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"So within him his mother was battling his mother": John Updike's (M)other

Olinger Stories

Laurie Champion

- 1 As Robert M. Luscher points out in his explanation of John Updike's *Olinger Stories* as a short story cycle, because the volume reprints stories from earlier short story collections, it is usually considered merely an anthology. However, *Olinger Stories* exemplifies a short story collection wherein the sum of the parts "raise[s] the volume beyond anthology status to a unique aesthetic whole that unfolds progressively and provides ample opportunity for harmonizing the stories with the connecting impulse" (101).ⁱ Similar to James Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, what most obviously unites *Olinger Stories* is the common setting among the stories: they are all set in or near the Pennsylvania towns Olinger and Alton, fictional names for the Shillington-Reading community where Updike grew up.ⁱⁱ
- 2 Although the names of the protagonists and of their family members sometimes change from story to story, the stories all portray in effect the same characters. Of the stories in *Olinger Stories*, Updike says, "They have been arranged here in the order of the hero's age; in the beginning he is ten, in the middle stories he is an adolescent, in the end he has reached manhood. He wears different names and his circumstances vary, but he is at bottom the same boy, a local boy--this selection could be called *A Local Boy*" ("Foreword" v). Because the protagonist(s) of Updike's Olinger stories is essentially the same character (although his name sometimes changes), I will refer to him as one protagonist rather than consider the main character of each story a separate individual.
- 3 From novel to short story, this protagonist's background remains similar: after his maternal grandparents lose money during the depression, he and his parents go to live with them in a city near Olinger, where they remain for many years; when the protagonist is a young teenager, his mother persuades the family to return to the farm

where she was reared. The protagonist and his father, who is a teacher, prefer the city to the farm; but the mother cherishes the farm, where she continues to live even after her parents and her husband die. After graduating from high school, the protagonist moves to a big city, usually New York or Princeton. In the later works in which the plot is set after the young man leaves Olinger, he makes frequent visits back to the farm, especially after his father dies. In terms of the protagonist's age and his developing relationship with his mother, Updike's works could be chronologically arranged as follows: "Pigeon Feathers," "Flight," and "A Sense of Shelter" (published in *Olinger Stories*); the novel *Of the Farm*; and "The Black Room," "A Sandstone Farmhouse," "The Cats," and "His Mother Inside Him" (published after *Olinger Stories* and set after the death of the protagonist's mother).

- 4 Read chronologically according to the protagonist's age, various stages of the mother-son relationship can be traced as a sort of continuum that relates to his level of maturity. Always told from the point of view of the son, observations about his mother reveal his ambiguous feelings, show how his attitudes evolve, and demonstrate that he finally resolves the internal conflict that influences his relationship with her. After those collected in *Olinger Stories*, Updike published several stories set in Olinger that develop his earlier depictions of the protagonist's relationship with his mother.
- 5 The chronological account of the protagonist's relationship with his mother begins with the short story "Pigeon Feathers," in which David is fourteen and has recently moved to the farm. In this story, David's mother and father frequently disagree about the land. Whereas his mother claims that the land has a soul, his father is not spiritually attached to the land. His father tells David, "You can't argue with a femme. Your mother's a real femme" (24). Robert J. Nadon points out that this debate between the boy's parents suggests that boyhood represents the small town, the mother represents the farm, and the father represents the desire to move to the city. He also suggests that the controversy that concerns farm versus city symbolizes the parents' dispute about their son's future (64-65). Interestingly, after the quarrel, David's father makes an assessment about his mother directly to David, as if to encourage him to participate in the conflict. Moreover, the comment insults his mother by implying that because she is a "femme" his father loses the confrontation. David deduces that, like his father, he is incapable of winning an argument with his mother.
- 6 When his mother reacts to his father's anger by walking toward the field, David follows her. Rather than focusing on her own predicaments, she asks David what bothers him. She persuades him to talk to her, and they have a discussion about religion.ⁱⁱⁱ While the discussion seems to console David, who perhaps has followed his mother to the field to comfort her, at one point during the discussion, he fears "she would reach out and touch him" (38). He also considers her view of life as "an ocean of horror" and rages against her: "all her grace, her gentleness, her love of beauty, gathered into a passive intensity that made him intensely hate her" (39).^{iv} After he shoots the pigeons, his mother comes toward him "and it made him smile to see her shy away from the smoking gun" (48), as though he enjoys frightening his mother.
- 7 The mother regrets that she had taken her own mother's advice and told David to kill the pigeons. When she says that they will have to bury the pigeons, David asks whether he should get her a shovel. She answers, "Get it for yourself; you bury them. They're your kill" (49). He walks to get the shovel, notices that she returns to the house, and observes, "Unlike her, she did not look up, either at the orchard to the right of her or at

