

LOVE'S AUSTERE AND LONELY OFFICES:
AN ANALYSIS OF TOM CIPULLO'S AMERICA 1968

by

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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My study reveals how the music of Tom Cipullo's America 1968 mirrors the theme of adversity leading to resolution as found in the poetry of Robert Hayden. This study should serve the purposes of investigating Cipullo's music in relationship to Hayden's poetry, and be a practical tool for anyone interested in performing these marvelous pieces. This study contains an introduction, a systematic look at each poem and song, and a conclusion reflecting upon my findings.

DEDICATION

The entirety of this document is dedicated to my wife, Andrea:

On February 26, 2015 you were miraculously left on this earth. In every explicable and inexplicable way, my life changed forever on that day. I love you now and always will.

Joshua

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I’d like to thank Ellen and Russ for being at my house helping me through this very difficult time. Your grace abounds, and I love you both.

To my parents, Janet and Doug, I love you both. You are both people I am proud of in every way. I admire your hard working spirits. The resolve you raised me with is something of which I am now very proud. I’ll always be a Detroit Tiger!

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INTRODUCTION

In *America 1968* Tom Cipullo writes music that mirrors the qualities of adversity leading to resolution as found in Robert Hayden's poems. Tom Cipullo is a living successful American art song and opera composer. The topic is of interest to me because I find the salient musical gestures Cipullo composes to mirror the turbulence that leads to positivity in Robert Hayden's poems. Additionally, I firmly believe the musical settings of this poetry evoke strong images and sentiments from 1968 and that entire decade in American history.

My analysis will examine how the music and poetry work together. This study will break new ground by virtue of its being the first ever study of this song cycle. I will also investigate the meaning of Robert Hayden's poetry by studying prominent poetic devices he uses that relate to Cipullo's musical treatment. This document will illuminate the meaning of the text as seen through the lens of Cipullo's music. It is my wish that this document not only serve as a study, but, as a useful tool that any performer may find practical in the discovery of these marvelously challenging pieces of music and poetry.

The research methodology will lie primarily with uncovering the meaning of each poem through personal study, published books, and dissertations on Robert Hayden.

After the analysis of each poem's prominent features, (drama, moods, rhetoric, syntax) I will examine Cipullo's musical treatment, considering how the composer's compositional devices relate to the text. This will be done by analyzing gestures in the keyboard and vocal parts. I will not attempt a full harmonic or theoretical analysis of the piece, but will reference harmonies and theoretical concepts when applicable to my thesis. I will also

include pertinent correspondence with Tom Cipullo, and another dissertation already written about his other songs.

In chapter one I will present Tom Cipullo's biography, outlining important events that shaped Cipullo's life. Chapter two will provide a brief biography of Robert Hayden, chronicling his upbringing in a Detroit ghetto through the end of his life. In chapter three I will begin analyzing each poem/song, with the goal of demonstrating my thesis: that Cipullo's music mirrors the qualities of adversity leading to resolution as found in Robert Hayden's poems. These chapters will be a systematic study of the six songs: *Monet's "Waterlilies," Hey Nonny No, The Point, The Whipping, Those Winter Sundays,* and *Frederick Douglass*. All analysis chapters will discuss poetry, music, and how they relate. The conclusion will summarize and reflect upon the findings of my analysis.

CHAPTER ONE

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOM CIPULLO

I will provide a brief summary of Cipullo's life, with supplementary details on the years 2012-2015.¹ In these years he was the winner of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Sylvia Goldstein Award from the Copland House (2013), and the Arts & Letters Award from the American Academy (2013). His opera *Glory Denied* received ten performances by Fort Worth Opera in 2013. Chelsea Opera and Opera Memphis will perform the work in 2015.

