

America part 11, The Evolution of the Landscape

Scene I

In the Beginning

Blackness...in the darkness, the Poet and the chorus take their positions within the performance circle. they wear full length capes. when they bend to their hands and knees and arrange their costumes, they appear like rocks. perhaps two or more join to form a boulder. the silence is profound—evocative—eventually interrupted, initially by flickers of softly pulsating light, breathing across the stillness of the dim landscape—a scintillating silence that seems to presage a catastrophe—an abrupt series of lightning flashes, thick bolts of awe inspiring electrical currents crash upon the stage, illuminating a massive world of dense, weighty rocks and boulders, a world of impalpable dimension. This impressive and dramatic discharge lingers, as place begins to lose definition and assumptions unhinge. The storm grows to the verge of reeking havoc. In due course, the thermal tension is broken by the prophetic voices of the Poet and [Chorus] with a chant, a breathy chant resonating from their chests, basso profundo. Slowly the landscape returns to quiet repose, once again encompassing the audience.

At a discrete location on the set we are treated to a cinematic wonder—a film—screening the creation and evolution of bacteria and their subsequent migration. we see a small patch of bacteria slowly take over an isolated area of the set; then we see this colony migrate...moving... moving...slowly, slowly migrating, as the colony takes over more and more of the set, migrating across the entire set. It is a humorously rendered film. The bacterial evolution starts with the first line of the Poet, and lasts through his line: *how completely the land was absorbed by these pilgrims, colonists, pioneers, settlers, and immigrants* (below, next three stanzas)

(Poet and [chorus]) [the choral chant becomes a rumbling. using only their voices they create the sound of an engine turning over] “by the bye” [echo, *by and bye*], “by the way” [echo, *by right*] “by low” [echo, *jure divino*] “by high” [echo, *Deo volente*] “by the time” [echo, *by the end*] “by the end” [echo, *of TIME (hold)!*] “the archean eon, a veneer of thin contrivance” [echo from ‘*contrivance...land*’] “lay o’er the land, a muscularity of fabricated resolution cloaked the earth” [echo on, ‘*cloaked the earth*’] “populating the planet, a text-tured crust had been *waved*” [echo on ‘*had been waved*’] “never to relinquish its hold—*life*” [*life*] “took over” [echo on ‘*took over...*’] “t’was by artifice; t’was by necessity; t’was by a wrinkle; t’is where we begin. the lead was taken, perhaps it was chemical, first transforming the air; perhaps by code, built-in to the species, reflecting its starch; perhaps the strongest do tend to survive—t’was a deceit” [echo, *of TIME!*] “a fear,” [echo, *oooooh*, like the wind, from *the fear of hunger* through *success, growth, and power*] “the fear of hunger, the fear of death, the fear related to the inability to control, or procreate, and fear eventually built a vast, complex world from rock, water and air, a world that utterly resembled the essential fear associated with its’ living, a fear that has never lost its finger, a fear which simply disguises itself in every generation, now, with the consumer trappings of notepads, palm pilots, cellular phones, powerful engines; the fear that writes the prescription that in order to be what one might become, they will have to cease to be what they have been; they will have to turn from that place, that very special place, to which one’s flesh, one’s thoughts, one’s devotion belong, for the guiding rule, the attitude and bearing of history, is against such a place, and toward achievement, success, growth, *power...*”

-pause in the film-

[this is a strange benediction, a gregorian-like chant, “*our failing in the garden has to do with our need to control (hold)...it is our desire to witness our power, a perceived unilateral power (hold)...ours is a ubiquitous power, a power that loosens the ties we have with nature (hold)...it is a power that dominates, dominates, dominates, that turns upon nature, that dominates (slight pause) nature. it is an unhinged, wild power, a power that knows no bounds (slight hold)...a power which recognizes no boun-da-ri-es...*”]

