"Bound Together . . . By Blood and Soul": Donald Davidson's Strategic Retreat into the Myth of Life in the Old South

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"BOUND TOGETHER . . . BY BLOOD AND SOUL": DONALD DAVIDSON'S STRATEGIC RETREAT INTO THE MYTH OF LIFE IN THE OLD SOUTH

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Presented to
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by
Carol Dee Pigg
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"BOUND TOGETHER... BY BLOOD AND SOIL": DONALD DAVIDSON'S
STRATEGIC RETREAT INTO THE MYTH OF LIFE IN THE SOUTH

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Donald Davidson has often been called stubborn because of his refusal to let go of the Southern past and in his insistence that his writings be based on and in the regional concerns that he saw as fundamental to all Southern literature. In many ways, Davidson's loyalty to the Agrarian and Fugitive causes, which are best defined in these groups interest in keeping the South's history alive and maintaining an agrarian lifestyle, is his greatest contribution to the Southern and American literary canon. Despite this fact, though, Davidson is now, as he was during his lifetime, ignored because of the Regionalistic concerns that critics see in his writing.

In the course of my thesis, I have striven to prove that Davidson is one of the most prophetic, prophetic in the biblical sense, since I believe that he can be compared to Hebraic prophets who spoke of doom and destruction that the people would face if they did not please God, of the Fugitive writers. His prophecies, I argue, are against industrialization of the South and warn the degenerate Southerner against forgetting the past, especially the Civil War. In the process of defining Davidson as a Southern writer and in defending his place in the Southern literary canon, I compare his "Lee in the Mountains" to Robert Penn Warren's
Brother to Dragons, emphasizing the importance of secular original sin in the lives of two historical legends, Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jefferson, a fact that brings universal appeal to Davidson’s greatest achievement. Turning away from topics of national, historical importance, I emphasize Davidson’s attempt to define and defend Regionalism as an art form and necessary tool in the teaching of history. Here, I speak of Davidson’s nonfiction writings, including Still Rebels, Still Yankees, and Other Essays, of his only novel, The Big Ballad Jamboree, and “Lee in the Mountains” and argue that the importance of these works lies in the fact that he is waging a war against critics who see Regionalism as a catchphrase for Southern rednecks, who refuse to let go of the past. After discussing Regionalism, I acknowledge the modern characteristics in Davidson’s poetry, mainly angst, isolation, and silence, by tying them into Davidson’s continual discussion of the past, which begins in “The Tall Men,” where he speaks of his Tennessee Frontiersmen ancestors, “Lee in the Mountains,” a poem in which Davidson turns to the most infamous, yet disenfranchised Civil War veteran, and The Long Street, which are a group of poems where Davidson speaks of the angst and loneliness that the modern Southerner feels in the modern world, where industrialization and shame have silenced the Southern man, who should be proud of his national heritage.

As I looked to Davidson’s writings to find why he is excluded from both the modern Southern literary canon and from the American canon, I found that we are slowly losing a national treasure. He may not be the writer that the other Fugitives were. He may not have been enjoyed the literary or financial successful that the
other Fugitives and Agrarians enjoyed, but his writings are fundamental to understanding the Fugitive and Agrarian movements, since they were based on a yearning for an understanding of the past and because they fought for an Agrarian lifestyle. He may not have moved on, as Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Allen Tate did, but I argue that his refusal to forget the past and give up the fight for the “cause” makes his writing great and is the reason that he should be returned to the Southern and American literary canons.
CHAPTER ONE: "WHOSE WORDS WERE BULLETS": DONALD DAVIDSON, THE LOYAL FUGITIVE

With the obvious exception of Robert Penn Warren and, perhaps of John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, the Fugitive and Agrarian poets have been lost to the contemporary American canon. Among those lost is Donald Davidson: one of the South’s, if not America’s, finest and most prophetic poets since he, like Old Testament prophets, was able to look around him and see where the South had been, where the people of his homeland had lost favor with God, and where they were headed if they didn’t change their ways. His greatest contribution to the modern South is found in the fact that he, unlike his fellow Fugitives and Agrarians, remained loyal to the Southern cause and spent his life fighting Northern industrialism and writing of the South’s regionalistic and historical beauty. His masterpiece, “Lee in the Mountains,” for example, portrays the actions and thoughts of Robert E. Lee after the Civil War, implying that the modern world is a wasteland of chaos and turmoil. The Confederate commander speaks of his life after the war, of the state of the South after the Civil War, and of his silence in the face of “shame and torment / Lashing the bound and trampled states” (Davidson 5). Within this poem and his other writings, both verse and prose, Davidson’s insistence that the South never forget, never retreat, and never stop fighting for the lost cause is his most prevalent theme, a theme which becomes his greatest contribution to
the literary canon and the reason that he is no longer a part of the canon.

Like many writers, Davidson found strength from his roots, a fact that is perpetuated in the fact that he uses the history of his home town, home state, and home region as a source and muse for his poetry. Despite his loyalty to the South and to Tennessee, his neighbors have not returned his kindness in recent years. In fact, most contemporary citizens of Pulaski, Tennessee, Seat of Giles County, which is nestled in a valley of Tennessee’s foothills, do not recognize Davidson’s name, even though other historical events are common knowledge. For instance, Sam Davis, the Confederate boy hero, was captured in Minor Hill (just South of Pulaski), jailed on Pulaski’s square, tried and convicted as a spy, and hung a few blocks from the square; Nathan Bedford Forrest founded the Ku Klux Klan in Pulaski proper to protect its citizens from carpet baggers and Northern influences; James K. Polk resided in Columbia, an industrial town to the north. In fact, under Mayor Dan Spear, Pulaski was recently named an All American City. Still many native Pulaskians are unaware of the fact that two important poets, Donald Davidson and John Crowe Ransom, were born in Giles County. According to Mr. Bill Burks, a local English professor, Ransom’s birth place cannot be pinpointed to an exact location, but many people believe that he was born on East Hill, which is on the East Side of Pulaski, a fact that is recorded on a sign celebrating local literary heritage (Personal Interview). Davidson’s birthplace, on the other hand, is readily identified by all. The first born child of Will and Elma Davidson, he was born in Campbellsville, a small community west of Pulaski, on August 18, 1892 (Winchell 9). Davidson took refuge from his early roots and returned to stories of his ancestors often, which is evident
in *The Tall Men*, a book of poetry in which Davidson celebrates his Tennessee roots and discusses the destruction of the Old South, the South before the Civil War, where his pioneer roots were firmly planted by his ancestors.

With the publication of *Where No Flag Flies: Donald Davidson and the Southern Resistance*, Mark Royden Winchell has opened the door for the return of Davidson to the Southern canon and for redefined criticism, which has been nonexistent in recent years because of Davidson’s reputation as an unregenerate Regionalist and because of his rigid stance against modern technology. Despite the fact that it has dwindled in recent years, the criticism that was produced during his lifetime and shortly after his death ignores the success of his writing to concentrate on the myth that Davidson created in both his poetry and his fiction about the South and about himself. His recognition of the stereotype that he placed upon himself is most evident in his description of the Fugitive preoccupation with the South. Despite romanticizing the Southern past, though, his poetry marks a modern Southern movement entangled in the Fugitive and Agrarian movement. Davidson’s nostalgic movement went far beyond the stance that his fellow writers and critics would take. Instead of moving on to other subjects, as Warren, Ransom, and Tate did, Davidson repeatedly returned to his notion that the Southerner should hold onto his past and fight to maintain an agrarian mode of existence.

Chapter Two will compare Davidson’s Lee to Warren’s Jefferson in order to emphasize the differences in the two historical heroes and the original sins that led to their continual need for repentance. Lee’s sin includes the fighting of the Civil War, the surrender of the cause and customs of Antebellum South, and the continuing “shame and
torment” that lingered after the Civil War to haunt the South during Reconstruction (Davidson 5). Jefferson’s sin is one of silence, since he never publically spoke of familial sins after his two nephews murdered a slave. Both men keep their sins alive through silence and, like Coleridge’s Mariner, the only way they can break free from the bonds of sin is to find the ability to speak of their sin. Jefferson, I argue, finds forgiveness of his sin through an ability to reassert his belief that men are innately innocent. Lee, on the other hand, finds a degree of forgiveness in his conciliatory sermon given to the young men at his school. Ultimately, the difference in the two poems lies in each writer’s differing ability to speak of the South and to relate to the sin and redemption of an important historical figure.

Chapter Three will emphasize Davidson’s defense of regionalism and his search for an accurate definition. Here, I am turning to “Lee in the Mountains,” essays that he wrote on the subject in Still Rebels, Still Yankees, and Other Essays and The Attack of Leviathan, as well as his only novel, The Big Ballad Jamboree. Basically, my argument is centered around the fact that Davidson’s use of both Southern art and history as a source for his writing emphasizes the greatness of the South and of its regional heritage. He writes to demand that someone hold onto the past and to find the bardic voice, which can truly represent the region. Perhaps this is where he surpasses the other Agrarians, in his devotion to his patria, while they turned away from Southern topics later in their careers. My argument will center around Davidson’s refusal to surrender the Southern cause and his ongoing fight for a Southern voice that was neither stereotyped nor ashamed.
Chapter Four will enable me to focus a modern reading on the theme of exclusion and loneliness in Davidson’s poetry as a source for analysis of his Southern narrative and heroes. Poems from *Lee in the Mountains*, developed in Chapter two, *The Tall Men*, a book based on Davidson’s Tennessee roots and ancestors, and *The Long Street*, a group of poems about life in the modern South, will be incorporated into my understanding of Davidson’s version of the waste land, where modern Southerners live without hope and without cause. In these works, Donald Davidson creates many myths about the South, especially historical heroes of the South. I will explore and define his feelings of anticipation about the modern world, where industrialism becomes the tool of Reconstruction, a tool that has been in use since the Civil War to keep Southerners tranquil and disenfranchised.

His insistence to remain a Fugitive and Agrarian writer is, in essence, Davidson’s greatest contribution to the Southern literary canon, yet it is also the reason that he is now excluded from the contemporary canon. Despite the fact that he is dismissed as a man who refused to leave the past in its grave, Davidson’s writing is plagued with other themes of the modern South, including the effects that original sin has played in the lives of historical figures, concerns about the loss of regional arts, and the fact that the South has become a wasteland, full of excluded and lonely men, who no longer know where they belong in the world.

