THE FLOWERS AND BONES OF GEORGIA O'KEEFFE:

A RESEARCH-BASED DISSERTATION

CULMINATING IN A FULL-LENGTH PLAY:

DAYS WITH JUAN

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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Doctor of Letters

Renata Renee Kessler

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ABSTRACT

The Flowers and Bones of Georgia O'Keeffe:
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Was Georgia O'Keeffe a nature mystic? *The Flowers and Bones of Georgia O'Keeffe* examines mystical philosophies prevalent during O'Keeffe's development as an artist and their influence on her. The influence of mysticism is sought through the examination of selected flower and bone paintings by the modernist artist. I have viewed selected works through an ethnobotanical and anthropological lens, seeking depth and meaning in the artist's work beyond the current interpretations which focus on gender, sexuality, and feminism. Through the prism of lotus, jimson flower, poppy, and sand dollar cactus, I have explored their importance to O'Keeffe, as well as the context of these plants in Eastern, Western, and Native American cultures in which she was interested. Ethnobotanical sources and intercultural seminars at Ghost Ranch, New Mexico, were included in my research.

In addition, a selection of tree portraits, representations of mystical writers the artist admired, are included. These portraits include *The Lawrence Tree* (D. H. Lawrence) and *Gerald's Tree I* and *II* (Gerald Heard), as well as *Chestnut Grey* and *Grey Tree*, an old oak at Lake George, which was a landmark on the Stieglitz property where it is rumored O'Keeffe secretly buried Alfred Stieglitz's ashes.

An investigation of animal bones that O'Keeffe found in the desert, juxtaposed with flowers, clouds, and landscape painting, linked life and death—heaven and earth. Ghost Ranch in the high mountain desert of New Mexico became a source of energy and creativity for the artist, where many of her bone paintings were executed.

Moving O'Keeffe's artistic activity from the page to the stage in *Days with Juan*, a full-length play, explores her later years. Being a victim of macular degeneration, the artist loses much of her central vision. One can only imagine what a crisis this can be for an artist whose vision is critical to her painting. Her young assistant, Juan, opens up a new avenue for her creativity through clay, building a pottery for her at Ghost Ranch. Juan's role of handyman, assistant, and friend keeps O'Keeffe going. The play explores O'Keeffe's relationship to Juan, as well as her relationship to her own life and death in the context of her mystical beliefs.

The characters in the play are composites of different people close to O'Keeffe. The play is strictly the writer's interpretation; the point where O'Keeffe's life intersects with the playwright's. Therefore, it is a work of fiction based on research probing deeper truths about the artist.

DEDICATION

To George Tschurjumow, Artist, Master Sign Painter, 1948-2010,

and my muse, Georgia O'Keeffe, 1887-1986.

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The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum and Research Center in Santa Fe opened their resources to me, as did the Ghost Ranch Library. The Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe aided me in my investigation of some of the sacred plants that O'Keeffe painted. I acknowledge the Taos Pueblo for their tours and the ceremonies I attended with the family of the late Lorencita Lujan, who worked at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House, providing insight and information that propelled the creation of this dissertation.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

I have always been fascinated by the compelling art of modernist painter Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), who inspired me to write a play about her life. She is known for her paintings of large flowers, skyscrapers, and New Mexico landscapes. O'Keeffe is often referred to as the "Mother of American modernism." As a budding young artist, she was discovered by her mentor, and later husband, Alfred Stieglitz, a famous photographer and promoter of modern art. Initially my goal for this dissertation was to burst the commonly held myth of the perfect relationship between the iconic American modernist painter and the renowned photographer Stieglitz, but as my research evolved, my direction changed; my research led me toward exploration of how her relationship with nature manifests itself through her art.

O'Keeffe was on a quest to express her own identity in art at a time when American art was establishing its own way, breaking away from European traditions.[1] Modernism and nationalism often paralleled during this period. With the rise of victory gardens between the two world wars, gardening and horticulture became very popular in the early twentieth century.[2] "Seeds for Victory" became a popular slogan when women were pursuing the vote. O'Keeffe's exploration of flowers as a feminine life force empowered her, as well.

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[1] Wanda Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (University of California Press, 2001), 31.

[2] Erin B. Coe, Bruce Robertson, and Gwendolyn Owens, *Modern Nature: Georgia O'Keeffe and Lake George* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 48-63.

Transcendentalism, a popular philosophy expressed in art and literature, suggested that the divine is present in nature, and that life can be understood by studying it and being close to it. Influenced by transcendentalists, many of O'Keeffe's most famous paintings are of flowers, plants, and objects found in nature.[3] Her life emulated transcendentalist ideals of closeness to nature, self-reliance, and individualism.

Stieglitz was the charismatic mentor of a small group of New York artists known as the "Stieglitz circle" who considered themselves "transcendentalist modernists." These artists and writers believed in rejecting materialism and pursuing closer communion with nature. O'Keeffe's art was very much in sync with the philosophy of the Stieglitz circle. Stieglitz became both mentor and villain in O'Keeffe's life. He was the most important person in the New York art world at a time when O'Keeffe was an art teacher in Texas. He became her guide and mentor, exhibiting her work in his gallery. Miserable in his first marriage, he began to see her as a kind of salvation, photographing every part of her body with his camera. The sparks between them flew. O'Keeffe seized the opportunity and moved to New York to be with Stieglitz and paint. His influence spurred O'Keeffe's growth as an artist, as well as provided opportunities for her work to be seen and marketed. She became a famous artist of iconic stature, thanks, in part, to Stieglitz's promotion of her.

Even though he was egotistical and narcissistic, Stieglitz was immensely charismatic, and he had the ability to establish a deep communion with people. However, his attention span was short. After several years of marriage to O'Keeffe, he embarked on

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[3] R. Barris, "Emily Carr and Georgia O'Keeffe: Whitmanesque Visions of Nature," *Emily Carr and Georgia O'Keeffe: Intersections between Feminine and National Identity*, accessed February 6, 2021, www.radford.edu/rbarris/Women%20and%20art/amerwom05/CarrOkeeffeweb.html.

a twenty-year relationship with the younger Dorothy Norman, exhibiting photographs of her publicly. In a situation where many women would have fallen apart, O'Keeffe was determined not to let it destroy her, and forged her own identity as a modernist landscape painter of the Southwest. From 1929 on, O'Keeffe made frequent trips to the deserts of New Mexico, exploring new sources of inspiration in the American landscape for her painting and redemptive healing through nature. Redemption through nature is a recurring theme in American art and literature. The British writer D. H. Lawrence wrote about man as redeemed by a ceaseless relation to his surrounding universe.[4] O'Keeffe subscribed to this view of the relationship between man and nature.

O'Keeffe painted the mountains, flora and fauna, and animal bones found in the high desert country. Influenced by the Indigenous and Hispanic cultures that were part of her environment, she incorporated them into her own modernist primitive vision.[5] The word "primitive" is loosely used to describe her art, as much of her painting contained a visionary component, based on indigenous plants, herbs, animal bones, rocks, stones, and mountains that are revered by Native Americans and other earthbound faiths which worship the spiritual interconnectedness of life on the planet. Suggestions of the shamanic are pervasive in her art. O'Keeffe represents the cosmos in ways that are underemphasized in modern culture. Research on this significant element of her work influenced the change of focus in my dissertation to the exploration of the visionary

[4] Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy, *Green Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, and the Environment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 199-212.

[5] Marianna Togovnik, *Primitive Passions: Men, Women, and the Quest for Ecstasy* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2013).

components and ethnobotanical dimensions of her work.[6] I make reference to some of these elements which are incorporated into a full-length play, *Days with Juan.*

O'Keeffe frequently consulted L. S. M. Curtin's *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande: Traditional Medicine of the Southwest*, which was a book in her library.[7] The artist's interest in healing plants and healthy cuisine are reflected in her book room with copies of gardening and horticulture magazines, as well as many volumes on the prevention of disease, diet, and vitamins, including a copy of *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit* by Adele Davis.[8]

Following in O'Keeffe's footsteps in the Southwest, I examined specific paintings as evidence of the influences of Native American herbal medicines used in tribal ceremonies, in the Far East, and Indigenous creation myths. In Chapter 2, I explore how the flower paintings are regarded as aligned with the "sacred plants" of ancient and Indigenous cultures. In both East and West they have both medicinal and religious uses.[9] Further explored in Chapter 3 are the influences of ethnobotany and shamanism in her art. Chapter 4 focuses on her bone paintings which are also steeped in Mexican and Native American folklore. A ram's head appearing to the blessed in the sky is a Navajo

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[6] L.S.M. Curtin, *Healing Herbs of Upper Rio Grande: Traditional Medicines of the Southwest*, ed. Michael Moore (Santa Fe, NM: Western Edge Press, 1997).

[7] Ruth E. Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton. *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu* (New York, NY: The Grolier Club, 1997), 25.

[8] Fine, Glassman, and Hamilton, *The Book Room*, 25.

[9] Christian Ratsch, *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2005), 9-16.

legend retold by Ernest Thompson Seton, an American naturalist, writer, and folklorist.[10] O'Keeffe painted it as a memorial to a friend who died.

Since ancient times, the healing power of nature has been acknowledged by religion, science, and the arts. Not only can exposure to nature increase awe, but it can also reduce stress and boost the immune system. People have long been interested in its healing power. Henry David Thoreau secluded himself in the woods for two years while writing *Walden*, his classic meditation on the subject. Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Waldo Emerson were the transcendentalist writers whose legacy influenced O'Keeffe. The artist found peace in her gardens where she cultivated a variety of flowers and healing herbs, often exploring them in her art. She also found sanctuary in nature from the disappointments of her marriage and family of origin. Her stoic disposition seldom allowed her to discuss her difficult childhood with an unstable, financially ruined father and tubercular mother. Nature and art gave her the solace and strength to overcome these challenges.

Having survived the Depression and two world wars, O'Keeffe found solace in the natural landscape and traditions of northern New Mexico. Through my research, I was inspired by her paintings that explore the healing and regenerating power of flowers, bones, and landscape. I made several trips to the Mabel Dodge Luhan House, the Taos Pueblo, the O'Keeffe Museum and Research Center, and The Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe. Visiting Ghost Ranch, O'Keeffe's house in Abiquiu, and the surrounding areas she painted helped me develop a rich sense of place as portrayed in her

[10] Ernest Seton, *Krag The Kootenay Ram and Other Animal Stories* (London: University of London Press, 1929).

work. The New York Botanical Gardens exhibit *Georgia O'Keeffe: Visions of Hawaii* yielded additional information about her paintings of the lotus flower.

Chapter 5, "Playwriting O'Keeffe," summarizes my exploration of the artist's life through drama, and Chapter 6 concludes the research portion of my dissertation. The dissertation culminates in a full-length play about the final years of her life.

Playwriting Process

As mentioned before, my original intent was to write a play shattering the myth of the perfect relationship between modernist artist Georgia O'Keeffe and her renowned photographer and gallerist, Alfred Stieglitz. After divorcing his first wife to marry Georgia in 1924, he soon embarked on a twenty-year affair with his younger assistant and paramour Dorothy Norman. Both were married. How did Georgia survive this? When most women would have folded, Georgia forged her own direction as a landscape painter of the Southwest and its flora, fauna, and skeletons, transforming disappointment into opportunity.

O'Keeffe came of age as an artist when the transcendentalist movement influenced modern art. The Stieglitz circle to which she belonged called themselves transcendentalist modernists. What caught my attention in O'Keeffe's work was an energy field that was not altogether of this Earth. I surmised that "many of the sexual references to her work could also refer to spiritual symbols."[11] Since much has been written about the sexuality of O'Keeffe's art, in my research, I have explored her life and

[11] Jeffrey Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe: The Life of an American Legend* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 135.

work through playwriting, using a mystical, ethnobotanical, and anthropological lens, to find out if she was, indeed, a nature mystic.

I approached my inquiry by studying her selected flower and bone paintings, as well as her connections to nature. In a Walt Disney animated rendition of *Alice In Wonderland*, the song lyrics "You can learn a lot of things from the flowers" literally suggested a deeper meaning which I probed through drama and research, culminating in two full-length plays. My first play was called *Flowers and Bones* and the second, *Days with Juan*, was an expanded version of the last scene in the first. These two plays were developed over a period of ten years.

Flowers and Bones begins in O'Keeffe's youth during the women's suffrage movement and World War I. O'Keeffe was a pacifist whose brother was a casualty of the war. *Red Poppy* (1927), inspired by the poem *In Flanders Fields*, written by battlefield physician John McCrae. The poppy became a favorite memorial symbol of the Great War, paying tribute to those boys whose blood was shed in the battlefield; those who made the ultimate sacrifice. It was on posters in magazines, blooming in gardens, and O'Keeffe painted it. A scene beginning with Georgia as schoolteacher at West Texas Normal College triggers a discussion about war and modern art in her classroom. Having been an art teacher myself, I wrote this scene referencing my own experiences teaching, as well as Georgia's. Our lives also crossed paths at the Art Students League, almost a century apart. Having painted many models from life myself, I was able to write the scene *Alfred and Georgia*, renamed, *Love and Marriage*, in which Georgia poses nude for Stieglitz in his studio. He photographs every part of her, using her sexuality to market her art.

Showing her paintings and his nude photographs of her in the same exhibit created a sensation, and everyone wanted to own an O'Keeffe. Not wanting to be viewed merely as a woman artist, yet contributing to it by allowing the public to view nude photographs of her, O'Keeffe was in conflict. This conflict changes when she is driven away by Alfred's twenty-year affair with Dorothy Norman. After unexpectedly walking in on them, O'Keeffe retreats to New Mexico and develops her own life and art away from Stieglitz and his mistress. It is in New Mexico that her new life begins: first, as a guest in the Taos salon of Mabel Dodge Luhan and her Pueblo husband, Tony, and then in Abiquiu, where she eventually settles. At Mabel's, O'Keeffe becomes enamored with Mabel's stunning husband who is also a member of the Native American Church. On her visits, O'Keeffe paints cactus flowers in the desert which resemble the *Star Peyote Cactus flower, Taos Pueblo* (1929) and *Taos Mountain* (1930). In my play *Flowers & Bones*, in Taos, she also meets photographer Ansel Adams; the writer D. H. Lawrence; and his wife, Frieda, who appear in several scenes in early drafts. I explored the characters of Mabel Dodge Luhan; her husband, Tony; D. H. Lawrence; and his wife, Frieda, in the scene *Mabel and Lorenzo*. These characters are later joined by Georgia O'Keeffe, who has a special place in my heart because I, too, am an artist, as well as a playwright.

Having explored Georgia's life through dramatic writing, I decided to use the latter part of her life for my dissertation because it is more parallel to my experience now. In *Days with Juan*, O'Keeffe is an old woman who is losing her vision. The young handyman knocks on her door to deliver a stove and a new friendship, giving the artist new hope and direction. Juan teaches her new skills through clay with pottery and

sculpture to compensate for her vision loss, all the while keeping her engaged with her art. Juan helps O'Keeffe plan a retrospective exhibit in a Santa Fe Museum. The play shows the power struggle between them. O'Keeffe struggles to maintain her power, as Juan struggles to take over. O'Keeffe knows this, but compromises, because she does not want to be or die alone. However, she loses agency to Juan as she ages, and at the end, she is not able to die at her beloved Ghost Ranch with Juan holding her hand, but in the arms of her nurse in a hospital bed in Santa Fe. It is only in death that she is able to manifest her wish, and that is where the play starts: with O'Keeffe as a ghost at Ghost Ranch, retracing the steps of her life to find out how and why she lost agency to Juan. The conflict over losing agency to men is timely for women of any age. To maintain a relationship and not lose one's self is no easy task.

A long journey of over forty years brought me to this project, which culminated in my dissertation and its accompanying play, *Days with Juan*. It began with an inspiring O'Keeffe exhibit at the Whitney Museum in 1970. I was so moved by her paintings that I wrote several poems about them and drove all the way to Taos in my first car, a 1952 Dodge. It had very few miles on it and my boyfriend, Peter, taught me to drive on the way. Surprisingly, the car held up for the entire trip. Driving into the Taos Valley, I felt the magnetism of Magic Mountain, and like O'Keeffe, I was captivated by its beauty, returning there many times to write this dissertation. The development of my playwriting process is more fully discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

NATURE

Transcendentalist Influences

America's faith in the wilderness as a source of purity and renewal played a central role in shaping the American identity in the early years of the twentieth century. This era was influenced by transcendentalism, a movement which began in the 1830s. Transcendentalists valued nature for its attributes of the sublime. These ideas were rooted in the works of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, who spread their literary Romanticism to Americans throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Emerson and his circle believed that the natural world symbolizes spiritual truth. Transcendentalist beliefs often paralleled Native American attitudes toward nature.[12] For example, Lois Rudnick states that "Pueblo cosmology pictures a universe in which man, woman, nature, body and spirit, cooperate in a 'balanced, co-relative interdependence.' Ritual, social, and political activities are geared to harmonize man's relation with spirits to ensure the desired cyclical changes will continue to come about in nature."[13] Pueblo culture celebrates this life force. Like the Native Americans who believed in the Great Spirit and Mother Earth, Emerson and Thoreau saw nature as the divine window to God, and because of this view they formed transcendentalism.

Transcendentalists believed that true knowledge comes through intuition and imagination, not through reason. Putting a premium on individualism and self-reliance,

[12] Terri St. John, "Emerson and the Native Americans," http://coursite.uhcl.edu/HSH//Whitec/LITR/4232.

[13] Lois Palken Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan: New Woman, New Worlds* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 150.

Emerson wanted Americans to stop looking to Europe for inspiration and imitation. He believed that everyone's potential was limitless, and he inspired colleagues to look to themselves, into nature and art, to find the answer to life's most perplexing questions. His followers took a progressive stance on women's rights, abolition, reform, and education. They were critical of government, organized religions, social institutions, and creeping industrialization. Emerson's contributions to transcendentalism inspired a uniquely American idealism and spirit of reform, culminating in the preservation of the wilderness movement and the creation of the great state parks. America, a relatively new country, was seeking to define itself through its wilderness. A national identity was being formed. These ideas were still in the air as O'Keeffe came of age in the early twentieth century.

Transcendental values reemerged in the early twentieth century, with progressives and members of the Stieglitz circle.[14] O'Keeffe became a member of this circle, whose participants found themselves in harmony with transcendentalist philosophy and modernist primitivism, which aligned itself with tribal objects and other nonwestern art forms rooted in nineteenth-century Romanticism's fascination with distant and foreign civilizations deemed to be naïve or primitive, inspired by the myth of a paradise lost, and by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notion of the "Noble Savage." These ideas undoubtedly inspired Gauguin, Picasso, and Braque, the most *avant-garde* European artists of their time, exhibited in Gallery 291 by Stieglitz and later shown in New York's historic 1913 Armory Show.

[14] Heinz Ickstadt, "Transcendentalists and Cultural Nationalists: Painters and Poets of the Stieglitz Circle," litda.ru>images>americana.PDF.

In the years following the Armory Show, Stieglitz dedicated most of his exhibitions to works by American artists. It became his mission to mentor a small group of transcendentalist modernists: a New York-based group of American artists. Among them were Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Arthur Dove, Charles Demuth, and O'Keeffe. His Gallery 291 originally promoted the modern photography of Edward Steichen, Ansel Adams, Paul Strand, and others, but soon began to represent painters as well. A distinctive element in the Stieglitz circle was their interest in nature. The landscape was a spiritual place for these artists. Arthur Dove claimed that the light in nature can only be expressed through the light we have in ourselves. O'Keeffe found her light in her flowers and the bleached bones of the desert.[15]

These ideas were certainly among O'Keeffe's influences, in addition to hours of solitude spent in communion with nature in farming communities where she grew up. In the plains of the Texas Panhandle, at Lake George, and in the high desert of New Mexico, O'Keeffe found a refuge and renewed artistic inspiration in the vast expanse of sparsely inhabited land that she later made her own. The artist also maintained a home in New York City. O'Keeffe divided her time between New Mexico and New York City, in part due to her problematic relationship with Stieglitz. However, she was well aware of the New York art world and its importance to her career, even though she could not tolerate Stieglitz's affair of over twenty years with his young protégé, Dorothy Norman, nor could she establish herself in the New York art world without him. Because her art always came first, O'Keeffe built a new life in New Mexico where she could paint

[15] Christie's, "The Story of The Stieglitz Circle," last modified 2021, https://www.christies.com/features/The-Stieglitz-Circle-the-call-of-the-wild-9881-3.aspx.

peacefully, and returned to New York to have her work marketed by Stieglitz. Their relationship was one of trade-offs and compromises for both.

When Stieglitz died in 1946, O'Keeffe made her home in Abiquiu where she found an enduring source of inspiration, painting a transcendent natural world filled with primordial vitality. For her subjects she gathered stones, bones, and shells from the desert floor, often coupling them with flowers and pulsating, undulating hills that suggest the curves of a woman's body, such as in *Datura and Pedernal* (1940). However, there is no trace of human habitation in her pristine scenes that communicate the music and primal voices of the earth. O'Keeffe survived an unstable, philandering father and a tubercular mother whom he abandoned. Virginia Christianson, an analyst who worked for the artist, as a companion in old age, concluded that she had most likely been molested by him, even though she refused to admit the betrayal, even to herself.[16] She was also disappointed in her relationship with Stieglitz and benefited from the healing power of nature by painting it.

The natural majesty of Ghost Ranch became nirvana to O'Keeffe. It reaffirmed her vision of the world as a place of brilliant light, fantastic form, and vivid colors.[17] Rejuvenated by the altitude and clean air, she had found her Shangri-La, where she eventually relocated, permanently.

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[16] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 256-257.

[17] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 172-173.

The Indigenous tribes of New Mexico inspired her paintings, as did trips she made to Peru in search of Incan secrets of other worlds.[18] Her journeys included visits to India, China, and Japan. Evidence of her interest in Native American art and culture is also suggested by her numerous visits to Pueblo and Navajo ceremonies.[19] O'Keeffe had an extensive collection of museum bulletins on Native American art of the Southwest, and she made numerous expeditions to Navajo country. On these trips, she was sometimes accompanied by Antonio (Tony) Lujan, one of the members of the underground Native American Church in Taos.[20] He was the third husband of Mabel Dodge Luhan.[21] Mabel hosted salons in Taos and New York that O'Keeffe frequented. Tony befriended O'Keeffe during her stay at Mabel's compound in Taos during the summer of 1929. Their friendship continued thereafter, perhaps inspiring her interest in shamanic flowers, such as lotus, poppy, jimson (datura), and cactus. On one occasion, when Mabel snubbed O'Keeffe, Tony stayed with her in her room while the Peyote singers performed at *Los Gallos*, Mabel's Taos salon. As Jeffrey Hogrefe explains, "Like other Native Americans, Pueblo Indians ingested psychedelic peyote as a ritual to join with the cosmic forces of the universe. Although many artists and writers also took peyote to gain insight, O'Keeffe did not experiment with [visionary] drugs by all

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[18] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 239. O'Keeffe's interest in Incan civilization is evidenced in her painting *Machu Picchu 1* (1957), on display at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

[19] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 143-144.

[20] See Appendix B for a letter from Geronimo Gomez, President of the Native American Church, Taos, New Mexico, in which Gomez confirms Antonio Lujan's status in the Native American Church and his peyote use.

[21] Spelling of *Lujan* was anglicized by Mabel Dodge Luhan.

accounts."[22] Being a very private person, she would never tell if she had. In addition, due to her iconic stature in the art world, such information would likely be suppressed. However, her hostess, Mabel, an American patron of the arts, became interested in peyote.[23] Many of her contemporaries in Taos did, as well. In the early twentieth century, modernists explored the visionary knowledge of primitive societies. Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher Isherwood, writers O'Keeffe admired, visited her at Ghost Ranch in the 1930s, each with a significant interest in Eastern religions, metaphysics, and sacred plants.[24] She shared these interests and expressed them through her art.[25]

Artist as Gardener

O'Keeffe's childhood was spent on a farm in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. According to Erin Coe, Bruce Robertson, and Gwendolyn Owens in *Modern Nature*, O'Keeffe first visited the Stieglitz estate in Lake George in 1918. There, she encountered the vegetable garden on the "Hill" (the nickname of the Stieglitz family farmhouse, which was situated on the hill) where the family lived. She formed a friendship with their chief caretaker, Donald Davidson, with whom she shared many interests, among them gardening, horticulture, and maintaining the Lake George property. At the Stieglitz estate O'Keeffe encountered opportunities to re-explore her agrarian roots.[26] Both she and Davidson were

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[22] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 156.

[23] Mariavittoria Mangini, "A Hidden History of Women and Psychedelics." *MAPS Bulletin* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

[24] Carolyn Kellogg, "Aldous Huxley's psychedelic Los Angeles life," *Jacket Copy*, June 24, 2011, https://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2011/06/aldous-huxley-psychdelic-los-angeles.html.

[25] Brenda Mitchel, "O'Keeffe's Arboreal Portraits of D. H. Lawrence and Gerald Heard," last modified 2017, https://www.geraldheard.com/writings-and-recollections/2017/8/4/okeeffes-arboreal-portraits-of-d-h-lawrence-and-gerald-heard?rq=o%27keeffe.

[26] Coe, Robertson, and Owens, *Modern Nature*, 48-50.

outsiders to the Stieglitz clan; they found "kinship in attitudes and experiences" in the form of "a non-sentimental and open respect for manual labor, an intimacy with the soil," and a "wry Celtic wit" that was otherwise missing in the Stieglitz family.[27] She soon recognized his expertise in all matters concerning the cultivation of vegetables, flowers, and fruit. Years later, after relocating to New Mexico, she reestablished her gardens and crops, continuing to seek advice from him. Davidson revered Luther Burbank, and the varieties of flowers and vegetables that he and O'Keeffe grew on the Hill were based on Burbank's cultivars.

Not until recently has O'Keeffe's work been tied to the horticulture and botany promoted by Luther Burbank in the 1920s. Due to his influence, gardening reached unprecedented popularity in the United States. Burbank, considered a national hero, was hailed as a genius and "plant wizard." He introduced more than 800 new varieties of plants including 200 types of fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains, and hundreds of ornamental flowers. Burbank successfully articulated parallels between plants and humans that were reflected in the works of artists of his day, who often used plant imagery as a surrogate to reflect the parts of human anatomy.

A flower closely associated with O'Keeffe and Burbank is the poppy (see O'Keeffe's *Red Poppy* [1928]). Burbank was able to make orange poppies red. He possessed a creative urge akin to an artist interested in producing color and form. He emphasized the parallels between horticulture, botany, and art-making, describing his

[27] Sue Davidson Lowe, *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* (MFA Publications, 2002), 150.

skills as analogous to those of a painter, "choosing colors for his palette."[28] Coe, Robertson, and Owens mention that Burbank pioneered a variety of hybridized poppies to achieve larger blooms; among them, his giant "Oriental Poppy" attained an extraordinary size which measured 12" in diameter, similar to the enlarged flowers that the artist was painting (See O'Keeffe's *Oriental Poppies* [1927]). In the spirit of Burbank, the artist blew up her flowers so that busy New Yorkers would take the time to look at them.

O'Keeffe's library contained dozens of texts on flowers and trees, both of which were frequent motifs of her paintings over decades of her career. Some of these books appeared for medicinal use and identification, such as *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande* by Curtin, but more than fifty were on gardening, geared specifically to conditions in the American Southwest. O'Keeffe's interest in gardening was as much for sustenance as for beauty, as well as for medicine, according to Elizabeth Glassman's foreword in *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu*.[29]

Many of the pamphlets in her collection focused on the growing of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, many of which had healing as well as culinary uses.[30] During the 1940s, the artist became increasingly concerned with the use of herbs not only as seasonings but also as natural remedies. *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande*[31] was one of many books the painter collected on the latter subject. The author, Leonora Scott

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[28] Randall R. Griffey, "Reconsidering the Soil: The Stieglitz Circle, the Regionalists and Cultural Eugenics in the Twenties," in *Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties*, ed. Teresa Carbone (Random House, 2011).

[29] Elizabeth Glassman, "Forward," in *The Book Room: Georgia O'Keeffe's Library in Abiquiu*, Ruth E. Fine, Elizabeth Glassman, and Juan Hamilton (New York: The Grolier Club, 1997), 15.

[30] Glassman, "Forward," 15.

[31] Curtin, *Healing Herbs*.