Tom Cipullo's parents, Ralph and Lois, met after WWII, and were married in 1949. Upon graduating from high school in the Bronx, Ralph joined the Marines. After the War, he became a bar owner and jazz musician. Hoping to deter attention from his Italian name, he took the stage name Ray Carle much of his life. Lois, a homemaker and store clerk, came to the Bronx from Ohio as a young adult. They moved to Long Island, and in 1950 had their first son, James, who would also be a musician. "Tommy" Cipullo, born on November 22, 1956, was named after Tommy Dorsey, a favorite of Ralph's. The parents' marriage ended in divorce in 1974. Ralph moved to Florida, playing the bass until age 85, giving it up when he could no longer easily transport the amplifier. Ralph is alive and well in Florida. Cipullo's mother died in 1998. Tom dedicated two songs to her: *The Crane at Gibbs Pond* from Long Island Songs and *Epilogue* from A visit with Emily.

Tom Cipullo's insatiable appetite for music began at an early age. Tom often heard the music of Cole Porter and George Gershwin while traveling to New York City

¹ Kling, Elizabeth Bell-. The Art Songs of Tom Cipullo. Diss. The City U of New York, 2001. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation, 2011. Print.

with his father. He was very interested in seeing his father play in local clubs, and they went to Radio City Music Hall together. This was all spawned because of Tom's musical interests that started in grade school when he sang both the bass and tenor parts using falsetto in the choir. He started taking piano lessons from Robert Yodice, a Manhattan School of Music student, at age five. As a youngster Tom also had an interest in baseball.

Tom Cipullo was the first person in his family to attend college. In 1974, after Cipullo graduated from Carle Place High School, he enrolled at Hofstra University on New York's Long Island and he began to study with his first composition teacher Elie Siegmeister. Siegmeister insisted Cipullo learn and master the skills of writing good counterpoint, and did not allow Cipullo to write a string quartet until he was satisfied with that skill. Cipullo soon gained interest in composing songs, so his teacher insisted that he bring one song of Debussy, Schumann, Brahms, and Ives to study each week. Being gifted at the piano himself, Siegmeister insisted that the keyboard had a great role in song composition. He is said to have had the ability to read open full score writing with great skill. Much like great German lieder, Siegmeister insisted that the piano have a character of its own, inter-dependent with the voice part.

Tom Cipullo's interest in harmonies also began at an early stage of his development. At Hofstra his harmony and theory teacher Dr. Helen Greenwald did not particularly like his harmony. When Dr. Greenwald told Tom that altering the fifth of the chord was acceptable he altered the fifth in every chord of his harmony final. Tom admits this was not a good choice. He graduated from Hofstra in 1979 with a B.S. in Music.

Tom Cipullo went to graduate school at Boston University in 1981, seeking a Master's Degree. He didn't get along with his first teacher there because of the emphasis on serialism and atonality. Consequently he ended up studying with the Pulitzer Prize winning composer David Del Tredici. Del Tredici was so in demand that he had to audition students to study with him. The audition was to be a full score reading of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony at the piano. By chance this was one of Cipullo's favorite pieces and he had played it at the piano many times before. He was accepted as a student of Del Tredici. One thing Cipullo really liked about Del Tredici was the ability he had to realize how and when harmonies should move. Tom also recalls how he said that composing music should be fun, which was different than how he'd thought before. While at Boston University Cipullo was a founding member of a group "Underground Composers," an organization that still exists.

After graduation from Boston University Tom Cipullo moved to Hawaii for two years for personal reasons, and in 1988 he came back to New York City. He wanted to continue studying with Del Tredici so he enrolled in the Doctoral Program at the City University of New York. He completed all work necessary for the doctorate except the dissertation because his first commission took too much of his time. Though he never finished his doctorate, he soon was on faculty on Bronx Community College and still is today. He teaches general music courses and does not teach composition.

Tom Cipullo's affinity for tonal music and poetry has led to significant vocal output including: over 70 songs, and an opera *Glory Denied*. He has felt that the nature of song writing lends itself to more tonality because of the need for a melody. He has had several notable commissions and premiere performances by tenor Paul Sperry

including *The Land of Nod*, *Late Summer*, *Rain*, *Long Island Songs*, and *Another Reason Why I Don't Keep a Gun in the House*. He has also written non-vocal pieces which include: *Sparker* for four-hand piano, *Water Lilies* for solo piano, *Paradigm Shifting* for solo violin, and *The Shadows Around the House* for SATB chorus, string quartet and percussion.

