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Once Upon a Time: Storytelling and Reader-Response Theory in Donald Harington's Lightning Bug

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Steinbeck is absolutely right, that the writer's audience is one single person. But in my case, and in all modesty, that one single person is Donald Harington. Or, rather, not myself as I really am . . . but rather an idealized D.H. who is partly old Dawny, and partly good-dispositioned, receptive, overly-intelligent grown-up Dawny who will buy anything but needs to be charmed, needs to be wowed with tricks, and needs to be vastly entertained. I wrote Lightning Bug for him to read, and I don't think he completely bought it, but he liked it well enough to let me send it out to the world.

--Donald Harington

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I. Introduction

Stories appear everywhere in literature. For instance, novels themselves are stories, and the narrative form that is commonly called "storytelling" is often included in the text of many novels. But if a novelist is already telling a story when writing the novel itself, why would he or she need to include separate, and very distinct cases of story-telling by characters in that novel? In the novels of Donald Harington stories within the text appear quite frequently, so their inclusion undoubtedly contributes to the overall effect of the work. Lightning Bug is one such novel.

When a story is told, three key elements are involved: the story itself, the storyteller, and the audience. Identifying what makes up the story itself is not terribly difficult, for it is comprised of the information that the storyteller puts into words for an audience. The other two elements, the storyteller and the audience, are where one can start to ask questions regarding roles in storytelling. Obviously, the storyteller tells the story and the audience listens to it. Speaking, though, on a larger scale, in conveying a meaning to an audience, when does the job of the author (teller) stop and that of the reader (listener) start? In fact, all three roles are quite interconnected. The listener or reader of a story, once involved in that story, begins to contribute something of him or herself to it. In an introductory essay appearing

in the October 1991 issue of PMLA, "Cluster on Reader-Response Criticism," Constance Jordan states, "It is hard to imagine any kind of literary criticism in which the reader, whether viewed as fictive, ideal, competent, historically situated, or culturally constructed, does not figure in some way" (1037). Exactly what meaning any particular reader gets from a text depends upon the type of reader the person is and the amount of information the author provides for the reader in the text. Do writers even think of anybody at all when writing? Donald Harington seems to have a certain awareness of his readers since he writes fiction that is conducive to reader participation. His technique of including multiple stories and storytellers in his novels models to his readers the natural attraction that people have to being tellers and listeners of stories (similar to the way that lightning bugs attract their mates). His style of maintaining ambiguity between reality and fiction is also one which is alluring to readers.

II. Stories

In Donald Harington's Lightning Bug (1970) stories are told for many different reasons to many different characters and can be sorted into categories by type of story and/or reason told. Categories of stories can then be divided up into historical accounts, stories for entertainment (including jokes), and, along those same lines, stories for children and ghost stories. Lies and a category of miscellaneous tales round out the list.

The historical events category is the largest and is comprised of stories that recount events of the past. To qualify for this category, a story must be told from the point of view of one of the characters in the novel to inform one or more of the other characters about some happening which transpired in the absence of the listener(s). There are multiple examples of this type of story throughout Lightning Bug, but their most certain locations are the "Sub" chapters. There are five "Sub" sections, one for each of the chapters in the "Middling" part of the novel. For it is within these sections that the young Dawny explains to his "lightning bug," Latha Bourne, specific events from her life in a series of flashbacks, which are set up at the ends of each of the "regular" chapters.

Each chapter of Lightning Bug is a specific time of the one day during which the action of the novel is set,

and the "Sub" chapters are also specific times, but from the past. For example, "Chapter One: Morning" ends with the appearance of Dolph Rivett, who comes from "the other side of Spunkwater" and tells Latha, "'I mean to have you, and I aim to tear the clouds out of the sky to git you'" (57). Immediately, the chapter ends to clear the way for the beginning of "Sub One: Recently" where the explanation of who Dolph Rivett is, how he knows Latha, and why he wants her, fills the next thirteen pages. "Sub One" is set apart from the rest of Chapter One because the background information is being told by Dawny to Latha in a conditional tense, as if she were not aware of what she had done. This technique contributes to the storytelling of the novel, as well as providing information for both Latha and the reader. Placing Latha in the same "need to be told in order to know" status gives the reader greater empathy for her. Dawny narrates how one Sunday Latha chooses to go fishing, and how she meets up with Dolph Rivett while doing so. Dawny says, "It could have been a Sunday morning in late June or early July . . . It could have been that you rose just before dawn and quickly tended your chores then dug a bucket of redworms out of the compost pile and pulled your cane pole out from under the porch and took off, up the creek" (58). Dawny also describes the scene when Dolph Rivett appears: "Sometime around eight o'clock the man could have come downstream, carrying his fine store-bought rod and

reel and his tackle box. A dog could have followed him, a mongrel whelp, black and tan" (59).

Not all historical accounts in Lightning Bug are given by Dawny, though. In the midst of "Sub Two" Every Dill accounts for what happened to another character, Raymond Ingledew, during World War I. Every and Raymond both had their sights set on Latha, and the ensuing feud between Raymond's family, the Ingledews, and Every is because of Latha. The history and fate of Raymond Ingledew are important to the plot of Lightning Bug and the story of Latha Bourne as well, because with Raymond out of the picture, the path to Latha's heart would be clear for Every.

Even in several of Donald Harington's other Stay More novels, there is a storytelling effect that provides background information for the reader. Using storytelling that way is appealing because readers may be made to feel as though they are finding out information at the same time as the characters in the novels. All of The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks is told in the voice of the narrator as an historical account of the development of the village of Stay More. Just how there only came to be two Indians left in what later became known as Stay More is divulged in the first chapter. In a story to Jacob Ingledew, Fanshaw the Indian "told him that the other members of the tribe had gone off on a hunting trip over a year previously and

had not returned" (6). In fact, the entire novel is an account of how people, "PROG RESS," and other things (including religion, "base ball," and the Masons) come to town and affect the lives of the citizens of Stay More.

The same is true in yet another Harington novel, The Cockroaches of Stay More. Rather than human beings, though, the focus is on those creatures of the insect world who inhabit Stay More in its ghost town years. One character who appears in town and has a life history that needs to be filled in by a story is Hoimin the mouse. Hoimin likes to talk, and he does tell his entire life story to anyone around to listen. The reader knows that while reading the story of Hoimin in the text, the mouse is telling it to Tish at the same time. For while he tells of his life at the science lab, the text states that Hoimin "was daily subjected to certain indignities, and he chronicled each of them for his listeners, followed by the question, 'Hodda ya like dat?'" (231-32).

The second category of stories is also one which is enjoyable, both within the novel and outside it. Certainly, telling a story merely to entertain someone is as good a reason to tell one as telling one to fill in gaps about the past. Having a sense of humor and the good sense to know when to come out of the sun and sit with good (or even bad) company spinning a few yarns is a quality which every fine upstanding citizen of Stay More possesses. The

setting in which most of these stories are told is the store porch in front of the general store which is run by Latha. Even in The Cockroaches of Stay More the storytelling location of choice is a store porch. The roosterroaches, "On any given night, after breakfast . . . could be found lolling around Doc Swain and Squire Hank, listening to them holding forth on the ancient stories of Stay More, swapping tall tales, and waxing prophetic about their favorite subject" (52).