Muse Curtin, was a Santa Fe authority on folk remedies, based on interviews with local friends, curanderos, and Native healers. These remedies were the original "holistic medicines" used for body, mind, and spirit. Ethnobotanists have studied these remedies, and much literature is available about them. O'Keeffe and her contemporaries—among them, Ansel Adams, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, and Gerald Heard—had an interest in these plants, as reflected in their literature and art. Adams photographed the datura plant. O'Keeffe painted arboreal portraits in honor of Lawrence (*The Lawrence Tree* [1929]) and Irish writer Gerald Heard (*Gerald's Tree 1* [1937]). Both Lawrence and Heard were writers who traveled to New Mexico, ambivalent toward the world of industrial technology and interested in mysticism. These paintings will be discussed in the section about her tree paintings.

Flower Symbolism

Is a flower just a flower? In the early twentieth century, Freudian theory attributed sexual symbolism to everyday objects—including flowers. Freud's theories were in vogue in Europe in the 1910s and spread to the United States by the 1920s. As Freud's groundbreaking ideas spread from Europe to the United States, artwork that dealt with sexuality in a metaphorical way grew in popularity, as critics looked for hidden psychoanalytic meanings in the works of several artists regardless of their intent. Painters Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley, contemporaries of O'Keeffe, also painted flowers having both male and female attributes. A hermaphroditic plant that fascinated O'Keeffe in her youth was Jack-in-the-pulpit. Her painting of the flower gave rise to questions about her sexuality. During the 1930s O'Keeffe was invited to *Los Luceros*, the home of Mary Cabot Wheelwright, who studied Navajo culture and its artifacts with a

hermaphrodite medicine man, Hosteen Klah. She painted a series of the flowers in the 1930s after she was a guest at Mary Wheelwright's home in Alcalde, New Mexico.[32] O'Keeffe often did portraits of people using symbols of the natural world, such as trees, mountains, flowers, bones, and animal skulls.

O'Keeffe's close-ups of floral forms from the 1910s through the 1930s have exclusively been read as sexual metaphors despite her continuous denial of such an intent. She often complained that Demuth's and Hartley's floral depictions were not given Freudian interpretations as often, and threatened to quit painting. However, she contributed to this situation by allowing Stieglitz to take nude photographs of her and exhibiting them in his gallery with her work. Furthermore, Marsden Hartley and journalist Paul Rosenfeld reinforced Stieglitz's inclination to promote her art as a manifestation of the erotic. In the article "O'Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze," Anna Chave takes into account that the artist took offense at the sexual reading of her flower paintings and abstractions, due to the degrading form these readings took, rather than her naiveté about her works' expression.[33] Later in her life, O'Keeffe acknowledged that even though the sexual readings attributed to her work never entered her mind, "that doesn't mean they weren't there." [34] Even though O'Keeffe denied the sexual intent of her art, she communicated much about herself subliminally; specifically, through the

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[32] Susan Thom Loubet, "Women Drawn to Santa Fe in the 1920s," *KUNM*, last modified April 22, 2014. https://www.kunm.org/post/women-drawn-santa-fe-1920s.

[33] Anna Chave, "O'Keeffe and the Masculine Gaze," *Art in America* 78, no. 1 (1990): 114-125+. http://annachave.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Masculine-Gaze.pdf.

[34] Lisa Messinger, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (London: Thames and Hudson World of Art, 2001), 30.

inherent sexuality of the nature of flowers. In addition, her flowers as subjects represent not only an opening of sexuality, but an opening of the mind and of consciousness.

The idea of tapping the unconscious mind, giving it reign, space, and voice was a popular practice among modernists. The turmoil and perplexity of modern life left many yearning for a simpler time. During this time, the unconscious was identified with the primitive. Sexuality itself became imbued with a type of religious mysticism. O'Keeffe's Abiquiu library that she modestly referred to as her "bookroom" has a first edition of Carl Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido; A Contribution to the History and Evolution of Thought.*[35] It is interesting to note that Jung made an anthropological expedition to study the Tarahumara of Mexico and the Pueblos of New Mexico in 1924 and 1925, several years before O'Keeffe arrived there to paint.[36]

Throughout history, flowers have had symbolic meanings. In ancient Egypt the lotus flower (water lily family) was believed to be a sacred, life-giving force. The sun god, Ra, was said to have been imprisoned in a lotus bud and emerged from the blossoming flower, then given the name "the God who rises from the great lotus." The *Egyptian Book of the Dead* describes the process of the deceased being reborn from the lotus into the afterlife. Even though Egyptian mythology does not directly align the flower with the female sexuality, it does symbolize the lotus as the womb from which

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[35] Carl Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido, a Contribution to the History and Evolution of Thought*, trans. and introd. Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York: Moffatt, Yard, and Company, 1916).

[36] Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffe (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

mankind emerged.[37] In India, a sexual mythology also exists around the lotus flower. Camphausen suggests that the Sanskrit term *padma* (lotus) is quite often used as a secret code for *yoni* (Sanskrit for womb or sacred place). The lotus became symbolic of the fruitful womb, its pistil, the fetus. As a bud, it represented the virgin cunnus; when in bloom, the labia of a productive woman. The phrase "the jewel in the lotus" took on a similar meaning with "jewel" denoting semen, penis, or embryo and "lotus" indicating vulva or womb. The lotus became a metaphor for the different stages of female sexuality.[38]

According to Aztec mythology, flowers were created from the genitals of Xochitl. According to Jane Hill, Uto-Aztecan people still use flowers to symbolize human hearts and other aspects of the vital force, such as blood, organs of perception, and the vagina.[39] Artist and contemporary of O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo created artwork titled *Xochitl Flower of Life* (1938), using the sexual symbolism of flowers intentionally. She painted a small but powerful image of a flower made up of opposite but well-integrated parts, a red, bell-like vagina and a penis received from above. Some Native American tribes continue to use flowers as sexual symbols to this day. Pueblo, Hopi, and Paiute tribes' public dances are held in celebration of a girl's puberty, where girls wear flower crowns.[40]

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[37] Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

[38] Rufus C. Camphausen, *The Encyclopedia of Erotic Wisdom: A Reference Guide to Symbolism, Techniques, Rituals, Sacred Texts, Psychology, Anatomy, and History of Sexuality* (Rochester VT: Inner Traditions International, Ltd., 1991), 110-124; Goody, *The Culture of Flowers*, 39.

[39] Jane H. Hill, "Flower World of Old Uto-Aztecan," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 133.

[40] Hill, "Flower World," 122.

During the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, other female artists, influenced by O'Keeffe and Kahlo, used floral imagery to represent their own sexual experiences. Judy Chicago's book *Through the Flower* and her installation at the Brooklyn Museum are a follow-up to women claiming their own sexuality and power. Her installation, *The Dinner Party*, now on permanent exhibition, functions as a symbolic history of women in civilization. The thirty-nine mythical and historical place settings commemorate famous women, using flower (vulvar) imagery to represent powerful women. The work was created between 1974 and 1979, at a time when women were claiming their own sexuality and power during the feminist movement (1970s). Among the famous women of the past, O'Keeffe was the only one still alive at the time the work was created. Hers is the last plate setting, but has the most height, signifying her liberation and success.[41]

As described in the museum's literature about O'Keeffe's place setting in the exhibition, "The imagery on O'Keeffe's plate incorporates the forms she used in her own flower paintings, such as *Black Iris* (1926), with the central core (or as a female vulvar imagery) used throughout" the exhibit.[42] The iris is frequently used in Christian iconography. Its sword-like leaves are frequently associated with Mary's suffering, meaningful to O'Keeffe due to her Catholic upbringing and parochial schooling.[43]

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[41] Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History* (Monacelli Press, 2014).

[42] "Georgia O'Keeffe: Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art," *Brooklyn Museum*, accessed February 6, 2021, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/dinner_party/place_settings/georgia_o_keeffe#:~:text=The%20imagery%20on%20O'Keeffe's,the%20imagery%20in%20her%20paintings.

[43] "Black Iris III, 1926 By Georgia O'Keeffe," *Georgia O'Keefe: Biography, Paintings, and Quotes*, accessed February 6, 2021, https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/black-iris.jsp.

Interpretations of the flower read the *Black Iris* as a morphological metaphor for female genitalia in vogue in the last century. O'Keeffe's life and work embodied feminism, but she was not cooperative with the feminism of the 1970s, and she remained ambivalent about women's art exhibits.[44] Though flowers had long been associated with the feminine and female artists, feeling competitive with other female artists, she did not want to be associated with feminism, or with the artistic aspirations of her sisters, Catherine and Ida Ten Eyck O'Keeffe.[45] O'Keeffe ran hot and cold on feminist politics, and was even considered anti-feminist at times, claiming she always knew she had to work twice as hard as a man to be accepted in the art world. She was known to refer to feminists as a bunch of whiners. However, "she embodied feminism, not through advocacy or petitioning, but in the ways she devoted her whole life to her art."[46]

Plant life has been linked to human sexuality, spirituality, and health throughout history. O'Keeffe was unable to resist the endemic eroticism and mystery of plants. Her paintings weave connections between science and art; botany entwined with painting, demonstrating a fascinating unity of culture between the two disciplines. It is interesting to note that Linnaeus' descriptions of plant reproduction in *Philosophia Botanica* also attracted controversy and accusations of obscenity.[47] O'Keeffe's flowers evoked similar

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[44] Linda Grasso, *Equal Under the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe and 20th Century Feminism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017).

[45] Michael Hardy, "In Dallas, Ida O'Keeffe Could Finally Escape Georgia's Shadow," *Texas Monthly*, December 2018, www.texasmonthly.com.

[46] "Was Georgia O'Keeffe a Feminist?" *SUM: Research, Innovation, and Creativity at CUNY, The Graduate Center, York College*, last modified 2020, https://sum.cuny.edu/was-georgia-okeeffe-a-feminist/.

[47] Marek H. Dominiczak, "Botanical Books, Taxonomy, and the Art of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Clinical Chemistry* 62, no. 10 (2016): 1420-1421.

reactions two centuries later. She always denied this as her intent, so I have explored her flowers and plants through a different lens: one of mysticism, ethnobotany, and anthropology.

O'Keeffe developed as an artist in the early twentieth century: a time when America's faith in wilderness as a source of purity and renewal played a central role in shaping American identity. A common thread of mystical thought challenged the pragmatic thought that had so long dominated America. Embraced by artists, writers, and seers, a long history of anti-materialistic philosophy began with the transcendental naturalists, such as Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, and John Muir. These elements expressed a reaction against the Enlightenment and scientific reasoning, a growing nostalgia for the past, and a reverence for the mysteries of nature.

At this time, a growing fascination with things Eastern emerged as Japan opened its doors to the West and cultural exchange began. Orientalism and Romanticism were receptive to the new ideas that emerged in the early modernist period. O'Keeffe's primary mentor at Columbia Teachers College, Arthur Wesley Dow, studied with Gauguin in France. He then befriended American Buddhist art collector Ernest Fellenosa, whose 1912 book, *Epochs of Chinese & Japanese Art*, impacted O'Keeffe as a student with Dow.[48]

O'Keeffe began to absorb mystical concepts, largely unacknowledged, that echoed through her work for decades. Her interest in mysticism, Eastern art, and abstraction, remained sustaining influences throughout her life, as evidenced in her

[48] Sharon M. Fitzgerald, *The Influences of Zen Buddhism on the Art of Georgia O'Keeffe* (The Art History Channel, 2016), 8, 10, 11.

flower and plant paintings. I have chosen selected flower and plant paintings to focus on the historical, cultural, and ethnobotanical dimensions of her work. My exploration of the lotus flower, jimson bloom, poppy, and cactus flower follow these tenets and their importance in O'Keeffe's work.

Selected Flower Paintings

White Lotus, 1939

Historical/Ethnobotanical

The lotus is often seen as being the seat of the Buddha and Hindu deities. It has had a cherished place in the sacred art of the East since antiquity. Since the lotus is self-generating, it has become a favorite symbol of transcendence because its roots are born in mud. They rise through murky waters, surfacing for air. The lotus is considered a calming plant that blooms above water. This growth is associated with man, born to earth, but always evolving. The *padmasana* (lotus position) in yoga is also a way of self-generating one's own energy to become in tune with the universe. In Chinese and Indian meditation, while a person is seated in lotus position, the cosmic energy rises through the *chakras* (wheels) or *padma* (lotus) to reach the top of the head and lead to enlightenment. *The Lotus Sutra* is a canonical Buddhist text containing the fundamental teaching for the attainment of enlightenment.

In traditional Chinese medicine, the lotus is seen to be a calming plant. Its seeds are thought to induce regenerative sleep and induce revitalizing effects. It has been used to treat various maladies in Ayurveda, Chinese, and homeopathic remedies. O'Keeffe was obviously aware of these. According to her caretaker, Carol Merrill, O'Keeffe read

and reread *The Secret of The Golden Flower*.[49] As her vision failed her, she asked Merrill to read the text on tape, so she could listen to it. In the context of the book, the golden flower is the lotus flower, a symbol of enlightenment. The book, based on Taoist and Buddhist texts, offers ways to achieve enlightenment. Therefore, one can conjecture that the lotus flower held special significance for O'Keeffe, not only for its sexual implications, but also for its spiritual dimensions. In India, what was called the "one-thousand petalled-lotus" was called the golden flower in China. It is a symbol that represents perfection: the beauty and splendor of being. The flower is deeply revered in Taoist teachings and has a role in creation myths, art, ritual, religion, and medicine. The lotus has had an important place in the art of the East since antiquity, ever-present in depictions of gods and sages, in the erotic and mystical verses of poets and seers, and is regarded as a self-generating symbol of creation and fertility. It is considered a stabilizing force, related to the lotus position in yoga. O'Keeffe's interest in Asian art and philosophy is evidenced by her book collection and the kimono style robes she favored during her lifetime.[50]

The lotus flower is highly regarded in Chinese medicine and homeopathy to cure physical as well as psychological maladies, such as depression and other psychological and psychiatric problems, as indicated in *Lotus Flower Essence Case Studies* by Dr.

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[49] Carol Merrill, *Weekends With O'Keeffe* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 3, 76-77.

[50] Wanda M. Corn (curator), *Georgia O'Keeffe: Living Modern*: Brooklyn Museum, 2017, published in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented at the Brooklyn Museum, March 3-July 23, 2017, 204-211

Marina Angeli.[51] O'Keeffe was interested in the healing power of plants, recommending local and homeopathic remedies to her sisters and friends. Her library contained books such as Curtin's *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande*, Holzer's *The Psychic World of Plants*, and other botanical volumes.

Lotus Symbolism

In the summer of 2018, while looking for an additional flower to research for my dissertation about O'Keeffe, I attended an exhibit, *Georgia O'Keeffe: Visions of Hawaii*, at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx. Her painting of a white lotus (*White Lotus* [1939]) caught my attention, and I instinctively knew it was the flower that was missing, the one I had been looking for. In 1939, when the artist had visited Hawaii, "She cropped and sectioned the flower to reveal its shower-head-like seed pod and long slender stamens, positioning at the center of the canvas, a passage of gold that glows against a near-monochromatic field, created by the flower's white-greyish petals and the background into which they blend."[52] The flower correlated with a book that O'Keeffe had read and reread many times, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, translated into German by Richard Wilhelm in 1926, and into English by Cary F. Baynes in 1929. The book came from an esoteric circle in China, transmitted orally, then in writing, first printed in the eighteenth century.[53] The golden (lotus) flower has a long

[51] Marina Angeli, "Lotus Flower Essence Case Studies," *Flower Essence Society*, accessed February 6, 2021, http://www.flowersociety.org/Angeli-Lotus.htm.

[52] Theresa Papanikolas and Johanna L. Groarke, eds., *Georgia O'Keeffe: Visions of Hawaii*: New York Botanical Garden, 2018, published by Delmonico Books-Prestel in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized and presented at the New York Botanical Garden, 2018, 83, 86-87.

[53] Lu Dongbin, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, comm. Carl Jung (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1962), 74-75.

history of mystic and spiritual traditions connected with it, opening up venues for me to explore O'Keeffe's connection to Buddhism and Eastern thought.

Psychological

What was O'Keeffe's relation to the lotus flower? According to Merrill, in her book *Weekends with O'Keeffe, The Secret of the Golden Flower* was a favorite book of the artist. In this book about Chinese meditation and spiritual unfoldment, light, symbolized by a golden flower, is used as a metaphor for awakening or opening of consciousness.[54] By 1973, O'Keeffe was going blind from macular degeneration; limited to her peripheral vision, and often asked her assistant to describe what was around on their walks together. She repeatedly wanted to hear the Taoist text read to her which deals with the circulation of inner light, breath control, the circulation of energy, and the opening of the thousand-petalled lotus between the eyes, often referred to as the third eye in Eastern religions. Due to her loss of sight, the book was probably a comfort to her, as well as a spiritual practice.

Jimson Weed, 1932

Following a bidding war, the 1932 painting of jimson weed by O'Keeffe sold recently for forty-four million dollars at auction. (*Jimson Weed/White Flower No.1.).* O'Keeffe found some varieties of these flowers growing wild around her houses in New Mexico.[55] These jimson blooms became the topic for a series of paintings and murals. A tour guide at her Abiquiu home told me that O'Keeffe had them cut down because they

[54] Merrill, *Weekends*, 3, 76-77.

[55] Karen Rile, "Georgia O'Keeffe and the $44 Million Jimson Weed," *JStor Daily*, December 1, 2014, https://daily.jstor.org/georgia-okeeffe-and-the-44-million-jimson-weed/.

were a dangerous psychedelic. However, I doubt that was the reason, as O'Keeffe enjoyed some of the controversy around her work because it sold art.

Historical/Ethnobotanical

Jimsonweed is also known as thornapple, moonflower, estramonio, sacred Datura, devil's snare, hell's bells, devil's trumpet, devil's weed, Jamestown weed, stinkweed, locoweed, prickly burr, and devil's cucumber. Its Spanish names are *Tolache* and *Tolguacha*. The plant belongs to the nightshade family of plants (*solanaceae*):

> *Datura* species have been revered as sacred visionary plants among almost all the cultures around the world that have encountered it. Archeological evidence shows that Datura has been in use for at least 3,000 years in the southwestern United States and even longer in other parts of the world. The genus *Datura,* with 9 to 12 known species, occurs widely throughout the temperate parts of both old and new worlds. The plants produce large white to purple tinged trumpet flower sand's spiny round seedpods (thorn apple). Datura has been used as poisons and ritual intoxicants since time immemorial. In the United States the common name for thorn apple is Jimson weed.[56]

The Chumash Indians of Southern California integrated datura in their creation mythology. The old grandmother "Momoy" turned herself into the plant datura after the great flood, which marked the transition between mythical times and the modern world.[57]

Datura meteloides is a Native of Mexico and the southwestern United States, but the origin of the name is disputed: *Datura stramonium* is thought to have originated in Asia, as the Sanskrit *dhattura* and the Hindustani *dhatura* form the basis of the general name. According to. Curtin in *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande*,

> When Hernando Cortez entered the elaborate Gardens of Mexico, he and his followers were amazed at their beauty and the variety of cures effected by their

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[56] United States Department of Agriculture, "Plant Profile for Datura (Jimsonweed)," accessed February 7, 2021, https://plants.usda.gov.

[57] Richard B. Applegate, "The Datura Cult Among the Chumash," *The Journal of California Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (1975): 7-17, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/37r1g44r.

> varied herbs, among which was Datura, used to alleviate all bodily pains. It was then known as *Toloatzin* (inclined head) on account of its nodding capsules. This became modified as *tolache,* and used for several distinct species of Datura. The post-conquest Maya, who called this plant *Mehen-x-toh-ku,* applied it mashed with butter to reduce tumors.
>
> The Aztec, however, were not the only Indians who knew *toloache,* for the Zuni tell us that long ago, when they still dwelt in the underworld, a boy and a girl found a trail up to this world of light, and decorated their heads with garlands of the large, white, sweet-smelling flowers while walking upon the earth. But these adventurous journeys were their undoing, for they met the twin sons of the Sun Father, the Divine Ones, to whom they joyously poured out forth what they had learned—that they knew how to put people to sleep and to make them see ghosts; that they could make others walk about and detect thieves. The divine ones, deeply alarmed, decided that the two children should be taken away. So, the couple disappeared into the earth forever, but where they vanished flowers sprang up like those the boy and girl had worn on their heads."[58]

The use of *toloache* is still prevalent among the Zuni, similar to the flowers suggested by the mythical children. A small quantity of the powdered root of *Datura meteloides* is administered by the rain priest causes sleep and visions of ghosts for the purpose of producing rain. *Datura stramonium* is employed by the Zuni as a narcotic, anodyne, and anesthetic. The blossoms and roots are ground into a powder as an external application for wounds and bruises. It is sold as a love potion in Mexico.[59] "Sacred Datura" is known to be a powerful hallucinogen and deliriant, which is used spiritually for the intense visions it produces. Across the Americas, Indigenous People have used the plant in sacred ceremonies to "open the mind." Hopis believed that consciousness is everything.

Jimson weed also made its way into popular music. In the original version of the 1942 recording of the song "Cow-Cow Boogie," Ella Mae Morse joined Freddie Flack's

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[58] Curtin, *Healing Herbs,* 166-167.

[59] Curtin, *Healing Herbs,* 167.

band with whom she recorded the song she first listened to from a soundtrack for the Abbott and Costello movie *Ride 'Em Cowboy*, even though the song was cut from the movie. The song referred to jimson weed by one of its nicknames, "Loco Weed."[60]

Psychological

Despite the controversial reputation of the plant, "Georgia O'Keeffe often depicted datura flowers in her world famous paintings. She said, 'when I think of the delicate fragrance of the flowers, I almost feel the coolness and sweetness of evening.'"[61] They grew abundantly around her Abiquiu house and Ghost Ranch studio. Since photos are not permitted there, it is difficult to document. In recent years, they have been removed, perhaps to avoid controversy because the flower, deadly poison in large quantities, but safely ingested in small quantities, was used as a hallucinogenic by the Yaqui Indians in Mexico for ceremonial rituals.[62] O'Keeffe was immensely fond of these plants, ignoring their toxicity, calling them her *Miracle Flowers*.[63] Cosmetics magnate Elizabeth Arden commissioned O'Keeffe to paint a mural of jimson flowers for her new salon on Fifth Avenue in New York City.

O'Keeffe's long-time friend, Ansel Adams also studied the datura flower with his camera.[64] Although datura is commonly associated with peyote in the mind of the public,

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[60] Benny Carter, Don Raye, and Gene De Paul, lyricists, "Cow Cow Boogie," performed by Ella Mae Morse. Santa Monica: MCA Music Publishing, A.d.o. Universal S, 1942.

[61] United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, "Celebrating Widflowers," http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/ethnobotany/mindspirit/datura.shtml.

[62] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 179.

[63] Teresa Bernard, "The Flower Paintings of Georgia O'Keeffe," *Teresa Bernard Oil Paintings*, November 9, 2015, http://teresabernardart.com/the-flower-paintings-of-georgia-okeeffe/.

[64] Ansel Adams, *Datura Flower, Canyon De Chelley National Monument, AZ. 1947*, Ansel Adams Museum Graphics, last modified 2012, https://www.anseladams.org/daturaflower.html.

it's identified as *yerba del diablo; devil's weed; or jimson weed* by author Carlos Castaneda. He was a guest of O'Keefe's in Abiquiu.[65] Castaneda was an apprentice to a Yaqui Indian, shaman-sorcerer Don Juan Mateus, who is said to have studied under a *Diablero*, a sorcerer. Datura can be taken as a tea, known as *Yerba Del Diablo* to the Chumash people of California. Castaneda submitted an early version of *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* as his master's thesis in the University of California, School of Anthropology. It was subsequently published by the University of California Press in 1968.[66]

Critics contended that it was a work of fiction and it is now marketed in the genre of memoir.[67] O'Keeffe had an interest in Castaneda and his books. Several of them were in her Ghost Ranch library.[68] Among the psychoactive flowers O'Keeffe painted, were the peyote flower, as well as the flowers of jimson weed which thrived near O'Keeffe's home and studio in Abiquiu, New Mexico. Both encountered in Castaneda's books as teaching spirits.

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[65] Merrill, *Weekends*, 152-153.

[66] Carlos Castaneda, *The Teachings of Don Juan* (Oakland: The University of California Press, 1968).

[67] Gordon Frank Richiusa, "An Analysis of the Works of Carlos Castaneda" (master's thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1978), http://dspace.calstate.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/124012/RichiusaGordon1978.pdf?sequence=1.

[68] "Collections Online," *The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum*, https://collections.okeeffemuseum.org/library/7237/.

Red Poppy, 1927

Historical/Ethnobotanical

The writings, art, and architecture of the ancient world hold clues to the role of the poppy in medicine, religion, and culture. Poppy images in the ancient city of Nimrud show scores of poppy heads that would have been harvested for opium production. In ancient Greece, the poppy was considered sacred to Hypnos, the god of sleep. Poppy was widely used in the days of antiquity; the priests and physicians of the ancient world created poppy tonics to benefit the populations' spiritual and physical well-being.

Cultivation of the opium poppy, *Paparver somniferum*, for food, anesthesia, and ritual purposes goes back to the Neolithic age. The ancient civilizations of the Sumerians, Assyrians, Indians, Minoans, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Persians, and Arabs all used opium as a potent form of pain relief. It is mentioned in medical texts of the ancient world in the Egyptian medical papyrus of herbal knowledge, *Ebers Papyrus*, and the writings of the Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides, Roman physician Galen, and Persian philosopher Avicenna.

Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, frequently mentions opium in his remedies. Despite the feeling of well-being experienced by opium users, its addictive qualities were already known. By the Renaissance, opium migrated to Europe and was established as a medicine. The fact that a harmless red corn poppy would prove to be a powerful agent in helping the casualties of war deal with their pain and sufferings was still in the future.

During the American Civil War and the Great War, the scale of suffering demanded pain medication. Only opium and morphine could help the soldiers survive the

brutal surgeries and amputations they needed to avoid gangrene. Opium solutions such as laudanum, a tincture of opium and alcohol, became common and remained in use after the wars' aftermath. It was widely available in pubs, groceries, barbershops, pharmacies, and even bakeries. Often cheaper than alcohol, it was affordable to all levels of society. It was prescribed for everything, including melancholia and women's troubles.

Laudanum inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge's most famous poem, "Kubla Kahn," and poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning depended on it to function. In the twentieth-century modernist period, opium nights were frequent in the Montmartre section of Paris, and often took place in Picasso's studio as a routine part of the lifestyle of bohemians who lived in his building. Due to the suicide of a friend from an opium cocktail, Picasso gave it up. Then the scene shifted to surrealist painter Andre Masson's studio. Masson experimented with automatic drawing and found the altered state brought on by opium to be a useful aid. Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Man Ray, and André Breton may have been present at the passionate discussions about the role of art in society, accompanied by abundant opium smoking and mandarin curacao drinking.[69] The mixture of opium and art in the early twentieth century deranged the senses to achieve flights of artistic fantasy. Opium was considered a useful aid in "automatism," a freeform expression executed without the interference of conscious thought, embraced by the surrealists, the most extreme modernists. That influence was reflected in O'Keeffe's painting *Ladder to the Moon* (1958), which depicted a handmade wooden ladder suspended in a turquoise sky. In Pueblo culture, the ladder is used to symbolize the link

[69] Jeff Goldberg, "The Complicated Relationship between Opium and Art in the 20th Century," *Artsy*, May 4, 2018, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-complicated-relationship-opium-art-20th-century.

between the Pueblo culture and the cosmic forces. The ladder prop is used in my play *Days with Juan* to indicate the relationship between life and death, heaven and earth.

Poppy Symbolism

How and why did the poppy become a symbol of remembrance and memory? Was it the color of blood spilled on the battlefield, or the opium given to soldiers to ease the pain of the wounded? For the soldiers of the Great War, the flower came to symbolize the war's goals of freedom and regeneration, a tactile connection between the living and the fragile spirits of the dead, rising from the blood-drenched earth.[70] No doubt, this flower inspired O'Keeffe, whose brother Alexis, was also a victim of the Great War.

The poppy symbol became significant during World War I through the poem "In Flanders Fields," written in 1915 by John McCrae, an army doctor, igniting the passion of the postwar public. Before the Great War, the soil of Belgian Flanders was not rich in lime to allow poppies to flourish in great numbers. Shattered bones and destroyed homes enriched the soil with calcium and lime for carpets of poppies to flourish, thereby associating death with the flower. Both the poem and the poppy became a symbol of war and were used to raise money for the war effort.

Psychological

The origins of the remembrance poppy are found in two species: the simple corn poppy and its powerful cousin, the opium poppy. O'Keeffe, undoubtedly influenced by the Great War, painted a bloodied American flag, *The Flag* (1917), followed by *Poppy* (1927), and *Oriental Poppies* (1927). While she was teaching in Canyon, Texas,

[70] Nicholas J. Saunders, *The Poppy: A History of Conflict, Loss, & Redemption* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 67-93.