the meadow on her left, but instead held her head rigidly, tilted a little, as if listening to the ground" (50). Although the pigeon incident has provided David with some sort of spiritual, existential experience, it is interesting to note that he observes his mother's actions. Although he may be unaware of it, he is attuned to his mother, for he simultaneously contemplates these powerful insights and judges her actions carefully, noting that she seems to listen to the very ground under which he will bury the pigeons. Through conversing with his mother, David reaches an epiphany about spirituality, a very positive experience; however, his epiphany also involves negative thoughts of his mother.

- 8 Whereas the fourteen-year-old protagonist of "Pigeon Feathers" remains unaware of positive feelings toward his mother, the seventeen-year-old protagonist of "Flight" develops from despising his mother to experiencing mixed feelings about her. In "Flight," Allen Dow confronts his mother rather boldly, but the story nevertheless demonstrates an ambiguous mother-son relationship. Allen's mother leads him to a hill, where he says that he is old enough to feel shame because she stands so close to him. With her hand on his head (he says, "she dug her fingers into the hair on my head"), she announces, "There we all are, and there we'll all be forever... Except you, Allen. You're going to fly." He notes, "My most secret self had been made to respond, and I was intensely embarrassed, and irritably ducked my head out from under her melodramatic hand" (62). Here, although his mother encourages him to expand beyond the scope of the community, her attention embarrasses him. This scene is packed with sexual implications: while Allen's mother stands close to him and touches him, his "secret self" reacts. His sense of embarrassment is similar to how he might respond to a sexual encounter, especially one in which his mother participates.
- 9 Unlike "Pigeon Feathers," "Flight" is told from the perspective of an adult, who recalls events that occurred when he was a teenager. Allen's memories of his mother include a history of her past before the time frame that begins his narrative. He recalls that she had attended normal school, bought him nice clothes, and worked in a department store. He also discusses his mother's father and says that she hated her own father; to avenge her, he tries to hate him as well. The plot of the story involves a trip Allen takes with his high school debate team. He becomes acquainted with Molly and when he joins his mother in the car to go home, he notices how tired she looks. He knows his mother had noticed his body language when he had told Molly goodbye, and he fears his mother will interrogate him about his relationship with Molly. When his mother finally asks him what happened on the trip, he claims nothing. His mother's response is to mention that Molly's mother had been rude to her and to demand that Allen not befriend Molly. Later, Allen notices that his romance with Molly brings him to a revelation about his mother: "this affair had brought out an ignoble, hysterical, brutal aspect of my mother that I might never have had to see otherwise" (78). Moreover, he notes, "Every time I saw my mother cry, it seemed I had to make Molly cry" (79). Allen unwittingly reacts to his mother's "brutal aspect" by transferring his anger to Molly--since he feels he cannot mistreat his mother, he mistreats Molly.
- 10 At the end of "Flight," Allen leaves the house and meets Molly; when he returns home, his mother's "loneliness caught [him]" (83). Allen regards as vulgar his mother's question "'how was the little hot-pants?'" and responds by demanding that she stop nagging. Allen's mother suspects that he wants to date but not marry Molly, so she creates for him a curious dilemma: she says that she will leave him alone only if he will

swear to marry Molly. The dilemma she poses for Allen, which employs reverse psychology, forces him to imply that he is not committed enough to Molly to marry her. Rather than directly answering her, Allen says, "All right. You'll win this one, Mother; but it'll be the last one you'll win," to which she responds, "Goodbye, Allen" (83). Allen's mother seems jealous of Molly, and Allen acquiesces to her. Ironically, the mother's winning the confrontation with Allen represents a Pyrrhic victory. Although in order to appease his mother Allen later agrees not to associate with Molly, his mother realizes that she and her son have become estranged. Robert W. Cochran suggests that at the time of narration Allen has come to appreciate his mother's disapproval of Molly and that the story's richness depends on the plot structure that establishes early that the mother envisions success for Allen. He suggests that the final "Goodbye, Allen" also signifies a farewell to his former self, his need to address himself in the third person (32). On the surface, the mother's comment may appear quite cruel and signify an emotional departure, but given that she has encouraged him throughout the story to succeed and to leave the farm, it can also be interpreted as acknowledgment that she has inspired Allen's departure from Olinger and his subsequent achievement.