(the Poet and film continue) “in the southwest, creole colonists, like green cholerochia or red chromatia before them, millennia ab ovo, reduced the sulfate breath they found so fetid in the native population, to a forced, heavy, labored, exertion, until nearly all the southwestern desert was encrusted with these microbial mats and temporary scum// along the craggy northern atlantic coast, clinging to the cold, barren rocks, sliming over its volcanic rubble, every pool of water boasted pushy pilgrims// in the semi-tropical shallow seas of the southeast, greening the earth, transformers, charlatans, confidence men, exuding wares to hungry opportunists// and in the middle atlantic, for the hoards of colonists, the very waste of a fermenter became the food of the acid loving swimmer. over salt grains, settlers fabricated glues and precipitated magnetite, creating an archive of products, merchandise and acquisition// immigrants established themselves in areas they previously did not exist—the frontier, the frontier was pushed the frontier, further and further; further and further and further—every available piece of real estate was occupied by the self proclaimed, the so called ‘enlightened’// producers, adventurers, pathfinders, explorers, all, pierced the air with an elaborate architecture, guided by rulers laid end to end across the land, moored insufferably to the earth// three thick, powerful, domesticating roots trans-planted during the earliest days of a long ago time century, germinated in three separate and distinct localities, descending underground, feeling their hirsute way silently, within the primal, virgin, black, rich, mineral-laden humus, everywhere, everywhere around them, and the land itself, oh the then wild, virgin landscape, absorbed, conducted, stored and anchored each and every young root for it knew naught else// *transplanting does require wrenching a plant from its native soil, and moving it to a new location. often this does not work. but sometimes with a waiting period of 600 years//* european root forms, (they) opened the land, licked its bounty and made it (to) yield immeasurable opportunities for others awaiting the Word. *how completely the land was absorbed by these pioneers, pilgrims, colonists, settlers and immigrants...*”

Blackout

the Poet and chorus remain in their rock-like positions. we hear them breathing quietly, individually, randomly...after six breaths they recognize one another. their breathing takes on a communal cooperative tone...up music. performers continue breathing...up film. **B X W** a menagerie of early North American flora and fauna is projected on the walls behind the audience. the imagery moves in a circle around them, like a merry go round. the music and chant-breathing of chorus and poet, create a cycle of life leitmotiv—the life of Turtle Island...

A Dream... abrupt **silence**...superimposed onto the thick, voluptuous, primeval, virgin woodland of the film, is the figure of a woman, an apparition really. she appears amidst the dense growth, a stark white, naked figure backed by the darkness of the trees. she is long, lean and muscular. she stands a solitary figure amidst enormous growth...up, monitor: Thorfinn Karlsefni and his wife Gudrid in their marriage bed, looking over the scene below them, chatting to each other...after a short while the naked white woman raises a huge oversized axe—the blade itself is twice its normal size; the handle is in the shape of a cross—wields it with a prodigious energy, swinging first behind her, then with a rush, landing its sharpness directly into the meat of the towering tree. there is a momentary frozen silence...then we see blood ooze from the pith of the tree...then we hear the deafening thud caused by the stroke. the thud becomes a sob, a louder sob, a much louder sob. the woman continues to wield her axe. the entire landscape cries out in pain. the audience is immersed in a plaintive soundscape, encompassed by the pathos of its ululation. the woman is Freydis...the ululation slowly dissolves. return the chant-breath of chorus and poet, as the scene fades to **Black**. the chant-breath continues quietly in the brief darkness....

the scene transforms. up lights. an effeminate, tall, lanky, well built, handsome man, sits in a reclining fashion on the sloping bank of a stream. enter *Birdman*—the human form of the great white eagle—on a bicycle along the path from the east. he is lean, well built, muscular in the upper body, around the shoulders, and he has a long thin face ending in the prominent caricature-like jaw of the great white eagle. his glasses give him a pronounced avian air. the Birdman rides a modified touring bike, stripped to one gear, with no shifters and an odd, unexplainable curved tube from the bottom bracket to the front stem. running the length from seat post to handlebars, just underneath the top tube, a shovel is bound with medium size cotton rope. there is no particular pattern to the knot. attached to the handlebars, covered in thick black foam, is a collection of personal stuff- power items, personal icons, practical accessories. with a large cup of coffee in one hand, and an over-sized thick, hardbound book on architectural graphics with pastel front cover, large print, cheap black and white hand drawn illustrations, in the other. he dismounts the black one speed bike. **end chant**.