O'Keeffe's brother Alexis was severely gassed during his service. O'Keeffe found herself increasingly at odds with the war and encouraged young men to finish their studies when the war called for young men to enlist. The Canyon community found itself increasingly nervous over her antiwar posture. With the Espionage Act of 1917, it was forbidden to criticize the war. O'Keeffe painted a vast array of multicolored poppies during the war and postwar period to reflect her feelings about it. Furthermore, O'Keeffe maintained an antiwar posture throughout her life. In the 1970s, O'Keeffe refused to support the humanitarian efforts made by the Red Cross during the Vietnam War because the Red Cross had been very involved with promoting the draft during the First World War. As Hogrefe noted, O'Keeffe saw hypocrisy in the war recruitment efforts, since "She had seen the Red Cross selling all these naïve young, beautiful men, the line about patriotic duty and glory."[71]

Yellow Cactus Flower, 1929

O'Keeffe painted the cactus flower blooming in the desert on her 1929 trip to the Southwest. Perhaps she was attracted to it because of its hard, protective exterior, its endurance and strength to survive in a harsh environment amid challenging situations. O'Keeffe painted many renditions of the yellow cactus flower with deep orange centers. Its common names are sand dollar cactus, sea urchin cactus, and star peyote. Its scientific names are *astrophytum asterias* and *astrophytum capricorne.* The flowers of the star cactus that O'Keeffe painted are yellow with a red-to-orange center and 3-5 centimeters across; the artist typically enlarged these flowers to fit her canvas.

[71] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 48.

Historical/Ethnobotanical

The cactus flower, associated with peyote, is often yellow, white, pink, or purple. Peyote was probably introduced to the Taos artist community by peyote users at the Taos Pueblo, influencing the subject-matter of O'Keeffe's multicolored cactus flower paintings during her stay in New Mexico. O'Keeffe spent time at the salons of Mabel Dodge Luhan in both New York and Taos. She was invited to Mabel's home in Taos in the summer of 1929, where she met Mabel's handsome husband, Antonio Lujan. He was one of the early members of the Native American Church in Taos, which was frowned upon by tribal elders, who claimed it was not the religion of the Pueblo people. He gave his wife peyote medicine when Mabel was very ill, and she had a classic transformative experience.[72] She claimed that the whole universe fell into place for her.[73] Peyote later became a contentious issue in her marriage and remains controversial for the Pueblo people to this day. Catholicism and the secretive Pueblo kiva-based aboriginal religion dominate. Membership in the Native American Church is small and not spoken about to outsiders.

Peyote in Taos

Unlike many displaced tribes, the Taos Indians still live in their ancient pueblo village in northern New Mexico which is part of their reservation. Taos is the northernmost pueblo near the Southern Ute Indian Reservation; the Pueblo and Ute had been friends, as well as enemies, over the centuries.

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[72] Rebecca Allan, "Mabel Dodge Luhan: A Force of Nature for Art." *Fine Art Connoisseur*, May-June 2016.

[73] Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Edge of Taos Desert: An Escape to Reality* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1937).

Little is recorded about Taos Indians' experiences with peyote during the Spanish occupation of New Mexico. However, according to J. S. Slotkin,

> one such experience occurred in 1720 when Antonio Quara and Aristoval Teajaya, Taos Indians, ate peyote, had visions under its influence, and tried to rouse the population of Taos to accept this as their true vision, revolt against the Spanish, and prepare for an attack from the Ute. The tribal leaders rejected the prophecies, declared Quara and Teajaya out of their minds, and delivered the two peyote eaters to Spanish authorities for trial.[74]

According to Omer C. Stewart in *Peyote Religion*, modern peyotism was introduced to the tribe about 1896, when a party of Taos Indians went to Oklahoma with Utes.

In 1916, in response to the questionnaire sent out by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the deputy special officer assigned to Taos pueblo reported that there were twelve peyotists in Taos, that the leaders were Antonio Lujan and Jose Ignacio Bernal, and they received peyote by mail and from visitors.[75]

As mentioned previously, Antonio Lujan was among those active peyotists at the Pueblo in the early twentieth century who worked with John Collier on a variety of Indian causes.[76] Lujan was turned out of his Kiva for his marriage to Mabel, and most likely, for his peyote activity at the time. He was also friends with O'Keeffe throughout her stay in Taos and continued the relationship when she lived in Abiquiu. One can surmise that she was probably introduced by Mabel's circle to the peyote dancers.[77]

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[74] J.S. Slotkin, "Early Eighteenth Century Documents on Peyotism North of the Rio Grande," *American Anthropologist* 51 (1951): 421-427.

[75] Omer C. Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 202-209.

[76] United States Congress, Committee on Indian Affairs, "Letter by Geronimo Gomez, President of the Native American Church, Taos, New Mexico," *Survey of Conditions of Indians in the United States*, vol. 14, parts 33-34, 18220.

[77] Stewart, *Peyote Religion*, 202-203.

When Mabel went to Buffalo, New York for a hysterectomy, O'Keeffe stayed at Mabel's compound with Tony Lujan and Rebecca Strand (Paul Strand's wife). They took camping trips to the sacred Blue Lake and visited sweat lodges where peyote was frequently used.

In 1920, Taos artist Ernest L. Blumenschein painted a portrait of peyotists: *Star Road (Geronimo Gomez) and White Sun* (1920), which he considered one of his most important paintings. Geronimo Gomez was an early proponent of the ceremonial use of peyote at Taos Pueblo. He became an activist for religious freedom for Native People. Peyote was not a traditional plant used in Taos and caused bitter conflict for decades. Mabel Dodge became involved in it and took her opposition to peyote to the US Congress. Blumenschein was well aware of these issues facing Native People and incorporated them into his paintings, notably his *Star Road and White Sun* (1920), on display at the Albuquerque Museum. Blumenschein was part of the Taos art colony at the time O'Keeffe was there. Both painted the Taos Pueblo and the Rancho de Taos Church, had an artistic interest in sacred plants, and painted in Taos during the time of controversy over the Native American Church.

Tree Paintings: Arboreal Portraits

O'Keeffe was one of the early fans of the banned *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and other novels of D. H. Lawrence. Even though the positioning aspect of her painting of the *Lawrence Tree* has been analyzed, viewed from the trunk up into the starry night, the portrait aspects of O'Keeffe's trees has been largely ignored. The artist often portrayed men as trees. Her arboreal portraits of them bring up several important issues; the first is her close relationships with important literary figures: the British novelist D. H. Lawrence and the Irish writer Gerald Heard who with Aldous Huxley visited O'Keeffe in

New Mexico. Like O'Keeffe, all three writers were interested in mysticism and were ambivalent to the world of industrial technology. Lawrence was interested in Theosophy and Heard and Huxley in Hinduism and Buddhism.

Lawrence's banned *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, which was smuggled into the country and read by both Stieglitz and O'Keeffe, proposed nature as refuge from industrial technology. Even though Lawrence was gone by the time O'Keeffe arrived in New Mexico, she memorialized him in a dramatic view of a starry night sky, which is *The Lawrence Tree* (1929). Heard, who had visited O'Keeffe with Aldous Huxley at Ghost Ranch in 1937, was portrayed as a tree in brilliant daylight against an orange mountain in *Gerald's Tree I* (1937). The shadow at the base of the tree suggests a man dancing with his arms spread wide. O'Keeffe found Heard' s footprints by the tree before she started to paint it and named the painting after him.[78] Due to his spiritual leanings, it is possible he was engaged in a kind of shamanic activity with regard to the red cedar.

The mystical bonds between men and trees are expressed in O'Keeffe's *The Lawrence Tree*, *Gerald's Tree I, Gerald's Tree II*, *Grey Tree*, and *Chestnut Tree*.

Grey Trees (Alfred Stieglitz)

The Chestnut Grey (1924) and *Grey Tree* (1925), perhaps a depiction of an aging Stieglitz in his later years, were painted at his family estate at Lake George, New York. It is interesting to note that Stieglitz had started to photograph the same dying tree in 1920 and continued to photograph it for ten years. Stieglitz's ashes are buried under a tree on the shore of the lake—perhaps that one.

[78] Brenda Mitchell, "Writings and Recollections: O'Keeffe's Arboreal Portraits of D. H. Lawrence and Gerald Heard," *Gerald Heard*, last modified 2021, www.geraldheard.com.

O'Keeffe's arboreal portraits expressed her admiration for these writers and photographers, at the same time playing jokes on "the men" [critics] of her art world. She enjoyed having secrets in her work that no one else would be able to discern.[79] O'Keeffe's paintings were tributes or memorials to people she admired and those in her life. During her time in Taos, her tribute to Antonio Lujan was her portrait of Taos mountain, sacred to the Taos Indians, called Mo-ha-lu by them. Mabel Dodge Luhan learned to appreciate the power of the mountain from her husband, a member of the Pueblo. The mountain slopes leading up to Blue Lake have traditionally been the burial ground for the ancestral dead. To the Native Americans and the Franciscans, the splendor of God is manifested in his most glorious creations. O'Keeffe referred to Antonio as the "crowning glory" of Mabel's compound, Los Gallos, and she painted him as a powerful dark rock during her second summer in Taos in 1930.

Historical/Ethnobotanical

The divinity dwelling in trees is expressed in religion, in popular traditions the world over (folklore), and in primitive metaphysics and mysticism, as well as in iconography and art of a great variety of ages and cultures. Mircea Eliade noted in *Patterns of Comparative Religion* that in varying cultures trees have been represented as images of the cosmos; presented as symbols of life, of inexhaustible fertility; and identified with immortality.[80] The cosmos is depicted as an immense tree in innumerable traditions. The idea of the "Cosmic Tree" is prominent in Mesopotamian art and Vedic

[79] Mitchell, "Writings."

[80] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 265-303.

writings. The tree of life is prominent in Scripture in the Garden of Eden. In Altaic and Scandinavian culture, the tree of life was perceived as the center of the world and the support of the universe. Primitive man was intuitively aware of his biological dependency (exchange of gases) and cellular connection to trees. The tree was perceived as a power representing the living cosmos, as well as a symbol of protection and regeneration. In Mesoamerican traditions, it is conceived as the tree of life. *Ahuehuete*, in Chalma, Morelos State, it is the umbilical cord connecting the sky with the womb of the earth.[81] As Otomi-Toltec elder Mindahi Bastida explains,

> Mothers make a small bundle with the end of the umbilical cord of the newborn baby boy and hang it to a branch of the Ahuehuete. My mother did that for me and all my brothers. They say that it will help them to travel during their life. I thought that it was about traveling from place to place, but now I know that it is about traveling to other dimensions. Because the Ahuehuete tree is connected to the five trees that are believed to hold up the sky, and on May 3 the energy flows from the heart of father sky down to the heart of mother earth and up to the sky and to the Pleiades, . . . there is a portal that opens, and those who are prepared can enter that portal.[82]

The Lawrence Tree, 1929

The D. H. Lawrence Ranch, formerly called the Kiowa Ranch, was bequeathed to his wife Frieda Lawrence in exchange for the original manuscript of *Sons and Lovers* to Mabel Dodge Luhan, who invited the Lawrences to New Mexico.

The Lawrence Tree presents a perspective that O'Keeffe saw when she was lying under a pine tree at Kiowa Ranch. It brings to mind the image of the inverted tree, with its roots in the heavens and its head in the earth, the sacred soil. It was painted near the cabin where D. H. Lawrence had lived, on a summer night. Lawrence called the tree his

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[81] "Ahuehuete de Chalma, árbol lleno de misticismo," *NTR Periodismo Crítico*, May 29, 2016, http://ntrzacatecas.com/2016/05/29/ahuehuete-de-chalma-arbol-lleno-de-misticismo/.

[82] Mindahi Bastida, email message, April 11, 2021.

"Guardian Angel." The author spent mornings writing under the towering pine. O'Keeffe, a fan of Lawrence, spent several weeks at the Kiowa Ranch, lying under the same tree on the same weathered bench, following its course into the twinkling night sky. She immortalized the scene in his memory, calling the painting *The Lawrence Tree*. In the painting, the tree's branches appear to be rooted in the starry firmament, resembling the cosmic tree.

The cosmic tree represents the cosmos in the form of a giant tree. According to Eliade, "This idea is defined fairly formally in the Upanishads: the universe is an inverted tree, burying its roots in the sky and spreading its branches over the whole earth."[83] According to the *Katha-Upanishad*, "This eternal *Asvattha*, Whose roots on high, and whose branches grow low, is the pure [*sukram*]. Is the Brahmin in the Cosmos, represents, the creation in other words, creation as a descending movement."[84] Stars beside a tree are a sure are a sure indication that a tree has a cosmological significance. O'Keeffe's perspective of the *Lawrence Tree* as she is lying on a bench looking up suggests this interpretation with its branches rooted in the starry firmament, as well as the earth Carl Sagan famously stated that we are made of star stuff in a *Cosmos* episode. Most of the elements of our bodies come from the stars. Native American legends agree that we come from Mother Earth and Father Sky.[85]

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[83] Eliade, *Patterns*, 273.

[84] Eliade, *Patterns*, 273.

[85] Tom Lowenstein and Piers Vitebsky, *Mother Earth, Father Sky: Native American Myth*, Myth & Mankind 4, no. 20 (New York: Time Life, 1998).

Gerald's Tree I, 1937

O'Keeffe met Irish writer Gerald Heard in Taos in August of 1937. Heard had just arrived in the United States. He was the newly appointed chair of historical anthropology at Duke University and had come to New Mexico with his close friend Aldous Huxley to visit Lawrence's widow Frieda.[86] O'Keeffe met Heard at Frieda Lawrence's Lobo Mountain house. O'Keeffe liked Heard immediately and told him he needed to come and stay a few days at Ghost Ranch. Heard accepted O'Keefe's invitation and his stay at Ghost Ranch coincided with a week of bright moonlight. She called the painting *Gerald's Tree I* after finding his footprints surrounding it, where he had been dancing. The tree was a dead cedar juxtaposed with sweeping folds of dinosaur dust that made the hills red, transforming it into something mysterious. Heard was a mystic, interested in extrasensory perception, telepathy, yoga, and development of psychic powers. The shadow at the base of the tree resembles a man dancing with his arms spread wide. Heard and Huxley had a history of experimentation with sacred plants and LSD.[87] O'Keeffe then followed up with a second painting, *Gerald's Tree II*, a close up view of the trunk of the same tree, more brilliantly colored and abstracted.[88]

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[86] Katherine Toy Miller, "An Outline of the History of the D. H. Lawrence Ranch," *Friends of D. H. Lawrence*, www.friendsofdhlawrence.org.

[87] Sissela Bok, "Meeting the Mystics: My California encounters with Gerald Heard and Aldous Huxley," *American Scholar*, March 4, 2015, www.theamericanscholar.org.

[88] Mitchell, "Writings."

Chapter 3

MYSTICISM/ETHNOBOTANY/ETHNOZOOLOGY

Earth-Centered Spirituality

Was O'Keeffe a nature mystic? When asked what she believed in, her response, gesturing with an open hand up, looking at Pedernal, "It's hard to say,"[89] as if to say, "I believe in this." According to Christian environmentalist Larry Rasmussen her spirituality was that of a nature mystic.[90] She was awed by the vivid colors of the landscape. She slept on the roof and loved looking at the night sky. "The beauty here," she said, "is just ridiculous."[91] Her attraction to Native American culture was based on the cosmology she shared with them.[92] The artist embraced nature as source of inspiration, identity, and expression.

Earth-centered spirituality is related to animism, which views everything in nature as having an indwelling spirit/soul. This ancient philosophy is based on the veneration of nature, honoring the spiritual interconnectedness of all life, not only on our planet, but throughout the cosmos. To earth-centered people, the sacred is here and now. According to Stephen Buhner in *Sacred Plant Medicine,* "For those on the Earth-centered spiritual path, the Earth itself is the place to worship; all things possess a soul, every tree, stone,

[89] Merrill, *Weekends*, 187-189.

[90] Larry Rasmussen, "Wonder, Nature, and Place in the Art & Pilgrimage of Georgia O'Keeffe," Presentation Paper, Earth Day Colloquium, Christ Church Cranbrook, Blooming Hills, MI, April 22, 2016.

[91] Rasmussen, "Wonder," 10, Cited from Letter 54 To Dorothy Brett, in *GOK: Arts and Letters,* National Gallery of Art, 1988, 201.

[92] Rasmussen, "Wonder," 21.

and root."[93] This is expressed in O'Keeffe's paintings, including *The Lawrence Tree*, with its mystical branches rooted in the starry firmament, and her stone collection, which John Loengard photographed for *Life Magazine*: *Georgia O'Keeffe holding her favorite stone in her rock collection, NM, 1966*.[94]

Indigenous tribal ceremonies across the American Southwest share common threads of emphasis on nature spirits, fertility, and renewal. For thousands of years, humans have used native plants for spiritual and physical healing. In the world of sacred plant medicine, the healer acts as an intermediary between the particular power of a sacred plant and the person who is ill. According to Buhner, the power of the plant strengthens the body of the sick person, so the disease cannot easily remain there.[95] O'Keeffe had an interest in ethnobotany.[96] She was also interested in the ethnozoology of "sacred animals."[97] In her book collection she consulted *Healing Herbs of the Upper Rio Grande* by Curtin. Curtin kept the herbal traditions of the Southwest alive and well; many of these plants were O'Keeffe's subject matter for her paintings. For example, *Jimson Weed* (1936), is described in Curtin's book by its Indian name, *Tolache*, also known as

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[93] Stephen Harrod Buhner, *Sacred Plant Medicine: The Wisdom in Native American Herbalism* (Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 2006), 9.

[94] John Loengard, Photo: *Georgia O'Keeffe holds her favorite stone in her rock collection, Abiquiu, NM, 1966*, New York Life Gallery of Photography, www.artnet.com.

[95] Buhner, *Sacred Plant Medicine*, 17.

[96] Ethnobotany is the scientific study of traditional knowledge concerning plants and their medical, religious, and cultural uses.

[97] Ethnozoology is the study of interactions between people and animals.

datura.[98] This flower and the morning glory have both been portrayed with animal skulls previously discussed in Chapter 2.

To Indigenous People, affinity with a certain animal is a focus of spiritual life. Power and communion come through the archetype of the animal. A deeper understanding of the archetype of the animal conveys knowledge to the person who has deep connection with the animal. O'Keeffe collected animal skulls and bones from the desert, often juxtaposed with flowers, as do the Spanish of the Southwest in their celebrations of Day of the Dead (*el dia de los Muertos*), a holiday when deceased loved ones awaken and celebrate with them. She developed her own secret language using flowers and bones, expressing the content of her unconscious.

What can be more symbolic of the spirit of an animal than a ram's skull floating in the sky? In the juxtaposition of *Ram's Head, Morning Glory* (1938), the heavenly blue morning glory the artist painted is a psychoactive species.[99] By painting a ram's skull in the sky, O'Keeffe extended her worldview by exploring the interconnectedness of life and death. The virile spirit of the ram juxtaposed with the power of the psychoactive blue morning glory suggests the power of a flower to promote consciousness. It is likely that the Aztecs ritually used the seeds of the morning glory during pre-Hispanic times, and this use was later adopted by Hispanic physicians.[100] In the twentieth century, books on ethnopharmacological research became more prevalent and psychoactive plants were used as therapeutic agents for a variety of medical conditions. The term "Flower Power"

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[98] Curtin, *Healing Herbs*, 166.

[99] Ratsch, *Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants*, 298-301.

[100] Ratsch, *Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants*, 298-301, 515.

was also used by the counterculture of the 1960s, advocating peace and love over militarism and materialism.

Historical Shamanism

Mediators between the material and spiritual world have often been referred to as shamans, mystics, healers, medicine men, or visionaries throughout the ages. They possessed the ability to heal, foretell, or call upon the spirit world to intercede in the events of men. Often employing the powers of psychoactive plants, shamans were looked upon as spiritual leaders of their tribes. Cave paintings may well have been early man's expression of ecstatic vision and the sublime experiences through sacred rituals.

Psychoactive plants were reflected in the arts and crafts of the Indigenous Peoples of the Southwest and Mexico. Visions from these plants, guided by shamans, influenced the life of a tribe or of an individual. The earth and its plants and animals are regarded as sacred.

The Navajos celebrate sheep/ram as a symbol of the good life. For Navajos, *Dine bi lina* (Sheep is Life) calls for a celebration of sheep, wool, and weaving, honoring the central role of sheep in Navajo spirituality.[101] Spirit animals are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Artist as Visionary

Why are certain substances revered in tribal societies throughout the world but repressed in contemporary Western culture? Psychoactive plants have played an important role in medicine, religion, ritual life, recreation, and culture since ancient

[101] Lee Allen, "Celebrate Sheep—Symbols of the Good Life for Navajos," *Indian Country Today*, May 30, 2015, https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/celebrate-sheep-symbols-of-the-good-life-for-navajos-UHp9N0wYukOUMLjauqOO0Q.

times.[102] A global "war on drugs" has blurred distinction between dangerous narcotics and ritually used plants. In the 1950s and 1960s numerous studies explored a class of chemical compounds known as "psychedelics" that radically alter consciousness and perception.[103] In the mid-1960s most of the known psychedelics were outlawed after consciousness expansion came into vogue. Prior to this time, during the 1920s, some adventurous psychologists, artists, writers, visionaries, and intellectuals took a similar "psychedelic" or "mind manifesting" journey of shamanistic initiation. In Indigenous cultures, shamans were tribal healers, medicine men, who served as spiritual guides and dream interpreters who led many sacred ceremonies, using psychoactive plants which played an integral role in purification rituals, vision quests, rites of passage, healing rituals, and burial rituals.[104] Artists and visionaries become Western culture's "shamans."[105]

What is Psychedelic?

The term psychedelic recalls a period of intense cultural transition associated with the young people of the late 1960s known as the "hippies," who experimented with these substances; in retrospect, this term is too simplistic, as "psychedelic" is not only related to the hippies, nor a purely visual phenomenon expressed solely by avant-garde artists.

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[102] Glenn H. Shepard, Jr., "Psychoactive Botanicals in Ritual, Religion, and Shamanism," in *Ethnopharmacology: Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*, ed. Elaine Elisabetsky and Nina Etkin (Oxford, UK: UNESCO/EolssPublishers, 2005), 2.

[103] Ben Sessa, "From Sacred Plants to Psychotherapy: The History and Re-Emergence of Psychedelics in Medicine," *British Journal of Psychiatry* (2006): 88-89.

[104] United States Department of Agriculture Forest and Tree Service, "Plants, Shamans, and the Spirit World," https://www.fs.fed.us./wildflowers/ethnobotany/Mind_and_Spirit/shamans.shtml.

[105] Denita Benyshek, "An Archival Exploration Comparing Contemporary Artists and Shamans," (PhD diss, Saybrook University, 2012).

The use of nature-derived, mind-altering hallucinogenic herbs and related substances has an extensive history that goes much further back—to the dawn of civilization among people living in Paleolithic and Neolithic Communities, before *Homo sapiens* evolved—and influenced art painted on cave walls, ritualistic body painting, and even twentieth century modernist interpretations of the universe.

Modernist Shamanism/Psychedelic

The remarkable influential series of books published by Carlos Castaneda in the late 1960s and 1970s describes some Indigenous Americans' longtime involvement with peyote (derived from cacti) rituals and truly captured the imaginations of many artists and those who hoped to meaningfully participate in consciousness expansion. O'Keeffe was familiar with Castaneda's book *Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, as mentioned in Merrill's book, *Weekends with O'Keeffe*.[106] She was obviously subject to some of the influences of the counterculture. However, if we dig deeper, beyond the countercultural focus of the 60s, we realize that the story of resurgence of psychedelic consciousness in the modern world began earlier with the postwar disillusionment of the Great War.[107]

In the aftermath and carnage of World War I, a number of serious avant-garde thinkers, artists, writers, and philosophers realized that alienation from nature and the cosmos was threatening to tear the world apart.[108] Progressives on both sides of the

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[106] Merrill, *Weekends,* 152-153.

[107] Robert C. Morgan, "Eternal Moments: Artists Who Explore the Prospect for Happiness," in *Psychedelic Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, ed. David S. Rubin, Robert C. Morgan, and Daniel Pinchbeck (San Antonio, TX and Cambridge, MA: San Antonio Museum of Art, in association with MIT Press, 2009).

[108] Daniel Pinchbeck, "Embracing the Archaic: Post Modern Culture and Psychedelic Initiation," in *Psychedelic Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s*, ed. David S. Rubin, Robert C. Morgan, and

Atlantic shared this view. The British born author D. H. Lawrence, whose books celebrated spontaneity, sensuality, communion with nature, and individualism, became their hero. Artists and intellectuals of the Stieglitz circle, to which O'Keeffe belonged, regarded Lawrence as a pioneer of the new consciousness guiding disillusioned humanity to an original state of grace by railing against the restrictive norms of Victorianism.

During this loss of faith in "reason," anthropologists discovered that cultures around the world still maintained processes of shamanistic initiation. Preserving a process of separation and vision quest, Indigenous People found that direct experiences of altered consciousness brought the adolescent out of ego-centrism. Through a direct encounter with *Anima mundi,* the soul of the world, the initiatory experience compelled an acceptance of sacred time and adult responsibility. This initiation thus dignified the individual by giving him a status a self-reliant member of the tribe and a keeper of its secrets. It was the modern West that had marginalized and rejected these practices, and the consequent loss of soul remained severe.[109]

During the twentieth century, a series of accidents led to the discovery of contemporary use of psychedelics. Plants such as peyote; psilocybin mushrooms; and *ayahuasca,* also known as *yage* among the Indigenous People of Central and South America, as well as ritual use of other flora, such as opium derived from poppies, jimsonweed (datura), belladonna (*atropa belladonna*), and various morning-glory species such ololiuqui (*turbina corymosa*) were used by Indigenous People and visionaries for

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Daniel Pinchbeck (San Antonio, TX and Cambridge, MA: San Antonio Museum of Art, in association with MIT Press, 2009).

[109] Britannica, s.v. "Soul," May 6, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/soul-relion-and-philosophy.

millennia. Curiously, and perhaps by no accident, some of the aforementioned plants and flowers are the subjects of O'Keeffe's paintings. These New World ritual plants predate the arrival of Hispanic cultures, some of which were later adopted by them.[110] When examining some of the most ancient cultures across Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and the Americas, up and through the time of the preindustrial age, many clans, sects, and tribes partook in psychoactive plants for spiritual and medicinal uses. The uses of these plants were strongly interconnected with ritual. For many tribal cultures, the plants were sacred in themselves.

Both men and women who served as tribal healers, shamans, and medicine men or women had a deep understanding of the use of these plants. These "herbalists" served as spiritual guides and dream interpreters, leading sacred ceremonies in which the use of psychoactive plants played an integral role in burial rituals, rites of passage, healing rituals, vision quests, and purification rituals. The plants induced visions and trances. The shaman was able to comprehend the spirit world and the real world and to maintain balance between the two, often combatting evil spirits and disease, communicating with ancestors, preventing famine, and controlling weather through rain dances. Prayers were offered to the spirits to whom these holy plants belonged. Indeed, for some, the plants themselves were or provided a way to God.

The Native American Church combined Native American beliefs with Christianity. The plant peyote was originally introduced to the southern Great Plains from Mexico. Today, the Native American Church is the most widespread religion among

[110] Curtin, *Healing Herbs*. xvii-xviii

Native Americans. The religion has been controversial with the elders at the Taos Pueblo up to the present day.

By 1929 when O'Keeffe visited Taos, Peyote and other herbal visionary plants fired the imagination of modernist writers and artists of the time. Consciously or not, they borrowed elements from the shamanic archetype. As Ratcliffe explains, "Like tribal shamans, the artists saw themselves, in Ezra Pound's phrase, "as the antennae of the race."[111] According to Daniel Pinchbeck, "In secular culture, they were the ones who journeyed into the land of the dead, who crafted images of an of an elusive sublime, who went into ecstatic states of inspiration."[112] Their work became a reaction to an increasingly dehumanized and demystified world. The resurgence of interest in the sacred tribal medicines opened a new phase of modernist exploration of the visionary knowledge of so-called "primitive" societies.

Jung, D. H. Lawrence, and Antoine Artaud all traveled to Mexico to take part in rituals of the Tarahumara. Writers like Havelock Ellis, a champion of the New Woman Movement "who saw in the liberation of female sexuality the potential of redeeming Western civilization from the life-denying practices associated with the law, order, discipline, and the materialism of patriarchy,"[113] He was intrigued with their visions, bringing to mind the lyrics of the song, "You can learn a lot of things from the

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[111] Susan Ratcliffe, ed., "Ezra Pound," in O*xford Essential Quotations* (Oxford University, 2017), www.oxfordreference.com.

