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Cover Page Footnote

I want to thank Marvin Jones for his patience and I want to thank Professor Tanya Perkins for her invaluable advice.

The Short Story Cycle and How Anger Can Empower

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Abstract

Scholars miscategorized the short story cycle by arguing that short-story cycles are novels and that they cannot stand alone. The stories in this tryptic cycle were created to be read together as well as read as stand-alone stories. The collection in this cycle are not novels; however, they do fit into a larger pattern of shared experiences, a shared world view, a region, a family, individuals, or in the case of this cycle, a house. The image of the house reoccurs throughout the cycle, as a physical manifestation of repressed anger. This ties into James Nagel's theory that the short story cycle is unified through narrative and characterized by shared motifs (Nagel, 2001). Furthermore, James Nagel, who is a scholar of the short story cycle, reveals that the short story cycle is not new to western prose. According to Nagel, there were writers in ancient Greece known as the Cyclic Poets, who wrote supplemental stories covering Homer's account of the Trojan War (Nagel, 2001).

Further, Jennifer Smith, who is also a scholar of the short story cycle, argues that the short story cycle appeals to the American sense of individualism and pluralism (Smith, 2017). Still, the cycle takes place in a house with strangers connected only by owning or renting the home. Moreover, the house, because of its history of rage, which permeates the walls, leaves the impression that it is Noah's grandparents who haunt the house.

These stories also include episodic explorations of anger and the way it can either be sharpened, vindicated, or empowered.

Keywords: Anger, Rage, Empowerment, Short Story Cycle, Tryptic Cycle

A short story cycle is a different genre than the novel. The most crucial difference between the novel and the short story cycle is that novels have chapters that cannot stand alone as stories by themselves. However, in this tryptic, the stories are stand-alone and are not novels, as previously believed by some scholars and publishers. Scholars such as James Nagel indicate that the stories in a sequence may encompass a region, a family, or an individual (Nagel, 2001).

According to Nagel, "a short story cycle can be unified by a consistent narrative voice, a setting, and a coalescing motif, which can fit into a larger pattern of a shared experience, world view," or in the case of this tryptic, rage, which has settled within the confines of a house. The image of the house reoccurs throughout the cycle, as a physical manifestation of repressed anger. Still, these sequences take place in a house with strangers connected only by owning or renting the home. Furthermore, the house, because of its history of rage, which permeates the walls, leaves the impression that it is Noah's grandparents who haunt the house. This ties into James Nagel's theory that the short story cycle is unified through narrative and characterized its diversity (Nagel, 2001).

Still, the cycle takes place in a house with strangers connected only by owning or renting the home. Moreover, the house, because of its history of rage, which permeates the walls, leaves the impression that it is Noah's grandparents who haunt the house. These stories also include episodic exploration of anger and the way it can either be sharpened, vindicated, or empowered.

Jennifer Smith argued, "the short story cycle rose and proliferated because its form compellingly renders the uncertainties that emerge from the twin pillars of modern American culture: individualism and pluralism. Short story cycles reflect how individuals adapt to change" (Smith, 2001).

Nagel also maintained that when Faulkner used the short story cycle in 1919, he was proclaimed unique and innovative. They ignored the fact that this genre predates Faulkner by several thousand years (Nagel, 2001)

According to James Nagel, the short story cycle has existed for centuries. There are tales written by ancient Greek writers, referred to as Cyclic Poets, who wrote some supplemental text with new material offering different accounts of Homer and the Trojan War. In contrast, the stories in this cycle explore the different styles of anger presented by the protagonists and the various methods they use of overcoming the obstacles that anger presents.

These stories also include episodic exploration of anger and the way it can either be sharpened, vindicated, or empowered. This short story cycle examines the effect of anger on the body and the human psyche.

The influence of this paper was the short story cycles written by Ernest Hemingway, Louise Erdrich, and Susan Minot. This cycle is different because of the episodic exploration of rage. Anger is an emotion, which we all feel, and it all too often hinders well-laid plans and usually works against us. Plus, too much anger festers and burns within our psyches and grows past all proportion. In short, anger can spread like cancer. Thus, the title, *Anger Metastasizes* (Pratt, 2014).

This short story cycle is connected by the rage of Noah Weems and his house, located at 826 N. Rockwell in Chicago, Illinois. In the initial story entitled *Pretty Girls Make Graves*, Noah

Weems inherited the home from his abusive grandparents, and it was they who installed and used the iron brackets and chains that festooned the walls and hung from the ceilings, and clanged in the night for Noah. The grandparents used the chains and cuffs on vagrants, runaways. However, when thwarted, they used Noah throughout his adolescence. Their callous behavior reduced Noah's once joyous childhood to one overcast by clouds of misery. Until to his great relief, the grandparents died. Noah spent many years consumed by rage, and as he was unable to express his anger in healthy terms, he took the pain out on himself. Noah's hatred turned into depression, which in turn prompted Noah to self-harm.

While anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility. It is a primary human emotion as elemental as happiness, sadness, or anxiety. Further, the sentiment is tied to the fight, flight, or freeze response of the sympathetic nervous system and is a natural part of being human (Anger, 2020).

It is helpful to think of ways to combat anger that are in accord with healthy living rather than feelings of regret. Anger is an aspect of depression. Because depression is anger turned inward, it is crucial to overcome depression by expressing anger whenever possible and in favorable terms.

According to Psychology Today, (2020) as anger never dissipates, it can injure a person. This response is why such a passionate response is nearly always thought to be harmful and destructive. However, anger, in and of itself, if not violently acted upon, is instructive, not destructive. This sometimes makes anger a good thing. However, for such an offensive emotion to have a positive effect, a person must first learn to manage their feelings. Sometimes, the right therapist can help (Pratt, 2014).

Noah would have benefited by such an intervention. Instead, Noah's rage was turned inward:

Twelve-year-old Noah sat inside of the narrow bathroom. The naked bulb dangled from the high ceiling, making shadows that crept across the tiled floor. The house sighed, a faint caress of consonants against his ears. The silent child's forehead wrinkled as he gripped the razor blade between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He pressed the steel razor against his pale flesh. He dragged the edge across his forearm—three straight lines. Noah smiled as the red bubbled, swelled, threatened to flow past the wad of pink tissue paper he pressed against the wound. Next, he wiped the blade, then doused it and his arm with rubbing alcohol. Before Noah replaced the edge, he had held it level with his right eye. Noah whispered to the cold steel. "I control you. I can do anything to you. I can toss you away like the garbage you are. Nobody would give a damn." Then he carefully slid the blade in among its dull gray siblings. After that, he unfolded the sleeve of his blue flannel shirt, lowering it past his bicep, and buttoned it around his wrist.

Furthermore, too much anger is toxic, resulting in diseases of all types. Violence is physically arousing and has damaging physiological correlates, such as muscle tension, headaches, decreased mental clarity, and clogged arteries (Shinnerer, 2020).

Even after Noah was grown, he continued to reside in his grandparent's house. Noah was plagued with images and impressions that the house, because of its painful history of rage, was sentient. This made the haunting by either the elderly couple or their sad victims well within the realm of possibilities. Noah's impotent grandfather and domineering grandmother continued to terrorize Noah even after they died, and Noah believed the chains were as alive as they. It was their ghosts that affected his dreams.

Anger Metastasizes is a short story cycle of three stories authored in 2019. This cycle is representative of unmitigated anger. The three main protagonists within this short story cycle, Noah in *Pretty Girls Make Graves*, Blanché in *Mindfulness*, and Cheyenne in *Cheyenne's Garden*, are at different points in their lives consumed by rage, an emotion that they struggle to contain. These stories also include episodic exploration of anger and the depression it can cause. The connection between the protagonists in the three-story cycle is alienation, loneliness, and powerlessness and unexpressed rage (Goggins, 2019)

To stop the cycle of anger, a person has to be in tune with the early warning signs. When violent passion overcomes a person, blood flows to the hands and feet, making it easier to strike at the perceived enemy. Heart rates increase, a rush of adrenaline kicks in, and the body prepares for forceful action. There is a surge of chemicals called catecholamines (cat e chol a mine), which causes a quick one-time rush of energy to allow for one brief shot at physical action. In the background, another batch of chemicals, including cortisol, is released through the adrenocortical branch into the nervous system that creates a backdrop of physical readiness. This emotional one surge can last for days and keeps the brain in a particular state of over-arousal (Anger, 2020).

Interestingly, there are four types of anger. The kind of madness relevant to Noah is anger directed inwardly at oneself. This passion makes one seethe and burn. It festers, and after enough emotion is turned inward, it eventually leads to inappropriate angry outbursts at underserving and unsuspecting people. However, it is more often turned inward and leads to self-damaging behavior, such as cutting (Shinnerer, 2020).

Yet, after many years of repression, Noah's inward battle with anger is released. When Syringa leaned down, her hair brushed Noah's face; her round hip poised by his left hand, he took a deep breath, and while he expelled, he stuck the needle into her ample flesh and released the contents. She yelped once, tried to force her elbow into his chest, but she seized, her torso stiffened. Her arms and legs akimbo, each limb working independently. Abruptly she fell over onto Noah's meager lap. Her head faced him, mouth, and eyes open and rolled upward so that he could only see white balls between the fluttering lids. Noah grabbed her head and wrapped both arms around it. He slapped his left hand over her mouth, while with the fingers of his right hand, he pinched her nostrils closed. She bucked, trembled, and tried to pitch him away, but Noah held on and rode her like a rodeo clown. After she was gone, he rolled her heavy weight off of his body and onto the floor. A boom of thunder drew his attention to the window. Now it was dawn, the pearl grey sky momentarily blinded him, but still, he raised his eyes toward heaven. It was remarkable he thought that he remained bound to the house.