By dismissing Davidson as a myth, who refused to give up on the antebellum South and as a man who continually called for a return to days when gentlemen, including Robert E. Lee, would stand up and fight for a cause, modern critics and readers
have lost one of the South’s greatest literary treasures. With this in mind, critics must now take up Cissy Timberlake’s (his heroine in *The Big Ballad Jamboree*) battle to save the South’s art and work to return Davidson’s poetry and prose to the literary canon for future generations to read, study, and, perhaps, to cherish as great literary traditions that all Southerners can return to as a source of comfort, inspiration, and hope for a better future.
CHAPTER TWO: SECULAR RE-ENACTMENT OF ORIGINAL SIN IN DONALD DAVIDSON’S “LEE IN THE MOUNTAINS” AND ROBERT PENN WARREN’S BROTHERS TO DRAGON

In a letter to Allen Tate, Donald Davidson described the Fugitive and Agrarian preoccupation with the South as a “romantic nostalgia” by stating that it was “certainly incurable” (Fain and Young 382). By “incurable,” he doesn’t mean that these writers desired to be “cured” of the need to write about the Southern past, but that this “romantic nostalgia” was a characteristic of all great writers, from Virgil (who was nostalgic for the virtuous Roman culture) to Tate himself. The Fugitives were, indeed, under the spell of the Southern Romance, but they certainly held no delusions about the South’s past, which Davidson viewed as heroic and unique (Conkin 36). Instead, these authors wrote about a South that was filled with the ghosts of monumental defeated heroes, a South whose defeat was based on original sin, a South that continually re-enacted its sin and the redemption for this sin, and a South that was in continuous conflict with itself.

Fugitive writers, from Warren to Davidson, were intrigued and concerned with the notion of original sin and its role in Southern history. Usually thought of as a separation of man from God, Warren and Davidson emphasize different and more secular
aspects of original sin in *Brother to Dragons* and "Lee in the Mountains." This fact is agreed upon among critics, but it is the definition of original sin that causes debate. John Crowe Ransom, for instance, defines this original sin as "the betrayal of our original nature that we commit in the interest in our rational progress" (34). Thus, it would seem, the original sin of the South is a "betrayal" of Southern heritage. A. L. Clement, on the other hand, states that this sin is "the darkness in the very nature of man, the partially fixed and inherited capacity for evil and irrationality" (qtd. In Thiemann 3). This definition fits into Warren's *Brother to Dragons* quite well, since the poem is based on a little known story in Thomas Jefferson's life, an incident in which his sister's sons murdered a slave. However Robert E. Lee's sin, for Davidson, is not the "inherited capacity for evil and irrationality," but is characterized by his actions during the Civil War, at the time of surrender, and throughout the first five years of reconstruction, which is marked by his inability to act and speak. Likewise, Jefferson's sin is not the act of murder, but the inability to speak of the murder that his loved ones committed. Thus, Lee and Jefferson's original sins manifest themselves into Southern history through another aspect of original sin, the failure of language (Thiemann 4).

In *Brother to Dragons*, Robert Penn Warren turns to a mythical American leader in order to uncover the effects that original sin had on his own life. By choosing an episode in Thomas Jefferson’s life, which went unrecorded in Jefferson’s lifetime because he could not bring himself to speak of it (Rubin 359), Warren emphasizes the "inherited capacity for evil and irrationality" that A. L. Clement recognized as being the major characteristic of the sins that consume Jefferson’s life, despite the fact that they
aren't actually his sins (qtd. in Thiemann 3). By placing his poem in Jefferson's past, Warren found himself dealing with many of the same problems that Davidson dealt with while writing "Lee in the Mountains," the most important being how to write a fictitious story about history. In the foreword, he contends that, "a poem dealing with history is no more at liberty to violate what the writer takes to be the spirit of his history than it is at liberty to violate what the writer takes to be the nature of the human heart" (XII).

Within *Brother to Dragons*, Warren, through Jefferson and his narrator, R. P. W., tells of the murder of a slave, George, committed by the President's nephews, Lilburn and Isham Lewis. John L. Stewart gives details of the murder by telling that,

> On the night of December 15, 1811, Lilburne and Isham... sons of...

Jefferson's sister Lucy, butchered a young Negro slave at their home near Smithland, Kentucky. They were arrested and released on bail, but before they could be brought to trial, Isham shot Lilburne, who was supposed to shoot him, too, but didn't. Isham escaped and later died in the Battle of New Orleans. Jefferson never made any recorded reference to the crime.

(510)

Jefferson had no hand in the death of this black slave, but he is filled with the shame, guilt, and inability to face the horrific actions that his own blood had committed. Jefferson must address his own demons in order to forgive his nephews and find peace. R. P. W. tells what the President cannot bring himself to utter; he explains why the two men could so heinously murder an innocent man by pointing out that, "paradoxically, Lilburn had done all for love" (Bohner 124),
For love was all he asked, yet love

Is the intolerable accusation of guilt

To all the yearning Lilburns who cannot love,

So must destroy who loves and achieve at last

The desiderated and ice-locked anguish of isolation.

(Warren 113)

The love that he murdered for is actually a love that he cannot feel, a love that he cannot “achieve.” Lilburn furthers this reasoning by stating that he is seeking the fulfillment in the ‘thrilling absoluteness of the pure act (Bohner 124). He tells that George’s murder was “done for good, / For his mother and the sweetness of the heart” and “That evil’s done for good, and in good’s name—” (Warren 143). Lilburn and Isham express their feelings about their actions in Brother to Dragons, but do so without actually admitting any wrong doing. They do not repent and feel no sorrow for the sin that they have committed.

Warren’s Jefferson, on the other hand, believes that his nephews have acted unjustly and demands that they take responsibility for their actions. At the climax of Brother to Dragons, Jefferson confronts his sister, Lucy, “absolving himself of responsibility in the murder of George and condemning the immorality of his nephew’s act” (Bohner 124). He condemns Isham and Lilburn by pointing out that their sin is the introduction of pain into the life of a man who had known nothing except pain. In the end, he concludes that pain is the only reality that survives the original sin that his nephews have committed and that he cannot bring himself to face:
We are born to joy that joy may become pain.
We are born to hope that hope may become pain.
We are born to love that love may become pain.
We are born to pain that pain may become more
Pain, and from that inexhaustible superflux
We may give others pain as our prime definition—(131-132)

He doesn’t admit guilt and he doesn’t insist that his nephews are evil, but Jefferson does recognize the fact that a sin has been committed and that this sin has brought about an inevitable pain. We all, he reminds himself, “give others pain as our prime definition” and it is this pain that defines man and allows the original sin, or separation of man from God, to continue.

Donald Davidson began writing “Lee in the Mountains” in 1934 despite the fact that he had earlier stated that no respectable Southern poet would even attempt a poem about Robert E. Lee (Conkin 26). Initially called “General Lee Remembers,” the poem covers “the period between 1865 and 1870 while Lee was President of Washington College (now called Washington and Lee), [and] may be divided into five parts, all presented through Lee’s stream of consciousness” (Young and Inge 7). The usage of this modern technique is apparent early in the poem as Lee begins the act of internalizing his life,

Walking into the shadow, walking alone
Where the sun falls through the ruined boughs of locusts
Up to the president’s office...
Hearing the voices

Whisper, *Hush, it is General Lee!* And strangely

Hearing my own voice say, *Good morning, boys.*

*(Don’t get up. You are early. It is long
Before the Bell. You will have long to wait
On these cold steps. . . )

The young have time to wait.

*(Davidson 3)*

Although he speaks here, General Lee doesn’t communicate his feelings with the boys. He can tell them what he feels they should do, but he is unable to accurately express why they should not rise for him, why they should not respect him so greatly. It is this inability to speak that characterizes Robert E. Lee in this poem, since he begins displaying an inadequacy of utilizing language early in the narrative. He looks at the boys on the steps and wants to say more to them than he can. Instead, he turns inward and begins remembering his sin being the Civil War, which he describes as “the shame and torment / Lashing the bound and trampled states” *(Davidson 5).*

Lee thinks, “The young have time to wait,” turns to a memory of the war where “soldiers’ faces under their tossing flags / Lift no more by any road or field,” and describes his present lifestyle by stating, “I am spent with old wars and new sorrow” *(Davidson 3).* He continually faces his sin everyday of his life in memories of the war, words which cannot be written, but are images that are alive in his mind:

Without arms or men I stand, but with knowledge only
I face what long I saw, before others knew,
When Pickett’s men streamed back, and I heard the tangled
Cry of the Wilderness, bloody with doom.
(Davidson 6)

Lee’s sin is embodied within his actions during the war, since he gave the orders, he sent innocent men to death at Gettysburg and in the Wilderness, and he surrendered the freedom and way of life that he had so courageously defended. The war, Lee states, is over, but he cannot let go of it; thus he is unable to forget the role that he took in the deaths of so many men, including his own family and friends. After this realization Lee tries to find his voice, as his own father had done, but he falls short. He remembers his mother, “Fingering the Memoirs, now so long unread,” but he can neither write nor speak about his own sins. He questions his father’s ability to write and admits his own failure of words:

Why did my father write? I know he saw
History clutched as a wraith out of blowing mist
Where tongues are loud, and a glut of little souls
Laps at the too much blood and the burning house.
He would have his say, but I shall not have mine.
What I do is only a son’s devoir
To a lost father. Let him only speak.
The rest must pass to men who never knew
(But on a written page) the strike of armies,
And never heard the long Confederate cry
Charge through the muzzling smoke or saw the bright
Eyes of the beardless boys go to death.
It is Robert Lee who writes with his father’s hand–
The rest must go unsaid and the lips be locked.

(Davidson 4-5)

Robert Lee is making no excuses for himself, but he wonders why he, unlike his father, can’t write to explicate his own fall.

After all, Robert E. Lee, unlike his father (Light Horse Harry Lee) was transformed into a “defeated and misunderstood man (at least in the eyes of the North) [who] wrote no memoirs of his own– not a line” (Brawling 75). Robert E. Lee seems unable, if not unwilling, to tell why he cannot write of his role in the war, but this inability to speak adds momentum to his story. Mark Royden Winchell touches on Lee’s silence by stating that “making a full report of the sufferings of the Confederacy would absolve Lee of the guilt he feels for trusting the seeming honorable terms of surrender offered by the enemy” (181). Lee never tells how it felt to surrender, and he is unable to write a word about the pain that he felt after the War. A Northerner may not understand Lee’s silence, but it is understood in the South because all Southerners were silenced after the war, which is a fact that he laments through memories. He, for instance, tells that he “saw the bright / Eyes of the beardless boys go to death” (Davidson 5). Once again, he uses images instead of words in order to find the ability to confess of his sin, which becomes proof of his failure, since he can’t write about his sin. Being that he is
silenced by sin, he surrenders to the silence that surrounds him, acknowledges painful memories, and admits that "The rest must go unsaid and the lips be locked" (Davidson 5).