- 11 Contrary to "Flight," "A Sense of Shelter" concerns the protagonist's mother's approval of the girl he admires. In "A Sense of Shelter," the high school senior William Young plans to tell Mary Landis that he loves her. Significantly, he says that his mother has liked Mary since she was a little girl: "Out of all the children that flocked, similar as pigeons, through the neighborhood, Mother's heart had reached out with claws and fastened on Mary" (87). He also finds his mother's and Mary's voices "indistinguishable" (86). However, William perceives his mother's fondness of Mary somewhat ambiguously, for he says that she reached toward Mary "with claws." Perhaps William's descriptions imply more about his own perception of human closeness than do his mother's comments or actions.^v Because he feels smothered by human comfort, he projects his discomfort onto Mary and assumes his mother's embraces psychologically confine Mary as well.
- 12 After Mary rejects William, he feels a sudden urge to "hurry and get home. He was seized by the irrational fear they were going to lock him in... the long dark space" (100). No doubt he looks forward to returning home to his mother, who apparently is less suffocating than the school, with its "cloistered odors of paper [and] sweat" (100). Again, the protagonist's description of his mother implies he feels ambivalent about her, but his sentiments have changed. He is not so ambivalent about her as his mother *per se*, but more confused about feelings she expresses for him. Even if William is unaware of these contradicting emotions, readers recognize that the very affection he seeks from his mother makes him uncomfortable.
- 13 Ambiguous ties between Updike's "local boy" protagonist and his mother continue throughout his adulthood. In *Of the Farm*, Joey, his wife, Peggy, and her eleven-year-old son from a previous marriage spend a weekend visiting Joey's mother. Joey's description of his mother in *Of the Farm* summarizes the ambiguity he continues to feel throughout her life: "I seemed to be in bed, and a tall girl stood above me, and her hair came loose from her shoulder and fell forward filling the air with a swift liquid motion, and hung there, as a wing edged with light, and enclosed me in a tent as she bent lower to deliver her good-night kiss" (127). Perhaps unwittingly, Joey reveals that he desires the nurturing his mother offers; yet he also feels "enclosed," a description similar in its

connotation of captivity to the one quoted earlier, wherein he feels his mother reach out to Mary "with claws" (87). Like one quoted earlier from "Flight," the description of his mother reveals interesting sexual connotations, with references to hair falling from her shoulder and poetic descriptions of a kiss. Throughout *Of the Farm*, tense conversations and conflict illustrate the control Joey's mother continues to have over him. He still wants his mother's approval, but he is caught between her and Peggy. The reason for his visit is to mow the pasture, but upon his arrival he asks his mother why they could not pay someone to mow it. She answers, "Because it's our place," to which he responds, "It's your place" (33). Repeatedly, Joey's mother tries to persuade him not to sell the farm after she dies. He finally agrees only because he does not want to betray his mother.

- 14 At one point amidst the conflict, Joey says, "I'm thirty-five and I've been through hell and I don't see why that old lady has to have such a hold over me. It's ridiculous. It's degrading" (45). However, at the end of the novel, his mother asks him to get a good price when he sells her farm to which he responds, "Your farm? I've always thought of it as our farm" (173), a comment that brings the novel full circle to the beginning, where he shows Peggy the property and refers to the barn as "our barn" (emphasis added; 3). Obviously, both at the beginning and at the end of the novel, Joey feels that he shares the property with his mother. The circularity of the plot suggests that he continues to feel ambivalence about his almost too close relationship with his mother.
- 15 The relationship between the protagonist and his mother is illustrated more subtly in "The Black Room." Here, the protagonist, Lee, notices that his eighty-year-old mother is thin, an observation that makes him realize that he wants her bulk back. The story concerns a visit to the house in Alton that the family had occupied prior to moving to the sandstone farmhouse. Lee's mother insists that she arranged the visit to please him, her only child. She also suggests that he claims to love the house not because he was born there as he argues, but to spite her. She says that she added years to their lives by moving from Alton to the farm and questions why he resents their having moved. He claims that he was just a child, in no position to resent anything, and adds that he is still in no position to resent anything. However, her comment inspires him to question whether he had wanted to visit the house just to spite her. Contemplating his own question from what he perceives is her sense of a higher level of truth, he realizes that it was his idea--she'd somehow read his mind and knew he wanted to visit the house.
- 16 As he visits the house with his mother, Lee considers his feelings about her. Watching her interact with the couple who now lives in the house Lee and his mother are touring, Lee recognizes his mother's charm and grace. However, later he concludes that throughout his life he "has seen other people, attracted by his mother, draw close; but in the end, only he could follow her twists and turns. Sometimes he wondered if his personality hadn't been so exactly conformed to his mother's that it made a poor fit with anyone else's" (275). On the way home from visiting the house, he tells his mother that the room that allegedly was once painted black scared him. She answers, "Oh my. And here we all thought you were such a happy child" (279). At the conclusion of the story, she apologizes for having felt so frightened during the tour of the house. When Lee begins to mention the black room, she says, "Don't even say it" (282). The story alludes to both of their fears, and they are joined in their shared human emotions. Whereas his mother did not realize that Lee was a frightened child, he recognizes his mother's fear. She in her eighties and Lee close to sixty, their parent-child relationship

