DESOLATION BLUES:
THE GOTHIC TRESPASS IN THE LIFE AND SONGWRITING OF TENNESSEE BLUES MUSICIAN RAY CASHMAN

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A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Folklore in the American Studies Department.

Chapel Hill
2017

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ABSTRACT

Victor Bouvéron: Desolation blues: The Gothic trespass in the life and songwriting of Tennessee blues musician Ray Cashman
(Under the direction of William Ferris)

This thesis explores the pervading feeling of the Gothic in the life and songwriting of Tennessee blues musician Ray Cashman. I argue that Cashman emotionally responds to the South through the framework of the Gothic to assert his identity as a white southern working-class male. As a reader, writer and performer, he trespasses the lines of race and class. The ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina between 2015 and 2017 led me to reflect on the intriguing relationship between blues, southern Gothic literature and white working-class culture in the South. The songs written by Cashman often express a feeling of desolation, bleakness and decay, invoke a sense of nostalgia for a bygone time, or describe eerie landscapes and supernatural presences. Cashman also retells southern Gothic stories, like "Snake Feast," inspired by Harry Crews's *A Feast of Snakes*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project started the day I met Bill Ferris in Lille, France, in 2013. Bill encouraged me to apply to UNC-Chapel Hill and introduced me to the field of folklore. It changed my life.

The success of my research depended on the support, kindness and generosity of Ray Cashman. It was a great honor and a privilege to work with such a gifted musician. I was always welcomed in his home and felt like family. I am forever indebted to Ray.

I would like to offer my gratitude to my consultants John Hermann, Mike McKee, Jameela Dallis, Tom Franklin, and Dave Lippman. The generous donation of their time and their willingness to share their thoughts on my project is invaluable.

I am thankful to my wonderful thesis committee Bill Ferris, Glenn Hinson, Crystal O'Leary-Davidson for their guidance, feedback, and insights.

This research would not have been possible without François de Crastes, who was the first person to introduce me to Cashman. It would absolutely not have been possible without the financial support of the Center for the Study of the American South (CSAS), director Kenneth Jenkins and associate director Patrick Horn, and of the D.K Wilgus Fellowship. This financial support allowed me to conduct extensive fieldwork in Tennessee and North Carolina in the summer of 2016. The CSAS also invited Cashman to perform at the Music on the Porch event on September 22, 2016. I am grateful to the American Studies Department, Patricia Sawin and Bernie Hermann, who helped to bring Cashman to Chapel Hill.

I would like to thank my folklore cohort (Zoe Van Buren, Rachel Garringer, Anna Kenada, Emily Ridder-Beardsley), Joseph Decosimo, and visiting scholar Iryna Voloshyna for sharing their thoughts on my work.

I would also like to thank Aaron Smithers from the Wilson Library, who found the collection of essays *Undead Souths* that became my personal Bible for this work.

Many thanks to Heidi Camp from the Durham Humanities Center and to my peer Kimber Thomas for inviting me at the conference "The Novel Sounds" in 2016 and 2017.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends (special thanks to Douglas McDaniel for driving with me to Tennessee and Mississippi in 2015 and 2016), and my parents for their unwavering support.

I learned a lot from each of you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

From southern Gothic literature to southern Gothic music

"Frankenstein's monster is not only alive, it also sings."

Isabella Van Elferen, *Gothic Music*, 2012.

The Gothic literary genre is considered to have originated in England with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764. Following in his footsteps were Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). First seen as decadent and immoral, Gothic novels became popular in the 19th century, from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). American Gothic literature is rooted in this European tradition. It is considered that Charles Brockden Brown was the writer who "most thoroughly founded the Gothic tradition in American fiction with the novels *Wieland*, *Ormond*, *Edgar Huntly*, and *Arthur Mervyn*, written between 1798 and 1800" (Lloyd-Smith 2004, 29). Following in his footsteps were John Neal, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Kirk Paulding, William Gilmore Simms, and Edgar Allan Poe. All these authors focus on the supernatural, the sinister, the grotesque, and the feeling of decay. This literary tradition then continued in the 1930s in the American South, carried out by William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers, to name only a few.

While scholars often address the Gothic in terms of architecture, literature, and film, few have explored the rich, complex influence of the Gothic in southern music. I trace back this connection to the early 1980s in Athens, Georgia, with the rock band R.E.M and singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt. The lyrics of R.E.M and Chesnutt reflect the writing of William

Figure 1. Ray Cashman (right) and Victor Bouvéron, Radio Campus Lille, France, March 2015. ©François de Crastes.

Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, two iconic southern Gothic writers. For instance, R.E.M refers to O'Connor's short story "Why Do the Heathens Rage Behind the Firehouse?" (1963) and creates the character Peewee in "Oddfellows Local 151" (1987). Many contemporary southern musicians are influenced by Gothic literature, including North Carolina-based band Delta Rae, and singer-songwriters Adia Victoria from South Carolina and Ray Cashman from southeast Texas. Cashman now lives in Nolensville, Tennessee.

My research focuses on Ray Cashman, whom I first met in Lille, France, in 2015 (figure 1). I interviewed him for "Bluesland," the weekly blues radio program I produced for ten years in the Lille metropolitan area, France. [1] I was introduced to Cashman by François de Crastes, a staff member of the music label Mauvaise Foi Records.[2] Crastes and Cashman graciously accepted my invitation to come on "Bluesland" the last day of March. Coming from Tennessee, Cashman was on a promotional tour for his latest album *Desolation* (Knick Knack Records, 2015). For an hour, he performed a wide range of songs from his repertoire, including "Desolation," "Tennessee Blues," and "Whiskey, Weed and Women." During our conversation, he explained that his songs were inspired by his life in the American South, his travels on the road, and by southern Gothic literature. I was intrigued by this convergence between the blues and the Gothic genre. It prompted me to reflect on the complex interplay of music and literature in the American South. I brought this project with me a few months later, when I decided to pursue an M.A in folklore at UNC-Chapel Hill. What was initially a research paper for my Southern Music class with Professor William Ferris became my Master's thesis.

[1] Bouvéron, Victor, "Bluesland", broadcast on Radio Campus Lille 106,6 FM on March 31st 2015 (www.campuslille.com).
[2] http://www.mauvaisefoirecords.com

I argue that Cashman emotionally responds to the South through the framework of the Gothic to assert his identity as a white southern working-class male.

Methodology: fieldwork in Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina

Between 2015 and 2017, I visited Cashman a number of times in his home of Nolensville, Tennessee, located about fifteen miles from Nashville. These fieldtrips allowed me to write an ethnographic study of this lovely rural town of 5,800 residents. I acknowledged the "sense of place," this unique relation between the artist and his environment. It was a pivotal experience to gain a better understanding of his music, placed in its proper context. Since our first encounter, we have built a strong collaborative relationship that has become a close friendship. This bond of trust allowed me to share his daily life with his wife Cindy and ten-year-old son Dylan. I recorded hours of conversations and a dozen of songs at his home, and took countless photographs. Cashman drove me around the area, from the antique stores of Nolensville to the Confederate Cemetery in Franklin and the Johnny Cash museum in Nashville. We shared homemade food and drinks, played music by a fire camp, attended a great concert of singer-songwriter Kevin Gordon at the Spot 5 club in Nashville, and listened the Hill Country blues of Robert Belfour on the CD player of his truck. During all this time spent together, Cashman shared stories about his life in the South and spoke extensively about his songwriting process.

Throughout my fieldwork, I gained relevant expertise from other musicians and writers who relate to the Gothic. The city of Franklin is only eight miles from Nolensville, and many musicians live in the area. Widespread Panic keyboardist John Hermann is one of them. In 2014, he wrote an impressive paper exploring the influence of southern Gothic literature on the music of singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt.[3] Hermann graciously agreed to

[3] Hermann, John. 2014. *The Life and Songwriting of Vic Chesnutt*. The University of Mississippi.

meet with me on May 2016, following my stay at Cashman's house. We had breakfast at the Mercantile Deli. For over an hour, Hermann brought insights on Vic Chesnutt and southern Gothic, that he presents as "a reaction against the romantic notions of the South" in the 1930s. We also talked extensively about the complexity of the South and Flannery O'Connor, who has become "one of his favorite writers" (Hermann 2016).

Figure 2. Andalusia Farm, Home of Flannery O'Connor, Milledgeville, Georgia, February 2017.

On January 2017, following Hermann's recommendation, I visited Andalusia Farm in Milledgeville, Georgia (figure 2). Flannery O'Connor lived in Andalusia, where she got inspiration for many of her stories, from 1951 until her death in 1964. I found myself enthralled by the place that fully embodies the Gothic. Andalusia reanimates the undead with the preservation of historic structures, including the barn, the milk-processing shed, the pump house and the peacock enclosure. The ghost of O'Connor lurks in every room of the house. In the bedroom, which contains the original bed, Morris chair, and oak bookcases. In the kitchen, where the martini set laid down on the top of the fridge. In the study, where stands on the desk the typewriter that she once used to write her stories. I took the hiking trail around the farmhouse under sunny skies. I walked along the ponds, through the woods, soaking up the atmosphere. Writer Peter Guralnick stressed the importance of going to places to feel the emotions. While writing the biography of Sam Cooke and Sam Phillips, he explained that he "drove around, went to the places" to gain a "sense of certainty."[4] Like Guralnick, I felt the need for a sense of certainty. I needed to be sure that I knew what I was writing about. Through my travels in the South, I got a sense of this distinguishing feeling expressed by many writers in their fiction and pervading Cashman's music.

[4] Guralnick, Peter. 2017. "Novel Sounds II. American Fiction in the Age of Rock and Roll", conference given at the National Humanities Center in Durham.

I included in this work the expertise of Mike McKee, drummer and percussionist of the band Delta Rae from Durham, North Carolina. Delta Rae appears on the "Southern Gothic Music" playlist created by the digital music service Spotify. I was particularly drawn to their song "Bottom on the River," released on their debut album *Carry the Fire* in 2012. On a hot sunny day of May 2016, I attended their show at the Civic Plaza in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where I interviewed McKee. He emphasized his appeal for rhythms and sounds, defining the term "southern Gothic music" by performing rhythms on the table we were sitting at. In many songs, he uses "clinging chains and stomping feet to replicate these old time sounds and brings them up to the modern," adding that "the metal chains bring back to the old chain gangs in the South" (McKee 2016). He mentioned Tom Waits as a major influence, whose albums "are nothing but percussion sounds, very spooky, very scary. It's awesome, especially *Mule Variations.*"

A southern Gothic journey in three steps

In my first chapter, building on the expertise of Cashman, Hermann and McKee, I attempt to define the controversial term "Gothic." The Gothic is located in a pervasive feeling that rests in the landscape and history, but also in a set of actions that are subversive. I focus primary on the murky feeling that pervades the Gothic in the arts, starting with the emergence of the "French art" in the 12th century, which was labeled "Gothic architecture" during the Renaissance era. I take a close look at Gothic literature in Europe and America from the 18th century until today, and examine the influence of Edward Burke's concept of the sublime and the beautiful on Gothic writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Harry Crews and Tom Franklin.

Figure 3. The Gothic in Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

My second chapter studies the historical, social and economic context in which Cashman evolved, from his upbringing in southeast Texas to his life in western Tennessee. I analyze how Cashman, an independent carpenter and a bluesman, experiences the South through the lens of the Gothic. The sense of place imbues his music. He wrote hundreds of songs based on his experience of living in the South and traveling like a modern times blues troubadour. In his songs and live performances, Cashman constructs different personas. Therefore, he adopts the "unreliable narrator" technique that Edgar Allan Poe is thought to have invented. I highlight the importance of southern Gothic literature—especially the subgenre called "Grit Lit"—in his songwriting process. These literary modes deepen his personal relationship with the South and resonate with his identity as a white working-class southerner. That said, Cashman does not only value the voice of the white working-class. He also carries forward the tradition of the blues, originally the expression of the black working-class community. I attempt to understand how Cashman cultivates these two different but complementary identities.

My third chapter specifically explores the pervading feeling of the Gothic in Cashman's songwriting. To undertake this task, I selected a body of songs that Cashman released between 2004 and 2016, including "The Ghost of Fred," "Desolation," "Dead Man's Cadillac," and "Nana's Diner," to name only a few. Through these songs, Cashman asserts his will of being outside of the mainstream. He tells ghost stories to express a sense of nostalgia and trespasses sexual boundaries. He reverses social, political and racial conventions. I also look at how songs retell, in whole or in part, a work of literature. I analyze "Snake Feast," inspired by Harry Crews's *A Feast of Snakes*, and "Evangeline," a song that centers on a character in Tom Franklin's novel *Smonk.* The lyrics of every song are attached as an appendix to provide a comprehensive overview of his songwriting. The visual art that illustrates Cashman's album covers is also reminiscent of the Gothic aesthetic. An old house,

a snake, evocative ruins, dice, and dancing women are portrayed on the covers of *Black and Blues* (2005), *Snake Feast* (2010), *Desolation* (2015), and *Slow Drag* (2016).

Figure 4. Ray Cashman playing by the fire with his wife Cindy, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

Figure 5. Cashman's "Music Room", Nolensville, Tennessee, October 2015.

CHAPTER 1

What is Gothic? Feeling and agency of the Gothic in literature and music

The rosemary nods upon the grave
The lily lolls upon the wave
Wrapping the fog about its breasts
The ruin molders into rest.

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Sleeper,” 1831.

Figure 6. McGavock Confederate Cemetery, Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

Defining the Gothic is challenging. In architecture, a Gothic building can be clearly identified with its typical pointed arch and ribbed vault, exemplified by the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in France and the Milan Cathedral in Italy. In literature, visual arts and music, Gothic is more undefined. Citing the works of scholars Teresa Goddu and Cornelia Bailey, literary scholars Eric Hary Anderson, Taylor Hagood and Daniel Cross Turner identify the core southern Gothic themes as including "haunted houses, evil villains, ghosts, gloomy landscape, madness, terror, suspense, horror," and "tangled genealogies, subterranean flights, incest, doubles, supernatural incursions and, of course, hauntings" (Anderson, Hagood and Turner 2015, 4) Though it is worth exploring the themes in Gothic narratives, a discussion in terms of sensibility and agency has proved to be even more relevant.

All the consultants I interviewed have their own ways of perception, feelings and tools of knowledge to define the Gothic. However different the taste is, they all agreed on a certain texture. "Southern Gothic is a sub-genre of a sub-genre, nobody really knows what it is," admits Mike McKee, drummer of Delta Rae. "It's not like: 'oh, it's this very thing'. You know when you hear it. For me, it's swampy. My expertise" (McKee 2016). In this statement, McKee gets at the heart of the issue of defining the Gothic. "You know when you hear it" means you need to experience it—the most subjective engagement. Every musician would have a different interpretation of Gothic. Widespread Panic keyboard player John Hermann, for instance, draws a compelling parallel between southern Gothic and the feeling of nationalism that arose after the attacks on the American soil in 2001:

> To me, nationalism can be considered Gothic. Those feelings of nationalism arose after 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Politicians played to the hilt. It's very scary when you see people marching off to war and waving flags. There was a big nationalistic movement in the South that kind of went away now. The difference is that nationalism in the South used to mean the South. In 2003, nationalism was the South aligned with America as a whole. Everything that happened after 2003 divided the country, and we're still dealing with these divisions. (Hermann, 2016)

Figure 7. Delta Rae performing in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2016.

Though the sensibility of the Gothic inherently depends on one's perception, as expressed by McKee and Hermann, it has always conveyed a certain set of feelings. From the Gothic fiction that emerged in the 18th century through southern Gothic literature of the 1930s-1960s to the songwriting of Cashman today, Gothic literacy has always captured a pervasive feeling of bleakness, desolation and decay. It expresses a strong sense of solitude, vagrancy and potential violence. The description of a mysterious and eerie atmosphere often evoked a supernatural presence. The frontiers between past and present, dream and reality, sanity and madness, are blurry. This ambiguity leads the narrator in a state of dizziness and confusion, anxieties and fears.

When asked about the meaning of the Gothic, Cashman drew a compelling parallel with the hardships of life, bad luck and superstition:

> In a lot of these stories, the characters are put through a lot of hardships. Not necessarily scary, but hardships of life, and bad circumstances, and a lot of bad luck. The belief they have luck, things they can't control. People here are very superstitious. They believe if you walk under a ladder you will have many years of bad luck. I forget how many. I walked under too many ladders! [Laughing] Broken mirrors, black cats, the numbers on a dice... I think it [the Gothic] has a lot to do with superstition. Maybe there's a little bit more superstition in the South than in the North. (Cashman 2016)

A year after this definition of the Gothic, Cashman added that it conveys a feeling of "desperation," usually expressed by the narrator. "Desperation leads to excitement," he said. "People act differently when they are desperate. They desperately need something. You're not going to act like this if you don't need it." In this quote, Cashman describes the Gothic in terms of a set of feelings and actions that impact one's life. In his reference work on Gothic, scholar Allan Lloyd-Smith also locates the Gothic in sensibility and agency: "the Gothic has an interest in extreme states and actions" (Lloyd-Smith 2004, 6). These "extreme actions"

often lead to transgression. Gothic writers tend to defy conventions of the time by trespassing a myriad of frontiers—social, political, religious, and sexual. They explore the extreme and the taboo, turning social conventions upside down. The performance of extreme actions is intended to reverse power dynamics. Cashman talks about a situation in which the protagonist cannot control what is going on. The character is making every attempt possible to make a change.

For Cashman, this feeling of desperation leads to excitement. In connecting these two extreme and contrasting emotions, Cashman evokes (consciously or not) the "sublime effect" that was theorized by Edmund Burke.[5] Burke's treatise is crucial to understanding the sensibility of the Gothic, as it deeply influenced Gothic writers in the 18th century.

Gothic sublimity in literature

Burke distinguishes between what he terms "the beautiful"—small, smooth, delicate and attractive—and "the sublime"—vast, gloomy, dark, and threatening. The beautiful produces pleasurable feelings, whereas the sublime evokes a feeling of being overwhelmed by that which has the power to destroy us. Burke argues that the sublime moves us more profoundly than the beautiful. Though the sublime is terrifying, it also delights us. Scholar Snorri Sigurosson insists that Burke's explanation of the sublime "is of great importance to understanding the attraction that the Gothic holds on its audience" (Sigurosson 2009). The sublime effect has pervaded Gothic fiction since the mid-18th century. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe explicitly refers to this concept in "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). As the narrator arrives at the mansion, he describes the building as follows:

> There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into the aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?" (1839, page 299)

[5] The concept of the sublime, attributed to Longinus, was developed by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757.

In the 1930s, the sublime was embraced by William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor. In Faulkner's short story "A Rose for Emily" (1930), the discovery of a corpse both repels and fascinates the people who live in the fictional town of Jefferson, Mississippi:

> For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him (…) Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair. (1930, page 16)

This description of a dead body that closes this story is horrific. Yet, there is something beautiful about it. Notice, for instance, how Faulkner repeats the word "love," reinforcing a poetic quality of the cadaver that lays "in the attitude of an embrace." In so doing, he transforms the corpse into something sublime.

This tension between beauty and horror is still being used by contemporary Gothic writers. In his work, Georgia-born novelist Harry Crews tries to reconcile the beauty and violence in America, especially his novel *A Feast of Snakes* (1976). This was the first American Gothic novel that I read, having learned of it from Cashman, who included it in a list that he sent me of his favorite books. I randomly chose Crews's *A Feast of Snakes*. At that time, I did not know that Cashman had written a song about it. He told me how fascinated he was by the story. "I never read a book like that before", he said. "It's so weird and so intriguing!" I found the story odd and unsettling. The Rattlesnake Roundup constitutes the common thread of a narrative filled with violence, sexual perversion and madness. The atmosphere is eerie, soggy, muddy. The novel's protagonist Joe Lon Mackey, a former high school football player, is an alcoholic, a violent husband, and a rapist. The sheriff Buddy Matlowe is portrayed as a perverted sexual outlaw who does not hesitate to use his power and privilege to sexually assault women, regardless of their race. The book's horrific accounts of

rape, dog fights and murder contrast with beautiful elements that makes the novel sublime. The story takes place, for instance, in Lebeau County. "Lebeau" is French for "the beautiful." One of the sentences that struck me was that of the character named Hard Candy, who said: "I'm pretty as a snake," an oxymoron that exemplifies the notion of the sublime.

Other writers like Cormac McCarthy, Larry Brown, and Tom Franklin embrace the "Gothic sublimity" of the American South. They all have influenced the songwriting of Cashman. They expressed the joys of extreme emotions and, at the same time, the thrills of fearfulness. The sublime effect is often conveyed through the descriptions of eerie landscapes. In this matter, it is crucial to keep in mind that architecture was the starting point of the "Gothic."[6]

The impact of Gothic architecture in literature and music

In all its expressions, the term "Gothic" has always been initially used by critics to express a feeling of rejection. This started with architecture and the description of medieval "Gothic" buildings. During the Renaissance period, the Gothic appeared as a synonym for "barbaric." It was popularized by Italian architect Giorgio Vasari. In his *Lives of the Artists* (1550), he used the word "Gothic" as a derogatory term to describe what he considered "monstrous and barbarous" medieval art. Although of a French origin, Vasari mistakenly connected Gothic art to the Goths, a Germanic tribe that invaded Europe in the Ancient Times. According to art historian Gerard Baldwin Brown, Vasari believed that the Goths "ruin[ed] the ancient buildings and kill[ed] off the classically trained architects" (Brown 2011, 133-136).

Figure 8. Visit of the Milan Cathedral, Italy, January 2017.

[6] The Gothic emerged in architecture in France in the early 12th century. Architectural historians Fiske Kimball and George Harold Edgell explain that Gothic architecture was originally called "French art" (Kimball and Edgell, 1946).

Consequently, he despised the pointed arch and the rib vault that he associated with the Goths. The term "Gothic" has applied to this medieval architectural style ever since. It remained disparaged throughout the 17th and 18th centuries by critics of the time. In *La Gloire du Val-de-Grâce* (1669), for example, French playwright Molière famously wrote:

> The besotted taste of Gothic monuments
> These odious monsters of ignorant centuries
> Which the torrents of barbary spewed forth.

Gothic architecture was disregarded during the Renaissance, because of its association with the Middle Ages, an age mischaracterized as one of little innovation. Then things began to change. The last half of the 18th century saw a renewed interest in the Gothic aesthetic. An architectural movement identified as the Gothic Revival began in England, and then spread across Europe.

Not only did the Gothic aesthetic revive through architectural buildings, but it also reared its head in literature. Both are closely interlinked. Architectural buildings played a central role in the European Gothic novel. Scholars often locate the origin of Gothic literature in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a work that is grounded in architecture with the imagery of castles, monasteries, and churches. Scholar Clara F. McIntyre agrees that "Walpole, with *The Castle of Otranto*, started the fashion of a tale which rested its appeal wholly upon the romantic and the supernatural. Clara Reeve, Mrs. Radcliffe, and 'Monk' Lewis followed his lead" (McIntyre 1921, 644). In her essay, McIntyre tries to define the Gothic, looking at the work of Ann Radcliffe, and emphasizes the influence of the English Renaissance theatre (especially William Shakespeare's plays) on 18th-century English writers. McIntyre reminds us that "two characteristics of the Elizabethan drama… are the tendency toward violent and bloody scenes, and the use of revenge motive" (McIntyre 1921, 652). She then comes up with two separate definitions that apply to these authors. The term "Gothic" in European literature can imply an "excess of ornament, divergence from a prevailing style, the

inclusion of certain abnormal and even grotesque aspects of life." Gothic narratives are sometimes "a genuine expression of the life of the Middle Ages." Writers who are considered Gothic express a feeling of isolation, claustrophobia, and a fear of religious beliefs. Protagonists are often trapped in a confined structure, such as a monastery or a church. McIntyre notes that "the prevailing emotion, with Mrs. Radcliffe, is not so much terror as a sort of superstition dread or fear" (McIntyre 1921, 667).

A significant example of the interplay of architecture and literature in Gothic fiction is found in *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* (1831), where Victor Hugo restores the importance of Gothic architecture. McIntyre's definition of Gothic literature applies to this novel in many ways. The story takes in the Middle Ages with the magnificent Gothic cathedral of Notre-Dame as the main setting, and features the grotesque character of Quasimodo. I read Hugo's masterpiece when I was in my early teens. My father encouraged me to read it and, at that time, I found the detailed descriptions of Paris and Notre-Dame excessive and distracting. I think differently today. I realize that those large descriptive sections were a way for Hugo to value the aesthetic of Gothic art in Paris, which was threatened by neo-classicism and Byzantine Revival Architecture. A few years before *Notre-Dame*, Hugo published a scathing article entitled "Guerre aux démolisseurs" (War to Demolishers), in which he expressed his shock and grief at the "murder" and the "vandalism" of monuments from the Middle Ages in France. The demolishers, he says, find these buildings "of bad taste, barbarian works, monsters in architecture." It is worth noting that the disparaging term "barbaric" was still being used at that time to define the Gothic art. Ironically, Hugo uses this same term to denounce the demolition of old buildings by his contemporaries, done "with more stubbornness and barbarity than ever." Additionally, beyond the political dimensions of

Notre-Dame, Hugo borrows elements from English Gothic fiction. He expresses a similar feeling of confinement and a fear of the church. For example, the archdeacon Claude Frollo embodies the character of the clergyman possessed by a demon, as it appears in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth, the Wanderer* (1820). This Gothic fiction that flourished in Europe was a major influence on American literature. Yet, these two traditions are very different. In her study *Gothic America*, scholar Teresa Goddu observes that, unlike American Gothic, British Gothic "developed during a definable time period… and has a recognized coterie of authors" (Goddu 1997, 3). She highlights a distinguishing sense of place, claiming that "the American gothic is most recognizable as a regional form," and a distinguishing sense of history, locating "the American gothic within specific sites of historical haunting, most notably slavery" (Goddu 1997, 3-4).

Figure 9. Andalusia Farm, Hiking Trail, Milledgeville, Georgia, February 2017.