Despite this resignation to remain silent about the war and his original sin, Lee is saddened by the fact that he lacks the ability to speak of the past. Robert E. Lee continually states, "If it were said, as still it might be said" (Davidson 5), which evolves into his admission that the words from the past no longer aptly describe his present condition. Lee isn’t the same man who rose to power in the Confederacy, who lost the Battle of Gettysburg, who surrendered at Appomattox, or who watched his men return home to live in a Southern waste land after the War and Reconstruction ravaged it. As the poem continues, Lee begins to realize that the only voice he has is the voice of repentance, yet he never repents. Lawrence E. Bowling describes Lee’s inability to repent as the action of a ghost at this point in his narrative, which is evident in his statement that, "the General is dead--his lips are locked--and it is Robert Lee who is doing this writing (with his father’s hand), and Robert is going to stick to his father’s memoirs and say nothing about ‘the rest’” (76). Robert E. Lee, unlike his father who found refuge in his memoirs, is unable to take up the pen in defense for his actions. Instead, he realizes that “He would have his say, but I shall not have mine” (Davidson 4), which becomes the definitive statement of Lee’s, and the South’s, ultimate defeat.

"Lee in the Mountains" is based on the myth of General Robert E. Lee and his life after the Civil War. He has committed his original sin and is now going through the motions of repenting for his actions. Thomas Daniel Young sees this myth as Davidson’s
attempt to incorporate the myth of the past into the modern world. He notes that Davidson depicts with almost tragic intensity the crisis of modern times, the vacuum left by the disappearance of myth as a means of exploring ultimate reality. He portrays man in a dehumanized state, one in which he is almost completely dominated by glandular action and reaction. His researches into the past convinced him, he reiterated in essay after essay, that the Civil War, the first all-out, unrestrained war in history, was the line of demarcation separating the traditional, purposeful past from the aimless, chaotic present. (52)

In “Lee in the Mountains,” Robert E. Lee, who is a Southern myth in his own right, speaks of the aimlessness of his life and of the sin that has caused him to lose all faith in man. He begins tearing the myth of General Lee apart by stating,

It is not General Lee, young men. . .

It is Robert Lee in a dark civilian suit who walks,
An outlaw fumbling for the latch, a voice
Commanding in a dream where no flag flies.

(Davidson 3)

The importance of separating General Lee from Robert Edward Lee is stupendous because this act allows him to find a road to redemption. He is no longer the man who was proud and honorable. Instead, he is the man who single-handedly gave up the “traditional, purposeful past” in return for the “aimless, chaotic present” in which he
lives (Young 52). He knows his sin, and he remembers it every day of his life. In fact, he states that his greatest sin was not the war itself, but was giving up the values of the South, which were lost in his surrender and in the death of so many men, men he loved. He doesn’t want the boys, whose fathers and uncles fought with him in the “Second War for Independence,” to look up to him. Instead, he wants them to see him for what he is, a broken shell of a man who is responsible for the loss of a culture. He looks to these boys, remembers the war, and strives to paint a realistic portrait of what happened. He reminds himself,

Among these boys whose eyes lift up to mine
Within gray walls where droning wasps repeat
A hollow reveille, I still must face,
Day after day, the courier with his summons
Once more to surrender, now to surrender all.
Without arms or men I stand, but with knowledge only
I face what long I saw, before others knew,
When Pickett’s men streamed back, and I heard the tangled
Cry of the Wilderness wounded, bloody with doom.

(Davidson 6)

Robert E. Lee relives his decision to surrender, “now to surrender all,” every day of his life and he is unable to let go of a past whose voice is found in the “droning wasps [which] repeat/ A hollow reveille” (Davidson 6). This aspect of Robert Lee, the man, is only further emphasized by the fact that he is haunted by the memories of the men who
served under him. Pickett’s men won’t let him forget the day that they were defeated at Gettysburg and the deafening sound of war, which “thunders no more” in the Blue Ridge, refuses to leave his ears.

Within “Lee in the Mountains” and Brother to Dragons, both Robert E. Lee and Thomas Jefferson admit to sinning and strive to define the original sin that is prevalent in their lives. These sins become the reasons that these men live and struggle for meaning and fulfillment, and it is through these sins that these men, “like the Ancient Mariner in Warren’s interpretation, re-enact the drama of repentance and rebirth” of their original sins (Bohner 121). In Brother to Dragons, Thomas Jefferson is trapped in the continual process of seeking forgiveness for the sins of his nephews, but it is a different type of cycle. Warren described this procedure as being more than a continual act of repentance, but states that it is a

communal nightmare. People from the past are caught in a terrible dream that must be re-enacted, over and over, for ever— or until they can resolve it, by coming to an understanding that will let them “die” into peace. Sometimes they relive the past, sometimes they speak bits of narrative, sometimes they probe at some fragment of meaning discovered for the first time. Always they are struggling for escape.

(qtd. in Walker 120)

By basing his poem in history and allowing Jefferson the voice to speak of a sin that has been committed in his life and of his quest for forgiveness, he allows Jefferson to continually live his sin and to repeatedly confess the sins of his blood, which make him a
“brother to dragons.” Despite his admittance, though, Jefferson is “allowed to put the
notion of innocence into a defining context,” by pointing out that he, despite the fact that
his nephews were evil, still believes in “man’s essential innocence” and that original sin
is not a determining factor in the crime that his nephews have committed (Walker 121).
He looks over the events of December eleventh and thinks,

. . . even then I was no fool,

And knew that if you open the door of the cupboard

There are wood-violet and shanker, merd and magnolia,

side by side.

And if I thought the housekeeping of Great Nature

Was wasteless and took all to beneficent use,

And decomposition and decomposition are but twin syllables

on the same sweet tongue

And two vibrations of the same string stung to joy,

I scarcely held that meditation on the nature of roses

Is much comfort to a man who had just stepped in dung,

And philosophy has never raised a crop of hair

Where the scalping knife has once done the scythe-work.

(Warren 37)

Jefferson believes that man’s goodness is evident in nature, which remains ordered and
close to God. Here, Jefferson proves himself a levelheaded man who thinks through
every aspect of life. Yes, his nephews have committed murder and yes, he has sinned by
remaining silent, yet he knows enough to believe that a sin becomes as burdensome to some men as “stepping in dung” makes other men stop their life in order to wipe their feet. Where do all of these comparisons lead to? Actually, they all accurately describe Jefferson since his common sense answers to life aren’t omnipotent and he is never directly able to identify the God of forgiveness. Instead, he finds forgiveness in himself, through the belief that his nephews, despite their sin, are good and that good men commit terrible crimes, which are forgiven by “the housekeeping of Great nature,” a nature that ensures that our lives and actions are not wasted. Thus, it is through his belief in man’s essential innocence that Jefferson is able to repent his sin and break out of the cycle of sin and repentance.

Robert E. Lee, who is the “gentle” Lee of the Southern myth that Davidson held in such high regard, goes through the action of repentance and rebirth through remembrance and through his final thoughts, which take place in the chapel (Davidson Still Rebels, Still Yankees 156). The poem leads to the final scene, where Lee is standing before the young men delivering his morning sermon. Turning inward and finding the strength to finally speak, he is finally able to breathe life into the words that he holds in his heart:

Young men, the God of your fathers is a just
And merciful God Who in this blood once shed
On your green altars measures out all days,
And measures out the grace
Whereby alone we live;
And in His might He waits,
Brooding within the certitude of time,
To bring this lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave,
To fruit upon the mountains whither we flee,
Never forsaking, never denying
His children and His children's children forever
Unto all generations of the faithful heart.

(Davidson 7)

This sermon allows Lee to vent some of the pent-up passions that he has held within since the end of the war and enables him to begin his quest for forgiveness. Unlike Jefferson, he addresses his students, the same students who rushed to greet him earlier this morning. He had barely spoken to them earlier, rationalizing that “The young have time to wait” (Davidson 3), but he now takes the time to let them know how great God is and how He, and He alone, can save and forgive the South for its sins. It doesn’t seem likely that he will view himself as forgiven since he knows that these are only words and that these words will not begin to bring about the absolution that he seeks, yet he reminds all that God sits in judgment of all and that, until judgment day, he will continue to anticipate a forgiveness that probably will never be given from a deity who sits

Brooding within the certitude of time,
To bring the lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave.

(Davidson 7)

He seems doomed to find solace in nature, silence, and in his final attempt, no matter how feeble, to repent for the sins that he committed during the Civil War. Despite his need for a reconciliation with God and for forgiveness for the role that he played in the destruction of the South, Lee realizes that this sin will outlive him and will rejuvenate and grow through “His children and His children’s children forever / Unto all generations of the faithful heart” (Davidson 7).

