

Cleveland, Ohio
to
Cleveland, Mississippi

Phil Slanina

June 2023

I enjoy observing things. One of my favorite things to do when I am in a new space is to be quiet and perceive everything around me. During the past week in the Mississippi Delta I saw the bright sun shining in a deep blue Mississippi sky, I felt the coolness of the Mississippi River, I smelled the sweetness of the Magnolia flower, and I heard the silence of seemingly infinite corn, soybean, and rice fields (strangely, no cotton).

As I experienced the people and places here in the Mississippi Delta, I decided to try to write poetry that would fit with what I observed. Poetry is my favorite genre of literature. One of my poetry professors, James Magner, stated that poetry is the concentrated language of experience. Since that Introduction to Poetry course, Dr. Magner's definition of poetry has traveled with me everywhere I go. I believe that poetry can be found in anyone and anything.

So for my project, I attempted to write a haiku to accompany each photo that I took while here in the Delta. Included in many of the poems are words and phrases that were spoken during our weeklong seminar on the most southern place on earth.

For poetry purists, haiku is dismissed as a poetic form. I understand that haiku may not approach the sophistication of a ghazal, pantoum, or villanelle but for me I think the haiku's dependence on imagery allows me the perfect vehicle to convey what I have experienced. For my project, you will have the picture present with the poem but my hope is that the imagery present in my poetry will be enough to convey what I witnessed during my time in the Delta.

All photos were taken by me using my Iphone during the National Endowment for the Humanities The Most Southern Place on Earth Workshop June 17 to June 24, 2023.

*I don't think I took as many photos as Emily on this trip but I hope my quality is close to hers.

** Jothi did you look up Miami University?

All Night Long

Friday night at Red's
Lady Gladys and Big T
teaching the Delta.



Till

This bloom is on the magnolia tree next to the Bryant Store in Money, Mississippi

One solitary
white magnolia. It's violent
fragrance permeates.



Dockery

I'm riding the blind
while T Model Ford plays
the Delta blues.



Fields

After Natasha Trethewey

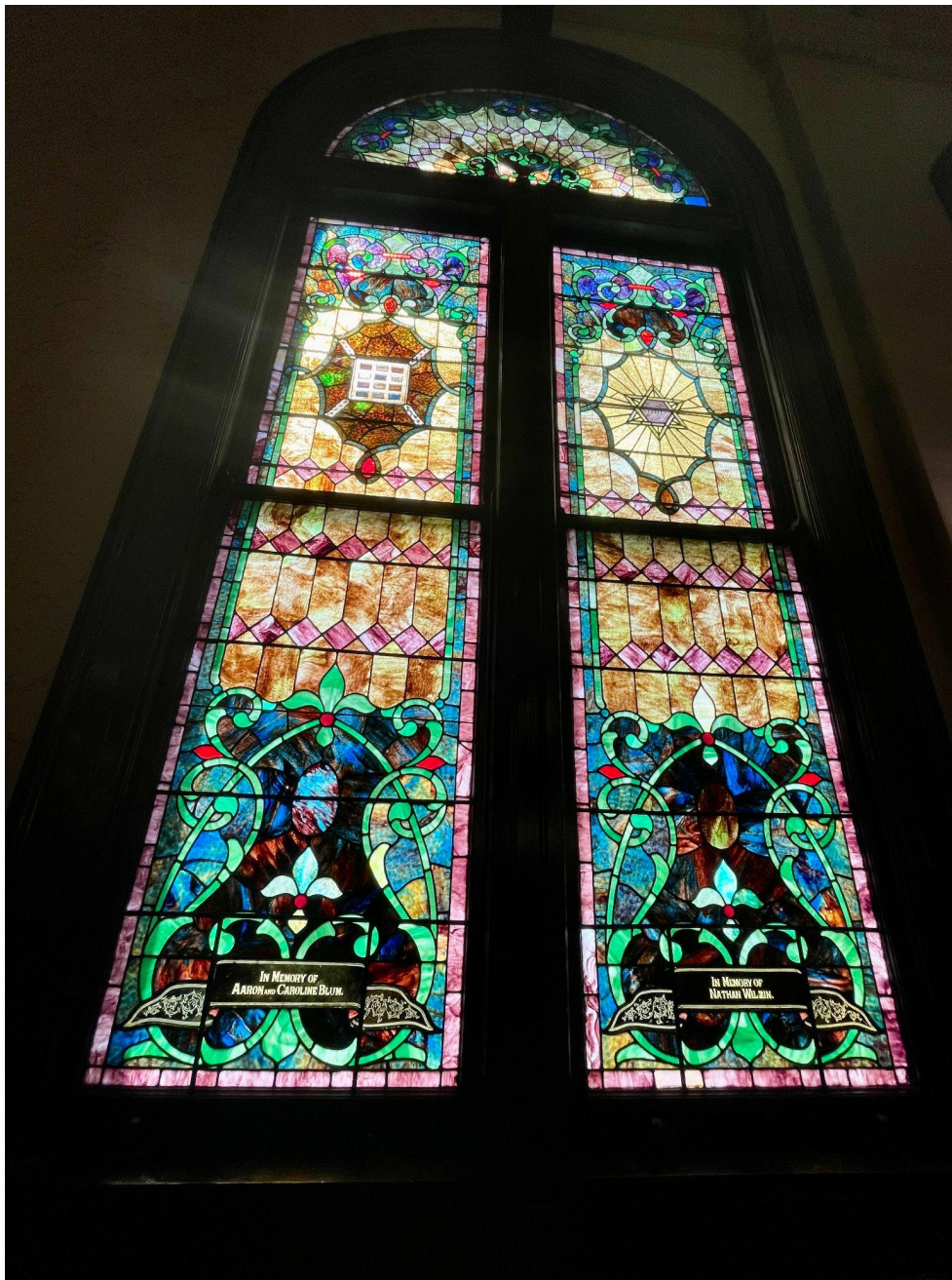
Again, the fields appear.
Blues and greens melding together
revealing the pain.



Benjy

*The peacefulest words. Peacefulest words. Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum. Somewhere I heard bells once.
Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi. –Quentin Compson*

As a driven leaf,
the Delta youth move away.
Erasing the past.



Mound Bayou

Shaped from the swampland.

This jewel of the delta
can until they can't.



Future

Curving to the right.
The tracks point to progress or
sheer obsolescence.



Sounding

The Mississippi.
Heaven and earth so close
but still miles apart.



One final image

The Mississippi Delta and the Northcoast are linked by so many things but the most striking link is both areas' growth because of natural bodies of water. We have learned this past week how critical the Mississippi River is to the formation of the Mississippi Delta. Similarly, Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River are responsible for the creation of Cleveland, Ohio.

If you ever find yourself in or near Cleveland, please do not hesitate to reach out. I would love to be able to return the hospitality that you all have shown to me and show you the people, places, and music of The Land.

Sincerely,

Phil Slanina