Cipullo currently lives in New York City with his wife, visual artist Hedwig Brouckaert.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER TWO

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROBERT HAYDEN

Robert Hayden was born on August 4, 1913 on Beacon Street in the Detroit, Michigan ghetto ironically known as “Paradise Valley.” This Detroit ghetto was the worst of the worst, and was demolished in the early 1960s. Detroit was revitalizing itself and currently Interstate 75 and 375 stand in its place along with Ford Field and Lafayette Park. As part of my research I have walked in these areas since much of Hayden’s poetry deals with his very difficult childhood. During its prime Paradise Valley was the scene of many great jazz performances by artists of the day such as Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and others. Notable residents included Stevie Wonder, the Supremes, Joe Louis, and Smoky Robinson.

Robert Hayden was born as “Asa Bundy” to Asa Sheffey and Ruth Finn. Hayden’s biological parents were impoverished living in a blatantly racist urban society.² Hayden’s mother Ruth moved to Buffalo, New York to pursue a stage career, and eventually divorced Asa Sheffey. When Ruth moved to New York, Asa Bundy was left with the neighbors William and Sue Ellen Hayden. Asa Bundy became Robert Hayden after he was re-named by the Haydens. William and Sue Ellen’s marriage was often filled with arguments and controversy though they were strict Baptists. His biological mother Ruth Sheffey eventually moved back to Detroit next door to the Haydens. Young Robert was often a spectator to fights, and was frequently the recipient of physical abuse. He describes the emotional turmoil of this as living in “the chronic angers of that house.” That lyric is found in *Those Winter Sundays* which is autobiographical, as is *The*

² Fetrow, Fred. Robert Hayden. Twayne Publishers, Boston MA, 1984.

Whipping. Interestingly, Hayden wrote *The Whipping* when he was in Nashville while witnessing a neighbor beat a boy in the front yard.³ *The Whipping* is an autobiographical poem so this provides clues as to the people “across the way” in that poem.

Hayden went to public school in the Detroit Public School system. His eyesight was so poor he was placed in the “sight conversation” class. Young Hayden felt himself an outcast because his peers ostracized him. He could not participate in sports and other activities with boys his age because of his near-sightedness and small physique. These afflictions had a positive effect by fostering his love of poetry. Robert was a devout reader. He felt poetry expressed more than other literature because it said the most in the fewest words.

From 1932-1936 Hayden went to Detroit City College (now Wayne State University). He worked in the theatre and it was there that he developed an ear for drama in his later work.⁴ He married Erma Inez Morris in 1940. Morris was a pianist and a teacher in Detroit Public Schools.

In 1941 he moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan to get a Master’s degree, and studied with W.H. Auden. Auden would be an important influence in his life. At Michigan he worked backstage in the theatre with the University Players. It was at Michigan where he worked with fellow graduate student Arthur Miller in Miller’s play *The Great Disobedience*.⁵ In 1942 Hayden became a member of the Baha’i faith. His faith was developed strongly and influenced many of his poems and life choices. In 1944 he

³ Lynch, Charles. 'Robert Hayden And Gwendolyn Brooks: A Critical Study'. Ph.D. New York University, 1977. Print.

⁴ The Oxford Companion to African American Literature. Oxford University Press. 1997.

⁵ Lynch, Charles. 'Robert Hayden And Gwendolyn Brooks: A Critical Study'. Ph.D. New York University, 1977. Print.

graduated from Michigan and in 1946 was appointed Assistant Professor of English at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Hayden was a professor at Fisk University through the turbulent 1960's. Fisk University was the origin of the now historic "freedom riders." After his first year of teaching at Fisk he was threatened with non-reappointment because in his words he was "an arrogant Yankee nigger who challenged the status quo."⁶

In *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature* Mark A. Sanders asserts Hayden was

An artist passionately committed to the discipline and craft of poetry, Hayden's symbolic density emerges from his manipulation of technical detail. Much of his poetry is highly economical, relying upon compression, understatement, juxtaposition, and montage, which often create highly textured and nuanced irony. Poems such as "Snow," "Approximations," "The Diver," "The Night-Blooming Cereus," and "For a Young Artist" demonstrate the pressure Hayden applies to specific words or concise phrases in order to release a range of suggestions and symbolic possibilities.⁷

