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RANDY WAYNE WHITE: AN AMERICAN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHER AND PRACTITIONER OF ECOLOGICAL NOIR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

John K. Hicks

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2007

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

John Keith Hicks

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 3, 2007 — Signatures on File
James M. Cahalan, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Director

August 3, 2007 — Signatures on File
Ronald G. Shafer, Ph.D.
Professor of English

August 3, 2007 — Signatures on File
Kenneth Sherwood, Ph.D.
Professor of English

ACCEPTED

Signatures on File — August 3, 2007
Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Randy Wayne White: An American Social Philosopher and Practitioner of Ecological Noir

Author: John K. Hicks

Dissertation Chair: Dr. James M. Cahalan

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Ronald G. Shafer
Dr. Kenneth Sherwood

This dissertation examines the Doc Ford series of mystery novels written by Randy Wayne White (1950-) along with his four volumes of essays. White's literary output is largely unexplored; he is the subject of only one significant critical study, Maurice O'Sullivan's "Ecological Noir," a chapter in *Crime Fiction and the Sunshine State* (1997), a collection of essays about mystery writers who set their fiction in the state of Florida. With his graceful prose, intricate plots, skillful integration of science and detection, and humor, Randy Wayne White has become a richly rewarding guide to American life in contemporary times.

I first examine White's rise as a writer, from his days as a regular essayist for *Outdoor Magazine* and *Men's Health*, while making a living as a Florida fishing guide, to his success as a popular novelist whose last four novels have appeared on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. My biographical sketch of White also explores his literary influences, including John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, and John D. MacDonald. I then attempt to place White's work in the larger context of American mystery and detective fiction, suggesting links between his novels and the works of Raymond

Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, John D. MacDonald, and other writers of the American Noir tradition.

Next I explore White's major achievement—his integration of science into the detective genre. I trace his use of the biological organism as the essential model for human and societal life and behavior.

After exploring how White connects biological phenomena to the social, and in particular, the criminal behavior of human beings, I examine another major theme in his fiction: the importance of the spiritual in contemporary life.

Having explored White's two major themes, I then discuss his position as a moralist and social critic of contemporary America.

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INTRODUCTION

"This life is much too much trouble, far too strange, to arrive at the end of it and then to be asked what you make of it and have to answer, "Scientific Humanism." That won't do. A poor show. Life is a mystery, love is a delight. Therefore I take it as axiomatic that one should settle for nothing less than the infinite mystery and the infinite delight, i.e., God. In fact I demand it. I refuse to settle for anything less. I don't see why anyone should settle for anything less. I don't see why anyone should settle for less than Jacob, who actually grabbed aholt of God and wouldn't let go until God identified himself and blessed him" (137). Walker Percy, *Conversations with Walker Percy*

"The use of science by or upon people who do not understand it is always potentially tyrannical, and it is always dangerous (52). Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition*

"Religion is rules of morality linked by love" (87). Zen Master Sighurdhr Tomlinson, *Everglades*

Having long been a fan of contemporary American detective and crime fiction, I was intrigued in the spring of 2001 when I first picked up *Captiva*, the fourth novel of Randy Wayne White's Doc Ford series. The blurb on the paperback's back cover heralded White as the heir to John D. MacDonald and his Travis McGee series. As a devotee of MacDonald's series with its blend of mystery, adventure, detection, and social commentary, I read *Captiva* and was hooked. I bought all the other books in the series, including the then just-released *Shark River* (2001), and kept reading. While I immediately found his characters unique and his plotting suspenseful, I also found the inclusion of his MacDonald-like social commentary fascinating. Like MacDonald's Travis McGee, White's protagonist, Doc Ford, provides readers with some compelling philosophizing about the state of the contemporary world. In particular, through his Doc Ford novels, White explores the zone where science and the spiritual intersect, a topic

that I have long been exploring.

The late novelist Walker Percy once told his friend Robert Coles that rock star Bruce Springsteen was his "favorite American philosopher." Percy confessed,

> It's Bruce Springsteen all the way for me. He's "onto us," as the young people now say it when they talk about someone who has figured someone else out "heart and soul"–the expression some "existentialists" use to describe a human encounter that sticks with the people lucky enough to have one, during the headlong course of the year. (Coles 7)

In listening to Springsteen's songs about America, Percy told Coles he was "carrying on a conversation" with the singer. "He says something, sings something that really says something, and then I get back to him, at him, with him, in my wondering head, wandering all over the map" (9). I feel the same way about Randy Wayne White. He is my "favorite American philosopher." Instead of philosophizing through song, White philosophizes through his novels, which feature marine biologist and covert operative Doc Ford and his zany, Zen Master sidekick, Tomlinson. In the midst of his eclectic detective-adventure fiction, I realized that White was sneaking in some pretty deep thinking about the roles of scientific and religious thought in contemporary America. White was expanding the limits of the detective fiction genre by setting up a dialogue between these two major sources of wisdom in our times. In turn, these two arenas of knowledge would help him to begin constructing a consistent code of ethics or moral wisdom within his fictional world. Within a popular detective series, White would write novels that not only contained an overall story arc, but also work towards developing a

consistent and balanced approach–or even philosophy of life–throughout.

Wendell Berry, the highly influential environmentalist and bio-regionalist, makes an interesting connection between scientism and detective fiction in his book-length critique of scientism, *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition*:

> If modern science is a religion, then one of its presiding deities must be Sherlock Holmes. To the modern scientist as to the great detective, every mystery is a problem, and every problem can be solved. A mystery can exist only because of human ignorance, and human ignorance is always remediable. The appropriate response is not deference or respect, let alone reverence, but pursuit of 'the answer.' (27)

When White told me that the only influence from the world of detective fiction on his work besides John D. MacDonald was Arthur Conan Doyle's protagonist, Sherlock Holmes, it made perfect sense to me. Ford, the cool and objective observer and biologist, is a clear echo of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective. Like Holmes, Ford's detachment and use of empirical evidence enables him to solve the "problems" he encounters, but as Berry would contend, his materialistic worldview limits his understanding of realities greater than mere problems. As Berry writes, "This pursuit, however, is purely scientific only so long as the mystery is empirically or rationally solvable. When a scientist denies or belittles a mystery that cannot be solved, then he or she is no longer within the bounds of science" (27). Within the series, this is precisely the place where Ford finds himself. Though he tries to understand human behavior in biological terms, he sometimes realizes there is more to reality than what can be seen,

weighed, and measured. Ford's inability to see without his glasses is bluntly symbolic of his inability to intuit spiritual realities. As the series progresses, he begins to open his mind toward solutions that transcend his limited views. Tomlinson is on hand to introduce higher and more spiritual ways of understanding problems that become mysteries.

I find it fascinating that White, a popular and prolific genre writer, would include a long-running and evolving conversation between a self-avowed materialist and an unabashed believer in the supernatural, especially in the current climate where few biologists announce themselves as spiritual. Of late, it seems trendy to publish atheistic tomes that proclaim a Darwinist-driven death knell to theism. Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006), Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006), Sam Harris's *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and Christopher Hitchen's *God Is Not Good: Religion Poisons Everything* (2007) are prominently displayed in all of the major bookstore chains, and each enjoys a spot on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. Finding an author who takes seriously the challenges of atheism and theism in what some would label "superficial" popular culture was a satisfying discovery. So much of popular culture is rightly considered disposable, but here within the well-defined limits of the detective fiction genre, I discovered a writer who was giving equal time to both viewpoints, looking for harmony between the two, and offering a hint at how an integration of both might be established—all wrapped up in exciting, suspenseful action-adventure stories.

Sociologist and Catholic priest Andrew Greeley argues that popular culture is not just a source of dialogue about ideas important to American society; he contends that popular culture is "locus theologicus," a theological place, the locale in which one may encounter God. Greeley argues that "popular culture provides an opportunity to experience God and to tell stories of God, to put the matter more abstractly, to learn about God and to teach about God" (16). I do not think I encountered God in Randy White's fiction—although Saint Ignatius bids believers to look in all of created reality for the signature of the divine—but I did encounter a fellow human traveler interested in the realms of biology and spirituality and how the two intersect.

In *Lost in the Cosmos*: *The Last Self-Help Book*, Walker Percy writes that the battle between scientific creationists and neo-Darwinists

> is, in fact, a marvelous waste of energy. The Christians need not have got in such a sweat. The evolutionary facts about the emergence of man, e.g., the sudden appearance of *Homo sapiens sapiens* (Cro-Magnon man) no more than 35 thousand years ago, are as spectacular as the account in Genesis and allow hardly less room for theology. Scientists should be less worried about overt intrusions by religion upon science, which never succeed, and more worried about covert scientific dogma, e.g., that we triadic scientists require only dyadic events be admissible to scientific theory. (163)

My thinking about the possibility of a conflict between science and religion echoes Percy's. I am, however, particularly interested in the fight to keep reductionistic materialism from overstepping its bounds. By its nature, empiricism limits itself to what

can be strictly seen, weighed, and measured. Such study should stick to what can be sensed. What I appreciate about White is his articulation of this unique blend of American wisdom in espousing the spiritual path in Tomlinson and the empirical path in Ford.

In *Why Read?* Mark Edmundson describes how a reader immersing herself in Proust "may encounter aspects of herself that, while they have perhaps been in existence for a long time, have remained unnamed, undescribed, and therefore in a certain sense unknown." He goes on to write that as she reads Proust, it might be said that she "learns the language of herself," that she is "humanly enhanced" and has expanded her very self. Beyond discovering and enlarging herself, Edmundson's reader may even see something that is perhaps more important–"glimpses of a world"–a "self and world that [she] may begin working to create" (5).

Edmundson's admonition that the discoveries of self and world through great writing remind me of a prompt that I often asked my former high school students to respond to in the form of an essay at the end of each academic year: Some say literature is like a mirror, while others maintain that literature is like a window. Using several texts from our course, explain which of these two takes on literature you think most true. Having journeyed with my students for an entire year, I always secretly hoped that they would think outside of the box and ask if they could answer the question using both comparisons—the mirror and window. For me, literature has always served both of these purposes: I can discover myself and the reality outside myself in it. If a particular text

does not afford me these two opportunities for discernment and transformation, I lose interest. Randy White's Doc Ford series provides for me what Edmondson claims is the purpose of a liberal arts education: "to give people an enhanced opportunity to decide how they should live their lives" (6). That White does so within the bounds of a limiting popular-culture genre—mere entertainment in the minds of some of the self-appointed cultural elite—is all the more impressive. In taking White's "pop fiction" seriously, I follow Terry Eagleton's lead and "establish that popular culture is worth studying," because "Today it is generally recognized that everyday life is quite as intricate, unfathomable, obscure and occasionally tedious as Wagner, and thus eminently worth investigating" (4-5).

Granted, popular fiction is undoubtedly rushed to the mass market. Thus, authors such as White do not always have the luxury of waiting for inspiration; nor do they have the luxury of allowing a work in progress to simmer in their minds for a great many years. Excellence in genre writing sometimes comes from within a context of speed, if not haste. White puts out a Doc Ford novel per year, always publishing during the week of St. Patrick's Day. Undoubtedly, the haste with which he must write the Ford series mitigates against achieving greatness on a most consistent basis. White's novels tend to repeat a too familiar pattern: a) a friend needs Ford's help; b) early on, Ford has the requisite brawl with a northern salesman in order to show his physical and mental prowess; c) Ford typically manages to attract mature, career-oriented women; and d) Ford must defeat an imposing villain, either a serial killer or corrupt and ruthless businessman. However, it is the character development and interaction and thematic elements that

make this standardized story platform come alive. As M. H. Dunlop writes in "Practicing Textual Theory and Teaching Formula Fiction," "The traditional literature classroom's heavy investment in originality has functioned to cut loose texts from culture, stranding them in the unapproachable vacuum of singular genius" (253), adding that "formula fiction short-circuits or averts certain weak but pesky learned responses to literary texts" (254). Randy Wayne White makes full use of these advantages of formula fiction—yet at the same time, he injects original ideas and themes, essentially having it both ways and appealing to both popular readers and more traditional ones seeking originality, as he anchors his work in the detective genre, but at the same time uses it as a springboard for a unique set of ideas that I explore in this dissertation.

What might one discover about one's self and the world by reading the Doc Ford series and White's nonfiction? One discovers that balance and authenticity in life are key elements. Visitors to White's home on Pine Island immediately confirm this when they observe how similar White's life is to that of his fictional counterpart, Doc Ford. Though his cottage is not on stilts like Ford's fishing shack, White's homestead includes an outdoor shower just like Ford's and is air-conditioner-free. However, it also includes a hot tub and office complete with computer, White's concessions to modern technology. Like Thoreau, both White and Ford attempt to live their lives simply, unencumbered for the most part by technology, lives valuing privacy but, also the opportunity to go into the community and meet with other members of the human family.

I begin this study by first examining White's rise as a writer from his beginnings as a regular essayist for the monthly magazines *Outside* and *Men's Health*, while he

made a living mostly as a Florida fishing guide, to his rise as the author of the popular Doc Ford mystery series. Chapter 1 documents my investigation of the ways in which his favorite writers—John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, and John D. MacDonald—influence him. I also demonstrate how White often uses in the Doc Ford series his own real-life adventures that he describes in his nonfiction. In Chapter 2, I place White's work within the larger context of American mystery and detective fiction, suggesting links between his novels and the work of early and contemporary hard-boiled detective fiction writers. I show how White works within, but continues to enlarge the boundaries of the hard-boiled school.

White's major achievement within the realm of American hard-boiled detective fiction is his integration of science into the genre. White uses biological models as ways of understanding human behavior and criminal behavior, thus demonstrating a clear link between humans and the ecosystems they live within. I examine the important ways in which White has integrated science into the detective genre, a move much more typical of science fiction and thriller writers. Having discussed science in Chapter 3, in Chapter 4 I examine the spiritual themes that run throughout the Doc Ford series, particularly as the spiritual and scientific viewpoints clash or connect. Through his two mouthpieces, Ford and Tomlinson, White attempts to integrate the spiritual drive and corresponding skepticism he feels within himself. The evolution of this integration is examined in great detail here.

Finally, in Chapters 5 and 6, I examine White's strong social and moral consciousness of that runs throughout the Doc Ford series. White's understanding of

science and religion heavily infuse his characters' moral codes and how these characters act towards their human, natural and spiritual environments.

Other than Maurice O'Sullivan's analysis of the first four Doc Ford novels, "Ecological Noir" (1997), White's fiction has been ignored by scholars of detective fiction. O'Sullivan notes White's use of science to explain both the physical environment and human behavior in the initial Ford books. Since he did not examine the spiritual concerns that increase as the series moves forward, I thought it necessary that I investigate these religious themes and that I trace in more depth the scientific themes that O'Sullivan initially called attention to in his seven-page essay. In order to thoroughly examine all fourteen of the novels in the series to date, I have adopted a multidisciplinary approach and cited not only literary critics, but also scholars in science, religion, American culture, and environmentalism. In doing so, my goal is to explore the importance of religious experience and scientific thought in contemporary American society as displayed in White's long-running and constantly-evolving Doc Ford series.

CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHICAL CONTEXTS AND LITERARY INFLUENCES

Assessing the importance of the work of the mystery writer and creator of the Travis McGee series, John D. MacDonald, Randy Wayne White wrote:

> Some educators, particularly unpublished educators, are quick to dismiss genre fiction as hack work not worthy of their time. "Formula writing," some call it. But MacDonald pushed the genre's envelope. He used McGee and other characters to explore the dark and quirky and sometimes hilarious corners of the human condition. He used digression—normally a taboo device—to jump up on a soap box and speak his own mind. The conduit of his own discipline, mystery writing, wasn't big enough for the things he wanted to say, so he ignored the limitations, and thereby expanded the genre. For that, all writers everywhere should be eternally grateful to the man. (*An American Traveler* 143)

White might have been describing himself. In a series that now numbers fourteen novels, White has used Doc Ford and other characters to "explore the dark and quirky and sometimes (oftentimes, in White's fictional world) hilarious corners of the human condition" (*An American Traveler* 143). White, too, makes ample use of digression in order to ruminate on the vagaries of human existence in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The Doc Ford series—an eclectic mix of mystery, espionage, biology, and adventure mirrors the life of its creator, White.

Randy Wayne White's novels reflect his own experiences, from his childhood in the American Midwest, to his thirteen years as tackle-fishing guide at Tarpon Bay Marina on Sanibel Island, Florida, to all his many real-life adventures documented in his four collections of travel essays. In addition to these experiences, White's reading of Steinbeck, Hemingway, John D. MacDonald and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories has provided major influences on the Doc Ford mystery series.

White was born in Ashland, Ohio in 1950 ("Florida Fishing Guide"). His father, a member of the 101st Airborne, met his "North Carolina mother and hit it off" while stationed there (Schwartz 1). The family then moved to "a little farm near a little village called Pioneer, right on the Indiana-Michigan border" (McDonald, "Randy" 1). Though he still considers himself a "Buckeye," White also considers North Carolina "home" since his many relatives on his mother's side still live there, where he fondly recalls spending most of his summers (MacDonald 2).

The sometimes solitary, isolated life of his fictional counterpoint, Doc Ford, seems a mirror image of White's childhood on the farm:

> It was certainly a solitary life; my brother is five years older, my sister five years younger. I was an amazingly poor student. I mean, I was a nice guy, I wasn't a troublemaker or anything, but for whatever reason, I just had trouble understanding. I went back to my old high school to be inducted into their Hall of Fame and they showed me some of my old grades and it was heartbreaking for me. But I loved books and grew up reading. I always thought if I could write a book, maybe I could be part of the magic I found in books. But I never really thought I was smart enough or capable of that. (MacDonald 2).

The Whites did not have a television until White turned twelve, so he read a great deal and fell in love with books: “Other kids’ heroes were ballplayers. Mine were writers: Conrad and Steinbeck and Twain” (Minzesheimer 1). While his father worked long shifts as a highway patrolman, White’s mother introduced him to his perhaps two greatest loves: books and fishing. She regularly took him to the tiny, one-room library in the little village of Pioneer where he “discovered *Cannery Row*, or *Sweet Thursday*, and it led me to all the other Steinbeck books. I remember sitting up in the hayloft reading Steinbeck” (MacDonald 5).

It is not difficult to see Steinbeck’s influence on White in the Doc Ford books. White has stated that he “love[s] Steinbeck” (MacDonald 5). He includes this passage in Steinbeck’s autobiographical *Travels with Charlie* to begin his first collection of nonfiction travel essays, *The Sharks of Lake Nicaragua: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing:*

> When I was very young and the urge to be someplace was on me, I was assured by mature people that maturity would cure this itch. When years described me as mature, the remedy prescribed was middle age. In middle age I was assured that greater age would calm my fever, and now that I am fifty-eight perhaps senility will do the job. Nothing has worked. In other words, I don’t improve, in further words, once a bum always a bum. (qtd. ii)

White's feverish need to experience adventuring and travel echo this sentiment of Steinbeck. As I will demonstrate, White's real-life travels heavily inform the action in the Doc Ford novels.

One can imagine a young Randy Wayne White reading *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* in the hayloft of his parent's barn and laughing about the going-ons in Cannery Row with its colorful denizens and its moral anchor, the character Doc, a rather solitary marine biologist whom Steinbeck modeled on his good friend, Ed Ricketts, also a marine biologist. Later, White would model his own series' protagonist and marine biologist, "Doc Ford," on Steinbeck's Doc (MacDonald 4). White has appreciated the humor in Steinbeck's works, saying, "He's a very funny writer" (MacDonald 5). Though White's Doc Ford novels are full of violence, crime, and evil, they are also very humorous. Part of the charm of the series are the many zany one-liners tossed off by the eccentric Tomlinson and the humorous situations Ford manages to get himself into on a regular basis. Setting Ford's home in the small boating and fishing community of Dinkin's Bay, Florida clearly parallels Steinbeck's use of Cannery Row in his two novels. Both White and Ford populate their small communities with offbeat characters.

Ohio author Louis Brownfield was another discovery White made in the small library in Pioneer. The Pulitzer-Prize-winning author had brought attention to Richland County, where he lived and wrote of Malabar Farm near Lucas. According to White, Brownfield "was such a natural historian, and he was also a very fine writer of fiction. *Malabar Farm* I adored. It's stunning. It certainly influenced my writing life . . . to be able to walk the same acreage and fields to the house made the possibility of being a

writer seems at least obtainable in a small way." Discovering a writer in his own backyard contributed to White's desire to "write early on" (qtd. in Minzesheimer 2).

A few years later, White's parents moved the family to Davenport, Iowa after White finished his freshman year of high school (White, "Email"). During the summer before his junior year, his parents moved from Davenport, and White

> just stayed. I got an apartment of my own and essentially left home. I had two jobs in high school and would keep my money in a jar underneath the sink. I didn't have a checking account until I was 26 or 27. But, you know, when you do that, if you don't have the money to buy something, you don't buy it. I worked for Davenport Brass and Foundry and washed dishes at night at a bar. When you're on your own, when the safety net's not there, you try not to fall. (MacDonald 2)

White would later mirror this experience to some degree with his creation of Ford. Ford loses his parents to a motorboat explosion which he thinks was accidentally caused by his Uncle Tuck, when the future marine biologist and covert operative is just ten years old. While his uncle takes him in, Ford is often on his own since Tuck is constantly off on his own adventures. Both young White and young Ford were on their own during their teenage years—White by choice, Ford by necessity.

While in high school, White played baseball and football and was an all-state springboard diver. He says he "was always slightly better than mediocre athletically" and had "one legitimate tryout with the Cincinnati Reds, but was not signed" (MacDonald 2). White's virtual mirror image, Ford, will later turn out to have been an all-state wrestler

and solid catcher in high school baseball. Baseball is featured in one form or another in nearly every Doc Ford novel. In fact, as a young operative, Ford once caught for Cuban dictator Fidel Castro who was pitching in an exhibition game that was part of an undercover mission. In *Sanibel Flats*, the first novel in the Doc Ford series, Ford and Tomlinson play a game of baseball with a rebel general and his men in the jungle of Central America. As the series moves on, it becomes typical for Ford and Tomlinson to stop at Hooters for wings and beer after playing in an adult baseball league, the Roy Hobbes League, a league that really exists where White still suits up in the tools of ignorance on Sundays (White, *Randy Wayne White*). In 2002, White took his over-forty baseball to Cuba on a good-will mission to bring baseball gear to a Cuban youth league called the Gigi Stars. Ernest Hemingway founded the team in honor of his son, Gregory, and White and former big league pitcher Bill "the Spaceman" Lee decided to "collect gloves, bats, and balls, fly to Cuba, and restart Hemingway's ball club" (White, "Gift" 162). While there, White shot a documentary of the trip entitled *The Gift of the Game*. In *Sanibel Flats*, Tomlinson declares that "Baseball is more than just a game, man. It's a ceremony" and that "the Buddha would have been a baseball fan" (189), confirming White's love of the game.

Like Huckleberry Finn, another quintessential American adventurer, White "lit out for adventure" after a stint as a telephone lineman (Minzeshiemer 2). A couple whose farm he worked on had raved about Sanibel Island, Florida, so White wound up there in 1972 after traveling on his own for a couple of years. Here White received what he calls his "education" by writing for the *Fort Meyers News-Press* for a three-year period. He got his captain's license in 1974 and became a full time small-tackle fishing

guide at Tarpon Bay Marina on Sanibel Island. He claims he "was never passionate about fishing, but it was a way to make a living" (MacDonald 2).

Though he might guide for forty days straight, White had still not lost his desire to be a writer, and the owner of the Tarpon Bay Marina, a retired banker named Mack who bought the marina when banking "lost its charm," supported White. When editors interested in White's work could telephone him only during his lunch hour, Mack or the New Zealand-born marina manager named Graeme would page the young writer over the public-address system, even though he was just outside the door. As White relates in the introduction to *Batfishing in the Rainforest: Strange Tales of Travel and Fishing:* "I'm sure the editors heard them: 'Paging Captain White, Captain Randy White, you have another damn call from New York,' which was a kind attempt to make me sound more important—and more in demand—than I actually was" (5). Not coincidentally, the Dinkin's Bay Marina of the Doc Ford novels is run by a New Zealander named Mack.

Graeme lived aboard a "35-foot Morgan sailboat called *No Mas* and kept it anchored just off the narrow channel that led into the marina. *No Mas* was a pleasant place to sit and have a beer after a long day on the water," according to White (*page number if needed?). Tomlinson likewise lives on board a sailboat called *No Mas.* While working as a guide at Tarpon Bay Marina, White enjoyed the friendship of a man named Nick, who "was an extremely successful guide despite his stuttering problem" (White, *Randy*). The Doc Ford series features a guide named Jeth who has a similar problem. Over the years, White has been asked by many readers if the characters in his books really exist. His reply: "Well . . . I know too many attorneys to reply to that . . . but I will

tell you that, like Ford, I have a passionate interest in biology and baseball . . . . Unfortunately for me, that's where all the comparisons with Doc Ford end–he's much smarter, tougher and more articulate than I" (*Randy*).

In the introduction to the 2006 reprint of a novel he wrote under the penname Randy Stryker, White describes how when he worked full-time as a fishing guide, he was "still obsessed with [his] own dream of writing for a living" (ii). He "worked hard at the craft" during the years before and after his charters. He sold a story to *Outside* magazine, which he considered to be "one of the country's finest publications." As he worked diligently to finish a novel, he was telephoned from New York by an editor from Signet books who had read his story in *Outside* and been impressed. She told White that Signet wanted "to launch a paperback thriller series that featured a recurring he-man hero." The editor wanted at least four writers on the project so that Signet could pump the books out one after another in order to gain momentum (viii).

White was skeptical about the project. The template for the project was problematical, including the he-man hero being "a Vietnam vet turned Key West fishing guide," who was blonde, surfed, had a shark scar, was "freakishly strong," and had been friends with Hemingway. Thinking White lived and fished in Key West, the editor considered that he might be right for the writing team. Would he submit a few sample chapters for her perusal? (viii). Since White and his wife, Debra, were desperate for money, his first son having just been born and the weather that winter being poor for fishing, he took up the offer. He wrote the first of what would eventually total seven "Dusky MacMorgan" novels in just nine days, "pounding away at [his] old black typewriter" around the clock (ix) in order to complete what would later be entitled *Key*

West Connection. As he would later do in the Doc Ford series, White based characters—or at least their names—on real people he knew and worked alongside. His friend Ralph Woodring owned a boat with "*Dusky* painted in big letters on the side" (ix). "Dusky," combined with his friend and marina manager Graeme's Morgan sailboat, became his hero, Dusky MacMorgan. Other series characters were named after other friends of White.

White now humorously refers to his seven Dusky MacMorgan novels as his "duck and fuck books, because in alternating chapters Dusky would duck a few bullets, then spend much-deserved time alone with a heroine" (x). In 2006 this over-the-top series was reissued by Signet due to White's success with the Doc Ford series. In his introduction to the reissued version of *Key West Connection*, White was frank about his writing of the Dusky MacMorgan series that he originally wrote under the pseudonym of "Randy Stryker":

> Seldom did a piece of paper go into my old typewriter that was ripped out and thrown away, and I suspect that's the way the books read. I don't know, I've never reread them. I do remember using obvious clichés, a form of self-loathing, as if to remind myself that I should be doing my *own* writing, not this job-of-work. The book you are now holding, and the other six, constituted a training area for a young writer who took seriously the discipline demanded by his craft and also the financial imperatives of being a young father. For years, I apologized for these books. I no longer do. (x)

During the 1980s when White was quickly penning the novels in the Dusky MacMorgan series as Randy Stryker, he also became a regular columnist for *Outside*. His column, entitled "Out There," featured White's retelling of the many—and sometimes bizarre—adventures his editors sent him on. The best are among the essays collected in White's four nonfiction collections: *Batfishing in the Rainforest: Strange Tales of Travel and Fishing* (1998), *The Sharks of Lake Nicaragua: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing* (1999), *Last Flight Out: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing* (2002), and *An American Traveler: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Sport* (2003). Important for this study is White's incorporation of the real-life experiences he documents in these four collections. In the series, Ford either visits the places White has been to and written about, or the biologist–assassin reenacts the experiences White has had in carrying out his editor's wishes.

In the first published collection, *Batfishing in the Rainforest*, White describes an experience he had while tracking the Florida Everglade's infamous "Swamp Ape" with his friend Peter Mattheiessen, author of *Wildlife in America*, *The Snow Leopard*, *Indian Country* and a host of other well-received books. The two never see the Swamp Ape, a distant cousin of Bigfoot, but instead comically encounter a pit bull and a one-armed man. In Doc Ford's tenth outing, *Everglades*, Ford accompanies his friend Tomlinson on a very similar adventure for the mythical creature. When Tomlinson invites his psychic friends to accompany them, hilarity ensues and the two find themselves running a wild-goose chase just as White and Matthiessen had. The parallels are actually much more significant. Mattheissen is an ordained Zen Buddhist monk as is Tomlinson. White has

admitted that the zany ex-hippie, Tomlinson, is a composite of Matthiessen and another good friend, former major league pitcher, Bill Lee.

Another parallel exists with respect to the existence of the Swamp Ape, Bigfoot, Sasquatch, or Yeti. In the essay "Gatorman," which appears in White's collection, *Last Flight Out: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing*, the author relates his own possible experience with such a creature:

> I was just an infant when I had my first encounter with a yeti-like creature—or so my mother told me. We were living in a remote farmhouse in Ohio, my father, a highway patrolman, was away on duty when, one March night, my mother was awakened by the steady thud of someone—or something—walking outside. Then the house began to shake, as if massive shoulders were being rubbed against the clapboard. For nearly an hour, the assault continued. We had no telephone. My mother lay awake until dawn, and then went outside to investigate. There had been fresh snow. Her description of what she saw never varied in over thirty years: the prints of a barefoot man circled the house; each print was a broom handle and a half apart. Caught in the clapboard were tufts of silver hair. (71)

White states that "I believe what my mother said; I don't believe what she saw. Not the way she interpreted it, anyway" (71). Nonetheless, it is another real-life event that finds its way into the fictional world of Doc Ford. The details of White's mother's creature sighting can also be found in the essay "Half Man" in his *An American Traveler: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Sport* (94-95).

In the piece “Navy SEALs” in the same collection, White relates his search for the perfect workout, which took him to the Naval Special Warfare Center at Coronado, California where he participates in some of the rigorous training with trainees for the Navy’s elite SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) commando team. Here he encounters a tough, but fair SEAL instructor named Bobby Richardson, better known to his students as “the Anti-Christ” for his intense conditioning workouts (144). In the fifth Doc Ford novel, Ford is visited by the daughter of an old, presumably dead, covert ops friend whose wife has possibly been kidnapped. The covert op friend’s name? Bobby Richardson.

One of the old “Out There” columns from *Outside* magazine, “Antiterrorist Driving School,” details White’s experiences in the BSR Inc.’s Executive Security Training course held at Summit Point, West Virginia. The program is “the real-life choice of the United States Department of State, the Department of Defense, various specialized military teams, as well as a garden variety of clandestine organizations, many of which are conveniently located only two hours away in Washington, D.C.” (29). Here White learns how to use “vehicular evasive tactics” on stretches of open track, including how to spot a ruse, how to flee a “killing zone” by making what is termed a “j-turn” (a maneuver made up of a quick shift, a locking of the emergency break, and a quick turn of the wheel), and “barricade breaching,” a ramming technique (33-34). White uses his knowledge of these vehicular techniques in the fifth of the Doc Ford novels, *North of Havana*. In hopes of rescuing Tomlinson, who has gotten mixed up with revolutionaries in Cuba, Ford drives a Nissan on a road to Angosta and is forced to employ a j-turn which he once long ago practiced at “a sequestered road track in Summit Point, West Virginia. [He] learned how to take curves at outrageous speeds. Learned how to escape,

how to flee, how to use a vehicle as a weapon" (158). In order to avoid a faked roadblock designed to stop him. Ford relates: ". . . I downshifted into first, released the emergency brake . . . we were driving in the opposite direction without ever having stopped. Not a great turn, but my old driving instructor would have approved" (159). *North of Havana* also relies on research of Cuba plus draws heavily on White's experience in Mariel Harbor during the 1980 boatlift of which he was actively involved (White, *Randy*).

White's real-life explorations and adventures, as documented in his *Outside* essays, sometimes even prove to be the basis for entire Doc Ford novels. The sixth in the series, *Ten Thousand Islands*, is heavily informed by the experiences of Rommie David Taylor, a fourteen-year-old Florida boy who mysteriously hung himself after discovering an oddly designed pendant on an island off the west coast of Florida in 1969. In the essay, "The Gold Medallion," which can be found in White's *An American Traveler: True Tales of Adventure, Travel and Sport*, David Taylor's story is related along with White's concern that treasure hunters will despoil the shell mounds left by the Calusa Indians along the west coast of Florida in the sixteenth century (1-9). David Taylor and his younger brother had found the golden pendant in the midst of human bones while sifting for Indian artifacts. The boy's mother tells White that her son had always had a great interest in archaeology and an uncanny knack for finding them (6). Though he was an excellent student, his grades began to fall, and David Taylor began to experience nightmares associated with his digging up of the Indian grave. Lorraine David Taylor tells White that she too experienced nightmares. "In one, she and her son were standing

in water up to their necks. The boy held the gold medal in his hand. Then he dropped it. She begged him not to go after it, but he laughed and disappeared beneath the water's surface. Three days after she experienced this dream, David Taylor hanged himself from a tree" (6).

Tragically, the boy's mother was further traumatized when a local amateur treasure hunter convinced the grief-stricken woman to participate in a séance in order to communicate with her dead son. The treasure hunter fooled her into thinking that her son wanted her to give the golden pendant to him using a few taps on a séance table that purportedly indicated her son's wishes that she pass on the necklace (6-7). The community was outraged and the man later sold the medallion to White himself, who stated:

> A friend and I bought it just to get it away from the guy who cheated David's mother . . . . We gave it to a third friend, with the stipulation that it be placed in a museum with David's name on it. But our friend was worried that publicly displaying it would only promote more looting. Eventually we began to bicker. One friend purchased the other friend's share. We bickered some more. It came so close to ruining our friendship that we began to joke about it. The Curse of the Medallion we called it. (7)

White further explained that he is "not superstitious. But I've given the thing away three times, and each time it's ended up back in my hands. My Indian friends—who are superstitious—say that's because the medallion is meant to remain here. They say it

should be reburied" (7). White finally donated it to the Florida Museum of National History.

In the "Author's Note" that opens *Ten Thousand Islands*, White states: "The gold medallion as described in this novel is real, but the characters have absolutely no relationship in fact or fancy to the good people who suffered the tragedy associated with the medallion's discovery" (xiii). In the novel, Ford's fellow marina-dwelling friend, JoAnn Smallwood, comes to Doc to see if he can help her friend, Della Copeland. Her friend's dead daughter's things have been gone through by someone who has twice broken into her trailer in Key Largo. Ford agrees to look into things, and it becomes clear that the intruder has been in search of a medallion that Della's daughter Dorothy had discovered before her apparent suicide-by-hanging many years before. White takes the mysterious, true-life tale with which he himself was once involved and fictionalizes it in a novel that picks up the strands of reality and weaves them into a satisfying mystery-adventure.

Likewise, the ninth installment of the Doc Ford series, *Twelve Mile Limit*, is also based on a true-life story that White had published in *Outsider* magazine. This time, White uses the story he relates in "The Lost Divers," which can be found in the collection of essays contained in *Lost Flight Out: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing*. "The Lost Divers" describes the sinking of a twenty-five foot pleasure boat, the *Sea Esta*, which had not returned from its voyage in the waters off the west coast of Florida along with the four Canadian men who had been out on it, scuba diving and fishing. A Coast Guard helicopter discovered one of the men, naked and waving his wetsuit, on the top of

a 160-foot light tower (105). The man, twenty-seven-year old-Jeff Wandich, had been on the light tower for thirty-five hours. The boat had sunk, and he had been separated from his three friends. His three friends, though wearing brightly-colored buoyancy compensator vests, disappeared and have never been seen or heard from since. They had simply vanished "into an abyss" (113).

A long search by many different outfits never turned up the missing men, and rumors began to spread about what had actually happened out at sea. White himself actually dove the boat wreck with others in search of evidence into the mystery. Some of the families of the other men began to suspect Wandich of foul play (perhaps he and the others were running drugs and met with some kind of foul play), but he passed a lie detector test administered by the FBI which was asked to take a routine look into the wreck by the Coast Guard (126-27). According to White, Wandich and the families of his three missing friends have never really given up the search. "The search continues and has been expanded to include Central America, Colombia, and Cuba, even as the families—and Jeff Wandich—struggle to come to terms with what occurred" (131).

In *Twelve Mile Limit*, White fictionalizes the account of Jeff Wandich and the *Sea Esta*. Wandich is represented by Amanda, who is similarly found atop a light tower in the Gulf of Mexico, naked and waving her wetsuit. Her three friends, one of whom includes Janet Meuller, another of Doc Ford's friends from the Dinkins Bay Marina, have vanished as Wandich's three companions did. As in Wandich's case, rumors begin to circulate—perhaps kidnapping or murder. Ford is bothered by the case and goes to the wreck and dives for evidence just as White himself had done at the wreck of the *Sea Esta*.

However, in White's fictionalized version of the story, the mystery of the vanishing divers is solved. After being discovered by pirates, the one male of the trio of divers is murdered, and Janet and the other woman are kidnapped by member of an international slave trade in Colombia.

White obviously has a penchant for incorporating the details of his real-life adventures in the Doc Ford series. It will be interesting to see which of the articles from his four non-fiction collections will be pillaged of its contents for inclusion in future Ford adventures. White's experience as the lead sledder for an entry into the U. S. Tobaggan championships, his raccoon hunt in Pioneer, Ohio, his ice-fishing excursion using X-ray-stunned night-crawlers, or the adventures of his cinder-block-retrieving Chesapeake Bay retriever, Gator? No doubt, White, the one-time fishing guide, will continue to turn his adventures into bestsellers.

White continued to run charters as a light-tackle fisherman while writing many of the bizarre articles for *Outside* that later informed the plots and characters of his Doc Ford series. Although he was writing these articles and pounding out the seven Randy Stryker novels, White was not really pressured until he was forced into early retirement by the federal government. In March of 1987 the United States closed the Tarpon Bay Marina off Sanibel Island to all powerboat traffic. "Being absolutely unqualified to do anything else, I wrote a book," says White about *Sanibel Flats,* the first Doc Ford novel, which was published in 1990 (Culbertson 1). Thirteen novels have followed, and during the summer of 2006 White holed up in a monastery in southern Indiana, writing the fourteenth in the series, *Hunter's Moon*, which was published on March 15, 2007. His

burgeoning popularity and openness towards his fans has caused him to relocate to remote locations in order to write (White, "Email"). Luckily, White finds himself happily at home on Pine Island working on the next and fifteenth Doc Ford novel, *The Black Widow* (White, "Telephone").

