

***Publications  
of the  
Mississippi  
Philological  
Association  
1996***

**Editors**  
***Rex Stamper  
Hilton Anderson***

**Advisory Editors**  
***Ben Fisher  
Colby H. Kullman  
Nancy Ellis  
David Wheeler  
Anita Stamper***

**Editorial Assistant**  
***Judy Wilson***

# Table of Contents

## Essays

- Revisiting Sleepy Hollow: An Analysis of Edna in *The Awakening* and Daisy in *The Stone Diaries* . . . . .** 1  
Lisa Sims-Brandom
- Searching for a Self in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* . . . . .** 6  
Dana Chamblee-Carpenter
- A Streetcar Named Wildfire: Tennessee Williams' Fulfillment of Paulding's *The Lion of the West* . . . . .** 13  
Greg Carpenter
- A Way of Seeing, a Way of Saying: Sampling Failure and Success of Figurative Language in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green* and *Losing Battles* . . . . .** 18  
Nancy S. Ellis
- It Takes a Village To Weave This Tale . . . . .** 27  
Jo LeCoeur
- The *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine and the Introduction of Spenser's Red Cross Knight . . . . .** 33  
Paul Lorenz
- Robert Flynn and Tim O'Brien: Driving the Vehicle of the Vietnam War as Writing Process . . . . .** 39  
Marth Minford Meas
- An Unshapely Whore and An Enchanting Beauty in William Faulkner's *Light in August* . . . . .** 46  
Caroline Miles
- The Knockout Artist* and the Kirke Myth . . . . .** 51  
Michael P. Spikes
- Arthur Miller's Theory of Tragedy and Its Practice in *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Crucible* . . . . .** 57  
Harksson Yim

## Poetry

<b>Junior Lifesaving</b> .....	63
<b>Knight of the Altar</b> .....	64
<b>Taking the Pledge</b> .....	65
Robert Collins	
<b>Funeral</b> .....	66
<b>Baptism by Fire</b> .....	67
Carolyn Elkins	
<b>Black Chair</b> .....	68
M. Minford-Meas	



## Revisiting Sleepy Hollow: An Analysis of Edna in *The Awakening* and Daisy in *The Stone Diaries*

Lisa Sims-Brandom  
John Brown University

One of the most captivating stories of American childhoods is that of "Rip Van Winkle." Rip, according to legend, disappeared into the woods one day in order "to escape from the labor of the farm and clamor of his wife" (Irving 281). Finding himself on a lovely green knoll, "he fell into a deep sleep" (283) and awoke some twenty years later to a completely new and different world.

Edna Pontellier, the heroine of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* published in 1899, has a similar experience as the Twentieth Century ushered itself in. Ironically however, Daisy, the protagonist of Carol Shields' Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Stone Diaries*, published in 1993 and almost one hundred years after *The Awakening*, is the antithesis--she seems to spend her entire life sleepwalking. Critics have often seen Edna as the forerunner of Twentieth Century feminist ideas while Daisy might be viewed by some as a reflection of women of past centuries, hopelessly out of step with the Twenty-First Century.

The binary oppositions between the two women are strong. Not only is there an awakening on the part of Edna while Daisy sleepwalks, but there are also oppositions regarding self-fulfillment versus self-sacrifice, thinking versus non-thinking, non-conventional versus conventional choices, and epiphany versus a lack of self-knowledge. The central paradox of the two novels seems to center around the question of whether these two women are typical or atypical of their respective centuries. Will a careful analysis of the two reveal a totally new view of the Twenty-First Century woman which will privilege Daisy's characteristics over Edna's? If so, will this new world which once again privileges a woman as self-sacrificing wife and mother be a step forward or a step backward in time?

When *The Awakening* was published in 1899, it awoke to a storm of criticism and scathing reviews, primarily written by men. Women, however, responded by writing Chopin letters praising her work and inviting her to read (Toth 121). It was obvious that they too could identify with Edna's literal and figurative awakening which begins at Madame Antoine's house. She, like Rip Van Winkle, awakes with the conviction that she has slept soundly:

How many years have I slept? . . . The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you (Robert) and me as past relics. How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? And when did our people from Grand Island disappear from the earth? (63)

Figuratively, Edna has awakened to a new reality. As Bender indicates: "she begins her career as a conventional Victorian woman and then awakens in her twenty-eighth year to the joy of Whitman's transcendental eroticism" (466). Edna will soon take a lover, Arobin, and later she will awake even more fully to a realization that desire does not always equal love. She realizes that the waking realities of motherhood and marriage, as well as the conventional Victorian mores of religious and social convention, continue to intrude upon her life, causing "her feminine liberation . . . [to be almost] narcoleptic, a

movement in and out of consciousness" (Birnbaum 301). As she analyzes her own personal stance at the novel's conclusion, she indicates, however, which of the two positions she favors: "perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life" (184).

Daisy, the protagonist of *The Stone Diaries*, chooses the latter position--illusions accompanied by sleepwalking--throughout her life. The waking realities of motherhood, marriage, religious, and social convention are simply accepted by Daisy without question. According to Turbide, *The Stone Diaries* "chronicles the ordinary life of Daisy Goodwill from her birth in Tyndall, Man. in 1905 through marriage, motherhood, work and old age" (76). Toward the end of her life, Daisy acknowledges the difficulty of choosing reality over illusion as she encourages Reverend Rick, a homosexual, to stay in the closet:

"Don't tell your mother," she says after a minute.

"But I can't go on living a lie."

"Why not?" Then she pauses. "Most people do." (334)

Even as death approaches for Daisy in her eightieth year, she continues to sleep:

She entered sleep, as through a tunnel, still groping in the past, breathing in like a species of inferior oxygen the real and imagined episodes of her life, and then a kind of exhaustion took over, or perhaps boredom--in any case a rapid fading of color and of line, and a failure of the mechanism that had previously called up the earlier scenes. (358)

In addition to awakening or sleepwalking as a binary opposition in these two works, another centers on the theme of self-fulfillment versus self-sacrifice. For Edna, Victorian mores simply assumed a woman's commitment to her children. The epitome of such a woman in *The Awakening* is, of course, Edna's foil--Madame Ratignolle. In a discussion between the two women: Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for any one. Then had followed a rather heated argument; the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language . . . "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; But I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me" (79-80).

Edna longs to be self-fulfilled, not self-sacrificing for her children and her husband. She reveals to her friend Madame Ratignolle her desire to paint again, "Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day . . . I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something" (92). As she prepares to leave her husband for Robert, she reiterates her desire for him and for him alone, "We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence" (179).

Daisy, on the other hand, is scarcely affected by any feminist notions of self-fulfillment. She chooses instead to make the needed sacrifices for her husband and children. She rarely takes time even to think about the nature of her soul:

Not that she's ever paid much attention to her soul; in her long life she's been far too preoccupied for metaphysics--her husband, her children, the many things a woman has to do--and shyly embarrassed about the carpenter from Nazareth, unwilling to look him in the eye or call him by his first name, knowing she would be powerless to draw him into an interesting conversation . . . . (320)

Edna obviously is a thinking woman as contrasted to the seemingly non-thinking Daisy. As she remembers her stay at Grand Isle, she analyzes why

this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself--her present self--was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect. (67)

In contrast, Daisy's daughter Alice, while sitting with her dying mother, longs for her mother to speak of her feelings:

Have you been happy in your life? she'd planned to ask her mother . . . . Have you found fulfillment? . . . Have you had moments of genuine ecstasy? Has it been worth it? Have you ever looked at, say, a picture or a great building or read a paragraph in a book and felt the world suddenly expand and, at the same instant, contract and harden into a kernel of perfect purity? . . . Instead they speak of apple juice, gravy, screams in the corridor, the doctor, who is Jamaican . . . . (326)

Fe remarks that Daisy is "oddly lacking in introspection and . . . rarely recounts her thoughts. She apparently retains the reticence typical of the autobiographer about personal matters, voicing few negative opinions of family or friends and mentioning sex only briefly" (173).

Edna's nonconventionality in fulfilling Victorian mores is evident throughout *The Awakening*. After an evening of Chaucerian story telling, Edna relates a story of a man who paddled away one night in a boat with her lover and never returned. Later she admits her love for Robert to Mademoiselle Reisz:

"Are you in love with Robert?"

"Yes," said Edna . . . .

"Why?" asked her companion. "Why do you love him when you ought not to?" . . .

"Why? Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing, because he has two lips and a square chin, . . . Because--." (135)

As Edna and Robert prepare to run away together, she announces, "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose" (178).

Daisy, however, continually chooses conventionality over non-conventional behavior. An ardent reader of *Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's*, and *The*

*Canadian Home Companion*, Daisy takes their advice on lovemaking, "Try to make your husband believe that you are always ready for his entreaties, even though his actual lovemaking may be sporadic and unpredictable" (185-6). As she is dying, she tells her daughter Alice, "Women back then were encouraged to take an interest in their husbands' careers--but it was never clear to me. Not clear. Just what those meetings were about, what they were for" (327).

That Edna experiences epiphany in her brief life of twenty-eight years cannot be denied. Beginning with her sexual awakening and love for Robert and ending with her suicide as she contemplates perhaps a series of future lovers, but no love, Edna has those brief but piercing moments of insight into her very being.

Daisy does not experience epiphany, but ironically all of the supporting characters in *The Stone Diaries* do. Clarentine Flett leaves her husband over \$2.50 which he withholds from her in order to consult a dentist. Cuyler Goodwill, Daisy's father, is converted at his wife's grave by a sudden rainbow and an October anointing. Alice, at the age of nineteen, realizes she is on the verge of becoming someone else and then changes and goes in another direction. It is Daisy only who never has enough insight into herself and who remains unchanged from her birth until her death. She, throughout her eighty years, was "only Mrs. Flett going through the motions of being Mrs. Flett" (314).

Edna and Daisy are two protagonists separated by a century of writing. Edna is a forerunner of feminism--her concern with sexual freedom even outside the bounds of marriage, her desire for self-fulfillment, her non-conventionality, her thinking processes, and her epiphanies are now familiar themes to readers of postmodern literature. Daisy is a woman who lives a conventional life in the Twentieth Century and is perhaps more reflective of the Victorian woman living by Shields' adage, "There are chapters in every life which are seldom read, and certainly not aloud" (111). Her story is anything but confessional.

One could say then that both are atypical in the centuries in which they lived. A modern woman, when queried, would likely answer that the terms *awakening*, *self-fulfillment*, *thinking*, *non-conventional*, and *epiphany* would represent the privileged ones, while *sleep-walking*, *self-sacrifice*, *non-thinking*, *conventional* and *non-awareness* would be the non-privileged choices. Considering Edna's suicide after being frustrated in love and self-fulfillment, one might pose the question of whether Daisy's life might have represented the better choice. When questioned about her motivation for writing about such a heroine, Carol Shields responded by saying, "Well, I didn't think there were enough novels about women who didn't make the historical record" (Graeber 3). Shields herself identifies with Daisy's domestic existence, indicating, "None of the novels I read seemed to have anything to do with my life . . . So that was the kind of novel I tried to write" (Graeber 3). In essence, Daisy is Everywoman. She comes to no harm; she has no Freudian nightmares (Brookner 28). One of Daisy's epitaphs even reads as follows:

Now there's a woman who made a terrific meatloaf, who knew how to repot a drooping rubber plant, who bid a smart no-trump hand, who wore a hat well, who looked after her personal hygiene, who wrote her thank-you notes promptly, who kept up, who went down, went down and down



and down, who missed the point, the point of it all, but was, nevertheless, almost unfailingly courteous to others. (354)

Daisy's life, as enumerated in *The Stone Diaries*, reveals the "beauties and contributions of a life spent in nurturing men, children, and plants. Domesticity is the heart of this novel" (Fe 174).

As the Twenty-First Century approaches in just four short years, women will likely have many opportunities to continue the debate over the question of feminism versus domesticity. Is the idea of a self-sacrificing wife and mother an obsolete one, or is it still more typical, as Carol Shields' Daisy, than atypical like Edna? Will women truly awaken like Rip Van Winkle to a new world where women share the power equally in the workplace as well as in familial responsibilities?

As Edna remembers the birth of her children, she speaks of "an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go" (182). Whether that "great unnumbered multitude of souls" in the next century become like Edna or Daisy may well depend upon the way humankind responds to the essential questions raised on feminism or domesticity.

### Works Cited

- Bender, Bert. "The Teeth of Desire: *The Awakening* and *The Descent of Man*." *American Literature* 63 (1991): 459-473.
- Birnbaum, Ichele A. "'Alien Hands': Kate Chopin and the Colonization of Race." *American Literature* 66 (1994): 301-323.
- Brookner, Anita. "A Family and its Good Fortune." Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *Spectator* Sept. 4, 1993: 28-29.
- Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. New York: Avon Books, 1972.
- Fe, Margery. "Auto/Biographical Fictions." Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *Canadian Literature* Spring 1995: 173-174.
- Graeber, Laurel. "Inside Daisy Flett." Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *The New York Times Book Review* Mar. 27, 1994: sec. 7:3.
- Irving, Washington. "Rip Van Winkle." *The American Tradition in Literature*. 8th ed. Ed. George Perkins and Barbara Perkins. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1994. 277-288.
- Shields, Carol. *The Stone Diaries*. New York: Penquin Books, 1993.
- Toth, Emily. "Notes--Kate Chopin on Divine Love and Suicide: Two Rediscovered Articles." *American Literature* 63 (1991): 115-121.
- Turbide, Diane. "A Prairie Pulitzer." Rev. of *The Stone Diaries*, by Carol Shields. *Maclean's* May 1, 1995: 76-77.

## Searching for a Self in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Dana Chamblee-Carpenter  
The University of Mississippi

In the postmodernist era, feminist and African-American activists and theorists struggle to answer questions about identity. What is a woman? What constitutes race? Is there some essential aspect of our nature that defines our gender and race, or are we a construct of society and language? Surprisingly, as these theorists debate the issues of identity on the grounds of established theory, biology, and innovative science, they seemingly ignore the plethora of written accounts of women and African-Americans investigating their own personal identities. Interestingly, these two groups have established a particular tradition in writing autobiographies for several reasons, not the least of which is an attempt to define their selves and develop a voice that might be heard in the white, male-dominated society and literary tradition. These autobiographies provide first-hand records of this quest for the self and explore the many avenues of and influences on the development of identity. Consequently, they provide a perfect location to examine the intricate theoretical issues of selfhood.

An analysis of Maya Angelou's autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, underscores the issues relevant to a young, African-American female's quest to know and develop her self. Angelou admits: "I decided many years ago to invent myself. I had obviously been invented by someone else--by a whole society--and I didn't like their invention" ("Maya" 88). In *Caged Bird*, Maya Angelou, the adult poet and writer-subject, re-examines her "other" self, the self as it develops and begins to define its identity. As Eva Lennox Birch argues, this process of development "is painful, as one by one Angelou faces and has to overcome the constraints imposed upon her by her race and gender" (126-127). Within the autobiography, the young Maya becomes aware of the social norms that attempt to identify and label her. Society has already "invented" her, but rather than accept the reflections of her self seen in the eyes of the black community around her and the white society at large, Angelou defines her identity in spite of those social mirrorings.

Throughout the autobiography, Angelou is acutely aware of being looked at. In the opening prologue, a very young Angelou struggles to remember her lines at a church Easter presentation: "What are you looking at me for?/ I didn't come to stay . . ." (1), and in a struggle to remember, she actually forgets lines, ultimately ending up with only "What are you looking at me for?" (1) before urinating on herself and running out of the church in embarrassment. Angelou clearly establishes her discomfort at being looked at and, later, at being defined by the black community. Moreover, Angelou is also aware of the power of the white vision that consistently attempts to negate her race and gender. For instance, as Angelou anxiously awaits her eighth grade graduation, she is full of hopeful anticipation of the future--her promising future of infinite possibilities. However, the white principal invited to speak at the graduation momentarily shatters her dreams: "The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and

Edisons and Gaugins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises" (151). Angelou sees her self and her classmates in the reflection of the white man's vision. Her infinite possibilities unravel, and she sees a future of "maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous" (152). Angelou actually loses her sense of identity in the aftermath of this whitewashing--"My name had lost its ring of familiarity and I had to be nudged to go and receive my diploma" (154). The mirror image revealed to her by the social norms mandated by white male society momentarily erases her identity. As in Lacan's mirror stage, the young Angelou acknowledges a self that is other, a self that is being looked at, a self defined by the black community and white society.

These images are hardly "ideal," yet from the beginning, Angelou seems to have a sense of her self that challenges society's perceptions of her identity. Interestingly, Angelou's prologue focuses on the black community's inability to perceive the "true" Maya, as she imagines one day when all the people "were going to run up to [her] and say, 'Marguerite [sometimes it was 'dear Marguerite'], forgive us please, we didn't know who you were'" (2). They do not know her, but they think they do. They think she is like every other young, black girl. Moreover, they see only an external awkwardness that they define as ugliness--"I [Angelou] was described by our playmates as being shit color" (17) and "our elders said unkind things about my features" (17). In contrast to these reflections of her ugliness, the young Angelou imagines her self looking "like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody's dream of what was right with the world" (1). Although Angelou apparently succumbs initially to the powerful influence of the white vision, she also indicates that she has a sense of her self that not only challenges the actual reflection in the mirror, but also challenges the negative image of her self projected by the black community.

