

*The
Molett
Reader*

1991 - 1999



THE MOLETT READER

PRIZE-WINNING ESSAYS
1991-1999

A Centennial Publication
of the
University Honors Program



University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Lafayette, Louisiana



November 1999

IN MEMORIAM

GRANT HAMILTON MOLETT

1915 - 1995

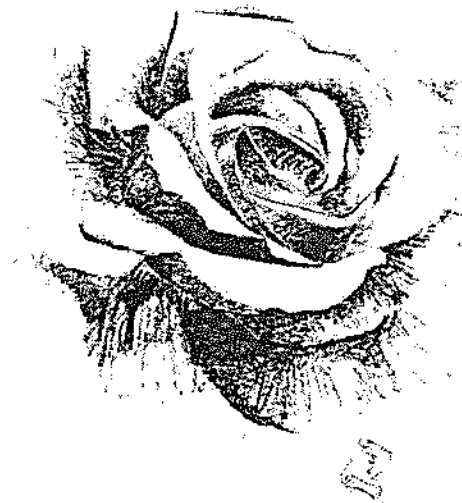
On September 6, 1995, the University Honors Program lost one of its dearest friends and most loyal supporters when, after a brief illness, Grant Molett died.

How can we ever forget the generosity and the graciousness of this very special man? We all remember him whenever we use the computers he bought for us. We bless him when it is raining outside and we have our very own Honors xerox machine, thanks to his kindness and his diplomatic skills. The eighteen students who have so far won the Molett Prize think of him when they use their engraved bookmarks. Michelle Seymour Meche, first winner of the Molett Scholarship, will always remember the effort he made, weeks before his death, to establish the scholarship and present the first one to her. All who attended the 1994 LCHC convention in Ruston will remember that he paid for us to charter a bus for the trip. The anthropology majors whose trip to a conference in Mexico he helped to fund have a priceless memory too.

Grant Mollet is still our Angel. His endowment in the USL Foundation means that the tradition of prizes and scholarships will continue. What we have to learn to do without is his presence. He loved to be with us, and we loved him. We still do.

—Patricia Rickels

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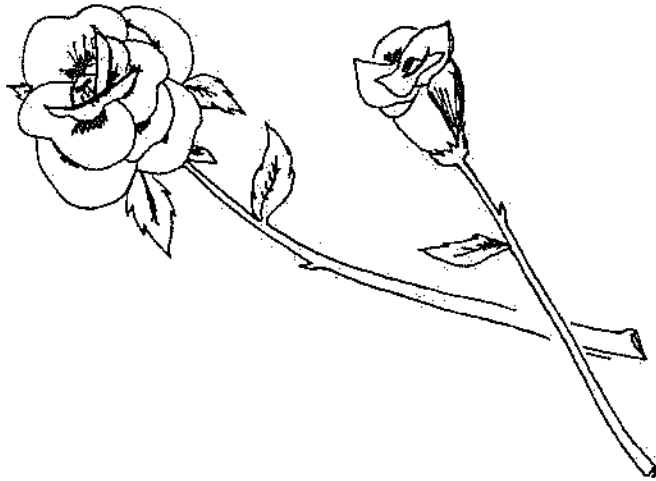
The Molett Prize

The Molett Prize, awarded each semester, is named for the late Grant Molett, whose generosity to the Honors Program, financial and personal, had no bounds.

Each semester all students in the Honors Program read "the Honors Book" and write an essay about it, responding to one of a series of topics proposed by Dr. Rickels. The author of the best essay receives the Molett Prize the following semester - a check for \$300 and a handsome engraved bronze bookmark. The prize winner reads his/her essay in Honors Seminar and it is published in *Areopagitica*.

In November, 1999, as part of its celebration of the University's Centennial, the Honors Program is published this book - *The Molett Reader*, an anthology of the eighteen prize essays thus far chosen.

"Per sapientiam felicitas"



Grant Molett Prize Winners

(Best Honors Seminar Essay - Prize is \$300 + bronze bookmark)

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**SPRING HONORS FORUMS 1991
BOOK: HOMER'S ILIAD**

**COPIES OF THE ILIAD, TRANSLATED BY RICHMOND LATTIMORE
ARE AVAILABLE UNDER HON.110 IN THE BOOKSTORES**



**FORUM # 1 TIME: 7:00 PM HLG 315 FACULTY LOUNGE
DATE: 3-14-91 THURSDAY
SPEAKER: PROF. CLIFFORD DUROUSSEUX
TOPIC: TRANSLATING THE ILIAD**

**FORUM # 2 TIME 7:00 PM HLG 315 FACULTY LOUNGE
DATE: 3-19-91 TUESDAY
SPEAKER: DR. TIMOTHY REILLY
TOPIC: HISTORIC GEOGRAPHY OF THE AEGEAN**

REFRESHMENTS TO FOLLOW BOTH FORUMS

Homeric Images of Battle

By: Tanya Anderson

In the epic poem The Iliad, Homer uses very eloquent and rhythmic language to produce what very well be the greatest war novel of all time. The war imagery of Homer's work bears not only the message of Greek history and religion, but also the values, ethics and morals of the Greek warrior himself. One particularly fascinating element in Homer's Iliad is the gods' meddling into mankind's war -- the Trojan War. The gods watch the war from heaven, plotting and aiding certain mortals that they have made alliances with. Many of the gods and goddesses physically enter the war themselves, and some of the "immortals" are even injured by human arrows and spears. Dione tells the injured goddess of love, Aphrodite, "Many of us who live upon Olympus have taken hurt from men, and hurt each other ... His days are numbered who would fight the gods" (V. 442-443, 468). Homer is illustrating the extreme anthropomorphic characteristics of Greek religion; the Greek gods are so human in their deeds and misdeeds that they, too, can be injured by human deeds and misdeeds.

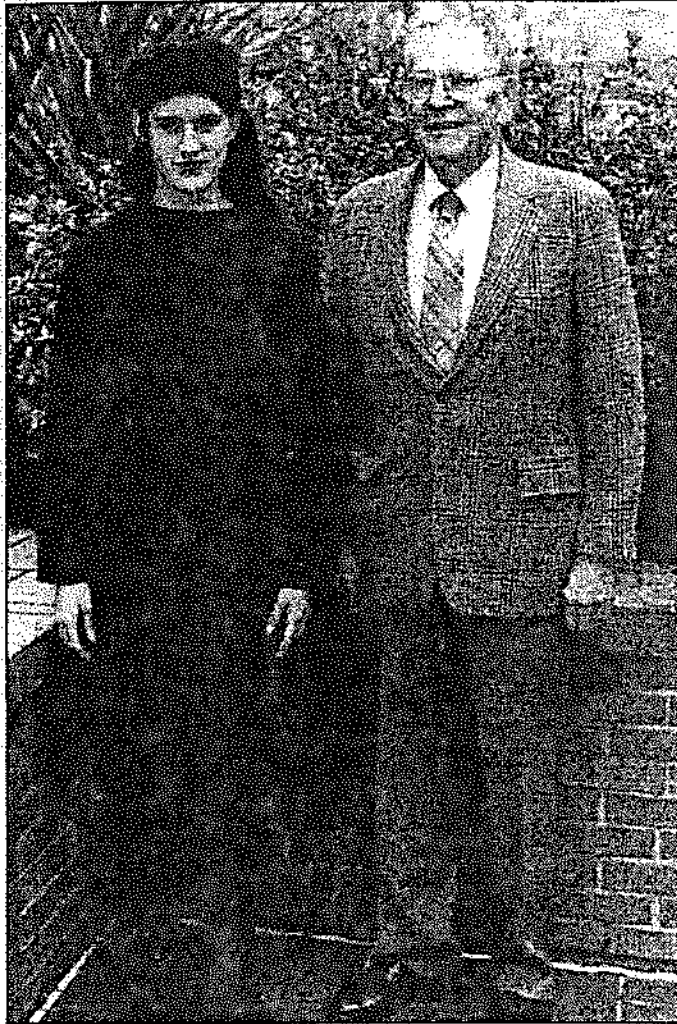
Another interesting element in Homer's Iliad, perhaps one of the more important reasons for the repetitive battle imagery, is the emphasis upon the definitive Greek hero. Alexandros, the man who is the sole reason for the Trojan War, is, quite ironically, a coward, a "milk sop". He remains behind the Trojan walls with Helen, "a whore, a nightmare of a woman" (VI. 401) by Hektor's definition. Alexandros is obviously one extreme of the personified Greek ideology of hubris, just as Hektor is the personification of the Greek values of courage and heroicism. Hektor is dead on the battlefield, yet Homer portrays him as compassionate and human as well. When Hektor's family stands before him and begs him not to leave the Trojan walls, Hektor refuses because of his duty to his men and his values. So, he tells his weeping family, "No, I would not, would not, wiser though it would have been. Now troops have perished for my foolish pride, I am ashamed to face townsmen and women. Someone inferior to me may say: He kept his pride and lost his men, this Hektor! So I will go." (XXII. 124-130). Hektor is the very, very balanced ideal of what a man should be, so much so that even his enemies, the Akhaians, respected him as a warrior.

The final, and perhaps most obvious reason for the battle imagery in Homer's Iliad is simply as a recounting of Greek history. In any of the numerous battle scenes and deaths, Homer never fails to mention genealogy or characteristics of the slayer, slain, or both. Many modern

readers sneer at what they consider to be Homer's repetition "... son of ...", perhaps (hopefully) ignorant of the Iliad's own history. The Iliad was, after all, saved for many years through oral tradition, prior to Homer's written account. Thus, Homer's repetitive style, particularly with the battle scenes, was a technique that the audience had developed to memorize the tale itself. Homer recounted a tale that is in itself a tale, volumes and volumes of memorized text containing the Greek history, values, traditions and ideologies that remain powerful through this day.

The Hero With 1000 Faces

by Joseph Campbell



Alison Sims - Mr. Grant Molett
Spring 1992

The Transformation

By Alison Sims

"The gods die every day
but sovereign poems go on breathing
in a counter rhythm that mocks
the frenzy of weapons, their impudent power"
—Denise Levertov: "Art (After Gautier)"

Modern man does not have "gods" in immortal poems reflecting humanity's aggression, degradation, and hopelessness. The poets, now stoically believe the nihilistic philosophy of Neitzche's Zarathustra: "Dead are all the Gods." Modern writers, such as James Joyce, believe that society is in a state of paralysis in which the spiritual man tries to free himself from physical forms.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell incorporates mythological heroes into modern society. Campbell, unlike the pessimistic philosophers and writers of the twentieth century, sees the hero in the poet, the artist, and the common man. The hero is not dead; he exists in movies, story books, and music. The philosophy of the anti-hero, however, has plagued modern industrial societies. The hero's task, then, is to find the truth of the unconscious myth under the façade of business meetings, material acquisition, and mass media. Moreover, the modern hero does not complete his sacred duty by battles; he must preach nonviolence. Finally, the man finds the divine, "the God" of unnamable sources in all man.

Man, in modern democratic industrial societies, believes and practices the philosophy of the anti-hero. In the Era of Enlightenment, man discovered science as the "God of man," "...the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual machine and the development of the scientific method of research...that... 'symbols' have 'collapsed'."(387).

Furthermore, man can only understand forces with rationality. The scientific man is constantly trying to explain the reason for existence in biological and physical terms. The gods no longer support a society in which humanity worships the advice of experts, but it does not listen to his own voice (387). Most importantly, mankind shifts its wonder from the explanations of nature and its interrelationships with man to humans. Psychology, biology, and psychiatry replace myth. There are no fertility rites of Old European civilizations, no ceremonies for Zeus, and no Romulus and Remus to discover new cities.

Unlike the ancient hero's sacred duty, the modern hero's task is to find the truth of the myth in his unconscious, and unite it with his conscious self. For example, Hamlet's sacred duty was to avenge his father's murder.

However, in modern society, the emphasis of existence has disappeared from the group. The corrupted state is not Denmark, the United States or society. The corruption is the suppressed goals of the unconscious. Moreover, in dreams, man visualizes himself in a sea, flying in the sky or eating his children. The myths of Osiris, Icarus, and Herakles and Poseidon at Troy emphasize the union of man with his primitive origins. Everyday he lives, dies (sleeps and dreams) and is reborn (myths in dreams).

Unlike the ancient heroes of Roman, Greek and Medieval civilizations, the modern hero does not pass the threshold through aggression. Unlike King Arthur's quest for the Holy Grail, the modern man crosses the threshold to spiritual healing through Nirvana. King Arthur fought to gain the Holy Grail so that the plague would end in his kingdom. In Nirvana, the man can bring the extinguished "light of the lost Atlantis to the soul." (387) Moreover, the journey is also a rite of passage. In the Jewish religion, once a male reaches puberty, he has a barmitzva marking his initiation into adolescence. However, modern alienated heroes, like Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye*, have no faith or trust in an institution of society. The hero's task is to find himself and integrate himself into society. The patriotic flags, which are a symbol of belief in the supernatural unidentifiable source in the Vedas, the Tao-te Ching and the Allah in the Koran, are now symbols of cruel imperialism. "...The saints of this anticult—namely the patriots...are precisely the local threshold guardians...whom it is the first problem for our hero to surpass" (391).

Finally, after crossing the threshold, man must find the divine, the god, in himself. He must ignore scientific explanations for the mysteries of the universe. When he feels the Romans in the Coliseum, when he sees Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel and when he hears the Gregorian chants in the Vatican, he has found his unity with primal existence. Although he does not physically experience travelling to distant places, he finds the "universal-man god" (391). The society, however, does not help the individual find the heroic voice of the poet, the artist or the philosopher. He must write, paint and think without society's limitations.