White's Doc Ford series has received many accolades, and the books have become national bestsellers, although he admits that his first book deal was "terrible" (MacDonald 2):

> I wrote *Sanibel Flats* and I sent the book to an agent who sent it to St. Martin's Press who called back all breathless and offered a three-year deal. I was paid $5,000 for the first book, $7,000 for the second and maybe $11,000 for the third. And that was low. My agent said, "Don't quit your day job." *Sanibel Flats* now sells in hardback on Ebay for as much as my advance on it. (MacDonald 2).

White faired a bit differently after leaving St. Martin's who had an option on the third and fourth book. Since they had not adequately promoted the first three, White signed with Putnam's' who gave him a $70, 000 or $80, 000 advance, which "just seemed gigantic" to him. White has sold options on the novels to Hollywood, but none of them have been made into movies yet (MacDonald 2).

On Sanibel Island, White's local fans have turned their love of the Doc Ford books into profit. Four fans have collaborated with White to open Doc Ford's Sanibel Rum Bar and Grille, which "feels like a sports bar for fisherman, with big-screen TVs, trophy fish on the wall, and a giant aquarium with tarpon, red fish, and snook." Dishes inspired by the books are offered, including "Ford's Famous Clam Chowder" and the

"Creative License Caesar Salad." Customers can also sample rums from the regions where Doc Ford travels. All the Doc Ford novels are on sale at the bar and grille, and so are Doc Ford t-shirts, baseball caps, and other products advertising the Sanibel Biological Supply Co.—a marine company run by Doc Ford in White's fiction and an important company run by the author in real life (Polcyn 2). White takes an active hand in everything that goes on at the restaurant, including the menu: "I try to go out there two or three times a week and work on drinks, which is tough duty . . . . It's pretty fun, plus it's a nice place to meet people. I like doing the retail stuff—I make up the shirts, the ball caps, baseball jerseys and stuff, it's cool" (McDonald, "Florida Fishing Guide").

Doc Ford's Sanibel Rum Bar and Grille is often the site of other overlapping combinations of White's real life and fiction. During book readings at the bar and grille, White often tells stories of one of the most fascinating characters he ever encountered, an old man who was born to whiskey makers in the mangroves of the Ten Thousand Islands. The old man, who ran a lucrative marijuana business, importing from Panama, was eventually convicted of income tax evasion. White's friend inspired the creation of Ford's adventurous uncle, Tucker Gattrell. White might also tell his audiences of his participation in a tarpon-spawning experiment he is working on with Mote Marine Lab, a marine research organization based in Sarasota (Polcyn 2). Doc Ford conducts a similar tarpon spawning experiment at the beginning of *Tampa Burn*.

White follows a disciplined, rigorous writing regimen. He usually sets a goal for the number of pages he will write for the day, and he will not stop until he has reached it. (Castanier 2). He writes approximately 1,000 words each day, five days per week

(Culbertson 2). White writes and rewrites ten to twelve hours per day (Castanier 2), and he has found it difficult to find the time to write as he has become more successful. White likes people and is not a "hermit-type" person, but people—even his friends—do not realize how difficult his craft is. He says, "I've had people just stop in—I mean, all day long, they'll just stop in. I have a very open house—I've got a natural shower [as does Doc Ford in the novels]. Too many times, I've been up there showering and people have walked in with books to sign" (McDonald, "Randy" 6). After he finishes his writing, "it's off to check on his boat, maybe do a little fishing or, if the weather is right, go windsurfing" ("Real Doc Ford" 1). Here White's life parallels another Florida fan-hounded writer, Ernest Hemingway, who lived in Key West.

White is very intent on getting the biological details in the Doc Ford books right. His determination to be accurate means he has got to do a lot of detailed research. He spends countless hours researching and even interviews a psychiatrist friend to make sure his villain's pathologies are reality-based (Castanier 2). White still travels a great deal in order to be able to describe accurately the locales Ford visits in the novels (White, "Telephone"). Again, he very much resembles one of his favorite authors, Hemingway, the most acclaimed writer-adventurer, larger than life. He is, as Bill Castanier writes, "a George Plimpton, who decided to write mysteries" (2). He continues his travels even though some think it dangerous in the post-9/11 world, saying, "I've never been anywhere where people didn't like Americans. That's just been my experience" (McDonald, "Randy" 10). He believes this despite being stabbed in the back in Peru when the Sendero Luminoso attacked the town he was staying in and 56 people were

killed, besides surviving being shot at and living through an explosion that blew up a hotel he was in. He does not write about places he has not visited. He must see them first hand (White, "*Telephone*").

White presently lives in a '20s Cracker-style house on an acre of old tropical growth on Pine Island, Florida. The house was built on an ancient Calusa Indian shell mound that overlooks the bay in Southwest Florida. White's description of Hannah Smith's house in *Captiva* is modeled on his Pine Island home. The house was destroyed several years ago by one of many hurricanes to hit his home. "His writing was relegated to churches, park benches, and bars" since he was essentially homeless for a year while rebuilding took place (Castanier 2). Though amicably divorced from his wife, Debra, White has close ties to his two sons: Lee and Rogan, who has recently begun running his own fishing, shelling and sightseeing charters around Sanibel Island (White, *Randy*). He has of late struck up a close friendship with Wendy Webb, a singer-songwriter from Kentucky who has recently relocated to Southwest Florida. White emailed Webb a couple of years ago after purchasing one of her CDs. She wrote back, a friendship developed, and "six months later it became something more." Their companionship has developed into an interesting artistic collaboration. Webb, "whose style conjures a mixture of Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez and Laura Nyro," has created a soundtrack to the Doc Ford series. One of the songs, "My Beating Heart," is "sort of a Doc Ford theme," according to Webb. "It captures his character. He's a very mysterious, dangerous and private person. I took the character and wrote a love song that a female character might

have written to Doc" ("Anchor"1). White has since used these and other Wendy Webb lyrics in his latest Doc Ford novel, *Dark Light* (Winslow-Hoffman 1).

The Doc Ford series—which begins with *Sanibel Flats* and includes the fourteenth, and latest, installment, *Hunter's Moon*—is an eclectic mix of mystery, detection, espionage, adventure, intrigue, and humor that zeros in on what it means to be a human in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Throughout the series, White explores environmental themes and politics, terrorism, religion, and American social mores. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer writes: "Tense action scenes, skillful character development and unerring eye for local flora and fauna make White a match for any Florida storyteller" (Steinberg 2). In his essay "Ecological Noir," part of the collection *Crime Fiction and Film in the Sunshine State,* Maurice O'Sullivan declares that with "his graceful prose, elegant plots, beautifully integrated science, and ironic humor, Randy Wayne White has become a richly rewarding guide to the distinctive culture of Florida's southwestern islands (126). Bill Ott of *Booklist* contends that White's novels feature "straight-ahead, leather-tough realism" (1603). In the *New York Times Book Review,* Marilyn Stasio writes: "Although his mano a mano action scenes adhere to the muscle-flexing style of writers like James W. Hall and Les Standiford, White is the most eloquent naturalist in the bunch" (22).

G. K. Chesterton defended the writing of detective fiction, suggesting in his essay "Fiction as Food" that "Sensational novels are the most moral part of modern fiction. Any literature that represents our life as dangerous and startling is truer than any literature that represents it as dubious and languid. For life is a fight and is not a

conversation" (4). White's Doc Ford series then certainly qualifies as healthy sustenance. Its pages full of violence, the series heeds Chesterton's dictum that "a novel without any death in it is still to me a novel without any life in it" (3). However, while White certainly appears to consider "life as a fight" as does Chesterton, he also views life as a conversation. Throughout the series, White combines fanciful adventure with a strong current of intellectualizing on science and religion. Although Chesterton's strong case that classifying popular fiction as "vulgar" is actually indicative of "the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued" (*A Defense of Penny Dreadfuls* 1), is one that White also seems to make in the Doc Ford novels, White also elevates the genre with his inclusion of thought about the roles of science and religion in contemporary society.

White is as unapologetic as are Walker Percy and John Updike about including questions about religion and spirituality in fiction. Clearly his novels are more outlandish than these two literary giants, but he is equally adept at integrating the subject of the spiritual and science's influences on it in the world of Doc Ford through Ford the biologists' tendency to only see life in materialistic terms and through Tomlinson's funky, yet serious spiritual sensibility. The result of White's inclusion of scientific and spiritual epistemologies is a mystery-adventure series that harkens back to one of the genre's original creations: Sherlock Holmes.

Although he is one of the top writers in his chosen genre, White does not read from within the mystery and detective genre itself. He is too afraid of stealing other's ideas. Although he is close friends with a number of fellow Floridian detective writers—Tim Dorsey, Carl Hiaasen, Jonathan King, P. J. Parish, and Tom Corcoran—he does not

read their work.. When asked if he has been influenced by any particular detective or mystery writers, he maintains that there are only two: Arthur Conan Doyle and John D. MacDonald. When White was a boy in Ohio and Iowa, he fondly recalls reading the entire range of Sherlock Holmes stories (White, "Personal"). In the series, other characters often describe how much Ford makes them think of Sherlock Holmes' deductive brilliance and Ford himself or Tomlinson often paraphrase Holmes' famous mantra when investigating: "What's the Arthur Conan Doyle line that you like? Eliminate the impossible, and whatever remains—however improbable—is your answer" (*Tampa Burn* 257). Although he contends he stopped reading the Travis McGee series, it is clear that Ford is an off-shoot of John MacDonald's well-known protagonist. Both McGee and Ford are large athletic men who attempt to live off the grid in Florida all the while worrying about the state's fragile environment.

When White's preoccupation with spiritual and scientific ways of knowing, which is preeminent throughout the fourteen novel series, is considered, it makes sense that he would be influenced by Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who lived at the time when Darwin's theories about evolution exploded on the scene. Holmes, like Doc Ford, certainly utilized the scientific method—rapidly becoming "the way" to understand reality in the Victorian Era—but still found that the "highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in flowers," since their beauty is an extra and not a necessity for life (Doyle 901). Ford's sidekick, the mystical Tomlinson, is always on hand to remind Ford of the bigger mysteries that mere science cannot unravel.

CHAPTER 2

DOC FORD: THE CONTINUED EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE

"Sherlock Holmes," she said. "You're almost scary, Ford. You know the color of the man's eyes? What he had for breakfast?" (86). Jessica McClure to Doc Ford in *Sanibel Flats*.

Randy Wayne White's Marion T. or "Doc" Ford is a part of the American hard-boiled detective fiction tradition that began with Dashiell Hammett and others who contributed to *Black Mask Magazine*. However, Wayne's series expands the boundaries of the hard-boiled format, as have many other contemporary mystery fiction writers. In order to clearly see Doc Ford's place in the annals of the hard-boiled tradition, I will offer a definition of the tradition and its many permutations.

Fellow crime novelist Robert Block (author of the popular Matthew Scudder series) writes:

> There are, as everyone knows, two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who don't. The world of crime fiction gets similarly cleft in twain. Mysteries are divided into two categories: the tough, gritty, mean-streets, in-your-face kind, which is labeled hard-boiled, and the gentle, effete, British country-house body-in-the-library sort, which is called a cozy. Stereotypically, the hard-boiled mystery is American. It features, and is very likely narrated by, a private detective, a hard-drinking softhearted cynic who looks a little like Humphrey Bogart when he's not looking like Robert Mitchum. The hard-boiled novel is written by a man and read by

> men. It is sour and downbeat and violent, and it means business. In contrast, the cozy is English, written by women and for women. Its detective is apt to be an inspired amateur, male or female, and all its characters, except for the odd charming rustic, tend to be well spoken and courteous, decorous even in death. Its violence is offstage and unthreatening, leaning toward esoteric poisons and ingenious murder methods. The sleuth sets things right by working out an elaborate puzzle, and order is restored to a universe that is orderly at heart. (40-41)

Having clearly distinguished the two types of mysteries, Block then points out the downside to such stereotyping: "their rules are broken in book after book" (41). Wayne's Doc Ford series is a perfect example of Block's good advice that making these kinds of sharp distinctions while investigating crime fiction is helpful, but ultimately too limiting to allow for any discussion of the evolution within the tradition. However, as Thomas Schatz contends, defining a genre can clearly be the basis for staking out unknown territory (16).

According to Schatz, a genre is a privileged story form, "part of a limited number of story forms that have been refined into formulas because of their unique social and/or aesthetic qualities" (16). A genre has a "specific grammar or system of rules of expression and construction," which work towards creating "a range of expression" for its producers and "a range of experience" for its consumers (Schatz 19, 22). A genre is, therefore, "a coherent, value-laden narrative system that has emerged through a process of commercial selection and repetition into a familiar, meaningful system that can be

named as such" (Coogan 25). Its range is determined and can be identified by its "cultural context, its community of interrelated character types whose attitudes, values, and actions flesh out dramatic conflicts within that community" (Schatz 21-22). The way to define a genre is "to reduce this context to its absolute minimum—the conventions that lie at the center of a genre and that must be present for a specific story or character to be considered an example of the genre (Coogan 25). In short, the best way to see how Wayne's Doc Ford series is both a part of and an expansion of the hard-boiled tradition is to "reduce" the hard-boiled tradition to "its absolute minimum" by uncovering and isolating "the conventions that lie at [its] center" (Coogan 25). If lines are not drawn, and the "floodgates are opened," almost any tale which has "the faintest connection with crime will be let in" (Symons 5).

American hard-boiled detective fiction was partially a direct response to the Anglo-American classical tradition of detectives inspired by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (Rzepka 179). "Spurning the drawing-room diction of polite society that filled the pages of Wright, Sayers, Christie, and Carr, the tough-guy writers cultivated a brusque, clipped, vernacular style. They also made a point of denigrating the formal puzzle element, along with the shallow characterizations and implausible conjunctions of events that it seemed to demand" (Rzepka 179-80). The classical detective seemingly surveys the scene from an objective viewpoint, using his ratiocination to solve puzzles and restore order to society. The hard-boiled detective, on the other hand, violently throws himself into the mix, stirring up trouble and using violence to attain justice. Hard-boiled authors "retained the inductive challenge of

classical detection under a garish surface of face-paced events, colourful personalities, and wise-cracking rejoinders" (Rzepka 180). As Julian Symons contends, the "problems are composed just as skillfully as those in an orthodox detective story, but they are the beginning and not the end of the book's interest" (147).

The interest, according to Rzepka, "lies mainly in the enigmas of character, mood, and motive, a strong sense of place, and lots of action" (180). In contrast towards the classical detective's reliance on physical clues to reconstruct the crime, hard-boiled detectives "often spend the major part of the investigation in simply trying to understand what is going on" (Pyrhonin 114). Robert S. Paul writes that

> however much Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe give us the impression of realism as detectives, they are only minimally concerned with *detecting* as an investigative rational act. As Chandler himself observed of the detective, 'The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure.' One has the impression that writers of the hard-boiled school, although they may be concerned with the ultimate triumph of what they believe to be right or wrong, or justice over injustice, they are not primarily concerned with demonstrating this as an outcome of rationality. Rather, their triumph comes as the end result of innately heroic qualities and of the hero's capacity to overcome all obstacles, physical as well as intellectual; their ultimate rationale is Adventure, with a capital A. (132)

Does White's major protagonist, Doc Ford, fit in the mold of hard-boiled detectives such as Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade? After taking

Schatz's prescription and reducing the context of the hard-boiled genre to its "absolute minimum," I will make clear Ford's place in the panorama of American hard-boiled detectives. In Ford and his sidekick Tomlinson, White has created an action-packed but uniquely intellectual detective series that examines contemporary American life through the combined lenses of scientific and spiritual epistomelogies. White simultaneously examines contemporay American notions about religion and spirituality, technology and civilization, violence and peace, and men and women through these two sometimes conflicting ways of knowing.

The work of John Cawelti and William Marling makes it easy to delineate swiftly the generic features of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction. Both scholars have probed the genre and noted its defining features. Broadly, American hard-boiled novels typically feature a detective (1) who is usually a loner and (2) lives in a corrupt, alienating urban setting where (3) his or her actions are seemingly futile. Hard-boiled detectives (4) eschew the brilliant ratiocination of the classical detective in favor of the use of physical force and violence. (5) The detective heroes themselves usually tell their own stories in the first person with a generous dollop of terse comebacks, wisecracks and slang. (6) Most hard-boiled novels feature a mix of action and introspection. Lastly, until the 1980s when women writers such as Sara Paretsky, "Amanda Cross" [Carolyn Heilbrun] and others entered the field, the detective hero was almost always a male, and (7) he typically squared off against a femme fatale. In the Doc Ford series, it is clear that White follows this standard formula. However, it is just as important to read his series against these conventions to see how he breaks with tradition and expands the genre as do

many contemporary hard-boiled fiction writers. The complexity of the character of Doc Ford elevates White's work above the stereotypes of the genre.

The Isolation of the Hard-boiled Detective

Doc Ford is, at times, very much the loner, as is typical of the detectives in the hard-boiled tradition. In the first novel of the series, *Sanibel Flats*, the reader's earliest encounter with Doc Ford comes as the 36-year-old covert operative escapes the Presidential Palace in White's fictional Central American country, Masauga, after his tryst with Pilar Santana Fuentes Balserio, the young wife of Masagua's dictator Don Jorge Balserio, is interrupted. An agent and assassin for a United States covert op group buried deeply within the intelligence community, Ford decides to retire, hoping Pilar will follow him to the States. Much to his sorrow, she does not. As he flies from Masagua to Florida in the cargo hold of a DC-3, Ford reflects on his present circumstances:

> By morning he would be in Virginia for a week of debriefing. After that his life as a bureaucrat was done. He could forget about Masagua and try to forget about Pilar. He'd get a place on the water and do the work he'd always wanted to do. A simple life, that's what he wanted. Just a place to do his work and no more women. Not for awhile. Not after the president's wife. . . . (5-6)

White continues to develop Ford's status as a loner when he describes how after his debriefing, Ford purchases an old Chevrolet pickup truck and drives along the southern coast through North Carolina and Georgia. He sleeps outside when the weather is good, keeping to himself. Finding plenty of nice places where he could live, he

continues south until he ends up in "Southwest Florida, as he somehow had known he would. He had grown up on this coast, yet there was no nostalgia involved in his decision—or so he told himself—for he was no less alone upon his return than he was when he had left eighteen years earlier" (6).

In keeping with the convention of the isolated detective, White describes how Ford discovers an old fish house built on pilings, connected to the boardwalk of Sanibel Island that "might be available on a long-term lease to a marine biologist with the proper credentials or the right connections" (6). Since Ford has both—an actual doctorate in marine biology from the University of Durban in South Africa which functioned as his cover story during his covert op activities—he is able to take ownership of the stilt house. Here he begins a rather solitary post-espionage life, creating a home in one section of the stilt fish house and a marine lab in the other, something he eventually will call Sanibel Biological Supply Company. Ford will attempt to live an almost *Walden*-like existence next to the ocean, making a living as a supplier of marine specimens to colleges, universities, and high schools across the country. This alludes rather bluntly to the character of Doc in Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday,* who makes a similar living on the coast of California. And like Steinbeck's Doc, Wayne's Doc Ford finds himself becoming a valued member of a community although an initial attempt is made at living a simple, unencumbered life of isolation:

> Gradually, Ford was accepted into the marina community—Dinkin's Bay Marina, it was called—and, as months passed, he became more than just a member of that small society, he became one of its pillars. . . . His rapid climb to position in the community surprised no one more than Ford. He

> had always been a private person, a man who attracted people and valued his friends yet went his own way. But just as the marina's society had adjusted to him, Ford adjusted to his new role, his new life, doing his work each day and sometimes far into the night, accepting callers with the offer of cold beer and letting down his guard, slowly, slowly, for it was not easy after ten years of being necessarily suspicious and living a life of professional deceit. (7)

Here, White begins to break a bit with tradition; however, Ford's early life still closely matches the isolation and lack of family experienced by most hard-boiled heroes. The reader later discovers that Ford's isolation was much severe in his earlier life. It turns out that he was orphaned as a ten-year-old when his parents were killed in a boating accident (*The Man Who* 145). His only family tie is with his uncle, Tucker Gattrell, "an ex-triple-A pitcher who picked up the bottle the day his contract was dropped" (*Sanibel* 17), a conniving schemer who takes him in until the young Ford discovers his uncle's tinkering with his parents' boat engine was the cause of their deaths. Like his creator, White, Ford moved out on his own when he was in his senior year of high school. He lived in a "little groundskeeper's cottage off West Gulf Drive" in Sanibel and worked, alongside going to school and playing sports, to pay the rent (*The Man Who* 145). He later leaves Sanibel for the Navy, where he is recruited by the intelligence community for whom he works the next eighteen years of his life (*Sanibel* 23).

Ford's formative years follow the genre's typical demand that the hard-boiled hero be a loner, someone who almost lacks biography: he has no real family connections, his career as an assassin and spy keeps him on the move and without roots, and his nature

seems to demand a simple existence, one without any messy commitments, yet the spy-turned-biologist becomes a part of his adopted marina community much to his own surprise. As surprising as this may seem, White's expansion of this component of the hard-boiled tradition is actually in line with developments in the genre during the last fifteen to twenty years.

In his book *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*, Fred Pfeil notes some interesting trends that have been evolving in hard-boiled detective or crime fiction for some time. "Soft-Boiled Dicks" is an aptly named chapter in this work that charts how hard-boiled writers have moved towards lessening their heroes' isolation and need for self-reliance. In comparing the present generation of detectives with their forefathers, Pfeil finds that " the clearest, most immediately discernable such difference concerns the greater degree of connection and interrelation the new generation of detectives has with other characters and, in most cases, the social worlds they inhabit" (122). Earlier hard-boiled protagonists had few if any stable romantic attachments, but Pfeil demonstrates how this one-time generic convention has been largely ignored or mitigated against by the new breed of detectives. He points to the long-running relationship between Robert Parker's Spenser and lover Susan Silverman (Pfeil 123), and even Spenser and Susan separate and have other relationships in a few novels in the middle of that series. He also notes the stress James Lee Burke puts on the family structure; his hero, Dave Robicheaux, has a long-running marriage and even adopts an orphaned girl he encounters.

White's Doc Ford also has a drive towards constructing strong familial and community orders. Ford discovers he has fathered a male child at the conclusion of his

first outing in *Sanibel Flats* (307). He makes a concerted effort to be the boy's father, even though Masagua and Sanibel Island are far apart and despite the danger that awaits Ford if he is to return to the Central American country where he had earlier helped to stir up political unrest. At first, he can only communicate with his son, Laken, by sending gifts at Christmas and birthdays. Later, when the boy is older, Ford strikes up a relationship via email with his son. Family becomes a primary concern of Ford in the last few novels of the ongoing series. In *Shark River*, eighth in the series, Ford first meets and develops a strong relationship with Ransom Gattrell, his uncle Tucker's daughter who first is led to believe she is Ford's blood sister. Three novels later, in *Tampa Burn*, Ford must save his son from a homicidal maniac. During the course of the novel, Ford discovers there is a chance that his best friend Tomlinson might actually be Laken's real father. Though a biologist, Ford learns that family is not merely a genetic reality when his cousin Ransom asks him, "Did you feel like the boy's father before you read them letters? Course you did. Then tell me, how can a few words change a man's feelin's for his child? Where's it say you got to have the same blood to be a father? Hell, man, I ain't even your *real* sister. But 'cause of the feelings you and I got, I am your real *sister*. See what I'm sayin'?" (223).

In the next installment of the Doc Ford series, *Dead of Night*, Ford learns that Laken is, in fact, his biological son. But the lesson that family is more than blood is learned. He even comes to think, as his cousin Ransom says, that Tomlinson is "almost like your brother" (222) though he and the "crazy, ganja-smokin' Stork man" clearly have opposite temperaments, and despite the fact that Ford has a standing order to

assassinate his friend for a bombing that killed one of Ford's fellow operatives years earlier.

There is one other significant departure from the hard-boiled convention that the hero must be lonely, isolated, existentially adrift, and without familial ties in White's Doc Ford series. This departure too begins to develop in the latter portion of the series, beginning with *Tampa Burn* and continuing in the two latest novels, *Dead of Night* (2005) and *Dark Light* (2006). This expansion of convention does not run quite as smoothly for Ford. Doc and Dewey Nye—his longtime friend, workout partner, and former tennis pro turned golf pro—begin the first significant long-term relationship in the marine biologist's life as the action in *Tampa Burn* begins. It is a complicated relationship due to Dewey's apparently bisexual nature. The coupling is further hindered when Dewey overhears Ford proclaim his love for Laken's mother, Pilar Balserio, as the two parents initiate a search for their kidnapped son (70-71). The female-jock leaves Florida and heads for her home state of Iowa. Once Ford has rescued Laken, Dewey does allow him to visit her on her family's old farm, but she has been "wounded deeply" by the words she heard Ford speak to Pilar (365). At the end of the novel, when Ford discovers that he will be a father a second time when Dewey tells him she is pregnant with their child, he begins to reflect: "I was thinking of Lake, and Dewey, and of friends who had become more than friends. Key elements came to mind, then key words: family. . . heredity . . . genetics . . . *blood"* (372).

As the next novel, *Dead of Night*, opens, the reader finds Doc commuting to Iowa to see Dewey, and this time they "seem to be sticking. Maybe because there was more at stake" (63). Although she has miscarried the child she was carrying near the end of the

action in *Tampa Burn*, Dewey is pregnant again after she and Doc have given their relationship another try (64). Dewey later gives birth to a baby girl, but as of the last novel in the series, *Hunter's Moon*, Doc has yet to meet his infant daughter. At the close of *Dead of Night*, Doc returns to Iowa from his adventures with eco-terrorists to discover that Dewey has rekindled a relationship with a former female lover (349). It is clear that things will not work out between him and Dewey. As he leaves for Florida, Ford "touched [his] fingers to Dewey's belly, wondering if [he] would ever see any of them again" (349). Perhaps White snaps back towards a more conventional type of hard-boiled attitude with regard to Doc's romantic attachments. Ford's second attempt to establish a traditional family fails, leaving him free to purposefully accept assignments as a Negotiator once again. Since he cannot find stability in the creation and maintenance of family life—something he has never been allowed to enjoy since the early deaths of his parents—Ford seemingly returns to a life as a part-time assassin in order to find some sort of equilibrium or order in his life. The limitations imposed by family life would certainly prohibit Ford from accepting assignments that could endanger, thus harm, his family. The loss of a possible family also seems to cause Ford to pursue the life of violence he had intended on renouncing.

One of the most interesting and engaging facets of the Doc Ford series is the ongoing evolution of the major characters. They are not static, ageless human beings as in many detective series. This allows for fuller, more complex characterization that gives White's characters a level of plausibility that supersedes characters in most of the novels in the genre. Readers of the Doc Ford series come to care about Ford, Tomlinson, and some of the other series' regulars since they know they will often be surprised by

changes in the moral and spiritual development of the characters. As the novels progress, White provides the reader with more information about the characters' pasts. He told Craig McDonald that "In every book I try to reveal a little bit more about the characters in terms of their histories. I drop little hints here and there, even from the first book" ("Randy" 3). When asked if he has a sense of "the larger arcs in his characters' lives, or if he just writes book to book," White affirmed that "when I wrote the first novel, *Sanibel Flats*, I wrote long dossiers on three of the main characters—Ford, Tomlinson and Tucker Gatrell. So I've long known their inner-workings and inner-weavings. It's fun, like a striptease—you reveal a little bit as you go along" (McDonald, "Randy" 3). However, White also admits to his frustration at having lost this long dossier several years ago. While he still remembers the basics he included in the character dossier, he "wishes I still had the thing" since there are sketches of several of the series characters who have yet to appear in the novels. One such character is a fictional U. S. President who Ford works with in *Hunter's Moon* (White, "Personal").

It may be impossible to make a final judgment about how White has used the hard-boiled convention of the isolated detective until the series is brought to a close. However, it seems doubtful that White will not continue to push back the boundaries of this particular trait since to do so is not consistent with the way he writes. He told me that it is the characters that he finds most interesting to write about and develop rather than the plots of his novels, which give him the most trouble (White, "Personal"). White similary remarked to Bill Ott that "people are more interesting than events" and that the motivations and flaws of people are what he finds "fascinating." Rather than the "crabby" writers he sometimes meets that lack "zest" and seem to "generally dislike

people," White contends that he likes people, and he likes "to write about them" (Ott 16). White's gregarious nature combined with the fascinating and often humorous interplay of Ford and Tomlinson would seem prohibitive of Ford's remaining isolated for long.

At any rate, White, like many other contemporary hard-boiled practitioners, has broken with earlier traditions. In *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, Ronald R. Thomas explains that this break with traditional generic conventions has been necessitated since our age is "burdened with the analysis of everything," adding that "hard-boiled writers have now made self-definition and self-justification regular features of the new hard-boiled hero. The struggle is for writers to try and have it both ways: to have heroes act instinctively and to have to define themselves" (206). The way most contemporary hard-boiled writers make this combination of action and introspection possible is to intersperse scenes of high energy with scenes of the detective interacting with a thoughtful partner or a significant other.

Conversations occurring between the heroes of contemporary hard-boiled books and their partners often "provoke self-defining passages" from these heroes (Thomas 207). Such conversations are plentiful in White's Doc Ford books, an issue that will be more fully handled when White's explorations of the scientific versus the spiritual are investigated in later chapters. At any rate, Thomas also notes the prevalence of the following in contemporary versions of the hard-boiled novel: lots of adopted children (221), long-term relationships (217), "more family and more hope" (222). These are certainly in abundance in the world of Doc Ford with Doc's growing family of blood and non-blood relations.

One last aspect of the convention of the isolated or lonely hard-boiled detective hero that must be examined in the Doc Ford series is the detective's as an outsider to institutionalized law enforcement. Most hard-boiled detectives, even those carrying state-issued private investigator licenses, operate from outside the official state justice system and even find themselves at odds with the system even if they have friends within it. John Cawelti sees this marginalization of the hard-boiled detective as being central to his characterization. Not only is he a man on the outside of institutionalized law, he is also

> a paradoxical combination of a man of character who is also a failure. The private eye is a relatively poor man who operates out of a seedy office and never seems to make very much money by his exploits; he is the most marginal sort of lower middle-class quasi-professional. Yet unlike the usual stereotype of his social class, he is a man of honor and integrity who cannot be made to give up his quest for true justice. He is a compelling American hero type, clearly related to the traditional western hero who manifests many of the same characteristics. (195)

White seems to knowing write in this vein. He makes Ford's first name "Marion," perhaps in homage to America's most iconic western hero, John Wayne (Marion Morrison). Ford's uncle fancies himself the last of the cowboys and he has given Ford the obvious nickname, "Duke," much to Ford's chagrin.

White's Doc Ford is both an echo of this stereotype and a break with it. Until his retirement, Ford was part of the nation's "institutionalized law," however secretive his role as a government agent and assassin was. His isolation in his stilt fish house on

Sanibel Island is self-imposed, but he is like the stereotypical hard-boiled private detective in that he was once appointed to bring about justice by United States charter. Like the private eye of old, Ford acts outside socially-instituted law enforcement in an attempt to bring about justice when it cannot. In *The Heat Islands*, second in the series, Doc Ford ruminates about his lack of trust in America's legal system:

> The legal system, Ford knew, was an abacus of shrewdness, not a scale of justice. Indeed, true justice was an anomaly. It was not that legislators, attorneys, and judges weren't good human beings—though some certainly were not. The problem was that they and their legal forebears had gradually perverted the legal system for the protection of their own profession. Jurisprudence was no longer a moral process. It was a competition in which the competitors—attorneys—created their own rules. (152)

Ford's understanding is that America's legal system has been corrupted by the competition brought about by naked capitalism. Instead of looking for justice, lawyers look for monetary gain. If a guilty party has enough money a lawyer can coach him to look innocent in front of a jury. It does not matter that justice is not served. In *Heat Islands*, Ford realizes that his friend Jeth Nicholes, innocent of murder, does not have the money necessary for capable legal representation. "Successfully negotiating the legal system, Ford knew, required that an individual be shrewd. Or wealthy. Or both. And Jeth Nicholes was poorly equipped on all counts" (153). Certain that the legal system is morally corrupt and likely will not gain Jeth justice, Ford decides that he must take matters into his own hands. This is nothing new for Ford. His many years of working in

the illegally-sanctioned Negotiators have dulled his own moral sense about law and justice. He has operated above the law for so long, he has no compunction doing it again, perhaps rationalizing that this time he is helping a friend who has been wronged through no fault of his own.

Ford's support for his friend Jeth is characteristic of the plots in virtually all of the novels in the series, and this distinguishes Ford from more conventional versions of the hard-boiled detective. Where the typical hard-boiled detective hero got involved in investigations without being under the purveyance of the police by being hired by various "clients," Ford usually becomes active when a friend is in trouble and needs his help, his past life as a spy and assassin catches up with him, or he is accidentally thrust into some kind of situation where he can save someone's life. Ford does not look for trouble; it seems to find him or one of his friends. In all fourteen Doc Ford novels, the main plot lines are all driven by Ford's taking action to help friends or family. Ford is not always enthusiastic about helping, but he always eventually becomes involved. As the series progresses and Ford is slowly drawn back into his work as a "Negotiator," assassinating international terrorists becomes a secondary part of the plots.

Working as a covert operative on a part-time basis gives Ford an ability common to other hard-boiled heroes; he is, as Pfeil puts it, "far from occupying a fixed location" and "hovers outside and above all fixed social space" (111). "Existing nowhere, he can go anywhere," and this lack of enforced restraints allows Ford to do whatever it takes to get justice (Pfeil 112). He is not handcuffed by the rules and regulations which institutionalized law enforcement officers must obey. In fact, given the institutional go-ahead to terminate other human beings when he deems necessary, Ford may be more

"above" than simply "outside" society's law. In many ways then, Doc Ford is a conventional hard-boiled hero. Like other modern and contemporary American heroes—Rambo, Batman, John McClain, and Dirty Harry among them—Ford buys into the myth of redemptive violence, but he often finds himself frustrated when those he helps are often left worse off than before he decides to take action. What he initially believes are gallant attempts to rescue women are not always successful: four women whom he tries to save die in the series.

Urban Setting of Corruption and Alienatinon

The next important convention of the hard-boiled tradition that must be investigated is the genre's call for an alienated and urban setting. At first glance, the idyllic beaches, lush foliage, and serene seascapes of southwestern Florida that Doc Ford inhabits might seem to be far removed from the usual dark, seedy, and nefarious modern cities navigated by the typical hard-boiled hero. As Cawelti notes in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Culture*, the "special role of the modern city as background" is "one of the most important aspects of the hard-boiled formula." Cawelti locates the importance of the city in classical detective literature where the "fantasy of the modern city as a place of exotic and romantic adventure" is quite obvious. However, Cawelti contends that when the city is represented in the hard-boiled genre, this "vision of the city is almost completely reversed" In the hard-boiled stories and novels of the mid-twentieth century, the reader finds "empty modernity, corruption and death. A gleaming and deceptive façade hides a world of exploitation and criminality in which enchantment and significance must usually be sought elsewhere, in what remains

of the natural world still unspoiled by the pervasive spread of the city" (Cawelti 141). Ford does not inhabit the typical neon-light, shadowy, and sleazy urban war zone of many typical hard-boiled heroes, but Sanibel Island, Cuba, and locations in Central America are hardly perfect, untouched, Eden-like locales.

This "city" for White may not be the burned out modern city of most hard-boiled writers, but the devastation wreaked at the hands of greedy developers and ruthless politicians of Ford's Gulf-Coast Florida parallels the voracious despoiling of Florida's southwest coast depicted by John D. MacDonald in his Travis McGee series. In discussing MacDonald's Travis McGee series in his *Your God is Alive and Well and Appearing in Popular Culture*, John Wiley Nelson sees the city in hard-boiled fiction as symbolic:

> Our world is not merely social or communal, it is urban. No one city is singled out, for the "city" of the detective novel is the "city" of our fearing yet fascinated imagination. . . . Here is the city not commonly known as "inner city," but the city of downtown and suburbs and exurbia combined—the "city" we carry around in our heads. To those who conquer and rule it, this "city" promises wealth, position, power. To the rest of us it offers material goods and anonymity to mask the means of their acquisition. (164-65)

Florida, for White and his hero, Doc Ford, is this imaginary "city" delineated by Nelson. Though the obvious beauty of the coastal islands of southwest Florida provides an intoxicating backdrop for the series, White, like his predecessor MacDonald, is clearly aware of its corruption at the hands of twisted humanity. As he writes in the "Author's

Note" to *Ten Thousand Islands*, "It is sad but not surprising. Florida is a transient state in which too many rootless people care nothing for the past nor this state's future. Florida is a vacation destination or a retirement place, as temporary as time spent in a bus station. Like a bus station, Florida attracts con men and predators. It always has. It always will" (xvi). This is as bleak as the urban nightmares described in the fiction of the original hard-boiled writers.

Though Ford's pillaged Florida may not seem like the noir cities of Hammett, Chandler, and Mickey Spillane, both cities are shot through with darkness and corruption lurking just below their shiny, brilliant, polished surfaces. For many, Florida conjures up visions of white sand beaches and gorgeous sunsets, but White instead offers Ford's realization of the disintegration of Florida's primal beauty:

> He drove across the causeway, then turned south onto U.S. 41, a six-lane Cuisinart where bad drivers from all over the nation gathered to tailgate and rush only to wait impatiently at the next light; unhappy travelers as driven as their automobiles. Here was the asphalt essence of everything bad Florida had to offer: a fast highway of Big Macs, furniture warehouses, trailer parks, disco drunk factories, and used car lots with pennants stretching two hundred miles from Tampa to Naples, jammed with traffic that slowed only when sirens screamed and ambulances came to strap the broken and bleeding onto stretchers and cart them away. Ford hated it. (121).

These are two different kinds of imaginary "cities," but both are equally bankrupt of true beauty or spirit or hope. As Chandler notes in his seminal essay on his and others'

hardboiled fiction, “The Simple Art of Murder,” “It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it” (236-37).