Donald Davidson and Robert Penn Warren turned to history in order to emphasize the importance that original sin has played on the American past, whether committed by a traitor or one of the most beloved and respected men of American History. Thomas Jefferson’s sin is the sin of silence; if he had only spoken out when his nephews murdered George, he would not have been cursed to the fate of continual repentance. Although he holds onto his belief that man is innately innocent, he is unable to accurately describe his feelings about the sin that his family has committed. Instead, he, like Lee, becomes an “incurable” and “romantically” nostalgic figure of Southern history that the Fugitive poets placed on a pedestal. Lee, on the other hand, sees his sin as surpassing time, which is evident in the fact that it began when he joined the Confederate forces at the beginning of the war, grew as he led many innocent men and boys to death, began to
control his life after his surrender at Appomattox, and forced him into a life of silence, isolation, and despair. Robert E. Lee’s sense of sin is heightened through a failure of language that makes it impossible for him to express the sorrow that he feels about his role in the deaths of so many young men. In “Lee in the Mountains,” he describes himself as an “outlaw,” which is a detail that Davidson probably found in an April 1866 letter that Robert E. Lee wrote after the war. In it, he explains the condition of his life after the war, by stating, “I am now such a monster, that I hesitate to darken with my shadow the doors of those I love best, lest I should bring upon them misfortune” (qtd. in Browling 71). With these words, Lee voices the effects that sin had on his life, a toil that Davidson yearned to pick up and complete for him, some sixty years after his death. Despite all of Lee and Jefferson’s efforts for ultimate forgiveness, the final act of forgiveness cannot be given to them. Instead, they must forgive themselves in order to obtain the peace that they seek.
CHAPTER THREE: “THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE OF THAT CONFLICT”:

DONALD DAVIDSON’S REGIONALISTIC CONCERNS

The current neglect of Davidson’s writing is most notable in his absence from many Southern Literature classes, probably the harshest step that critics and scholars have taken in the process of forgetting Tennessee’s and, arguably, the South’s most prophetic writer. Southern literature, today, consists of classes where students are introduced to greats, such as Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom, two of the greatest of minor Southern writers, whose early writings, like Davidson’s collected works, express regionalistic concerns and beliefs that the South’s future lies in its past and art. M. E. Bradford claims that Davidson’s worth as a poet is being denied him because of his commitment to Southern Regionalism and art, which is evident in his belief that

Too often has it been assumed that these commitments do themselves preclude any serious consideration of his art when in fact they are, insofar as they make “available” to him the language and perspective of our elder poets, a partial explanation of the merit of that art. (519)

Davidson’s greatest works, including his American epic “Lee in the Mountains,” are ignored by scholars because they are distinctively Southern and because they rely upon Regionalism, the past, and art as means to remember, which is best understood in Davidson’s own ability to “see the poet not as an alienated rebel but as the keeper of
society’s memories” (Winchell 108). Fellow Fugitive and Agrarian Robert Penn Warren incorporates many of these characteristics into his writing and is praised as one of the nation’s greatest writers, while Davidson is ignored.

The problems that many critics have with Davidson have nothing to do with his writing, but are grounded in his connection with the Agrarian and Fugitive writers, who have been portrayed, according to Davidson, as “a kind of lily-fingered aristocrat or secluded academician yearning romantically for some sort of moonlight-and-roses old plantation life” (Daniels 113). Jonathan Daniels, and other critics, show signs of believing stereotypes of Davidson and his fellow Fugitive poets, which is evident in his statement that “the poetic-professional gentlemen of Vanderbilt urged a retreat in force to the Old South” (114), but, like other critics, he emphasizes many points about these men that are taken for granted. Yes, Davidson wrote about the South, which can be viewed as a nostalgically Romantic South, and he did discuss his desire to retreat from the industrialization of the South, but his main objective is to argue for the endurance of Southern art, which exemplifies the beauty of the Southern culture and its regionalism.

Donald Davidson’s insistence that Southern writers not forget the past is one of his greatest contributions to the literary canon, yet it remains the reason that he is no longer included in this canon. His epic poem, “Lee in the Mountains,” is a classic example of a masterpiece that is ignored because of its regionalistic concerns. Lawrence E. Bowling emphasized this point in 1952, by stating that “many readers, without giving the work the attention it requires and deserves, dismiss it summarily as a regional poem or merely as a piece of political propaganda” (69). Despite the fact that this comment
was made almost fifty years ago, it still holds true. Davidson’s greatest work, the poem for which he is known, is the reason that he is no longer widely read or studied, a fact that prompts Bowling to state the obvious and then drops the subject. Oddly enough, he makes a statement that still defines Davidson as a poet and then acts as though he had never said it. “Lee in the Mountains,” with its discussion of Robert E. Lee’s life after the Civil War, is a Regionalistic piece, but Bowling fails to recognize the fact that the War, itself, was surrounded by Regionalistic and Sectionalistic concerns. In his own discussion of the great War, Davidson contemplated the reasons for the war, dismissing both slavery and the issue of “state sovereignty” (The Attack on Leviathan 31). Finally, he decides that “the roots of the controversy lay elsewhere— in social differences, in climate, soil, industries, and labor systems, in divergent social forces” (The Attack on Leviathan 32). Taking all of these definitions of Regionalism and understandings of the Civil War into consideration, one must question Mr. Bowling’s intentions. Why does he mention the fact that readers dismiss this poem, simply because it embodies regionalism and never mention it again? Why does he call the poem “a piece of political propaganda” and never explain himself (69)? Perhaps he doesn’t want to take up Regional concerns in this poem out of fear of the slavery issue, but he overlooks the fact that Lee “was not fighting primarily to preserve the institution of slavery, which he opposed, but to defend the autonomy of local government. Donald Davidson believed that the gravest threat to political liberty lay in a coercive central authority” (Winchell 180) and never mentioned that the issue of slavery is not brought up in the poem itself. Instead, the Regionalism in “Lee in the Mountains” is found in Lee’s attempt to restore
the pride lost, during the War, to both his father’s name and to a defeated South.

One of Robert E. Lee’s most important tasks in “Lee in the Mountains” is found in his attempts to restore his father’s memoirs, which, in essence, will restore the Southern sense of Regionalism that was lost during the war. Light Horse Harry Lee, Lee seems to believe, would have understood his need to maintain the past, since he had been involved in the American Revolution, which resembled the Civil War, since it was fought so that Americans could “assert the right of local-self government” (Winchell 181). Lee tells himself that he must continually return to his father’s memoirs to understand his past and to keep it alive, since his father had known that words were the only way to keep the truth from dying. After asking why his father wrote, he reminds himself,

I know he saw

History clutched as a wraith out of blowing mist

Where tongues are loud, and a glut of little souls

Laps at the too much blood and the burning house.

He would have his say, but I shall not have mine.

What I do is only a son’s devoir

To a lost father.

(Davidson “Lee in the Mountains” 4)

Lee realizes that the past, recorded by those who have lived through it, is a Regional legacy that should be held sacred and read, in order to keep that person and that world alive for future generations to understand. Robert E. Lee wants to turn to his father’s
Memoirs in order to understand the disappointment of his own life, since, like his son, Harry Lee was an “outlaw,” a man who lost his home because of political causes. Lawrence Bowling explains Harry’s disappointing life by explaining that his troubles stem from the fact that he opposed Madison’s war policy toward Great Britain and sympathized with the anti-war stand taken by the Baltimore Federal Republican and attempted to help a number of other Federalists defend the editor amongst a mob attack. Among those beaten, cut, shot, and left for dead, Harry Lee was disfigured, crippled, and doomed to invalidism for the remaining years of his life. (73)

These biographical facts explain the pain that Lee explicates when he tells readers that “My father’s house is taken and his hearth / Left to the candle-drippings where the ashes/ Whirl at a chimney-breath on the cold stone” (Davidson “Lee in the Mountains” 4). His father’s life, like his own, had been destroyed by a lost cause, so Lee strives to regain the home that he had fought for and the Regionalistic concerns that he still believes in before they follow in his father’s footsteps and leave him. Here, the poem parallels history, which is evident in the fact that Light Horse Harry Lee left his homeland in order to “regain some degree of health and peace of mind,” which was a trip that he never returned from, since he died on Cumberland Island in 1813 (Bowling 73). In his own memories of his father, Lee focuses on this period of his life, stating,

I can hardly remember my father’s look, I cannot

Answer his voice as he calls farewell in the misty
Mounting where riders gather at gates.

He was old then— I was a child— his hand

Held out for mine, some daybreak snatched away,

And he rode out, a broken man. Now let

His lone grave keep, surer than the cypress roots,

The vow I made beside him.

(Davidson “Lee in the Mountains 4)

Light Horse Harry Lee was, literally, broken down during his life and left powerless in a world that could not understand him. Robert E. Lee, the man and the General, understood his father’s plight and is now striving to finish his memoirs for future generations to read and study. In the end, his attempts to remember his father and restore his memoirs become his inheritance to a South, whose past was its Regional heritage.

If “Lee in the Mountains” is viewed as a Regional poem or as a “piece of political propaganda” (Bowling 69), then this poem should also be read as a political satire about the final years of the South’s most Regionalistic citizen, Robert E. Lee. In his discussion of Regional behavior patterns, Davidson acknowledges the fact that all Southerners are judged by those who refuse to let us forget “the old threat of secession” and discusses the fact that

In them the Southerner may find his own intimate knowledge and feelings. His regional peculiarities and his regional claims are set forth in terms clearer than he might have imagined himself, since the terms include both the situation and its causes, which in turn are balanced
against the national situation and its claims and causes.

(The Attack on Leviathan 44)

Robert E. Lee doesn’t complain about his life after the war, evidenced by the fact that he never spoke publicly about the war or about the changes and disappointments that represented the final years of his life, which may have caused a rift in regional knowledge of how the South’s most beloved soldier reacted to the war. Despite this fact, however, Lee’s appearance, alone, remains a fixture in the Southern regional ideal of the South and of what we fought for and lost in the Civil War. He is not a beaten and dejected man in the eyes of those who understand his regionalistic concerns, yet he doesn’t seem to acknowledge his role in rebuilding the pride of the South as he looks around him and asks himself if he fought for the region or for a cause:

I see clear waters run in Virginia’s valley
And in the house the weeping of young women
Rises no more. The waves of grain begin.
The Shenandoah is golden with new grain.
The Blue Ridge, crowned with a haze of light,
Thunders no more. The horse is at plough. The rifle
Returns to the chimney crotch and the hunter’s hand.
And nothing else than this? Was it for this
Than on an April day we stacked our arms
Obedient to a soldier’s trust? To lie
Ground by heels of little men,
Forever maimed, defeated, lost, impugned?
And was I then betrayed? Did I betray?

(Davidson "Lee in the Mountains" 5)

Lee seems to see himself as a comic figure in this passage, since he asks if everything that he fought for was lost after the war. He tells that people have returned to their old way of living, which is evident in the fact that they have once again planted crops and are now living simple lives, where cannons no longer are heard thundering in the Blue Ridge Mountains and where the hunter once again places his rifle “to the chimney crotch” after he has returned home from his search for meat (Davidson “Lee in the Mountains 5). To Lee’s surprise and, perhaps, to his disappointment, things in Virginia have returned to normal and people seem to be giving little thought to the War. The description he gives of Virginia is beautiful here, but the question of the real loss lingers behind his love for his homeland. His regional love for Virginia is lost in his disappointment of having lost the War, which may, in fact, turn the tone of this poem into that of political propaganda to some, but to the Southerner, it represents a common loss and feelings of respect for General Lee. Mark Royden Winchell’s description of Lee and of the regional tradition that he passed down to all Southerners, including the Agrarians, best exemplifies how Davidson saw the general and how we should interpret this poem:

We know that the historical Lee believed that sacrifices of the recent past would be redeemed in the future. As confident as the general might have been about that future in the late 1860s, Davidson and his readers must
have seen the situation from a somewhat different perspective. Living in Lee’s future, they had not yet celebrated the triumph of the South and the revenge of its Old Testament God. If anything, industrialism represented to them a second wave of reconstruction. The Agrarians saw themselves as keeping the old dream alive even in the face of likely defeat. As a teacher of the young who was also trying to pass on the lessons of history, Davidson must have found his own situation mirrored in that of the aging Lee. Even though he had been born too late to be a Confederate General, he could still plead the cause of the South. It was a vocation that Lee himself had vouchsafed to future generations of the faithful heart.