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell defines the modern hero's task. He must climb the Jacob's Ladder of every man's collective conscious. As the man ascends through the threshold, the angels descend past him. The light of the soul, the divine, brushes against man as the angels bump into him. Through this rite of passage or transformation, he gives birth to the poem, the song, the art and the philosophy. Although, in reality, man is traveling alone on the Jacob's Ladder, he overcomes loneliness and experiences one with the Universe. "And so everyone of us shares the supreme ordeal — carries the cross of the redeemer — not in the bright moments of his tribe's victories, but in the silences of his personal despair" (391).

Spring Honors Forums 1992

The Difference Darwin Has Made

Text: Charles Darwin's

On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life



- Forum 1: Michael S. Zavada, Ph. D.
The Difference That Darwin Has Made In the Sciences
8:00 p.m. Tuesday March 24
HLG Faculty Lounge, third floor
- Forum 2: Prof. Burton Raffel
The Difference Darwin Has Made in the Humanities
8:00 p.m. Wednesday March 25
HLG Faculty Lounge, third floor
- Forum 3: MOVIE 1
Inherit the Wind
4:30 p.m. Friday March 27
Maxim Doucet 205 (Honors Lounge)

REFRESHMENTS SERVED!

On Darwin's The Origin of Species

By: Renatti S. Dupont

Although Charles Darwin has long been identified with the phrase "survival of the fittest", that was not the term he used to explain his theory of evolution. The cornerstone of his treatise set forth in The Origin of Species is the premise of "Natural Selection". Most simply defined, natural selection is the "preservation of favorable variations and the rejection of injurious variations" by a life form. Darwin proposed that this process and not an act of independent creation accounts for the great diversity of life in our world. After careful consideration of both domestic and wild species of both plant and animals he concluded that natural selection was the main but not exclusive means of modification of species.

Through observation of domestic breeds he theorized that variability results from changes in the reproductive elements prior to the act of conception and that these changes are brought about by changes in the animals' condition of life. Although man can modify domestic animals through selective breeding practices, even this selection is dependent on the variations provided by nature. According to Darwin, the primary difference between natural selection and selective breeding is that man effects adaptation to benefit himself while nature effects adaptation only when the modification gives an advantage to the species being modified.

By studying plants Darwin observed that the species that are already dominant are most likely to have offspring that inherit the advantages that allowed the parents to dominate. This success in leaving descendants is an important principle of his theory and part of what he terms the Struggle for Existence. Since more of every species are born than can survive, there is a constant struggle between the individuals of the same species and with the physical conditions of life. Darwin himself admit this concept is the "doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms". It is this aspect of his theory that most clearly sets forth the idea that only the fittest survive.

Other conditions that affect survival are the lack of food or the circumstances in which one individual serves as the food for another. Climate also is a factor, as much for its effect on the food supply as for its direct effect on an organism. Sexual selection, in which males compete for the females, assures that the most vigorous animals produce the greatest number of offspring. As new generations inherit the advantageous traits of their forebears, species continue to diversify. This divergence of character allows more organisms to co-exist in the same area and leads to the formation of new and distinct species, but it also leads to the extinction

of what Darwin terms "less improved and intermediate forms of life."

It is easy to understand how The Origin of Species elicited such a strong reaction. Not only did it contradict the long-held belief in independent creation, but it presented life itself in brutal terms. Darwin himself realized how harsh a view of life his theory provided and tried to soften its impact with the suggestion that:

When we reflect on this struggle, we may console ourselves with the full belief, that the war of nature is not incessant, that no fear is felt, that death is generally prompt, and that the vigorous, the healthy, and the happy survive and multiply.

Yet it seems noteworthy that even in this passage in which Darwin attempts to console us, he uses the word "war".

Machiavelli in His Time and Ours

Text: Niccolò
Machiavelli's

The Prince



- Forum 1: Wednesday November 4, 1992 4:30p.m.-5:30p.m.
Harry L. Griffin Hall Room 422
Gloria Fiero on "Machiavelli in His Time"
- Forum 2: Wednesday November 11, 1992 5:00p.m.-6:00p.m.
Harry L. Griffin Hall Room 422
John Vigorito on "Machiavelli's Relevance Today"

A Look at Bill Clinton's Application of Machiavellian Principles

By: Ryan Keats

The qualities that Niccolo Machiavelli attributed to a great leader hundreds of years ago are many of the same we attribute to one today. These attributes include, "compassion", "good faith", "integrity" (Prince 101), and honor.

Beginning with the way he came into office, if living today, Machiavelli would commend President-elect Clinton on much. As President, Clinton will not have to fear the power of nobles, as he became "prince by the favor of the people" and "people are generally more honest in their intentions than the nobles are" (Prince 68-69). Also, Clinton already has "the main foundation of every state... good laws and good arms" (Prince 77).

So far as Clinton's campaign is concerned, many found him to be lacking as he did not always keep his word. But, according to Machiavelli, "men are wretched creatures who could not keep their word to you, you need not keep your word to them" (Prince 100). Other positive issues in Clinton's campaign include his stress on bringing together the country on a domestic level. This appears to be a wise move on his part because one thing a prince must fear "is internal subversion from his subjects" (Prince 103). The very theme of Clinton's campaign, "change", is one Machiavelli would approve of because "one who adapts his policy to the times prospers" (Prince 131).

Before Clinton officially takes office, he has already begun the creation of "new laws and new institutions," including the allowance of gays into the military and his creation of a "powerful, new governmental agency." If, as Machiavelli said, "nothing brings a man greater honor than the new laws and institutions he establishes" (Prince 136), then Clinton is well on his way to the fulfillment of another of the leadership characteristics, honor.

Nothing brings a prince more prestige than great campaigns and striking demonstrations of his personal abilities" (Prince 119). If this is true, then Clinton has also fulfilled the characteristic of prestige throughout his campaign to get to the presidency and throughout his twelve-year reign as Governor of Arkansas.

Yet, for all of the attributes Machiavelli would find positive in Clinton, he would find an equal number of negative ones. Bad for Clinton would

be that though he "need not necessarily have... good qualities...he should...appear to have them" (Prince 100). There are many character issues that make Clinton's ability to keep our country, questionable. Machiavelli states that "the prince should...avoid anything which would make him hated or despised...He will be hated above all if ...he is rapacious and aggressive with regard to...the women of his subjects" (Prince 102). During his campaign, Clinton's alleged womanizing was brought to the light, but little was resolved as to whether it was merely a rumor or it was the truth.

Another negative aspect of the campaign was Bill Clinton's "waffling," his inability to make a clear-cut decision and stick with it. Machiavelli states that "it will always be to your advantage to declare yourself and to wage a vigorous war" (Prince 121). Clinton did not make his stand on many topics understood. Machiavelli continues by saying that "Princes who are irresolute usually follow the path of neutrality in order to escape immediate danger, and usually they come to grief" (Prince 122).

On the subject of national defense, Clinton also made a mistake. His plans to greatly reduce our nation's spending on defense. Yet Machiavelli writes that one thing "a prince must fear" is "external aggression by foreign powers" (Prince 103).

Yet another fault with Clinton is that he has no plans to honor "those who excel in their profession" (Prince 123). Instead, he has plans to tax those with high incomes. Machiavelli says that "man should not be...deterred by high taxes" and yet Clinton's plans will inevitably deter some men from personal greatness.

There are many other faults that Machiavelli would surely find with Bill Clinton, but I feel the above ones are enough to prove that the Clinton form of government is not the type that will last. Or, as Machiavelli writes to the "Magnificent Lorenzo De' Medici", "it is my urgent wish that you reach the eminence that fortune and your other qualities promise you" (Prince 30). Fortune alone is on Clinton's side as "she favors young men" (Prince 133). Clinton's other good qualities are too few to successfully outweigh his bad ones, thus Niccolo Machiavelli would almost certainly not believe in this man and would not recommend him to our nation.

Spring Honors Forum
Wednesday, April 14, 1993
Honors Lounge
(MDD 204)

7:00 p.m.

Subject:

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Speakers:

Dr. Barbara Cicardo
Department of English

Prof. Burk Foster
Department of Criminal Justice

Discussion and refreshments to follow.

*Books may be found at both
the University Bookstore
and Follett's under Honors 110.*



Crime and Punishment

Jason Meaux

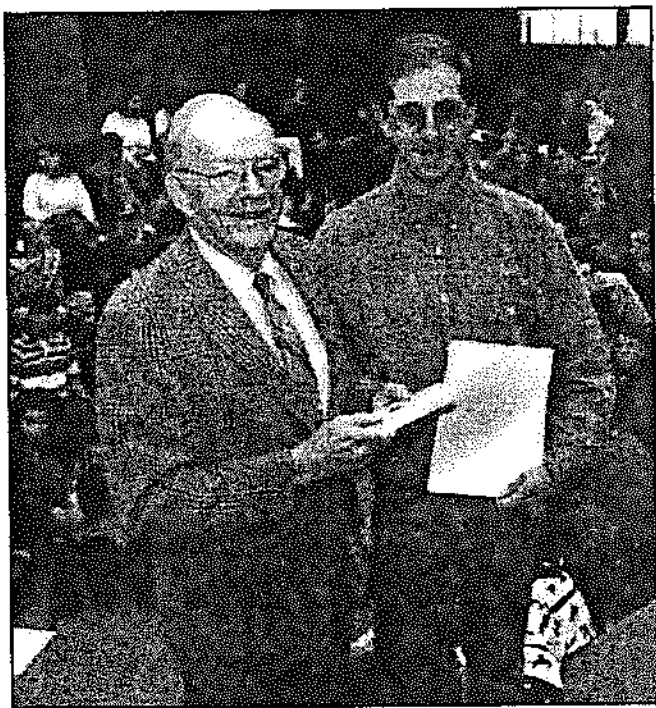
Rodion Romanovitch Raskolnikov (or Raskolnikov for short) is an impoverished student living in St. Petersburg. An "exceptionally handsome, above the average" young man, Raskolnikov is a turn-of-the-century young Russian intellectual who has formulated a theory whereby the "extraordinary" men of the world have the right to commit any crime. To test his theory, Raskolnikov decides to murder a vile and despicable old pawnbroker. As a result of his crime, Raskolnikov is thrust into a world of isolation and human suffering brought about by his guilty conscience. All of his actions—his crime and subsequent isolation and suffering—come about due to Raskolnikov's destitute environment and life of poverty. The theme of abject poverty plays an important role in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment.

The first and most important sign of Raskolnikov's poverty is the room in which he lives: "It was a tiny cupboard of a room about six paces in length. It had a poverty stricken appearance." The cramped quarters of the tiny garret act as a prison of solitude which confines Raskolnikov's body, mind, and soul. He was "like a tortoise in its shell," completely isolated from society, alone to mull over his plans for murder. From within this prison of solitude, Raskolnikov rationalizes his plans for murder. Since he is nothing, others are also nothing, and because of this, one can kill with impunity. Because of the solitude brought upon by his destitute living conditions, Raskolnikov is presented with the opportunity and mindset necessary to formulate and carry out his plans for the murder of Alyona Ivanovna.

The isolation which follows Raskolnikov's crime is augmented by the isolation he already experiences due to his impoverished conditions. When he reads his mother's letter, he learns that his sister is to marry Luzhin. Raskolnikov sees this act as his sister sacrificing herself to get money for him. He now understands that he, like Marmeladov, has "nowhere else.. [to] go." The murder was supposed to supply him with money, money that he—an impoverished student—lacked, so that he could have somewhere to go. Raskolnikov becomes tormented by this realization, thus beginning the suffering he must endure for his crime. When his mother comments that she and Dounia "were alone, utterly alone" the previous day when Luzhin failed to meet them at the station, Raskolnikov also begins to feel this loneliness. As his tiny room has confined him physically, so his crime has confined him intellectually, to live in a "square yard of space [for] all his life" because he can no longer

openly communicate with others. Raskolnikov is now physically and mentally isolated from humanity, both of which result from his life of poverty.

Poverty takes on its final shape in the person of Sonia Marmeladov—a young woman who helps Raskolnikov come to grips with his crime and accept his punishment. Through the passage of time, Raskolnikov's thoughts become more and more centered on the concept of being alone and having no place to turn to. Because he can no longer stand to be confined by his crime and isolated from the rest of humanity, he finally gives in to his conscience and turns to Sonia, a young woman living in poverty and forced into a life of prostitution to support her family. It is through Sonia—a symbol of the “suffering of humanity”—that Raskolnikov learns that suffering is the key to salvation. Only after his confession and subsequent sentencing to eight years in a Siberian prison is Raskolnikov finally able to feel a sense of freedom, and to declare that his “conscience is at rest”. The book ends with Raskolnikov's revelation that while he still has several years of suffering ahead of him in prison, he will have the rest of eternity to begin a new life of happiness with Sonia.



The time of poverty plays a major role in Crime and Punishment. Because of his impoverished, cramped living conditions and physical isolation from society, Raskolnikov has been placed into an environment conducive to a life of crime. After his crime and with increasing feelings of isolation because he had no where to turn, living in poverty and being confined by a lack of money adds to the deterioration of Raskolnikov's mental state. It is only at the end of the story that poverty helps Raskolnikov through the person of Sonia Marmeladov. Because she has lived a life of poverty and destitution, and a life of tremendous suffering, Sonia is able to reveal to Raskolnikov that it is through suffering that one is able to cleanse the soul. Crime and Punishment stands as a supreme example of how one can rise above the shortcomings of poverty and begin life anew.