In her vision of her self, Angelou is not an ugly, awkward, black girl. Yet, as Birch suggests, "Blackness itself was no disbarment in Angelou's eyes to beauty. Her brother Bailey was lauded for his velvet black skin" (128). Additionally, for the young Angelou, the white community was something "to be dreaded" (20), and she "remember[s] never really believing that whites were really real" (20). Imagining herself to be white was less a *real* desire to be white, than it was a need for Angelou to feel beautiful. Unfortunately, little white girls did represent "what was right with the world," so the surest way of changing the perception of her self as ugly was to reinvent her self as white. Consequently, Angelou's anecdote simultaneously represents the struggle of a young black girl against the social norms of "what is right with the world" and her attempts to define her self in spite of the preconceived ideas about her identity reflected in the eyes of the black community.

Angelou's hazy fantasy about the non-people white folks quickly dissipates as she faces the real consequences of a white dominated society. As previously indicated, Angelou becomes painfully aware of the negating power of that white society at her eighth grade graduation. Angelou cannot even find her reflection in the principal's vision of the future, and she momentarily loses her sense of identity. However, Angelou eventually defines her self in spite of the white man's vision. After completing his "inspirational" address, the principal leaves, and a young black boy, the valedictorian of Angelou's class,

leads the audience in the "Negro national anthem" which reinvigorates Angelou as she becomes "no longer simply a member of the proud graduating class of 1940: [she] was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race" (156). She reinvents the future for her race and her self. Later, Angelou aggressively challenges the white principal's vision of her potential as she fights to become the first African-American conductor on the trolley in San Francisco: "I'd picture myself, dressed in a neat blue serge suit, my money changer swinging jauntily at my waist, and a cheery smile for the passengers" (225). When she learns that they do not accept African-American employees on the streetcars, Angelou refuses to allow the white world to disrupt her picture of her self as a conductor: "From disappointment, I gradually ascended the emotional ladder to haughty indignation, and finally to that state of stubbornness where the mind is locked like the jaws of an enraged bulldog" (225). Angelou recognizes the prejudice of the white vision that erases all sense of self--"the miserable little encounter had nothing to do with me, the *me of me* (227 italics mine), and she even struggles with the "Negro organizations" (to which she appealed for assistance) whose officials "thought [her] mad" (227) for challenging tradition. Yet, Angelou determines to make them see her as a self, not a stereotype, and particularly, she makes them see her as *her* self, as a conductor on the streetcars.

However, although Angelou's autobiography functions much like Lacan's mirror, reflecting a sense of self as other, in the narrative, Angelou reflects that other self in terms of language. In the Lacanian mirror stage, the child has not yet acquired language, and consequently, he has not yet entered the symbolic order. Angelou's reflection of her self in her autobiography exists within that language symbolic order, and this further complicates her presentation of her developing identity. Although similar to Freud's version of the Oedipal cycle, in the Lacanian model, the phallus represents the real that was forfeited in order to gain access to the symbolic. As Silverman argues, this lack of the real initiates a system of desire in which the male wishes to obtain "the cultural privileges and positive values" (183) associated with the role of the father in patriarchal society.

The female in the Lacanian model, as Silverman indicates, "neither succumbs to as complete an alienation from the real, nor enjoys as full an association with the symbolic" (186). Consequently, although both the male and female subjects in Lacan's model suffer from various lacks or separations, the female develops her identity based on a lack of lack. As Cixous argues, this effectively keeps the female "outside the Symbolic, that is outside language" (483), and consequently, "without man she would be indefinite, indefinable" (483). Because the female lacks the penis, she has no access to the phallus, consequently remaining connected to the real; but she also "acquires" language and so participates in the symbolic.

Whereas Lacan's male subject leaves the real for the symbolic, the female subject effectively splits to participate in both the real (phallus-less) and the symbolic (language). Moreover, as Catherine Belsey suggests, the female subject in the symbolic order splits once again to "participate both in the liberal-humanist discourse of freedom . . . and at the same time in the specifically feminine discourse" (597-98). Although men also seemingly operate both as human and as man, they avoid a similar split in subjectivity because, as the dominant social force and fully situated in the symbolic, they

mandate for themselves what it means to be human and man. Thus man and huMAN are synonymous. The female, however, must learn to define her self while functioning in the symbolic male discourse that has already defined her role as woman. The female subject is not simply huMAN. In Irigaray's words, "*She is neither one nor two*" (26), she is both. Consequently, the female in Lacan's model remains split. She remains aware of her self as other and of her self as real.

In *Caged Bird*, we can see the effect of the male symbolic on the black female self, and the clash of the symbolic and the real within that female self, through Angelou's representation of her self and the process of defining her identity. In particular, Angelou's reconstruction of her rape brutally expresses the violent aftermath of a wielded male power on the female body. Initially lured into the arms of Mr. Freeman (her mother's live-in lover) by the promise of tenderness and affection, a confused eight-year-old Maya misinterprets the molestation as the act of a true father: "From the way he was holding me I knew he'd never let me go or let anything bad ever happen to me. This was probably my real father and we had found each other at last" (61). However, months later, an older, more independent Maya no longer needs Mr. Freeman's "affections," so when he approaches her again, she rejects him: "I didn't need him to hold me any more" (65). Mr. Freeman refuses to take no for an answer, and he rapes her:

Then there was the pain. A breaking and entering when even the senses are torn apart. The act of rape on an eight-year-old body is a matter of the needle giving because the camel can't. The child gives, because the body can, and the mind of the violator cannot. (65)

Maya, the child, the body, the real, succumbs to the force of Mr. Freeman, the man, the symbolic; and in the aftermath, Angelou loses herself again--"My belly and behind were as heavy as cold iron, but it seemed my head had gone away and pure air had replaced it on my shoulders" (67).

Interestingly, Irigaray echoes the physical brutalities of rape to express what happens to a female self in male society:

This autoeroticism is disrupted by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of the two lips by a violating penis, an intrusion that distracts and deflects the woman from this "self caressing" she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure in sexual relations. (24)

Just as Angelou "disappears" after Mr. Freeman "imposes" his own image of her as "Desire," the female self risks losing her sense of identity by necessarily functioning within the symbolic order dominated by a masculine discourse. In fact, as Cixous argues, many women escape from this torn self into silence or hysteria: "Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech . . . They are decapitated, their tongues cut off . . . In the end, the woman pushed to hysteria is the woman who disturbs" (486). Symbolically, Angelou loses her head after the rape, and she also loses her voice. Speaking only to her beloved brother Bailey, and then only out of necessity, Angelou remains mute for almost five years, and in her silence, she disturbs:

When I refused to be the child they knew and accepted me to be, I was called impudent and my muteness sullenness.

For a while I was punished for being so uppity that I wouldn't speak; and then came the thrashings given by any relative who felt himself offended. (73)

For a time, Angelou retreats from the symbolic world of language, but Mrs. Flowers, a compassionate, African-American gentlewoman in the Stamps community, convinces Angelou that speaking is a necessity. She coaxes Angelou back into the speaking world and thus back into the symbolic order.

In order to disrupt the dominant male discourse, the female subject must position herself within the symbolic order, yet she also remains the other, still connected to the real and outside of that symbolic order. Often in *Caged Bird*, Angelou effectively disrupts the masculine discourse just as she challenges the images of her self reflected by society. In other words, not only does she reinvent her self, but she also reinterprets traditional male symbols as they apply to her own identity. For example, she refers to her vagina as her "pocketbook," heeding Momma Henderson's advice to "Keep your legs closed, and don't let nobody see your pocketbook" (61). Remembering this advice as Mr. Freeman molests her, Angelou maintains a sense of worth about her self and her sexuality. Irigaray describes the traditional view of the female sexual organ as "'lack,' 'atrophy' and . . . the penis being the only sexual organ of recognized value" (23). Angelou challenges this traditional notion of the female sexual organ as a hole, a nothing, by implying that it contains some value as a pocketbook might hold money.

Similarly, Angelou disrupts the most significant symbolic representation of woman in the male discourse when she challenges traditional notions of motherhood. Mary Jane Lupton suggests that Angelou's series of autobiographies focus "both literally and metaphorically [on] the significance of motherhood" (260). However, in *Caged Bird*, Angelou seems more driven by the *absence* of the mother-child contact, at least until the end when she becomes a mother herself. The narrative focuses entirely on Angelou's development as a young, African-American SELF, not her role as a daughter, or a granddaughter, or even as a mother. She reflects on her relationships with her mother and grandmother since they certainly affect her development as an individual. Yet even these relationships challenge traditional notions of mother and child. For example, as a young girl, Angelou has no recollection of her mother, so she creates a mental image to represent a symbolic Mother:

I could cry anytime I wanted to by picturing my mother . . . lying in her coffin. Her hair, which was black, was spread out on a tiny little white pillow and her body was covered with a sheet. The face was brown, like a big O, and since I couldn't fill in the features I printed M O T H E R across the O, and tears would fall down my cheeks like warm milk. (43)

This hardly represents Lacan's vision of the ideal symbolic Mother, but it does indicate Angelou's representation of the ideal mother for her. Angelou's mother needed to be dead in order for Angelou to avoid feeling abandonment, and the melodramatic M O T H E R effectively erases any real sense of loss. Moreover, when Angelou eventually faces the terrifying moment of actually

meeting her mother, her description still challenges any traditional concept of Mother--"To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power . . . She was too beautiful to have children. I had never seen a woman as pretty as she who was called 'Mother'" (50). Throughout *Caged Bird*, Angelou depicts her mother as neglectful, beautiful but always absent. She left the eight-year-old Maya in the care of the man who would rape her, and then, unable to deal with the shattered and mute consequence, she again sends the children to the care of their grandmother.

Angelou's representation of her own motherhood at the close of the autobiography seemingly resembles the ideal symbolic mother. Although initially afraid of her new son, after her mother's coaxing, Angelou seems to accept that mothering comes naturally:

But after closer investigation I found that I was lying on my stomach with my arm bent at a right angle. Under the tent of blanket, which was poled by my elbow and forearm, the baby slept touching my side.

Mother whispered, "See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking." (246)

This scene seems somewhat ironic when considering that the advice comes from Angelou's own mother who apparently was never "for the right thing" during Angelou's own childhood. Birch concurs that in Angelou's portrayal of her mother, she "was deliberately exploding another stereotypical myth: that motherhood in itself is completely fulfilling, that mothering is a biological rather than a social function" (131). However, Birch argues that Angelou's "own life and love of her son deny this" (131). Interestingly, in the later autobiographies, Angelou frequently leaves her son with babysitters, seeing him only on weekends, and, reminiscent of her own childhood, Angelou also leaves him with her mother for several months in order to tour Europe with *Porgy and Bess*. Additionally, Angelou frequently comments in interviews that although she loves her son, she has "never been in love with him" ("Black" 63). Although Angelou certainly takes her role as a mother seriously, she also seems aware of maintaining her own separate sense of self, not an Angelou who is either all mother or just mother, and she challenges the traditional concept of an all consuming and forever nurturing motherhood.

In fact, in an interview, Angelou states, "To bring up a person healthily you have to be liberated. You have to be liberated from all sorts of things, for one, from being in love with the child" ("Black" 63). Throughout *Caged Bird*, Angelou liberates herself from the negative reflections of the black community and white society, and she challenges the restrictions of a male dominated symbolic order. In effect, Angelou liberates her self in order to "raise" a healthy concept of her self as a young, African-American female. She embodies the struggle of women to define their "selves" in a white, male-dominated society where definitions of identity pre-exist. Although Angelou's self in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is certainly in part a construction, it challenges any social or historical confines and becomes a construction of Angelou's own design.

## Works Cited

- Angelou, Maya. "The Black Scholar Interviews Maya Angelou." *Conversations with Maya Angelou*. Ed. Jeffrey Elliot. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989. 52-67.
- . *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Bantam, 1969.
- . "Maya Angelou Raps." *Conversations with Maya Angelou*. Ed. Jeffrey Elliot. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1989. 86-96.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Constructing the Subject." *Feminisms*. Eds. Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991. 593-609.
- Birch, Eva Lennox. *Black American Women's Writing*. New York: Harvester, 1994.
- Cixous, Helene. "Castration or Decapitation?" *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Eds. Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1989. 479-491.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Lupton, Mary Jane. "Singing the Black Mother: Maya Angelou and Autobiographical Continuity." *Black America Literature Forum* 24 (1990): 257-275.
- Silverman, Kaja. *The Subject of Semiotics*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.



## A Streetcar Named Wildfire: Tennessee Williams' Fulfillment of Paulding's *The Lion of the West*

Greg Carpenter  
University of Mississippi

When Eugene O'Neill emerged from a tuberculosis sanatorium in 1912, he officially began his career as a playwright. Decades later, after four Pulitzer Prizes and the Nobel Prize, O'Neill has emerged, for many, as the founder of American Drama, even though, thanks in part to the legend of Edwin Booth, and perhaps even more so to that of his brother, John Wilkes, everyone seems vaguely aware that the American theater enjoyed tremendous success during the nineteenth century. In fact, O'Neill's own father was a highly acclaimed actor and contemporary of the Booths. Yet, few see any connection between the early American plays and those which followed the appearance of O'Neill. Instead, O'Neill's American predecessors appear as insignificant peddlers of frivolity, doomed to dusty volumes of long-out-of-print anthologies. In fact, early American Drama has suffered a fate unique among the major genres; for certainly no one seriously proposes that the American novel began with Fitzgerald, poetry with Frost, or short fiction with Hemingway. Perhaps as Arthur Hobson Quinn notes, American drama has suffered because many of the most popular nineteenth century plays were never published in an effort to prevent rival theater companies from stealing them (xi).

Ironically, one can say with reasonable certainty that Williams knew nothing of Paulding's farce when composing his masterpiece, since *The Lion of the West* had been "lost" until after the Broadway debut of *Streetcar*. Paulding wrote *The Lion of the West* at the behest of James H. Hackett, an actor known at the time for his popular portrayals of Rip Van Winkle and Falstaff. Like most actors of the time, Hackett protected his "property," which resulted in its ultimate disappearance. Until James Tidwell discovered a written version of the play in England, which Hackett had submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for censorship prior to a London performance, we only had sketches of the play's content from a handful of theater reviews. It is impossible to assess the degree to which the current text resembles Paulding's original creation, since the play was revised significantly by John Augustus Stone, and then by William Bayle Bernard prior to its debut in England. As Tidwell notes, with this third version, Bernard actually supplied the play with its alternate title--*The Kentuckian, or a Trip to New York* (9).

The scenario for *The Lion of the West* focuses on the daughter of a New York merchant family and her two English suitors, one of whom is an imposter. However, the real attraction in this play rests not with the dramatic situation, but rather with the intervention of the girl's cousin, Nimrod Wildfire, an energetic, rough-hewn Kentuckian-turned-Congressman, who bears more than a passing similarity to Davy Crockett. Paulding contrasts Wildfire with another cultural archetype, Mrs. Wollope, a visiting Englishwoman intent on observing the barbarous nature of the uncivilized Americans. Just as Wildfire closely resembles Davy Crockett, most critics agree that Wollope bears a striking resemblance to Mrs. Frances Trollope, author of the unflattering *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, and the mother of the English novelist

## A Way of Seeing, a Way of Saying: Sampling Failure and Success of Figurative Language in Eudora Welty's *A Curtain of Green* and *Losing Battles*

Nancy S. Ellis  
Mississippi State University

Eudora Welty's sense of the human comedy has inspired much critical attention through the years, with that attention frequently addressing her stylistic ability to render character and humor through the speech of her native South. Louis Dollarhide, Jennifer Uglow, and Robert Drake are among critics and reviewers who have commented on Welty's "ear" for and artistry with the patterns and comic power of Southern speech.<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Holland, in "Dialogue as Reflection of Place in *The Ponder Heart*," presents the spoken language as actual "verbalization of place," which, like humor, is central to Welty's fiction (168). And Cleanth Brooks, addressing Welty's "treatment of the folk culture of the South" in "Eudora Welty and the Southern Idiom," observes that she has thoroughly captured the force and vitality of the language--from its vocabulary, rhythms, accents, and intonations to its idiom and metaphor (93, 96). Yet a general criticism of the speech of Welty's characters, particularly in the first two collections of stories, *A Curtain of Green* and *Other Stories* (1941) and *The Wide Net* (1943), is that the idioms are "cliches and trite expressions [which] . . . 'reflect unimaginative thinking'" (Brooks 101).

This spoken language--this "way of saying" that Welty has mastered--we know most intimately through talkers such as Edna Earle Ponder, Leota from the beauty shop, and Sister from the P.O. Logically, these talkers are not so much "act-ers," as they are actors who script their own lives, unabashedly turning personal experiences into public performances.

Consider the oral cliches, expressed as similes, in these examples from four stories in *A Curtain of Green* and *Other Stories* [page citations for this text are from *Collected Stories*.] In "A Worn Path," when the young white hunter asks Phoenix Jackson what she's doing in the ditch, Phoenix responds with "[l]ying on my back like a June-bug waiting to be turned over" (145). In "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," Mrs. Watts joins others in bribing Lily to go to Ellisville (the state home for the feeble-minded) by offering Lily "a pink crepe de Chine brassiere with adjustable shoulder straps." Mrs. Watts defends the intimacy of this offer by declaring, "Well, [Lily] needs it . . . What would they think if she ran all over Ellisville in a petticoat looking like a Fiji?" (8). In "Petrified Man," a story that is almost entirely dialogue, when Leota contrasts her busy day in the beauty parlor to her unemployed husband's idleness, she remarks that he "lay[s] around the house like a rug" (22). And, finally, in the monologue that is "Why I Live at the P.O." Sister, the postmistress of china Grove, dramatizes her self-imposed predicament with phrases such as "dizzy as a witch" (48) and "drank like a fish" (51), while boasting that she'd "sue . . . like a shot" (54) and remarking that family members look "like a fool" (49, 52) or a "half-wit" (48).<sup>2</sup>

When Brooks examines similar idioms found in *A Curtain of Green*, he

dubs them "glib comparisons" but defends them as "well-worn phrases" integral to "all oral art" (101). Likewise Holland accepts such predictable and identifiable oral structures by seeing them as "uttered . . . for the taste of the words and intimacy of the idiom" (170).<sup>3</sup> On the surface these "glib comparisons" are delightful capsules of the comic, but when reconsidered within the context of the story, their triteness diminishes. The careful reader discovers these similes are well-chosen, even revelatory idioms, and as such bear the weight of metaphor.<sup>4</sup> Reconsider these comparisons for their metaphoric potential.