[112] Daniel Pinchbeck, *Breaking Open the Head: A Journey Into Contemporary Shamanism* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2002), 114.

[113] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 90.

flowers"[114] from the Walt Disney version of *Alice in Wonderland,* embodying multiple meanings, as we shall see. Deeper meanings of Lewis Carroll's innocent fairy tale was a topic for heated discussions by Freud and other scientists.[115]

O'Keeffe and Shamanism

O'Keeffe once attended a Navajo healing ceremony which lasted quite a few days. (Navajo healing ceremonies can last as long as a week.) It is possible that there she was introduced to some healing plants that were later the subjects of her paintings—plants that produce changes in consciousness and are used as spiritual agents for healing of the body and soul by Native Americans.

While painting at Mabel Dodge Luhan's house in Taos during the summers of 1929 and 1930, O'Keeffe was most likely present for performances of the peyote singers, but became distracted by the activity and gossip that accompanied her stay, as well as Mabel's jealousy.[116] The following summer she stayed in Alcalde with her friend, Marie Garland, visiting the adjacent ranch of Mary Wheelwright, who was known for recording Navajo religious rites, rituals, and customs with her friend Hosteen Klah, a Navajo medicine man, weaver, and sand painter. According to Jeffrey Hogrefe in *O'Keeffe: The Life of an American Legend,* Wheelwright, like Mabel, had established her own cosmos where O'Keeffe was a guest.

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[114] Sammy Fain and Bob Hilliard, "All in a Golden Afternoon," music and lyrics from *Alice in Wonderland* (Disney Music Co. Ltd., 1967), www.Disneyclips.com.

[115] Robert Douglas Fairhurst, "Alice in Wonderland—What Does It Mean?" *The Guardian*, March 20, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/20/alice-in-wonderland-what-does-it-all-mean.

[116] Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, *Art in Full Bloom: The Life of Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015), p. 322.

According to Benita Eisler, at Los Luceros, Wheelwright maintained an active social life. “She hosted luncheons and dinners, at which O’Keeffe was a frequent guest. Wheelwright was an émigré from Boston who shared Georgia’s love of the land, and welcomed the freedom it gave her. Remote regions like Alcade offered escape precisely from such genteel euphemisms as “Mighty Maiden” and “Boston marriage.”[117] Wheelwright became the doyenne of a growing colony of lesbian women. Though O’Keeffe was private about her sexual life, she liberally mingled with known homosexuals and lesbians without prejudice.

Eisler maintains that O’Keeffe’s friendship with Wheelwright was described as “friendly rivalry” by mutual acquaintances. O’Keeffe admired her combination of patrician privilege, competence, and grit. Like Mabel, Wheelwright was a discerning collector of Indian crafts, weavings, sand paintings, *santos*, and splendid jewelry. Her holdings formed the nucleus of The Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art. It was renamed the Wheelwright Museum after her death in 1958. Eisler explains: “Rich, domineering, and influential, like Mabel, she loomed for Georgia as a competing sphere of influence. To a bisexual woman, her open lesbianism was too challenging. O’Keeffe’s move to Ghost Ranch was also a decision that Alcade was not big enough for the both of them.”[118] O’Keeffe had a similar reaction to Mabel Dodge’s compound, where she resided in 1929 and 1930. Both Mabel and Wheelwright were American Brahmins who had same-sex relationships and owned paintings by O’Keeffe, whose flower painting had suggestive vulvar imagery, even though the artist refuted this interpretation. However, the feminist

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[117] Benita Eisler, *O’Keeffe and Stieglitz: An American Romance* (Penguin Books, 1992), 457-458.

[118] Eisler, *O’Keeffe and Stieglitz*, 459.

writer Lisa L. Moore has made the case that O'Keeffe's flowers should be seen as part of a lesbian tradition dating back to the eighteenth century, since some evidence suggests that O'Keeffe had several sexual relationships with women, among them, Rebecca Strand, Mabel Dodge Luhan, and Maria Chabot. There is much speculation that while Stieglitz had other relationships with other women, O'Keeffe had relationships with both men and women.[119] In Native American culture, a homosexual, bisexual, or intersexed person was given the designation of "two-spirited." Rather than being denigrated as "different," they were given special status. In many tribes they were given status as artisans, shamans, or healers.[120] Even though an argument could be made that O'Keeffe fit this profile, there is no conclusive proof that O'Keeffe was bisexual, but she often sported an androgynous style, wearing men's clothes and associated with more openly lesbian women. While it was rumored that O'Keeffe had female lovers, everyone respected her privacy. During this period, in Western cultures, people hid same-sex attractions and relationships with good reason: because for centuries homosexuals were persecuted. A latter-day transcendentalist, O'Keeffe repressed much of her sexuality and expressed it through her art, in her landscapes and flowers.

Like O'Keeffe, Wheelwright was also drawn to the area by her interest in Native American culture. Wheelwright learned everything she could about the ritual and ceremonial practices of "her" Navajos. She kept a Navajo medicine man, Klah, for spiritual guidance. With his help, she transcribed legends and songs, writing articles on

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[119] Randall Griffin, *Georgia O'Keeffe* (Phaidon, 2014).

[120] Indian Health Service, "Two Spirit/Health Resources-Indian Health Resources," accessed February 7, 2021, https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/health/twospirit/.

the symbolism of sand paintings and tribal dances. Klah was a hermaphrodite, chosen by Navajos in his tribe to maintain the secrets of the ancestors because of his special body. Like other Native Americans, Navajos in this area believed that homosexuals and hermaphrodites, because they combined both sexes in one body, possessed special powers and unusual mental capacities. Klah was also the great grandchild of the great Chief Narbona. Klah studied the Yeibichai Ceremony under the tutelage of Nah-Cloie, a prominent and well-liked medicine man. Klah knew the Hail Ceremony, which may have been passed down from the ancients who lived at Pueblo Bonito before the drought conditions forced them to leave the Rio Chaco. Klah knew the chants, myths, and herbs which originated in Canyon de Chelley, historic tribal lands of the Navajo in Arizona, in which O'Keeffe was most interested.[121]

It is quite possible that the healing ceremony O'Keeffe attended was at Wheelwright's invitation with Klah officiating. It is interesting to note that both O'Keeffe and Mary Wheelwright used Orville Cox as their guide when traveling through Navajo country. Hosteen Klah was known to Orville Cox and may have accompanied them on some of these excursions. A photo of O'Keeffe with Orville Cox, visiting Canyon De Chelley in Arizona in 1937 was taken by Ansel Adams, who was also part of the trip.[122] O'Keeffe accepted the invitation of Antonio Lujan to visit the Grand Canyon and Mesa Verde, including a visit to Shiprock, the massive rock formation on the Navajo Nation's high desert plain. He was her link to the ancient world and she knew it.

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[121] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, p. 160.

[122] Siobhán Bohnacker, "Picture Desk: The Faraway," *The New Yorker*, December 16, 2013, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/picture-desk-the-faraway.

O'Keeffe's extensive library included books on Native American art, among them numerous museum bulletins on Navaho textiles, mythology, and religion; folk art of the Southwest; Pueblo silver; prehistoric baskets; and the use of traditional Southwestern herbs and their uses. Stieglitz's assistant, Herbert Seligman, observed that "something of an aboriginal soul has descended on Georgia" as expressed by the environment and subjects of her paintings from New Mexico.[123] O'Keeffe completed drawings and paintings of kachina dolls. Frequently attending seasonal dances, she was fascinated by the rhythms of the drums and the colorful costumes of the Pueblo dancers. However, even though O'Keeffe painted them, *katsinam* represent Hopi spirit beings and are not meant to be seen by outsiders. Exact reproductions and photographs are discouraged. In a recent exhibit the O'Keeffe Museum agreed to exclude carvings of these deities out of respect for the Hopi Nation. During the years O'Keeffe painted these images, "the politics of appropriateness of depicting, selling, displaying, and exhibiting these representations of Native American spirit beings had not yet developed."[124] O'Keeffe portrayed sixteen kachina dolls between 1931 and 1942.[125] The kachina dolls are spirit representations of elements of the natural world. O'Keeffe painted *Kokopelli with Snow* (1942). He represents the fertility god to the Pueblo tribes, going back to the ancient

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[123] Barbara Buhler Lyne and Carolyn Kastner, *Georgia O'Keeffe in New Mexico: Architecture, Katsinam and the Land* (Museum of New Mexico Press, 2012).

[124] Michael Abatemarco, "Spirited imagery: Georgia O'Keeffe in New Mexico: Architecture, Katsinam, and the Land," *Pasatiempo*, May 17, 2013. https://www.santafenewmexican.com/pasatiempo/art/museum_shows/spirited-imagery-georgia-o-keeffe-in-new-mexico-architecture-katsinam-and-the-land/article_d29b862a-be61-11e2-b4aa-001a4bcf6878.html.

[125] Anna Landi, "That's the Spirit: O'Keeffe's Kachinas," *Art News*, June 3, 2013.

ancestors of Mesa Verde. An aged O'Keeffe makes reference to this deity in my play *Days with Juan.*

The Navajo and Pueblo perception of O'Keeffe's art is one of appropriation. The term "O'Keeffe Country" has been used to describe the area of northern New Mexico where the artist lived and painted. Dr. Alicia Inez Guzman led a discussion at the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum on August 26, 2020, claiming that the term "O'Keeffe Country" does injustice to the description of the Abiquiu area, ignoring the Tewa's ancient burial ground for Indians in New Mexico. Native Americans resent O'Keeffe for claiming it as her own. Her attitude was: "It's my private mountain. It belongs to me. God told me if I painted it enough, I could have it."[126] Was her claim to the mountain merely a metaphoric response? Local Native Americans resent her ashes being spread over an ancestral table village, where artifacts dating back ten to eleven thousand years remain. Tewa people think her ashes should have been spread somewhere else. They view O'Keeffe as benefitting from the "Manifest Destiny" white colonialism by calling it her country, even though she did not directly participate in it, and a product of Indian displacement, whereas O'Keeffe felt in communion with the area and its culture.[127]

According to biographer Jeffrey Hogrefe, when the artist began to age, she increasingly turned to spiritual sources for guidance, as is reflected in her 1958 painting *Ladder to the Moon*. He explains: "As early as 1956, the artist journeyed to Peru in search of Incan secrets of other worlds. Although she did not exhibit the results, she

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[126] Georgia O'Keeffe, *My Front Yard, Summer* (1942). "Pedernal Society," Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, last modified 2021, www.okeeffemuseum.org.

[127] "This Is Not 'O'Keeffe Country'" (online discussion via Zoom webinar), Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, August 26, 2020.

painted several views of the mountain *Machu Picchu,* the sacred apex of Inca civilization."[128] Further, Hogrefe demonstrates that O'Keeffe's spiritual quest continued in her adopted home of New Mexico: "The flat topped *Pedernal* Mountain which she painted repeatedly, was home of the mythical Changing Woman and was O'Keeffe's sacred apex."[129] Referring to the Pedernal she often said, "God told me that if I painted it enough, I could have it."[130] She also painted the mountain with a white Datura (jimson flower) *Datura and Pedernal* (1940). Datura grew abundantly around her Ghost Ranch house and Abiquiu home. O'Keeffe made multiple paintings of the Pedernal, interspersed with flowers and bones.

During her trip around the world in 1960, the artist spent seven weeks in India, visiting Hindu temples and other holy places. Later, she made several trips to Japan. While in Hong Kong, she picked up a bronze hand called *abhaya mudra*, which means "fear-not." She hung the hand by her bed, where she could see it every day.[131] It centered her while she coped with the challenges of macular degeneration. Previously mentioned paintings, *Ladder to the Moon* (1958), and her spirit animals floating in the sky, juxtaposed with flowers, *Ram's Head Blue Morning Glory* (1938) suggests that the artist was approaching her own shamanic symbolism: a private language influenced by the Pueblo Indians whose houses are entered through the roof by a ladder. For Pueblo Indians, the ladder is both a practical tool and a powerful metaphor used to descend and

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[128] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 239.

[129] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 239.

[130] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 240.

[131] Hogrefe, *O'Keeffe*, 239-240.

ascend to multiple worlds. Its users are connected to their ancestors, their spiritual beliefs, and one another. Pueblo people descend in their ceremonial *kivas* through them.[132] In my play a ghostly Georgia descends the ladder into mortality to understand her life. O'Keeffe painted bones that remain behind after life passes. They are discussed in Chapter 4.

[132] Lillia McEnaney, "Ladders to Other Worlds." *Sapiens: Anthropology Magazine*, March 21, 2016.

Chapter 4

GETTING DOWN TO THE BONES

Symbolism of Bones

O'Keeffe was fascinated by bones. As she stated in 1943, "To me they are more beautiful than anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around…the bones seem to cut to cut more sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive." [133] Many of O'Keeffe's abstractions express the essence of things. Numerous pelvises, animal skulls, and skeletons were scattered around the Southwest landscape as the result of a drought in 1930. Fascinated by them, she shipped a number of them back to New York City to be used as studies for paintings inspired by her trip.

In *Cow's Skull with Calico Roses* (1931), the artist decorated the skull with artificial flowers that adorn graves in New Mexico. *Dia De Los Muertos* is a timeless tradition that New Mexico shares with its southern neighbor, Mexico. Though the name mentions death, it is a time to memorialize loved ones to keep their spirits alive through celebration. Skeletal images and skulls (*calveras*) are found in art, candy, costumes, and face paint. Certainly, the art of O'Keeffe shows its influence.

Skulls mixed with flowers (marigolds) are an important part of *Dia De Los Muertos*.The soul of the departed was sacred to *Mictlantechuti*, the Mexican god of the dead. According to Mexican belief, souls of the dead of the departed family and friends return to Earth, and the scent of the marigold helps to guide them. In New Mexican tradition, O'Keeffe painted numerous animal skulls juxtaposed with flowers. This

[133] Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, "The Natural World" (installation), accessed February 7, 2021, www.okeeffemuseum.org/installation/the-natural-world/.

tradition of mixing bones with flowers seems contradictory, but it actually helps overcome the fear of death by mixing life with it. In *Summer Days* (1936), a suspended skull and several flowers, possibly marigold and Indian paintbrush, suspended in the sky, give the painting a surreal quality, symbolic of life and death cycles that shape the natural world.

O'Keeffe's life span covered two world wars and a depression. During World War II, her interest in skeletal forms expanded when paleontologists from the American Museum of Natural History unearthed fossils of dinosaurs close to her Ghost Ranch studio. At that time, she began using bones as a viewfinder. She liked what she saw through the holes in bones, which functioned as a framing device, both physically and symbolically. She thought that they were most wonderful against the blue sky that will always be there after man's destruction finished. She transmutes her bones into transcendental portals that link heaven and earth. (See *Pelvis IV* [1944] and *Pedernal-From the Ranch #1* [1956].)

History

In our culture bones are often associated with death. However, they are also associated with the essence of things, as in the expression "getting to the bare bones." In many parts of the world people believe that bones are associated with the vital principle or even the soul. Seen as the locus of life, bones have mystic powers ranging from cure and divination to birth and rebirth. In the Hebrew Bible, Eve is born from Adam's rib: "bone from my bones" (Genesis 2:21-22)

A widely held belief is that bones can be reanimated and therefore are essential to rebirth. This conviction is especially common among people in northern Asia and can

also be found in the myths of Germany, the Caucasus, Africa, South America, Oceania, and Australia. Ancient civilizations in Iran, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit also believed in the reanimation of bones.[134] As Joseph Henninger explains, "That the hunted or domesticated animal can be reborn from its bones is a belief held outside Siberia. The skeleton in the Shaman's costume actualizes the drama of his initiation into the greater drama of death and resurrection. Whether the bones are represented as a human or animal skeleton makes little difference. In either case what is involved is the life-substance, the primal matter preserved by mythical ancestors. The skeleton or the mask transforms the shaman into an animal is a typical expression of the relationship between man and his prey, relations that are fundamental for hunting societies."[135]

Where there is belief in reanimation bones are often venerated, preserved, and treated with special care; they are often given a separate burial or preserved as objects of worship. It is not only human bones that are regarded as sacred, but animal bones as well. Joseph Beuys, whose art draws upon spiritual tradition that many regard as primitive, explains the abiding significance of animals: "Why do I work with animals to express invisible powers?—You can make these energies very clear if you enter a kingdom that people have forgotten, and where vast powers survive as big personalities. And when I try to speak with the spiritual existences of this totality of animals, the question arises of whether one should speak of these higher existences too, with these deities and elemental

[134] See Joseph Henninger, "Bones," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 197.

[135] Henninger, "Bones," 200.

spirits."[136] Three of the most venerated animals are cattle, deer, and elk, the skulls of which O'Keeffe collected and are the subjects of her art.

The use of bones for divination is a common part of shamanistic rituals. Eliade defines shamanism as an "archaic technique of ecstasy," playing a critical role in the ritual of death and rebirth of the holy man. According to Eliade, the human skeleton represents the archetype of the shaman. A similar theory, in which the skeleton or mask, transforms the shaman into some kind of animal ancestor is the matrix of life of the species in these animals' bones.[137]

Clarissa Pinkola Estes uses bones to describe a contemporary transformation of the self. In *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, she describes an old woman, called La Loba, who lives in old places that everyone knows in their souls but few have ever seen. Her soul work is the collecting of bones:

> She collects and preserves especially that which is of danger of being lost to the world. . . . I might say she lives among the rotten granite slopes of the Tarahumara Indian territory. . . . We all begin as a bundle of bones lost somewhere in the desert, a dismantled skeleton that lies under the sand. It is our work to recover the parts. It is a painstaking process best done when the shadows are just right, for it takes much looking. *La Loba* indicates what we are to look for—the indestructible life force, the bones.[138]

O'Keeffe does precisely that in her art, making her unknown known and keeping the unknown always beyond her, the mystery.

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[136] Carin Kuoni, ed., *The Energy Plan for Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York, NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 142.

[137] Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 159-60.

[138] Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetypes* (New York, NY: Ballantine, 1989), 23-24.

At a time when Americans were searching for their identity, O'Keeffe's *Cow Skull—Red, White and Blue* (1931) isolates a single skull on a blue and white background with red stripes, iconic in stature, showing the strength of the American spirit. This sun-bleached cow's skull, a mature head that appears animated, "seems to possess secret knowledge, the kind that holy people pass down from generation to generation. It wants to commune."[139] She also gave the skull special bearing: high and centered on the canvas, appearing isolated and iconic. The beaded eyes in the upper skull are not eyes at all, but holes that channel veins, suggesting a mask, such as Native dancers wear with their own eyes peering out from underneath. O'Keeffe attended many such dances at Southwestern pueblos. Among them was the winter Deer Dance at Taos Pueblo, as well as a ceremony by the Laguna Eagle dancers.[140]

Like *La Loba*, O'Keeffe records the personal past and the ancient past in her work. She expresses creation myths without fully realizing it, since art expresses the unconscious, as well as the conscious. According to Estes, "the one who creates from that which has died is always a double-sided archetype. The Creation Mother is always also the Death Mother and vice-versa."[141]

Much of O'Keeffe's work can be read subliminally, depicting the life cycle from flowers (blossoming) to bones (death and resurrection), as in *Cow's Skull With Calico Roses* (1931). A painting now known as *Horse's Skull with a Pink Rose* (1931) was called *Life and Death*. One newspaper titled *Cow's Skull, Red, White and Blue* (1931) as

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[139] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 245-247.

[140] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 246 (Laguna Eagle Dancers, Laguna Pueblo, Fig. 218).

[141] Estes, *Women*, 24.

the telling *Death and Transformation*. These modern paintings evoked meanings from older European traditions where bones served as religious and philosophical meditations upon life and death, reminding the viewer that no one is immortal and all life ends in death. O'Keeffe consistently claimed that the skulls and bones were symbols of the desert and she complained, "More nonsense has been written about the alleged life and death symbolism on my skull and flower paintings than I care to remember."[142] As always, O'Keeffe refuses to be pigeon-holed by interpretations and remains enigmatic.

However, bleached animal bones also served as a metaphor for the passing and death of the old West. The buffalo skull became its powerful metaphor because Americans knew something about the slaughter of these animals, once numbering in the millions, on which the Native Americans depended. These metaphors were also linked to the fate of the Native Americans. Thus, the buffalo skull served as an elegy not only for the animal species but also for a vanishing race of people. The fusing of the buffalo's fate with that of the Native Americans was so pervasive during O'Keeffe's childhood that it would have been impossible for her not to absorb it.

In modernist tradition, O'Keeffe wanted the resonance of these subjects in her bones without their literalness. A standard prop among the Taos Society of Artists' collections were Native American artifacts with a buffalo skull hung in a prominent place. Skulls and antlers, also associated with cowboys, were used as decorations on gateways, doorways, ranch houses, and interior walls. Dude ranches had their heyday after World War I, offering rustic accommodations, simple living, and spectacular settings to paying guests. The skull became the Western male symbol, so much so that in

[142] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 271.

World War I it was used as a heraldic design on an armed forces badge identifying a division from New Mexico. Such associations with men's activities made O'Keeffe's appropriation of it all the more audacious, confusing her critics, because her earlier trademark had been flowers, so often associated with female art. However, O'Keeffe's interpretation did not present a gendered view. In her homes in Abiquiu and Ghost Ranch, she hung bones, skulls, and antlers on adobe walls, just as dude ranchers and male artists had done for several decades.[143]

Bones also symbolized sacrifices as early as Paleolithic times, representing offers to the dead or to a deity. They also represent mortality, but have a permanence beyond death, representing our truest and barest selves—in other words, our essence. O'Keeffe's bone paintings encompass all of these. They embody the sacrifices she made for her art. As a young woman, O'Keeffe often gave up social engagements to paint. Most likely, she stayed in an unhappy marriage because Stieglitz marketed her work in the New York art world. She forfeited children and motherhood as a result of this decision, because Stieglitz deemed motherhood incompatible with her art: he thought she needed to focus all her attention on her painting, which she did.[144]

Bones at Ghost Ranch

Bone Collecting

O'Keeffe's bone collecting actually began during her early summer visits to Taos and Alcalde, as concrete reminders of the natural world of New Mexico. She brought

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[143] Corn, *The Great American Thing*, 276-282.

[144] Sue Figalde Lick, "Georgia O'Keeffe: Childless Artist," *Childless by Marriage*, July 21, 2010, https://childlessbymarriage.blogspot.com/2010/07/georgia-okeeffe-childless-artist.html.

bleached bones back to New York in 1929. She wanted to paint the desert and didn't know how, so she brought home the bleached bones as symbols of the desert. She described them:

> To me they are as beautiful as anything I know. To me they are strangely more living than the animals walking around—hair, eyes and all their tails switching. The bones seem to cut sharply to the center of something that is keenly alive on the desert even though it is vast and empty and untouchable—and knows no kindness with all its beauty.[145]

Ranch cowboys and various residents were appreciative of her bone collection and began to collect them for her. She befriended Frank Hiibben, a Princeton graduate working on his dissertation about New Mexico mountain lions (cougars), who brought her deer and cow skulls. Jack McKinley, a ranch cowboy, became friends with her after he began collecting skulls for her while riding the range.[146]

The drought of the 1930s devastated wild and domestic animals of New Mexico. "The bones were *everywhere*," Dorothy Burnham Frederick, daughter of a Piedra Lumbre homesteader, remembers, [and] "of course O'Keeffe painted them."[147] When Dorothy's pet Billy goat died, O'Keeffe painted a ram's head in its memory. The goat skull may have been misidentified, but its dog-chewed horns were accurately depicted in the paintings *Ram's Head, White Hollyhock-Hills* (1935) and *Ram's Skull with Brown Leaves* (1936).[148]

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[145] Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, "The Natural World."

[146] Lesley Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch* (University of Arizona Press, 2005), 117.

[147] Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch*, 115.

[148] Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch*, 118.

An antelope enchanted O'Keeffe (as it did everyone at the ranch) when it ran alongside her car. O'Keeffe was worried that the young pronghorn might jump into the back of her car due the goring and death of Mary Duncan, the nanny of the children staying at the ranch. The animal was briefly kept in a pen near Rancho de Burros, where O'Keeffe kept her studio. The antelope would stand and stare at her, then eat from her hand, and hook it with his horn, as if that were a natural gesture. Sometimes a pet coyote would recline near his pen, like a dog. The buck was later shot, and his skull was given to O'Keeffe, who later placed it in her paintings. To the outside world, the antelope skull hovering in the sky above the Pedernal looked like a playful magical painting, but to those at the ranch who knew the story of the nanny and the antelope, Mary Duncan was elegantly memorialized in *Antelope Head with Pedernal* (1953).

O'Keeffe admired an independent, half-Navajo, half-Spanish Juan Dios, who was almost one hundred years old in 1935. She also admired his two giant oxen, and frequently reminded him if one were to die, she would very much want the skull, which he later gave to her. Ansel Adams photographed the large ox skull that came to be the sign marking the road to Ghost Ranch when he came to visit O'Keeffe. O'Keeffe's work always communicates a sense of place.[149] What secrets did the earth around Ghost Ranch have? How was it expressed in O'Keeffe's work?

Dinosaurs at Ghost Ranch

Edwin Colbert's new knowledge and interpretation of geology in New Mexico, and of the world, for that matter, shows that in Triassic years the American Southwest was situated much farther south than is the case today. New Mexico and the surrounding

[149] Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch*, 119-120.

terrain were only about ten degrees north of the equator, compared to the present latitude of thirty-five degrees.[150] The past relationship of Ghost Ranch to the equator is comparable to that of the Present Panama Canal, Nigeria, and Thailand. The environment was moist and humid, and summer reigned throughout the year; it was vastly different from the arid, high desert climate of New Mexico today. What was the cause for this? According to Wenger's theory of continental drift, all the continents at one time were part of a supercontinent known as Pangaea. During the Mesozoic period, Pangaea began to break up to form the continents and land masses as they are now, with new oceans developing between them. The shifting of crustal plates also caused the change in the continents. Thus, Wenger's theory of continental drift was later refined as plate tectonics.[151]

In 1928, paleontology was relatively new. Scientists were still puzzling as to the origins of dinosaurs. Early paleontologists believed that Triassic dinosaur fragments would prove to be the basic patent for all the giant dinosaurs that later evolved in the Jurassic age. Many undug sites in the Southwest were awaiting the attention of serious Triassic bone hunters. One of the most prominent, Charles Camp, came to Ghost Ranch, following the trail of earlier fossil hunters Baldwin and Cope (1881). Baldwin was basically a mountain man who sent fossils to Cope. Cope's study of these tiny bone fragments led him to name a new genus, *Coelophysis*, meaning "hollow form." Cope's conclusion about the Triassic dinosaur was published in the *American Naturalist* in 1895.

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[150] Edwin Harris Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs of Ghost Ranch* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995); Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch*, 216-218.

[151] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 216-218.

His entire collection was later moved to the American Museum of Natural History in 1895. Remaining in a dark draw for another sixteen years, *Coelophysis*'s remains were rediscovered by Friedrich Von Huene of Tubingen University in Germany. After studying the fossils, Von Heune traveled throughout New Mexico and published a lengthy paper with 37 illustrations describing and illustrating *Coelophysis* as an early but mysterious ancestor of the great dinosaurs.

Aware of this research, Charles Camp came from the University of California, Berkeley, to dig for bones. He found fossils in the red badlands of Piedra Lumbre in Northern New Mexico at Ghost Ranch. The phytosaur quarry he unearthed there became famous among paleontologists.