Another aspect of this “city as wasteland” convention typical of the hard-boiled school is the detective’s discovery that corruption pervades every aspect of society. The detective can trust no one, and is oftentimes betrayed by institutional law enforcement and even his own clients. R. Barton Palmer, in writing about American film noir, captures the rot at the heart of society that similarly stains most hard-boiled detective novels:

> The noir detective discovers darkness everywhere, finds it to be life’s ruling principle, and learns that even the rich and privileged are usually no better than the poor and deprived. In the battle between good and evil, the greater strength is wielded by the latter. This fictional world is not ordered by poetic justice but by an amoral determinism. People are inherently evil and self-centered. Death comes unexpectedly to all. Chance, not intention, governs human experience. Any tracing of crime to its source is thus insignificant, a triumph not of virtue, but of the detective’s relentlessness and cunning. The bleak America where the private dick practices his profession holds out no crime results from the pathological pursuit of gain; it is the preeminent and inalterable fact of life, not a social or moral problem. (121)

Ford, like his predecessor McGee, definitely discovers corruption in all levels of society, particularly in nature as well which suffers from the debilitating greed of

humanity. However, both heroes are quick to congratulate their fellow human beings who demonstrate integrity, honesty, and a firm sense of morality. For instance, in describing Janet Mueller, a woman who has relocated to Dinkin's Bay Marina to start a new life following the death of her young husband and unborn child in the series' fourth entry, *Captiva*, Ford honors her determination to survive and live a good life:

> I could relate to her sense of loss, and I was impressed by her determination. The good ones do not always die young; neither do they ever, ever quit. They keep finding ways to create and construct, struggling all the while to endure, because we are, above all else, a species of builders—though it seems that more and more aberrant destroyers live among us. Janet was one of the good ones, the good ones always find a way. (188)

Ford encounters the daughter of a deceased fellow covert-operative in The Mangrove Coast and here he likewise notes her positive qualities that he thinks, unfortunately, distinguish her from most people whose lives have been stunted from too much civilization and over-reliance on modern technology:

> Something else I liked was the attitude she'd brought with her to meet me, the stranger who had once been a friend of her late father. She was businesslike, tough, but she wasn't one of those women who plays the cast-iron role of feminist, thereby sacrificing her own personality along with her credibility as an individual. Nope, I liked her. A good woman; one of the private people who sat back, watched carefully and thought about things. (85).

Ford's knowledge of—as Cawelti puts it—"the secret alliance between the rich and respectable and the criminal underworld" puts him squarely in the camp of the typical hard-boiled detective hero. Among the criminal element he encounters in the fourteen novels are a psychopathic, murdering candidate for the U. S. Senate who is protected by his ultra-wealthy father, a phony, billionaire spiritual leader, several morally bankrupt land developers, and a few corrupt businessman protected by the "system." However, with the exception of one police officer who has sold out to corruption for an early retirement, Ford tends to trust, understand and respect the institutional law enforcement officials he bumps up against in his adventures. For example, even though he begins to tire of the questioning he is put to by a sheriff's detective, Ron Jackson, in *Captiva*, Ford recognizes that

> Law enforcement people are the standard—and the victims—of the unappreciated imperative. Day in, day out, they deal with misfits, liars, drunks, and head bangers. Their only reward is low pay, bad hours, and a firestorm of criticism if they make a mistake. If you're a bureaucrat and screw up, you get a private memo from the department head. If you're a cop, and screw up, you get headlines. As a result, law enforcement people are usually a hell of a lot more efficient and professional at their jobs than professionals in other fields. But they also develop a myopic under-siege view of the world. They trust no one—why should they? (21)

In *Everglades*, Ford makes a similar confession about law enforcement: "I find it surprising as I do heartening that law enforcement continues to attract top-quality people despite the daily, predictable hammering that law-enforcement professionals take from

the media, the public and from special interest groups of all types" (254). This charitable view towards law enforcement in general is not nearly as cynical as the view espoused by most hard-boiled detective heroes. Perhaps White's experience in having a father who worked as a patrol cop has given him a different outlook.

However, when government or other institutions charged with law enforcement ignore their duty to citizens, Ford has no compunction about playing the role of the vigilante and marshalling out his own brand of justice. Here, White works within the pessimistic strand of contemporary heroes, who since the 1980s, do not need to rescue individuals from an Edenic paradise corrupted by outsiders, but instead need to rescue a fallen community from "evils within its own leadership" (Lawrence and Jewett 152).

Violence versus Ratiocination

The third major convention of the hard-boiled school is a substitution of physical force on the part of the hard-boiled hero for the brilliant ratiocination that the classical detective used to solve the puzzling crimes he faced. White's Doc Ford series is clearly aligned with this substitution of the hard-boiled school. However, one reason the Doc Ford series stands out among other hard-boiled crime series is White's refusal to completely abandon the who-done-it or puzzle aspect of the more classical mystery novel. Accustomed to the use of violence from his days as a government assassin, Ford is also a methodical thinker; this is particularly evident in the experiments he conducts as part of his new career as marine biologist. He is a mix of Sherlock Holmes and Mike Hammer. Bill Ott captures this unique synthesis well in his *Booklist* review of White's ninth Ford novel, *Twelve Mile Limit*: "White sticks closely to formula in this series; a

small, brave person gets in trouble, and Ford, reluctantly shrugging off his Clark Kent disguise, does whatever it takes to rescue the imperiled soul, realizing in the process, that violence still attracts him" (1485).

Ford, like most hard-boiled heroes, finds that sometimes it is best to just stir things up in order to get to the truth. In *Sanibel Flats*, Ford thinks his best friend and battery mate from high school, Rafe Hollins, has been killed by smugglers he cheated. The killers make the murder look like a suicide, but Ford pursues the case by throwing himself into the middle of the mix even though Major Lester Durrell of the Fort-Myers-Sanibel Municipal Police Department—another old high school friend and teammate—tells Ford not to get involved: ". . . are you trying to play amateur detective? People watch TV, get the impression they can snatch clues out from under the noses of the pros, solve the puzzle, live happily ever after, which is utter, utter bullshit. It doesn't work that way and, from what I remember of you, you're too smart to think it does" (102). Ford moves forward, not by trying to "snatch clues out from under the noses of the pros," but by trying to, as the biologist says, "get the right organizations in line; to nudge them in the right direction" (105). Ford believes Durrell's theory about the ridiculous assumptions of the amateur detective, but he figures that too many organizations are involved in the investigation surrounding Rafe and that an "outsider might be able to wrangle a small bit of information from one, but the hope of assembling data from all three was absurd. "No one seems interested in solving Rafe's murder; the Sheriff's Department of Everglades County and the medical examiner's office are treating it as a suicide and have closed the case. Instead, Ford decides to follow what he has learned from nature. "In nature," he thinks, "all organisms filled the dual role of predator and

preyed upon. Big things attacked smaller things. They picked up the scent, stalked, and fed. Ford was now assembling bigger predators. He was throwing out the scent" (106). Ford asks his old friend Major Lester Durrell of the Fort Myers-Sanibel Municipal Police Department to get involved, and Ford also enlists the aid of feisty investigative reporter Henry Melinski. Ford believes that if he and Durrell and Melinski begin to poke about and stir up the disinterested law enforcement and the evasive and shady Sealife Corporation, those guilty of Rafe's murder will seek Ford out. He will use himself as bait to flush out and deal justice to the guilty parties. Throughout the series, Ford will continue to use himself as a lure in order to discover the predators he is trying to find. However, when he finds them, Ford turns the tables on them and becomes their predator.

When Ford's fishing guide buddy Jeth Nicholes is framed for the murder of the most hated man on Sanibel Island, marina-owner Marvin Rios, in the second Ford adventure, *The Heat Islands*, Doc takes action. He offers his services to Elizabeth Harper, the public defender assigned to Jeth's case, giving her an insight into his motivation which is sheer altruism:

> I have no secret fantasy of being a private eye. I have absolutely no desire to get involved with the legal system. I don't want to strut around and ask strangers for just the facts, please, just the facts. I'm very happy doing the work I've chosen to do. But you don't know the water, and you don't know the people who live around the water. I do. I can be your eyes and ears out there. Maybe I'll come up with something that will help. (157)

Again, rather than simply using his mind to probe the conundrums with which he is faced, Ford has no compunction in using physical force to get things moving.

Obviously the Doc Ford series contains the hard-boiled convention of the detective or hero using violence as a way to rev up and contain the disorder around him. However, the series refuses to merely substitute "muscle for brains." The classical tradition is still alive in the series since, many times, Ford's training as biologist is what makes him initially suspicious enough to question what he or others see to the point where he uses his mind "to solve the enigma of the crime-puzzle" (Pfeil 108). Without going into detail, since this issue will be explored in much more depth in the next chapter on the use of science in the Doc Ford series, I merely note in passing here that Ford's use of his training in science is key in his quest to restore order or achieve justice. He is, at times, every bit as brilliant as are his classical forebears Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot or Ellery Queen. In fact, several characters in the series go so far as to draw direct comparisons with Ford and Holmes. Early on in the first Ford novel, *Sanibel Flats*, Jessica McClure is awed by Ford's reasoning process in arguing that Rafe Hollins has been murdered and not committed suicide. She remarks, "Sherlock Holmes...You're almost scary, Ford. You know the color of the man's eyes? What he had for breakfast?" (86) in response to his brilliant use of the time it takes a golden-silk spider to spin its web as a clue to prove his point. The classical mystery motif of the crime-puzzle operates to some degree in every one of the fourteen Doc Ford novels. Be that as it may, it is clear that the hard-boiled tradition of the detective stirring things up by using violent measures is a potent aspect of White's fictional universe.

First-Person Narration

Another major convention of the hard-boiled school of detective fiction is "the frequent employment of the first-person *recit* to recount the tale" (Pfeil 108). Narrating the stories from the first person point of view creates an almost camera-eye view of the action, and it amplifies the reader's "sense of the detective protagonist's close involvement, indeed his complicity with the events he recounts, just as the more distanced accounts of classical detective fiction, employing either third-person narration or, as in the Sherlock Holmes' stories, the use of a sidekick *ficelle*, serves to increase both [the reader's] cerebral detachment from events, and the classical detective's" (Pfeil 108-09).

In addition to the first-person point of view, there is usually a distinctive style of speech used by the detective-narrator in hard-boiled fiction. David Geherin has written about the style as "a carefully controlled blend of colloquialisms, terse understatement, objective descriptions, all narrated in a detached tone" (22). Frank Krutnik describes the style of narration as an "idiom" that is "tough, cynical epigrammatic, controlled" and that its "defining characteristic is perhaps the 'tough' wisecrack" (43). William Marling notes that the "hard-boiled hero or heroine also carries on the tradition of verbal prowess: he or she can use language against opponents and is conscious of words and their effects" (4).

The detective's expert use of language—to the point of using it as a weapon—elevates him above all of the messy ugliness within which he finds himself caught. The wisecrack also lets the other characters in the story understand that, in mastering a "wide variety of sociolects," the detective has a "masterful detachment from and disregard for them all" (Pfeil 110). In other words, the detective's use of language indicates to the

reader and the other characters in the stories that the detective is somehow occupying a higher moral ground, and that he is—however much tempted—immune to the corruption he violently stirs up in the course of his investigations.

The first-person point of view narration and accompanying speech style that includes the use of the local vernacular and the brandishing of wisecracks is really not a part of White's Doc Ford series. This is another departure White makes from the usual conventions of hard-boiled fiction. White does not consistently use one style of narration, there are very few wisecracks made by Ford, and the cynical, world-weary tone is largely absent from Ford's utterances.

In fact, White employs third-person narration in the first three Doc Ford novels. The stories told in *Sanibel Flats*, *The Heat Islands*, and *The Man Who Invented Florida* are told from the viewpoints of various characters, though White allows the reader to see most of what happens through the mind of Ford. Beginning with the fourth in the series, *Captiva*, White gives Ford the narrative duties, and the reader sees, hears, and feels everything from Ford's perspective.

Ford's first-person narration is exclusively used from *Captiva* until the ninth novel, *Twelve Mile Limit* where White expands the narrative voice to include multiple points of view. Here third-person narration that describes the perspective of Ford's friend Janet Meuller, lost at sea, is interwoven with Ford's first-person point of view. Though slight, this is a story-telling option White will continue to mine throughout the remaining Doc Ford novels. In particular, White uses third-person narration to relay the inner thoughts of his villains, like Izzy Klein in *Everglades*, Praxcedes Lourdes in *Tampa Burn*, Dasha in *Dead of Night* and Bern Heller in *Dark Light*. Since these three men all share

Ford's predatory nature, it is clear White makes use of third-person narration in order to juxtapose their inner thoughts with those of Ford, who has, unlike them, been able to sometimes control and channel his predacious instincts in more positive, less sadistic directions. The reader is meant to see what Ford might have been, become, or potentially be.

As previously mentioned, the "tough wisecrack" is little used by White in the Doc Ford series. Though physically "tough," the wisecrack does not at all fit Ford's personality. As Dinkin's Bay Marina owner, Mack says, when Ford tells him he wants to "stir things up a little" in the police investigation of Rafe Hollins' death in *Sanibel Flats:*

> Forgive me, Doc, but you really aren't the type. I'm sure you're very good in your field, bookish and studious and exacting and all, but weaving one's way into the heart of a corrupt government is an entirely different job of work. People like DeArmand are little tyrants, and tyrants have the unhappy habit of turning nasty when their competence is questioned. That sort of thing calls for someone shifty and devious; a bit of a liar, too, I'm afraid. I really can't see you in that role, Doc. As Jeth says, you're a nice, quiet man; a person who can be trusted. I think you should leave the muckraking to those more suited for it. (53)

And this persona, a Clark Kent or Bruce Wayne alter-ego, is the one Ford presents to those in his new life as nerdy, thick eyeglass-wearing scientist. However, even when Ford allows his predatory nature to surface, the wisecrack is not a part of his Superman or Batman alter-ego.

Some of the few times Ford comes close to using the conventional hard-boiled wisecrack are in his encounters with bullying men that are typical of most of the Doc Ford novels. In the course of over half of the adventures, Ford finds he has to stick up for others or himself against tormentors who are usually mid-level corporate leaders who are visiting Florida with their underlings who they desperately want to impress. Ford always attempts to take the high road with such bullies who always immediately underestimate him though he is a large, bear-like man. As Dewey Nye tells one such tormentor in *Tampa Burn*: "Doc's not the physical type. He likes to look through his telescope. It'd be like taking a poke at your high school principal" (77). Ford, attempting to make up with Dewey in a bar after a fight, is accosted by a corporate v-p who, actively working Dewey for a date, tells Ford he is breaking up a "private party" and that maybe Ford is just "lost" and "mistook" them for "friends," which they "are not" (76). Having noted a wedding-band width of sunburned skin on the ring finger of the man's left hand, Ford replies, "The only thing lost seems to be your wedding ring. I'm willing to make a guess. The ring's back in your hotel room. Probably hidden under the condoms you bought at the airport" (77).

In *The Heat Islands,* when Ford prepares to drown the vicious Karl Sutter, the killer pleads with him saying, "I'm not responsible! I need a psychiatrist!" to which Ford glibly replies, "No, Karl . . . you need gills" (299). This is as close to the tough wisecrack that Ford ever gets. Doc seems much too logical to resort to sharp words as weapons. Even his attempts at wisecracks are based on logic and scientific observation.

Mixing Action and Introspection

Since White primarily uses the first-person scheme of narration, it is easy for him to have Ford ruminate on his life in autobiographical fashion. William Marling notes that "the hard-boiled novel began to branch out as Raymond Chandler, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sought to make it not only the vehicle of social comment but of autobiographical reflection" (4). Thus, more contemporary hard-boiled detectives have managed to simultaneously investigate crime and naval-gaze. A confessional mode of self-reflection is one of the newer conventions of the hard-boiled school. The strong reader-identification encouraged by the use of the structure of first-person narration allows the reader to travel along with the detective on his journey of pensiveness and brooding.

Clearly the Doc Ford series offers an extreme mix of action and introspection with Doc's ongoing struggle with the dichotomy of his two personalities. As Bill Ott writes in *Booklist*, "White can always be counted on for an entertaining mix of character interplay and straight-ahead action adventure. Ford's ongoing struggle is to achieve in his human relationships the sense of the equilibrium he has found in the natural world" (1580).

Ford has an introspective moment while in the Masaguan jungle in his first adventure in *Sanibel Flats.* He is anxious to find Rafe's son alive and to rescue him so he can

> get back to Sanibel, his stilt house, his work, and the life that he had once hoped would be simple and without encumbrances. That simple life, the one recommended by Thoreau, was an unrealistic goal, though–not that he

> had ever wanted it; not really. He had wanted a simpler life, not a simple life, but now even that was proving impossible. In a modern world, only a person who was absolutely selfish could live an absolutely simple life, and only a hermit could live free of the personal and moral obligations inherent in taking one's own existence and the existence of others seriously. (196)

Restless and unable to sleep midway through *The Heat Islands*, Ford dreams of his old, first love, Pilar Belsario: "He could put her out of his mind during the day, even in the first months. He was that disciplined. But at night, the dreams came. Never welcome, but he had no control and he despised himself for that weakness" (133).

For a man of action, Ford spends in inordinate amount of time contemplating his existence.

Ford is aware of and hopes to stave off his introspection that occurs at the beginning of *The Man Who Invented Florida*: "Sunset was not an easy time for Ford. He busied himself in his lab or gave himself small jobs and hoped visitors would come by. He spent even more time working out–running, calisthenics, swimming in the bay–than normal, and, for the first time in his life, he began to read newspapers. Newspapers were great blotters of idle time, an effective antidote to his introspection" (5). In *Captiva*, when Ford is upset that Hannah Smith's attention seems to be heavily directed towards Tomlinson, and not himself, he considers the image he has of himself: "Nothing I had felt in the last several hours meshed with my own image of self. It was a red flag. When your emotions are or your behavior are contrary to your own self-image, it's time to stand back and reassess" (92). Even others recognize Ford's tendency to ruminate and get lost

in himself, and this inclination is a source of worry for them. Later on in *Captiva,* Hannah Smith confides to him that "I used to watch you around the marina, and you seemed . . . so remote. Like you're there, but you're really someplace else. When I first saw you? That's what I'm talking about. You actually seemed kind of scary" (181).

As a man so profoundly respective of logic and the scientific method, Ford struggles with any tendency towards feelings or emotions. Though he thinks deeply about them, they worry him. At one point in *The Mangrove Coast* he admits that he is "wary of my own reaction because I am wary of emotion as a motivator. Emotion is energy without structure, without reason. Emotion can be a dangerous indulgence" (63). Such thoughts are characteristic of each and every one of the Doc Ford novels. Balancing intellect with emotion, the propensity towards violence with an altruistic streak, Ford constantly reassesses his life–or rather–his two separate lives, as he moves on through the fourteen and counting novels in the series. This constant self-reflection and rumination about the meaning of life lies behind the hard-boiled detective's formulation of a moral or ethical "code" that I intend on examining in a later chapter.

The Femme Fatale

A stock figure in the hard-boiled detective genre is that of the femme fatale, a convention inherited in American popular literature from European melodrama. The femme fatale is ambiguous—beautiful but dangerous, seemingly always leading the detective into danger. A classic example is Brigid O'Shaughnessy, who is used by Sam Spade in the Maltese Falcon because the detective is quite aware that she has begun to use him for her personal gain. The femme fatale is akin to the Sirens like Circe from

Greek mythology that would allure men with their beauty and songs, only to kill them. The femme fatale convention is often viewed as being essentially misogynistic, and that the pervasive fear and even hatred of women and sexuality in hard-boiled novels might be linked to the changing roles of men and women in society. With women taking on roles once reserved for men, males begin to feel threatened and take satisfaction in seeing their literary detective heroes outwit the femme fatale (Bertens and D'Haen 58-67; Cawelti 189-90).

Like most other contemporary practitioners of the hard-boiled style of detective fiction, White has largely abandoned this once-familiar convention, but with a couple of exceptions. In Ford's first outing, *Sanibel Flats*, White stays close to the older formula. Jessica McClure, an artist with whom Ford begins a romantic relationship, is clearly in the mold of the classic femme fatale. Unbeknownst to Ford, she has shady connections to the smugglers for whom his old friend Rafe Hollins has been working. The smugglers have blackmailed the budding artist using her past as a drug addict as leverage. While helping her get off drugs, they had put her to work, as essentially, a high-priced call girl, videotaping her with their clients that she was instructed to "entertain." After catching her "entertaining" Rafe as part of her deal for getting back the incriminating video tapes that could ruin her career as an artist, Ford is kind to her, but rejects the chance to resume their relationship and walks away. Though she has not directly worked against Ford's efforts to rescue Rafe's son and solve Rafe's apparent murder, she has been dishonest with him and held back important information. To a man of Ford's integrity, it is betrayal all the same.

Rafe's wife, Helen, is another example of the more traditional femme fatale. Like

Circe and the other sirens, she is extremely alluring, though not beautiful:

> In his life, Ford had met four, maybe five women with that same quality of animal sexuality so strong that it bypassed the conscious fabric of awareness and struck some deep visceral chord. It had little to do with beauty. None of the ones Ford had known had been model material. They had been tall and gawky, lean and sharp, or ripe and doughy like this one, Helen Hollins. Rafe had said, "She smells like she wants it" (141).

Helen cares little for her missing son, and, in fact, has taken up with a crooked judge and makes a pass at Ford when he comes to her home to investigate. She is the most amoral woman in any of the thirteen Doc Ford novels.

One other woman in the novels might also be considered to be a femme fatale, and that character is, surprisingly, the person Ford considers his first and unforgettable love, and the mother of his son, Pilar Balserio. He thinks he still loves her even though at the start of *Tampa Burn* he has taken up with Dewey Nye and Pilar is back running the country of Masagua. However, Tomlinson reveals some disturbing information: Pilar has twice tried to seduce him. The first occurred years before, and, unbelievably, the second took place two nights earlier when she should have been only concerned with finding Laken. He tries to explain what he thinks Pilar is to Ford: "The thing about you, Doc, is you tend to see the good in everybody. You're analytical sure. But you focus on what's productive in people, what's positive" (306). He continues:

> there's no rational explanation for malice or impiety. Because of that, rational people like you are slow to recognize it. But someone like me, I know it intuitively if a person's basically good, or basically bad. You've

> always thought Pilar was one of the great women in the world. I knew the moment I met her she was just the opposite. She's one of the bad ones. Not evil, just bad. (306)

As Ford listens to his friend, things begin to fall in place. Pilar's constant mood swings and delusions of grandeur—taking the name of a Mayan goddess—begin to make sense. Tomlinson believes she suffers from a disorder called "acute bipolar mania." People with this disorder, he says, ". . . don't love anyone. . . They're not capable of emotion. They only play roles that advance their own delusions" (307). And so while Pilar may not be entirely culpable for her behavior, she has used her sexuality and beauty for duplicitous purposes, much as Helen Hollins or Jessica McClure have.

Overall, Ford mostly has a favorable view of women in the series. He gallantly avoids coupling with the women who share the marina community with him because, as he says, it would ruin the strong friendships he has established with them. He treats all of the women, except for those mentioned above, with respect. The convention of the femme fatale is noticeably limited in the Doc Ford series.

Closing Thoughts on Genre and Conventions

In his article "Eyewitness: Miss Marple is Not a Private Eye," Kevin Burton Smith argues for a precise classification of hard-boiled private eye fiction. He speaks of this enduring cultural icon, the hard-boiled PI, in the strictest of terms. He, or she, must be one "who seeks clients, accepts pay for his services, and is not the member of an official law enforcement agency. . . . Investigators working for private firms–such as insurance companies–and lawyer-sleuths" (53). Using this definition, Smith discounts all

amateur sleuths such as Miss Marple, all professional policeman, such as Dave Robicheaux, and even "salvage expert" Travis McGee, who essentially does favors for friends. So where does this leave Doc Ford?

First of all, the hard-boiled conventions listed above are applicable to any story of a hero who investigates and stirs things up as a way to solve crime or regain order from chaos. As William Marling notes, the "genre has adapted to change" (4). In his study of Ross Macdonald, Bernard Schopen contends that "the American detective novel is also a remarkably flexible genre, allowing seemingly endless variations and innovations" (27). In further discusses Macdonald's work and contribution to the genre, Schopen insists that it is misguided to view the hard-boiled detective drama as a mere formula. Rather, he says, "[t]he genre that these writers developed consists not of a formula, but of a collection of motifs, ideas, situations and patterns that novelists are free to use according to their purposes" (28). So, rather than see hard-boiled fiction as a rigid, calcified structure, it should instead be viewed as an assemblage of certain, but not, unlimited, possibilities.

And this appears to be the attitude White has taken towards working in the genre. It is not an unyielding structure like a Petrarchan sonnet that, when mastered, is almost transcendent, but rather a range of possibilities to be explored. One of those possibilities is the integration of the spy genre with the hard-boiled detective genre. After all, Doc Ford is not a private eye and not a member of institutional law enforcement. Because of his abilities and the skills he learned while serving in the covert ops, he can hardly be thought of as merely an amateur sleuth. In their introduction to their work, *The Spy Story,* John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg assert that the spy or secret agent has become

the “heroic protagonist of a major form of popular narrative” (3). In fact, contend Cawelti and Rosenberg, as “the [twentieth] century progressed into the 1980s, the spy hero became still more important, increasingly replacing earlier popular heroic figures like the cowboy and the hardboiled detective” (3).

In the semi-retired assassin/covert op Doc Ford, White has added a new wrinkle to “the collection of motifs, ideas, situations and patterns” from which the hard-boiled fiction-writer can choose to weave his or her stories. In the present day and age when concerns about America’s intelligence communities is so pronounced, it opens up intriguing possibilities for future hard-boiled crime fiction. In a world of increasing globalization, where a resident of Pennsylvania with computer problems speaks to a service representative in Calcutta, White’s Doc Ford is the perfect counterpart. Though he prefers to stay in his beloved southwest Gulf Coast, his adventures take him all manner of places and connect him with all manner of people.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTEGRATION OF SCIENCE AND DETECTION

"Human beings, while basically animals, are also something more—animals *plus*. Many believe this plus to be a soul; most biologists maintain the specialness resides in humanity's plus-sized brain and that language, imagination, culture, symbolism, and self-consciousness all result from big-brainedness. But however you slice it, no objective observer worth his salt, upon studying the life-forms of planet Earth, would conclude that human beings are in any sense nonbiological" (6). David and Nanelle Barash, *Madame Bovary's Ovaries: A Darwinian Look at Literature*

Randy Wayne White goes beyond the formal demands of the detective genre and imparts a body of information with which he is familiar and independently concerned. In White's Doc Ford series, the world of science, particularly evolutionary biology, is imparted to his readers. White's knowledge of biology is accurate and deep, and though it goes beyond the immediate interests of his stories, he expertly integrates it into all of the series' fourteen novels.

In their *Clues* essay, "The Detective as Teacher: Didacticism in Detective Fiction," Michael O'Hear and Richard Ramsey provide an interesting focus on detective fiction "based on a different kind of didacticism" (95). Instead of targeting moral or ideological didacticism, O'Hear and Ramsey explore what they term detective fiction's "realistic, excursive didacticism"—or, the trend in some detective series where the authors communicate "a coherent body of factual information according to some thematic . . . bent" (95). O'Hear and Ramsey explore how certain detective series writers plug specific knowledge into their works that is authoritative, accurate, excursive and of some kind of value to the reader (96). The two examine Tony Hillerman's infusion of

pervasive amounts of cultural anthropology in his popular Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn series, Ed McBain's illumination of deafness in his long-running and massively influential 87th Precinct series, Jonathan Gash's delivery of an extensive knowledge of the antique trade in his Lovejoy series, and Harry Kellerman's inclusion of information about Judaism in his Rabbi Small series (97-103). White's detective fiction can be examined in a similar manner.

Although White never attended college, his knowledge of science, particularly biology, is most impressive. He is a voracious reader of nonfiction and admits he has a tendency to lose himself in what he finds is fascinating research. White constantly befriends experts in the fields of law enforcement and science and has them critique his work to maintain its accuracy. For instance, in *Tampa Burn*, White consulted plastic surgeons and psychopharmacologists in order to describe realistically the behavior of Praxes Lourdes, the burn-scarred villain. (White, "Personal"). Although he has yet to include lengthy works cited lists at the end of his novels like Michael Crichton, White's forewards to each of the Doc Ford novels consistently include his thanks to various experts who helped him in his research.

Through Doc Ford, White integrates biology into detection in four principle ways. First, White's fiction explores biological interpretations of violence which are particularly evident in his action scenes. Second, White shows how Ford's expertise in marine biology aids him in crime-solving and in escaping enemies. Third, White explores how biology similarly affects the human organism and the natural environment. Finally, White uses the subject of science as a device to jump-start his plots.

Biological Interpretations of Violence

On a first reading it would appear that extreme levels of violence fill White's Doc Ford novels. After all, the series features some rather concrete and grotesque descriptions of injury and death. What Ford initially believes is Rafe Hollins' corpse is missing most of its face, vultures having ravaged it, Jackie Merlot's head is impaled on a pole, and parasitic worms sprout from a dead man's body. These are just a few of the gruesomely-described deaths. Interestingly, if the reader takes a closer look, the number of violent incidences is fewer than he thinks. It is the thorough way White describes each is what makes them seem more prevalent. With the eye of a biologist, Ford provides specific and detailed—almost clinical—descriptions of the violence he encounters, provokes, or dispenses.

Single violent encounters of Ford's frequently take up entire chapters in the novels. Through Ford, White decelerates the pace of the action, giving the reader the impression that the violent scenes have been captured on film and are being played in slow motion, while an objective observer narrates the biological interpretation of what the reader is seeing. In *Shark River* Ford gives this phenomenon a biological basis when his brain slows down the fast-paced actions of men bent on kidnapping and murder. He describes it this way:

> In panic situations where the events unfold rapidly, the brain sometimes processes these events in what seems to be slow motion. That was the way my brain now reacted. It was as if I were viewing a film run at half-speed. My eyes suddenly enjoyed absolute clarity in which I seemed to

> see everything at once, interpreting and understanding what was happening and why. (19)

The first such instance of a "narrated slow motion action scene" occurs in the fourth Ford outing, *Captiva*. When forced to fight a thug on a dock in a fishing village, Ford pauses his narration and offers his justification of resorting to violence, his knowledge of how to fight, and his biological interpretation of violence. He admits: "I am not an eager let's-prove-something-here-fighter. I'd much prefer to talk it out. Or leave. Or even run. Which is probably why I have been in so few street fights." When finds he has no options but to fight, Ford confesses that the fights he takes part in do not resemble the typical fisticuffs in Hollywood or television productions (or, perhaps the typical hardboiled detective novel). He states: "By the time I was nineteen, I'd seen enough fistfights to know that no one ever wins; one man just loses more painfully than the other. I also knew that the clean, bare-knuckled choreography that constitutes fighting in books and movies has no more basis in reality than film's absurd lionization of the martial arts." Ford contends that every fight "always ends up on the ground," and that a college wrestler could "humiliate any one of Hollywood's kung fu movie stars—or a good professional boxer—were he so inclined" (45). Ford claims that a "fistfight—or any fight—is ugly, bloody, and brutal; a quick descent to the primate roots. It is proof that, in the deepest wells of our own brains, Neanderthal man still lives. There is always a lot of grunting and growling. A lot of scrambling and panicked scratching amid the sweat and adrenal stink" (46). He deconstructs male combat, removing all socially constructed notions of honor, bravery, and heroism, replacing them with primal, struggle for existence characteristic of evolutionary-driven reality.

White returns to the idea that humanity's propensity for violence is rooted in its evolutionary past in the next novel, *North of Havana*. As he is being stalked by a shadowy assassin in the Cuban jungle, Ford draws a clear parallel between their situation and humanity's evolutionary past. As he considers how to deal with his stalker, Ford thinks:

> His position, my position were both the senseless pantomime of a vanished death dance; a pointless ceremony that was still embraced by a political theater of the absurd. For a thousand millennia we sharpened sticks or rocks into weapons and we stalked and we hunted and we killed because that is what the strongest and the fittest of us did. Those who were incapable did not contribute to the chromosomal mandate because they did not survive. It is what the genetic memory of a thousand millennia told us to do, what it *still* tells us to do. (168-69)

Ford continues his interpretation of human violence by consistently focusing on how evolutionary biology might describe it:

> Necessity plays no role. If the drive is strong enough necessity can be invented. It is the imperative, *not* the nature of our predicament. It is deep within us and it is a hunger; a hunger that feeds on meat and feeds on fear and feeds on tribal differences, social, sexual, or visual. Political leaders who want to survive pander to the drive. Political exigencies are the ideal excuse. (169)

As Ford later admits to himself in the novel, "When reduced to the context of survival, my view of nature is pragmatic, not romantic" (188). He interprets all of reality from a

Darwinian context. This interpretation enables him to ease his conscience when he has to use violence or take human lives.

White, through Ford, is very much interested in the flight-or-fight phenomena. Since Ford routinely encounters situations where it becomes expedient to take one or the other of these courses of action or the other, it offers White an arena to discuss the interchange between humanity's biological framework and humanity's capacity for free action. In *The Mangrove Coast*, Ford wonders why he and most humans do not scream when they discover corpses like in the movies. He wonders why the more common reaction is to take a step back and freeze and feel a sudden reluctance to get involved. Ford theorizes a reason: "It is in the milliseconds of shock that the brain has time to charge the flight-or-fight instinct with adrenaline, preparing to take control. Are we in danger? Has the predator struck and run? Or has the predator lingered?" (8).

Later in the novel, as Ford stalks Acky, the henchman of the evil Jackie Merlot, Ford, the marine biologist and retired covert operative, speculates that the fight-or-flight instinct has been activated in the man. Though Ford silently comes up behind him, Acky suddenly turns to face Ford,

> perhaps alerted by the sound of my feet on grass, or the air pressure of my bulk moving toward him, or possibly by some atavistic alarm that warned of predators—for that is certainly what I was in the instant, a predator; a predator locked so precisely on my target that all else vanished in a charge of adrenaline so pure, so potent, that the feeling surely mimicked elation. (298)

In *Ten Thousand Islands*, assistant professor of anthropology at Everglades University Nora Chung's eyes widen in fear as she hears the sound of unknown individuals coming closer to a dig site she and Ford are investigating. Ford notes that "her brain tried to gather sensory data. It is a primitive response, signaled from deep beneath the cerebral cortex, an atavistic reaction. The brain seeks a quick answer so that it may make an ancient, ancient decision: Should we fight? Should we take flight?" (134). Ford pushes the biological explanation of Nora's impulse further, suggesting that " [o]ur revulsion for snakes is stored in the same dark little crevice. Right there next to our panicked reaction to lightning and our dread of murky water" (135). Ford's most complete formulation and use of the fight-or-flight instinct occurs midway through *Twelve Mile Limit*. As he hears Amelia Gardner relate the story of how she, Janet Mueller and their two friends began to panic when their boat went down, Ford theorizes to himself about why the four swimmers panicked:

> The psychology of group hysteria is well documented, its roots predictable—*la participation mystique*, Carl Jung termed it. Hysteria can begin when one member of the group is overwhelmed by a fear or an illusion so powerful that all rational thought processes cease, sparking brain activity in the frontal lobe and the primitive limbic system. All primates are deeply coded with the instinctive fight-or-flight response. When one group member displays that limbic response, other members react immediately, and for good reason—survival is the only individual mandate of our species. Panic is contagious because it effectively speeds reaction time. (130)

Chemical reactions in the brain, Ford thinks, are responsible for the flight-versus-fight responses of humans during violent encounters. As he squares off against the dangerous Lenny Geis in *North of Havana*, Ford notices that his legs begin to feel weak and watery. However, "a surprising calm had come into my mind. I wondered clinically: In times of extreme fear, does the brain produce some kind of pheromone that acts as a natural sedative?" (174). After he is hit in the shoulder by a kidnapper's gunfire in *Shark River*, Ford notes how in "the aftershock of any serious injury, the brain scans immediately for answers: How bad is it? Has the vehicle been crippled for life? Will the vehicle survive so the brain can survive?" (24). He is aware of his brain taking control after Ford falls over one hundred feet from a helicopter and into a river during the action of *Twelve Mile Limit*. As he swims to the bank his "brain sent out the careful little search requests: Did I feel pain? Were all my body parts in place? Had I suffered some terrible injury that I was still too stunned to realize?" (241).

However helpful these instincts are for his survival, Ford still sees a need to somehow transcend his biological coding. As he reacts to the knowledge that a man stalking him through the Cuban jungle is intent on killing him, Ford begins to feel the "panic alarms in all the motor response areas of a very, very tired nervous system" (*North of Havana* 167). He explains how he "had to control the natural instinct to breathe too fast and shallowly. Had to consciously tell myself that fear is meaningless; fear is a handy warning system, nothing more. Repeated words in my head—*stay calm, be patient*—as I waited, listening to the small noises that marked his progression, getting closer to me, closer" (167). Ford must override his own biological warning system so he can calmly act in order to survive. Instinct is an aid, but an incomplete one. Likewise,

after being hit on the head with a sap in *Everglades*, Ford is once again forced to overcome his own biology. He describes how an "ancient mammalian instinct which my forebrain inspected, then rejected: When overpowered by someone or something unknown, play dead. Remain motionless. Maybe it'll go away. Opossums are more strongly coded, but that survival instinct remains within most vertebrates" (147). Ford has discovered that something in the human makeup is able to trump biological instinct. Dr. Miller, a retired rear admiral for the U. S. Coast Guard gives Ford a compelling reason for this in *Twelve Mile Limit* when Ford asks him if Janet Mueller and her friends could have survived in the cold sea:

> Mental toughness is difficult to predict, but it is the most important survival tool that a person has. Back in the old days, when we could still experiment on lab animals, some researchers used shaved and anesthetized dogs to learn about the effects of cold water on physiology. But the data weren't much good. In survival situations, animals react consistently. People don't. Maybe that's one thing that separates us from animals. We react very differently. There may be a spiritual component—no one knows. (156)

Though Ford would be resistant to admitting the existence of Dr. Miller's "spiritual component," White suggests throughout the Doc Ford series that humanity's spiritual nature and its biologically material nature at are at odds with one another. Ford's difficulty in accepting his own predatory nature is a manifestation of this hidden battle.

Ford's conflict with his own predatory impulses comes to a head in the eleventh and twelfth novels of the fourteen book series, *Tampa Burn* and *Dead of Night*. At the

start of the action in the first of these two novels, Ford experiments with a male tarpon before he tries to anesthetize a female fish. He is worried that he may kill a female tarpon, thus ending its ability to spawn up to twelve million eggs in a single spawning season. Ford reasons: "A valid point Darwin didn't make but could have made: In most dimorphic species, males are interchangeable, and so expendable. Perhaps that's why only primate males seem to inherit the war gene" (17). As part of the primate community, Ford believes he has inherited such a gene. He finds this disturbing, but virtually unshakeable, unlike his ability to override his brain's survival instincts.