Comparing herself to a June-bug lying on its back, with legs probably flailing in the air, seems to be Phoenix's way of laughing at her situation, but the image also suggests her vulnerability and thus underscores her helplessness. Similar seriousness is embedded in the other examples as well. Mrs. Watts' self-justification through the invocation of the image of Fijis conjures up pictures of bare-breasted natives in issues of *National Geographic* once routinely hidden from curious children by school librarians as well as images of heathen hordes considered to be in desperate need of good old southern protestant missionary efforts. But by extension these reactions also reveal the community's tendencies toward public scandals and closed-mindedness. While Leota's unimaginative comparison of her unemployed husband to a rug seems flippant, it can be interpreted as her subconscious way of "putting her husband in his place" and thus as another example of how "under foot" these women see men. Then while the whole of Sister's incessant chatter seems a trivial but amusing plea for attention, her bravura rings false as it disparages relatives and reveals family secrets and bitter jealousies.

When considering such embedded metaphoric power in Welty's writing, it is important to recognize that figurative language is not limited to the idiomatic similes of her characters's speech--that is, to "way of saying"--nor is it always grounded in the comic. Welty frequently indulges in common figures of speech such as simile and metaphor as well as personification and metonymy to create a "way of seeing." These, too, often expand in meaning until they, like the idioms of colloquial speech, become metaphoric. But critics generally have relatively little to say about this facet of her style.

Welty has said of herself: "I have a visual mind and like things translated into what the eye sees" (Qtd. In Skaggs 161). The truth of that statement is evidenced in Welty's fiction as well as in her photography. Suzanne Marrs has stated: "Welty's vision as a photographer and her vision as a story writer were similar: what interested her in one art form interested her in another" (283). Marrs makes this judgement:

What unites all of Welty's photographs and much of her early fiction is scope. The well-framed photographic image is highly selective--it includes relatively little; it captures a single, decisive moment in time. In these terms, Welty's first two story collections [*A Curtain of Green* and *The Wide Net*] seem photographic in nature. (290-91)

The result of this interest in the visual is an aspect of Welty's style in which passages of direct exposition often nearly teem with figurative language, particularly similes. In fact, of the seventeen stories in *A Curtain of Green*, those that are almost entirely exposition (stories like "The Whistle," "The

Key," and "A Memory") are the most laden with common figures of speech. This "way of seeing" is not always successful, however; at times, Welty's images seem abrupt or inappropriate, or so exotic or frequent or random that they fragment rather than focus the reader's attention.

Consider these three examples from *A Curtain of Green*. In "The Key," an unbuckled suitcase hangs apart "like a stupid pair of lips" (29). In "Powerhouse," Little Brother, even minus his clarinet, looks like "an East Indian queen, implacable, divine, and full of snakes" (135). Even more strangely in the same story, when a bubble "shoots out" on Powerhouse's lips, it does so "like a plate on a counter" (134). Indeed, with each of these similes, Welty "snaps" a picture for her reader to see, but in the context of the story the picture seems to come from nowhere and to go nowhere. What does the unbuckled suitcase have to do with lips? Nothing, unless the reader wants to find some connection in the muteness of the deaf couple to label that muteness stupidity. What about Little Brother makes him look like a queen, and one full of snakes at that? Is he a statue of some kind? Wouldn't it be more believable to imagine a clarinet player as a snake charmer? What's the connection between the bubble and the lips and the plate and the counter that Welty wants her reader to make? Speed? Motion? Size? Though sufficiently visual, by failing to contribute clearly to the story these strange similes create distraction for the reader.

Such distraction compounds into near chaos in other places. By the time the reader has reached the end of the third paragraph in "Old Mr. Marblehall" he has been overwhelmed by figurative language. In the third paragraph alone, along with other descriptive details about the "ancestral home," Welty asks her reader to see that the box maze in the yard is a "trap," the door knocker looks "like a grasping fish," the [b]rocades" (or draperies) are "as tall as wicked queens in Italian tales," the sofas are shaped like an "S," the shutters look "like old eyelids," and the son of this house "stares out like a kitten" (192). In addition to their sheer number, the problem is that none of these work together for any readily discernible purpose, unless that purpose is to represent clutter and confusion appropriate to the story.

This tendency toward sometimes awkward figurative detail, as evidenced in these examples from *A Curtain of Green*, continues in *The Wide Net* where both Diana Trilling and Robert Penn Warren criticize it. This tendency is most likely a part of the "technical virtuosity" that Trilling criticizes in her review of the second collection of stories as calling attention to the author and away from the author's object (85-86). Warren, in the noted essay "Love and Separateness in Eudora Welty," similarly comments that there is

a good deal of the falsely poetic in . . . [*The Wide Net*'s] style, metaphors that simply pretend to an underlying logic, and metaphors (and descriptions) that, though good in themselves, are irrelevant to the business in hand. (21)

But thankfully this awkwardness is not ever-present in Welty's early works. Just as Welty's idiomatic expressions in her character's speech are successful as a "way of saying," there are many places where her "way of seeing" is equally successful and perhaps more powerful and significant than the reproduced oral idiom. These places are the passages of exposition in which

she controls and focuses various figures of speech with discernible design or purpose. The following examples, some from the stories already sampled for oral idiom, show how she successfully employs figurative detail.

The expository passages connecting the ladies' busy speech in "Lily Daw" are brief, but Welty contributes to the comedy of the story by building on the stereotype that pictures women as mother hens (or other nesting birds). She presents them as "clucking" their tongues and speaking in voices "sad as the soft noises in the hen house at twilight" (5). Even the innocent Lily, who dumbly sucks on a zinnia stem, produces a noise that sounds "exactly like a jay bird" (6). Then making this already feathered, female world noisier and more chaotic, Welty repeats but varies the image by turning "a crate full of baby chickens . . . loose on the [train] platform" (9).

Another story in which figurative language is effectively controlled is "Petrified Man," for its imagery consistently identifies the beauty shop as a private and somewhat violent power center for these women the readers overhear talking. The shop is a "den of curling fluid and henna packs," a place where "curiosity" can have "freedom." In it, hair "float[s]" from a comb in "a small storm cloud," women have "sharp" eyes, scalps are "dug" into with "both hands," and lips and fingernails are "blood-red" (17-18, 24).

Welty's "way of seeing" is especially successful in "A Worn Path," one of her most frequently anthologized stories. With exposition rather than dialogue the primary mode here, the author exemplifies on many levels her skill with figurative, even metaphoric language. While the story has been studied frequently for Christian and mythological imagery, Welty's skillful "way of seeing" should be noted as well for how it presents Phoenix's unsteady physical movements, conveys awareness of the natural world, and guides the reader into deeper insight into Phoenix's character and thus into meaning in the story.

As an early focal point, Welty establishes various comparisons for Phoenix's unsteady physical movement on her journey to town. At first Phoenix walks slowly, with "the balanced heaviness and lightness of a pendulum in a grandfather clock" (142). That heaviness and lightness swings back and forth in other images. Soon Phoenix speaks of feeling that she has chains on her feet, but when she faces the "trial" of crossing the creek on a log, Welty perks her up to march across "like a festival figure in some parade" (143).<sup>6</sup> The comic abandon suggested by the festival figure is a sharp contrast to the careful deliberateness that follows as Phoenix faces a barbed-wire fence like a baby "trying to climb the steps" (143). When Phoenix tumbles into the ditch, she does so "like a little puff of milkweed," with no weight at all (145). Welty is attentive to other movements that Phoenix makes as well. When the old woman picks up the dropped coin, her hand moves slowly and deliberately, sheep-like, and as gracefully careful as if "lifting an egg from under a setting hen" (146).

Welty further enriches the exposition in this story with figurative language that reflects Phoenix's natural world and limited experience. The old woman's wrinkles "branch" from the "little tree" on her forehead (142). The wind "rocks" the pine needles and pine cones fall lightly like feathers (143). Before Phoenix's failing eyes, dead trees stand "like black men with one arm," a scarecrow appears ghost-like, its sleeve empty and "cold as ice," and live-oaks form a dark cave through which Phoenix passes (144-45). The images

associated with Phoenix become darker as her journey progresses.

The connection between the seemingly ordinary reference to a bird in the description of the natural world in the beginning of the story and another reference to a bird near the conclusion has been overlooked in studies that explore Welty's bird imagery in general and her mythological Phoenix images in particular. But the connection between these references, both expanded with similes, contributes to the characterization of Phoenix and thus to the story's meaning. In the first paragraph, Welty describes the noise Phoenix's cane makes when tapped on the frozen earth as "grave and persistent" and compares it to the meditative-like "chirping of solitary little bird" (142). Near the end of the story, Welty once again refers to a solitary bird. This time the reference is Phoenix's remembering her grandson wrapped (or nested) in a "patch quilt and peep[ing] out holding his mouth open like a little bird." With the memory, Phoenix makes this vow: "I not going to forget him again, no, the whole enduring time. I could tell him from all the others in creation" (148). Through the repetition of the bird image in this intimate and serious context, the words *grave* and *persistent* and *meditative* begin to echo from the first paragraph as metaphor for Phoenix herself. Likewise, the repetition of the image demonstrates how skillfully Welty has structured the story.

While not always as successful as it is in stories like "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies," "Why I Live at the P.O.," or "A Worn Path," Welty's penchant for figurative language is a definite facet of her writing style that continues vividly in *Losing Battles*. Louise Y. Gossett, though not limiting her comments to figurative language, praises it in both speech and exposition in the novel:

The authenticity of the spoken idiom in *Losing Battles* is unshakable in structure, idiom, intonation, and rhythm. Miss Welty makes us hear [individualized voices] . . . When the characters are not speaking, the omniscient narrator supplements and moves ahead with descriptions, summarized narrative, and infrequently, explicit interpretations. Descriptions may be an exact account . . . or it may be a lyrical response. . . . (203)

While Gossett notes that "similes and metaphors which call obtrusive attention to themselves" in other works, are, in this novel, "abundant but functional" (204), she goes no further in exploring their function or evaluating their success.

Yet Welty's fondness for figurative language in both speech and exposition is perhaps one of the reasons the novel is difficult for many readers. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., has commented that the difficulty of *Losing Battles* is that its surface is dense and "cannot be skimmed" if the wisdom of [the novel] is to be savored in its fullness" (197). A prime example of that density of surface that needs savoring is the brief opening of Part 1 of this 1970 award-winning novel. This passage is one of the most image-filled portions in all of Welty's writing. The images here, appropriate to rural Mississippi experience, come from Nature and farm life as well as from hearth and family. But there are so many that a reader who is in a hurry can get bogged down. In under four pages, eleven of the paragraphs are straight descriptive exposition (i.e. paragraphs uninterrupted by dialogue), and an amazing one half of the forty-

nine sentences in those expository paragraphs present some kind of figurative detail, and readers who are in too big a hurry may feel bogged down.

What can the purpose of such density of imagery possibly be? How can it serve rather than hinder the reader? In this case, examination of the imagery suggests that Welty is creating an introduction that functions as precise, detailed stage directions. This premise complements James Boatwright's assertion that the whole novel is "like a play" except there is a "narrative voice which makes clear to us, through the description of gesture and through assertions of silence, what is happening where there is no speech" (211). Look at how carefully, in these opening four pages, Welty uses figurative language to control lighting, sound, and initial movements, as she brings up the curtain on the Renfro reunion celebrating Granny's birthday and the return of Jack, the family's young hero.

In the first six-paragraph block, Welty unveils the broad scene and sets the day into motion through varied similes, metaphors, and personifications. The moon sets on "flushed cheek"; and as day breaks, the ridge "put[s] its red lick on the sky" "like the tongue of a calf." Even as the "Sunday light" comes up and begins to "race across the farm," Welty manages to control the pace of that illumination (as carefully as a lighting director would use spotlights) by drawing the reader's attention to first one detail and then another until the whole scene is lit. To create the fluidity that shows how the house finally becomes seen as a whole, she juxtaposes the image of "an old man's silver watch [being] pulled once more out of its pocket." Only then does the tin roof "[run] with new blue" (3-4).

Still controlling the pace of illumination Welty directs the reader's attention downward from the roof. To show how daylight is erasing shadows, she focuses on the porch posts, making them "[bloom] downward," becoming white, like "chalk marks . . . drawn . . . down a still misty slate." Daylight continues to progress, passing through a fire-y stage, making the woods and mists and "naked clay," "flicker" and look like "live ashes." A mirror on the porch also "flicker[s]" but like a just-struck kitchen match; and when the sun hits the chinaberry trees, Welty likens them to "roosters astrut with golden tails" (4).

Even as this sunlight spreads, Welty manages to create the sensation of holding the illumination back a bit with similes that inject a feeling of deliberateness and distance. A cloud lingers "like a name being called," and changes perceptible in the morning air arrive like drafts created after a distant door swings open (3).

Through attentiveness to so many visual details, Welty makes this daybreak a very self-conscious awakening. But at the same time, to pull against the quietness, to startle it, she introduces motion and activity with still more figurative language. A dog who's "lain like a stone" leaps up, barking. A baby "bolts naked out of the house" and "monkey-climb[s]" off the porch to run through the yard until her mother darts out too, grabs her, and takes her back inside "with her little legs still running like a windmill." The chickens--the Plymouth Rocks--suddenly "loosed on the world," fly fast through the yard (3).

By the end of the first six paragraphs thus dense with simile, metaphor, personification, and metonymy, day has broken and fully flooded the landscape, and Welty is ready to give first voice to several characters through

XV; nor that he lost face with his people when the U.S. did not honor its agreement. She told me he'd done something sleep-troubling, that his people turned against him and tried for years to kill him, setting fire over and over to his house that would not burn down until after he was dead. She said they fed him poison but he just poured it down his trouser leg and smacked his lips for more, that at last they found a doctor who knew a poison to make the blood hard, to make the arms and legs stop working, a poison so strong it dissolved his flesh, bones, coffin and all, so that today his grave is empty. She said his father, Doom Dark (*l'homme d'arc*) had once owned Jackson, Mississippi, and that Uncle Green Flower had journeyed to a land with three rivers running through it, a flat land that rose straight up and sudden into a hilly wood. My Paul Bunyan uncle in red flannel logging shirt and team of blue oxen had cut down trees and made bricks and built a house so big that he had had to give it a name. The house had gold furniture, she said, tapestries from Europe, and so many silver spoons it would take a year to count them.

My mother cautioned me not to believe the stories, not that she doubted her mother's word, but the source was questionable; Grandmother's grandmother had lost her mind, said Mother, when she lost two sons in the Civil War and gave birth to a baby boy, number eleven. Still, I held on to my belief . . . until 1960 when I read Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* Mother had warned me away from "Old Count No-Count" who was "giving Mississippi a bad name." But who could resist the characters' mythological proportions? Here was historical romance given respectability by Faulkner's having won the 1950 Nobel Prize for Literature. His description of "Sutpen's Hundred" convinced me that both Mother and I had been naive; I had found, I thought, the source of Grandmother's tales. Too many parallels existed between Uncle Green Flower's and Sutpen's "kingdoms." The autonomy of plantations failed to explain not only that both mansions had been constructed with timber cut from their own land, hewn at their own sawmills, even the bricks for foundation, chimneys, and walkways dug from the creeks and rivers on their land and fired in their own kilns, but also that both, purchased at a cost to conscience, had been furnished not just lavishly, but obsessively; and both had burned to the ground.

Thirty-three years after I lost faith in my grandmother's word, my mother sent me a copy of geneology research showing my grandmother's grandmother Elizabeth Allen Harrison to be the daughter of RoseAnn LeFleur Allen whose brother was Greenwood LeFlore (Harrison 27) at which point I began research revealing an ancient uncle's sellout and a grandmother's integrity intact; revealing that in 1800 a fourth child was born to Louis LeFleur and French/Choctaw Rebecca Cravat in a cabin on a Choctaw footpath (pre-Natchez Trace) that followed bluffs along the Pearl River--LeFleur's Bluff is the present site of Jackson. They ran a trading post, a liaison between animal skins and the European goods supplied by English sea captain Greenwood for whom the child was named (Ray).

The year after signing the Treaty at Dancing Rabbit Creek, with thirty-two slaves (according to the Lowndes County Tax Rolls for 1831 in the Mississippi archives), LeFlore began in earnest to build his empire. From 1840 to 1844 he represented Carroll and Tallahatchie counties in the state senate, where he filibustered in Choctaw (Denley). In 1854, with slave labor and an architect from Georgia, his own steam-powered sawmill, wagon teams



of oxen, bricks fired in his kiln, and hand hewn cypress sills stored a year to season, he began construction on the fifteen-roomed *Malmaison* (House of Sorrows) named for a palace of Napoleon's Josephine. Designed to accommodate 200 guests, it was furnished with tapestries, mahogany, Louis XIV furniture (gold leaf over French hickory), eleven black Italian marble mantels, four linen window shades hand-painted to depict the views out Josephine's windows, monogrammed silver imported from France by the gross (Ray). Did he, like Sutpen, get lost among the knives and forks and spoons? The obscenity of such opulence is magnified by slave labor and that the Choctaw people were placed on steamboats and carried upriver as far as it was navigable, from there taken in wagons, ox carts and on mule back, with not nearly so many arriving as had left home, the winter a severe one, and cholera striking on the way (Milligan).

