that I can for all considered. I will call you on Thursday, early probably, but I have your mobile phone number, I suppose that it is on you at all times and that whenever I call, at whatever time, you will answer immediately. But I will definitely call you and do what I can, leave Friday open just in case.”

Wind felt now that he had confirmation that Sutra knew something and he felt a little elated, lighter. On the wheel, his hands were for a moment looser until his mind projected forward. He knew he would be restless in waiting until Thursday for her call, but he was putting his power in her hands for this time and he trusted that she would respond according to that trust. The days ahead, without his power, days in waiting, without control, would be insecure, filled with a proliferation of thoughts and expectations, creating false perceptions, as she said, about the result of her call and findings. Still, he knew this is what he had to work with, this was the most direct avenue into Flora’s life that he was left with and he needed to embrace it without attachment, to hold on without clinging to make it through.

She directed him left off Ponce de Leon onto Oakdale and he followed her lead conscientiously.

“Just up here on the left,” she said, pointing to the white stucco building.

“The Hare Krishna Temple, I should have guessed, on some level I did. Flora told me that you both met at the Hare Krishna Center for the first time. I guess on a Sunday like today, she liked to go there for chanting and the free spiritualized vegetarian dinner.”

“Yes, we bonded well instantly, we stood out among the robe wearers. That was years ago, when I was coming into town from Athens for these Sundays and at times to visit the Vajrayana Buddhist Center in Decatur. She definitely got me in here more often, got me to see much more to this city, which I had grown up in than I would have ever encountered on my own. From where she started me I went on my own adventures of exploration. I loved her perspective on things from the start, her sense of devotion while still understanding how to be part of something without being restricted by it. She was always herself, with everything she did and participated in, she was always herself, always honest.”

“That she was, that she was,” he said and found it easy to avoid having to stifle his emotions as he discovered a fortuitous and convenient parking spot on the street. He got out of the car with her after parking and they walked beside each other after she came around.

“Are you coming to join me? I was going to ask, but for some stupid reason assumed you wouldn’t be interested. After all that I have learned about you today alone, I guess I shouldn’t think that way. You are pretty open-minded, I shouldn’t be so shocked, Flora wouldn’t have loved you if you weren’t the way you are, she had good taste, good taste in everything. You are welcome to join me though, I’d like that.” She had stopped while walking up to the building.

“It is funny actually, I was instinctively following you. I need to ease into waiting for you to call on Thursday and had nothing else to do so I guess I was just naturally following you. Maybe I thought you might let some more information slip,” he said smiling. “I would love to join you, I don’t have dinner plans.”

“That would be nice. We are on time for the Arati and Bhajans, so you will have to chant a little, but it is a good meditative exercise, I am sure you can handle it, and then Prasadam, dinner, is at 6:30. What about your girlfriend or fiancée or whatever she is, won’t she be expecting you or worry about you?”

“Actually we just broke up yesterday. I came clean.”

“Woh, that is some timing you have there. That’s pretty funny, funny and sad, your timing.”

Jonathan Wind agreed with Sutra Diamante by a humble smile and a knowingly slow sullen nod of the head. They walked up to the building. The ruggedness of his American street clothes with brown boots and a beige barn jacket crashed like a dry limb on a fire behind her as her orange saree blended with the orange, yellow and red robes of the congregating crowd. They were just getting out of a Bhagavad-Gita lesson and his contrast fueled the flames of interaction, robes flapping in introduction, bowing, and hand-shaking, but soon enough a calmness was resumed and the phosphorescent colors eased in their flux and chanting was ready to begin.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANNOTATIONS OF FERTILE GROUND

The title of this chapter, **Fertile Ground**, like the titles given to all the chapters of the novel, provides an governing theme. The theme of this chapter is about space and place and ties into one of the overall themes of the book, resurrection or rebirth. This chapter represents Atlanta as a place for cosmogony and consecration, as in the words of Mircea Eliade where he said “to organize space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods.”<sup>1</sup> The epigraph from *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, like the epigraphs given to all the chapters of the novel, provides deeper support of the theme established by the title. This epigraph exhibits Morrison’s notion of **rememory**, which involves how memories or occurrences located in space can transcend time as there is always some trace or connection to what is left. The experience of history is not only spiritual, mental and emotional, but physical; it is ever present, waiting to be rediscovered and again participated in. This follows up Eliade’s thought since organization of a new space and creation of a cosmos is always done with and on the old, what was there before.