Fall Honors Forum 1993

Topic: "Kate Chopin's novel The Awakening and the film Grand Isle."



Critics have called Chopin's work "poison," "morbid," "disturbing - even indelicate," "a compelling portrait of a trapped and finally desperate woman," "a drama of self-discovery, of awakening and doom," "pervaded with the spirit of Whitman's 'Song of Myself'."

You have read the novel.
Now see the film and hear Dr. Carolyn Bruder's ideas about the book and the movie.

HL Griffin Auditorium
7pm, Wednesday Nov. 10

The Awakening of Edna's Self

By Carmen Comeaux

The issue of "awakening" which is central to the novel is a very complicated one. It takes on many forms. Edna is first, on the most basic level, awakened to her sexual desires. It seems incredibly ironic that a woman who increasingly strives to separate herself from those around her should be sexually awakened. Sex is the ultimate act of union with another person, another soul. While she is trying to distance herself from all ties by moving to the "pigeon house," she is also beginning her affair with Alcee. This characteristic conflict of her desires is part of the reason that she has such a tragic end.

Throughout the course of the novel, Edna finds herself caught between two worlds, a world of romance and a world of realism. She has many highly romantic ideals. In the course of her life, she has been infatuated with a cavalry officer and a great tragedian. These were not, however, real romantic attachments; they were simply "crushes." She does not know these men. They are really only figments of her imagination, grounded in reality in that they do exist as people, yet they are illusions because she truly knows nothing about them. They are the fantasies of a young girl. Even her love for Robert is, in many ways, just infatuation. He has assumed the role of the cavalry officer and tragedian. Never is this more apparent than in the scene in which Robert announces his plan to travel to Mexico. Chopin states that Robert speaks "in a high voice and with a lofty air, which reminded Edna of some gentlemen of the stage." (55) This romanticism in her nature leaves her open for a sexual awakening.

However, while she is tempted by the romantic, in some ways we see shades of anti-romantic sentiment in her character. She is disturbed by its lushness and voluptuousness, two characteristics of the society, which parallel qualities of the climate/setting around her. Edna is very prudish and has a difficult time reconciling herself to the fact that the Creoles talk openly of matters of sex and childbirth.

A book had gone the rounds of the pension. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with a profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so—to hide it from view at the sound of approaching steps. It was openly criticized and discussed at the table. (19)

Her Protestant upbringing has made her sensitive to such issues. Only after she has reached her awakening is she able to confront these issues within herself.

The other form of awakening found in the novel is even more complex than the issue of sexual awakening. It is also one of the factors which finally lead to her downfall. I am speaking of the awakening of her soul, an aspect of this novel which leads it to the transcendental realm. Edna, in the course of the novel, is awakened to "her position in the universe as a human being." (17) Chopin describes this as "a ponderous weight of wisdom to descent upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight." (17) This weight, in the end, becomes too much to bear. She begins to become aware of the cruelty and, to some degree, the meaninglessness of life. Because she can find no real happiness, she decides to take her life.

Edna feels keenly the oppression of life itself, of the wide world around her. She is awakened to a feeling of her place in this great, unfathomable universe. She feels the enormity of this world, much like the vastness of the sea. The sea is open and seemingly infinite, capable of allowing a soul to lose itself in its embrace.

The voice of the sea is seductive; never
ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring,
inviting the soul to wander for a spell in
abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes
of inward contemplation. (17)

As she begins to understand her place in this great vastness, she also becomes awakened to her true character. She is a solitary figure, one who seems to crave some degree of isolation.

The novel opens with the symbol which will dominate the work. We find two exasperating birds locked in a cage. This sets the scene for Edna's arrival. Edna is consistently compared to a bird. Even Chopin's description of Edna's physical characteristics remind one of a bird. Edna "had a way of turning [her eyes] swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought." (4) Madame Reisz asks Edna to turn around so that she may see her wings. Toward the end of the novel, she moves from the house provided by her husband to the home she refers to as the "pigeon house."

The meaning behind this symbolism is perfectly evident. Edna is a free spirit who is awakening to the sense of her solitary nature. She wants complete liberty to do as she pleases. However, it is also clear that it is impossible to hold absolute freedom in this world. Therefore, she divorces herself from all society, and the bird is caged in her pigeon house. As she

drowns herself in the final scene, there is seen in the air above her a crippled bird. Edna is that crippled bird who must in the end plummet because she wants to be entirely free and will not admit her dependence on others.

In her quest to find her true self, Edna becomes a kind of Everyman figure, ultimately standing for humanity itself. This is one of the first novels in which a woman ultimately stands for "man" in the sense of "mankind." She is the person searching for her own soul, her true identity, her self.

In the final analysis, I believe that Edna comes to some of the same conclusions that all of us come to, in some form, at some time in our lives. She realizes that the individual cannot have complete liberty within the confines of our society. No society, not even one of utopic perfection, will ever allow this sort of freedom. Coming to terms with our place in the universe can lead to despair. Despite these facts, it is evident to me that the novel's ending is not an entirely unhappy or hopeless one. Edna is finally allowed the solitude she desires. Death, in this sense, is not an end but an attainment of her ultimate goal.



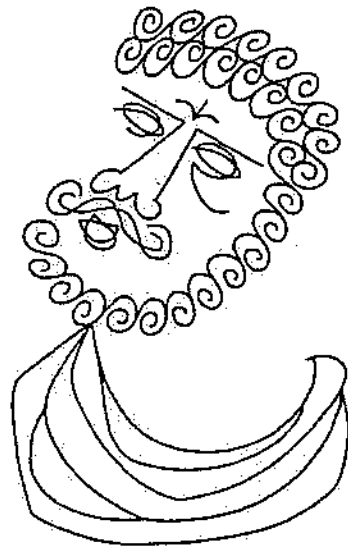
Spring Honors Forum

On Thursday, April 14, from 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.
In the Honors Lounge (MDD205)

A forum will be held on the Spring Honors book:
Sophocles' Three Theban Plays

Film Showing: Sophocles' Oedipus Rex

The forum will feature a full color film directed by Tyrone Guthrie,
with the actors wearing masks as in Sophocles' day.
Lasts 90 minutes.



Grecian attire is suggested, though not required.
A **valuable prize** will be awarded for the best Greek costume.
Refreshments will be served, starting at 5:30.

Flawed: The True Nature of the Tragic Hero By Reggie Rodrigue

Today, the word "tragedy" is used all too often and all too loosely. Every misfortune that a person is unlucky enough to suffer is called a tragedy. For instance, when a large number of factory men are fired from their jobs or a bus-load of children are injured in an accident, the media is quick to call these occurrences tragedies. Yes, both situations are truly sad; however, they simply do not constitute tragedies. Tragedy, in its purest sense, evolved in ancient Greece as a form of drama, centered around one tragic hero who, for the most part, is capable of acting freely in any situation encountered. Yet, a substantial portion of this very flaw that influences his personal decisions on how to act. Unfortunately, his decisions and course of action usually lead to his demise. This is why the character is tragic. Such is the case for the two heroes from the ancient Greek dramatist Sophocles' most celebrated works, *Antigone and Oedipus Rex*.

Free will is immensely important in *Antigone and Oedipus Rex* because it opens the doors for the tragedy in both plays. Undoubtedly, Oedipus and his daughter would be pathetic figures if they were not able to act of their own accord. In her play, *Antigone* is caught in "a collision between the two highest moral powers"(41). When her brother (a traitor to the entire city of Thebes) dies, she must decide whether to follow the laws of the "polis" and leave his body out to be picked at by the birds or to follow the laws of the of the gods of the Dead and respectfully perform the funeral rites on her brother's body. From the beginning, *Antigone* realizes that she must respect the gods' wishes and bury him, though she knows that this will surely mean death for her. She tells her sister *Ismene*, "no, he has no right to keep me from my own"(61), referring to *Creon*, who represents the laws of the state that she would break.

She is not bound to the law, and she lives on her own terms as her father does in his play, *Oedipus Rex*. While it is true that *Oedipus* lives out the horrible prophecies that the oracle proclaimed for him, his fall does not come from "the actions which *Oedipus* was fated to perform," but from his own actions directed towards discovering the truth about himself (149). His words to *Creon* sum up the power of this choice to find the truth: "I'll bring it all to light myself!"(167)

Both *Antigone's* and *Oedipus's* actions are of their own design; however, there is one particular trait or quality in their characters that underlies all of their actions. They could choose to follow other instincts, yet they choose to be led by their fierce determination and persistence to find the truth. This is their fatal flaw. *Antigone*, speaking of the laws of

the gods, says, "These laws—I was not about to break them, not out of fear of some man's [Creon's] wounded pride, and face the retribution of the gods"(83). Knowing that she faces death, she remains obstinant under Creon, "Give me glory! What greater glory could I win than to give my own brother decent burial?"(84). She knows that she is right in what she believes.

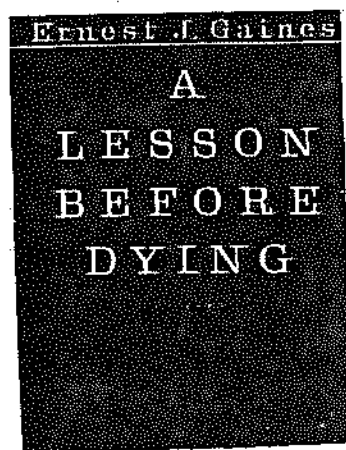
Oedipus' will cannot be dissuaded, either. When Jocasta realizes the horror of her and Oedipus' situation after the meeting with the messenger, she pleads with Oedipus to never "give it another thought." He retorts, "What—give up not, with a clue like this? Fail to solve the mystery of my birth? Not for all the world!"(222) He cannot stop himself in his search, yet he knows that the stakes are high and the losses are great.

In the end, both Antigone's and Oedipus' resoluteness directly cause their downfall. Antigone is sentenced to being buried alive by Creon. In her last words, she prays for punishment from the gods for Creon: "But if these men are wrong, let them suffer nothing worse than they mete out to me—these monsters of injustice!"(106) She feels no remorse because her ethics go beyond the city's—beyond Creon's. She hangs herself in triumph in the cave, rather than die at the hand's of Creon's edict. Oedipus must also undergo a deep amount of suffering. When he finally finds out the truth about himself—that he killed his father and married his mother, he gouges his eyes out (symbolizing his blindness all of those years) and he proclaims, "the agony! I am agony...My destiny, my dark power, what a leap you made!"(239) His choice to follow his overarching determination leads to all of his suffering.

However, amidst all of this suffering, the persistence of the human spirit thrives. This is what great tragedy does. It reaffirms our humanity. Tragedy proclaims "that in certain heroic natures unmerited suffering and death can by met with greatness of soul which, because it is purely human, brings honor to us all."(53) Both Antigone and Oedipus are tragic heroes because they must live through immense suffering but realize that they are all the better for it. They realize that there is purpose in suffering. This is evident in one of Oedipus' last speeches. He says, "O but this I know: no sickness can destroy me, nothing can. I would never have been saved from death—I have been saved for something great and terrible, something strange."(246)

HONORS FORUMS

Fall 1994



Wednesday, November 16
7:00 p.m., Maxim Doucet 205

Two films

Ernest Gaines: Louisiana Stories, a prizewinning LPB Documentary
The Sky is Gray based on a short story by Gaines
Discussion will follow the films.

Thursday, November 17
7:00 p.m., V. L. Wharton 101

Ernest Gaines will discuss *A Lesson Before Dying*,
read from it, and answer questions.

Refreshments will be served following each forum.

Free and Open to the Public

An Analysis of Humanism in A Lesson Before Dying **By Patrick Holman**

Ernest Gaines' book, A Lesson Before Dying, is a book about humanism. The scene is set in the 1940's when racial discrimination was still quite common in southern communities. Everything was segregated, from the courthouse bathrooms to the bars and schools. An all white jury convicted a young black man, Jefferson, of a murder he did not commit, then sentenced him to death. Jefferson was described by his defense team as a "hog" to try and avoid the death penalty. This attempt fails. Grant Wiggins, the school master for the local colored school, is enlisted by Jefferson's godmother to, "make a man out of him," before he is executed. Grant was supposedly an educated man, having been to college, but his alter ego, Reverend Ambrose, begs to differ. I shall investigate the deficiencies in both men's attitudes toward education and their opinions as to what makes a "man."

This novel was set in a time period and a society that effectively separated its people in a sort of caste system of worthiness and human value. The lighter your skin was, the worthier you were. The more human you were. As one can see in history, once a group has established its dominance over another, that group will tend to be very apprehensive in allowing the submissive group any tools, which may permit it to successfully revolt against its tormenter. In our case, the dominant class had withheld academic education, social equality and, in many respects, basic human rights. And this worked quite well. By consistently shoving the African American down, the largely white establishment kept control. This created a cycle that is well defined in the novel. Under these harsh conditions, a person may either allow himself to be broken or leave the system in hopes of finding a better place, thus commonly abandoning his family and friends.