Southern Gothic literature: sense of place and sense of history in America

Gothic literature, which began as means of invoking a certain feeling, was different in the "Old Continent" and the "New World." In sharp contrast with European writers, American Gothic writers focused their stories on feelings of vastness and vulnerability, through characters who are surrounded by a boundless spread of territory. Colonial America was a new continent that was yet to be fully explored by its European settlers. Edgar Allan Poe expressed this feeling of vastness in his short story "The Gold Bug" (1843), which takes place on Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, South Carolina. The narrator recounts an expedition led

by his friend William Legrand, who is accompanied by his African American servant Jupiter, as they tried to find the buried treasure of a pirate named Captain Kidd:

> We crossed the creek at the head of the island by means of a skiff, and, ascending the high grounds of the shore of the main land, proceeded in a northwesterly direction, through a tract of country excessively wild and desolate, where no trace of a human footstep was to be seen… . In this manner we journeyed for about two hours, and the sun was just setting when we entered a region infinitely more dreary than any yet seen. (1843, 510)

Poe's compelling description of a land that is "wild" and "desolate" is key to understanding American Gothic, and more specifically southern Gothic literature. The Gothic, as expressed by writers like Poe, closely links with the sense of wilderness and desolation of the new land.

In her impressive study of 18th-century landscapes in America, Visual Studies scholar Jill Casid describes colonization and landscaping practices. Casid shows that Europeans expanded their imperialistic power by the removal of the Natives and the importation of slaves from Africa, and imposed their cultural identities through colonial landscaping. Literary scholar Jameela Dallis also demonstrates how colonization introduced the concept of race in Gothic fiction. In early Gothic novels, the villain was typically a European foreigner, but "by the 1790s, the expanding British Empire introduces a new host of potentially threatening characters into the literary landscape: the racial, social, and natural *others* of colonies" (Dallis 2015, 227). The representation of a different culture has always been a playground where fantasy can play. The notion of the "primitive" conveyed by the colonial empire became an ideal villain for European and American Gothic writers in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the short story "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844), for example, Poe evokes the "dusky-visaged and half-naked Indians" that the narrator encountered near Charlottesville, Virginia (Poe 1844, 581). Interestingly, their presence is first suggested by the sound of a drum. As van Elferen puts it, "the sound suggests presence even when the presence is invisible or intangible, and is thus closely related to the ghostly" (Van Elferen 2012, 4). In

this story, the writer also emphasizes a strong feeling of solitude that "seemed absolutely virgin" in the vastness of the hills (Poe 1844, 581).

Thinking of the sense of place as a crucial component to the understanding of American Gothic literature. Family and religion are the two structures that define the sense of place in American Gothic. They were the first words that came to Cashman's mind when I asked him about how he relates to the South. Family and religion define the sense of place in American Gothic, in literature and in music. While popular notions of family and religious spaces presume that they are safe zones, American Gothic writers insist that at some point, both will be shattered. An outsider, for example, will eventually invade the family space, while the religious space will be questioned by rationalism and perversity. Charles Brockden Brown, one of the first Gothic novelists in the United States, voiced a fear of the church in a number of his novels. In *Wieland* (1798), for instance, the main character of the story, Theodore Wieland, is a deeply religious man. He ends up consumed by fire in a small temple that he had built himself. His intense religious beliefs ultimately lead to his death. Theodore is also a slave owner. It raises the question of the treatment of history in American Gothic fiction, which inevitably differs from its European counterpart.

America, and more specifically the South, is deeply marked by the massacre of Indians, the violence of slavery, the Civil War, segregation and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s-1960s. It is not surprising that a new kind of literature emerged during the first half of the 20th century, called "southern Gothic literature," a term coined by novelist Ellen Glasgow. In the 1930s-1940s, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Flannery O'Connor, and Carson McCullers, to name only a few, reacted to the pervasive portrayals of a Romantic South. Musician John Hermann, who has explored the Gothic aesthetic in Vic Chesnutt's songwriting, says that "southern Gothic was used as a disparaging term by a critic to go against all these romantic notions of the 'wonderful South'. All these stories of honor and

gallantry, heroes and heroines, men in their swords and shiny bright uniforms" (Hermann, 2016). The romanticized and glorified Old South had been depicted by a wide range of writers who were not necessarily advocating for slavery, although they were glorifying the white society that depended wholly on its presence. Consequently, they were hiding the violence that lay below the picturesque "glory" they so celebrated. John Pendleton Kennedy, "the first major novelist to set fiction on southern plantations" (Geist 2008, 117), was opposed to this institution. His novels "painted a picture of the Virginia gentry and romantic plantation life that would become typical in popular fiction during the next decades" (see, e.g., 1832 *Swallow Barn: Or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*). Kennedy was followed by Eliza Ann Dupuy, Emma Dorothy Eliza Nevitte Southworth. In the postbellum era, *Uncle Remus* tales by Joel Chandler Harris (1888-1906) and Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia* (1887) continued this tradition and were widely popular. Harris and Page "codified the popular image of the Old South rounding out the traditional stereotypes of the beautiful young belle, her chivalrous beau, and the faithful slave" (Geist 2008, 118). Southern Gothic fiction breaks this long-established "moonlight-and-magnolias" imagery.

Though southern Gothic writers borrowed from the classic European Gothic motifs, they also adapted their stories into a new place—the South. As scholar Elsa Charléty puts it, there is a "quasi-organic link between the South and the Gothic" (Charléty 2015, 113). The plot is often set in a plantation instead of a castle or a church (see, e.g., 1940 *The Hamlet*). That said, in contrast with the "plantation romance" mentioned above, these writers challenged the romanticized myth of the Old South "by grounding the fictional discourse in prosaic, crude reality" (Charléty 2015, 113). The horror of slavery and lynching, for instance, brought a strong feeling of guilt in the writing of Faulkner and his followers. It has become a hallmark in American Gothic fiction. The Gothic expresses the racial tension that pervades the South through what literary scholars Anderson, Hagood, and Turner call "zombification,"

a term that they say offer "a telling metaphor of slavery" (Anderson, Hagood and Turner, 2015, 1-2). Zombies are a visual depiction of the dehumanization of Black slaves forced to work. During slavery, and later in the segregated society of Jim Crows, the white man tried to keep African Americans from being educated. It was common for a white southern man to call a Black man "boy," regardless his age, as a form of humiliation. They were not accepted as fully human. This idea was theorized by sociologist Orlando Patterson as "social death". When Mississippi blues musician McKinley Morganfield, known as Muddy Waters, sings "I'm a man, I'm a full-grown man" ("Mannish Boy," 1955), he reaffirms his humanity denied by the white-dominated society. Southern writers like William Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell understood that the racial exclusion and persecution remained a tragic presence in the Jim Crow South. In "Saturday Afternoon" (1931) and "Kneel to the Rising Sun" (1935), for example, Caldwell powerfully "illustrate[s] in a crude way the brutality and gratuity of lynching in small rural Georgia towns" (Charléty 2015, 114). In the writing of Faulkner and Caldwell, the past comes back to haunt those who have committed crimes. Therefore, their narrative usually conveys a strong feeling of "undeadness."

A southern feeling of "undeadness": the past shaping the present

In the South, slavery lasted longer than in the North, and, at the end of the Civil War, southern whites soon re-established the disenfranchisement of African Americans, enforcing a series of Jim Crow laws until the late 1960s. The feeling of undeadness—the past shaping the present—is what characterizes southern Gothic the most. It was described by Faulkner, who famously wrote: "the past is never dead. It's not even past" (Faulkner 1951). The daunting legacy of slavery and racism, combined with the trauma of the Civil War (1861-1865), has provided a favorable ground for ghost stories in the South. There are "diverse forms of undeadness—racial, ethnic, political, economic, historical—in the South" (Anderson,

Hagood, and Turner 2015, 1), to which I would add a sonic dimension. Drummer Mike McKee said that the band brings sounds of the past in their music. “One thing we’re known for is having chains on a metal trash can, with feet stomps and clapping” he says. “The metal chains bring back to the old chain gangs, in the South. The slaves will be chanting along and keeping in time, either with chains that they were dragging or, if they were working on the railroad, the clinging of hammering. They are different things” (McKee 2016). Singer-songwriter Dave Lippman evokes a similar feeling of undeadness. He draws a similar parallel between the South and the idea of zombification. “Clearly, the Gothic and the blues are intertwined in the South,” he says. “This really is a zombie nation. The creepy aspects also pop up in Harry Smith’s *Anthology of American Folk Music*, which was influential on the 50s-60s folk revival and which Bob Dylan referred to (in part) as ‘the old, weird America’” (Lippman 2016).

Figure 10. Visit of the McGavock Confederate Cemetery with Ray Cashman and his family in Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

This feeling of guilt related to the dark history of the South is expressed by white southerners in both literature and music. In *Go Down, Moses* (1942), for instance, Faulkner portrays the character and his “compulsive guilt over his ancestor’s sexual exploitation of black people” (Ryan 2015, 124). Author Tom Franklin, a strong influence on Cashman’s music, said that “the pervasiveness of guilt suffused with many of my novels and stories, and with my personal life.” In his song “Still a Southern Man,” Tennessee native Will Hoge powerfully expresses his inner conflict between his identity as a proud southerner and the association of the Confederate Flag, which he describes as “a hammer driving nails in a coffin of a long dead land.” In the second verse, Hoge shouts: “You call it what you want but it’s a God damn shame” (Hoge 2015). The dark legacy of the

South, described by Hoge as "a long dead land," can feel like a burden for white southerners. It is worth noting that this song was not released by his record label Cumberland Records, probably due to the controversial lyrics. The inflammatory comments of some of those who responded to the song's YouTube video indicate how sensitive the subject is.[7] Cashman has also raised his voice against the racism that plagued the South, though he did not explicitly express a feeling of guilt in his songs. He said that he does not "think too much" about the black experience when he listens to the blues.

In addition to the horror of slavery, the Civil War had a stark impact on southern writers (see, e.g., 1866's *War Poetry of the South* by William Gilmore Simms). The traumatic and humiliating Civil War "forever changed America's 'culture of death'," produced "at least 620,000 bodies," and "fundamentally changed how Americans remembered those dearly departed" (Frye and Hutchison, 2015, 50). It imbues the writing of William Faulkner and more recently Natasha Trethewey (see 2006's *Native Guard*). The Civil War is still an integral element of southern life, including Cashman.

During my visit in the summer of 2016, Cashman drove me to the McGavock Confederate Cemetery in Franklin, Tennessee (figure 10). He told me about the battle of Franklin and explained the meaning of the coins that were placed on the graves. If someone knew the deceased, they would place a dime or a quarter on the tombstone. We walked through the cemetery. Reading the tombstones, he observed that many people died during the conflict. The following day, I met with musician John Hermann, who now lives in Franklin. He shared a similar feeling of a past that is not even past. Like Cashman, he mentioned the Civil War, Sherman's March to the Sea, and the McGavock Cemetery: "I did a tour of the cemetery," he said. "There's a story saying that the troops would go to the cemetery and change the dates on the headstones. It would say: 'born 1838, died 1778'. They would change

[7] Hoge, Will. "Still a Southern Man." www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHOfj1mmubM

a six to an eight, a three to an eight. It was a way to say: 'we are not going to burn down Savannah, but we are going to spit in your face'. A cemetery and the grave stones are a sacred hallowed ground. It's pretty dark!"

Conjure and blues: the "transformative Gothic"

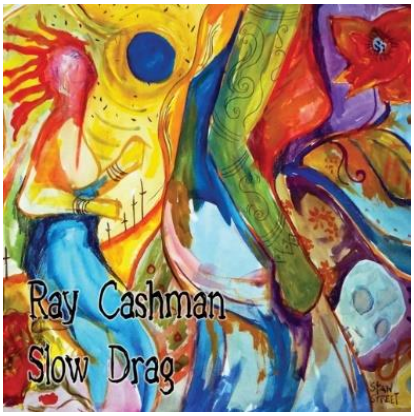


Figure 11. Art cover of Ray Cashman's album Slow Drag, *2016. ©Stan Street.*

I found compelling how this dark undeadness of the South brings together Gothic, blues and conjure—a general word for African Diaspora magic, and one often used today as a synonym for hoodoo (Anderson 2008, 132). The transgressive potential that Cashman expresses in his music and his life brings up assumptions of magical powers and metaphysical questioning. A number of his songs blends the blues with conjure tales and supernatural presences ("Nana's Diner", "Dead Man's Cadillac", "Desolation", "The Ghost of Fred"). It is particularly revealing that Cashman defines his music as "a blues gumbo repertoire than can conjure up the ghosts of the Mississippi." In one sentence, we have it all: Gothic, blues and conjure. Cashman makes explicit the connection between blues, Gothic and conjure with the cover art of *Slow Drag* (figure 11):

> It's a very bright painting from a friend of mine in Clarksdale, Stan Street. He's a folk artist, most of his work is blues oriented. He's done many paintings for blues festivals in America and Canada. It's very colorful, with a lot of blues elements. Dice, and snakes, and dancing women. It does still have the Gothic influence to it. I think the blues is a lot of Gothic. There's a lot of voodoo, a lot of charms, and rolling dice… All that comes together, the Gothic and the blues. All that comes from Africa. It was brought over to here, and maybe that's why they have the term "southern Gothic." You never hear "northern Gothic," it's all southern Gothic. The South used to be a very large Black population, more Black than white. I think that there's something to go with it, and also be in this place. Those people are writing about their environment. They have the Gothic part, a little bit of voodoo, hoodoo, and all that stuff. (Cashman 2016)

Gothic, blues and conjure are all closely linked to the dark history of the South, as explained by Cashman in this quote. Slavery, the Civil War, lynching, and Jim Crow laws generated the omnipresence of undead figures in literature and oral tradition. Both conjure and blues music have a transformative and therapeutic intent. Historically, conjure allowed African Americas to reverse the power dynamics of the society. Scholar Cheryl A. Wall wrote that "hoodoo empowered all of its adherents; it allows them to perceive themselves as actors in the world, not the passive reactors the dominant society held them to be" (Wall 1989, 670). In the same vein, poet Ishmael Reed sees the conjure man as a symbol of black subversion of white society and culture. The blues performer, as the conjurer, is empowered by the practice of his art. Using the first-person narrative, he reaffirms his identity as a fully human being.

In her analysis of Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, scholar Jameela Dallis theorizes what she calls the "transformative Gothic" (Dallis 2015, 224-235). The Transformative Gothic is a concept that illustrates how disempowered people found ways to overcome a traumatic experience and take back control of their lives. They reclaim spaces to give them new life and new attitude. In my conversation with Dallis, she explained that the garden is a "sublime space, where the person is taking outside of themselves. This can be achieved through many ways. You have music, you have arts… For Mala, it's caring about the garden. All these ways are avenues to get to that sublime space" (Dallis 2017). In the novel, Mala transforms the garden into something else. The garden becomes a metaphor for spaces where "people being oppressed can take back pieces, or maybe even holes, and turning into something that is their own" (Dallis 2017). Songs can achieve this transformative act as well. The music, blues in particular, becomes a space of transformation.

From a white perspective, the transformative Gothic must be interpreted differently. In a position of privilege, white southern males tend to cope with their guilt regarding the haunting legacy of the South. Cashman does not talk too much about it, but McKee overtly

Figure 12. Delta Rae singer Brittany Hölljes performing "I Will Never Die", holding the "voodoo stick" in her hand, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2016.

expresses the shame that he feels. "There's an awareness of what happened, and there's a shame that goes along with it," he says. After the Charleston shooting, Delta Rae released the song "All the People." He explains: "it's a call for action to stop violence against Black Americans. We're trying to heal those deep wounds that are rooted in slavery, and then segregation, Jim Crow." From his perspective, their music serves the purpose of remembering the past, and paying homage to the African American experience. I would say that this approach, rather than being "transformative," is more of a belief in transformation. In "I Will Never Die" (2013), Delta Rae singer Brittany Hölljes uses a "voodoo stick" (figure 12), as McKee puts it: "I built a five-foot stick that I wrapped in goat hooves and these African shells and a bunch of ropes and bells. That's kind of a voodoo stick. As a percussionist of the band, I try to bring in sounds that are scary!" This "voodoo stick" illustrates a white appropriation of elements of black culture, mixed with European influences—the goat hooves, for example. There is a fine line between homage and appropriation: the key is to show awareness of the history and to acknowledge cultural appropriation, as McKee and Cashman do.

In this chapter, I examined the pervading feeling of the Gothic in literature and music, from the 18th century to nowadays, from Horace Walpole and Edgar Allan Poe to Delta Rae and John Hermann. Now, I would like to elaborate on how Cashman fits into the framework of the Gothic, taking a close look at his southern life, how he relates to southern Gothic writers, and how it serves to assert his identity as a white working-class male.

CHAPTER 2

The Rough and Tumble South of Ray Cashman: a fondness for white southern Gothic writers

"To know who you are, you have to have a place to come from."
Carson McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, 1940.

Figure 13. Ray Cashman's backyard with the chicken coop on the left, and the vegetable garden on the center, Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.

This chapter examines Cashman's background in Texas and his life in Tennessee, looking at how Cashman relates to southern Gothic writers, and how he uses the technique of the "unreliable narrator" as a speaker and a performer.

Both a musician and a carpenter, Cashman believes that these two forms of art are connected. He creates his songs the way he crafts wood. The process of songwriting, like the craftsmanship of wood, demands skills, patience, and creativity. Each piece is unique, and the end result has to be the best possible outcome. By his own admission, Cashman does not follow a formal songwriting process. When he plucks his guitar strings, he will come across a driving rhythm or a haunting melody from which he builds a new song. Alternatively, when he remembers a personal experience or a story he read in a southern Gothic novel, he will write memorable lyrics, and then create the music component. During my first visit in Nolensville in October 2015, Cashman recalled how he started to write his songs. He was a teenager living outside of Monroe, Texas:

> I was 13 or 14 years-old. I entered a town contest with two friends of mine. We had a two-day practice and we tried to learn 'Under My Thumb' by the Rolling Stones. But since none of us were really good, we couldn't figure out how to play it. So I wrote a song! (Cashman 2015)

Looking back to his life, no one could have predicted that Cashman would become a successful singer-songwriter. Born on a military base in Puerto Rico in 1965, he spent the majority of his childhood in southeast Texas. His family "has never been musically inclined," but Cashman has always been drawn to the songs that were played on his parents' radio. Country records mostly, but not exclusively:

> I've played guitar since I was about 15. As far as I can remember, music has always done something for me. My entire life. Behind me is the stereo that my parents had when I was a young child. The stereo is as old as I am. We would come home from church, and I would play Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, any country music of the time. Music of the 1970s. It's still my favorite. I was also fond of British rock bands like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Like a lot of people, my parents would

> occasionally turn on the radio and listen to what was on. But to me, music was really compelling. I would be like: 'oh man, I love this song!' (Cashman 2015)

Cashman took the path of songwriting by listening to Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and Joni Mitchell. Later came Steve Earle and Townes Van Zandt. He modeled himself on these artists. For instance, Cashman pays a tribute to Van Zandt with his beautiful and ethereal cover of "Highway Kind" (*Desolation*, 2015).

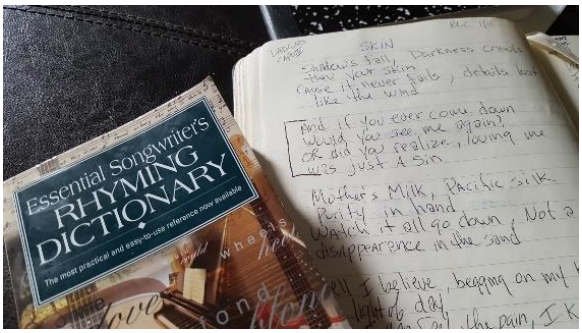


Figure 14. Ray Cashman's manuscript of the song "Skin," Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.

The long arc that has shaped his songwriting is closely linked with Texas. In Austin, the self-proclaimed "Live Music Capital of the World," Cashman was exposed to the blues. Around the age of 15, when he was "old enough to drive," he ventured to the black neighborhood of a city scarred by years of segregation and violence. "We would go over the river tracks, which weren't that far from the house," he recalls. "It was less than a mile." Cashman made his way to clubs and house rent parties where African Americans performed music and storytelling. He sat around and listened to them playing the blues and telling stories. He bought barbecue sandwiches and beer for one dollar. He even had a sip of moonshine. "We could do things that we couldn't do in my part of town," he says. "It was just one mile away, across the river tracks. I felt privileged to be sitting where most white folks wouldn't want to be." Early on, as expressed in this statement, Cashman shows an inclination towards transgression and a taste for the forbidden. By going to the black part of Austin "where most white folks wouldn't want to be," Cashman trespassed physical boundaries (the river tracks), but also social, racial and political boundaries. He broke the law by consuming alcohol underage, and challenged the racial barrier of the time.

Figure 15. At the Continental Club, Austin, Texas, April 2017.

In the early 2000s, Cashman lived in Houston, Texas, where he started the band The Tequila Cowboys. "It was a small success within the city limits," he recalled. Three years later, he moved back to Austin where he started a solo career. He met successful songwriters like James McMurtry and Jon Dee Graham. Both McMurtry and Graham played, and still play, on Wednesday nights at The Continental Club, a renowned institution for live music since 1955. Cashman learned from them, watching and listening to their songs. "Both had a catchy story," he says. "Just like a good storyteller who keeps you focused on the story." Since then, he has written hundreds of songs, not only inspired by his life in the South, but also by southern Gothic writers such as Harry Crews, Larry Brown and Tom Franklin.

Cashman settled down in Tennessee in 2007, first in Memphis and then in Nolensville. "People always think I moved here for the music," he says with a smile. "I was actually following my wife. She had a job in Nashville, and I told her: 'well I guess I'm coming with you!'" Cashman has led a nomadic lifestyle that is reflected in his music. On *Desolation* (2015), he covered Townes Van Zandt's "Highway Kind," singing: "the leaving I don't mind, it's the coming that I crave". Cashman is always "moving fast" and "living slow" ("Moving Fast"), and "know[s] that moving forward is what life is about" ("The Simple Life"). In the upbeat song "Turn the Key," he sings: "turn the key and lock the door, because I'm leaving like never before." These songs were released on *Rough & Tumble South* (2012).

The Rough South of Ray Cashman: southern Gothic, Grit Lit, and white working-class

In Cashman's music, the sense of place is central, as shown by his albums *Texassippi* (2007) and *Rough & Tumble South* (2012). The "Rough South" is a key concept to understand

Cashman's connection to the Gothic. The term "Rough and Tumble South" was defined by filmmaker Gary Hawkins, who produced a documentary about Larry Brown.[8] In an interview with scholar Katherine Powell, Hawkins provides a definition for the "Rough South," stating that Brown embodies "the prototypical Rough southern author (…) He was born and raised in a southern state. His upbringing was rural. He's working-class and despite the acclaim, remains so. He's largely self-educated and writes about the local landscapes Those qualities define Rough South." This description of a Rough southern author is in every way consistent with Cashman, a white working-class man living in a rural southern town and largely self-educated.

Southern writers translate and convey their experience of the South in different ways. Cashman writes extensively about the local landscapes. On *Texassippi Stomp* (2007), for instance, he displays an intimate connection between the place where he grew up, Texas, and Mississippi, a region to which he musically connects with the blues. The term "Texassippi" was coined by harmonica player Grant "Gabby" Brown, who is featured on Cashman's release. *Rough & Tumble South* recounts the ups and downs of a white working-man living in the South. "The songs reflect the region of America I have lived and respected, the South," he says. "They are about love, food, music, murder, illicit substances and the yearning to leave a small town." In his song "The Simple Life," Cashman sings about his "pickup truck with those mirrors on the side," his "yard full of chickens" and "a couple of goats." He values "the simple things of life," like "an old wood barn," "a well-crafted song," "a 50-acre farm," and "an old southern charm" (Cashman 2012). Cashman "tries to live off the land," as he told me during my radio show in France in 2015. His large yard at the back of his home, with a vegetable garden and a chicken coop, is an excellent illustration of that. During my stay in the summer of 2016, his son and I picked up some fresh eggs from the coop to make crepes.

[8] *The Rough South of Larry Brown* (2002) was a sequel to a previous project called *The Rough South of Harry Crews* (1991).

The Rough South experienced by Cashman and described in his music is also portrayed by southern Gothic writers as they lived it. Therefore, Cashman can identify to them. Here, I will talk more specifically about Grit Lit, a subgenre of southern Gothic literature. Grit Lit is a literary movement that emerged in the late 1970s and conveys similar pervading feelings of bleakness, desolation and decay as southern Gothic literature. That said, Grit Lit has a deeper focus on white working-class people living in the South than the southern Gothic literature of the 1930s-1960s (Erskine Caldwell, who wrote many stories about the lives and the struggles of the working-class, is an exception). Scholar Zachary Vernon defines Grit Lit as "a genre largely shaped by white male authors who are from, or at the very least write convincingly about, working-class communities, usually within the context of the US South" (Vernon 2016, 78). Cashman carries the "Grit Lit" tradition in his music.

I found that Cashman relates more to Grit Lit than to southern Gothic literature mainly because of the social background of the writers. While Faulkner and his followers all come from white middle-class and privileged families, most Grit Lit writers—who would include Harry Crews and Larry Brown—are white and working-class. Cashman's favorite authors are white working-class southerners. When I asked him about early southern Gothic writers, he told me that he read *The Sound and The Fury* in high school. "I just liked it," he said. "Later on, I got into a lot of writers who were influenced by Faulkner. I think all southern writers are influenced by him in some way." He mentioned Harry Crews as a source of inspiration, and claimed Larry Brown as one of his favorite writers. Harry Crews, whose novel *A Feast of Snakes* was adapted into a song by Cashman, was a tenant farmer's son and grew up stripping tobacco in Georgia. Larry Brown was a firefighter in Oxford, Mississippi. Crews and Brown both joined the Marines at age seventeen and eighteen. They both also held had odd jobs. Crews was a bartender, a carnival barker, and a short-order cook. In addition to his work as a

firefighter, Brown "for six years, held a wide variety of part-time jobs: bagging groceries… helping build houses, cleaning carpets, cutting pulpwood and deadening timber… painting houses and hauling hay" (Cash 2008, 199-201).

The similarities between Cashman's life and that of Crews and Brown are remarkable. Cashman also joined the army after graduating from high school. He worked as a bartender, fry cook, plumber and a carpenter. He is from a white southern working-class family, and came up the hard way. I asked Cashman how he got interested in the southern Gothic genre:

> I've always enjoy reading books. It's kind of an escape from the everyday grind. Somebody recommended this book by Larry Brown, who is from Mississippi. He wrote this book called *Fay*. He wrote several books and there are all very good. This one in particular is great, I was hooked. Oh man, it was great! It's a really good story, told in the dialect of the people. Not like some authors you read and you're like 'oh, what does that word mean?'. I really enjoy writers who write in the dialect of the area, where the plot takes place. (Cashman 2016)

This quote is particularly revealing, in that Cashman shows enhanced affinity to Grit Lit because it is written "in the dialect of the people." This leads us directly to discuss the vernacular and the issue of "authenticity" that this implies.