has reversed: he cares and nurtures her. The last line of the story, "Don't even say it," is spoken in jest and the teasing that occurs between them suggests a sort of friendship has emerged in addition to the reversed parent-child relationship. Clearly, the protagonist's attitude toward his mother, developed from ambiguous to paternal, includes a sense of friendliness.

- 17 The final stories in the chronological account of the local boy's relationship with his mother might be the same story. "A Sandstone Farmhouse" and "The Cats" both reveal an older man's return to his mother's farm after her death. In "A Sandstone Farmhouse," the protagonist, Joey, recalls that when he was a small child his mother had frequently caressed him. Most importantly, after summarizing her life before they moved to the farm, the narrator concludes, "This was the mother Joey had loved, the mother before they moved, before she betrayed him with the farm and its sandstone house" (129). Joey also remembers that even as a very small child he had been aware of his mother's anger and had learned to avoid her when she was angry. Instead, he had tried to "amuse her, to keep her light. But now, as they were nearing the end of their time together, and her flesh was dissolving and her inner self rising to the surface, his responses had become more daring, less catering, even challenging" (135). On the other hand, after he leaves the farm, he has warm memories of it as his childhood home and feels displaced. He realizes that the connections between his mother and himself were significant. His emotionally packed memories of her suggest--if not to himself at least to readers--that she will continue to be a part of his life even after her death.
- 18 Joey recalls his mother saying that she had spent her life unsuccessfully trying to gain her own mother's approval. Joey's mother says that her own mother never said explicitly that she disapproved of her. When she comments that her mother never said much, Joey teases her, says, "Unlike *my* mother" (113). He recalls having been aware of his mother and himself as survivors of a larger familial group. Echoing the description in "Pigeon Feathers," Joey recalls that his father had referred to her as a "femme" and explains that as the reason his father had acquiesced to her whims. One epiphany he experiences concerns his realization that his mother's love for him had little to do with his personal qualities that he had hitherto imagined she cherished. Rather, her love for him was actually a testimony of herself: "a piece of her body, as a living proof of her womanhood" (119). He recalls that once while she was sick in the hospital, their life together was "lifted into new octaves, and mother and son seemed in these moments of hospital conference simply a man and a woman, both with more white hairs than dark, taking counsel because no one else whose advice would count was left on earth" (121). "A Sandstone Farmhouse" demonstrates that the mother-son relationship has evolved from a friendship to one wherein both understand that only the other's opinion counts--a deep, one-to-one human connection. Joey's insight, similar to that of the protagonist of "The Black Room," is that he has become both child and parent to his mother; likewise, his mother has become both parent and child to him--they protect and nurture each other.
- 19 Paralleling the story line of "A Sandstone Farmhouse," in "The Cats," the protagonist, Frank, returns to the farm after the death of his mother. The story concerns Frank's worry about what to do with all of his mother's cats. Recalling that she had claimed that she fed the stray cats to prevent them from eating the birds, he says, "Being my mother's son, I could follow her reasoning..." (92). Obviously missing his mother terribly, Frank speaks about her to the cats: "The lady who used to feed you is dead.

