Conserving/Confronting the Past: The Roles of Letters and Ageing in Society in *The Touchstone* and *The Aspern Papers*

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Abstract: Letters in literature intimately convey information to both the characters and the reader; letters in literature also represent captured moments that the characters can revisit over and over again to relive memories of themselves and the letter's author from the vantage of temporal distance. When characters keep letters into their old age, the letter becomes a catalyst for reflection on who they have become in their society. In Henry James's novella *The Aspern Papers*, the titular papers are in possession by a famous author's former lover, now an old woman, and a young man is trying to purchase them for their literary value. The old woman uses the letters as leverage to claim power for herself and her niece. Edith Wharton's novella *The Touchstone* similarly focuses on the letters of a famous dead author, but in this case, it is a man having to confront the passionate affair of his youth, when wanting to settle into the prescribed social views on marriage and career. Both of these works use the letter as a way to explore the tensions that come with having a record of cavalier youthful behaviors with the desire to maintain a position in society – the tension between dissention and conforming. These two novellas take two different positions on this tension with James favoring the former and Wharton the latter. Both illustrate the complicated cultural forces that shape perceptions of ageing.

Keywords: Letters, ageing, love, Edith Wharton, Henry James

Letters in literature intimately convey information about characters to the reader. The intimacy of letters stems from how letters can serve as a kind of tether to the particular moment which led to their composition. Letters can be seen as ordinary objects as well, from a time when correspondence by letter writing was just a part of day-to-day existence. The amalgamation of the mundane and the memorable can give letters their narrative power. As Margaret

Gullette writes in her work *Aged by Culture*: "Narratives may have most power over us when they are most invisible, that is, infinitely repeatable in ordinary life but unnoticed and unanalyzed" (Gullette 2004, 143). Gullette's observation about the relationship between narrativity and ordinariness can be particularly tied to letter writing, because the writing of letters is the personal implementation of that narrativity. As the letter's author ages, their relationship to the captivity of the narrative of the ordinary past becomes informed by their shifting relationship to these past events. While the contents of letters can range from the mundane to the passionate, from concise to verbose, the object of the letter itself holds a sense of significance due to its tangibility. Some scholars have also noticed an equivocation between the tangibility of the letter and the physical body of the author.

In her introduction to her case study of the role of correspondence in American Literature, Elizabeth Hewitt observes that this connection is what leads to the privileging of the letter as a form, writing "The epistolary form is often privileged, for example, because the frequent conceit of familiar letters is that there is no essential difference between the letter-writer's *body* and her *letter*" (Hewitt 2004, 1). Keeping on letters or seeking out letters at times could be read as individuals wanting to add a claim on the intimate parts of an individual. When letters appear in literature, they reveal aspects of the characters that were felt necessary to communicate about themselves and share with the recipient. As Hewitt continues, "…the letter lies *between* tongue and pen. Like conversation, letters express our true sentiments; and like print, letters are permanent and leave a 'lasting record'" (Hewitt 2004, 10). Letters in literature represent captured moments that the characters can revisit over and over again to relive memories of themselves and the letter's author from the vantage of temporal distance. When characters keep letters into their old age, the letter becomes a catalyst for reflection on who they have become in their society. One aspect of that reflection could be the character being sentimental over their personal growth; however, if the letters contain a record of social transgressions, the reflections prompted become complicated. The contents of such letters can possibly threaten a character's social position, because exposure of these letters can serve as evidence for social punishment. But, the impulse of characters to keep potentially incriminating evidence can be read as illustrative of a desire to tangibly remember these times of dalliance with social transgression, times of acting outside of social parameters, even with the risk of possible exposure.

As the events of these letters fall further and further behind, the author and even the recipient of the letter might disconnect themselves from the social consequences of their youth, considering their age as giving them exemption.