As he contemplates drawing his pursuers into a trap in the Everglades where he will pick them off with his Sig Sauer and bury their bodies in a gator hole, never to be found, Ford hates that a part of him is easily capable of such an extreme action. It also scares him. But he claims to have come to terms with this ugly reality. He wonders

> if focusing on marine biology as a life's work isn't a way of justifying, or at least validating, a specific and unsentimental view of existence. From biology's elemental view, human beings, like all species, are not only guided by the tenets of natural selection, we are mandated. In such a world, eliminating enemies, or behavioral anomalies, isn't a decision to be made. It is a necessary process. (112)

However, Ford's own action proves the lie that humans are "mandated" to "eliminate enemies, or behavioral anomalies." Ford proves that human decision is possible, that human action is not always necessary when he decides he cannot put his trap into action since he would need his friend James Tiger's help in carrying out the plan, involving

James in cold-blooded murder. "That," says Ford, "was something that I would *not* do" (112).

In *Dead of Night* Ford appears to have made his peace with his biologically-mandated predatory nature. He speculates about the intent of those who have instigated a "biological attack" on the state of Florida, thinking they have been wise to introduce an "exotic" or "fecund select species" into the region. When such species are introduced into an area where there are no predators, an environmental catastrophe is created. When not checked by predators, the select fecund species thrives, affecting the entire biota. Ford realizes that "a balance between predator and prey is requisite if a biota is to function as a whole, because the health of the macrocosm is dependent on the health of its living parts." It is, Ford thinks, "a fragile symbiosis. Predation is one of the few checks that prohibits one species from dominating, then destroying all others" (252).

Ford then begins to think of the bioterrorists as "another form of exotic" (253). He contrasts the bioterrorists with other predators, suggesting that there "is nothing sinister about snakes, or sharks, or spiders. They are what they are, beautifully coded, the trophies of adaptation. But these people were purposeful, seditious exotics, no less poisonous than the creatures they'd smuggled into the U.S. Like the fecund-select creatures they were using, there was no predator to track them and intercede" (253).

With the bioterrorists set up in his mind as "fecund-select creatures" or "exotics" without a predator to check them, Ford determines that he will function as their predator. Though he describes the bioterrorists and himself in biological terms, Ford is clearly aware that both he and the bioterrorists have had the power of free choice or intent in taking action. Here White applies biological notions about checks and balances from the

animal level to the human level. Later, Ford echoes this application when he writes the following in his journal:

> Premise: Predation is a necessary check that prohibits one species from destroying all others. A society whose moral ideas inhibit its own defense is a society doomed to destruction by those predators it defines as immoral. . . . all primate units struggle for ascendance, the weaknesses of many sheltered by the strength of a few. Conventional human conduct—trappings of respect, ceremony, alliance, and ritual—are added later to maintain the comforting illusion of a sentimental, civilized world. (254)

Here Ford uses the language and theory of biological evolution to explain his own behavior, and to justify his own place in the scheme of the cosmos. He is a predator, a necessary check of one species' power over another.

Though his biologically-mandated predatory instincts help Ford to defeat the bioterrorists and their plans, it must be stressed that White makes sure the reader realizes Ford's awareness of his ability to choose his role as predator to the bioterrorist's exotic. As Walter J. Ong contends in *Fighting for Life: Contest, Sexuality, and Consciousness*, a masterful synthesis of the thought of Edward O. Wilson and other exponents of sociobiology with human free will:

> . . . the human biological organism, in which self-consciousness is nested, does not float free as self-consciousness does. It has a past of millions of years of biological evolution, not to mention a much longer inorganic past. Biological evolution underlies social structures in the infrahuman world and in the human world as well: patterns of aggression and appeasement,

> of hierarchy, dominance, and submission, of group formation, of sexual drives, and much else. Knowledge of the genetic heritage, far from destroying human freedom, enables us to better understand and exercise freedom, for it provides understanding of the fields in which freedom operates. (11)

Though he may not fully realize the spiritual implications of his choice to act on his predatory impulses, Ford, like Ong, has taken his knowledge of his genetic makeup and used it "to better understand and exercise" his freedom. This is an important truth for humanity to grasp.

All in all, White's violent scenes might seem more prevalent than they are because they appeal to his readers on more than one level. Like other practitioners of hard-boiled style detective fiction, White is unafraid of penning scenes of brutality and violence. But where similar scenes in other writers (Mickey Spillane comes to mind) are purely gratuitous celebrations of violence, White's scenes transcend the simply titillating. Again, the scenes themselves run for many pages; sometimes entire chapters are devoted to a single altercation Ford finds himself involved in. However, with Ford's long ruminations on the biology of violence and his own predatory impulses, White needs more pages to carry the scenes through to their finish. He slows the action down, and the reader can take pleasure in safely and vicariously living through the sometimes ultra-violent passages and in Ford's equally fascinating meditations on violence and the bloodthirsty tendencies latent in human beings. Perhaps those readers who take pleasure in the safety of reading about violence are in actuality an indication that Ford is correct about human nature including a predatory instinct.

Comparing one of White's violent scenes with those of two of his contemporaries easily demonstrates the added intellectual appeal to the reader. The first is the opening scene from acclaimed creator of the Dave Robicheaux series, James Lee Burke. After Burke paints a rather sultry picture of Robicheaux's wife sleeping alone in their bed, he describes her violent death at the hands of gunmen:

> They begin shooting and the room seems to explode with smoke and flame from their shotguns barrels, with shell wadding, mattress stuffing, splinters gouged out of the bedstead, torn lampshades, flying glass. The two killers are methodical. They have take out the sportsman's plug in their shotguns so they can load five rounds in the magazine, and they keep firing until their firing pins snap empty. Then they reload with the calmness of men who might have just stood up in a blind and fired at a formation of ducks overhead. The sheet is torn, drenched with her blood, embedded in her wounds. (1)

Burke's scene is graphically violent; it resembles a Sam Peckinpah western with its abundant images of gunfire and blood. The following scene from *Sacred*, the third installment of Dennis Lehane's popular Kenzie and Gennaro series, is equally brutal:

> John started to open his mouth, and Nelson hit him dead in the face with a sawed-off hockey stick. Blood spurted from John's broken nose, and he pitched forward and Nelson caught him and hoisted him over his shoulder. The Twoomey brothers came through the entrance-way with metal trash cans in their hands. They swung the cans in pinwheels over their shoulders and brought them down on the heads of Manny's steroid cases,

> pile-drove the men into the cobblestone. I heard a loud crack as one of them shattered his kneecap on the stone, and then both crumpled and curled into the ground like dogs sleeping in the sun. (103)

Fans of the genre easily get their fill of savagery and bloodshed from the pages of Burke and Lehane. White's prose is filled with equal brutality, but his inclusion of Ford's analysis and understanding of the scene before him elevates his action scenes above those of his peers. White's readers do not just revel in the violent imagery he provides; they are also privy to an intellectual apprehension of the slow-motion action scenes. The following passage from *Ten Thousand Islands* best demonstrates how White's scenes of violent action transcend those of his peers. Ford is forced to fight Tony Rossi and Rossi's friend, Derrick. After evading the club which Derrick has swung at him, Ford describes how he "drove up hard and hit him in the crotch with a full right fist. I put all my weight and the strength of my thighs into it, so it drove him a couple of feet into the air. I heard him scream as his legs collapsed beneath him, but I didn't let him fall. I caught him under the throat with my left hand, forcing him to stand."

Having immobilized Derrick, Ford then calmly relates how he stuck his thumb into the man's ear in order to make him an object lesson:

> People don't realize how tenuously the human ear is attached to the head. I gave Derrick a painful demonstration. Early white settlers, who were scalped by Indians but managed to survive described the terrible, deafening sound their skin made when it was ripped away from the bone. I suspect Derrick's ear made a similar sound as I tore it away from his temple. I didn't pull it completely off. No. But I broke through the skin

> and popped enough tissue to send a message: it was mine if I wanted it. (147)

The ferocity of White's scene is equal to that of Burke's and Lehane's scenes, but with White's inclusion of Ford's clinical narration, complete with a biologist's lesson about the physical nature of the human ear and head, it is somehow more chilling. The reader must imagine the sound of the ear being partially torn from Derrick's head, by juxtaposing it with Ford's detached lecture on the nature of scalping. Somehow this is more terrible than Lehane's scene where he provides the reader with the "splat" of a broken watermelon or Burke's vicious description of the victim being "drenched in blood." Adding the element of Ford's knowledgeable discussions—or even "lectures"—gives White's action scenes an added dimension unlike any other practitioner in the genre. As scenes like these are read, the reader cannot help but think that Ford's objectivity in the midst of so much pain and brutality is manifestly disturbing. Ford has a void in him that most people do not. As the murderer Karl Sutter discovers when fighting Ford at the climax of *The Heat Islands*, "This guy has something missing in him" (295).

Though Ford has reconciled a need for biologically mandated violence in order to maintain a proper balance in human society, he recognizes the debasement that comes when such action is taken. He describes this corruption as a chemical reaction, but one that must be caused by the higher, perhaps spiritual, nature in the human species. After dispatching Tony Rossi and his friends in a violent fight, Ford describes how both he and Nora Chung sit "side by side, but alone" on his skiff as they leave the archaeological dig behind in *Ten Thousand Islands*: "Violence releases a potent chemical cocktail into the

muscles and brain. The aftereffects can be a little like a hangover. It produced gloom in us both" (156). Ford has a similar experience following his thwarting of Lindsay Harrington's kidnapping, his heroic actions including a bullet to the shoulder. Unable to sleep, Ford tells Tomlinson why he is emotionally and physically drained:

> Participation in violence opens all the adrenal reserves and dumps in a way too much adrenaline way too fast. Especially violence that seeks the lethal existential. Violence has always produced a grayness in me. It seems to extract light and validity from those things that provide the scaffolding for what I normally see as a useful, productive existence; the chemical/mathematical order of biology; the interaction with friends and lovers, days of solitude and open water. (65)

Ford recognizes, once again, the usefulness of biologically-mandated violence in maintaining equilibrium in the human and natural biospheres, but for him, it comes at a dear price. He tells Tomlinson: "Violence is a vital component in natural selection and the hierarchy of species, and I view it unemotionally in all conditions but my own, which is the human condition. Violence debases us. It sparks the dark arc that refutes all illusion" (65-66).

Once again, White echoes Ong's contention that a human being's intellect cannot be reduced to the merely material, but neither is it purely spiritual. As Ong insists, "Intellect does not sit on the biological organism like a rider on a horse in a Cartesian or Platonic superdualistic world. Thought itself operates out of genetic as well as intellectual history. It has neurophysiological support or grounding" (11). Ford is objective about violence in the natural world, but when he has to resort to using it in the

world of humanity; he feels too much to remain objective. He is, as Ong states, "truly a microcosm . . . in an even deeper sense than the ancients could have been conscious of," bringing together the "extremes of existence: the genetic heritage, which reaches all the way back into the inorganic world, and the biologically unprocessable, genetically free-floating self-consciousness which is the only situs of human intelligence and of its dialectical complement: human freedom" (11).

Even the ultra-spiritual Tomlinson is not immune to the biology of violence. In a scene from *Dark Light* he suffers from the jags of the aftermath of violent action much as Ford has in earlier novels. Ford describes Tomlinson as sitting "alone on the forward cushion, legs intertwined in full lotus position. Eyes glazed, staring at a gray horizon that melded into gray mangroves" (63). Ford understands what Tomlinson is feeling though he does not share this with his friend: "Violence creates chemical and emotional by-products. Depressants that, hours afterward, permeate the veins with a poison that sometimes scars for years. Tomlinson had felt the poison. He'd sat himself up there in the wind, perhaps thinking it would cleanse him" (63).

In having the peace-loving, pacifist Tomlinson experience the chemical aftereffects of violent behavior, White is able to explore fully the often challenging maintenance of equilibrium between the genetic heritage of humanity and its spiritual stores. After helping protect Ford from Bern Heller by getting a stranglehold on the man's neck, Tomlinson feels the need to apologize to Ford for his behavior. When Ford finds his apology unnecessary—since he fully understands the violent instincts still locked inside the human organism—Tomlinson goes on a talking jag where White is able

to further show the complications of integrating the animal and spiritual natures that intersect in humanity. Tomlinson says:

> What I did makes all my so-called spiritual convictions a joke, man. . . . I didn't just lose my temper. I went nuts. Snapped like a dry twig. Like some country club—Republican psycho. Rush Limbaugh on a very nasty acid binge—that's the way I acted. Doc, I wanted to *kill* him. There, I said it! I wanted to choke him until those sick blue eyes of his bulged like muscat grapes. . . . Hatred, man. I was boiling with it. It came out of nowhere, like something evil slipped into my head when I wasn't paying attention. The old expression: My blood ran cold. I experienced it, man. A chemical change. Like there was Freon in my veins. (63-64)

White would probably think it wise of Tomlinson and Ford to take Walter J. Ong's advice: "The biological side of our nature is nothing to be ashamed of. Human consciousness always has a biological grounding or complement" (10). White seems to suggest that until one comes to terms with both one's spiritual nature and one's biological nature, one will remain caught up in a dualistic existence, the two sides constantly warring with one another. Ong's thinking neatly encapsulates White's leading premise in the series: how the "all spiritual, wistful, intuitive" side of humanity is "at odds with" the "analytical, unsympathetic, violent, and existentialist" side (White, "Personal").

One last aspect of White's inclusion of violent scenes must be noted. Besides having Ford ruminate on the origins, nature and practicality of human violence, White also has his marine biologist and former covert operative use his knowledge of herd instinct in order to understand and aid his efforts to triumph in his altercations with other

human beings. When Ford is faced with multiple assailants, he takes advantage of his biological expertise by likening them to animals and picking up on the way they move in for attack. His knowledge of biology allows him to pragmatically turn violent encounters to his advantage.

When confronted by the grave robbers, Tony Rossi and Derrick, in *Ten Thousand Islands*, Ford treats the two like animals in nature:

> "Very gradually," Ford explains, "I had been moving towards them, trying to force eye contact. In return, I'd been receiving all the comforting signs of submission that are similar in primates and pack animals. Tony would not return my glare. He kept his head down when listening; looked beyond me and to the side when speaking. For each step I moved toward him, he scooched back a foot or two." (139)

Ford's realization that Tony and Derrick, though human, share a biological base with other primates allows him to later recognize their intentions when one of them moves to Ford's left and the other moves to the right. He thinks: "Like elements of submissive behavior, aggressive behavior is just as telling. This slow dividing of pack members and changing angles was typical. They were moving into attack formation" (143). Here Ford's expertise in biology helps him fight. Similarly, Ford recognizes the same primitive attack formation in the body language of Izzy and Clare, two Bahamian criminals who begin to "imperceptibly move apart—the first feral indicator of attack formation" (155-56).

White has Ford thinking to himself about the nature of multigroup violence before a typical slow-motion action sequence is launched in *Twelve Mile Limit*. In fact, this sequence runs through several chapters. Ford notes that

> Studies have been done on multigroup violence, and the template is fairly standard and shares an odd and surprising symmetry with tornado storm cells, of all things. As fighting between the combatants intensifies, little skirmishes will begin to occur on the outskirts of the main fight, much as large tornadoes at the center of a storm spawn a minion of smaller tornadoes on the borders. Like the smaller tornadoes, the skirmishes are energized, concentrated, but dissipate quickly, only to reappear at another place along the outskirts. (79)

To the reader's delight, the bar fight that ensues exactly parallels Ford's description of its echoing a tornado storm cell. The main event features Ford's fishing guide friend, Jeth Nicholes, and action movie star, Gunnar Camphill, and Ford and the other characters engage in smaller skirmishes around them. Once again, through his mouthpiece, Ford, White demonstrates some ways that human activity parallels the larger sphere of activity found in nature as a whole. This makes his fictional world unique. While specialists in the mystery genre provide their audiences with exciting and stimulating scenes of action and violence, White gives his readers more than simple thrills. He explores the sources of violent human activity and tries to place violence within the much larger sweeping arc of the evolution of organic life, yet not forgetting the unique human ability to choose one's course of action.

Using Knowledge of Marine Biology to Solve Crimes and Combat Enemies

In an era when CBS runs three different versions of its hit police drama, CSI, creating a detective who solves mysteries because of his expertise as a marine biologist might not seem particularly inventive. And, after all, anyone who watches the evening news now knows that the use of DNA has been successful in proving both guilt and innocence in our own real world. One might also point to the works of Patricia Cornwall and other writers who create detective-protagonists whose work as forensic examiners allows them to solve crimes using the latest scientific advances. However, since Ford is not an officially licensed police officer or private detective—functioning essentially as an amateur detective in the lineage of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple—his use of his doctorate in marine biology to solve crimes is most unlike any other series detective, official or amateur. Whether he uses his scientific expertise to figure out solutions to crimes or to escape captors, Ford's use of science is a constant theme in the Doc Ford series. The key to solving the mysteries or problems which he encounters is often found in the clues Ford discovers within the environment.

Ford's use of biology and other scientific knowledge is introduced in the very first installment of the series, *Sanibel Flats*. Here Ford uses his knowledge of the length of time it takes a golden-silk spider to rebuild its web to prove that his old friend Rafe Hollins was murdered, and that his corpse had been strategically placed to make it look as though he committed suicide (84-87). Ford figures that it takes this species of spider nearly three hours to rebuild its web, and since it is only half re-built when Ford finds the scene of Rafe's apparent suicide, he knows that someone has been back to tamper with the body, Rafe having been dead for several days.

Later in *Sanibel Flats*, Ford's knowledge of local frogs and fish allows him to concoct a means of diversion then escape from the insane Masaguan revolutionary, Zacul. In order to rescue Rafe Hollins' son, Jake, Ford enlists Tomlinson's help in collecting "Dendrobates" or "South American poison dart frogs," three-inch long frogs of iridescent scarlet with black flecks at the dorsum. They are, Ford informs Tomlinson, called poison dart frogs because natives use a poison that the frog secretes through its skin on the tip of their arrows. Ford contemplates using the frogs "alkaloid poison," which he says is "potent as hell," to poison Zacul and his men's food, allowing himself, Tomlinson, and Jake Hollins to escape. Ford figures that even if the poison does not kill Zacul and his men, it will likely "paralyze them for an hour or two" (259) while they make their way out of camp with Jake.

In order for the plan to work, Ford estimates that he will need the poison from at least twelve poison dart frogs. When he and Tomlinson only find one frog, they abandon the plan. However, while wading in the shallows of the lagoon, Ford discovers an alternate course of action when he sees "a large population of gray and black fish with large flat heads and big incisor teeth—a genus known as *botete.* They were slow moving; so docile that they could be caught by hand" (260). Ford captures ten of the botete, related to the puffer fish or "fugu" fish of Japan. Making his way into the kitchens where Zacul and his men's food is prepared, Ford slips the entrails of the botete into a large pot of soup that is cooking on a stove. The poison in the fish entrails incapacitates and even kills Zacul and his men after they enjoy the soup at dinner, furnishing the diversion Ford needs to collect and then escape with Jake (265-75).

Ford's inclination to rely on his wits and expertise in science continues in the second novel in the series, *The Heat Islands*. Once again, Ford uses his doctorate in marine biology to good use. Ford finds himself in a desperate race to clear both Jeth Nicholes and Dewey Nye of the murder of "the most disliked man on the barrier islands," land developer Marvin Rios, whose dead body has been found floating in the Gulf (1). When it becomes apparent that the Rios has not simply drowned to death, Ford tries to find out what really killed the man. He does this by examining and dissecting some of the many mullet fish that have also been found dead in the waters where Rios' body was discovered. During his dissection of the mullet, Ford notes that although the outside of the fish looks unharmed, the fish's swim bladder is missing, something that could only be caused by great trauma, like an explosion. Ford figures that Rios was either accidentally killed using explosives to capture fish which he could later claimed to have caught, thus winning his own fishing contest, or that someone who had been helping him with the explosions killed him and put him into the water (138-41). This echoes Sherlock Holmes' enthusiastic use of the scientific method in his adventures.

Other examples of how Ford's scientific savvy enables him to solve puzzles and crimes abound in the series. For example, Ford is usually able to approximate the time of death of corpses he discovers like Frank Calloway's in *The Mangrove Coast*. Standing over Calloway's body, Ford thinks: "I'm a marine biologist not a medical examiner, but it wasn't difficult to make an educated guess. How long would it take for a pool of water to evaporate off tile on a balmy, April afternoon? How long did it take blood to coagulate and dry? An hour? Two hours?" (11). Ford's detailed knowledge of chemistry gives him the ability to concoct primitive home-made bombs from iodine,

baking soda, fertilizer and mason jars, bombs he uses to halt the fleeing serial killer, Teddy Bauerstock in *Ten Thousand Islands* (271-72). Ford puts his doctorate in marine biology to a most fortuitous use in *Dead of Night* when he helps concoct a scheme to eliminate the dangerous guinea worms that bioterrorists have released into Florida's water. He tells Dr. Clark, a special investigator from the Florida Department of Health and Center for Disease Control, whose specialty is epidemiology, the study of the origin and spread of disease: "I think we can culture a hybrid copepod that doesn't recognize guinea worm larvae as food. If the larvae's not eaten, the parasite never matures, so it can't reproduce" (170). Ford and Clark carry through with Ford's idea, and the plan halts the spread of the worms.

White's most appealing application of Ford's scientific prowess is presented in *Tampa Burn*, the series' eleventh installment, where the former covert operative must rescue his son from a serial killer who has kidnapped him. Though Laken does not live with his father, communication via the Internet has brought the two together who particularly share a love of baseball and science. It is through their shared slogan, "Science is its own language," that Lake is able to surreptitiously send Ford clues that the marine biologist can interpret in order to discover the locations where his son's kidnapper has taken him to. Ford notes the call of the quetzal bird in the background of the video Lake's kidnapper has sent to prove he has the boy. Ford tells Tomlinson that the quetzal bird can only be found in the high mountains of Central America. Further noting that the male of the species "begins a round of territorial calling just before dawn" (43), Ford is able to pinpoint the time the video was made which in turn helps him to figure out where the kidnapper may have taken Laken. When the kidnappers contact Ford by phone and

allow Lake to speak to his father in order to confirm he is still alive, Ford tells his son: "I'll follow their orders, you do the same. They're going to let you send me e-mails. Don't be tricky. Write about the usual stuff: baseball, birds, plants. Just so I know it's you. Things just the two of us know about. *Science*. Understand?" (193).

Ford hopes Lake has understood his deeper meaning, thinking to himself: "On one level, I meant exactly what I said. On a more subtle, second level, I was trying to tell him there might be a way for us to pass information secretly. Science is its own language. We'd written that back and forth often enough. Did he understand?" (193). Lake does understand Ford's deeper meaning, and through the e-mails he is allowed to send, he drops clues as to his whereabouts using their shared notion that "Science is its own language." He writes to Ford of alligators, reddish egrets, mature tadpoles and gray parakeets. Ford, with his knowledge of biology, is able to pinpoint the spot where Lake is being held, the clues of the wildlife, the language of science, communicating the secret. This knowledge leads ultimately to Lake's rescue (246-260).

A Biological Understanding of Both Nature and Humanity

Besides using science to explore the violence he encounters, Ford also uses science, particularly biology, to explain the behavior of human beings, criminal or not. Maurice O'Sullivan, in "Ecological Noir," was the first scholar to note that "the language and principles of science are never far from Ford's mind or White's prose" (121). Although it only deals with the first four Doc Ford novels, O'Sullivan's chapter precisely uncovers White's use of the biological organism as an "essential model for human life and human behavior" (121). White integrates the imagery of science into the detective

genre by having his mouthpiece Ford often express his reactions or insights using biological imagery.

This tendency is evident from the series' start, as an early scene in *Sanibel Flat*s shows. As Ford slips into an intimate liason with artist, Jessie McClure, he cannot help but describe the experience without mixing in the language of science:

> There would be no need for CBS, Ford was thinking, not if every woman in the world looked just like this. No need for television, lawyers, *Playboy*, toupees, *Doonesbury*, war or Dr. Ruth Westheimer. The end of competition and contrivances: A good dose of natural selection, that's what the world needed. (89)

Ford even goes so far as to compare the moon's glow on Jessica's various physical charms as being like the "bioluminescence" he has often observed in sea creatures. Using the imagery of science to describe such an intimate encounter demonstrates how Ford is blocked emotionally from experiencing full, rich relationships.

Biology is normally claimed as the province of science fiction writers, so, as O'Sullivan suggests, White's major achievement just might be his exploration of the ideas of molecular biology, evolution, and chaos theory within the detective genre. Michael Crichton has worked these ideas into his popular thrillers for most of his career, but White is the first to do so consistently in detective fiction. In "Ecological Noir," O'Sullivan seizes on White's first significant application of the biological organism as the essential model for human life. In trying to finesse an unresponsive law enforcement system into seeing Rafe Hollins' death as a murder rather than a suicide, Ford justifies his actions in the language of his expertise:

> What he was trying to do was get the right organizations in line; to nudge them in the right direction. It was the one hope he had of securing justice for Rafe Hollins. . . . The odds were impossible because, on a more formal business basis, people didn't deal with people anymore. They dealt with beings Ford thought of as Bionts. In the literature of natural history, a biont was a discrete unit of living matter that had a specific mode of life. (*Sanibel Flats* 105)

Ford extends the language of biology to the ways in which human beings function in modern American society. Ford theorizes that "a Biont was a worker or minor official who, joined with other Bionts, established a separate and dominant entity: the Organization. A Biont was different from an employee . . . . The Biont looked to the Organization as a sort of surrogate family; depended on the Organization to care for him" (106). Ford contends what he terms the "Organization" is in actuality an "organism" much like a coral reef or a beehive—an organism made up of individuals working for the good of the whole. He explains that when the "Organization prospered, so did the Biont—a sort of professional symbiosis, with loyalty built in" (106).

When Ford's investigation of Rafe Hollins' apparent murder requires him to wrangle important information from multiple "Organizations," including the sheriff's department, the medical examiner's office, and a development corporation, Ford applies his understanding of this biological model in order to speed up the information-gathering process. Knowing that individual members of the biont "unite like a shield to rebuff the intruder," such as Aztec ants rushing to attack anything assailing their host Cocoloba tree or killer bees protecting their hive, Ford "throws out his scent," hoping the three large

bionts or Organizations will attack him—their intruder—and move in his direction where he hopes to acquire the information from them. He will get them to come to him, saving time by using the "organization-organism theory to his advantage" (106). Interestingly, this is very much in line with the hardboiled detective's tendency towards violently revving things up to get at the truth or find solutions to mysteries rather than simply putting his intellect to work and using logic. Ford's understanding that human societies are organized according to principals found in simpler biological organisms enables him to recognize that human beings are connected to one another in a myriad of ways. He knows that by nudging or influencing one domain of human society, he might get a reaction he wants from another sphere of human existence.

In *Captiva* Ford applies similar evolutionary dynamics to his take on a net ban controversy with the local fisherman population. He ruminates:

> Would the ban revitalize Florida's shallow water fishery? Absolutely. But there would be a long-term price. When disturbed, water oscillates far beyond the point of contact. The same dynamics apply to the environment—and to society. With netting banned, many of the backbay fish houses would be forced to close. Most of them were located on the water in delicate mangrove littoral zones. They were already zoned for commercial use, they already had docks and dredged canals. Who could buy them out? Big condo developers and marina investors, that's who. No permits required, no environmental hoops to jump through. And where would Florida's banished netters go? They would join the growing

> numbers of migrant fisherman and thereby contribute to the decimation of fisheries in states—such as the Carolinas—that still allowed netting (34).

Ford's frustration with the action—or inaction—of Florida's state legislators contributes to his thesis that "human existence seems a dichotomy of random intersections acted out on a precise biological framework . . . which might explain my passion for biology" (*Shark* 196). White shares this frustration with political solutions with Ford, something that will be covered in the last two chapters of this dissertation.

In dealing with Corporate V-Ps and their underlings who come to Florida on business trips, Ford typically compares American corporate life to that of animals in nature. In one such instance, after defending himself against and ultimately humiliating and unmasking a blustery V-P named Hal in front of his corporate drones, Ford notes a parallel: "The hierarchy of corporations is as complicated—and no less primal—than the hierarchies of pack animals. In such packs—wolves or lions or chimps, for instance—alpha males rise to power, then survive or are banished by jockeying underlings" (*Tampa* 81-82). Ford constantly sees human activity and society through the lens of biology.

The ultra-spiritual Tomlinson is just as apt to use the scientific imagery to describe his mystical vision of the universe to the skeptical Ford:

> Okay, Okay, so back to the energy deal. It's part of a force field that links everything. The earth. Our own bodies. Our *souls*. The energy's produced by three key elements: iron, oxygen and silicon crystals. Quartz and silicon; it's the same thing. Silicon Valley? That's

> why computers will ultimately evolve to the point where they have their own spirituality, their own crystal souls" (*Everglades* 86).

Ford would certainly find Tomlinson's vision flaky, but he would certainly understand the scientific imagery within which it is couched. Energy, for Tomlinson, is Ford's "Organization," and the earth, souls, bodies and elements are its "bionts." Computers "evolve" into higher, spiritual forms as do the material elements in Ford's domain. In fact, for the most part, Ford and Tomlinson, though they seem at loggerheads over their clash of science and spirit, both use images of science to illustrate the outlines of their worldviews. Ford admits that Tomlinson's espousal of the Gaia Hypothesis—that nature is all one interacting organism—is essentially accurate since both men contend that "all life forms are symbiotic. Each life is interlaced" (*Mangrove* 10). Ford does not consider himself an amateur astronomer, but he does enjoy looking through his Celestron telescope, to "spend an evening viewing objects in deep space," so "your own small problems and tiny life are given a healthy proportion." He continues: "Plus, as Tomlinson is continually pointing out, there is an unmistakable if unprovable symmetry and repetition of design shared by the marine creatures that I collect and the visible structure of the universe" (*Shark* 67).

When Ford and Tomlinson put their heads together to try and make sense of the mysteries they encounter, they both work as "scientists." For instance, in *Twelve Mile Limit*, the two try to figure out what could have happened to Janet Mueller and her friends at sea. Ford states:

> Tomlinson and I wrote it as we would have written a scientific paper. There was a summary, an introduction, a description of methods, then the

> results of our investigation. We ended with conclusions and a few recommendations. Everything was footnoted with supporting materials listed in an appendice. It all went together quickly because we knew the material intimately, plus we've both authored and published many, many papers. (151)

Tomlinson variously refers to himself throughout the series as a "scientist" of pain and pleasure, pharmaceuticals, celestial truths, and baseball, and his pontificating on most any topic is littered with scientific jargon. While trying to explain the enticing "aura" Chessie Engle projects, Tomlinson voices his theory in scientific terms: "This is science, man. Read the Bible, those halos weren't made of plastic. The brain and body put out thermal energy and electromagnetic waves" (*Dark* 83). The mystical Tomlinson puts a scientific spin on spiritual realities.

When Ford worries that Tomlinson's drug use has escalated to dangerous levels, Tomlinson begins a typically humorous but serious exchange with him. He tries to reassure Ford by appealing to evolutionary adaptation:

> I've dealt with this circumstance so many times in my life that my brain has adapted. . . . I've developed what I think of as my 'Lifeguard Twin.' Imagine if you will, a Tomlinson clone locked inside a tiny room in my brain. In an emergency situation, I open the door and the little fellow skips out and rescues my ass. Happens every single time I need him. It doesn't matter what a slobbering pathetic wreck I've made myself, he grabs the controls and takes charge. . . . Personally, I think my Lifeguard Twin is further proof of evolution." (*Ten* 72-73)

Tomlinson rationalizes his propensity for engaging in chemical stimulation by suggesting that his being is sophisticated enough to evolve along with his chemically-altered environment.

Ford can be equally comical in his use of biology to describe life. He has difficulty with change, despite choosing a field of science that deals with all kinds of change. White relates that Ford had "nothing against change; he just resented it interfering with the neat perimeter of his own life. It made him irritable, cranky" (*Man* 130). Equally comic, he explains his problem relating to females to the squid he is examining in his lab in *The Heat Islands*: "It's not that I don't like women," he told the squid. "It's just that I find biology less complicated" (217). Human sexuality, a constant frustration to Ford, is one of White's main foci in the Doc Ford series. Ford is confounded by love and romance, and tries to take refuge in thinking that they are merely chemical reactions between biologically-determined animals. In *The Mangrove Coast* he tells himself that although he has only been in love twice in his life, he has "gradually come to the conclusion that love is not a condition, it is a dilemma. Love . . . is chemically induced; created and maintained by the little-understood and complex chemistry of the brain. How we target and connect with our partners is anyone's guess, but the resultant response has more in common with addiction than with rosy emotion" (30). Unable to get his old love Pilar (also the name of Robert Jordan's beloved in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, as well as one of Hemingway's boats) out of his mind, he rationalizes his feelings: "Realizing that helped me feel better, too. Chemistry is something I understand. It is chartable, predictable. Withdrawal from a chemical

dependence would take time, but the chemical's hold must necessarily grow weaker day by day. It made sense that the same would be true of Pilar's hold on me" (34).

Ford constantly attempts to reduce his infatuation with certain women to biologically- and chemically-mandated behavior. In describing Hannah Smith, perhaps Ford's second greatest love, he describes her in naturalistic terms: "Her hair, her muscle tone, all exuded the body gloss of a healthy young female, a prime example of her species, who was in the ripest years of her fertile life" (*Captiv*a 69). He would like to think that he is merely responding to what has been genetically "hard-wired" into his being. While contemplating the hermaphroditic state of black grouper fish, a species that while always born female usually makes the transition to male as it matures, Ford tries to apply the phenomena to the human species, specifically wondering why Gail Calloway has been so quick to latch onto someone like Jackie Merlot:

> I found the question intriguing. Successful species have an extraordinary ability to adapt quickly to ensure procreation. In humankind, adaptability tends to be behavioral rather than physiological, but the ability is there because the mandate is so strong. I wondered if Gail Calloway's strange behavior was symptomatic of some deep need to reacquire a full-time male partner. From what Amanda had told me, her acceptance of Jackie Merlot had been so quick, so unquestioning that it had the flavor of panic. Maybe she was reacting to some powerful internal drive that was deeply coded. . . . Why else would a woman like Gail Calloway give herself to a man that her own daughter had described as a pile of mashed potatoes beneath a face that made her skin crawl? (110-11)

A related fascination of Ford's that White explores throughout the series is the nature and purpose of beauty. Ford determinedly sees beauty as a trick of nature, a means by which the species is prolonged on the planet. He illustrates this theory by explaining what his reaction is to an unknown woman he happens to see strolling on the beach while he is in conversation with Tomlinson: "You see one like that, a woman with the physical sensibilities of a deer, and you wonder if she is the One, The One you have been waiting all your life to meet. You also worry that if you don't immediately stop, if you don't act on the strange urge to introduce yourself to a stranger, that you may have forever missed the chance . . . (95). Ford dismisses the phenomena of love at first sight or the notion of a soul-mate by reducing them to natural selection. However, Ford shows he has the power to transcend the biological need to procreate in order to maintain the species when he describes his initial reaction to Karlita, a beautiful television psychic. He opines: "When it comes to the human female face, researchers have identified the five most important components that define our standards of beauty. The male brain, apparently, has been encoded to react both physically and emotionally." He continues: "Features include sexual maturity balanced with neonate, or childlike, qualities. Also important are facial expression, the shape of a woman's mouth and lips, plus a measurable ration between cheek and chin that is similar to the proportional difference in bust size and waist that keys sexual arousal in most men." However, Ford is resistant to Karlita's charms, and is able to overpower his own brain's "encoding" for her form. He is resistant to the mandates of evolution. He explains that "Karlita had all of the above. But I found her decidedly unattractive. I appreciate woman as people, so I tend to evaluate them by the same criteria I use to select male friends" (*Everglades* 65). So, Ford

has injected the notion of "personhood" into his selection of possible mates, something that hard core, purely materialistic biologists refuse to admit into their view of reality.

Besides rejecting his own "encoded" impulses, Ford feels genuinely sorry for how men treat women when they are no longer in their reproductive primes or for those not born with the requisite traits to attract mates. He reflects on this when thinking about a good friend from the marina, Janet Mueller:

> As much as anyone I know, Janet reminds me why I like women as people. She is also my secret reminder that, for women who are not born with great looks, or who are past a certain age, the world is an unfair place. Men can compensate for their genetic bad luck by being successful in business or politics. The same is not true for women. Inequity becomes a fact of life. Some of the very best of them end up settling for guys who are not their intellectual or emotional equals, and lead lives that never offer them much challenge or reward. These are the private ones, the undiscovered treasures whose gifts are forever concealed by an oversized body, or facial conformation that's a few centimeters off the current Hollywood ideal. (*Tampa* 173-74)

Thus, Ford's ruminations reveal that he recognizes, however distantly, that there are realities other than natural selection that some males take into account when selecting their mates. Biology can be transcended. Human beings can make free choices.

White and Ford continue to develop their meditation on the genetics of beauty in the thirteenth novel in the series, *Dark Light*. Here Ford encounters the mysterious and

beautiful occupant of a beach house, Chestra Engle. Chestra is in her sixties, but something amazing occurs when she is seen beneath the lightning bursts of a fierce summer storm: she appears to get younger. Ford is shocked as one flash of lighting appears to change her to her fifties, and then a second changes her appearance to how she must have looked in her forties. Ford figures the storm light must be creating the illusion of youth in Chestra; after all, he speculates, "the human eye is sensitive; retina cones can numb. Stare at a star for more than a minute and it will vanish—an illusion." (141). Ford determines that the phenomena of Chestra's anti-aging is due to a genetic device. He contends that "beauty is genetic . . . trickery that instigates competition. All illusions are temporal" (277). Ford reasons that

> there are certain rare people, however, who are born with a pheromone signature so potent that, even in a crowded room, every member of the opposite sex is aware when they enter, or exit. Maybe it came down to that. Sensuality is more subtle than sexuality; beauty is more complicated than bone structure, elastic skin, and an assemblage of hydrated cells. (143)

So, somehow for Ford the hard core biologist, mind transcends matter with respect to beauty and its necessity.

Science and Evil

Detective and mystery fiction always include a concern for the concept of evil, and White's Doc Ford series is no exception. However, White's meditation on evil transcends the typical focus of the genre, which merely examines the evil actions of

criminals, and instead attends to the very existence of evil itself. If Darwinist thought has reduced all of reality to blunt matter, flattening out all distinctions, then both good and evil disappear. Nothing is left to distinguish the two. In *Dark Light,* where much of the plot revolves around the diving of the wreck of a World War II Nazi U-Boat, the question of Hitler's being evil naturally surfaces. Chestra Engle pointedly asks Ford if "you scientific types believe there's such a thing as good and evil? That there are people in the world who are truly *evil?* Or do you think it's all a bunch of silly hobgoblin nonsense?" (153). Ford pauses, then replies: "I've met my share of men capable of evil deeds" (154), demonstrating his ability to see evil as a metaphysical reality on some level.