Once again, just as she and her life are the focus of the historical accounts of the "Sub" chapters in Lightning Bug, Latha is at the center of Stay More storytelling; if she is not the storyteller herself, she is more often than not among the listeners. Latha herself is popular for her storytelling, especially with Dawny. In fact, the first story for entertainment in Lightning Bug is told by Latha to Dawny on the store porch after the lad requests to hear one. The subject is a tradition known as a "dumb supper" which Latha describes as "an old, old custom that must go all the way back to the days of yore in England" (20). She goes on very dramatically to explain the custom further to Dawny:

> The idea . . . is that you take and set out a place at the dinner table, just like you were having company, except you don't set out any food. You put out the plate and the knife and

fork and spoon, and the napkin. Then you turn the lamp down very low. A candle is even better. Then you wait. . . . The idea is that if you wait long enough, the apparition--not a real ghost, Dawny, but a ghost-like image--the apparition of the man you will marry will appear and take his seat before you at the table." (20)

Although this story succeeds in entertaining, it is not indicative of the humor which is found in so much of Donald Harington's work. The humorous anecdote is frequently found both in the novels and on the store porch. One example is a little story told by Doc Swain to the gatherers at Latha's. Doc says with a chuckle:

> "Puts me in mind of old Granny Price up on Banty Creek. Th'other day she come into the room where her grand-daughter Sally was a-nursin that big overgrowed baby a hers, and she says, 'Why, law sakes, chile, when air ye ever gonna wean that youngun?' and Sally says, 'Grammaw, I've tried and tried, but ever time I wean him he throws rocks at me.'" (43)

Certainly, a sense of humor is vital to appreciating the fiction of Donald Harington, for there is no shortage of laughter from his characters or his readers.

Lightning Bug has more references and allusions to children's and ghost stories than actually appear there.

The relationship between Dawny and Latha seems to be cemented together by the stories told by and about Latha. With the exception of her story about the dumb supper, none of Latha's ghost stories appear in the text, although many references are made to them. Ghost stories are, after all, Dawny's excuse for spending time with Latha. The beginning of "Sub Five: Now" at the end of the "Middling" section starts out in a very child-like, storybook way. Dawny, alone in the woods after running away because he was punished for spending the night at Latha's listening to ghost stories, confesses his little boy fears. He says:

> I shiver, though the night is hot. My fingers feel goose bumps on my thighs, and not because they're bare. Bear? Are there bears in these woods, if not gowrows and jimplicutes? Real things? I fear no boogers; I believe Tull Ingledew and trust him; there are no boogers; but real things? Bears and panthers and wolves and foxes and snakes and spiders. (212)

Latha also believes the story of her rescue from the mental hospital to be very much like a fairy tale. This is another situation in which Every tells Latha a story that is omitted from the actual text. The readers are aware that Every is telling the story, and they already are familiar with it from Dawny's "Sub Four: Fourteen Years Ago" version. The text picks up with Latha's reaction as

Every finishes telling her his version. Every's appears in the text this way:

> So he began at the beginning and told her as much of the story as he could remember. He seemed to be glossing over or making little of his own efforts, which she realized must have been little short of stupendous. Great Day in the Morning! she thought: My hero. I've got a hero. It's like a fairy tale. (195)

Another type of storytelling is lying. In Chapter Four Latha says, "'There is only one thing worse than telling a fib . . . and that is breaking a promise'" (154). That does not stop her or any of the other characters from telling them, though, as they appear repeatedly in Lightning Bug. Dawny lies to his aunt, making up a story about a bunking party at Latha's because he wants to spend the night there. This action results in great pain for Dawny later on, for when his lie is discovered he is severely beaten by his aunt and uncle. His devotion to Latha is constant, though, as he chooses to run away rather than to betray his promise to Latha about not telling anyone that he slept in her bed. Latha misrepresents her identity to Dolph Rivett twice, once at Banty Creek and once in Stay More, and the greatest lie of all is the one Latha tells to both Every and Sonora about Sonora's biological parents. Dawny, too, at the beginning of the

novel misrepresents his identity at the Arkansas State Hospital to find out information about Latha's stay there. Lightning Bug is a novel in which part of the plot is concealed in a deception that must be uncovered to get to the truth. The Choiring of the Trees is another novel whose plot is based on a lie. Nail Chism's very existence hangs in the balance because he has been falsely accused of the rape of a young girl, Dorinda Whitter, who has been convinced to lie about her attacker. Her best friend, Lightning Bug's Latha, knows that Dorinda is lying, for when she starts to speak at the hearing, Latha wonders:

> I listened with wonder as she told what had happened. And I began to question whether she was capable of giving the performance that it seemed to be. It seemed to me somebody else was speaking through her mouth. (27)

The rest of the novel is the story of how the characters involved try to undo the damage done by this one devastating lie. Latha is certain that Dorinda is not telling the truth, and before Dorinda actually admits that she has lied Latha asks her if in fact she truly was raped by Nail. Dorinda tells her, "'Latha, ladybird lollypop, we swore we'd never ever tell a story to each other. Didn't we? So don't you git me to tell ye a story'" (32). Truly, there is very little difference at times between telling a lie and telling a story, and here, the two terms are used

interchangeably. Most of the lies in Lightning Bug are told to protect either one's self or someone else, and in Choiring, Dorinda's motivation is really not much different. When Nail asks her why she would do a favor for someone who really raped her by placing the blame on him, she replies, "'Nail, I believed to my soul that the onliest thing they'd ever do to ye was to make ye stop botherin 'em the way ye was, with the federal law and all. I had no idee atall they'd th'ow ye in prison, let alone try to put ye in the burnin-cheer'" (163). She too thought that she was doing somebody a favor by lying.

The last category of stories is that which contains the less traditional types. Among those are the songs and chatter of animals and insects, the messages contained in various vegetation such as the sycamore tree or the mullein stalk, and, of course, the flash of the lightning bugs. Donald Harington includes these sounds of nature in both The Cockroaches of Stay More and The Choiring of the Trees, as well as in Lightning Bug. Insects of all types make music that is a part of the Purple Symphony in Cockroaches, and in Choiring the overwhelming sound is the singing of the trees. Perhaps most important regarding this category are not the sounds or messages themselves, or even the sources of those sounds and messages, but rather the way they are perceived. Sam tells Tish in Cockroaches, "You have to see everything in a different language to

understand it" (121). The importance is found in how the intended receiver, or listener, processes the intended messages, or stories.

III. Tellers

Just as there are multiple categories for the stories themselves in Lightning Bug, the storytellers too come in many shapes and sizes. Just about everyone in Stay More is a teller of tales, so the storytellers vary from the major characters such as Latha Bourne, who is popular with everyone as a great teller of ghost stories, to Every Dill, who tells a good many tales to entertain a variety of characters, to Dawny, the young narrator of the "Sub" chapters and "Beginning" and "Ending"; and they include other creatures and forms of nature that contain and relate messages to other living things (human, beast, or plant).

Part of the way a text or story is interpreted is due to the presentation of the information by the author or storyteller; the rest of that interpretation is provided by the reader or listener. The teller of a story then is just as important in his or her delivery of the information as the listener is in deciphering it. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Chapter 11 of The Implied Reader, Wolfgang Iser states that the author of a literary work aims "to convey the experience and, above all, an attitude toward that experience" (291).