Several times during the War, *Malmaison* suffered fire damage from unknown sources; LeFlore was pro-Union. In 1863 he made two trips to White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia for treatment of paralysis. He died August 31, 1865 (Ray). Three of Faulkner's Confederate soldiers, Sutpen and two sons, survived the War to kill and be killed at home. Quentin figures "God let us lose the War" because "only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth" (6). In January, 1996, my mother and I searched for a trace of the House of Sorrows. We drove north to where three rivers converge, turned just past the bridge over Big Sand Creek and took the winding red dirt Teoc Road from flat delta into sudden, wooded hills. We stopped at a point fourteen miles east of Greenwood, eleven miles west of Carrollton where, though the newspaper said his grave was empty (Biggers), there should have been a tall white marble tombstone for which his will in 1860 had designated \$10,000. Or across the road among the pine, the oak and cedar, there should have been at least a brick or two from one of *Malmaison's* old crumbling chimneys. But even now it seemed if Quentin stopped to listen he might "hear the galloping hooves; might even see at any moment now the black stallion; and the rider . . . who at one time owned, lock stock and barrel, everything he could see from a given point . . . to remind him (if he ever forgot it) that he was the biggest thing in . . . sight" (290). Quentin "looked at the two huge rotting gate posts in the starlight, between which no gates swung now" (291), and I heard the words in Shelley's *Ozymandias* echoing off my mother's "Nothing remains." Pulling a seamless shawl about her shoulders, she wants us home by dark.

### Works Cited

- Biggers, Jane. "Officials Find Greenwood Leflore's Grave Empty." *The Greenwood Commonwealth*. 14 March 1964.  
Book A, Register of Wills, Carroll County Mississippi, 473-5.  
Cook, Ann. Personal Interview. 26 January 1996. (Cottonlandia Museum employee, *Malmaison* visitor before it burned in 1942).  
Cowley, M. *The Portable Faulkner*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.  
Debo, Angie. *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.  
Denley, S. Gale. "Greenwood Named in Honor of Choctaw Chief," *The*

*Scott County Times*. 22 March 1995.

Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage, 1990.

Harrison, Sylvia Blake. *The Sundial*. Jackson, Mississippi: Russell Piorrier, 1986.

Milligan, Dorothy. "Jay LeFlore, Ardmore" *The Indian Way: Choctaws*. n.p.:n.p., 197?. (Byng School Oklahoma interviews).

Ray, F. R. *Chieftain Greenwood Leflore and the Choctaw Indians of the Mississippi Valley*. Memphis: C.A. Davis, 1936, 1993.

Washburn, Wilcomb E. *The American Indian and the United States, A Documentary History, Vol IV*. New York: Random House, 1973.

For a historical retelling, see LeCoeur, Jo. "Knit One, Purl Two," *History, Myth and Cultural Identity*. eds. Stuart Sillars, Amalia Mondriguez. San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word, 1996.

# The *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine and the Introduction of Spenser's Red Cross Knight

Paul H. Lorenz  
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Although the Red Cross Knight is introduced in the first few stanzas of Canto One, Book One, of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser does not explicitly identify the knight with Saint George until the twelfth stanza of Canto Two. Nevertheless, it is clear from the very beginning of the poem that it is Spenser's intention that the Red Cross Knight be identified with Saint George. Spenser establishes this identification by drawing heavily on popular myth and the iconography associated with Saint George in creating his verbal picture of the Red Cross Knight and his retinue. Graham Hough, in *A Preface to The Faerie Queene*, suggests that a popular collection of hagiology entitled *Legenda Aurea*, translated into English as *The Golden Legend*, was probably Spenser's source for many of the details of the Saint George legend which he incorporated into Book One of *The Faerie Queene* (140). Hough's suggestion is worthy of the attention of first time readers of *The Faerie Queene* for a familiarity with the entry for Saint George in *The Golden Legend* renders the identification of the Red Cross Knight with Saint George obvious from the first five stanzas of Canto One.

*The Golden Legend*, written in the thirteenth century by the archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Voragine (Jacopo de' Varazze, 1230?-1295), is a medieval manual of ecclesiastical lore which, for the most part, consists of entries describing the lives and legends surrounding the saints whose feasts are celebrated throughout the liturgical year. The text, in the original Latin version, was popular throughout Europe for centuries. William Caxton published the first English translation of *The Golden Legend* in 1483, the book which proved to be the most popular of the one hundred books Caxton published at Westminster (Ryan, v). Thus, *The Golden Legend* was certainly available to Spenser and, not surprisingly, the entry for Saint George's Day, April 23rd, provides the details of the legend which make the identification of the Red Cross Knight with Saint George evident.

According to Jacobus de Voragine, George, a tribune in the Roman army, was traveling in the province of Libya when he came to the town of Silena. At that time, Silena was being terrorized by a horrible dragon who liked to crawl around on the city walls killing anyone who came too close. To appease the dragon, the townspeople had been giving it two sheep a day, but when the town started running out of sheep, they began to give the dragon one sheep and one human being a day. The humans to be sacrificed, young men and women, were chosen by lot. On the day that George came to Silena, the lot had fallen to the only daughter of the king. The king lamented that his virgin daughter would never produce an heir, but he was compelled by the townspeople, many of whom had already sacrificed their sons and daughters to the dragon, to send the princess to her death. George met the crying girl leading a sheep and decided to intervene. At this point, *The Golden Legend* provides two alternative endings. In the shorter version, George puts on his armor, makes the sign of the cross, and slays the dragon in one blow. In the other version,



Princess Cleodolinde and Her Lamb

Title page of Sarum Missal ca. 1500 (STC 16170), 167 x 151 mm.

Courtesy of the Harvard College Library

after arming himself with the sign of the cross and saying a prayer to God, he stuns the monster so that the princess can lead the dragon into town as a demonstration of the power of the true God. Only after the King and all the townspeople have become Christian does George finally slay the dragon (232-233). From this account of the legend, the origin and purpose of Una's lamb in *The Faerie Queene* is clear. The lamb, no matter what other symbolic associations it may have (Lamb of God, etc), is, along with Una, half of the

offering meant to be sacrificed to the dragon. As an additional clue, note that Spenser introduces Una, the royal virgin, and her sacrificial lamb immediately after announcing that the Red Cross Knight is going to prove his strength by killing a stern and horrible dragon. Clearly, the lamb and the virgin are part of Spenser's announcement that Book One of *The Faerie Queene* is going to be built around the legend of Saint George.

The symbology associated with St. George was also familiar to Spenser's audience for a variety of other reasons. C. S. Lewis has pointed out that Spenser begins *The Faerie Queene* with a verbalized pageant. Red Cross, Una, and the lamb are symbolic figures dressed in symbolic costume. These very same figures appeared in several documented Saint George pageants. Lewis mentions one such pageant presented at a feast given by King Henry V for Sigismund, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and another performed at the 1461 Entry of King Edward IV into Bristol (Lewis, 3). Franklin

of oxen, bricks fired in his kiln, and hand hewn cypress sills stored a year to season, he began construction on the fifteen-roomed *Malmaison* (House of Sorrows) named for a palace of Napoleon's Josephine. Designed to accommodate 200 guests, it was furnished with tapestries, mahogany, Louis XIV furniture (gold leaf over French hickory), eleven black Italian marble mantels, four linen window shades hand-painted to depict the views out Josephine's windows, monogrammed silver imported from France by the gross (Ray). Did he, like Sutpen, get lost among the knives and forks and spoons? The obscenity of such opulence is magnified by slave labor and that the Choctaw people were placed on steamboats and carried upriver as far as it was navigable, from there taken in wagons, ox carts and on mule back, with not nearly so many arriving as had left home, the winter a severe one, and cholera striking on the way (Milligan).

Several times during the War, *Malmaison* suffered fire damage from unknown sources; LeFlore was pro-Union. In 1863 he made two trips to White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia for treatment of paralysis. He died August 31, 1865 (Ray). Three of Faulkner's Confederate soldiers, Sutpen and two sons, survived the War to kill and be killed at home. Quentin figures "God let us lose the War" because "only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He stay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth" (6). In January, 1996, my mother and I searched for a trace of the House of Sorrows. We drove north to where three rivers converge, turned just past the bridge over Big Sand Creek and took the winding red dirt Teoc Road from flat delta into sudden, wooded hills. We stopped at a point fourteen miles east of Greenwood, eleven miles west of Carrollton where, though the newspaper said his grave was empty (Biggers), there should have been a tall white marble tombstone for which his will in 1860 had designated \$10,000. Or across the road among the pine, the oak and cedar, there should have been at least a brick or two from one of *Malmaison's* old crumbling chimneys. But even now it seemed if Quentin stopped to listen he might "hear the galloping hooves; might even see at any moment now the black stallion; and the rider . . . who at one time owned, lock stock and barrel, everything he could see from a given point . . . to remind him (if he ever forgot it) that he was the biggest thing in . . . sight" (290). Quentin "looked at the two huge rotting gate posts in the starlight, between which no gates swung now" (291), and I heard the words in Shelley's *Ozymandias* echoing off my mother's "Nothing remains." Pulling a seamless shawl about her shoulders, she wants us home by dark.

## Works Cited

- Biggers, Jane. "Officials Find Greenwood Leflore's Grave Empty." *The Greenwood Commonwealth*. 14 March 1964.
- Book A, Register of Wills, Carroll County Mississippi, 473-5.
- Cook, Ann. Personal Interview. 26 January 1996. (Cottonlandia Museum employee, *Malmaison* visitor before it burned in 1942).
- Cowley, M. *The Portable Faulkner*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- Debo, Angie. *The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.
- Denley, S. Gale. "Greenwood Named in Honor of Choctaw Chief," *The*

- Scott County Times*, 22 March 1995.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Harrison, Sylvia Blake. *The Sundial*. Jackson, Mississippi: Russell Piorrier, 1986.
- Milligan, Dorothy. "Jay LeFlore, Ardmore" *The Indian Way: Choctaws*. n.p.:n.p., 197?. (Byng School Oklahoma interviews).
- Ray, F. R. *Chieftain Greenwood Leflore and the Choctaw Indians of the Mississippi Valley*. Memphis: C.A. Davis, 1936, 1993.
- Washburn, Wilcomb E. *The American Indian and the United States, A Documentary History, Vol IV*. New York: Random House, 1973.

For a historical retelling, see LeCoeur, Jo. "Knit One, Purl Two," *History, Myth and Cultural Identity*. eds. Stuart Sillars, Amalia Mondriguez. San Antonio: University of the Incarnate Word, 1996.

## The *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine and the Introduction of Spenser's Red Cross Knight

Paul H. Lorenz  
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Although the Red Cross Knight is introduced in the first few stanzas of Canto One, Book One, of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser does not explicitly identify the knight with Saint George until the twelfth stanza of Canto Two. Nevertheless, it is clear from the very beginning of the poem that it is Spenser's intention that the Red Cross Knight be identified with Saint George. Spenser establishes this identification by drawing heavily on popular myth and the iconography associated with Saint George in creating his verbal picture of the Red Cross Knight and his retinue. Graham Hough, in *A Preface to The Faerie Queene*, suggests that a popular collection of hagiology entitled *Legenda Aurea*, translated into English as *The Golden Legend*, was probably Spenser's source for many of the details of the Saint George legend which he incorporated into Book One of *The Faerie Queene* (140). Hough's suggestion is worthy of the attention of first time readers of *The Faerie Queene* for a familiarity with the entry for Saint George in *The Golden Legend* renders the identification of the Red Cross Knight with Saint George obvious from the first five stanzas of Canto One.

*The Golden Legend*, written in the thirteenth century by the archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Voragine (Jacopo de' Varazze, 1230?-1295), is a medieval manual of ecclesiastical lore which, for the most part, consists of entries describing the lives and legends surrounding the saints whose feasts are celebrated throughout the liturgical year. The text, in the original Latin version, was popular throughout Europe for centuries. William Caxton published the first English translation of *The Golden Legend* in 1483, the book which proved to be the most popular of the one hundred books Caxton published at Westminster (Ryan, v). Thus, *The Golden Legend* was certainly available to Spenser and, not surprisingly, the entry for Saint George's Day, April 23rd, provides the details of the legend which make the identification of the Red Cross Knight with Saint George evident.

According to Jacobus de Voragine, George, a tribune in the Roman army, was traveling in the province of Libya when he came to the town of Silena. At that time, Silena was being terrorized by a horrible dragon who liked to crawl around on the city walls killing anyone who came too close. To appease the dragon, the townspeople had been giving it two sheep a day, but when the town started running out of sheep, they began to give the dragon one sheep and one human being a day. The humans to be sacrificed, young men and women, were chosen by lot. On the day that George came to Silena, the lot had fallen to the only daughter of the king. The king lamented that his virgin daughter would never produce an heir, but he was compelled by the townspeople, many of whom had already sacrificed their sons and daughters to the dragon, to send the princess to her death. George met the crying girl leading a sheep and decided to intervene. At this point, *The Golden Legend* provides two alternative endings. In the shorter version, George puts on his armor, makes the sign of the cross, and slays the dragon in one blow. In the other version,



Princess Cleodolinde and Her Lamb

Title page of Sarum Missal ca. 1500 (STC 16170), 167 x 151 mm.

Courtesy of the Harvard College Library

after arming himself with the sign of the cross and saying a prayer to God, he stuns the monster so that the princess can lead the dragon into town as a demonstration of the power of the true God. Only after the King and all the townspeople have become Christian does George finally slay the dragon (232-233). From this account of the legend, the origin and purpose of Una's lamb in *The Faerie Queene* is clear. The lamb, no matter what other symbolic associations it may have (Lamb of God, etc), is, along with Una, half of the

offering meant to be sacrificed to the dragon. As an additional clue, note that Spenser introduces Una, the royal virgin, and her sacrificial lamb immediately after announcing that the Red Cross Knight is going to prove his strength by killing a stern and horrible dragon. Clearly, the lamb and the virgin are part of Spenser's announcement that Book One of *The Faerie Queene* is going to be built around the legend of Saint George.

The symbology associated with St. George was also familiar to Spenser's audience for a variety of other reasons. C. S. Lewis has pointed out that Spenser begins *The Faerie Queene* with a verbalized pageant. Red Cross, Una, and the lamb are symbolic figures dressed in symbolic costume. These very same figures appeared in several documented Saint George pageants. Lewis mentions one such pageant presented at a feast given by King Henry V for Sigismund, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and another performed at the 1461 Entry of King Edward IV into Bristol (Lewis, 3). Franklin



Williams has pointed out that in many English woodcuts, including one printed in a prayer book of Spenser's time (see illustration), as well as in paintings of Saint George slaying the dragon, the princess is often seen leading a lamb on a string (Williams, 304).



The armor the Red Cross Knight is wearing also associates him with Saint George. Spenser's readers did not need to consult *The Golden Legend* to identify the Red Cross Knight by his costume. Saint George had been recognized as the patron saint of England since the days of Edward III, when the Order of the Garter adopted the chivalrous knight as their patron. In the 1590's, the image of Saint George appeared on many of the gold coins in circulation in England. Spenser even had a woodcut of Saint George slaying the dragon printed at the end of Canto One, Book One of both the first and

second editions of *The Faerie Queene* (see illustration below). When Spenser describes the Knight as carrying a silver shield with a bloody cross on his breast, the association with Saint George must have been immediate and obvious to most of his readers. Saint George's red cross is featured prominently in the paintings depicting Saint George encountering the dragon by Uccello (1397-1475) and by Raphael (1483-1520) and George's cross is featured prominently in all of the popular iconographic representations of Saint George of the sixteenth century. *The Golden Legend* also describes Saint George as wearing white (silver) armor adorned with a red cross.

*The Golden Legend* may also have influenced Spenser by giving him the

idea of moving the Saint George legend to Faerie Land and allowing a novice to take up the role of Saint George. According to the lore collected by de Voragine, during the crusades, when the Christians were about to lay siege to Jerusalem, a fair young man who was passing by told a priest that he was Saint George, the captain of the Christian armies. He said that if the crusaders carried his relics into Jerusalem, he would be with them. During the siege, when the crusaders fell back, afraid to scale the walls of the city, Saint George appeared dressed in white armor adorned with a red cross and led the successful attack on the city. It is not surprising then, that in Canto 10, Stanza 61, when the Red Cross Knight is in the House of Holiness, he is told that God has ordained for him a blessed end in Jerusalem, just before he is told of his saintly and very English identity. In the mythology, the true Saint George has the ability to reappear whenever he is needed.