Love letters, particularly, often are kept for sentimental memory. The love letter as an object provides a most intimate portrayal of its sender; the letter's author is vulnerable, indulging in expressions of emotion that might not be permissible to openly display. As Roland Barthes writes in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, "This figure refers to the special dialetic of the love letter, both blank (encoded) and expressive (charged with longing to signify desire)" (Barthes 1978, 157). Women, as portrayed in English and American literature of the late nineteenth century, could especially be victimized by social censure if knowledge of these recorded, passionate desires came to light. In the introduction to *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture*, Amanda Gilroy and W. M. Verhoeven write,

> Female letters traditionally focused on domestic life or on love; they spoke in the private voice appropriate to women whose roles were increasingly circumscribed within the constraints of bourgeois ideology. Of course, we know that women did engage in other modes of correspondence… (Gilroy and Verhoeven 2000, 2)

While in history women could engage in these other modes, authors, particularly those who wrote in the form of realism, would often fall back on that bourgeois ideology. For the female author, the love letter allowed space for exploration of feelings that societal pressures might be pushing her to suppress. This suppression can make the content of these letters acts of rebellion. As the authors and recipients of these letters age and look back on their preserved narrative chronicling, there seems to be two reactions: either hiding behind the social maturity that often comes with aging, or a full indulgence of these social transgressions.

Both of those reactions seem to be present in the case of the letters of novelist Margaret Aubyn, whose presence haunts Edith Wharton's novella *The Touchstone*. The plot of which focuses on the consequences of her former lover selling and exposing the letters she sent him in his attempts to mature out of his more cavalier youth and settle into the prescribed social views on marriage and career. In Wharton's novella, the love letters threaten the social capital and respectability of the protagonist, robbing him of power, giving it to the specter of his

past. This role of Aubyn's letters is in many ways the opposite of the papers of Jefferey Aspern in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, which shares similar plot points to *The Touchstone*. In James's novella, the titular papers are in possession of the famous author's former lover, now an old woman, and a fanatic fan of Aspern is trying to acquire them for their literary value. However, instead of socially pressured shame for what the papers might reveal about herself, the woman uses the papers as leverage to claim power for herself and her niece. Both of these works use the letter as a way to explore the tensions that come with having a record of cavalier youthful behaviors with the desire to maintain a position in society – the tension between dissention and conforming. These two novellas take two different positions on this tension with James favoring the former and Wharton the latter. Exploring both illustrates the complicated cultural forces that shape perceptions of ageing.

The Touchstone opens not with the narrative but instead with a fictional newspaper article. A professor in England, wanting to write a biography on Margaret Aubyn, is inquiring for letters from her. What this newspaper paragraph initially reveals to the reader is: firstly, that Aubyn is probably dead, since all the verbs are in the past tense; secondly, that she emigrated to England and became an individual who could garner academic interest; and thirdly, as well as most significantly, that she "had so few intimate friends, and consequently so few regular correspondents, that letters will be of special value" (Wharton 1991, 41). The reader is then introduced to Wharton's protagonist Stephen Glennard, reading the article. Wharton describes his reaction to the article saying: "He had read it for the first time with a scarcely perceptible quickening of attention: her name had so long been public property that his eye passed it unseeingly…" (Wharton 1991, 43). This portrayal of Glennard's reaction to the call for Aubyn's letters is illustrative of what will lead to the central tension of the novella: what will selling the letters mean to Glennard? This paragraph is a reintroduction to Aubyn's intimacy for Glennard; the quote gives the reader the impression that Aubyn's fame has allowed for him to create distance between himself and the relationship that they shared. But, he cannot completely divorce himself from what the two of them had. The "scarcely perceptible quickening of attention" indicates an inextricable tie between Glennard and Aubyn. The nature of this tie is unclear, though. It could be read as residual affection or as his excitement for the opportunity to financially gain from the previous connection. Glennard is in need of funds, because he wishes

to establish a household with the woman he currently loves, Alexa Trent, who, while coming from a good family, has nothing to contribute to their household income. Glennard cannot support them on his own, and when her wealthy aunt wants to take Alexa to Europe, he is desperate to stop her. Glennard sees marrying Alexa not only as a fulfillment of his feelings for her but as a means of having the ideal of being married to a beautiful woman. Repeatedly in the early chapters, when Glennard thinks of Alexa, he thinks of her beauty and then her pragmatism and then her social competence. In these regards, as Glennard imagines her, it would seem to the reader that Alexa is the embodiment of all that society at the time would see as virtuous in a woman. And at the center of how Glennard sees his new mature life is his marriage to Alexa. Aubyn is his past, his youthful mistakes, while Alexa is his future, where he has aged into the type of man he is supposed to be. This transition is embodied early in the novella with a description of what he sees when he enters his rooms: "…a photograph of Alexa Trent, placed, in the obligatory silver frame, just where, as memory officiously reminded him, Margaret Aubyn's picture had long throned in its stead" (Wharton 1991, 49). Trying to marry Alexa also gives Glennard the opportunity to perform traditional masculinity in order to secure their lives together. He sees marrying her as the best reason to sell Aubyn's letter, exposing that woman to the public to be privileged to have a private life with the other. Glennard rationalizes his decision to sell Aubyn's letters through the lens of his affection for Alexa:

> [H]e argued, his first duty was to her – she had become his conscience. The sum obtained…combined with Glennard's professional earnings, took the edge of compulsion from their way of living, making it appear the expression of a graceful preference for simplicity. (Wharton 1991, 83)

But even with what Glennard believes to be the best reasons for revealing this most private part of Aubyn, he still on some level understands that what the parts he played, as the receiver and the exposer of the letters, will taint how he is perceived by the people who know him, particularly by Alexa. He tries to further distance himself by presenting a twofold lie to the man he sees about publishing the letters, telling him, "A poor chap I used to know – who died – he died last year – and who left me a lot of letters, letters he thought a great deal

of…the letters a woman would write to a man she knew well. They were tremendous friends, he and she" (Wharton 1991, 73-74). He denies both his position as the receiver of the letters and their nature; when asked directly if they were love letters, he denies that as well. In this regard, he tries to posthumously rob Aubyn not only of her privacy but of the space she could have to express more passionate feelings, feelings which she would be permitted to express openly. Even though he is determined in his course, he still seeks social absolution for the action he is taking. "When letters are as personal…Well, I don't mind telling you that the cash would make a heap of difference to me…I'd like to know whether you think I'd be justified…" (Wharton 1991, 75). Glennard's willingness to sell such personal documents shows how he values aging into a respectable social position, beyond the passion that defined his youth.

But it is important to note that the passion that is embodied in Aubyn's letters is hers alone. While it is clear that she loved Glennard deeply, it is also clear that he did not reciprocate those feelings. Like with Alexa, when Glennard describes Aubyn, he focuses on her looks and her literary genius as an afterthought.

> [T]he poor woman of genius with her long pale face and short-sighted eyes, softened a little by the grace of youth and inexperience, but so incapable even then of any hold upon the pulses. When she spoke, indeed, she was wonderful… (Wharton 1991, 43)

Aubyn's gift with words might lead the reader to believe that Glennard might have found more love for her through the letters, but Glennard quickly dispels the benefit of that doubt by admitting that he primarily kept the letters for his own vanity. With Aubyn's growing prestige as an author, her admiration fed his vanity. Even though he kept her admiration mostly to himself, Glennard does brag of his knowing Aubyn to Alexa, making it known that he knew her well but hiding the true nature of her feelings for him. Even with this benefit though, Glennard admits that he tired of Aubyn's affection for him and her beautifully brilliant words that expressed that feeling. Not long after reading the initial call for Aubyn's letters, Glennard reflects:

> [H]e used to avoid looking in his letter-box when he came home to his rooms – but her writing seemed to spring out at him as he put his key in the door. (Wharton 1991, 45)

But to dismiss Glennard as simply shallow in his relationship to Aubyn is complicated by Wharton when she adds, not long after the description of his avoiding his mailbox, the following:

> So few intimate friends! For years she had had but one; one who in the last years had requited her wonderful pages…with the scant phrases by which a man evades the vulgarest of sentimental importunities. He had been a brute in spite of himself…he chafed at his own inadequacy, his stupid inability to rise to the height of her passion. (Wharton 1991, 44)

While Glennard is so fixated on the appearances of the women around him, this fixation can be framed as Glennard having doubts about his own character and intelligence. This awareness of his own limitations as an individual also manifests itself in his critiquing the social order that he was so eager to be a part of. The collection of Aubyn's letters to Glennard becomes a popular bestseller, being read by everyone in their social circle. But Wharton makes clear that this circle is filled with hypocrisy, with everyone consuming these private feelings of Aubyn, while condemning the individual who released the letters. Glennard tries to ease the guilt he is feeling across the novella by trying to console himself in this hypocrisy. "[H]e knew that half the women who were horrified by the publication of Mrs. Aubyn's letters would have betrayed her secrets without a scruple" (Wharton 1991, 107). At this point in the story, Glennard is still trying to reconcile what he sacrificed to become the person that he feels like he socially should be. However, this acknowledgement of this hypocrisy illustrates how what Glennard thought would be his maturing actually is hollow and to a degree petty.