“hail to he who occupies this sloped part of the earth. i say my friend, there is a lack of trust, between man and the earth. man used to survive only off the land. it is no longer that way. now he lives with money. jobs take him away from the land. i ask you, how will the land look after him?...i speak of placing roots deep into the ground, so the growth above is healthy, vibrant, alive, dynamic, pungent. let the lay of the land guide you...water your children like you water a tree. the shady lane breeds mud. determined man, he who ‘sets his teeth together’ Dekanawideh, take this holy feather from me. i know your thoughts as you sit and muse upon the bank of this river and i say unto you, take this holy feather Dekanawideh, for it shall represent your vision. take this holy feather, present it to your people, for they shall truly become the great Nations of your vision. take this holy feather, let your people hear your words, Dekanawideh.”

-Blackout-

the scene changes: Dekanawideh transforms into Hiawatha, who remains on the bank of the stream. depression is written indelibly upon his face. the Birdman rides in circles nearby. Dekanawideh arrives in a white birch bark canoe. he speaks to Hiawatha, “Hiawatha, it is me, the one who was born of the virgin mother, the one who was informed by a messenger from the

creator in a dream, that she was to bear a son destined to plant the Tree of Peace. i have come unto you to offer you this feather. it represents my vision: a great tree with six mighty branches, it grows from a rich, deep, black soil; its thousands of untangled roots are spread across the entire earth. an eagle, with its wings spread, sits at the top. the spirit of the great eagle is the spirit of wisdom. the people must become one. they must cease arguing. they must cease competing. they must cease fighting and bickering amongst themselves. they must unite, as the six mighty branches of this indomitable tree, into a strong nation. they must unite into one nation dedicated to peace and brotherhood. they must spread themselves across the face of the earth, like the roots of this great tree. they must unite under the sheltering branches of this Tree of Great Peace. they must firmly bind, that if this great tree were to fall, their nation would not be severed, but would stand, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Hiawatha and Dekanawideh place their right hands across their hearts in the style of the pledge of allegiance. in the background a soft undertone of American patriotic music (a la charles ives) can be heard. they seal their bond with tobacco. they smoke from a sacred pipe. the smoke curls upwards into a cloud hovering over them. the smoke smells distinctly of sweet tobacco. the scene fades to **Black** and merges with its successor. exit Dekanawideh, Hiawatha and the Birdman.

Scene II

the very next day

- **John Rolfe**, a southern planter, a white, aristocratic, englishman. his goal is to strike it rich and dominate the region politically and economically. resembles Karlsefni.
- **white male Anglican Preacher**, the religion of the state and business. how like Gudrid.
- **a Yeoman**, a cocksure white male farmer, though he takes his cues from the planter. he stands like Freydis, and speaks like her as well.
- **a White Woman**, American, salt of the earth, ally to Indians and women, precursor to Ruth. a mother, she carries her child. her clothing connects her to Ruth.
- **Pocahantas**, Indian woman, she too lives in the garden. her clothing also connects her to the white woman and Ruth.
- **Powhattan**, Indian chief, head of a very large regional tribe, the equal to John Rolfe.
-all characters think heart, lungs, throat, the emotions located in these areas and their expression-

shift scene: Jamestown, Virginia. the lighting is the same as **Scene X, The Meeting, America, part one**: three white men are gathered near a sandy shore, jawboning, chawin’ tobacco, occasionally spittin’. the rhythm of their spittin’s what’s interesting along with the shifting of their feet and the tiny movements of their hands and faces, how they resemble Karsefni, Gudrid and Freydis. the scene should take its time to develop.

the planter draws his sword, stretches it to full length, then pierces the earth. **Freeze**...the Planter pulls the sword toward him, through the earth, dividing the land from the white woman, Powhattan and Pocahantas, who quietly stand nearby. no words are spoken. the scene unfolds by physical gesture, facial and bodily expression, by very particular, subtle but essential movements and gestures. the Indians of course, sense the deeper meaning to the swordsman’s tableau.

Rolfe “the land is divided. t’is a tidings that shall bode well for us. they shall pay us a tithe in food, and we will grow for ourselves the exotic nicotiana tabacum.”

-the white men are pleased. they shift in place. the sword is returned to its scabbard-

Rolfe (while holding up tobacco plants) “you can’t hold the ocean ‘twixt your fingers. my boots are ready to sink into this sandy, marshland soil. i’m quite ready to dirty me feet and place the roots of these leafy tobacco plants in their rightful homes. to be sure, we’re already knee deep into summer.”