On June 14, 1947, three paleontologists from the American Museum of Natural History, vaguely familiar with O'Keeffe's painting of the region, came to Ghost Ranch. It was a scientific not an aesthetic pilgrimage. Colbert was curator of vertebrate paleontology. He came with two assistants, George Whitaker, a fossil preparer, and Dr. Thomas Ierardi, a professor at City College of New York. They began digging and uncovered an extensive deposit of skeletons—not just fragments, but complete backbones, legs, a jaw, and skull, and other completely articulated skeletons—not just several, but layers, upon layers of them. It became clear to Colbert and his colleagues that this was a rare and wondrous site with an unusual staggering, perhaps record-setting concentration of dinosaur bones.[152] Colbert called his friend and colleague George Gaylord Simpson for advice and counsel. Simpson was Colbert's immediate superior at the Museum of Natural History and was widely regarded as one of the world's greatest

[152] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 70-86.

paleontologists. Working across the mountains at a fossil site near Lindrith, New Mexico, where *Coelophysis* scraps were found in the 1870s, Simpson drove over to Ghost Ranch and declared the site "the greatest find ever made in the Triassic of North America."[153]

The owner, Arthur Pack, was an educated and devoted landowner, "dedicated to the conservation of all wild things, botanical and zoological, and to the advancement of knowledge about life on the earth, past and present."[154] Pack and his wife, Phoebe, were delighted to have Colbert and his crew remain the summer at Ghost Ranch. By midsummer, numerous periodicals and newspapers carried the story of the dinosaur quarry, attracting scientists, journalists, and photographers from all over the globe. Despite O'Keeffe's need for privacy and her dislike of mobs of people and inquisitive journalists, her first visit to the quarry was in the company of a jeep full of nuns visiting Abiquiu. Colbert describes O'Keeffe's visit to the quarry in *The Little Dinosaurs of Ghost Ranch*:

> Our quarry naturally attracted the attention of many people—at first the local folk, and subsequently visitors from afar. O'Keeffe was interested, and on July 29th [1947] she appeared at the Johnson House as we were finishing breakfast, to accompany us to the quarry. Evidently, the demonstration we provided was sufficiently interesting for her to return on August 5th, this time accompanied by four jolly nuns, two from Abiquiu, and two from Ohio. In spite of their long gowns they piled into the jeep along with Georgia for the trip to the quarry, and a good time was had by all.[155]

[153] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 166.

[154] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 167.

[155] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 50

Dinosaur Dust

On subsequent summer mornings, she drove her car up the rugged road and then walked cross country to the steep slope containing the quarry. She became good friends with Ned Colbert and the fossil crew that summer, inviting them for informal dinners at Rancho De Los Burros. She found Ned to be an articulate and committed scientist, a humble genius. O'Keeffe watched the excavation for hours at a time, quizzing the always-friendly Colbert about what they were doing and why. Both were fascinated by bones for different reasons. Although she liked the more recent ones, and he liked the very old ones, they had something in common. O'Keeffe had Colbert describe what life was like millions of years ago, when Ghost Ranch was a tropical environment. One can only speculate as to whether daily breathing of dinosaur dust inspired contributed to the primal quality of O'Keeffe's work.[156] She enjoyed chats about fossils she had found in the area, as well as the paleontological history of Ghost Ranch.

Even though Colbert did not understand art, he understood O'Keeffe's fascination with Ghost Ranch. She chose to live there because of the marvelous scenery that surrounded her house on all sides. She loved the colors of the Chinle Formation, over 200 million years old, that occupied the foreground around her dwelling—the banded reds and whites and purples so characteristic of the hundreds of feet of sandstones and clays and the mixture that geologists call siltstones, which formation carried within its layered deposits the fossils which attracted them. She was also intrigued by the great vertical cliffs of the Entrada Formation, immediately above the Chinle, and the white Todilto gypsum capping above the Entrada. One of her well known landscapes painted in 1943,

[156] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 186-187.

shows the sequence of Chinle, Entrada, and Todilto that rise just behind her home. For her, these Mesozoic rocks of Ghost Ranch and the surrounding country were a symphony of colors, bright beyond belief for many people. Lacking formal training in geology, O'Keeffe, with her perceptive eye, depicted the land forms and the earth colors of the Southwest with an understanding that is a constant delight to members of the geological fraternity that have studied the country.

O'Keeffe was also intrigued by the Cerro Pedernal, south of the ranch. It appears in several of her paintings as a silhouette against the sky. Colbert also mentions *Pelvis with Moon* (1943), which depicts the Pedernal as a blue silhouette at the bottom of the painting with the white weathered pelvis of a cow and the moon above. The Chinle badlands of Ghost Ranch are depicted in *Pedernal with Red Hills* (1936). His primary concern, of course, was the Chinle Formation, in the upper part of the newly discovered dinosaur quarry.[157]

Paleontology was an important, but little-known science in the 1940s. However, it fit in with Pack's philosophy, and he was fascinated by the work of the Piedra Lumbre fossil hunters since the 1930s. As Colbert noted, "Pack placed his ranch foreman, Herbert Hall, all of the ranch's heavy equipment, and a second jeep that Arthur bought for his own use after the war, at Colbert's disposal. Hall spent two days cutting a road across the desert to the quarry site, and, although extremely rough and only passable by a jeep and the bulldozer itself, the road allowed diggers to come and go with large amounts of equipment with relative ease."[158]

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[157] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 28.

[158] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 187.

Colbert found that there were not merely skeletons on the top layer of the quarry, but more of them underneath, layer after layer. Colbert's educated estimate was that 10,000 bones of dinosaurs dating back some 225 million years, lay buried in the hillside. As Colbert explains, "By the end of the summer of 1947, seven massive plaster-encased blocks of bones had been lifted from the sands of Ghost Ranch. The story of *Coelophysis* could now be investigated."[159] The specimens ranged in size and weight, offering a sampling of the entire herd, from newly hatched infants, juveniles, young adults, full-grown adults, and elderly adults. All were piled together where they had died suddenly in a local catastrophe.[160]

Although this story belongs to Ghost Ranch, when these dinosaurs actually walked across this landscape, it occupied another place; a humid, moist, summer land that lay just thirty-five degrees north of the equator. This high desert plateau along with all of northern New Mexico, was a tropical land of streams, rivers, lakes, ponds, and rolling terrain in between, consisting of great forests, with thick under growth of ferns. The story of *Coelophysis* at Ghost Ranch revealed a truly global one that Colbert would spend the rest of his career researching and connecting. However, Colbert could not understand why the *Coelophysis*'s closest relative, *Syntarsus*, was found in present-day Zimbabwe, until the theory of an ancient supercontinent, Pangaea, and its breakup into the continents known today, began to evolve in the scientific community. After years of excavating and studying fossil evidence for continental drift and plate tectonics that took him to

[159] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs*, 190.

[160] Poling-Kemps, *Ghost Ranch*, 190.

Antarctica, Colbert came to the conclusion that the two dinosaurs had once walked the same continent.[161]

By 1949, Colbert's amazing discoveries at Ghost Ranch were well known among his appreciative and envious colleagues. Charles Camp had just one question for Colbert: What made him fossil hunt at the mouth of the Yeso Canyon in the first place? Fossil hunters rarely went up canyons, and never searched hillsides. According to Colbert, like all good ideas, it was just a hunch, and a bit of luck.[162]

It is timely that a new fossil find in New Mexico is named *Effigia okeeffeae,* after the artist, by two paleontologists who work at the Museum of Natural History. It honors O'Keeffe, who lived near the site where the fossil was found. According to *Science Daily* and *Columbia News,* Columbia scientists discovered the fossil of a toothless crocodile related to today's alligators and crocodiles, even though it resembles a six-foot-long, two-legged dinosaur. *Effigia* means "ghost," in reference to the time that the fossil remained hidden from science. Adjunct Columbia Professor Mark Norell said, "It is astounding to see so many advanced features in animal so closely related to modern crocodiles. Obviously, this group of crocodiles and dinosaurs must have had similar habitats and probably fed in the same way, accounting for similarities in limb and skull."[163]

The scientists think that this example of "convergence" shows how two lineages evolve the same body plan. Other examples of convergence given are marsupial

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[161] Poling-Kempes, *Ghost Ranch,* 191.

[162] Colbert, *Little Dinosaurs,* 35.

[163] Columbia University, "New Fossil Find in New Mexico Named After Georgia O'Keeffe," *ScienceDaily,* February 21, 2006, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/02/060220104429.htm.

mammals related to kangaroos and opossums that evolved into creatures resembling lions and wolves. Sterling Nesbitt, graduate assistant to Mark Norell, commented that the features of *Effigia okeeffeae* were also unexpected: "It has large eyes, a beak, it walked on two feet and had small hands."[164]

"Effigia" means "ghost," referring to the eons the fossil was hidden from view. It was found on Ghost Ranch, not far from O'Keeffe's home. It is timely that she appears as a ghost in the opening scene of my play. O'Keeffe refers to dinosaurs, geological formations, Navajo burial grounds, sacred plants, *Katsinum* (Kachinas), and historical sites in her art. Among them are Mesa Verde, the Grand Canyon, Taos Pueblo, and Ghost Ranch, all of which I visited for research.

[164] Columbia University, "New Fossil Find."

Chapter 5

PLAYWRITING O'KEEFFE: THE WRITING PROCESS

Nestled within the Sangre de Cristo—"The Blood of Christ"—mountain range sits Taos mountain, rising majestically over the one-thousand-year-old pueblo inhabited by the Tiwa Indians. For decades, studies have explored a low-frequency humming sound known as the "Taos Hum" emitted by the mountain. "Ancient lore of the area tells of 'Nature holding counsel with her own,' as she 'sings,' resetting her patterns of harmony."[165] Emitting low frequency electromagnetic vibrations, named by the Indians as the "mountain song," that mountain climbers today continue to describe. Congress was petitioned to investigate it, and politicians responded by sending teams of scientists and investigators to explore the low—frequency noise.[166]

I experienced the "hum" of the "Magic Mountain," as it is referred to by locals, in the 1970s. Responding to its legendary pull, I returned there for a summer workshop in global studies offered by the American Federation of Teachers in 1988. The week-long workshop was held at the legendary house of Mabel Dodge Luhan, built by her husband Antonio Lujan. It abounds with legends of being haunted by the ghosts of the couple and of other famous guests who stayed there.[167] Spending time in the rooms where O'Keeffe, the Lujans, and Lawrence inhabited planted a seed that would bear fruit many years later

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[165] Kathy Weiser, "The Mountain Song of Taos, New Mexico---or, The Taos Hum," *Legends of America*, last modified 2021, https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nm-taoshum/.

[166] Weiser, "The Mountain Song."

[167] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 156. In May 1918, Antonio Lujan encouraged Mabel to buy a twelve-acre plot where he built her the house, originally named: *Los Gallos* for the porcelain statues of roosters on the roof. In 1970, Dennis Hopper bought the house, and renamed it "Mud Palace." In 1977 it was sold to George Otero. The Oteros started "Las Palomas De Taos" and began to hold workshops which I attended in 1988.

in a dissertation for my doctoral studies at Drew University. My dissertation began with an essay about my experiences in Taos during a creative writing course (*Writing to Heal*). After reading my essay, Professor Phelan told me, "I think you have a dissertation." I was encouraged, and began to develop dramatic dialogue, submitted as a proposal to write a research-based play to my advisor, Dean Robert Ready. He suggested Professor Rosemary McLaughlin, Theatre and Dance Department, and Professor Kimberly Rhodes, art historian, as my advisors. They became my committee to oversee the development of research and dramatic evolution of my play.

I have long been fascinated by the characters who stayed in that house. As I researched their lives, I began writing scenes about Mabel and Tony; D. H. Lawrence, his wife Frieda (*Mabel & Lorenzo*); and Georgia O'Keeffe (*Georgia & Alfred*), who eventually became my main character. I centered on O'Keeffe because since childhood, as I have always had a passionate interest in art. I studied at the Art Students League of New York. Unbeknownst to me, O'Keeffe had also studied there in 1908, so we already had something in common. I read everything I could about O'Keeffe's experiences as a budding artist and her exploration of the collective unconscious through forms in nature. I understood why the eroticized interpretation of her flowers as vaginas enraged O'Keeffe because she wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, instead of just a "woman artist." She often considered feminists whiners because she always knew she had to work twice as hard as "the boys" to be taken seriously. She worked prodigiously and created a vast body of work.

O'Keeffe would forgo social events and active participation in the suffragette movement, even though she supported it, to excel in her work. Even though O'Keeffe

was not marching, she was still a feminist, whether she acknowledged it or not. She endured the challenges and sexism of the art world to create a name for herself. O'Keeffe wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, not just a "woman artist." The sexual imagery of her flowers was promoted by Alfred Stieglitz in 1919 to sell her work, while exhibiting nude photographs at her art exhibits. This created ambivalence and conflict in O'Keeffe, who felt that her work was being compromised, even though this tactic drew public attention and sold paintings. I give voice to her ambivalence about being viewed as a sexual object in the *Georgia & Alfred* scenes.

In her personal life, O'Keeffe endured Stieglitz's infidelity. He would continue to market and advance her work, but O'Keefe had to pay a heavy price for it emotionally, suffering a mental breakdown, which drove her to New Mexico to recuperate in 1929. This journey proved fruitful and took O'Keeffe's life and art in a new direction, as she engaged with Hispanic and Native American culture and its influence on her work.

In my research I have endeavored to examine her trees flowers, bones, and desert landscapes, as an intensified response and interest in the sublime. In the 1920s, O'Keeffe was friends with Theosophist architect Claude Bragdon and novelist Jean Toomer, a follower of the Russian Mystic G. I. Gurdjieff. She also admired writers who had an interest in mysticism. Like-minded writers Huxley and Heard visited her at Ghost Ranch. She disguised her portraiture of them as trees. Her flowers were also used by Indigenous cultures to enhance religious experience of the sublime. O'Keeffe engaged with the

artistic and philosophical issues occupying many of the thinkers of her generation, emphasizing personal experience over rationality in the industrial age.[168]

Bringing this research from the page to the stage has indeed been challenging. I was influenced by O'Keeffe's modernist philosophy. I sought not to portray O'Keeffe accurately, but rather, my interpretation of her, because it is not possible to be entirely objective about someone I have never met, looking for the points where our lives intersect to make art. Like O'Keeffe, I, myself, have experienced reduced vision later in life. Therefore, I developed an understanding of her reality. My characters are composite characters who influenced her life. I began by writing and presenting scenes from the artist's life in playwriting class at Drew, manipulating the timeline of O'Keeffe's life for dramatic effect.

My initial draft, written in 2014, dramatizes Georgia O'Keeffe at the Art Students' League during the suffragette movement. Her friend Anita Politzer first introduces her work to Alfred Stieglitz, who falls in love with it, and eventually with the artist. Following O'Keeffe's bout with illness during the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, Stieglitz invites her to New York to recuperate, offering her a free studio space and a year to paint—a difficult proposition for the young budding artist to refuse. His sexual interest in her leads to hundreds of nude photographs, exploring different body parts, as Georgia poses for nude photographs in his studio, sometimes using them as departures for abstractions in her paintings.

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[168] Brenda Marie Mitchell, "Music That Makes Holes in the Sky: Georgia O'Keeffe's Visionary Romanticism," (PhD diss, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1996), http://hdl.handle.net/2142/22108.

In a *Love & Marriage* scene in the play *Flowers & Bones,* after a steamy confrontation with Alfred's wife, Emmy, he and Georgia are thrown out and move in together. Emmy and Alfred are divorced and he marries Georgia, who is twenty-five years his junior. Another draft written in Fall 2019 shows the shortness of Alfred's attention span, as he begins yet another affair with Dorothy Norman, twenty years younger than O'Keeffe. No doubt the affair contributed to O'Keeffe's mental breakdown.

To recover, she travels to New Mexico with her friend Rebecca Strand to paint. Both women become the houseguests of the salon and culture maven Mabel Dodge Luhan in Taos. There, O'Keeffe meets modernist writers and artists of her day, as well as Mabel's dynamic Native American husband, Tony. Having common interests, they become friends, which inspires great jealousy in Mabel, as well as in Georgia's husband, Alfred. Mabel writes a letter to Stieglitz informing him of Georgia's interest in Tony. To complicate matters, Mabel is also in love with D. H. Lawrence, who departed for Europe prior to O'Keeffe's visit, but in my 2019 draft of *Flowers & Bones,* he appears at a dinner party to which Georgia has been invited. All this drama distracts Georgia too much from her artwork and she leaves Taos, or "Mabeltown," as she calls it, to spend time in Alcalde, and later at Ghost Ranch, which becomes one of her summer homes.[169] Despite her marital tensions, she paints prodigiously and sends her work to New York where Alfred sells and exhibits it, building Georgia's reputation. When Alfred dies, Georgia returns to New York to settle Alfred's estate. She throws out his office manager and gallery assistant, Dorothy Norman, Alfred's mistress for twenty years, finally resolving the conflict.

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[169] Rudnick, *Mabel Dodge Luhan*, 238-241.

Having taught art myself, I was inspired to begin another version of this draft in October of 2020 at West Texas Normal College, where O'Keeffe taught during World War I. After returning from a leave of absence during the Spanish Flu pandemic, she leaves her class and goes to New York to be with Alfred, who has promised her a year to paint with all expenses paid. As the play unfolds, O'Keeffe becomes his muse and his mistress to advance her career, but she is also falling in love with Alfred, as he with her.

A final version is renamed *Days with Juan*, inspired by the last scene of *Flowers & Bones.* It begins with a ghostly Georgia, after she has died. Like her art, my play explores themes of life and death, while focusing on her relationship with her assistant, Juan.

Belief in the existence of an afterlife is widespread, dating back to animism and ancestor worship. In folklore, a ghost is the spirit of a dead person or animal that can be seen by the living. Humans have been fascinated by ghost stories since time immemorial. Ghosts have been an integral part of drama since ancient Greece. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Ghost of his father screams out for revenge.[170] The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen made a scathing commentary on nineteenth-century morality in his play, *Ghosts*.[171] There are parallels between O'Keeffe's floating skulls and pelvises, transmuted into portals that link heaven and earth, and the mystical New Mexican tale of *La Loba*, the wolf woman, who collects bones and preserves what is in danger of being

[170] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet; Prince of Denmark*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

[171] Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*. In *Four Major Plays* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1981).

lost to the world.[172] Ghost Ranch, where O'Keeffe had her studio, was originally known as Rancho de Los Brujos, to discourage locals from looking for stolen goods hidden in the canyons by cattle rustlers, the dangerous Archuleta brothers. When O'Keeffe arrived there in 1934, she was happy to install herself in the "Ghost House" for the duration of the summer. In 1940, Arthur Pack sold her his own *Rancho de los Burros* with seven surrounding acres, which O'Keeffe used until her death in 1986. The ambience of ghost stories and legends of New Mexico inspired the choice and setting for *Days with Juan,* which evolved into a full-length play from the final scene of earlier drafts titled *Flowers & Bones*. It was difficult to narrow my focus because there were so many interesting stories to tell.

Days with Juan, the final draft for my dissertation play, begins in the twilight of O'Keeffe's life, as she struggles with blindness and aging. In the opening scene, O'Keeffe appears as a ghost who has just died in a hospital bed in Santa Fe. She returns to her beloved Ghost Ranch because her last wish to die there was not granted by her dear friend and assistant, Juan.

The ghostly O'Keeffe wants to find out how this happened, and she does this by reliving their relationship, seeking to find out why she lost agency to Juan. In the second scene, O'Keeffe is summoned back to her studio by a knock on the door. She is an old woman when the handsome young sculptor/handyman knocks on her door to deliver and install a woodburning stove. He seizes the opportunity to solicit work from her. By this time, O'Keeffe is going blind from macular degeneration. Juan charms her and makes himself indispensable. He teaches her pottery and sculpture to keep her going, and

[172] Estes, *Women*, 26-28.

becomes her assistant. The power struggle between the two develops subtly as O'Keeffe loses ground and Juan gradually takes over. He deserts her when she needs him most, being left alone to die in the arms of her nurse. It is only in death that she is reborn and her vision and faculties return to enable her to figure out why she has lost agency to Juan, a theme relevant to women of any age who struggle with losing agency to men.

In O'Keeffe's lifetime, very few women, if any, became famous for their work without the agency of men to move them forward. Knowing this, O'Keeffe tolerated Stieglitz's dalliances in the interest of promoting her art through his galleries and connections in the art world. As her sight diminished in later years, O'Keeffe became increasingly frail. It was natural for her to seek a protector. However, as demonstrated in the play, the price that O'Keeffe pays for this is very high. She is not able to die at her beloved Ghost Ranch, the womb of her creativity, where she feels comfortable and safe, because it inconveniences Juan. He is ambivalent about dealing with his benefactor's death and absent in her last moments which causes her distress. This scene was inspired by my own mother stating, "I want to die in my own bed." How we die is just as important as how we live.[173] If one thinks of death as a transition, rather than an end, this transition should be a peaceful one to prepare for what's ahead. O'Keeffe felt comfortable and safe at home and wanted to die "a good death," consistent with the way she lived her life. However, this proved too difficult for Juan, and her nurse, apparently experienced at hospice, is able to fill in for him. This topic becomes timely during my

[173] Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die: Reflections on Life's Final Chapter* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, Random House, 1993).

senior years. O'Keeffe lived to the ripe old age of ninety-eight and I hope I will be fortunate enough to do the same.

My research for the dissertation and play included several trips to the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, her house in Abiquiu, and Ghost Ranch where the artist lived and worked. I also spent time at the Mabel Dodge Luhan House and Taos Pueblo, where O'Keeffe lived and painted in 1929-1930, which provided a sense of place for my play. While in Taos, I took day trips to the Kiowa Ranch (D. H. Lawrence Ranch, University of New Mexico), as well as Los Luceros in Alcalde, where she visited and painted. Since O'Keeffe painted *The Lawrence Tree* at the Kiowa Ranch, I attended a literary event focused on Lawrence at the University of Nottingham, in order to find out more about his literary life in New Mexico.[174] There, I met Steven Lowe, a British playwright who was inspired by Lawrence's unfinished play called, *Altitude*, to write *Altitude Sickness*.[175] Lowe gave voice to Lawrence's relationships with Mabel Dodge Luhan and her husband Antonio, his wife Frieda, and Lady Dorothy Brett, all familiar to O'Keeffe. Inspired by his play, I wrote several drafts incorporating these characters into a longer version of O'Keeffe's life, beginning in the wake of World War I and the women's suffrage movement.

These drafts were written and revised with Rosemary McLaughlin and with John Pietrowski's adult playwriting workshop, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, whose workshops are currently being held virtually. I was challenged to eliminate unnecessary

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[174] Andrew Harrison, "100 Years of Sons and Lovers," University of Nottingham, May 15, 2013, www.nottingham.ac.uk.

[175] Steve Orme, "Chaos in Taos as Lowe Finishes D. H. Lawrence Play," *British Theatre Guide*, May 15, 2016.

exposition from my dialogue, “to show and not tell” and examine the conflicts and resolutions of my primary characters. By listening to my script being read and responses from other playwrights at Drew University and Writers Theatre, I was able to hear and analyze what worked, and what didn’t.

Even though I have focused on O’Keeffe’s later life in my dissertation play, I plan to utilize all my drafts for future play development. Thereby, nothing is wasted and becomes a learning experience.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

Early in my dissertation, I posed the question: Was O'Keeffe a nature mystic? She painted the radiance of nature with an almost religious ambience. She thought that artists and religionists weren't far apart, that artists go to the source of revelation for what they choose to experience, and what they report is the degree of their experience. O'Keeffe's work reflects the mystery. In a 1923 letter to Sherwood Anderson she wrote, "I feel that a living form is the natural result of the individual's effort to create the living thing out of the adventure of his spirit into the unknown."[176] O'Keeffe arranges form, line and color in a beautiful way based on Oriental art concepts taught to her by her mentor Arthur Wesley Dow at Columbia Teachers College.[177] She celebrated consciousness and the splendor of nature in her paintings, using abstraction and space, as influenced by Dow. She painted many psychoactive flowers. Among them are the jimson flower, poppy, morning glory, (peyote) cactus flowers, and lotus. In *Days with Juan,* the visually failing O'Keeffe sculpts the lotus flower on the lip of the vase she has created with the help of her assistant Juan. And on her deathbed, her nurse reads her favorite Chinese meditation text, *The Secret of the Golden Flower,* in which the lotus represents enlightenment.

The spiritual symbols of animal skulls with flowers next to them reappear in O'Keeffe's art. Through them, she permits us to sense both simultaneously: her quest for

[176] Linda Leinen, "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Way of Seeing," *The Task at Hand*, July 2018, shoreacres.wordpress.com.

[177] Dow, an Orientalist and Theosophist, made a spiritual pilgrimage to India. His Eastern approach to art influenced her, as did Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, considering art as spiritual antidote to the values of materialism.

renewal. O'Keeffe expresses these metaphors of the sublime in nature and communicates them through her paintings, imbued with a light from within.

O'Keeffe references the Pedernal in her art. Like the Navajo *Changing Woman*, also known as *Spider Woman*, she gathered stones from her beloved mountain, which she claimed as her own by painting it often. According to Navajo legends, the mythical *Changing Woman* was born on this mountain, and she lives there still. In each year she is reborn in the spring, becomes a young woman in the summer, a mother in the fall, and an old woman in the winter. *Spider Woman* (Grandmother) is Changing Woman's older wisdom aspect. For the Navajo she is the daughter of the Earth and sky, a personification of the natural order of the repetition of the seasons. The villagers often called O'Keeffe *Spider* (*Arana* in Spanish) because of her black garb and association with the Pedernal, as well as being an unconventional outsider.

The word *Pedernal* is the Spanish name for flint. Flint Mountain was settled by Indigenous People from 1161-1275 C.E., possibly abandoned through drought. Flint arrowheads and jars with round bottoms and pottery chards remain behind.[178] O'Keeffe painted it from her studio at Ghost Ranch and claimed it as her own: "It's my private mountain. It belongs to me. God told me if I painted it often enough, I could have it."[179] It is not surprising that O'Keeffe requested her ashes be dispersed on her favorite mountain to roam with the spirits of Changing Woman and the Native Americans who once inhabited this land.

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[178] Sara Wright, "Pedernal, Changing Woman Speaks," *Over the Edge and Beyond: Journal of a Naturalist*, November 30, 2020, https://sarawrightnature.wordpress.com/.

[179] "Pedernal Society."

In the opening scene of *Days with Juan*, a ghostly Georgia references the *Cerro Pedernal*, Chimney Rock, and Ghost Ranch as "My little piece of heaven." She compares the length of a human life to the flash of a shooting star. She sees the ghost riders hunting buffalo in the clouds.

The Black Place, once a Navajo burial ground, is a scene where Georgia tells Juan that she wants her ashes scattered on the Pedernal. She believes that Juan was sent to her for some special purpose. Juan teaches her pottery using the red clay, "dinosaur dust" abundant at Ghost Ranch and the surrounding area, a burial ground for prehistoric dinosaurs. Native People of this area have been making pots from this soil for thousands of years. The pueblo people view pottery as a communion with the earth, making the clay and person one.[180]

While making a clay pot, Georgia puts clay on her eyes and references Jesus as healing a blind man by putting mud on his eyes. O'Keeffe was eclectic in her beliefs: even though she attended services at Christ in the Desert for Christmas and Easter, she also attended many Native ceremonies. In the final scene of *Days with Juan*, Georgia asks her nurse to read *Secret of the Golden Flower*, a book popular in Dow's Oriental philosophy of art.

Much of my creative process evolved from walking in O'Keeffe's footsteps from the Art Students League of New York to her Abiquiu home and her Ghost Ranch Studio. I also visited the Research Center of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe where information and inspiration for my play drafts was gathered.

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[180] Tessie Naranjo, "Pueblo Pottery: Continuing a Tradition," *New Mexico*, 1992, 48, https://folklife-media.si.edu.

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APPENDIX A

Artwork by O'Keeffe and Other Artists Cited in Dissertation

Chapter 1

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Taos Pueblo*, 1929, oil on canvas, 24" x 40" (61cm x 101.6 cm), Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, IN, https://www.flickr.com/photos/vcwald/8689510286

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Taos Mountain*, 1930, oil on canvas, 16" x 30" (40.6 cm x 76.2 cm), Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/objects/p.993.62

Chapter 2

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Datura and Pedernal*, 1940, oil on board, 11" x 16 1/8" (27.9 cm x 40.9 cm), Orlando Museum of Art, FL, https://omart.org/artwork/detail/collections/american_art/10/

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Oriental Poppies*, 1930, oil on canvas, 30" x 40" (101.6 cm x 76.2 cm), Frederick R. Weismann Art, Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/oriental-poppies.jsp

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Poppy*, 1927, oil on canvas, 17.8" x 22.9", private collection, New York, NY, https://www.georgiaokeeffe.net/red-poppy.jsp

Georgia O'Keeffe, *D. H. Lawrence Pine Tree*, 1929, oil on canvas, 31" x 39 1/8" (78.7 cm x 99.4 cm), Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT, https://www.thewadsworth.org/the-lawrence-tree/ .

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Gerald's Tree I*, 1937, oil on canvas, 40" x 50 1/8" (101.6 cm x 76.5 cm), Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM, https://collections.okeeffemuseum.org/object/81/

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit I*, 1930, oil on canvas, 12" x 9" (30.5 cm x 22.9 cm), Smithsonian Institution, https://www.si.edu/object/siris_ari_391192

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-Pulpit-No.2*, 1930, oil on canvas, 40" x 30" (101.6 cm x 76.2 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.70177.html

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. 3*, 1930, oil on canvas, 40" x 30" (101.6 cm x 76.2 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.70178.html

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. IV*, 1930, oil on canvas, 40" x 30" (101.6 cm x 76.2 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.70179.html

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-Pulpit Abstraction - No. 5*, 1930, oil on canvas, 48" x 30" (121.9 cm x 76.2 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.70180.html

Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit No. VI*, 1930, oil on canvas, 36" x 18" (91.4 cm x 45.7 cm), National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., https:///www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.70181.html

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APPENDIX B

Letter by Geronimo Gomez, President of the Native American Church, Taos, New Mexico

The letter reproduced below confirms Antonio Lujan's status in the Native American Church and his peyote use.