Grit Lit: the use of the vernacular and the question of authenticity

"You write about what you know, and you write about the dialect of the people," says Cashman. "For uneducated people like myself, you can understand it better!" During my Nolensville visit on May 2016, Cashman lent me Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. He encouraged me to read it, but warned me half joking that I would probably not be able to read anything else for a while after that. It has all the distinguishing qualities of a Gothic novel—dark, bleak, seedy. McCarthy also uses the vernacular through his novel. The characters speak with one another in their native speaking language. The idea of the "Rough South" discussed earlier, combines with the use of the vernacular, raises the complex question of "authenticity." I asked Cashman about this notion:

> I don't know how much of that I'm doing. I was at a festival once, and this group of guys were playing. I thought they were good and they were playing old blues songs. From the 1940s, stuff like that. This one guy kept saying: "they're not authentic." You could tell, he was playing like Americana style. I don't really know what he meant by that. People get too caught up in being authentic or not. Like you play "authentic blues," or any "authentic" style of music. If you get caught up too much in that, then you lose what the purpose really is. It's to listen to the music. People listen to the music because it takes stress off their life. It makes you feel good, it makes you feel happy. If you're too worried, "oh, is this authentic?" You're missing the whole point. There's a lot of guys they just play old songs. They play note for note, exactly the same as the record. Do you want to listen to that old the time? I don't. Definitely I don't want to play that. (Cashman 2017)

Additionally, one would challenge that playing note for note the same old song would be authentic. Cashman agreed: "yeah, that's the question. Is that even authentic? You recreate an authentic sound, but is it really authentic for you to copying it? Wouldn't you be more authentic if you put your own spin on it?"

When I came back to Cashman's home at the beginning of 2017, we had an extensive discussion on Grit Lit. I handed him the book *Grit Lit*, edited by Tom Franklin and Brian Carpenter. Cashman read through the authors listed in this book. He was very knowledgeable about most of them. He explained how he relates to Grit Lit writers in terms of class and place. He first mentioned self-taught novelist William Gay from rural Tennessee. "He was a carpenter all his life. I read all his books, I love this guy. All his stories take place not very far from here, in Hohenwald, Tennessee. That's where he lived. It's about forty miles from here." In the course of our conversation, Cashman drew an interesting parallel between writers and tradesmen. "A lot of writers were tradesmen because they needed to make money. William Gay didn't publish his first books until he was 60.

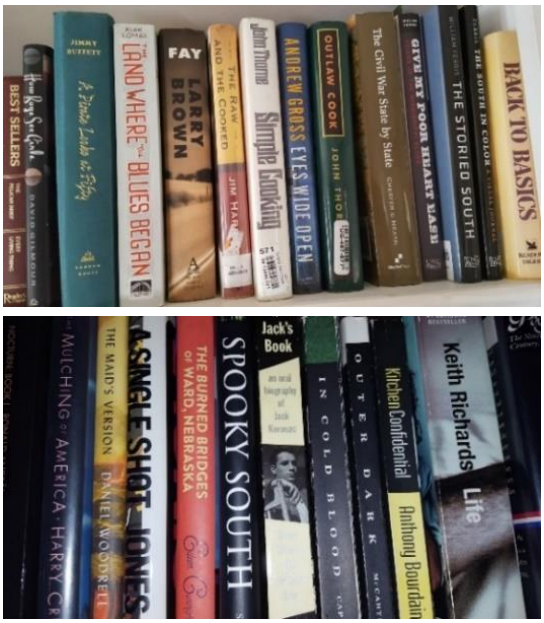


Figure 16. Ray Cashman's books, Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.

Donald Ray Pollock is very similar. He was maybe 45 years-old when he published he first book. He was also like a tradesman."

Fond of the Gothic fiction of Crews, Brown, Gay, and Pollock, Cashman also pointed to the narratives of Rick Bragg, whom he saw as different from the others:

> He writes memoirs, not really fiction. *Ava's Man* and *All Over but Shouting* are about his family, who is from Alabama. They worked in a plant back in the early 1900s. He told the life of that. It was a brutal life. They worked in cotton gins, and the cotton was floating in the air. Back then, there was no respiratory. In the town, there was just one product. It was the only company. If you were sick, you would never take a day off because you fear that somebody else would take your job if you didn't show up. (Cashman 2017)

The word that recurred the most through our conversation was "disturbing" and "brutal." Cashman found Daniel Woodrell's *Tomato Red* and *The Death of Sweet Mister* "particularly disturbing," adding "that's why they are good stories, because they are so weird!"

A feeling of undeadness pervades Grit Lit. In *Woe to Live On*, Woodrell revives, the devastation of the Civil War. "It's more historical fiction," Cashman says. "It's based on some true events. It takes place at the border between Kansas and Missouri, it's a famous battle. It's really good because you don't know what's going to happen until the very end. What they find you would never imagine!" Cashman devours books, especially literature that combines fictional and real elements, and that is filled with Gothic motifs, such as cemeteries and tombstones. Writer Edgar Lee Masters revives the dead in *Spoon River Anthology*, a collection of poems that appealed to Cashman:

> I have this book, *Spoon River Anthology* by Lee Masters. I think it took him five years to write it. He went to this graveyard in a town, and looked at the tombstones names and made up the stories. The poem that I like the best is the one about a hunter. One day, after hunting rabbits, he comes home. He sees a guy going into his house. That's how he found that his wife was having an affair. The guy ran, the hunter is chasing him, and bang! Shot him. So he dies. [Pause] Lee Masters, he tells stories of how those people died. That is good, though! That's true Gothic right there! [Laughing] Another one I like is about a guy who gets drunk, and… [Laughing] He drinks too much that night and he takes a shortcut to go back to his house. He come upon this guy's yard, he took a stick, and beat him to death [Laughing]. That's how he dies! (Cashman 2017)

The epitaphs that Cashman mentions are made up, just like the town Spoon River. However, this series of poetic monologues are both real and imagined by Masters. He found inspiration in a cemetery, and in reading names on tombstones. The cemetery and the tombstones are typical elements that convey a Gothic feeling of darkness and bleakness.

I was curious to know why these "weird" and "disturbing" stories appealed to Cashman. He said:

> I found those stories interesting because I wonder how can they come up with stories like that, and not be a morbid person? [He changes the tone of his voice, impersonating a discussion between two persons] "Hey, what do you do for a hobby?" "Oh, I like to think about how people can die!" [He laughs, then pause for three seconds] I've always liked stories like that, to be more entertaining than… something that's nice. (Cashman 2017)

Cashman's songwriting is largely inspired by the Grit Lit stories he reads. "My people in my songs never have a good ending. They all going to die, or they have some kind of trouble" he says, laughing. This approach of combining ideas from Gothic fiction and elements inspired by his southern life in his songs raises the question the "unreliable narrator." In his texts and in live performances, Cashman makes up stories and constructs different personas.

Cashman and the notion of the "unreliable narrator"

Cashman stands out as a bohemian figure, a southern troubadour who writes about his environment with a watchful eye. Through his travels around the globe, Cashman embodies the "global South." He is a worldwide troubadour singing about the South in a context of the world. This idea is consistent with the way he presents himself to his audience. For instance, during his 2016 European tour, he crafted the persona of a "blues singing

Figure 17. Ray Cashman's 2016 European Tour Poster.

troubadour" (figure 17). The tradition of troubadour is deeply rooted in France and in Italy. In his texts, Cashman also constructs different personas, and becomes "unreliable."

The "unreliable narrator" is a technique that Edgar Allan Poe is thought to have invented in some of his poetry and short fiction (see, e.g., 1839 "William Wilson", and 1843 "The Tale-Tale Heart"). This unreliability of the narrator highlights the Gothic themes of violence, guilt, repression, and mental instability. The narrator also creates an unease for the reader. Singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt once explained how he took the dark cloud of depression to the stage to "torture his audience" (Hermann 2014, 91). He wanted his audience to feel "uncomfortable," Hermann wrote. At a different level, Cashman also carries with him this notion of unreliability of the narrator in his songs, both as a songwriter and as a performer:

> People write about what they know, more or less, unless you try to make it up, which you can do. I've done that plenty of times. You can tell: "yeah, this is totally make up, none of this is true." Some people hear your song and think it's a life experience. Some of the stuff I sing my wife would be mad at you if it was true! [Laughing] A lot of my songs are made up stories. When I was in high school I really wanted to become a writer, a novelist. But I didn't want to have to go to school! [Laughing] The easy way out is to write a song.

On many occasions, Cashman underlined the ability for a writer to be "whatever you want to be." He mentioned a blues musician little known in America, but quite popular in France, Seasick Steve. Though from California, Seasick Steve constructs a southern rural persona through his album artwork, in which he is represented driving a tractor, wearing a distinguishing John Deere cap and overalls.

As a writer, Cashman explains that he always "make[s] up stories." As a performer, he lies to his audience. Talking about his song "Snake Feast," he said: "when I play it live, I always lie and tell people: 'this is some party in Georgia!', adding that he "always make[s] up stories here and there—it always sounds better than to say: 'I've got this idea from a book!'"

In this chapter, I Cashman's background in Texas and Tennessee, and how he relates to southern Gothic writers, Grit Lit stories in particular. I will now take a close look at how Cashman finds inspiration in Gothic literature. I will also discuss how Cashman relates to the voices of two different communities, and how he cultivates identities of both whiteness and blackness. While Cashman embraces a whiteness identity through southern Gothic literature, he also interprets a blackness identity by defining himself as a bluesman. He powerfully acknowledges the influence of African American musicians, including Mississippi Fred McDowell, Skip James and R.L Burnside.

Figure 18. Stopping for moonshine at the liquor store, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

Figure 19. Stopping at the gas station, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

CHAPTER 3

Ray Cashman: connecting the blues to southern Gothic literature

Desolation, the state in which I crave
Straight down to the grave
When you have nothing in you left to lose
Well they call that the blues.

Ray Cashman, “Desolation,” 2015.

Figure 20. Ray Cashman performing at the Center of the American South, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, September 2016.

This chapter explores the pervading feeling of the Gothic in Ray Cashman's songwriting. By examining both his testimony and song lyrics, I will address the prevailing emotions and attitudes expressed in his music, and how Cashman crosses boundaries between past and present, dream and reality, sanity and madness, and whiteness and blackness.

Cashman and the blues: the choice of being outside the mainstream

Cashman defines his music as "a blues gumbo repertoire than can conjure up the ghosts of the Mississippi" (www.raycashman.net). Though he has never lived in Mississippi, he deeply connects to this region and to the tradition of the blues. He spends a lot of time in Clarksdale, a town of the Mississippi Delta significant in the history of the blues. He is very familiar with the blues community there, especially Red's Lounge, a renowned juke joint, and the music venue Ground Zero. Cashman is drawn to the pool of talented blues players in the area, and gets a kick out of the Juke Joint Festival and the Deep Blues Festival where he performs almost every year. His song "Where The Blues Was Born" (2016) is inspired by his Clarksdale visits. Cashman presents the Delta as "the home of the blues." Accompanied by a rhythm section that creates an upbeat tempo, he performs forceful slide guitar riffs and sings:

> From Memphis to Jackson
> In the land where the blues was born
> It came like a hurricane
> Like the eye of the storm.

Since my first encounter with Cashman, he has always clearly defined his music as blues. When I hosted Cashman in my radio show in Lille, France (figure 21), and I asked him how he would define his music, he replied:

> Basically, I'm a blues player. But I like writing songs. I was influenced by a lot of folk and blues players, and guys that did both. Like most teenager who grew up in America in the 80s, I listened to Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix and the Rolling Stones. Then I found out the real blues like Lightnin' Hopkins and Townes Van Zandt, who was a songwriter but also a blues player. Also Mississippi Fred McDowell, he's one of my favorite. And Mance Lipscomb. (Cashman 2015)

Figure 21. François de Crastes (left) and Ray Cashman, Radio Campus Lille, France, March 2015.

A year later, Cashman was invited onto a community radio station in Nashville.[9] In his introduction, deejay Mojo explained "I know a lot of blues guys, and I'm not just categorizing you in blues but…." He was then immediately interrupted by Cashman who said: "oh but I am!." It is a powerful and intriguing statement. I find it almost paradoxical. Cashman is a white musician who was first exposed to country music. Yet, he powerfully identifies himself as a bluesman, performing a music that is originally an expression of African American culture. During my 2016 stay in Nolensville, Cashman explained his affinity for the blues with these words:

> I feel like I live the blues on a daily basis. The history of blues artists is the history of hard working guys. They played out at night, and worked in the fields in the day time. That was the case of some of them discovered in the 1960s, like Mississippi Fred McDowell and Skip James. I relate to the blues because I try to make ends meet, and for that you have to do more than one thing, work and play music. (Cashman 2016)

However central the question of race is when it comes to talk about the blues, it appears that Cashman relates first and foremost to this music in terms of class. He shows a profound respect and admiration for African American blues musicians because they were "hard working guys." Furthermore, when I asked how the black experience impacts his music, he replied that he "do[es]n't think too much about it when [I] listen to the blues." This statement can be interpreted as an active removal from the dark history of race relations in America. Or, at least, a will to move forward. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, who wrote extensively about memory and contested memory in the South, stresses that there are "diverse memories of the South" (Brundage 2000, 22). For instance, white southerners lost the war, not

[9] "Mojo's Attic", WXNA Radio, Nashville, Tennessee, 101.5 FM, 2016.broadcast on December 10, 2016.

Black southerners. Cashman is acutely aware that racism is deeply engrained in the American society, and the different perspectives on the South. He acknowledges these complex issues:

> I was born at the end of the Civil Rights, so I never experienced that. Thankfully, I missed all that. The South is a very complex area. It's very family oriented, and religion oriented. Then, there's also a very hypocritical aspect of it, because there's still a lot of racism throughout. Still today, you can feel it in a lot of places you go. There's still some tension between the two races. In Tennessee, more in rural areas. Mississippi still is a very racist place. All of the places are. Something that's in the DNA of humans. It's not just the South, it's everywhere. At least in America. (Cashman 2016)

Then, taking an informed look at how music was segregated by the record industry in the 1920s-1930s, Cashman rightly pointed out that the social construction of race has led to a social construction of music genres. In the case of the blues and country music, the distinction was made in the 1920s-1930s by people who had the power, namely the white music producers. For Cashman, blues and country music are actually very much alike:

> The blues was predominantly a black music. In the old days, it was called 'race records', but if you were white, it was "hillbilly records."[10] Jimmy Rodgers was considered a hillbilly singer, but if you listen to a lot of his songs, he was pretty much blues. He had a lot of blues influence, and some country influence. The way they distinguished the two had mainly to do with your color. If you were Black and played rural music, then you played the blues. If you were white and played rural music, they started to call it country. Both are pretty similar actually. They have different instrumentation, but the topics are about the same. It's about hardship of life, with barely food to feed your family. For the most part, those topics are still relevant today. (Cashman 2016)

This idea was developed by Karl Hagstrom Miller in his impressive study *Segregating the Sound; Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow (*2010). Miller argues that before the advent of the phonograph, folks played the music within their communities, for the sake of it. When songs started to be recorded, the music industry fabricated categories to market them. It is still a reality today. Though Cashman grew up listening to country music,

[10] Companies like Okeh Records and Vocalion Records commercialized African American music (spirituals, work songs, dance tunes and blues performed by black musicians) as "race records."

he presents his music in the media as blues. When I asked him why he claims his music as "blues" rather than "country," he replied:

> Because now is way different. I don't know if I told you, but a couple albums ago, I wrote some songs that I thought were country. Then I played them in Nashville. I was in one of those rounds, and one guy had a couple of songs that some big names recorded. I don't think they were hits, but they recorded them. When he played these songs, you could tell, there's a big difference. A big difference. Even though I thought I was playing country songs, this guy said: "you know, you can play the blues really good." I said: "well, I'm not [Laughing] blues, I really play country songs! Now everything is so defined. (Cashman 2017)

Like any professional musician, Cashman cannot escape the rules of classification. For the purpose of marketing, he needs to categorize his music. These categorizations are beyond his control. "Some of my songs are not really bluesy, but other people think that there's a lot of blues. That's how it is. That's why I say I'm blues, because… If I try to sell myself, if I try to get myself a gig, and I say I'm country, and I play the music that I play... They will say: 'you're not country at all, you're blues'." The power of defining the music is in the hands of the music industry, the "other people" that Cashman refers to in his statement. While this idea of things being out of his hands aligns with his perception of the Gothic (which he defined as a "the belief they have luck, things they can't control"), Cashman also attempts to regain control by resisting these power dynamics that influence the performance of the music.

This state of mind of staying true to himself and to his values is conveyed through his song "Tennessee Blues" (2015), which was "written in the perspective of a Texan about Tennessee." I was intrigued by the line "I lost my soul down in Tennessee" that ends the chorus. "Living in Nashville is a dog-eat-dog world," he explained. "There are so many people... I'm not going to say they are more for the fame or for the glory, but they're doing something to get little attention. Maybe someone's going to say: 'you need to do this for your career'. So they do it, even though it's not exactly what they want to do. They give up their soul. Just like when Robert Johnson said he sold his soul to the Devil to gain fame. I didn't

Figure 22. Recording session with Ray Cashman, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

lose my soul, but I made it for a song!" he concludes, laughing. In "Tennessee Blues," Cashman takes the persona of a man who gave in to the siren calls of fame and who, as a result, lost his true self. I found the cultural reference to the myth of Robert Johnson particularly compelling as it emphasizes his identity as bluesman. The use of this persona allows Cashman to distance himself from musicians who accept to adjust to please the producers. It reinforces the choices that Cashman has made – an active refusal to change anything so he can fit the mold.

Interestingly, this theme of turning down the notion of celebrity appears again in *Slow Drag* (2017). Cashman opens his latest album with a long, slow and unsteady melody, "Fame." In this song, the narrator warns anyone who is in a quest of celebrity that there will be consequences:

> Mystery encased in doubt, you get what you receive
> It's all part of the game, all in the name of fame.

Cashman sings. In the second verse, he overtly rejects every aspect of celebrity:

> Trouble's all around, it's all that I can see
> Alcohol pouring down, and your sexuality.

While musicians who want to become famous may be drawn to the hard-living stereotype of "sex, drugs and rock and roll" (or at least be willing to accept this necessity), Cashman takes the opposite line. Far from the spotlight, Cashman values freedom and enjoyment rather than fame. He is committed to his music and his songwriting:

> First and foremost, I write these songs for me. Because I have to write these songs. I'm not out there thinking: "I have to write this song for the general public," it's strictly for me. If it's good enough, maybe some other people will like it and might want listen to it. That's what you can hope for. I don't know if everybody's like that,

> but you would think the majority of people are. To be a writer, any kind of writer, you do it for yourself, for your own enjoyment. Then you can share it. If you're a national songwriter you don't do it that way. You do it for the money, which is very little, unfortunately. But if I were playing music for the money, I won't be doing it! You got to enjoy yourself. (Cashman 2016)

Ironically, despite his convictions and his efforts to stepping away from the spotlight, Cashman got the critics and the public's attention in 2007. His release *Texassippi* was placed on the nominated ballot for best traditional blues album of the Grammy Awards.

The sublime in Cashman's songwriting

The sublime effect that prevails in southern Gothic literature and Grit Lit have an influence on Cashman's songwriting. Cashman came up with the song "Desolation" while he was driving on the highway that goes from Johnson City, Tennessee, to Asheville, North Carolina. He recalls:

> It was one day in October, so the fall was going on. I was driving through the Appalachian Mountains. It was very beautiful. A lot of leaves were red and different colors. I was listening to this song, called 'Killing the Blues'. It's not really a blues song, more like an Americana style. I can't remember the guy's name, but I totally loved this song.[11] I had that in my head, and then I listened to Townes Van Zandt. (Cashman 2015)

Despite the appealing colors of the Appalachian Mountains, "Desolation" has a tragic tone. In the opening verse, Cashman sings:

> Drizzling fog undress the hills of gold and red
> Image etched into my head
> Cold wind cuts straight to the bone
> Memories toiled in stone.

Written in the first-person narrative, it conveys feeling of loneliness and despair. In one line, Cashman describes a striking contrast between the colorful landscape of western North Carolina, and a quite sinister atmosphere. He responds with a set of emotions that convey

[11] "Killing The Blues" is a song written by country-folk singer John Prine, born and raised in Maywood, Illinois.

bleakness and desolation. For the narrator, the Appalachian Mountains are both overwhelming and appealing. They are terrifying and delighting. They are sublime—vast, threatening—as theorized by Burke. The first verse is filled with Gothic elements. The fog, a recurrent element across Gothic literature, sets the tone. It obscures the vision and hides things from view, therefore it accentuates the senses of mystery and ambiguity. It is not surprising then that the fog is a "classical Gothic trope," like "solemn cathedrals, labyrinthine buildings and cemeteries" (Van Elferen 2012, 34). John Carpenter's movie *The Fog* is a perfect example of how the radiant mist connects with the uncanny. In "Desolation," the fog takes the colors of the mountains away. The words "cold wind," "bone," and "stone" increase the gloomy atmosphere of the song. In the chorus, things get worse. The narrator has one foot in the grave, and strongly expresses the idea of desolation:

> Desolation, the state in which I crave
> Straight down to the grave
> When you have nothing in you left to lose
> Well they call that the blues.

The sublime of the lyrics is amplified by the music performed by Cashman. In "Desolation," the minor key gives the song a sad and tragic tone. This dramatic effect is emphasized by the sound of the slide guitar, which responds to Cashman's acoustic guitar. Instead of pressing the strings against the frets, the musician presses the strings with a "slide," which allows him to vary the vibrating length and the pitch. As a result, the weird twangy sound creates an eerie atmosphere, evokes supernatural phenomenon and a sense of sadness. Music psychologist Vicky Williamson explains that "in western musical tradition, major music is played at times of celebration, jubilation, and general fun times, whereas minor music is used to mark the mourning, heartache, and despair." Williamson points to Billie Holiday's "Gloomy Sunday", Johnny Cash's "Hurt," and Amy Winehouse's "Back to Black" as minor-key songs

that express sad feelings. [12] One could easily add to this list Cashman's "Desolation." The sublime is reinforced by the Hill Country Blues style[13] that imbues *Texassippi* (2007) and many other albums that Cashman released since 2005. The repetitive rhythm of the guitar in the songs, combined with the Gothicism of the lyrics, powerfully express the sublimity of his music.

Hill Country blues: amplifying the sublime effect

On the evening of my arrival in Nolensville on May 2016, Cashman took me to Nashville's 5 Spot Club. We attended the performance of Louisiana singer-songwriter Kevin Gordon. On the way to the venue, Cashman played some Hill Country blues on his CD player—Robert Belfour. That set the tone. He parked his truck on a parking lot close to the venue. He pointed to a nearby building, explaining that it was the high school where Oprah Winfrey went. As we talked, Belfour's voice and percussive guitar rhythm came from the speakers.

Cashman, though a versatile musician, is particularly drawn to the Hill Country blues style. The more time I spend with him, the more I realize that. A year earlier, during my first visit, we talked extensively about the blues. He unveiled solid knowledge about the history of the music and how a sense of place impacts the style, with particular fondness for the Hill Country blues:

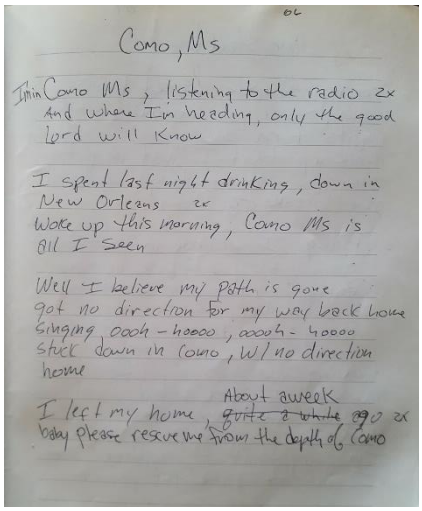
> The blues depends on what part of the country you are from. Texas blues, you have tons and tons of good guys like Mance Lipscomb, Lightnin' Hopkins and T-Bone Walker. The Mississippi Delta Blues, that's a different style. And then just 40 miles away you have the Hill Country blues. When I first heard the Hill Country blues, I was like: 'wow, that's a different style, that's what I like!' There's stuff like [he plays a riff on his guitar]. Lots of open tuning.[14] It's a happier blues, a party blues where we get together. In the Carolinas, you have the Piedmont blues and the fingerpicking style. Lots of rag, jazzy, stuff like [he plays the Piedmont style] There are so many

[12] Williamson, Vicky, "The Science of Music – Why Do Songs in a Minor Key Sound Sad?" (www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/the-science-of-music-why-do-songs-in-a-minor-key-sound-sad). Williamson digitally shifted R.E.M's gloomy "Losing My Religion" to a major key. This musical change is a powerful example of how the musical key can completely change the atmosphere of a song. As she puts it, "it triggers a totally different emotional effect."

[13] The Hill Country Blues is a regional style of blues that we can hear in northern Mississippi, especially in Holly Springs and Oxford. It is characterized by the use of the "drone string" effect, where a note or chord is continuously sounded throughout most or all of a piece. It also has a strong emphasis on rhythm and percussion.

[14] When a musician changes the standard tuning of is guitar into a different tuning to a form a chord, it is called an "open tuning."

subgenres of blues based on the region where you live. If you have a band, you dance. If it's just one guy with an acoustic guitar, you're still moving. (Cashman 2015)


Como, Ms

I'm in Como Ms, listening to the radio 2x
And where I'm heading, only the good
Lord will know

I spent last night drinking, down in
New Orleans 2x
Woke up this morning, Como Ms is
All I seen

Well I believe my path is gone
got no direction for my way back home
Singing oooh - hoooo, oooh - hoooo
Stuck down in Como, W/ no direction
home

I left my home, About a week
~~gone a while ago~~ 2x
baby please rescue me from the depth of Como

Figure 23. Manuscript of "Como, Ms", Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.