Preacher “most certainly, most certainly, my dear Mr. Rolfe. we shall build this wilderness up. to be sure, we shall form this land in our own image.”

Yeoman “fer starters, we’ll rid the land of it’s wild animals and savage peoples.”

Preacher “in no time, if i may dare say, we shall dominate the land, and all that inhabit it, spreading ourselves in every direction, for the lord doth guide us.”

Yeoman “others are huntin’ fools gold. i say tabacca’s gonna take this economy over.”

Preacher “soon enough, soon enough, god willin’, it’ll be the main crop a the entire southland.”

Rolfe “t’is our gold most certainly. since these savages haven’t any valuable treasures, they can feed us while we grow the tobacco. i’m convinced dear olde england’ll buy all that we produce. men, i think we stand to reap a fortune.”

-simultaneously they each pull out an enormous cigar, clip it, light it, inhale...then exhale, more than satisfied-

Rolfe “tobacco is sellin’ in london for its weight in silver shillings. t’is a most popular extravagance amongst the dandies who blow big round, smoke rings tokin’ on their ornate clay pipes, shipped all the way from jamaicaland.”

-Freeze frame...

.....white smokers frozen. Powhattan, Pocahantas and the White Woman move amongst their smoke rings, each taking a cigar from the mouth of one, and placing it between their own lips, puffing away. the year **1607** is etched in bold black letters on each of their backs.

Pocahantas speaks,

“today, thursday, the 14th of may, shall be etched forever on our backs. the London company hereby lands to begin a plantation, in honor of their king’s most excellent majesty. t’is six hundred years since three ships from the cold north Atlantic, from the sea of Labrador, from an island called Greenland, to this sandy shore came; six hundred years from the time their seeds were planted unbeknownst to them; a six hundred year gestation. and t’is only now the seeds within this soft soil we stand upon, sprout before our very eyes; six hundred years from the end of part I of this prodigious four part theatre production...the great river hereby, they call King’s River, which we call Powhattan’s River, because that is the name of the country among my people and our greatest chieftain, Powhattan, who has helped these whites immensely through their most difficult recent time when they lacked plentiful food and shelter, shall in years later come to be known as the James River, because the Powhattan will all be gone, and that is their king’s name, and because this river flows past their plantation, James’town.”

Powhattan, as King James “what honor or policie can move us to imitate the barbarous and beastly manners of the wilde, godlesse and slavish indian, especially in so vile and stinking a custome?”

the Woman “in his ‘counterblaste to tobacco’ published anonymously, James the king pointed out that tobacco was first used as an anitdote to the ‘pockes’. he observed doctors regard smoking as a dirty habit injurious to the health, and find it...”

Powhattan, as King James (overtop the Woman) “a custome lothsome to the eye, hatefull to the nose, harmefull to the braine, dangerous to the lungs and in the blacke stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the horrible stigious smoke of a bottomlesse pit.”

-Freeze...the white smokers retrieve their cigars-

the Yeoman “who’d a thought in less than five years the James River valley’d produce 1,600 pounds of leaf per acre?”

Rolfe “James’town ’s a boom town, son. the Virginia Company has grown quite prosperous, indeed”

the Preacher “and James is enriched beyond his wildest diatribes. god has seen fit.”

Rolfe “exports are nearly double in value those of bread, flour, fish, rice, indigo, and wheat. sirs, i think everybody should be quite happy!”

-everyone nods...Freeze white settlers-

Pocahantas “this is the first sign there’s a lack of trust between men, these European settlers, and the earth. for these white men nature is a wilderness and the land *infested* with *wilde* animals and *savage* people. for these strangers, the land has a price—they have yoked it to their pocket books. they now tax the land. they feel no sorrow for their actions. a land inhabited, has become a land possessed.”

the Woman “a land worshipped, a land of great mystery, now has a church anchored to it.”

Pocahantas “my people work the land for spiritual sustenance. these people work the land hard. they drag steel teeth across her belly.”

Powhattan “every culture has the right to reject its own ideas. they teach their children arrogance, self righteousness and vengefulness...rain?”