There are other types of anger besides anger directed at oneself. Some anger is directed at others. This was Cheyenne's anger style. Cheyenne had an antipathy toward men. She was advised by her aunt not to marry. Although at the time, all of her frenemies flashed diamonds and wondered aloud. What was Cheyenne waiting for? Also, Cheyenne was afraid of being left behind, so she latched onto the first man who told her she was pretty. "As cute as a speckled pup." He said. Cheyenne was charmed when Adrian lowered his bulk and rested awkwardly on one knee. Then after it was too late, she realized her mistake. Still, she blamed Adrian for his own death.

Cheyenne had turned back to the counter to chop vegetables while she enjoyed the movie of making the scar on Lewis's corpse, as it played behind her eyes. Suddenly she spun around, held the butcher knife in the space between her and her corpulent husband. Cheyenne was about to speak, but the taller black man had panicked and grabbed for the blade with his left hand, the cutting edge resting in his palm. She tried to grab it back, the instrument slashed his palm. He unwittingly balled his fist and struck her hard in her jaw. Cheyenne's head rocked back; she staggered a bit but did not fall.

"You hit me," she said. The sound echoed and expanded, crept up the walls and into the rafters of the attic where the greedy shadows sucked them away.

"Damned right," slipped from his lips before his brain caught up with his emotions. The blood made a plunking sound as it dripped to the floor between them.

Cheyenne said, "You are a goddamned bastard." Her face a mosaic of red and pale. The print of his fingers slowly fading.

"Blasphemy," he said, so emphatically that Cheyenne was startled. The young woman's stomach seemed to fold and clench. Meanwhile, the blood which fell from his right hand produced a flat plopping splatter as it dripped between them. It stained the tan grout on the tiled floor with lines of red, the thick fluid ran in every direction. Adrian made his left hand into a weak, awkward fist. He raised his arm and tried to strike her. Cheyenne deflected the blow with her left arm, and using her right hand, drove the long-bladed kitchen knife deep into the left side of his chest.

It was an undiagnosed bipolar disorder, which caused Cheyenne's rage. This type of anger is the second type, which is anger directed outward. It is destructive and frequently leads to

episodic periods of turmoil. This type of violence is typically displaced onto an innocent person, at an inappropriate time and in the wrong manner. It was bipolar anger that led Cheyenne to murder her first husband, Adrian (Shinnerer, 2020).

It was Cheyenne's prison therapist at Dixon Women's prison a rotund woman, who handed Cheyenne a small gift-wrapped package. Inside was a small, yellow basket with six brightly decorated worry dolls. Cheyenne hid a sneer with the heel of her left hand when the rotund woman explained that she was to tell one what troubled her, put it away into the basket, and as she overcame these obstacles, she could remove one from the basket. The catch was Cheyenne was only allowed six worries at a time. One for each doll. Cheyenne thought it was bull, but she liked their cheerful colors and the handwoven wicker basket. It was the end of the second year when she opened the basket and stared at the dolls. Then she whispered and was soon regularly confiding in them and adding and subtracting from the basket. Until one morning, at the end of three years, all six dolls were outside of the basket at the same time. It was that week that both her therapist and the prison psychiatrist claimed her rehabilitated and no longer a danger to society. The therapist blamed the dolls, the shrink her therapeutic intervention; however, Cheyenne did not care. She was free.

The third type of anger examined in this short story cycle is Blanché's type of hyper-emotion, which most closely resembles disappointment and exists in tandem with sadness and sometimes involves a judgment that has not been met (Shinnerer, 2020).

Because Blanché's life was filled with disappointment, she sought enlightenment at Safe Haven Yoga. After several sessions, Blanché's Yogi, YuYu, a tiny, vivacious, Asian woman placed her right hand on Blanché's forehead, and with her left hand, she covered Blanché's abdomen. Both hands were as warm as a coal fire.

She said, “The seat of your anger is here and here. You *must, you must* release this pain to the universe, or you will harm yourself.”

Although Blanché tried to stem her rage, which draped her psyche like a caul. She was physically unable to let go. After all, what would she be without her anger? Even though it was painful, she thrived on it. It burned like acid, but the rage was needed to prop her up. It was as if by letting go, she would shrivel and blow away like a discarded brown paper bag captured by the wind.

