

The Fallen Idol and Southern Women Writers (II)

—Mother and Daughter in Flannery O'Connor's Stories—

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Fiction and fantasy create a seemingly truthful (hi) story of our past ; we project our emotional and psychic need rather than invoke our memory of the past. In *The Plantation Mistress* (1982) Catherine Clinton observes that this is exactly what happened to the image of the plantation mistress of the Old South. She argues that the image of the Southern belle has changed in our time but that the revision is not any closer to the reality. She deplores the fact that "The current popular portrait of the southern woman may have transformed her from the idle, afflicted creature of our romantic imagination, but she remains sexually stereotyped nonetheless" (230). Quite importantly, however, while popular portraits and images manipulated by male fantasies continue to do violence to Southern womanhood (and womanhood in general), as Clinton argues in the aforementioned book, Southern women writers have presented in their fictional women the social realities of woman's world, past and present, seen through their perspectives, which provide quite different stories of "the Southern belle."

As has been observed in my first discussion of "The Fallen Idol and Southern Women Writers"¹⁾, Katherine Anne Porter's adolescent heroine,

1) See Keiko Beppu, "The Fallen Idol and Southern Women Writers: Katherine Anne Porter's Fictional Women," *Women's Studies Forum*, No. 2 (March 1988). pp. 49-64.

Miranda Gay, uncovers the veil of the myth. Miranda's wonderment ends in a bitter-sweet realization that the Southern belle in the romance she grew up with is, like a curio of an old faded picture of strange-looking men and women, a myth. Aunt Amy is not a tragic heroine of romance, whose mutability and beauty enhance the more the tragic implication of her short, unhappy life, but is really a prisoner of myth and a victim of the social system in the Old South where matrimony determined woman's personal happiness and welfare. Whether Miranda herself is successful in creating a new image of her self is yet to be seen. The stories in the Miranda Cycle end just where the heroine, disillusioned of life's realities, is about to set out on her quest of a truly fulfilling life.

Likewise, Flannery O'Connor (1925-64), another Southern writer, gives a sardonic rendition of the Southern lady. The anonymous Grandmother with her "white cotton gloves," "a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim," dressed in "a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print," is a mockery of the lady of the romance. The Grandmother spends much time on her toilet for a family weekend trip so that "In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once she was a *lady*" ("A Good Man Is Hard to Find," 118. Emphasis mine.)²⁾ Her "white cotton gloves" and "navy blue straw sailor hat," and "a purple spray of cloth violets" pinned at her neckline *won't* make her a lady, since she has no social status nor a sense of *noblesse oblige* without which the very idea is a sacrilege. Julian's mother who wears an outlandish hat to her reducing class at the Y in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is another caricature of the Southern belle.

The label "feminist" is, perhaps, as misleading as those of "Southern"

2) All the quotations from O'Connor's stories are from *The Complete Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971.) Hereafter the pagination will appear in parenthesis within the text following the quotation. Ex. (CS 118).

and "Catholic" for O'Connor; it is not to do full justice to her unique artistic vision which only concerns itself in revealing the "truth." Social and political issues hardly touched her life at Andulsia; she never heartily endorsed the civil rights movement (Stephens 341), as the identification of Julian's mother and the black woman riding on the bus face to face with the identical hat may lead the reader to conclude that O'Connor is an enthusiastic supporter of the cause. This recognition scene in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and the subsequent death of the white woman at the end of the story does not mean retribution, but it indicates a sudden visitation of grace which eventually results in redemption of her soul.

Similarly, feminism hardly affected O'Connor in any direct manner as to find expression in her writings. Even so, like many literary women before her—George Eliot, Carson McCullers, or Willa Cather—"Mary" O'Connor chose "Flannery," thus repudiating "a stereotypically feminine gender identity", which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar regard as "the mark of a private christening into a second self, a rebirth into linguistic primacy" (*No Man's Land* 241). Joy Hopewell in "Good Country People" emulates her creator, and on her twenty-first birthday she gives herself a name, "Hulga," which almost sounds "ugly" more appropriate for her freakish appearance and deformed personality which undergoes transformation during the course of the story.

This brief consideration of fictional women in O'Connor's stories is a continuation of the aforementioned discussion on the changing image of the Southern belle in the novels and stories of Southern women writers. To see what manner of woman this intensely imaginative writer of fiction has created in her works, here two of her stories with a similar dramatic setting and a set of characters³⁾ are examined: "The Life You Save May Be

3) Other O'Connor stories with a similar setting and a similar dramatic situation are "The

Your Own" (1953) and "Good Country People" (1955).

I

The rural South is the milieu of O'Connor's fictional world as opposed to a more urban or cosmopolitan arena in Katherine Anne Porter's works. The action of the drama takes place on a farm or a rundown plantation where only a residue of the glorious Old South lingers. The world depicted in O'Connor stories is a world without men. Woman is separated from her husband either by death or divorce. Sometimes, like Mrs. Hopewell, and Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person", she is widowed, remarried, and then divorced. Just like Flannery and her mother at Andulsia, the displaced farm widow is invariably accompanied not by her son but by her only daughter, who is more closely bound to the household, a gender-differentiated realm. Moreover, the daughter is either crippled like Hulga Hopewell in "Good Country People" or mentally handicapped like the deaf-mute Lucynell in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." On the other hand, sons leave home and their mothers to the public realm as Mr. Shiftlet recalls the day he left his mother, "a angel of Gawd."