-as a trio, the Indians turn toward the heavens...blood emanates from Rolfe’s *fissure*-

image: an old boot, an old, tattered, leather boot; an old muddy pair of work boots; a clothes line of twelve boots, six pairs, shuttles between Jamestown and Vicksburg. the six Jamestown characters, in a choreographed ritual dance, remove their boots, in consort with one another, then move together as a group, to the clothesline, where they attach their boots. when all twelve boots are secure, the clothesline is trundled from east to west, across the stage, till the last boot disappears, appearing then, on video, seen, moving across the landscape, like musical notes, heading west across the frontier, toward Vicksburg, Mississippi, the last stop on this here train...

Blackout

Scene III

some time after...on the edge of the frontier, part the first

- **Ruth**, a Woman, the idealized southern woman but also a mother, earth mother. she wears thick, white cotton clothing. she is played by the white woman from the previous scene.
 - **Araminta**, a black woman, salt of the earth, played by Pocahantas.
 - **Plantation Negro**, nervous, uncertain, good hearted, takes cues from his wife, Araminta. in previous scene he was Powhattan.
 - **Southern Planter**, white, hard working, whose indomitable spirit created a veritable dynasty upon the rich southern black soil. aristocratic, childlike, a simpleton, he lives in the contrived world of his imagination. played by John Rolfe.
 - **Episcopal Preacher**, the spirit of Freydis and brimstone, outlandish mixture of confidence man, evangelical mouthpiece, charlatan & roustabout, he can rouse the dead, & shake the bones of every parishioner. singlemost strength, his ability to exhort. the Preacher from scene ii.
 - **a Farmer**, white male, hardworking, a racist with little ambition, he takes cues from the Planter, helping support his contrivances. he was the Yeoman Farmer in previous scene.
- all characters continue to think heart, lungs, throat, especially the hollow below their Adam's apple, and the emotions located in these areas and their expression-

the lighting has an underwater, opaque, lambent, suffused quality. it is thick, like quicksand, and surreal. six people sit on the southern side of the road, in a serpentine geometry, five, on simple, unadorned backless stools, one, on a white rocking horse. up video: twelve boots make their appearance in Vicksburg, moving across the southern frontier, preceding their arrival in the theatre...the boots make their live appearance attached to the turquoise clothesline, moving from east to west above the road. they arrive at the last stop on the western frontier accompanied by a train whistle...the six characters turn their heads as one with the sound of the whistle. the Negro, Negress, Preacher, Yeoman and Planter, simultaneously, as one, rise from their seats and with a choreographic motion, move to the clothesline, where they each remove a pair of shoes. the Preacher, Planter and Yeoman place them on their feet before returning to their seats, while the Negro and Negress carry them, returning to their seats, whereupon they place them in front of their chairs...adjust lighting—stark, very white as Ruth rises from her seat—he third chair closest to the road—and begins her dance: she bends her right leg, raises it forward, above her head, extending it straight up for just an instant, then bends it as she limps forward, taking short strides as she moves increasingly toward the clothesline, offering the effect of a wounded soldier limping home from battle. she removes a single pair of work boots, muttering to herself as she places each one on her feet—a ritual she has performed many times; then walks toward a stack of cotton packing crates, deep on the southern side of the road, walking on the outside of her shoes. she climbs the stack of crates. color this woman Ruth. momentary **Freeze**...

the Planter resumes steady rocking on his horse—back and forth, back and forth—then speaks, “...begin with that, yes, begin with the separation of the self, the separation of the self from all that surrounds it so as to allow the self to locate for its self, a place, a separate place, without which one cannot continue and call himself a man, a place of personal dominion, power, a place in nature, neither confined nor restricted by

nature, separate from all else, from everything that can number this place or call it its' own, a place that reflects the man whose place it becomes...begin with that.”

-momentary **Freeze**...

up video. the stage is transformed into a southern field, fecund, black earth, alive, erotic...**the Preacher** stands holding a bible in his right hand. he gets up on his chair, his right arm is raised to heaven, clutching his bible. he speaks,

“niggah, niggah man, draw yourself nigh unto Him who has created your abject soul, elsewhile, you shall be cast into a lugubrious antinomian pit of darkness forever more.”

momentary **Freeze**...

Yeoman stands as the **Preacher** continues,

“sinful creature, subject to affliction and death, as the consequences of your natural pollution and guilt: that you and your'n are now in a state of probation...”

the following is performed simultaneously, timed so that the Preacher's soliloquy ends with the Yeoman placing the noose around the negro's neck...