Grant went away and came back, but carrying an education with him. He decided to pursue the only career acceptable for an educated black man: to be a schoolteacher. When asked by Miss Emma, Jefferson's godmother, to teach Jefferson to be a man, Grant is extremely apprehensive to do so. "There's nothing I can do anymore. Nothing any of us can do anymore." Grant does not want to teach Jefferson to become a man because he does not really have confidence in himself. Grant despises his position as a schoolteacher and longs to escape with his girlfriend, Vivian, but cannot. Guilt holds him down. He cannot leave his aunt, who raised him from childhood. But he can complain about his job and he can lament about his students and their future in the cycle. Grant frightens the white

establishment because of his college education. Truthfully, Grant's problem is that he is too smart for his own good, meaning he is smarter than the white establishment. He knows this and they know it and thus he will never overcome their oppression. Grant simply believes he is a better human being than his oppressors are. While this may be obvious to most readers, it is an unacceptable position in Grant's society. He silently stewes about adding "sir" to the end of every statement addressed to a white person, about having to enter the back door of Pinchot's house and about being a school teacher. The white establishment keeps him in his place by "forcing" him to submit to the cycle by making him wait on them to finish dinner or even use the bathroom. Grant will not leave the Quarter after Jefferson is gone. Like the men at the Rainbow Lounge who lived through Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis, Grant lived through Jefferson.

Reverend Ambrose is probably as far opposite of Grant as one can imagine. Along with Tante Lou and Miss Emma, the reverend symbolizes the broken elements of the cycle. He does not have a formal education, academic or religious. The Reverend is a person who has turned to lies and intangible beliefs to allay the dehumanizing environment his people must endure. He sees himself as being less than a man by white standards. This is not an outward belief, but the sentiment is there. While castigating Grant on corrupting Jefferson's views toward God, Reverend Ambrose refers to Grant as "boy." Retorting that his name was Grant, the Reverend responded, "When you act educated, I'll call you Grant. I'll even call you Mr. Grant, when you act like a man." When addressing a white person in the novel, black persons nearly always use the person's first name preceded by Mr. or Miss. Ambrose seems to be implying his subservience to men, which indicates he does not consider himself to be of equal stature to a man. This lack of self-respect perpetuates that cycle of subservience and does not cast it off. As with the sermon in, "The Sky is Grey," Gaines seems to be saying that you cannot lean on God for every thing. You must help yourself. Neither the Reverend nor Grant can do this on his own. Jefferson is their only hope.

Anger rules Jefferson in the first portion of the novel, and for good reason. Being young and foolish enough to go along with Brother and Bear seems to indicate to some that he cannot be called part of the cycle. I don't think he saw himself as being broken to the white man's dominance quite yet. In an instant, he is thrust into a world, part of which hate him and another, which see him as the savior. Needless to say he is unprepared for either. In the weeks following his conviction, Jefferson can best be described as a bitter, angry man who is determined to fill his white defined role as a hog. This subsides eventually and he begins to realize, with the help of Grant, that he has the unique opportunity to be something other

than a hog. He can be a man, a hero to his people. Jefferson can rebel against the system in the most effective way through the smallest of gestures. Throughout the weeks leading up to his execution, through his talks with Grant and his writing, Jefferson learns what it means to be a man and to give of yourself selflessly, which is more than Grant or the Reverend have learned to do.

Why was it Grant's influence that won over Jefferson? Why didn't he fall on his knees when he walked to the chair, as Ambrose pleaded with him to do? Grant presented Jefferson with a better picture of what life could be. The Reverend was concerned with Jefferson's soul, but Jefferson wasn't dead quite yet. He didn't need that right then. Through the radio and the pad and pencil, he grew up and gained respect for himself and for his community. Everyone was affected by his death. The witnesses to the execution would spread the word and perceptions would change. Jefferson did not die in vain. In his death, new hope was given to the people who had seemingly run out. For that, they should be eternally grateful.



Photo credit: Dianne S. Gaines

Lessons Learned in Ernest J. Gaines' A Lesson Before Dying A Lesson Before Dying By: Denise Guidry

The lesson learned in Ernest J. Gaines' A Lesson Before Dying is how one person, caught in a society which demeans him at every turn, can still be a man. Manhood is sought by the male characters while female characters, in turn, provide it for and steal it from the men they love. The narrator, Grant Wiggins, is an educated black man in 1948 Louisiana. He is forced to attempt to make a man out of Jefferson, a mildly retarded young man who is sentenced to death for his presence (though he is actually innocent) at a robbery which ended with the deaths of the proprietor and the two actual thieves. Characterized as a "thing" and a "hog" by his defense attorney, Jefferson believes that he is indeed less than a man. His godmother (nannan), Miss Emma, asks Grant, who questions his own manhood, to help Jefferson to become a man before his execution. Grant, trapped by society, racism, family, and love, first resists doing this chore, but is manipulated into compliance by his aunt, and he finally learns a few things from his visits with the convict. In this novel black men are emasculated by a system which allows them few choices, which denies them mobility, and which demands that they hide their intelligence around whites who feel intellectually threatened by them. The women in their lives, with few choices themselves, place men in situations which further restrict their decision-making ability concerning where they live, what role religion plays in their lives, with whom they should associate, and the things they should do. Gaines has said,

The theme I work with most is: how does one, being a black person, how does he stand when it comes to that moment? Is it only to defend himself or to stand for race of his family?... How Does one stand, as an individual, at the one moment he is called to stand—whether to face a mob or one person or an electric chair? (Plaisance, C1)

Although Grant is apparently the smarter of the duo, it is actually Jefferson who teaches Grant the more important lesson.

Grant Wiggins is a plantation teacher who detests his job because he feels as though he is being forced to do it (there are no other jobs for an educated black man). He lives with his aunt, Tante Lou, who is in the process of a divorce. While her skin color creates tension between Grant and Tante Lou, Grant and Vivian cannot simply leave Louisiana for a better life elsewhere because there is really nowhere they can go. When Jefferson's Aunt Emma requests his assistance in teaching Jefferson to be a man, Grant resists, but is ultimately manipulated into it by Emma and

Tante Lou. Exasperated, he says, "Years ago, Professor Antoine told me that if I stayed here, they were going to bread me down to the nigger I was born to be. But he didn't tell me that my aunt would help them do it." (Gaines, 79) However, Grant realizes that if Jefferson cannot become a man, "[Emma] will never get another chance to see a black man stand for her." (Gaines, 167)

The problem is that Grant does not know how to be a man himself, and he resents being forced into doing this task which makes him feel so uncomfortable. His own personal doubts, compounded by others' expectation of him and by his lack of choices, further diminish his fragile sense of manhood. Virtually every white male character tries to inflict every indignity he can upon black men. Just as society can be destructive, so is the cycle which black men are forced to endure. A drunken Grant explains to Vivian,

We black men have failed to protect our women since the time of slavery. We stay here in the South and are broken, or we run away and leave them alone...So each time a male child is born, they hope he will be the one to change this vicious circle—which he never does. Because even though he wants to change it, and maybe even tries to change it, it is too heavy a burden because of all the others who have run away and left their burdens behind. So he, too, must run away if he is to hold on to his sanity and have a life of his own. (Gaines, 167)

Because of the legacy which has been passed down to him, Grant must be taught how to be a man; strangely, Jefferson is the person who will teach him.

Gaines has said that Grant must answer the question "What is a man?" (Gaudet, 134) He does find an answer, as he tells Jefferson:

A hero does for others. He would do anything for people he loves, because he knows it would make their lives better. I am not that kind of person, but I want you to be. You could give something to [Aunt Emma], to me, to those children in the quarter...To [racists], you're nothing but another nigger—no dignity, no heart, no love for your people. You can prove them wrong. You can do more than I can ever do. I have always done what they wanted me to do, teach reading, writing, and arithmetic...And I went along, but hating myself all the time for doing so. I want you to show them that you are as much a man than they can ever be. (Gaines, 191-92)

While it is indeed important for Jefferson to be able to die a man, and while the lesson he learns is extremely valuable to himself and the people around him, he is actually a superior teacher because his lesson is taught to the entire community, not to only one person.

Grant tells Jefferson about his realization that Jefferson is teaching the more important lesson:

I need you much more than you could ever need me. I need to know what to do with my life. I want to run away, but go where and do what? I'm needed here and I know it, but I feel that all I'm doing here is choking myself. I need someone to tell me what to do. I need you to tell me, to show me. I'm no hero: I can just give something small. (Gaines, 193)

Summing up his take on the lessons taught in this story, Gaines has said:

[W]hat he has done for this man who was condemned will bring something out of him. And he will go back to these kids, these small kids he has around him, and he will realize he has a duty to perform...But this other person, this condemned man, must be the one to convert him to this, to give his life. That's what the whole thing is about. He in one way makes the condemned boy, who is like an animal, a man, and the condemned one makes *him* a man, so that he can go back to develop something. (Gaudet 135-36)

Grant does fulfill Emma's wish; he makes a man out of Jefferson, who writes in his journal, "good by mr wigin tell them im strong tell them im a man..." (Gaines, 234) The deputy, Paul Bonin, tells Grant that at the execution,

[Jefferson] was the strongest man in that crowded room, Grant Wiggins...When Vincent asked him if he had any last words, he looked at the preacher and said, 'Tell Nannan I walked.' And straight he walked, Grant Wiggins. Straight he walked. I'm a witness. Straight he walked. (Gaines, 253-54)

In *A Lesson Before Dying*, the educated Grant Wiggins is charged with teaching a "fool" to be a man. In this process, he learns a lesson from his student about how to become a man. However, Jefferson teaches Grant, his Aunt Emma, the children of the quarters, and the town of Bayonne a lesson of his own: he teaches everyone that at any one person's "moment," as Gaines has called it, any person can stand.

A Personal Matter

by

Kenzaburo Oë



A Personal Matter: A Subconscious Decision

By Kim Becnel

In Kenzaburo Oe's *A Personal Matter*, the main character Bird has a very hard time deciding what course of action to take, and even exactly how he feels, concerning his newborn son, who has been diagnosed with a brain hernia. Bird's uncertainty stems from the fact that he lacks a faith strong enough to guide him in his decision. He has no religious faith to scare him into respecting the life he has helped to create, no faith in technology or the sterile white-clad doctors to help him expect a miracle, and no faith in his family to lend him the strength that he is groping for. Without a faith to guide him, Bird must search for his answers in the immature, aimless mind that is his own. An almost subconscious battle begins within Bird, and at various points throughout the novel fragments of the war come to the surface for the reader to examine.

The first tiny hint of acceptance comes simply in Bird's references to the child. He refers to the baby as "it" in the very beginning, but fairly quickly he begins to say instead "the baby" and "my son" until finally he gives the baby a name, Kikuhiko. The name that he chooses for the baby is also significant, causing fresh memories of the friend he had once abandoned as well as the regret he has felt every since. For the first time beginning to consider someone beside himself, Bird begins to wonder about the baby and whether or not it is suffering. He contemplates the baby's honor, "Like Apollinaire, my son was wounded on a dark and lonely battlefield that I have never seen, and he has arrived with his head in bandages. I'll have to bury him like a soldier who died at war"(25). He then begins to wonder what death would mean to his baby, "What if there was a last judgment? Under what category of the Dead could you subpoena, prosecute, and sentence a baby with only vegetable functions who died no sooner than he was born?"(31). Bird feels a deep fear and realizes that were he called as a witness he could only identify his baby by the lump on its head. The baby has become human to Bird, with its own pain, honor, and soul.

Later, when Bird goes to check on his baby at the hospital, he assumes that the baby has died and comes to the realization that because of this assumption, "Now he was the baby's true enemy, the first enemy in its life, the worst. If life was eternal and if there was a god who judged, Bird thought, then he would be found guilty"(67). Later, in conversations with the doctor, Bird first admits that he actually wishes an end to his baby's existence and "Bird sensed that he had taken the first step down the slope

of contemptibly"(75). The doctor proposes giving the baby sugar water instead of milk, and Bird agrees, his tears hot with shame.

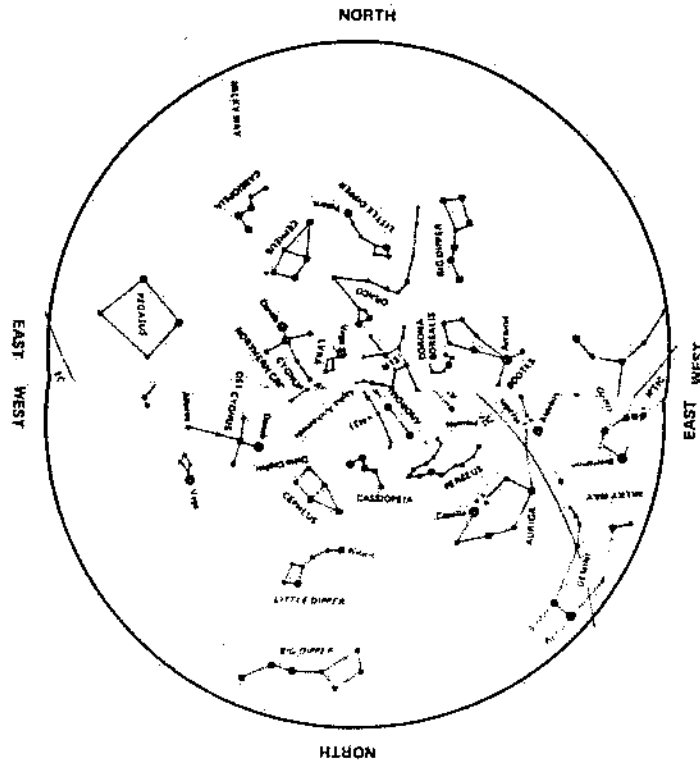
Throughout the novel, as Bird's desire and plans to go to Africa diminish, his acceptance of his baby grows. Halfway through the novel, the thirty thousand dollars he had saved toward his trip to Africa is used to pay hospital bills. "Now, except for two road maps, Bird was left with nothing that related directly to a trip to Africa"(78).

