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FIVE SHORT STORIES FOR STUDY
I AND THOU IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

FIVE SHORT STORIES FOR STUDY

I AND THOU IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

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The following thesis proposes to serve as a community college teacher's guide for the five stories herein analyzed. The Introduction is an attempt to unify the five stories and the essays about them by pointing out a common theme. Each of the five critical essays not only has its individual thesis but also suggests at least most of the story's major aspects that normally would be discussed in a classroom situation. At the end of each essay is a biographical-bibliographical essay designed to aid the teacher with additional sources of reference about the author as well as evaluations of these sources.

dedicated to . . .

The three professors whose advice and support helped me greatly: Leon Lewis who reminded me to concentrate on the important matters and to forget scholarly flights into trivia and who faithfully mailed the thesis and encouraging remarks back and forth while on his vacation; Tom McLaughlin who taught me to look more carefully at the narrator and author of a work and who cheered me up a number of times when I had just about decided to try for a degree in geography; and Mary Dunlap who taught me all I know about scholarship and research, who endlessly proofread for those tiresome "little" errors, and who proved to be a friend whose only fault was that I hadn't met her sooner . . .

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My husband, J. Bruce McKinney, who did more than his fair share of the laundry and who furthermore has taught me (over the years) the kinds of words one needs to know while writing a thesis;

And even the children themselves: Todd who brightened up the duller moments of thesis writing with gems of knowledge (Did I know that Belgian hares were really rabbits and that jackrabbits were really hares?) and Kathie and Laura who together provided the choral background for my work:

"THESIS YUK!"

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Chapter One

Introduction

The five short stories in this thesis vary considerably. The first story "Two Blue Birds" by D. H. Lawrence is the story of a sexless author-husband, his devoted, equally sexless secretary, and his not-so-sexless, estranged wife, a story told by an obviously critical narrator. From this clearly biased narrator we move to an apparently dispassionate observer in "The Chaste Clarissa" by John Cheever; from a very sexless male character to a very sex-obsessed one. In this story a divorced playboy spends all his energy trying to seduce a beautiful, newly married woman whose husband is overseas. Within this apparently realistic account, the seduction and its success carry no consequences. However, the next story about a very different kind of seduction carries consequences from the beginning. Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode" is as wildly unrealistic as "The Chaste Clarissa" is calmly realistic. Kugelmass wants a discreet affair that he doesn't have to pay for. He gets the affair through a magician who transports him into the novel Madame Bovary for a fling with the heroine. But he doesn't get it for nothing. The affair turns out to be

more expensive than one in the real world. After paying financially and emotionally, Kugelmass pays again by his final imprisonment in a remedial Spanish textbook as he is chased over barren land by a hairy irregular verb. After such a fantasy, Joyce Carol Oates's story "In the Region of Ice" brings us back to the everyday with a thud. The main character, a nun, first helps then refuses to help a young student who desperately needs her assistance. The result of her final noninvolvement is the literal suicide of the young man and the figurative suicide of herself, two deaths that have no redemptive quality within the story whatsoever. From this tragic conclusion, we go to the final story, Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation," a comedy with the salvation and hence the happy ending associated with comedy. Here, a self-righteous bigot in a doctor's office has both a book and the angry epithet "wart hog" hurled at her by a teen-aged girl. This violent confrontation alters the main character's perceptions of herself and others and God and leaves her self-righteousness broken.

Is there even a unifying factor relating these diverse stories? Although four of them are comedies, one of them has a saving revelation for the main character while the others do not. "In the Region of Ice" is not a comedy at all. Three of the stories have

close ties with realism; "Revelation," with its final vision of heaven, and "The Kugelmass Episode," with its magician and magic Chinese cabinet, have not. Four are traditional stories well within the regular critical canon, but "The Kugelmass Episode" is not.[1] The main characters of the stories range from the sex-obsessed to the sexually indifferent, from single to married to separated or divorced, from male to female, from Jewish to Catholic to Southern fundamentalist to totally irreligious.

For the most part, the authors have corresponding religious differences: Flannery O'Connor was a devout Catholic; Cheever, an Episcopalian; Woody Allen, a former orthodox Jew and a present atheist; Oates, a former Catholic and present agnostic; and Lawrence, a creator of his own religion, a mystic blending of power and sex. The authors are not of a particular school. And they are not related by geographical location. While four of them are American, these come from the South (O'Connor), the Midwest (Oates), and the Northeast (Allen and Cheever). Lawrence's being English even rules out any unity by continent. The stories begin to look as though they have in common only a century, the twentieth, and a genre, the short story.

Yet as widely divergent as the stories are, they do have a theme in common. Each illustrates some aspect of

the I-and-thou theme, the relationship of the main character to one or more people or to God. In each of these stories, we see the individual in relationship to some kind of community, even when that community is as limited as the Gee household in "Two Blue Birds." In each of these stories, someone is either saved or damned--or, in less Christian terms, freed or trapped--by his response to the outer world, his choices in relationship to it.

All of the stories have at least one character who tries to deny reality, particularly the reality of other people. In "Two Blue Birds" the husband makes such a denial. Here we see what it feels like to encounter a person oblivious to all but his own ego. The husband has wrapped himself in a cocoon created by the secretary and her family who surround him with comfort and admiration, and Mrs. Gee cannot get any response from him but supercilious smiles.

Like Mr. Gee, Baxter in "The Chaste Clarissa" uses other people to gratify his own ego. Rather than obsequiousness from others though, Baxter wants the other person to become a part of a game he plays, a challenge to himself. What the person's wishes and needs are remains insignificant to him. He doesn't once question whether he ought or ought not seduce Clarissa, not once wonder what the seduction will mean to her or others.

Kugelmass, the middle-aged Jew of "The Kugelmass Episode," does not want to use the other, but wants instead to run away from personal involvement, particularly that with his wife. When she talks to him, he goes into the bathroom to escape. When he gets the chance, he escapes even further by having an affair. The person with whom he has the affair is not really even a person. She is a fictional character who, like any fantasy, originally behaves exactly as he wants her to behave, not as a separate being with thoughts and demands of her own. When she does in fact become a separate being, he wants to get rid of her too.

Sister Irene of "In the Region of Ice" similarly wants to escape the needs and demands of others, but she enters a convent rather than a novel to do so. When a student begins to treat her as a person rather than as a nun, when he attempts to get her to treat him as a person in return, she does respond to him. But her response is precarious: she is tempted by the comfort and safety of her life before meeting him. When he comes too close, she retreats, thus denying herself the chance of forming a relationship.

Ruby Turpin of "Revelation" is locked into herself through her self-righteousness and her immediate pigeon-holing of other people. She is so busy congratulating herself and criticizing others that no one can break

through the barriers. No one breaks through, that is, until the homely teen-aged girl in the doctor's office throws a book at her and calls her a wart hog from hell. Like Sister Irene, Ruby Turpin has a protective shell broken; unlike Sister Irene, Ruby Turpin does not return to her former oblivious self. Unlike the other characters in these stories, Ruby Turpin does respond to the world outside herself.

As a part of this I-and-thou theme, all of the stories end with the main character alone in some respect. In "Two Blue Birds" the husband's denial of other people except when they are fulfilling his wishes causes his wife to rebel. Her rebellion, her resistance of him in a final sharp-tongued attack, leaves her cut off from him and his secretary, as well as the two of them from each other. Thus his denial has not only alienated him but even those on whom he practices it. In Oates's story the nun's decision similarly reverberates causing her final lonely walk down the corridor and contributing as well to the young man's suicide. Woody Allen's Kugelmass definitely ends up alone--out of the world of the I and thou, away from his wife--into an uncontrollable fantasy world where he is chased not by a person but by a verb. Even "The Chaste Clarissa" concluding as it does with the most intimate of acts, the sex act between two people, shows us a main

character who is alone. Intimacy is impossible, for Clarissa is never more than an object to him.

"Revelation" ends differently. The main character is also alone, more physically separated from people than Baxter is. She has left her Negro help behind and has watched her husband go back to the house. In a new kind of awareness about the fragility of things, she is left stripped of her worldly goods. She is equally stripped of her high judgment of herself and of her belief in the yes-ma'am reinforcement of the people around her. But this kind of aloneness for her is essential before her return to the community. As the final essay on "Revelation" attempts to show, she has changed in relationship to these people; and while she is momentarily cut off from humanity, her vision symbolically assures us that she will be reintegrated into that humanity. She is alone, but the author continually reminds us of the presence of God to whom Mrs. Turpin is responding for the first time.

Werner Manheim in his book Martin Buber summarizes a part of Buber's philosophy thus:

> Man exists as if encased in armor. The world speaks always to us. But only at certain moments the armor is pierced. . . . Every man is approached by the signs of

> address, which, meeting with a favorable response, could bring forth his creation.[2]

Each of these stories presents characters encased in armor, somehow unable to hear the world that is speaking to them. Each of these characters has failed to become part of a real community. Only in the last story do we see a character whose creation has haltingly begun, but that all of the characters need a similar creation is evident.

The beginning of this "Introduction" emphasizes the differences between the stories and the authors. The wide range of stories shows us what a great variety of forms this isolation of the individual can take. That such unrelated authors present characters all armored in some way against the world adds emphasis to the theme. In a way perhaps, the stories are related by their century, as general as that may seem. Although the individual probably has resisted the signs of address in all centuries, the wide variety of forms here, the dissimilarity of the authors, both suggest that this theme is particularly relevant to the twentieth century.

Notes

[1] Jonathon Culler, "The Uses of Madame Bovary," Diacritics, 11 (Fall, 1981), 80.

[2] Werner Manheim, Martin Buber (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 40.

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Chapter Two

Lawrence, Women, and the Wonderful Mrs. Gee

Faith Pullen and Kate Millet are among those who accuse D. H. Lawrence of male chauvinism in his creation of women characters. "Lawrence is a ruthless user of women," Faith Pullen writes. He "isn't concerned with women as themselves, but only . . . as they sup[port] and encour[age] the male. . . ." Usually, she believes, he doesn't even bother "attempting the creation of the other sex."[1] Kate Millet attacks him as a "counter-revolutionary sexual politician" who wanted to deny "personality in women."[2] Instead of credible women, Ms. Millet finds that Lawrence's fictional women merely serve as object lessons for real women, as exumpla to teach "that the salvation of the world lies in a reassertion of virility which will make it possible for women to fulfill their true nature as passive objects and perfect subjects to masculine rule. . . ."[3]

It is not hard to find examples in Lawrence's work to support such criticism. Katherine Farquhar in "The Border Line" learns her true female role, "her perfection and highest attainment" by submitting to a very masculine

man "[n]o matter what the man does or is. . . ."[4] What the man happens to be in this particular case is a dead man--or the spirit of a dead man--a fact which makes the submission not only one-sided, but quite morbid. In "Sun," Juliet, the main female character, gives herself not to a dead man, but to the sun, an obvious symbol for the virile male. Furthermore, almost as if Lawrence wrote this story to prove Kate Millet's point that he denies personality to his women, Juliet in submitting to the sun enjoys the nullification of her individuality. "[H]er blindness was like a richness to her, and her dim, warm, heavy half-consciousness was like wealth."[5] In "The Woman Who Rode Away" Lawrence moves even farther from reality. Whereas both Juliet and Katherine Farquhar occasionally seem like women--if somewhat strange women--once the woman who rode away rides away, any relationship she has to an actual person disappears. This depersonalization is, in fact, the point to which the story is leading. "Her kind of womanhood, intensely personal and individual, was to be obliterated again." At the conclusion of the story, the old, old priest prepares to stab her with his knife; when he does, he will "accomplish the sacrifice and achieve the power. The mastery that <u>man</u> must hold and that passes from race to race" (p. 581) [emphasis mine]. Even in his nonfiction Lawrence often clearly proves himself to be a chauvinist:

"When a woman is thoroughly herself," he writes, "she is being what her type of man wants her to be."[6]

Yet in spite of abundant evidence of Lawrence's chauvinism, in spite of a number of non-persons among his fictional females, there is another side to Lawrence. If we see Lawrence only as a "counterrevolutionary sexual politician," we will miss much of his truth about the relationship of the sexes. If we find all his female creations inadequate, we are blinding ourselves to his many life-like female characters, perceptively created. Lawrence does not always have a program to preach for women and does not always manipulate them to prove his points. At his worst, his women are flat characters and sometimes perverted symbols. But at his best, the Laurentian women emerge with the very special, quite unexplainable, life that the finest fictional creations have.

A number of examples could show this other side of Lawrence--Elizabeth Bates in "Odour of Chrysanthemums," Connie Chatterly of Lady Chatterly's Lover, Ursula in The Rainbow, and Gudrun in Women in Love.[7] But the example that I would like to discuss in depth is Mrs. Gee of "Two Blue Birds," a less well-know Laurentian woman, but one of my favorites.

In this story Mrs. Gee's marriage to Mr. Gee does not have the healthy whole quality of the relationship

of Connie Chatterly and Mellors in Lady Chatterly's Lover; rather, it is a story of a marriage that fails. Using Kate Millet's philosophy we could interpret this failure as a result--a result intended by Lawrence--of a man not in his rightful sexual place and of a woman not in her perfect submissive one. Further, we could find Mrs. Gee not a rounded character but an example of a common female stereotype, the bitch. But although such interpretations would not be totally wrong, they would be incomplete. There is more to this story than a woman who is out of her place. There is more to Mrs. Gee than the fact that she is a bitch.

Nevertheless, she is a bitch. If Mrs. Gee compares her husband to a "fairy prince who could call the ants to help him" (p. 516), she herself might be compared to the wicked witch who thwarts the prince. Though she shudders at the thought, she is, nonetheless, the one who metaphorically throws "the naked baby" (that is, Mr. Gee) "in the dust bin" (p. 520). Six times she is compared to a wolf. And a fierce, predatory, carnivorous wolf could hardly be more "cruel" to the two blue birds of the story than Mrs. Gee is to her husband and his secretary, the devoted Miss Wrexall. Mrs. Gee cuckolds her husband, taunts her husband, and eventually destroys her husband, a pattern quite characteristic of the stereotyped bitch.

But in order to see what Lawrence has done with this stereotype, we might compare Mrs. Gee briefly with an American counterpart, Margot Macomber of Ernest Hemingway's "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber."

Margot is also a bitch. She mocks her husband's fear of the lion. She flirts openly with the hunter Wilson, and she has sexual relationships just as openly. When her husband wants to discuss her infidelity, she goes to sleep. And when he finally gains the masculinity that she has mocked him for not having--masculinity, that is, in Hemingway's sense of that word--she shoots and kills Macomber. In spite of one minor assurance in the story that the marital situation was not her fault, that once she had tried hard, she is an unsympathetic character as she belittles and cuckolds her husband, as she laughs at Wilson, as she kills her husband. When she is reduced to begging at the end of the story--"please . . . [p]lease, please. . . ." she repeats to Wilson--Hemingway implies that she is in her rightful place, pleading and submitting.[8] At that time, Wilson, Hemingway's admirable character, agrees to lie for her, agrees to help her.

Mrs. Gee, on the other hand, is never reduced to begging. Though she too is openly unfaithful, though she too taunts and destroys her husband, though she looks down upon his "common" little secretary, she is

still a sympathetic character. In fact, she is the character in the story who most fits her husband's definition of a hero: "the one outstanding character with . . . whom we always sympathise . . . even when we are most aware of the human frailties" (p. 521).

Why? Why do we identify with a character who sounds so unlovable?

Again, let's compare this story to Hemingway's. In both stories there are three major characters. "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" portrays the other two characters sympathetically. Francis Macomber is likable and boyish and open; furthermore, during the course of the story, he grows to manhood. Wilson, already an admirable man, is brave, aware of the growth of Macomber, and in his own terms--as well as those of Hemingway--ethical.

The other two characters of "Two Blue Birds" are not portrayed sympathetically at all. Mr. Gee, whose letter-name abbreviation possibly signifies the God he would like to be, has a vastly inflated sense of his own importance. His voice is theatrical; his movements, dramatic. His bearing is like that of a "cock of his own little walk" (p. 517) and his voice like "the voice of God to Samuel" (p. 518). He is a "boss," a "chief," a writer whose "every and and but is preserved forever" (p. 515). He believes that he and his work

are so important that he never once questions whether he deserves the sacrificial devotion of the secretary. So loftily does he move through the pages of the story, so whimsically does he smile at his wife's foibles (her need for sex, for example), we are hardly sorry to witness his comeuppance at the end of the story.