As a storyteller, Latha Bourne is reknowned in Stay More. Her store porch is the place for telling or hearing a great story. However, in the text of Lightning Bug,

Latha is infrequently the narrator of any stories; rather, readers are familiar with Latha's gift as a ghost story teller through Dawny's narration. When Dawny spends the night at Latha's during "Beginning," the reader is not privileged to any of Latha's stories but is assured by Dawny that he heard many gripping tales. Upon his request to hear a story, Dawny says:

> She tells me, not just one ghost story, but several, many. Some of these I have heard her tell before, but they are good ones, and the new ones which I have not heard before are very good indeed. They thrill me, they hold me, they seize me, they jolt me, they drain me. . . . She likes her own stories too, and gets carried off by them, which is why she is such a good teller . . . . (27)

Latha's reputation as a storyteller then is made not by conclusions that the reader draws after reading several of the stories that Latha tells, since very few of her stories are even included in the text, but through Dawny's observations and opinions. She is known to the reader as a good storyteller because Dawny thinks she is one.

The only stories of Latha's that are really included in the text of the novel are her lies. After lying to Dawny in a situation about which he knows she has purposefully deceived him, he tells her, "'You tell better stories than I do'" (125). Again, lies are referred to as

stories. Latha misrepresents herself to Dolph Rivett repeatedly, first telling him she is named Sue McComb from near Demijohn; then when he discovers that is a lie, she tells him her name is Sarah Chism, so Luther Chism would assist her in "getting rid of" Dolph (61, 74). Just as Dawny tells her, she is good at making up stories, whether they are for entertainment or deception.

In The Choiring of the Trees Latha really becomes a storyteller, for there she is the narrator, telling a story that is very close to her in much the same way that Dawny performs in Lightning Bug. In Choiring Latha knows the entire story from being involved with those characters directly involved, either as a friend or just as an observer. She is even a bit smitten with Nail in the same way that Dawny is smitten with her in Lightning Bug. Latha admits, as the story of how Nail and Viridis are brought together reaches a close, that when she goes to say good-bye to them, "It will bother me to be that close to Nail, and I guess I'll blush. I'll still be in love with him" (386). As Latha is only thirteen during Choiring, she does not yet know her own story, although some of the readers might if they have already read Lightning Bug, which was actually written by Donald Harington twenty years earlier. She alludes to what happens to her in a direct address to the audience near the end of Choiring when she says "the story of all that, and what will happen between Every and

Raymond, will have to wait until you, dear reader, can tell it" (385).

As a storyteller in Lightning Bug, Every Dill is perhaps most important when he uses the storytelling medium as a means to try to revive Latha after he rescues her from the hospital. Dawny explains what happened then during his narration of "Sub Four." About Every, Dawny says:

> He talked a blue streak the whole time, trying to be amusing. He told jokes by the dozen . . . . And he would slap his leg and laugh, then turn to see how you would be taking it. But if you were smiling, it was hard to tell. (181)

Unlike Latha's stories, however, Every's stories and jokes are included in "Sub Four" for the reader to engage in. Every is not known to be a great storyteller, but he turns out to be invaluable as the character who uses the story in one of the most serious and important situations in the novel. When Latha is in her fugue, Every tells stories trying to bring her out of it. His importance as a storyteller then is that he alone can revive the heroine of the novel, getting her to return to her normal self.

Viridis Monday in Choiring acts as the same sort of encouraging support to Nail Chism during his stay on Death Row that Every does for Latha after her stay in Little Rock. In one of her letters Viridis tells Nail that what she wants to say is, "'All is well. Please be happy. You

will live. Don't give up. Gardez la foi. We shall prevail. Truth will out. Justice will triumph. I love you'" (183). All of these statements that she wishes she could make, she does just by saying that she wishes that she could. For Nail not to lose his strength during his stay of execution, he thinks of Viridis, her visits, and her letters of encouragement.

In other parts of Lightning Bug, more stories to entertain can be found, and Every is the teller of at least one of them. The store porch is again the setting when Every tells Tearle Ingledew a humorous anecdote while waiting for supper to be ready. As Latha rejoins the men Every, is in mid-sentence saying:

> ". . . during the big freeze last winter . . . I was at this big revival over in Kentucky, with preachers there from all over the country. Well, there was a boy staying in one of the boarding-houses over there and he told everybody that he'd had a dream of hell. One of the preachers kind of smirked and said, 'Sonny, what is it like in hell?' And the boy answered him, all right. 'Just about like it is here,' says he. 'I mighty nigh froze. The preachers was so thick, I couldn't get near the stove.'" (131)

Every is every bit as effective a teller as Latha, as Tearle Ingledew shows with his guffaws at the end of the

story told by the man who was once his enemy.

Another effective storyteller is Dawny, the young narrator who thinks the story of his Bug worthy of being written down. It is Dawny who provides the readers with important background information, which fills in the gaps of the past for the readers and, one would suppose, Latha too, as he begins each of the "Sub" chapters addressing her. Some of the most important events in Latha's life are explained in "Sub Three: Seventeen Years Ago." Dawny begins, "Cry, Bug. This is a happy story . . ." then goes on to tell about Latha's experiences in Little Rock (133). It is in Little Rock while staying with her sister and brother-in-law that Latha gives birth to Sonora, is committed to the State Hospital, and is rescued by Every. This part of Latha's life is very unclear to her, and Every later explains the same events to her in a story that is omitted from the text. Dawny is the most passionate storyteller within Lightning Bug, for his stories are the most serious and informative, as well as being the longest. All of his stories are addressed to Latha, and it is the stories that connect Dawny to her.

Among the miscellanous tellers of stories and deliverers of messsages are the bugs, trees, frogs, dreams, and the U.S. Mail. During "Beginning," Dawny hears the sounds of the many insects of the approaching dusk that he refers to as music. He explains, "The blinking, flashing

scintillation of the lightning bugs seems to keep a beat with the music from the grass and trees" (15). Immediately following that description, the chorus of sounds is given human words to explain those sounds and their rhythms. Included in the passage are the sounds of the katydids, the bullfrogs, the crickets, and cicadas. They all say the word "Bug" somewhere in their songs, and after it's all over, the next words in the text are Dawny asking his Bug to tell him a story (16). There are messages in those songs, which are important only to the intended listeners.

Accompanying the songs of the insects are the messages found in the various vegetation of the novel. While in Little Rock at her sisters, Latha identifies a sycamore tree from the window of her room. In "Sub Three" Dawny says:

> Beyond the field of weeds rose a single large sycamore tree; you had studied the configuration of the branches endlessly and you were beginning to read the language hidden in that wild calligraphy. God or Whoever It Was had been putting up these trees as signboards, as posters, for millions of years, but nobody until now had learned how to read the script of the twisting branches. You were finding a long message there, and understanding it; without that message you could have closed your eyes and ceased to exist. (134)

Another plant that can deliver a message to an intended audience is the mullein stalk. Superstition says that when someone is away, a mullein stalk bent down can predict whether or not that person will ever return. Latha bends one for the missing Dawny and knows that "If it straightens, the boy is not gone for good" (238).

The most obvious of all communicating vegetation in Donald Harington's fiction are the singing trees of The Choiring of the Trees. These are the trees that keep Nail Chism from death in the electric chair, for when he hears them singing "Oh stay more!" he "[sings] back, I'm doing my best!" (4). The singing trees "don't really talk each other's language, but they sing a tune together, a kind of soughing ballad, a ditty maybe just of fragrances, leaf-smells in the sunlight that drop an octave in the moonlight" (5). Very clearly, by the time he had finished writing The Choiring of the Trees Donald Harington had increased the importance of the singing vegetation and the audience's awareness of its importance. Of course, in Lightning Bug the signals are represented by the flashing lightning bugs.

At the end of Lightning Bug's "Sub Five" Dawny tells Latha that he is going to give to her, as a sort of a gift, "the sweetest of [her] dreams" (215). The dream is a story that Dawny is telling, but it also may be thought of as a

dream with a message to be interpreted. In the dream, Latha experiences a sensation that unites her religion and her sexuality, both of which are fundamental to her relationship with Every.