As the story progresses Glennard more and more feels that he betrayed Aubyn, but he also begins to see what he has done not only as it affects him, but what it means for the memory of Aubyn.

> He understood now that, at the moment of selling the letters, he had viewed the transaction solely as it affected himself: as an unfortunate blemish on an otherwise presentable record. He had scarcely considered the act in relation to Margaret Aubyn… (Wharton 1991, 97)

Since Glennard wanted to sell the letters to have more capital to grow socially to achieve the markers of maturity, like spouse and house. But the biggest

consequence of the realization of what putting the letters into the world is being a witness to Alexa reading and reacting to them. At first, he tries to dissuade her from reading them, telling her that reading them is not "nice", which is his way of trying to place Alexa back into the box of ideal femininity. Alexa responds to this critique saying, "It was not nice to publish it, certainly; but after all, I'm not responsible for that, am I?" (Wharton 1991, 100). Alexa spends the majority of the novella unaware that her husband is the publisher and the receiver of such intimate correspondence. Eventually though, the nature of the letters becomes too private, making both of them feel uncomfortable. When Alexa reads one of the letters out loud they both have a deep emotional reaction to the passage.

> Why had he included that one among the others? Or was it possible that now they would all seem like that?...'it *is* like listening to a key-hole. I wish I hadn't read it! (Wharton 1991, 105)

Glennard realizes the genuine nature of Aubyn's love, and Alexa realizes her participation in the violation of this fellow woman's privacy. Alongside the developing guilt and remorse of publishing the letters, Glennard decides that Alexa needs to know, but he cannot bear the shame of directly confessing to what he has done. So, he begins to resent Alexa, while both anticipating and dreading her finding out. He attempts to leave clues for her to find, and she does figure it out, though not telling Glennard that she now knows. Alexa, like Glennard, tries to save face, knowing how their relationship would be ruined, not by Glennard's having a relationship with Aubyn but by his exposing her, which in many ways could make Alexa wonder if Glennard would betray her also. Glennard indulged in Aubyn's feelings until he tired of them, and Aubyn's being older is framed as a contributing factor to his tiring. While Alexa currently has assurances of his affections, she must confront the idea that as she also inevitably ages Glennard's affections might not be steady.

At the end of the novella, Glennard is finally able to come to terms with what he did and explains his motives to Alexa: "I took everything from her, I deceived her, I despoiled her, I destroyed her – and she's given me *you* in return" (Wharton 1991, 160). While Glennard does feel remorse, he still frames the two women as commodities. However, Alexa points out to him that the remorse he feels has forced him to mature beyond the shallowness of the mere markers of progressing in life. But Wharton makes it clear that this whole experience is one that will

continue to haunt their marriage moving forward. Wharton also includes several moments throughout the novella of Glennard reflecting on what his life with Aubyn might have been; even at one moment in anger towards Alexa, he imagines Aubyn as his wife. These moments of reflection back at a time when he was younger illustrate his disillusionment with the life he had been told by society to want. Even though he used these letters to conform, Aubyn's haunted presence broke down the social power that he thought he was claiming.

In his preface to the New York Edition of *The Aspern Papers*, Henry James recounts how he "found" the story. While living in Italy, James heard how for years Jane Clairmont was in residence in the city with her grandniece. Clairmont was the half-sister of Mary Godwin Shelley, the mistress of Lord Byron, and the mother of his daughter Allegra. While Clairmont had passed by the time James learned of her being in the city, a legend had developed of a man trying to take up residence in the Clairmont house because he hoped that she might still have letters from Percy Shelley. This story captured James's imagination and led to him considering the relationship between admirers of an individual and the people and objects that individual left behind. James, himself, confesses

> [I]n fact, had I happened to hear of her but a little sooner, I might have seen her in the flesh. The question of whether I should have wished to do so was another matter… (James 1983, xxix)