The chapter opens with **Jonathan Wind**, on vacation from the Atlanta Police Force, reading a book. His surname, Wind, carries one of the greatest themes of the novel, that of imbuing natural phenomena with properties and meaning. The symbol of wind is particular for this as in the both testaments of the Bible wind is the means through which God speaks and acts. In Hebrew, Greek and Latin the word for wind can also be used for breath and soul. Conversely, wind as a natural phenomenon is also used to express emptiness and the exposure of something being insubstantial. *Fire From Heaven* is the most researched of the works out there on the pseudo-scientific investigation of spontaneous human combustion (SHC) and yet tries to connect

religious connotations to the unexplainable phenomenon. Fire Inspector **Aaron Brennen**, who appears in the second chapter of the book, titled “Holocaust,” carries his job and the religious theme of that chapter in his name. **Brennen** is the German word for the English word “burn” and represents the German Jewish background of the character. His first name, **Aaron**, supports the Jewish identity along with the ritual burning theme of the chapter as Moses’s brother was Aaron and in chapter six, line nine of “Leviticus,”<sup>2</sup> he is commanded to perform a burnt offering, which is what holocaust means in Hebrew.

The deceased woman, **Flora Ross**, bears a symbolic name, the first name, **Flora**, refers to a Roman fertility and flower goddess, often known as Chloris in Greek tradition. In the Etruscan tradition, she was also a fire goddess. Chloris had a tragic love affair with Zephyrus, the west wind<sup>3</sup> and some traditions hold that Flora was a prostitute<sup>4</sup>. The citation from the “**Book of Job**,” involving fires from heaven destroying Job’s flock is from chapter one, line sixteen<sup>5</sup>. When Jonathan Wind thinks of Job’s words **like a stone with patient strength, with bronze flesh**, he is thinking of the lines from the “**Book of Job**” at chapter six, line twelve<sup>6</sup>. Jonathan Wind thinks through Job to paraphrase Tennyson in his thoughts from his indictment of war “Charge of the Light Brigade,” **is it not mine to wonder why, more than just to do and die**<sup>7</sup>. More poetry comes to mind from this farther down when he thinks **some father there on his sad height** in paraphrase of Dylan Thomas<sup>8</sup>. When Jonathan Wind thinks of **Lao**, it is in reference to his friend **Lao Benjoseph** whom appears in chapter four, titled “The Altar of Osiris.” A high school friend

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane* (New York:Harcourt,1987) 32

<sup>2</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible* (New York, 1993) 160

<sup>3</sup> Charles Russell Coulter and Patricia Turner, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 180

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, translated by Virginia Brown, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 265

<sup>5</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 752

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 757

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poems of Tennyson* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1958) 274

and mentor to Jonathan Wind, he was born David Cohen and changed his name to **Lao Benjoseph** at age of twenty-one while Wind was away at NYU. With the title of chapter four involving Osiris, a dying and resurrecting god, David Cohen's name change in itself, along with what he changed it to, supports that theme. The first name evoking the author of the Tao Te Ching and the surname evoking Jesus since in Judaic tradition this would have been his last name, "son of Joseph." Chapter four begins with Lao speaking of the history of the land in North America and the need for Jonathan to listen to the land and allow it to share its history and the history of those that lived off it and upon it. This reoccurs in Jonathan's thoughts as he thinks of Atlanta history.