(182-183)

The hope for the future that Lee’s sermon ends with is the one aspect of Regionalism that is worth fighting for. It is the religion of the South, a religion based on the acts of a just

And merciful God Who in this blood once shed
On your green altars measures out all days,
And measures out the grace
Whereby alone we live;
And in His might He waits,
Brooding with the certitude of time,
To bring this lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave,
To fruit upon the mountains whither we flee,
Never forsaking, never denying
His children and His children's children forever
Unto all generations of the faithful heart.

(Davidson "Lee in the Mountains" 7)

Lee's one legacy to the modern Southerner is his undying faith, which he emphasizes in his sermon, yet it is also an inheritance, of sorts, since he gives it to these boys at a time in his life when he no longer has hope, when he has lost everything, and when he must work on his father's memoirs because he does not have the ability to write his own. Sadly enough, Mr. Bowling's statement that readers dismiss this poem as regional and as a "piece of political propaganda" is emphasized in this section, to some point, because General Lee is preparing his troops for future battles, since Southern values will once again be threatened by outside intervention.

The University of Mississippi recently opened the door for Davidson's return to literary study by publishing his only novel, The Big Ballad Jamboree, which exemplifies his attempts at raising a national interest in folk art. Difficult to accurately date, this book was never published in Davidson's lifetime, despite Davidson's numerous attempts to find a publisher (Winchell 276). After several rejections, Davidson put his manuscript on a shelf. Not until 1994 did Davidson's granddaughter, Molly Kirkpatrick, discover "the complete typescript of the novel in her mother's garage" (Winchell 276).
Davidson’s manuscript was finally discovered and published. Within this poetic and whimsical novel, Davidson turns to Southern history and art in order to strengthen his argument for Regionalism. Here, he continues his discourse that had become a large part of his nonfiction writings by reminding readers of the defeated South and of its cultural heritage. Cissie Timberlake’s personal war with “Hillbilly” music becomes symbolic of Davidson’s desire to understand Regionalism by returning to the South’s past, which is a past full of defeat and pain. In Still Rebels, Still Yankees and Other Essays, Davidson emphasizes this fact by stating,

History, like God and nature, had been both generous and unkind to Georgia and the South. The Georgia Rebel must approach his early history with a bloody link of war and reconstruction that was hazy and bygone to the Vermont Yankee. Defeat had possessed him and had rubbed deep into his wounds. Around him where the visible reminders of destruction and humiliation. His land had been ravaged and rebuilt, and he had been told to forget. But he would not forget and he could not forget, and was therefore torn between his loyalty and his awareness that the great world was bored with his not forgetting. (241)

Cissie’s battle in The Big Ballad Jamboree stems from her refusal to let the rural people in North Carolina forget their past by losing the folk ballads that have filled their lives with local color and history. Like Davidson, Cissie knows that she has taken up an impossible task, but she cannot fathom a future without the past. At one point, she tells Danny (student, fellow ballad gatherer, and her love interest), “we’ll have to work fast to
get the ballads before the rest [of the people in the hills] move away. And before the old folks die. I don’t like to think about it. It’s sort of—ghostly” (73). Cissie’s desire to collect folk ballads is symbolic of Davidson’s attempt to establish Regionalism as a literary movement. Both of these “historians” have set definite goals: defend the South’s regional heritage by defending its art and emphasize the fact that Southern literary works, whether spoken by the bard or sung in ballads, are meant to be oral.

Within The Big Ballad Jamboree, Davidson continues his fight for recognition of Southern art and Regionalism as a literary movement. Based on his mistrust of industrialization in the South, he forges his argument on “the old human desire of the particular as the complement or foil of the universal which industrialization and modernism in art had made entirely too abstract” (Davidson The Attack on Leviathan 87). Davidson saw Regionalism as an attempt to turn away from the modern world and art in an attempt to save the past and keep the Southern past, which was Agrarian and regionalistic, alive through art and literature. He is aware of stereotypes that have been placed on the term Regionalism, but he is stern in his belief that a respectable art form lies hidden beneath these stereotypes. The problem with Regionalism, he tells us, is not in the term itself, but in the fact that we cannot accurately define it, which becomes most evident in the fact that “words like region and regionalism lose all exactness when they enter into the literary vocabulary” (Davidson Still Rebels 267).

The problem, he argues, is not found within the Southern use of Regionalism as an art form, but in critical understanding of Regionalism as a mode in which we define ourselves and our heritage. He further defines Regionalism by stating,
In desperation, the critics have made shift to borrow a name, but hardly as yet have been willing to get down to the business of definition. For one group of critics regionalism is a catchword which they use almost as a formal dismissal for tendencies that they do not bother to take seriously. For another group regionalism is a battle cry, the symbol they feel is worth fighting for in the reconstruction of American literature. (Davidson Still Rebels 267).

Davidson, obviously, fits into the second group, but he goes beyond them and strives for a better understanding of Regionalism, which is evident in his attempts to envelope the term in heritage and pride. Like Davidson, his character Danny finds it impossible to define Regionalism and to understand its role in Southern art, but he is able to make the connection between “the long-hair stuff,” or folk ballads, and commercial hillbilly music. In short, he states that commercialism means, “they didn’t want no poetry” (Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree 14), which becomes his own way of drawing lines between Regionalism as a “catchword” and as a “battle cry” (Davidson Still Rebels 267).

Cissie’s attempt to collect the folk ballads of North Carolina becomes the main focus of Danny’s narrative because his view of art changes throughout, and he comes to realize the importance of the past on hillbilly music. Interestingly enough, Danny begins to understand Regionalism without knowing the name of the concept. Davidson’s own view of Regionalism is manifested in Danny, but Danny’s understanding of folk art and its importance in his rural society, which can be described as “a consciousness of society and the daily world and the preservation of those things good in the culture” (Lasseter
36), stems from a personal desire to understand Cissie’s actions. He doesn’t always understand Cissie or her attempt to save North Carolina’s oral traditions, which is evident in his statement, “Then she went off into some big talk that I couldn’t understand. Something about the ‘creative imagination of the folk’” (Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree 136), but he is able to come to his own personal understanding of why he should help Cissie collect these ballads. Surprisingly enough, his acceptance of Cissie’s actions does not come about because he experiences a sudden understanding of Regionalism or because he becomes insightful to the sociological importance of her research, but because he realizes that Cissie wants to collect these ballads in an attempt to recreate her childhood and to show respect for songs that had touched her as a child.

He explains,

> About the old songs, there is something strange that nobody ever explained to me, and it kept coming to my mind while Buck Kennedy was singing. If it is a sorrowful song, and most of the old songs are sorrowful, you still feel good about it when you are singing, even though it’s enough to make a body cry. But if it is a jolly song, you fell sad, too, underneath, even while you are merry with the music. Is it the tune that makes ‘em like that? Or is it the story? Or is it tune going along with the story, the two mixed? I don’t know. Maybe it is only that Glad is never so far from Sorry after all, and that’s the way the old songs are.

(Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree 115).

Danny’s simplistic understanding of why he likes folk ballads seems to stem from
Davidson’s understanding of Regionalism as “an expression of a spirit that had never before in the South’s history fully taken on a creative shape” (The Attack on Leviathan 91), but Danny realizes that folk ballads become the “creative shape” of Southern history because they tie the past to the future by waking up primal emotions and memories that we are told to forget.

Cissie’s desire to collect folk ballads takes on a different tone as she discovers that the only true way to enjoy this regional art is by keeping it in its oral form. Early in the novel, her plan is to collect the ballads on tape and then transcribe them into a book, but, like Davidson, she decides that the ballads were meant to be oral and should remain in their original form. Davidson had once thought that poetry was dying as an oral art because it was no longer being written to recite, but was being written for publication (Simpson xi). Like Cissie, whose greatest work in The Big Ballad Jamboree is found when she sings the folk ballads that she has collected, Davidson argues that “Oral communication— the word remembered through human voices, the word in its purest form— is the continuum in its purest nature” (Simpson XI). Cissie explains that collecting ballads in their oral form is a “conservation of resources” (Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree 64), which becomes her argument for saving North Carolina’s Regionalism by keeping its heritage alive through the ballads. At this point, though, she is arguing that these ballads need to written down and saved for future generations:

“These old songs are our treasures. We don’t want to let them pass away. I want to get them in a permanent form before they are lost— lost and forgotten. Get them to study myself, and learn them, and teach them to other people” (Davidson The Big Ballad
Jamboree 64). Cissie is striving to keep Regionalism alive by collecting folk ballads for future generations to read, but she seems to be overlooking the fact that these ballads weren't written down because they weren't meant to be enjoyed in the written form, but were created out of the "creative imagination of the folk" to be sung (136). Aunt Lou tries to explain this fact to Cissie by performing these songs with her family, but she doesn't understand it until the Academia turns her research into a project to further the success of her teachers.

Both Davidson and Cissie must come to terms with Regionalism and the impending defeat of the oral tradition, but they both insist on going down fighting. In his notes for an autobiography, Davidson discusses the importance of songs on his early life by reminiscing, "You could not easily visualize how music was a part of everybody's life in those days. People sang a lot" (Inge 206). Davidson devotes much of his attention to remembering the past and keeping its traditions alive. For this reason people view him as "yearning romantically for some sort of moonlight-and-roses old plantation life" (Daniels 113), yet something sad and defeated remains in his desire to keep these traditions alive. Cissie embodies these sad and defeated feelings in her belief that "It was a sin and foolishness to read [ballads] in books and do nothing more" (Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree). Here, Davidson's argument begins to turn and he isn't the aristocratic, educated Fugitive or Agrarian writer, but is a Southerner who is striving to keep his past and heritage alive through art. Likewise, Cissie is tormented by her inability to make people understand why she must keep folk ballads in their oral form, which is evident in her belief that
On the printed page, . . . a ballad is dead. Dead as a stuffed coon or a pickled fish. No better than a skeleton of the real thing. And the words in print, compared to Shakespeare's poetry, may look like trash. But with the tune it comes alive— it's entirely different. It's as good as Shakespeare then. And you can't help rememberin' it.