Spenser's early identification of the Red Cross Knight with Saint George is not confined to the symbolic figure and dress of his characters. Canto One begins with the line, "A gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine." Spenser's language often seems so ideologically archaic that it is easy for a reader to simply read past words like "pricking" without making the effort to determine what, exactly, Spenser is talking about. If Canto One begins with a pageant, then it is important to know what, exactly, the Red Cross Knight is doing when the pageant begins. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one use of the verb "to prick" in Spenser's time referred to the act of spurring a horse, but this hardly seems to be the correct literal interpretation for this word in this scene for the knight would have no need to spur his horse to keep up with a Lady who is riding on an ass and leading a lamb on a line. The most plausible meaning of the word is as a reference to thrusting at something. Considering the speed at which the company is traveling, and the desire of the Knight to prove himself, the Knight could be bored and thrusting at things with his lance for the sake of diversion. It is quite likely that the Red Cross Knight is bored, for later, when he meets Archimago, the first question he asks concerns possible adventures he might take on while traveling with the Lady. There is, however, one additional meaning of this verb which Spenser may have used in a secondary sense to introduce the legend of Saint George. The verb "to prick" in Spenser's time also meant to plant seedlings in small holes. The entry for Saint George in *The Golden Legend* begins with a discussion of the etymology of the name "George" which appears to be of significance in *The Faerie Queene*:

George comes from *geos*, earth, and *orge*, to work, that is, one who works the earth, namely, his own flesh. But Saint Augustine writes in his book *Of the Holy Trinity*, that good earth is found on the summit of mountains, on the hills, and in the plains; the first bears good grass, the second, grapes, and the third, the fruits of the field. So, too, Saint George was on the heights, for he disdained base things and had the fresh green of purity; he was temperate by his prudence, and thus was permitted to share in the wine of heavenly joy; he was lowly in his humility, and therefore was clothed with the fruits of his good deeds. (232)

Spenser was certainly aware of the etymology of the word "George." The Red Cross Knight was a farmer before he attended the Court of the Faerie

Queen and took up the cause of Una. There is a stanza in *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto X, Stanza LXVI, which brings all of these georgic elements together:

Thence she thee brought into the Faerie lond,  
And in an heaped furrow did she hyde;  
Where thee a ploughman all unweeting fond,  
As he his toylesome teme that way did guyde,  
And brought thee up in ploughman's state to byde,  
Whereof *Georgos* he thee gave to name;  
Till prikt with courage, and thy forces pryde,  
To Fary court thou cam'st to seek for fame,  
And prove thy puissaunt armes, as seemes thee best became.

In light of this stanza, it is clear that Spenser is using the verb in the first line of Canto One in all three of its senses: the Red Cross knight is bored and thrusting his lance in practice, he is planting the seeds that will bring him rewards in the House of Holiness, and in doing so, he is spurring on his own courage. In the stanza of Canto X which follows the one quoted above, the Red Cross Knight, clothed in all the fruits of his good deeds, realizes that he has tasted the wine of heavenly joy and finds it far superior to any of the fruits of the earth.

A familiarity with the details of the legend of Saint George and the associated liturgical lore reported in *The Golden Legend* will certainly help first time readers of *The Faerie Queene* to quickly identify the Knight of Holiness in Book One, Canto One as St. George, the patron saint of England and allow them to immediately begin to perceive some of the significance of the story which Spenser is unfolding. Though much of the material in the *Legenda Aurea* concerning the legend of Saint George was so well known in Spenser's time that it might not have been necessary for Spenser to have consulted *The Golden Legend* while composing *The Faerie Queene* or for his readers to have need of an outside source to identify the Red Cross Knight, for modern readers, whose familiarity with the legend of Saint George may not be so extensive, the entry in *The Golden Legend* for Saint George's Day could serve as a fine thematic introduction to Book One of *The Faerie Queene*.

## Works Cited

- Brookes-Davies, Douglas. *Spenser's Faerie Queene*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1977.
- The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*. New York: Oxford, 1971.
- Dencef, A. Leigh. *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor*. Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1982.
- Harvey, Paul. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Rev. Dorothy Eagle. 4th ed. New York: Oxford, 1967.
- Hough, Graham. *A Preface to the Faerie Queene*. New York: Norton, 1952.
- Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend*. Trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger. New York: Longmans Green, 1941.
- Lewis, C. S. *Spenser's Images of Life*. Ed. Alastair Fowler. London:

- Cambridge UP, 1967.
- Nohrnberg, James. *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1976.
- Rose, Mark. *Spenser's Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1975.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. 1596; rpt. London: Scolar, 1976.
- . "The Faerie Queene". In *The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser*. Cambridge Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1908, pp. 145-677.
- Williams, Franklin B. "The Iconography of Una's Lamb." *PBSA* 74 (1980) 301-305.

## Robert Flynn and Tim O'Brien: Driving the Vehicle of the Vietnam War as Writing Process

Marth Minford Meas  
Houston, TX

*Wisdom consists in knowing the season, knowing when to fight and when to make accommodations, when to take hold and when to let go.* So the introduction of *Seasonal Rain and other stories* (1986) by Robert Flynn begins. Both Flynn, a southwestern writer, and Tim O'Brien, an eastern writer, are seasoned veterans of war and writing. Study of their work and written comment gives the reader as writer a view of the writing process, of first-hand modeling of what to keep, what to weed. *Seasonal Rain* ends with five Vietnam war stories; Flynn's second short story collection, *Living With the Hyenas* (1995), starts with six war stories. O'Brien's collection *The Things They Carried*, called one of the best books of 1990 by the *NY Times Book Review*, uses flashback from the Vietnam war as a telling device. The collections of both authors center on the accommodations people make in this life. Each writer also echoes in his own way the writing process as their stories and novels unfold.

O'Brien's first book, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* (1969) is a memoir of Vietnam with "names and physical characteristics of persons depicted . . . changed." (Foreword) A book that chronicles the conflicting emotions many draftees felt is written anecdotally. In an interview, O'Brien commented that while writing the book, often he couldn't remember the exact words people used but tried to give conversations "dramatic intensity" and immediacy by using "dialogue that seemed true to the spirit of what was said."

This fresh account of a 23 year-old foot soldier gives a good baseline, when combined with Flynn's memoir as a 38 year-old, *A Personal War in Vietnam*, to study the writings of the two authors. After returning from two months as a war correspondent working with marines in Vietnam in 1970, Flynn had

recorded the conversations as they were spoken, . . . had described the actions shortly after they took place . . . These are judgments I made at the time and on the scene with incomplete and sometimes misleading information. But the men I was writing about were also acting with incomplete and sometimes misleading information, and as I judged them for their on-the-spot decisions, I think I must allow others to judge me the same way. (xii)

O'Brien makes a similar statement in *If I Die*.

The immediacy of the last explosion--three legs, ten minutes ago--made me ready to burn the midsection of this report, the flippant itemization of these killer devices...but only to say another truth will I let the half-truths

stand. The catalog of mines will be retained, . . . that is how we talked about them, with a funny laugh, flippantly . . . . It is funny. It's absurd. (129)

War was a different experience than each man/writer expected in the Marines (Flynn) and in the Army (O'Brien). Drafted, O'Brien said he served, instead of going to Canada as he would have liked, so as not to disappoint people. The lauded *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home* describes a protagonist named Tim O'Brien who also considered deserting in the beginning. O'Brien served in the army infantry two years, one of those in Vietnam where he became a sergeant and earned a Purple Heart. Robert Flynn on the other hand, dropped out of college to fight in Korea. In *A Personal War in Vietnam*, a journal, he explains,

I expected to be confirmed and transformed by the experience [of fighting] for transformed by childbirth. I would be a man, but a man who understood what manhood meant, who knew the limits of his courage and endurance, who had looked life and death in the eye and would never again be afraid of anything--the flinty-eyed hero I had seen in war and western movies. (ix)

Flynn never got to Korea.

I got to a replacement draft, went through infantry training, and then, when the others got shipping orders to Korea, I got orders to a range company at Camp Pendleton. I was a marine, even a wartime Marine, who had served during but not in Korea, and I had boot-camp stories to tell, but I had not been confirmed, and I had not been transformed. And I was not flinty eyed. (x)

To understand the Vietnam fiction of either Flynn or O'Brien, it helps to read Flynn's *A Personal War*, a non-fictional account that records daily life of marines connected with a pacification unit during the war. It contains a Vietnam acronym and jargon list which informs any Vietnam discussion. The account provides a backdrop with such passages as, "we walked single file until everyone was atop the hill. 'Where the hell are we?' someone asked. There was no fighting, no VC, and no Marines. The countryside was quiet, peaceful, as though we had walked out of the war and into another time and place." O'Brien's third novel *Going after Cacciato* (1978) explores the imagination of a soldier who daydreams such an experience, that the platoon follows a deserter Cacciato all the way to Paris. The following passage from that novel reveals a blueprint for a writer to follow:

The trick, of course, was to think through it carefully . . . look for motives search out the place where fact ended and imagination took over. Ask the important questions. Why had Cacciato left the war? Was it courage . . . Was it even possible to combine courage and ignorance? How much . . . was Cacciato's doing and how much was the product of the biles? . . . Normally [Doc's advice to Paul Berlin] . . . those are healthy things. But in your case, these biles are . . . leaking out, infecting the brain. This

Cacciato business--it's the work of the biles . . . [concentrate]until you see it's just the biles fogging over, just a trick of the biles . . . . Facing the night . . . Paul Berlin concentrated. (25)

O'Brien has titled this second chapter "Observation Post." As Stephen Dobyns writes in the opening line of *The Wrestler's Cruel Study*, "First we need a place to stand." Paul is standing where the reader stands . . . at an observation post. O'Brien has Paul chanting the artist's mantra "remember the details."

By publishing the journalistic notes he used for the creation of fiction, Flynn provides a valuable look at the writing process. Elements found in Flynn's novel *The Last Klick* and in stories from *Living With the Hyenas* can be traced to *A Personal War*. Fodder for "A Boy and His Dog" comes from, " 'The heat really kicks the dog's ass,' said Hill . . . when we're out in the field, I have to carry twenty-two canteens of water for me and the dog . . . But you don't feed them much . . . They work for food. You got to keep them hungry but the dogs aren't any good at night, and they're hard to handle." In the story, it becomes,

Iowa picked up Fat Chance and carried him over his shoulder to keep him from alerting at suspicious wire or disturbed earth and from being confused . . . Iowa knew the others were ridiculing him for carrying the dog, and he was furious. They had no respect for Fat Chance. The dog knew what was going on, and if they didn't respect him, he wouldn't work for them. (51)

*The Last Klick* (1994), Flynn's latest novel, is set in Vietnam and begins with "The Killers," a short story which was published in the NEA Vietnam flashbacks by Pig Iron Press and then collected in *Seasonal Rain and other stories*. The story grew out of interviews from *A Personal War*. With characteristic understatement, Flynn satirizes, through his main character, Sherrill, the idea of new recruits being killers:

"What was the patrol like?"

"They all said it was a slide. They said we was skating. This was just to get me ready for the humping I'll have to do later on. Man, it kicked my ass. I ain't never been so hot. I could hear my heart beating in my head. 'How far we come?' I said 'About ten clicks.' Ten clicks. Hell, I can run ten clicks."

"When did you first see the enemy?"

"We was taking a break, all crapped out along the trail in this little clearing. . . I seen this dude with a rifle. He wasn't much farther than that pig tube over there. Hey, I said, because I didn't want to shoot no friendly. I didn't even know what the enemy look like . . . He aimed his rifle at somebody . . . there wasn't nobody for him to shoot but us, so I shot him . . . Don't say I pissed on myself."

"Wet his pants," Sherrill wrote in his notebook.

The killer threw away his cigarette and lighted another one. Sherrill made a note that he was wearing a high school ring. It looked new." (3)

In the early seventies, Knopf, Flynn's regular publisher said *A Personal*

*War* was not publishable because people were tired of hearing about journalistic reports of Vietnam.

The book sat on the shelf for fifteen years. While writing *The Last Klick*, Flynn referred to the shelved book, titled *Golf CUPP*, to test the accuracy of his memory. He decided it deserved to be published as it was, without hindsight's polishing, as a journalist and former marine's fresh impressions from war. It was published in Texas A& M's Military History Series in 1989 as *A Personal War in Vietnam*.

Robert Flynn writes about Vietnam because he believes it has been misreported, misinterpreted. Just as the famous North American battle was not fought on Bunker Hill, but on Reed's Hill, the hill behind it, Flynn knows and would like to share some of the real, unpublicized battles of Vietnam. Housed with marines as a correspondent, he tells their story in *A Personal War*, and, in doing so, explores the central question of Captain Tilley, "Was it a waste?" In a postscript, the author states,

The war would continue for four more years. The killing would go on. But the protest was over. The cameras were going home. Tilley's question--was it a waste?--when asked, was on an inside page. And no one bothered to answer. Maybe only the peasants in the villes knew for sure. (Postscript)

Tim O'Brien writes about Vietnam as a metaphor for life. He never wanted to be a soldier, but some critics say he can't escape writing about Vietnam. In a 1994 New York Times Book Review, he says in reference to *In the Lake in the Woods*, his latest novel, which although set in Minnesota, recounts the My Lai (specifically Thuan Yen) massacre, that he wanted to "write a book where craving for love can make us do really horrid things that require lifelong acts of atonement. That's why I write about Vietnam. It was given to me, and I'm giving it back" (Elsen 33). In this 1995 novel, the author experiments with form. Combining anecdote, quotations, history, etc. he lays out a mystery with chapters titled: "How Unhappy They Were," "Evidence," "The Nature of Loss," "Hypothesis," "The Nature of Marriage," "How the Night Passed," "The Nature of Love," "What He Did Next," "Evidence," and so forth. The biographer/reporter interrupts with comments in footnotes also. In the end, we don't know what happened to John Wade's missing wife, Kath; in fact, John Wade also is missing by the novel's end. However, the writer/reader has found a treasury of material questions collected and laid out for use in writing a novel.

O'Brien's central preoccupation in his works could be summed up with one word: "verisimilitude," focusing on the appearance of truth. O'Brien constantly blurs the line between reality and fiction. In an interview with Tim O'Brien that Brian C. McNerney conducted, O'Brien described pursuit of a sort of 'ahistorical' truth, "You are allowed when you write fiction--in fact you have to--to imagine, to make up your own truths. You have to manufacture a system that is coherent and meaningful and moving without having to wade through layers of competing versions of fact (IFRF, 2, "Responsibly Inventing History...").

McNerney dealt with the issue of verisimilitude this fall in a SCMLA paper, "Inventing Facts & Remembering Fictions: Tim O'Brien's Literary



Reconciliations." McNerney pointed out that even though the central character in *The Things They Carried* was given the name Tim O'Brien, O'Brien repeatedly warns that the work is not about his own life's experiences and that the details are all invented. As a regular faculty member of the Sewanee Writers' Conference in Sewanee, TN, O'Brien's words adorned the 1993 conference T-shirt: " 'Just because it didn't happen doesn't mean it isn't true,' said to have been said by Tim O'Brien."

Verisimilitude is also a major theme for Robert Flynn. According to Gail Amdahl in a Booklist review of *The Last Klick*, the novel centers around the questions "What is a hero? And What is reality?" Sherrill O'Connell, the protagonist, a professor and failed novelist has gone to Vietnam to write stories for the magazine *REAL*. In actuality, Flynn had written stories for the magazine *TRUE*. O'Connell is being told by his magazine to manufacture stories, make up facts, arrange pictures to make believable, if not accurate stories. Sherrill O'Connell feels like his novel's hero Cassady is also being molded in an artificial way. Sherrill is being asked to fictionalize reality, something fiction writers Flynn and O'Brien do on purpose but is not supposed to be disguised as journalism. When O'Connell burns his hand on a smoking gun on a gun-truck after an Alley Cat, a photographer catches him in civilian shoes out in the jungle. He is made a hero for gunning down the enemy, but it didn't happen.

Both authors strive for truthfulness in conveying motivations for their actions. In *A Personal War*, Flynn says he refused a gun as a journalist with the Marines

not for humanitarian or ethical considerations but because I wanted to avoid the responsibility that went with it . . . . On the ground [with the Third Platoon] I had felt confused and nearsighted . . . . After listening to the tapes, I wasn't sure that air had a picture either. Dropping bombs at smoke drifting through the trees, flying over friendlies to prevent jets from turning in on them, or looking for air panels to discover the disposition of troops was not reassuring . . . . I was awed by the speed and power that air support represented but doubt persisted . . . . 'The big nightmare is hitting friendly troops,' Lieutenant Hudson confessed. "You have to get straight in your mind what you're going to do," Hudson said.

"And what if you have what you're going to do straight in your mind but your picture is based on bad information?" I asked.

"Somebody's going to get hurt," Hudson said. (62)

Misinformation forming the wrong picture becomes the basis of Flynn's *The Last Klick*, a novel which speaks to the division of what is fact and what is fancy in distortion. The struggle of the theme is over the journalist's struggle that:

You can reconstruct history but we have to file a report when no one knows what the hell is going on and we'd better be right most of the time . . . . Maybe that was why, once they had agreed that the house was on fire, it was so difficult to clarify that it had really been the garage. History could be revised but news could only be superseded by other news

on the same subject.

Side by side, the novels of Flynn and O'Brien give a clearer picture of the war in Vietnam. Alongside the critical footsoldier of O'Brien, we have the critical journalist of Flynn. Both authors are always pushing for and dubious of truth, as they would want the students they teach to be. O'Brien has taught at Breadloaf for many years and for several years at Sewanee Writers Conferences. Flynn taught drama for several years at Trinity in San Antonio, has been Professor and novelist in residence there since 1986. As Flynn says in the introduction to his acclaimed 1960 novel, *North to Yesterday*, "Writers have no credentials that are certain . . . besides, if you introduce yourself as a writer you invite the usual response, 'Never heard of you' although occasionally you encounter someone who has heard of you and responds, 'Not in my book you're not.'" Flynn's humor is legendary in Texas. O'Brien has stated that teaching is one thing and telling stories is another. "I wanted to use stories to alert readers to the complexity and ambiguity of a set of moral issues--but without preaching a moral lesson . . . By 'teach,' I mean provide insight, philosophy" (CA 325). Both authors continually pose questions for the reader of their work. The writer/reader reader/writer is on a quest.

The cover picture of Flynn's *The Last Klick*, an astounding blown-up negative of a group of soldiers with what looks like a body bag at their feet, an *abc* camera and cameraman in the right foreground, was taken by Flynn Southwest of Hoi An, Vietnam in 1971. Sherrill O'Connell asks in the novel:

"What is it like to have an experience no one else can share?"

"I can't remember a lot of things I know I'll never forget," Dinky said . . .

"Did you try to tell people what you had been through?"