In a conversation with his mother-in-law and the doctor in the hospital where his wife was staying, Bird begins to understand his cowardice, "Well, that's probably for the best!" the doctor said. "To weaken and die before they could operate." That meant escaping the burden of vegetable baby, and without fouling your own hand with murder. All you had to do was wait for the baby to die hygienically in a modern hospital ward"(91). In conversation with Himiko's friend, Bird is hit with the force of what he is really doing. She informs him that he should either face the villain in himself and murder the baby with his own hands, or tries valiantly to save it. She forces Bird to realize his self-deception, stating bluntly, "But what you're doing leaving the bloody work to some doctor in a hospital while you mope around playing the gentle victim of sudden misfortune"(113).

Since the neat plan of death by neglect fails, Bird decides, along with Himiko, to take the baby from the hospital and bring it to a doctor who would allow it to die. On the way to the doctor's, Bird and Himiko quite ironically worry about the baby catching pneumonia. The doctor's greeting is also steeped in irony, "I was afraid you might have done something dreadful on the way. There are radicals, you know once they've decided to take the step they don't see and distinction between letting a baby weaken and die and strangling it to death"(157).

After dropping the baby off, Bird and Himiko visit the baby's namesake, Kikuhiko. It is here that the fateful decision is reached. Bird wonders, "What was he trying to protect from that monster of a baby that he must run so hard and shamelessly? What was it in himself that he was so frantic to defend?"(161). He informs Himiko that he has decided to take the baby back to the hospital for the operation. He admits with relief and resolve, "Ever since the morning my baby was born I've been running away"(161). After a long process of self-discovery, Bird has decided to stop running, and to face not the villain, but the hero himself.

SUMMER



AUTUMN

Coming of Age in the Milky Way

by
Timothy Ferris

Questing Through the Milky Way

By Thomas Renfro

Sine the dawn of speech, stories have been told of great heroes questing after prizes of incredible value. From Gilgamesh and his search for immortality to Jason's hunt for the Golden Fleece to Frodo's destruction of One Ring, the quest has been an enormous undertaking that has a major effect on everyone involved. Timothy Ferris, in his book *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, describes a quest which affects all mankind, spans the centuries from ancient Mesopotamia to the modern world, and still has not reached a conclusion. It is the story of man's search for an understanding of the world he lives in. It is a quest like others but greater than them all because it is never-ending. Although Achilles will someday catch Zeno's turtle, humanity will never fully understand its universe because each step towards knowledge shows how much is still unknown. Despite this, the quest for understanding is still passionately pursued, and each tiny discovery brings man one step closer to true enlightenment.

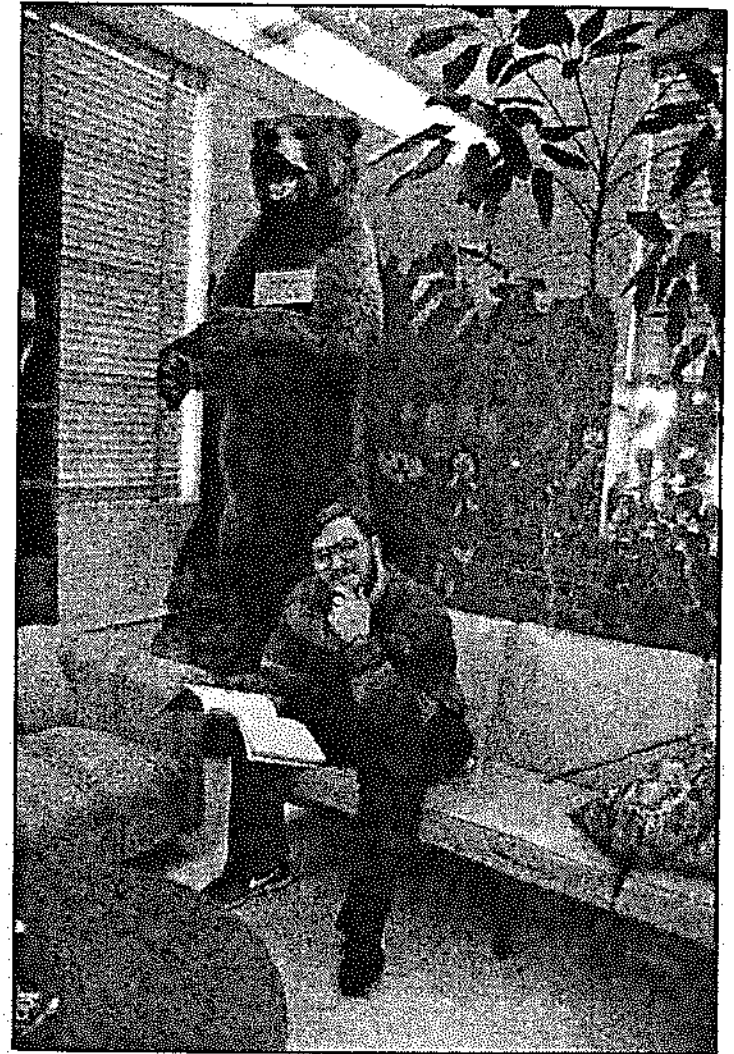
The theme of the quest is common in life. It is present whenever people, be they great or average, pursue goals that are impossible, daunting, or far-reaching in their consequences. Literature and myth are saturated with these tales. Histories of any group or culture contain them. This is definitely true of the history of science. Our senses tell us the Earth is flat. Someone long ago, however, took up the impossible task of challenging that notion using solid evidence. He faced the ridicule of other men, but was resolute. He changed the way all men saw their worlds. The same scenario applies to many scientific discoveries. A prime example is Einstein and his theory of relativity. He spent years working to perfect it and show its usefulness while being scoffed at for predicting that time slows down as an object speeds up and other phenomena contrary to common sense. These men spent their lives working to do the impossible, fighting hard along the way against their antagonists. Science, instead of swords or trickery, was their weapon, but they undertook quests nonetheless.

The quest described in *Coming of Age in the Milky Way* is the grand search for an understanding of the universe. From the earliest pre-humans staring up at the night sky to modern astronomers peering through the Hubble Space Telescope, men have asked the question, "What is this?" and "Where did it all come from?" For almost as long, answers have been proposed. Better world views superseded outdated ones. New information forced reevaluations of old ideas. Ptolemy's geocentric model served well for a time, but it was ousted as the accepted view by Copernican heliocentrism. Kepler had to abandon his theory of nested Platonic paths

that emblazoned his name in the annals of science. The replaced theories were not useless, but instead were guideposts, explaining what they could and highlighting what they couldn't, paving the way for new speculations. Each step was a step forward in the quest to fathom the depth of the universe.

The quest continues even to this second and beyond as men and women propose, test, and accept or discard theory after theory. They slowly cut away the veil of shadows covering the well of knowledge, but unfortunately, the veil will never be gone. As one layer is hacked apart, dozens of folds are revealed beneath it. Today, humanity understands more about the world than ever before, but many questions are yet unanswered. A number of those questions could not have even been posed ten years ago, because each answer generates another series of questions. Here lies the conundrum: Scientist cannot solve problems and answer question without generating more of them. This does not say the solutions are futile... Sir Isaac Newton's smooth pebbles and pretty shells had a drastic influence on contemporary science although he could not grasp the sea of truth. As science brings man closer to true understanding, he may not know it all, but one hundred trillion dollars instead of an infinity of dollars is not something to worry much about.

The theme of quest permeates literature, myth, history, and even science. The great quest of science is the quest to know about the universe. It began when the first humans appeared on Earth and will continue until the last humans pass away. Timothy Ferris' book Coming of Age in the Milky Way tells the story of part of this quest. Working to understand the impossible depth of creation, the great minds of man have painted picture after picture of the world, each layered on top of its predecessor. Although the canvas will never stop being used, the form of the painting is discernible. As one becomes two becomes infinity, the details will come out, and even a few large areas will be redone. Hopefully, neither the paint nor the painters' desire to use it will ever dry. Although humanity has come of age, it still has a long way to go.



Tragedies of William Shakespeare



+

Clashing of Feminine Personalities in Shakespearean Tragedy By Cristine G. Gerbert

The great Shakespeare Tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, place great emphasis on the assumed ignorance, blatant infidelity, or egotistical wickedness of their women. Regardless of their true natures, the most pure and angelic characters can deceptively become perverted and twisted into seemingly corrupt fiends with selfish urges and impure, lusty attitudes. Four starkly different yet oddly similar female characters, Desdemona, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Lady Macbeth, reveal Shakespeare's ability to accurately portray an amazing variety of attributes and personalities while at the same time emphasizing a somewhat recurring misogynistic theme.

In Shakespeare's *Othello* Desdemona is a faultless child whose sweet innocence is retained for the entire length of the play. Without tangible proof of a rumor that Othello and Emilia slept together, Iago becomes obsessed with a maniacal plan to cause a rift between Othello and Desdemona. This situation is reminiscent of the morality plays still fairly common in Shakespeare's time. Othello is the easily influenced Everyman; Iago is the clever, manipulative Devil; and Desdemona is the fragile, faultless Angel. Iago plants the seed of Desdemona's possible infidelity in Othello's mind, nurtures it with trickery and deceit, and admires his handiwork as it blooms into a full-blown jealous rage in which the guiltless Desdemona is strangled to death. Before Desdemona dies, Emilia finds her in bed asking, "Who hath don't the deed?" (V.ii. 133). Faithful to the end, she simply responds, "Nobody, I myself. Farewell./ Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!" (V.ii. 134-35) and then dies. A treacherous whore in Othello's eyes, Desdemona appears to forgive him unwittingly allowing his guilt, not her wrath or vengeance, to single him out as the murderer.

Allowing her father and brother to brainwash her, *Hamlet's* Ophelia is a spineless yet innocent maid never in possession of an original thought. Like a puppet with too few strings, she is pulled in confusing variety of directions by Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet; and just about everyone takes unfair advantage of her at some point in the play. When Ophelia first appears in act I scene iii, she is being given a lecture regarding her supposed misbehavior with Hamlet. Feeling that Ophelia and Hamlet are becoming too intimate, Polonius commands her to shun Hamlet using the excuse: "Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star./ This must not be" (II.ii. 141-42). Plotting with Claudius, Polonius suggests an idea to prove what he believes

is the reason for Hamlet's madness:

You know sometimes he walks four hours together
here in the lobby....

At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him.

Mark the encounter. If he loves her not

And be not from his reason fall'n thereon,

Let me be no assistant for a state,

But keep a farm and carters. (II.ii.161-66)

Here, Polonius takes advantage of his daughter's compromising position in order to discover the true cause of Hamlet's dreadful malady and, as a result, invokes the prince's suspicion and ensuing disgust for Ophelia. The controlling forces which take advantage of her become too much for the simple maid to cope within the end. Gertrude, with some help from Polonius, shatters Hamlet's esteem for all women, including Ophelia, which in turn causes Ophelia to take her life.

Containing yet another intriguing female figure, Shakespeare's Hamlet possesses an ambiguity about Gertrude which exudes evilness. Fanning the flame of Hamlet's misogynistic attitudes, Gertrude is a major contributor to the chain reaction which culminates in Hamlet's perverted view of a non-existent, dark side to Ophelia. When Gertrude marries Claudius, Hamlet's faith in the sweet and virtuous nature of women is sorely shaken because he believes that she is committing incest with the man who murdered his father. Combined with Polonius' meddling attitude, Gertrude's offenses help to trap Ophelia in a cycle of hatred and violence which she can only escape through death. Shakespeare never highlights exactly how Gertrude feels or what she thinks; rather, he subtly hints that she has unscrupulous motivations. Gertrude's emotionless, pictorial description of Ophelia's death excites a sense of suspicion:

...Her clothes spread wide,

And mermaidlike awhile they bore her up,

Which time she changed snatches of old lauds,

As one incapable of her own distress,

Or like a creature native and endued

Unto that element. But long it could not be

Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,

Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay

To muddy death. (IV.vii. 176-84)

Obviously, Gertrude was present, and this places the queen in a precarious position. Although lacking an obvious motive, the possibility that she was involved in Ophelia's death becomes a relevant assumption. While not blatantly misogynistic, the idea implies that women are both weak and vindictive.

Male or female, one of Shakespeare's most interesting creations is Lady Macbeth. Stemming from the traditions that evil characters are more fascinating than heroes, her perverseness becomes painfully apparent in her first appearance in act I scene v after she reads Macbeth's letter concerning the weird sisters. Fearing that Macbeth "is too full o' th' milk of human kindness/ To catch the nearest way," (I.v. 16-17) she makes the fulfillment of the final prediction her top priority. The total extent of her evilness is not actually realized until she learns that Duncan is conveniently coming to stay at her house. To enable her to do what she must, she calls on the evil spirits:

...Come you spirits

That tend of mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,

Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctions visiting of nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

Th' effect and it. Come to my women's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,

Wherever in your sightless substances

You wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes. (I.v. 39-51)

When Macbeth begins having second thoughts about murdering Duncan, Lady Macbeth attacks his manhood saying:

...I have given suck, and know

How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.