At the end of that paragraph, he thinks **not destroying but completing** in paraphrase of Jesus from chapter five, line seventeen of the "Gospel of Matthew" which originally by the New Revised standard version translation is "Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophet; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."<sup>9</sup> **Tsa-lagi** is the basic transliteration for what the Cherokee people called themselves that was corrupted by the European conquerors into Cherokee. **Kituhwa** is the ancestral home of the Cherokee to which their own cosmology traces their origins.<sup>10</sup> The psychic, **Tia Maite**, is a character that appears in chapter three, "Serpents with Wings." Her name is Spanish for Aunt Maite, Maite being a less than common Hispanic woman's name, but together it refers to Tiamat, the ancient Mesopotamian aquatic serpent-like Earth goddess who was overthrown by Marduk, her son and winged sky-god<sup>11</sup>. **Tia Maite** has a tattoo of Quetzalcoatl on her back, a winged serpent figure from Mesoamerican mythologies that contains a similar story to that of Tiamat and Marduk. This somewhat universal myth of an

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<sup>8</sup> Dylan Thomas, *Collected Poems* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1957) 128

<sup>9</sup> *Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1866

<sup>10</sup> James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Toronto: Dover Publications, 1995) 15

<sup>11</sup> Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, 466

aquatic serpent-like earth goddess being overthrown by a sky-god type figure is the central theme to chapter three as well as a reoccurring theme to the rest of the book. **Her Aztec ancestors at Teotihuacan** refers to the military migrational process by which the Aztec tribe settled the area now called Mexico City and moved right into the pyramids abandoned there by previous tribes<sup>12</sup>, a process Tia Maite related to Jonathan Wind.

The portion of Cherokee cosmology beginning with **They are a people of balance** is from a recounting of that tale at a Cherokee council meeting in New York City, 1975<sup>13</sup>. The story of the **Cherokee Rose**<sup>14</sup> is related in the text and its appropriation as the state flower is seen by Jonathan Wind as a negative but can also be seen as an homage to those who came before, as in the theme of the chapter. After Jonathan Wind thinks about Atlanta's growth and Sherman he gets to the remains of Atlanta's burning on page seventeen at the line starting with **Left standing after** and thinks of the churches left<sup>15</sup>, thoughts that give some European religious history for the city. *The White Tecumseh* was the text used for the Sherman biography and his history of involvement in Atlanta history, as it is a favorite of both the protagonist and the author. Page eighteen begins exploration of the mythic creature, the **phoenix**, a perfect symbol of rebirth for the city and the chapter, and starts with **Herodotus**<sup>16</sup> as its first reference source. **Phoung**<sup>17</sup>, **Feng Huang**, **Ho-Oo**, **Cinamolgs**, and **Bennu or Benu** are all other names for a phoenix-type creature and along with **Heliopolis**, **Raven**, **Thunderbird**, and **Tlanuwa**, (but not Phoung) are mentioned in the *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*.

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<sup>12</sup> Mary Miller and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993) 18

<sup>13</sup> Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 105

<sup>14</sup> Cherokee Rose source

<sup>15</sup> Gary Laderman, *Religions of Atlanta* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996) 5

<sup>16</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by A.D. Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 359-361

<sup>17</sup> Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968) 3

The **Pliny the Elder** reference is from his work, *Natural History*,<sup>18</sup> and the **Sir John Mandeville** reference is from his *Mandeville's Travels*<sup>19</sup>. The Cherokee mythology that **viewed the sun as feminine**, which appears quite unique by my research, is mentioned along with their cosmology in a previous source<sup>20</sup>. Both **the burning thread** and **labyrinthian ways** on page twenty-one are indications of the direction back to the Greco-Roman tradition Jonathan Wind was moving and thinking towards as he walked to the aisles in search of Ovid's work. Both phrases invoke Jason in labyrinth of King Minos, who escapes through cunning and the help of a woman. Ovid's *The Metamorphosis* is a work that at once both reinforces the theme of the chapter and provides a reference to a fire scorched Earth for Jonathan Wind to think through and to relate to the Civil War and Sherman. After that, it also gives another source for the phoenix on which for him to dwell. Towards the end of page twenty-two, the phrase, **washed away as ash by wind**, is one of the few times in the book that the title is invoked and rephrased. The title, *And Wind Will Wash Away*, can be taken either in the sense that wind is the subject employing the verb wash or that wind is the object modified by the verb wash.