"If it wasn't on the screen they didn't know about it, and if it was on the screen, they already knew." (354)

The cover of *In the Lake of the Woods* shows blood red in the lake and the sky, a blazing sunset offset by shadowed woods, grass and ripples of a wake from a dark boat. We hear John Wade say:

The issue wasn't trust or distrust. The whole world worked by subterfuge and the will to believe . . . the cold came from inside him. A deep freeze, he thought, and then he felt something he'd never felt before, a force so violent it seemed to pick him up by the shoulders. It was rage, in part, but it was also illness and sorrow and evil, all kinds of things. (33)

The covers of the two novels help pose the questions: What is a hero? What is reality?

Aspiring writers can glean process understanding from the writings of Flynn and O'Brien through such evidentiary notations as: *Don't panic. Ask questions. Remember the details. Continue writing. Diversify. Concentrate. Go for the spirit of conversations. Look for humor. Be aware of mis-information. Let a book sit if necessary. Experiment. Keep the faith.*

At the beginning of *Seasonal Rain & other stories*, Flynn writes

Rain is one of the blessings of earth, the salvation of the farmer, but hell to the infantryman. But even to the farmer, rain at the wrong time, out of season, is destructive . . . . There is also a dichotomy in the harvest. The harvest is a time of fulfillment, of rejoicing, but death is the Grim Reaper, and war is the random harvest . . . rain is to be expected,[and] lasts only for a season . . . for . . . soldiers . . . the time to kill passes and the time to heal begins.

The anguish Tim O'Brien feels at being a footsoldier, at killing is echoed by Robert Flynn's anguish at the futility as a correspondent of trying to report the truth. Flynn feels each of us gets caught up in the world's picture of us, a picture of mis-information about the real self, that we should tell ourselves that we are just "living with hyenas" when people laugh. He might argue that we should write that which the world does not expect of us, and I suggest that O'Brien would agree. As writers, in our accommodations with the world, we seek the season for the writing of our stories and the stories for the season.

### Works Cited

- Contemporary Authors*. "Tim O'Brien." New Revision Series, Vol. 40: 324-325.
- Dobyns, Stephen. *A Wrestler's Cruel Study*. New York: Norton, 1993.
- Flynn, Robert. *A Personal War in Vietnam*. College Station: Texas A & M U. Press, 1989.
- . *Living with the Hyenas*. Fort Worth: TCU, 1995.
- . *North to Yesterday*. New York: Knopf, 1967.
- . *Seasonal Rain and other stories*. San Antonio: Corona, 1986.
- . *The Last Klick*. Dallas: Baskerville, 1994.
- McNerney, Brian C. "Inventing Facts & Remembering Fictions: Tim O'Brien's Literary Reconciliations." Paper delivered at SCMLA, Houston, Nov. 1995.
- O'Brien, Tim. *Going after Cacciato*. New York: Dell, 1978.
- . *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*. New York: Delacorte, 1973.
- . *In the Lake in the Woods*. New York: Houghton/Mifflin, 1994.
- . *The Things They Carried*. New York: Houghton/Mifflin, 1990.

## An Unshapely Whore and An Enchanting Beauty in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

Caroline Miles  
University of Southern Mississippi

In *Light in August*, William Faulkner portrays Lena Grove and Bobbie Allen as two contrasting representations of women. In chapter one, Faulkner depicts Lena Grove's perception of herself, while in chapter eight, Faulkner composes a picture of Bobbie Allen through Joe Christmas's notion of femaleness. Faulkner constructs these contrasting impressions of women through skillfully threaded symbols and vividly portrayed surroundings. In the first chapter, Faulkner offers an abundance of images suggesting nature, wholeness, peace, harmony and eternity. These images exist in striking contrast to the smoky, seedy, temporary, dead, and artificial atmosphere of the restaurant in which Joe meets Bobbie Allen.

In chapter one, Faulkner initially puts forth Lena Grove as a symbol of femininity as projected by the male imaginary. At the beginning of the chapter, Lena Grove's feminine desire and consequent pregnancy label her as threatening and unwholesome. Lena's brother-in-law calls her a "whore" (403), while Lena's lover, Lucas Burch, has abandoned her because she carries his child. Faulkner's emphasis on Lena's "changing shape" (403) suggests male fear both of feminine fluidity and of the responsibility of family and children that women carry. Armstid, the wagon driver who asks Lena to spend the night at his house, persists in worrying about the reaction of his wife and says, "I reckon I do know what Martha's going to say. I reckon womenfolks are likely to be good without being very kind. Men, now, might. But it's only a bad woman herself that is likely to be very kind to another woman that needs the kindness" (408). Armstid himself notices immediately that Lena lacks a wedding ring.

However, against this marginal, external image of Lena as a whore who has been abandoned, Faulkner evokes the confidence that Lena has in herself, a concept that her surroundings mirror and accentuate. Faulkner describes Lena descending from the wagon with an "inwardlistening deliberation" (409), and throughout the chapter, Lena demonstrates her overwhelming faith in humanity by her remarks about people's kindness; "behind her the four weeks, the evocation of *far* is a peaceful corridor paved with unflagging and tranquil faith and peopled with kind and nameless faces and voices" (403).

Faulkner conveys how Lena completely immerses herself in a timeless world of natural surroundings; he ingeniously paints a picture of the wagon, a vehicle that reflects both Lena Grove and the "augmenting afternoon itself" (405). Wagons moving "slow and terrific" (404) dominate Faulkner's landscape in this chapter, and Lena's movement becomes identical to the motion of the plodding vehicles. While seated in the wagon, Lena exists as part of its motion; outside of the vehicle she becomes an extension or a shadow of that motion. Before the wagon even comes into Lena's sight, she thinks: "It will be as if I were riding for a half mile before I even got into the wagon, before the wagon even got to where I was waiting, and that when the wagon is empty of me again it will go on for a half mile with me still in it"

(404). This image of Lena and the wagon shadowing each other implies that the hypnotic wagons exist in the novel as "creekwheeled and limpeared avatars" (404) of the curved urn-like Lena Grove. The simple, steady, tranquil, and intoxicating motion of the wagons moving across "the red and unhurried miles" (420) reflects the powerful simplicity, innocence, warmth, and serenity of Lena Grove. Faulkner presents Lena as inhabiting and reflecting a landscape so natural and harmonious that it becomes dreamily quiet and hypnotic; movement exists, but it exists unseen, resulting in a mirage of motionlessness and eternity; fields and woods "seem to hand in some inescapable middle distance, at once static and fluid, quick like mirages" (439).

Faulkner reflects Lena's apprehension of herself as fluid through images of her surroundings. He combines curves and other circular depictions with images of ghosts, shadows and smoke, suggesting the connection between the female and that which cannot be grasped. The wagon moves "as though it were a ghost traveling a half mile ahead of it's own shape" (404), "the road curves on and away, crossslanted with shadows" (409) and, looking ahead towards Jefferson, Lena "sees two columns of smoke" (420). These images suggest the slipperiness of the female which the male imaginary finds threatening and cannot contain. Females, ghosts, shadows, and mirages resist being fixed and stabilized.

Lena Grove, a woman connected with peace and eternity, has no place in the mind of Joe Christmas. The intangible, phantom-like motifs of dust and shadows that pervade the first chapter indicate that the scene mirrors Lena's state of mind, but these images also seem to suggest that in Joe's male psyche, Lena Grove exists as no more than a dream, an ideal in the male world.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, throughout the novel, Joe Christmas and Lena Grove never meet; Lena does not form part of Joe's reality. Instead Joe desperately attempts to contain and control his own threatening reality of women; when filtered through Joe's experience, females, urns, and nature become associated with filth, hostility, disorder, and death. In chapter eight, Faulkner graphically translates Joe's distrust and disgust of the fluid reality of the female into the figure of Bobbie Allen. Lena's perception of herself acts against and transcends any external perception of women, but Bobbie Allen never achieves this transgression and consequently remains as a mere projection of Joe's negative view of women.

In contrast to the hot, light, August afternoon of chapter one, at the beginning of chapter eight Joe leaves his house by night and the changeable moon. Faulkner uses the moon, a female symbol, to foreshadow Joe's precognition of women. In the moonlight, Joe's house acquires personality and becomes "threatful, deceptive" (524), suggesting that women will become alarming and delusory in this chapter. Faulkner offers the harsh artificial *glare* of car headlights as the other source of light on the road in this scene, making the road appear hostile to Joe. Unlike the bright, red dusty road in chapter one, this road appears dark, *treacherous*, and consuming; the lane "went straight beneath the moon, bordered on each side by trees whose shadowed branches lay thick and sharp as black paint upon the mild dust" (524-25). Roads represent journeys, and link Lena Grove with the Armstids and other members of the community. The inimical lane that Joe encounters throughout the novel indicates his inability to successfully connect with the

people he meets, and more specifically prepares for his failure to accommodate the uncontainable Bobbie Allen.

Faulkner begins chapter eight with Joe leaving his house through the window in order to meet Bobbie Allen, an action that articulates a subtle connection with Lena Grove who left through a window to meet Lucas Burch. From Joe's standpoint, women should not transgress boundaries to fulfill their desire, and Bobbie Allen remains, for the most part, contained in an enclosed space, a restaurant, bedroom, car or dance hall. Just as Bobbie's pimp, Max, desires to contain her in the single role of a whore, Joe demands to control and fix Bobbie with his rigid expectations of her.

The "long, barren, somehow equivocal" (528) wooden counter, in chapter eight, connects the restaurant scene to Joe's recollection of the dietitian at the orphanage and "the ceremony of eating at the wooden forms" (487). This connection indicates how Faulkner presents Bobbie Allen from Joe's viewpoint. Through the episode of the dietitian making love to a young doctor, Faulkner unveils how Joe determined at a young age that the motivations of women would always remain incomprehensible. The dietitian catches Joe hiding in the closet, and he lives in a state of dreadful anticipation, expecting to receive punishment for his offence. However, instead of punishing him, the dietitian offers Joe money as an act of blackmail to prevent him telling anybody about her lovemaking. Still expecting punishment, Joe finds this contradictory act of blackmail an exhausting experience of suspense, and the act destroys his sense of order. This episode with the dietitian occurs immediately before Joe's abduction by the janitor and his adoption by McEachern, and therefore Joe correlates the actions of the dietitian with the destruction of his peaceful existence. So the wooden counter in chapter eight echoes an incident that explains Joe's rejection of femininity, and the counter acts as a foreboding object that insinuates Bobbie Allen's role in demolishing Joe's sense of rightness.

Redolent sensory images connected with food suggest the connection in Joe's mind between Bobbie Allen and the dietitian. The "sweet and sticky" (488) taste of pink colored toothpaste triggers the episode with the dietitian, while pungent odors of cooking food pervade Joe's meeting with Bobbie Allen. Joe and Bobbie Allen provocatively discuss lemon, coconut and chocolate pie, over a "grease crusted" (531), alter-like counter: "They must have looked a little like they were praying: the youth countryfaced, in clean and spartan clothing, with an awkwardness which invested him with a quality unworldly and innocent" (531). This spiritually sexual, deathlike vision of coming of age suggests Joe's innocence and his expectation of Bobbie's goodness. The smell of the greasy restaurant echoes the images of eating and odors that characterize Joe's other encounters with women, first those with the dietitian and then with the Negro girl. Having eaten too much toothpaste, Joe sits in a closet smothered by "womansmelling garments" (489) and vomits while the dietitian makes love to the young doctor. In the following chapter, when Joe first attempts to have sex with the young Negro girls, he stands "smelling the woman smelling the Negro" (514) and finds "something in him trying to get out, like when he had used to think of toothpaste" (514). Like the wooden counter, these odors pervade Faulkner's language in scenes that show Joe's perception of women as contradictory and disruptive. Joe's inability to contain and control the motivations of women results in his rejection of

anything feminine.

The element of masculinity that pervades Joe's meeting with Bobbie Allen suggests his suspicion and rejection of anything womanly. Faulkner displays Bobbie Allen as a woman stripped of femininity; she has a small, hard, almost mannish figure which protects "her from the roving and predatory eyes of most men" (526). Bobbie works in a "masculine, transient" (526) restaurant that stands in a town inhabiting a population of men who lead "esoteric lives" (526). Earlier in the novel, Faulkner depicts Mrs. McEachern as "a patient, beaten creature without sex demarcation" (521) and later in the novel, Faulkner conveys Joanna Burden as an "almost manlike, almost middleaged woman" (589). This masculine quality links all the women in Joe's adult life and suggests that they will all disrupt his sense of order.

Faulkner presents Bobbie Allen, from Joe's viewpoint, as not only manlike, but also unnatural and death-like, producing a violent contrast between Bobbie Allen and Lena Grove; her "smallness was not due to any natural slender but to some inner corruption of spirit itself: a slenderness which had never been young, in not one of whose curves anything youthful had ever lived or lingered" (525). A host of images in chapter eight suggest something unhealthy and unnatural; people talk through "the smoke of cigarettes" (527) and the "brasshaired woman" (527) at the counter offers "a belligerent and diamondsurfaced respectability" (527). Faulkner links Bobbie Allen with temporal and with death in other images; the customers in the restaurant look like people who have "just got off a train and who would be gone tomorrow and who did not have any address" (527), and the wooden counter resembles a wooden slab for laying out corpses. Joe's attraction to masculine women, artificiality, *corruption of spirit*, and lack of youth epitomizes a rejection of nature, reproduction, and the eternity of life, leaving only a sterile deathly sexual attraction for Bobbie Allen.

Outside, on the road, Bobbie Allen explains her menstrual periods to Joe, and subsequently, women, sex, and scent culminate into a death-like image of urns. In chapter one, Faulkner associates urns with Lena Grove and therefore with harmony and life, while in chapter eight Joe pictures disgusting urns that, like the toothpaste and the smell of the dietitian's clothes, make him vomit:

In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcoloured and foul. He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it, seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited. (538)

This becomes the climax of the chapter, the height of foreboding and preparation for the confirmation of Bobbie's prostitution. The female symbols of moonlight, caves, and urns become distorted, broken, contaminated, and vile as they get filtered through Joe's disgust of the female reproductive cycle. When Joe faces the periodical proof of Bobbie's femaleness, he fouls and condemns her with his horrific vision of female symbols. Joe can no longer contain Bobbie in a state of masculinity, in the restaurant, or in the scope of his expectations.

As long as Bobbie stays contained within the restaurant and the bedroom,

she remains controlled within Joe's or Max's viewpoint. In the bedroom, Max controls Bobbie in the role of a whore, while in the restaurant Joe fixes Bobbie in a state of masculinity and expects that he exists as her only lover. When Joe proves his suspicions about Bobbie's prostitution, he strikes out at her because she has failed his expectations and has disrupted his sense of order and rightness. Bobbie claims that she thought Joe knew about her prostitution, but Joe's view of her as deceiving and rotten dominates and smotherers any positive view that Bobbie may have of herself. Faulkner hints at Bobbie's ability and desire to love Joe romantically and not as a whore; she demands to see Joe, and tells Max: "Maybe I like him. Maybe you hadn't thought of that" (540). As Joe physically strikes Bobbie down, Faulkner metaphorically strikes down Bobbie's viewpoint. Faulkner's extreme repetition of the word *downlooking* in connection with Bobbie expresses her failure to hold her head up high above the perception and condemnation of the men around her. Bobbie allows Joe to hit her, and Max speaks of her "to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore" (545).

In chapter one, Lena Grove achieves a strong, positive, and overpowering view of herself, while Bobbie Allen remains limited and controlled by a male perspective. Lena retains a strong voice in the novel and displays her confidence in life, but at the same time remains alienated from masculine reality, particularly Joe's. Bobbie Allen lacks both a voice and an awareness of her worth and beauty. Lena Grove, in chapter one, although pregnant and unwed, radiates in the novel as a woman of beauty and purity, while Joe Christmas's limited viewpoint leaves an incomplete picture of Bobbie Allen as a sordid, unshapely, manly, unnatural woman who chooses to whore, lie, and disrupt men's lives.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> In *Ink of Melancholy*, Andre Bleikasten presents Lena Grove as a mythic figure, "the Virgin Mother, a classical icon of fetishized or sublimated maternity" (298).

## Works Cited

- Bleikasten, Andre. *The Ink of Melancholy*. Bloomington: Indiana U Press, 1990.
- Faulkner, William. *Light in August*. Ed. Joseph Blotner and Noel Polk. *William Faulkner 1930-1935*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1985.



## ***The Knockout Artist and the Kirke Myth***

**Michael P. Spikes**  
*Arkansas State University*

Early in *Iron John*, a book about male identity in the contemporary world, the poet and essayist Robert Bly tells of attending a conference for men in 1980 where he discovered just how much pain and anguish many modern American men suffer. As Bly sees it, the sixties produced a male type which is still with us today--the "soft" man immersed in his feminine, sensitive side; the "nice boy who pleases not only his mother but also the young woman he is living with" (4). It was such men that Bly encountered at the 1980 conference, and, according to Bly, it was precisely their gentleness and compliance that was at the root of their suffering. They had learned, through bitter experience, that "receptivity wasn't enough to carry their marriages through troubled times;" that always saying "I can feel your pain, and I consider your life as important as mine, and I will take care of you and comfort you" had eroded their masculine resolve, had nullified their ability to say what *they* needed and wanted (4).