I would, while it was smiling in my face,

have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums

and dashed the brains out, had I so sworn

As you have done to this. (I.vii. 54-59)

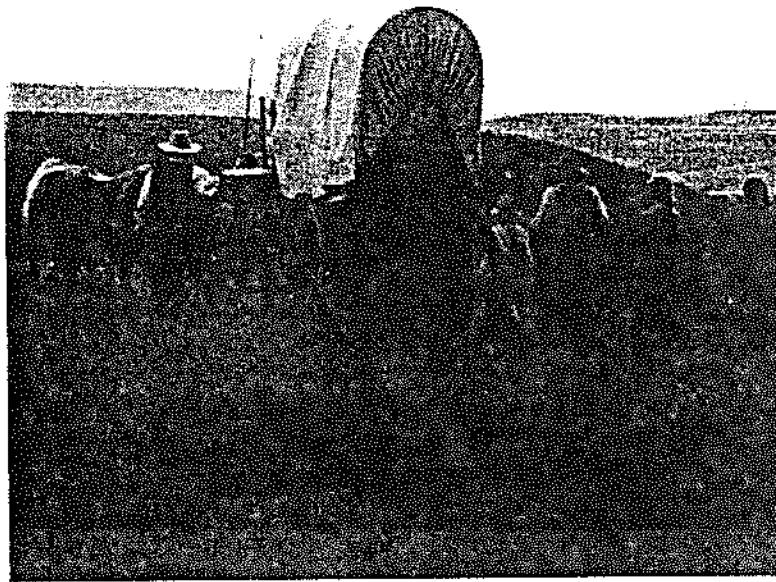
She is terribly evil in the beginning of the play; yet, showing no remorse, she makes a hasty descent into madness. Initially intending to stab Duncan to death, Lady Macbeth backs down with the excuse: "Had he not resembled/ my father as he slept, I had done 't" (II.ii. 12-13). Act V scene i, the sleepwalking scene, reveals the pitiful state into which she has fallen. Reliving various episodes from the plot on Duncan's life, she walks in her sleep and rubs imaginary blood spots off of her hands while exclaiming "Out, damned spot; out, I say" (V.i. 33).

Although misogynistic in nature, the fall of each woman not only reveals the weakness of women in general but also the fickleness, violence, and suspicion that men are solely capable of exhibiting.

The Oregon Trail

by

Francis Parkman



A Bostonian's Western Adventure

By Janette Douglas

Undeniably, Francis Parkman was an opinionated, narrow-minded Boston elitist; but whatever our personal opinion of him might be, Francis Parkman was also a first-rate observer and writer who reported on the people and events exactly as he saw them. The story, whether you like Francis Parkman or not is irrelevant, he tells in his book, *The Oregon Trail*, is important to Americans for it not only provides colorful and detailed descriptions of the settling of the West, but it reveals the prevailing prejudices and conventional attitudes of the 'civilized' East. Parkman's upper-crust, Bostonian Brahman bias reflects, at various times, both the good and the bad of both the East and the West, much of which we now know is painfully true.

Francis Parkman gave up his health and eventually his life to go "on a tour of curiosity and amusement to the Rocky Mountains"(37). At the time of the trip, he was a young man just out of college. While many of his opinions may already have been formulated, he was still relatively fresh and impressionable when the trip began. Quite unaware of what he was about to encounter, Parkman, the 'tenderfoot,' departed on an incredibly dangerous trip to hunt buffalo in the west. He returned a much more enlightened and wise man.

Parkman opens his story, which is more like a travel journal, by describing the busy scene in St. Louis and the passengers who will travel with him up the Missouri River for the first leg of his journey. He says, they "were Santa Fe traders, gamblers, speculators, and adventurers of various descriptions...Oregon emigrants, 'mountain men,' Negroes, and a part of Kansas Indian" (38). On shore there were "slavish-looking Spaniards, gazing stupidly" (39) at a French hunter. From the opening chapter, Parkman has established the promise of his book and an example of the frank portrayals we can expect from him.

Throughout his book, Parkman does not reserve his caustic descriptions only for the natives or frontiersmen, but, rather, he gives an honest and, sometimes, harsh description of everyone, including those in his own party. He says of R— he "had none of the peculiar traits of the ordinary 'British Snob'... [and] although he had the usual complement of eyes and ears, the avenues between these organs and his brain appeared remarkably narrow and untrodden...His energy was more conspicuous than his wisdom..."(90-91). Or the puffing, pompous Captain, who puts on quite a show as the great white hunter until he actually faces the buffalo. Only then does he determine to have nothing to do with the "break neck

business"(116). Then there was Jack C—, sitting "cross-legged, in the sun, splicing trail rope"(68), and the rest "lying in the grass, smoking and telling stories"(68). Parkman tells of the 'real' men of the west like Henry Chatillon, reminiscent of a John Wayne character — big and strong, a man who had respect for the Indians and buffalo — and his trusty sidekick, Tete Rouge, "bloated by sherry-cobbers and brandy-toddy...who cared only for himself and gratified his every whim"(424). Parkman pokes fun at himself when he writes, "Thinking of that morning's journey, it has sometimes seemed to me that there was something ridiculous in my position; a man, armed to the teeth, but wholly unable to fight, and equally so to run away, traversing a dangerous wilderness, on a sick horse"(240). Of his friend Shaw, Parkman tells of a time when he was asleep under the cart and tar, dripping from the wheel, caused his had to be glued to his red flannel shirt(71). Parkman also writes of the swarthy, ignoble and brutish faces of the Mexicans and the hard, weather-beaten expressions of the Canadian trappers and mongrel race of 'Mountain Men.'

Parkman's descriptions of the emigrants reveal both the hardship and the danger of the journey west. A trip that real people undertook in a desperate, often fatal, effort to improve their lives. Parkman writes of the "melancholy traces" of graves left behind and "yellow-visaged Missourians," whose faces were care-worn, square-built, and intelligent-looking, while their frames were of land angular proportion in brown homespun. "It was easy to see that fear and dissension prevailed among them"(97). He writes of another group who was "not robust, nor large of frame, yet they had an aspect of hardy endurance...fiery energies...that fierce spirit which impelled their ancestors...from the German forest...[to] break to pieces the Roman empire"(132). Of the backwoodsmen, he says they "seemed like men totally out of their element; bewildered and amazed, like a troop of schoolboys lost in the woods...[but animated by a] high and bold spirit"(158).

Parkman even relates American's hatred and mistrust of the Mormons as they made their way across the plains, shunned and alone, to their promised land in Utah. Yet it is his descriptions of the Indians that both dismay us and bewitch us. Parkman begins with an old Kansas Indian, where he says of him:

...a man of distinction, if one might judge from his dress. His head was shaved and painted red, and from the tuft of hair remaining on the crown dangled several eagle's feathers, and the tails of two or three rattlesnakes. His cheeks, too, were daubed with vermilion (sic); his ears were adorned with green glass pendants; a collar of grizzly bears' claws surrounded his neck, and several large necklaces of wampum hung on his breast. Having shaken us by the hand with

a cordial grunt of salutation, the old man, dropping the red blanket from his shoulders, sat down cross-legged on the ground(51).

To a young man just out of college and from Boston, the sight of his first real Indian must have seemed remarkable. At this point in his journey, Parkman has no other experiences by which to judge the Indians. When the remainder of the tribe appears, Parkman says of them:

...suddenly a motley concourse...men, women and children...squalid and wretched. Old squaws, mounted astride of shaggy, meager little ponies, with perhaps one or two snake-eyed children seated behind them, clinging to their tattered blankets; tall lank young men on foot, with bows and arrows in their hands; and girls whose native ugliness not all the charms of glass beads and scarlet cloth could disguise...They were the dregs of the Kansas nation, who, while their betters were gone to hunt buffalo, had left the village on the begging expedition...(51).

Although, today, a reader is prone to blanche at such a derogatory description of Native American Indians, it should be noted that Parkman himself says, "They were the dregs of the Kansas nation," not the entire Kansas nation.

In contrast Parkman describes the chief of the Shawanoes as:

A remarkably large and athletic man"...in half-civilized dress...[who] owns a trading establishment...a fine farm and a considerable number of slaves. Indeed the Shawanoes have made greater progress in agriculture than any other tribe on the Missouri frontier; and both in appearance and in character form a marked contrast to our late acquaintance, the Kansas(52).

As the group begins to cross the plains, westward, Parkman's party encounters "the first specimens...of the genuine savages of the prairie," the Pawnees. He further describes them as:

Squalid savages...[whose] attire consisted of scanty cincture and an old buffalo robe, tattered and begrimed by use. His head was a close shaven, except a ridge of hair reaching over the crown from the center of the forehead, very much like the long bristles on the back of a hyena, and he carried his bow and arrows in his hand, while his meager little horse was laden with dried buffalo meat...not pausing or looking towards us, after the manner of Indians when meditating mischief, or conscious of ill desert(107-108).

Clearly, his assessment seems biased; and, yet, it is true that the Pawnees were more hostile toward the hunters and emigrants and that they were know to rob and attack without provocation.

The Dahcotah tribe would most impress Parkman and his descriptions of his time spent with them should, surely, spare his reputation from the title of Indian-hater. In a lengthy description of a warrior, Parkman says:

He was nearly six feet high; lithely and gracefully, yet strongly proportioned; and with a skin singularly clear and delicate. He wore no paint; his head was bare; and his long hair was gathered in a clump behind, to the top of which was attached transversely, both by way of ornament and of talisman, the mystic whistle...From the back of his head descended a line of glittering brass plates...his chest and arms were naked, the buffalo robe, worn over them when at rest, had fallen about his waist, and was confined by a belt. This with the gay moccasins (sic) on his feet, completed his attire (139).

Parkman goes on to describe in glorious detail the warrior's weapons, horse, and, even, the horse's attire. Then he portrays the full spectrum of the tribe as it follows in "a rude procession." He writes, "men, women, and children swarmed like bees; hundreds of dogs, of all sizes and colors, ran restlessly about; and close at hand, the wide shallow stream was alive with boys, girls and young squaws, splashing, screaming, and laughing in the water" (141). Parkman's impressions of the Dahcotachs had radically changed from previous Indian descriptions. His writing had a light-hearted and gay feeling to it. Parkman presents rare insight into the social, political, and religious customs of the Dahcotah tribe. He writes:

Characteristic indecision perplexed their councils. Indians cannot act in large bodies...They are divided into several independent bands, united under no central government, and acknowledging no common head. The same language, usage's, and superstitions, form the sole bond between them. They do not unite even in their wars...A people so loosely united, torn, too, with rankling feuds and jealousies, can have little power or efficiency. The buffalo supplies them with almost all the necessities of life...When the buffalo are extinct, they too must dwindle away (197-199).

As Dr. Reilley and Dr. Gibson pointed out in an Honors Seminar lecture, Francis Parkman's book is important 150 years later, because of what it tells us, both good and bad. Through it we can see the faces that formed the character of our people and the events that helped to form the backbone of our country. No one is spared the sharp and biting tongue of Francis Parkman.

Jane Eyre

by

Charlotte Bronte



Jane Eyre: Plucking the Mask from the Face of the Pharisee By Christine Andrepont

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* can in many ways be viewed as a protest against bigotry and injustice in her society. In her preface to the second edition of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë specifically addresses those readers "whose ears detect in each protest against bigotry...an insult to piety" (v). She refers to those who would, or had, criticized her for her attacks on the injustices and double standards she saw about her. She argues that "To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns." (vi). In this novel, Brontë addresses several of the issues and inequalities which plagued her society, including the treatment of the poor, the emphasis on outer rather than inward beauty, and especially the status of women in nineteenth century England. She boldly reveals the double standards held by the elite, and offers through her heroine a response and an option to these.

The first several chapters are primarily occupied with the relationship of the poor and dependent with the rich and "charitable". We first see Jane's relationship with Mrs. Reed, who exemplifies the stereotypical condescending patroness. In her eyes, her own children, wicked and selfish as they are, can do no wrong; Jane, on the other hand, can do no right. She feels her charitable obligation to Jane as a weight about her neck, yet she perceives herself to be kind and generous. She is constantly referred to as Jane's "benefactress" (14), and everyone seems blinded to not only her selfishness and pride, but also to Jane's virtues. Mr. Brocklehurst is an even more powerful example of the self-congratulating upper class whose charity is no more than an elaborate show. When Brontë asserts that "Self-righteousness is not religion." (v-vi), it is no doubt a reference to the Mr. Brocklehursts of the world. He denies the students of Lowood School adequate food and clothing, claiming that his "...mission is to mortify these girls in the lusts of the flesh..." (67). But his double standard is immediately revealed by the entrance of his wife and daughters, who "ought to have come a little sooner to have heard his lecture on dress, for they were splendidly attired in velvet, silk, and furs." (67). Brontë contrasts this farce to the true charity demonstrated to Jane first by Ms. Temple, but later in an even more moving way by the Rivers family. Without question, they received Jane, fed her, and cared for her out of true sympathy and pity rather than as a pompous show performed for the benefit of onlookers. This reveals Brontë's true ideal of charity.