As for his secretary, that obviously devoted young woman is hardly an admirable martyr. Miss Wrexall is actually an argument against Kate Millet's assertion that Lawrence wants only subservient women. For Miss Wrexall is subservient to the greatest degree. She works harder than Mr. Gee himself--not only taking down his notes, but also retyping them three times and not only writing and typing, but also keeping any angry creditors out of his way. Nor does she merely serve him herself. She is so devoted that she brings in the rest of her family to pour "out their lives for him day and night" (p. 519). Yet as hard as she works, as generously as she seems to give, Lawrence seems to like her submission little more than Mrs. Gee does.

For one thing, he shows what the secretary gets out of her apparently selfless devotion. She doesn't get sex--for Mr. Gee is asexual. She gains little money--for she is concerned about her boss's debts. The job offers "[n]o expectations" and "[c]omparative isolation" (p. 519). It is Mrs. Gee who dimly perceives

that the secretary's reward must be "a sense of uplift and importance because . . . [she] saw his name and photograph in the newspaper sometimes" (p. 519). What Miss Wrexall wants is to merge herself with her boss.

In Studies in Classic American Literature, Lawrence clearly gives his opinion of her wish:

> For the Holy Ghost says you must not be as one thing with another being. Each must abide by itself and correspond only within certain limits. . . . [T]he longing for identification with the beloved becomes lust.[9]

Miss Wrexall is guilty of such lust; she is denying such a Holy Ghost. We are not sympathetic with her--even when Mrs. Gee ruins the secretary's relationship with her boss--because Miss Wrexall is inordinate in her desires, because she is also, again as Lawrence says in Studies in Classic American Literature, "asking to be sucked."[10]

So two unlovable people are living together in Mr. Gee's house. Enter Mrs. Gee, the wife--the bitch. How can she help looking better than Margot Macomber? Who wouldn't be bitchy here? She is like a bit of spring wind blowing into the closed-up atmosphere of the self-sufficient household; she is the life in the story.

Why is Mrs. Gee, flawed as she is, more alive than the other two characters? Because she at least has an instinctive understanding of what life ought to be. She knows something about reality.

Mrs. Gee doesn't want to be treated with undue--that is, unrealistic--respect. Whereas Mr. Gee finds it natural to be treated as a king, when Mrs. Gee is treated as a queen, she suspects a "hair in the soup" (p. 516). While he likes getting the reverence due to a god, "[p]alm branches under her feet . . . only ma[ke] her feel ridiculous" (p. 517).

Mrs. Gee also knows that life should not be always comfortable, that people need some resistance. Mr. Gee's problem, she realizes, is in his " . . . having nobody, absolutely nobody and nothing to contradict him" (p. 518). The secretary and her family provide for his every need. They have " . . . the house spotless and running like a dream" (p. 517). And a dream, in this sense, does not imply reality. "She adored him, and the whole thing went on wheels" (p. 517). Of course, wheels. They offer no friction. "'I do like to think he's got nothing to aggravate him,' the secretary [says] to the wife" (p. 518).

The wife, however, has no such philosophy. She thinks that "[n]othing to aggravate him" is a terrible position for a man and one that ironically will aggravate

him. Well, Mrs. Gee will aggravate him. She will ask him if he's not too comfortable. She will get him into debt. "[S]he [doesn't] intend to be relied on" (p. 514).

The wife's sexual responsiveness, the husband's asexuality further illustrate their different ways of dealing with resistance. Mrs. Gee has got to "live"; she's not about to give up her sex life prematurely. She doesn't want to turn into a sexless pillar of salt. But Mr. Gee never kisses anybody. Why? Probably because a certain amount of resistance is inevitable in a sexual relationship. Mr. and Mrs. Gee themselves have "the awful unspoken intimacy of the once married" and a "private feeling of bitterness about the other" (p. 514). But with the secretary, Mr. Gee finds no such tension, no resulting bitterness. Instead, he and she have "ten hours a day intercourse a deux, with nothing but a pencil between them, and a flow of words" (p. 515).

The secretary too in her desire to merge with her boss is avoiding resistance. She not only wants no aggravation for Mr. Gee, but she also wants no resistance from Mr. Gee for herself. When Mrs. Gee suggests that the secretary has been writing Mr. Gee's novels, she is not only hurting him in his most vulnerable spot, she is also zeroing in on the secretary's problem.

Not only do the working couple deny the resistance of life, they also deny the mystery. Mr. Gee never

questions, never observes any mystery, any inexplicable aspects of life. How can he? He's too busy endlessly expounding. The secretary never questions, never wonders; she only endlessly takes notes.

But Mrs. Gee is puzzled, first about the secretary: "'What on earth she gets out of it,' thought the wife, 'I don't know'" (p. 518). And she is puzzled by herself: "Whether she herself--the wife, that is--wanted to be kissed by him, even that she was not clear about" (p. 518). "The mystery goes on," writes Lawrence, and Mrs. Gee is at least vaguely aware of the fact.[11]

She is also aware of Lawrence's philosophy that "[t]he Holy Ghost bids us never to be too deadly in our earnestness, always to laugh in time, at ourselves and everything."[12] The husband and the secretary, however, are both deadly earnest. Although Mr. Gee might smile superciliously at his wife and her need for affairs, "he couldn't bear it if she mocked his work for one moment" (p. 517). He doesn't really laugh either. As for the secretary, in the whole short story she doesn't once smile.

But Mrs. Gee realizes that she is verging on the ridiculous in her jealousy over the secretary whom she knows she does not want to replace. And she laughs at herself in her thoughts: in the secretarial family's admiration for her position as 'his' wife, she feels

"[h]is halo . . . like a bucket over her head" (p. 516). She acknowledges that she has been "a fool to come up in the spring!" (p. 520) and thinks, "What an idiot of a woman to go and be forty!" (p. 520). As she laughs at herself, as she is aware of her own mortality and frailty, she shows a humility with which we can sympathize.

The characters of all three come most sharply into focus on the spring day when two blue birds come fluttering into the garden. In the attitude of each character toward the spring day and the blue birds, a typical response is evident.

How does the secretary see the pretty spring day? She sees it as she sees everything--in terms of her boss. The fresh air might be good for Mr. Gee; perhaps working outside will give him a needed change of pace. When the blue birds arrive, she doesn't see them, for she is still taking notes. In fact, she never sees them at all, looking up only after they are gone, "gazing brightly around, her eyes half-blinded with work" (p. 522).

Mr. Gee sees the birds as a nuisance. "But 'he' [is] disturbed by the fighting blue birds . . ." (p. 522). He doesn't like anything to fight. He wants everything smooth with no resistance; he wants dreams and wheels and comfort. If the bluetits will only leave, he can enjoy the spring day: " . . . these are the

loveliest afternoons, when there's no direct sun, but all the sounds and the colours and the scents are sort of dissolved . . . . It's like being inside the egg and just ready to chip the shell" (p. 522). This attitude sums up Mr. Gee in an eggshell. How he enjoys "dissolved" colors and scents--nothing sharp, no rough edges, nothing terribly bright or smelly. And how he enjoys the pleasure of being inside the egg--inside the uterus that the secretarial family creates for him--where he'll find no resistance, no otherness, where he will remain quite unborn.

As for Mrs. Gee, she is not a whole person either this fortieth spring of her life. She does not like the absurd names of the flowers and would have called them instead "blue dots and yellow blobs and white frills" (p. 520), for "[t]here is a certain nonsense, something showy and stagey about spring . . . unless you have something corresponding inside you. Which she hadn't" (p. 520).

But at least she knows she is lacking the right attitude. And unsentimental though she is, she is the one who sees the blue birds of happiness in the two blue, gray and yellow bluetits. And she knows that "[o]n a soft spring afternoon" the secretary "ought to have him dictating poems . . . about the blue birds of happiness fluttering round [her] dainty little feet"

(p. 521). She knows she would if she were his secretary.

But no. The boss dictates on the future of the novel ("Was there nowhere to get away from his voice?"), and the secretary "took it down, took it down, took it down!" (p. 521). And his eternal meaningless dictation and her eternal taking it down incite Mrs. Gee to hurl the remark that will spoil the relationship between the secretary and her boss. His endless words are "more than flesh and blood [can] bear" (p. 521). And she--the wife--is flesh and blood in a fictional sense, the only flesh and blood in the story.

"I honestly thought . . . Miss Wrexall had written . . . [the novels] from your hints" (p. 525). The insult is effective. In one statement she hits the man "who cannot bear having his work criticized" (p. 525) by implying that a common secretary could have written his work and hurts that common secretary who has tried to become as one with him. With this remark, Mrs. Gee has broken the pleasant, protective shell of the spring day and has forced her husband, at least for a moment, to let the harsh sunshine of reality shine upon him.

And this moment for Mr. Gee brings us to the final reason why Mrs. Gee is a sympathetic bitch whereas Margot Macomber is not. Margot's bitching is all for herself; her behavior is for self-centered ends. She kills her husband because he will leave her if he

lives. She destroys the life of one who has just faced up to reality, who is about to enjoy an adult life and adult relationships.

Mrs. Gee, on the other hand, throws her husband into the very adult world (the "dustbin") from which Macomber is taken. She is a woman who has refused to be stifled by her husband, who has left him in order to make a life for herself; yet she does come back home in an attempt to change the relationship. Perhaps in a sense beyond herself, Mrs. Gee really does try to "do something to save him" (p. 520). He may not be saved by the end of the story: his flat response "Quite" makes his salvation highly dubious. But at least Mrs. Gee has given him (and herself) the chance. As long as life is without resistance, he has no hope whatsoever. "The root of all evil," Lawrence has written, "is that we all want <u>without resistance</u>."[13] Although Macomber who has just faced a charging buffalo doesn't need a bitch, the egotistical, overprotected, humorless Mr. Gee needs one very much.

The chance to begin anew, to start over from the dustbin, to save himself from himself is the chance that his wife offers him. Is this the behavior of the stereotyped bitch? Is this a woman without personality? A flat woman character? A woman whom Lawrence thought should be kept in her place?

Certainly not.

Notes

[1] Anne Smith, ed., Lawrence and Women (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978), pp. 49-50.

[2] Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Avon Books, 1971), pp. 233, 264.

[3] Millet, pp. 284-285.

[4] D. H. Lawrence, The Complete Short Stories, Vol. III (New York: Viking Press, 1969), p. 597.

[5] D. H. Lawrence, The Complete Short Stories, Vol. II (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 531. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[6] D. H. Lawrence, Assorted Articles (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), p. 38 as quoted in Kingsley Widmer, The Art of Perversity: D. H. Lawrence's Shorter Fictions (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), p. 77. For a brief discussion of "Two Blue Birds" with a viewpoint opposite to that found in this essay, see Mr. Widmer's book. He finds "[t]he wife as anti-heroine of the . . . sardonic 'Two Blue Birds' . . . [the] self-sufficient woman who insists to her husband that she has the right to 'live.'"

[7] A full-length discussion of Lawrence's sympathetic portrayal of numerous women characters can be found in Carol Dix, D. H. Lawrence and Women (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980).

[8] Ernest Hemingway, The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 154.

[9] D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1951), pp. 89,86.

[10] Lawrence, Studies . . ., p. 88.

[11] Lawrence, Studies . . ., p. 91.

[12] Lawrence, Studies . . ., p. 83.

[13] Lawrence, Studies . . ., p. 86.

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Biographical-Bibliographical Essay on D. H. Lawrence

Although somewhat dated, the best biographical-bibliographical essay on D. H. Lawrence is that by J. I. M. Steward in Eight Modern Writers (Oxford, 1963), pp. 689-694. This essay gives valuable information and evaluations about collections and editions of Lawrence's work, biographies, and bibliographies.

According to Steward, the best biographies are Not I, But the Wind (New York, 1934) by Frieda Lawrence; The Life and Works of D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1951) and The Intelligent Heart (New York, 1955; revised ed., 1960), both by Harry T. Moore; the three volumes of D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography (Madison, 1957-1959) by E. Nehls; Memoirs and Correspondence of Frieda Lawrence (ed., E. W. Tedlock [New York, 1964]); and Portrait of a Genius, But . . . by Richard Aldington (New York, 1950). Since Steward's time, other valuable biographies have been published. E. W. Tedlock's D. H. Lawrence, Artist and Rebel: A Study of Lawrence's Fiction (New Mexico, 1964) divides Lawrence's fiction into four parts with a related biographical sketch for each part. Two

Laurentian authorities, Harry T. Moore and Warren Roberts, have written the text for the very good biographical picture book, D. H. Lawrence and his World (New York, 1966). A short, helpful introduction to Lawrence, the man and his novels, is Tony Slade's D. H. Lawrence (New York, 1969). And for a very brief biography of Lawrence, see Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature (New York, 1942), pp. 794-797. However, for a comprehensive biography, see The Priest of Love: A Life of D. H. Lawrence (Penguin, 1976) by Harry Moore.

Eight Modern Writers has in-depth listing and evaluations of bibliographies up through 1962. At that time the standard bibliography was E. D. McDonald's A Bibliography of the Writings of D. H. Lawrence (Philadelphia, 1925) and The Writings of D. H. Lawrence, 1925-1930: A Bibliographical Supplement (Philadelphia, 1931), both of which were republished (New York, 1969). These two works should be supplemented by W. White's D. H. Lawrence: A Checklist, 1931-1950 (Detroit, 1950). Since Eight Modern Writers was published, the standard bibliography is Warren Roberts, A Bibliography of D. H. Lawrence (London, 1963). For a serious look at bibliographical work on D. H. Lawrence criticism, the D. H. Lawrence Review is essential. Each issue contains the latest checklists and bibliographies of theses,

dissertations, and foreign criticism, as well as numerous checklists of scholarship and criticism.

Chapter Three

"The Chaste Clarissa": A Dark Comedy

That John Cheever's short story "The Chaste Clarissa" both begins and ends in the evening is not insignificant. For all its comedy this is a story about people on the edge of night, about the darker side of human nature. Though the events take place in the summer and consequently there is sunlight in the story, there is no corresponding human light. Roses are present--"Mrs. Ryan's climbing roses . . . [are] in bloom"--but like the sunlight they only serve as a contrast for what is blighted and thwarted in Vineyard Haven.[1] Except for a brief mention of the housekeeper Mrs. Talbot's taking her husband to the hospital, little sign of human caring is evident and not a hint of mercy. Very little justice is here either--unless it is the justice of a fool getting what she deserves. "The Chaste Clarissa" is a story of a seduction, a remarkably easy one, that costs the stingy seducer Baxter nothing, a seduction, in fact, that carries very little meaning for anyone in the story.

Though bleak, the story does have many comic elements. Baxter's single-minded preoccupation with overcoming the resistance of the chaste Clarissa has the mock excess of comedy that makes Baxter laughable, and his early unsuccessful attempts to seduce the beautiful, red-haired Clarissa often are amusing. During one of his conversations with her, for example, Mrs. Ryan interrupts by leading him off to a lengthy discussion of sheep raising. Three times his attentions and flattery get him nothing but a door closed in his face. The lovely but dimwitted Clarissa's attempts at conversation are equally comic. She staunchly defends her faith in her belief that stones grow, and she states in complete seriousness one of her major philosophies of life: "'I think we're all like cogs in a wheel'" (p. 155). Attempting to demonstrate her intelligence for Baxter, Clarissa jumps from one unformed idea to another, concluding with her opinion about the problem of progressive education: "'it fails to teach children what's nice and what isn't'" (p. 155). Instead of the godlike aspirations of tragic heroes and heroines, Cheever's characters in this story have very limited desires: Baxter wants to gratify his lust, and Clarissa wants to appear smart. Instead of the momentous flaws of tragic characters, Cheever's creations have some very human foibles, foibles creating the aesthetic distance necessary for comedy.