Yeoman walks to the seated Negro, a length of rope in his hand. the noose end of the rope is placed around the Negro's neck. **Freeze**

(**Preacher** continues) “...and that God as a Righteous, All-wise Sovereign, not only disposes of you and your'n as he pleases, and bestows upon you unmerited blessings and comforts, but also subjects you and your'n to privations, afflictions and trials, with the merciful intention of making all your afflictions, as well as your blessings, work, finally, and at long last, for your good. embrace his salvation, humble thyself before Him, learn yrself righteousness, and submit to His holy will.” **Freeze**

the **Negro** stands with the rope around his neck. he bends and places a hand into each shoe (which have wheels on their soles) and holds this position, while the farmer grasps the rope, yokes it to himself, then grasps the Negro's legs. **Freeze**...**Araminta** rises from her chair. momentary **Freeze**...**Yeoman** begins pushing the Negro into the field like a plow. in this fashion they commence turning over the black earth of the south. **Araminta** speaks,

“we, we is de frontier. sure enuf. we done replaced de red skin. we is dey frontier on whose backs us'n, black men, and black women, dis here land's bein' worked, dis here land's bein' cultivated, dis here land yields. we is de frontier on whose backs dey done builds dey *plantacioun*.”

momentary **Freeze**...

Araminta starts her work, casting cotton seed into the furrows (traces) the **Negro** plow has created. his lament can be heard as he is made to work the land,

“i'se workin', i be workin' marster, the day ain't but half resolved. i'se gwyne finish dis here row, yeah, afore the sun burn your neck. don't you worry 'bout me none.”

-hushed voices, the voices of the chorus offstage. sounds like a spiritual-

the Preacher “to have you and your'n brought to this happy state is the great object of Christian benevolence and piety; for this state is not only connected with the truest happiness, which can be enjoyed at any time, but is introduction to eternal life and blessedness in the future world.”

momentary **Freeze**...

Ruth “stuck in the ground like helpless plants, while the earth all ‘round dries up...we came to the last stop. that’s where we settled. pulled our boots on, them that had ‘em, and walked across the earth.”

the Planter “i came here because there was a life that required erectin’, a life embedded in the fertile, black humus...”

the Preacher “if the low grade of intelligence, virtue and civilization...”

the Negro “if de shoe dun fit, wears it.”

the Preacher “...of the african in America, disqualifies him from bein’ his own guardian...”

Araminta “we ‘s livin’ in consort wif de earf, yes we is. we is livin’ in tune wif her rhythms, her creative juice. the earf dun speak to us. i knows she do, cuz i hears her.”

the Preacher “...and if his own true welfare and that of the community, shall be plainly marred by this freedom...”

the Planter “...a life which necessitates and costs all of us an enormous loss of blood, sweat and tears, a life at once genteel and raw...”

Araminta “so much so i tinks sometimes we ‘s more free den our’n white marsters.”

the Planter “...a life which has had an encumbrance placed upon it...but we are prepared to pay it’s price...”

the Preacher “...then the law decides correctly, that the african here has no natural right to his self-control, his own labour and locomotion. hence, his natural liberty is only that which remains after that privilege is retrenched.”

momentary **Freeze...**

Ruth “i have come to believe the land does not belong to people, but that people belong to the land and that the earth permits us to live on and from it, and use it, only so long as we behave, and that if we do not behave, the land will shake us sure enough, as a dog its fleas.”

momentary **Freeze...**

the Planter “...from the very first man to my father, who is with me now, at this inscrutable moment in history, where change, and i can smell it, looms...”

the Preacher “when tempered with humanity and justice, it is a state of tolerable happiness; equal, if not superior, to that which many poor enjoy in countries reputed free.”

Araminta “they done corrupted the land with their notions of what’s right and what’s wrong, plantin’ their seeds into dis here soil.”

the Preacher “a master has a scriptural right to govern his slaves so as to keep them in subjection; to demand and receive from them a reasonable service; and to correct them for the neglect of duty, for their vices and transgressions.”

the Planter “...and what lies before us, can never, never be as what we have lain to rest. i have been called upon to defend our land and in turn, i have called upon my ancestors from the recesses of my skeletal frame, so that together we may go forward.”