Mabel D. Lujan is a white lady who married Antonio Luian, of the Taos Pueblo Indians. Antonio Lujan was one time a member of this peyote religion, as well as our old religion in the pueblo. But since he married to this white lady, he lose all his religion. He also belonged to the Catholic Church. But he lose that, too. And today he is fighting against his own religion. Antonio Lujan is an undesirable person who is bad in our pueblo affairs through his wife's advice. We objected of Antonio Lujan buying lands on the Indian ground. Antonio Lujan does not have any money to buy lands. But he buys lands from his wife's money.

Our understanding was that we are not supposed to sell any lands to the outsiders, but this land is being bought by Antonio Lujan on his wife's money. Where does those lands go to? Or to whom does these lands belong to? Taos Pueblo Indians are as a community. Therefore we oppose Antonio Lujan buying lands on our community land.

Mabel D. Lujan does not belong to our pueblo. We do not want her advice whatsoever.

We have self-form of government, and we want to carry it on as we have always been doing. We are the wards of the Government and not the wards of Mabel Lujan.

We appreciate very much to have our request be considered by our White Father in Washington. We appreciate your consideration in the above matter.

Yours truly,

GERONIMO GOMEZ,
President, Native American Church.
JOE SANDOVAL,
Vice President, Native American Church.
TELESFOR ROMERO,
Secretary and Treasurer.

(Reproduced from United States Congress, Committee on Indian Affairs. "Letter by Geronimo Gomez, President of the Native American Church, Taos, New Mexico." *Survey of Conditions of Indians in the United States*, vol. 14, parts 33-34, 18220.)

Days with Juan

A full-length research-based play

By Renata Renee Kessler
Drew University, Madison, New Jersey

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CHARACTERS:

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE
JUAN RUSSELL THOMAS
NOTARY (Charles Ellsworth Jr.)
NURSE MISSY
JOHN POOLE, WAITER

Note: This play is based on research, but the actual characters are fictional, based on a composite of people O'Keeffe knew during her lifetime, and people the playwright knew.

ACT I
SCENE I: GHOST RANCH

Setting: Ghost Ranch, late sunset. Evening stars appear. GEORGIA, a ghost, is on roof of adobe house. A ladder descends into the house and scenery is projected on a large screen at rear of stage. A night sky painting is seen on the screen along with the setting sun and evening star against the purple *Pedernal* mountain and Chimney Rock.

GEORGIA

I sleep up here at night and watch for shooting stars. A flash of light, that's the length of our lives. We never realize how precious our time is. It seems so long and slow in the beginning, like it will last forever and then puff!

GEORGIA pretends she's blowing out a candle.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

It's gone. I didn't waste *my* time. I made the most of things as best I could. I used whatever came along for my art; a bone, a ram's skull, a cow's pelvis. Shell or blossom, disappointment or death, longing or bliss, I painted them all.

GEORGIA points at sky scape projected on screen.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

You see those clouds over yonder by the setting sun? The ghost riders are hunting buffalo, even here, in the hereafter. Their white horses are turning grey. Means rain's going to come soon and my little people Bo and Chia will be dancing around in the puddles and barking for joy.

GEORGIA points to two big rocks projected on a screen above her and the stage lights up.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Even Chimney Rock will be glistening in the morning sun against the big blue. My little piece of heaven! God said if I painted my mountain, *Cerro Pedernal* often enough, I could have it!

(Project painting of *Cerro Pedernal* on scenery screen.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

This is where I wanted to die, but he wouldn't let me. He took me away to Santa Fe and I didn't want to go. *Why did I let him?*

(SOUND: A knock is heard on the door downstairs. JUAN stands outside with a stove.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Who could be knocking on the door at this hour? I better go answer it.
(GEORGIA descends the ladder into the house.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE II: THE HANDYMAN

Setting: Afternoon, at Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico. GEORGIA is in her painting studio. SHE is a very old woman. JUAN is a handsome young man. His long brown hair is tied back in a ponytail. HE wears blue jeans, a blue work shirt, and a tool belt around his waist. GEORGIA wears a colorful housedress and bandana. In her studio there's a long worktable and a big picture window of red cliffs and blue sky. Paintings, rolls of canvas frames, and boxes are stacked against the wall. A large easel with paints, and brushes are near the window. There is a bed and two comfortable chairs. A cow's skull, bones, rocks, seashells, fossils, a decorative Indian bowl with a human skull in it are on table. JUAN has a black stove on a small wagon behind him.

(SOUND: Knock on door.)

JUAN

Is anyone home?

(SOUND: Another knock.)

GEORGIA

Hold your horses. I'm coming!

GEORGIA opens the door.

JUAN

I'm Juan Thomas, ma'am.

GEORGIA

I don't know any such person.

SHE tries to close the door in his face, but HE wedges his foot in it.

JUAN

I'm here with your stove.

GEORGIA

Why didn't you say so?

GEORGIA opens the door.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Aren't you the boy who came last time?

JUAN

Yes. I came to fix your plumbing, but you sent me away.

GEORGIA

Then why did you come back?

JUAN

The office sent me to deliver your stove.

GEORGIA

That sounds like trouble.

JUAN

What kind of trouble?

GEORGIA

It hasn't come yet.

JUAN

I'm just looking for an honest day's work.

GEORGIA

Are you sure?

JUAN

Just hoping to make myself useful, mam.

GEORGIA

Useless?

JUAN

I said, *Useful!*

GEORGIA

You don't have to yell. I might be blind, but I'm not deaf.

JUAN

JUAN rolls his eyes and brings in the stove and sets it down.

Where do you want it?

GEORGIA

Let me see it first.

GEORGIA inspects the stove with her hands.

JUAN

Is it all right?

GEORGIA

This is not the one I ordered from the hardware store.

JUAN

If you don't want it, I can take it back.

GEORGIA

It will do for now.

JUAN

It looks like an antique.

GEORGIA

I ordered something new.

JUAN

The old ones have more character.

GEORGIA

But they don't heat, as well.

JUAN

It's probably a replica. Do you need help setting it up?

GEORGIA

I don't do stoves.

JUAN

I do. Where do you want it?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA points.

Over there, in the corner by the window, where the last one was.

JUAN

JUAN inspects the stove site.

I'll have to enlarge this hole for the new exhaust pipe.

GEORGIA

Just make sure you seal it properly. I don't want any drafts getting in during the winter.

JUAN

You'll be snug as a bug in bed.

GEORGIA

There's some sealer in the drawer.

HE gets out his drill and makes a hole.
SOUND: A loud drilling noise is heard.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

That sounds like a mighty fine drill.

JUAN

It has a diamond drill bit that can cut through anything; brick, concrete, adobe, metal.

GEORGIA

Where'd you get a drill like that?

JUAN

I built my house with it.

(GEORGIA watches him put in the pipe and attach the stove.)

GEORGIA

Around here?

JUAN

In Vermont.

GEORGIA

You're a long way from home, young man.

JUAN

It's not my home anymore.

GEORGIA

Why not?

(JUAN continues drilling.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

You don't have to tell me if you don't want to.

pause

JUAN

HE stops drilling.

What did you say?

GEORGIA

(raises her voice)

What happened to your home?

JUAN
I lost it in a divorce. I'm starting over now.

GEORGIA
I did the same thing after my husband died.

JUAN
Alfred Stieglitz?

GEORGIA
You know him?

JUAN
From *Art News.*

GEORGIA
You read that?

JUAN
I'm a sculptor.

pause

GEORGIA
Can you throw pots?

JUAN
That's my specialty.

GEORGIA
I need a new set of mugs. All the handles broke.

JUAN
I can make you some new ones.

GEORGIA
So you're good with your hands?

JUAN
You could say that.

GEORGIA
Then you can sweep up the mess you made!

JUAN
Do you have a broomstick?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA feels around for the broom and hands it to JUAN.

Yes. I fly around at night on it!

(JUAN takes the broom and sweeps up.)

JUAN

So they don't call you a *bruja* for nothing.

GEORGIA

How dare you say that to me!

JUAN

I heard it in the village.

GEORGIA

They usually don't talk to outsiders.

JUAN

Comprendo espanol.

GEORGIA

So you like to spy on people's conversations?

JUAN

Just getting the lay of the land.

GEORGIA

Seems you've learned a lot in a short time.

JUAN

Heard a heck of a lot of dark legends about *this* place.

GEORGIA

To scare people off, so that they don't bother me!

JUAN

You don't really mean that.

GEORGIA

I like my own company better than anyone else's.

JUAN

Aren't you afraid of those Archuleta brothers?

GEORGIA
There are a lot of feisty spirits around here.

JUAN
A loud howl woke me up last night.

GEORGIA
It must have been crying woman.

JUAN
Why does she cry?

GEORGIA
For her murdered child.

JUAN
Do you believe in ghosts?

GEORGIA
They don't call it Ghost Ranch for nothing.

JUAN
Aren't you afraid to be alone here?

GEORGIA
I'm used to it. Besides, I have Maria, but she's gone on a camping trip to Grand Canyon with her family.

JUAN
Maybe you could use some help in the meantime?

GEORGIA
I have a girl who comes on the weekends.

JUAN
What about the rest of the time?

GEORGIA
I could use someone to do odd jobs, a little bit of this and that.

JUAN
I'm a jack of-all-trades, mam.

GEORGIA
What do you do at the ranch, Jack?

JUAN

I'm Juan.

GEORGIA

What can you do, *Juan*?

JUAN

A little bit of everything.

HE takes the stove pipe out of a box and pushes it through the hole.

GEORGIA

What are you doing?

JUAN

Seeing if the pipe fits.

GEORGIA

And does it?

JUAN

Perfectly.

GEORGIA

Can we try it out?

JUAN

I'm not through yet. I have to check the outside. Do you have any wood?

GEORGIA

In the shed.

JUAN

I'll bring some in.

GEORGIA

I haven't got all day.

JUAN

What's your rush?

GEORGIA

I need some canvases stretched.

JUAN

I can build frames.

GEORGIA

We'll see how you do with the wood. There's an ax in the shed for chopping.

(JUAN exits.)

(SOUND: A loud banging noise is heard outside of GEORGIA's studio. JUAN is splitting logs. GEORGIA sticks her head out the window.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

What a racket! Do you have to be so noisy?

JUAN

Play some music, so that you don't hear me.

GEORGIA

Puts a record on an old-fashioned phonograph.

Maybe this will drown it out.

(GEORGIA hums, sings along, and dances around the room to a country tune, "I'm Your Handy Man" by James Taylor.)

JUAN

(Enters with a pile of wood in his hand. GEORGIA stops humming and dancing.)

What have you been smoking?

GEORGIA

You told me to play some music.

JUAN

I didn't know you were a Country & Western singer.

GEORGIA

Actually, I was hoping to be reincarnated as a blonde opera singer.

JUAN

I didn't know you liked opera.

GEORGIA

I like the open-air one under the stars in Santa Fe.

JUAN

I saw the billboards for *La Boheme* on my way from Albuquerque.

GEORGIA

Do you own a suit?

JUAN

I'm *La Boheme* all the way.

GEORGIA

You'll need a suit.

JUAN

Is that an invitation?

GEORGIA

We'll see.

JUAN

I'll need an advance for the suit if you want me to accompany you.

GEORGIA

You'll have to earn it.

JUAN

I was hoping to. Where do you want this wood?

GEORGIA

Put it down next to the stove.

JUAN

(JUAN picks up some logs and puts them in the stove.)

Do you have any kindling?

GEORGIA

I have a box full of old newspapers.

JUAN

HE picks up a faded newspaper.

You read the *New York Times* book review?

GEORGIA

If there's someone to read it to me.

JUAN

This one is recent.

GEORGIA

Can you read to me?

JUAN

"A new book, Alfred Stieglitz: An American Seer by Dorothy Norman rocks the art world."

GEORGIA

Throw that in the trash! Where it belongs.

(JUAN tucks the controversial newspaper into his pants and covers it with his shirt.)

JUAN

Don't you want to hear about your husband?

GEORGIA

I told you to use it for kindling!

JUAN

(JUAN tears up a different piece of newspaper and lights it.)

It's gone.

GEORGIA

I don't want to hear that woman's name again!

JUAN

I didn't know it was a sore point.

GEORGIA

It was before your time.

JUAN

Would it help to talk about it?

GEORGIA

I've been trying to forget since 1929.

JUAN

Isn't that when you painted *The Lawrence Tree?*

GEORGIA

You know the date?

JUAN

From your retrospective at the Whitney.

GEORGIA

You have a good memory for dates.

JUAN

That painting stands out in my mind.

GEORGIA

How did you like the rest of the exhibit?

JUAN

It was very impressive.

GEORGIA

You're not here to be impressed.

JUAN makes a foul face and hold up his middle finger.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

I saw that.

JUAN

Saw what?

GEORGIA

Your middle finger and that monkey face you made.

JUAN

So you still have some vision?

GEORGIA

Out of the corner of my eye.

JUAN

I'll have to watch out for you.

GEORGIA

And I'll have to do the same.

(JUAN puts logs in the stove.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

I suppose you know how to make a fire.

JUAN

That's how I heated my cabin. Do you have any matches?

GEORGIA

Next to my oil lamp, by the bed.

JUAN tries to strike a match several times.

JUAN

It's not working.

GEORGIA

Get a flame from the gas stove in the kitchen.

JUAN

I have a lighter.

HE pulls it out of his pocket.

GEORGIA

You still smoke those cancer sticks?

JUAN

I gave them up; only Indian tobacco now.

JUAN lights the fire and then rolls a homemade herbal cigarette, lights it. HE takes a puff.

GEORGIA

Smells sweet.

JUAN

It's not the stuff you buy at the store.

JUAN puts the cigarette into her hand and GEORGIA takes a puff.

JUAN (cont'd)

You like it?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA inhales deeply.

It's not white people's tobacco.

JUAN

I'll get you some the next time I'm at the pueblo.

GEORGIA

Reminds me of nights under the Lawrence tree.

JUAN

Is it still standing?

GEORGIA

At the *Kiowa* Ranch.

(GEORGIA smiles at him.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
I studied that tree under the stars all night.

JUAN
So you know your stars?

GEORGIA
I grew up on a farm. We went out on summer nights to see the Big Dipper. Those twinkling lights, I knew all their names. I could see *great* distances in those days.

JUAN
(JUAN hands her the herbal cigarette. GEORGIA takes another puff.)
I had a telescope when I was a kid.

GEORGIA
You'll need more than a telescope to see Kokopelli dancing in the sky between the Big Dipper and Bootes.

JUAN
I saw him!

GEORGIA
Where?

JUAN
He was the Kachina doll you painted, dancing in the snow.

GEORGIA
He visited me in a dream.

JUAN
So now you're possessed by a fertility spirit?

GEORGIA
They don't call him the Casanova of Mesa Verde for nothing. He visits barren women at night and helps them bear children. He changes the winter into spring.

JUAN
And does he visit you?

GEORGIA
He fills me with beautiful paintings.

SHE takes off her bandana and loosens her hair.

JUAN
Be careful! The sparks are flying, might catch your hair on fire.

GEORGIA
Hasn't happened yet.

JUAN
Do you have a screen?

GEORGIA
SHE feels around with her hands for the screen.
Here.

JUAN
I have an idea.
JUAN adjusts the screen.

JUAN (cont'd)
Maybe you'd be good at pottery.

GEORGIA
What makes you say that?

JUAN
You see with your hands.

GEORGIA
I haven't made a pot since grade school.

JUAN
I could show you.

GEORGIA
I don't have any clay.

JUAN
We can get some at the Red Place. Beautiful terracotta dinosaur dust.

GEORGIA
That dust will ruin my paintings!

JUAN
We can set up a studio for you in the shed.

GEORGIA

Where will we put the wood?

JUAN

I can build a lean-to and cover it with a tarp.

GEORGIA

I'll have to think about it.

(smiles)

JUAN

I make beautiful pots.

GEORGIA

Can you stand in the doorway?

JUAN

Why?

GEORGIA

So I can see what you look like.

JUAN

Out of the corner of your eye?

JUAN opens the door and stands in the doorway.

GEORGIA

I'm only three quarters blind. Turn your face to the light.

JUAN turns his head sideways. GEORGIA touches his face. SHE traces the outline of his features with her hands.

JUAN

That tickles.

(HE scratches his nose.)

GEORGIA

Hold still, I want to see what you look like.

JUAN

Am I handsome?

GEORGIA

Let me see your hands.

JUAN stretches them out. GEORGIA touches them.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

They feel strong, capable. Can you do anything else besides looking pretty?

JUAN

Everything. I'm a builder, plumber, sculptor, potter, even secretary.

GEORGIA

Did you finish high school?

JUAN

I have a master's degree in art *y hablo espanol.*

GEORGIA

That would help with the locals.

GEORGIA walks to her drawing table and hands JUAN a box.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Can you straighten out these nails?

JUAN

(HE spills them out on the table.)

It wouldn't cost much to buy another box.

GEORGIA

I can see you didn't grow up during the depression.

JUAN

I'd actually be saving you money. It would cost you far less than paying the amount of time it would take me to straighten them, but I'll do it for free, just for you.

(JUAN starts hammering nails.)

JUAN (cont'd)

What do you need them straightened for, anyway?

GEORGIA

To make my canvases.

JUAN

It's far easier with a heavy-duty stapler.

GEORGIA

Nails are sturdier.

JUAN

HE takes stapler out of his tool box and puts her hand over it.

Try this.

GEORGIA

It feels like a gun.

JUAN

These heavy-duty staples shoot into the frames like nails.

(JUAN shoots the staple gun into the air, his hand over GEORGIA's.)

GEORGIA

GEORGIA takes over the gun and keeps shooting nails with both hands at the ceiling.

Wheeee! This is fun!

JUAN

Take it easy with that gun, Annie Oakley.

GEORGIA keeps shooting staples.

JUAN (cont'd)

Let me have that before you do some serious damage.

GEORGIA

JUAN takes the gun out of her hand.

Can you stretch a canvas with this?

JUAN

I learned how in art school.

GEORGIA

There are frames are in the corner.

JUAN

I've got one.

JUAN takes out his tape measure.

GEORGIA

How big is it?

JUAN

HE measures the canvas.

34 by 46.

GEORGIA

I'll need it to be 48 by 84.

JUAN

Almost as big as a wall.

GEORGIA

This is to paint the red wall with the black door in it.

JUAN picks up some large stretchers and measures them.

JUAN

This should do it.

(JUAN assembles the stretcher bars into a rectangular frame.)

GEORGIA

Hammer the edges together tight. I don't want anything coming apart.

(JUAN pulls a hammer out of his tool belt, and hammers the edges lightly.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

How are the edges?

JUAN

Ninety degrees.

GEORGIA

(JUAN continues to hammer.)

What are you doing now?

JUAN

I'm making a crossbar; it will hold it better.

GEORGIA

We have enough crosses in New Mexico.

JUAN

Trust me. This will make it sturdier.

GEORGIA

You'll have to cut the canvas to fit. See those big rolls standing in the corner?

JUAN opens the roll of canvas on the floor and then lays the stretcher over it.

JUAN

Do you have scissors?

GEORGIA

Look over the table. There should be a big pair of shears there, hanging on the wall.

JUAN

You have everything memorized.

GEORGIA

That's the only way I can find things.

JUAN

I'll put everything back the way it was.

GEORGIA

You'd better.

(GEORGIA puts another record on an old-fashioned gramophone: Bach's cello suite in D minor.

JUAN

Casals?

HE starts cutting the canvas around the edge of the stretchers.

GEORGIA

Yes. I always listen to music when I work.

JUAN

How big do you want the overlap?

GEORGIA

At least four inches overhang. Make sure you pull it tight.

JUAN

JUAN groans.

I am.

GEORGIA

Use pliers.

JUAN

Where are they?

GEORGIA

On the wall, next to the scissors.

(JUAN gets them and stretches the canvas.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

How is it?

JUAN

Very taut.

GEORGIA

Good. I don't want any wrinkles. Let me know when it's done.

JUAN

I'm just getting started.

(Pause. Music plays as Juan stretches.)

GEORGIA

When I was your age, I used to stretch them in half the time.

JUAN

No one could stretch that fast!

GEORGIA

snickers

Why not?

JUAN

looks up from the floor

Do you like giving me a hard time?

GEORGIA

chuckles

Just testing your mettle.

JUAN

You just like busting my chops.

GEORGIA

To see if you're fit for the job you're trying to make for yourself.

JUAN

I like a challenge.

GEORGIA
Make sure you tuck in the edges.

JUAN
How?

GEORGIA
Do you know how to make hospital corners?

JUAN
On my bed.

GEORGIA
Fold the edges like that. Nice and neat.

pause

(JUAN cuts the canvas around the frames and staples, folding the edges.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Let me check your work.

JUAN
(JUAN hands her the canvas and GEORGIA feels it.)
How are my corners?

GEORGIA
Not bad. What about the primer?

JUAN
You didn't mention that.

GEORGIA
You can't expect me to paint a canvas that's not primed.

JUAN
Where's the primer?

GEORGIA
In that white paint can under the table, marked "oil-gesso."

JUAN gets the can. He opens it with a screwdriver, takes a large brush and primes the canvas.

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Which brush are you using?

JUAN

Yours.

GEORGIA

Don’t you dare use any of my good brushes for the primer!

JUAN

Why didn’t you tell me that before?

GEORGIA

Didn’t they teach you anything in *that* art school?

JUAN

Which brush should I use?

GEORGIA

There should be an old horsehair one next to the can.

JUAN

JUAN looks under the table picks up the brush and holds it up.

Which end should I use?

GEORGIA

Not the end I should paddle you with.

JUAN laughs.

JUAN

I probably deserve a good spanking.

GEORGIA

I can tell your parents didn’t do it often enough.

JUAN

JUAN applies primer to the canvas.

It’s thick and creamy.

GEORGIA

Just be careful. Don’t overload the brush with gesso, or it will drip.

JUAN

I wasn’t planning to be *Jackson Pollack.*

JUAN dips the brush and wipes off the excess gesso.

JUAN (cont'd)
This looks about right.

GEORGIA
Now go up and down in one direction. I need a smooth surface.

JUAN goes slowly back and forth with his brush and hums a song in Spanish, *La bruja*.

GEORGIA
Watch out for bubbles.

JUAN
It's very smooth.

GEORGIA
The groundwork is very important.

JUAN
Do you still paint?

GEORGIA
I have to.

JUAN
I have a good eye and a steady hand if you need help laying out your canvas.

GEORGIA
Maybe you can help me with this one when the primer coat dries.

JUAN
I love the smell of turpentine.

GEORGIA
So do I. Now clean the brushes off. I must give you something for this.

GEORGIA pulls a photo out of a draw and hands it to JUAN.

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Have you seen this?

JUAN
Maybe at your retrospective.

GEORGIA
It's a photo Stieglitz took of me in 1927. I'll sign the back for you if you like.

JUAN

I would like.

GEORGIA

GEORGIA signs the back.

What's today's date?

JUAN

September 20th, 1973.

SHE hands him the signed photograph.

GEORGIA

Don't sell it to buy a new suit.

JUAN

Never! I'll always treasure it.

HE kisses photo and puts it in his left shirt pocket.

GEORGIA

It'll be a collectors' item one day.

JUAN

You're still beautiful, you know.

GEORGIA

With all these wrinkles?

JUAN

Your face is like a roadmap of your life.

GEORGIA

Then maybe you can help me lay out a roadmap for my painting.

JUAN

I have some ideas.

GEORGIA

I already know what I want.

JUAN

Just tell me how you want it laid out.

GEORGIA

This will be our secret. Can you come back tomorrow when the gesso dries?

JUAN

JUAN gets out an imaginary pad.

Let me check my busy schedule.

GEORGIA

I hope you're not too busy to clean up after yourself!

JUAN

Where's the turpentine?

GEORGIA

points

There's a clean turp over there.

JUAN

I see it.

JUAN dips the brushes in the turpentine.

GEORGIA

Now dry the brush upside down so it doesn't get bent.

JUAN

Done.

(He sweeps up scraps, puts back equipment, and starts wrapping up his toolbox.)

GEORGIA

Just one more thing---

JUAN

Yes?

GEORGIA

Can you pack paintings?

JUAN

I packed valuable ceramics as a studio assistant and shipped them all over the world.

GEORGIA

I'll be checking your references.

JUAN

I was studio assistant to Henry Takemoto. How many did you say you need packed?

GEORGIA

Just a few more. I'll pay you by the piece so you can buy that new suit.

JUAN

Where are they?

GEORGIA

Over there in the corner.

JUAN

JUAN picks up a painting.

The Jimson Bloom!

GEORGIA

They're beautiful in the moonlight and give off a sweet perfume.

JUAN

I saw them all over your front yard.

GEORGIA

GEORGIA takes a few out of a vase and smells them.

I'll boil them in a mix with herbs to make a wonderful brew.

JUAN

Be careful with that. It can be poisonous.

GEORGIA

I know how to prepare it.

(She inhales the scent of the flowers again.)

JUAN

Where does one learn such things?

GEORGIA

From the *Curanderos.* Might be just the medicine I need tonight to help me dream.

JUAN

Do you have bubble wrap?

GEORGIA

I use blankets. There's a pile of them in the corner.

JUAN begins wrapping the painting in blankets.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Cover it with acid-resist paper first.

JUAN

I'll need the masking tape.

GEORGIA

It's on that wall where you got the scissors.

JUAN gets the tape.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Are you using the acid-resist?

JUAN

Which one is that?

GEORGIA

The smaller roll.

JUAN measures the canvas.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

What are you doing?

JUAN

I'm measuring, so that everything fits right.

GEORGIA

Don't forget the cardboard.

JUAN

Where is it pray-tell?

GEORGIA

In the closet.

JUAN covers the painting with acid resist paper front and back. HE takes a knife out of his pocket and cuts the cardboard to size.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Does it fit?

JUAN

Perfectly, and the blankets are snug around your babies.

GEORGIA

That's what Stieglitz used to call my work. He said I was pregnant with creation.

JUAN puts two paintings in a large box.

JUAN

This box fits two.

GEORGIA

Which two?

JUAN

The *Lawrence Tree* and the *Jimson Blooms.* I can't believe I'm actually handling them!

GEORGIA

Be careful!

JUAN

I can just imagine what they're worth.

GEORGIA

Never mind what they're worth!

JUAN

They're priceless.

GEORGIA

Make sure you fill the airspace with the old newspapers next to the stove. I don't want anything rattling around.

JUAN

Don't you use bubble wrap?

GEORGIA

I've been packing them this way for sixty years; no reason to change now.

JUAN

That's how the museums are packing them.

GEORGIA

I don't care what the museums are doing. All this plastic will poison the earth!

JUAN

Where are these going?

GEORGIA

The New Mexico Museum of Art.

JUAN

Excelente!

GEORGIA

Where did you learn Spanish?

JUAN

My parents moved to Latin America when I was young. They were missionaries.

GEORGIA

Is that where you became *Juan?*

JUAN

That's what they called me at school and it just stuck.

GEORGIA

It sounds like a name that kids make up when they play pirates, but I like it.

JUAN

I like yours too, Mrs. Stieglitz,

GEORGIA

I'm Ms. O'Keeffe to you.

JUAN

That's fine with me, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Do you always talk back to your elders?

JUAN

Only the young ones.

GEORGIA

Maybe you can use some of that charm to sell paintings.

JUAN

Like Stieglitz?

GEORGIA

His charm turned into dollars.

JUAN

I can hang them for you. I've got a good eye.

GEORGIA

Is that how you're going to support yourself, young man?

JUAN

I'm a man of many talents.

GEORGIA

That's good to know in case the new girl doesn't work out.

JUAN

I thought you needed *me*?

GEORGIA

I'll need you during the week. The new girl is here on weekends.

(JUAN picks up a book on the table and opens it.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

She's going to put my favorite books on tape. That's how I read these days.

(JUAN checks out the bookshelves on the wall.)

JUAN

I can do that for you.

GEORGIA

You're here to do odd jobs, packing my paintings, and stretch my canvases.

JUAN

sighs

Is there anything else?

GEORGIA

There is just one more thing-----

JUAN

What is it *now*?