(Davidson *The Big Ballad Jamboree* 192)

The symbols of this comment appear harsh, and readers are left cold by Cissie's sense of frustration, but there is hope within this statement. Cissie knows that she is doing her part in keeping the ballads alive in their oral tradition, and she sees her students as a tool in remembering these ballads for future generations. Cissie explains that the ballads that she loves cannot be understood by anyone who is "not our folks" because they are our heritage and inheritance. She explains to Danny that she, herself, had forgotten the importance of the ballad in her life until Dr. Hoodenpyl reminded her by having an old woman sing:

Last night I dreamed a weary dream,

It filled my heart with sorrow.

I dreamed we pulled the leaves so green,

Up on the banks of Yarrow.

Oh, true love mine, stay here and dine

As you have done before, O,

And we will pull the leaves so green

Up on the banks of Yarrow.
At this point of the narrative, Cissie becomes the voice for the dead, forgotten bard and makes her voice the tool for keeping the past alive. Here, she embodies Davidson’s insistence that “the poet must not withdraw from his society,” but must “‘retire more deeply within the body of the tradition to some point where he can utter himself with the greatest consciousness of his dignity as an artist’” (Young and Inge 115). She returns to the people who know this music and understand the stories that they are singing in their soul and begins to shun those who are misusing the music as a tool to make themselves look better. She is insulted by Mrs. Eccles, who, she tells Danny, is

usin’ me and she’s using those old folks. That’s all she cares about. Just to be up there on stage, talkin’ about folklore– as if she knew. But those old singers are just another kind of hillbilly to her. And so am I. She don’t really care anything about ballads.

(C Davidson The Big Ballad Jamboree 195)

Cissie is striving to keep ballads alive by putting them in print and by teaching them to students in an academic setting. At first, she thinks that approach is the only way to keep them alive, but she realizes that respect for the ballad is the only true way of understanding its importance to the past, the preset, and to the future generations of Southerners. In the end, the only way to keep this art alive is to refuse to put it in print and maintain that it is best when kept in its oral form.

Within The Big Ballad Jamboree, Davidson argues for Regionalism and for the dignity of Southern art by introducing Cissie Timberlake, a woman who is waging a war
against hillbilly music and the academy in order to keep the folk ballads of North Carolina alive and in their oral form. By preserving songs that “would soon be destroyed by modern civilization” (Davidson *The Big Ballad Jamboree* 110), Cissie becomes a representative for Davidson’s argument that it is the poet’s responsibility, both morally and socially, to keep the oral traditions alive for future generations to enjoy.

In the end, Davidson’s argument is one for remembrance and respect. He understands the stereotypes that are placed upon the Southern culture and its unique form of Regionalism, which is evident in his statement that, “It almost amounts to this: that a poet cannot be ‘Southern’ without behaving like a fool; and if he tries not to be a fool, he will not be recognizably Southern” (*The Attack on Leviathan* 341). Nevertheless, Davidson rejects this view of a Southern writer in order to emphasize the fact that Southern art and poetry is as “good as Shakespeare” and should be studied and respected for qualities that make it unique and distinct from other forms of regional writings (*The Big Ballad Jamboree* 192). Unfortunately, this claim can now be used to defend Davidson’s poetry and as a reason for arguing for his return to the canon so that future generations of Southern readers and poets will have someone to turn to for inspiration and for support in a world where the word Regionalism is whispered with shame and where being a Southern poet is a joke.

As Donald Davidson delved deeper into his support for regionalism and as his argument for the Agrarian cause strengthened, his relationship with the Agrarian and Fugitive groups suffered almost to the point of deterioration. During this period, Davidson maintained and complained about “a growing sense of intellectual and personal isolation” that he felt growing between himself and his former colleagues (Winchell 219). Unkind words were passed between friends, a fact that left a rift in the group and caused Davidson to feel unwanted and unappreciated. He explained the despondency that he felt to Allen Tate by stating,

Well, I am certainly isolated. No doubt of that. I do not grieve, however, over the kind of isolation that may occur from the disregard of Mr. Zabel... But I am decidedly grieved by being isolated from my friends. I don’t mean that I suddenly find myself at a disagreeable intellectual distance, for reasons that I do not in the least understand... It is this intellectual isolation, this lack of communion, which I feel most.

(Fain and Young 220)
Despite the feelings of exclusion that Davidson describes, though, his Fugitive and Agrarian friends found themselves defending their actions by discussing his mood and lack of movement in behalf of the group. They simply felt that Davidson was no longer pulling his weight and that his refusal to adapt to the group’s changing ideals and role in the modern literary canon left him emotionally detached from the group and from projects that they were pursuing.

In a letter to Tate, John Crowe Ransom described Davidson as being “incapable of action. His trouble is pretty deep. He can’t be jollied out of his melancholy, and as for intimidation, Don is like a large Tennessee knob of limestone” (qtd in Winchell 220). As odd as it may sound, Ransom’s description of Davidson’s “trouble” is not rooted in the fact that he is refusing to give up the Agrarian ideals or that he is the only Fugitive who has resisted moving on to new topics, but is rooted in Ransom’s belief that Davidson is depressed and that he is as stubborn as a rock.

In fact, Davidson saw the purpose of the Agrarians was “to seek the image of the South which [we] could cherish with high conviction and to give it, wherever we could, the finality of art in those forms, fictional, poetical, or dramatic, that have the character of myth” (qtd. in Young and Inge Donald Davidson 101). The despondency that Davidson expressed to Tate may have found roots in the personal attacks that Ransom and the other Fugitives were making against him, but it appears to be much more serious than a case of modern “melancholy.” Instead, Davidson, who has been described as the most emotional of the Fugitive and Agrarian groups about the past and modern industrialization of the South, may have been reacting to Post World War I feelings of
angst and isolation.

Tate, himself, took both of these viewpoints into consideration and sided with Ransom about how Davidson, not the other men, was actually the one who was causing his own sense of exclusion and loneliness. Answering Davidson’s complaints, he contended “that Davidson had always refused to enter casually into intellectual conversations, preferring instead to withdraw into his own ego” (Winchell 220) and accused him of having a “gift of persecution and martyrdom” (Fain and Young 221). Despite all of the turmoil that resulted from Davidson’s inability or refusal to move on and the rift that his “stubborn” persistence caused within his relationship with the Fugitive and Agrarians, Davidson neither dissociated himself from his Fugitive roots nor detached himself from his Tennessean ancestors. Instead, he opted to adopt a “guarded style,” which becomes a profound underlying emotion in the poems where he emphasizes the exclusion and loneliness that the Southern man had felt throughout the ages (Young and Inge Donald Davidson 115).

In *The Tall Men*, which many critics have hailed as Davidson’s most emotional poetry, readers are told of Davidson’s heritage, since he bragged of being a descendent of men and women who tamed the wilderness of Tennessee, and of the exclusion and loneliness that began with the Tennessee frontiersman (Allen 397). Years after the collection was first published, Davidson told of his sources by describing them as “a blend... of what I learned from my folks, ... what I learned from history and what I myself experienced” (qtd. in Young and Inge Donald Davidson 65). He introduces his ancestors in “The Tall Men,” which he begins by stating,
It was a hunter’s tale that rolled like wind
Across the mountains once, and the tall men came
Whose words were like bullets. They, by the Tennessee waters,
Talked with their rifles bluntly and sang to the hills
With a whet of axes. Smoke arose where smoke
Never had been before. The Red Man’s lodges
Darkened suddenly with a sound of mourning.

(Davidson 65)

Davidson’s one goal in this poem is to celebrate life in the wilderness, but he goes beyond the wilderness by having the settlers, including David Crockett, tell of their heroic lives in order to find a “contrast to the disillusionment which afflicts us in the chaotic modern world” and to emphasize “a mood of positiveness rather than the gesture of defeat to be found, say, in The Waste Land” (Jordan 51). Readers are aware of the modern world that is intruding on the wilderness, which is evident in the narrator’s statement that

Something (call it civilization) crept
Across the mountains once, and left me here
Flung up from sleep against the breakfast table
Like numb and helpless driftwood. Through the trees
Where summer morning grows with a threat of drouth
I look back on the centuries (not quite two).

(Davidson “The Tall Men” 66)
The narrator, who lives in the modern South, still feels the pain that the land has
gone through in its evolution from a scenic, natural garden of Eden into a wasteland of
machinery and factories. Gone is the day when great men, like Andrew Jackson, can
speak of honor, which "by the Eternal, will endure" (Davidson "The Tall Men" 72).
Instead, the wilderness has become a place where men are isolated from one another and
where, we are told, the hearts of men are made "in stone" (Davidson "The Tall Men" 73)
and where the men have changed. Davidson describes the modern world by contrasting
it with the frontier that he had introduced earlier:

Speaking with words for bullets politely now

I move on rubber heals dividing parallel grooves

On the swept sidewalk. I with an evening paper

Folded neatly in my coat pocket salute the tree

And walk, a veteran of storms and traffic, home,

Where windows bloom with mellow lights against

A square slab of buildings. This is dusk

Where tall men humped on cushioned seats glide home

Impatiently. Feet in immaculate leather,

Silken-cased, urge down the throttle gently,

Speeding with effort only of ankle and wrist.

Seven o'clock in the twentieth century is

The hour of supper, not the hour of prayer,

And something (call it civilization) turns
A switch; a fan hums pianissimo,
Blowing old ghosts into outer darkness where
The bones of tall men lie in the Tennessee earth.

(“The Tall Men” 73-74)

Within these poems, Davidson listens to “the words of ghosts” and realizes that the angst of modern life did not begin with World War I, but is as old as time, since all men have felt the pain of being alone and the defeat of old wars that turn into new sorrows long after the war is complete and life returns to daily routines (Davidson “The Tall Men” 73). The world has changed in looks, he explains, but the souls of the men have not changed, which is evident in the fact that the modern Tennesseans, like the frontiersmen and settlers, are still referred to as “tall men” and, as Davidson’s final line indicates, they will join their ancestors when they, too, die and become “The bones of tall men [that] lie in the Tennessee earth” (74).