Finally, another obvious form of message delivering is in the letters sent through the U.S. Mail, and ironically Latha is the postmistress. The arrival of the mail truck is apparently quite an event in Stay More. The text reports, "Folks began to drift up to the store to wait for the mail truck to come. By ten o'clock there were nearly twenty people hanging around the store porch" (43). When the truck does arrive, the exact time of arrival is given; and once the mail is distributed, all can share their wealth. Latha's letters are shared with all readers of the novel. This, the only mail delivery included in its entirety in the novel, threatens Latha's very existance, as she receives the two pieces of mail that day. The first is from her sister in Little Rock requesting that Sonora's visit to Stay More be cut short and that Sonora should catch the first bus back to Little Rock. The second letter announces the discontinuation of the "Staymore" branch of the U.S. Post Office by Regional Headquarters. Latha wastes no time in returning letters to both of the parties who wrote to her, and in both cases she apologizes for being unable to comply with their requests. As important contributors to her bad day in the novel, and since the

entire novel is set on that day, the letters received then are important to framing the story.

Perhaps in all novels letters are one of the most effective means of communication both to others as well as to one's self, and so there is no surprise at the frequency with which letters appear in Donald Harington's work. In Cockroaches the only way the roosterroaches can think to communicate with Sharon the urgency of Larry's condition is by typing her a letter on Larry's ever turned-on IBM Selectric. It remains undelivered, however, when a strong gust of wind carries away their effort. Sam thinks to himself, "As author of the message, I could only feel the frustration of having no ultimate reader of it" (251). Letters, like stories must have listeners or readers to be of any value to anyone, especially the tellers. The two need each other. The thoughts of Sam are echoed in Viridis' frustration when she discovers in Choiring that the prison officials have not been delivering her letters to Nail. When Viridis brings an autographed book of poetry to Nail in prison, beneath the inscription "in blacker pencil someone had block-printed: WRITING STUFF IN BOOKS IS AGAINST RULES OF THIS PRISON" (255). Both accounts suggest the power of the written word. As Jane P. Tompkins states in "The Reader in History," "When language is believed to have an overwhelming influence on human behavior, then mastering its techniques and exercising ethical control over its uses

must of necessity become paramount critical considerations" (204). This statement is based on the fact that Plato banished poets from his republic for much the same reason that the prison officials feel it's necessary to censor Nail's mail. Tompkins says, "Plato's expulsion of poets from the ideal state unites the two features of the classical attitude toward literature that distinguish it most markedly from our own: the identification of language with power and the assimilation of the aesthetic to the political realm in Greek life" (204).

There are many types of people who can and do tell stories; almost no characters in Lightning Bug are exempt. There is also a variety of means of delivering messages or transferring ideas from conversations between characters to letters to "messages" that occur in nature. In Stay More, communication, or lack there-of, is just as important as it is in the "real" cities in the "real" world.

IV. Listeners

The third element involved in storytelling is the most intriguing, for it is the listener or audience of a particular story or message that distinguishes the differences in the type of story that results and the way it is interpreted. The role of the author or teller is clear; he or she provides the story in a specific manner, and the reader or listener processes and reacts to that story. The reader, after hearing a story, then reacts to, and, may classify it. An author writes a novel for an audience of readers. But, within the novel, when one character tells another character a story, the audience is composed of whatever characters are listening to that story, as well as the readers of the novel, who are always there.

An audience is a very complex thing since it is always inclusive of anyone who is within range to be a listener. Therefore, any time that there is dialogue between two or more characters, or even if there is some attempt at non-verbal communication, an audience has been created. In The Rhetoric of Fiction Wayne C. Booth states, "The author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agree-

ment" (138). This statement could not be truer in the case of Donald Harington, who readily admits that his ideal reader/listener and his second self come together in Dawny, when he says that when he writes, his audience is "in all modesty . . . Donald Harington. Or rather, not myself as I really am . . . but rather an idealized D.H. who is partly old Dawny and partly a good-dispositioned, receptive, overly-intelligent grown-up Dawny who will buy anything but needs to be charmed, needs to be wowed with tricks and needs to be vastly entertained" (letter). In the words of Walter J. Ong in his essay, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction":

> If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalize in his imagination an audience that he has learned to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionaliz-ing in their imagination audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers, and so on back to the dawn of written narrative. (11)

That audience, in turn, does not merely sit idly, but rather, participates in the interpretation of the text. In the same essay, Ong goes on to say, "the writer's audience is always a fiction. The historian, the scholar or scientist, and the simple letter writer all fictionalize their audiences, casting them in a made-up role and calling on them to play the role assigned" (17).

Lightning Bug is a novel in which a plethora of audiences may be identified since it is a novel whose focus on communication is intense. Characters talk, argue, deceive, read, observe, and listen, and many times they don't. Even noncommunication is a form of communication. Perhaps the reader is first alerted to the importance of being a part of an audience upon reading the opening of a novel. Ong states that, "'Once upon a time,' . . . lifts you out of the real world" (15). In Lightning Bug even the divisions of the sections, "Beginning," "Middling," and "Ending" are indicative of the movement from the real world into the story world created in the novel. In her essay "The Reader in History" Jane P. Tompkins sheds light on the role a text plays in the lives of its audience through her study of poetry. She says, "At exactly the time when a consciousness of history becomes fundamental to critical thought, poetry is spoken of as transcending the influences of place and time" (217). The opening sentence of Lightning Bug is a sound. That sound is the "Wrirrraang" of the screen door on Latha's porch opening and closing, and it drowns out the other sounds of the night air to capture the attention of the characters on the store porch as well as the readers of the novel. This sound transports the readers from their everyday worlds into that which has been created by the author. In Lightning Bug and other Harington novels, the readers may transcend their everyday

worlds to enter Stay More.

Not all listeners behave in the same way. Obviously there are those characters who pay very close attention and are careful never to interrupt, while likewise, there are the types of listeners who feel obligated to contribute commentary whether it is necessary or not. The behavior of the listener also may be determined by whether he or she is the intended listener or just someone close enough to hear what is being said. Because types of stories and types of storytellers are easily classified, one might safely assume that listeners would be just as easily grouped, and for the most part that is true. Listeners may be grouped by the way they listen, just as stories may be grouped by their content; and storytellers may be grouped by the types of stories they tell and the way they tell them. Different types of listening, and thus groups of listeners, include the dialogist (as one who is included in a conversation with another character), the interested listener, the bystander or casual listener, the interrupter, the eavesdropper, the lover, the truthseeker, and the unresponsive listener. Of course, one character may be grouped in more than one category of listener depending on his or her situation at a particular moment. These audience roles that characters are grouped into also pertain to the reader of the novel. Whether or not the reader chooses to be grouped, he or she does participate in

the stories in the novel the way that the listening characters do. The reader is inevitably one of the types of listeners that the characters can be. Donald Harington, by including so many storytellers and listeners of those stories in his work, portrays a wide range of the types of listeners the audience/readers might be. In the introduction to The Reader in the Text Susan Suleiman states, "Only by agreeing to play the role of this created audience for the duration of his/her reading can an actual reader correctly understand and fully appreciate the work" (8).