**Sonny's mother** is mentioned because in chapter six, when Jonathan Wind and his partner Sonny Ledbetter speak of Flora's death, it comes up that **Sonny's mother**, being a very strict and devote Southern Baptist, would feel that Flora, as a prostitute, was suffering God's wrathful judgment in her fiery death. Flora's death, being **a semiotic sign of the same density as the Phoenix**, is similar then to Wind's last name, a phenomenon that can bear great meaning and no meaning. At the end of page twenty-five, when Wind thinks of Atlanta as a home to him and a place for **overlapping memory**, he is expressing both the thought of Eliade and Toni

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<sup>18</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, translated by John Bostock and H.T. Riley (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855) ii. 479-481

<sup>19</sup> John Mandeville, *Mandeville's Travels*, edited by M.C. Seymour (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1967) 34

<sup>20</sup> Erdoes, *American Indian Myths and Legends*, 105



Morrison's concept of rememory. When Wind's sister is brought back to mind on page twenty-seven, her name, **Astrid**, is given. Her name is derived from the Latin word for star to enhance the Greco-Roman mythology and tradition behind Jonathan Wind's name and identity. He is western rational man of the Greco-Roman tradition, but the name Wind also alludes to the four winds of Greek myth, one of which, Zephyrus, was already mentioned to have a relationship with a figure named Flora. The mythic Greek genealogy of the four winds is that they were the children of the Titan, Astraeus, and Eos, the dawn. Corresponding with this the first chapter of *And Wind Will Wash Away* is named "Eos." As **Astrid** is the sibling of Jonathan, the stars were also the siblings of the four winds under the parentage of Astraeus and Eos<sup>21</sup>.

On page twenty-nine, when Jonathan Wind is at Hardy Ivy Park, he walks up to the **marble arch** there. The arch works as a symbol for the chapter and Atlanta, of classical design it incorporated learning of science, humanities and industry and on its floor the pattern is of revolving circles for the institutes of higher learning. The man who approaches Jonathan Wind there is described as **hunched** and **hunchbacked**. He is delivering a message to Wind from an Aztec revival group that worships the Goddess Tlazolteotl, and they are using **Goethe**<sup>22</sup> to get his attention. They are led by Tia Maite and are trying to warn him about his sister getting mixed up in drugs with Tia Maite's grandson. Coincidentally, it is the same group that Flora attended on her last night of life, so they are trying to contact Wind as he is searching for them. There are three times this message is delivered in the book, chapters one, nine, and twelve and each one is in a different translation of the same passage from Faust. Some sources describe the retinue of

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<sup>21</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) 107

<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, translated by Philip Wayne (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1968) 189

Goddess Tlazolteotl to contain dwarves, hunchbacks and buffoons<sup>23</sup> and this revival cult has one of each. At the very end of the chapter, what Wind reads on the shirt of passing woman, **“Relax, God is in Control,”** is a very Calvinist slogan employing Calvin’s notion of double predestination and the supreme control of which the Christian God has in this world. The shirt reinforces what a religious place Atlanta is and the role that many are allowing religion and a god to play in their daily lives, though not in the life of the protagonist.