Turning to the South after the Civil War, Davidson begins describing the exclusion and loneliness that Southerners felt after the Civil War when the Union began to enforce Reconstruction of regenerate Southerners. Oddly enough, Davidson doesn’t view the Reconstruction period as over. Instead, he implies in “Lee in the Mountains” and “From a Chimney Corner” that this punishment, which began shortly after the Civil War, was still being enforced by Northern industries that moved to the South. In The Attack on Leviathan, he had described the Reconstruction period as one of “compromise” (Davidson 41), but the portraits that he paints of Robert E. Lee and of an elderly lady after the war cannot be explained as proof that Davidson saw the War or the
memories of the war as a Southern characteristic that could be compromised away.
Instead, the Southern memory becomes a shadow and the people who lived during the
war, saw the destruction of their homeland, and who were forced to witness the growth
of Northern industry in the South now become isolated and silent. Davidson picks up on
Faulkner’s notion that the South had made its women into ghosts and discusses the fact
that the War and its offspring, not the men of the South, had created ghosts who want to
talk, but who are left silent in a world that sees them as backward and unwilling to let go
of the past.

In “Lee in the Mountains,” Robert E. Lee becomes the epitome of the Southerner
who has become silent and lost in the Reconstruction era of the South. Critics now see
Davidson’s great epic as proof of his refusal to let go of the past. Despite this fact,
though, Allen Tate turned away from this reading and insisted that the critic’s role, in
understanding this “great elegiac monologue” is to
correct (in so far as it is possible to correct indifference) the belief that
Davidson wants to ‘restore’ the Old South and would be willing to
undertake extreme ‘reactionary’ measures to bring the restoration about.
The poetry, in this view is a kind of sublimated frustration. (671)
Within “Lee in the Mountains,” Davidson emphasizes Robert E. Lee’s weakness after the
Civil War, which is best explained in Lee’s discussion of the mountains, where he
reminds himself,
The mountains, once I said, in the little room
At Richmond, by the huddled fire, but still
The President shook his head. The mountains wait,
I said, in the long beat and rattle of siege
At cratered Petersburg. Too late
We sought the mountains and those people came.
And Lee in mountains now, beyond Appomattox,
Listening long for voices that never will speak
Again; hearing the hoofbeats come and go and fade
Without a stop, without a brown hand lifting
The tent flap, or a bugle call at dawn,
or ever on the long white road the flag
Of Jackson’s quick brigades. I am alone,
Trapped, consenting, taken at last in the mountains. (6)

Here, Davidson emphasizes the life that Lee had forced upon him after the war. He is excluded from the people he had fought with, lost in the world of the mountains, where all he can do is remember the War, and is lonely for men he had known, loved, and saw die.

John Stewart sees this poem as a “symbolic flight from the human condition, the deliquescent diction, the emphasis on such qualities as softness, weakness, and weariness [that] suggests much about the sensibilities and the attitudes toward the artist which formed such poems” (54). Here, Mr. Stewart emphasizes the fact that Lee has suffered through a terrible ordeal and that the fact that he is “taken at last in the mountains” as symbolic of Davidson’s own feelings about the Civil War and Reconstruction. Thomas
Daniel Young and M. Thomas Inge take Lee’s role in the poem one step further by emphasizing his historical importance to the South and to a modern Southern understanding of the most famous Confederate soldier, which is evident in their belief that, by turning to the “‘living tradition, a heritage of heroism and humanism,’ [Davidson] does not have to plead in Lee’s defense; properly presented, the case can rest on its own merits” (101). Instead, readers empathize with Robert E. Lee and the pain that he feels as he returns, solitary and grieving, to his memories of the War and as he doubts his actions.

Robert E. Lee, who is called “General Lee” by his students, has taken on the role as isolated Southerner as punishment for the sins of the South, but this sense of exclusion is symbolic of his understanding that these boys do not know of the Civil War, since they were not old enough to fight in it and do not comprehend the chaos and melancholy that soldiers feel after experiencing war first hand. As they begin to stand, in respect for him, he shows a detached sense of self loathing, which is evident in the fact that he recounts that he doesn’t answer, but hears himself answer. Why does he not feel or act? Why does he not realize that his actions are not memories, but are continuing expressions of himself? Perhaps it’s because Davidson doesn’t turn to Robert E. Lee, the man, as a source for his poem, but to General Robert E. Lee, the Southern myth, which becomes a dominant theme of the poem, since “Davidson’s poetry seems to be the knowledge of inevitable defeat in the machine of history and with that knowledge an indomitable courage to stand for the good and true” (31). Robert E. Lee has seen and lived the defeat that the South suffered during the War and now must find a way to survive
Reconstruction, which he decides to do by returning to the Mountains, as the president of a military school, where he can be a silent observer of a world that continues to grow and thrive without him. It is true that he doesn’t understand the young, but they don’t know his heart and that he understands universal truths about life, which he explains by telling himself,

The young have time to wait.

But soldiers’ faces under their tossing flags
Lift no more by any road or field,
And I am spent with old wars and new sorrow.
Walking the rocky path, where steps decay
And the pain cracks and grass eats on the stone.
It is not general Lee, young men...
It is Robert Lee in a dark civilian suit who walks,
An outlaw fumbling for the latch, a voice
Commanding in a dream where no flag flies.

(Davidson “Lee in the Mountains” 3)

He has been silenced by his actions during the war and has returned to the mountains to live a life of exclusion and loneliness. He emphasizes this point by describing himself as “Robert E. Lee in a dark civilian suit,” which implicates that he is no longer the myth or the heroic general who many Southerners saw as a great Messiah sent to save God’s chosen people in the South. He then calls himself “An outlaw fumbling for the latch, a voice / Commanding in a dream where no flag flies,” which implies that his isolation is
not voluntary, that he may have been condemned to exclusion for war crimes or for political alliances. Whatever the case, though, Robert E. Lee is not the myth that the boys expected him to be, but is a human who finds himself cut off from the world by actions that he once thought full of valor and by symptoms that appear to be characteristic of World War I’s shell-shock victims.

After discussing the angst, isolation, and exclusion that the most famous Southerner felt after the Civil War, Donald Davidson turns to an elderly woman who was a child during the War for memories and a description of her anxiety in “From a Chimney Corner.” In his discussion of this dramatic monologue, Mark Royden Winchell parallels the story that the child hears in this poem to stories that Davidson heard as a child by emphasizing the fact that readers enjoy this poem because it contains subliminal emotions, but does not rely on Davidson’s voice as a guide for what to do with these emotions:

Neither the grandmother nor the third-person speaker of the poem tells us what to think or feel about this experience. Davidson trusts his dramatic powers enough to believe that we will get the point of the story on our own. Based on what we know of his life and family background, it is easy to imagine the grandmother as Rebecca Patton Wells and the child as Donald Davidson. Although this knowledge is not essential to appreciating the poem, it may account for the fact that Davidson did not feel the need to generate emotion through explicit statement. The feeling was already there in search of an objective correlative. (173)
Here, Davidson listens as we are told of emotions that cannot be spoken of or described accurately. The setting of the poem separates the family from the outside world and makes it apparent that these stories are known inside the familial circle, but have not been uttered outside. Instead, we told that “An old room big with firelight holds the boy / Alone, till grandmother comes, remembering” (Davidson “From a Chimney Corner” 40), which implies that she is remembering stories, people, and feelings that she is unable to share with anyone besides the boy.

The grandmother, who as a child experienced the War, possesses many qualities that bring Robert E. Lee back to mind when reading the poem. The narrator describes her mental status by stating,

    The town
    
    Rises in mind, the house on the Lewisburg Road,
    Where girl-grandmother lived, by battles made wise.
    The voice murmurs, with the soft twilight knitting
    Till night gathers deeper on these two sitting
    Touched with old sorrow to unseal his eyes.

    (Davidson “From a Chimney Corner” 40)

Unlike Robert E. Lee, the “girl-grandmother” is not isolated or excluded because of actions that she has committed, but because of things that she has seen and heard. She tells her grandson that she felt “bound / To peep at the window” (Davidson “From a Chimney Corner” 40), thus, seeing the ugly face of the War and learning to keep silent about the things that she saw, which she learned from the Confederate Soldiers. She
remembers

The front yard filled with draggled men in gray,

Resting, shoulders propped, bandaged, drooping,

Drenched with December and sore defeat.

They do not talk or move till finally trooping

At some far command they take the road

And press in broken files on limping feet.

(Davidson “From a Chimney Corner” 40-41)

Within this description, Davidson emphasizes the effect that the war had on the people of the South through words, but he doesn’t communicate a message about the War. Instead, his description brings the alienation that these people felt alive. The grandmother talks about what she saw in her front yard, but she doesn’t tell what she feels and gives no indication that the soldiers spoke to her. Because of this, there is a void of silence and exclusion of words that arises in this poem and continues to linger until the end, when we are told of “Women who wait for the armies in blue / That soon will break through distant cedars” (Davidson “From a Chimney Corner” 41).

After discussing the exclusion and loneliness that Southerners have felt since the days when David Crockett and other frontiersman hunted in the mountains and foothills of Tennessee and of the lives of Southerners after the Civil War in his poetry, Davidson turned away from the past and found a continuing sense of angst in the Modern South. In “Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar,” which was published in 1961, Davidson answers his critics, which includes his fellow Agrarians and Fugitives, and argues that the un-
regenerate Southerner needs to talk about the past and that his approach to handling the modern world, with technological breakthroughs and industrialization, is the most important step in helping the South find a voice. One of his most powerful poems in *The Long Street*, Davidson’s intention here is to show Regionalistic differences in the ways that the North and South view and understand the Civil War. Despite the fact that he does accomplish this task, his ultimate goal is to end the silence that the South has lived throughout the generations and breathe new life into an old story.

Fellow Agrarian and Fugitive, Robert Penn Warren also discussed the importance of the Civil War in Southern History. In his essay, “The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial,” Warren points out that “It is forgotten, in fact, that history is history” (293), which may be used to contradict Davidson’s stance that the Civil War should not be forgotten, yet he also celebrates the memory of the Civil War. Despite his stance that the past is nothing but a shadow, Warren also admits,

> The Civil War is, for the American Imagination, the great single event of our history. Without too much wrenching, it may, in fact, be said to be American history. Before the Civil War we had no history in the deepest and most inward sense. There was, of course, the noble vision of the Founding Fathers articulated in the Declaration and the Constitution— the dream of freedom incarnated in a more perfect union. But the Revolution did not create a paper except on paper.