YuYu said. “This what is meant by mindfulness. Paying attention to what goes into \ the body—thoughts, as well as food. Remember, all flesh is perishable, and all we have is time borrowed from a stingy God. Obsession, whatever the drive, sex, danger, or overeating, is anger. Find the source of your anger and defeat it. If not, it will follow you unto death. Anger never goes away it--metastasizes.”

Although Blanché’s anger clung to her, she hung on to YuYu's counsel until one day, she found a solution.

Jaysen had said, “You have fallen for everything else. The engagement ring.” Even in his precarious position, he still found the nerve to sneer.

“What do you mean by that?” said Blanché.

“Are you enjoying it?”

“Yep.” Blanché looked lovingly at her first diamond. She loved to play the light over the surface of the stone.

He leaned forward to rest his arms on the woman beneath him, and he said. “It is a fifty dollar cubic zirconia.”

Blanché gasped; her heart heaved one huge thump then rested in her chest like a stone.

She said. “That’s okay, you mutha...Hey, let’s call the paramedics.” Her voice was thin, brittle, and brutal.

She sidled over closer to the bed but remained beyond either person’s reach. With a flourish, she pressed the numbers 911. Then she pressed speaker.

“911 what is your emergency?”

She said. “Good day, officer. I have a problem here.”

“What’s your problem?”

“Well, officer, it appears that my paramour and his paramour have melded, sweetheart,” Blanché said.

“Your what, did what?”

“My boyfriend is stuck to a bimbo.”

“Hey,” Katrina said.

“What do you mean stuck?”

“Oh, I think I’ll leave that guess for EMT’s. She winked at the two people glued to each other. Blanché’s investment in crazy glue had been a success. She glanced at the night table and saw three beers were missing from a six-pack. She said. “Hurry.” She was barely able to wheeze out the last few words because now, Blanché was bent over and shaking with laughter.

After the paramedics left, she bagged all of Jaysen’s clothes to donate to Good Will. She threw out his sundries, tossing the balls of socks one by one into the garbage can. She called Handy Andy the Locksmith and had every lock in the house changed.

She left alone the damage made to the steel bar that was supposed the guard the back door, but, at least, Jaysen could not re-enter. She hummed while she mopped and waxed the floor.

It was a week before Christmas, and the contented woman heard knocking, then banging finally, Jaysen called her name. She ignored him. Blanché, having cleaned house, was done with foolishness. She was alone but not lonely, enjoying her freedom. It was cloudy, and by 6 pm it was dark. Blanché sat before the big picture window in the living room, but all she saw was her reflection imprinted on the snow.

Feelings of fear and sadness are indeed uncomfortable, and people tend to avoid these emotions because they make them feel vulnerable and out of control. Since people tend to avoid these feelings in any way they can, one way is to shift into anger mode subconsciously. However, anger provides a surge of energy. This energy can be redirected, then that person can use this surge of energy to help themselves by confronting the object or objects that inspire fear and rage (Shinnerer, 2020).

Then rather than being vulnerable and helpless, they can make a stand to disperse these uncomfortable feelings and channel them as a force for making moral and positive changes. However, the objective is not to allow anger to overwhelm because too much passion can be counterproductive; regardless, with the right incentive, anger can empower (Pratt, 2014).

Each latter inhabitant of Noah's grandparents' house had different ways to deal with the rage soaked into the walls of 826 N. Rockwell, and each embraced a different response to Noah's house. In *Pretty Girls Make Graves*, Noah was driven to violence, helped along by the influence of his lover. In *Mindfulness*, Blanché pretended not to notice the moans and groans of the ghostly

inhabitants and convinced herself that the clinking chains were either the chittering of rodents trapped within the walls of the house or raccoon claws clicking against the attic floor. She did not acknowledge the shadows which lurked over her head when she tried to rest. She instead blamed Jaysen, her erstwhile lover, for the disharmony, and after taking action to rid herself of Jaysen, the haunting was less noticeable. In *Cheyenne's Garden*, Cheyenne did not believe in ghosts, and her pragmatic nature and firm disbelief dispersed their influence. After that, Cheyenne lived at 826 N. Rockwell in peace.

The short story cycle has existed for centuries, and the idea that they are stand-alone stories as well as grouped within a sequence is not new. Even though they share many common elements with novels, each having a beginning, a middle, and an end, rising action, one or two well-developed characters, and a satisfying conclusion. However, the short story cycle is an entirely different genre. Most short story cycles are connected by common themes such as myths, ideas, points of view, or settings (Nagel, 2001).

What unifies this short story cycle is a haunted house and the common elements of the main character's powerlessness, anger, and rage. This emotion can be obstructive and destructive, but it is can also be instructive. Anger can also empower.

Although the plots in this short story cycle share the common features of anger and rage, they are separate and unique stand-alone stories and are as relevant for today's society as Homer was for the Greek cyclic poets.

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