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<sup>23</sup> Bourke, John G., *The Portable Scatalog*, Edited by Louis P. Kaplan (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994) 69

## CHAPTER 5

### ANNOTATIONS OF MAHA-ATLANTA

The title of this chapter, **Maha-Atlanta**, is a play on Mahabharata<sup>24</sup>, the name of the great epic of the people of India. The name translates from the Sanskrit as “Great India,” since the kingdom that became India, was called at that time Bharata. Here the play on the term creates “Great Atlanta,” at once inferring that Atlanta contains an epic story and alluding to an Indian content to that story. The greatness of Atlanta in this chapter is also expressed in religious pluralism depicted within the varying traditions all of Indian origin. The epigraph from Hans Zimmer’s book *Philosophies of India* expresses a way of interacting with the world and religious traditions and captures a Buddhist attitude of perception. This sets up the reader for the person Jonathan Wind meets in this chapter and what they discuss.

On page thirty-six, Sutra Diamante tells Wind that it is the weekend of the **Durga Puja**. The character of Sutra explains the origins of her own name later in the chapter. A **Puja** is a festival in the sense of honoring or worshipping and **Durga** is the Hindu goddess life and death and an aspect of the Great Mother Devi<sup>25</sup>. The line where he says **that Durga is one of the oldest recorded names for a goddess** is from a source without footnotes of its own, but it is a book referred to in the novel earlier<sup>26</sup>. On page thirty-seven, the sister’s name **Kamalika** means lotus flower in Hindi, just another flower in a book with a lot of flower imagery. Lower down on that page, Jonathan Wind mentions **a lot of name changing or aliases**. This is because in chapter ten he attended a goddess worship coven Flora used to attend and all the women present had **Goddess Names** along with their birth names; again a method of rebirth in the book.

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<sup>24</sup> R. K. Narayan, *The Mahabharata* (New Delhi, India: Vision Books, 1998) 8

<sup>25</sup> Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*, 158

Throughout page forty-one, when Sutra speaks of the history of her first name **Sati**, its connotation of “**good wife**,” the story from the *Rig Veda*, **Shiva**, the **British outlawing of the practice of Sati**, and the line **white men protecting brown women from brown men** all come from the article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by Spivak<sup>27</sup>. The article examines the position of women in the third world position of the postcolonial Bengali Indian tradition. It is written with more articulation than Sutra speaks but just as much anger under the surface. When Sutra speaks of **Josephus**, and **his Jewish Wars**, she is speaking from the Loeb Library and the **footnote** that is on page 406, which refers to another work by Josephus where he quotes Aristotle. I can find no evidence that Aristotle ever spoke of the Indians. When Jonathan Wind brings up **Buddhism** and the fact that **the Sanskrit word sati can be used to mean mindfulness, as in right mindfulness** and Sutra agrees and uses the full Pali for right mindfulness, **Samma sati**, it all comes from the same source<sup>28</sup>.

The character of **Dr. Phil Ruen**, found on page forty-three, is based upon the University of Georgia’s Dr. Glenn Wallis who was in the Philadelphia punk band Ruin many years ago. His teaching and field of work have been indispensable to the writing of this chapter. In the sixteenth chapter of the book, the character Dr. Toni Medecin, is based off Dr. Carolyn Jones Medine, also of the University of Georgia, whose teaching and field of work have helped in the writing of this book throughout. When Sutra speaks of **the split from Theravada to Mahayana Buddhism**<sup>29</sup>, it not only corresponds to her own growth and naming, but to the theme of the chapter and then the greater theme of the work involving rebirth and the development of the new out of, or on, the

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<sup>26</sup> Lanier Graham, *Goddess in Art* (New York: Abbeville Publishing Group, 1997) 23

<sup>27</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” from *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Edited by L. Grossberg and C. Nelson (New York: Macmillan Education, 1988) 93-97

<sup>28</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1974) 45

<sup>29</sup> Willard L. Johnson, Richard H. Robinson and Thanissaro Bhikku, *Buddhist Religions* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2005) 84-85

old. All of the **Diamond Sutra** references are inspired by Edward Conze's translation and commentary from a volume titled *Buddhist Wisdom*, housing two volumes of *Prajnaparamita* literature, The Heart Sutra and the Diamond Sutra, works of the perfection of wisdom.