Bronte also challenges the ideal of beauty in her time. The beauty of Blanch Ingram in her "noble bust, the sloping shoulders, the graceful neck, the dark eyes and black ringlets" (174) is not disputed. Bronte does not argue the outward features which were considered beautiful, but rather asserts that "beauty is in the eye of the gazer." This beauty is not one made up of merely outward features, but it includes the attitude of a person as well. No doubt the average observer would have dwelt only on Ms. Ingram's outer charms rather than considering her "...arched and haughty lip." (174) or on Mr. Rochester's grim and heavy features rather than his strength and penetrating eyes. Blanche Ingram's beauty is marred, as is Georgiana Reed's and Bertha Mason's, by her knowledge of and pride in her appearance and situation, and her constant denigration of others around her. Jane, on the other hand, despite her plain face and irregular features, establishes her beauty in the minds on Mr. Rochester (who declares her "a beauty just after the desire of my heart—delicate and aerial"(261)) and of the reader by her gentle goodness and strength.

The most powerful and compelling statement of *Jane Eyre*, however, is Bronte's assertion of the rights of women as human beings on a level with men. Throughout the novel, Jane struggles with the limitations imposed upon women by the society in which she lives. In a powerful feminist declaration, she expresses her opposition to the forces which would deny women of limited means the opportunity to be anything other than teachers or governesses, or that would give wealthy women the status of mere drawing room ornaments. She speaks of the "restlessness" (112) in her nature that would have been deemed improper at the time. Her passionate statement that

...women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do...and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings...it is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (112-113)

expresses her contempt for scorn and for those that would cage her by traditions regarding station and sex. Even when she has won Mr. Rochester's love, she is willing to surmount the obstacle of her comparative poverty by dependence upon his wealth; she spurns his attempts to clothe her in silk and jewels, and wishes for "even so small an independency" (270) for "the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation." (270). In the end, however, Bronte does put Jane on an equal footing with Mr. Rochester. She is given her

"small dependency" (which she generously shares) and Mr. Rochester is slightly handicapped. All of these elements combine to give her the upper hand, so to speak, in the relationship upon her return. Mr. Rochester is no longer absolutely confident of her return of his affection, because not only is she now an independent and well-educated woman who has had a proposal from a handsome man, but he has been humbled and is now in a position where he is forced to ask for, rather than demand, her presence. Jane states "I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector." (449) Bronte's ideal of marriage, which is one in which each partner is in a state of mutual dependence upon the other, is expressed in the statement "...I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine." (454) Man and woman have their respective places in society according to Bronte, but these places are based upon mutual respect and equal opportunity.

In her attacks upon the attitude of the elite towards the poor, the emphasis on outward beauty alone, and the inequality of the position of women in society, Bronte forcefully expresses her position, and presents her ideal of the way things should be. In her condemnation of false charity and beauty, she states clearly the alternative to these. In regards to women's status, however, she is somewhat less successful in providing a viable solution to the problem, as not every poor and restless governess could be so fortunate as to discover a wealthy uncle in Madeira. However, her declaration of the equality of women and her demand for social justice is powerful and could not have been ignored by a thoughtful contemporary reader.

The Honors Forum Committee presents:
An evening with Dr. Chet.

As the time approaches to start thinking about this semester's Honors essay, we would like to give you the opportunity to come and listen to Dr. Ryzakiewicz discuss various topics concerning Russia the USSR, in the context of the book, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich"

Topics will be Leninism and Stalinism, as well as prison camps in Siberia.

We will be serving authentic Russian food, such as Ivan would have eaten!!!

Honors Forum, fall 1997

Thursday, November 13, 1997

6pm to 8pm

Doucet, room 205

Bring a friend! It's a great way to prepare for the essay.

Imprisonment As Selflessness
in Alexander Solzhenitsyn's
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
By Roxanne Guillory

Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* follows the prescribed routine of a prisoner in a Russian work camp under the Stalinist regime. In strikingly realistic detail, Solzhenitsyn describes the grim life of the men in the Soviet forced labor camps. They are awakened at sunrise to spend their days in unimaginably harsh temperatures of fifty degrees below zero working to construct buildings for a country that will never allow them as full citizens to benefit from the constructions. While Solzhenitsyn is certainly making a poignant political statement on the corruption of the Russian state under Stalin, he is also delving into the prisoner's mind to show how imprisonment, especially wrongful, unprovoked, and unnecessarily cruel imprisonment, affects the human spirit. By examining only one day in Shukhtov's life, Solzhenitsyn shows how imprisonment, especially under these "special" circumstances, goes beyond reforming a man to robbing him of his basic human identity and individuality. A man loses his name and becomes nothing more than an expendable number working for the state. "No one would care if a prisoner froze to death" (Solzhenitsyn 58). Throughout the novel, Solzhenitsyn confronts the ways in which the prisoners are forced to give up their dignity, their capacity for creative expression, and even their thoughts in order to survive their horrible plight. They must suppress their basic human pride—not a pride of haughty superiority, but the pride of being an autonomous human being who possesses a free will—and display a debasing, groveling inferiority and subservience to their oppressors in order to survive their prison term.

Several times, Solzhenitsyn describes scenes of prisoners, once free and dignified men, reduced to roles of groveling animals to ensure themselves either a momentary pleasure or their very lives. Forced to live on only the barest rations of food, yet required to perform strenuous labor from dawn until dusk, the prisoners take advantage of every opportunity to acquire more food, even if it means behaving like a hungry animal. "...[I]f you found a bowl with something left in it you could hardly resist licking it out" (18). Extra food for these men is a necessity in keeping themselves alive, but they perform inhuman and degrading acts to ensure themselves simple pleasures as well, brief moments of satisfaction that are all too precious in a harsh prison environment. The

quest for a cigarette is one that drives several prisoners in this novel to beg or to scour for leftover butts. One prisoner, Fetiukov, even smokes the cigarette butts that he finds in the spittoons and when scolded for his actions by a captain he replies, "You wait, captain. When you've been in for eight years you'll be picking them up yourself" (57). Every man, however dignified or above such behavior he considers himself, will wilt under the pressure of imprisonment and will lose his last vestiges of human dignity.

In addition to their loss of dignity, any creative expression or display of individuality is denied the prisoners, thus further depriving them of the characteristics that make them human beings. The "morning prayer" to which the prisoners are subjected daily reminds them of their lack of autonomy. Nothing which might express the hint of autonomy or of free will is allowed the prisoner. "Marching orders must be strictly obeyed... No hurrying... No talking. Keep your eyes fixed ahead and your hands behind your backs. A step to right or left is considered an attempt to escape and the escort has orders to shoot without warning" (47). Not only is the will to move oneself prohibited, but also is the power to speak. A prisoner is desired for the labor he can provide the state, and not for his ability to express himself. Even moments of personal freedom are denied the prisoners. An order is issued that prisoners may not walk around the camp alone. He is to be at all times within a group of four or five men. "With that rule of his the commandant would have robbed them of their last shred of freedom" (129), and that freedom is simply to be alone with oneself, with one's own thoughts.

The freedom to think, however, is one that is strictly denied the prisoners. They are intentionally kept at work throughout the day, so that by nightfall their only thought is to sleep. At no time is a prisoner allowed a personal moment of reflection, and even if he should capture a precious moment of solitude, his thoughts are naturally bound by his condition. "The thoughts of a prisoner—they're not free either. They kept returning to the same things... Would they feel that piece of bread in the mattress? Would he have any luck at the dispensary that evening?" (47). The thought of survival becomes one's only concern, and the possibility of any other stimulating idea is oppressively overshadowed by the desire to live.

Artistic expression is also vehemently denied a prisoner. The only artists in the camp are those who repaint the identification numbers on the prisoner's uniforms. "There were three artists in the camp. They painted pictures for the authorities free of charge, and in addition took turns appearing at roll call to touch up the numbers" (39). An artist is free only to work for the state and its employees, never for his own gratification. Other artists in the camp are not so fortunate, since they are not allowed

to work at all. Tsezar, for example, was a filmmaker before his arrest. "He'd made films. But he hadn't finished his first when they arrested him" (40). The fulfillment of his first piece of artistic expression is robbed him, and the hope of completing his work later is virtually non-existent, since he is not even guaranteed to get out alive.

Solzhenitsyn seems especially concerned about the artist in this novel, as the argument about Eisenstein between Tsezar and X 123 indicates. Tsezar proclaims Eisenstein to be a genius, describing the art of his films as the proof of his great ability. X 123, however, proclaims that Eisenstein is nothing more than an "ass-kisser" (84) who compromises his artistic talent to suit a political structure that does not tolerate dissent. "Geniuses don't adjust their interpretations to suit the taste of tyrants!" (84). Tsezar, a filmmaker himself, is never allowed the chance to revolt against the state through his art. His opportunity for expression is denied him before he even completes it. Obviously no "ass-kisser" himself, Tsezar's possible genius is never allowed to develop. All his efforts are put to work for the state, and his genius is forbidden to display itself.

There are moments in the novel when the prisoners assert their individuality and reclaim their basic power as human beings. The confrontation with Der is an especially empowering moment for the prisoners. Through their combined force of will, they manage to intimidate a superior into humility and to escape the pain of punishment and the embarrassment of rebuke. The men also display their individual force of human will through their drive to work. Though they will never receive any sort of remuneration for their back-breaking labor, the prisoners of Shukhov's squad work furiously to accomplish their day's work. The sense of accomplishment, of victory through labor, is what drives the men to work, not the pressure of their superiors. Shukhov works with more drive than any other member of his squad, taking pains to ensure that his work is first-rate. "Wasn't it enough that Tiurin had told them himself not to bother about the mortar? Just throw it over the wall and fuck off. But Shukhov wasn't made that way—eight years in a camp couldn't change his nature" (105). Even forced hard labor is not enough to break Shukhov's human spirit completely.

Although Shukhov and others do occasionally display their individual will and therefore assert their capacity as human beings for free will and autonomous action, they realize that such displays of autonomy will cost them their lives eventually. Only the most humble prisoners, those who have been fully stripped of their individuality survive the camp. "Better to growl and submit. If you were stubborn they broke" (57). Even the noble Captain Buinovskiy is forced to deny his individuality, his pride, and his personal dignity to ensure his survival. "Though he didn't know

it...they were transforming him from an eager, confident naval officer with a ringing voice into an inert, though wary, zek. And only in that inertness lay the chance of surviving the twenty-five years of imprisonment he'd been sentenced to" (81). No one, not even a refined naval captain, can resist the dehumanizing effects of imprisonment. This is the message that is repeatedly emphasized in Solzhenitsyn's novel. The Stalinist regime created a corrupt form of government that in turn established a system of imprisonment which operated to strip its inhabitants of their basic humanity.

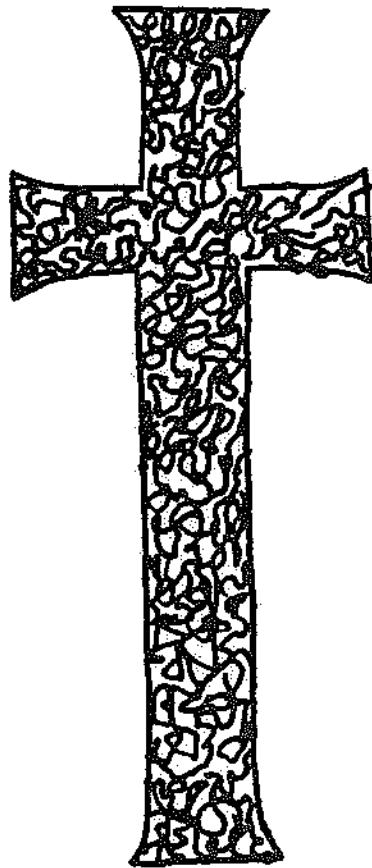


Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, left, with his sons Stephen, center, and Yermolai, right, receives the traditional Russian greeting of bread and salt in Vladivostok.

Things Fall Apart

by

Chinua Achebe



Irony in *Things Fall Apart*: A Historical Lesson By Casey Guillot

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* gives a rare and objective look into the thoughts, insights, and everyday life of the Ibo people. This quality alone is quite unique, since normally not much is written or read about the tribes of Africa, but it is actually another issue which is addressed that firmly establishes the book's place as a masterpiece; history can often be a one-sided version of a two-sided story. Unlike most widely read literature having a historical basis, *Things Fall Apart* is a tale told not from the point of view of the "civilized" conquerors but instead one told from the point of view of the "primitive" people who are being overtaken. In doing so, Chinua Achebe has raised many ethical questions regarding the oppression of a society's beliefs. The final paragraph of the novel, which switches to the point of view of the District Commissioner, contains several ironies that not only force the reader to reevaluate what historical truth really is but also to morally debate how much right a mighty civilization has to push its beliefs upon others.

One irony, found in the final paragraph, is the District Commissioner's knowledge of tribal customs. He states that throughout his travels of Africa, "he had learned a number of things." More specifically, he stresses the importance of not cutting a hanged man down from a tree, because it "would give the natives a poor opinion of him" (208). While it may be true that the District Commissioner has knowledge of tribal customs, he makes no effort throughout the novel to respect those customs. One example is when Obierika explains to Okonkwo that the prison in Umuofia was "full of men who had offended against the white man's law" (174). These natives were most probably doing what was right according to their beliefs, but the District Commissioner took it upon himself to dictate right from wrong to them. Another example is the decision of the "white man's court," which is presided over by the District Commissioner, taking precedence over the tribe's customs about land in dispute. The natives of the land have held their customs sacred for generations only to be shattered by the power of the white man; Obierika even states that the white man "says that our customs are bad" (176). Another example is when the leaders of Umuofia are called to a meeting with the District Commissioner after the burning of the Christian church. Before the men have a chance to explain why such actions were taken, they are all handcuffed. The District Commissioner then passes judgement on the men by instantly assuming their guilt and decides that they must "pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries" (194). It's beginning to sound like might does make right.