Later in our conversation, Cashman mentioned Robert Palmer's *Deep Blues* and offered me a copy of the documentary film that features a wide range of Hill Country blues musicians such as R.L Burnside, Jessie Mae Hemphill, Junior Kimbrough, and Big Jack Johnson. He also toured with T. Model Ford. On *Texassippi*, he sings about Como, Mississippi, a major place for the performance of the Hill Country blues:

Como, Ms, listening to the radio (x2)
And where I'm heading, only the good Lord will know

From Cashman's *Black and Blue* (2005) to his *Slow Drag* (2016), a distinctive hypnotic Hill Country groove runs through the songs. On his debut album, Cashman pays homage to his role model Mississippi Fred McDowell, with "You Gotta Move" (a remaking of the song recorded by McDowell in 1965) and "The Ghost of Fred." On the slide guitar, he performs what a "drone string effect" *à la manière de* McDowell. The drone music can be identified as one riff played repeatedly all along a song that "would put people in trance" (Hermann 2016). Hermann cites Junior Kimbrough and R.L Burnside, "who would play just one riff for ten minutes." Cashman uses the drone string effect on most of the songs released on *Black and Blues* (including "I'm Ready," "Bullet," "Lady," and "Personality") and *Texassippi* (including "Black," "Watcha Doing," "Como, Ms," and "Pistol Blues"). They are all are amplified by foot-stomping, high-pitched harmonica licks, and usually a kick drum. With the addition of the banjo and the fiddle, *Rough & Tumble Sound* (2012) has a more country music feel. The Hill Country blues style, however, is still floating in the air. A

hypnotic groove can be heard o “Nobody But You,” “Moving Fast” and “Skin.” The drone sound is produced by distorted electric guitar riffs and a strong bass-and-drums rhythm section. More recently, *Slow Drag* (2016) includes numbers like “Where The Blues Was Born” and “Just a Girl” that follow the Hill Country blues style.

As literary Allan Lloyd-Smith notes, “repetition is a hallmark of the Gothic… , Freud identified repetition as one of the central characteristics of the uncanny” (Lloyd-Smith 2004, 2). When the repetition, inherent of the drone music, is combined with the murky lyrics of the songs, Cashman produces a double sublime effect. While the repetitive guitar riff is both eerie and appealing, the lyrics are a subtle combination of beauty and threat. This is exemplified by the Hill Country Blues song “Skin”:

> Mother’s milk, Pacific silk
> Purity in hand
> Watch it all go down, not a sound
> Disappearance in the sand.

The song “Skin” is performed in an upbeat tempo, but this doubly sublime effect can also be created by a slower rhythm. In “Devil & I,” a dragging and haunting sound emerges from the distorted electric slide guitar and the fiddle. Delta Rae’s drummer and percussionist Mike McKee identifies this sound as a slow southern drag, directly related to the hot and humid climate of the South:

> There’s something so appealing about a swampy drum beat. It’s a very slow drum beat, and it makes you think walking slowly. People in the South, from the summertime, they walk slowly because it’s so freaking hot, especially deep down Alabama, Mississippi. It’s just muddy. The music sounds slower, it’s very draggy. That’s the weather. (McKee 2016)

Cashman’s latest album, called *Slow Drag*, may reference a blues dance tune, but also the “draggy” sound described by McKee. This slow draggy sound is reminiscent of the zombie dimension of the South (see chapter one). People “walk slowly,” like the walking dead. This idea clearly relates to the feeling of undeadness that pervades southern Gothic fiction and

Cashman's songwriting. These (un)dead figures prevail in many songs, including "The Ghost of Fred," "Desolation," and "Nana's Diner."

Presence of the dead: the ghost story in Cashman's songwriting

In his songwriting, Cashman often uses the ghost story, a strong Gothic narrative. He depicts scenery where spiritual beings visit the living in their everyday life. In "Nana's Diner" (2016), for example, Cashman describes the appearance of a very attractive girl who came in, sat down, and then got up and left, while the narrator is having a fine meal at a dining place. This girl is described as an "angel." In most stories, "ghosts visit the living to avenge a wrongful death, complete unfinished business, deliver important information, reward the living, punish or protect, or reenact their deaths (Brown 2009, 296). In "Nana's Diner," Cashman explained that the girl is an attractive enchantress sent to the earth to seduce men—like a Succubus. This incursion of an irrational element in a rational world (Nana's Diner, which is a real restaurant in Nolensville) creates a supernatural ambiance that is reminiscent of Gothic fiction. The frontier between the world of the living and the world of the dead is shifting. His eyes are "burning through her soul." In the last verse, the female angel mysteriously "disappeared into the air," leaving only the flower that she had in her hair.

Another spirit appears in "Dead Man's Cadillac" (2016). As in "Nana's Diner," the frontier between the living and the dead is blurry. After purchasing a dead man's car, the narrator receives the visitation of a ghost, probably the owner's:

> Got me a dead man's Cadillac, and that spirit's over me
> Feeling kind of eerie, 'cause that spirit just won't let me be.

The lyrics revive the dead through the purchase of a car. The owner's death allows the narrator to break a social barrier. It "feel[s] like a million dollars, driving it down the road," sings Cashman. The Cadillac was a symbol of success and social advancement from the 1950s

to the 1970s. It also had a major impact in the music business (the Cadillac El Dorado given to Isaac Hayes as a reward for his album *Hot Buttered Soul* in 1972 is one of many examples). The narrator is fully aware he will whet envy: "all my friends will be jealous, cause that Cadillac is so fine."

The persistence of dead figures in Cashman's songwriting are also a way to show gratitude and respect. According to T.S Eliot, a poet must write "with his own generation in his bones," and with an "appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (Eliot 1920). In the song "Desolation," for instance, Cashman shows a strong admiration for the late Townes Van Zandt:

> Sadness helps the craft move along
> Just for the sake of the song
> Old Van Zandt was the master at his best
> Poetry in distress.

The phrase "poetry in distress" suggests that things were better in the old times. Cashman expresses a feeling of nostalgia for a bygone time with the evocation of a dead figure. Additionally, the line "for the sake of the song" references Van Zandt, as Cashman explains:

> I was influenced by the guy who was singing "Killing the Blues" and Townes Van Zandt. When I came with that one line, "for the sake of the song," that was in a Townes Van Zandt song that he wrote. "For the Sake of the Song," I think he recorded it at on least six different albums. I don't think he was ever satisfied with it. As soon as I put that line in it, I had to give ode to Townes Van Zandt. (Cashman 2015)

The presence of a spirit is more explicit in "The Ghost of Fred," released on Cashman's debut album *Black and Blues* (2005). The term "ghost" clearly implies a supernatural presence. In the last verse, Cashman acknowledges the influence of Mississippi Fred McDowell by sampling four traditional blues songs that McDowell recorded ("Shake 'em On Down," "Gotta Move," "Drop Down Mama," and "Kokomo Blues"). He sings:

> Shake 'em on down and you gotta move
> Drop down mama and Kokomo Blues
> Song after song, from a man who's dead

This ain't no rock and roll, it's the ghost of Fred.

In addition to freely borrowing from other McDowell performances,[15] the line "this ain't no rock and roll" also references McDowell and his album *I Do No Not Play No Rock 'n Roll* that he recorded in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1969. Cashman greatly admires the Hill Country Blues style of McDowell, whom he emulated. "The first guy I ever tried to learn how to play was Fred McDowell," he recalls. "I tried to sound like him. It sounded really simple… until you really start to learn. It took me a while to learn that style!" It is not surprising, then, that Cashman fantasizes taking a lesson from his role model. In this song, the dead figure has a positive influence:

> The groove that he's playing is out of the world
> I know it's a dream, get me out of this bed
> I'm getting a lesson from the ghost of Fred.

The dream is a key Gothic component that facilitates confusion. The "Gothic's distortions of reality and the self" (Van Elferen 2012, 8) foster the apparition of spirits, often in a dream. The vision of Fred McDowell came in a dream ("I've been dreaming of this from far, a black man singing and playing the bottleneck guitar"). Similarly, the angel of "Nana's Diner" can be interpreted as a Succubus, which always appears in dreams.

Cashman, from reading to writing songs: "Snake Feast" and "Evangeline"

In my second chapter, I explained that Cashman is an avid reader, particularly drawn to southern Gothic literature He has "always enjoyed reading books" as they are "an escape from the everyday grind" (Cashman 2016). Musicians are often influenced by texts they read, be they fiction or memoirs. Singer-songwriter Rhiannon Giddens embodies this idea in her music video "Black is the Color."[16] Directed by Peter Zavadil, the clip was shot at Fisk

[15] "Drop Down Mama" was first recorded by Sleepy John Estes and Hammie Nixon, but Fred McDowell made his own version in 1959.
[16] Giddens, Rhiannon. 2015. "Black is the Color." *Tomorrow is My Turn*. Video available on www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Pg2lt8PmTA.

University. Sitting in the library, Giddens is reading *The Story of the Jubilee Singers* (figure 24). As she reads the book (and other manuscripts, photographs, and objects related to the story of the Jubilee Singers), she starts to write the lyrics of the song that she is singing:

> Black is the color of my true love's hair
> His face so soft and wondrous fair
> The purest eyes
> And the strongest hands.

Figure 24. Rhiannon Giddens reading in the library of Fisk University in the music video "Black is the Color", 2016. ©Peter Zavadil.

This close connection between reading and writing was also expressed by Giddens during her show at the Carolina Performing Arts Center in Chapel Hill, on February 2016. When she introduced her song "Julie," she explained that she was inspired by slave narratives she read in Andrew Ward's *The Slaves War: The Civil War in the Words of Former Slaves* (2008). A year later, at the same venue, musician Steve Earle told about a song he wrote after "spending the whole day and the whole night at the public library of Nashville, Tennessee."[17] He added with a smile: "you know, a library, it's like Internet, but slower, and all is true!" Many songwriters are inspired by literature, and sometimes retell a fictional story in a song. Cashman has taken this approach a couple of times, particularly in his songs "Snake Feast" and "Evangeline."

He wrote two songs that are inspired by the fiction of Harry Crews and Tom Franklin. "Snake Feast" is based on Crews's *A Feast of Snakes* and "Evangeline" tells the story of a character in Franklin's *Smonk*, Evavangeline. Cashman briefly explained the process of retelling a song that originated as a piece of literature:

> For one thing, you need to make it way shorter. You got to take a 200-page novel and condense it in about three minutes. Once you figure out that part, you got it! Then make sure some of the stuff rhymes! [Laughing] That's how I did, I condensed it in a

[17] Earle, Steve. March 4, 2017. Concert at the Carolina Performing Arts Center at UNC-Chapel Hill.

> song form. So, obviously, you don't have as many details. You pick up the details that will tell the story very quickly. (Cashman 2016)

The first challenge that Cashman faces is the amount of words he can use in a song. In his compelling comparative study of Faulkner's fiction and the blues, scholar Tim Ryan observes that "almost every one of Faulkner's nineteen novels exceed 250 pages, whereas few blues songs get close to 250 words" (Ryan 2015, 155). *A Feast of Snakes* is a complex and weird story that involves many characters. In "Snake Feast," Cashman retells the 192-page story in 205 words, and therefore has to make choices. In the novel, Crews describes in details the animality and the brutality of his characters, which include Jon Loe, an alcoholic and violent husband, and sheriff Matlow, a serial rapist. This contrasts with "Snake Feast," in which Cashman eludes all names and focuses on non-human figures. The feast consists of deep fried snakes that hunters have captured during the Roundup Party. In the first verse of the song, animals are at the core of the story. Snakes are crawling and gophers are digging:

> Way down in north Georgia, in the mountain air
> A snake is coiled up to strike a who do there
> Well the gophers dig down in the earth a hole
> The snakes crawl down it when the air gets cold.

This constant association made between human beings and the snake emphasizes the bestiality of those who participate in this "party," as Cashman puts it. Cashman pushes the grotesque to its paroxysm. Indeed, he takes up the metaphor of the snake, "one of the best animal to suggest a grotesque image" (Lachaud 2014). It is emphasized by the focus on the grotesque figure of the serpent and the incongruous feast. Even the priest has a serpentine shape. In the chorus, the snakes are "lying on the altar of the serpentine priest" and "keep crawling for the feast" where they are the main dish. This makes it particularly macabre. That said, adapting a novel into a song does not necessarily mean changing everything, as Cashman explains:

> The meaning in "Snake Feast" does not change, because it's about the same thing. I haven't read that book in a long time, but basically the song is about the party that the characters have at the end of the novel. They all gathered up to catch the snakes, and everybody is there camping out. That's how I came up with the Winnebago campers. Like that I give a little detail in the song, and I don't think in that book Harry Crews ever mentions Winnebagos. But it's a pretty general term in America for a camper. In the old days, Winnebago used to be the only make, or the most popular. Instead of saying: "hey, there's a camper," you say: "hey, look, there's a Winnebago." I put a little tit bits in there like that. (Cashman 2016)

When Cashman retells the story to make it his own, he brings new and personal references. The addition of the Winnebago campers, for example, is a great illustration of the way he adapts the novel, while expressing a similar Gothic feeling. In few words, the listener falls into the murky waters of Mystic, Georgia, where "the smell of snake drifts through the air." Cashman depicts the suffocating space appealing to all our five senses:

> White corn liquor is the drink of choice
> A water back to keep your lips moist
> Deep fried snake is served with rice and beans
> And cute little girls wearing those cutoff jeans.

The other challenge that Cashman brought up is to "make sure that some of the stuff rhymes." "Evangeline" is a great illustration of this challenge, and how it can be overcome. In this song, Cashman was inspired by a character in Franklin's *Smonk*, Evavangeline. For the sake of the rhyme, he respelled the name as Evangeline. "There's one character, her name wasn't Evangeline, but it was similar to that," he explained. "It didn't rhyme, it didn't have the syllables to work in a song properly, so I changed it to Evangeline." In the novel, Evavangeline is an underage prostitute and a murderer. Cashman provided further details: "a posse was after her because she performed sodomy with someone. That was illegal, so she was on the run. I don't want to tell you more because you need to read the book!" [Laughing] In the song, the narrator shows sympathy for the unfortunate girl and wants to rescue her:

> Oh Evangeline, won't you come with me
> High Sheriff wanting you, mistaken identity
> I believe if I were you girl, I'll be set to leave

Oh Evangeline won't you come with me.

Given all the books Cashman reads, I was curious to hear more about how he decides to adapt novels (as he did with *A Feast of Snakes* and *Smonk*), and how he chooses the subject of the song. For instance, in *Smonk*, there are many characters (including the sinister figure of Smonk, which gave the book its title), but Cashman chose to focus on Evavangeline.

> Some books I just think: "hey, this could be a good song." That's how that comes about. I put a lot of thoughts into the process of writing a song, but not so much how I choose a subject. I used to try to write about subjects, and start to write a song about this. (Cashman 2016)

In the process of retelling a novel as a song, Cashman has free rein to select the topics he wants to talk about, the novels he wants to adapt, and how he wants to do that, as long as it rhymes. The choices he makes reinforce the pervasive feeling of the Gothic, either by focusing on one character ("Evangeline") or by condensing the narrative to emphasize the animality of the protagonists ("Snake Feast").

CONCLUSION

Exploring the interplay of southern Gothic literature and southern music from an African American perspective

You asked me a question I'll tell you a lie
And now he's looking at me right dead in the eyes
He said I'm dead in the eyes
Dead in the eyes.

Adia Victoria, "Dead Eyes," 2016.

In 2015, I came to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to study the blues. At that time, I did not imagine that my journey would take me to look at how southern Gothic literature and southern music have evolved and influenced each other. My encounter with Ray Cashman in France marks the start of this intriguing and compelling research. I began to explore new territory, connecting southern music—blues and country music—with southern Gothic literature, Grit Lit, and conjure. This study examined how Cashman asserts his identity as a southern white working-class man in his everyday life and in his music, expressing emotions and performing actions that are reminiscent of the Gothic.

I first stressed the challenge of defining the Gothic. While Gothic architecture can be clearly identified, "Gothic" is more problematic when applied in literature and music. From Cashman to Mike McKee and John Hermann, all the consultants that I interviewed offered a different definition. I indicated that the term "southern Gothic literature" was coined in the early 1930s by writer Ellen Glasgow to categorize the works of William Faulkner, Erskine

Caldwell, and Flannery O'Connor, among many others. As Hermann puts it, this terminology was "used as a disparaging term by a critic to go against all these romantic notions of the 'wonderful South' and these heroic tributes to the great South" (Hermann 2016). As for Cashman, he identifies the Gothic as an expression of life's hardships, superstition, and desperation.

Then, I underlined the influence of the "sublime effect," this tension between horror and beauty, on Gothic writers from the 19th century until today, from Edgar Allan Poe to William Faulkner and Tom Franklin. Next I discussed how this applies in Cashman's music approach. The sublimity of his lyrics is amplified by his use of the minor key (as in the song "Desolation") and by use of the droning Hill Country Blues style in his music.

The feeling of "undeadness," this idea that the past is shaping the present, a defining characteristic of southern Gothic literature, Grit Lit and southern music. It is closely linked to the daunting legacy of the South, which fostered the emergence of dead figures (such as ghosts and zombies). The enslavement of Africans is expressed metaphorically with zombies by writers like Faulkner and Franklin. This idea relates to the concept of "social death" by Orlando Patterson. After the abolition of slavery and throughout the twentieth century, African Americans remained "invisible" to much of the society, as expressed by Ralph Ellison in his novel *Invisible Man*. I found that this "undeadness" of the South brings together the Gothic, blues and magical beliefs. Jameela Dallis conceptualizes the "transformative Gothic" to convey the idea that oppressed people use many ways to deal with and transform the pain of a traumatic past.

Cashman is also breaking racial barriers. The influence of southern Gothic literature, along with the performance of the blues in the Mississippi Delta, Cashman cultivates identities of both whiteness and blackness. At many levels, he shows evidence of cross-cultural understanding. In his music, he cultivates a whiteness and a blackness being,

acknowledging the influence of white writers (Larry Brown, Tom Franklin), country music (Townes Van Zandt, Steve Earle) and African American blues musicians (Mississippi Fred McDowell, Skip James). His songwriting references both cultures, and overtly relates to white and Black working-class communities.

Grit Lit is a new literary trend that emerged in the 1970s, very similar to southern Gothic literature. It includes contemporary writers like Harry Crews, Larry Brown and Tom Franklin, all of whom have a direct influence on Cashman's songwriting. Cashman can relate to these writers as they all come from and focus on white working-class people struggling in small rural southern towns, writing about the "Rough South."

My last chapter analyzes how Cashman retells Grit Lit stories. "Snake Feast" is based on Crews's *A Feast of Snakes*, and "Evangeline" is inspired by a character in Tom Franklin's *Smonk*. When Cashman transforms the long narrative of a novel into a song, he first has to make it a lot shorter. Getting to the essence of the story, he reinforces the sinister and the grotesque. The other challenge that Cashman has to face is to make the lyrics rhyme.

Today, Cashman continues to be devoting his time to songwriting, reading, carpentry and cooking. On January 2017, during my latest visit to Nolensville, he showed me the manuscript of his new song "Mice Among Men," inspired by John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1937). The lyrics convey this Gothic sensibility of bleakness, desperation and violence, along with feelings of displacement and vulnerability, and references to dire situation during the Great Depression, all while telling stories about the struggles of white working-class men:

> Well I almost never saw them
> It'd been dust for several miles
> And I never planned on stopping
> When up walked on an old man and a child.

While my research focuses on a white musician, and build on the expertise of other white artists, including Mike McKee and John Hermann, I would like to expand my study on

Figure 25. Cover of Adia Victoria's album Beyond the Bloodhounds *(2016). The title references Harriet Jacobs's* Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, published in *1861. ©Adia Victoria.*

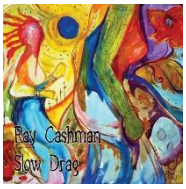
African American performers. I would like to look at how they relate to southern Gothic literature, and how this genre shapes their music. Singer-songwriters like Adia Victoria need to be studied in order to bring a new perspective on this topic. On her official website, she claims that her music has "plenty of southern Gothic styled, marrow, deep joy." While Victoria shares the tradition of southern Gothic literature, how does she take this similar tradition into her songwriting? What kind of emotions is she expressing? The title of her debut album *Beyond the Bloodhounds* (2016), for instance, pays homage to a line in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). In her song "Stuck in the South" (2016), Victoria talks about racism that plagues the South:

> I don't know nothing about southern belles
> But I can tell you something about southern hell
> When your skin give 'em cause
> To take and take.

The music video "Dead Eyes" evokes slaves making an escape from the plantation. A black woman is running through the woods, chased by masked men dressed in black robes and blood hounds. The incorporation of slave narratives in Victoria's work does not appear in Cashman's. This is a whole new territory that is worth exploring.

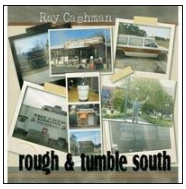
APPENDIX 1: RAY CASHMAN'S DISCROGRAPHY

Slow Drag, Knick Knack Records, 2016.



Desolation, Knick Knack Records, 2015.

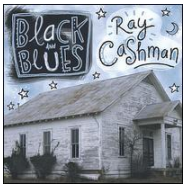
Rough & Tumble South, D-Bomb Records, 2012.



Snake Feast, Southern Sound Records, 2010.

Texassippi Stomp, 219 Records, 2007.

Black and Blues, Scorpion Ranch Records, 2005.



APPENDIX 2: LYRICS OF THE SONGS WRITTEN BY RAY CASHMAN

Ray Cashman, *Slow Drag*, Knick Knack Records, 2016.

"Fame"

Sunlight against the wall
Door shuts as you leave
Mystery encased in doubt
You get what you receive
It's all part of the game
All in the name of fame

Trouble's all around
It's all that I can see
Alcohol pouring down
And your sexuality
You want to stake your claim
All in the name of fame

Moonlight shining down
The mood as cold as steel
Distance makes not a sound
The circle rolls like a wheel
You say you're not to blame
All in the name of fame

"Nana's Diner"

Down at Nana's Diner, called a meat at three
The local feed store across the street
In walked a living angel, well I do believe
She nearly swept me off my feet

She wore a strapless dress, had a flower in her hair
She walked down the aisle, like a 12-bar blues
And as she passed my table, leg glistening bare
Hips swaying in her high heel shoes

Down at Nana's Diner you can order most anything
From liver and onions to BBQ chicken wings
I can't recall a meal that was finer
That night down at Nana's Diner

My eyes were burning straight through her soul
There's not a finer woman I do abide
She smelled better than a gulf shrimp boil
When suddenly she stood, and walked outside

(Chorus)

Just like that she was gone, disappeared into the air
And everybody let out a sigh
And as I picked up that flower that fell from her hair
The women laughed, and the men began to cry

(Chorus)

"Dead Man's Cadillac"

There's a Cadillac for sale, and the owner just died (2x)
Wanna ride that Cadillac with my baby sitting by my side

I'm gonna spend my money, so that Cadillac will be mine (2x)
All my friends will be jealous, cause that Cadillac is so fine

(Guitar solo)

I got the title in my hand, that Cadillac is now sold
Feel like a million dollars, driving it down the road

Got me a dead man's Cadillac, and that spirit's over me (2x)
Feeling kind of eerie, 'cause that spirit just won't let me be

(Guitar solo)

Where The Blues Was Born

From Memphis down to Jackson
In the land where the blues was born
It came like a hurricane
Like the eye of the storm

Now the blues they were born there
On a one room country shack
They'd play out on the weekends
Thumb a ride on their way back

Some say it's in the water
Others believe it's in the air
But when you're down in the Delta
The blues is always there

Ray Cashman, *Desolation*, Knick Knack Records, 2015.

"Desolation"

Drizzling fog undress the hills of gold and red
Image etched into my head
Cold wind cuts straight to the bone
Memories toiled in stone

Desolation, the state in which I crave
Straight down to the grave
When you have nothing in you left to lose
Well they call that the blues

Sadness helps the craft move along
Just for the sake of the song
And old Van Zandt was the master at his best
Poetry in distress

(Chorus)

"Snake Feast"

Way down in north Georgia, in the mountain air
A snake is coiled up to strike a who do there
Well the gophers dig down in the earth a hole
The snakes crawl down it when the air gets cold

The snakes come a crawling for the feast (3x)
They lying on the altar of the serpentine priest

White corn liquor is the drink of choice
A water back to keep your lips moist
Deep fried snake is served with rice and beans
And cute little girls wearing those cutoff jeans

(Chorus)

Now there's Winnebago campers and tents everywhere
The smell of snake drifts through the air
When the sun goes down and cups litter the ground
The snake skins piled in a burial mound

(Chorus)

"Day After Hells Burns Out"

There was a time, when we could all sing
You sparkled and shined like a new diamond ring

The water surrounding would bring all to see
For all who believed and trusted

Your pedigree consists of all that was great
Your arrogance and wisdom will seal your feat
When the time came for you, you stood up for all
Proclaiming it justice

You can holler and scream till your face turns blue
You can rant and rave till your lungs burst through
When all said and done and the end without a doubt
It's looking like the day after hell has burned out

You out lasted all, the toil and the blood
From the thirst of the drought to the water of the flood
You staggered and wobbled but you never did fall
Strong relevantly speaking

You've had conflicts and sorrows but you always put through
Never settled on triumph always searching for new
And they came with anger from all directions
Faith they proclaimed hey were seeking

(Chorus)

Now you battered and bruised and all but done
You gave it your all, loved all as one
You fought the battles and engaged in the wars
Democracy has spoken

Now we sit in silence, out thoughts to reflect
Of a time long ago that we can't recollect
And down that dark path, we all must go
Our future bent and broken

(Chorus)

"Weather Song"

You know I've seen it all before
Dark sky rolling in, weather fixing to pour
Looks like our plans will be washed out again
Cause love and weather are uncertain since time began

But come December, the chill will grow
The cold air will change the rain to snow

Spring will come and it will be
Time for love to blossom like the trees
Warmer weather will bring thunderstorms

But you need rain to grow and adorn

(Chorus)

Sometime's love's as cold as the Hudson Bay
Other time it's as hot as a July day
But I've been one for emotional change
Like the heat being washed away from a Houston rain

(Chorus)

"Time"

Time's the answer, she softly whispered
As she turned to leave
And I can't let her go

The moon's like embers, as I remember
My heart, it does bleed
But she already knows

I sit and watch the sun rise
A thirst I do crave
My reflection glaring back into my eyes
The price that I must pay

(Cello and acoustic guitar solo)

Shadows falling, her words are calling
Just a distant memory
These choices are my own

I sit all alone, wishing Lord I was stone
This lie I still believe
As darkness falls like a stone

I sit and watch the sun rise
A thirst I do crave
My reflection glaring back into my eyes
The price that I must pay

Ray Cashman, *Rough & Tumble South*, D-Bomb Records, 2012.