This acknowledgement of both his curiosity and hesitancy at actually seeing Clairmont represents the central theme of *The Aspern Papers*, which for James is how trying to explore how forcing ties to people of the past for their fame leads to exposing the humanity of either the person trying to find information about the historical figure or of the historical figure. James expresses the reason for being relieved to not face the temptation to seek out Clairmont, therefore running "no risk, in other words, by too rude a choice, of depreciating that romance value which, as I say, it was…attached to her long survival" (James 1983, xxix). James tying the mysticism of Clairmont not to the other people she once knew but instead to her old age is an interesting move, giving deference to age and personal experience rather than to the other people once known. This deference also humanizes Clairmont and gives her power over her life narrative, and individuals who would seek her out would be only interested in a phantom of what they think the dead celebrities would be like. More often than not,

people want confirmation of what they have always believed about those celebrities. The story of Clairmont and the interpretation that James writes of her circumstances in *The Aspern Papers* reveals how individuals – particularly younger ones – look to older people – especially those with fame – as ways to cement nostalgic interpretations of the past, that have more to do with the interpreter than the individual who lived that past.

This conflict is what drives the novella. The nameless narrator is fanatically obsessed with a dead poet, named Jefferey Aspern, and his work. Early in the text, the narrator calls Aspern his god saying, "One doesn't defend one's god: one's god is in himself a defense" (James 1983, 2). This character does not know for certain if there are any Aspern papers in possession of this elderly woman, but his devotion drives him to make the pilgrimage to Venice to try to get into the good graces of the old woman and get the papers, which he emphatically declares exist. His adoration of Aspern makes him act entitled to any materials of his that the lady and her niece might have and act as though he were exempt of social rules for his higher cause. He states his plan to deceive saying,

> I can arrive at my spoils only by putting her off her guard…Hypocrisy, duplicity are my only chance. I'm sorry for it, but there's no baseness I wouldn't commit for Jefferey Aspern's sake. (James 1983, 7)

The narrator's willingness to commit base actions to get his way exemplifies his not thinking of Aspern as a human and is not thinking of how his former lover might feel about his papers and is not thinking of any other person's memories about Aspern except his own. The narrator's colleague failed to get the papers from the old woman, so he plans to seduce the spinster niece in order to gain access to the papers. His colleague is despairing of her appearance, indicating to the reader that Miss Tina, the niece, is not an embodiment of ideal womanhood that might be appealing to the shallowness of the narrator. He seems trapped in an idealization of this author, keeping himself in a more immature state.

When the narrator arrives in Venice and to the home of Juliana Bordereau and her grand-niece Tina, he finds that Miss Tina is also trapped in a liminal state that keeps her from ageing. While the narrator's immaturity is something that he has brought on himself, because of being so encompassed with his obsession, Tina's immaturity seems to be imposed on her by her aunt. When the

narrator begins to visit with Miss Bordereau and Miss Tina, trying to become their lodger and insert himself into their social circle, Miss Bordereau brings the following censure against Miss Tina: "She had a very good education when she was young. I looked into that myself…But she has learned nothing since" (James 1983, 19). She expresses this criticism because she does not approve of Tina's friendliness to the stranger in their home; Miss Bordereau does not trust him, or really anyone, and thinks of her niece as too naïve or stupid to discern for herself if someone has ulterior motives. But Tina's reply hints to the reader of some depth to her character. "'I've always been with *you*,' Miss Tina rejoined very mildly, and of a certainty with no intention of an epigram" (James 1983, 19). Miss Bordereau and the narrator both dismiss this reply from Tina, illustrating how she might be resentful of being isolated from a life where she could be a part of society and have a household of her own. The two women's lives in Venice are described in the opening of the novella with James writing: "She herself had been established in Venice some fifteen years…the two shy, mysterious and, as was somehow supposed, scarcely respectable…" (James 1983, 1). This perception of the women's lack of respectability further isolates Miss Tina. Her exile with her great-aunt from society seems to keep her in stasis, seemingly lacking the maturity that comes from socializing. Although past young adulthood, it seems she has not been allowed to live. Society holds Tina guilty by association because of her aunt's decisions in her youth. Miss Bordereau still faces criticism for being a man's mistress. The narrator has an acquaintance that still expresses judgement at her being a mistress, even though this occurred in her youth. The narrator sees her relationship with Aspern as understandable because "[a]s if a woman needed an excuse for having loved the divine poet!" (James 1983, 3). The narrator does not see her love as Aspern from her point of view nor does he celebrate her taking autonomy in the kind of relationship she wanted, again indicating how he cannot comprehend anyone seeing the poet as anything else. Miss Bordereau withdrawing from society could be seen as both an imposed state and a chosen one. She does not seem to regret it when talking with the narrator.