In fact, Lynne Waldeland in her book John Cheever calls "The Chaste Clarissa" "essentially a comic story about a summer dalliance."[2] But can this story be a comedy? Though it does have many comic attributes, "The Chaste Clarissa" does not have a happy ending, salvation for the characters, or a sense of community at the conclusion. It does not seem to have the social significance that comedy generally does, for the successful seduction of Clarissa does not change anything in the story. Yet Lynne Waldeland is not wrong. In spite of its divergence from traditional comedy, "The Chaste Clarissa" is nevertheless a comic story. As I shall attempt to show in this paper, this story's lack of certain characteristics of comedy is quite intentional by the author. Using comedy is one of many ways that Cheever makes his theme, which is a grim one, even darker than it would be otherwise.

If one critic is right that "[c]omedy is essentially a carrying away of death, a triumph over mortality by some absurd faith in rebirth, restoration, and salvation . . .", "The Chaste Clarissa" lacks the essential ingredient.[3] No faith--absurd or otherwise--in rebirth or restoration is here. Spring is traditionally the season for rebirth, and in the first paragraph we read that the "noise and movement of the small port seemed to signify that spring had ended" (p. [147]).

The story ends with an assurance only of the ease of the seduction--"It was as simple as that" (p. 155)--and with no suggestion that either Clarissa or Baxter will learn anything or grow in any way from the experience. Instead of restoration, Clarissa loses her chastity. Instead of a triumph over mortality, the triumph is over stupidity and vulnerability, over an empty chastity.

Cheever makes it clear that no one has been saved by the conclusion of "The Chaste Clarissa." Baxter correctly realizes on the night that he finally succeeds in seducing Clarissa that "the poor girl [is] lost" (p. 155). The word saved is mentioned only twice in the story--both times on the night of the barn dance which Clarissa and Baxter attend. Clarissa tells Baxter, then repeats herself, that he has "saved [her] life" by taking her away from the barn dance (p. 155). At best, this salvation is meager. At worst, it is ironic. Baxter has indeed taken her away from a group of people who don't seem very much interested in her, but where has he taken her? Into a parked car where he forces on her an unwanted kiss. As for Baxter, he is not saved in this story either: from beginning to end he is interested in only one thing, in getting Clarissa into bed with him.

The imagery of the story adds to the bleakness. In the first paragraph Baxter waits for "the warning

whistle [that] would separate the sheep from the goats" (p. 147), an image that functions successfully in many ways. It is the first example of animal imagery. Moments later when Baxter meets Clarissa, he thinks that "she seem[s] to belong to a different species from old Mrs. Ryan and her large-boned, forthright daughters" (p. 147). Still later, he observes the married women at the beach "sporting around the pier like seals" (p. 150). When one of these married women talks to him at a cocktail party, he looks over her, appraising her much as one would a horse: he notices that "[h]er teeth [are] sound" (p. 153). Baxter is not the only one who treats or observes people like animals. The Ryans, who are passionate bird watchers, act as though Bob Ryan's wife Clarissa is but another bird to watch. He marries her, but not for companionship as he says that she's "stupid" (p. 154)and he leaves her to go to France six months after the wedding. Not a letter or phone call from him to her is ever mentioned. His mother uses Clarissa for decorative purposes only at her party: she has her sit behind the teacups, and the minute a guest (Baxter) attempts a conversation with Clarissa, Mrs. Ryan interrupts. Apparently such behavior, treating Clarissa as a not-very-bright pet, is hardly an isolated incident, for Clarissa says later that "Bob and Mother Ryan don't ever let me speak" (p. 155). The double appearance of

the barn also associates people with animals. The dance at which Clarissa is so miserable is a barn dance, and the cottage where she stays has been "thrown together out of a barn in 1922" (p. 148).

Animal imagery is, of course, frequent in comedy, with the humor coming from the reminder that in spite of all our pretensions and posturings, we do have a close relationship to beasts. But in "The Chaste Clarissa" the reminders seem rather to emphasize that the human characters are more plotting and manipulative than animals. One of the mothers on the beach who seems as innocent and playful as a seal later tries to seduce Baxter through "glances . . . innuendoes . . . [and] a general discussion of the nature of married love" (p. 153). Animals too do not capture other animals just for watching as Bob Ryan seems to have done with his wife. And animals do not become obsessed with a particular animal as Baxter does with Clarissa; animals do not seduce.

Interestingly enough, it is Baxter who originally conceives of the sheep-and-goat imagery. By this thought, he means to equate the islanders with the sheep and the tourists with the goats; and as an islander who has summered in Holly Cove all his life, he is including himself among the sheep. But with the mention of his "general promiscuity" (p. 153) and our observance of his

behavior with Clarissa, Baxter emerges instead as the goat, the lecherous man, a stock figure in comedy. Clarissa then becomes the foolish sheep, the easily-led sheep, the sheep to be sheared.

The phrase sheep and goats is also an allusion to the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, the parable of those who are saved at the end of time and those who are not. In the parable salvation depends upon charity and upon giving to the least of the brethern. But who is giving in Holly Cove? Baxter buys one box of candy, but he is unwilling to buy Clarissa even "[a]n inexpensive gold bracelet or . . . a bunch of flowers" because he is an "extremely stingy man" (p. 153). The islanders give very little to Clarissa--only the one invitation by the Hortons to the barn dance where she ends up sitting by herself for nearly an hour. And Clarissa, in return, gives nothing to them, not even friendliness. When at the beach "[a] few of Baxter's friends and neighbors [stop] to pass the time . . . Clarissa's unresponsiveness [makes] it difficult to talk" (p. 150). The only large gift given in this story is her "chastity," and she is manipulated into giving that. Again the implication is that no one is saved. When it comes to sharing and caring about others, there are no sheep in this story at all, only goats who do not minister unto the least or even the most of the brethern.

Other imagery emphasizes the isolation of this world, an isolation intensifying the grimness of the story and illustrating that the community associated with comedy is missing here. The events take place on an island which not only cuts off the characters from people on the mainland but also reflects their isolation. Although we have a certain vague sense that a community exists--there are parked cars at Mrs. Ryan's party and "voices drift[ing] out of the open window" (p. 149), women "sporting around the pier" at the ocean, and people undoubtedly dancing and talking at the barn dance--that community is almost always implied and rarely brought directly into the story. We do not see Mrs. Talbot take her husband to the hospital; we only hear about it from Clarissa. When the islanders do enter the story briefly on the beach as "[a] few of Baxter's friends and neighbors [stop] to pass the time," we notice not only the facelessness of the people but also the immediate mention that "they [don't] stop for long" (p. 150). The only islander who is given a face is the one who approaches Baxter with suggestions of seduction, a secretive act since she is married, that cuts her off from the community. Baxter, whom we do see, is a loner, a twice-divorced man, staying on the island without a friend, a lover, or any children from one of his marriages. As far as we know,

he has no children. And the Ryan family members with whom we are acquainted all go their separate ways: Mother Ryan leaves for Norway, Bob Ryan is in France, and Clarissa stays by herself in the cottage.

Clarissa's cottage is the remotest place of all, "a couple of miles from any other" (p. 148), quite appropriate for the character who seems most alone in this story. Not only her location emphasizes her solitude; Clarissa is also associated with closed-up windows and doors. "From a distance, [her] cottage look[s] shut" (p. 153), and three times she closes or slams a door in Baxter's face.

Even parties which would seem to be a symbol for human interaction do not emphasize interaction in this story. Instead, in each of the three parties the major action or image is an isolating event. At Mrs. Ryan's tea party, Mrs. Ryan "com[es] between [Baxter and Clarissa] and smil[es] wildly in an effort to conceal some of the force of her interference" (p. 149). At the barn dance the predominant image is that of Clarissa sitting alone on a packing crate. At the cocktail party the only scene is the seduction attempt by the married woman and Baxter's breaking "off the conversation and leaving the party" (p. 153).

As the images of isolation add to the barrenness of the story, inert and lifeless symbols stress that this

is not a story with comedy's rebirth and salvation, not a story that a book reviewer could claim "celebrates life." The Ryans are associated with the codfish bones in the ditty and the geological specimens that they passionately hunt. These specimens give us a sense of the past, but not a past of tradition, a dead past. Clarissa too is seen in relationship to these geological specimens: at the tea party "[a]gainst her back [is] a glass cabinet [holding] the Ryans' geological specimens" (p. 149); and shortly before Baxter seduces her, we read that "[t]he sheet of glass that protected the Ryans' geological specimens reflected the fading sky outside the window" (p. 154). Clarissa is also associated with stones, stones that she does not believe are inert and lifeless. She claims that "the stones on the point [have] grown a lot since [she] was here last" and that "a stone in [her] mother's rose garden . . . [has] grown a foot in the last few years" (p. 150). While these statements primarily illustrate her childlike thinking, they show also her inability to see the difference between lifelike and deathlike, thus tying her closely to the death-in-life motif running through the story.

Also tied to the death-in-life motif is water, another symbol in "The Chaste Clarissa." As E. Chesnick points out in his "Domesticated Stroke of John Cheever," water is very important as a symbol in all of Cheever's

work. "During events of significant emotional intensity, we are almost always made aware of the rain outside or of the water nearby."[4] It is a rainstorm in Cheever's "Housebreaker of Shady Hill" that restores Johnny Hake to an appreciation of love and friendship and turns him away from a life of crime. It is the sound of rain on the palms that concludes "A Vision of the World" with the feelings of hopefulness and contentedness. It is a week of rain at Seal Harbor (along with son Tobey's one-hundred-and-four-degree temperature) that brings about a marital reconciliation in "The Cure."

But in "The Chaste Clarissa" the water is not a reconciler, not a restorer, but a reminder that reconciliation and restoration are not taking place. Chesnick says that for Cheever "immersion in water indicates full sensory vitality."[5] Clarissa's one venture into the ocean indicates anything but sensory vitality:

> When she first felt the water, she stopped short, for again unlike the others . . . [she] didn't like the cold. Then, caught for a second between nakedness and the cold, Clarissa waded in and swam a few feet. She came out of the water, hastily wrapped herself in the robe, and lay down in the sand. (p. 150)

Later, a storm precipitates the loneliness and boredom that Baxter uses so effectively. And just before he finally succeeds in seducing her, he hears the surf outside the cottage window. In each of these instances the water offers no baptism and no spiritual or even physical renewel. The water seems unable to purify or to do much more than separate Clarissa from her husband and her New York friends whose plane is unable to land.

The major symbol of this particular story is probably that of chastity, in both its meanings of "morally pure, decent, and modest" and "abstaining from unlawful sexual intercourse."[6] Like the water that does not offer rebirth, the chastity works by contrast. Clarissa does appear chaste. She certainly is modest as she hesitates to walk about in her bathing suit. She spends nearly all of her time with Baxter telling him no or closing doors in his face, and when he kisses her she writes and tells her husband. And she does abstain from intercourse for eight pages of this nine-page story. But once Baxter discovers her vulnerability, she is easily seduced. Her chastity is obviously superficial. And superficial seems to be the way of the world in this story. Unless we count the statement that Mrs. Talbot took Mr. Talbot to the hospital, we cannot find a single whole relationship even suggested in this story. Nor can we find examples of moral purity. Clarissa's

vulnerability is--at least in Baxter's experience--a common occurrence. The conversation with the married woman is one "that Baxter [has] been through many times, and he [knows] roughly what it [promises]" (p. 153). He is confident with Clarissa, confident as only someone with many similar experiences could be, that "if he could only adjust his flattery to what she believed herself to be, her scruples would dissolve" (p. 151). And he is proved to be correct. He is right when he observes that her chastity merely hangs by "a thread" (p. 152).

This chastity may be an allusion to that epitome of chastity, Penelope of Homer's Odyssey. If so, the allusion, which adds to the comedy of the story, works like much of the imagery by contrast. The faithful Penelope makes the chaste Clarissa look all the less chaste. Whereas Penelope wards off 136 suitors for twenty years, the newly-married Clarissa is unable to withstand one summer of one Baxter who doesn't even promise the marriage that Penelope's suitors do. While Penelope's virtue is saved by many threads, by the weaving that she does by day and undoes by night, Clarissa's chastity hangs precariously by "a thread."

Not only does Penelope's weaving illustrate her faithfulness, it also brings out her vitality and intelligence, two other sharp contrasts with Clarissa who has neither. In spite of her predominance in the

title and in Baxter's mind, Clarissa seems to be the least alive, the most negative, person in this story. She is repeatedly associated with negative words and with signs of inactivity of both mind and body. When first we see her, she is bored by "Woods Hole and the activity on the wharf" and is "not interested in Mrs. Ryan's insular gossip" (p. 147). Mrs. Ryan says that Clarissa isn't interested in geology, birds, books, or music; and Clarissa tells Baxter that she doesn't know how to play cards. Sitting at the barn dance, she claims not to like "all that skipping and hopping" (p. 151). Baxter can't find her at the tennis courts or on the beaches, and when he finally gets her to agree to go with him to the beach, she does so "unenthusiastically" (p. 149) and is "noncommittal . . . and unwilling to talk" in the car. Everyone in the story, except Clarissa herself, agrees that she is stupid, and her own remarks support this general opinion. Although twice she seems to come to life--when she speaks of stones growing and when she tries to prove her intelligence--both times her energy is based on unreality.

The two colors most associated with Clarissa then--white, the white of her skin, and red, the red of her hair--are both ironic. White suggests purity, and red suggests passion. Not only does the easily seduced Clarissa lack purity, she also lacks passion.

Though this excess of negativism is a comic distortion, it nevertheless adds to the bleakness of the story. First, it shows us that the only two men mentioned by name in the story, Bob Ryan and Baxter, want Clarissa only for her superficial loveliness; they don't want a person but a nonentity. Second, the chastity that thus arises out of the story is linked to its most negative, its most unalive, its most unrealistic character. Even while Clarissa's chastity lasts, it seems to be merely a negative quality: she doesn't have extramarital (or even marital during the story) sexual relations because she doesn't do much of anything. Her chastity is not a positive force of good but an absence of active evil, not power but a lack of power. If the rest of the characters presented a moral contrast to her as Penelope does, we might say that the "chaste" of the title is merely an indictment of such negation. However, since the other characters are either unchaste or not clearly chaste, the story may imply that people are chaste only as long as they're not actively seduced, only as long as they themselves remain inactive.

Does activity look any more positive in this story? With Baxter as the major active force, both sides of the coin--activity and inactivity--are tarnished. Baxter is constantly in action--playing tennis, driving around,

attending and leaving parties, picking up Clarissa's mail, visiting her, searching for her, and kissing her. But none of his action is directed toward any kind of productive work or any type of charity. His job, if he has one, is never mentioned, and as for charity his stinginess has already been noted. Baxter, through whom we see most of the story, is mentally active too. Unlike Clarissa, he is not stupid. He quickly discovers that Clarissa likes gifts; he uses good strategy when he doesn't come to rescue her from loneliness immediately after the storm; and when he is finally given the trump card, he's smart enough to know how to play it. But just as his physical activity is geared only toward seducing Clarissa, so is his mental activity. In the small world of Vineyard Haven, both energy and lack of energy lead to the same dismal conclusion: that of one person manipulating and taking advantage of another.

Even though Baxter succeeds through his scheming and even though the story may suggest that such scheming pays off, there is more to his eventual success than his own unaided efforts. Baxter is helped in this story by chance. Beginning his string of compliments in his attempt to "adjust his flattery to what she believed herself to be" (p. 151), he hits on her weakness quite by accident. A second later he does not even remember what he said:

"You're so intelligent," he murmured.

"You don't mean that?"

"Mean what?" (p. 154)

As the final outcome depends upon a chance remark, we do not find here (or elsewhere in the story) any implication of the "universal principle . . . a loving though somewhat feeble God" that John Gardner finds in Cheever's Falconer.[7] Instead, the world seems to be governed, at least partly, by chance.