Another irony found in the final paragraph is the District Commissioner's proclamation that he could write "perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph" on Okonkwo (209). The reader has just reached the final paragraph on a novel which is written almost entirely about Okonkwo, yet the District Commissioner believes that he could possibly write a lengthy paragraph about him; the irony just seems to stream from this statement. Okonkwo is introduced in the first paragraph of the novel as being "well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond" (3). Okonkwo's importance is further stressed in the last paragraph of the first chapter; "he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars" and even though he "was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time" (8). Obierika even defends Okonkwo as having been "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" (208). Only after the reader has been allowed to develop a personal relationship with Okonkwo does the full arrogance and disregard of the District Commissioner become clear. Okonkwo, one of the most important men in Umuofia, is now nothing more than a paragraph about a "man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself" (208). One begins to wonder what implications such a statement may have towards events, which are deemed historically important. Has recorded history become distorted by, as the District Commissioner puts it, "cutting out details" (209)?

Another irony found in the final paragraph is the District Commissioner's selected title for his book, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* (209). The District Commissioner may believe that it is his job to pacify the natives and "to bring civilization to different parts of Africa," but the natives themselves see things quite differently. The white men are viewed by the natives as "locusts" who will "break their clan and spread destruction" from their very first encounter with the stranger in Abame (139; 138). When the missionaries who had arrived in Mbanta began to preach that only their one God lived and judged all men, the natives determined that "these men must be mad" (146). After all, who were they to dictate that all of the tribe's gods were harmless and of no importance when it was they who were the foreigners to the land? On one occasion, "three converts had gone into the village and boasted openly that all the gods were dead and impotent and that they were prepared to defy them by burning all their shrines" (154). Shouldn't the natives be entitled to their own religious beliefs? If so, then why is it necessary for the Christians to express their faith in God not through preaching but through the destruction of the natives' shrines? On yet another occasion, a Christian convert "brought the church into serious conflict with the clan...by killing the sacred python" (157). Intentionally

killing the sacred python was so severe an offense that no punishment for such a crime even existed among the natives of Mbanta, because "nobody thought that such a thing could ever happen" (158). It is no wonder that the elders saw the Christian faith as being "an abominable religion" (167). Even the court system of the white men is viewed as horrible; "the District Commissioner judged cases in ignorance" and "the court messengers were greatly hated...because they were foreigners and also arrogant and high-handed" (174). What right did these foreigners have to tell the natives how to live in their own land? When the many episodes throughout the novel in which the beliefs of the two cultures clash are compared to the title of the District Commissioner's book, an important question is raised: is history an objective record of events, or is it simply the point of view of the conquering nation?

Chinua Achebe has done a masterful job of incorporating ethical questions with the downfall of the Ibo culture. He poses such questions as "What is historical truth?" and also "Does might make right?" In doing so, the reader is forced to reevaluate history as a whole. Are historians too self-centered to objectively record events? And also, can the morals of one culture be superior to those of another when each culture believes whole-heartedly that it is right? After all, as Uchendu said, "what is good among one people is an abomination among others" (141).

Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America

by

John Barry



The Illusion of The Southern Gentleman

By Thomas Pierre Hebert

In the back of my mind I have always held the concept of the Southern gentleman in high regard. He was a noble creature of honor and integrity and of a class to which I desired to belong. Contrary to popular sentiment I held that the values and ideals embodied in my mental picture were not dead. I set a high standard for this gentleman. Crisis will cause any man's true colors to come to the fore. John Barry's portrayal of the "gentlemen" involved in the Mississippi flood of 1927 showed my ideal to be just that—an ideal, and not a reality. This revelation occurs mainly through the picture which is painted of relations between the races and the inborn classes which are associated in the South with the two races involved.

Various levels of class come to play as history unfolds in *Rising Tide*. The first level is that of social class. In the South, being black meant you were born onto the bottom rung of the pecking order. This meant you were destined to be a laborer. The Percy clan viewed the black man as necessary labor to work the plantations. When the levees needed repair the black man was called upon to wage the battle with the forces of nature. When the waters receded the black man would clean up the muck left behind. Even Non-Southern blacks are wary of the established social order, which places the black man as a laborer. When the representatives of the colored commission created by Mr. Hoover to investigate inequality of treatment in the Red Cross camps travel to the Southern states, they never stay for long for fear of being drafted to the black labor gangs.

The white populace was granted more room within the social order. Yes, the white lower class did exist, but they do not take the spotlight in Mr. Barry's account. The class of the white gentlemen makes the decisions in controlling the forces of the machine that is the lower Mississippi river valley. White gentlemen head the Red Cross committees. White gentlemen appoint foremen for the black work gangs. White gentlemen make the decision to destroy a section of levee to sacrifice St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes rather than New Orleans.

To "have class" is to have a certain degree of nobility. As a part of my pictured ideal of the Southern gentry I had imbued the upper social class with this nobility. Barry would show that nobility lay elsewhere. The attitudes of the blacks and whites in Greenville evidenced the difference in nobility between the classes. The black men lived on the levees and worked on the levees. The gentlemen lived in the dry homes which were left. The seemingly noble act of evacuating white women

and children was overshadowed by the denial of this escape to the many blacks who crowded the levee banks. The reversion to de facto slavery clinched the conclusion that the white gentlemen were gentlemen of the surface only. The blacks were worked without pay and at gunpoint. The supplies sent as relief to all victims did not reach the blacks as they were supposed to. Either the supplies were sold when they were supposed to be given freely, or they were diverted to the white need if black need was less.

The attitude of the black men showed a far greater nobility than that evidenced by any of the southern gentlemen of this book. They worked despite the horrid conditions, which they were subjected to. When the call was sent out for 1000 black men to show up voluntarily, they came. It was the white foreman who broke faith and brought a pistol to the levee. Well before this opportunity to choose to work (what little choice they had) the blacks endured and were made noble through their suffering under the white domination.

The planter families believed that they were of a higher class because of their family lines, positions in the community, and their wealth. All that these men could focus upon was the equation that labor + land over time produced profit. These economists struggled to protect the variables of this equation. The levees were worked upon constantly so that the development done upon the land would be protected. The labor was kept from leaving because of the fear that it would not return after the flood waters receded. The laborers were tagged for receiving their shots and to show where they had come from and where they would be sent back. Those without tags could not receive food for themselves or for their families.

The banker "gentlemen" of New Orleans were no better than the planter "gentlemen" of Greenville. These men would sacrifice their neighbors-not in the interest of saving a greater number of lives in the city, but rather to protect investor confidence. The petty focus on economics again triumphs over the nobility of protecting lives. After they have carried out their act of destruction, the bankers do not even keep their word to care for and reimburse those people whom they flood out of livelihood and home. The "great humanist" Herbert Hoover does little better on the scale of nobility. He fails to address the disparity of treatment received by the two races, and the entire relief effort becomes a tool to break into the Presidency.

Overall, *Rising Tide* was indeed a fascinating book. I learned a great deal regarding flood control and the massive size of the drainage basin of the Mississippi. The progression of knowledge of the working of the Mississippi was also quite interesting. All this was overshadowed by the

story about the relationship between the classes. Even as man continues to struggle with the river, so too we continue the struggle to treat men-all men-with equity. The nobility of class that I had expected from Southern gentlemen was not there. Through their perseverance through suffering the black people were made noble in my eyes.



Frontispiece of the first American edition of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1885.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by
Mark Twain

Huck's Sense of Family
By Neal Raley

The battle raging inside Huck's spirit began with his relationship with his father, which was projected to virtually all authority figures who crossed his path, and throughout his adventures Huck kept referring back to his memories of his father to help him rationalize his choices, almost all of which made him turn away from society's strict "moral" codes of his time toward that inner voice that had always gotten him into trouble. Had he possessed more respect for his father may have felt a strong attachment to the rules of the time and made the wrong moral choices; however, because of his volatile relationship with his pap, he questioned everything anyone in authority had ever taught him was right, choosing instead to trust his own seemingly damning instincts primarily on the basis of his distrust of society.

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* grew up during a time when family values were supposed to have been stronger than they are today, entrenched in a deep respect and loyalty for blood ties rooted in a healthy fear of God. But somehow these so called values were twisted and distorted by the warped social consciousness of the day and served primarily to undermine the humanistic morality intrinsic within our species, a morality which Huck himself discovered and struggled against because of the influence family and society had forced upon him. Huck did not begin to be conscious that his inherent goodness was the true force at conflict with the cultural norms until he decided to rescue Jim toward the end of the story, and even then it was only a feeling that he was just doing what was good and right, at the price of losing his own soul. As Huck said in Chapter Thirty-one, just before he tore up the note to Miss Watson in which he had decided to turn Jim in, "All right, then I'll go to hell." So in order to fully come to grips with his own goodness, Huck had to not only shake off his attachment to family and society, but to God, the divine authority, as well.

Huck's off and on relationship with his drunkard father was violent and often too predictable. Even when Pap was around Huck was frightened of him and preferred to be out in the woods and on the river, so most of Huck's life was devoted to avoiding him at all costs, and that included the things his pap had taught him, which came into play down the line. There is no argument that his father could have been a negative influence on the young Huck, but the boy's reaction was a positive one. Pap didn't want Huck to go to school, to have any of the freedoms associated with being a boy, or to do anything else but serve his own selfish needs. His father

was a thief, a drunk, an abusive man, and downright mean—a regular son of a bitch—and Huck could have accepted this and become a victim, helpless and angry, but instead he chose to reject his father and the rest of society by running away, not by shooting the dastard at the end of chapter six, which would have been justifiable, or by giving up and becoming an image of his rapscaillon father. Fear drove him to go to extraordinary length to get away clean, but fear was not enough to overcome the goodness in his heart.

The boy's being jerked around from place to place created an emotional distance that instilled in him a strength that allowed him to defy the rules of society. Because he had distanced himself so effectively he was able to trust his own feelings more securely and make the decisions that he felt were right, and his path in life was established—he would be his own person regardless of what anyone thought. But even though he struggles to maintain this distance, a connections was always there, and when he had to make a moral choice—whether or not to lie, or steal, to help a runaway slave, or whether or not a slave was a real person or not and loved his children—he always chose the thing society had always told him was wrong, but which true morality tells us all was right; in his heart, Huck was a rebel, and despite possibly uncomfortable repercussions, he would do what he felt was right and to hell with the rest of the world.

Huck's relationship with Jim was not based on a search for a father-figure; quite the opposite, the boy at first did not even consider the slave to be a person, referring to him as "Miss Watson's Jim," but nevertheless was glad to see him; the rest of their relationship was defined more as Huck the protecting father and Jim the troubled child. When Jim got bitten by the snake, Huck felt responsible and took care of him; when he found out from Mrs. Judith Loftus that her husband was bout the search the island, Huck raced back to save him; when he fooled Jim in Chapter Fifteen, Huck felt so bad that he humbled himself and asked forgiveness, explaining: "I didn't give him no more tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a' knowed it would make him feel that way"; and again toward the end when Huck decided to give up everything to save Jim from slavery. During their time together, Jim told the boy all sorts of superstitious things: the hairball in Chapter Four; the birds and Jim's father's death in Chapter Eight; and the whole rattlesnake fiasco in Chapter Ten, among others. Yet, the words of this uneducated slave held more weight with Huck than those of any authority figure in the entire book, especially those of his father.

The conflict with his old man drove Huck away from trusting any man other than Jim, who for a time was not even considered a "man," and the only people that he trusted had been women, as stated in the first

paragraph: "I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary." He seemed to see Pap in most men, and because of this he considered the majority of the men he encountered to be the enemy. Even in his tall tales he symbolically killed off his father, as in Chapters Eleven and Seventeen, or worse, as in Chapter Sixteen when he gave his father a horrible disease, which "turned out" to be smallpox.

For a brief time, though, Huck felt a sense of belonging, a sense of family, with the Gragerfords, but ironically enough the tight blood ties exhibited by this family had served as their doom, a result of the pointless feud with the Sheperdsons; after witnessing Buck Gragerford's death in the river, Huck was traumatized:

It made me so sick I almost fell out of the tree. I ain't a-going to tell *all* that happened—it would make me sick again if I was to do that. I wished I hadn't ever come ashore that night to see such things. I ain't ever going to get shut of them—lots of times I dream about them.

So yet again, another of Huck's family experiences left a horrible effect on him, further driving him away from familial attachments of any sort. Even with the Phelps, whom Huck considered good people, he avoided any unnecessary closeness with them by first lying to them (which was reaction to everybody) and then by working with Tom to free Jim, in effect stealing from them. This attitude toward family is carried through to the end, even after Aunt Sally is going to adopt him, when he says that she is going to "sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before," remembering back to his time with the widow, although one may get the feeling that his resolve was weakening happily.

Because of Huck's experience with the family life and his father, he developed the strength to separate himself from many evils represented by society in general, and eventually become his own person, to trust his own sense of right and wrong. Never, though, did he *search* for a father-figure, not with the duke and the king, not with the Phelpses, and not with Jim, and the only acceptable father type showed up in his life it ended tragically, further validating his determination to distance himself from any sense of family. It was his choice *not* to become a victim of his father or anyone else that eventually empowered him to be able to take control of his life, and it was his innate goodness, that inborn morality we all possess somewhere deep inside, that caused him to be the champion of victims throughout his adventures.