GEORGIA

About the Jimsonweed outside.

JUAN

Sticks his head out the window.

It's taking over the house.

GEORGIA

I keep trying to get rid of it, but it keeps coming back. It's smarter than all of us. Maybe if you help me cut it down, people will stop talking.

JUAN

Maybe if you stop talking to me, I can finish packing this crate.

GEORGIA
A box full of memories. I want them done well. I won't accept sloppy work.

JUAN
I told you, I know how to take care of artwork.

GEORGIA
I'll depend on it. Just one more thing---
Do you drink?

JUAN
Not anymore.

GEORGIA
Why not?

JUAN
It causes too many problems.

GEORGIA
Are you an alcoholic?

JUAN
Why do you ask?

GEORGIA
I had a feeling---

JUAN
I saw Christ in the Desert and got saved.

GEORGIA
So you've got religion now?

JUAN
I dried out with the monks at the monastery.

GEORGIA
Don't they make beer?

JUAN
The brewery was off-limits to me.

GEORGIA
The Abbot is my personal friend. Don't ever drink before you come here or bring alcohol. I don't pay for bad work, or for injuries.

JUAN

You'll never regret hiring me.

GEORGIA

Furthermore, make sure you wear clean clothes and take a shower before you come here. No bare feet. I don't want people to think I'm running a commune.

JUAN

Noted.

GEORGIA

I'll pay you what they do at the ranch; not a penny more.

JUAN

You drive a hard bargain, Ms. O'Keeffe.

GEORGIA

What's your real name, not your nickname?

JUAN

I was baptized John Russell Thomas.

GEORGIA

I'm going to ask the director about you.

JUAN

He knows everything about me.

pause

JUAN (cont'd)

He's a friend of my father's.

GEORGIA

It figures.

JUAN

Can I see the shed again?

GEORGIA

Why?

JUAN

To see where a kiln would fit.

GEORGIA

I haven't agreed to that.

JUAN

I though you wanted-----

GEORGIA

I said I would think about it.

(SOUND: scratching and whining at door)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

That must be my dogs. Can you let them in?

(HE opens door.)

JUAN

JUAN rolls on floor, laughs, and plays affectionately with the dogs. Sound of dogs continues. Blocking obscures the fact that dogs really are not onstage.

What are their names?

GEORGIA

Bo and Chia. Since they love you, you've got the job.

JUAN

Do you always let your animals do the hiring?

GEORGIA

I always consult with my dogs about important decisions.

(Lights fade. GEORGIA walks to the front of the stage a spotlight is on her.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

I shouldn't have let him in, but it seemed like the right thing at the time.

(End of scene.)

SCENE III: THE POTTERY

Setting: Ghost Ranch, a few months later. A large table with a huge white circular revolving plate. A potter's wheel is right and a kiln on the left. Shelves are filled with pots, glazes, tools, and sculptures.

JUAN

What are you doing?

GEORGIA

I'm putting clay on my eyes.

JUAN

Are you giving yourself a facial?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA presses the clay to her eyes with both hands.

No dummy.

JUAN

Looks like a mud pack.

GEORGIA

I hate those things!

JUAN

Be careful of your eyes.

GEORGIA

Jesus healed a blind man like this.

JUAN

Are you getting religious on me?

GEORGIA

I'll try anything at this point.

JUAN

pointing to the view

I thought you believed in *this.*

GEORGIA

It's all the same thing.

JUAN takes the clay off GEORGIA's eyes and gently puts it in her hands.

JUAN

Well, the Gospel of *St. Juan* says, just roll the sausages into snakes.

(JUAN puts his hands over GEORGIA's and rolls the clay with her hands.)

JUAN (cont'd)

Keep rolling it into a long snake.

GEORGIA hisses.

JUAN

I'm scared.

GEORGIA

You should be, I have a collection.

JUAN

Just keep rolling.

GEORGIA

I haven't done this since I was in grade school. I made a coil pot.

JUAN

This isn't so different. Just keep it moist.

HE dips her hand into a cup of water and sprinkles it on the clay.

JUAN (cont'd)

Now twist it into a circle.

GEORGIA

Like this?

JUAN

Is that the size you want?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA traces the round shape with her hands.

That should make a nice size bowl.

JUAN

Score it on the edges.

GEORGIA

How do you do that?

JUAN

HE cuts off the ends with a wire, puts a scoring knife in her hand and guides it.

Cut off the ends and make little Xes like this for bonding,

GEORGIA

Like tic-tac-toe.

JUAN

Almost. Now bond them together and make a few more.

GEORGIA

I need some more clay.

JUAN

Here's another lump.

HE pounds it and kneads it like dough.

GEORGIA

What are you doing?

JUAN

I'm kneading it.

GEORGIA

What are we making?

JUAN

Pancakes. Now roll out the dough about a quarter of an inch thick.

GEORGIA

JUAN puts a dough roller in Georgia's hands.

Where'd you get this?

JUAN

I borrowed it from the kitchen.

GEORGIA

You're ruining my good roller!

JUAN

HE stands over her, guiding her hands over the roller.

We'll clean it when we're through.

GEORGIA
Whatever I make with it will always taste like clay.

JUAN
Just relax.

GEORGIA
Stop telling me to relax. It irritates me.

JUAN
Stop being a curmudgeon.

GEORGIA
If you had to sit in the dark, you'd be a curmudgeon too!

JUAN
Let's roll together.

HE puts his hands over hers.

JUAN (cont'd)
Like this.

GEORGIA
Let's make flapjacks.

JUAN
With syrup.

GEORGIA
And sausages.

JUAN
Now use your hands and roll the pancake into sausages.

GEORGIA
I'm getting hungry.

JUAN
Keep rolling.

GEORGIA
Is it time for lunch yet?

JUAN
Not yet. Roll the sausages into little snakes. Coil them around into a circle and cut off the ends.

GEORGIA

Am I doing it right?

JUAN

Now score them.

(GEORGIA picks up the scoring knife and JUAN` cuts ends.)

GEORGIA

These remind me of baby rattlers.

SHE hisses.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Sssssssss

JUAN

You sound just like one too.

GEORGIA

It takes one, to know one.

JUAN hisses into her ear.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

That tickles.

JUAN

Isn't that what you like?

GEORGIA

It itches. I can't scratch my ear with my hands full of clay.

HE scratches her ear with his finger.

JUAN

Is that better?

GEORGIA

A little more.

HE scratches her ear again.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

That's better. What do I do next?

JUAN

Make another circle and continue stacking them.

GEORGIA
stacks them
How's this?

JUAN
Looking good. Now bond the seams together with your fingers, smoothly, so they can't be seen.
HE dips her fingers into the water.

JUAN (cont'd)
Keep it tight and moist, or else there will be bubbles.

GEORGIA
And then what will happen?

JUAN
They will explode.

GEORGIA
I'll have to get you a new kiln.

JUAN
Trust me, at eighteen hundred degrees you wouldn't want that to happen. The flames would take everything.

GEORGIA
You'll have to check my work, so that won't happen. I'm blind.
HE turns her put around on the revolving stand.

GEORGIA (cont'd)
How does it look?

JUAN
It looks good. How does it feel?

GEORGIA
SHE puts her hand inside the pot.
Deep and smooth.

JUAN
(JUAN puts his hand in the pot over hers.)
Now it needs to dry for a few days before baking.

GEORGIA
Can we try the wheel today?

JUAN

It’s been waiting for you.

GEORGIA stands up. JUAN takes her hand and guides her to a stool at the pottery wheel.

JUAN (cont’d)

Now spread your legs and put one leg on each side of the wheel.

GEORGIA

That’s not very lady-like.

JUAN

I’m not looking.

GEORGIA

Are you sure? I know your type.

JUAN

I’m just looking for the right clay.

HE puts a wedge of clay in the center of the wheel.

GEORGIA

What color is it?

JUAN

New Mexico red.

GEORGIA

SHE smells the clay.

Dinosaur mud.

JUAN

Now we’re going to wedge it.

GEORGIA

What’s that?

JUAN

To make it pliable. Put both hands on the clay and move it toward you. Roll it into a cylinder.

GEORGIA

Am I doing it right?

JUAN
A little more force. Sprinkle a little water.

GEORGIA
What are we making?

JUAN
Dinosaur bread.

GEORGIA
Will we turn into lizards if we eat it?

JUAN
We'll have to try it and find out.

GEORGIA
Are we going to bake it?

JUAN
We're going to use it to make something.

GEORGIA
Where did you get the clay?

JUAN
From the red place.

GEORGIA
I used to paint there.

JUAN
Now we're going to use *that* earth to make art.

JUAN puts his hands over hers.

JUAN (cont'd)
Let's center the clay on the wheel.

HE sits in back of GEORGIA, putting a leg on each side of her and guides her hands on the clay.

JUAN (cont'd)
What should we make?

GEORGIA
I need a tall vase.

JUAN
Center it. Now put take both thumbs and poke a hole.

GEORGIA
Is this deep enough?

JUAN
Let's spin it, slowly, carefully. Support the side. One hand in the hole, and one on the outside.

GEORGIA
The clay spins into a high form.
It's rising. Feels slippery.

JUAN
Keep it wet.

GEORGIA
It's getting big.

JUAN
Narrow it at the neck.

GEORGIA
Is this high enough?
(HE puts her hand deep in the vase.)

JUAN
How do you want the lip?

GEORGIA
Wavy, like flower petals.

JUAN
Let's cut off the hump and turn it around first.

GEORGIA
The hump?

JUAN
The part we don't want, the extra clay.
HE takes a wire and removes it.

GEORGIA
We can use it for the next time.

JUAN

You'll sign on the bottom.

HE hands her a tool.

JUAN (cont'd)

Scratch it in with the needle.

GEORGIA

I never sign my paintings.

JUAN

Just your initials.

GEORGIA

Okay just this once. G-O-K

JUAN

That's it. Now let's turn it around and play with the lip until it's a shape that pleases you.

GEORGIA

Bends the edges.

How does that look?

JUAN

Like a water-lily.

HE guides her hand over the edges.

JUAN (cont'd)

Is that what you want?

GEORGIA

Do you like it?

JUAN

It looks good.

GEORGIA

When can you fire it?

JUAN

When it dries leather-hard in 2 or 3 days.

GEORGIA

And glaze?

JUAN

After it's bone dry from the kiln. What color do you want it?

GEORGIA

Azure, like the sky.

JUAN

And the inside?

GEORGIA

Flaming, like the red *chile ristras* hanging from the houses.

JUAN

We'll glaze it together when it's dry.

GEORGIA

Juan.

JUAN

Yes.

GEORGIA

Can we take a ride to the black place tomorrow? I love it when we go places.

(End of scene.)

SCENE IV: THE BLACK PLACE

Setting: Project O'Keeffe's painting of the Black Place on screen. It is a few months later. A pool of water is at stage left. It is a hot summer afternoon.

GEORGIA

(SOUND: Recording of hissing snake-like sounds)

Do you hear that?

JUAN

Ssssss

GEORGIA

Pound the cane!

HE beats the ground with it.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

It's the rattlers approaching. They'll hear us and get out of the way.

JUAN

Are you afraid of them?

GEORGIA

I had to kill some to protect my little people. I've got a collection. Hold on to the dogs!

JUAN

I've got them, don't worry, and I have you.

GEORGIA

You've got a steady arm.

JUAN

Which way?

GEORGIA

Keep walking to the hills.

JUAN

Looks like a valley of elephants.

GEORGIA

Then we're here.

JUAN

This place is ominous.

GEORGIA
The Navajos used to come here to die.

JUAN
I can see why. It's bleak.

GEORGIA
Doesn't bother me. Seems like a good place to be buried.

JUAN
Do you want a plain pine box made to order?

GEORGIA
Your humor is very dark.

HE pulls an imaginary tape measure out of his pocket.

JUAN
Let me take your measurements.

GEORGIA
I'm not ready to go yet.

JUAN
Well let me know when you are.

GEORGIA
A box is much too confining.

JUAN
So how do you want to do it?

GEORGIA
I want my ashes scattered on the *Pedernal*, the mountain G-d said I could have.

JUAN
You two must have a very special relationship.

GEORGIA
He said if I painted it often enough, it was mine. That where I want my ashes scattered.

JUAN
Do you need someone to do it for you?

GEORGIA
I can't trust my sisters to follow directions.

JUAN

You'll outlive them.

GEORGIA

How do you know that?

JUAN

Only the good die young.

JUAN tickles her. GEORGIA laughs.

GEORGIA

Don't you have any respect for your elders?

JUAN

You're ageless, my dear.

(JUAN kisses GEORGIA's hand.)

GEORGIA

Soon I'll belong to the ages.

JUAN

You know the people in town'll talk about a younger man keeping company with an older woman.

GEORGIA

They already do. The servants tell me everything.

.

JUAN

Doesn't it bother you?

GEORGIA

When a man has a younger woman, no one notices, except with envy.

JUAN

Everyone is gossiping about us.

GEORGIA

I put a stop to it already.

JUAN

How did you manage that?

GEORGIA

I donated funds to build a gymnasium and community center for their children. Now I can do no wrong.

JUAN

But they don't like me.

GEORGIA

Because you were chosen, and not them.

(THEY walk along.)

JUAN

Stieglitz chose me.

GEORGIA

How do you know that?

JUAN

Because I was born the year he died.

GEORGIA

You weren't the only one.

JUAN

Do you believe in dreams?

GEORGIA

I believe you were sent to me.

JUAN

I had a dream when I was camping up at Lake George, a spirit came out of the mist over the lake and directed me here.

GEORGIA

It took you long enough to get here.

JUAN

I needed time to grow up.

GEORGIA

You're not done growing yet.

JUAN

What's that over there?

GEORGIA

There used to be a waterfall up there.

(SHE points.)

JUAN

A million years ago?

GEORGIA

Not that long, when I first came out here to paint in my Model A, I made it into a portable studio. Loaded it up with brushes, paint, canvas, food and water. We showered in the waterfall.

JUAN

How long did you camp for?

GEORGIA

A week or longer. Maria and I picked up all kinds of bones, pebbles, and stones to bring back. I painted with my clothes off.

JUAN

You must have gotten burnt.

GEORGIA

We baked like cookies and fasted on Vodka and oranges. It was heaven!

JUAN

You've got a wild streak, old lady!

(JUAN kisses her on the cheek.)

JUAN (cont'd)

My old lady.

GEORGIA

We were original bohemians; the real thing, long before you hippies came along.

JUAN

Can I ask you a personal question?

GEORGIA

SHE nods.

I've been very open with you.

JUAN

Was there anyone after Stieglitz?

GEORGIA

You have some nerve asking me that!

JUAN

I thought we were close enough---

GEORGIA

You're trespassing.

JUAN

It's hot as hell here. Is there a place to swim?

GEORGIA

(Project a photo of a hot spring on stage.)

By the hot springs over there. It's good for my arthritis, but I didn't bring my suit.

JUAN

Isn't there a place where no one could see us?

JUAN carries her to a pool of water, and puts her in.

JUAN (cont'd)

How's the water?

GEORGIA

I can't believe it! I don't feel any pain.

JUAN

That's what hot springs are for.

GEORGIA

The locals say these minerals and Sulphur work miracles.

JUAN

HE takes off his jeans, jumps in and splashes her. SOUND: water splashing.

Bless you my child!

GEORGIA

Watch out for my eyes!

JUAN

Stop being such an old fuddy-duddy.

GEORGIA

Stop being a brat!

JUAN

I'm the one that has to jump when you call me.

GEORGIA

Not anymore.

JUAN
We're busy getting ready to move to Santa Fe.

GEORGIA
Why are you moving so far away?

JUAN
It's closer to schools and hospitals. Marcelee is pregnant.

GEORGIA
Are you going to marry her?

JUAN
You told me to. Don't you remember?

GEORGIA
I let you into my deepest most secret places.

JUAN
You told me to have a family. You can't have babies.

GEORGIA
You're my baby.
(SHE caresses his face.)

JUAN
Now you can be a grandma.

GEORGIA
It's going to be very lonely here.

JUAN
Then move to Santa Fe with us.

GEORGIA
I can't do that. This is my home. I want to die here.

JUAN
Do you want your hair washed, the way we used to?

GEORGIA
I love having my scalp massaged.
(JUAN pretends to lather GEORGIA's hair.)

JUAN
Aren't you glad I remembered the shampoo?

GEORGIA
Mmmm, Rub the suds in.

JUAN
Now lean back in the water for a rinse.
GEORGIA floats on her back.

JUAN (cont'd)
Don't worry. I've got you.

GEORGIA
Juan---

JUAN
Yes---

GEORGIA
I'll hardly ever see you anymore.

JUAN
I can't drop everything whenever you call. Santa Fe is a long drive.

GEORGIA
Then don't leave.

JUAN
Why don't you move in with us? You'll have your own room.

GEORGIA
Abiquiu is my home. I don't want to go anywhere else.

JUAN
You'd be closer to hospitals and good doctors in Santa Fe.
GEORGIA's teeth start chattering.

JUAN (cont'd)
What's wrong?

GEORGIA
I'm starting to get cold. Hospitals are such awful places.

JUAN
We'll hire you a nurse.

GEORGIA
It's too expensive.

JUAN

It’s not up to you. I’m in charge now.

GEORGIA

I don’t remember giving you the right—

JUAN

You don’t remember a lot of things. That’s why I want you to come home with us, so we can take care of you.

GEORGIA

Why do you have to marry the poor thing?

JUAN

Her name is Marcelee. She’s going to be my wife.

GEORGIA

I can’t stand the thought.

JUAN

You told me I needed someone after you’re gone. Why can’t you be happy for us?

GEORGIA

I am, but I hate being alone.

JUAN

Put your arms around me and we’ll get you changed.

GEORGIA

My clothes are soaking wet.

JUAN

I have some of your clothes in the truck.

GEORGIA

Why?

JUAN

I packed a suitcase for you.

HE picks GEORGIA up, wraps a towel around her, and carries her to the car.

GEORGIA

Take me home!

JUAN

I am.

GEORGIA

To Ghost Ranch that's where I live.

JUAN

It's only for a few days. You're getting awfully light. We're going to have to fatten you up. Marcelee is a great cook!

GEORGIA

I don't want to go!

JUAN

Don't you want to be at the opening of your show? It'll just be for a little while.

GEORGIA

That's what they always say in the beginning.

JUAN

Don't you want to oversee the hanging of your show?

GEORGIA

I always lock horns with the curator.

JUAN

I'll hang it myself, just for *you!*

(Lights fade, spotlight on GEORGIA centerstage)

GEORGIA

I shouldn't have gone with him *then,* but I did.

(End of scene.)

SCENE V: THE MUSEUM

Setting: New Mexico Museum, Santa Fe, several months later. Georgia is seated in a courtyard café. She is wearing dark glasses and a flowered wrap-around dress. Juan has on a white suit. His hair is in a long ponytail. He is unshaven and sports a bristly dark beard. Juan is standing on a ladder and hanging Stieglitz's photos on the courtyard wall.

GEORGIA

(SHE takes off her dark glasses and wipes her forehead.)

I don't need them. They don't do any good anyway.

JUAN

(hanging a panting across the room)

What did you say?

GEORGIA

I said, I don't like looking like Hellen Keller. What the hell are you hanging now?

JUAN

Be patient, I'll be through soon.

GEORGIA

I can't hear you. Speak *louder!*

JUAN

I'm not a miracle worker.

GEORGIA

You didn't answer my question.

JUAN

I'm hanging Dorothy Norman.

GEORGIA

She should be hanged!

JUAN

I'm just following the original 1930s catalogue.

GEORGIA

Stieglitz only hung her because Dorothy paid the rent.

JUAN

It's a nice photograph.

GEORGIA

Does she have clothes on?

JUAN

It's a portrait.

GEORGIA

Take it down!

JUAN

It's in the catalogue. You don't need another lawsuit.

GEORGIA

Don't tell me what I need.

JUAN

I'm just trying to protect you.

GEORGIA

Maybe it's you I need to be protected from!

JUAN

If that's the way you feel, I'll----

(JUAN gets off the ladder.)

GEORGIA

See how far you get without me, you and that pregnant----

JUAN

I've turned myself inside out to please you.

GEORGIA walks toward the ladder and starts climbing.

JUAN (cont'd)

What the hell are you doing?

GEORGIA

GEORGIA pulls the portrait of Dorothy off the wall.

I should have done this years ago!

JUAN

Get down from there. You'll break your neck!

GEORGIA
The lord helps those who help themselves.

GEORGIA starts to lose her balance on the ladder.

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Juan!

JUAN
JUAN rushes over and catches GEORGIA.

The *Lord* just caught you.

GEORGIA
I thought you were going to quit me.

JUAN
You can't be trusted by yourself.

GEORGIA
And *you, you* just ruined a perfectly good lawsuit.

JUAN
What are you talking about?

GEORGIA
I could have had something to hold over their heads if they try to sue me for changing the exhibit.

JUAN
Aren't you having enough legal problems?

JUAN carries GEORGIA back to her seat and puts her down.

JUAN (cont'd)
Now stay put, before you get into any more trouble.

GEORGIA
The trouble is Dorothy, not me.

JUAN
Let me hang her portrait.

GEORGIA
clutches the portrait to her breast

No!

JUAN

I'll tell you what….I'll hang Dorothy there, in the corner, next to the toilet, so no one can see.

GEORGIA

That's where she belongs!

(GEORGIA loosens her grip on the portrait and JUAN hangs it in a dark corner.)

JUAN

Apparently, *Stieglitz* didn't think so.

GEORGIA

He would have never looked at her if it wasn't for the money.

JUAN

Is that so?

GEORGIA

People had no money to buy paintings during the depression.

JUAN

They were too busy jumping out of windows.

GEORGIA

That's very glib.

JUAN

I thought it was humorous.

GEORGIA

Of course you would! Your generation never learned the value of money.

JUAN

I'm working hard for mine.

GEORGIA

Can you move the *Jimson Weed* next to the entrance?

JUAN

This is the fifth time you changed your mind!

GEORGIA

I'm trying to figure out the best place.

JUAN

Let me do the figuring. You don't see so well anymore.

GEORGIA

I see them in my mind. The last few places didn't seem quite right.

JUAN

How much longer are we going to do this?

GEORGIA

Until it feels right.

JUAN

Then make up your mind about what right is!

JUAN takes down the painting, moves the ladder, and begins to hang it across from entrance.

GEORGIA

No over here.

SHE points to the wall closest to the table.

JUAN

One needs the patience of a Sa-----

GEORGIA

Can't you make me happy? This could be my last show.

JUAN

It seems that's all that I do.

JUAN moves the ladder and painting, yet another time.

GEORGIA

How far off the floor is it?

JUAN

gets his tape measure out of his back pocket and measures

About sixty inches.

GEORGIA

Move it down to fifty-seven for short people and children.

(JUAN lowers the painting.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
I want everyone to enjoy it. How many inches between the photos?

JUAN
JUAN measures the distance.
Two.

GEORGIA
That sounds too cramped. Give them some breathing room.

JUAN
How many inches?

GEORGIA
About six, I don't want them fighting each other.

JUAN
JUAN separates the photos against the wall.
They want to be connected. How about three inches?

GEORGIA
Try five.
(JUAN changes the spacing and lines them up along the wall.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
They need a lot of space, like me.

JOHN
(JOHN enters wearing a bright lavender T-shirt with museum insignia and left earring)
A phone call for you, Ms. O'K----

GEORGIA
From whom?

JOHN
Andy Warhol.

JUAN
I'll take it. Where's the phone?

JOHN
HE puts his hand over his heart.
Andy honeeey!

JUAN

Stop crooning and bring me the phone.

JOHN

JOHN puckers his lips.

Yes sweetlips.

As JOHN exits, JUAN imitates him.

JUAN

Andy, honeey! What a groupie! Did you hear what he called me?

GEORGIA

Sweetlips. I think it's cute.

(JUAN puts his finger in his mouth as if to vomit.)

What does Andy want?

JUAN

Maybe he's coming to the opening.

GEORGIA

Maybe you can sell him a painting.

JUAN

I'm not Stieglitz.

GEORGIA

Certainly not!

JUAN

picks up a photo of Stieglitz

But I do look like him.

GEORGIA

You're not at all alike!

JOHN brings an extension.

JOHN

Here you go, dear.

JUAN

I'm not *your* dear.

JOHN

The phone is for Ms. O'Keeffe.

JUAN

(JOHN hands GEORGIA the phone. JUAN grabs the receiver.)

Hello, Andy?
How nice of you to call.
This is Georgia's assistant, Juan.

pause

GEORGIA

He wants to talk to me!

JUAN

Shhh, Georgia. I can't hear.
We won't sell it. Yes. We'll save the purple petunias for you, *sweetie.*

GEORGIA

I thought he wanted the white ones.

JUAN

Purple matches his décor.

JOHN

(JOHN points to his lavender T-shirt.)

Matches mine too.

GEORGIA

Where is he calling from?

JUAN

Sush! I can't hear

pause

JUAN (cont'd)

You're in Santa Fe?

GEORGIA

Invite him to stay with us.

JUAN

(He covers the receiver.)

Shhh! He's with his boyfriend.

GEORGIA

So what?

JUAN

You don't want people to think we're running a free-for-all!

GEORGIA
Since when did you become so conservative?

JUAN
I'm thinking about my children.

GEORGIA
They're not even here yet.

JUAN
I'm thinking about their futures.

JUAN uncovers phone.

Georgia is delighted!
Her opening is Thursday evening.
Six to eight at the New Mexico Museum.
On the plaza.
Yes, of course.

pause

Ah—huh. We look forward to seeing you then.

GEORGIA
Give me the phone, G-d dam it!

GEORGIA grabs the phone from Juan.

This is Georgia, hello? Hello?
He hung up.

JUAN
We just finished talking.

GEORGIA
Why didn't you let me talk to him?

JUAN
You will later, he's going to interview us.

GEORGIA
That boy is going to go far. I should be interviewing him.

JUAN
What's so great about Marilyn Monroe in drag?

GEORGIA
I hope you're not going to say that in front of Andy.

JOHN
I don't mean to eavesdrop, but, Andy as Marilyn, now that's clever!

. JUAN
Who asked you?

GEORGIA
Mind your manners, Juan.

JOHN smiles.

JOHN
Warhol's painting is a commentary on Leonardo as the Mona Lisa.

GEORGIA
I never thought of it that way.

JOHN
I studied art history in *Florence.*

JUAN
Gay art history.

GEORGIA
Gays have made a great contribution to the arts.

(JUAN rolls his eyes.)

JOHN
The boy who modelled for that statue of David was one of his favorites.

GEORGIA
I don't doubt it.

JOHN
It was common knowledge at the Academy where I studied.
What would you like to drink?

JUAN
What have you got?

JOHN
Beer, wine, soda, tea, coffee.

GEORGIA
Do you have water?

JOHN
Mineral water. Sparkling or plain?

GEORGIA
I'll have some plain.

JOHN
What will it be for you, my friend?

JUAN
I'm not your friend!

GEORGIA
I'm sorry, but he forgot his manners at home.

JUAN sticks out his tongue and makes a face.

GEORGIA (cont'd)
Don't mind him. He hasn't grown up yet.

JOHN

JOHN puts his hand on his hip.

Children are charming, aren't they?

JUAN
I need a beer.

JOHN writes down the order.

GEORGIA
You won't go far with those.

JUAN
I only have one every now and then.

GEORGIA
There's a sea of beer cans in your studio.

JUAN
How do you know?

GEORGIA
The housekeeper tells me everything.

JUAN
I was saving them to weld together, so I can make a social statement like Andy Warhol.

GEORGIA
Andy will go far with those soup cans.

JUAN

What about me?

GEORGIA

You won't get too far with those beer cans.

JUAN

Not if you can help it.

GEORGIA

Didn't you give up drinking?

JUAN

For a while. I need you to motivate me again.

GEORGIA

Didn't I acknowledge you in my book?

JUAN

I need to be acknowledged in the exhibit.

GEORGIA

You'll be acknowledged in the exhibition catalogue as curator.

JUAN

But I want you to help me with my work!

GEORGIA

Didn't I let you set up a pottery studio in my shed?

JUAN

That was for you!

GEORGIA

For both of us.

JUAN

Then why didn't you let me put some of my pots in the show?

GEORGIA

You're not ready. You haven't figured out what you want to say yet.

JUAN

I would have been happy with just one piece in it. One piece would have encouraged me.

GEORGIA
It's not about one piece. It's about developing one's craft, creating a body of work; not making an impression.

JUAN
I'm too busy doing your work; driving you around, running every time you call.

GEORGIA
I was driven when I was your age. I taught all day, and when I came home, I painted all night. That's when I could afford to buy paint. Most of the time, I had to work in charcoal.