In any novel, there tends to be a good percentage of dialogue, and Lightning Bug is no different. Conversation is one way that characters get the opportunity to interact with others as both listeners and tellers. In Lightning Bug little is revealed about types of listeners through their conversations with other characters. However, much of the important exposition of the story takes place through dialogue. A typical revealing conversation that takes place between Latha and Sonora on Latha's store porch goes as follows:

"Will I find out who my real mother is?"

"Mandy Twichell is your real mother."

"Will you look me in the eye and swear that you are not my mother?"

"I will look you in the eye and swear that I

am not your mother."

"Cross your heart and hope to die?"

"Sonora, what's got into you? Your mother would be hurt if she could hear you talking like this."

"I think she can hear me talking like this, and she does not look very hurt," Sonora said, and then she turned on her heel and went back into the house. (76)

Here both parties involved in the dialogue contribute equally to keep the pace of the scene moving forward. In most conversations between two people, the two participants do just that. They wait for the other person to finish speaking, then answer. The courtesy of listening enables the conversation to proceed without incident. Exceptions to this rule allow for additional categories of listeners.

Perhaps some of the most entertaining conversations in all of Donald Harington's novels take place between Fanshaw the Indian and Jacob Ingledew in The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks. One of the things the two men enjoy most is their in-depth intellectual conversations. For example, in one conversation the topic switches from the shape of the earth and moves through the name of Stay More and ends up in a discussion about the origin of each man's "people." It begins:

"The time has come, now, when we must at last

cultivate a topic of discussion which, hitherto, we have avoided: why did you come here and build upon this land?"

"Hit was gittin jist too durn crowded back in Tennessee," Jacob said. . . .

"But you have never even asked for permission to build here. Stay More is the land of my grandfathers."

"'Stay More'?" . . . "I reckon that'll do as well as ary other name."

"But you cannot," Fanshaw said.

"Cannot what?"

"Stay More." (16)

And on and on go all of their conversations.

The reader in Lightning Bug is aware from the very beginning of the most ideal of all teller/listener relationships in that novel. There is a mutual respect between the two that is created by their "storytelling relationship," which demonstrates the benefits of a good teller/listener relationship. Dawny is in love with Latha; he "likes to come to Latha's place in the evenings because she is a great teller of ghost stories, but mainly he likes to come to Latha's place because he is in love with her, and will always be, even when he is old" (2-3). Because of her storytelling Dawny gets to be near Latha. Storytelling brings the two close together, and out of that relationship bloom more stories, including the novel itself. As it is

stated in "Beginning" about Dawny's fixation with Latha and the creation of Lightning Bug, "the only way he will ever exorcise her, the only way she will ever give him any peace, is for him to write a book about her, who is, it should be obvious by this time, the Lightning Bug" (3). Lightning Bug is for Latha. For Dawny to be able to tell her story, someone must be there to listen to it, just as he listens to Latha's stories; and Dawny, who knows that Latha would enjoy hearing her story and would pay the kind of attention to him that he pays to her, addresses parts of the narrative directly to Latha. Dawny, who is too young to have her, is attracted to Latha by her signals, which for him are manifested in the stories that he can have. She always treats him with fondness and affection and lets him hear as many stories as he wants to. For a five-year-old child, this woman is the perfect mate.

And for Latha, Dawny represents the perfect little mate as well. She even responds to Dawny's "'I love you'" this way, "'I love you too, and if you were a growed-up man I would marry you right this minute'" (28). As one who tells tales or as one who flashes, to have a perfectly attentive listener is a wonderful thing, and Latha knows that Dawny is a good one. It is appropriate that Dawny is an attentive listener, since Donald Harington says that it is partially Dawny that he writes for. During an argument with Every, Latha says, "'My very special true love is a five-

year-old towhead named Dawny'" (164). The relationship between Latha and Dawny then is a perfectly matched one, for he is an attentive listener for all of her stories, and later when he becomes the storyteller in the "Sub" sections, he addresses all of his stories directly to Latha. So, in Lightning Bug, listener becomes teller and teller then becomes listener. This illustrates the importance of mutual communication, and the give-and-take relationship that must exist between stories and listeners. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Wolfgang Iser states the importance in reading a text is derived from the "interaction between text and reader" (276). Stories must have listeners to go on existing, and those listeners must go on participating in the text they read. Dawny tells the readers that he writes Lightning Bug for and because of Latha; therefore, if there were no Latha, there would be no Lightning Bug. In fact, with Dawny as Donald Harington's model listener, he is probably the type of listener he expects one to be while reading Lightning Bug. Ideal readers must receive and participate in the text for it to succeed.

Another listener who becomes mesmerized by the stories of her teller is Tish in The Cockroaches of Stay More. Like Dawny to Latha, Tish asks Sam directly to tell her stories about Stay More. Ironically, the story Sam tells her is about the Woman, Sharon, who 'was the granddaughter

of a demigoddess named Latha, who once had lived here but now lived east of Stay More" (119). Mostly, Sam concentrates his story on Sharon, though; and he brings Tish as up to date as he can. When she enthusiastically begs him to go on, he replies, "'That's all we know, right now, ... The story is continuing. Like the story of you and me'" (120).

In The Choiring of the Trees Viridis Monday is an especially attentive listener. Her purpose of traveling to Stay More is so that she can find out more information about Nail Chism from the people that know him the best. She listens very carefully to everything anyone has to say, especially his family, Latha Bourne, Dorinda Whitter, and even Nail himself.

Another example of an attentive listener comes towards the end of Lightning Bug when Every is the audience to God. When Every appeals to the Lord to make Latha well, God responds with a command for Every to become religious. Dawny reveals that Every "continued kneeling a moment more, amazed that God had spoken to him, then he sprang up and threw on his clothes and dashed out through the door. He ran down to the desk and asked the clerk, 'Where can I find the nearest preacher?'" (192). Not only does Every listen, but he also obeys.

Those characters who end up as bystanders, or casual listeners, could be just any of the other characters in the

story who are close enough to hear what is going on. For example, because there are so many people who spend time milling around there in Lightning Bug, the store porch presents a good locale for an audience of casual listeners. When Every comes to the store to buy some tacks, he speaks with Latha about a few inconsequential matters such as whom to talk to about a meeting house; and the whole time Sonora is there. Latha realizes this at a point and introduces her: "She noticed for the first time Sonora sitting there on the porch, watching and listening, and she said, 'Sonora, this is Every Dill. Every, this is my niece Sonora'" (55).

Later that day (and in the novel), Latha becomes a bystander at her place as well. After leaving Tearle Ingledew and Every out on the porch talking while she fixes dinner, she remains aware of their presence. The text reads:

> From time to time, as she rolled out dough for a pie, she could hear their voices raised against each other, but after a while it grew so quiet that she thought one or both of them had left. She wiped her hands on her apron and went through the store to peer out the window. They were still there. (130-131)

Because she is aware of the conversation between the two men, and because she checks to see if it's still going on

at the point that she becomes unsure of whether or not it is, Latha is a casual listener.

Latha is again a bystander during part of her "visit" with her sister Mandy Twichell. After she refuses to acknowledge even her awareness of Mandy and Vaughn's presence when they are all in the same room together, the evil Twichells continue to discuss Latha as though she weren't there. Dawny narrates, "They ceased trying to get you to speak. They began to pretend you were not there, and to talk about you in your presence" (145). Of course, Latha has chosen to ignore Mandy and Vaughn, so the reader may safely assume that Latha is still able to hear everything that is being said. This idea is corroborated by Latha's visit to the doctor during which she speaks, but only after Mandy and Vaughn have left the room. After asking Latha her name, and having Mandy answer, the doctor frowns and asks that Mandy and Vaughn leave the room. Then, "When they were gone, he said, 'Now, I already know your name. You can talk to me, I know. Will you tell me your age?'/ You spoke.'Almost twenty-one'" (146). That she answers the doctor is proof that she can in fact hear all that is said by her sister and brother-in-law when they are talking to each other about her while they think she is not listening. In fact, she is a casual listener to their conversation.