"The Food Song"

Bread and butter with blackberry jam
Redeye gravy and country ham
Three egg omelet with bacon bits
Hot black coffee, cheese and grits

Doctor told me, drinking will kill me this time
I drink on my birthday, if my birthday is down the line
Well if I can't drink, I guess I'll eat you off my mind

Wonder bread and pimento cheese
Pass the salt and pepper please
All beef patty, with special sauce
Pulled pork sandwich and coleslaw

(Chorus)

Fried catfish and rice and beans
Hushpuppies and collar beans
There's chicken as far as you can see
Wash it all down with a glass of sweet tea

"The Simple Life"

I had a little dream, about a double wide
A pickup truck with those mirrors in the side
Bait castling reel and an old Jon Boat
A yard full of chickens and a couple of goats
The simple things in life, like an old wood barn
A little slowing down couldn't cause us any harm

I was walking through the wood, could smell the fresh pine
Had a five-pound fish on a floating jug line
Looking at the sky for the man on the moon
The simple things in life, like a well-crafted song
A little slowing down couldn't cause us any harm

I heard my grandma say, child bless your heart
The sound of a sixty-eight Plymouth ragtop dart
The pop of a church key, opening a beer
Darkness of the night was my biggest fear
The simple things in life, like a fifty-acre farm
A little slowing down couldn't cause us any harm

I know that moving forward is what life is about
Putting food on the table to feed those little mouths
But if we took a little time, like saying grace

Thank the good lord for the food on our plate
The simple things in life, like old southern charm
A little slowing down couldn't cause us any harm

"Evangeline"

Oh Evangeline, won't you come with me
High Sheriff wanting you, mistaken identity
I believe if I were you girl, I'll be set to leave
Oh Evangeline won't you come with me

Oh Evangeline, running from the man
Leaving men in your tracks, six shooters in hand
They say they'll get you baby, as quick as they can
Oh Evangeline, running from the man

Oh Evangeline, what you gonna do?
They say they getting close to surrounding you
Gonna put a rope around your neck girl, till your face turns blue
Oh Evangeline, what you gonna do?

(Banjo solo)

Oh Evangeline, won't you come with me
High Sheriff wanting you, mistaken identity
I believe if I were you girl, I'll be set to leave
Oh Evangeline won't you come with me

"Skin"

Shadows fall, darkness crawls thru your skin
Cause it never fails, details lost like the wind

And if you ever come down
Would you see me again?
Or did you realize, loving me was just a sin

Mother's milk, Pacific silk
Purity in hand
Watch it all go down, not a sound
Disappearance in the sand

Well I believe, begging on my knees
The light of day
And I can feel the pain, I know the shame, okay

"Devil and I"

Two different spirits, together they held sway (2x)

One is old as the cross, the other aged a few days

Deliver us from evil, temptation runs too high
That's always been the story, between the devil and I

(Fiddle solo)

On one side there's a church, on the other there's a bar (2x)
But my thirst for that clear liquid, flows from a mason's jar

Since the beginning of time, this battle has waged (2x)
Religion verse whiskey, until your dying day

Turn the Key

Everyone is a victim of their troubled past
Brown eyes grey with sadness
Lingers thru the past
Turn the key and lock the door
I'm leaving here like never before

Grief thrives in a quiet heart
Yours has not made a sound
Close my eyes, I see her face
Hoping that you'd come around
Turn the key and lock the door
I'm leaving here like never before

(Slide guitar and fiddle solo 1)

I wake up and I feel alone
I feel that train run thru my head
Hard parts over, they all say
Cause surely now I must be dead
Turn the key and lock the door
I'm leaving here like never before

I see her take other men
Lead down by the hand
Seen 'em cry for the sakes
Lying face down in the sand
Turn the key and lock the door
I'm leaving here like never before

(Slide guitar and fiddle solo 2)

Ray Cashman, *Texassippi Stomp*, 219 Records, 2007.

"Como, Ms"

Como Ms, listening to the radio (2x)
And where I'm heading
Only the good Lord will know

I spent last night drinking
Down in New Orleans
Woke up this morning
Como Ms is all I seen

Well I believe my path is gone
Got no direction for my way back home
Singing oooh-hoooo, oooh-hoooo
Stuck down in Como, with no direction home

I left my home about a week ago (2x)
Baby please rescue me from the depth of Como

Ray Cashman, *Black and Blues*, Scorpion Ranch Records, 2005.

"The Ghost of Fred"

I've been dreaming of this from far
A black man singing and playing the bottleneck guitar
It's him and I so dark and surreal

The groove that he's playing is out of the world
I know it's a dream, get me out of this bed
I'm getting a lesson from the ghost of Fred

Shake em on down and you gotta move
Drop down mama and Kokomo Blues
Song after song, from a man who's dead
This ain't no rock and roll, it's the ghost of Fred

APPENDIX 3: CONVERSATIONS WITH RAY CASHMAN

DATE: Tuesday, February 14, 2017.

LOCATION: Phone conversation.

PHONE: 615-856-6100.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

Hi Ray! As I mentioned in my email, I would have one question regarding country music and blues, and how you identify your music. I went through our conversations, in which you explained that you were first exposed to country music that your parents played on the stereo, Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash... You also say that country and blues music are very similar, arguing that the main difference between those genres was made by the music industry in the old days, mostly was based on the race of the performer. Then, you clearly define your music as blues, and powerfully claim you are a bluesman… So, I was wondering why…?

Ray Cashman: Well because now is way different. I don't know if I told you, but a couple albums ago, I wrote some songs that I thought were country. Then I played them in Nashville. I was in one of those rounds, and one guy had a couple of songs that some big names recorded. I don't think they were hits, but they recorded them. When he played these songs, you could tell, there's a big difference. A big difference. Even though I thought I was playing country songs, this guy said: "you know, you could play the blues really good." I said: "well, I'm not [Laughing] blues, I really play country songs!" Now everything is so defined. In country, in blues, it would never sound… At the very beginning, when American music was very popular, like Jimmy Rodgers. He was a country player. But if you're listening to his music, he's basically playing the blues. Just because he was white so he had to be country.

There are other guys… There's a blues book that also goes back… It tells about three or four guys who were white, but they were considered blues players. They lived in West Virginia and Kentucky where everybody worked in the mines. Even the black people worked with the white people, they were all the same class. Some of those white guys learned how to play the blues.

I feel like you relate to the blues in terms of class, and not so much in terms of race…

RC: [Five-second pause] I think now days it's definitely the type of music you play. They are so many classifications. If you hear… Some of my songs are not really bluesy, but other people think that there's a lot of blues. That's how it is. That's why I say I'm blues, because… If I try to sell myself, if I try to get myself a gig, and I say I'm country, and I play the music that I play... They will say: "you're not country at all, you're blues."

How do you explain that?

RC: Because it is blues. It has a lot of blues elements, which is the structure of the music. Because blues music you play a lot of 7^{th}s. Rock and roll you play something else. And country, you mostly play all major chords, but you put a minor chord in there for saddest songs. It all goes back to the music theory of it. I'm playing the music theory of it. All my music has a blues structure.

But at the same time, you don't always follow the AAB form…

RC: No, but there's all different kinds. I tried to distinguish myself. I don't want to do that simple… Of course, some songs I do, because it seems to work. But sometimes when I want to tell stories, or show inner emotions. Some songs that you can't really tell what I'm singing about. More an emotion than a story, or something like that.

If I get it right, you say you're more blues that country to market your music?

RC: Yes, because they wouldn't… If I was trying to play a country they knew. When they heard my music, even I send the most country of my music, they would say "you're not country at all!" [Laughing]

I was thinking about your songs like "Evangeline" or "Turn the Key," with the fiddle, it does sound country to me. What would be country music for those music people in Nashville then?

RC: Whatever they play in the radio. I think that's why the roots music is getting big. Those songs fall into America roots music. If you ever watched Americana Awards, they give awards. There's blues, there's country. Basically, roots music is everything that is not country or pop or rap. Charlie Parr is considered blues. He plays in a lot of blues venues and blues festivals, even though he's more roots. It's undefined. It's a lot of elements. You have blues, you have folk, you have country. One consistent thing is that you can't be popular. You can't play popular music like music that's on radio stations around America. I like the structure of the blues, and I like good songwriting. It's like the country or folk. The folk is not very popular. There's still a lot of good folk songwriters but… In the 60s and the 70s where the folk songwriters… Well, the phrase singer-songwriter... Songwriter is mainly a folk music, but they're not as popular as they were back then.

This idea of "popular music" and "roots music" makes me think of the questions of authenticity. How would you define that?

RC: I don't know how much of that I'm doing. For instance, I was at a festival once, and this group of guys were playing. I thought they were good and they were playing old blues songs.

From the 1940s, stuff like that. This one guy kept saying: “they’re not authentic.” You could tell, he was playing like Americana style. I don’t really know what he meant by that. I think when you get caught up with all these… Like you play “authentic blues,” or you’re playing “authentic” any style of music… If you get caught up too much in that, then you lose what the purpose really is. It’s to listen to the music. People listen to the music because it takes stress off their life. It makes you feel good, makes you feel happy. If you’re too worried, “oh, is this authentic?,” you’re missing the whole point. [Laughing] Do you want to hear… There’s a lot of guys they just play old songs. They play note for note, exactly the same as the record. Do you want to listen to that old the time? I don’t. Definitely I don’t want to play that. People get too caught up in being authentic or not.

And I’m not even sure if that would be being authentic, playing note for note, the same old song…

RC: Yeah, that’s the question. Is that even authentic? You recreate an authentic sound, but is it really authentic for you to copying it? Wouldn’t you be more authentic if you put your own spin on it?

I had a class in which we talked about authenticity, and it’s so complex. I think you ask the right questions. Well, I really enjoyed talking to you, Ray. It’s awesome. You always bring so much insights!

RC: Thank you, Victor!

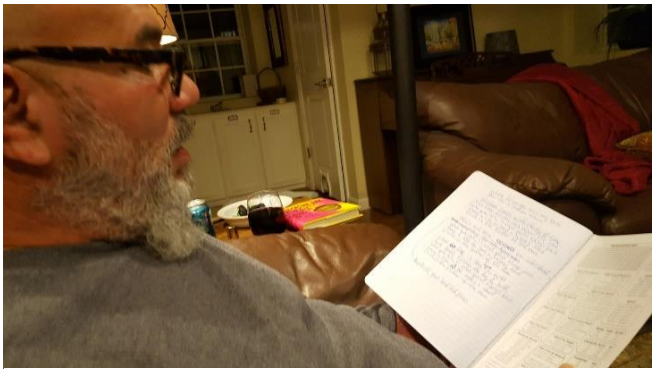


Figure 26. Cashman showing the manuscript of his new song, "Mice Among Men", referencing John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men*, Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.*

DATE: Monday, January 30, 2017.

LOCATION: 1150 Waller Road,

Nolensville, Tennessee.

PHONE: 615-856-6100.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

Cashman and I were sitting on the couch in the living room, having a casual conversation. I brought with me the book Grit Lit *edited by Tom Franklin that I wanted to share with him. He showed great interest, and started to review the authors who are included in the book. I did not start recording after the first five minutes if discussion.*

Ron Rash

Ray Cashman: They were both from Wake Forest. One brother was older and he became a doctor, the other was four or five years younger. He became a writer but he was a major alcoholic. His life was not very successful. The other guy was a very famous doctor in Charlotte. They talked about… Back in 1969, when they were 20 and 16. They met a girl at a river. She was a hippie girl, and she had sex with them. They do drugs. One brother did. The other brother… He's really good, Ron Rash."

Daniel Woodrell

RC: Daniel Woodrell is great. This guy is really great. His has a lot of books. The most famous of his is probably *Winter's Bone*. All his stories take place right on the border of Arkansas and Missouri. He also has this one called *Woe to Live On*. This is a very good one, about the Civil War, between Kansas and Missouri. It was based on some true events, it's

more like a historical fiction. It's a really good cause you don't really know what's going to happen until the very end. What they find out you would never imagine! [Laughing] Wow, how did he come up with that! *Tomato Red* is a very disturbing book. A brother and a sister. They go and find out about this… Like a funeral house. Who does the funeral parlor? Who's the one that dresses up the dead? It's a specific name of someone who works at a funeral house. Like a coroner. Basically. Can't think of the name though. It's a specific name of someone working at a funeral. That's what that was about. It's very disturbing. *The Death of Sweet Mister* is another disturbing book. I also read *The Maid's Version*, it's good. I was actually going to get Tim Gautreaux because I haven't read him for a while. But yeah, Daniel Woodrell, he's good.

Rick Bragg

RC: This guy writes more like memoirs and stuff, not really fiction. He also writes for *Southern Living*, it's a magazine. These two, *Ava's Man* and *All Over But Shoutin*, they are about his family, who is from Alabama. They worked in a plant back in the early 1900s. He told the life of that. It was a brutal life. They worked in cotton gins, and the cotton was floating in the air. Back then, there was no respiratory. In the town, there was just one product. It was the only company. If you were sick, you would never take a day off because you fear that somebody else would take your job if you didn't show up.

[Ten-second pause]

RC: There's this book that comes up every year called Great Literature of the South or something like that. The Best of the South. I've never ready this story by Larry Brown, about this guy who was a travelling doctor. He went to this house, and they kept their kid in a cellar caged up. It was a crazy story! That's why they are good stories, because they are so weird!

William Gay

RC: I read all his books, I love this guy. He was a carpenter all his life. All his stories take place not very far from here, in Hohenwald, Tennessee. That's where he lived. It's about forty miles from here.

Donald Ray Pollock

RC: He was also like a tradesman. William Gay didn't publish his first books until he was 60. And Donald Ray Pollock is very similar. Maybe he was 45 or something. He discussed William Gay. A lot of writers were tradesmen because they needed to make money. And a person said, do you think there's a similarity between working a trade and coming with stories, he says… Because a lot of times you become so mundane, you… I wish I could tell you who wrote that story about the wallpaper hanger. That was the most incredible. You cannot be saying a story like that! It was unbelievable. It was not that long, like twenty pages. It's very short. I'm pretty sure it's Donald Ray Pollock. The book was called something like… Being dead in southern Indiana.

Figure 27. Cashman performing a new song in the style of Ry Cooder, Nolensville, Tennessee, January 2017.

Cashman shows me on his phone a book he would like to purchase, Luis Alberto Urrea's The Devil's Highway: A True Story.

RC: The border that goes from Mexico through Arizona is called the devil's highway. This reminds me of this book that I have, *Spoon River Anthology* by Lee Masters. I have it upstairs. This guy dig… I think it took him five years to write it. He went to this graveyard in a town, and looked at the tombstones names and made up the stories. His poems… The one that I like the best was... The guy was hunting rabbits. He came home and he saw a guy going to his house. And that's how he found that he was having an affair with his wife. The guy ran, he was chasing him, the guy turned, and bang! Shot him. So he died. So he tells stories of how those people died. That is good, though! That's true Gothic right there! [Laughing] Another one the guy was drunk, and… [Laughing] He drinks too much that night and he takes a shortcut to go back to his house. He come upon this guy's yard, he took a stick, and beat him to death! [Laughing] That's how he dies! I found those stories interesting. I found it interesting because you can think. How can you come up with stuff like that, and not be a morbid person? [He changes the tone of his voice, impersonating a discussion between two persons] "Hey, what do you do for a hobby?" "Oh, I like to think about how people can die!" (pause) I've always liked stories like that, to be more entertaining than… something that's nice.

Would you say that you have the same approach in your songwriting?

RC: Oh, definitely. My people in my songs never have a good ending! [Laughing] They all going die, or they have some kind of trouble. Desperation leads to excitement. To me anyways. People act differently when they are desperate. They desperately need something. You're not going to act like this if you didn't need it. [Five-second pause] See, my son called

me yesterday because he was so desperate to try to sublease his apartment in Austin. He's like: "man, I've had it up for two months, and nobody's taking it. Now that the school year have started, I'm not going to get rid of it. I can't afford a thousand of dollars in New York and seven hundred dollars in Austin. What am I going to do, I can't afford it, blablabla." I said: "keep posting it up there, you might have to lower the rent a little bit. Maybe if you pay fifty or hundred bucks of your own pocket, it's not the end of the world. Things work themselves out. It might take a little time." Then he called me back: "man, as soon I got up off the phone with you, I got this guy on the phone who said: "man, I'm looking for an apartment, I'm really desperate!" I said: "see, what happens when two desperate people get together? He's desperate to find an apartment because the semester has already started and has no place to live yet, and you're desperate because the semester has already started and you haven't leased your apartment." That's why he called me. He said: "I'm so relieved! Man, I was so desperate, I didn't know what I was going to do." See what happens. When you're desperate, you don't act your normal self. You don't see rationally. [Pause] Man, I wish I could remember the title of this book. Something like "Crimes in the South of Indiana." [Cashman looks on his phone] *Crimes in Southern Indiana*. Frank Bill is his name. [He then mentions another writer's book] I remember this one. Very stories are totally brutal. Even Tom Franklin's *Poachers* is brutal. I have it up there.

Figure 28. Recording equipment, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

DATE: Friday, May 13, 2016.

LOCATION: 1150 Waller Road, Nolensville, TE.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

Out on Interstate 40 from East to West, from North Carolina to Tennessee. Last October, I took this road for the first time to visit Ray Cashman in Nolensville, Tennessee. I was amazed by the beauty of the Appalachian Mountains. Once again, the landscape was overwhelming. I drove through the long and winding road, surrounded with high hills of green covered by tall brown trees. A beautiful setting illuminated by a clear blue sky and a bright sunlight. After a nine-hour drive, I arrived. His son Dylan opened the door, and Cashman generously offered me homemade tacos. As he reminded me, he grew up in Texas, and "when you are from Texas, you have to like Mexican food, especially on the western part!" I conducted this interview the next day, after a breakfast made of scrambled eggs and sausage. Cashman and I agreed to record out conversation outside, on the patio located at the back of his house. This shady spot shields us from the blazing sun.

Ray, when we first met in France two years ago, you identified yourself first and foremost as a blues musician. Can you tell me how do you relate to this music and its history, and about the racial issues?

Ray Cashman: I feel like I live the blues on a daily basis [Laughing] The history of blues artists, they were hard working guys. They played out at night, and worked in the fields in the day time. That was the case of some of them discovered in the 1960s, like Mississippi Fred McDowell and Skip James. I relate to the blues because I try to make ends meet, and for that you have to do more than one thing, work and play music. About the racial issues… I think

some older Black guys still think that if you're White you can't play the blues. But for the most part, everybody has accepted each other. I go quite often to Clarksdale, Mississippi. There are a lot of blues payers there, they are Black, and for the most part they have accepted of each other. I'm not sure who was the first white musician to play the blues, but it probably didn't happen until the 60s. It was predominantly a black music. In the old days it was called "race records," and if you were White then it was "hillbilly records." Jimmy Rodgers was considered a hillbilly singer, but if you listen to a lot of his songs, he was pretty much blues. He had a lot of blues influence, and some country influence. The way they distinguished the two had mainly to do with your color. If you were Black and played rural music then you played the blues, if you were White and played rural music, they started to call it country. Both are pretty similar actually. They have different instrumentation, but the topics are about the same. It's about hardship of life, with barely food to feed your family. For the most part, those topics are still relevant today. Now some songs are about computers, and fifty years from now people would be like: "what is that?" [Laughing] There are a lot of songs about old cars, like T-Model Fords. Model ways. Not T-Model Ford, he was a blues singer! [Laughing]

What musicians influenced you the most?

RC: The first guy I ever tried to learn how to play was Fred McDowell. I tried to sound like this guy. He sounded really simple until you really start to learn, and it's not simple. Other things about blues, no matter where it's coming from. The blues depends on part of the country you are from. Texas blues tons and tons of good guys like Mance Lipscomb, Lightnin' Hopkins and T-Bone Walker. The Mississippi Delta Blues, that's a different style. And then just forty miles away you have the Hill Country Blues. When I first heard the Hill Country Blues, I was like: "wow, that's a different style, that's the style I like." If you have a band, you dance. If it's just one guy with an acoustic guitar, you're still moving. It took me a

little while to learn that style. Stuff like [he plays a riff]. Lots of that, lots of open tuning. It's a happier blues, I think. More of a party blues where we get together. Then in Carolina you have the Piedmont Blues and the fingerpicking style, lots of rag. Stuff like [he plays the Piedmont style]. Stuff like that, rag style, jazzy. There are so many subgenres of blues based on the region where you live. I guess the Delta felt it the hardest because of the poverty, the music influences more. [He plays "Catfish Blues"] I think John Lee Hooker was almost Hill Country. He had that one chord trans. He put people in trans. It's hypnotic. Also in Texas you have country influences.

Talking about all these different places. You grew up in Texas and then moved to Tennessee. I'm intrigued by your song "Tennessee Blues," in which you sing this line "I lost my soul down in Tennessee"… Why is that?

RC: [Laughing] Because living in Nashville is a dog-eat-dog world. There are so many people... I'm not going to say they are more for the fame or for the glory, but they're doing something to get little attention. Maybe someone's going to say: "you need to do this for your career." So they do it, even though it's not exactly what they want to do. They give up their soul. Just like when Robert Johnson said he sold his soul to the Devil to gain fame. I didn't lose my soul, but I made it for a song!

Let's talk about your music and your songwriting. You delve a lot into southern Gothic literature. How did you first get interested in this genre?

RC: I get interested in the writers, and the novelists. I can't remember who was the first. William Faulkner was probably one of the first where they put the label "southern Gothic" because, obviously, he was from the South, and a lot of his novels have tragic stories. And then I just put the music to it. I didn't even know that there was such a genre until you brought

it to my attention! [Laughing] I enjoy both William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. I read them a long, long time ago. In school, we read William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and a lot of American writers. I just liked it. And then later on I got into a lot of writers who were influenced by Faulkner. I think all southern writers are influenced by him in some way. You write about what you know, and you write about the dialect of the people. For uneducated people like myself, you can understand it better! [Laughing]

You said that a lot of southern writers are influenced by William Faulkner. Can you name a few?

RC: Larry Brown was one I truly enjoyed. I read every book that he put out before his death. Tom Franklin is kind of a new writer. His books have been published for about fifteen years. Harry Crews was one that I start liking very early on. I though he was just a very good and vivid imagination. There's a bunch of them, and probably some I don't know yet that I need to discover. I saw a guy in Clarksdale who had the Thacker Mountain radio, out in Oxford, at the Mississippi University. There's a writer from there who wrote a book about him going to Junior's Juke Joint in Holly Springs, Mississippi. He read a few pages to the audience, it was really good. I'd like to get that book when it's published. What he read was great, it was a good story, which goes back in the early nineties. At the beginning, there was this house, and he moved out all the furniture. Then he's driving in the middle of nowhere, and finds this little place. There are fried catfish and fruit beer. This was a little part of what he read, about him trying to get a beer. They said: "do you want canned beer of Junior's fruit beer?" [Laughing] He was a little wary of the fruit beer so he had a canned Budweiser. And then, when he went back, he said: "let me try this fruit beer," and she said: "it's all gone now." He said: "obviously everybody was drinking that." So fruit beer was like moonshine! [Laughing] Fruit

beer is the good stuff. It was probably a white lightning corn liquor with fruit in it, like peaches or blueberries. They do it quite often, to give a little flavor.

The juke joint and the moonshine are all part of the South. How does this place influence your songwriting?

Figure 29. Cashman and his son Dylan during the recording session on the back porch, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

RC: It has some influence on my writing. Few years ago, I put out a record called *Rough and Tumble South*, and every song had to do with the living in the South. Some songs are about small towns, southern living. Others are about the food that we eat. I do think that you are influenced by your surroundings. If I were living in France, I'd probably be singing different songs. I think the sense of place affects everybody. The South is not like it used to be. I was born at the end of the Civil Rights, so I never experienced that. Thankfully I missed all that. The South is a very complex area. It's very family oriented, and religion oriented. Then there's also a very hypocritical aspect of it, because there's still a lot of racism throughout. Still today, you can feel it in a lot of places you go. There's still some tension between the two races. In Tennessee, more in rural areas. Mississippi still is a very racist place. All of the places are. Something that's in the DNA of humans. It's not just the South, it's everywhere. At least in America. I don't know about Europe, but it doesn't seem as prevalent as here. But I still think there's still some in Europe, maybe not so much race, but religion. Now a lot of people are against the Muslims, even though it's a very small percentage that is doing everything. The majority is fine. It's something that's bred into the human race. South gets the blunt of it, but the North is just the same.

Even though you were born after the Civil Rights Movement, how does the Black experience affect you and your music?

RC: I don't think about it too much when I listen to the blues. A lot of people around my age or younger learn the blues from English rock bands. Because nobody really listened to the blues in America. Eric Clapton or Led Zeppelin were really into it and listened to this music. They put it out in their own form, and that's how America started to rediscover its own music. That's how I came to the blues. I was listening to rock bands, and then one day I was looking at the record, and it would say Robert Johnson, or Chester Burnett, or Muddy Waters. His real name was McKinley Morganfield. So they have those names on it, and I was like: "Um, I wonder who this is." Then I went to the library and I looked it up in encyclopedias. That's how we did it. At least in the old days, now it's too easy! [Laughing] I was always going to the library to get all kind of records. Mainly rock records, but also a lot of Bob Dylan, and everything that was around in the mid-70s. I would get three or four records, play them, try to record them on a tape recorder, with a microphone held to the speaker of a stereo. You did the best you could! [Laughing]

Going back to Harry Crews, whom you mentioned earlier… You adapted one of his novel, *A Feast of Snakes*, into a song, "Snake Feast"…

RC: [Laughing] I've never read a book like that before. It was so weird and so intriguing! It keeps me… So I wrote a song about that. When I play it live, I always lie and tell people: "this is some party in Georgia!." I always make up stories here and there, it always sounds better than to say: "I've got this idea from a book!" [Laughing] Harry Crews was out there, kind of a strange guy. I've never met him. I wish I could. I did hear about someone who went to his "Creative Writing" class. From my understanding, it was the hardest class to get into. At the time, Crews was a fairly popular novelist, so there was some reward for the students

who got into. But he didn't want people to get into that class just because of his fame. He wanted people who really wanted to write. As you know, some of these classes where the instructors are famous, everybody wants to get into, so they have to figure out a way. He got rid of people who were not serious! [Laughing] I actually wrote "Snake Feast" five or six years ago. I recorded it and I was not happy with the recording. It was real electric. I think I had been influenced to more electric, heavier, like rock-blues style, and that's really not me. Heavy, kind of rock, electric and drums. The whole album is like that. I took a couple of songs that I really like off that album. "Snake Feast," and "Whiskey, Weed and Women," I redid them acoustic, I think it has a better feel for it.