Hayden took the job teaching at Fisk University because his poetry was not achieving the critical acclaim he wanted. Though he did not want to teach, he needed an income since he had a wife and daughter. There were many challenges at Fisk including racial tensions in the segregated south, unsupportive faculty who wanted him to publish papers about poetry instead of his own poems (which were gaining acclaim), an

⁶ Interview: May 28, 1970 from Lynch, Charles. 'Robert Hayden And Gwendolyn Brooks: A Critical Study'. Ph.D. New York University, 1977. Print.

⁷ William Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, Trudier Harris. "Robert Hayden," *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, eds. New York: Oxford University Press. 1997.

overloaded teaching schedule, and faculty who wanted him to use his poetry as a platform for the Civil Rights movement. Hayden was very much against being considered a black poet. Rather, he wanted to be a poet who happened to be black. There is some irony in that because Hayden wrote about Malcolm X, Frederick Douglass, Nat Turner, and Cinquez. The poet William Meredith said “Hayden declared himself, at considerable cost in popularity, an American poet rather than a black poet, when for a time there was posited an un-reconcilable difference between the two roles. There is scarcely a line of his which is not identifiable as an experience of black America, but he would not relinquish the title of American writer for any narrower identity.”⁸

By the end of the 1960’s Hayden was finally enjoying some critical acclaim for his poetry when his *Selected Poems* was published. During the iconic year of 1968 he was Visiting Professor of English at the University of Michigan, and was appointed Professor of English in the fall of 1969. He left Fisk University one year after being promoted to Full Professor.

The last ten years of Hayden’s life were his most content. In 1976 he was appointed Consultant of Poetry to the Library of Congress (now Poet Laureate). He received honorary doctorates from Benedict College in Colombia, South Carolina, and his alma mater Wayne State University. He was finally being published in noteworthy anthologies and collections of his own. For roughly the last two years of his life he complained of not feeling well, but refused to see a doctor. He felt that if he didn’t know anything was wrong, he could just deny and hide the fact that he was truly ill. My hypothesis of this mindset is attributed to events in his boyhood in Detroit. Young Robert

⁸ Meredith, William. *Collected Prose Robert Hayden*. The University of Michigan Press. 1984.

was often caught in the middle of fights between his foster parents and biological mother. The Haydens wanted no part of hearing about his real mother, so Robert hid his feelings. Robert Hayden miraculously saw all the negatives of his childhood as a positive. He acknowledges that those experiences with his foster parents and his “inner demons” gave him the confidence to persevere through periods of turmoil and adversity.⁹ Tragically, Robert Hayden did not find out his true identity until he was 40 years old when he tried to get a passport. This revelation plagued his mind through his last days.

Ironically, the night before his passing there was a celebration of his poetry at The University of Michigan entitled “A Tribute to Robert Hayden” sponsored by the center for Afro-American Studies. The Tribute to Robert Hayden continues annually to this day. He did not attend because he was feeling ill. After the ceremony friends came to visit him and he had lively spirits that evening. He passed away the next morning, February 25, 1980, of heart failure.

⁹ Lynch, Charles. 'Robert Hayden And Gwendolyn Brooks: A Critical Study'. Ph.D. New York University, 1977. Print.

CHAPTER THREE

MONET'S "WATERLILIES"

From his collection *Words in Mourning Time*, Robert Hayden writes this poem that exhibits qualities of adversity leading to resolution. According to Fred Fetrow, many poems in this collection share a common theme of human despair, endurance, and the possibility of transcendence. Fetrow further asserts that *Words in Mourning Time* gave Hayden a way to express his "compassionate grief."¹⁰ Adversity abounded in the 1960s and Hayden found comfort in light and color in Monet's *Waterlilies*. He was in James McNeill Whistler's Peacock Room and found inspiration for this poem. Charles Lang Freer had purchased The Peacock Room in 1904. Ironically Freer lived in Hayden's boyhood home of Detroit, Michigan. The Peacock Room is a paneled room in which all the walls are painted as murals in Japanese style, and includes Monet's *Waterlilies*. The Peacock Room was moved to Freer Gallery of Art at The Smithsonian Museum in 1923. For Hayden, Monet's *Waterlilies* provided an escape from the angst of the times. Robert Hayden saw splendor in the painting, which evoked a hopeful quality, and the redemption of human spirit. Hayden was able to draw additional inspiration from being in the Peacock Room thinking of Monet's paintings.