Closely related to the casual listener is the

eavesdropper. When Latha follows Every to the Ingledews, she finally gets to hear the story of what happened to Raymond Ingledew. Every happens to tell the story and Latha happens to overhear him, even though her purpose is solely to hear whatever it is that is said during that visit. In describing Latha's action Dawny narrates, "You leave the road and cut through the woods, to eavesdrop from the side of the house without being seen" (93). Her eavesdropping provides her with the information that she needs to accept that Raymond is really dead, as well as proof of the lengths that Every is willing to go for her. She still decides that he is the last man that she would want to have. For, "even if he did not actually kill Raymond, he was responsible for Raymond's joining the service in the first place" (98). This point, however, seems more a view of Latha's stubbornness than of her true feelings for Every.

When Sam, who lives in the clock in Parthenon in Cockroaches, deliberately moves closer to Sharon while she is on the phone with her grandmother, Latha, he also is eavesdropping. As he climbs up Her to get close enough, "He was very careful not to touch Her hair, and very careful to keep an escape route in sight in order to vanish in an instant in the unlikely event that She began to turn Her head in his direction" (47). This, however, is not the only time that Sam listens to or spies on Sharon. Since he

lives in the clock in Her home, and he is obsessed with Her, he makes a point to pay attention anytime She uses the phone or reads, or even moves around.

A listener becomes an interrupter at that moment when he or she interjects commentary while someone else "has the floor." More often than not, someone interrupts someone else during a conversation in which both parties are very excited about the subject matter. For example, in the scene in Lightning Bug which Latha dreams up regarding what will happen to Dolph when he goes to the Chism place after she has lied to him about being Sarah Chism, she imagines this exchange with Luther speaking first:

> "Mister, if ye've went and got Lucy inter trouble, I'll--"
>
> "Naw, naw, this don't concern her." (75)

That scene exemplifies the intensity that would exist if Luther thought that Dolph had committed some act against Lucy Chism. Rather than allow Luther to continue inaccurately to question his purpose, Dolph interrupts to avoid any harm that Luther might inflict upon him.

During childbirth the doctor is forced to interrupt Mandy Twichell because her constant nagging chatter is an annoyance to everyone around. Mandy is saying:

> "Look, Doc, we got to have that baby. Even if she don't want it, I do. I'll take care of it, Doc. Me and Vaughn caint have no children of our own,

so I'd be more than happy to have it. Please, Doc--"

"Get out of here, both of you!" he snapped. (140)

Again the heat of the moment causes the doctor to quit listening to Mandy and interrupt her in order to focus on the task at hand, which is delivering Sonora. Just as the doctor is forced to interrupt to keep control over the arguing people during Latha's labor, in most cases, an interrupter is forced to do so in order to prevent someone from continuing speaking in a manner which could bring harm to the current situation.

Dolph Rivett is a listener who is a lover, although a jilted one. He is one character that Latha does want at one time, but later decides that everyone would be better off if he would go back to his own family. However, now Dolph is bent on having her again. As a listener, Dolph must endure Latha's lies, which are one reason why their relationship could never be. When Dolph flashed at Latha when they first met, Latha flashed back; but she was not in earnest. Although Dolph comes to Stay More trying to find and reclaim what he had at Banty Creek, he cannot have it (her) because it (she) never truly belonged to him. Therefore, when he does appear at Latha's store, she lies to him again. Believing numerous untruths, Dolph as a listener is patient and gullible. Only a lover could behave this way.

Dolph is played for a fool by Latha, and the audience of the novel should see him as such.

Tearle Ingledew is another character who is attracted to Latha and is also a good example of a lover as listener. As the town drunk, Tearle (or Tull) often seeks out Latha to compliment her, repeatedly to no avail. When he first appears during "Beginning," he comes to the store porch to pay Latha a series of compliments including, "'thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead'" (17). When Dawny tells him that Latha is not there he says, "'I jest drapped by to give her my love'" (17). Tearle would obviously like Latha to notice and fall in love with him, but whether or not he has ever been sober enough to realize that he is trying to fill his lack of a woman remains unknown. Tearle flashes at Latha as a male lightning bug flashes at the female, but she does not flash back. Tearle too is like Dolph in that he takes abuse that only someone who thinks he is in love could stand. In fact, it never seems to matter whether she is actually listening or not. Latha does not take him seriously, and he is too drunk to care. Latha as audience to Tearle is a model of an unresponsive listener, since she, the intended audience of Tearle's advances, obviously hears but does not respond in the way Tearle hopes.

Sonora, who is presumed to be Latha's niece from Little Rock, is a listener who is also a truthseeker. She

is an attractive teenager who desires very much to remain in Stay More rather than travel back to Little Rock to live with Latha's sister Mandy. Sonora is certain that Latha is really her mother and that Every is her father. She listens to the stories of seventeen years ago and watches the behavior of Latha and Every to reach this conclusion. The reader of the novel knows that Sonora is right, and she herself is fairly certain that she is. During one conversation with Latha Sonora asks multiple questions about her parents. In fact, in this conversation Sonora comes right out and asks:

> "I <u>am</u> your daughter, aren't I Latha?"
>
> "Why land sakes, honey! What makes you say that? Just because I told that feller--"
>
> "I don't much favor Mother at all. I look a lot more like you than like her." (75)

At supper with Latha and Every, Sonora tries to find out why Every has a black eye, and why Latha has been crying. The two adults begin to tell a series of lies, all of which Sonora identifies as lies while she pushes them even harder to tell her what has been going on. She declares that she knows what has made Latha cry anyway, and Latha thinks about the situation:

> While she was feeding the hogs, she realized she was not really worried that Every would tell Sonora anything; after all, he had promised her he would

not. But all this business of promises was becoming rather ridiculous anyway; that girl could sit there at the table and look across the table and see her own features written all over the face of the man sitting there talking to her. What worried Latha was not that Every would give anything away, but that Sonora would back him into a corner and try to make him confess what she had already guessed on her own. (154)

Sonora too then is a listener/audience member. She listens for that which she hopes to be true regarding her real mother and father.

In The Choiring of the Trees Viridis Monday is also a listener who is a truthseeker. When she visits Stay More her objective is to find information that she can use in freeing Nail from his sentence. In the words of Latha, the narrator, "Viridis Monday was here to tell what she knew, to find out what she wanted to find out, to do what she wanted: to learn everything about Nail; to convince herself of what she already believed: there was no way Nail could have done what he'd been convicted of" (138). Similar to the way Sonora is fairly certain of the identity of her natural parents and desires to find out the truth, Viridis believes in Nail's innocence and seeks truth and justice.

After Latha models the behavior of the unresponsive

listener with Tearle, the best example of an unresponsive listener is Latha during the time which begins right after she gives birth to Sonora. It is then that she begins tuning people out until she doesn't talk anymore to anyone and acts as though she doesn't hear anyone. During the trip out of Little Rock Every tells stories and jokes and sings Latha songs to try to "find" her. Although he is physically with her, she has not spoken to or really responded to anyone in months, so he is alone unless he can bring Latha back from within herself. As they travel, he talks on and on, periodically checking her reaction, but most of the time there is none. Dawny narrates, "you did not show much reaction to any of his stories, and he did not dare attempt to engage you in serious conversation, for fear he would find that you could not reply to the simplest question" (184).