Thus, we get no idea that the seduction means anything on a universal scale. Nor does it seem to mean anything on the individual scale of the characters. The seduction of Helen of Troy ended with lives lost and prices paid. But the seduction of the beautiful Clarissa costs no one anything but a few cheap lies. Baxter does not even buy the inexpensive gold bracelet. We might even say that we get the happy ending of comedy here. Baxter gets what he wants and will undoubtedly go on to other, perhaps more challenging, seductions. Clarissa gets what she wants, someone finally to recognize her as "something she [is] not"; and on the evidence given in the story, she seems unlikely to suffer great passion of guilt or remorse. Her husband, Bob Ryan, who has treated her like one of his geological specimens, probably will not be hurt because Clarissa's only value for him is her appearance, and the

experience with Baxter will not change her looks. No one in the community--hardly a community like the one that shamed Hester Prynne--is interested enough in Clarissa even to gossip about her. In the small island community, as well as in Norway and France across the sea, this seduction, this using of one person's weakness for another person's lust, does not seem to make one bit of difference.

If it does not make a difference, is it then not true, as was suggested at the beginning of this paper, that the story lacks social significance? Even the author does not seem to care as he very calmly reports this story in which social reform does not occur, justice is not meted out, reintegration into a community does not take place. Cheever appears to be a very dispassionate narrator.

But he is not withholding comment entirely from the story. From the beginning there is a hint of another moral world that is judging--although fairly unobtrusively--this world of Baxter. Occasionally the words describing Baxter encourage a negative response. Both stingy and promiscuous have negative connotations; the word unsavory, moreover, is a judgment from the neighborhood people. The narrator also tells us on the first page that "the implications of the hour and voyage [make] no impression on Baxter at all" (p. [147]). We

already know that the implications have made an impression on the narrator, for in such a tightly condensed short story, he has taken time to inform us that "[t]he noise and movement of the small port seemed to signify that spring had ended and that the shores of West Chop, across the Sound, were the shores of summer" (p. [147]). Near the conclusion of the story, the narrator observes that Baxter notes certain details "dispassionately and for what they [are] worth" (p. 154). Baxter notes the details "dispassionately," for with the exception of his lust, Baxter, not the narrator, is dispassionate. What these details are worth to Baxter is very little, for things outside himself and his lust don't make an impression on him.

Is there not a judgment of Baxter here? For Baxter's lack of concern causes us as readers to have one of two responses: either to laugh at him or to be angry with him. His unawareness does not elicit any empathy or admiration.

Also, even though Baxter doesn't read symbolic meaning in the world around him, the narrator does. He has used the isolated cottage and the water to tell us something about the characters. Too, he has emphasized what John L. Brown has called "'that darkness at the heart of life' of which Cheever is so deeply conscious."[8] The first boat of the story is an "evening boat"

(p. [147]), and the story ends in the evening: "[t]he sun that had lighted [Clarissa's] hair was gone" (p. 155). In the same way that "[t]he sheet of glass . . . reflect[s] the fading sky outside the window" (p. 154), the images of darkness reflect the moral character of these islanders.

The author also has used the broken and out-of-control as symbols in the story. At the beginning Mrs. Ryan has had "trouble with the brakes" on the way to Holly Cove (p. [147]). The storm, Baxter thinks later in the story, would cause the drawers to stick, and it does keep the New York plane from landing. Taken by themselves these things would be insignificant. But by the conclusion these isolated incidents have increased greatly. When Baxter arrives at Clarissa's cottage, she reports what has happened to the household since Mrs. Talbot has left, Mrs. Talbot who has been responsible for order in the household. With her gone, everything seems to be out of control:

> The fire in the stove that heated the water had died. There was a mouse in the kitchen. The bathtub wouldn't drain. She hadn't been able to get the car started.
>
> In the quiet house, Baxter heard the sound of a leaky water tap . . . (p. 154).

Literally these items show the disintegrating world of Clarissa when she is left to take care of things herself, a lack of ability that foreshadows her inability to withstand Baxter. But these things suggest that more is disintegrating than Clarissa's world. Baxter doesn't try to fix anything--doesn't check the bathtub or the tap, doesn't try to catch the mouse. Once the housekeeper is gone, no one is around to resist the chaos. This is a disintegrating world on a moral level too, and by underlining that fact with these symbols, Cheever is making a value judgment.

The strongest indication of Cheever's judgment on this story may come from the pattern of contrasts that he uses. The brightness of the summer sunlight at the beach makes the darkness of Baxter's motives and behavior look darker. All the water in the story--the ocean surrounding the island, the storm that would "metamorphose the island" (p. 152)--makes the fact that no baptism or resulting rebirth takes place more noticeable than it might be on a desert. Even the word metamorphose in the above quotation, suggesting change as it does, highlights the fact that even though a seduction takes place, nothing really changes on the island.

Similarly, the story's ending without the traditional marriage or dance or community scene of

comedy makes the criticism sharper than it might be if Baxter were reformed and Clarissa saved. This is a comedy, and we expect a satisfactory conclusion. But we don't get it. Nothing happens to Baxter for taking advantage, and the narrator treats this unsatisfactory conclusion so matter-of-factly that it is even more jarring. By treating the subject as though no one is really concerned, by making light of what is serious, John Cheever has emphasized his point that people do treat other people as objects, do have very superficial virtues, and, as a result of both of these, are isolated from caring relationships with others.

Notes

[1] John Cheever, The Stories of John Cheever (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 149. Subsequent references appear in the text.

[2] Lynne Waldeland, John Cheever, ed. Warren French, Twayne's United States Author Series, 335 (Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1979), 101.

[3] Willie Sypher as quoted in Frederick Bracher, "John Cheever and Comedy," Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction, VI, I (Spring, 1963), 69.

[4] E. Chesnick, "Domesticated Stroke of John Cheever," New England Quarterly, 44 (December, 1971), 533.

[5] Chesnick, p. 533.

[6] The American Heritage Dictionary, ed. William Morris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1978), p. 228.

[7] John Gardner, "On Miracle Row," Saturday Review, 4 (February, 1977), 22.

[8] John L. Brown, "That 'Darkness at the Heart of Life': The Collected Stories of John Cheever," World Literature Today: A Literary Quarterly of the University of Oklahoma, 53 (Autumn, 1979), 625.

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Biographical-Bibliographical Essay on John Cheever

Although numerous brief biographies and numerous interviews with Cheever are available, a full-length biography has not yet been published. For one good brief biography, see the Cheever entry in Current Biography Yearbook, 1975 (New York, 1976), pp. 74-76. Two books, both entitled John Cheever, do contain introductory chapters on Cheever's life: John Cheever by Lynne Waldeland in Twayne's United States Author Series (Boston, 1979) and John Cheever by Samuel Coale (New York, 1977).

A number of bibliographies and checklists have been compiled. In 1979 Bulletin of Bibliography published a primary and secondary checklist (Dennis Coates, "John Cheever: A Checklist, 1930-1978," Bulletin of Bibliography [January-March, 1979], pp. 1-13, 49) and Deno Trakas compiled "John Cheever: An Annotated Secondary Bibliography (1943-1978)" (Resources for American Literary Study, [1979], pp. 181-199). The most extensive and comprehensive bibliography to date is John Cheever: A Reference Guide by Francis J. Bosha (Boston, 1981).

Chapter Four

Levels of Satire in Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode"

The plot of Woody Allen's "The Kugelmass Episode" is hard to believe. Kugelmass, a middle-aged Jewish humanities professor, once divorced and twice married, wants to have a romantic but discreet affair in order to forget for awhile his dull sons by his first wife, his alimony and child support, and most of all his present wife, Daphne, "the troglodyte who share[s] his bed."[1] When his analyst tells him that this desire is unrealistic and that analysts are not, after all, magicians, Kugelmass terminates his therapy. Shortly thereafter, Kugelmass gets a mysterious phone call from someone who does claim to be a magician, someone who calls himself "the Great Persky." And Persky soon helps Kugelmass escape into a piece of fiction.

What's hard to believe about that? People have been reading escapist fiction for years in order to get away temporarily from their daily existences. But Persky doesn't help Kugelmass to escape by reading fiction. He rolls out a chintzy-looking, rhinestone-studded plywood

cabinet on roller-skate wheels, convinces Kugelmass to climb inside the cabinet, throws in Madame Bovary, the novel that Kugelmass has chosen, and raps three times. Then the magic. Kugelmass finds himself suddenly in Yonville, in the bedroom with Madame Bovary. And more magic. Emma Bovary is quite willing to have a passionate love affair with a balding, middle-aged man who is decidedly short on savoir-faire. But Kugelmas's escape into fiction is not all. Emma Bovary and Kugelmass decide that they would like to take their affair out of the world of fiction and into the real world of Kugelmass. When they ask Persky for even more magic, Persky proves to be worthy of his title the Great. He conveys Madame Bovary to New York, where she and Kugelmass continue their affair. However, when they are both more than ready for her to go back into the novel, the cabinet fails to work. It takes a week, but Persky strips the cabinet down and fixes it. Or so he thinks. Though he does manage to send Emma Bovary back into Flaubert's novel, the next time Kugelmass comes back for another affair, the cabinet explodes, kills Persky, and traps Kugelmass in a Spanish grammar book.

Even a summary of the plot suggests that Woody Allen is up to his usual habit of poking fun at somebody or something. But who or what is he satirizing in this story?

Is he satirizing psychoanalysts with his picture of the ineffectual Dr. Mandel? "'An affair will solve nothing,'" says Dr. Mandel. "'You're so unrealistic. Your problems run much deeper'" (p. 45). Kugelmass apparently realizes that the doctor's language is so general that it tells him nothing, for he completely ignores these comments and interrupts twice. When the analyst gets to talk again, he continues in typical psychobabble that helps Kugelmass not at all. "'Mr. Kugelmass the worst thing you can do is act out. You must simply express your feelings here, and together we'll analyze them. You've been in treatment long enough to know there is no overnight cure'" (p. 42). There seems to be, in fact, no cure at all in this office. Kugelmass decides that he has indeed been in treatment long enough, and Dr. Mandel disappears from the story into a well-deserved oblivion.

Is Woody Allen satirizing college professors? There are four of them in the story. When strange things begin happening in Flaubert's Madame Bovary and students begin asking their teachers about the bald Jew kissing Madame Bovary, "a teacher in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, sighed and thought, Jesus, these kids with their pot and acid. What goes through their minds!" (pp. 46-47). Confronted by what is happening in the novel, the teacher uses a stereotype to explain the confusion. He doesn't bother

to check the novel. And obviously he hasn't reread the book before teaching it this time--undoubtedly relying instead on dated notes. The Stanford professor, who has at least read the novel, when faced with the entry of Kugelmass into the book and later the disappearance of Madame Bovary from the book, resorts to a somewhat lame professorial cliche: "'Well, I guess the mark of a classic is that you can reread it a thousand times and always find something new'" (p. 50). Perhaps even more telling of the limitations, as well as the aspirations, of academia is the same professor's remark: "'I cannot get my mind around this'" (p. 50). Also, we find Professor Fivish who has identified Kugelmass as the character altering Flaubert's book and has been threatening to tell Kugelmass's wife. Kugelmass accuses him of being jealous, a hint of foolish academic rivalry. At the very least, Professor Fivish seems small-minded with petty threats of getting people in trouble. Finally, of course, is Kugelmass himself, a professor of humanities at City College of New York. He failed freshman English, and he isn't making much success of his later life: he has made two unhappy marriages and is having one deteriorating affair that ends without even a kiss; he runs through a string of analysts who never seem to help him, then resorts to a magician.

Rather than a success, Kugelmass is an escapist. He left his first wife trying to escape one marriage; in the story he is trying to escape his second wife by having an affair. As the affair draws to an end, Kugelmass wants to get out of this one too. "'Persky,' he whisper[s], 'we have to get her back'" (p. 51). By Sunday afternoon when he has not yet been able to get her back, he looks out the window and contemplates another escape--suicide. But true escapist that he is, he would prefer a less costly escape than suicide, some magical new beginning: "Maybe," he thinks, "if I ran away to Europe and started life over . . . " (p. 53).

Perhaps Woody Allen is satirizing escapists. He certainly does not seem altogether sympathetic with Kugelmass's desire to escape. When Kugelmass says to his analyst "'Did I know it would turn out so badly?'" (p. [41]), Allen points out that he "whined." The author also contrasts Kugelmass's desire for a young, nubile, perfect beauty with the description of Kugelmass himself, "bald and as hairy as a bear" (p. [41]); "grunting" as he gets into the cabinet (p. 43); dressed in an outdated leisure suit; and, as he has Kugelmass admit, "'not getting any younger'" (p. [41]). Allen satirizes Kugelmass by letting us know what he's thinking. When Kugelmass's escapism includes suicidal thoughts, they are brief. "Too bad this is a low floor, he thought,

or I'd do it right now" (p. 53). When he is "smelling Emma's French perfume and burying his nose in her hair," we read: "I've earned this, he thought . . . I've suffered enough. I've paid enough analysts. I've searched till I'm weary" (p. 48). Allen's choice of the word suffering is significant. That Kugelmass seems to equate suffering, a word that generally connotes the endurance of great mental or physical pain, with statements like "I've paid enough analysts" and "I've searched till I'm weary," he appears to be overestimating his problems. Moreover, in light of what we already know about Kugelmass, his assumption that he's earned the affair looks dubious.

Instead of earning this affair, in fact, Kugelmass is a typical escapist who doesn't want to earn anything. "'I don't want to have to pay for it,'" he tells Persky when Persky suggests a prostitute (p. 44). That he agrees quickly to an affair with a fictional character is not surprising. A fictional character, after all, can't kiss and tell. When it begins to look as though this particular fiction may, in fact, tell on him in one way or another, Kugelmass whispers to Persky, "'I'm not prepared for anything more than a cautious affair at this point" (p. 51). If there is any doubt that this unwillingness to pay is being satirized, a look at the story's conclusion ought to dispel it. Because of the

earlier trouble with Madame Bovary, Persky gives Kugelmass a "freebie" at the end (p. 54), a free trip into Portnoy's Complaint for an affair with the sexually "free" Monkey. But what happens with all this freedom? Kugelmass doesn't get any at all. Instead, he is caught in a remedial Spanish textbook where he must run "for his life over a barren rocky terrain as the word 'tener' race[s] after him on its spindly legs" (p. 55). The escapist who doesn't want to pay ends up paying dearly. Ironically, he ends up trapped in a permanent situation of trying to escape.

One of the strongest indications that Allen is satirizing the escapist is the way that he continually undercuts the romantic wishes of his hero. Kugelmass wants "romance . . . softness . . . flirtation . . ." (p. [41]). He wants to "make love in Venice, trade quips at '21, and exchange coy glances over red wine and candlelight" (pp. [41], 42). In short, he wants, what is for him as a married man, a fantasy. And Allen gives him the fantasy. But what kind of fantasy does he give? It begins, as it ends, grounded in the same kind of cause-and-effect world that Kugelmass is trying to forget, a world where things grow old and decay, a world where inexpensive things look cheap, a world where people end up paying for what they get. The magician, a short, "thin, waxy-looking man," lives in a "broken-

down apartment house" (p. 43). The means of the fantasy, the Chinese cabinet, is as tawdry as anything at a carnival. It is "a large object on squeaky roller skate wheels . . . a cheap-looking Chinese cabinet, badly lacquered. . . . [with] a couple of ugly rhinestones glued onto the raw plywood" (pp. 43-44). Even the books that Allen has the magician suggest seem to be a kind of joke on Kugelmass. For example, Sister Carrie, The Scarlet Letter, and Sanctuary, though very diverse, all have one thing in common: they are not pleasant fantasies, not escapist fiction. Certainly the novel that Allen has Kugelmass choose, Madame Bovary, would seem to be the last place a person wanting an affair would look. Not only does the book satirize Emma's desire for romantic escape, it also concludes with a gruesome description of her death. Perhaps Allen is suggesting that Kugelmass failed freshman English either because he didn't finish reading the novel or because he wasn't bright enough to figure out what the story was saying.