As they speak of Flora's death, on page forty-six, Sutra begins with the line **Oh, Bhikkhus, all is burning...**, which comes from the Fire Sermon<sup>30</sup> followed by her lines giving a short sense of the whole sermon. The sermon is from a greater work, *Samyutta-nikaya*, as Sutra says, but the research on this is from the same source. What Jonathan Wind responds to her, as he says, is from **T.S. Eliot**, his poem, *The Waste Land*, specifically the "**Fire Sermon**"<sup>31</sup> section of the poem. On page forty-eight, when Jonathan Wind mentions **Gotama** it is a reference to Gotama Siddhattha the Pali name for the figure commonly called The Buddha, or awakened one. Below that, when Sutra defines **nirvana** as **unbinding**<sup>32</sup> for Wind, and breaks down its etymology, she makes mention of Dr. Ruen's translation of the **Dhammapada**, which is based on Dr. Wallis' own translation of the **Dhammapada**. All the rest of her discourse on **Nirvana** in relation to a flame going out in the Brahmin physics of **the Buddha's time**, the cessation of suffering, and the experience of freedom, come from chapter four on nirodha the third noble truth in Rahula's book *What the Buddha Taught*. The sense of dukkha that Sutra conveys, a state of tension and agitation, is invoked by the narrator on page forty-nine where the car at a stoplight is described as in **a state of tension, ignited but stopped**.

At the stoplight, Jonathan Wind is visited by another messenger bearing the same message from **Goethe**, but in a different translation<sup>33</sup>. This messenger is described by his actions and the narration as a **buffoon**. Not only does the buffoon description go back to the retinue of

<sup>30</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 95

<sup>31</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace and Co, 1964) 58-62

<sup>32</sup> Glen Wallis, *The Dhammapada: Verses on the Way* (New York: The Modern Library, 2004) 100

Tlazolteotl, but also the word **buffoon** comes from the Latin words “bufare” for blow and bufo for “toad,” because of that animals puffed out cheeks. The blowing essence of the word **buffoon** ties it in with the wind metaphor for the whole book and the “blowing out” sense of nirvana. When their conversation resumes on page fifty-one, she speaks of **karma**. Sutra says **Karma in the Buddhist usage is just action**<sup>34</sup> and she then goes on to explain its relation to **dependent-origination** which is often referred to in the terms “conditioned genesis”<sup>35</sup>. Sutra proceeds to speak of death as **a zero point** in the same way that Jonathan Wind thinks of Flora’s death and the phoenix in chapter nine and his last name is used throughout the book. In Buddhism, there is the Sanskrit word **nimitta** that means “sign,” as she mentions, and can be used in the same capacity as a variable. Sutra explains that **it can also mean a false perception**<sup>36</sup>. This gives a Buddhist context for one of the major religious themes of the whole book, the superimposing of religious ideas, meaning, and needs onto phenomena. Another Buddhist expression slips into the text on page fifty-five when the narration when his mental process is described as **a proliferation of thoughts**. This expression is a common English definition for the Sanskrit word, *papancha*<sup>37</sup>, what one seeks to calm, quiet, and slow down during meditation. Further down page fifty-five, they arrive at the **Hare Krishna Center**, which displays another aspect of Indian religious traditions flourishing in Atlanta. In the last paragraph, as they enter, the dissonance of his clothing is said to **crash like a dry limb on a fire** among her saree and the robes of the Hare Krishna practitioners ending the chapter with more floral and fiery imagery,

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<sup>33</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, edited by Stuart Atkins and translated by Bayard Taylor (New York: The Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1969) 176

<sup>34</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 144

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 52-53

<sup>36</sup> Edward Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) 18-19

<sup>37</sup> Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publishing Society, 1997) 145

tying in the passages from the fire sermon earlier and acting as another reminder of the deceased Flora Ross.

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