(Warren “The Legacy of the Civil War” 270)

The distinction that Warren hits is a point that Davidson misses. The Civil War is not
important only because it is a Southern concern but because it is also an American concern. Early Revolutionary figures, including George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, had made an impact on history and became the beginning of our national history, but we did not create our own individual history until the Civil War, so Warren seems to argue that we should not forget or deny the war its place in our history books. Instead, we should realize that “we became a nation, only with the Civil War” (Warren “The Legacy of the Civil War” 270). Before this time, America was growing not as a country, but it was, as Davidson points out in his argument that the Civil War was fought because of regionalism, a loose confederation of regional governments, who saw themselves as “a people divinely chosen to live on milk and honey at small expense” (Warren “The Legacy of the Civil War” 270).

Davidson, who, obviously, is the speaker of this poem, finds himself in a herculean situation when he and some colleagues begin discussing two wars (Winchell 336). Davidson, believing that the Civil War is being discussed, is insulted when Harvard turns to him and exclaims,

“Oh, not that war! How strange
That you should mix it in! Why, who would talk
Of Sixty-one, or bother to make walk
Old John Brown’s ghost that’s laid past all debate?
There’s no ill-will from here to Scituate.
When I said ‘war’ I meant of course the late
Unpleasantness. I must say you surprise
Me with these dank Faulknerian memories.

Why should you care for what we've long forgot?

That's not the issue now.”

(Davidson “Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar” 15)

Harvard and the other professors believe that enough has been said about the Civil War and that Davidson should remain silent about his feelings on the subject. Despite the fact that Harvard claims that it’s “not the issue now” and another turns the discussion into a lighthearted question, answer session about what the “Rebel Yell” sounded like, Davidson refuses to be silent and lectures his colleagues on the South’s feelings about the Civil War, which becomes a political statement about the modern Southerner who is silenced in the Modern world by technological and industrial breakthroughs. He wants to bring the ghosts of Southern men back to life and longs to open the doors to the past in order to remember the lives and deaths of Southern and Northern soldiers and to make his own “Faulknerian” comments about a War that killed a whole generation of men and left a generation of widows and spinsters. He tells that the memories are in his blood, that “The remembering heart carries it round again / Till it beats in the throat, the lips, the weeping eye/ And is born at last in a blazing wordless outcry” (Davidson 16), which emphasizes the fact that Davidson, Faulkner, and their fellow countrymen can no longer remain mute about the War, that the Southerner must speak of the past in order to survive in the future.

After addressing his need to speak, Davidson’s tone turns didactic and he begins to lecture on the need for a Northern pride in the Civil War, which was never needed since
the North won the War and because the Northern man never knew the glory of the wilderness, but believed in manifest destiny and in industrialization. He stresses these points by telling his comrades,

"You who debate by night cannot be mourning
Faroff kinsmen dead or a roof burning;
Yet a burning roof, kin dead long ago,
If you could weep, would give you right to know
The sound of valor where it dwells with sorrow
Or, chilled by reason, hides in the deep marrow.
Did you hear it rousing once at Saratoga?
Or when the Highland dead at Ticonderoga
Lay naked to the stars? Or when the blood
Of Jennie McCrea cried out, you understood?
“We mourned with you then in brotherhood,
And I’ll weep with you now for those whose names
Burn on your monuments like altar flames.”

(Davidson “Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar” 16-17)

Donald Davidson is refuting Harvard’s accusation that he is too emotional by turning the tables on him: Northerners are too unemotional about the war, which becomes evident in the fact that they don’t know facts about important battles or about the men and boys who died in the War, fighting for a cause that they believed in. Despite the fact that he disagrees with their attitudes about the War, Davidson is able to come to terms with the
War and reaches out to console the Northern men whose ancestors died alongside his. He tells that he will cry for the Northern soldier and reminds them of what the South had lost in the War:

We, too, have names that blaze on mouldering stone
And I have seen men’s tears fall where they slept
And heard a shouting while I wept,
A century off yet louder in my ear
Than all that’s so much magnified and near.

(Davidson “Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar” 17)

Davidson’s ancestors had died as had the ancestors of these Northern professors, but Davidson doesn’t forget. Instead, he argues that the War needs to be spoken of and that the South need not be excluded from the modern world because of Southerners’ refusal to forget about their dead ancestors and the cause they had fought and died for.

Despite the fact that Davidson, Warren, Ransom, Tate, and the other Fugitive and Agrarian poets did not always see eye to eye about the path that the group should take in the literary world, they did realize that the South could produce great writers and that these authors had important observations to make about the Southerner’s role in the modern world. Davidson, it is true, answered the call more fervently than the others and his refusal to give up on the “cause” constituted a rift in the group. He refused to forget, became resistant when told that he should move on in order to grow as a poet, and was despondent at Ransom’s declaration that “Don just stopped growing before the rest of us did. . . . Don’s case is partly private but partly, I’m afraid, the effect of ideology” (qtd. in
Winchell 220). Despite the hard feelings that grew between the Agrarian and Fugitive groups in this era, though, their relationships, like Davidson's poetry, did not remain stagnant for long, which is evident in Ransom's review of *The Long Street*, in 1961, where he commented that Davidson, unlike himself and some of the other Fugitives, had "maintained continuity and development most steadily in his art" (qtd. in Winchell 316).
“ANCHORING THAT IMAGE IN LANGUAGE”: DONALD DAVIDSON AND THE MODERN SOUTHERN LITERARY CANON

Despite the fact that Donald Davidson was involved in a mainstream literary movement, his writing is no longer canonized and is no longer accessible to academics or critics because most of it is now out of print. It can be argued that the South is losing a vital natural resource in the loss of Davidson, but the truth is that Davidson was not accepted by critics during his lifetime, so it would be hypocritical to place the burden of the blame on modern critics and readers. M. E. Bradford noted the strengths in Davidson’s poetry in the 1960s, which is evident in his belief that Davidson

. . . is, in style, as indigenously American—of his particular heritage as a conservative Southerner, a product of classical education, orthodox religious orientation, and experiences of his times from the perspective which these, together, provide—as he is in theme. (518)

Donald Davidson, unlike the other Fugitive and Agrarian writers, began his career writing about the Regionalistic concerns of the South and died still fighting for the Southerner’s right to be proud of Sectional heritage and pride. His refusal to forget the past and the need to listen to the voices of his ancestors, rousing him to action, becomes a major theme in his poetry and his one novel, The Big Ballad Jamboree, despite
demands that he "Admit! Confess! Nostalgic! No, he fights/ Historical process. . . .
Absurd movements. . . . Remember what? Gastonia? That makes sense" (Davidson "Late Answer: A Civil War Seminar" 15). Davidson, unlike Robert Penn Warren and John Crowe Ransom who would never "agree with the statement that their own purpose as poets was to seek the image of the South" (Rubin 185), continually turned to his Southern roots as a source for inspiration and pride. He didn't "seek the image of the South," but he did embrace the need for pride in Southern history and regional arts, which becomes his most crucial contribution to the Southern literary canon.

The problem that most readers have with Donald Davidson is not that he writes about the South or that anyone believes that he wanted to return to the Antebellum South; instead, critics seem to have a problem with the fact that Davidson, a white Southern writer, spoke longingly of the Southern way of life and fought to preserve its past. Coming from a man who was born only miles from the town where the KKK was founded may be one factor that hinders Davidson's success as a Southern writer, yet it is the reason that many writers are celebrated. Ralph Ellison's discussion of his opinion of his ancestors brings Davidson's concept of the past to mind. In Invisible Man, he turns to the issue of slavery and tells his audience, "I am not ashamed of my grandparents for having been slaves. I am only ashamed of myself for having at one time been ashamed" (Ellison 15). The main difference brought up by this quote is that Ellison was a descendent of slaves, who is writing about the plight of African Americans in the twentieth century, while Davidson is the descendent of white men who fought, at least incidentally, to maintain a social system that approved of and defended the institution of
slavery, yet the two writers are doing basically the same thing in their writings. Ellison is fighting to maintain pride in African-American history, and Davidson’s writing maintains that all Southerners should remember the past and keep it alive in both oral and written form. In essence, he is telling modern Southerners that we should not be ashamed of our past, and maybe not overly proud of it either, but that we should learn from it. Ellison would have been insulted by the parallel, but his ancestors are directly tied to Davidson’s by their role in Southern history, which modern Southerners still feel when confronted by symbols of the South and of the Civil War. These are symbols of hatred, prejudice, and enslavement to African Americans, while many white Southerners feel that they represent cultural and regional pride. In any case, the need to find pride where there once was shame becomes a major theme in Davidson’s poetry, as it had in Ellison’s novel. If for this reason alone, Davidson should be returned to the modern literary canon, both to the American canon and to the Southern canon, so students can learn about a man who cherished the South and its past above all else and fought to keep it in its purest form.

Davidson’s return to the literary canon, along with a rising interest in his writing, should open up other doors for Davidson’s return. The city of Pulaski may take a pivotal role in this process of remembering. Recently, Mayor Dan Spear approved and promised that the city would support a local celebration of our two Fugitive writers: Davidson and John Crowe Ransom. Hopefully, this event will draw scholars to Davidson’s poetry and will become an intricate factor in helping to bring Davidson’s poetry back into print. This fact, along with the rising number of Davidson’s students
writing about him, both personally and professionally, will be pivotal in breathing life into Davidson’s writing, which Winchell argues is proof that Davidson’s legacy is not dead, but simply struggling to find new life. In his discussion of Professor Davidson’s students, he prints a sonnet that Jesse Stuart wrote about him. The final lines sum up Davidson’s career, both as a writer and as a teacher, perfectly. Here, Stuart speaks directly to his teacher: “Don Davidson, I speak: Go use your pen, / And let peace come from tangled grass and wind” (qtd. in Winchell 188).

When the South is able to appreciate Donald Davidson’s role in Southern literature, especially the literature and literary movements of the Twentieth century, we will be able to return him to the literary canon and to the college classroom as an important figure in the Southern Renaissance. Davidson, we will emphasize and understand as a fact of life, was not as important to his own lifetime as he could have been if he had been born one or two generations earlier, but his efforts to show pride in his home state, home town, and family show that he understood a great deal about the past and about the South as a region that many people overlooked in his poetry, believing him to be an incurable romantic who turned to the past as a time that should be rekindled and relived. Instead, he was a man who, despite the fact that he may have once been ashamed of the South and of its controversial past, wanted to celebrate this past and its literary and cultural heritage, which had caused many Southerners to become excluded and silenced in the modern world, where Northern technology and industry moved South.
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