He also undercuts his main character by making him do exactly what he doesn't want to do: like Emma Bovary, Kugelmass does have to pay for his affair. First, he has to fork over twenty dollars every time he takes a trip into the novel. Then he finds Emma Bovary an expensive young woman. "'I'm pouring Dom Perignon and black eggs into this little mouse,'" he tells Persky,

"'plus her wardrobe, plus she's enrolled at the Neighborhood Playhouse and suddenly needs professional photos. . . . Not to mention a hotel tab that reads like the defense budget'" (p. 53). He also pays in worry. He's afraid that Professor Fivish is going to report on him to his wife and he's afraid that his wife is having him tailed by a private detective and most of all he's afraid of "ruin . . . alimony jail . . . [and] beggary" (p. 53). The fantasy begins to sound at least as costly as an affair in the everyday world.

Allen frequently make this everyday world, this "real world," intrude upon the fantasy. Kugelmass has to interrupt his first encounter with Madame Bovary in order "to meet Daphne at Bloomingdale's . . . by three-thirty" (p. 46). Both his wife and the clock are still making demands later on in the story: "'I'm a married man,'" he tells Persky, "'and I have a class in three hours'" (p. 51). Frequently his moments of wine and love and sex with his beloved are followed by scenes with his wife. "'Where the hell do you go all the time?' Daphne Kugelmass bark[s]. . . . 'You got a chippie stashed somewhere?'" (p. 49). When she continues talking, reminding him not to forget her father's birthday and to be more polite to Cousin Hamish, his only recourse is "closing the bathroom door and shutting out the sound of his wife's voice" (p. 49). At first, the intruding "reality"

is only upon his return to the "real world." But shortly after he gets Emma to New York, the affair begins to take on the tones of a marriage with demands, responsibilities, and expense. "'Get me back into the novel or marry me,'" Emma tells Kugelmass (p. 52). Then Kugelmass tells Persky, "'Emma and I have had it up to here with each other'" (p. 53). Persky counters that he can't do anything. "'This is the world of magic'" (p. 53), he says; and this world of magic is incredibly like the one Kugelmass has tried to leave.

Allen is not only satirizing escapists by showing the futility of their wishes; he also is satirizing their kind of fiction: romantic escape fiction. As has already been mentioned, the novel into which Kugelmass chooses to escape is itself a novel that satirizes the romantic novels of the nineteenth century and the romantic pretensions of Emma Bovary who has read them. For his own satire Woody Allen uses the language of romantic escape fiction. "He [Kugelmass] [feels] a sudden impulse to take this vision into his arms and tell her she was the kind of woman he had dreamed of all his life" (p. 45). This "sudden impulse" comes straight from novels in which love-at-first-sight is frequent; the expression "this vision" and "the kind of woman he had dreamed of all his life" are both clichés from poorly written romances. Also clichés are Emma's voice "full of

playful implication" (p. 45) and the lovers' experience of "reclining under a tree and whisper[ing] together . . . [telling] each other deep meaningful things with their eyes" (p. 46). Allen is particularly successful here at satirizing with the expression "deep meaningful things." It's a cliché, but it's more than a cliché as it's so general as to be almost meaningless, a group of words, in fact, that very nearly contradicts itself. The experience with Emma is filled with other similar trite expressions: "Emma couldn't hide her excitement at seeing him" (p. 47), "his tales . . . enthralled the young French beauty" (p. 48), and "[t]he lovers passed a blissful weekend" (p. 50).

How can we know that Allen is using these clichés ironically? Because once again he undercuts the romantic at every point with the mundane, the comic, the ridiculous. When Emma "smile[s] flirtatiously" and asks if Kugelmass would like a glass of wine, the romantic hero is not the confident, assured masculine hero of dime-store romances. "'Yes, some wine,'" he begins appropriately enough. But then he gives himself away. "'White,'" he says. "'No, red. No, white. Make it white'" (p. 46). When Emma compliments his clothes for being so modern, he answers: "'It's called a leisure suit'" (p. 46). We might not be quite positive that Woody Allen is using the leisure suit as a symbol for the

outdated, the almost immediately obsolescent, except that the next line lets us know that Allen understands exactly what he is doing. "'It was marked down'" (p. 46), Kugelmass says. The exalted romantic language of "his beloved" looks ludicrous in the same story as Kugelmass's thought "My God, I'm doing it with Madame Bovary" (p. 47). Obviously Kugelmass is not a hero to enthrall the young French beauty or his female readers for any length of time. Woody Allen makes sure that the reader is aware of this fact. He even makes sure that Kugelmass is aware of this fact. "'Make sure and always get me into the book before page 120'" Kugelmass tells the magician one day. "'I always have to meet her before she hooks up with this Rudolphe character'" (p. 47). Finally, as a reminder to the reader that romance isn't forever, the romantic interludes always end with an "audible pop" that brings Kugelmass back to Brooklyn, a contrast indeed to the happily-ever-after marriage plans of romantic escape fiction.

But we may not be through yet with the satire in this story. The leap of the main character into a work of fiction may be a comment on contemporary literary criticism, a jab at the theorists who emphasize the reader as creator of the text. If we think of Kugelmass as the reader here, we see that he does create the text. He alters the fiction so much that he adds a character and

and an extra affair to the novel. This addition changes Madame Bovary. She learns about O. J. Simpson, the Academy Awards, and F. A. O. Schwartz. Even her language changes as she begins using twentieth-century slang: "Are any of [Jack Nicholson's] flicks showing?'" (p. 50) she asks; and "'watching TV all day is the pits'" (p. 52), she complains. And as language changes, so does the character. The greatest effect that Kugelmass as reader, as creator, has on the text is that he eventually manages to take the main character out of the book, a feat rather astounding in its implications. Madame Bovary without Madame Bovary falls apart, becomes nothing--without her, there is no novel. And without the novel, there is no Madame Bovary. When the reader is allowed complete freedom to recreate the novel, the effect can be, as Allen shows, quite absurd.

If we see Kugelmass as reader, we don't need to look much farther to see Persky as author, at least as some kind of author. With his cabinet for a slight fee, Persky can help a person travel to other lands and other times. Persky helps Kugelmass escape through a fiction, even throws a fiction inside the cabinet with him. Even the title magician suggests the possibility of author, for storytellers have often been associated with magic.

If Persky is seen as an author, might we find that Woody Allen is satirizing authors too? Already we have

noted satiric undertones in the narrator's statement that "his tales . . . enthralled the young French beauty." We might also look at the place where Persky lives--in a bad neighborhood in a broken-down apartment house and up three flights of darkened stairs. He calls himself "the Great Persky." But Kugelmass gives us other suggestions. "'Persky, are you some kind of outpatient?'" he asks (p. 44), and "'Persky . . . what's your scam?'" (p. 43). Perhaps the author thinks more highly of himself than others do. And perhaps others might perceive his skill as insanity or trickery. If Perksy is compared to an author, it is hard not to notice that he has been unable to help Kugelmass improve his life in any way. He admits: "As far as your personal anxiety goes, that I can't help you with. I'm a magician, not an analyst'" (p. 53). And he has been only a magician, one who creates the temporary appearance of something. The escape is a clever deception; the magician, a sham. The final joke on Persky may be that his fictional situation gets out of control. Attempting to operate his cabinet again after he has "fixed" it, instead of the usual "pop" he hears "a dull explosion" (p. 55). Persky "leap[s] back, [is] seized by a heart attack, and drop[s] dead," completely overcome by his own creation (p. 55).

Perhaps Woody Allen is not only satirizing writers of fiction but also writers of metafiction, those self-

conscious writers who write stories about the stories themselves in which there is endless questionning: what is fiction? what is reality? what is the role of the author? In the story we have the familiar story-within-a-story that so delights metafiction writers. We have a fiction created by Woody Allen about a character named Kugelmass. This fiction enters into another fiction that is a real piece of fiction in the world that the reader knows. It is also a real piece of fiction for those in the created story by Woody Allen. To make matters even more intricate, the fictional character steps out of her fictive world into that of Woody Allen and causes confusion for the characters of Woody Allen's fiction who believe that she is only a fiction. Of course, we must not forget that even Madame Bovary in this story is Woody Allen's Madame Bovary, a fiction that is part of his fiction. Or we might ask about reality. What is the real world here? Is it the story of Kugelmass that is a fantasy but that nevertheless is governed by certain laws of reality? Is it the novel Madame Bovary which both the readers of "The Kugelmass Episode" and the characters in it agree is a real novel? But we have already noted that the novel Madame Bovary is not the real Madame Bovary. Or is it? It certainly could be considered as a real novel that Woody Allen invented for his story. But if he invented

it, is it real? It seems as though there are two worlds in this story--the everyday world of Kugelmass and the fantasy world of Kugelmass. But the two can't be separated; they intrude upon each other. Is the real world the one that the reader comes from? But he's reading a fantasy. While the initial concept is energizing and this particular story successful, Allen still seems to enjoy making such speculations tiresome.

If he is satirizing self-conscious works about fiction, the conclusion is perfect. Kugelmass ends up in another world from what seems to be the "real world" of the story, but not in a work of fiction. He's not lost in anything quite so symbolically interesting as a funhouse; he's not chasing anything quite so exciting as a chimera. Instead, he has been "projected into an old textbook 'Remedial Spanish'" (p. 55). All the questioning about the nature of fiction and reality ends up in a grammar book with no magician around to save Kugelmass.

But if Woody Allen is satirizing authors, is he satirizing himself and his work, this story in particular? Is he even satirizing all authors, along with psychoanalysts, professors, critics, and readers? The story is a very clever piece of work with the satire cutting in many different directions, but if there is no positive alternative to the things satirized, "The

Episode" is nothing more than a lightweight comedy, and ultimately the work will have little value.

To discover the positive against which Allen's work is a distortion, we need to consider two points. First, we need to look at the other writings that the magician suggests for escape: Sister Carrie, The Scarlet Letter, Hamlet, Sanctuary, and Portnoy's Complaint. In part, as has already been discussed, these function as a humorous contrast to the romantic escape fiction that Kugelmass wants. Furthermore, each of these works develops its major characters into complex creations quite unlike the flat characters of romantic escape fiction. And each of Persky's suggestions is a serious work of art, a work that offers more questions than answers, particularly the simplistic answers of happily-ever-after romances.

Next, we need to notice the way that these works are used. The magician uses someone else's work to transport Kugelmass. He throws a book in the cabinet and raps on the cabinet three times. He himself is not an artist of original vision like Dreiser or Hawthorne or Shakespeare, but a borrower, a sham creator, or, as Persky has called himself, a magician, a creator of illusions.

So the contrast is set up between sham art or borrowed art and real art. In Loser Take All Maurice Yakowar writes:

> Allen is especially interested in the relationship between art and life. On the one hand, art affords relief from the uncontrollable forces in reality. On the other, our self-conception is obscured by the myth and rhetoric that film and other media inflict upon us.[2]

If he is indeed trying to show the "relationship between art and life," in "The Kugelmass Episode" he satirizes all those who falsify this relationship. He creates those who falsify it through clichés and over-simplifications--the glib psychoanalysts, the dusty academics, the facile critics, the escapist heroes. He satirizes those who try to possess and control art: his character Kugelmass is finally chased by the verb meaning "to have." And he satirizes those who construct elaborate, self-conscious writings, over-intellectualized thought that is of no more value than the philosophy of the wife in Allen's comic routine, a "philosophy [that] only enabled her to prove that he did not exist."[3] The satire in "The Kugelmass Episode" then is on those who offer nothing more than a denial or escape from reality, on those, unlike real artists, who do not even attempt to discover and illuminate reality.

Notes

[1] Woody Allen, Side Effects (New York: Random House, 1980). Subsequent references appear in the text.

[2] Maurice Yakowar, Loser Take All: The Comic Art of Woody Allen (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1979), p. 5.

[3] Yakowar, p. 18.

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Biographical-Bibliographical Essay
on
Woody Allen

The biographies thus far published on Woody Allen deal with the public aspect of the comedian/writer rather than with his private life. Probably the worst of these is Myles Palmer's book Woody Allen: An Illustrated Biography (London, 1980). Lee Guthrie's Woody Allen: A Biography (New York, 1978) and Eric Lax's On Being Funny: Woody Allen and Comedy (New York, 1975) are better but lack critical insight and memorable writing. Perhaps the best two biographies are Loser Take All: The Comic Art of Woody Allen by Maurice Yakowar (New York, 1979) and Love, Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life: Woody Allen's Comedy by Foster Hirsch. Although neither of these gives much personal information on Woody Allen, both books offer perceptive insights on the man as comedian and as writer. Both books include indexes, filmographies, and bibliographies, both by and about Woody Allen. No other valuable bibliographies are presently available.

Chapter Five

"In the Region of Ice"
And Its Relationship to Christianity

Joyce Carol Oates is certainly not considered a "Christian author" and does not espouse the Christian faith. She does not even necessarily believe in God. In a Paris Review interview, she says:

> Having completed a novel that is saturated with what Jung calls the God-experience, I find that I know less than ever about myself and my own beliefs. I have beliefs, of course, like everyone--but I don't always believe in them. Faith comes and goes. God diffracts into a bewildering plenitude of elements . . . I hope to continue to write about the religious experience, but at the moment I feel quite . . . as baffled as ever. . . .[1]

Her faith is not in God but in the transcendence of art. Accepting the National Book Award, she claims that "the use of language is all we have to pit against death and silence."[2] And in her Introduction to The

Edge of Impossibility, she discusses "the triumph over nothingness that art represents. . . ."[3] Unlike Flannery O'Connor who sees life as a Christian comedy, Joyce Carol Oates finds human life an "inescapable tragedy" which cannot be overcome "unless and until it is so recognized."[4]

Yet as I shall attempt to show in this essay, "In the Region of Ice" seems to come from as orthodox a Christian viewpoint as O'Connor's "Revelation" does. The two stories do not really share a similar stance. But as I shall also attempt to show, Joyce Carol Oates very carefully uses the Christian standpoint not only to get across her own philosophy but also to criticize the very Christianity that permeates the story.

The terminology of the story is primarily Christian, as is the imagery. And the main character, a nun named Sister Irene, is a Christian faced with one of the two central questions of the Christian faith: how ought a Christian respond to another person. The theme arising out of this question is that Christians must not withdraw from the world but must act in it, the same theme as that in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, the play from which the major allusion and the title come.[5] The tragedy of the story lies in Sister Irene's decision to withdraw rather than act, to choose isolation rather than a human relationship, and, as a result of

her decision, to enter the world of the damned rather than that of the saved, a possibility ever present in a Christian world.

Oates uses the third-person singular point of view partly to show that Sister Irene sees herself as a Christian. She "[is] a nun, she [is] recognized as a nun and [has] given herself happily to that life . . . ; she saturate[s] herself daily in the knowledge that she [is] involved in the mystery of Christianity" (p. 22).[6] She lives in a convent, has a prayer life, has "given up pride" (p. 22), and has dedicated herself solely to the church. As a teacher at a Jesuit university, Sister Irene's thoughts reveal that she believes she is fulfilling her function as a Christian teacher who serves others and truth and ultimately God: "[I]n front of a class . . . [s]he [becomes], once and for all, a figure existing only for the benefit of others, an instrument by which facts [are] communicated" (p. 14).

Sister Irene is not altogether confident though: she feels herself "on trial," has "conflicts in her mind," and is "confused and alarmed" by "the world immediately outside the classroom" (p. 14). Her facade of confident Christianity is threatened in the story by a very bright, though somewhat obnoxious, student, Allen Weinstein. About two weeks after her class has begun, Weinstein appears and asks to be admitted into the class.

During the rest of the story, he asks her to accept a late paper, to read his poetry, to intercede on his behalf to his father, to loan him some money. "'I want you to look at me like I was a human being . . .,'" he finally tells her (p. 32). This demand frightens Sister Irene, and ironically she "want[s] to cry out in fear that she [is] being forced into the role of a Christian, and what [does] that mean? . . . [H]e was making her into a Christian, and to her that was a mystery, a thing of terror . . . a magnificent and terrifying wonder" (p. 23). Yet even in these moments revealing doubts about herself, she obviously still sees Christianity as real.