Can you tell me how do you retell a song after a piece of literature?

RC: For one thing, you need to make it way shorter. You got to take a 200-page novel and condense it in about three minutes. Once you figure out that part, you got it! Then make sure some of the stuff rhymes. [Laughing] That's how I did, I condensed it in a song form. So, obviously, you don't have as many details. You pick up the details that will tell the story very quickly.

How did you get interested in the southern Gothic genre in the first place?

RC: I've always enjoy reading books. It's kind of an escape from everyday grind. And somebody recommended this book by Larry Brown. He's from Mississippi. He wrote this book called Fay. He wrote several books and there are all very good. This one in particular is great, I was hooked. Oh man, it was great! It's a really good story, told in the dialect of the people. Not like some authors you read and you're like 'oh, what does that word mean?'. I really enjoy writers who write in the dialect of the area, where the plot takes place.

How do you choose the novel that you will adapt into a song?

RC: There's not a real way to do things. You read a book, and sometimes it has a big influence on you. Then you can write a song about it. That's how I did with "Snake Feast." There's another song that I played earlier called "Evangeline." That was a character in a book written by Tom Franklin. It's like a western, set in the early 1890s, with numerous characters. There's one character, her name wasn't Evangeline, but it was similar to that [editor's note: the name of the character is Evavangeline]. It didn't rhyme, it didn't have the syllables to work in a song properly, so I changed it to Evangeline. This particular character, a posse was after her because she performed sodomy with someone. That was illegal, so she was on the run. I don't want to tell you more because you need to read the book! [Laughing]

What's the title of this book?

Figure 30. Cashman and Dylan, Nolensville, Tennessee, May 2016.

RC: I can't remember the exact title of it, but it's by Tom Franklin.[18] Some books I just think: "hey, this could be a good song." That's how that comes about. I put a lot of thoughts into the process of writing a song, but not so much how I choose a subject. I used to try to write about subjects. I used to come up with a couple of subjects, and start to write a song about this. But a lot of times you just start playing a piece that you come up with, and play it. You can ask Dylan [editor's note: Cashman's son], if I'm writing a new song, he will probably hear it fifty times, over and over and over. A lot of times it's the music that brings the words out. I play something and all the sudden I will be singing this line, and I will be: "hey, this line must be part of the song," because this was what was coming to me. And then you can build around that.

[18] The book is called *Smonk* and was published in 2006.

Does the meaning change from the novel to the song?

RC: Not in "Snake Feast," because it's about the same thing. I haven't read that book in a long time, but basically the song is about the party that the characters have at the end of the novel. They all gathered up to catch the snakes, and everybody is there camping out. That's how I came up with the Winnebago campers. Like that I give a little detail in the song, and I don't think in that book Harry Crews ever mentions Winnebagos. But it's a pretty general term in America for a camper. In the old days, Winnebago used to be the only make, or the most popular. Instead of saying: "hey, there's a camper," you say: "hey, look, there's a Winnebago." I put a little tit bits in there like that. Kevin Gordon, the guy we saw last night, is a very good writer. He writes about where he's from, which is Louisiana. I read a good article on him, about growing up in Monroe, Louisiana. People write about what they know, more or less, unless you try to make it up, which you can do. I've done that plenty of times. You can tell: "yeah, this is totally make up, none of this is true." Some people hear your song and think it's a life experience. Some of the stuff I sing my wife would be mad at you if it was true! [Laughing] A lot of my songs are made up stories. When I was in high school, I really wanted to become a writer, a novelist. But I didn't want to have to go to school! [Laughing] The easy way out is to write a song.

Your song "Desolation" gave your last album its named. The black and white photograph on the album cover representing evocative ruins is very Gothic. Can you tell me more about it?

RC: I told the record label guy: "I think we are going to call the album Desolation," just that word alone. You want something that's bleak, despair. His cousin took a bunch of photos of this ruined house. I saw them, and I said that would be as good as we could get. We were looking for bleakness and despair, and all that. I googled and everything was coming up like

devils, I didn't want to go that way, I didn't want it to be that obvious. I saw these photographs and I said: "yes, that looks like despair, no hope." "Desolation" is a song of hopelessness, which is not always bad, as long as you can get out of it. Sometimes I like going to the hopelessness area. The photograph that is going to be in my new release in August is totally different. It's a very bright painting from a friend of mine in Clarksdale, Stan Street. He's a folk artist, most of his work is blues oriented. He's done many paintings for blues festivals in America and Canada. It's very colorful, with a lot of blues elements. Dice, and snakes, and dancing women. It does still have the Gothic influence to it. I think the blues is a lot of Gothic. There's a lot of voodoo, a lot of charms, and rolling dice… I think all that comes together, the Gothic and the blues. I think all that comes from Africa. It was brought here, and maybe that's why they have the term "southern Gothic." You never hear "northern Gothic," it's all southern Gothic. The South used to be a very large Black population, more Black than white. I think that there's something to go with it, and also be in this place. Those people are writing about their environment. They have the Gothic part, a little bit of voodoo, hoodoo, and all that stuff.

What Gothic means to you?

RC: In a lot of the stories the characters are put through a lot of hardships. Not necessarily scary, but hardships of life, and bad circumstances, and a lot of bad luck. The belief they have in luck and things they can't control. People here are very superstitious. They belief if you walk under a ladder you will have many years of bad luck. I forget how many, I walked under too many ladders! [Laughing] Broken mirrors, black cats, the numbers of dice... I think it has a lot to do with superstition. Maybe there's a little bit more superstition in the South than in the North.

Rock band R.E.M and singer-songwriter Vic Chesnutt are profoundly influenced by the southern Gothic writing of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. How do you feel about these musicians?

RC: I've never heard of Vic Chesnutt until you brought it up. I found out about him, he was a very tragic figure. He committed suicide so, obviously, he had great deals of depression. He also suffered of polio. And R.E.M, I've never really thought of them as southern Gothic. I was never a huge R.E.M fan. There was a time on a radio where you were going to hear about R.E.M played numerous times a day. When you think about songs like "Losing My Religion," I'm sure there's a big influence of superstition and everything else we just talked about. Sorry I can't give you more than that.

I'm still till such a newcomer in all of this, and I find that I don't know what to ask. Are there questions that I should be asking, things that a newcomer should know about your music and the Gothic tradition that I'm completely missing?

RC: I learn a lot from you, when I read your paper. There's a lot of insight, a lot of research, and lots of details. Very good. I don't think I can add anything to that. You covered it very well, lot more than I could.

Thank you. Actually, I'm learning a lot from you, as you delve a lot into the southern Gothic tradition. Other than R.E.M and Vic Chesnutt, do you know other musicians who have the same approach?

RC: People don't usually really say. I think the writers want to be mysterious, they don't want to give away all those tricks. For instance, I've seen many interviews of Townes Van Zandt, and the journalist always tried to get how he wrote "If I Needed You," one of his biggest song. Every time he said: "it just came in my sleep." He woke up, wrote it down, and played

the song exactly how it was in his dream, without changing a single thing. He stuck with that story the whole time! I don't know if it really happened. I've never had a song coming to me in my sleep. I've heard Keith Richards said the same thing about "Jumping Jack Flash." He woke up, wrote it down, and when back to bed. You believe or not. Maybe it happens. I'm still waiting for some songs coming to me in my sleep! [Laughing] I wish so. That would be great, go to bed, and wake up with a new song. Hopefully it will still happen. Most time I have to sit and think. I'm trying to write a new song, and I don't really have a subject of it. I'm just throwing things against the wall, see if anything sticks. That's one way. It's a slow process. If you're not happy with it, then you'll be probably bored. First and foremost, I write these songs for me. Because I have to write these songs. I'm not out there thinking: "I have to write this song for the general public," it's strictly for me. If it's good enough, maybe some other people will like it and might want listen to it. That's what you can hope for. I don't know if everybody's like that, but you would think the majority of people are. To be a writer, any kind of writer, you do it for yourself, for your own enjoyment. Then you can share it. If you're a national songwriter you don't do it that way. You do it for the money, which is very little, unfortunately. But if I were playing music for the money, I won't be doing it! You got to enjoy yourself.

Figure 31. Cashman and I, "The Music Room", Nolensville, Tennessee, October 2015.

DATE: Thursday, October 13, 2015.

LOCATION: 1150 Waller Road, Nolensville, Tennessee.

PHONE: 615-856-6100.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

It's about 11 pm and my friend Douglas McDaniel, who drove us all the way from Chapel Hill to Nolensville, is off to bed. Cashman is playing a song on the couch as I am setting up the audio recording. The song ends…

Ray, thanks so much for having me. What were you playing?

Ray Cashman: That was a song that I recorded a couple of years ago. It's called "Feeling No Pain." It's about epidemic opioids addiction in America. It's unbelievably high, because it's so easy to get prescribed in America. We don't want this to be a political thing. It will turn into political because America is run by insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies. If you got a lot of money in your back pocket [He taps on his back pocket], it's all about money. That's what makes it all go around here. That's unfortunate. I wrote that song about that, the addiction to pain medicine. The recorded version has trombone. It has a New Orleans feel to it.

I see. So today we are Thursday, October 8. We are in your beautiful house in… Is it Brentwood or Nolensville?

RC: Nolensville, Nolensville.

Because it's like in the border, technically you are in Brentwood, right?

RC: Yeah, but I don't want to claim Brentwood! [Laughing]

To get started, would you mind introducing yourself?

RC: Okay. Well, my name is Ray Cashman, I live here in Nolensville, Tennessee. I'm from southeast Texas where I did the majority of my childhood. I've played guitar since I was about 15. My entire life I can remember music has always done something for me. If you look behind me, this is the stereo that my parents had when I was a young child. It's as old as I am. We would come home from church and I would play Johnny Cash and Merle Haggard records that my dad had. Country music of the time, of the seventies.

So you grew up listening to this music?

RC: Mostly to country music. Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash… Still my favorite. My family has never been musically inclined. They turned on the radio but… To me, when I was listening, I was like "oh man, I love this song!"

Where were you born?

RC: I was born at an Air Force base, in a Caribbean island. In Puerto Rico. My dad was in the Air Force. The story he told is that he was almost out, but he actually reenlisted for extra time, so I could be born for free! [Laughing]

You said you start guitar when you were 15?

RC: That's the first time I got a guitar. We used to go over to… I can't remember whose house it was… We used to go to this house when I was a young child, and the person had an electric guitar. I was staring at that thing, and sometimes I would grab it and looked myself in

a mirror. I had no idea what to do, but for that moment I knew that I wanted to play that instrument.

You grew up in southeast Texas and then you moved to Austin…

RC: Austin is just a music city, especially at the time. It's a little bit different now. There's still tons of music in Austin today. Actually, where I grew up, like a lot of towns in the South, it was divided by river tracks. Black people being on one side of the river tracks, white people being on the other side.

But segregation was over at that time…?

RC: Yeah, but that's just the way it always was. There's the black side of town and there's a white side of town. Once I got old enough to drive, my friends and I, we would go over the tracks, which weren't that far from the house. It was less than a mile. This guy was selling barbecue sandwiches, and Budweiser, and moonshine. We were kids, only fifteen, and he didn't care how old we were.

You were fifteen and you drank beer!

RC: Beer, moonshine… First time I had a sip of moonshine, and they all laughed at me because I was like aaaaagh! [Laughing] But those guys would play… I don't even know if they were really playing the blues… They played some blues songs, but they played a lot of different songs. I think you would call them songsters. They knew songs from all genres. This was probably like in 1980.

You're a blues musician and a songwriter. You also write a lot of different songs, like these songsters. How did you learn?

RC: Actually, the songwriters were… Besides the Rolling Stones… But they were songwriters too, Keith Richards and Mick Jagger. Besides them I really gravitated towards the songwriters of the time. Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Joni Mitchel… The list goes on, I can't remember everybody that was an influence to me. That's the path I wanted to go down. A little bit later, Steve Earle, [inaudible] and Jon Dee Graham. Townes Van Zandt was probably my favorite. At the beginning, you always try to copy somebody because you don't know what you're doing. You try to emulate yourself after these people. Then you have all bunch of them, but all the sudden, you're not copying any good [laughing], so it becomes your own kind of thing. I just started writing songs. The first song I ever wrote I was 13 or 14. We entered a town contest, me and two other guys. None of us knew how to play anything good. We had two practice before the town contest. We tried to learn "Under My Thumb" by the Rolling Stones, but since none of us were any good, we couldn't figure out how to play it… So, I wrote a song!

What was the song about?

RC: The song was called… Something like "Tell Me What You Really Think," or something like that. I can't remember exactly the name of it. Probably more of a punk rock song, because we could only play one chord! [Laughing] That was how it all started. Just for a lack of… being any good.

Any musicians who explained you how to write a song?

RC: When I moved to Austin, that's really when I got to meet so many really good songwriters. Not so much as we sat down and "this is the do's and don'ts," but more watching, and listening, and singing. "Wow, I really liked a song, how they are doing that? What makes these songs good?"

Any musicians you remember in particular that influenced you?

RC: There was really a lot of them, but certain guys, like James McMurtry and Jon Dee Graham. They play every Wednesday night at the Continental Club. Both of them have a really catchy story, like a good storyteller. It keeps you focused on the story at hand.

What's your songwriting process?

RC: I don't really have a songwriting process. Now I pretty much come up with some kind of a hook, or a riff on a guitar, and then try to put some words to that. Lately, I come up with the music and try to put lyrics to it. Like scatting for a while, you know [he goes scat singing], and then try to put some words to it, trying to make sense. A lot of times it's just something that keeps coming up to me. And I say: "I just going to go with it."

What about "Desolation", did you start with the lyrics?

RC: No, this is different. I come up with that song when I was driving. I told you that highway that goes from Johnson City to Asheville, North Carolina. I was driving that one day. It was on October, so the Fall was going on. A lot of the leaves were red and different colors. I drove through the Appalachian Mountains, very beautiful. I can't remember the guy's name, but I was listening to this song, and I totally loved this song. It was called "Killing the Blues."[19] It's not really a blues song, more an Americana song. I was listening to that. I had that in my head, and then I listened to Townes Van Zandt, and just seeing the colors and stuff… That's how the lyrics came to me, especially the opening line. [Cashman plays "Desolation"]

[19] The song "Killing The Blues" was written by Rowland Salley. Country singer John Prine released it on his album *Pink Cadillac* in 1979. The first verse inspired Cashman for his song "Desolation":

> Leaves were falling, just like embers
> In colors red and gold, they set us on fire
> Burning just like a moonbeam in our eyes.

Thank you, Ray. This is a great song. I was curious about the way you play the guitar, using the thumb and the first finger. How did you learn this fingerpicking style?

RC: There's a lot of other guys doing that. When I started trying to learn fingerpicking, a lot of guys I watched used, and I couldn't figure out. One guy that I think is totally underrated is Dave Van Ronck, and he used two fingers. Also, I think it was Merle Travis who used two fingers. Django Reinhardt always used two fingers, you can a lot with two fingers! [Laughing]

About the lyrics, this song sounds really Gothic. Desolation, drizzling fog…

RC: Yeah. I was influenced by the guy who was singing "Killing the Blues" and Townes Van Zandt. When I came with that one line, "for the sake of the song," that was in a Townes Van Zandt song that he wrote. "For the Sake of the Song," I think he recorded it at on least six different albums. I don't think he was ever satisfied with it. As soon as I put that line in it, I had to give ode to Townes Van Zandt. The other part, like I said, driving through the Appalachian Mountains… The opening line just came to me immediately. I think I had that line, and then the rest of the song came, at least a week later. I just had that one line that kept singing over and over.

About southern Gothic literature, how did you get interested in that?

RC: My whole life I've always read. I've always reading. It's kind of an escape from everyday grind. Somebody recommended this book. His name is Larry Brown, he's from Mississippi, and he wrote this book called *Fay*. He wrote several books that are all really good, but this one in particular… I read that book and I was hooked. "Man, this is great, this is a really, really good story," but told in the dialect of the people. You know, you read some

authors, and you're like: "oh, what does that word mean?" But this was just like… I really like that writer, writing in the dialect where the plot takes place.

There's this song you wrote after reading Harry Crews's *A Feast of Snakes*…

RC: Yeah, the song is called "Snake Feast." I read that book and I was so… I've never read a book like that. It's so weird. But it was so intriguing it kept me… I read it, I was intrigued. I basically wrote a song about that. When I play live, I always tell people: "this is some kind of party in Georgia." I always make up stories here and there to go along with... It sounds better than to say: "I got this idea from a book!" [Laughing] He was up there, kind of a strange guy. I've never met him, but I wish I could. I did meet someone who went to his creative writing class. From my understanding, what this guy said… It was the hardest class to get into. It was extremely hard just to get into. At the time, he was fairly popular as a novelist so… There was some award for the students to get into it. But he didn't want the people to be in that class just because of his fame. He wanted people who really wanted to know how to write. As you know, some of these classes where the instructors are famous, like William Ferris, everybody wants to get into, so they have to figure a way to...

How did your friend get into this class?

RC: [inaudible]

So, "Snake Feast." Would you like to play that song for me?

RC: Oh, you want to hear that one?

I would love to, and you already have your guitar in your hands!

RC: It's the same, it's a standard tuning here. [Cashman plays "Snake Feast]

Thank you for this song, Ray, and thank you Harry Crews who inspired you for this song!

RC: Yes, thank you Harry! [Laughing]

You said you read a lot. What kind of books do you read?

RC: I read a lot of cooking books. Like I told you, I read that book from Emile Zola that was way better than expected. When I was in France, I stayed with a friend in Paris. One block from the house, I was walking around, and I said: "hey look, I'm on Emile Zola Avenue!"

When you think of Gothic and music, what names come to your mind?

RC: I would think guys more like Tony Joe White. He sings about swamps, snakes, and grave diggers… "Rainy Night in Georgia…" Influence wise, blues wise… R.L Burnside was... The first guy I ever tried to learn how to play was Mississippi Fred McDowell. That was the first that I ever tried to sound like. Or tried to. It sounds really simple until you start to try to learn, and it's not simple. The other thing about blues, no matter where the blues is coming from… As you know, the blues depends on what part of the country you are from. Texas blues, you have tons and tons of good guys like Mance Lipscomb, Lightnin' Hopkins and T-Bone Walker. The Mississippi Delta Blues, that's a different style. And then just 40 miles away you have the Hill Country blues. When I first heard the Hill Country blues, I was like: 'wow, that's a different style, that's what I like!' It took me a little while to learn that. There's stuff like [he plays a riff on his guitar]. Lots of open tuning.[20] It's a happier blues, more of a party blues where we get together. It's basically just one chord. In the Carolinas, you have the Piedmont blues and the fingerpicking style. Lots of rag, jazzier, stuff like [he plays the Piedmont style] On the one genre of blues, there are so many subgenres that are based on the

[20] When a musician changes the standard tuning of is guitar into a different tuning to a form a chord, it is called an "open tuning."

region on where you live. Maybe the Delta felt the hardest. If you have a band, you dance. If it's just one guy with an acoustic guitar, you're still moving. And the music influences… [He plays "Catfish Blues"] I think John Lee Hooker was almost… Even though he was not Hill Country, I think he was, because he had that one-chord trans. He put you in that kind of trans. Not a whole bunch of chords in it. Hypnotic. [He pauses for three seconds] And also in Texas you have country influence.

Talking about places, I'm interested in your song "Tennessee Blues." As you said, you grew up in Texas, and then moved to Tennessee. You sing "I lost my soul down in Tennessee." Why is that?

RC: Because living in Nashville, it's like a dog-eat-dog world. There are so many people, they are more for… I'm not going to say they are more for the fame and the glory, but they do something to get a little attention. Maybe someone says: "you need to do this for your career," so they do it, even though it's not exactly what they want to do. You gave up your soul, just like Robert Johnson. You sell your soul to the devil to gain fame.

And you, you lost your soul…?

RC: Well, I didn't, but I made it for a song! [Laughing]

Would you mind playing it for me…?

RC: Sure, sure! It's on this one. [He picks up his guitar] "Snake Feast", I actually recorded about five years ago. I wrote it about five or six years ago. I recorded it and I was not happy with the recording. It was real electric. I think I'd been influenced to a more electric, heavier, like a rock-blues style, and that's really not me. Electric and drums and heavy, kind of rock… The whole album is like that. I took a couple of songs that I really liked off that album,

“Snake Feast,” and “Whiskey, Weed and Women” was another one. I redid them acoustic. It has a better feel for it. So, “Tennessee Blues” [He plays “Tennessee Blues”]

When did you move to Tennessee?

RC: We moved to Tennessee in July of 07. We were in Memphis first. It was in a period when real estate was really good, so we bought a house. I tried to fix it up and sell it, but in that period of time, it crashed. My wife got a job in Nashville, she moved there with our son. I stayed in Memphis for a year. Finally sold the house, and moved to Nashville. I was going back and forth in Nashville and Memphis every single week. I was getting old! [Laughing] Memphis is good, I like it. It’s a bit rougher than Nashville. Always one of the top, one or two cities for homicides and crime. But there’s so much history and so much soul. Memphis got a lot of soul. There’s going to be too much for you to see in just a few hours. When you have a town that put up music like Stax and Sun Records, and all the blues that came from there. The history of all the music that came from Memphis in the 30s and 40s...

Have you visited those places?

RC: Sun Records, I actually never went in because it costs like $25 to go in. You can always hang out outside, and get your picture taken. There was a Cadillac out there, I got a picture with the Cadillac! Maybe it was Jerry Lee Lewis’s, I’m not sure. You’ll see it tomorrow. I’ve never been to Stax Museum either. Outside. Lot of good barbecue places. I was always going to those places, can’t pass that without barbecue! What else is there… It’s a very good community, everybody watched out for everybody else. One guy lived from across the street… Here’s an example. This guy was a bit extremist, and he drank probably too much. One time I was there and I had to leave for about four days play some shows. We were new there, so I asked this guy, Don: “you don’t mind keep an eye on the house, when I’m gone?”

My son Dylan was very young at the time, two or three years old. He said: “yeah, no problem.” When I came back, he came over. He goes: “I kept an eye on your house for you,” and I say: “oh, I appreciate that, thank you.” “Except on Sunday between 4 am and 6 am, I felt asleep.” [He laughs]

What? Really? That’s insane!

RC: Yeah, he literally watched the house! Poor guy. He died shortly after we left. He was a really nice guy, he just drank too much. Another time I came back with a little bottle of moonshine. It was given to me as a gift from a juke joint in Bessemer, Alabama. The guy who owns it, it’s his house. He has this juke joint. His name is mister Gip. He’s about 92 or 93 now, but he still plays, still really good. So, I got this moonshine from him, and I had a little get together at my house, with six or seven guys. We just took a few sips. Then Don then came over. He drank some and then, when we left, he poured it into his beer. I noticed when everybody left, I was like: “man, somebody drank all the moonshine!” I kind of knew who it was. He was a nice guy, Don. Two days later, he came at my door, and he had a bottle of Everclear. I don’t know if you what Everclear is, it’s about 95% alcohol. You can’t drink it straight. He said: “I’m very sorry I drank all your moonshine, this is the best I can do to replace it.” That’s the kind of guy he was, such a kind heart. He just had a problem, he was an alcoholic. But a super nice guy.

Did you get to play a lot in Memphis?

RC: Occasionally, but I play Clarksdale way more than Memphis. I used to play in Mississippi all the time. Clarksdale, Jackson, Indianola, Greenville, Hattiesburg, Biloxi, Gulfport… Lots of place. I stopped traveling as much as I did. Staying in crappy hotel rooms and not making a lot of money. I’m a lot more selective now. Also, in the last three years, I’ve

been playing mostly acoustic solo. I can really pick and choose where I want to play. If I really had my way and I could play Europe three or four times a year, I probably wouldn't be on tour in the United States anymore. I would just do some good blues festivals in the States.

Why do you like Europe better?

RC: For many reasons. Music wise. There's always a good crowd. People are very knowledgeable about the music, while here they are not. People live in Mississippi and they don't know the history, their history. Obviously, it pays better. Overall, in Europe, they are listeners. They listen. You have a couple of people talking about what they did last night… I think they just appreciate. The biggest reason is that in Europe, when you're a musician, you walk around with a guitar and you tell somebody: "I play the blues, I write music," they act like you're an artist. In America, you say: "I play the blues, I write songs," they act like you're homeless. Like: "oh, you don't have a job?" [Laughing]

That's a huge difference…

RC: Yeah, that's a huge difference, that's the main difference. Europeans, they appreciate it, that you spent so many years learning. Here they don't. In Nashville, it's different, because it's a music town, so everybody plays music. But, in a lot of places… In the middle of nowhere in the United States: "ummm, really, you can make money playing music?" "A little bit!"

That's why you do other trades…

RC: Yes, it takes like three jobs. I play music. I get money from airplay, Internet mostly. Pandora. Spotify. You can get some money from that. I have some songs on cable television, Discovery. You can get a little money from that, but not of it is enough to live on, especially

with a family. You can't support a family with that. So, you do other things that…. Ever since I was 16 years-old I learn how to do carpentry. The older I get, I started to do stuff on my own… I don't build house anymore, but I still have the knowledge of how to build things. Furniture, and tables. I built everything in here. That's another way to get income. It also gives me the freedom to be able to play the guitar and travel. I'm totally solo everyday! [Laughing] Except I got my wife, but I need her. Without her, all of this would not have been possible. It helps to have a partner who understands the passion that you have, and helps. Really, without her, I don't think I could do all this. To my beautiful wife, Cindy.

What about a last song to end this wonderful interview?

RC: How about… This is an older song I recorded. [He plays "Whiskey, Weed and Women]

Figure 32. Ray Cashman and François de Crastes (right) at Radio Campus Lille, France, March 2015.

DATE: Tuesday, March 31, 2015.

LOCATION: Radio Campus Lille, Université Lille 1, 59650 Villeneuve d'Ascq, France.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

The conversation was conducted both in French and in English. I asked my questions to Ray Cashman in English and in French. François de Crastes translated in French Cashman's replies.

Victor Bouvéron: Ray, it's a pleasure to have you here in Radio Campus…

Ray Cashman: Thank you, it's a pleasure to being here.