I'm just her son, her only child. I don't live here... I don't want to be here, I never did" (92). He says that his duty was to escape the farm. When he meets his mother's neighbor, Dwight, he thinks, "Dwight was the son I should have been" (93). He also claims, "it had suited me, too, to keep her on her farm, out of my life" (93). However, he also mentions that he had made many trips to the farm to visit her and had worried how she would survive the cold winters. Apparently, she had spent a lot of time thinking about her son, for she had told the clerk from whom she purchased cat food, "My boy thinks I'm crazy, feeding all these cats, but it's my only luxury" (95). Upon hearing this from the clerk, Frank feels the need to defend himself: "I never said crazy. I might have said funny" (95).

- 20 Frank sells the farm to a couple who promises to continue to rent the fields to Dwight, but he concludes, "The farm could take its chances" (101). His mother had always left the land unposted, allowing anyone to hunt on the property, but Frank is unconcerned when Dwight admits that he has posted the land. He only observes that "the last days of owning the farm were strange" (102). When Frank returns to the farm the day before closing the sale, he notes that the absence of an owner was apparent. He sees "a few shadows" and realizes that the cats are still on his mother's property: "The cats had survived. They thought I was my mother and good times had returned" (102). Significantly Frank observes that the cats thought he was his mother. Perhaps unconsciously, he is so connected with his mother that since her death he has become her, united with her so complexly that she is almost resurrected. Frank is able to sell the farm only after he has resolved his ambiguous feelings for his mother. He no longer needs to maintain the property as a physical reminder of his mother, nor does he feel that to sell it would constitute betrayal.
- 21 As its title suggests, "His Mother Inside Him" most pointedly reveals the protagonist's attitudes toward his mother. It appears as if the son (Allen Dow from "Flight", but now approaching sixty) has returned home to make arrangements for his mother's funeral, a situation that arouses thoughts about her. The narrator assesses his attitude toward his mother: "Though he learned to get around her--indeed, no one was better at getting around her; he was her only child, her confidant, her charmer, her prince, amusing and politic--he remained wary of the rage inside her that he had been permitted to glimpse. She made him nervous, and nervousness became his mode" (234). Allen resents it when his kin remark how much he resembles his mother. At first he sees no similarities between his mother and himself. However, later it surprises him when he recognizes that his own laugh reminds him of his mother's. He also recalls having almost taken the seller's side when he and his second wife were buying a house. He recollects that when his wife had questioned his motives he had "felt his mother inside him" and had recognized her wisdom of refusing to take a single perspective on any issue. Furthermore, Allen considers his mother's life and sees her as a separate entity rather than simply as his mother. He wonders about her own personal struggles for happiness--how she had served others in her roles as housewife and mother. He learns to view her as a person in her own right and recognizes her strengths as a person whose identity moves beyond defining her in relation to himself.
- 22 Allen understands that throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, he has maintained ambiguous feelings toward his mother: "he felt about land, *as about his mother*, ambivalent, she having planted in him the idea that land was sacred" (emphasis added; 237). Also, he summarizes events that readers recognize from

previous stories. For example, when he begins to understand that his own ideas have come from his mother, he recalls the scene in "Flight," where his mother tells him that he will leave the farm and find a prosperous future. His most astute insight comes at the very end of the story, when he remembers that while lying in the hospital she had announced that she regretted having become fat. The narrator then observes, "Allen Dow was getting fat" (241). Significantly, the bulk of his body is contrasted with the smallness of his life. Dow no longer fears death but is afraid "that his life was too small" (241). His epiphany and resolution with his mother occur when he recognizes that his mother's strength as an individual person had been her ability to envision a fulfilled life for her son and her attempt to live a satisfactory life in spite of the barriers that her roles of mother and wife placed upon her. In a humorous note, he ends his thoughts with the notion that his mother had matured at an earlier stage in her life than he had, and he concludes, "As they tell you in seventh-grade health class, girls develop more rapidly than boys" (241).