There is only the one period of time within the novel that Latha quits communicating with anyone and does not begin again until after Every rescues her from the hospital. While living in Little Rock with her sister Mandy shortly after the birth of Sonora, Latha stops talking because Mandy becomes overly possessive of the child. Dawny attempts to explain:

> It was not that you were deliberately holding yourself incommunicado, Bug. You were not consciously refusing to speak to them. It was

> simply (maybe not so simply) that you were unable to speak to them. . . .They ceased trying to get you to speak. They began to pretend you were not there, and talk about you in your presence. (145)

Because of the cruel treatment by Mandy and her husband Vaughn, Latha tunes them out. She does not cease to be a listener, but she changes from being one who participates as a responsive listener to one who can probably hear, thus classifying her as a legitimate audience even though she shows no signs of understanding. She does not respond to them at all, because she does not want to. This is similar to the way a lightning bug will not respond to another species whose flashes don't correspond to its own. The idea here stresses the dependence of a storyteller on an audience. If nobody is there to listen, then telling a story, writing a letter, or even just talking becomes useless. Mandy and Vaughn never listened to Latha (or each other), so Latha just stops trying to communicate with them at all. On a grander scale, since Latha is such a fundamental part of the storytelling scheme of Lightning Bug, what happens during this time in Latha's life may represent what would happen in the world if there were no audiences for stories. There would cease to be stories. This prospect frightens characters like Every and Dawny so much that they try as hard as they can to bring her from this fugue and keep it from recurring, Every by telling

Latha stories and Dawny by telling everyone Latha's story through his narrative in the novel. Even most readers sense the danger of Latha's silence and hope that something will bring her back so that the story might continue. The time Latha spends silent is important to the concept of the dependent relationship between stories and storytellers in the novel and in general. To be able to tell stories, someone else must be willing to listen to them, but there would be nothing to listen to if there were nobody to tell stories.

V. Theme

The theme of Lightning Bug is stated directly in "Ending." The text reads, "The theme will be of loss. Of loss and search, of losing and finding, of wanting" (240). This theme can also be applied to the storytelling that occurs within the novel. The characters who tell stories, and just about all listeners, whether they are intended to be so or not, fit into one of the categories: one who has experienced a loss, one who is seeking to find something, or one who wants something in particular. Since in Lightning Bug the character who is "most wanted" is Latha Bourne, and a large portion of the novel focuses on Latha and those other characters who come in contact with her, she is often the intended audience in Lightning Bug, merely by being the one desired in so many situations. Perhaps one of Latha's best relationships with another character in the novel is the one she has with Dawny. Other than Dawny, Latha is desired by her daughter/niece Sonora, Tearle Ingledew, Dolph Rivett, and, most of all, by Every Dill. There are even characters who want Latha to do things, and they too are unsuccessful in communicating with her.

Years before the day that passes in Lightning Bug, Every "loses" his girl, Latha. From that moment on, he dedicates his spare time searching for Latha, either trying to bring her back into his life or trying to locate her

because he doesn't know where she is. A description by Dawny of this same process regarding lightning bugs states, "The lightning bug flashes to find, and finds by flashes and is found by flashes. But is lost until found. The flashing is of loss, and yearning" (240). Therefore, the lightning bugs are the link between stories and audiences. Every is like the male lightning bug waiting for a response from his lightning bug of choice, who is Latha. Clearly, the event which best illustrates this point is the time that Every goes to Little Rock to rescue Latha from the State Hospital. Many years prior to the setting of the novel, Every "lost" Latha, and he subsequently has spent many days searching for her. When he finally does find her at the hospital, she is at first unable to respond to his "flashes"; so even though he is with Latha, he is without her. His search will not conclude until she returns his signal.

Although he fears that she would be unable to respond in a serious conversation, Every does not quit trying to communicate with her; he keeps flashing at her, hoping that she will return to him. In this situation, Latha is the intended audience, and she is at best only a passive unresponsive listener since she can probably hear him yet does not respond. Just as the lightning bugs count on the flashes that bring them together for the survival of their species, so Every must keep flashing at Latha so he can

find and reclaim what he has lost to satisfy his wanting. Latha must flash back at him before he can be sure that she is returned to him in such a way that will cease his wanting. Perhaps he is afraid really to engage her in conversation because if she doesn't respond, she is still not his.

Equally as important to the flashes of the male lightning bugs are the responding flashes from the stationary females. In the situation with Every right after she is rescued from the hospital, Latha at first is unable to respond verbally to Every, although she is able to follow his instructions during the escape. Like the female lightning bug, Latha too sends out signals to the males who are in pursuit of her. In Lightning Bug it is Latha's story that makes the novel a novel. In addition to Every there are at least three other males in the novel who would like her to flash at them. They are Dawny, Dolph, and Tearle. Sonora is another character who desires to be near Latha since she has figured out that Latha is her mother. Dawny is the lad with whom Latha has the perfect relationship, and she even says that if he were older she would want to marry him. Dawny knows that he can never have Latha, so the only way for him to satisfy his desire for her is to write her story. That is as much of her as he can ever have. She cannot completely belong to Dawny, though, because he is too young. He can only have her in the way that the beauty of Shakespeare's summer day lady lives on,

and that is through the life that continues in her stories. For both Dolph and Tearle, Latha does not respond because she does not really want either of them. Dolph only temporarily fills her sexual needs and hears only lies from Latha, and Tearle merely bestows meaningless compliments upon her and pledges her his unrequited love. Neither of these men is good enough because whom she really wants is Every. Therefore, she does not respond to them. Sonora fits the theme since she has lost her true parents, but finds them, and more than anything wants to remain with them. Latha does respond to Sonora since being with her daughter is something that she wants.

Since Latha has lost things that she is trying to find because she wants them, she too becomes a part of the loser, seeker, finder theme. Mostly what Latha has lost are the parts of her life which are the people who would make it complete, Every and their daughter Sonora. She, then, like the female lightning bug, sends out the appropriate signals to all of the people in her life to get exactly what she wants. In "Beginning" the explanation of the lightning bugs' flashes is given:

> Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of the flashing light is not guidance, nor illumination as such, but purely and simply to make "assignations": the males fly around in the air, advertising their availability; the females wait immobile on leaves

> in bushes and trees, and if they spot a flash coming from an eligible bachelor of their own species, they return a flash whose signals has the same intervals. (7)

The same is true with people. They respond to the things and the people they want. If a story is something that a person wants, he or she will be unable to avoid a response. That response may come in the form of a desire to continue reading or listening for more story, or the response may result in a more direct action, such as inspiring a person to convert to a more carefree lifestyle. Either way, there must be an attraction between the story and the audience, and the teller of the story is responsible for sending that first "flash" to attract the reader.

VI. Conclusion

Storytelling in Lightning Bug is much like the flashes of the lightning bugs. It is a specific means of communication which is usually intended for a specific audience. Recalling the technique of the lightning bug, Suleiman says in the introduction to The Reader in the Text:

> the author and the reader of a text are related to each other as the sender and the receiver of a message. The transmission and reception of any message depend on the presence of one or more shared codes of communication between sender and receiver. Reading consists, therefore, of a process of decoding what has by various means been encoded in the text. (7-8)

Stories too relate to the given theme of loss, finding, and wanting. Latha, after a fight with Every, is left alone on her porch and she figures out the connection:

> Those bugs and frogs out there in the grass and trees were as talkative as all get out. But the lightning bugs never made a sound; just light . . . . Hush! she said to herself, and hushed, thinking, There's nobody listening. Nobody listens to these bugs and frogs except their mates. No reason to talk to anybody except somebody you

want. (202-203)

Latha knows this statement is true and she models her actions after it. The same is also true for literature/ novels/stories. Readers listen because they want to. If something is not appealing or desirable, it will not be sought after; that goes for stories as well as other people.