JUAN
Stieglitz gave you a break. When will I get mine?

GEORGIA
(Project painting of *From a Day with Juan* next to Washington Memorial Picture.)
I'll bend the contract, and we'll put up Days with Juan, one, two, three and four in your honor, and for all those beautiful young men who died in the war. Will that make you happy?

JUAN
Those paintings will be like our four children.

GEORGIA
That's the kind of thing Stieglitz would say to me until Dorothy got pregnant.

JUAN
There's no danger of that.
JUAN raises his voice.

JUAN (cont'd)
Why can't you bend the contract for one of my pots?

GEORGIA
I already explained it to you.
(JOHN enters and brings a water for GEORGIA and a coke for JUAN.)

JUAN
What's this, a Shirley Temple? I ordered a beer?

GEORGIA
GEORGIA winks at JOHN.
You don't need one.

JUAN

You're a real ball breaker, *vieja*!

HE slams his first on the table. GEORGIA remains composed and keeps a poker face.

GEORGIA

Lots of young men would be happy to be in your position.

JUAN

You're embarrassing me in front of the waiter.

GEORGIA

You're embarrassing yourself.

JOHN

You two argue like an old married couple. It's endearing.

JUAN

We're secretly married.

GEORGIA

One husband was enough for me. We're just friends.

JUAN

Friendship is highly underrated these days.

JOHN

Is there something else can I get you, sir?

JUAN

Are you still serving lunch?

JOHN

It's tea time. We have desserts.

GEORGIA

I don't want dessert!

JOHN

How about some fresh raspberries?

JUAN

looks at menu

That sounds nice.

GEORGIA
Why should I eat them here when we have them growing in Abiquiu?

JUAN
We're here now.

GEORGIA
I can't wait to get home.

JUAN
I'm sure you don't want to miss your opening here.

JOHN
What would you like, sir?

JUAN
I'll have a *Café Ole* and a raspberry tart.

GEORGIA
I can bake that for you at home. There are raspberries all over the yard.

JUAN
You're living in Santa Fe now, with us.

GEORGIA
How did I ever agree to that?

JOHN
Will there be anything else?

GEORGIA
I'll have some *flan.* What's your name young man?

JOHN
John, John Poole. I'm a big fan of your work.

GEORGIA
Are you an artist?

JOHN
I'm a painter. This is my day job.

GEORGIA
I might need a studio assistant; someone's who's good with a palette knife and knows color.

JUAN

You have *me* for that.

GEORGIA

You won't have time for me when the babies come.

JUAN

HE takes Georgia's hand.

You know better than that.

JOHN

I'll be happy to assist in any way I can. Here's my card if you need me.

JUAN

I'll take that. Georgia might lose it.

(JUAN takes the card and puts in his pocket.)

JOHN

Anything else?

GEORGIA

Some herb tea, please.

JOHN

I'll see what we have.

JOHN exits.

JUAN

Why are you giving my job away?

GEORGIA

I thought you might be too busy to have time for me.

JUAN

What gives you that idea?

GEORGIA

You're always complaining.

JUAN

I'm not the only curmudgeon around here.

GEORGIA

What about when the babies come?

JUAN

HE touches her cheek tenderly.

You'll be a grandma.

GEORGIA

What will you live on when I'm not here to help you?

JUAN

Having something in the exhibit will give me a jump start.

GEORGIA

I suppose a grandma has to help.

JOHN enters with a tea tray.

JOHN

Here you are, your *Jimson* tea, I mean *Jasmine.*

JOHN pours tea into GEORGIA's cup.

JUAN

JUAN grabs the teapot.

Don't get wise. I'll take care of that.

JUAN finishes pouring the tea.

JOHN

Freudian slip, sorry.

JUAN makes a face.

JUAN

It's showing, your slip, I mean.

GEORGIA

I apologize for him.

JOHN

I'm used to it.

GEORGIA

You shouldn't have to be.

JOHN

I just can't get those Jimson Blooms out of my mind, Ms. O'Keeffe.

GEORGIA

Neither can I. Where's his card, Juan?

JUAN
I thought I put it in my pocket, it must have fallen on the floor.

GEORGIA bends down to feel for the card, searches the table, and knocks over a cup of tea.

JUAN
Ochhh!!!

GEORGIA
giggles
Accident. It was an accident.

JUAN
I can't take you anywhere! My white pants are ruined.

JOHN
Let me help you.

JOHN picks up a napkin and begins patting JUAN's leg dry.

JUAN
Don't!

JUAN pushes him away rudely.

JUAN (cont'd)
That won't be necessary. Santa Fe is full of stores.

JOHN
Are you all right Ms. O'Keeffe?

GEORGIA
Silverware fell off the table.

JUAN
It's a knife, step on it!

GEORGIA
Why?

JUAN
Means someone's gonna stab you in the back.

GEORGIA
An old wives' tale.

JUAN

If you step on it, it will break the curse.

GEORGIA

Maybe I'd better.

GEORGIA steps on the knife. JOHN bends down and picks it up and puts it on tray.

JUAN

We'll take everything to go. How much is the bill?

JOHN

It's on the house for Ms. O'Keeffe.

JOHN puts everything on tray and takes it to kitchen.

GEORGIA

Juan, leave the waiter a nice tip.

JUAN

I only have a hundred-dollar bill.

GEORGIA

Leave it for him. He needs it.

JUAN

But I need a new suit. I can't go to the opening like this.

GEORGIA

You'll get more at the bank.

JUAN

But my name isn't on your account.

GEORGIA

We'll take care of that later.

JOHN

HE returns with food in bags and gives them to JUAN.

Here you go. It was such an honor to meet you, Ms. O'Keeffe.

GEORGIA extends her hand and JOHN shakes it. JUAN turns away from them and puts his fingers in his mouth as if he's going to throw up.

GEORGIA

Juan, give the waiter his tip.

JUAN distastefully puts a hundred-dollar bill down on the table along with waiter's card.

JOHN

I've never received a tip like this!

GEORGIA

It'll take care of a few art supplies.

JUAN

Let's go, Georgia.

GEORGIA

Where do you live, young man?

JOHN

At the YMCA in Santa Fe.

GEORGIA

Then you must come over for dinner some time. Juan's girl is a *great cook*!

JUAN and GEORGIA walk to the door.

JOHN

HE pockets money, picks up card and runs after them.

You forgot my card!

JUAN

Reluctantly takes the card and JOHN clears table and exits.

Why are you being so generous?

GEORGIA

Someone has to help the young people.

(As they exit JUAN casually throws the card on the floor.)

(Stage darkens. Spotlight on GEORGIA stage front.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

I saw that out of the corner of my eye, but pretended I didn't. Maybe I shouldn't have, but I was in too deep.

(End of scene.)

SCENE VI: THE PALETTE KNIFE

Setting: GEORGIA's studio at Ghost Ranch. JOHN POOLE is mixing paint to apply to one of GEORGIA's canvases. She sits holding her cane and raises her eyes skyward.

GEORGIA

What color are the clouds?

JOHN

JOHN looks out the huge picture window in GEORGIA's Studio.

They're like pastels, peach with yellow and orange. There's some blue-green, like sage in places.

GEORGIA

Put those colors on your palette.

JOHN

JOHN reads the labels on the tubes.

Cobalt blue, crimson, yellow ochre, viridian green…

GEORGIA

Mix them in, just a smidgeon. We don't want the monuments too white.

JOHN

We'll blend them in. Where's the white?

GEORGIA

In the large tube.

JOHN

Do you have a palette knife?

GEORGIA

Hanging on the wall.

JOHN gets the palette knife and mixes the paint.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Add linseed oil or they won't be the right consistency. You're not painting window trims now.

JOHN

I know how to paint.

GEORGIA
Use a medium size brush to paint smooth long strokes from one end of the monument to the other.

JOHN
You need masking tape to get the straight edges. I use it for my own hard-edged work.

GEORGIA
That's on the wall too.

JOHN
Good remembering!
(HE takes the masking tape off the wall.)

GEORGIA
Don't patronize me. I've had nine lives and I remember every one of them!

JOHN
You must be a cat.

GEORGIA
I'm a sphinx.

JOHN
And very enigmatic
JOHN masks off area to be painted.

JOHN (cont'd)
Did Juan ever paint with you?

GEORGIA
He had too many ideas.

JOHN
And me?

GEORGIA
You're much easier to work with.
(JOHN continues painting the monument.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)
You do what I tell you.

JOHN
And Juan?

GEORGIA

He likes to argue.

JOHN

sarcastically

Tell me about it.

GEORGIA

Are you done mixing yet?

JOHN

I'm applying the paint.

GEORGIA

Don't forget to come back and pull off the masking tape when the paint dries.

JOHN

I'll make a special trip next week. We have to get you back to Santa Fe before Juan returns from New York.

GEORGIA

Time flies when we're having fun doesn't it?

JOHN

It certainly does.

GEORGIA

Bring me some of your work the next time.

JOHN

I'm not sure you'll be able see it.

GEORGIA

You'll describe it to me. I've become very adept at visualizing.

JOHN

I don't get much chance to paint anymore.

GEORGIA

You have to make the time.

JOHN

It's hard with my day job at the café.

GEORGIA

A person can accomplish anything if they set their mind to it.

JOHN

I'm spent when I get home at night.

GEORGIA

When I was your age, I taught all day and painted all evening.

JOHN

Where did you get the energy?

GEORGIA

It's a matter of commitment. I always knew I had to be twice as good as the boys to get anyone to notice.

JOHN

You're an inspiration, Ms. O'Keeffe.

GEORGIA

Would you like to have lunch with me?

JOHN

I'd be honored.

GEORGIA

Go tell the cook to set another place for you.

SOUND: Aggressive knock on the door.

GEORGIA (cont'd)

That sounds like Juan.

JOHN

Do you want me to get the door?

SOUND: A series of loud aggressive knocks.

GEORGIA

I guess you'll have to before he knocks the door down.

JOHN opens the door. JUAN enters.

JUAN

What are you two doing up here?

GEORGIA

What are you doing back so early?

JUAN

When Marcelee came home and found you gone, I thought you'd been kidnapped.

GEORGIA
No need to worry. John is taking excellent care of me.

JUAN
I hired you to paint window trim, not this.

GEORGIA
John and I are in the middle of something.

JUAN
Are you taking advantage of my old lady?[181]

JOHN
Isn't *your* old lady at home in Santa Fe?

GEORGIA
There are two of us, but I'm the real one.

JUAN
The real what?

GEORGIA
Old lady, of course. I haven't lived all this time for nothing.

JUAN
Looks at his watch.
Isn't it time for you to go wait on tables?

JOHN
Ms. O'Keeffe just invited me for lunch.

JUAN
I wouldn't want you to lose your job. Ask the cook to pack it to go.

GEORGIA
Tell the museum you were delayed and stay for lunch.

JOHN
I'll tell them I'm your guest.

JUAN
HE lifts Georgia up with both arms.
We're going home right now!

[181] During this era, the term *Old lady* referred to girlfriend, wife, or fiancée, without reference to age.

GEORGIA
I am home. Put me down!

JUAN
I know what's best for you.

GEORGIA
You only know what's best for yourself.

JUAN
Be practical, Georgia.

GEORGIA
I'm not going.

JUAN
Yes, you are.

JUAN heads for the door with GEORGIA in his arms.

GEORGIA
You don't give a dam about what I want!

JOHN
Do you need some help, Ms. O'Keeffe?

JUAN
JOHN blocks the door with his body.
Get out of the way!

JOHN
I see what you're doing.

JUAN
Why don't you mind your own business?

JUAN lifts up his fist.
before I---

JOHN
Before you what?

JOHN picks up the phone. SOUND: a dial tone can be heard.

JOHN (cont'd)
Ms. O'Keeffe, is there anyone I should call?

JUAN
If you call the cops, you better make sure they kill me!

JOHN
Is that a threat?

GEORGIA
Calm down you two! Before there's a scandal.

JUAN
JUAN puts GEORGIA down and wraps his arms around her.
Just looking out for my old girl.

GEORGIA
Then take care of me here.

JUAN
You know that wouldn't be practical.
JUAN looks at his watch.

JUAN (cont'd)
Isn't it time for you to go?

JOHN
I won't leave until I know Ms. O'Keeffe's okay.

JUAN
Everything's under control, isn't it, Georgia?

GEORGIA
I'll be okay.

JOHN
Are you sure?

GEORGIA
Juan just needs some time to calm down.

JOHN
Some scary temper he has.

GEORGIA
Don't make it worse.

JOHN
I hate to bring this up at a time like this---

JUAN
Then why do it?

JOHN
I didn't get paid this week, Ms. O'Keeffe.

JUAN
Are you starting that starving artist routine?

GEORGIA
Just, give him another hundred-dollar bill.

JUAN
JUAN reaches into his pockets.
I'm out of cash.

GEORGIA
John, I'll owe it to you.

JOHN
You can give it to me the next time I come.

GEORGIA
Don't forget to take your lunch.
JOHN goes into the kitchen.

JUAN
Good riddance!

GEORGIA
Juan, what's gotten into you?

JUAN
I hired him to paint window trim. What else is he doing for you?

GEORGIA
He's helping me finish my last painting for the legacy edition of my book.

JUAN
Why didn't you wait for me to do that?

GEORGIA
I was afraid there wasn't enough time.

JUAN

Why didn't you ask my permission?

GEORGIA

I didn't know I had to.

JUAN

Why did you invite him to eat lunch with you?

GEORGIA

Is there a law against that?

(JOHN returns, puts sandwiches into his bag. HE starts cleaning up and putting materials away.)

GEORGIA (cont'd)

Don't forget to come back and peel off the masking tape when the paint dries.

JUAN

I can do that! We'll mail you a check.

JOHN

Are you sure you're going you be okay, Ms. O'Keeffe?

JUAN

She's fine.

JOHN

Are you sure?

JUAN

She's well taken care of.

GEORGIA

It's better for all of us if you go now.

JOHN

Good-bye Ms. O'Keeffe. It's been splendid!

HE exits.

JUAN

What does he mean, *splendid*?

GEORGIA

It means we had a good time.

JUAN
You're not going to give him credit for painting your canvases, are you?

GEORGIA
Did Michelangelo or Leonardo give credit to their studio assistants?

JUAN
I'm relieved.

GEORGIA
He's just a palette knife, as far as I'm concerned.

JUAN
You sure got friendly with your palette knife.

GEORGIA
I just wanted him to do a good job.

JUAN
And what's my job?

GEORGIA
To protect my legacy.

JUAN
Then you'll need to sign the papers your lawyer has drawn up in Santa Fe.

GEORGIA
What kind of papers?

JUAN
Power of attorney.

GEORGIA
Juan, I'm not so sure about this.

JUAN
Who else will protect your legacy?

GEORGIA
I hardly hear from my relatives any more.

JUAN
They only call when they want something.

GEORGIA

And what do you want, Juan?

JUAN

To take care of you for the rest of your life.

GEORGIA

I'm running out of time.

JUAN

That's why you need to sign the papers.

GEORGIA

I want my lawyer to be there.

JUAN

He's waiting for us in Santa Fe.

GEORGIA

Do we have to do this now?

JUAN

Later might be too late.

GEORGIA

Juan, I don't feel so well.

JUAN

Let me help you.

HE puts her on his knee, cradles her head, and rocks her back and forth.

JUAN (cont'd)

You're my baby, my sweet old lady.

(Lights dim. Spotlight on GEORGIA facing the audience.)

GEORGIA

I almost made my getaway, but then I didn't.

(End of scene.)

SCENE VII: THE WILL

Setting: GEORGIA's room in Santa Fe in Art Deco mansion. A NURSE sits in an armchair reading a newspaper to GEORGIA, next to a floral lamp. JUAN wears a suit. GEORGIA is dressed up in a white nightgown that looks like an antique lace wedding dress. A long grey braid hangs down her back.

NURSE

NURSE reads from newspaper.

O'Keeffe began making pottery in 1973.

GEORGIA

That was when Juan came to me.

NURSE

Continues reading.

Her young assistant, who was a trained ceramicist, undoubtedly influenced her work.

GEORGIA

He taught me how to use the wheel.

NURSE

As an interpreter and manipulator of natural forms, colorist, and lyric poet of her beloved New Mexico landscape, O'Keeffe has left her mark on the history of American Art.

GEORGIA

(JUAN enters but GEORGIA does not see him.)

They talk about me like I'm not here anymore.

JUAN

I see *you*.

NURSE

Doesn't she look pretty today?

JUAN

JUAN walks over and touches GEORGIA's shoulder.

JUAN (cont'd)

You look like a bride in that white thing.

JUAN (cont'd)
to NURSE
How is she?

GEORGIA
Not ready for our wedding day.

JUAN
chuckles
Why? I thought I was your man.

GEORGIA
I can't make it to the altar. My feet are killing me.

JUAN
Georgia, have you been hiking in your sleep again?

GEORGIA
Just walking the dogs to the *Pedernal* at Ghost Ranch.

JUAN
Why don't you massage her feet?

NURSE
She only wants you.

GEORGIA
(JUAN begins to massage her feet.)
What took you so long?

JUAN
I was at your lawyer's getting the papers drawn up.

GEORGIA
What papers?

JUAN
The Power of Attorney.

GEORGIA
What do you need it for?

JUAN
To protect your legacy. Remember?

GEORGIA
Weren't we going to get married to do that?

JUAN
It's better if you adopt me.

GEORGIA
I already adopted my little *Luis*.[182]

JUAN
The juvenile delinquent?

GEORGIA
He was such a beautiful, spirited child.

JUAN
He's in jail again. He doesn't deserve anything.

GEORGIA
He has no one to look after him.

JUAN
Are you being Mother Teresa again?

GEORGIA
We wore out those dirt roads in Abiquiu on his Harley.
(Flash picture on screen of GEORGIA on motorcycle with young man.)

JUAN
I bet he didn't even have his license.

GEORGIA
I want to leave him something.

JUAN
He's a hopeless case.

GEORGIA
If I thought that about *you*, you wouldn't be here.

JUAN
You really do want to adopt *him*!

GEORGIA
He was my little protégé.

---

[182] She "adopted" him emotionally; figure of speech.

JUAN

When?

GEORGIA

When he was five. All his watercolors are still up on my refrigerator in Abiquiu.

NURSE

Ms. O'Keeffe, you have mom's heart.

JUAN

Didn't I build you a pottery studio to teach you how to work with clay?

GEORGIA

I almost forgot.

NURSE

Winks at JUAN

Miss O'Keeffe just told me how you taught her to use the wheel.

JUAN

Ms. O'Keeffe just loves to bust my chops.

GEORGIA

You weren't cuffed enough, Juan.

JUAN

Nurse, can you help me walk Ms. O'Keeffe to the desk?

NURSE

She's too frail to stand up.

JUAN picks her up and puts her in chair.

JUAN

(JUAN strokes her head.)

The notary should be here soon.

`

GEORGIA

My lawyer?

JUAN

His assistant.

SOUND: Knock. JUAN opens the door.

NOTARY

Good afternoon, I'm here to notarize the documents.

JUAN

We've been waiting for you.

GEORGIA

Who is this man?

NOTARY

Your attorney sent me. He's in court today.

(HE hands Juan his card, sits down, and opens his briefcase.)

NOTARY (cont'd)

I'm Charles Elsworth Jr., his assistant.

GEORGIA

Get his card, Juan.

JUAN

I have it.

NOTARY

I'm a big fan of your art, Ms. O'Keeffe.

JUAN

Let's just get down to business.

NOTARY puts the documents in front of GEORGIA and JUAN inspects them.

Everything looks okay.

GEORGIA

What does it say?

JUAN

I told you, power of attorney.

NURSE

(stands over Georgia)

That's what it is, Ms. O'Keeffe.

GEORGIA

It means I'm trusting you with everything.

JUAN

I'll do my best.

GEORGIA

Then I don't have any choice, do I?

JUAN

You won't be sorry.

NOTARY

Who's going to witness her signature?

JUAN

Her nurse.

NURSE

Is it okay, Ms. O'Keeffe?

GEORGIA pauses.

GEORGIA

Remember, what I told you about the ashes.

JUAN

Yes, scatter them on the *Pedernal.*

GEORGIA

The grass there needs all the help it can get.

NOTARY

He snickers and covers his mouth.

Excuse me for laughing, but it can get very dry up there.

GEORGIA

Don't forget to tend to the garden in Abiquiu.

JUAN

I have the gardener on it.

GEORGIA

I don't want my flowers dying after I'm gone.

JUAN

No one will forget them.

GEORGIA

Any donations in my name are to go to the *Abiquiu* Elementary School.

JUAN

I made a note of it.

NOTARY

Is there anything else?

JUAN

JUAN looks at his watch.

Let’s get this over with.

GEORGIA

I don’t know where to sign, Juan.

JUAN

HE puts a pen in her hand and guides her hand.

Sign down here.

GEORGIA nods and signs the papers.

NOTARY

Thank you, Ms. O’Keeffe. I need Ms. . .

NURSE

Hernandez

NOTARY

To witness it. Sign right here under Ms. O’Keeffe.

NURSE signs, notary stamps and records it. NOTARY takes out his seal and perforates paper.

NOTARY (cont’d)

Now it’s official.

GEORGIA

Can I see it?

GEORGIA runs her fingers over the seal.

GEORGIA (cont’d)

Now it’s done.

JUAN

You can relax now.

NURSE

Can you help me bring Ms. O’Keeffe back to the bed?

(JUAN guides GEORGIA with NURSE back to the bed.)

JUAN

Take care of her.

HE picks up the documents.

JUAN (cont'd)
I have to go now.

GEORGIA
Where are you going?

JUAN
To bring the documents to the attorney.

GEORGIA
I can't fall asleep when you're not here.

NOTARY
I'll bring them to the office in the morning.

JUAN
(JUAN holds her hand.)
Trust me, you'll sleep better if I bring them myself.

GEORGIA
I'm feeling a chill.

NURSE
Let me cover you.

NURSE covers GEORGIA and feels her forehead.

NURSE (cont'd)
She's got a fever.

JUAN
Call me if she gets worse.

GEORGIA
Ohhhh

NURSE
(Holds GEORGIA's hand.)
She *is* worse.
(GEORGIA groans.)

JUAN
JUAN kisses GEORGIA's forehead.
I won't be long.

GEORGIA

You promise?

JUAN

Don’t I always come back?

NOTARY

Goodbye, Ms. O’Keeffe.

(JUAN nods and exits with NOTARY.)

GEORGIA

I need to rest for a bit.

NURSE

Let me help you.

(GEORGIA reclines in the bed. NURSE puts a blanket over her.)

NURSE (cont’d)

Do you want me to continue reading?

GEORGIA

Just wake me up when Juan comes back.

(Lights fade.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE VIII: THE HOSPITAL

Setting: GEORGIA is sitting up in bed in a dark hospital room Santa Fe. A spotlight is focused on her. A NURSE dressed in white enters the room. SHE wears a long stethoscope around her neck. A bed, a night table, and a window are the only furniture in the room.

NURSE

Ms. O'Keeffe, is there anything I can get you? Maybe a pillow behind your back?

GEORGIA

Good posture is very important.

NURSE tucks in a pillow behind her.

NURSE

Is that better, dear?

GEORGIA

Yes. Did Juan call?

NURSE

You keep asking me that.

GEORGIA

I thought he was coming to say goodbye.

NURSE

He did.

GEORGIA

I would remember it if he did.

NURSE

He's been in Hawaii for two weeks.

GEORGIA

What is he doing there?

NURSE

He's on his honeymoon.

GEORGIA

He married that poor thing?

NURSE

She's his wife now.

GEORGIA

Tell him he has my blessings, and that I forgive him.

NURSE

I'm sure he'll be glad to hear that.

GEORGIA

I don't want to hold any grudges.

NURSE

SHE squeezes GEORGIA's hand.

Don't worry dear. I'm here.

GEORGIA

I'm thirsty.

NURSE

SHE takes a glass off the nightstand.

Here's some water.

GEORGIA

Can you turn it into wine?

NURSE

Do I look like Jesus?

GEORGIA

I'll have Merlot.

NURSE

That won't mix with your meds.

GEORGIA

Throw them out. They're garbage!

NURSE

You must take them, doctor's orders.

GEORGIA

They don't know anything.

NURSE
GEORGIA is sitting up in bed cross-legged, almost in yoga position.

What are you doing?

GEORGIA

I'm looking for the light.

NURSE
SHE touches light switch.

Do you want me to turn it on?

GEORGIA

I mean the light inside.

NURSE

Let me know when you find it.

GEORGIA

We each have to find our own.

NURSE

Where's yours?

GEORGIA

In a golden flower.

NURSE

Does it grow in the garden?

GEORGIA

No, between the eyes.

NURSE
Closes her eyes

I don't see anything.

GEORGIA

You have to concentrate.

NURSE

I still don't see anything.

GEORGIA

Use your imagination. Let's pretend we're painting it.

NURSE

I'm a nurse, not an artist.

GEORGIA

Then visualize a white healing light, coming out of a yellow lotus flower between your eyes.

NURSE

Closes her eyes

I can almost see it. It's starting to glow.

GEORGIA

Stay with it. Do you feel a warm streaming in your chest?

NURSE

I feel something-------

GEORGIA

It's your heart, opening.

NURSE

What do I do now?

GEORGIA

Move the energy all around your body, like I do.

NURSE

And then what happens?

GEORGIA

It makes me feel sexy! Alive!

NURSE

opens her eyes and looks at her watch

This is all very interesting, but it's time for your medicine.

GEORGIA

This is my medicine.

NURSE

What can you see with your eyes closed?

GEORGIA

The inner light. I keep running it through my eyes.

NURSE
Do you expect it to restore your vision?
(NURSE takes notes.)

GEORGIA
One can only hope.

NURSE
I've never heard of hope reversing macular degeneration.

GEORGIA
It doesn't work if you don't believe in it.

NURSE
I hope you won't tell your doctor we did this.

GEORGIA
At my age, I can get away with saying almost anything!

NURSE
And you do.

GEORGIA
I didn't invent this, Missy!

NURSE
Who did?

GEORGIA
It's mental yoga, thousands of years old.

NURSE
Is there a name for it?

GEORGIA
They call it gathering the light.

NURSE
How long have you been doing this?

GEORGIA
Longer than you've been here. Can you read to me?

NURSE
Do you have a bible?

GEORGIA

I have something else.

NURSE

What?

GEORGIA

Get that book on my nightstand.

NURSE

The Secret of the Golden Flower?

GEORGIA

Yes, that's it. I have a few lines I like marked off.

NURSE

Turns on lamp, opens book and sits in a chair, next to GEORGIA's bed.

"The Thousand petalled Flower opens." "The boat of life has reached the shore; bright shines the sunlight." Ms O'Keeffe are you listening? Are you cold?

SHE wraps a shawl around GEORGIA's shoulders.

GEORGIA

I'll need it for my trip.

(GEORGIA lies and NURSE puts a blanket around her. SHE holds her hand.)

NURSE

Where are you going?

GEORGIA

I don't want to die here.

NURSE

Where do you want to die, darling?

GEORGIA

Where I can see my beautiful colors and shapes taking form on my canvas. I'm heading back to my country, to the red cliffs and dinosaur dust. The dogs are running ahead and leading the way.

NURSE

Where should I tell Juan you're going?

GEORGIA

(A dark tunnel is projected on screen with a blinding light shining through.)

Home to light, I'm returning the light!

NURSE

Yes, dear. I'm opening the blinds.

(She opens the shades. A blinding light fills the stage.)

(NURSE feels her pulse. She embraces GEORGIA who dies in her arms. SHE covers her with a blanket. A Cello Bach Sonata by Pablo Casals can be heard.)

(A big yellow lotus flower unfolds as GEORGIA awakens on the roof at Ghost Ranch.)

GEORGIA

Sits up and faces the audience.

Wow! I'm finally home and I can see.

(End of play)

VITA

Full name: Renata Renee Kessler

Place and date of birth: Vienna, Austria – December 13, 1946

Parents' names: Edmund Kessler and Frederica Kessler

Educational Institutions:

School	Degree	Date
Secondary:		
Washington Irving High School New York City, New York	High School Diploma	1965
Collegiate:		
Ramapo College of New Jersey Mahwah, New Jersey	Bachelor of Arts Art and Education	1981
Graduate:		
New York University New York City, New York	Master of Arts Fine Arts	1985
New Jersey City University Jersey City, New Jersey	Master of Arts Special Education	1989
New Jersey City University Jersey City, New Jersey	Master of Arts Urban Education	2005
Seton Hall University South Orange, New Jersey	Master of Arts Jewish-Christian Studies	May 2009
Drew University Madison, New Jersey	Doctor of Letters	May 2021