Ford's acceptance of the metaphysical reality of evil is something hard fought. At the onset of the series, he is incapable of admitting anything beyond the physical into his world view. In *The Heat Islands* he and Tomlinson engage in a charged debate about evolution, humankind and evil. After Tomlinson indicts humanity's greed for despoiling Florida's environment, Ford quickly disagrees, saying he thinks human beings as a species have just been "too successful." He provides a confused Tomlinson with an analogy: "…say a tribe of orangutans lives in the same small valley for a hundred years. In, say, Sumatra, feeding on a few big mango trees. Then one day, one of the oranges discovers he can knock all the mangoes off the tree using a stick. Doesn't have to climb. But the mangoes they can't eat rot on the ground. Soon they're starving." When Tomlinson still insists that metaphysical evil is involved at the heart of all destruction, Ford contends that what Tomlinson is really seeing is the evolution of the human species, a process that does not travel in a straight line, but instead makes mistakes and travels

down some blind alleys. "It's not a matter of it being ugly or greedy or sinful," he tells Tomlinson. "It's a process, a way of evolving" (61).

Tomlinson remains undaunted and challenges Ford's perception of reality:

> So explain this. Thirteenth century, Genghis Kahn conquers China, and his grandson Kublai Khan, same thing in Russia. Scorched earth. At the very same time, the Seventh Crusade is preparing in France. Same phenomenon occurs off an on throughout history. The Second World War; Hitler. That's fucking inimical, man, not a process. (62)

Tomlinson contends that "technology is the new dictator," and by following it right down an evolutionary blind alley, humanity is "not just taking the fruit" but "killing the entire valley. That's not a process; it's a kind of hysteria. Like world war" (62). When Ford argues that Tomlinson is taking the analogy too far, Tomlinson replies:

> Nope, nope; damned if I am. A destructive force sparked by a catalyst, that's what I'm talking about. The catalyst can be a man, or an idea, or a method—like the orangutan with a stick. You don't see the parallels in nature? Introduce an unstable cell into a body of living tissue, and the result may be cancer. Introduce an unstable atom into a chain of atoms, and you have a nuclear holocaust. The microcosm and the macrocosm, man. What's true of the tiniest unit is true of the whole. A basic principle. (62-63)

When an exasperated Ford explains that he was only trying to explain red tide to him, Tomlinson arrives at his thesis: "The reaction to the catalyst, though, can be positive or negative. Yin and yang, that's another basic principle. But it's different for

man than the rest of nature. See why? Because we can consciously decide whether to be constructive or destructive. That's important." (63) "The option," Tomlinson continues, "implies a higher force. Absolutely; a higher consciousness. That single option is the hot line to the force of good and evil. . . . You can't doubt that they exist" (63). But Ford does doubt this. As he states in another installment, "Free will or not, none of us seems to have much control . . . " (*Mangrove* 15).

Later on in the series, in *The Mangrove Coast*, Ford cannot seem to find an evolutionary perspective about the reasons for Jackie Merlot's behavior towards Gail Calloway and other women, wondering, "What quirk of experience or genetic coding compelled certain men to isolate vulnerable women and then to prey upon them? That kind of behavior certainly did not benefit the species, so why were their devices so commonplace . . . and so successful?" (2). He is haunted by the anomaly and tries to explain Merlot's sadistic behavior by resorting to biology:

> There is a certain rare child, because of chemical imbalance or neurosis or freak genetics, who is so genuinely manipulative and evil that he or she must necessarily learn to communicate an air of perfect innocence. It's more than an expression, it's an attitude, it's body language . . . and it is a totally contrived act. They perfect that act quickly because their survival depends on it" (134-35).

Of course, Tomlinson naturally frames Merlot's behavior with a more metaphysical definition of evil. Merlot scares him because "he's empty. Like a pit. That kind of emptiness" (139). This is very much like the traditional Western concept of evil

put forth by Augustine and Aquinas: evil is a lack of goodness rather than a separate entity from the good.

As the series progresses, Ford admits the reality of free, conscious choice into his view of reality; however, he still maintains, like Ong, that human choice is intermixed with a biological basis. Refusing the divide human beings into a duality of body and spirit, Ford is careful to note the nuances of the intermixture of the two. Though Ford realizes that serial murderer, Teddy Bauerstock, is culpable for his crimes and needs to be stopped, he always realizes that Bauerstock's damaged brain is partially to blame. This is confirmed for Ford when he reads a report of a psychological evaluation done on the killer when he was seventeen. Tests confirmed that a distinct abnormality in the right amygdala portion of Bauerstock's brain showed that he did not respond to a series of actual news photographs of individuals who were about to be shot, burned or who were falling. The report also suggests that Bauerstock suffers from very low levels of noradrenalin which is associated with predatory violence. Dieter Rasmussen tells Ford that "the human brain is especially vulnerable to such defects. During the last 1.5 million years, it has tripled in size. Any organ that changes that rapidly is increasingly prone to genetic error. There will be more and more of these people. . ." (242). However, Ford recognizes that Bauerstock fakes the normal human reaction to the photos although his brain does not register this compassion. Bauerstock knows what the morally-correct human response is but he does not experience it himself.

A similar situation is probed in *Tampa Burn*. Praxcedes Lourdes, the serial killer/revolutionary for hire, sets his victims on fire. The pain he suffers has affected his mind. Ford is determined to kill him anyways, but stops when Laken argues, "But he's

insane. His head was crushed in when he was a kid. He's sick. There's a medication out now that might change his entire behavior" (359-60). Ford relents, remembering what he had earlier told Tomlinson about pathology: that "when illness is involved, a person's behavior can't be judged as either moral or immoral." He asks himself if he really believes what he has told Tomlinson and decides "Sometimes. Maybe" (361). Unsure, Ford gives Lourdes the benefit of the doubt and lets him live. Thus, in order to act freely, White suggests that the biological aspects of the human being must be healthy and in order.

Scientific Topics Used to Drive Plots

Finally, in returning to O'Hear and Ramsey's observation that more than a few writers of detective series fiction promote what the two critics term "realistic, excursive didacticism"—a coherent body of factual information—it is clear that White writes in this vein. Even the most casual reader of the Doc Ford series is exposed to a wide assortment of scientific subjects. For instance, a reader of the series would learn some unusual things: how tarpon spawn, how some species of sharks inhabit lakes, how human facial transplants might become a reality, and how Guinea larvae manage to migrate into the human body and grow into worms that are two to three feet in length. A reader would also be introduced to material on genetic testing, DNA profiling, and how terrorist are using exotics from nature to intentionally injure or kill human beings. Additionally, a reader of the Doc Ford series would vicariously participate in Ford's many dissections of marine specimens. Besides the thrills of suspense and mystery, readers of the series would learn much about the world of science from reading the series.

Ultimately, White's use of science distinguishes the Doc Ford series from all other detective fiction. Although his belief in biological evolution prompts Ford to recognize a natural world with a set of imperatives completely separate from human concerns, Ford, as O'Sullivan has written, realizes that as humans, "we must, therefore accept responsibility for our own activities. Among those responsibilities are our conflicting needs to understand ourselves, to uncover the truth, and to continue the species" (124). With Ford constantly making the case that human beings are biological creatures and that as such there exists a certain amount of stability in their evolved human nature, White's fiction offers a different reading of human behavior and culture. Although Ford describes a nature that is somewhat open and malleable, his understanding of how biological realities ground human life offers a refreshing way to look at the patterns and consistencies that make up human behavior.

CHAPTER 4

SCIENCE, SPIRIT AND ECOMYSTERY: FORD AND TOMLINSON

"You my friend, will never be a happy man because you are a 'rational' man. In you, and people like you, intellect and spirituality will always be in conflict" (319). Dieter Rasmussen to Doc Ford in *Twelve Mile Limit*

"Hope could not exist if man were created by a random, chemical accident. Pleasure, yes. Desire, yes. But not hope. Selfless hope is contrary to the dynamics of evolution or the necessity of a species." Tomlinson from "One Fathom Above Sea Level."

After seven Travis McGee novels, fellow mystery writer Charles Willeford wrote that "John D. MacDonald . . . is a spokesman for our times: he speaks for the Sixties as Scott Fitzgerald did for the Twenties, Nathaniel West for the Thirties, Raymond Chandler for the Forties, and John Barth for the Fifties" (qtd. in Moore 11). Randy Wayne White's exploration of the complexities and ambiguities that modern society present to him and his readers makes him a prominent spokesperson for the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. George Garret echoes Willeford's election of MacDonald as societal spokesperson by contending that MacDonald gives his readers "a clearly focused picture of the world we're in, and a generous sense of its patterns and processes" (qtd. in Moore 11). White, too, presents his readers with a clearly articulated vision of the contemporary world. However, as White voices his worldview through the characters of Doc Ford and Tomlinson, two initially extreme viewpoints are expressed: a scientific understanding of the world and its processes via Ford and a religious conception of reality via Tomlinson. The disputes, dialogue, and understanding that occurs between White's two "mouthpieces" makes for an fascinating dialectic on the nature of reality as experienced by contemporary Americans. Through Ford and Tomlinson, White asks the

reader to consider some important questions: Should the world be interpreted spiritually or scientifically, or can the two viewpoints be somehow integrated? Is the supernatural real? Are religions a healthy means by which humans can live?

White's motivation for incorporating the debate between religion and science is clear. Though he does not hold a particular religious persuasion, he calls himself a spiritual person. He believes that human beings are part of the evolutionary process in the universe, but that spirituality is a necessary ingredient in that process. However, he admits to often feeling conflicted when religious and spiritual interpretations of reality appear to clash. "I am both analytical and spiritual, and that has caused me to argue with myself." He often feels that these two drives or impulses are in opposition to one another, and that puts him "at odds with himself. White maintains that "the premise of the entire Doc Ford series is the death dance between a human nature that is all-spiritual, wistful, intuitive—one that sees order in the universe versus a human nature that is completely analytical, unsympathetic, existential, and that believes that there is no order in the universe other than that which human beings project onto it." One of the main points of writing the series is to see "which component—the purely spiritual or purely cerebral—will win out" (White, "Personal").

Many commentators on matters religious have noted a similar conflict in humanity ever since Darwin's theory of evolution was popularized at the end of the nineteenth century. White's focus on humanity's uneasiness in combining scientific and religious outlooks on life is appropriate for contemporary times, what with the recent debates of teaching creationism, evolution, and the newest theory of life, intelligent design, in the nation's public school systems. The debate that oftentimes ensues between

those holding a scientific epistemology and those operating from within a religious epistemology is an important one in contemporary life, and the fact that this debate infuses White's entire Doc Ford series is one of the things that makes his work stand out above the works of all other mystery and detective series writers.

Before the themes of religion and spirituality are examined in the Doc Ford novels, an examination of the mystery novel's fittingness for contemplating religious questions and for making use of the spiritual as subject matter is necessary, as well as a clear look at White's two spokespersons, Ford and Tomlinson.

The mystery or detective novel is an appropriate setting for the consideration of the subjects of religion and spirituality, since the concept of mystery lies at the heart of both. Many philosophers and theologians have referred to God as "Mystery," not in the sense that the divine is a problem to solve, but that any and all attempts to grasp such an astonishing reality by the use of reason alone are doomed to failure. Thus, the detective in trying to get to the bottom of "whodunit?" might be said to be on the track of causal connections, the ultimate in causality being the "cause of everything" or the "divine." In his theological analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories, Stephen Kendrick contrasts Holmes's drive to understand and untangle the human mysteries he encounters with the unfathomable process of fate and the mystery of a God whose face is hidden from all human searchers:

> There are some mysteries you cannot solve. They must be lived in the raw experience of truth. This is as it must be. The good news is that everyday life, the greatest detective story ever told, happens to be exactly what we

> have been given. When we are alert, open to what is happening, it is amazing what we can see: everything. (158)

As Robert Paul contends in *Whatever Happened to Sherlock Holmes? Detective Fiction, Popular Theology, and Society*, the writers of detective fiction, consciously or not, appeal directly to society's moral and spiritual roots that are consciously or unconsciously "affirmed and endorsed by the readers" (7). Paul continues: ". . . because of his or her dependence on popular taste in order to sell books, the writer will be particularly sensitive to the changes that occur in basic attitudes of the public. If detective fiction, therefore, reveals radical changes in the theological presuppositions of society, it may help us to see the way society is going" (7).

Popular mystery writer John Grisham admits to this dependence, and in novels such as *The Testament* and *The Street Lawyer*, he consciously worked in elements of his Christian belief, though he knows, "I can't do it every time out. I have to watch it, because I'm writing popular fiction and you can't preach too much" (qtd. in Mattingly 102). However, Grisham is clear that he first had to master the craft of writing suspense novels before he could try "to weave in a deeper message" since "it rarely works the other way around" (qtd. in Mattingly 102). As journalist of religion, Terry Mattingly writes in his study of the interface between religion and popular culture: "Like it or not, popular culture shapes the way most Americans think about issues ranging from fashion to faith" (xvii). Mattingly believes it is valuable to study "the voices of our day" (xviii) to see what can learned about contemporary society. Examining the subjects of religion and spirituality within Randy Wayne White's Doc Ford series will illuminate what much of contemporary America believes, thinks, and feels about these two topics.

Religion as a subject in the Doc Ford series reflects the spiritual eclecticism in the contemporary United States. Ford encounters believers in ancient Mayan religion, Masons, Catholicism, simple Christian believers, Voodoo, Santerian priests, cult leaders, Islamic terrorists, Tarot card readers, New Age mystics and clairvoyants, Calusa shamans, and Tomlinson's belief in Zen Buddhism and karma. Like Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, White's Doc Ford series, "poised with the historian's caution between criticism and celebration . . . strives for a fair-minded depiction of the origins and unfolding of the American preoccupation with spirituality" (Schmidt 22-23). White's overall evaluation of religion in America bears a striking familiarity with Alan Wolfe's thoughts about the evolution of religion in the contemporary times in his book *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith*, where Wolfe contends:

> The more we refrain from treating religion as if it has some status that makes it different from everything else in the world—holier and more moral if you like it, more sectarian and divisive if you do not—the greater our chances of avoiding religion's ugly legacies while still being able to appreciate its benefits for the individuals who practice it and for the democratic society they inhabit. American religion has been so transformed that we have reached the end of religion as we have known it. This does not mean religion no longer has meaning. It means we will have to know it in new ways. (264)

Ford and Tomlinson, like working sociologists, examine and evaluate the worth of the many belief systems they encounter on their adventures. Like Wolfe, these two

characters look upon religion as an everyday reality for Americans. Ford, the skeptic, judges religion's efficacy by its practicality for individuals and society. Tomlinson, the believer, judges its efficacy by its relation to truth. In both cases, the true function of religion for these two characters is one also offered by theologian John A. Haught who writes: "The function of religions is to fortify our trust that there is some 'way through' the barriers that block the road toward ultimate fulfillment" (5). In measuring the usefulness of religion, Ford and Tomlinson might also echo Haught's four ways of understanding religion:

> (1) In relation to trust, religion is *ultimate reassurance*; (2) in relation to our attraction to the unknown, religion is openness to *ultimate mystery*; (3) in connection with our experience of what Buddhism calls the "unsatisfactoriness" of life, religion is the affirmation of an *ultimate perfection*; and (4) as it relates to our moral impulses, religion is the articulation of an *ultimate goodness*. (146)

White's interest in the spiritual or religion is obvious from the start of *Sanibel Flats*. The reader first meets Ford as he escapes a tryst with Pilar Balserio by running through a secret tunnel from a convent constructed in the 1500s. As he emerges from the tunnel, an old man mistakes the blond-haired Ford for the Mayan God, Quetzalcoatl, exclaiming that he "came at a moment of prayer." The old man quickly realizes his mistake when he sees Ford is "cut in the way of the Hebrews," and subsequently determines that a naked man in the convent is "a bad omen," praying to the real Quetzalcoatl to "restore and show him the way" (3).

In exploring the phenomena of religion in the Doc Ford series, White has

ingeniously provided his readers with two very different "mouthpieces" with which to articulate his viewpoint. Though he begins to soften as the series progresses, Ford is a biologist with a materialistic bent. In *Everglades,* he voices his longest and fullest reflection on matters spiritual:

> As I've told him [Tomlinson], I'd very much like to believe in the things in which he believes. I'd also like to believe in Heaven, visitors from outer space, divine creation, divine providence, divine revelation, predestination, telepathy, guardian angels, ghosts, soulmates, reincarnation, absolution and (most of all) I'd like to believe that order and virtue ultimately triumph over that which is evil, existential, random. (61)

However, Ford finds he cannot believe. While remaining "hopeful" in matters spiritual, Ford refuses to take shelter in the haven of thought that intelligent people do not need religion, admitting that Tomlinson, a believer, has an IQ that exceeds Ford's own by forty points. Ford realizes that the "so-called intellectual types who assume that spirituality and religion are refuges of the ignorant simply provide testimony that condemns their own stunted intellects" (*Everglades* 62). Despite this realization, Ford contends that logic and rational thought do not support a spiritual worldview.

Tomlinson, on the other hand, is unabashedly spiritual. This is evident to Ford upon their first meeting. He thinks that "looking at Tomlinson was like stepping into the past and seeing a child of the Sixties with all that look in his eyes, still hearing music, an old hand at psychedelic visions, a man . . . who had weathered badly but had visited God often enough not to care" (43). Ford's hunch about the man's religiosity is proved correct when Tomlinson tells him he attended Harvard for seven years, obtaining a

doctorate in Eastern Religions and a master's in World History. With his characteristic humor, Tomlinson explains his long tenure of studies: "Why not shoot for enlightenment? Sometimes you got to go for broke" (47). With each man putting his cards on the table, the battle lines are drawn as early as the first Doc Ford novel: the man of science versus the man of faith.

However, Tomlinson proves to use the very logic and rationality that Ford claims makes it impossible to accept a spiritual view of the world. In *Sanibel Flats*, Ford's talk about his research on sharks inspires Tomlinson to do his own research, research on the religious history of the Maya. He tells Ford: "The story you told me about the freshwater sharks got me interested. Pagan deities, man. Ancient ceremonies. The influence of ancient religion on a specific modern culture. It's all part of a philosophy and world history, my two chosen fields" (113). In discussing the history of the Mayans, the Spanish Conquistadors, Quetzalcoatl, the Kache and Tlaxclen, Tomlinson philosophizes that "scratch any religion and you come up with the day to day fears of its followers" (114).

Although he initially appears as a flake to Ford, Tomlinson impresses the marine biologist with his "scientific" approach to Mayan religion. Tomlinson states: "What a study, man. Parallel the religion and philosophy of pre-Alvarado Maya with the Maya of today. Take pure data four hundred and fifty-years-old, and juxtapose it with current data. See what little quirks survived" (*Sanibel* 118). Here White demonstrates that religion, too, can be studied with a logic equally as rigorous as that used in science.

And with that, White embarks upon his series' long exploration of the conflict and meeting of the analytical and scientific mindset with the religious, intuitive, and spiritual

mindset. This exploration will be a continuous examination of both Ford and Tomlinson's particular worldviews and how these worldviews develop, of the existence of the miraculous in human affairs, of the power of ancient religions to still function in the world, and of what White views as good and evil religion.

White does not promote a specific religious path. Rather, he broadly promotes a contrast between people who are open to the spiritual and people who close themselves off to any hints of divinity. Tomlinson, obviously, is the mouthpiece through which White expresses his approved attitude of openness. As the series progresses it is clear that Tomlinson finds few religions that he does not like. After Ford explains to him how Catholic priests make compromises with the remaining pagan beliefs of their Mayan converts, Tomlinson offers immediate and humor-filled praise for Catholicism: "Catholicity. I like that. My respect for the Church just went up a notch, man. Catholicism is great. They got a franchise everywhere" (*Sanibel* 210). In speaking of Obeah, a strain of voodoo, Tomlinson quips: "The slaves, they integrated it into Christian ceremonies. Blood sacrifices, occult rituals. Scares people shitless, plus plenty of social outings—a first rate theology, you ask me" (Ca*ptiva* 80). He also feels comfortable delivering an impromptu funeral sermon in *Ten Thousand Islands* and expresses a fondness for Ransom Gatrell's practice of Santeria, the syncretic religion that is a mix of traditional West African religions and Catholicism practiced in Cuba and other parts of Latin America, in *Shark River*. About Scientology, he claims he "has no beef" as long as their controversial "auditing" is used to elevate and not control (*Everglades* 87).

White characterizes Tomlinson's openness to spiritual realties with the broadest of brushes. Not only has he, in his own words, "Never found a religion I didn't like," (*Everglades* 87), but also Tomlinson never fails to find a spiritual dimension to reality no matter where he is or what he is doing. For example, Tomlinson finds a spiritual component in the game of baseball in several places in the series. As he and Ford play in a baseball game in the jungles of Masagua with General Juan Rivera and his guerilla fighters, he solemnly tells Doc that "the Buddha woulda been a baseball fan, believe me" (*Sanibel* 189). The ordained Zen Buddhist monk continues to explore the parallels between sport and religion to the annoyance of the skeptical Ford: "All the people who have ever played baseball are linked by virtue of having dealt with predictable game situations in unpredictable ways, each person trying to resolve random events within an orderly sphere of balls, strikes, and outs," touching on Haught's notion that religion is the "ultimate assurance" that the random facts of life can be subsumed under an ultimate higher meaning. Tomlinson continues to instruct Ford, humorously claiming that baseball, like other prophetic religions, is a religion of the book: "There's the scorebook: a historical document more accurate and succinct than, say, the *Old Testament*. All those thousands and thousands of scorebooks all over the world forming an unbroken ceremony, a chronicle far more detailed than say, Ireland's *Book of Kells*" (189).

Through Tomlinson, White suggests that the person open to spiritual existences will encounter them anywhere and everywhere. Tomlinson has the knack of doing just this when he again plumbs the depths of baseball and again finds spiritual treasure. He thinks nothing of driving "to the mainland to hear a lecture on the three pillars of Zen and

maybe hit at the Line Drive Batting Cages in Cape Coral"(*Heat Islands* 3). Although eccentric, Tomlinson's spiritual observations are anchored in the man's day-to-day world. After signing Ford and himself up for the Roy Hobbes Baseball League, Tomlinson explains to Ford that "it'll be good for our heads, man. Get out there between the lines where the karma is purer. Keep in mind, amigo, that the shape of the baseball diamond is nothing more than two pyramids joined at the base. And I suspect you've read about the electro-magnetic vibes generated by pyramids. Very powerful, man. A very heavy mojo" (*Mangrove Coast* 89). Tomlinson is even able to find a bizarre, but somehow sensible connection between the mundane act of playing the position of catcher in baseball and the sublime act of philosophizing about the symmetry at the heart of the universe:

> I just flashed on something: Have you ever stopped to realize that a right-hander's curve-ball—picture it now. Follow along with what I'm saying. I'm saying that a right-hander's curve-ball spins in the same direction and with the same degree of inclination as the Earth. Which is a heavy dose of symmetry, if you dig where I'm headed with this. Squatting back there, Doc, looking through your catcher's mask, you ever notice the similarity? Watched a baseball spinning toward you like this quantum miniature of Planet Earth? (99)

For Tomlinson, material reality is just a reflection of the spiritual reality that lies behind it, the flip side. He tells Ford that "All matter in the universe was structural repetition. An atom with electrons, a planet with moons … adapted fins which were a bird's wing, the fingers of a child's hands." Amazingly, he even asks Ford if he has "looked down to notice that a stream of urine spirals like a DNA helix?" (*Captiva* 10).

Whereas Ford attempts to reduce all reality, including the spiritual, to merely the material, Tomlinson never hesitates to affirm the reality of both.

Although White does not prescribe one particular way or form of being religious in the Doc Ford series and instead advocates an attitude of spiritual openness, this openness is not an unlimited, bottomless posture that might lead to nihilism. Offering his own definition of religion, Tomlinson stresses that "Religion, any legitimate religion, consists of rules of morality linked by love" (*Everglades* 87). Religion, for White and Tomlinson, truly adheres to the word's own etymology: to bind fast. Any healthy expression of religion includes a moral code operating from a context of mercy, forgiveness, and understanding and not pure judgment.

Although Tomlinson is an ordained Zen Buddhist monk, White characterizes him as being a spiritual seeker very much in the spirit of openness with which he suffuses throughout the Doc Ford series: "During the second decade of his life, Tomlinson had wanted so badly to be wise that he sometimes embraced beliefs in which he had no confidence and many times spoke words in which he had no faith" (*Heat Islands* 99). After immersing himself in religion, philosophy, politics, and the drug culture, Tomlinson suffered a nervous breakdown, and thinking himself a religious fraud, checked into a Chicago facility known as the Elms where he made billfolds and signed all his letters "Sincerely as a Fucking Loon." Here he anchored himself in what he called "The True Course," a "personal compass assembled from his own knowledge, his own pain, and the pain of others" (*Heat* 99).

Along with his enormous empathy for other people, Tomlinson has thought long and hard and decided what to accept as true from a variety of religions. Though his odd

humor and quirky personality might seem to indicate that he is a religious flake, he has not merely cobbled together things he likes from certain religious traditions. Although he accepts all the positive elements from any and all religions, he has chosen to follow a somewhat traditional religious path. His compassion for other human beings and all of nature puts him squarely in the Mahayana path of Buddhism and in the role of that path's "bodhisattva"—"one who is already far along the path toward enlightenment and nirvana" (Haught 54). Tomlinson has, in effect, rejected nirvana or salvation in order to reach back and help others to get onto the path toward nirvana. His empathy for others is very much aligned with the sentiments of the Mahayana tradition, where the bodhisattva takes on the suffering of other creatures suffering from bad karma since it is better that one suffers for many instead of many suffering for a few (Haught 54). These Christ-like words fully describe Tomlinson's spiritual motivations, echoing his constant refrain about "taking a shot at being a bodhisattva" in many of the novels. He often recognizes a "karmic obligation" to help others, quite frequently roping in a skeptical Ford as a karmic accomplice. He often claims that "he is just a tool" for God, and that "you wouldn't believe some of the stuff God has gotten me into" (*Captiva* 74). Everything that happens has a purpose, according to Tomlinson, who sees "a perfect symmetry to every event, to every little thing that happens" (*Captiva* 23).

It is no secret that modern science has, in the minds of many, displaced older and more traditional religious views of the world (Smith 4-6), and for Ford, evolutionary biology fully explains reality. He articulates the empiricist's view of life. When he makes his first appearance in *Sanibel Flats*, he is sitting in the cargo hold of a DC-3 with his "back braced against crates that held his books and specimens and microscopes; the

things he still cared about" (5). These are the prized accoutrements of the scientist, and they are the only things he brings back to the United States with him as he leaves his life of espionage behind in Central America. Jessica McClure, an early love interest of Ford, recognizes in him how he has made science his world view, a lens she clearly believes is too limited to fully capture all of reality: "You've got a cold eye, Ford . . . . They way you study all the data trying to make it fit because you won't abide anything that can't be weighed or measured. Trouble is, some things don't fit, never will fit, but you still go plunking along collecting pieces, weighing the evidence, trying to neaten up a world that seems way too emotional and untidy . . . (*Sanibel* 20).

As a marine biologist, Ford naturally views the world through an evolutionary lens. He often compares his world view to Tomlinson's in the Doc Ford series, typically expressing variations of this basic rumination from *Captiva*:

> Tomlinson says my best quality and my worst quality are the same: an orderly mind. I think he's half right. Tomlinson is mystical, I am methodical. He believes in the Great Enigma. I do not. The behavior of any organism should be understandable once external influences are deciphered. When an otherwise predictable animal behaves oddly on the tidal flats—or on the docks—a little alarm goes off in my head. The inexplicable attracts me because there is nothing that cannot be explained. When the explanation is not readily apparent, I become compulsive about isolating the external influences. It attracts me in the same way that jigsaw puzzles and chess draw in similar types of people. Assemble enough pieces, and the reward is clarity. (54)

Ford, in short, is a believer in the religion of "scientism," which according to theologian and philosopher, Huston Smith, "adds two corollaries" to science: "… first, that the scientific method is, if not the *only* reliable method of getting at truth, then at least the *most* reliable method; and second, that the things science deals with—material realities—are the most fundamental things that exist" (59-60). Believers in scientism, charges Smith, suffer from a failure of nerve to admit a whole host of realities that the scientific method cannot verify: "values, meanings, final causes, invisibles, qualities, and our superiors" and that "science leaves much of the world untouched" (199-200). Smith contends that individuals attracted to the "church of scientism" are control freaks—since "we can control only what is *inferior* to us" (195). The elimination of higher spiritual realities puts human beings at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy. The human drive *towards* God has changed into the desire *to be* God.

Thus, Ford's rejection of spiritual or religious reality might have less to do with logic and more to do with his need to control reality, and reductionism allows him to narrow his focus, as Jessica McClure says, to try and make the data "fit" because he "can't abide anything that can't be weighed or measured" (*Sanibel* 20). Reality is "too untidy" and "too emotional" for Ford. Reducing all human action to material causes seems to help Ford deal with things he cannot control. Perhaps the loss of his parents in the boat explosion when he was a child has caused him to fear a universe that is not his to orchestrate. When trying to get over lost love, Ford reminds himself that love is chemically induced: "Realizing that helped me feel better, too. Chemistry is something I understand. It is chartable, predictable. Withdrawal from chemical dependence would take time, but the chemical's hold must necessarily grow weaker day by day by day"

(*Mangrove* 30). This is Ford's typical maneuver when he encounters that which is more powerful than he. He attempts to reduce those things to mere matter, something he can predict, something that will not last forever and hold him spellbound. Ford's faith in science borders on the superstitious. Theologian John Haught's thoughts fully describe Ford's motivation to reduce reality to something he can manage:

> It is difficult to deny that we are attracted to the unknown. It is true, of course, that we are also terrified by it. We anxiously shrink away from it. We suppress our underlying awareness that the real world is mostly unknown and unfamiliar to us. We seek to make everything predictable. Magic is one way of doing this. Science may at times be another. But all of our attempts to make the world completely familiar eventually fail. (158)

Ford, White suggests, uses science in the same way a superstitious person uses some kind of talisman to control a reality that is too unwieldy.

White has created Ford and Tomlinson from "two cerebral components." Ford is, in White's words, "pragmatic, mathematical, non-sympathetic, non-spiritual, rational." He created Ford's opposite, Tomlinson, as "this very intuitive, spiritual, former hippie" (Schwartz 5). Ford's dilemma—not believing in spiritual reality but hoping and being open to its possibility on his best days—is clearly drawn from White's own inner debate which, admittedly, is not as tinged with skepticism as is Ford's. Tomlinson's spiritual concerns have been modeled after "hippie and hipster" friends of White, like author and Zen Priest, Peter Mathiessen, and former big league pitcher and practitioner of all things radically spiritual, Bill Lee. "I never went through a hippie stage myself," White admits,

"but I did and do have a lot of hippie friends," and from them, he has developed Tomlinson's personal expression of religion. Besides drawing on his own sense of conflict with logic and religion, White has built Ford's empirical outlook on careful reading of a plethora of texts about biology and evolution (White, "Telephone"). Throughout the series, these two halves of one completely integrated person have profoundly affected one another, and their teaming has resulted in solutions or escapes during their many adventures. However, it is still their opposing viewpoints—Ford, the strict empiricist and Tomlinson, the spiritually intuitive thinker—that helps White to broadly define and investigate the truth of the supernatural in his fiction.

Though Ford, throughout the fourteen-novel series, remains skeptical that anything supernatural really exists, White clearly endorses the view that miracles do happen and that powers beyond reason's ken are real. In spite of Ford's refusal to admit them into his world view, the series is full of the miraculous and unexplained phenomena. One such instance occurs is when Jeth Nicholes, a fishing guide and good marina friend to Ford and Tomlinson, claims that seeing the phenomena of the green flash "was an awakening" and that seeing it has cured him of his stuttering. Tomlinson echoes his appreciation for the "miracle," saying, "Absolutely, man. No doubt. Signs try to speak to us everyday, it's just that almost no one listens. The Indians knew it" (*Heat Islands* 69). Much to Ford's chagrin, Tomlinson offers another example of a "sign" that might have been ignored, but was ultimately a beneficent message from the divine. He relates how two weeks earlier, he stubbed his toe on some owl pellets after being awakened by a hooting owl that was perched on top of the mast of his sailboat: "I stub the shit out of my toe. Just as I'm bending down to hop around, the boom swings over my head, coulda

knocked me right over" (70). Jeth tells him that it was clear the owl was trying to warn him, and that it saved his life, something Tomlinson finds easy to believe. Ford ignores this, to him, fanciful conversation, and he will continue to try and ignore all miraculous interventions he encounters. When Tomlinson routinely makes some startling predictions or appears to have the powers of telepathy, Ford is quick to assign more natural, scientifically explained rationales for what he witnesses, refusing to assign any spiritual significance to Tomlinson's abilities: "the man has a first-rate intellect. Granted, he's eccentric, often bizarre. As a late sixties drug prophet, his mind sometimes takes odd and quirky turns, though it's impossible to say whether it's through enlightenment, as he claims, or because he has done serious damage to the neural pathways and delicate synapse junctions of his brain" (*Captiva* 6). Ford does not reject the truth of what Tomlinson claims to know; he just rejects any claim of extra-mental powers his friend makes, asserting that "Tomlinson's genius is nonlinear, empathic, able to make intuitive leaps from illogical cause to logical effect" (7). Ford chooses to believe that Tomlinson's powerful ability to empathize gives him the ability to intuit things most people cannot. Ford once again attempts to reduces something that seems to be a spiritual reality to mere matter.

In the Doc Ford series, Tomlinson often likes to make the following claim: "I am an alien being in spiritual contact with distant galaxies and, that I was sent to earth on a mission I have yet to understand" (*North of Havana* 34-35). He moves beyond the strict agnosticism about god often espoused by Zen Buddhism, concluding in one novel that "God's out there! God is out there, and He's *not* us! What a relief! (*Captiva* 10). His god is a personal god (note the use of the large-case "H" in the pronoun Tomlinson uses

to describe the divine). Many claim that the Buddhist concept of "nirvana" might represent a "godhead" or an uncreated, unborn, unformed truth at the heart of reality, but as Huston Smith notes in *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions*, the concept of god in most varieties of Buddhism "cannot be described as being a personal creator" (114-15). However, the Mahayana school of Buddhism can support such an assertion. As opposed to the Theravada school, the Mahayana school holds that human aspirations are supported by divine powers and the grace they bestow whereas the former system holds that human beings are emancipated strictly by self effort, without supernatural aid (Smith 126). Thus, whether his experiences of the miraculous led him to the Mahayana path or whether his taking this path caused him to presuppose the reality of miracles, Tomlinson accepts them as part of his reality.

Interesting, though, is how White often presents strange occurrences that are interpreted one way by Tomlinson and another way by Ford. When Tomlinson miraculously is able to understand the Spanish spoken by the Cuban revolutionaries, Ford decides that Tomlinson's many years of heavy drug use have caused him to forget that he once learned the language at Harvard. However, Tomlinson does not have the ability to speak the language—he can only understand it. Likewise, when Tomlinson appears to have an incredibly detailed knowledge of the geographic terrain of Cuba's Cayo de Soto, a place he has never been before, Ford notes that Cayo de Soto and their home, Sanibel Island, are duplicates of one another: "To me it was a geographic oddity. To a mystic like Tomlinson, under the influence of peyote and pressured to pick a spot on a map . . . the similarities would register subconsciously—as they had with me—or consciously . . . something he would interpret as a divine message (*North* 204). Seeing this mirror image

of Dinkin's Bay in Cayo de Soto, Ford believes that Tomlinson would surely "accept every likeness as a directive; a kind of homing signal from God" (222).

Every time something miraculous seems to intrude into the natural world, Ford is quick to offer an alternative, "scientific" explanation. However, as the Doc Ford series progresses, White includes some supernatural occurrences that Ford, despite his strict empirical mindset, must surely accept as being beyond the realm of scientific explanation. The first such occurrence takes place at the conclusion of *Captiva*. Hannah Smith, Ford's love interest, contends that her power of second sight has given her the feeling that something bad will happen, the "same feeling" she had "the night her mama died" (267). Her premonition comes true, and like her forebear, her great-aunt, the first Hannah Smith, she does sink in the water. With Hannah dead and the critically injured Tomlinson about to be removed from his respirator, Ford arranges a small Buddhist ceremony for spreading his friend's ashes and then leaves to track their killer, Raymond Tullock, to Indonesia. After dispatching Tullock, Ford resolves never to return to Sanibel and begins to live off the land in a largely uninhabited part of Australia. He "wanted to cut free. Revolted at the idea of ever risking it again." Though he reaffirms his central view of reality—"the only thing I knew or believed was that all life … was a definable, weighable process" (315)—he is shocked to hear an interview one night on a Voice of America program on his short wave radio. Tomlinson's doctor tells an astounding tale of how a lightning strike had resurrected the man who had just died. After running a battery of tests, the doctor admitted that she had no rational explanation for what had happened in the operating room.

In their later adventure in Cuba, Tomlinson tells Ford not to worry since he has "assigned an angel to protect him" *(North* 96). Just as Ford is about to be captured and murdered by Taino's followers, the small orphan boy, Santiago, falls from a tree where he has been hiding after Ford's gunshot warning breaks the branch the boy has been sitting on and spooks a flock of white doves that have also taken refuge in the tree. The fall fulfills—at least in the minds of Taino's followers—a Santerian prophecy that a "child will fall among them from a tree of white doves, and he is wearing ornaments that the gods refused to reveal to them" (247). Ford is able to escape, Santiago telling him that he found the medallions he is wearing with the help of Tomlinson's psychic powers. "He can do magic tricks. He says he can heal people," the boy tells Ford, who, still skeptical, says, "I would love to believe that" (248).

White will continue to populate the novels in the Doc Ford series with uncanny events that can only have supernatural explanations whether Ford believes them or not. Doc has a vision of himself and the Dorothy, the long-ago murdered artifact hunter, so real he cannot discount it in *Ten Thousand Islands*. She tells him that they have been searching for one another throughout many incarnations, and "in small ways, through other good people" (223) touched briefly. Dorothy's vision tells Ford that "Love is religion, not emotion. It requires a leap of faith" (224). This is significant, since Ford has earlier discounted any such notion of his attraction for women as being little more than chemical reactions. He is not yet a believer in realities that transcend purely scientific understanding, but at the novel's conclusion his friends discover that he has a lighter mood about him. He also wears the Dorothy's locket around his neck.