In fact, as she responds to the young Weinstein's request to intercede with his father, "[f]or the first time . . . [she] approach[es] the realization of [the] sacrifice of Christ's . . ." (p. 25). The nun presumably is a Christian who has denied her own selfish interests to follow Christ, who has chosen Christ's church as a vocation. Yet she has apparently never really made the choice that we would take for granted underlies her life, the choice to give up her own ego for somebody else's need. Consequently, even at the time she actually does deny her own predilection--"another part of her would have liked nothing so much as to be waiting as usual for the

summons to dinner, safe in her room"--and as she chooses Weinstein's need over her own, for the first time she begins to understand more than intellectually what her faith is based upon. Even here, with what might be the first hint of a criticism of the Christian faith, we see something similar to Flannery O'Connor's questioning of the faith of some of her "religious" characters. Even here, as Oates shows a weakness in a so-called believer, the author seems to be in sympathy with the Christian point at issue.

Although Sister Irene does make some sacrifices for Weinstein and does begin to understand the sacrifice of Christ, she is not the Christ figure in this story. But the story does have a Christ figure--Allen Weinstein. Jewish, with an ageless quality--"he look[s], despite his childish face, like a little old man" (p. 19)--he is the suffering Christ. He appears to Sister Irene as a young man "betrayed" by his parents (p. 25). After reading his letter from the mental institution, Birchcrest Manor, she thinks: "he [does] not deserve this, why [does] God allow him to suffer so?" (p. 24). At the end of the story he cries to her, "'I'm alive, I'm suffering'" (p. 32). He is also the Christ who is least among men, the alienated and the outcast, the poor--emotionally, socially, and, in spite of his father's money, financially. He is the Christ who takes on the

sins and burdens of another, the scapegoat Christ:

> She spent too much time thinking about him, as if he were somehow a kind of crystalization of her own loneliness . . . . Weinstein did so much more than think of his predicament: he embodied it, he acted it out, as if he were doing a dance for her, a dance of shame and agony and delight, and as long as he did it, she was safe. (pp. 21-22)

Primarily though, he is the Christ figure who by offering her a human relationship offers her the possibility of transcending her own ego, of losing her life in order to save it. For a time Weinstein partially thaws the region of ice in which Sister Irene has frozen herself and in so doing gives her the chance for a truly Christian life.

Not only the characters but the title also clearly associates this story with Christianity. As stated earlier in this paper, the title comes from a line in Measure for Measure, a play with a central Christian concern of the appropriate response of the Christian to others. The particular line comes from a speech by Claudio to his sister, a speech quoted in the short story itself. In his speech Claudio wonders about the

spirit after death: is it destined "To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside / In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice?" (p. 24). The title also may allude to Dante's Inferno, the very worst ninth circle of hell, the ice lake Caina. Although, as we shall later see, this particular circle of hell is appropriate because it is reserved for traitors, the primary emphasis here is that hell is pictured as a region of ice. Both allusions then are reminders of life after death, of possible hell after death.

In addition to the allusions to hell, much of the imagery and language intensifies the atmosphere of hell that the story creates so vividly. There are images of pollution with smokestacks giving "to the sky the excrement of the populated and successful earth" (p. 22), city traffic giving off "filthy exhaust" (p. 30), and Weinstein's summation of European history as "one big pile of garbage. . . .[f]ilth and rotting corpses . . ." (p. 17). Prison imagery is frequent. Weinstein is locked up in Birchcrest Manor and locked into his emotional problems. When he brings Sister Irene his late paper, she has the "startling sense of seeing the real Weinstein stare out at her, a terrified prisoner behind the confident voice" (p. 19). After meeting with his parents, she feels he "might have been watching her somehow from a barred window" (p. 29). Her own

imprisonment comes out clearly at the conclusion in her self-questioning: "Was she safe . . . or was she trapped?" (p. 33). She is, of course, trapped, trapped in a hell of loneliness. Insanity seems frequent. Weinstein is sent to a mental institution, and Sister Irene, even while doing her Christlike good deed, feels "a flicker of something close to madness" (p. 25). Real sanity, however, seems nonexistent. The rare heat in this story is neither the heat of a cozy fireplace nor the heat of a passionate love. Instead, the heat comes from "skies of the city at night . . . glowering with identical smokestacks ranged against the clouds" (p. 22).

The predominant aspect of this hell is not heat, but its absence. The "region of ice" of the title reflects the coldness of Sister Irene, particularly her final decision about Weinstein, and is reinforced by many images of coldness. The quotation from Shakespeare contrasts "warm motion" which stands for life to "cold obstruction" that signifies death (p. 24). Sister Irene's "customary rigidity" (p. 19) at the beginning of the story implies an icy nature, and her seeing Weinstein as a "crystallization" of her own predicament (p. 22) further illustrates that she sees the world in frozen pictures. When she receives the letter from Birchcrest Manor, she becomes "cold with

fear" (p. 24). When she goes to the Weinstein household and asks the parents to consider taking their son out of the institution, "Sister Irene [can]not stop shivering" (p. 26). The outer world reflects her inner self at the conclusion of the story as the "autumn drizzle" of her city turns to "snow" (p. 32) in perhaps an echo from Joyce's "The Dead." Finally, her initial response to Weinstein's suicide creates yet another picture of a region of ice as she "feel[s] a part of herself drifting off, lured by the plains of white snow to the north" (p. 32). This drifting seems to be a death wish that reinforces the death motif of the story, perhaps a wish to join Weinstein in his death. But "[s]he call[s] that part of herself back" (p. 33). Even as she apparently acts to affirm life, ironically she retreats into an even icier hell--death not in response to Weinstein, but death totally by herself.

Oates has chosen to emphasize the "region of . . . ice" of Shakespeare's quotation rather than the "fiery floods" in this story of hell because the hell of this story has nothing to do with the passion and hatred associated with fire-and-brimstone hells. The hell in this story comes from the choice to cut off passion and anger, the choice to be alone, the choice for one's own ego and safety and comfort rather than for the risk and response to someone else. The damned in this story are

damned because they are alone, because they are very alienated--from other people, from God, even from reality.

And in this story everyone--not only Sister Irene--seems to be alienated. In the Jesuit university where she teaches, she finds "the cynicism of her colleagues, the indifference of many of the students . . ." (p. 14). There is "no necessary sense of unity among the teachers . . .; they [come] and [go] separately and might for a year just miss a colleague who left his office five minutes before they arrived, and it [does] not matter" (p. 32). Just as Sister Irene finds isolation in the university, so does she find it in the convent. "What could the other nuns tell her? . . . She was alone, no one could help . . ." (p. 23). The family, the unit ideally in which people are least alone is represented by the Weinstein family. At first, Sister Irene sees the home as "a kind of heaven" (p. 26), but this home that produced the unhappy Weinstein is anything but a heaven. Inside, "[t]he room [is] so big it seem[s] it must be a public place; there [is] nothing personal or private" about Sister Irene's conversation with his parents (p. 29). The father acts as an agent whose primary function is to get rid of people. Already he has banished his son to a mental institution. During the short time in which we see

him, he waves his hand "motioning his wife off" and telling her "'to get out of here'" (p. 28). "He silence[s] [Sister Irene] with a flick of his hand" (p. 27), and he terminates the conversation with "a gesture meant to help Sister Irene on her way out" (p. 29).

His son's isolation is emphasized more than that of anyone else with whom Sister Ireme comes into contact. In the classroom "his jagged, protean mind [has] alienated the other students" in a week; ". . . and though he [sits] in the center of the class, he seem[s] totally alone, encased by a miniature world of his own" (p. 18). His family, particularly his father, has abdicated responsibility for him. "'[W]e got him committed!'" the father tells Sister Irene. "'[H]e can't control himself, and we got him committed!'" (p. 28). The young Allen claims that even the few friends he does have are "'sons of bitches . . . one of [whom] pretended not to see [him]'" (p. 31) the day before his final appearance in Sister Irene's office. And there in her office he tells her, "'[Y]ou're the only one. Everybody else is rotten!'" (p. 31). Then "the only one," Sister Irene who has initially shown him kindness, draws back when he reaches for her hand; "she jerk[s] away" (p. 32), leaving him completely alone. His suicide later is the ultimate expression of his isolation.

This isolation comes partly from his own emotional

problems. He does not know how to get along in his world. He is intelligent, but he uses his intelligence as a weapon rather than as a means of talking with others. He does not know how to get other students to relate to him, he is unable to get his parents to love him, and he cannot talk his friends into loaning him money. He sees enemies everywhere: the former professor who had worked with him on a master's thesis is "this bastard" (p. 16); the doctor at Birchcrest Manor, a "shrink [who] hates Jews . . . [a] dirty bastard, a sick, dirty, pathetic bastard . . ." (p. 30). With Sister Irene especially, we see that he can't respond appropriately to others. He tells her that he wants to discuss what she has said in class, then talks about things that she has never mentioned. When he wants to get into the class late, he wonders if he has missed anything and has "no idea of the rudeness of the question" (p. 17). He puts her on a pedestal, and as she falls off, she lands in the same category as the other people he hates. "'You bitch!'" he cries (p. 32). His father is right: his son is "unbalanced" (p. 28). But in a non-caring, isolated world like the one he is in, what does it mean to be balanced? To be sane in his world is to be crazy. Weinstein's desperate passion for knowledge, his poetry, his attempt to get Sister Irene to respond to him are his reactions to a world without passion.

He is a flawed Christ figure here--alienated not only because of the world but also his own problems--yet he offers the only escape from the region of ice.

Of course, most of this alienated world is the one seen through the eyes of Sister Irene, and some of the loneliness may be a reflection of her own. The implication of the story is that she has become a nun partly to escape the "whining weak people" that her parents had been (p. 19). In becoming a nun she has changed her name and apparently has cut herself off from her parents as they are no longer anything but a memory. With the exception of the tentative relationship with Allen Weinstein, we do not see that she has formed any other relationships to take the place of the parental one.

She is alienated not only from people but also from reality even though she prides herself on knowing what reality is. When Sister Carlotta asks if she does not think ideas are real, "Sister Irene acquiesce[s] with a smile, but of course she [does] not think so: only reality is real" (p. 18). Yet she lies to herself. She thinks she has "given up pride" (p. 22), yet she feels slightly superior to Sister Carlotta in the above-cited example. She also feels superior to her parents: "[O]ut of their wet need for affection, the girl she had been . . . had emerged stronger than either of them,

contemptuous of tears because she had seen so many" (p. 19). And though she has dedicated "her superior intelligence to the church" (p. 22), one thing that she likes about Weinstein is that he adds to her class "a mind that could appreciate her own" (p. 18). By the end of the story we find her lying to herself about the reason that she has denied Weinstein. She tells herself that her previous choice for Christ--"she had only one life and had already given it to someone else" (p. 33)--has precluded a choice to treat Weinstein as a human being. What she has done is mistake the choice to respond to Weinstein for a sexual choice. "He had come too late to her. Fifteen years ago, perhaps, but not now" (p. 33). In the final paragraph she is "walking down the corridor in a dream" (p. 33), totally cut off from the world of others, totally imprisoned in questions about herself and in her self-justification.

Alienated from more than outer reality, she is even alienated from her own feelings. She who initially suspects herself of feeling "guilty" (p. 14), who at first can respond to Allen Weinstein, cannot by the end of the story even feel guilt about what has happened to him. "If she could have felt guilt, she thought, she might at least have been able to feel something" (p. 33). Not even any negative feelings are left. The region of ice is perfect, perfectly cold and still and empty--as much

a death as Weinstein's suicide.

This emphasis on the alienation of the characters, this absence of community and denial of reality is a Christian theme. The choice that Sister Irene has to make is similar to that confronting the Good Samaritan of the parable when he is faced with the plight of the robbed man. But no good Samaritan passes by in this story. Sister Irene, the one person who shows the potential to act as he did, does not finally choose to be like the Good Samaritan, but turns away instead like the Levite and the priest.

The story does imply that the choice exists. This implication comes largely from the series of choices that Sister Irene makes, decisions both to respond to and not to respond to Weinstein. She does let him into the class. She accepts his paper late. She reads--or tries to read--his poem. She honors his request to plead with his parents for his release from Birchcrest Manor. Only twice does she reject him. Once after reading his poem, she feels his eyes focus intensely upon her; and she thanks him and turns away. More important is her final rejection. Shortly after he has entered her office, she is drawn towards helping him. "She want[s] to take his hand, to make some gesture that would close the aching distance between them" (p. 30). But after he asks to borrow money, just "ten dollars

maybe" (p. 31), "[e]verything [becomes] splotched and uncertain before her eyes" (p. 31). She feels as though "he [has] asked her to do something obscene" (p. 31), and she tries to get him to leave. But he gives her another chance to respond: "'Help me. Give me your hand or something, touch me, help me--please. . . .'" But when he "reach[es] for her hand, she [draws] back" (p. 31). Once more he asks for something real and personal; once again he tries to take her hand. "[T]his time she jerk[s] away" and calls him "Mr. Weinstein," a formality he has just asked her not to use (p. 32). Back and forth her choices have gone, but this final rejection sends Weinstein away forever. That Sister Irene changes in the story after this decision, changes and becomes even more rigid and empty than she is at the beginning, further indicates that the author sees her as responsible for her decision.

Sister Irene then is in one respect like Ruby Turpin of O'Connor's "Revelation": she does seem open to the possibility of change. Like Ruby, she takes seriously the appearance of a disturbed youth in her life; her world, like Ruby's, becomes topsy-turvy for a time. "In the Region of Ice" is a story of what happens when one does not accept the possibility for change, when one denies the outside world and its reality, whereas "Revelation" suggests what happens when one does accept

and doesn't deny. Both stories offer salvation or damnation to two religious women. In O'Connor's story Ruby Turpin chooses salvation; in Oates's story Sister Irene chooses damnation.

Yet in spite of the similarities, a basic difference lies behind the two stories. "Revelation" is a story actually written from a Christian viewpoint. "In the Region of Ice" only seems to be. While the author of "Revelation" believes that reality lies behind her symbolic presentation of a vision of the entrance into heaven, the author of "In the Region of Ice" does not really agree with her main character's belief that "[t]his city was not her city, this world was not her world" (p. 22). In Contraries Joyce Carol Oates has written " . . . of the world that is no metaphor, but our only home."[7] Although she does use Christian terms in her short story, the choice between heaven and hell is only a temporal one. Hell for Sister Irene is not a future possibility for her spirit after death; rather, it is her own nothingness at the conclusion of the story.

Even though Christ and God are frequently mentioned, even though Sister Irene believes that Christ's sacrifice is "that by which Christ transcended both God and man at one moment" (p. 25), God and Christ are not objective reality in this story. When Sister Irene thinks about Christ's sacrifice in this way, she

[feels] a flicker of something close to madness" (p. 25). The other nuns see her foray into the world, her attempt to integrate the convent with the world, as a "sense of mission that seemed to have come to her from nowhere" (p. 25), a lack of faith, it appears, even by the nuns. In spite of Sister Irene's "pray[ing] for guidance . . . [and] hours on her devotions" (p. 22), Sister Irene nonetheless feels that "[s]he [is] alone, no one [can] help" (p. 23).

No one or nothing does help her. In "Revelation" we repeatedly find hints that the reawakening of Ruby Turpin is a gift of grace. The adolescent who changes her life is named Mary Grace; the response to Ruby's angry prayer at God is "returned to her clearly [in an echo] like an answer from beyond the wood," and at the end she is granted a vision of "a vast horde of souls . . . rumbling toward heaven."[8] "In the Region of Ice" gives no similar sense of God intervening in the story. Sister Irene makes her choice by herself, without help and without grace. Unlike Ruby Turpin she is given no vision and no insight; she learns nothing from Weinstein's suicide. As God is missing from the story, so is Christ in the traditional Christian view. The Christ figure, a very flawed and very human character, does not finally offer redemption but commits an apparently meaningless suicide. The suicide itself does not point

to life after death. Although a Catholic nun, Sister Irene shows no concern about the state of Weinstein's soul after his death; not once does she worry about his going to hell for committing suicide. The Christian God is not really a factor in this story either during life or after death.

Yet why does the story have such close ties with Christianity? For one thing, this approach of getting inside Christianity is a more effective way of criticizing it. The author can judge the faith by using its own terms, its own values. And by using the point of view of a Christian, she is less likely to alienate any Christian readers when she presents the church in a negative light.