VB: You're playing tomorrow night at the Pickaboo in Lille. We just listened to "Let the Good Times Roll" from your album *Desolation*. François, tu as l'album dans les mains, je te laisse en dire un mot…

François de Crastes: C'est un album qui va sortir chez Knick Knack Records très bientôt. On l'a entre nos mains, en avant-première. On va écouter "Desolation," que Ray va nous jouer en live…

RC: Yes.

VB: On présente Ray tout à l'heure ?

FdC: On présentera Ray tout à l'heure, oui.

VB: So Ray, you want to start with a song?

RC: This is the title song of the CD *Desolation*.

Cashman plays "Desolation". At the end, applause in the studio.

RC: Merci beaucoup!

VB: ça donne envie de venir au concert demain soir, merci beaucoup, Ray Cashman, avec "Desolation." Ray, this is an awesome song! I cannot wait to attend your concert tomorrow night in Lille, after listening to this song. We're looking forward to hearing more of your songs! On a hâte d'entendre d'autres chansons. François, c'est une chance. D'ailleurs, on salue le travail de Mauvaise Foi Records. We need to congratulate the work of Mauvaise Foi Records that is producing the concert tomorrow night in Lille.

FdC: Il n'y a pas que Mauvaise Foi Records, mais aussi plein d'autres personnes qui aident Ray Cashman à faire sa tournée. On va le retrouver à Paris, à Poitiers, à Auxerre… Il nous fait l'honneur de traverser notre beau pays. On doit l'aider ! Il n'y a pas que Mauvaise Foi Records.

VB : So Ray, you're touring in France, in different cities?

RC: Yes, I also do one in Rennes.

VB; It's not your first time in France, is it?

RC: No, it's my third time.

VB: How do you like it here?

RC: I love it very much. Very nice country. Great food, and great people.

VB: François, je te laisse faire la traduction?

FdC: Oui, donc un super pays, des gens super…

VB: Et la nourriture très bonne ! [rire]

FdC: Et la nourriture très bonne, mais ça ferait trop chauvin de traduire tout ça ! [rire]

VB: Ray, would like to say a few words about your music? How would you define your music?

RC: Basically, I'm a blues player. I like writing songs. I have a lot of roots influence. I was influenced by a lot of folk and blues players, and guys that did both.

FdC: Maybe you can tell us more about artists and blues players that influence you?

RC: Like most teenagers growing up in America during the 80s, I liked Led Zeppelin and Hendrix and Rolling Stones! Then, I found out the real blues. Lightnin' Hopkins was a Texas blues player, and Townes Van Zandt was a songwriter, but also a blues player. Mississippi Fred McDowell was one my favorite. Mance Lipscomb.

VB: Since you mention Mississippi Fred McDowell, do you play slide guitar as well?

RC: Yes, we bought a few records of those guys, maybe we can play some later?

VB: Sure, of course. Perhaps you can play a song live first, so I can prepare the disc you want to play?

RC: Yeah, I'll play this song. It's called "Tennessee Blues." Basically, it's written in the perspective of a Texan about Tennessee! [Laughing]

Cashman plays the song. At the end, applause in the studio.

Thank you!

VB: "Tennessee Blues," Ray Cashman, sur Radio Campus Lille 106,6 FM, et sur Internet www.campuslille.com. On a également la page Facebook de l'émission, « Bluesland ». Ray Cashman sera en concert demain soir 20h30 au Pickaboo, 92 rue de l'Hôpital-Militaire à Lille. Ray, I read you are also a carpenter…?

RC: Yes, I was a carpenter, I was a woodworker, I had a lot of jobs throughout my life. I do a lot of carpentry work because that's a good job for a travelling musician. You can't have a job where you have to be there all the time! [Laughing] I live on some land on Tennessee. We have chickens, a goat… I try to live a little bit off the land, fresh eggs and vegetable garden. We try to live off the land as much as we can.

VB: Whereabouts in Tennessee?

RC: I live about twenty kilometers from Nashville.

VB: You also do a lot of sports, and I was surprised to read that you used to play rugby!

RC: Yeah, that was when I was a lot younger! [Laughing] But I love watching sports. That's my hobbies. That and drinking beer.

VB: What kind of sports do you like watching? Football?

RC: Yes. Well, your football, or our football? I actually like your football than our football. Yes, soccer. I don't know too much about this team, Lille team, but I know PSG is a really good team! [Laughing] They broadcast in the US. We're becoming a little more worldly.

FdC: You mention that Fred McDowell is one of your favorite blues player. You chose the song "Get Right Church." Why did you choose this one?

RC: It's a gospel song that he does. He did a lot of gospel, along with blues. Some of his songs were recorded with his wife and church choirs.

FdC: Ce sont des enregistrements d'ailleurs de William Ferris.

VB: Oui, tout à fait. I see it was recorded by William Ferris.

RC: Yes.

FdC: Victor is a big fan of William Ferris. On va écouter un titre de cette compilation de William Ferris.

VB: "Get Right Church," Mississippi FredMcDowell, sur Radio Campus Lille 106,6 FM.

The song "Get Right Church" is played.

VB: Mississippi Fred McDowell à l'instant sur Radio Campus Lille, "Get Right Church," issu des enregistrements de William Ferris *Come and Found You Gone*. William Ferris qui enseigne à l'université de Caroline du Nord, et Mississippi Fred McDowell qui est une influence pour Ray Cashman. He has a huge influence on your music.

RC: Yes, very.

Figure 33. Cashman warming up before the radio show.

VB: It seems that your music is very diverse. Last week, we broadcast some songs from your album *Rough & Tumble South*. There's some blues, blues-rock, country music… Je vois que François prépare un joli vinyle…

FdC: On va écouter un autre morceau sélectionné par Ray Cashman. "Tecumseh Valley" de Townes Van Zandt, en vinyle s'il vous plaît. C'est sorti chez Fat Possum Records. C'est parti !

The song "Tecumseh Valley" is played.

VB: Townes Van Zandt à l'instant sur Radio Campus, avec "Tecumseh Valley," proposé par Ray Cashman, toujours avec nous, et François. It's really a great pleasure to have you here, Ray, in our studios of Radio Campus Lille. Thanks so much for coming.

RC: Thanks for having me, I appreciate it.

VB: Et donc en concert demain soir, 92 rue de l'Hôpital-Militaire à Lille, au Pickapoo, 20h30.

FdC: Be there, or be square! [Laughing]

VB: On annonce également la sortie de l'album *Desolation*. Ce sera le 5 mai prochain. Ray, can you tell us about the people you work with on this album?

RC: This album is an acoustic album. Three of my friends from Nashville. We just got together in the studio, and play a bunch of songs that I had written. We put on a cover of Townes Van Zandt. It's actually pretty quick, two days and it was finished. The record label, out of Seattle, Washington, picked it up. It's going to be distributed throughout my website, Knick Knack Records website, and all the usual places. iTunes, Amazon.

VB: And your website is www.raycashman.net. Great. We are looking forward to listening to this new album. We had a little preview of your new songs. On a déjà eu un petit apercu. Are you ready to play another song?

RC: Yeah! This one is called "Whiskey, Weed, and Women."

Cashman plays "Whiskey, Weed, and Women." Applause in the studio.

Thank you!

VB: So whiskey, weed and women will be the death of you… Is it an autobiographical song? [Laughing]

RC: Not today, but at one point of my life, maybe! [Laughing]

VB: Merci beaucoup Ray Cashman, en live sur Radio Campus Lille, 106,6 FM. Great song, I really enjoyed it. You said you wrote your own songs, is this one of them?

RC: Yes, and it's going to be on my new album. All the songs I play today are going to be on my new album.

VB: We are very lucky today! On rappelle que Ray Cashman sera en concert demain soir au Pickaboo à Lille, 92 rue de l'Hôpital-Militaire. Nouvel album *Desolation,* à paraître le 5 mai prochain, chez Knick Knack Records, un label de Seattle, comme l'expliquait Ray tout à l'heure. François, tu as préparé un autre titre ?

FdC: "Jack O'Diamond," un titre de Mance Lipscomb. Un joueur de blues du Texas. Ce n'était pas son travail de tous les jours, il était avant tout agriculteur. C'est un titre assez classique, "Jack O'Diamond," qui fait référence à un jeu que jouaient les Noirs, le plus souvent dans des tripots. Cette fameuse carte, Jack O'Diamond, était souvent synonyme de malchance. Ils perdaient leur mise, tout ça. Gros problème d'addiction au jeu, d'alcool…

VB: Une chanson très prisée dans le blues.

FdC: Tout à fait. Un classique.

VB: Ray, can you tell us why you chose this song?

RC: Yes. Mance is an old Texas blues artist who got discover late in his life.

VB: On lance "Jack O'Diamond," Mance Lipscomb, sur Radio Campus Lille.

The song "Jack O'Diamond" is played.

Mance Lipscomb sur Radio Campus Lille 106,6 FM, avec "Jack O'Diamond." Mance Lipscomb qui est du Texas.

FdC: Comme Ray Cashman. We're going to listen another song from your coming album. You chose the third song. On va écouter la troisième chanson de ton nouvel album, Ray. "You Don't Know My Mind."

VB: Je crois que Ray Cashman propose d'offrir l'album, ne l'oublions pas…

FdC: Tout à fait. Vous avez exactement 11 minutes et 37 seconds pour appeler la radio… D'ailleurs tu vas donner le numéro…

VB: 0320912400. 0320912400. Et je vois qu'on a déjà des appels, on va prendre tout de suite. Voici "You Don't Know My Mind" sur Radio Campus. C'est parti.

The song "You Don't Know My Mind" is played.

Le nouvel album de Ray Cashman, *Desolation*. Et on félicite Thérèse qui a gagné l'album de Ray Cashman.

FdC: On a eu de nombreux appels, ça s'est déchaîné au standard.

VB: Oui, ça part très vite. Ray, we received a lot of calls, what a success! Un grand merci également à tous les auditeurs et auditrices qui écoutent Bluesland sur Radio Campus, et félicitations à notre gagnante, qui a gagné le nouvel album de Ray Cashman, *Desolation*, qui sortira le 5 mai.

RC: Thank you very much, thank you for having me.

FdC: We're going to listen another favorite musician of yours, Ray. His name is Sonny Boy Williamson….

RC: He's a very popular Mississippi blues artist. He was around at that time with Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker and all those guys. He was one of the first to come to Europe and play the blues in Europe.

FdC: On va écouter "One Way Out."

The song "One Way Out" is played.

VB: Sonny Boy Williamson à l'instant sur Radio Campus Lille, un artiste qui a beaucoup influencé Ray Cashman, et le titre "One Way Out."

FdC: On a eu la chance d'écouter son nouvel album qui va sortir prochainement. On va aussi écouter avant la fin de l'émission "Mudbugs," sorti sur *Rough & Tumble South*, en 2012, sur D-Bomb Records. I think it's your own record company?

RC: Oui, oui.

FdC: It's official, Ray Cashman speaks French!

VB: Bravo!

RC: Merci beaucoup!

VB: So we don't need to do the interview in English... [Laughing]

RC: Well, I pretty much understood everything you said [Laughing].

VB: On est pris par le temps… Time flies… We improvise a lot, but that's the spirit of the blues. Once again, Ray, it's been a pleasure to having you with us today.

RC: Thank you for having me.

VB: We're looking forward to your concert tomorrow night. Au Pickaboo, 20h30, 92 rue de l'Hôpital-Militaire à Lille. Et le nouvel album de Ray Cashman, *Desolation*, sort le 5 mai. On en reparlera les prochaines semaines. It's a great album, we'll talk more about it in the next few weeks. Ray Cashman, on a le temps d'une dernière chanson…

FdC: On termine en beauté avec "Mudbugs," sorti en 2012.

VB: Time to say goodbye. Thanks, Ray, and maybe next time!

RC: Merci, au revoir !

VB: Et merci à vous pour votre écoute, merci François…

FdC : Merci Victor.

VB : On se retrouve pour ma part la semaine prochaine. Ray Cashman, "Mudbugs."

The song "Mudbugs" is played.

APPENDIX 4: CONVERSATION WITH JOHN "JOJO" HERMANN, KEYBOARDIST OF WIDESPREAD PANIC

Figure 34. Meeting with John Hermann, Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

DATE: Monday, May 16, 2016.

LOCATION: Mercantile Deli, Franklin, Tennessee.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

I met with John Hermann, also known as "Jojo," on May 16 at the Mercantile Deli in Franklin, Tennessee. It was almost 10 in the morning when I stepped inside the café. Jojo was already sitting at a table by the window, drinking a cup of coffee. Due to the loudness of the music coming out of the speakers, we agreed to do the interview outside. We sat down at a small round metal table on the terrace overlooking a quiet street. I set up my tape recorder, and engaged the conversation.

Good morning, Jojo. Thank you so much for taking the time!

John Hermann: Thank you, great to be here. In Franklin, Tennessee, at the Mercantile Café, right off Main Street.

How do you enjoy this place?

JH: I eat here all the time. It's got an old timey feel, something like an old diner kind of feel. There are still lot of lot of those around Franklin. Merridee's right here, and Dotson's[21] right down there, a diner's breakfast place from way back where all the country musicians are running. They tend to gravitate around Dotson's, like the Judds.[22]

[21] Dotson's Restaurant, located 99 E. Main Street, is permanently closed today.
[22] Country music duo composed of Naomi Judd and her daughter Wynonna Judd. Their biggest hits include "Girls Night Out" (1985), "Turn It Loose" (1988), "Why Not Me" (1984), "I Know Where I'm Going" (1987) and "Grandpa" (1986).

As a musician, what do you think of the music scene around here, especially in Franklin and Nashville?

JH: It's funny because I don't play in country bands. I pretty much do New Orleans music, but I settled down here in Franklin to be near to Nashville. I lived in Oxford, Mississippi, or more precisely in Taylor, Mississippi. My wife is from Birmingham, Alabama, and my band, Widespread Panic, is based in Athens, Georgia. I told my wife: "I'm not going to live in Alabama, it's just too far on the way." And she was like: "I'm not going to live in Mississippi." Mississippi is too far from the airport. I didn't want to fly everywhere all the time, and Oxford is two hours from the Memphis airport. I wanted to be within a short drive of Athens, Georgia. Oxford is too far from Athens. So we settled down in Franklin, Tennessee, because it's right in the middle of the triangle between Oxford, Birmingham, and Athens. We are in the middle of everything, Nashville is an equal distance to those places. We came up here one day to look at houses and we fell in love. It is so beautiful, lots of horses and pastures. It's a great town. It's been fifteen years now. But I still go to Oxford as much as I can.

How often do you go to Oxford?

JH: Twenty years ago, I was getting my Masters at the University of Mississippi, in Oxford, and Widespread Panic called. I dropped out and rejoined the band. Twenty years later, we get a year off and I decided to finish my Masters. I called up Charles Wilson.[23] I said: "hey Charles, can I finish my Masters?" He was like: "are you serious?" I said: "yes, I really want to do this." They graciously said: "okay, it seems that you stayed in the game." I taught at Vanderbilt University a little, I think that helped. I had to take two courses to fulfill the

[23] Charles Reagan Wilson is the director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. A professor of history and Southern studies, he earned his B.A and M.A at the University of Texas in El Paso and his Ph.D at the University of Texas in Austin. Source: http://mwp.olemiss.edu//dir/wilson_charles_reagan/

requirement for the Southern Studies, so I back down in Oxford every week for a year to take classes. I had to write a lot of my thesis while I was on tour with the band, that was a trip. I got my degree. I did my research on Vic Chesnutt. We made a film, then I had to write the paper the long way. I definitely have a new-found appreciation for how hard work it is to do a Masters. It's a lot!

Why did you choose to write your thesis on Vic Chesnutt?

JH: I recorded with Vic Chesnutt, I was friend with him. He was from Athens, Georgia. He asked Widespread Panic to do an album together, and we did two albums together.[24] And I got to know Vic, I found in love with his songwriting and music. I decided to make a documentary film on Vic. It started there. I went to Vic's house, set up the camera, and started shooting. He was really into it. We went song by song, I said: "okay Vic, tell me about all your songs." By the end of the day I had about twenty-three hours of footage of him talking about his songs and his wife, and his songwriting. The film came together.

How would you describe your relationship with Vic?

JH: With musicians, it's really on and off. You become very close, and then you don't see each other for two years. It's that way with all my musician friends. You have this bond when you record or when you're on tour. It's almost like you're a brother. If you're a band with someone, it's like you're with your wife! [Laughing] If you play with people and you're not actually a band together, they're like your brother. There's a bond there. You hang out with someone, and you won't see him for two years, then you see him at a festival or in Athens, or at a session, you pick up where you left off. It's a thing with musicians, you don't stay in touch. None of us really do that.

[24] *Nine High a Pallet* (Capricorn, 1995) and *Co-Balt* (Widespread Records, 2002) by the band Brute, which was a collaboration between Vic Chesnutt and the members of Widespread Panic. The band Brute played five shows under that moniker.

Can you tell me more about when you came to Vic's house and interviewed him?

Figure 35. Mercantile Deli, Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

JH: He was really into it. He was a great person to interview, very chatty. I just rolled the tape, and he told me all the stories. He loved talking about his music. He's very influenced by Flannery O'Connor and southern writers. He's almost like a poet as much as he's a songwriter. He's like a writer. We talked about that, and I wanted to get into his mind about the writers he read, and his influences. His songwriting is so focused on the South, he grew up in Georgia, in a little town called Zebulon. We talked about his family growing up, and I was fascinated by the fact that at a very young age he decided to become an atheist in a small southern town. It was a big, big deal. He wrote a lot of songs about that, like "Speed Racer." We talked about that. With interviews, you go where the interviewee takes you. We did it that way.

You mentioned the writers that Vic read. What about you?

JH: I really got into Flannery O'Connor. She died the year Vic was born, in 1964. I thought that was very interesting. Vic was really into her writing. They both shared a very dark sense of humor. They have so much common as writers, so I really focused on Flannery O'Connor. I read everything she wrote, and I have to say she became one of my favorite writers. In Mississippi we read [inaudible]. I got into Larry Brown a lot. He has a lot in common with Vic on the subjects. William Faulkner, of course, who is very difficult. But once I started with Vic, I just stick to Flannery O'Connor.

How did you get interested in these writers?

JH: It was Vic. He was fascinating, and it was not just me who appreciated him. He became a mainstream artist. He got major record deals and for a guy in a wheelchair you never heard of. He was so influential and so unique. I thought he should be the kind of writer that would be taught in school. He needed to be documented. His music is different from everything else. In the documentary, everybody says that. There is *nothing* compared to Vic. It's hard to describe. He's his own genre. The way he phrases his words. He was paralyzed in his hands, he had a unique sound when he played the guitar. He was a brilliant artist. You just have to listen to him.

How did you feel when he passed away?

JH: It was in 2009. I think everybody knew it was coming. We were all waiting for the phone call. He was opened about that fact he was going to kill himself. He purposely overdosed on painkillers on Christmas Day. Everybody was very sad.

You mentioned he was an atheist in a small southern town…

JH: Yes, he was fascinated by that, he wrote about it. Religion is just such a big part of the South. When you study or read about the South, religion is the main thing, along with music, writing, and food. Since he wrote about it and loved to talk about it so much, the documentary focused on that.

How do you relate to the South—religion, writing, food and music?

JH: They are all related. The food is a relatively new thing in terms of popularity, it's incredible. Southern food, I just eat it, I've never thought about it. Religion is just everywhere. It forces you to look life through faith. It's been a very good thing for me. It

definitely forces me to look at life through that prison, which helps me along. I have my own religion, I don't buy any organized religion. They called Franklin the "buckle." The reason being we are in the Bible Belt, and the heart of the Bible Belt is the buckle. And Franklin is literally the heart of the Bible Belt. The Bible Belt is a region through the South that is so religious. It's basically the Deep South. Religion was such a huge part of life, and it still is. Franklin is the buckle, it's the heart of Christian music. Christian music records and recording industry is in Franklin. The biggest Christian music artists are all round Franklin and based in the studios here. Sometimes I come to the Mercantile, and I see kids who look like MTV, with the dyed hair, the nose piercings, and the ratty black jeans, and the Chuck Taylors. A lot are going to Bible study groups in the morning. It's interesting! [Laughing] As Bill Ferris often mentions, the blues basically came out of the church, it's possibly related. Uganda says those lectures in church, they say: "lord," and the juke joint says: "baby," but other than that… There's some truth to that.

What does southern Gothic mean to you?

JH: Back in the 1930s, it was used as a disparaging term by a critic to go against these romantic notions of the South. All these stories of honor and gallantry, heroes and heroines, men in their swords and shiny bright uniforms… The wonderful South. Southern Gothic, William Faulkner especially, was a reaction to this romantic South. They talked about the dark underbelly of the South. They wrote much more realistic stories about the South, and not these heroic tributes to the great South. Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is a perfect example. That's what southern Gothic is. But today it has lost its meaning. I remember articles written about my band twenty years ago. They called Widespread Panic "southern Gothic," which is so untrue. The notion of a hippie band or a jam band being Gothic is ridiculous. It got to the point where if you are from the South, Northern writers will

instantly lump you in with this southern Gothic term. Vic is one of the fewer examples. It's almost got to the point where any southern writer, like Americana, this is very common. If you are from the South and write about cornbread, you are southern Gothic. It's stretching it beyond what this term was meant to be. I'm skeptical about the use of it today, especially with modern newspapers. I think *Rolling Stone* wrote an article about southern Gothic recently because somebody wrote about collard greens and cornbread, I say: come on!" It bred a lot of skepticism among writers about the use of the term today. It's like the term "Americana," everything that's American is Americana. What isn't Americana, if it's from America? I think sometimes critics will use terms so much that they begin to lose their meanings. Southern Gothic harkens back to it. The media overplays. They always try to categorize things, to lump things in categories, and southern Gothic helps them to do that. I might be guilty a little bit of that in my thesis, but you got to do with what you have.

How would you describe the relationship between southern Gothic literature and southern music, blues especially?

JH: I'm not sure personally I relate to. I can't say I do. I think blues is a totally different beast. There's just different blues. I don't englobe blues as one thing. When I was in Oxford, which is north of Mississippi, we go to Holly Springs, where you have Junior Kimbrough and R.L Burnside. Then in the Delta it's different. The North Mississippi, the Hill Country blues they call it, they just play one riff, the drone string. It would put people in a trans. Junior or R.L would play just one riff for ten minutes, and they wouldn't go to the four of the five. In the Delta, it was more like one-four-five, twelve of thirteen bar blues pattern. And that's the blues that went up to Chicago. The Delta guys got on the train and went to Chicago. We went to the

Figure 36. Main Square with the statue of a Confederate soldier, Franklin, Tennessee, May 2016.

Playboy Club in Greenville, Mississippi. We played with Booba Barnes there, he was on Rooster Blues records. I was with his band, he let me sit in with him, it was great days. Dave Thompson was in that band, he recorded on Fat Possum. He's a perfect example of the twelve-bar blues. Hill Country blues is much different. I enjoy very different kind of blues from very different regions. It's regionally. I remember when I took my classes the sense of place became such a thing. It confused me at first. I was like: "the sense of place, what does that mean?" That's a big, big deal right now with all the writers, like this book *Memphis and the Paradox of Place*. I finally started to get that through the literature and music, and how much they became products of their environment. But it's also the environment that become products of the artists. It's a dual relationship. It's hard to say why a certain form of blues was formed in one region, and not the others. Robert Palmer in *Deep Blues* wrote about the African beginnings. Certain people were brought over from one region, and over people were brought from Mauritania. If you listen to Junior Kimbrough and if you compare to Farka Touré, from Mauritania, there's a real similarity, and that's string music. The Piedmont Blues has much more folk elements because they were exposed to folk balladries. I don't know exactly why. Robert Palmer's *Deep Blues* goes in that, the roots, it's a really good book. I was a close friend with Robert. With Bob. I knew him in New York City, through CeDell Davis, from Pine Bluff, Arkansas. There were no blues clubs yet, it was the early 80s, it was not the trendy thing. It was a small blues community. There was an Irish bar, Tramps, and Bob convinced the owner Terry Dunn to fly up these guys from the Delta, from the South. He did it, and I was the sound man at this little Irish bar, I was eighteen years

old. All the sudden I was doing sound for Lightning Hopkins, Big Jack Turner, Charles Brown… The Neville Brothers would come up, and CeDell Davis came up. Bob was a big CeDell fan. He needed a place for CeDell to stay, because he was in a wheelchair. They asked me: "would you put up CeDell in your place?" and I was: "yeah!" I was so excited, and all my friends would come over. It was very exciting to have all these guys from Arkansas coming up to New York City and staying with us. I wheeled CeDell around, did the sound for him, played with him. Bob played with him. He was stationed in Oxford when he wrote *Deep Blues*. One day I said: "Bob, I got to get out of here. The music I play nobody plays up here, it's all new wave bands with synthesizers." And he says: "what won't you go to Oxford, Mississippi, and look up a friend of mine, Bill Ferris. I came down to Oxford to visit for a week or two. I wanted to get out of the city and go to Mississippi, because so much music I love was from there. I was supposed to stay for a week, but I never left. I just stayed. I didn't have a job or anything. That was in 1987. It's hard to believe. Bill and I lost touch for a long time, but it's like musicians. You lose touch for ten years, and pick up just right where you left off, because you have common bounds, common interests, which is music. Every time you leave a musician, if you do a gig, I see you down the road, or I see him when I see him. You don't plan it. You don't say: "keep in touch."

Can you tell me more about your first encounter with Bill Ferris in Oxford?