Later in the same adventure, Ford is shocked when the Bauerstock's blind Indio servant and self-proclaimed shaman, Bella, senses his presence when he was sure to move in absolute silence through the Bauerstock's compound. Though she cannot physically see him, Bella moves towards Ford, tells him she has long been waiting for him, gives him his lost eyeglasses, and calls him by name though they have never met. When a bewildered Ford asks how she can know what she knows, she startles his logical sensibilities by saying: "I know more than you realize, big man. I know that you swam into the eye of the earth and stayed as long as a fish" (*Ten* 269). She also knows that he has recovered a golden amulet at the bottom of a pond, something Ford knows is impossible.

White continues to allow Ford to experience irruptions of the supernatural or miraculous interventions in order to test his materialistic world view. In *Tampa Burn*, another blind soothsayer—this time a carnival midget—gives Ford predictions that later come true. Mystivo, the Pygmy Fortune Teller, provides Ford with his correct age, weight, and the month in which he was born. He then predicts that Ford will lose one of his two children. Though Laken survives, Ford later discovers to his shock that Dewey has suffered a miscarriage, his "other" child dying (327).

Finally, White has Tomlinson to engineer Ford's own resurrection in *Dead of Night*, the mystic's powers of telepathy letting him know that Ford has died many miles away. From his hospital bed, Tomlinson prays that Doc comes back to life. Impossibly, Doc does with the help of Dasha and her medicine kit and oxygen tank. However, the way White writes from Tomlinson, Dasha, and Ford's perspectives, there is no other way to interpret what has happened except to call it a healing miracle initiated by Tomlinson

who could not have known of Ford's condition. While dead, Ford himself encounters the mysterious Dorothy who coaxes him back to life, Dasha's physical ministrations functioning as a mere conduit. However, Ford still does not believe.

But how skeptical should Ford remain after all that he has experienced? White suggests that we choose our basic stances to life and reality, and that we will believe whatever that chosen stance allows us to believe. Because Ford has adopted a purely empirical epistemology which rules out the miraculous and spiritual from the start, White proposes that he will never be able to accept such occurrences as anything but random chance. White echoes the posture of philosopher Ralph McInerny, who writes in his book *Miracles*:

> We are far more likely today, in our view of the natural world, to find a place for random occurrences in it, so that the random itself is natural. This supplants the view that whatever occurs in the natural world happens with rigorous necessity. The miracle would then disrupt this necessary unfolding. But if one begins with the assumption that everything happens necessarily, simply issuing from its antecedents without any possibility of an alternative occurring, miracles have been defined out of the world along with the random. (135-36).

Using science to define miracles out of existence, according to White, is an improper use of the scientific method. Miraculous events really occur, but by being so closed off to them and presupposing they cannot possibly exist, will cause one, like Ford, to miss them entirely.

Despite Ford's leanings toward scientism, White does not present his hero in a bad light. Though Ford cannot believe, he does try to remain open-minded, and he retains hope that he might someday believe. Here, White's ruminations on religion take a different turn from his preoccupation of testing reality to see if the supernatural is real. White, in the latter novels in the Doc Ford mysteries, presents a series of religious types. Through his characters, White distinguishes between good-and-evil approaches to religion. In the world of Doc Ford, there are both good and evil skeptics, good and evil followers, good and evil religious leaders. Most of this comparison occurs in the series' tenth novel, *Everglades*, which is White's most developed and profound treatment of religion in the Doc Ford mysteries.

Ford is White's example of the good or honorable skeptic. He hopes to someday believe in the things Tomlinson believes in: "Heaven, visitors from outer space, divine creation, divine providence, divine revelation, predestination, telepathy, guardian angels, ghosts, soulmates, reincarnation, absolution and (most of all) … that order and virtue ultimately triumph over that which is evil, existential, random" (*Everglades* 61). He simply finds himself unable even despite his firsthand encounters with the miraculous. However, unlike today's fashionable religious debunkers like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris and the late Carl Sagan, Ford does not carry on like the village atheist, raging against the stupidity of any and all religious belief. In speaking about the length of time he has known Tomlinson, Ford affirms "that one's spiritual convictions have little to do with one's intellect" (*Everglades* 61). Ford knows that Tomlinson and many other religious believers have intellects far greater than his own, and he castigates professional atheists like Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris, saying, "The so-called

intellectual types who assume that spirituality and religion are refuges of the ignorant simply provide testimony that condemns their own stunted intellects" (*Everglades* 61). Here, White displays Ford's logical and open mind in a positive light.

Ford never disrespects the religious beliefs of people who seem to be sincere in their convictions. When his old friend Sally Carmel tells him about being born again in Jesus, she expects to be ridiculed. However, Ford tells her, "A person who makes fun of anyone's religion lacks the brains to be taken seriously" (*Everglades* 41). Ford further asserts that "I am incapable of lying to myself, so I am incapable of embracing a spiritual view of the world. I'm hopeful, though. I remain hopeful" (62). His attitude is skeptical, yet respectful and open. While he will still hope, he also decides that he will no longer engage in the debate between spirituality and materialism, "or risk undermining the beliefs of others" (331).

Izzy Kline, right hand man and killer for bogus religious leader Jerry Singh or "Shiva," is White's example of a poor or dishonorable skeptic. Kline, having seen first hand Shiva's fraudulent religion, thinks that "all religion was *bullshit*. Religion was nothing more than legend manipulated by carefully staged illusions" (*Everglades* 5). It is what he terms his "water and wine theory": "All religion was bullshit and fakery. Same with the holy goofs who pretended to practice it. *Hypocrites*" (104). Ironically, Kline appeals to God at the novel's end when it becomes clear that Ford will execute him by throwing him into a live volcano. He lies and tells Ford that he is "going to Church now. *Confession*. I've been talking to a priest, trying to get my life in order, I *deserve* to be in hell" (327). Kline has become one of the hypocrites he earlier derided.

Proper and healthy religious belief is another aspect of White's examination of religion in the Doc Ford series. He provides several examples of positive followers and some of negative followers. Once again, *Everglades* includes his most thoroughly developed consideration of this aspect of religion with Geoffrey and Sally (Carmel) Minster representing authentic and inauthentic religious belief. Geoffrey Minster has turned to Shiva's cult for all the wrong reasons. As a businessman in a high pressure field, he finds it a relief to let go, and put someone else in charge of his life. This makes him particularly susceptible to Shiva's brainwashing. On the other hand, Geoffrey's wife, Sally, is able to escape the cult. She has recognized that she is not in charge of all aspects of life as Geoffrey has also realized, but she does not leave her free will and logic behind when she embraces belief. Sally tells Ford, "that little church changed my life. I've never felt such unconditional love . . . . I think God was there. I think he helped me and I didn't even know it. That's why I pray so much" (41). She later tells Ford that "Before I found my church, before my life changed, wealth and possessions—all that stuff—social status? They meant something. Now, though. I couldn't care less for money" (76). Sally's acceptance of belief has enabled her to transcend greed, whereas one of Geoffrey's main motivations in joining Shiva's cult was to attract wealth and prosperity into his life. White suggests that Sally's simple faith is an authentic one. After praying for rescue from Izzy Kline, her prayers are answered, God having given her the strength to not be afraid of "all the things that creep tried to do to me" (307).

Ford and Tomlinson's good friend from Dinkin's Bay Marina, Janet Mueller, is another example of a healthy religious believer. Having lost both her husband and unborn child years before in a horrifying automobile wreck, Janet has developed two

mantras from a bedtime prayer from her childhood: "I am strong. My faith is stronger. I am strong. My faith is stronger" and "This evil stands no chance against my prayers" (120). These prayers sustain Janet, and Ford discovers upon rescuing her, that she has even scratched them onto the walls of her cell in the slave trader's compound. Her prayers are answered just as Sally Carmel Minster' are, and here White seemingly approves of Christianity's admonition that persistence in prayer is eventually guaranteed an answer. In any case, both Janet and Sally's religious belief are not airy, pie-in-the-sky sentiments, nor are they simple defenses against the harshness of life. Both women, unlike Shiva's adepts who give up a sense of self and accept mind control, retain strong wills and strong minds in their acceptance of religious doctrine.

Good and evil appropriations of religious belief are most pointedly analyzed by White in the form of the religious leaders that populate the Doc Ford novels. Tomlinson is White's paragon of the healthy, authentic religious leader, while cult-leader Shiva from *Everglades* and Santerian priest Taino from *North of Havana* are the embodiment of destructive religious leaders. In these figures, White characterizes the good religious leader as being truthful, humble, logical, open, and loving, and the evil religious leader as being deceitful and power-hungry.

In Tomlinson, White presents a religious leader who avoids publicity, the mad grab for power, and any kind of fraudulent behavior. Tomlinson's sincere acceptance of the Mahayana path of Buddhism negates the drive to have power over others since its focus is on sublimating one's self in order to take upon the suffering and bad karma meant for other people. Although he has studied long and hard, Tomlinson is always careful not to press his religious views on others. In fact, Tomlinson is so humble, he

resists becoming a religious believer after he gains an incredible amount of popularity with people who want to follow him after an old essay of his, "Universal Truths Connecting Religions and Earthbound Events," is rediscovered and published on the Internet. "One Fathom Above Sea Level," a new title his admirers have formed from a line in the essay's text, sets out a vision of the universe as viewed from the eyes of a human being—hence, the use of the word "fathom." The essay has been translated into a dozen languages, and an Internet website has been created that includes various translations of the essay plus a page where fans can post stories of how Tomlinson's thought within the essay has changed their lives. These fans track Tomlinson to Dinkin's Bay Marina, and here White shows in Tomlinson's reaction to them how a good and authentic religious leader should behave: with honesty and humility.

From Ford's skiff, which he uses to evade them, Tomlinson explains to his rabid followers that he is not worthy to be their "roshi" or spiritual leader by being truthful and humble. He tells them: "I am not worthy to teach you or anyone else. Not anymore . . . . I'm a terrible person. I abuse drugs. I'm a fornicator—*nothing's* beneath me . . . . Basically, I'm an absurd wanderer . . . . sent to this planet to conduct inhuman experiments on the human liver" (*Everglades* 227).

Tomlinson's reluctance to lead is in direct contrast to Jerry Singh, or Shiva's, need to control others and to gain financially from his followers' submission. Unlike false religious leaders like Shiva, Tomlinson believes in truth, and he does not crave the power to control the masses. He rejects his followers' creation of a new religion based on his teachings, which they call "Tomlinsonism." Tomlinson possesses, as Ford describes it, "a kind of stray dog purity that is without ego or malice" (*Captiva* 7). When

Shiva denounces western science and religions' destructive separation of physical and spiritual reality in order to understand them, Ford tells Tomlinson that Shiva sounds a lot like him. Tomlinson, the selfless bodhisattva, counters Ford's words by asserting, "Yeah, but do you know what the difference is? I live it. He *uses* it" (282). Here White is clearly denouncing any real spiritual leader who is motivated purely by power or financial gain.

Shiva is Tomlinson's polar opposite. He changed his name and began actively seeking disciples, "mostly dropouts and runaways who'd craved the discipline, and liked wearing robes and growing their own food." This "rich man's prophet" and "incarnated sex guru" has amassed a quarter of a million followers and set up one hundred twenty Church of Ashram Centers (2). He is a huckster, a man who, as Tomlinson contends, uses religion for his own personal gain. This "wizard of religion" stages elaborate "miracles" to fool people into following him. He, unlike Tomlinson, does not offer an attitude of openness, but instead isolates his followers in order to keep control of them, teaching them that once they are accepted into his church's fold, "the morality of the outside world no longer applied to them" (71). As Sally Carmel Minster says, Shiva has "set himself up like a god, so everyone else is beneath him" (72). This is in direct contradiction to Tomlinson's extreme humility, which causes him to believe himself unfit to teach and lead others.

In *North of Havana*, White provides another instance where religious belief is used to gain power over people. White distinguishes between Tomlinson's positive example of spirituality from that of Taino, the Santerian priest, and his followers. Lenny Geis, ex KGB member and one-time advisor to Fidel Castro, explains to Ford how Castro

appropriated the Santerian religion as a means of frightening and controlling the Cuban masses. Castro and his priest Taino use religion to create fear and establish a social order where they are in charge, an evil use of religion in White's estimation. Santeria is not used for any positive purpose; it is used as a means of enslaving the Cuban people, using their superstitions against them. Taino, like Shiva, is a fake and creates bogus miracles to fool the Cubans.

Finally, religions themselves, White contends, can be twisted and misrepresented by their followers in order to enslave others and gain power. Teddy Bauerstock, like the ancient Calusa Indians he has spent his life studying, eats the eyes of his human victims with the perverse goal of acquiring the energy of their souls. In the most recent Doc Ford novel, *Hunter's Moon*, White makes a clear distinction between "Islamicists" and "Muslims" in a speech given by former U. S. President Kal Wilson. Wilson tells Ford and others that while Muslims are authentic believers, Islamicists are fascists who wear religion as a "costume." He challenges what he terms Islamicists: "You have no morality, no character, no conscience, while most people around the world are blessed—and burdened—by all three" (304).

Thus, for White, Kal Wilson's accusations can be taken as the necessary traits of true, healthy, and authentic religion: morality, character, and conscience. Early on in the series, even the skeptical Ford has found these traits in the good will of a minister who he first believes is a typical huckster televangelist with his blown dry hair hired to speak at Rafe Hollins' funeral:

> Ford settled in his seat, ready to tune out the slick, shallow performance to come. But surprise, surprise, the sermon was neither slick nor shallow.

> The Reverend Somebody turned out to be a thoughtful man and an honest speaker. No, he hadn't known Rafe. But he knew about pain, and he knew about loss, and he spoke about the things he knew with sincerity, a clarity, and a sense of humor that had every man sitting up, listening. (126)

Ford realizes that once again he has begun to formulate a theory in advance of any real data. He labeled the minister as a charlatan before he even heard what the man had to say.

How Ford's religious development will further evolve as the series continues is open to debate, but White has certainly painted a clear picture of what he believes about religion in contemporary times. Religious belief that does not develop in its followers aspirations for self-sacrifice, humility, respect and openness towards others is false. Religion used for personal gain and to achieve power in order to control others is evil. Science and religion are not mutually incompatible, but are two different lenses human beings use to understand the world, science being the more shortsighted lens. Authentic faith in spiritual reality does not require the submission of logical thought and does not require that one leave one's freedom behind. Finally, White argues that healthy, authentic religious belief does not attempt to falsely and destructively sunder spiritual and bodily realities; instead, it seeks to recognize all of life as spiritual. White's skeptical hero Ford even seems to appreciate these truths, however dimly. He most likely will never be at complete peace with a spiritual mindset. As his good friend, pharmapyschiatrist Dieter Rasmussen, tells him, "You, my friend, will never be an entirely happy man because you are a *rational* man. In you, and people like you, intellect and spirituality will always be

in conflict" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 314). Ford might be a patron saint for today's world, which finds itself bewildered by scientific and religious truth claims.

CHAPTER 5

THE SOCIAL CRITIC

"Save The American Crocodile, Skin A Developer." Quotation on a t-shirt worn by Randy Wayne White in 2007

"Let's face it, Nature may be great, but it's not a lot of laughs" (139). Randy Wayne White, *The Sharks of Lake Nicaragua*

A strong social consciousness is a distinguishing feature in all fourteen novels thus far in Randy Wayne White's Doc Ford series. As I have explained, Ford is not a professional crime solver like a policeman or private investigator. He is a semi-retired government covert operator who makes a meager living by collecting and selling marine biology specimens to high-school and college science labs. He does not ask or receive payment for taking action and helping others. His profit is simply fulfilling his own moral mandate to help friends in distress and in righting social wrongs.

White does not hesitate to use his characters to voice his own opinions. In particular, his change to first-person narration after the third novel of the series has afforded him the ability to put forth his own views about society through the mouth of Doc Ford. Throughout the fourteen Doc Ford novels, White has chosen to talk about several social and ecological subjects through his thoughtful marine biologist mouthpiece. Unlike the topics of religion and spirituality, where he used both Ford and Tomlinson's outlooks in order to fully consider his own views, White will largely espouse his social philosophy through Ford. Hence, his social philosophy may be come from a context of scientific epistemology rather than a religious one. Through Ford, White has commented not only on contemporary ecological concerns, but also on such

varied and wide-ranging social issues, among others, as the place of women in American life, the negative effects of technology on the human spirit, the loss of the individual in an increasingly homogenizing, over-civilizing contemporary society, and the positive and negative role of religion (as shown in Chapter 4), particularly as White has observed them in his adopted state of Florida.

Utilizing a recurring series hero in Doc Ford has given White a consistent arena in which he can express his strong views on things that matter most to him. Here he has clearly followed the modus operandi of the detective writer to whom he is most often compared, John D. MacDonald. White once noted in *An American Traveler* that MacDonald "used digression—normally a taboo device—to jump up on a soapbox and speak his own mind. The conduit of his own discipline, mystery writing, wasn't big enough for the things he wanted to say, so he ignored the limitations, and thereby expanded the genre. For that, all writers everywhere should be eternally grateful to the man" (143).

White, who quit reading MacDonald's Travis McGee series for fear he would too slavishly imitate it (White, "Telephone"), has a similar knack for including asides and diatribes in his mysteries. These "interruptions," as some critics want to call them, are popular with the series' many fans, who read the books in part for the wisdom White imparts. MacDonald's readers were similarly fond of the "interruptions" in the Travis McGee series, something that White himself has insightfully recognized: "The popularity of MacDonald's work is not a mass market phenomenon. It is the result of a chain reaction catalyzed by a solitary writer speaking to a solitary reader, communicating in a way that went straight to the marrow" (*American Traveler* 142).

In creating a series character who continues to develop mentally, morally, socially, and spiritually as the books progress, White is able to present his views on issues he deems important since the Doc Ford seems so lifelike, credible, and appealing. Because readers have grown fond of the evolving hero, they are much more given to allowing and even enjoying the tangents Doc Ford introduces and follows. The asides and diatribes, because they are mouthed by this likeable and respected character, do not come off as being too preachy or too tangential. Because the readers have chosen to follow Doc along on all his adventures, they expect this lifelike hero, who tells his stories in the first-person, to express his views on topics that come up in the unfolding of the plot. These diversions never seem to distract from what Doc Ford is doing as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive reader emails posted on regular basis on White's website.

Environmental Concerns

White's concern with ecology is his most consistent, and it runs throughout the entire Doc Ford series. Certainly, since White is a former fishing guide in the Gulf of Mexico, a regular columnist for *Outside Magazine*, and the writer of four books of travel literature, it is easy to see where this concern originated, and it is easy to recognize White's credentials for frequent comment on the environment. In both long and short commentaries advanced often by Doc Ford, White voices his own fear that the natural beauty of Florida will be destroyed by humanity and its constant development of the state. He singles out developers and local politicians and their greed as the major factors in the corruption of pristine nature. However, like MacDonald, White does not present an either-or, black-or-white case that environmentalists are right and those who overbuild

are wrong. Rather, this one-time fishing guide and longtime resident of Florida's west coast carefully examines both sides of the environmental debate, showing that both sides can justify their respective motivations.

White's meditations on such nuances are best seen in *Captiva*, where the action in the plot stems from a soon-to-be-implemented ban on net fishing, which is the sole means of employment for many poor families living on tiny, out-of-the way back-bay islands off the west coast of Florida. The ban on net fishing has caused a war to develop between the "netters" and sports fisherman, whom the netters believe have pushed for the new legislation. The fishing dispute has resulted in renegade commercial fisherman vandalizing marinas, stealing engines and electronics, and setting boats on fire. The vandals have ramped up their fight with acts of terrorism. A man is killed when a faulty bomb explodes before it can be dropped from a small aircraft and onto boats that may have people on board, and a steel cord is stretched across the bay in hopes that boats hitting it will be destroyed, crew and all. Despite all the emotions surrounding the proposed net ban, Ford objectively examines the legislation and the motivations of both sides in the dispute.

As a marine biologist, Ford realizes that the netters have been wiping out all of the Gulf's fish, but he does not find fault with the poor local netters who, his friend Tomlinson says, have "babies to feed, mortgage payments to make" (5). Ford places the blame on migrant netters who have come down from North Florida, Georgia, Texas, and the Carolinas: "They come down for December and January, take the fish, dump their garbage, and leave" (6). Besides that, he notes that the migrant netters harvest and sell

fish eggs to the Taiwanese, who consider them a delicacy. As a result, the fish cannot reproduce.

While Ford openly admits that the netters are their own worst enemies, having used spotter planes to exterminate the king mackerel, Ford has voted against the ban, something that angers his fishing-guide friends who have had their boats vandalized and destroyed by the renegade netters. Ford, with his understanding of biological evolution, recognizes that the same dynamics apply to both the environment and society. He has the foresight to realize the ultimate outcome of the passage of the net ban. He reasons that the ban will effectively restore Florida's shallow water fishery, but when the back-bay fish houses are forced to close, Ford knows that the condo developers and marina investors will buy them out, further despoiling the environment. Furthermore, he understands that the displaced netters will then move up to exterminate all the fish in the waters of other states that have yet to pass such bans, repeating the vicious cycle.

Ford places most of the blame on Florida's local politicians and bureaucrats. In order to net fish, individuals must be granted a license by the state, which gladly sells them to the poor locals whose families had fished the Gulf for hundreds of years and migrant netters alike. Feigning indifference, the bureaucrats fail to act. They fill their greedy pockets with monies from selling licenses to migrants, all the while making dire predictions about "imminent collapse of Florida's fishery" (34). In discussing his reasons for voting against the net ban, Ford makes a key point about what he believes is most important when innate conflicts between humanity and the environment arise: "The world market demands sea products. Nothing is going to change that. When there are innate conflicts between man and the environment, I believe it is wiser to dilute the

problem by sharing and wisely regulating the burden. Saltwater and sea creatures do not acknowledge the boundaries of states or nations" (35). White continues to articulate this kind of balanced, reasoned compromise in response to difficult environmental questions throughout the Doc Ford series. Here Ford resembles those on both sides of environmental protection battles of the 1990s as described by Hal K. Rothman in *The Greening of a Nation: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945.* Noting the polarization in the sociopolitical culture of the United States, Rothman contends that consensus or compromise was impossible because extremes between the political right and the political left were so heated that were either side to give in on the other's demands it would look like an "abdication of moral responsibility" (208).

White creates a similar scenario some five novels later in *Twelve Mile Limit* where legislation regarding Florida's manatee population is highlighted. Once hunted as food, the manatee is now threatened by powerboats. In order to protect this species, which Ford admits "evokes an emotional response from people" due to its "pug face and teddy-bear countenance"(7), a proposal to restrict or close thousands of hectares of public waters to private boaters may result in the closing of Ford's home, Dinkins Bay Marina, to power boats. Closing the marina to all power boats will, of course, destroy the livelihoods of the fishing guides, force the marina boat dwellers to move to different waters, and even force Ford to close Sanibel Biological Supply. The issue has become so irrational and mean-spirited that someone has taken a black marker and drawn a bull's eye, complete with arrow, on the belly of an exquisitely-carved manatee in a local bar, The Crow's Nest. Written above the bull's eye are the words "Save a Fishing Guide, Kill a Sea Cow" (75). Ford's fishing guide friend, Jeth Nicholes, sports a t-shirt picturing a

manatee roasting on a spit with the words, “Any Questions?” below the cartoon. Ford recognizes the irony of the t-shirt, very popular with Florida’s sports fisherman, and the manatee situation. Although Florida’s sports fisherman have long “been among the state’s most vocal and powerful environmental advocates,” they were now “being labeled as ‘antienvironmentalist’ by groups pushing to get fishing boats off the water” (65).

Again, Ford calmly assembles all the data about the explosive issue. While recognizing the value of saving the manatee but realizing that doing so could put the livelihoods of himself and all his friends at risk, Ford admits that “most of us are eager fans of the environment, until its maintenance threatens to inconvenience us” (9). White again refuses to view the problem in simplistic, black-and-white terms. He wonders what the “necessary maintenance” of the manatee problem and other so-called environmental causes might be. The real dilemma, he thinks, lies in determining if such necessary maintenance is really helping solve environmental problems or if it is merely “symptomatic of very human and predictable attempts by government and nonprofit bureaucrats to expand their power.” Ford reasons:

> The line has become so broad, so gray, that I sit way back and gather all the information I can before choosing sides in any environmental debate. In Florida, considering environmental issues has, increasingly, become a time-consuming job. Truth is? Sometimes there are no good choices, and there is almost never a perfect choice. (9)

So, as in the case of the ban on net fishing in *Captiva*, Ford recognizes that there are certainly no easy answers to problems between humans and their environment—and

furthermore—that there may not any good answers at all. Ford recognizes that competition and survival of the fittest is often the reality or the situation, and that everyone—humans, animals, and the rest of the natural environment—cannot all win. Hence, his balanced understanding that problems such as these must be diluted by "sharing and wisely regulating the burden" (*Captiva* 35). Ford recognizes, as Alison Byerly puts it in her essay "The Uses of Landscape," that "'more natural' ecosystems can only be attained through deliberate human effort" (64). Holding most of the power due to incredible advances in technology, "many people choose to reject that option" (64).

Ford believes such burdens will not be "diluted" by a sharing and wise regulation because of greedy bureaucrats who head up both the local political scene and the once non-profit environmental movements. This realization is driven home when Ford's friend, Frieda Matthews, "one of Florida's best biologists and field researchers" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 75) informs him that that the state's manatee population has been increasing and not decreasing for the past twenty-five years. After she informed SAM ("Save All Manatees") of this fact and the fact that the manatee should be removed from the endangered species list, the group brands her a "heretic," a "liar," and a "stooge for the boating industry" (76). When she wonders about SAM's reaction to her data and speculates about the possible reasons the group would have to continue to promote a baseless endangerment crisis, Ford echoes her answers: "Money" or "Group survival or some political agenda" (78). Ford recognizes that with the millions of dollars they have collected and the political clout they have begun to enjoy SAM's leaders have lost touch with their original ideals and become infected with greed and a desire for power. White, through Ford, indicts these one-time idealists whom he claims have been blinded by

money and the force of their influence. He understands as does environmentalist Thom Hartmann that "responsibility for these failings falls squarely at the feet of corporate lobbyists and the conservative politicians who not only allow themselves to be bought and controlled by dirty industries but proclaim that such 'such support for industry' is a positive political virtue" (242).

Although he censures what they believe to be the corrupted leaders of some environmental organizations, Ford has no patience with those who would label such groups and their members as "environmental wackos" (*Everglades* 222). White has Ford articulate a strong stance about environmental ethics: "As a marine biologist, I am also, necessarily, an environmentalist. I take pride in the fact that some of the research I've done, certain papers I've published, have played a role in protecting our dwindling marine resources" (222). Ford credits Rachel Carson and her 1962 call to action, *Silent Spring*, and the entire environmental movement for stopping "private enterprise and profit-minded government" from "slowly killing an entire continent" (222). However, Ford maintains strong feelings about the corruption of the movement as the following diatribe attests: "Half a century later, though, what was once a movement has now become the very thing its founders battled. So-called 'environmentalism' has become a profit-driven, power-hungry industry in which private political agendas are more important than biological realities, and monetary objectives excuse any perversion of scientific fact" (222). From Ford's point of view, "unthinking extremists have taken possession of what was once a noble title, *environmentalist*, and they are destroying our credibility, just as surely as they are giving credence and power to people who use sad phrases such as *environmental wackos*" (222). Instead, Ford would define the term

"environmentalist" in the way Edward Abbey meant it in an entry in his journal. Calling himself a "devout environmentalist, he means, according to James M. Cahalan, " 'environmentalist' not in the 1970s, Earth Day meaning but rather in the sense that people are shaped by their social environments and nationalities" (61). Later, Ford and investigative reporter Henry Melinski's joke about petty politicians and greedy bureaucrats neatly captures this sad reality: "Florida attracts the best people in the world, and it attracts the worst people in the world. The best people already have it made, so they go to the beach. And the worst people go into politics" (304).

Ultimately, White's vision of being environmentally sound is one that requires balance and compromise. Though humanity and the rest of nature are symbiotic, individual species do compete with one another for survival; thus, solutions where both species receive the fullest benefits do not exist. Although White recognizes this less-than-perfect situation, he still indicts the environmental industry, or "En-dustry" as he calls it, that is made up of governmental agencies, private businesses and "nonprofit" organizations, for refusing to put the "well being of the environment before their own self-interests" (223). There are, Ford notes, "parties on both sides of environmental issues who seldom hesitate to pervert science to advance their own cause, increase their own power" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 315).

In Jayson Reynolds, an environmental biologist in the employ of Tropicane, a fictional Florida producer of sugar cane, White seems to propose a way to achieve a balance between the powers of corporations and environmental groups. Reynolds, an admirer of Tomlinson and his hipster generation, has determined to work for environmental health by working from within the power structure rather than attacking it

from the outside. When Tomlinson questions how he can in good conscience work for the "big-money screw-heads," Reynolds explains, "It's biologists like yours truly who keep the old corporate leeches on the straight and narrow . . . . I get into their heads by preaching to their wallets. These days, they want to save the environment *plus* make a profit" (*Dead of Night* 229). Reynolds, and other young people like him, attempt to create a sea change in corporate thinking about the environment. He uses his expertise in environmental biology to demonstrate that saving the environment will help Tropicane (a fictionalized Tropicana), and other industries like it, turn a bigger profit since these industries cannot continue to reap the benefits of selling what the land produces if they themselves ravage it and destroy its fertile powers to reproduce itself. As Gary R. Mormino notes in *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, industries such as "Big Sugar" were "not always so big, chiefly because the Everglades used to be much larger. At the end of the twentieth century, the Everglades is about half the size it was at the beginning of the century" (213). In the character of Reynolds, White attempts to indicate how the self-interests of the environmental enthusiasts and big business might work in harmony and mutually benefit both sides. This would counteract the "corporate greed, political influence peddling, human ingenuity, hubris on a colossal scale, a public's unquenchable appetite for winter vegetables, cheap sugar, and yes, even good intentions" (Mormino 212).

However, at several points in the series, Ford points to instances where human beings do not even have the luxury of choosing sides in environmental issues. With his broad and clear vision, White opines on another aspect of his extensive environmental concerns in the Doc Ford series: the inability of the poor in Third World countries to be

anything but pragmatic when questions of whether humanity or the environment should come first are posed. After realizing that a poor Cuban man and his children—all suffering from malnutrition, their stomachs distended—do not want his help in order to save a manatee, but in order to capture it so they can have meat for their Christmas dinner, Ford is initially stunned. He soon returns to an earlier understanding he formulated during his covert ops days, one that he realizes the poor Cuban father must also possess: "When reduced to the context of survival, my view of nature is pragmatic, not romantic" (*North of Havana* 188). Ford is given a reminder of his pragmatism in *Twelve Mile Limit* when he sees a desperate tribe of Remate de Males men hunting, harpooning, and butchering the pink Amazon River dolphin, *Inia geoffrensis*, which supposedly is the most intelligent of all species of dolphins. Remembering that at one time these dolphins were one of the least endangered of their kind, Ford notes that the poverty of Third World humans might reverse this trend. The human denizens of the Third World are not powerful enough to attain, in Alison Byerly' words, "a 'more natural' ecosystem" (64).

In his essay "Croc Poachers of Panama" in *The Sharks of Lake Nicaragua*, White himself recognizes that "To a community of poor, wildlife isn't a resource, it is table fare. To a community of poor, wildlife isn't a natural wonder, it is chattel to be eaten or sold." When roaming through parts of Asia, Ford reflects on this truth, once again in a pragmatic mode:

> Americans who call themselves environmentalists would have found the wholesale destruction I saw shocking. I did not. It was tragic, yes. But not shocking. When stray dogs become a part of the citizenry's menu,

> professorial speeches about the long-term benefits of virgin forests and sea conservation won't turn a single head—particularly when those speeches come from people who have never had to stalk their neighborhood's pets.(*Captiva* 316).

People who live lives on the precipice of civilization, White contends, cannot afford to be trendy and work towards advocating animal rights. "People," he says, "have as much a right to exist as otters and dolphins, and if the crunch was really on, even the most self-righteous would elbow their way toward the killing fields" (154).

Overpopulation and Overdevelopment

Although White contends that human beings have as much of a right to existence as other creatures, his fiction makes it clear that he worries that Florida will be overpopulated and overdeveloped. According to Ford: "Despoil a mountainside, despoil a human being. What was the difference?" (*Mangrove Coast* 256). He recognizes that humanity and the natural environment are intractably connected. The health of humanity depends upon the health of the environment. Although Ford espouses the mechanism of natural selection, he sometimes thinks it works too well. In the case of humanity, whose struggle to survive has been so successful, this success has had its price. In the Doc Ford series, White often bemoans the reality of what he calls the "instant city" and the pollution that accompanies the urban sprawl perpetuated by humanity's extraordinarily successful adaptations. University of South Florida history professor Gary R. Mormino writes that dreams of better lives in exotic climes exercised a powerful hold on Americans causing what he terms as "Florida's Big Bang," the period of 1950-2000 when

the state's population swelled from 2.7 to 15.9 million. "Every single day since 1950, about a thousand new persons have become new Florida residents" (3).

According to White, the "instant city" is a Florida phenomenon. Large financial groups purchase large islands, tear down all the fishing shacks, and start spraying for mosquitoes. Concrete block structures are quickly built, no wooden structures are allowed. Before long these "instant cities" are among the largest in Florida, and the developers control their political seats, law enforcement, and citizenry. Driving along Highway 41, Ford reflects on how the gush of transplants from the north keeps the developers happy and rich:

> The love of money kept people in the development trade yammering for more zoning changes, and the fear of money inspired local commissioners to grant the changes. Never mind the demand on Florida's already waning water supply was increasing by about half-million gallons a week. And never mind the number of cars on the already jammed highways was increasing by about twenty thousand a month. And never mind how out-of-control growth was affecting schools or impacting on the environment because, hell, all growth was good; growth meant money—just ask the elected officials struggling to make their towns carbon copies of Miami. (*Sanibel Flats* 122).

Since many of the developers and citizens are transplanted from northern states, according to Ford, they do not think of Florida as their own state, but rather as just a place to live for awhile. For them, "Florida is just an old whore who was going to be picked clean" (122). Mormino echoes Ford's thinking about the virtually unlimited and

destructive growth, writing: "growth became theme, mantra, and creed" (4) to the newcomers, developers, and politicians.

Because most of Florida's population is first generation and has nothing to conserve, Ford reasons that its politicians and voters do not see a need to set limits for growth, believing that nature will take its course. Ford agrees that nature will eventually limit the overgrowth, but not in the way people think: "Only three things limited growth naturally: crime, decay, and overpopulation" (122). Retirees, thinks Ford, do not have to worry about their grandchildren being stuck with these three destructive checks on growth. One of White's literary muses, John Steinbeck, once wrote in *Travels with Charley*, "The very name Florida carried the message of warmth and ease and comfort. It was irresistible" (41). In 1880, 2.3 percent of Florida's population was over the age of sixty-five as compared to 3.4 percent representing the entire United States. By 2000, 18.4 percent of Florida's population was made of senior citizens, quite a bit higher than the national average of just 12.4 percent (Mormino 130-31).

A destination for tourism and retirees, Florida, according to Ford, is susceptible to such ravaging, but native Floridians also have themselves to blame. He says, "Floridians have chopped up, dredged and reconstituted their homeland as eagerly as the most thoughtless of outsiders. Or sold it to developers who did worse" (*Ten Thousand Islands* 67). Though tourism and retirement communities have contributed to Florida's troubles—fertilizer, used to keep the many newly-developed golf courses green, has seeped into Florida's waters, polluting them, and the highways are crowded with cars—White, through Ford, shows his usual keen eye for the truth, a vision that is measured and balanced. Though Ford despises the pawnshops, repossessed car lots, boarded-up

businesses and bail bondsmen, he enjoys meeting the nice and interesting tourists who come to Sanibel and Captiva Islands and other as yet undeveloped parts of Florida despite the crowded conditions created with their arrival. He believes that the tourists who come to the islands year after year tend to be like those who make the islands a year around home—"outdoors oriented and energized by a longing for quiet beaches and immersion in the subtropics: wading birds, gators, crocs, manatees, littoral fish, coconut palms, ospreys, you name it" (*The Mangrove Coast* 145). Like Ford and White, these types of tourists treasure the islands because they are not yet overdeveloped, and they treasure and do not seek to build upon the still wide open spaces.

In fact, Sanibel Island, often described as "the sandspit of Eden" or "American's Tahiti," as well as being the home of Doc Ford, prided itself on its isolation from the rest of ravaged Florida, but felt threatened in the early 1960s when it was finally reachable by travelers due to bridge construction. Home to Rachel Carson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, the island was threatened by developers who wanted to develop the charming and remote community. In 1974, only a few years after White's arrival, the Sanibel Islanders revolted and voted to incorporate Sanibel Island and exert home rule. "Strict new zoning laws were implemented, sectioning the island into ecological zones and drastically limiting development" (Mormino 328). Sanibel remains an island without traffic lights, four-lane highways, and condominiums. The community's only fast-food establishment is a Dairy Queen which was grandfathered in by city fathers. "City statutes also forbid any new sea-walls and jetties" (Mormino 329). It is easy to see why White feels so strongly about overdevelopment in his adopted community.

Ford's complaints about the overcrowding and overdeveloping of Florida are not solely based on his concern for the health of the environment. He has aesthetic concerns as well; he deplores the imitation of bleak and antiseptic Midwest suburban sprawl in Florida in places "with names like Cross Creek Estates, Eagle Ridge, Jamaica Bay—names founded not in geography but at the desks of advertising agencies" (*Shark River* 238). The logos vary, but the template is the same: "little guardhouses, rolling fairways, stucco and spray-creted houses with red synthetic roofs pressed to look like real Spanish tile, lakes and palms in sodded lots, communal pool and tennis courts, and high, ivied concrete walls built to keep Florida out" (238). But for all his love of natural, unspoiled Florida, Ford can still appreciate the charm of cities:

> I'm a fan of downtown St. Pete, and nearby downtown Tampa, and their outlying barrier islands. The area is among Florida's great, unheralded metropolitan treasures, and the two cities have much in common. I appreciate their eclectic architecture: bootlegger 1930s meets the twenty-first century; Little Havana meets Manhattan; Southern Californian beach Deco joins Steubenville-by-the-Sea. I like the funky backwater canals with rusting shrimp boats that lead to elegant waterfront neighborhoods, plus all the great restaurants, cigar factories, museums, galleries, beaches and bars. (*Tampa Burn* 265-66).

White, through Ford, shows an appreciation for humanity's creative ability to develop civilization and urban centers. He does not reject these; he simply rejects carbon-copy, overly-planned communities that are practically indistinguishable from one another, unimaginative in their development. Unlike the successful stoppage of growth on Sanibel

Island, a place like Marco Island—once designated as a nature reserve—has ninety miles of canals constructed on it to create as many waterfront homes as possible, swelling its population to over thirteen thousand people. Mormino grimly states that as realtors hail Marco Island as one of America's great success stories, "environmentalists grieve" (327).