Joyce Carol Oates does present the church of this story in a negative light. Even through the eyes of Sister Irene, the convent does not appear as interacting with the world:

> The little convent was not like an island in the center of this noisy world, but rather a kind of hole or crevice the world did not bother with, something of no interest. The convent's rhythm of life had nothing to do with the world's rhythm, it did not violate or alarm it in any way. (p. 22)

So rather than an island that might save someone lost at sea, this convent is compared to a hole or a crevice, both places suitable for hiding, both places easy to get lost in. That the convent is "something of no interest" with "nothing to do with the world" shows an absence of action and an absence of worth. Even the statement that the convent does "not violate or alarm [the world] in any way" is not a positive statement about peace. From the traditional Christian standpoint, it is instead a criticism. Christianity should violate and alarm people; Christ said that he came to bring not peace but a sword. From the standpoint of Joyce Carol Oates, the statement is also reprehensible. "[V]iolence is always an affirmation," she writes in Contraries; "there can be no violence out of a sense of nothing."[9] Both sentences in the quotation about the convent, devoid of violence and action as they are and weighted with five negative words, do give a sense of nothing rather than of affirmation. The convent and its Christianity have no effect upon the world.

Of course, these remarks about the convent can be applied to the role of Sister Irene. She has used the convent as a "hole" and a "crevice" in which to hide so that she can escape the whining and the wetness, the demands for money, for touching, for intimacy from other people. Is Joyce Carol Oates not suggesting that this

possibility is a threat of the convent life--that a nun might use her religion, might wear a habit that hides her inadequacies? When Allen Weinstein claims that there's "nothing under that ugly outfit" (p. 32), he is correct. By that time she is no longer a person nor a woman, but a hollow nothing, a habit and little more. Her decision against Allen Weinstein is like the convent's practice of remaining isolated from the world. In both instances we have an indictment of the Christian religion, an indictment of those--both people and institutions--who use their religion in order to escape living it.

Earlier I mentioned that Oates has used the nun's point of view in order to criticize Christianity from the inside. But she has not used first person. While we do get only Sister Irene's thoughts, at the same time we observe her from the outside; thus, we are set further apart from her than we would be were the first-person pronoun I used. This distancing that the third person gives not only makes the region of ice more complete by separating us somewhat from the main character but also enables us to look more objectively, more critically at the character.

Though criticizing from the inside in this story, Joyce Carol Oates is definitely not a proponent of the Christian faith which she finds outdated in a scientific

age.[10] When she talks about the need for "a redefinition of God in terms of the furthest reaches of man's hallucinations . . . [to] provide us with a new basis for tragedy," this God is not the Christian God as creator, intervener, and redeemer.[11] Her idea of God is a far hazier one than that of Flannery O'Connor; her hope lies largely in man himself. Mary Kathryn Grant finds the "consistent refrain in Oates's six novels . . . [to be] 'I must take control of my life.'"[12] Her emphasis is always on man and his choices: like Allen Weinstein she is a believer in spiritual humanism. For Oates, the purpose of art is to lead the reader to a more profound realization of the mystery and the sacred possibilities of human existence, not to any awareness of God.

Yet a question remains: why are certain values behind the story the same as Christian values? Certainly the self-contained ego is presented as negatively as the one in "Revelation" is. Clearly the central issue is a Christian one: that a person should act in this world, should respond to the world, and should reach out to other people.

A look at the author's theory on tragedy helps to explain the similar values; for her theory, her faith in art, intersects with Christianity at certain points. "The art of tragedy," she writes in The Edge of Impossibility, "grows out of a break between self and

community, a sense of isolation." In a tragedy the hero or heroine "risk[s] loss of self in an attempt to realize self." And in tragic writing "nihilism is overcome by the breaking down of the dikes between human beings."[13] The philosophy arising from this theory is similar to Christianity in its demands for the loss of self, the importance of community, and the need for breaking down the dikes between people. The two basic commandments of the Christian faith are to love God completely and to love neighbor as self. Joyce Carol Oates, who finds Flannery O'Connor's insistence on the first commandment "a rather creepy dimension," accepts only the second commandment.[14] Yet this acceptance makes Sister Irene's story closer to the Christian viewpoint. At the same time that she is criticizing Christianity, Joyce Carol Oates uses her agreement with Christians on the danger of the isolated ego to strengthen her own writing about the region of ice.

Notes

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, "Art of Fiction," interview by R. Phillips, Paris Review, 20 (Fall, 1978), 215.

[2] Oates, "Remarks by Joyce Carol Oates accepting the National Book Award in Fiction for Them," from Mary Kathryn Grant, R. S. M., The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1978), p. 164.

[3] Oates, The Edge of Impossibility (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1972), p. 5.

[4] Grant, The Tragic Vision of Joyce Carol Oates, p. [118].

[5] William T. Liston, "Her Brother's Keeper," Southern Humanities Review, 11 (1977), 195-203. This article gives an extensive comparison between "In the Region of Ice" and Measure for Measure.

[6] Oates, The Wheel of Love (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1970), p. 22. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[7] Oates, Contraries (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 168.

[8] Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 217.

[9] Oates, Contraries, p. 145.

[10] Oates, Contraries, p. 145.

[11] Oates, The Edge of Impossibility, p. 7.

[12] Grant, p. 127.

[13] Oates, The Edge of Impossibility, p. 4

[14] Joyce Carol Oates, "Interview with Joyce Carol Oates," interview by L. Kuehl, Commonweal, 91 (1969), p. 308.

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Biographical-Bibliographical Essay on Joyce Carol Oates

The brief biographies that are available on Joyce Carol Oates concentrate on her works and are somewhat sketchy about her life. For a very brief biographical essay, see the Oates entry in World Authors: 1970-1975 (New York, 1980), pp. 592-596. Generally the best sense of Oates as a person emerges from her interviews. Some of the better ones include L. Kuel, "Interview with Joyce Carol Oates" (Commonweal [December 5, 1969], pp. 307-310); A. Kazin, "Oates," (Harpers, [August, 1971], pp. 78-82); and J. D. Bellamy, "Dark Lady of American Letters: An Interview with Joyce Carol Oates" (Atlantic Monthly, [February, 1972], pp. 63-67). Perhaps the best source for biographical information is Joyce Carol Oates by Ellen G. Friedman (New York, 1980), a book that contains conversations and correspondence with Oates and that combines biographical and critical elements.

As in the case of any contemporary author who continues to write, Joyce Carol Oates does not have any up-to-date comprehensive bibliography of her work. Two bibliographies that are extensive according to

G. F. Waller (Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates [Baton Rouge, 1979], p. 221) are the following: Lucienne P. McCormick, "A Bibliography of Works by and about Joyce Carol Oates" (American Literature [March 1971], pp. 124-132) and Douglas M. Catron, "A Contribution to a Bibliography of Works by and about Joyce Carol Oates" (American Literature [November, 1977], pp. 399-414). The first is, according to its author, "a near-complete bibliography of the works of Joyce Carol Oates . . . [and] a selected bibliography of works about her" (p. 124). The two articles, which should be used in conjunction with each other, contain nearly fifteen years of work both by and about Ms. Oates. The two major weaknesses are that book reviews by her are not included and that her work after 1976 is missing. In 1979 Joanne V. Creighton published a bibliography, "Joyce Carol Oates" in Twayne's United States Authors (Boston, Massachusetts), pp. 161-169. As prolific a writer as Joyce Carol Oates continues to be, all of these bibliographies are complete only prior to their dates of publication.

Chapter Six

Ruby Turpin

A Grotesque and More Than a Grotesque

Echoing the many critics who are always finding grotesques in Flannery O'Connor's writing, Gilbert H. Kruller calls Ruby Turpin, the main character in "Revelation," one of O'Connor's "countless grotesques."[1] I don't think he is wrong. Even though Ruby is not one of the prophet freaks or one of the criminal misfits, even though she is another of those everyday-seeming "good country people" who manage the farms and utter the clichés throughout O'Connor's work, Ruby Turpin is distorted and satirized. She seems almost a stereotype of the self-righteous and bigoted, not terribly well-educated, church-going woman of the South--an exaggerated stereotype. The dominant image associated with the one-hundred-and-eighty pound woman is, after all, that of a pig, an "old wart hog" from hell.[2] As we see her looking down on the other people in the doctor's office at the same time that she is congratulating herself, we are as detached from her as we are from O'Connor's more bizarre grotesques.

Yet perhaps because Ruby is less bizarre than the prophet-freaks or the criminal misfits, identifying with her becomes somewhat easier than it does with them. And O'Connor does want us finally to identify with Ruby Turpin and her distorted pride. She effects a change in Ruby that makes empathizing with her possible, and she parallels Ruby's situation with that of other characters in the story and that of Biblical characters in certain allusions. "We're all grotesque," the author claimed in an interview.[3] For her, a Catholic believer in original sin, Ruby Turpin's condition is a universal one.

This condition is certainly satirized. The satire begins with her name. In the doctor's office Ruby does see herself as a ruby, a woman like the virtuous woman in Proverbs whose "price is far above rubies."[4] "'When I think who all I could have been besides myself,'" she says, sounding more like the Pharisee in the parable of Jesus than like the woman in Proverbs, "' . . . I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus'" (p. 206). Part of her worth she derives from her personal neatness and cleanliness. She is offended by the unemptied ash tray, the young child with the runny nose, the woman with the snuff-stained lips who should have got "a wash rag and some soap" with her green stamps instead of jewelry (p. 197). Ruby herself is quite clean; even her hogs

are "not dirty" and "don't stink" (p. 198), she tells the people in the waiting room. Like the wife in Proverbs, she "eateth not the bread of idleness," for she knows "[w]hen you got something . . . you got to look after it" (p. 199). Also like the wife in Proverbs, Ruby feels that she "openeth her mouth with wisdom" as, for example, when she explains smugly to the white-trash woman that you just couldn't send black people back to Africa: "'It wouldn't be a way in the world you could get all the niggers back over there'" (p. 201).

Best of all, she believes, is her goodness, the quality that relates her most to the good wife, the jewel, of Proverbs. Ruby too stretcheth out her hand to the poor; for "[s]he never spare[s] herself when she finds somebody in need" (p. 202). Ruby even has a virtue not possessed by the Proverbs' wife, that of knowing that she would choose goodness above everything. "'Make me a good woman and it don't matter what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor,'" she tells Jesus in one of her imaginary dialogues with him (p. 203). As the gospel hymn plays in the doctor's office, Mrs. Turpin mentally supplies the line that sums up her feelings about her goodness and her self-assurance that extends into eternity: "[W]ona these days I know I'll we-eara crown" (p. 194).

But her pride over her clean hogs seems foolish; her good sense appears dubious as she shouts out in the doctor's office her prayer-meeting praises of gratitude for being herself; and her charity looks questionable when she has such distaste for the poor. And just as these inconsistencies undermine our faith in her opinion of her own worth, so does her last name Turpin undercut her first name Ruby. Turpin, an ugly-sounding name, is closely related to the word turpitude, meaning baseness and depravity. Ruby's thoughts and actions are often base, thus revealing the true worth of some of her respectable virtues and a grotesque discrepancy between what she thinks she is and what she really is.

Her thoughts dominate from the beginning of the story, and they are not the thoughts of the virtuous woman from Proverbs, not thoughts that are precious as a jewel is precious. Upon entering the doctor's waiting room, she immediately begins deciding who is trashy and who is not. She might be willing to help out trashy people, but she isn't willing to see them as anything more than her stereotype of them. "Too lazy to light the fire. There was nothing you could tell her about people like them that she didn't know already . . . . Help them you must but help them you couldn't" (p. 203). We discover that "[w]ithout appearing to, Mrs. Turpin always noticed people's feet" (p. 194), literally

doing what she figuratively does: looking down on others. Her disdainful observation of the old woman's cotton print dress--"She and Claud had three sacks of chicken feed in their pump house that was in the same print" (p. 194)--makes it obvious that Ruby doesn't begin to understand the ideal of humility that comes from the religion she thinks she espouses. Even her sympathy is edged with a somewhat base self-congratulation. When she notices the teen-aged girl's face blue with acne, "Mrs. Turpin thought how pitiful it was to have a face like that at that age. . . . [She] herself was fat but she had always had good skin, and, though she was forty-seven years old, there was not a wrinkle in her face except around the eyes from laughing too much" (p. 194).

From Ruby's caustic observations, the author moves into one of those interior, late-night monologues that Ruby thinks is a dialogue with Jesus. In these monologues she poses childish questions that seem grotesque for an adult: what if Jesus had told her before she was born that she could only be white trash or black? Or what if Jesus had said that if she were svelte and fashionable she couldn't be good? These questions, aspects of the turpin underside of her character, serve to give her another chance to congratulate herself for choosing to be a "neat clean

respectable Negro woman" (p. 195) and for choosing to be a "good" woman.

The classifying of the people in the doctor's office is reinforced by our discovery of her other late-night practice, another base practice, that of "naming the classes of people" (p. 195). She doesn't have too much trouble labeling the people beneath herself and her husband Claud, but as she goes above themselves on the social scale, things begin to get complex, and she is bothered by the ambiguity. Although this ambiguity gives us the first hint that Ruby Turpin can be changed, the image is a sinister one, evoking Nazi Germany and the final result of her kind of thinking.

> Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven. (p. 196)

Even as her thoughts are more turpin-like than jewel-like, so are her actions. Just as she has been in total control of the little talk with Jesus, so does she wish to be in control of the circumstances surrounding her. With Claud she manages pretty well.

> Mrs. Turpin put a firm hand on Claud's shoulder and said . . . "Claud, you sit in

> that chair there," and gave him a push down into the vacant one. . . . [H]e sat down as if he were accustomed to doing what she told him to. (p. 191-192)

She doesn't have as much success with the rest of the world. She wishes she could get the runny-nosed child to move over and let her sit down. She would like to give the doctor a little help running his office. She'd be happier if the old white-trash woman would keep her mouth shut. For O'Connor, who is a very orthodox Catholic, this desire to control the world creates the sin of pride, a pride that is an attempt to usurp the freedom of others, an attempt to become godlike and therefore grotesque.

Not only would Ruby Turpin like to recreate the world to suit herself, but she is also rude with a thoughtlessness that reminds us of her last name again and that further detaches us from her. When the white-trash woman asks Mrs. Turpin if she would like to know where to get a clock like the doctor's, Mrs. Turpin cuts her off. "'No. I already have a nice clock,' Mrs. Turpin said. Once somebody like her got a leg in the conversation, she would be all over it" (p. 197). Later, when the same woman tries to discuss her family's medical problems, Mrs. Turpin does not at all respond to what

the woman says but sarcastically implies what she has been thinking all along. "'Yes, indeed,' she says aloud, but looking up at the ceiling, 'it's a heap of things worse than a nigger'" (p. 204).

The locations of the story further emphasize Ruby Turpin's grotesqueness. The first part of the story takes place in a doctor's office, which underscores the fact that while Ruby is physically well, she is spiritually unhealthy. More importantly though, the beginning takes place primarily in Ruby Turpin's mind. All her thoughts reveal her self-centeredness, her unjustified superiority, her stereotyping, and her meanness to those beneath her socially. These distorted perceptions and her non-stop interior monologue casts a claustrophobic atmosphere, even upon the doctor's office, which Ruby characteristically finds too small: "she could not understand why a doctor . . . couldn't afford a decent sized waiting room" (p. 192). The beginning of the story then is located in her own ego that is far larger than it ought to be, a significant distortion.

The conclusion of the story is located in the pig parlor. The comparison of Ruby with the pigs first made in the doctor's office when the teen-aged girl calls her a wart hog is again repeated, this time by Ruby herself. "'How am I a hog?'" she demands of God. "'Exactly how am I like them?'" (p. 216). No longer is she seeing her

particular pigs in a flattering light either, no longer thinking that "[t]hey're cleaner than some children" (p. 198). Now she "glower[s]" down at them and notices them "grunting" and "shaking themselves like idiot children" (p. 214). She thinks of them in the words of the white-trash woman "[a]-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin" (p. 215). As the pigs become more grotesque, so, by association, does Ruby Turpin.