-the Negro and Araminta sing, “...any day now, any way now, i shall be released...” followed by a short **Freeze-**

Ruth “came from North Carolina. came on a roan horse with only what he could carry in a single, small portmanteau. had a bit of money he’d saved workin’ for others along the way, and before he departed. settled in above the bottomland nearby here, where the soil was fertile, rich and black. married a woman he met in church. i was born in a cabin with a sod floor. we never did have much. when i was old enough to marry...”

the Planter “i had her ensconced in my home, my sumptuous manse, surrounded by a hundred square miles of plantation. she was my queen...which she has seen fit to abandon.”

-momentary **Freeze**...the Negro, Yeoman and Araminta continue their work; the Planter continues rocking and the Preacher continues preachin’, silently, still standing on his chair-

the Planter “...she’s not the same woman, speakin’ in this way, i once knew.”

the Preacher “a lady, such a nice woman, it’s hard to imagine her speakin’ this way...”

Yeoman (plowin’ stops suddenly) “i know’d her as a quiet and shy person. it’s hard to imagine her... speakin’ this way...” (plowin’ resumes)

the Preacher “what a mouth...”

Yeoman “...seemed like such a nice lady.”

the Planter “she is not the same woman, speakin’ in this manner, that i knew, i can assure you a that.”

Araminta “well i declare, she can talk all day fuh me.”

momentary **Freeze**...

Ruth “i h’ve been on a journey to heal myself. my journey’s been toward a new way of perceivin’ who i am. my internal pain’s been denied far too long. why i never had the courage to examine it... then one day i banged my head but good, and rather than go on and ignore the pain, i sat on the floor and cried. i cried and i cried and i allowed my pain to have its way with me. i allowed my pain to circulate through my body and while i cried, i observed my feelings. i observed my pain. i realized how deeply we hurt and how infrequently we allow ourselves to feel, really feel our pain, the pain that hurts deep, deep down...oh, we have done the land a grievous misdeed. she cries out. she too is in pain. “how doth the land sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! she weepeth sore in the night and her tears are on her cheeks; she hath none to comfort her among all her lovers...”

the Preacher “sistah, sistah Ruth, how can you, of all people, speak in this manner? you, who married into one of the finest plantations in the south. in your heart, dear Ruth, you know your family has a responsibility to this land. you must stay with your people...dear one, you have gone astray, an errant lamb wandering lost upon the land. these times they are difficult, but come, take my hand and together we shall return to the fold.”

the Planter “i married this woman, gave her the finest of ev’rything. she was never without...”

the Negro “forty acres and a mule...”

Araminta “we is become separated from de rest a humanity. we is become solitary amongst de people.”

the Negro “dese folks, dey dun lost deys connection to de land. dey ain’t gots no cobenat wit her —‘cept what dey dun made wit de debil...”

Yeoman “shet yer mouth and keep on workin’.”

the Negro “we’s deys agreement and dey dun makes us do some mighty dirty work cause ebry day i’s e out here (Yeoman whips negro with rope...Negro finishes line while moanin’) i hears the land a moanin’ and a sobbin’ like a baby.”

-Yeoman whips Negro with rope. **Freeze**...the performers slowly return to their seats. as they do, the Poet enters. he walks along the road to the rock at the western end. he speaks as he walks-

“in the semi-tropical southeast, greening the earth, transformers, charlatans, confidence men, exuding their wares to hungry opportunists. the frontier was civilized on the backs of the negro.”

Ruth “let not that empty chair divide us. we can survive this gloomy pall of depression that cloyes our land. the earth ‘round us is bein’ stripped. cotton is exhaustin’ our land. when i was a young girl, it seemed so eternally fecund. life was prolific. we are beginnin’ to lose our sense of place... i h’ve heard rise up from the land, cries, moans, a great lamentation.”

lighting slowly fades to a burning ember...Ruth descends from the cotton crates and walks toward her chair. she stops, bends, and with a ritualized movement, takes off one of her work boots. she gives her boot to Araminta, who sets it in the earth. the Negro then fills it with soil, and plants Ruth’s boot securely within the ground. ‘rows, red, red roads’...the three begin to sing an old spiritual...long slow fade to **Blackout**...performers exit, leaving the boot...fade up sound of washing machines accompanied by slow, breathy chant, sotto voce, of [chorus]