Just as a male lightning bug flashes at the female lightning bug because he needs to, and Every persists in trying to make contact with Latha because he needs her, an author (storyteller) has a need to tell stories. Likewise, the female lightning bug is the receiver of those signals, and an audience (listener) is the receiver of the stories. Each one needs the other for either to continue to exist. The role of the receiver, though, is at least as complex as that of the sender, for the receiver has the extra task of responding in some manner to the information received. In Lightning Bug, Latha is most often "flashed" at and the reader can see how she responds to each "flasher" or suitor or storyteller, but on a greater scale is the audience of the entire novel. In "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" Wolfgang Iser states that

> Herein lies the dialectical structure of reading. The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity--i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which

> we are not directly conscious. The production of the meaning of literary texts--which we discussed in connection with forming the "gestalt" of the text--does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. (294)

In a class of twenty-five students all reading the same work of fiction, the chances that there will be twenty-five different reactions and interpretations to the same work are great. Each student reads differently since each student is different. Although the text itself is the same, each person creates his or her own version of the text through the different ways each has interpreted it.

Certainly, by including so many stories and examples of types of listeners in the novel, Donald Harington has provided the reader with plenty of models for the readers of his fiction to follow. In fiction, it is common for readers to identitfy with the primary characters in the novel or work in hand, and the characters in Donald Harington's works, who are not only likeable, but almost real in their characterization, are very easy for any reader to empathize with and like. The realism bestowed upon Harington's characters is due in part to the fact that in his

fiction Harington has created an alternative and completely fictional world: the town of Stay More. Stay More, a sheltered village in the Arkansas Ozarks, is a sort of literary Utopia, where anything can happen. In "Southern Style," a 1971 review of Lightning Bug from the Times Literary Supplement, the reviewer points to the awareness of Stay More's Utopian elements with the statement "Significantly enough, the book's real monsters are outside the community" (413). As a fictional town placed in a real state (Arkansas) and surrounded by real cities (Parthenon and Jaspar), which can be found on a map and are acknowledged in the fiction, Stay More and its inhabitants are that much more believable. This combination of fiction and reality is the necessary element for readers to stay engaged. Stay More exists because of the elements of realism that exist around it.

This is not to say that all fiction must contain some elements of reality before a reader is interested enough to spend time reading. But, in the era of instant gratification, one looks for and expects those elements which he or she can identify with, whether it is a place that is familiar or characters that are likeable. (That's why a show like Twin Peaks cannot find enough of an audience to "stay more" on the air. Its bizarre elements far outweigh the real.) Donald Harington is one of the best authors to study in regard to expectations of the audience because he

has managed to supply his readers with both the bizarre and the real. His characters and setting are so real, yet totally fictional, that his readers become immersed in the events of the novels. In any fictional work, readers read because they want to read; therefore, an author must give his or her audience some reason to want to read. Donald Harington has given his readers Stay More and its citizens. It is in Stay More that readers find that sense of order and balance as identified by Jane P. Tompkins in "The Reader in History," when she says that the literature "becomes the place of order and equilibrium; it is the condition of harmony toward which humanity strives" (220). The desire to know a place like Stay More keeps readers involved in Donald Harington's fiction (or should I say, it keeps them wanting to "stay more"?).

The theme of losing, seeking, and finding of Lightning Bug runs parallel to the give and take relationship of author and reader throughout Harington's novels. In The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks the idea that a listener only listens because he or she wants to is evident through the character of the traveling salesman who periodically visits Stay More, Eli Willard. During the Second Spell of Darkness, while waiting for Eli Willard to bring more oil to light the lamps, the Stay Morons grow restless in the dark, suffering from insomnia. As a result they become incredible storytellers: "Realizing that their

insomnia was hopeless, the people sat up in the dark, telling to one another terrifying ghost stories, which did nothing for their insomnia but gave them something to do in the dark" (176). The activity keeps the citizens occupied until all of those stories are told and retold. Finally, the "Stay Morons began to create new stories, fantastic tales that stretched credulity beyond bounds" (176). Once they have had enough, that is, when the stories no longer entertain them, they make up new ones. The process is repeated with Eli Willard, who better represents what happens with readers of novels when the stories no longer entertain. At first, "he was captivated, so that when daylight came and the people stopped telling stories and went to work, he decided to stay for another night to hear more stories" (177). Soon thereafter, though, Eli Willard becomes bored:

> What had seemed fabulous and fanciful in the stories now struck him merely as long-windedness. What had seemed clever and imaginative now seemed only silly. In the middle of an exceptionally long and silly story, he left town, using his kerosine lamps to light his way. (178)

Just as Eli Willard leaves town when the stories of the Stay Morons no longer serve as a means to interest him, the reader of a novel will quit reading after becoming bored and move on to another book or activity.

In addition to providing Stay More as a wonderful place that readers can go, Donald Harington has a special awareness of his audience's needs. He knows that his readers are out there in much the same way as Vernon Ingledew becomes aware of the people outside of the novel, Architecture, when he puts on Eli Willard's gold chronometer: "As Vernon puts the watch on his wrist, he becomes aware of us" (357). It is this awareness of "us" that also signals Donald Harington's acknowledgement of his audience. Donald Harington also seems to be aware of his readers of Lightning Bug, especially during "Ending" when Dawny is lost. What actually happens to Dawny? Is he ever found? Instead of Donald Harington answering those questions directly in the novel, the reader is left to his own devices to ponder the whereabouts of Dawny. If Dawny is the ideal audience, then perhaps he is with those readers. As Wolfang Iser states, "no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes. If he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating his reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text" (282). Donald Harington allows his readers to be involved by leaving part of the picture to the imaginations of the readers.

Readers need to hear stories as much as tellers need to tell them. From the sounds of human voices in speech to

the songs of the insects and frogs to the flashes of lightning bugs, all are sounds and signals that attempt to communicate messages and help locate what is lost or wanted. This is true of the listeners of stories within the novel as well as the readers of the novel itself. The sense of satisfaction a story provides for its audience fills a certain void that would remain empty were it not for the stories that exist to fill them. Since art imitates life, and fiction is art, readers yearn to and can experience some things in life vicariously through literature. Readers and stories have continued to exist for centuries, and neither group is showing signs of subsiding. This proves the human need to know or be entertained, and the desire to hear stories that accomplish those purposes.

In The Architecture of the Arkansas Ozarks, the lightning bugs are once again at the heart of the Stay More story. Right before his death, Eli Willard gives ten year old Hank Ingledew, future father of the last born male Ingledew, his gold chronometer to be passed down to that son along with Eli Willard's story, which he tells Hank, who thinks it "was a very interesting story" (287). Right before Eli Willard finishes telling the story, as Hank is straining to hear, the old man dies. But first, because it had gotten so late, "The lightning bugs had all come out and filled the air" (287). That Eli Willard dies before he can finish telling Hank the whole story is perhaps significant in that

the Stay More story does not end with Eli Willard, nor will it end with Hank Ingledew or his son either. Like the story of Tish and Sam in Cockroaches, the stories of Stay More continue, and so do the flashes of the lightning bugs.

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