Bly sums up his judgment of those men and their plight by alluding to the Kirke episode in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus is instructed by Hermes to stand up to the goddess Kirke, who represents "a certain kind of matriarchal energy," with raised sword (4). Many of the men at the conference, Bly observes, were absolutely unable to raise the sword over the Kirkes in their lives. Referring to a particular man in attendance who was "a kind of incarnation of certain spiritual attitudes of the sixties," Bly notes that "he had learned so well not to hurt anyone that he couldn't lift the steel, even to catch the light of the sun on it" (4). Bly deplores this condition, proclaiming the need for this man, and the legions of others like him, to assert himself, to reclaim his masculine authority and dignity. Throughout *Iron John* Bly insists that such sword brandishing does not entail physical violence against or domination of women. He applauds the women's movement and the various forms of feminine empowerment it has encouraged. Bly simply thinks men should cease being so meek and mild, should rediscover their natural strength and learn "joyful decisiveness" (4).

Most of the leading male characters in Harry Crews's fiction would appear to be largely uninfected by the masculine malaise that Bly identifies. Indeed, many are, in obvious respects, antitheses of the "soft" male, brandishing their swords often and in the direction of whomever crosses their paths. They display qualities more typical of the traditional man than of the feminized version of the sixties. Yet, interestingly enough, if one closely examines even the hardest of these characters, one discovers that the concerns Bly raises do, in fact, play a crucial role in their lives. Most all of them consciously or subconsciously struggle, even in successfully asserting their authority in relation to women, to suppress their softer selves; their Odysseus-like aggression and dominance often signal an awareness, shared by Homer's hero, that women are threatening and must be defended against, and the extremity of their efforts not to submit is often a measure of their fear that they might. Eugene Biggs, the focal character of Crews's 1988 novel, *The Knockout*

*Artist*, is an excellent example. His story clearly illustrates the principal patterns and lessons of the Kirke myth, which Bly evokes. Crews may or may not have consciously drawn from *The Odyssey* in creating his protagonist, but his novel quite plainly and strikingly shares certain classic themes and plot elements with Homer's epic.

The Krike episode, which occurs midway through *The Odyssey*, proceeds, in brief, as follows. On their return voyage from the Trojan war to Ithaka, Odysseus and his men happen upon an island inhabited by this goddess. Initially, Odysseus sends twenty-three of his soldiers, led by Eurylokhos, to scout the island. They find, in the depths of a forest, a stone house with wolves and lions lounging in the yard. Far from being fierce and threatening, these animals are meek and tame, fawning on the men as they approach. As they near the house, the men hear beautiful singing coming from within, and when they enter, the seductive Kirke, who has invited them in, offers each a drink, which each unquestioningly accepts. The drink is actually a magic potion that immediately turns the men into swine. Eurylokhos, the only member of the party wary enough not to be lured into Kirke's home and thus the only one who manages to escape her snare, discovers what has happened and rushes back to the ship to report to his leader his shipmates' fate. A distraught Odysseus then sets out to rescue his men. On the way he is intercepted by Hermes, who gives him an antidote to counteract Kirke's magic drink and who further instructs him to let his "cutting blade appear/ Let instant death upon it shine" (186) when she tries to treat him as she has treated his crew. Equipped with the antidote and these instructions, Odysseus arrives at Kirke's hall, takes the drink she offers, is unaffected by it because of the antidote, and when she attempts to herd him into her pig sty he draws his sword and holds it to her throat. Awed by and attracted to Odysseus's strength and authority, Kirke falls at his knees and suggests that they "mingle and make love" (187). But Odysseus is not finished. "Kirke, am I a boy that you should make me soft and doting now?" (187) he responds to her request. He lets her know that he will not allow her to entice him into her bed to "take my manhood when you have me stripped" (187). He insists that she first swear not to work any more of her magic. She does, and they enter "Kirke's flawless bed of love" (187). Later, he gets her to release his men, and after she does, the men feast and Odysseus revels in Kirke's sexual favors, for almost a year, before the men remind their leader that it is time to resume their mission and head for home.

There are several significant aspects and implications of this tale, which are echoed in *The Knockout Artist*, that should be noted: (1) The men in the search party whom Kirke turns into pigs are not outwardly "soft," as Bly defines "soft," but are rather hardened warriors who have survived the Trojan war and numerous perils on their voyage home. They are, however, like the men Bly describes, "soft" in the sense that they are vulnerable to psychological domination by women. (2) The woman, Kirke, whom Odysseus and his men encounter is a threatening and formidable force, a goddess with magic powers, not some passive, weak, frail girl. She is also very beautiful and seductive. (3) Odysseus's and his men's identities and well being are bound up with this woman, determined by how they respond to her. (4) The man who succeeds with Kirke, the man who maintains his dignity and manhood and to whom she submits, is the man who, albeit with the aid of a god, refuses slavishly to give

in to her charms and dictates, the man who stands up to her, who forces her to accede to *his* will. (5) The men who unhesitatingly and wholly submit to Kirke lose their manhood, and are transformed into pigs or docile and domesticated lions and wolves. Rather than being flattered by or appreciative of their submissiveness, Kirke has nothing but disdain for men who obey her. Keith May has commented that the role of women in Homer's world is often to test the metal of the male figures. "Men die directly or indirectly through the devices of women," says May, "but the great men are untouched by those devices or profit from them . . . In fact the women generally enhance the heroic values" (8). Certainly, this is true in the case of Odysseus. He, with the help of Hermes, establishes his heroic identity by forcefully defying Kirke's seductive charms and power.

It would be hard to find a contemporary American novelist who has created more vivid portraits of Kirke-like women than has Harry Crews. Writing several years before the publication of *The Knockout Artist*, Patricia V. Beatty observed that the "overtly sexual women in Crews's novels" are "terrible [former] virgins, warrior goddesses" who "have a capacity for wickedness, bloodlust, violence" (117). Though she is speaking of the women in Crews's earlier works such as *The Gypsy's Curse* and *A Feast of Snakes*, her remarks are also certainly applicable to Charity, the female protagonist of *The Knockout Artist*. Charity is perhaps not guilty of "bloodlust" or physical violence, but she is nonetheless extremely dangerous, a warrior of sorts, who is capable of pronounced forms of "wickedness" and psychic violence. Certainly, she fits the mold which Beatty claims that women not only in Crews's texts, but those of many other American novelists as well, fall into: "Women for these writers . . . are most always a threat, something to be feared, struggled against, attacked, or occasionally succumbed to" (112).

Like Kirke, Charity is a seductive and, in many respects, powerful woman. She lives in a lavish, expensive home in one of the richest residential areas in New Orleans. She wears the finest clothes and drives the finest cars. Her money is inherited, coming from her father who is a wealthy oil man in Dallas. As the novel opens, we are led to believe that she is a graduate student in psychology at Tulane, working on her dissertation. Later we discover that though she was indeed a student, and a quite good one, she was finally abandoned by her dissertation director, not because of her lack of ability, but apparently because of certain psychological and personal problems he perceived her to have. Even after withdrawing from the university, however, she continues, in a driven and determined fashion, to pursue her research and ultimate goal of writing a book. Not only is Charity like Kirke, though perhaps a bit more unstable than the goddess, in her forceful, aggressive personality and regal station, but she is also, like Homer's heroine, gorgeous and sexually alluring. The narrator describes her undressing for Eugene for the first time: "And as each piece of clothing fell away, she was revealed to him [Eugene] more and more beautiful: taut, symmetrical, muscled long and lean like a gymnast or sprinter" (63).

Just as Charity resembles Kirke in certain noticeable ways, so does Eugene resemble Odysseus and his men. Like the Ithakan general and each of his soldiers, Biggs is, quite literally, a fighter. Raised in poverty and hardship in south Georgia, he, as a young man, departs for Jacksonville, Florida, looking for work. There under the tutelage of his uncle Bud he becomes a boxer.

Through hard work and natural ability he compiles a 13-0 record before being knocked out by a far more experienced and talented opponent in an undercard match at Madison Square Garden. After this defeat, Biggs is never the same again. He has several more fights, is knocked out each time, and is eventually deserted by his manager Bud. As a finished fighter with no education, Biggs winds up waiting on tables in a restaurant in New Orleans's French Quarter and supplements his income by marketing the only real talent he has, the ability to be knocked out. More specifically, he discovers that he can make large sums of money by knocking *himself* out. For the rich and perverse of New Orleans, he performs, like a freak in a circus sideshow, solo matches in which he strikes himself on the chin and lapses into unconsciousness. Certainly, Biggs lacks the nobility and achievement that Odysseus, and to a lesser degree his men, have. In the end, Eugene does not prevail in the ring as Odysseus and Crew prevail in the Trojan war, and knocking oneself out is obviously an humiliating act. But Eugene was once a successful fighter, and he does do what he has to do in order to survive after his brief career as a boxer is over. He is surely, in most ways, not the outwardly "soft" man Bly describes, and like Odysseus and his men he is tough and battle hardened. Moreover, as we shall see, he eventually quits performing and pursues more dignified work.

From the very first encounter between Eugene and Charity, the parallels with the Kirke episode are apparent. They meet in the restaurant where he is working. She spots him from her table, is attracted by his animal charm, calls him over and tells him to meet her after he gets off work, and later takes him home and seduces him. To poor, uncultured Eugene, Charity, in all her wealth and refinement, appears little less than a goddess. Just as Odysseus's men are lured into a goddess's home and then unquestioningly do her bidding, so is and does Eugene. After they make love, Charity, having learned of and being fascinated by Biggs's knockout act and background as a boxer, offers him a plush apartment and other amenities in return for his continued sexual services and, a point she fails to mention at the time but which later becomes painfully clear, the privilege of studying him, of making him the focus of her book project. Though he "has his doubts about staying in an apartment Charity was paying for" (67) and though the deal does not seem to "make sense" (67), he nonetheless agrees, unable to decline the money and sex. He becomes, in a way, a kept man, though he does retain his restaurant job and continues to perform his knockout act and thus has an independent source of income. Unlike Odysseus's men, Eugene Biggs does not forfeit the temptress's sexual favors by submitting to her, nor is he, in a literal sense, driven into a pig sty. To the contrary, he is offered all the sex he wants and is afforded a life of luxury. However, like Odysseus's men, he proves vulnerable to the power of a beautiful woman, allowing himself to be controlled and dictated to by one. And though he is not exiled to a physical pig sty, he is confined, as becomes more and more apparent to him and us as readers as the story progresses, to a pig sty of the spirit, namely, to the degrading condition of being Charity's sex toy and experimental guinea pig.

Charity visits Biggs's apartment only when it is convenient for her. She sometimes dresses him up and parades him before her educated friends, much as one would show off an exotic pet. And while they make love, she asks him intensely personal questions and records his answers on a machine. As the

narrator explains, Charity believes that "everybody's defenses are totally destroyed during a raging fuck" (82), and thus, she thinks, she will be able to get the most honest, revealing responses from him during those times. Biggs initially puts up with all this but gradually becomes more and more dissatisfied by the way he is allowing himself to be treated. He has become little more than a pig-like captive of a Kirke-like keeper, and he knows it, if at first only dimly. His obedience gets him exactly what Odysseus's men's obedience gets them: enslavement and degradation.

The turning point for Biggs occurs midway through the novel when he breaks into Charity's locked file cabinet and reads what she has written about him. He learns that she has not protected his anonymity as she promised she would. Worse, he is directly confronted by the fact that he has given Charity his deepest, darkest, most secret thoughts and feelings. Deeply disillusioned with her and disappointed in and ashamed of himself, he vows to change, to eradicate not only the soft spot in his will that has allowed him to submit to Charity, but also the soft spot which has allowed him to submit to the humiliation of knocking himself out. He gives up his freak show act and, along with his friend Pete, becomes the manager of a young fighter, albeit a fighter owned by a sleazy businessman for whom Eugene once performed. And though his relationship with Charity does not immediately end, he spends less and less time with her and avoids sex. Gradually, Biggs is lifting himself out of the pig stys he has gotten himself into, freeing himself from his Kirke, and becoming more Odysseus-like.

At the very end of the novel, Biggs makes a final, dramatic and violent break with Charity. He discovers that she is having an affair with a woman, a prostitute, who is a friend of his, and that while they make love, Charity asks this woman personal questions and records her answers, exactly as she has done with him. Eugene decides he has had enough. He goes to Charity's house to put an end to her intrusive research and their relationship. In an act of aggression strikingly similar to, though considerably more brutal than, Odysseus's, he forcefully and defiantly stands up to her. Rather than placing a sword to her throat, he puts a pistol barrel in her mouth. After sufficiently terrorizing and humiliating her, he then forces Charity to burn the tapes and notes in her file cabinet. This act symbolically severs her possession of and control over him. Biggs seriously considers killing Charity, who has sunk to the floor and is crying and trembling at his feet, but finally decides not to and simply leaves, forever. His self-assertion has brought his captor to her knees, earning a complete victory over her, just as Odysseus's show of will leads to triumph over Kirke, signified by her slumping at his feet.

Unlike in *The Odyssey*, in *The Knockout Artist* the hero loses the temptress's sexual favors when he establishes his authority over her. And in Crews's novel, unlike in Homer's epic, the act of establishing authority is exceptionally ugly and violent, resulting in an absolute emotional break. But Eugene Biggs, like Odysseus, must physically threaten, with a deadly, phallic weapon, a treacherous woman in order to free himself from her power and achieve personal autonomy and dignity. The message in both texts is the same: women are potentially deadly, can engulf and destroy a man's soul if he unreservedly submits to them, and consequently they must be stood up to with the utmost force. Though Eugene Biggs finally proves that he, unlike Odysseus's soldiers, is *not* one of Bly's "soft" men, Biggs, like the victorious

Odysseus, implicitly acknowledges, through his early actions and extreme act of defiance in the end, how dangerous women are and how tempting it is to be a pig, to go "soft" and submit.

### Works Cited

- Beatty, Patricia V. "Crews's Women." *A Grit's Triumph: Essays on the Works of Harry Crews*. Ed. David K. Jeffrey. Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, 1983.
- Bly, Robert. *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1990.
- Crews, Harry. *The Knockout Artist*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. Garden Cit, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961.
- May, Keith. *Characters of Women in Narrative Literature*. London: MacMillan, 1981.

# Arthur Miller's Theory of Tragedy and Its Practice in *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, and *The Crucible*

Harksoon Yim  
University of Southeast Louisiana

Arthur Miller has asserted his theory of tragedy in his various essays and interviews. Even if his theory of tragedy has been considered to be important in the history of American drama, it fails to explain all of his plays as tragedy. Judged by his own criteria of tragedy, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, which he uses as examples of modern tragedy, may have to be called other than tragedy because Miller shows the discrepancy of theory and practice in these two plays; however, his theory is better practiced in *The Crucible*.

Since the production of *Death of a Salesman*, there have been many disputed debates to answer the question: "Is *Death of a Salesman* a tragedy?" Some critics, going all the way back to the time of Aristotle, have used Aristotle's paradigm to answer the question. Some other critics, rejecting the paradigm as an obsolete criterion for any modern tragedy, have set up a modern criterion for modern tragedy and tried to answer the question. In either case, they have reached different answers. Among the critics who have applied the Greek theory, some have found that the play is a tragedy while others have reached the conclusion that it is not. It goes the same with the latter group. At this juncture, the question will be what criterion we have to use to evaluate any modern tragedy. As Robert Corrigan states, if we "use Aristotle's *Poetics* as a prescriptive guide book" to evaluate any work written in the modern era, it will not only be inappropriate but also lose the very validity of the argument (7). Thus, there must be some kind of compromise to resolve the duality in using the criteria. Fortunately, noticing the changes in the development of tragedy in Western literature, the majority of the critics have agreed that there is still the possibility of tragedy in the modern era although the form of the tragedy is somewhat different from the Greek's. Fortunately again, they have agreed that the nobility of the tragic hero still remains as the essence of tragedy.

At the center of tragic theory lies the nobility of the tragic hero. The greatness of the tragic hero has been considered as coming from the hero's high status. It is, in a sense, appropriate to the Greek tragedies because the Greek writers chose their heroes only from the high class. But for Aristotle the emphasis was not on status itself but on the way persons of the higher classes acted. Therefore, in modern democratic society which is quite different from the Greek's, the hero's great nobility of spirit is not confined to the higher classes only. Miller's claim on this point is right; any common man can be a tragic hero. Whether he belongs to the high or the low class, his nobility comes from his actions. We admire heroes when we find greatness in their actions. These actions are always related to man's ultimate question. While most people accept their fate passively, some reject the given fate. That rejection is the heroic quality that we find in great nobility. Without this quality, we cannot feel pity and terror.

However, from the hero's nobility comes his "tragic flaw" or "hermatia," a much disputed concept. Many critics have interpreted these words in terms

of morality because Aristotle does not elaborate on the implications of the terms. To make clear the meaning of this term, it is appropriate to examine an example from the Greek tragedies. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus' "hubris" or "overweening pride" causes his suffering and ultimate destruction. He does not accept his fate. The very act of refusing to accept his fate is a tragic flaw which makes a hero defy the "status quo" of being human.

In Arthur Miller's statement, this "tragic flaw" becomes the human will to overcome man's lot:

In the sense of having been initiated by the hero himself, the tale always reveals what has been called his "tragic flaw," a failing that is not peculiar to grand or elevated characters. Nor is it necessarily a weakness. The flaw, or crack in the character, is really nothing--it need be nothing but his inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity, his image of his rightful status. Only the passive, only those who accept their lot without active retaliation, are "flawless." (*Theater Essays 4*)

But later in his introduction to *Collected Plays*, Miller seems to have changed his concern with tragedy, as Emile McAnany points out (16). Miller now emphasizes the intensity of commitment in a person who follows out his chosen path. The fixed point of commitment is "some conflict, some value, some challenge" (*Collected Plays 7*). Miller states that the tragic hero commits himself to some value or a set of values even in the face of death. Miller's emphasis on the intensity of commitment may allow the hero to be insane (Cassell 33), as he himself mentions "fanaticism" (*Collected Plays 7*). But the hero cannot walk away because the causes to which he commits himself have some positive values. The causes and their values are not the matter of "right or wrong" in terms of morality. They must have some goodness in the protagonist's own terms. If he clings to any wrong or false value by his own judgment, he is merely a fool. Therefore, what prevents the hero from walking away from his conflict is not just an emotional matter. What makes the hero commit himself to the fixed point gives the inevitability of tragic action. As intense commitment is related to the inevitable cause, nobility or greatness of spirit comes from the intense commitment to the cause shown in a character's actions. So the nobility of a character with the tragic flaw may be the first and most important criterion to measure the characterization of Miller's protagonists.