White, is a radical localist in the spirit of a Wendell Berry, a Henry David Thoreau, or front-porch anarchist Bill Kaufmann who writes: "I believe in peace and justice but I do not believe in smart bombs, daycare centers, Wal-Mart, television, or Melissa Etheridge's test-tube baby" (xi). Unimpeded growth, White thinks, is like a cancer which kills its host, necessarily killing itself. As Robert Grudin contends in *American Vulgar: The Politics of Manipulation Versus the Culture of Awareness*, "The most colossal and preposterous of all vulgarities would be a civilization that, in the course of its busy, growing ways, paved over its environment and destroyed its only source of sustenance" (55). Unfortunately, this is the vision of Florida presented by White in the Doc Ford novels.

Always seeking to find a balance between the extremes, White does not formally engage in any environmental efforts or belong to any official conservation groups. Instead, he allows his fiction to speak for him. For instance, Ford researches sharks throughout the series, and though he makes a simple living selling their circulatory systems to college and high school biology departments for dissection, he also asks his friend Jeth not to club the shark's brains since he also wants to sell them. He explains to Jeth: "That way every shark gets double duty. I won't have to kill so many that way" (*Shark River* 34).

The Conformity Brought About by Modern Civilization and Technology

Despite his approval of and appreciation for certain types of tourists and cities, one of White's main social concerns in the Doc Ford series is his contention that modern human society suffers from too much civilization and too much reliance on technology. White, and his hero Ford, who both live in simple, small homes on the Gulf of Mexico, resemble another front-porch philosopher of the simple and unadorned life: Wendell Berry. Like Berry, White is a man of place in a world run by the placeless. All three figures vow that a simple life lived near nature, as Thoreau espoused, was preferable to the rootless, flattened-out world of suburbia.

In order to counter the twin encroachments of civilization and technology, White suggests the simple life. Living in his stilt house in Sanibel, collecting marine specimens, and studying tarpon, Ford attempts to live a life with few encumbrances, "the life recommended by Thoreau." Ford originally aspires to this simple life, but ultimately finds it unrealistic: "He wanted a simpler life, not a simple life, but now even that was proving impossible. Only a person who is absolutely selfish could live and absolutely simple life, and only a hermit could live free of the personal and moral obligations inherent in taking one's own existence and the existence of others seriously" (*Sanibel Flats* 196).

Although Ford finds that the simple life seldom ideal or even possible, he still worries that modern society is responsible for what he contends is the growing loss of the individual in contemporary times. Throughout the series, Ford distinguished between society's "winners" and the truly individual. A "winner," according to Ford, is a person so acknowledged by his or her employer—complete with excellent dental, medical and

retirement plans; nice car and apartment; fitness program and regular vacation destinations. He encounters one such "winner," Farrah, in *Captiva*: "She had joined the team, so the corporation was providing for her every need. Lately, I had been meeting more and more team members—but fewer and fewer individuals" (113). Ford believes that the modern world and its "complicated series of safety nets have orphaned us from the exigencies of fundamental survival" (93). Though he does not like Colonel Tyler, Ford echoes his belief that "the more sophisticated a society becomes, the more adolescent it behaves" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 278). Both men realize that most people in their desire to be safe, fed, and entertained will give up some of their freedoms. As Tyner says, "they want all of the benefits, but refuse the responsibilities. Let's face it, most people are sheep. And they're cowards, too" (279).

Technology, according to White, is one of the tools contemporary society uses to build its "complicated series of safety nets," so he creates ambivalence in Ford towards modern "gadgets and gizmos" and their use. Ford, like John MacDonald's Travis McGee, wants to "live off the grid," protecting his freedom and privacy. When White first introduces Ford in *Sanibel Flats*, the former covert operative does not even have a telephone in his stilt house, nor does he use credit cards. He believes that "at the root of all technology is the human drive to triumph over isolation" (*North of Havana* 10), something he does not fear; but, in starting Sanibel Biological Supply, Ford finds it necessary for his business that he have a telephone installed so customers can reach him. He is impressed to discover that Hannah Smith is "one of the two or three people remaining in America who did not use and answering machine" (*Captiva* 242). Ford almost appears to be an anti-Luddite in *The Mangrove Coast* when he has to rely on

Tomlinson's knowledge of the Internet, email, and instant messaging in order to locate the evil Jackie Merlot, calling himself a "dinosaur" (124).

As the Doc Ford series progresses, Ford gradually makes an uneasy truce with technology such as computers and cell phones although he still continues to label himself an "anti-gizmo snob" (*Tampa Burn* 29). While others think of such things as modern conveniences, Ford and White believe that over-reliance on them enslaves human beings, regarding TVs, air conditioners, and satellites and other modern technologies as "magic pills that cure ancient ills" (*Tampa Burn* 18). Tomlinson tells Ford after he buys a cell phone and beeper in order to be immediately accessible to his disciples, "Hell, I'm a Buddhist monk, but I've come to the conclusion that we're all destined to be microchip whores" (*Tampa Burn* 30). But Ford continues to resist the imprisoning effects of technology, only purchasing a cell phone in order to stay in touch with his son's kidnappers in *Tampa Burn* and the pregnant Dewey Nye who has left Florida for Iowa in *Dead of Night*. Here White, through Ford, approaches Marshall McLuhan's definition of technology as an extension of the senses. He tells Bernie Yeager that he does have an appreciation for the electronic niceties of today:

> I appreciate the fact that I now have access to instant communications worldwide with people about whom I care deeply. Pick up a telephone, punch a few buttons, and we have an immediate conduit to those individuals who have made a mark upon our lives. Much of technology is a response to the loneliness of the human condition. Drums and signal fires, cell phones and Internet cafes—methods change, but our wistfulness, our rebellion against isolation, does not. (*Twelve Mile Limit* 106)

In fact, without technology, Ford would be unsuccessful in many of his adventures and his life in general. He only comes to know his son, and later save him, by corresponding via email. Bernie Yeager's access to intelligence satellites gives Ford photographic evidence which allows him to rescue Janet Mueller and her friends in *Twelve Mile Limit*. His Sig Sauer, which is admittedly a well-crafted weapon, enables him to defend himself and others, and he appreciates how well-made his boat is which affords him a way to make a living at Sanibel Biological Supply. Although he is a throwback to an older, simpler age, Ford is finally able to appreciate the advantages of modern technology without being enslaved by it, a philosophy White shares. Ford's attitude toward technology is reminiscent of Wendell Berry, who, refusing to buy a computer upon which to word process his prose and a television set to take the place of his newspaper, explains that he feels a deep sense of joy:

> from my instantaneous knowledge that I am not going to buy either piece of equipment. When the inevitable saleswoman comes to tell me that I cannot be up-to-date, or intelligent, or creative, or handsome, or young, or eligible for the sexual favors of so fair a creature as herself unless I buy these products, dear reader, I am not going to do it. (xxii)

In the fourteenth and most recently published Doc Ford novel, *Hunter's Moon*, White returns to the theme of humanity's over-reliance on technology and its possible imprisonment by it. Former President Kal Wilson informs Ford that he knows he and Tomlinson are working on a paper about humanity's "over-specialization." A humorous example this over-reliance on technology occurs when both Ford and Wilson cannot remember telephone numbers they need because of the ease of the speed-dial on their cell

phones has made memorization of phone numbers unnecessary. Yet, when the two men have to leave their cell phones behind because they might possibly be bugged, they are left helpless since they cannot remember numbers they never had to put to memory.

Ford's thinking also echoes the thought of critics of technology such as Peter Augustine Lawler who ascribe our development of it as a "Promethean excess." Admitting that technology is a form of progress in that it rapidly increases human beings' ability to control and manipulate nature, Lawler nonetheless feels that technology is at rock-bottom an "ambiguous" reality. He writes that "technology would become an unambiguous good only if its progress culminated in some sort of human perfection, if we were able to become satisfied with some future level of technological development" (48). White's Doc Ford reminds us that we probably will not reach such a level of satisfaction. Like Walker Percy—scientist, philosopher, novelist—Ford does not see our basic sense of alienation being calmed and satisfied with any pill biotechnology might develop.

Women

High on the list of White's subjects for comment is the subject of women and their place in American society. Because of the nature of his lifestyle and work habits, Ford is well equipped to express White's views. He associates with a substantial number of women, falling in love with a few, and encountering several as enemies. His attitude towards women is usually one of great respect. More than most other male mystery or detective novelist, White presents his women characters in a strong and positive light. Though contemporary hard-boiled crime fiction has tended to elevate the status of

women (in particular, the entrance of female hard-boiled writers and their female detectives), no other male writer has consistently portrayed his women characters as being strong, tough, and of admirable character. No other male writer in the hard-boiled genre, in fact, has populated his books with so many strong women.

Throughout the series, Ford is quick to note and comment on certain traits he finds admirable in women: toughness without sacrificing femininity, intelligence, professionalism, a sense of humor, independence, talent, athleticism, and an ability to survive. As Ford contends in *Shark River*: "With women of sufficient character and humor, it takes only a few weeks to forge an intimate relationship, yet their well-being remains a matter of concern even years after parting. Their dilemmas still squeeze the heart" (5). Ford discovers these qualities in his female friends at Dinkins Bay Marina, in his lovers, and in minor female characters whom he encounters during his adventures.

The four women living at the marina that Ford befriends include Janet Mueller, JoAnn Smallwood, Rhonda Lister, and Ransom Gatrell, Ford's cousin. All four women are survivors. JoAnn and Rhonda left abusive husbands and together founded a local fishing magazine that has proved to be lucrative. Ford and JoAnn have an ongoing sexual chemistry, but they do not act on it since to do so would violate the marina's friendship pact. Both Rhonda and JoAnn are successful, independent women who have successfully started up their own business. Janet Mueller is even more impressive. She has survived the tragic deaths of her young husband and unborn child in Ohio, and relocated to Sanibel where she starts a new life as Ford's lab assistance. White later allows Janet to prove her mettle by having her survive her kidnapping by an international sex slave syndicate. Ransom, whom Ford discovers is his cousin, has similarly overcome

many obstacles in an effort to remake what was once a loveless life. After losing her son and surviving the abuse of her dead husband, Ransom has re-created herself, working out, losing weight, and getting plastic surgery. White clearly admires women who transcend their limited circumstances, and he believes they have every right to work towards the same kinds of success that American males aspire to achieve.

This is a clear departure from the golden age of hard-boiled detective fiction, when Mickey Spillane's misogynistic Make Hammer series may have been the most outlandish. Spillane and others typically presented women as mere sexual objects, or as the stereotypical femme fatale whose role it was to try to seduce, trick, and defeat the male detective. Interestingly, White picks up one aspect of Simone de Beauvoir's particular strain of feminism. Although Ford clearly confirms that biological differences have to some degree fixed the natures of men and women, he allows for some decision about sex and gender. For instance, though he initially maintains that Dewey Nye's lesbianism is "genetic in origin" (*Heat Islands* 19), Dewey later attempts to transcend that genetic "programming" in order to take up with Ford and even attempt to start a family with him. Dewey's power to freely change her course of sexuality seems more in line with Beauvoir's denial of "the so-called data of biology" further "arguing that any fixed nature of women is bound to be mistaken" (Mansfield 133). Ultimately, White appears to side with what Harvey Mansfield terms a "friendly" reflection on feminism, one where "feminism wants transcendence over previous definitions of womanhood" (*Manliness* 167).

For White, a reworking of previous definitions of womanhood includes an updating of women's roles in contemporary society. He often portrays women as being

more than competent professionals. Through Ford, White demonstrates the appreciation he has for women who do their jobs well, whatever their positions may be. Among the women Ford encounters in the series are Nora Chung, an anthropologist, a professional tennis player turned professional golfer in Dewey Nye, a lawyer in Amelia Gardner, and an artist in Jessica McClure. Ford's first great love, Pilar Balserio, is the political leader of a Central American nation. Frieda Matthews is an excellent marine biologist. Though they are not as prominently featured, Ford also is impressed by several female physicians and several female law enforcement officers. Ford even appreciates the deadly professionalism of Dasha, the former KGB operative who proves to be a formidable foe. Although Ford consistently notes genetic differences between male and female human beings, he, and White, clearly believe these differences should play no part in determining the careers and life paths women choose. Though Ford often describes himself as a "throwback" to an earlier time, he is very modern in his acceptance of women as men's equals in professional life.

Genetic differences play no part in Ford's assessment of female intelligence either. He is quick to notice the natural intelligence in the younger women he meets. Lindsay Harrington, although hooked on drugs, impresses him with her deep understanding of human nature, and Ford is soon impressed with the natural know-how of Shanay Money and Keesha in *Twelve Mile Limit*. Hannah Smith is even as physically strong as many men, though no less attractive for it. For White, women are every bit as resourceful as their male counterparts.

Although White is quick to approve of strong, successful women in American society, his most compelling concern about them is their vulnerability. In seeing women

as men's equals, White through Ford is disturbed by the double standards he sees still existing. Although Ford is not a fan of promiscuous women, he refuses to take refuge in the idea that men should be praised for their sexual conquests while women should be considered sluttish for behaving similarly. He also finds that the modern media is harder on a woman's physical beauty, something he clearly disapproves of: "These are modern times. All men and women are required to fight hard to maintain the preferred Prime-Time American uniform: thin. But it's harder on the women because they must not only be thin, they must be fashion model-gaunt. Television commercials, like certain poisons, have to have a cumulative effect" (*Captiva* 182). In particular, middle aged women are portrayed as particularly vulnerable in contemporary society.

Gail Calloway's seduction and subsequent abduction in *The Mangrove Coast* affords White the opportunity to explore this vulnerability in depth. Though once a strong woman, her divorce has made her vulnerable. White voices his concern for this female segment of the population through Ford:

> Divorced middle-aged women were easy targets indeed. I'd never given it much thought before, but I'd seen enough to know. And there is no shortage. More than half of America's marriages end up in divorce, and, in a generation of Baby Boomers, it means there are a lot of forty-something women out there going it alone. By the dumb measure of generations past, too many of these women see themselves as failures because they failed to maintain a marriage and "keep their man." (110)

Ford finds this nonsensical. He contends that women between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-five are at their intellectual and physical peaks. Society has, he thinks, created a

false self-image in women that tells them they need to work too hard in reproving themselves if their marriages have failed.

Ford, and therefore White's, overall view of and appreciation for women is best summarized in Ford's description of Amanda Richardson, daughter of his former covert operative friend, Bobby Richardson: "She was businesslike, tough, but she wasn't one of those women who plays the cast-iron role of feminist, thereby sacrificing her own personality along with her credibility as an individual. Nope, I liked her. A good woman; one of the private people who sat back, watched carefully and thought about things" (*The Mangrove Coast* 85). Ford almost seems to prefer to study and ponder women rather than bedding them, and his interesting observations about them elevate White's treatment of women above all other male detective novelists.

The comments that White allows Ford to consistently interject in the Doc Ford series serve two clear purposes. One, White is able to fully delineate a realistic person in Ford, the frequent discourses on contemporary American society adding to the realism of the character. Second, the various digressions made through the mouthpiece, Ford, enable White to expand the boundaries of the detective novel genre. White, through his hero Ford, is not only detecting crime in the Doc Ford novels, but he is also detecting the pulse of American society.

What Ford discovers is a lack of balance in society's attitudes, beliefs, and actions in regards to the environment, the conformity brought on by technology and over-civilization, and the place and role of women. Hal Rothman notes that "Popular culture mass movements meant that people paid lip service to the concepts of environmentalism without engaging in the behaviors necessary to turn concepts into action" (210). This

thinking nearly echoes Ford's. As he tells his cousin Ransom, who is disappointed that she may not be able to use her "pretty little teal-green eighteen-foot Hewes with a ninety-horse Yamaha" due to the possible ban of powerboats from areas where manatees swim: "Most of us are eager fans of the environment, until its maintenance threatens to inconvenience us" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 9). Ford also fears for the loss of the authentic individual self to the onslaught of technological advance and a civilization of "safety nets" that threatens to become a prison. Like Emerson who quips that "Things are in the saddle, / And ride mankind," and like Thoreau who echoes, "We do not ride upon the railroad, it rides upon us," (qtd. in Brooks 72), Ford fears that too much reliance on technology will enslave human beings and that too much civilization will erect barriers between humanity and nature, causing people to be alienated from themselves. Finally, Ford perceives a lack of balance between viewing women as the biological carriers of life and women as professionals in society. Ford's constant appreciation for women in both of these capacities makes it clear that White's vision includes a sense of equilibrium between the biologically-given essence of women and their ability to freely choose their course of action in life.

CHAPTER 6

THE MORALIST: (THE DETECTIVE'S CODE)

"We have a moral obligation to see this thing through—no matter what it reads on your plane tickets. We don't choose our evils; our evil chooses us" (212). Tomlinson in *Dead of Night*

"Sometimes being a moraled [sic] man in an immoral world is a gigantic pain in the ass" (11). Tomlinson in *Shark River*.

The moral implications of what happens to the characters in his Doc Ford novels have been a primary consideration of Randy Wayne White's. In reading his fiction, particularly through the eyes of the Doc Ford character, it is easy for one to see how he believes people should accept responsibilities for the choices they make, particularly those choices that affect the lives of other people. The Doc Ford novels feature a plethora of characters who are confronted by moral and ethical dilemmas that require them to choose one course of action over others.

White's strong moral stance places him squarely within the camp of writers whom the late John Gardner described as practitioners of "Moral Fiction," which, according to Gardner, is fiction that "holds up models of decent behavior: Characters whose basic goodness and struggle against confusion, error, and evil—in themselves and others—give firm intellectual and emotional support to our own struggles" (qtd. in Singular 14). Gardner felt that the scarcity of "first-rate fiction" in our time was not the result of a sick society, but instead the sickness originated in fiction itself. He said, "Real art creates myths a society can live by instead of die by, and clearly our society is in need of such myths" (qtd. in Singular 15), yet modern novelists, in his opinion, were not providing them. He equated the death of great fiction with that of the death of moral fiction. For

Gardner, the true value of great fiction is "not that it just entertains us or distracts us from our troubles, not just that it broadens our knowledge of people and places, but also that it helps us to know what we believe, reinforces those qualities that are noblest in us, leads us to feel uneasy about our failures and limitations" (14). Gardner noted in his book *On Moral Fiction* that even escapist literature, which "has always been conservative and conformist," was becoming "mean" as "cynicism, despair, greed, sadism, and nihilism became increasingly chic" (43). Though White writes what might initially be labeled "escapist" or "genre" fiction, his Doc Ford series never completely succumbs to nihilism or meanness despite its high quotient of violence.

In White's case, "escapist" detective fiction has always served as an arena to advance or explore moral codes. In *Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction*, Woody Haut describes this idea well:

> To examine a culture, one need only investigate its crimes. Thus, the fictionalisation of crime has become a favourite pastime and means of analysing society. A popular and often lucrative genre, contemporary crime fiction addresses the social contradictions and conditions of a decaying society. In personalising the political, and politicising the personal, crime fiction takes the temperature of a culture obsessed by paranoia, hooked, as it were, on packageable insights, instant replays, soundbites and various post-mortem proddings. (3)

White's Doc Ford series offers a way to "take the temperature" of current American mores from—its 1990 beginnings in *Sanibel Flats* to its latest reflection on American life in 2007's *Hunter's Moon*. In particular, White's moral concerns include the unique

situation of modern middle-aged males, sexual ethics, the laws of friendship, the justification for violence, and the articulation of solid American moral examples incarnated in what White terms the "good ones."

Writing about Robert Parker's popular Boston private detective, Spenser, Ronald R. Thomas notes that "in an age burdened with the analysis of everything . . . hard-boiled writers have made self-definition and self-justification regular features of the new hard-boiled hero. And here, Parker led the way with Spenser mouthing passages about autonomy . . . . After Parker, in fact, defining THE CODE becomes a regular feature of the genre" (206). Most versions of "the code" include the following points: The private eye is 1) dedicated to the client, 2) economical, if not thrifty, in his expenses and personal habits, 3) loyal to his profession, 4) cooperative, to some degree, with the police, 4) concerned with self-survival, and 5) unwilling to be duped by anyone. "Later detectives, Marling notes, such as Archer, Spenser, and Warshawski, add a considerable amount of empathetic humanism to the first feature above" (2). While White is not as heavy-handed as Parker and some other detective fiction writers in having his hero articulate a clearly-delineated code, White does present Ford's constant struggle to do the right thing, especially when the Thoreau-like marine biologist realizes that his actions or inaction will affect the lives of other people.

The articulation of a code shows Ernest Hemingway's influence on White and the entire hard-boiled genre. Hemingway defined what he called the "code hero" as "a man who lives correctly, following the ideals of honor, courage and endurance in a world that is sometimes chaotic, often stressful, and always painful," additionally describing this type of hero as demonstrating "grace under pressure" (21). In *Ernest Hemingway: A*

Critical Essay, Nathan Scott notes that besides expressing his moralism through his own highly disciplined writing style, Hemingway expressed his own moral code in the "strict discipline of conduct to which he holds the people of his fiction accountable" (32). Philip Young contends that Hemingway found this code "operating among various sporting figures, and he wrote several short stories the intention of which is to formulate the basic principles of the code by illustrating it in action" (64). White's Doc Ford carries himself in a similar fashion: he thinks it is important to live simply, speak precisely, and conduct himself consistently. Hence, Ford frets anytime he does not live up to his own high expectations. He is forever limiting his beer drinking to one day per week, working out to keep in tip-top shape, and berating himself if he thinks he has not been honest with himself. When Ford thinks he has failed to honorably help his friends, he half-seriously imagines moving to a remote spot far from human company and posting a sign warning, "Beware the Big Dumb Shit" (*Captiva* 311). As cold and clinical as Ford can be, he spends a lot of time in introspection where he assesses his actions. One way White relays Ford's self-assessment is through the use of first-person narration.

First-person narration in detective fiction has always served as a way for a writer to make the action of a novel more immediate. The reader can follow along with this personal "I" and look through the detective's own point of view, a process that can lend empathy towards the detective and his moral choices as well as granting this sense of immediacy. First person narration can more closely connect the reader to the detective, and many readers relish series detectives since they can trace these personalities throughout a number of adventures, examining their personal moral growth. An old standby essay prompt bids us to make a choice about what literature is like and what it

can enable us to do: is literature like a window to the outside world, or is literature like a mirror where we see a reflection of ourselves? In White's Doc Ford series, White casts a light on the larger world Ford inhabits, but as the many emails to the Randy Wayne White website demonstrate, it is Ford's gazing into his own soul that has hooked White's readers. They operate as one with Ford, and as John Gardner maintains, their journey with Ford helps them to know what they "believe, reinforces those qualities that are noblest in us, and leads us to feel uneasy about our failures and limitations" (Singular 14).

Reading first person-narrated detective novels is akin to reading the biographies and autobiographies of people one finds worth emulating. Biography was rightly prized by Samuel Johnson as "giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can turn to and *use*" (qtd. in Bate 164). Certainly readers read White and other detective fiction practitioners in order to vicariously—and safely—experience the thrilling action experienced by the detective hero, but some readers also look to detective fiction as a template of the right course of action in the contemporary world.

Part of what hard-boiled detective fiction is about is the adherence to a moral code in a world without any moral code or moral values at all. Chandler and Hammett wrote about this in their detective novels, and even the very spiritual Tomlinson articulates this hard-boiled tradition in White's *Shark River* when the hipster complains: "Sometimes being a moraled man in an immoral world is a gigantic pain in the ass" (11). To properly consider any sort of code in the Doc Ford series, one must remember Tomlinson's influence on Ford, since book after book, both Ford and Tomlinson realize that the Zen Buddhist monk is attempting to soften Ford up and allowing him to become a more

sensitive soul, one in touch with his intuitive nature. In his attempt to leave his former world behind—the shadowy universe of covert operations and assassination missions—Ford attempts to come to terms with his cold, calculating, logical, and predatory self as he tries to merge it with his newly discovered emotional self. White has Ford do this in a unique way: he has Ford articulate a code of ethics for the modern American middle-aged male, something White has written about in his nonfiction as well.

Middle-Aged Males and Morality

Naturally, there are biological underpinnings to White's thinking about the onset of middle age. In the latest Doc Ford installment, 2007's *Hunter*'s *Moon,* Ford contends that the forties of American males should be advertised as "The Most Dangerous Decade." He notes that it is during their forties that most men die of heart attacks, smoke themselves towards lung cancer, drink themselves towards alcoholism, and suffer panic attacks, nervous breakdowns, depression and creeping weight gain. Ford comments that "men in their forties are more likely to have affairs, divorce, and make asses of themselves by dating women twenty years younger, who, twenty years earlier, they wouldn't have given a second look" (118). In looking for the cause of the deadliness of this particular decade in an American male's life, White points in the direction of the biological drives housed in human nature: "This is the problem: The expectations of society are in direct conflict with an adult male's most powerful mandate: to compete in the gene pool" ("Journey into Middle Age" 123).

White reduces the stereotypical male midlife crisis and all that comes with it—sportscars, hair-loss solutions, male virility—to the notion that "as primates, we are

coded to behave one way; as humans we are expected to behave another" ("Journey" 123). Although a recent spate of conservative thinkers such as James Q. Wilson and Francis Fukuyama have argued that evolutionary biology confirms the objective reality of human nature just as well as religion does, one such theorist, Larry Arnhart, admits there exists a contradiction between the ways in which family satisfies male longings and the reality that males' natural mating desires are not easily satisfied. He hints that "social learning is required to establish family stability" and that marriage as a "social, economic, and sexual bond between husband and wife is not simply spontaneous but the result of social prescription" (Holloway 130). Here again, as he does so with the sometimes opposing drives of biology and religion, White finds the human male at a confusing intersection, and he makes an effort to show how his characters, notably Ford, deal with the dualism that seems to result between genetically mandated impulses and human free choice: "it does not mean that we must act upon our drives. But the conflict is there; it's hardwired; it runs deep, and goes far beyond just sex. And any conflict between expectation and instinct must necessarily result in confusion" ("Journey" 123). American middle-aged males, according to White, act in ways that seem immature to the rest of society, but they are in fact struggling with the fact that humans are composed of body and soul, or animal and spiritual natures that are often at odds with one another.

The opposition of the physical and spiritual in the middle aged American male is a constant theme running throughout the Doc Ford series. Again, White has often noted the same opposition in himself and has contended that this duality is the premise of the entire Doc Ford series. As far back as the second adventure in the series, *The Heat Islands*, Ford is shown admitting to a middle-aged need to "get off the grid" and resist

what society expects of the seemingly well-adjusted middle-aged American male when he tells Tomlinson: "I quit beer because it was getting to feel like a habit. And I work out because I feel like crap if I don't. There are all kinds of ways a body adapts to its role in an industrialized society—none good. So I choose not to adapt. A conscious decision" (33). In order to stop the "negative momentum and of jump-starting a change in personal behavior," Ford often resorts to a lifelong practice of his that he calls the "Dumb Ass Triathlon" (*Ten Thousand Islands* 50). He punishes himself with physical activity such as long runs, sprints, weightlifting, pushups, pull-ups, and long swims. Ford contends that "tough physical work" is exactly what he needs. "Pain is good. Extreme pain is extremely good. I punished myself with it and then I used it as a purge" (*The Mangrove Coast* 29). Ford repeats this process of pain and purge again and again in the series.

White makes it a moral imperative for middle-aged American males to reassume emotional and physical command of their lives. Here, he elevates free human choice over the demands of biological drives. White defines middle age as the moment when a man experiences the first and unexpected death of a friend, which brings about an awareness of the speed and fragility of life, creating a sense that "we must rush to do all the things we've left undone. We confront the final straightaway." He contends that if a middle-aged man is not happy with his life, "he has a generational obligation to change his life" ("Journey" 122). And though he admits that his generation of American middle-aged males is linked by their being "at odds with a similar demon: our own true nature" (124), he does not excuse infidelity to women. Just as the choice to engage in physically punishing exercise subjugates the body to the mind, White claims that the drive to

procreate, though a biological mandate, should similarly be subjugated to the intellect and will. White truly elevates mind over matter, making it a moral imperative for men to activate their ability to choose freely over the demands of their physical nature.

White refuses to allow middle-aged men to use their drive to compete in the gene pool as a valid excuse to cheat on their wives or significant others. In "The Invisible Orangutans of Borneo," a piece from *Last Flight Out*, he relates how he along with a friend, who ruined two marriages due to his infidelity, created a short code of behavior for middle-aged men "at risk." Among their prescriptions are the admonition to "choose one good woman and be faithful," and if a man stumbles and is unfaithful, he should forgive himself since "It's the guilt that kills us, and feeling guilty for acting upon a genetic drive is akin to feeling guilty for being stocky" (45). White and his friend further warn men to avoid falling in love with other women if one has committed himself to a good woman. Furthermore, they counsel that if a man breaks this "inviolate truth," it will not "end happily." Lastly, White and his friend recommend that men understand that their true "soul mates" are their children (45-46). As long as middle-aged men are faithful to their familial affairs, White makes it a moral imperative that they do the best they can to accept and subjugate their genetic heritage. He also, through Ford, makes it clear that free choice must be properly exercised when it comes to sexual relations.

Sexual Ethics

Throughout the series, Ford beds a number of women despite his claims that he has always avoided promiscuous women. Although Ford does sleep with a total of thirteen women during the run of the Doc Ford series, he tries to be faithful within each

relationship while it lasts. The sex scenes, especially in the earlier novels in the series, are as graphic as those in other contemporary hard-boiled novels or in the novels of John Updike. Ford's sexual encounters are often described in startlingly frank terms; however, as the series progresses, Ford's romantic encounters are lessened as are the graphic descriptions of them. In contemporary mystery fiction, it is commonplace for the writer to include bawdy bedroom scenes since many readers expect to live vicariously through the lives of the detective heroes; the titillation factor of gratuitous sex and violence is necessary to sell books. Initially, White seems to have continued his "fuck and duck" formula from his early, hastily-written Dusty McMorgan series. Typical of Ford's early trysts is his sexual encounter with Hannah Smith aboard his skiff in *Captiva*. White writes of Ford: "I had my hands cupped over her skinny little rump, still kissing her . . . let my hand drift up over the wash-board convexity of ribs . . . felt her sharp intake of breath as my fingers found the heavy underside of her breast, then traced that soft curvature to the length and heat of the nipple" (199). But as the Doc Ford series has continued, he seems to have resisted the genre's call for gratuitous sex and focused more on Doc's efforts to maintain a long-term relationship with Dewey Nye, one that might lead to a family. In later novels, Ford either does not engage in sex, or it is briefly mentioned without any description.

However titillating White's sex scenes might be, there has always been a moral component included in them. White seldom allows Ford to simply objectify the women in his life; unlike other hard-boiled detective heroes, Ford respects the women close to him. Whereas John MacDonald's Travis McGee used sexual relationships to "heal" the broken women he encountered—really placing McGee in the patriarchal role of

"savior"—White's Doc Ford resists all the typical stereotypes and instead often becomes philosophic mid-coitus. He stops to appreciate his experience with Jessica McClure in *Sanibel Flats* though he is clearly intoxicated with her physical charms: "there was a finite number of times he would be with this woman and there ought to be a way to lock onto a moment such as this, to preserve it" (89). Later in the novel, he sleeps with a beautiful tourist and tells himself that it is a morally sound decision since he and Jessica do not have expectations of one another, but he realizes he is lying to himself and feels a strong sense of shame (95).

Although he was once a covert operator, Ford is no James Bond lothario who keeps notches on his bedpost to keep track of his sexual conquests. He is usually responsible about his relationships and he bemoans the fact that AIDS, "The Modern Specter" or "The Dark Gift" as Tomlinson calls it, has made complete disclosure necessary when taking on a new sexual partner. When he realizes that he and Sally Carmel are moving towards a sexual encounter, he laments the fact that "Coyness couldn't be tolerated; discretion became a necessary casualty—one more ghost of romance that had to be abandoned to hard reality. In ways, that kind of complete disclosure seemed to Ford as demeaning as being marched naked through a crowded laboratory. To betray so many past confidences" (*The Man Who Invented Florida* 191). Even though he will not mention specific names of women he has bedded, he feels that even talking about it seems an intrusion upon their privacy. This great respect is such an unexpected attitude from a man who can be so clinical, so cold in his own marine biologist's lab. White again advances the idea that human love is more than just genetically driven although human beings are, admittedly, hardwired to procreate.

Granting that White has already dismissed the guilt that comes from desiring to procreate with someone other than the partner one has committed oneself to, Ford often shows frustration and guilt over the one-night stands or near occasions of them that he encounters during the course of the series. After nearly kissing close friend JoAnn Smallwood, Ford philosophizes over the possibility of negative effects of engaging in casual sex:

> There is no such thing as casual sex. It can elevate one's sense of self-worth or diminish it proportionally. It always, always changes a relationship, sometimes for the better, often for the worse. Each and every new partner extracts something from us; a little piece of something that is innermost and private. Sadly, it is one of the most common ways of ending a friendship. (*Ten Thousand Islands* 39-40).

Since he considers his friendships with women more important than the fleeting pleasures of casual sex, Ford makes it a moral imperative that he not engage in sexual relations with any of his female friends living at the marina. He does not want to take the chance that he might ruin these friendships. In this way, Ford proves to be somewhat conservative in his sexual morality.

Ford wants to be monogamous, as his lengthy relationship—troubled as it may be—with Dewey Nye attests. In thinking about onetime love Sally Carmel, Ford thinks: "It is a common modern phenomenon. Lovers separate, then gradually or abruptly orbit away, trajectories increasingly dissimilar, until one member vanishes, never to reappear. It is a death of sorts, and it has happened all too often in my life" (*Everglades* 8). His first love, Pilar Balserio, is unavailable to him emotionally, Hannah Smith is dead, and

Dewey Nye continues to be confused about her own sexuality, at one point wanting to start a family with Ford—romance and all—and at the next, believing that she is a lesbian. His failed relationships with women do not make him bitter and hateful; instead, he makes light of the situation with good humor, complaining that "Here it is, Friday night, and I'm talking to cephalopods" (*Sanibel Flats* 42). He tells a squid he is examining in his lab that "It's not that I don't like women; It's just that I find biology less complicated" (*The Heat Islands* 197). White does not allow Ford to disparage women, a fact that elevates his fiction above older versions of the hard-boiled school where the detective heroes were clearly misogynistic, fearing the advance of women into the once male-dominated professional world. As noted in the chapter discussing White's role as a social philosopher, both White and his mouthpieces, Ford and Tomlinson, fully support, celebrate and honor women as men's fellow professionals.

Though he slips from time to time, Ford is White's model of the new chivalric hero. In lovemaking, women are given equal status with men. Genetics drive but do not dominate sexuality in either sex. Ford refuses to assign a double standard when it comes to women enjoying sex as much as men. Also, Ford may be tender during his lovemaking, but unlike MacDonald's Travis McGee, he is not a sexual healer. He is merely a companion. Although Ford beds many beautiful women, White is careful that he sometimes sleeps with women who are not considered beautiful in the classical Hollywood movie-star or international supermodel sense so typical of most detective fiction. When Amelia Gardner, ashamed of her small breasts, tells Ford that if he likes the "busty type," he is "in for a disappointment," Ford finds "the self-deprecation touching, almost sad. If we men were required to wear sized penis stockings outside our pants, our

discussions of women's breasts would be markedly less frequent and our preferences more vaguely defined" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 179). Amanda Richardson and Nora Chung are not the typically voluptuous Playboy Bunny-type of male sex fantasies found in most hardboiled detective fiction, but Ford finds a personal connection with them that overrides the imperatives of Darwin's theory that the most fit—or physically attractive—survive and replenish the species. In fact, Ford seems to even deplore the reality of this biological mechanism. He sympathizes with his friend Janet's struggle to be thin: "These are modern times. All men and women are required to fight hard to maintain the preferred Prime-Time American uniform: thin. But it's harder on the women because they must not only be thin, they must be fashion-model gaunt" (*Captiva* 182).

Ford has qualms about sleepig with Amanda, daughter of his long-dead friend Bobby Richardson, and Ford is similarly guilt-ridden when he slips into sex with Lindsay Harrington, who, only twenty-one, is nearly twenty years his junior. He clearly tries to avoid falling for women nearly half his age as White has cautioned against doing in his ruminations on the perils of being a middle-aged American male. In these two encounters, and several others similar to them, Ford's conscience and biological drives are clearly at war with one another. He typically tells himself that what he is doing "is not right," as he allows himself to be overwhelmed by his genetic disposition, succumbing to intercourse.

At any rate, White makes Ford's sexual morality a fairly traditional one. Ford respects women for who they are, rather than only what they look like. He deplores one-night stands and all other forms of casual sex, believing them ultimately destructive of

male-female friendships. He seeks monogamy even while realizing that he is alone because it is his nature to be independent:

> I live alone because I am, at the core, an essentially selfish person. It's taken awhile for me to admit it. My lab, the work I'm doing, it always comes first. All loving, devoted relationships require compromise in terms of how time is shared, and I'm too self-interested to compromise. No woman's going to put up with that for long and I don't blame 'em. (*Twelve Mile Limit* 179).

When it comes to women, Ford consistently attempts to act honorably, but he is not always successful. Part of his failure stems from White's interest in exploring the dual biological and spiritual natures of men and the trouble these sometime opposing drives can cause. The other aspect of Ford's occasional slips is due to the constraints of the genre. A certain amount of sex scenes seem expected by the reading public. With the exception of Dewey Nye, Ford's relationships are not long lasting. At least twice in the series, what looks to be the beginning of long-term romance ends with the violent death of the woman Ford loves, another limitation brought on by the genre's convention for violence.

The Morality of Friendship

Since he is so concerned about protecting his friendships with women from the destruction that can be wrought by engaging in casual relations with them, it is clear that friendship in general is of great importance to Ford. In fact, the Doc Ford series might be said to be an exploration of the morality of friendship. This is clear when one considers

Ford's motivation for getting involved in the dangerous adventures documented in the series. Unlike most series regulars, Ford is not a police official or licensed private investigator. He has saved enough and invested enough from his life as a government assassin to live in relative comfort for the rest of his life. His needs are simple, so monetary gain is not the drive that pulls him along. Even MacDonald's Travis McGee considered himself a "salvage expert," taking on jobs from time to time that would allow him to live his retirement in the present. Ford has no such motivation, nor does wielding power excite him either. Ford gets involved in his adventures because it is simply the moral, right and good thing to do when friends are in trouble. He similarly recognizes the moral consequences of his possible inaction, clearly reflected in White's quoting of Edmund Burke's famous dictum—"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"—in the frontispiece to *Hunter's Moon*. Like Tomlinson's definition of religion—"rules of morality linked by love"—Ford's view of friendship is equally powerful and it includes strong moral ties.