- 23 Throughout the series of Olinger stories, it takes Updike's "local boy" sixty years to resolve the conflict within himself, only to conclude that he needed sixty years to arrive at insights his mother reached when she was half that age. Significantly, he is able to sell the farm and relinquish the past, including his ambiguous ties to his mother. He has resolved the conflict, accepted his mother, and now is able to move forward in his own personal growth. Interestingly enough, the protagonist in "Cat's" concludes, after selling his mother's house, "As for my mother, it is strange, once a life is over, how little there is to say about it" (96). In 1964, Updike said about his Olinger stories that he offers "this book in the faith that it is a closed book" ("Foreword" vi). As Nadon pointed out in 1979, Olinger still represents home for Updike and that at least fictionally he is "always coming back" (68). With his continued return to this childhood in Shillington-Reading (Olinger), he becomes "a child again in this town, where life was a distant adventure, a rumor, an always imminent joy" ("Persistence" 135). Updike's prolonged examination of his past experiences on the farm have forced him to reevaluate his attitudes toward the locale to which he once thought he never desired to return. Recalling and rewriting scenes from his past from different stages in his own maturity, Updike reworks his memories of events. Thus, he is able to (re)create experiences from different levels of maturity that say more about ways attitudes develop as we mature than it does about artistic variations of a story.
- 24 Although contrary to his 1964 claim that he was finished writing about Olinger, Updike, even since Nadon's 1979 observation, still finds the farm a rich setting for his fiction. Updike's statement that "Olinger is a state of mind, of my mind, and belongs entirely to me" illustrates his continuing need to draw from Olinger when he creates fiction ("Foreword" v). The more recently published Olinger stories reveal that even now for Updike, as stated by the narrator of "A Sandstone Farmhouse," "He had always wanted to be where the action was, and what action there was, it turned out, had been back there" (135). Much of the action that occurs at the farm involves the protagonist's mother; also, the protagonist's recollections of past experiences at the farm trigger memories of his mother.
- 25 Updike's continuing depiction of Olinger reflects the protagonist's developing maturity, where the setting signifies personal development and growth. The main character's appreciation of the farm parallels his maturing attitude toward his mother. As a young adolescent he feels confined by both the physically restraining geographical

boundaries of the farm and by the psychologically confining relationship he has with his mother. However, for the protagonist in the more recently published Olinger stories, the farm represents not confinement but freedom. More importantly, his feelings for his mother no longer encumber him, for he has come to recognize her as an important figure in his own development and also as a unique individual whose worth is not defined solely in terms of her relationship to himself.

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NOTES

- i. For general studies of the short story cycle as genre, see Dunn and Morris, Gereben, Kennedy, and Lynch; for studies of Updike's short story cycles, see Luscher, Miller, Nadon, Uphaus, and Wilhelm.
- ii. For an excellent discussion of the ramifications of Updike's Olinger setting, see Miller.
- iii. Steven M. Chanley suggests that the conversation between David and his mother is essential to his contemplations about religion, which eventually help him create his unique sense of religion and mythology.
- iv. William H. Shurr compares David's rebellion against his mother with that of Luther's against the church.
- v. For brief but interesting debates about William's attitudes toward home and his mother, see Edwards and Reising.

RÉSUMÉS

Les nouvelles du recueil *Olinger Stories* de John Updike sont toutes racontées du point de vue du protagoniste. En les lisant dans l'ordre chronologique, on constate que le comportement de celui-ci envers sa mère change selon son âge. Les histoires se développent autour des sentiments ambigus du fils et montrent l'évolution de son attitude à l'égard de la mère. À la mort de celle-ci il finit par résoudre son complexe d'infériorité. De manière significative il vend sa ferme et réussit à ne plus penser au passé. Ainsi il renonce aux liens ambigus qui l'attachaient à la mère. Cette évolution du personnage crée aussi une continuité entre les nouvelles. L'apprentissage de la vie du héros est vu à travers des angles différents. Toutefois, l'auteur fait moins "des variations sur le même thème" qu'un exposé sur la façon dont certaines manières de penser se développent au fur et à mesure qu'on vieillit.

AUTEURS

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Laurie CHAMPION enseigne (*Assistant Professor*) la littérature anglaise à l'Université d'état de San Diego, Imperial Valley. Elle a publié des articles et des nouvelles dans : *African American Review*, *American Literature*, *Diversity*, *Explicator*, *Studies in Short Fiction*, *Journal of the Short Story in English*, *Langston Hughes Review*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, *New Texas*, *Southern Literary Journal*, *Southern Quarterly*, *Studies in the Novel*, *Texas College English*, *Texas Short Stories*. Elle travaille actuellement comme coéditrice sur la publication d'une anthologie intitulée *Texas Short Stories II*, et d'une deuxième : *Blacks in the West: A Century of Short Stories*. Enfin elle termine une étude sur la tradition de la nouvelle africaine-américaine.