In *All My Sons*, does Joe Keller have the great nobility of spirit which comes from his intense commitment? The play portrays Joe's suffering and destruction obviously from the crime he has committed. Critics say that Joe is forced to commit this crime by social evil or his evil surroundings. Santosh Bhatia compares Joe's guilt with Macbeth's and says that "the private guilt of the individual is matched against the larger social evil" in both plays (33). But Macbeth's crime is inspired by a supernatural force--the three witches--which can be tolerated by the Shakespearean audience (Abel 58). Joe's crime, however, cannot be excused by the larger social evils. Macbeth suffers from the violation of moral values. His violation, not totally self-inspired, is given as his fate. His suffering is understood from his struggle with his fate.

Joe Keller's suffering, however, is different from Macbeth's. Joe suffers



from the crime that he has committed consciously. Calling Joe's crime "a crime of omission, not of commission," Barry Gross holds that "Joe Keller is guilty of an anti-social crime not out of intent but out of ignorance" (16). According to Gross, Joe does not have any concept of "society"; he is simply a "provider, bread-winner, husband and father" (16). But Joe does not show any nobility in his action. He is simply one of us. Any man can commit a crime, feel guilty, and suffer from it. However, we cannot admire a man who does not possess a great nobility of spirit.

Miller tries to defend the play:

The crime in *All My Sons* is not one that is to be committed but one that has long since been committed. There is no question of its consequences being ameliorated by anything Chris Keller or his father can do; the damage has been done irreparably. The stakes remaining are purely the conscience of Joe Keller and its awakening to the evil he has done. (*Collected Plays* 18)

Miller here emphasizes Joe's struggle and suffering as a process of his conscience awakening. In spite of Bhatia's contention as well as Miller's, the play does not reveal any process of Joe's conscience awakening to the evil he has done (32). Evidently, the crime and its effects, rather than his conscience awakening, are an on-going process. His business partner, Herb Deever, is still in jail, suffering a fate that he has not deserved. If Joe suffers, he actually suffers from the effort to hide his past and present crime, with the help of Chris and Lady Kate "Macbeth" Keller. When the letter reveals that fact about his son Larry, Joe loses his foundation for further excuses. Samuel Yorks says that "his final recognition of all who fought as his sons" brings him to death (403). But he is not "a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing--his sense of personal dignity" (*Theater Essays* 4). Joe escapes from the responsibility of his crime by killing himself. Instead of admiration raised by the tragic hero's great nobility, we feel only pity which pathetic drama arouses.

Miller considers *Death of a Salesman* as a heroic play in which Willy Loman is the tragic hero (*Collected Plays* 31). Does Willy have great nobility? Miller seems to think that Willy has it. He says that "this man is actually a very brave spirit who cannot settle for half but must pursue his dream of himself to the end . . . this was no dumb brute heading mindlessly to his catastrophe" (*Collected Plays* 34). By saying "must," Miller seems to provide Willy's action with inevitability--at the outside of the text. Miller continues:

[Willy] was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he had placed his fate in, so aware, in short, that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart, that he staked his very life on the ultimate assertion. (*Collected Plays* 34-35)

Judged by this statement and the play itself, Willy has been aware of his commitment to false dreams of success and of good fatherhood well before his suicide. What prevents him from "walking away" is neither the inevitability

nor the intensity of commitment. The best explanation for this discrepancy is that he has no character (Field 24). This is not the hero Miller defines as a man with "inherent unwillingness to remain passive" (*Theater Essays* 4). He wants to remain in his wrong dream almost pathologically.

The dreams Willy has clung to are false in terms of social standards and of his own knowledge. He has been aware of it. Willy has committed himself ignorantly to the false dreams: the dreams of success and good fatherhood. But Willy's dream of success, unlike some critic's assumptions, is not the same one as Uncle Ben's (McAnany 18; Bettina 410). Willy expresses his regrets for his lost chance: "Why didn't I go to Alaska with my brother Ben that time!" (*Collected Plays* 152). Willy has refused to go with Uncle Ben because he has had his own value system. Ben's success dream is easy wealth. But Willy's dream is that of a salesman's which can be achieved by being well-liked. So his image of the good father is not associated with wealthiness. He so much wanted his sons to admire him as a hero that he made up the story about a mayor.

Willie made up his own false dreams and pretended to live by them. But at a certain point in his life, maybe after the Boston hotel incident, he could not pretend any more and could not admit his failure, either. The tension in this discrepancy between reality and made-up illusion pulls him apart. When Biff embraces him, he misunderstands Biff. On this seeming father-son reconciliation, Miller states: "This is the moment of a very powerful piece of knowledge, which is that he is loved by his son and has been embraced by him and forgiven. In this he is given his existence, so to speak--his fatherhood" (*Collected Plays* 34). Miller and those who consider the play as tragedy believe that this is the moment of Willy's tragic awareness (Bhatia 55). What actually happens in this scene, however, seems to discredit their claim. Willy's experience at this moment is far from a tragic recognition because Biff's gesture and statement do not embody the worship that Willy has wanted all his life. Biff actually strips himself of his father's lies and wakes his father out of his dream: "Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens?" (*Collected Plays* 217). Biff touches Willy's very sensitive spot, and this makes him go out of his mind. Miller says he intended in this incident:

That he is unable to take this victory thoroughly to his heart, that it closes the circle for him and propels him to his death, is the wage of his sin, which was to have committed himself so completely to the counterfeits of dignity and the false coinage embodied in his idea of success that he can prove his existence only by bestowing "power" on his posterity, a power deriving from the sale of his last asset, himself, for the price of his insurance policy. (*Collected Plays* 34)

Willy's suicide is not the result of his tragic recognition at all. The suicide is all preconceived when he discusses it with Ben in his hallucination. It cannot be a "tragic victory" which Miller associates with the consciousness of a hero and an assertion of bravery (*Collected Plays* 33). The insurance money gives him an excuse for his defeatist's escape. As George Kernodle points out, Biff already rejected his father's dreams (58). Willy's self-destruction may be inevitable for the making of tragedy, but it does not have any plausibility in the

characterization and plot. Even though Willy's suicide is the expression of love, it merely signifies the hollowness of his dream and life. Moreover, his suicide cannot be "a gesture of the hero's victory over circumstances" (Jackson 67).

Willy is a pathetic figure. Even if we consider that his false dreams are a manifestation of the value system of his society, and that he is forced to embrace the false dreams, he cannot transcend a pathetic figure. He dies having learned nothing and does not have the moment of clear self-knowledge. He does not have the great nobility of spirit.

In *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's practice of his theory of tragedy is more or less a failure because his protagonists do not represent the tragic hero whose nobility shown through the inevitable actions arouse in the audience the feeling of admiration. In the next play, *The Crucible*, Miller's concept of tragedy is better embodied. Its protagonist, John Proctor, is presented as a tragic hero who is admirable and whose action is inevitable. He is the man who shows, in Miller's words, "the struggle . . . of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society" (*Theater Essays* 4), and the play demonstrates, through John Proctor, "the indestructible will of man to achieve his humanity" (*Theater Essays* 7).

Miller presents Proctor as a befitting tragic protagonist. Proctor is the only character in the play with an ability to appreciate the evil side of the society, so in Act One he shows his confidence that he can confront the evil factions by revealing the real account of the issue. But when he becomes deeply involved in the court proceedings, with his wife accused as a witch, he senses his personal conflict. To save his wife he confesses his sin and tries to liquidate the reliability of Abigail Williams's accusation. Here the cause of his and his wife's direct involvement is his past sin related with Abigail. But the triangle between John Proctor, Abigail Williams, and Elizabeth Proctor "seems merely a convenient device to set a scene for the play" (Cassell 35). Some critics, however, see this past sin of Proctor as his tragic flaw. Bhatia contends that Proctor is destroyed by his own effort to make amends for "his weak moment of passion he yields to the lascivious machinations of Abigail" (61). Henry Popkin suggests that Miller introduces this triangle conflict "because Miller found himself compelled to acknowledge the Aristotelian idea that the blameless, unspotted hero is an inadequate protagonist for a serious play" (144-45). Miller's concept of the tragic flaw, however, is quite different from the one in these two critics' assertions. As Miller states, the tragic flaw is the character's "inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity" (*Theater Essays* 4). Proctor shows this inherent quality in the beginning, and when he becomes more deeply involved, his commitment intensifies. What brings his final catastrophe is not the moral flaw of his past but the subsequent intense commitment.

Miller provides Proctor with the great nobility which is chiefly concerned with his commitment to his notion of human dignity. Proctor lies because he thinks the act of verbal confession cannot be considered as a sin, at least in his own conscience, or does not conflict with his notion of personal dignity. But he realizes that his confession letter with his name goes beyond the personal dimension and affects other people on the social dimension; it will be used for the execution of many more innocent people. When he recognizes this horrible

strategy, he tears up his confession. With this act, his commitment to personal dignity intensifies and he sticks to the wider and higher cause. Thus, with this tragic recognition, he transcends the quality of a mere protagonist. He chooses death rather than life with human dignity. His final decision, inevitable in the lines of his tragic actions, does some good for society, which makes him noble and admirable.

Proctor's good action for society, with his intense commitment in his inevitable choice of actions, not only makes him noble and admirable but also allows the play to meet Miller's own criteria on an important point. Miller emphasizes enlightenment and optimistic vision which a tragedy gives to society. While Proctor does some good for his immediate fellow convicts, the play, with the protagonist's entire actions and tragic recognition, has the power of enlightenment that brings us "the knowledge pertaining to the right way of living in the world" (*Theater Essays* 9). The function of enlightenment is also a key to distinguish the tragic and the pathetic in Miller's theory: "the essential difference, and the precise difference, between tragedy and pathos is that tragedy brings us not only sadness, sympathy, identification and even fear: it also, unlike pathos, brings us knowledge of enlightenment" (*Theater Essays* 9). But his two plays, *All My Sons* and *Death of Salesman*, belong exactly to the category of the pathetic drama according to this differentiation and other criteria he asserts in his various essays while *The Crucible*, judged by some important points as well as traditional theory of tragedy, succeeds as a tragedy.

### Works Cited

- Abel, Lionel. "Is There a Tragic Sense of Life?" Corrigan 52-61.
- Blettina, Sister M. "Willy Loman's Brother Ben: Tragic Insight in *Death of a Salesman*." *Modern Drama* 4 (1962): 409-12.
- Bhatia, Santosh K. *Arthur Miller: Social Drama as Tragedy*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1985.
- Cassell, Richard A. "Arthur Miller's 'Rage of Conscience'." *Ball State University Forum* 1 (1960): 31-36.
- Corrigan, Robert W., ed. *Tragedy: Vision and Form*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
- . "Tragedy and the Tragic Spirit." Corrigan 1-13.
- Field, B. S., Jr. "Death of a Salesman." *Twentieth Century Literature* 18 (1972): 19-24.
- Gross, Berry. "All My Sons and the Larger Context." *Modern Drama* 18 (1975): 15-27.
- Jackson, Esther Mere. "Death of a Salesman: Tragic Myth in the Modern Theatre." *CLA Journal* 7 (1963): 63-76.
- Kernodle, George R. "The Death of the Little Man." *Drama Review* 1 (1955-57): 47-60.
- McAnany, Emile G. "The Tragic Commitment: Some Notes on Arthur Miller." *Modern Drama* 5 (1962): 11-20.
- Miller, Arthur. *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays*. Vol 1. New York: Viking, 1975.
- . *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. Ed. and intro. Robert A. Martin. New York: Viking, 1978.

Popkin, Henry. "Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*." *College English* 26 (1964): 139-36.

Yorks, Samuel A. "Joe Keller and His Sons." *Western Humanities Review* 13 (1959): 401-7.



POETRY





*Robert Collins*  
*University of Alabama at Birmingham*

## **Junior Lifesaving**

What were all those lessons for  
up to my neck in brackish water  
behind the crumbling cabanas  
learning to breathe and crawl,  
treading lagoons of darkness,  
perfecting the dead-man's float?  
I wanted to be back on shore  
flirting with the girls or racing  
faster and farther for gold  
or learning to dive, arcing forward  
with ease, all eyes upon me,  
before parting the pool's  
clear water with barely a splash.

Later, hardly holding my own  
against swirling currents,  
I found I couldn't save even myself.  
I was the one in need of rescue,  
gasping and flailing, crying for help,  
in even the shallowest waters--  
whose strength gave out,  
whose courage failed soonest,  
who never held another in my arms  
risking the saving embrace  
that might drag me under,  
or learned a way to love  
despite that flash, that shadow  
we glimpse sometimes in open water,  
its black fin turning toward us,  
rising to take us down.

## **Knight of the Altar**

I'm kneeling on the sanctuary steps  
at the foot of the altar, cassocked, surpliced--  
immaculate palms pressed firmly together,  
a perfect steeple pointing toward the dome  
of heaven--mumbling the appropriate response  
"to God, the joy of my youth."

But I'm dreaming of the night before  
in the bathtub when I groaned with pleasure  
and such a longing for the incomprehensible  
as I never knew I could feel, smitten  
for the first time in all eleven years  
I've lived with the promised ecstasy,  
and almost passed out like the day at mass  
I sang too loud and fainted dead away.  
I'm stunned by what possessed me,  
coursing from the chakra in my groin up  
and down the brainstem all the way to my toes  
as though the spirit had descended unannounced,  
infused my flesh, depriving me of speech,  
and breathed immortality upon the water.

And then I get it all confused  
as if suddenly I'd been stricken with vision--  
burnished light battering the altar,  
bells and incense, bread and wine,  
body and blood, semen and water,  
chasuble and chalice, transubstantiation,  
fitful paroxysm last night in the tub.

Above me Jesus crucified and naked,  
bread quickening to flesh, wine into blood,  
at the moment God approaches,  
holy, holy, holy, lord of hosts,  
suddenly I'm in love with everything.

## Taking the Pledge

The gospel and the sermon ended,  
Jesus having said the magic words  
to transform jars of water into wine,  
I'm standing up in church during mass  
one Sunday close to Pentecost about  
to swear I'll never take a drink, and  
trying to ignore the shattered man  
trembling unshaven across the aisle,  
biting his lip and knuckling the pew,  
ashamed of what little he remembers  
of last night's raucous episode,  
to keep his wife and kids from leaving,  
going on the wagon one more time.  
By evening he'll be drunk again, of course,  
all promises forgotten as he rages  
into darkness, demented, incoherent,  
threatening his children and his wife,  
sloshed and crazed enough to murder  
till a squad car squawking idles up,  
projecting on the stained all-weather  
siding revolving images, red as spilled  
Tokay, a film he's sure he's seen before  
and starred in through sequel after sequel,  
reprising for his neighbors one more time  
a role that's earned him local fame  
though he's always not remembering his lines.  
He'll wake a wreck in jail tomorrow,  
all promises unkept, bewildered, retching,  
bloodshot, wishing he were dead,  
willing to sign anything if they'll  
only send him home to sleep it off.  
At thirteen I'm too young to comprehend  
all this. Obedient, ecstatic, I say  
the words too loud as he begins to falter,  
ahead the many nights I'll babble wildly  
in tongues, blood changing into wine,  
certain I've no need of miracles.

## **Funeral**

My mind explodes  
Itself on flowers,  
Makes flowers explode,  
Stops,  
Caught,  
Desperate to loosen.  
The mind is a knot.  
I had forgotten.  
Everyone who is not  
Dead  
Is not  
Dead  
For a reason.  
I look for mine.  
Put your arms around--  
Lean your head against--  
Hold on tightly to--  
This flower.  
This flower:  
This coiled, pink  
And twisted knot  
My mind explodes.

## Baptism by Fire

In August in Mississippi  
cropdusters drone  
languidly  
in air  
so heavy  
it's more water  
than air,  
so hot  
it's less water  
than fire.

In August in Mississippi  
each rising trickle  
of heat  
carries the stench  
of cotton  
from endless  
sweltering fields  
into unbearable  
blazing air.

In August in Mississippi  
beneath the cicadas' high whine  
far off under the heat lightning  
at dusk  
in the delta  
the damned  
hear a vast  
dry  
rasping  
like a monstrous match  
burning  
in the baptismal air.

*M. Minford-Meas  
Houston, TX*

## **Black Chair**

It may be easy to let things rock  
out of pictures, out of somnolence  
into extreme focus like that black

chair in this picture on wood, collaged  
as an early gift from my sister who wished  
to convey into marriage serene walls,

years before her death. Here, two girls  
stand sandwiched behind the rocker, one  
reading over the other's shoulder a letter

they both hold. Their heads are a couple  
of pressed thumbs silhouetted against  
an open window with gauze sheers doubled

back. Cataclysmic surroundings unseen  
before. Their hair is matrixed, haloed in  
this small painting of apricot and greens,

but a confocal point is the ebony teeter  
addressing them with its open, curving  
arms, stating motion in the foreground.

What holds the rocker in is woodgrain  
bordering either side, wide-waled as  
the flattened opening of a folk guitar.

Striated madder cherry mutes a familial  
scene. UnPlathlike, the black lines  
in the resting place rock, then settle

into an object that can be reassessed.