JH: He helped me a lot. I didn't go to the university, I didn't enroll. I just wanted to visit. I said: "I'd like to play piano." I play New Orleans piano, Professor Longhair. Bill said: "there's this place called the Hoka, down the street. Why don't you visit Ron Shapiro?" [25] I went to visit Ron, and he had a little piano in the back. I hanged up there, started playing the

[25] From 1975 to 1996, Ron Shapiro presided over Oxford's Hoka, "a combination restaurant, movie theatre, concert venue and general hangout place" (Scott Barretta, "Oxford's Ron Shapiro's new venture is Shelter", published in The Clarion-Ledger, Febriary 3, 2016, http://www.clarionledger.com/story/entertainment/2016/02/03/oxfords-ron-shapiros-new-venture-shelter/79720584/).

piano. I put up a little tip jar, we'd make $2 or $3 dollar a day in tip, and that was enough to eat. You could eat on that. Ron gave me a cheese sandwich. Just at the Hoka, I was literally making $10 a week. Then there was a band up the street called Beanland, for the most part a Grateful Dead cover band. They also covered some Allman Brothers, but I would say eighty percent of the Dead. The drummer came down the street and heard me playing. He said: "man, do you want to seat with us?" They didn't have any keyboard player. I had never played Grateful Dead before in my life, although I listened to them, and loved them. I said: "sure, why not," and I started to play with Beanland, and joined them. Those kinds of bands were really going through all over. Not only in the South, but also in the North. In the late eighties, there was this thing about bands that harken back Grateful Dead, Allman Brothers, the Band, Bob Dylan... There was this new breed of musicians who twenty years later would play all of our covers and would pack the clubs. A lot of people would come. At the same time in Athens there was Widespread Panic. At the very same day in New York, Blues Traveler. The very same day in the Vermont, there was a band called Phish. There were thousands of these bands. It was a new movement. I fell into that. Next thing I know with Beanland, we write some songs, we hit the road. We opened for Widespread, and I met them that way. You don't plan it, that those bands were packing the clubs. And respond! [Laughing] It was a lot of fun.

R.E.M was also one of those many bands that was formed in the eighties. For the anecdote, when I drove to Franklin this morning, the first song that was played on the radio was "Losing My Religion"…

JH: That was a very unlikely hit. I didn't think even R.E.M expected it to be a number one hit. It doesn't' really have a chorus, or a bridge. There's a little bit of mandolin. It was an incredibly unlikely hit, but it was huge. I think it might have been their biggest hit. The

subject if the song definitely hits a nerve. R.E.M did that a lot. A lot of their songs had this ability to touch people and hit a nerve. You can't really explain that. They just made it happen.

You talk a lot about R.E.M and Vic Chesnutt in your thesis. How do you feel about those musicians?

JH: The singer, Michael Stipe, is the one who took Vic into the studio to record his first album. He exposed him to the world. There is a close connection there. We are all from the same little town, Athens, in Georgia. Yes, that was the connection.

What kind of advice can you give to a student in Folklore who is writing his thesis on southern Gothic literature and southern music?

JH: You got to go to Milledgeville, Georgia, to Flannery O'Connor's house. There's a little museum set up. I definitely recommend that. I think what you're doing right now is exactly what you need to do, travel around the South and get off the beat the path as much as you can. You must go to Savannah, Georgia. It's so beautiful. There's so much on what you're talking about, a lot of haunted histories. One story about Savannah is when Sherman's march came through. During the Civil War, General Sherman did the march to the sea. The idea was to wreak havoc in Georgia, in the sense that "don't never want to do this again." Let's teach them a lesson. Personally, I think it was unnecessary. A lot of the animosity of southerners towards the North is still here because of Sherman's March. It was not a good idea. It was terrible. He did the march to the sea, but Sherman told his troops to spare Savannah. It was such a beautiful city, he loved it. He burnt out everything, but did didn't burn out Savannah. I did a tour of the cemetery, and there's a story saying that the troops would go to the cemetery and change the dates on the headstones. It would say: "born 1838, died 1778." They would

change a six to an eight, a three to an eight. It was a way to say: "we are not going to burn down Savannah, but we are going to spit in your face." A cemetery and the grave stones are a sacred hallowed ground. It's pretty dark.

The trauma of the South is still a reality today?

JH: Yes, it's still there. It comes and goes in waves. I've been here for thirty years now. My experience ebbs and flows. There are certain times when it really dies down, and everybody is getting along just great. And there are certain times those old feelings rear their ugly heads. That's what I found. Now that old South issues came up, rose a lot over the last decade with 9/11, and the war in Iraq, it was so divisive. It was from 2001 up until now, a lot of that rear their ugly heads. The 90s were such positive and wonderful, the South united, and everybody came together. Then everything became divided with that Iraq thing and Bush. That was Karl Rove and Dick Cheney's plan. Let's divide and conquer, and it worked. They did adeptly. It was bad for a while, very ugly. I feel now it's starting to get back to a better place. That's just my perception.

Can you tell me more about this notion of the "new South"?

JH: It's basically the South after the Civil Rights Movement. There was a healing because the 60s got so ugly and so divisive. When I moved to Oxford in 1987, there was a real sense of people coming together. Those wounds from the 60s were healing and the South was becoming more inclusive. The 80s and 90s were that period with that great feeling in the air. We were healing all those wounds from the past, the segregation, and Jim's Crow. We were taking down all the signs of "colored people only," and all that. It was more than just a memory, but we were really moving out. I moved here the year before the war in Iraq, and you can just tell the divisiveness around Franklin, especially Williamson County. The

divisiveness got really ugly. Country music was pro Bush and in favor of the war in Iraq. It was very divisive, no doubt about that.

It's interesting when you talk about "healing the wounds." I read about Faulkner and how the zombification was a metaphor of slavery. What would be southern Gothic today with this notion of the New South?

JH: You could argue that. It's hard for me to think of southern Gothic today. When I think about it, I think of back then as a reaction against the romantic notions of the South. You can argue with the war of Iraq, those feelings of nationalism arose. History teaches us that nationalism is not a good thing, it always leads to a lot of people dying. World War I, World II… Nationalism does not help. There was this feeling of nationalism after 9/11. The politicians played to the hilt. To me, nationalism is Gothic. It's dark. It's a very scary thing when you see people marching off to war and waving flags. That's scary to me. That's Gothic! [Laughing] That was definitely happening in 2003. A lot of flags waving and the bumper stickers were everything. Bush said: "if you're not with us, you're against us." What is more Gothic than that? Marching the war is Gothic. There was a big nationalistic movement in the South that kind of went away now. The difference is that nationalism in the South used to mean the South. In 2003 nationalism was the South aligned with America as a whole. It didn't divide it from the North or from America. So it's a different kind of nationalism. It's not like the South raised against, someone transferred that nationalism into America. An American nationalism centered in the South. That would be the difference. It's like the South raising to defend New York City, when did that happen? That's a first! [Laughing] That happened in 2003 when America invaded Iraq. It was crazy. I was in Europe at that time right before the military builds up. Everybody over there was like: "what's going on?" I said: "he's just bluffing, there's no way we're going to do this." And they actually did

it. Bush got on TV, saying: "you got 48 hours." [Laughing] It was like a western movie. And I was: "oh my god, he's really going to do this." It was so divisive. Then the flags started to coming out, "if you're not with us, you're against us," "if you're not for this war, you're anti-American…" I thought we were over that. I thought Vietnam taught us that this is not the way to go. Obviously, it didn't. It's a mess. It took away this feeling of the South uniting and coming together. The war in Iraq and everything that happened after 2003 divided the country. And we're still dealing with these divisions, no doubt. Yes, nationalism can be considered Gothic.

Anything I'm missing?

JH: I think I've written everything in my paper. Definitely Flanney O'Connor. There's a writer named Carson McCullers which I did not touch on, or mentioned briefly, I wanted to delve into that more. But I said: "I'm done, I can't go any further." Leadbelly is a great subject for blues and Gothic. He's very prolific and a brilliant writer. Just listen Leadbelly and his music. He delves deeply into a lot of issues. If I had to pick one blues artist, that would be Leadbelly. He would be great guy to get into for this. It's in there. I was going to write about him in my paper, but I had to stop. He's from the 30s-40s, and southern Gothic is that period. Southern Gothic today, in terms of literature, it's so overblown. It has lost its meaning. If you say "southern Gothic" to most southern artists and writers, they will roll their eyes! [Laughing]

Thank you, Jojo!

JH: Thank you, Vic!

Figure 37. Carpe Diem, the record store where John Hermann purchases his own vinyls and CDs, Franklin, Tennessee, May 2017.

APPENDIX 5: CONVERSATION WITH MIKE McKEE, DUIMMER AND PERCUSSIONISTE OF DELTE RAE

Figure 38. Mike McKee, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, May 2016.

DATE: Monday, May 25, 2016.

LOCATION: Winston Salem, North Carolina.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

I met Delta Rae's drummer and percussionist Mike McKee at the Civic Plaza, in Winston-Salem. On that hot and sunny day of May, he had just finished the sound check in prelude of the concert he was giving. After the sound check, Mike came off the stage, passed through the gate, and got nearby me. He is a tall white man, slim, bald head with a small beard. It was already six o'clock, which left us less than an hour to talk. He asked me if I already had dinner. I had not, so he suggested we go grab something to eat and do the interview at the same time. As we were walking downtown to a sandwich place he had spotted earlier, he asked me a lot of questions. One of the first being how I heard about the band. I explained that I googled "southern Gothic music," which led me to a Wikipedia page listing many bands considered "southern Gothic." Delta Rae's music really appealed to me. I listened to many songs like "I Will Never Die," "Bottom of the River" and "Dance in the Graveyard." I was captivated by their music videos, definitely tied up with the Gothic aesthetics. We laughed about the text messages we exchanged earlier that day, when I did not understand when he texted "Word." Mike told me he wondered from what generation I was. I reply: "the same generation as yours, as far as I can tell. Only from a different place!." I transcribed the text messages below:

- Good morning Mike. This is Victor from UNC-Chapel Hill. We emailed about my thesis project on the convergence between southern Gothic literature and

southern music. Do you know about what time we can meet today, and where? Thanks!

- Hey there! My sound-check wraps around 5, would that time work for you?
- Sounds great.

Later in the afternoon, I was packing up my stuff and getting ready to hit the road. I received a text. It was Mike.

- Big delays on stage. Do you happen to be around where the show is happening at the moment?

But I was not.

- Actually, I'm leaving Chapel Hill right now. I should be where the show is happening around 4.
- Word

His reply puzzled me. Word? I thought it was perhaps some kind of typo - "Works (for me)? I asked:

Word?

- All good. See you there after soundcheck!

Once Mike and I arrived at the sandwich place, we started our conversation.

Hello Mike! Can you introduce yourself?

Mike McKee: My name is Mike, I'm the drummer-percussionist for Delta Rae. I'm from Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. Born and raised. And I'm eating a very delicious sandwich during this interview. [Pausing] Not a dramatic pause, but eating pause. [Pausing] I was thinking about your topic research. Southern Gothic is a sub-genre of a sub-genre. Nobody really knows what it is. There's no like: "oh, it's this very thing." It's like Americana. What's Americana? You know when you hear it. Same thing for southern Gothic. For me, it's

swampy. My expertise. The music is complementing a song with percussion. I brought the table. One thing we're known for is having chains on a metal trash can on one of our songs with the feet stomps and clapping. The metal chains bring back to the old chain gangs, in the South. The slaves will be chanting along and keeping in time, either with chains that they were dragging or, if they were working on the railroad, the clinging of hammering. They are different things. People are naturally drawn to rhythm, and beats, and sounds. There's something about like a hit, like a "bam" hit, and there's something up to the hit, like a chain, like a dragging [he hits on the table]. There's something when you hear: "ooooooh tchak!" [Singing the rhythms]. Everybody can relate to the hard beat, no matter who you are. The hard beat is something that gives us life, and the drum beat gives the song life to me. That's where I'm coming from with all these things.

It's like in "Bottom of the River," we can hear the clinging chains and the stomping feet…

MM: Yes, and I have a big old piece of metal for a different song. In "I Will Never Die," that simulates from the sound, it's a very high pitched sound. I try to replicate these old time sounds and bring them up to the modern. There's something very old about southern Gothic, and people try to replicate it now. A lot of instrumentalists will use old instruments or make instruments to have old mechanical sounds. There's an artist named Tom Waits, his whole albums are nothing but percussion sounds, very spooky, very scary. It's awesome, especially *Mule Variations*.

Figure 39. Mike McKee performing the drums during Delta Rae's show at the Civic Plaza, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, 2016.

It's interesting to see how the dark history of America still impact southern musicians like you. How do you personally relate to that today?

MM: I grew up in the South, my family is from Alabama. This history is very, very complicated. There's an awareness of what happened, and there's a shame that goes along with it. American race relations is a complex topic, and everyone has a different perspective on that. It's impossible to truly understand one side or another without living in those shoes. We have an awareness that there are some serious issues going on right now. We have a song called "All the People." It's a call for action to stop violence against Black Americans. We released it right after the Charleston shooting. We're trying to heal these deep wounds that are rooted in slavery, and then segregation, and Jim Crow laws. They are deeply rooted in a bigger tree. As beautiful the South is, there's this dichotomy. If you go to Savannah, Georgia, it's the most magical city, but also spooky. There's a lot of ghosts there, literally and metaphorically. Savannah is the root of southern Gothic. The mass trees, weeping willows trees, it's beautiful. Beautiful and scary, that's the dichotomy I'm talking about. Visually that's the southern Gothic thing. There's swamps, like down in Louisiana. We believe that the storytelling from... We do have a song. It's the story of a hitchhiker, lingering the highways. She's a ghost, maybe. That's the fun part. Same thing as "Bottom of the River." It sounds like a baptism song, but it also could be a witch hunt. The music video leads more to the witch hunt, but when you listen to the song it sounds like a baptism. Again, this dichotomy of the South, a lot of deep religious roots, that's the baptism, and then this mystical darkness, the witch trial thing.

As a southerner, how do you relate to religion?

M: I grew up in a very religious household. The word "dichotomy" keeps on coming up because there's a tension of what is tradition for the sake of tradition? What is right and

wrong? These blacks and whites… But life is great. In our music, we talk about that, no explicitly. There are songs like "Dance in the Graveyard." The video is Louisiana type, southern Gothic. It's a celebration of death in a way. It's a not fearing death and not saying this is the end, this is what's next. I think the video, visually, does a great job. It's a joyful video. Southerners tend to be simple minded, but also very complicated. Again, when you grew up in a very religious household, it can complicate things. For the song "I Will Never Die," and also a little bit for "Dance in the Graveyard," I built a five-foot stick that I wrapped in goat hooves and these African shells and a bunch of ropes and bells. That's kind of a voodoo stick. As a percussionist of the band, I try to bring in sounds that are scary! [Laughing]

Can you tell me more about some of the songs you talked about?

MM: In "Dance in the Grayeyard," the idea was to dress up with face painted like during the Dia de los Muertos, which means "the day of the dead." It's a Mexican holiday, like our Halloween. Instead of getting scared and having fun with that, it's a celebration of those who already passed away. If you lost a grandfather, you'll maybe have some kind of a painting, an effigy of him celebrating his life. It's foreign to us, we look at it like: "why are you celebrating death, why are you dancing in a graveyard? It's weird." We grabbed that idea and put it in a Louisiana, a swampy graveyard setting. The masks and the painted faces are a lot like that. Somebody of our label at that time got that idea. We filmed that in a park in L.A.

What about "Bottom of the River"?

MM: That was in Durham, and it was our very first video shoot. We shot the whole thing for under $2,000. That includes the plane ticket for the director and pizza for the crew. It was all volunteers, and a very cross cultural thing. The two directors were from China, some friends

of the band, and an African American step team from Duke. I think the make-up director was also from another country. It was very diverse set, and very fun to do something like that. We were all playing roles, just like "Dance in the Graveyards."

We mentioned earlier William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor. Are you familiar with these writers?

MM: Not enough to speak in authority, unfortunately. I should. The music is more appealing to me than the literature. There's something so appealing about a swampy drum beat. It's a very slow drum beat, and it makes you think walking slowly. People in the South from the summertime they walk slowly because it's so freaking hot, especially deep down Alabama, Mississippi. It's just muddy. The music sounds slower, it's very draggy. That's the weather.

Any thoughts you can share about Delta Rae album covers?

MM: We have a lot of input, but the actual execution of the first album was done by an artist of the label. The second album was done by an artist outsourced of the label. We definitely have a very strong envision of it. The first one, *Carry the Fire*, is an homage to the rape of Europa. It's the story of Zeus transformed into a bull to take away Europa. I'm not super familiar. The second album, we played around with the bull character again, but it looks like it's bawling or charging this mystical woman. There's again this dichotomy: is it charging? Is it submissive? You let the viewer decide. It's the same thing with "Bottom of the Rover": is it a baptism, is it a religious song? Or is it a spooky song? I don't know about the themes of southern Gothic, but ambiguity is in what we do.

John Hermann argues that nationalism can define southern Gothic today. What do you think of this statement?

MM: The music does celebrate the South, but it also acknowledges the complications of it. You can't do a song like "Bottom of the River," and not being aware that it sounds like an old spiritual, which is an old slave song. You can't ignore that. We are very aware of that. It's all tied together. We're not mocking it, we're paying tribute to it. Music is a celebration of the tension, the dichotomy. It's interesting when you have a bunch of white people singing songs talking about old slave songs, it's weird, right? I think it's just paying an homage to it. That's how the blues was formed. It comes from those old field songs, the call and response, and the phrases. Then those was put into instruments that become blues, which then become rock and roll. It all come back to that. It is interesting that all that was born in the South. If you trace it back to slave work, they were in the fields and sung just for survival. My dad teaches musicology, and he always harkens back to those original things. In Europe, the music developed in different type of way, more technical. Back in the renaissance, baroque, classical period. At the same we were at the romantic area with Beethoven and Chopin. Slavery happens at the same time. We sometimes cover an old blues song called "John the Revelator," about John who wrote the Book of Revelations, an apocalyptic literature in the Bible. That's the storytelling, and again that's a religious text.

APPENDIX 6: E-MAIL CONVERSATION WITH TOM FRANKLIN, AUTHOR OF THE NOVEL *SMONK* (2006)

From: THOMAS FRANKLIN <oxfordtom@bellsouth.net
To: Victor Bouvéron <victor.bouveron@gmail.com>
Date: 21 octobre 2016 à 04:26

Dear Victor,

thanks for writing, and please tell Bill hi from me! My wife, family and I are in Berlin this semester. I'm a fellow at the American Academy here.
I read through your pages. I remember Cashman. He sent me that song years ago and I listened to it and liked it. I tried listening again, here in Germany, but youtube wouldn't let me.
As I read yr definition of American Gothic, I realized that Smonk fits em all except maybe the pervasiveness of guilt. I don't think there's too much guilt in that book! Though it's suffused in my other novels and stories. And in my personal life.

But Smonk is as American Gothic as it gets in all other respects. The vast setting, the architecture of a town (and destruction of it), the terror, incest, etc. I'd add a dizzying preoccupation religion, too, to the definition: O'Connor's Christ-Haunted landscape. To me, Smonk has always been a bible story. I love how earthy the bible is, how violent. Lot's daughters getting him drunk and "laying" with him! Samson killing how many Philistines with the jawbone of an ass? Crazy. So Smonk became a kind of retelling of Sodom and Gomorrah to me, Smonk and Evavangeline are angels (or anti-angels) sent to destroy the deeply sinful city of Old Texas Alabama, to punish it for its horrific sins. The idea of a perverted religion is there, too, in that the entire town of Old Texas's "church" and its "scripture" are based on the ravings of a man going mad with rabies. Not a kind commentary on religion, I'm afraid.
But you got your incest. You got your spooky town. The book's got witches and zombies, madmen. It's violent and very concerned with the grotesque. An outsider (Smonk) comes and reveals he's "part of the family!" and then destroys the family and its houses. One thing I like about the book, though, that might run against the idea of American Gothic, is its humor. Smonk is first and foremost a broad comedy. American Gothic has gotten a little tired to me, except in some case (see Wm Gay, below). To me, the American South is changing rapidly from its backwards ways to more ... forward (?) ways. The internet, satellite television, these things are catching us up. Where before things took years to trickle down to the deep south, now they're there at the speed of light. Or faster than that. A lot of the current unrest and maybe even the rise of Trump are due to the fact that Southerners can now see the rest of the world where 50 yrs ago they couldn't. The world has gotten bigger, everywhere.
William Gay is another to read, if you haven't. His "The Paperhanger" is a classic of American Gothic. His posthumously published last novel, the not-quite-complete Little Sister Death is as well; it's about the Bell Witch events in TN. Also, his Twilight is pretty damn Gothic as well.

Oh, speaking of Smonk, I just adapted it as a screenplay for the actor James Franco. Fingers crossed!
Thanks TF

APPENDIX 7: E-MAIL CONVERSATION WITH SINGER-SONGWRITER

DAVE LIPPMAN

From: DAVE LIPPMAN <dlippman@earthlink.net
To: Victor Bouvéron <victor.bouveron@gmail.com>
Date: 24 mai 2016 à 10:17

Victor, this is a very interesting study, not close to anything I have worked on but certainly intriguing. I'm not a student of literature but clearly the gothic and the blues are intertwined in the South. This really is a zombie nation. The creepy aspects also pop up in Harry Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music, which was influential on the 50s-60s folk revival and which Dylan referred to (in part) as "the old, weird America."

Dave

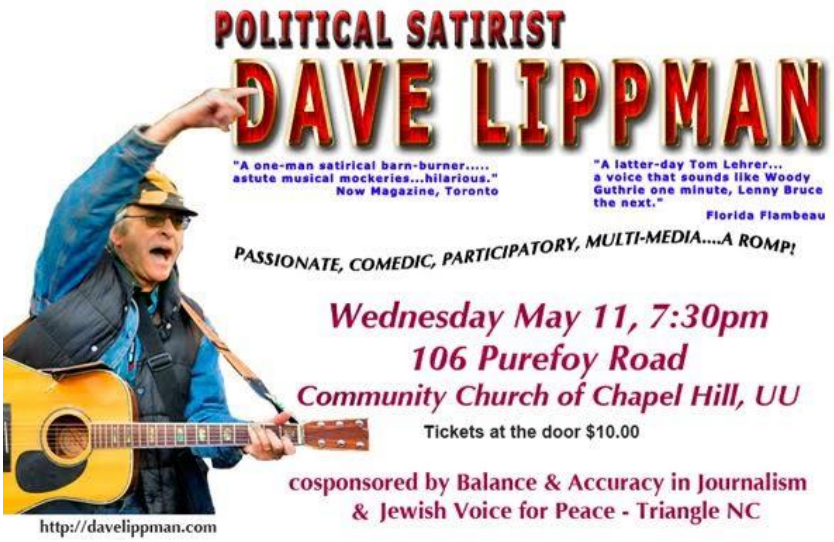


Figure 40. Poster for Dave Lippman's concert in Chapel Hill, May 2016. ©Dave Lippman.

APPENDIX 8: CONVERSATION WITH SCHOLAR JAMEELA DALLIS

Figure 41. Jameela Dallis posing with her night-blooming cereus in her home, April 2017, Durham, North Carolina.

Conversation with scholar Jameela Dallis, and author of "Life Refusing to End: The Transformative Gothic in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*" (2015).

DATE: Friday, April 7, 2017.

LOCATION: Durham, North Carolina.

INTERVIEWED BY: Victor Bouvéron.

The following is an excerpt of a two-hour conversation I had with scholar Jameela Dallis in Durham, North Carolina.

Can you tell me more about the paper you wrote, and this concept of the "transformative Gothic"?

Jameela Dallis: That paper is a very short excerpt of a dissertation chapter that is about fifty pages. I started with this interest in the sublime, and how the sublime combines this feeling of terror, but also this feeling of expansion. I was very interested because I felt that the main character, Mala, in the space of the garden. Gardens are very Gothic spaces, they are also what Foucault calls "heterotopias". Do I talk about that in my paper?

That doesn't ring the bell, I don't think you do…

JD: Well, that might be interested then! [She quickly goes through her paper published in *Undead Souths*] Yeah, I didn't make it in this. Are you familiar with this concept of heterotopic space? This is one of Foucault things. The essay is called "Of Other Spaces:

Utopias and Heterotopias." You can get a PDF of it if you Google it. He's talking about these different spaces. [She looks ion her phone] I'm just going to read a little bit, I hope this is not too boring. [She reads] So, he talks a little bit more about examples of these spaces. Cemeteries, churches, gardens, museums, libraries… He says that these are types of heterotopic spaces. It has all these principles that govern the space. These heterotopic spaces, the sublime, and this idea of… How the sublime, at least the way Cristeva explains it, you're there in the place, but you're also here. It's a place that expands us. It's a place that you have to stray in order to be. There's this contrast between us being there versus these expansive moments that exist maybe in the realm of our minds. There are still real. I don't know if that makes sense?

Yes, it does. It's like the image of the mirror that Foucault talks about in his essay. It's you being there, but it's also an expansion of your own being…

JD: Yes, it's like real and not real at the time. For Mala, she takes the place, the garden. Gothic texts usually associated the garden with bad things. People are raped in gardens, people are murdered in gardens, people are given poison things in gardens… In Gothic literature, the garden is usually something to avoid. You have "Rappaccini's daughter", it's a short story. It's a classic, written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The story is about this man, he has a daughter, and doesn't want anyone to see her or marry her, though she's beautiful. It's a classic "locking in the tower", but she's locked in the garden. People that want to encounter her wander why she can't leave the garden. In the garden, there's always poisonous plants. Eventually, she becomes poisoned herself. It's part of the reason she can't marry, she can't see anyone, because if she touches somebody, they ultimately die. I do thin Mala becomes like that character. She's incorporating American Gothic, also southern Gothic. A space where everybody puts their fear, that's a very southern Gothic thing.

How would you define the "transformative Gothic"?

JD: I'm going to read something from my dissertation. Some of this may be in that, the second part is not. I'm going to read these together. It will give you a little bit of context. In my dissertation, I also talk about through texts. [She reads] So, I think you need to have the two words together. The sublime space, where the person is taking outside of themselves. This can be achieved through many ways. You have music, you have arts. For Mala, it's caring about the garden, preparing bird seeds... All these ways are avenues to get to that sublime space. In psychoanalysis, people would say this is a way to get to experiences through songs. The songs are the space of the imaginary. We always try to get back to that imaginary, but we can never really get back to it. I think that's part of it. I want to get to the end. This is what Mootoo says about Mala. All of that is leading to answer your question! [Laughing] This is from a 2000 interview with Linda Hall. Mootoo talks about Mala: "Mala is not, as everyone thinks, a mad woman. But she is someone who has found extraordinary ways to survive incest and abuse in society's neglect and scorn. Mala gives a verbal language, while I use a verbal language to detail her trauma and her triumphs. To my mind, her abandonment of language and my use of it, are different sides of the same coin." So again, reinforcing this idea that there are different tools for similar meanings. I talk about "Ghostly Matters", which is Avery Gordon's idea. Definitely give that a look. [She reads] It's this emphasis on the garden space, how she transforms this Gothic space into something else. [She reads] It's the way that people who are being oppressed can take back pieces, or maybe even holes, and turning into something that is their own. There's that transformative quality.

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