¹⁰ Fetrow, Fred. Robert Hayden Twayne Publishers, Boston MA, 1984.

Today as the news from Selma and Saigon
poisons the air like fallout,
I come again to see
the serene, great picture that I love.

5 Here space and time exist in light
the eye like the eye of faith believes.
The seen, the known
dissolve in iridescence, become
illusive flesh of light
10 that was not, was, forever is.

O light beheld as through refracting tears.
Here is the aura of that world
each of us has lost.
Here is the shadow of its joy.

The first stanza tells of horrendous news from Selma, Alabama, and Saigon, Vietnam. Selma was the sight of notable activity in the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. There were marches organized from Selma to the State Capitol of Montgomery. “Bloody Sunday” was the most awful of these marches. On Bloody Sunday several hundred African Americans assembled for a march. On the Edmund Pettes Bridge in Selma, the marchers were met with police who used tear gas and clubs to beat them relentlessly. Through more attempts the march made it to the State Capitol on March 25, 1965.

On January 30, 1968 Saigon was a major city attacked in the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. “Tet” is the term for Vietnamese Lunar New Year, and in previous years there had been cease fires to observe the holiday. Many cities in South Vietnam were under surprise attack in the early morning hours. The North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong attacked the American Embassy in Saigon shortly after midnight.¹¹ CBS news

¹¹ Walton, Anthony. The Eye of Faith. Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry. Goldstein and Chrisman.

anchor Walter Cronkite reported nightly news about Selma and Saigon that “poisoned the air like fallout” in the spirits of millions of Americans. After Cronkite’s media coverage of the Tet Offensive public opinion of the Vietnam War began to change. According to Anthony Walton, Hayden was very emotionally upset about the possibility of nuclear conflict, and his word choice “fallout” alludes to public issue of the time.¹² The public was feeling emotional fallout of nuclear proportions due to this news.

Additionally, in the first stanza Hayden tells us how he comes to see the great picture he loves. Hayden uses allusion with the poem’s title. In our subconscious, the serene great picture that Hayden loves is juxtaposed with the horrid images of Selma and Saigon.

The second stanza begins describing the painting. Hayden describes space and time being suspended in light. This description of space and time relates to the first stanza by referencing the escape provided in this painting amidst the news of the times. Hayden uses the imagery of light and darkness to describe mystery beyond physical comprehension.¹³ The “eye of faith” is a reference to Hayden’s Baha’i faith. According to Anthony Walton’s essay Baha’i believers “strive to see clearly; sight, vision, and, most important, light are the constant metaphors of their religious texts.” Walton argues that looking at this “serene great picture” was a religious encounter for Hayden. Additionally, human evil for Hayden was the result of misunderstanding the continuum of space, time, and light, which make up the seamless universe that all humans are equally a part of. He believed in one ultimate light. This light that was explained by physics as composed of all

¹² Walton, Anthony. *The Eye of Faith*. Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry. Goldstein and Chrisman

¹³ Fetrow, Fred. Robert Hayden Twayne Publishers, Boston MA, 1984.

the colors of the spectrum was an appealing metaphor for him.¹⁴ Furthermore the second stanza uses metaphors of light. Hayden describes “the seen, the known” as dissolving in iridescence. Iridescence is the partial reflection of white light. According to Walton, Hayden had the ability to stand in front of Monet’s Waterlilies and allow the issues of the time to “dissolve.” Robert Hayden was able to go through a “flesh of light” to a timeless state, the original state, Eden.¹⁵ The last line of the second stanza suggests eternity, the Alpha and Omega.