White has written that "friendship can tolerate anything but joint boat ownership and deceit" ("Darwin Town" 185). Toleration sums up Ford's attitude to his friends, with the further caveat that absolute "acceptance is the core of all friendships" (*North of Havana* 12). When Ford's old lover Sally Carmel shows up battered and afraid of the man who has been stalking her since her husband disappeared, Ford recognizes the implicit obligation he has to her even though he and Sally drifted apart and have had little contact in the years since. He tells himself: "Friendship comes with responsibilities—reliability during a crisis being among them. If an acquaintance does not behave accordingly and dependably, he or she is not your friend" (*Everglades* 9). Ford also

affirms that “friends aren’t supposed to press friends for details, nor do friends leave friends waiting for answers” (*North* 22). In thinking about Tomlinson, Ford echoes these ideas of tolerance and obligation: “Sappy greeting cards aside, friendship is defined, not measured by one’s willingness to go to the aid of another. It is an obligation that blends conscience and accountability” (*North* 216).

When looking back at each of the fourteen Doc Ford novels, it is apparent that the bonds of friendship are indeed what prompt Ford to get involved in such dangerous ordeals. The memory of his childhood friendship with Rafe Hollins finally motivates his action in the series’ first novel, *Sanibel Flats* even though he is initially reluctant to help. Even after he believes that Rafe is dead, he still tracks Rafe’s son to the jungles of Masagua, explaining to Tomlinson that he feels like “it’s sort of an obligation” to find the eight-year-old boy. Tomlinson, who wants to accompany Ford, finds a similar moral obligation based upon his religious belief that he must help those suffering, even take on their suffering himself. He applauds Ford’s choice to take action: “For sure, man; you gotta do it. The grand gesture: one brave man walking into the Valley of the Shadow—hell, no other choice for a moraled human” (*Sanibel Flats* 154).

Likewise, Ford feels the moral obligation to help his friends in *The Heat Islands* when he attempts to prove Jeth Nicholes innocent of a murder he did not commit and in *Everglades* when he protects Sally Carmel from her stalker while helping her to find her missing husband. In *Dead of Night* Ford reluctantly gets involved in trying to prevent then to solve the murder of his friend Freida Matthews’ brother Jobe Applebee. He does not know Applebee, and is “uncomfortable imposing on a reclusive man” whom he has never met. He thinks that “Friends—true friends—show up when there’s trouble, or

work to be done, and stay long after everyone else is leaving or has left. Friends are also obligated to intercede if the situation warrants it" (14). However, Tomlinson reminds him that in helping Jobe, Ford will be helping his good friend Frieda, who worries about her brother since he suffers from Asperser's Syndrome. Similarly, he becomes involved with Della Copeland's case because he feels obligated to respond to his good friend JoAnn Smallwood's petitions to aid her friend. Besides rescuing Jake Hollins from his kidnappers, The Shining Path, Ford also springs into action because of several other kidnappings of friends or family. The plot of *Tampa Burn* revolves around Ford's efforts to locate and free his son Laken from Praxes Lourdes, who has taken him from the Masaguan presidential palace. Likewise, *Twelve Mile Limit* finds Ford searching for his marina friend, Janet Mueller after she has been abducted by slave traders. And, although he once barely escaped with his life, Ford bravely returns to Cuba, site of some of his former acts in espionage, to rescue Tomlinson who has foolishly been abducted by revolutionaries. In fact, the entire Doc Ford series is actually a meditation on the bonds of friendship as modeled on Ford and Tomlinson's peculiar relationship.

As White has maintained, he has set up the relationship of the two men as a "dance of death" since the series' beginning in *Sanibel Flats*. Little by little, White reveals further details about the connections between Ford and Tomlinson. It is gradually revealed to Ford that Tomlinson, in an earlier incarnation as a drug-addled anarchist, is responsible for assembling and sending a bomb which killed several American service men along with a covert operative close to Ford. It turns out that before retiring, Ford was given the assignment to execute Tomlinson in retaliation for his acts of terrorism. When

Hal Harrison discovers this, he presses Ford to kill Tomlinson. However, Ford, having forged strong bonds of friendship with Tomlinson, prevails upon Harrison not only to release him from the assassination assignment, but reminds Harrison that he owes him for saving his daughter's life. For awhile this is enough, but when Harrison continues to badger him to finish the job, Ford instead agrees to reactivate his status as a Negotiator, a secret team of assassins created by a former sitting President. By agreeing to terminate various terrorists, Ford is able to get Harrison agree to grant at least a temporary stay on Tomlinson's life.

Even when Tomlinson finally remembers the acts of violence he had participated in earlier in his life and seeks to turn himself into the authorities, Ford—believing the man has suffered enough and done many good works in the meantime—throws Tomlinson's letter of admission away. Harrison finally provides Ford with secret documents which exonerate Tomlinson from all charges. Though Tomlinson has earlier taken the life of a friend and comrade-in-arms, the friendship Ford has built with Tomlinson outweighs anything illegal Tomlinson has done. Ford, aware of his own limitations and flawed self, sets himself up as judge and jury and decides to forgive Tomlinson. Whether or not Ford's forgiveness of Tomlinson is truly heart-felt and a sign of Ford's continual emotional development remains to be seen as the series progresses.

Emblematic of Ford's willingness to take action to help his friends is a scene in *The Mangrove Coast* when his old friend and fellow covert operator's, the late Bobby Richardson, daughter Amanda prevails upon him to help her locate her mother Gail whom it appears has been brainwashed and taken away by Jackie Merlot. She reminds Ford: "You and my father were once very close friends, and the woman that he loved is

in trouble. Guys like you—and I may be wrong here, but it's the way I read it—guys like you, the straight shooters, you're throwbacks. You take friendship seriously, and what I just told you really pisses you off. Not you personally, but in a way that offends your sense of loyalty" (63). Initially reluctant to get involved, Ford complies with Amanda's wishes, his friend's daughter having clearly read his character and his desire to act honorably.

"The Good Ones"

Ford's strong friendships also reveal another source of moral wisdom that can be frequently located in the Doc Ford series: the moral excellence of people White terms "the good ones." White has Ford encounter certain people in the course of his adventures whose character Ford immediately discerns as being rare, precious and exemplary in a world that often seems empty of moral concern. He sees these strengths in Janet Mueller who presses on with life although she has lost her young husband and unborn child to a horrific automobile accident. About her, Ford remarks: "The good ones do not always die young; neither do they ever, ever quit . . . . The good ones always find a way" (188). He makes a similar observation in *Tampa Burn* when he describes James Tiger as "one of those rare men" one is lucky enough to meet and is one of "a handful of people he can trust under any circumstance, in any situation, life or death" (111). Ford identifies several other characters in the series as being among "and few good ones left in the world," and Tomlinson helps him to refine his definition of this type of person. The two men refer to "the good ones" as being "'PBR'—a person who is reality based." Ford explains that what he and Tomlinson mean by a "PBR" is not simply a kind of blue-collar beer:

> It was also someone who was not dominated by neurosis, ambition, or ego. It was a person who was relatively honest, rational, and reasonable most of the time; a man or woman who had a general sense of his or her own worth and limitations, who acknowledged the worth of others, who demonstrated a sense of humor, and didn't take him-or-herself too seriously. (*Twelve Mile Limit* 87)

Ford laments that, lately, he is finding fewer and fewer of these exemplars of good character. The "good ones" morality is based on truth and honesty, two qualities much admired by Ford and Tomlinson.

Violence and Morality

The Doc Ford series has much to say about how violence is used in the contemporary world. Writing from within the often bloody and violent hard-boiled genre gives White plenty of opportunities to examine the use of violence in political relationships, self-defense, and terrorism. Earlier, Ford's initial reticence to see himself as a predator was discussed, and although it was shown how he finally comes to terms with the "usefulness" of this part of his nature, White indicates that Ford still has a strong moral stance when it comes to dealing out violence and death. Given Ford's past and his present reenlistment as an assassin for the Negotiators, he is uniquely equipped to express White's views on the sanctioning of violence and on current concerns with international terrorism. In particular, White's fiction examines the rightful use of violence in two different scenarios: dealing with the challenges posed by terrorists and protecting the environment. It should be noted that neither White nor Ford are particularly "political."

White is a self-described moderate, who sometimes takes a quiet hand in Florida politics (McDonald, "Randy" 2). He says the political issues important to him are "largely environmental." White describes himself as being "middle of the road—Democrat/Republican/ Independent" and finds himself attracted only to politicians who are "straight shooters and who have reasonable outlook in terms of the environment and other issues." He is generally uncomfortable talking about politics since he does not know "anymore about politics than the next guy" (McDonald, "Randy" 8).

However, a few days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he penned a powerful piece entitled "An Open Letter to He Who Hides Behind the Coffins of Innocents" that appeared in the "Letter to the Editor" sections of several Florida newspapers and was later republished in as a "Second Introduction" to the paperback reprint of his *Last Flight Out: True Tales of Adventure, Travel, and Fishing.* In this piece, White addresses those responsible for the 9/11 attacks:

> The difficult question for us Americans, though, is not will we triumph, but how? Our quandary is this: In any conflict, the boundaries of acceptable behavior are defined by the party that cares least about morality. You have defined the boundaries, and there are none. The lives of the innocent, of women, children, and good men, are meaningless. You hide weapons factories beneath day-care centers. You hide collectively behind the caskets of innocents. You have no morality, no character or conscience, while we Americans are blessed—and burdened—by all three. (xvii).

In his latest Doc Ford novel, *Hunter's Moon* (2007), White recycles this stirring and passionate piece yet again—replacing "Americans" with "most people around the world"—when he includes portions of it in a speech former president Kal Wilson makes while he shares a stage with Thomas Bashir Farrish and Altif Halibi, financial and spiritual backers of terrorist cells. Wilson, a direct descendent of Woodrow Wilson, has lost his wife to assassins hired by Farrish and Halibi, and has begun calling the national media cowards for espousing the "dangerous charade" of political correctness that will not allow them to condemn what he terms "Islamic" aggression against the United States. Wilson makes a clear distinction between what he calls "Islamicists" and Muslims (70). The former he equates with Nazis and other fascists. "Fascism," he tells the Islamicists, "has worn many costumes. Yours is religion" (304). Whatever his politics, Kal Wilson is no chicken hawk; he faces his enemies directly, confronting Farrish in person and challenging the man to a duel as President Andrew Jackson once did when a man offended his wife.

Wilson's words, and the words from White's angry essay, appear in an even earlier version in *The Mangrove Coast*. Here Ford recounts a story about how he and Amanda Richardson's father, Bobby, developed a truism about war while stationed together in Cambodia years earlier. Ford and Richardson identified what they considered to be a "great truth": "In any conflict, the boundaries of behavior are defined by the party that cares least about morality" (84). Ford's point in recounting this old maxim is that in dealing with that novel's villain, Jackie Merlot, he and Amanda must "adapt" their own strategy if they are to stop Merlot. He seems to be suggesting that in extreme conflict, a party can only win and survive if they realize this truth, and perhaps make adaptations in

their own behavior—adaptations they may not be comfortable in initially accepting—to defeat the enemy. Hence, Ford's finds his rationale by seeing himself as simply functioning in the role of predator, an important cog in the process of natural selection, and this allows him to adapt his behavior to severe situations without feeling immoral.

However, White never makes it clear just how far Ford—or anyone—may go in order to successful adapt the behavior of an opponent who has no morality. A comment made, interestingly enough, in the first Doc Ford novel, *Sanibel Flats*, by the Masaguan [sp?*] revolutionary, General Juan Rivera, might hold the answer to this question. Rivera, certainly no pacifist, understands that war is not glorious or beautiful, but he thinks it is sometimes necessary. However, when contemplating the way Zacul and his men have tortured prisoners, have gratified themselves with his enemies' women, and have treated his enemies' children, he feels a sense of shame. Rivera modifies Hemingway's moral maxim that "an immoral act is anything we feel bad about afterward" to "an immoral act is anything that makes us feel shame" (193). Rivera tells Ford that he has never been ashamed of the things war demanded he do. He has "felt bad about them," but "has never felt shame" (193). Thus, White's maxim provides a quandary: How low must one stoop if one's enemy knows no shame? Rivera's words seem to suggest that certainly torture and rape are out of the question even when adapting to one's enemy's lack of moral boundaries, but what else is out of bounds?

The key to answering these questions lies in Ford's self-conception, which is in flux throughout the long-running series. Despite his fascination with Tomlinson and his spiritual beliefs, Ford does not share his friend's religious outlook. He maintains on a continual basis that he is open to such belief, but despite all the evidence he has

experienced in favor of supernatural realities, he cannot find it in himself to accept that which he cannot sense. Congruent with his belief that biological evolution can explain everything in the universe, Ford often refers to himself as a "predator." He sees himself as a necessary part of natural selection; the assassinations he carries out are a system of checks and balances against the excesses of the human species for the good of the whole.

Ford tries to avoid conceiving of himself as a predator during the action of the first seven novels in the series. He has left the Negotiators at the start of his first adventure in *Sanibel Flats,* having begun to bristle at functioning as an instrument to help manipulate political and world events using violence. He explains that he has

> seen some nasty things. Witnessed scenes so appalling that an attempt to communicate detail would reenergize the event and give the thing life again. Those images are best sealed away, never reviewed in memory, or conversation. Invite the monster to return, you may end up living with the monster. It's just my way of dealing with things. (*Dead of Night* 67)

However, initially motivated to help friends or family, Ford too easily makes available his his talent for violence to use.

The first few Doc Ford novels contain some brutal acts and killings. Ford poisons the evil revolutionary leader Zacul and his army and denies them the antidote as he and Tomlinson rescue Jake Hollins from Zacul's jungle camp. Having decided to let murderer Karl Sutter live, Ford holds him under water long enough to drown him after Sutter tries to stab him with a knife. In later adventures, Ford breaks a man's neck, kills two men aboard a speedboat using homemade bombs, and sends a paralyzed serial killer to his

certain death by directing his small boat towards an approaching hurricane. Despite Ford's continued use of violence, Tomlinson's example of living a life of non-violence does have an effect on him.

Tomlinson's influence can be seen in *The Mangrove Coast* when Ford is able to wrestle away the gun that Jackie Merlot is pointing at him, turning it back on Merlot the serial murderer and rapist of women and children. As he aims the gun at Merlot, Ford admits to feeling an intensity or appetite for killing, but he tells himself to fight it: "Shoot a man in cold blood? That was something I had never done. Yet the urge, the craving was there. I spoke to diffuse the feeling of want, of need. How could my voice seem so calm? I might have been joking around with a locker-room buddy" (301). It may seem disingenuous of Ford, who has assassinated at least fourteen men in his years as a Negotiator, to claim he has never shot a man in cold blood before, but he is being only partially truthful here. Although Ford seems to have no compunction about killing, he alleges that he really does not care for that part of himself that allows him to kill. In order to project some kind of honor onto his assassinations, Ford bizarrely kills all his victims by strangulation or by breaking necks because he feels it is "more personal" (*Twelve Mile Limit* 284). He takes no joy in performing what he believes are necessary acts. He whispers the words "I'm sorry" into the ears of his victims before he quickly and as painlessly as is possible dispatches them. He does not seem to want the role he seems so skilled at performing. He allows Merlot to live, but later regrets the mercy he shows the man after Merlot rigs an explosion that kills Amanda Richardson and disfigures her mother, Gail.

Ford's strange execution method clearly delineates his central conflict, which is examined to some degree in all of the novels in the series. Ford would like to follow Tomlinson and be purely spiritual, wistful, intuitive, and peaceful, but he finds he cannot. He reduces the world to pure nature where morality does not exist. Ford's purely biological view of the world has no room for morals; everything is mere interaction, one material reality with another. He has taken the dictum that if God is dead, everything is permitted. For Ford, violence is merely the struggle for survival among forms of life. There is no moral component to his assassinations except what is projected onto them by human beings looking for some kind of meaning in it all. Is this what White intends his readers to glean from the Doc Ford series? Is this existential outlook where human beings create their own meaning from the chaos of what is the White's last word on the subject or is there more? These questions are difficult to answer.

However, Ford does begin to have some epiphanies about his role as a predator midway through the series. He sees his double in Curtis Tyner, a mercenary he encounters in *Twelve Mile Limit.* Disturbed by Tyner, who has a large collection of shrunken heads and who has thrown a man to his death from a helicopter hovering above the jungle, Ford is more greatly disturbed as he realizes that the things Tyner says about him are true. He initially bristles when Tyner admits his great admiration for Ford's exploits, but then realizes that Tyner has made a correct assessment of him: "I turned and looked at him, hating what I saw, hating him because he'd been right all along—about him, about me, and hating him now because he was right once again" (283).

In *Everglades,* White most closely examines Ford's violent proclivities. When Ford investigates the disappearance of Sally Carmel Minster's husband, he is forced to

fight a security guard who works for a phony and criminal religious leader. Rendering the man helpless, Ford finds himself being taken over by a cold inner fury, and he readies the man for his preferred method of execution. Only the pleas of Tomlinson and Frank DeAntoni, a private detective, dissuade him from snapping the man's spine. Later in the novel, Ford's one-on-one encounter with a shark prompts an epiphany about his predatory nature. Foolishly windsurfing at night, Ford must charge a shark that attacks him. Seeing the shark coming toward him, he realizes that "there was a single, stabilizing truth that fueled my rage: Why run? We are *both* predators" (272). Having fought off the shark, Ford sails back towards his stilt house and thinks deeply about his dual nature: the calm, friendly biologist and the cool, calculating, violent assassin: "I'd spent the last year or so reacting to past mistakes, punishing myself—or so my inner voice claimed. After my shark encounter, though, self-flagellation seemed an absurd justification for allowing the circumstances of my life to control me" (273). Ford accepts his dual nature: he is both predator like the shark is, but he also has additional qualities. He believes he can often be "ethical, kind, selective, and generous" (273).

Ford makes peace with both his personalities, thus bridging the sense of disconnection between them. This process of coming to terms with his predatory nature is especially evident in the most recent hard-boiled fiction. "There is a certain enjoyment," writes Fred Pfeil, "in the detective's yielding to and immersing oneself in the very morass that must be finally resisted and tamed" (114). Ford rationalizes that he can freely use his predatory nature in the service of good by allowing it to take over when he has decided that someone deserves death. He does this in his next adventure, *Everglades*. Having tracked Izzy Kline, a cult leader's top enforcer to Nicaragua, Ford

subdues the man and ties him to a makeshift spit he builds at the mouth of an active volcano. When Kline, a predator himself, begs for his life, he tries to appeal to Ford's more "human" half: "My life is in your hands. The guilt I feel's going to haunt me forever. I've got to live with that. But you *don't.* You're too good a person to do what you're thinking about doing now. I can *tell*. It's an instinct I've got. First time we met. You're a stand-up guy. There's something about you. Solid" (328). Ford responds, "Izzy, we have both badly misjudged my character and my conscience"(328) as he pulls a rope sending Kline into the volcano. Ford tells himself that he is operating in the mode of predator, that he is helping to check against another predator's efforts to harm the species. But is he really functioning in this role? One gets the sense that he is motivated more by revenge for Frank DeAntoni and Freida Matthewes, who both were murdered by Kline.

Ford's newly rediscovered role as an assassin, but this time as a vigilante operating outside the bounds of government mandate, is clearly in line with the motivation of most hard-boiled detective heroes for whom " a case is not merely a problem; it can become a crusade to root out and destroy the evils that have corrupted the . . . world" (Cawelti 151). And, as if to show he has put his own stamp of approval on this crusade as well as his acceptance of his predatory nature, Ford formally returns to work as a "part-time" Negotiator. The novel ends with Ford accepting an assignment from Hal Harrington to take "executive action" against Omar Muhammad, an Islamic terrorist.

Interestingly enough, though Ford believes he has reconciled his two opposing natures in *Everglades*, he resists an opportunity to kill the serial killer who has kidnapped his son Laken in the next novel, *Tampa Burn*. Upon encountering Praxcedes Lourdes on

the barge where the flame-scarred killer is holding his son, Ford allows his "rage to take control" (353) and beats the killer unconscious. However, Laken's pleas to spare Praxcedes work on Ford's rage and determination to execute Masagua's "Man-Burner." Laken tells Ford that no matter how vile the murders were committed by Praxcedes, it is difficult to judge the killer's behavior as moral or immoral since he suffers from brain damage that has probably affected the way he behaves. Laken's logic wins out, and Ford spares the life of the monster. Besides *The Man Who Invented Florida*, it's the only Doc Ford novel where Ford does not need to kill any of his major antagonists minus the terrorist which he takes "executive action" upon in the novel's denouement.

Dead of Night is the twelfth Doc Ford mystery, and in it, White this time juxtaposes Ford's example of the predatory nature latent in humanity with yet another predatory type, but one that is a much clearer echo of Ford than either Tyner or Kline. Dasha, a former KGB operative and assassin and now a mercenary who has been hired by eco-terrorists, is an adept and inventive killer who recognizes Ford's similar nature. While looking at a photograph of Ford on her computer, she

> [z]oomed in on eyes looking out through thick wire glasses. Thick glasses. Eyes that seemed dark even though they reflected pale light, the man's expression showing that he'd been startled by the photographer, the eyes chilly, expectant; expectant in the way of someone who sits back and accesses before making a move. Surprise a carnivore in the grass, you'd get the same reaction. (274)

Ford reminds Dasha of a death adder, a "reptile that, from birth, knew instinctively to wait, calculate, before striking. Efficient. That was another way of saying it. Ford's eyes were similar. Vague and dusty. Something dark inside there coiled" (274).

White adds an intriguing new aspect to Ford's propensity for violence when he describes Dasha's perusal of a file containing Ford's many assassination operations. She uncovers a detail never mentioned by Ford himself in all of his many reflections on his propensity for violence. The report details that "while in secondary school, MDF was suspect in the disappearance and presumed murder of a man rumored to have had an affair with the subject's mother just prior to her own death. According to sealed records, a juvenile court judge (and friend of subject's Masonic uncle) strongly suggested MDF leave Florida and enlist in the military. . ." (276). This one detail has yet to be revisited in the series, although it seems of great importance. As Curtis Tyner earlier noted, Ford was successful in each of the seventeen assassination orders he was given except for the three women he refused to kill. He later spares Dasha making it four women Ford has refused to kill, though the former KGB agent is perhaps the most vicious and sadistic opponent he has faced. Perhaps there is a connection with his mother's death. White promises to return to Ford's past and uncover this mystery in a future novel (White, "Personal"). Despite this new wrinkle, White continues to develop Ford's moral development with respect to the just use of violence. Doc does not kill anyone (unless it is a "sanctioned" assassination) for the second novel in a row. There is plenty of violence, but Ford does not directly measure it out. Alexis, Dasha's colleague, is killed after a fight with Ford, but a giant mamba dispatches the man who has killed Ford's friend Frieda Matthews and her brother Joel Applebee. Instead of using violent force against Dasha, Ford merely

leaves her on the island to take her chances with the eco-terrorists' collection of dangerous reptiles and animals. She has attempted to save his life, and though he would never hire himself out for evil men as Dasha has, White seems to suggest that Ford sees something honorable in her past—a past he shares—as a government-sanctioned assassin. Despite Ford's apparent passivism, *Dead of Night* closes with Doc throwing Abu Sayyaf, an Islamic disciple who had helped plan a train bombing in Madrid, and who was now developing a plan to bomb school buses, off the deck of the *Queen Mary 2*. Once again, Hal Harrington has given him an assignment. Ford is both friendly marine biologist and deadly assassin. Tracking the progression of Ford's use of hard-boiled-styled violence and vigilantism in the thirteenth novel of the series, *Dark Light*, is problematic. Like White's offbeat third Ford novel, *The Man Who Invented Florida*, *Dark Light* is an odd entry in the series. Rather than the accustomed rescue of friends in distress, this last novel is almost a gothic romance-mystery, complete with mysterious old house and equally mysterious woman. Mixed up in the mystery of the strange woman in the old house along the beach is a World War II Nazi treasure, a 1940s love story, and a present day search for wealth by a serial killer named Bern Heller. During the course of the novel, several murders are committed–most notably that of Ford's good fishing-guide friend, Captain Javier–but Ford kills no one though he intends on killing Bern Heller. In the climatic struggle with Bern near the book's end, Ford immobilizes his opponent and intends on drowning the serial killer in the sea, allowing his desire for revenge to again surface. However, the police arrive, ironically thinking that Ford is trying to save an unconscious Bern from drowning.

The latest installment in the series, *Hunter's Moon*, shows Ford taking another step back in his moral development with respect to the use of violence. Believing that the escaped Praxes Lourdes has murdered Tomlinson, Ford faults himself for staying the killer's execution in *Tampa Burn*. Although he initially agreed to Laken's contention that Lourdes was not responsible for his behavior because of a chemically-conditioned insanity—thus, he should not kill him—Ford now believes that, insane or not, the serial killer is too dangerous to remain alive. He feels no shame when defending himself against Lourde's attack in Panama, and he is about to snap the killer's neck when former President Kal Wilson orders him to stop.

Ford's attempt to achieve balance by integrating his predatory nature with his more altruistic side is unparalleled in contemporary hard-boiled fiction. Ford's recognition, acceptance, and desire to use his predatory nature against what we perceives to be evil is perhaps only echoed by one other contemporary hard-boiled crime writer; Jeff Lindsay's Dexter novels (recently made into a *Showtime* cable television series) feature a serial killer who chooses to leave innocent human beings alone in favor of tracking and killing other serial killers like himself who have not gained any control over their predatory desires. By day, Dexter works as a blood spatter analysis expert for the Miami Police's Homicide Division. By night, he is a vigilante on the track of serial killers. The parallels with Doc Ford are obvious.

Until the series finally comes to a climax, and we are able to see which of White's opposing components wins out—the wistful and spiritual or the analytic and predatory—we will have to wait for White's final word on the moral uses of violence. Just when it appears that Ford is taking Tomlinson's spirituality more seriously and just as he is

attempting to better control his predatory impulses, things take a turn for the worse in his latest adventure. With *Hunter's Moon*, it appears as if White is in favor of sanctioning lethal means to restore order in the world. In other words, might appears to make right. However, with the continued spiritual and peaceful example being set by Tomlinson, there is no telling what White's ultimate vision will encompass.

Violence in the Service of Environmental Causes

Always concerned about the health of the environment, White also takes a strong stance in protecting it from pollution, overuse, and ruin. In several Doc Ford novels, he distinguishes between "bio-vandals," whom he approves, and "bio" or "eco" terrorists, whom he condemns. When disgruntled netters string up a steel cable to wreck the boats of the sports fishermen whom they blame for pushing legislation outlawing their netting operations, Ford refuses to see it as a statement of political dissent. Rather, for him "it was attempted murder, nothing less" (103). Ford willingly helps Nora Chung destroy the digging equipment of illegal developers and artifact collectors in *Ten Thousand Islands* so that they may save coastal shell mounds from being despoiled. Ford and Nora's destruction of the machinery brings to mind the exploits of Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang* and White further develops this connection in the character of Jayson Reynolds, who appears in *Dead of Night*. Reynolds, a biologist for the giant sugarcane corporation, Tropicane, hopes to reform the way big business treats the environment by working from within the industry. He is a fan of Edward Abbey, enthusiastically referring to him as "The *man*." However, Reynolds goes too far in the minds of both Ford and Tomlinson, who informs Reynolds that he had always enjoyed spending time

with Abbey, although "Ed did have his thorny side" (230). Ford and Tomlinson make a clear distinction between tampering that hurts human beings and vandalism that simply stops the destruction wrought by human beings. Reynolds terms his stance "ecotage," or "ecosalvage," and describes his motivation as looking for proactive ways to "help save a planet that's being gutted and poisoned" (292). He has intentionally introduced parasites into Florida's water systems in order to scare potential buyers from buying up and overdeveloping the land. Reynolds contends, like Abbey, that he refuses to participate in activities that will lead to the deaths of any human beings.

However, the people Reynolds conspires with do not share his concern. In fact, they are not environmental activists at all. Their goal is to profit from drugs that can kill the parasites infecting Florida's human population that they and Reynolds have planned to release into Disney World's water supply. Ford and Tomlinson describe the plot as "bio-terrorism" rather than "bio-vandalism." When human beings are injured or killed, the two deem it immoral. Neither have a problem with bio-vandalism, but both worry about extremist groups who smuggle parasites and diseases into countries in hopes of ruining local economies. Ford notes that humans have engaged in bio-terrorism—or using nature to kill other human beings—since at least the Middle Ages, "when attackers used catapults to lob the corpses of black plague victims over castle walls" (121). Realizing that "disease is an effective weapon," Ford worries that terrorists bent on creating chaos and crippling American society might find it easier to conceal and transport infectious diseases and parasites and loose them on Americans rather than using

air-to-ground missiles. Familiar with the works of Edward Abbey, whom he briefly met at a gathering of writers for the magazine *Outside*, White has no issues with bio-vandalism that halts or slows the destruction of the environment; he just does not tolerate the willful use of nature to inflict pain, injury, or death on human beings in order to do so, agreeing completely with Abbey (White, "Personal").

Although Ford's development of a "detective's code" is not as clearly or self-reflexively articulated as that of Robert Parker's *Spenser*, in the course of the action of the fourteen Doc Ford novels, he can clearly be seen working out a set of standards by which he will live his exciting, oftentimes, violent life. Though couched in biological terms such as "adaptation," Ford's ethical code is ultimately a traditional and conservative one, reflecting the typical hard-boiled detective code. The ability of humans to choose is the linchpin of his moral philosophy, a unique response in that Ford's materialistic world view should preclude him from considering free will as being a factor in ethical situations, or that ethics can even exist without the power of choice. Ford and Bobby Richardson's maxim that "In any conflict, the rules of behavior are defined by the party that cares least about morality" is a chilling reality in a post 9/11 world.

In any case, Ford's Code might be listed this way:

1. Free choice should usually trump genetic coding.
2. Sexual relations between men and women should be partnerships.
3. Friendship implies commitment of the utmost degree.
4. The "Good Ones" are rare and should be highly-valued when discovered.

5. Violence can sometimes be necessary.
6. The natural environment should be protected at almost any cause, short of human suffering or death.

CONCLUSION:

RANDY WAYNE WHITE—PHILOSOPHER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO

"If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story" (92).
Ernest Hemingway, *Ernest Hemingway on Writing*

Randy Wayne White has openly appropriated Hemingway's "iceberg" theory of writing fiction, providing small details every other novel or so which give his readers hints about the mysterious pasts of both Doc Ford and Tomlinson. It would be interesting to discover his long-lost dossier of character descriptions and plot lines to see what still remains "underwater." Despite being very generous with his time and open about his writing, White refuses to speed up the pace of the "striptease" he has begun with the characterization of Ford and Tomlinson. Although the Doc Ford novels can be read in stand-alone fashion or in any order, the larger story arc that continues to develop book to book is full of suspense and will captivate the readers until White reveals all.

In any case, within the guise of "mere" formula fiction, White has sneaked in a sophisticated meditation on modern America's two primary epistemologies: the vision of science or empiricism and the vision of religion or the spiritual. Through Ford, White demonstrates that fidelity to scientific ways of knowing results in insight and sometimes material progress. Through Tomlinson, White reminds us that no matter how successful

in building and understanding material reality, empiricism cannot answer our more pressing questions: What should I do? What does it all mean?

Ultimately, the Doc Ford series is a long-running meditation on trust. Initially, Ford and Tomlinson do not seem to have much of anything in common, but slowly they begin to trust one another as they help one another survive dangerous encounters and as they share their thoughts about science, religion, and love. In reading the Doc Ford series, one cannot miss White's beseeching request that we keep some sort of openness in our approach to reality, whether this spirit of broad-mindedness is applied to ideas, truth, the natural environment, and other human beings.

What will White do next? As far as showing more of the iceberg or revealing more in the striptease, who can say? In the latest in the series, *Hunter's Moon* (2007), Ford is glad he had earlier played judge and jury and *failed* to execute his friend Tomlinson although he had earlier been assigned to assassin the one-time radical for constructing a bomb that killed several people, one a close friend of Ford's and fellow covert operative. Former President Kal Wilson not only reveals that he himself is a Negotiator, but that Tomlinson had actually been in the employ of the CIA years earlier as a remote viewer. The memories of building and constructing bombs for radical organizations originated in brainwashing sessions the government subjected Tomlinson to so he would have no memory of his participation. Two novels earlier, in *Dead of Night* (2005), ex-KGB agent and mercenary Dasha learns from an old intelligence document that Ford had once been a suspect in the disappearance and presumed murder

of a man rumored to have had an affair with Ford's mother just prior to her own death. Dasha also learns that sealed records describe how a juvenile court judge (and friend of Ford's uncle Tucker Gattrell) strongly suggested that the young man leave Florida and enlist in the military. White isn't saying what he has planned to reveal next about Ford and Tomlinson and their shadowy pasts. When asked, he replied that their "dance of death" will eventually move to some sort of conclusion, adding that he had worked out descriptions of other important characters that have yet to be introduced into the pages of the Doc Ford novels. However he did mention to me that it is possible Tomlinson might have been assigned at one time to execute Ford. How soon the series will reach its culmination is hard to figure with White telling me that he would like to do a few stand-alone books in the manner of the offbeat *The Man Who Invented Florida*, featuring Tomlinson without Ford, along the way before he wraps up the series (White, "Personal").

Three things seem certain: 1) White will continue to explore the intersection of religion and science in the Doc Ford series, and 2) White will continue to provide a concrete example of how one may can develop and follow a moral code in contemporary America, and 3) White will continue to ruminate on the state of the natural environment. Whether or not Ford continues to fall short of accepting belief in supernatural realities remains to be seen, but if White continues to insert miraculous happenings into the plots of the Doc Ford books, it will be increasingly difficult for Ford to resist admitting larger, transcendent realities into his flimsy materialistic worldview. White's inclusion of Max

Risch's statement, "Technology is the knack of so arranging the world that we do not experience it," to open *Shark River* (2001) is surely a theme he will continue to plumb in the series. Throughout the series, White has described Ford as trying to achieve a proper and authentically creature-like balance between nature and human technology. By living simply, Ford tries not to make an idol of technology, hoping to resist the kind of self-imposed slavery of civilization that environmentalist Thomas Hartmann warns his readers about in *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight* where he writes:

> In modern society, few people report that they feel even remotely "free" in our modern society: we are modern-day slaves, held captive by "slave-holders" of our culture. The slave-holders use the chains of the mortgage owed the bank, the loan on the car, the unpaid credit card bills, they requirement to pay property taxes if you own your own home, and the many other subtle and not-so-subtle forms of economic and cultural pressure to extract the majority of your life's time and use it to their ends. (184).

The most intriguing possibilities in the continuation of the Doc Ford series lie in what White will do with our post-911 global political climate. Years before the destruction of New York City's Twin Towers and the Pentagon, White was already speculating in his fiction about terrorism and the United States' relation to it. Some of the people Ford had assassinated were terrorists bent on introducing a state of chaos into the nation. White, earlier described as "middle of the road" politically would seem to

continue to take a "both/and" rather than an "either/or" approach to the United States and its program to deal with terroristic threats. In distinguishing fanatic "Islamicists" from God-fearing and good Muslims in *Hunter's Moon*, the character of former President Kal Wilson indicates that White will be careful to make distinctions that prevent him from blanketing any outsiders as terrorists.

White's statement that "In any conflict, the boundaries of acceptable behavior are defined by the party that cares least about morality," have been included in a letter to the editor he wrote addressing those responsible for the 9/11 attacks, in the "Great Law" Ford and Bobby Richardson develop in *The Mangrove Coast*, and in the words of a speech former President Kal Wilson delivers before international terrorists in Panama, where the President also challenges the terrorists to a duel in the spirit of his predecessor President Andrew Jackson. White describes the statement above as the "quandry" America must face. In his letter to the editor, White confidently predicts that America, nation of courage-filled "mongrels" will "find a way as Americans always have. As Americans always will" (*Last Flight Out* xvii). How White will work this all out in the Doc Ford series is a mystery. In returning to semi-active status as a Negotiator, Ford has assassinated two such Islamicists since 9/11, and perhaps White will continue to mine this vein for plot twists and turns.

However, this is where the promise of White's Doc Ford series has the potential to go wrong. Depending upon how he wraps the series up, particularly if he decides that Ford's more analytical and violent nature will ultimately overshadow the spiritual and

intuitive influence of Tomlinson's nature, the Doc Ford series may ultimately be nothing more than the latest version of the "myth of redemptive violence." This myth, articulated by thinkers such as theologian Walter Wink, literary critic Rene Girard, and popular fiction scholar John Cawelti, and cultural critics Robert Jewett and Shelton Lawrence John have all written about this myth which Jewett and Shelton refer to as "the American Monomyth" (3). In attempting to discover why Americans like to read about violence, these various scholars have all pointed to a mythic structure that has been told in culture after culture. Wink succinctly states that the myth of redemptive violence is the "story that the rulers of domination societies told each other and their subordinates. It enshrines the belief that violence saves, that war brings peace, and that might makes right" (42).

Wink locates its origin in an ancient Babylonian myth where order is gained by disorder of violence on the part of the gods (45). In any case, he and the other scholars contend that this myth is rightly the most powerful source of belief in the modern world. Children are inducted into its charms from their earliest days. Batman, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Popeye, even Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner and a host of other cartoon characters instruct children that violence "saves," that violence always wins the day.

One reason the myth is so powerful is that it appears to work effectively. If an enemy is quickly dispatched, the problem is solved. At least for awhile, until another enemy takes his place. The myth of redemptive violence is evident in many Hollywood's most popular films: *Star Wars*, *Superman*, *Dirty Harry*, and most of the old Westerns.

With Tomlinson's spiritual influence, the Doc Ford series has the potential to deconstruct the myth of redemptive violence. However, this fact lies solely with Ford

and whether or not he will mature spiritually by coming to an acceptance of a supporting divinity. If Ford fails, it is possible the series will fail as a ground-breaking evolution in the detective genre.

In the meantime, Randy Wayne White's Doc Ford series demonstrates that popular literature need not be mere escapism. In the series, White has taken the full measure of human society with great care and great humility, and then offered his observations about contemporary American life to his readers. Through the detective fiction genre, White has traced the influence of both science and religion on the American people, offered a moral code to help negotiate one's self through contemporary life, ruminated on solutions to current environmental problems, and begun to ponder America's response to global terrorism. He has capitalized on the conventions of the genre, using it as means of sharing his wisdom in an entertaining and instructive fashion.

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