The pig parlor also recalls the parable of the prodigal son who ended up in the fields with the swine. Reduced to feeding swine, he became so desperately hungry that he was willing to eat their food, a desire relating him as clearly to the pigs as Ruby Turpin is in this story, a link with swine that is for a Jewish person a particularly terrible indignity.

As the allusion emphasizes Ruby's grotesqueness, at the same time it ties her, a woman who prides herself on respectability, to a person who was not respectable. The prodigal son, after all, had "squandered his property in loose living."[5] Equally important, the allusion reminds us that like the prodigal son Ruby is capable of becoming humble and is open to a revelation.

Ruby's revelation is the result of her encounter with Mary Grace, the teen-aged girl in the waiting room. The homely teenager first begins to make Mrs. Turpin nervous by looking at her in strange ways. She singles

out Ruby for her "ugly looks" (p. 197); later her eyes "fix" on Mrs. Turpin (p. 197). When Mrs. Turpin talks to the girl's mother, "she is aware that the ugly girl's peculiar eyes [are] still on her, and she [has] trouble bringing her attention back to the conversation" (p. 199). Mary Grace seems to see some of the grotesqueness about Mrs. Turpin that the woman has yet to see about herself. And by the conclusion of the story--after the girl's words and action have had their effect--Ruby does have an insight into herself and her so-called virtues as well as a new vision about others.

The epiphany comes from a strange source. The eyes of the girl have "a peculiar light, an unnatural light like night road signs give" (p. 197). Though Mary Grace does jolt Mrs. Turpin into a new way of seeing and though O'Connor clearly intends for her to be the agent of grace that her name implies, the experience is hardly the pleasant religious experience that many people associate with the word grace. "[I]n my stories," O'Connor writes, "I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work."[6] As in other O'Connor stories grace here is a violent action that throws things off balance; it is not sentimental or sweet but bitter, as Mary Grace's first name means bitter.

The experience is both violent and bitter for Mrs. Turpin. After Mary Grace has made faces and glared at her, she then throws a book at her, tries to choke her, calls her a wart hog, and tells her to go back to hell. Mrs. Turpin takes the girl seriously, and her whole world becomes altered "as if she were looking through the wrong end of a telescope" (p. 206). Her energy that dominates the beginning of the story seems to dissipate, and she " . . . could not have moved a finger"; "she [feels] like someone trying to catch a train in a dream . . . and the faster you try to run the slower you go" (p. 207). Her confidence likewise is shaken. As she and Claud head toward home, she looks out the truck window "suspiciously"; "[s]he would not have been startled to see a burnt wound between two blackened chimneys" instead of her home between two hickory trees (p. 209). No longer is she thinking about her good complexion: when she and Claud lie down to rest after their experience, she is plagued by the image of the wart hog. "She moaned . . . 'I am not,' she said tearfully, 'a wart hog. From hell'" (p. 210).

The good disposition of which she is earlier so proud is gone. In the doctor's office she says thickly to the doctor "'Lea' me be'" and shakes him off. Then she "growl[s] to herself . . . Quit your pattin me" (p. 208). At home in bed her tears turn to anger, and

"[h]er eyes [begin] to burn instead with wrath," and she "scowl[s] at the ceiling . . . [o]ccasionally rais[ing] her fist" (p. 210). Her loving and "buttering up niggers" (p. 199) that she has talked about in the doctor's office are nowhere evident as she meets with the hired help. She greets them "grimly"; she speaks to them in a "flat tone that indicated they could leave off their foolishness" (p. 212); and she tells them "shortly," "'I got more to do than just stand around and pass the time of day'" (p. 213).

Even as these changes take place in Ruby Turpin, she is still somewhat a comic figure as she stumps out to the back porch in her unlaced brown shoes and becomes the object of the humorous, overstated sympathy of the black hired help. She yet can make us laugh as she rails against God:

> . . . [y]ou could have made me a nigger. It's too late for me to be a nigger," she [says] with deep sarcasm, "but I could act like one. Lay down in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Roll on the ground." (p. 216)

And when in her "house clothes" and her unlaced brown shoes, she heads out to confront God at one of the most unlikely places of all for a religious experience, a pig parlor, she appears quite ludicrous. Shouting and

shaking her fist at God while she hoses down the hogs, she becomes even more grotesque.

Yet although she is still prejudiced and self-righteous and humorous, although outwardly she appears more ludicrous than when she was dressed up in her good black pumps at the doctor's office, she is, nevertheless, no longer merely an object for satire or contempt. Even as she becomes more grotesque, paradoxically she becomes more than just a grotesque. When her confrontation with God seems to be finished, she is compared to "a monumental statue coming to life" (p. 217), and for the reader she already has begun to come to life too. After Mary Grace throws the book at her and calls her a wart hog, Ruby begins the change that encourages the reader to empathize--at least a little--with her.

What helps a reader begin to empathize with Ruby Turpin? For one thing, she takes Mary Grace's action seriously. Rather than brushing off the girl's attack as nothing more than the mark of a lunatic, as indeed the white-trash woman does, Ruby Turpin chooses instead to confront Mary Grace. "She leaned forward until she was looking directly into the fierce brilliant eyes . . . 'What you got to say to me?' she asked . . . " (p. 207). Instead of self-righteously refusing to admit that she might be a wart hog, instead of becoming defensive and pointing out Mary Grace's own faults, she takes the name

as a message directly from God. "'What do you send me a message like that for?'" she yells at the heavens (p. 215).

She also begins to treat people differently. Although her treatment of her black hired help is hardly ideal, she does try to share her experience with them. Even though when they respond to her as they have always responded, she becomes angry and falls back into her old pattern--"Idiots. . . . You could never say anything intelligent to a nigger" (p. 213)--she has for the first time talked to them as human beings. Also, for the first time in the story she attempts to really share something other than a platitude, a command, or a joke with her husband Claud. She wants "to tell him what the girl had said" (p. 210) and tries to do so twice. But "she [does] not wish to put the image of herself as a wart hog from hell into his mind" (p. 210). Later, she is very careful to make sure that he is "nowhere in sight" (p. 215) before she starts shouting at God. Not only the attempt to share, but this weakness on her part also makes her a little easier to sympathize with.

In her changing relationship to God, she becomes again more than a mere grotesque. Her confrontation with Him presents a vivid contrast to her earlier monologues with Jesus. This time she's not providing God with His lines, but is instead just asking questions, honest

questions. And this time He has the last word. "'Who do you think you are?'" she cries in a "final surge of fury." And clearly "like an answer from beyond the wood," she is answered with her own words in the echo: Who do you think you are? (p. 217). Though the answer is but a question, it challenges her presumptuousness. Apparently it is effective too, for at this point in the story she becomes truly silent for the first time. "She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it" (p. 217).

This silence is important because it allows her to open herself to what is going on around her. It clears the way for her vision. And it quiets her fury so that by the conclusion of the story she is not endlessly talking but is listening to "the voices of the souls climbing upward . . . and shouting hallelujah" (p. 218). For us as readers, her silence means that we are no longer overwhelmed by her ego, and, consequently, can respond to her more easily.

She also begins to see in a different way. Her possessions are not what they were. At the beginning of the story, her material goods--her "couple of acres of cotton and a few hogs and chickens and just enough white-face that Claud can look after them himself"--are large in importance, a part of what gives her a fairly high position on her social classification list. After her

silence near the end, her goods become small and vulnerable:

> A tiny truck, Claud's, appeared on the highway. . . . Its gears scraped thinly. It looked like a child's toy. At any moment a bigger truck might smash into it and scatter Claud's and the nigger's brains all over the road. (p. 217)

At the beginning of the story she is looking down on other people and down at their feet; by the conclusion she's looking up to see a vision in which the white trash, the blacks, and the lunatics are all ahead of her on their way to heaven. During the first half of the story Ruby sees her own virtue; during the second half she sees even her virtues being burned away. All of these changes show a humbled Ruby Turpin, a character whom O'Connor would see as having "return[ed] . . . to reality and prepar[ed] to accept [her] moment of grace."[7]

The way that we see her in the story changes too. When she first enters the doctor's waiting room, it is very small.

> . . . Mrs. Turpin, who [is] very large [makes] it look even smaller by her presence. She stands looming at the head of the magazine

> table . . . a living demonstration that the room [is] inadequate and ridiculous. (p. 191)

At the end she becomes small as the emphasis is on the sky and the streak in the sky, the "vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth" filled with "hordes" of others' souls (p. 217). At the beginning, with Ruby's continual reminders, we see her as a proud owner of property, but near the conclusion O'Connor moves from the pasture that Ruby is so proud of owning to the sun, a reminder of the real ownership of God:

> The pig parlor commanded a view of the back pasture . . . [that] sloped down to the highway. Across it was their cotton field and beyond that a dark green dusty wood which they owned as well. The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of the trees like a farmer inspecting his own hogs. (p. 215)

In the doctor's office Ruby appears secure to us in her social position and in her faith in her value judgments. However, when we read that "[a]t any moment a bigger truck might smash into [Claud's truck] and scatter Claud's and the nigger's brains all over the road" (p. 217), we see her actual insecurity. In the face of such insecurity, she and all her pretensions--rather than

her surroundings--look inadequate and ridiculous. Yet it is her very ridiculousness and inadequacy that help us to identify with her.

The author also wants us to identify her with others, to show that she is not alone in her pride and self-satisfaction. The allusions that O'Connor uses show that she doesn't think Ruby's particular grotesqueness is unique to Ruby. The comparison to the Pharisee who thanks God that he is not like other men relates her to the highly respected people of society; the comparison to the prodigal son ties her with the unrespectable, the down and out. The allusion to Belshazzar--"She was looking straight up as if there were unintelligible handwriting on the ceiling" (p. 211)--compares her to a king while the allusion to Job--"Occasionally she raised her fist and made a small stabbing motion over her chest as if she were defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong" (p. 210)--relates her to Job as mythical everyman of the Old Testament.[8]

The other characters in the story are likewise related to Ruby. Partly through Ruby's thoughts and partly through narrative voice, O'Connor satirizes the humanity in the doctor's office, just as she does Ruby. Each of them feels superior too. The woman Ruby labels "white-trash" has contempt for blacks ("'They ought to

send all them niggers back to Africa'" [p. 200]); for Mary Grace ("'I thank Gawd . . . I ain't a lunatic'" [p. 209]); and for Ruby herself ("'I know I wouldn't scoot down no hog with no hose,' she said to the wall [p. 198]). The pleasant stylish lady, Mary Grace's mother, feels superior to her daughter as she thinks that "'people with bad dispositions are more to be pitied than anyone on earth'" (p. 205). And although Ruby misses the point, the author shows this woman patronizing Ruby after she talks about Negroes: "'Like you read out of the same book,'" she says (p. 199). Mary Grace, the author makes obvious, feels superior to both her mother and Ruby Turpin with their uneducated down-home platitudes and their self-satisfaction. And everyone in the doctor's office seems to share a supercilious attitude toward black people.

Even the reader is brought into Ruby's story. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that we too have been doing to Ruby Turpin, as well as to the other people in the doctor's office, just what she has been doing to others. We have been looking down on her and feeling superior. We have been calling her a grotesque.

What about the narrator? She has created this world of grotesques. She has implied that the reader too is grotesque. Is she merely satirizing everyone in the same way that Ruby Turpin does at the beginning of the

story? And does this possibly leave us with a narrator and an author who hasn't achieved the salvation that Ruby has?

The author herself would not have denied that she too was a grotesque. In fact, she once compared herself, as she has done to Ruby, with a pig.

> . . . [B]eing a Georgia Author is a rather specious dignity, on the same order as, for the pig, being a Talmadge ham. . . . [but] a pig is a pig, no matter who puts him up.[9]

Again, talking about authors, she compares herself, as well as other authors, this time to freaks:

> When . . . a writer has a freak for his hero, he is not simply showing us what we are, but what we have been and what we could become. His prophet-freak is an image of himself.[10]

Her letters frequently show her awareness of her own frailties. The following comment shows that she knows her own affinity with Ruby Turpin: "Smugness is the Great Catholic Sin. I find it in myself. . . ."[11]

In addition to her acknowledgment of her own original sin, O'Connor's theories on art and her art itself show that she does know what she is doing with the satire in "Revelation." In The Habit of Being she

writes: "The writer has to make the corruption believable before he can make the grace meaningful."[12] Thus, her picture of Ruby Turpin must illustrate both the corruption and the meaningful grace. The corruption is obvious. But so too is the grace. When Ruby near the end of her story has "the look of a woman going single-handed, weaponless, into battle" (p. 214), the author, without losing her comic perspective, manages to give the object of her satire an emerging dignity. The change that does take place in Ruby Turpin shows that O'Connor does know what she is doing here. The satire is not merely for the sake of satire; the distortion, not merely a mocking of the follies of mankind. Like all of O'Connor's work, this story uses grotesquerie and satire to show that she believes something better can exist.

Notes

[1] Gilbert H. Kruller, Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 49.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 207. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[3] C. Ross Mullins, "Flannery O'Connor, An Interview," Jubilee (June, 1963), taken from The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, eds. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 255.

[4] Proverbs 31:10, The Holy Bible, Authorized King James Version. Subsequent Biblical documentation comes from this version: the references that follow are from Proverbs 31:27, 31:26, and 31:20 respectively.

[5] Luke 15:13.

[6] Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1961), p. 112.

[7] O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 112.

[8] Diane Tolomeo has an extensive comparison of Ruby Turpin with Job in her article "Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation' and the Book of Job," Renascence, 30 (1978), 78-90.

[9] Friedman and Lawson, p. 238.

[10] O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 118.

[11] Flannery O'Connor, The Habit of Being: Letters Edited and With an Introduction by Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 131.

[12] O'Connor, The Habit of Being . . . p. 516.

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Tolomeo, Diane. "Flannery O'Connor's 'Revelation' and the Book of Job." Renascence, 30 (1978), 78-90.

Biographical-Bibliographical Essay on Flannery O'Connor

A complete biography on Flannery O'Connor has not yet been written. For a very good, very brief biography, Barbara MacKenzie's "Flannery O'Connor and the Business of the Purified Mind," (Georgia Review [Winter, 1979], pp. 817-826) is helpful. Two books with adequate introductory biographies are Preston M. Browning's Flannery O'Connor (Carbondale, 1974) and Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain's Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor (Lexington, 1971). For a pictorial biography Barbara MacKenzie's Flannery O'Connor's Georgia (Athens, 1980) has excellent pictures of the author, Georgia, and the religious services of which O'Connor writes. The best information on her life probably comes from the collection of her letters, The Habit of Being: Letters Edited and With an Introduction by Sally Fitzgerald (New York, 1979), a book that contains biographical information by the editor as well as that which arises naturally from the letters.

Although the great amount of criticism that continues to be published about O'Connor makes a

bibliography about her work nearly outdated before it goes to press, a number of good bibliographies have been compiled. The oldest, and as a consequence least helpful, is George F. Wedge, "Two Bibliographies: Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers" (Critique [1958-59], pp. 59-70). The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor (New York, 1966), edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, has an excellent bibliography of O'Connor's published works and a thorough bibliography of her secondary work through 1965. J. T. Brittain in "Flannery O'Connor: A Bibliography," (Bulletin Bibliography [September 1966--December 1968], pp. 98, 123, 142) has a bibliography by and about Ms. O'Connor that is good through 1967. For a fine expansion of this earlier bibliography by Ms. Brittain, see Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor (Lexington, 1971). A further supplement to these two is the compilation by Allen D. Lackey, "Flannery O'Connor: A Supplemental Bibliography of Secondary Sources," (Bulletin of Bibliography [October, 1973], pp. 170-175). J. E. Dorsey has a checklist that covers graduate theses and doctoral dissertations, "Carson McCullers and Flannery O'Connor: A Checklist of Graduate Research" (Bulletin Bibliography [October, 1975], pp. 162-167). For a chronologically arranged and descriptively annotated bibliography with very

extensive coverage of all secondary work except for very minor criticism, see Robert E. Golden and Mary C. Sullivan, Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide (Boston, 1977), a work that is as complete as possible through 1973 and less so after that and is the most extensive bibliography completed yet.

VITA

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