The final stanza of this poem begins with a line of catharsis suggesting Hayden’s inner emotional turmoil needing to be purged because of the events in Selma and Saigon. Refraction is the change in direction of a light wave due to a surface medium change. The light of faith is cathartically changed into a direction of acceptance through the medium of tears. According to Walton the “lost world of this poem can be: childhood, worldly innocence, or simply good memories.” For a moment, in the presence of great and redemptive art a “shadow of its joy” can be revisited and reclaimed.¹⁶ Hayden said, “that particular Monet helps me to recapture something – to remember something. I would say that one of the valuable functions of all the arts is to make us aware, to illuminate human experience, to make us more conscious, more alive. That’s why they give us pleasure, even when their subjects or themes are unpleasant.”¹⁷ Hayden’s comments mirror the impressionistic movement in art. Perception was vital in impressionistic art, along with the use of light. Reflection, refraction, and how natural light functions were crucial in the movement.

¹⁴ Walton, Anthony. *The Eye of Faith. Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry.* Goldstein and Chrisman

¹⁵ Walton, Anthony. *The Eye of Faith. Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry.* Goldstein and Chrisman

¹⁶ Walton, Anthony. *The Eye of Faith. Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry.* Goldstein and Chrisman

¹⁷ Fetrow, Fred. *Robert Hayden* Twayne Publishers, Boston MA, 1984.

Tom Cipullo's setting of this poem mirrors the qualities of adversity leading to resolution found in Hayden's poem. While the scoring is dense, Cipullo is economical with his material with most of the song constructed from just two themes, and I will call them the *Walter Cronkite theme* and the *restless theme*. By composing these themes in variations he further elicits the adversity leading to resolution in troubled affairs both domestic and abroad. Written from Cipullo's perspective, Hayden's viewing of this painting leads to a catharsis with acceptance.

The *Walter Cronkite theme* (see Example 1) contains two distant key areas, F-sharp and E-flat, related only by the enharmonic A#/Bb. The theme (which I, not Cipullo, have assigned) derives its name from the famous CBS news anchor who discussed the harsh reality of the day. Millions of Americans had no way of comprehending its bloody reality or the injustices of racial prejudice. These two distantly related keys can be thought to represent both the public's naïve view of the issues in contrast to the real images Cronkite was beginning to expose in his newscast. Perception and reality exist peacefully side-by-side in measure 1, but such friendly coexistence does not last for long. The theme is immediately repeated with a hideous dissonance to be illuminated in Hayden's first line of text.

Example 1

Slow, free, expressive ($\text{♩} = 66$)

poco sost. a tempo

Baritone

Slow, free, expressive ($\text{♩} = 66$)

poco sost. a tempo

Piano

p *mp*

In measure 3 (Example 2), the left hand cadence behaves like a V-I in E-major but is juxtaposed with V-I in E-flat in the right hand. This semi-tone dissonance, along with a rhythmically blurring 5/8-meter change musically suggests the adversity to come. A Bb major chord (the enharmonic hinge of the two primary key areas) ushers in the vocal line with a fleeting moment of relational possibility. This consonant chord in the keyboard's lower register suggests stasis, but the fleeting consonance is cast aside by a dissonant F against F# that dissolves this moment high in the keyboard register, as the vocal line enters with its reflection on the news from Selma and Saigon.

Example 2

3 poco sost. a tempo poco riten. a tempo

Bar. *pp*

To - day as the

Cronkite theme

poco sost. a tempo poco riten. a tempo

Pno. *f* *ppp*

Dissonance

In measure 6-7 the news of Selma and Saigon is delivered by the *Cronkite theme* occurring in cold harmonic variation as shown in Example 3.

Example 3

6 *P*

Bar. news from Sel - ma and Sai - gon

Pno.

The *restless theme* occurs in measure 8 with high keyboard registration. The *restless theme* is characterized by its undulating and unsettling pattern containing dissonance and syncopation. In this case the C-major chord is voiced under D-sharp octaves. This cold sound musically heightens the awareness the public had with frightening aspects of nuclear war during the Cold War years, thus matching “poisons the air like fallout.” The vocal line gesture elicits nuclear fallout in the air by being seated in the upper passaggio. Additionally, and appropriately, the vocal line falls on “fallout” suggesting nuclear matter falling in the air.