Instead she celebrates the independence and control that she has been able to exercise outside of society's scrutinizing gaze. She tells the narrator,

> 'I've always got most things done I wanted, thank God! The people I've lived with have humoured me,' the old woman continued, speaking out of the white ashes of her vanity. (James 1983, 65)

The narrator's fixation on the age of Miss Bordereau also indicates that he cannot acknowledge how she might feel about the papers, how they tie her to her past and memories that she found pleasurable. At one-point Tina tells the narrator that her aunt lived off the letters, not that she lived off them monetarily but rather emotionally (James 1983, 88). The sentiment that the papers inspire in Miss Bordereau along with her feelings of control in her isolation reveals to the reader how these ties to the past are a source of emotional power for her. To culminate this feeling of power, she requests that Tina destroy the papers upon her death; however, Tina does not directly promise to do so. Tina then decides to use the papers for her own ends, holding them over the head of the narrator to get him to marry her, allowing her to have the markers of adulthood as prescribed broadly by society. But the narrator's obsession with Aspern alienates Tina, causing her to realize that she would be isolated again. Tina decided to honor her aunt's final wish and destroys the papers, having her life on her own terms. The text implies that she begins to cultivate a life for herself, maturing while the narrator is still stuck. James ends the novella with him still mourning the loss of the papers, still not understanding the women who possessed them. The reader realizes that Tina self-actualizes like her great-aunt; however, unlike her aunt, this growth comes from her own internal reflections instead of life experiences. Her maturity shows an alternative way to age.

Both novellas focus on private letters from famous authors and the consumption of those private moments as entertainment for outsiders, and the tension that comes with that kind of presumption into that space. Wharton and James have not been exempted from that kind of curiosity from their readers. As Lyall Powers opens his collection of Wharton's and James's letters, "An obvious justification for publishing the letters exchanged between Henry James and Edith Wharton is that the correspondents were both important professional literary artists" (Powers 1990, 1). Because of their fictions, readers might feel entitled to their realities. But as they imbue in their works, reality is complicated for these people in very human ways. *Edith Wharton's Inner Circle* describes it in this way, "In a sense, the inner circle contrived to live in three separate worlds, none without its tax: the real world…the 'romantic' world…a separate world of work and personal struggle" (Goodman 1994, 18). These three separate spheres also inform how these authors portray reality for their characters. Both Wharton and James working in the mode of realism led to them ascribing several of the bourgeois ideologies that dominated their time.

> The fictions of James and Wharton suggest a qualified acceptance of a socially conservative understanding of discretion, whereby verbal and behavioral prudence are required in order to survive in a vigilant, moralistic society. (Levine 2002, 11)

However, both James and Wharton used age as a way of distancing some of their characters from those ideologies, allowing for more liminal spaces for the characters between the three realities Wharton and James might have used to frame their understanding of and engagement with the world. Age was even more significant for Wharton, because of her not becoming an author until later in her life, having the advantage of age and life experiences to make her more critical of social structures. While not about themselves specifically, Wharton and James use *The Touchstone* and *The Aspern Papers* to critique these structures that mattered to them. Millicent Bell in her biography, which traces the friendship of Edith Wharton and Henry, considers the intersection between these two novellas writing:

> James's interest lay in the psychology of the young man [and his worship of an author]…Edith Wharton's interest was aroused by the situation of the aging Muse who, being so eminent a priestess, could never be anyone's divinity. (Bell 1965, 229-230)

While Bell specifically mentions ageing as a theme of Wharton, James also uses the age of his female characters to illustrate passion. The letters in these novellas not only tether characters to the past, but illustrate how the characters continue to engage with that past.

> A vigorous defense of an activist style of growing old is offered by Simone de Beauvoir… 'in old age we should wish still to have passions strong enough to prevent us turning in upon ourselves'… Old age is not a time for wisdom or summing up. It is a time for continual engagement. (Moody 1986, 21)

Glennard turns in on himself when he realized what he was passionate about – fulfilling societal expectations – is hollow and will not sustain him as he continues to age. Tina lets go of that same desire, instead making her own way and

attempting to free the narrator of his hollow passion as well. In this way she illustrates how to move past the past with serenity, letting it move on with the people who lived it.

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