Thus, the displaced plantation mistress is dependent on hired hands who "come and go," and on shiftless blacks who are left behind on dilapidating farms after the industrialization and urbanization of the Old South. Woman is deprived of a responsible man who can take care of the farm and the household, reminiscent of plantation life in the Old South where "families depended on women to supply crucial domestic labor" (Clinton, 38). And the plantation mistress must now make what she can without man's help of her meagre legacy. Mrs. McIntyre can barely

Displaced Person," and "A Circle in the Fire."

make both ends meet after the Judge's death ; moreover, the legacy is not what she expected ("The Displaced Person").

Now the picture of the mother and the daughter in O'Connor's stories is by no means a pleasant one. The mother and the daughter are so despicable and so physically repulsive, and their retributions at the end of the stories portrayed in so uncompromising a way that many readers will find it hard to believe that the author felt any sympathy for them. This is deliberately done on the part of the author to show the fallen state of humanity and make the act of redemption "gratuitous," which is indeed the original meaning of "grace," for as her critics agree, O'Connor's work is essentially a study in faith and belief.

"The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and "Good Country People" are examples of the traditional confidence game in which a travelling salesman takes advantage of a farmer's daughter (Gentry 113). In both stories Mrs. Crater and Mrs. Hopewell hope that some day there will be a gentleman caller for their daughter. In this they are as manipulative as Amanda in Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie* ; the mother's fixation with a gentleman caller spoils the life of her daughter, Laura, who could have found a new life as a typist.

The old woman in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" attempts to capture a gentleman caller she judges to be a tramp and no one to be afraid of (CS 145), that is he is homeless and may anchor in place where he can find it. Mrs. Crater "ravenous for a son-in-law" (a free farm hand), tries to marry him to her handicapped daughter, Lucynell, who is "a angel of Gawd" (CS 154) pure and innocent.

The authorial design is apparent in the portrayal of the scoundrel. Mr. Shiftlet behaves gallantly *like* a romantic gentleman caller. He tips his brown felt hat at the large blonde girl, who at the sight of the tramp makes excited speechless sounds, "as if she were not in the least afflicted"

and toward the old woman he “swing [s] the hat all the way off” (CS 145). Yet the narrator presents Mr. Shiftlet as an ominous stranger, who looks young but who has “a look of composed dissatisfaction as if he understood life thoroughly” (CS 146). He tells Mrs. Crater, “Nothing is like it used to be, lady. The world is almost rotten” (CS 146).

Mr. Shiftlet is a perennial wanderer, and like Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*, regards a car as a tool indispensable for his mobile life. “The body, lady, is like a house: it don’t go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move...” (CS 152). Obviously, the stranger is interested in the square rusted automobile sitting in the yard for fifteen years. ““That car ain’t run in fifteen year,’ the old woman said. ‘The day my husband died, it quit running’” (CS 146). Again the implication is: the mother and the daughter do not drive; they do not move around; they stay on the farm. Whereas men are always off the farm and on the road in search of excitement as the classic example of Rip Van Winkle, who escapes into the woods with his dog, shows.

Here O’Connor seems to question the validity of gender differentiated realms: woman tied down to domesticity⁴ and man detached from home. (Mrs. McIntyre says, “All I’ve got is the dirt under my feet!” [CS 203]). Curiously enough, Lucynell the daughter looks at Shiftlet “as if he were a bird that had come up very close” (CS 146), and the first word which Lucynell vocalizes is “Burrrtddt ddbirrrttdt.” Mentally retarded as she is, Lucynell dreams of the world beyond the desolate farm where she is stuck for life with her mother.

Since Shiftlet lives a life on the road free from any obligation, social

4) O’Connor herself moved around the country despite the pain due to lupus. After 1955 she could get about only on crutches; still she was able to fly away on trips around the country to speak and read her work. See Stephens 337.

or personal⁵⁾, he believes in the omnipotence of an automobile which he associates with the spirit, not the body, even though the car belongs to the world of matter. "He had always wanted an automobile but he had never been able to afford one before" (CS 154). He works hard on the disused car, and restores it to life; he even paints it dark green. In order to get the much coveted car, however, Mr. Shiftlet must marry Lucynell (=the body). The shrewd old woman in turn lusts for a son-in-law, and agrees to give him extra money in order to secure him as her own. O'Connor's use of the grotesque is consummate here; in offering her daughter Mrs. Crater is offering herself since they have the identical name, a variation on the theme of the double in O'Connor's works.

"If it was ever a man wanted to take her away, I would say, 'No man on earth is going to take that sweet girl of mine away from me!' but if he was to say, 'Lady, I don't want to take her away, I want her right here,' I would say, 'Mister, I don't blame you none. I wouldn't pass up a chance to live in a permanent place and get the sweetest girl in the world myself. You ain't no fool,' I would say" (CS 151).

The scenario the old woman writes for her play seems to work. The confidence man agrees to marry Lucynell, because "he ain't no fool", taking extra seventeen-fifty from the grudging widow. The bride and the bride-groom leave for their honeymoon. On the way he abandons the sweet Lucynell, an "angel of Gawd," at a diner in cold blood but without malice, and is on the move again toward Mobile, "the only city in the state [of Alabama] looking out on the open sea" (Hendin 68-69). Clearly, the abandonment of Lucynell means forfeiting "the comforts of home"—the title for an O'Connor story—because Lucynell is associated

5) O'Connor has a different ending to this story, in which Shiftlet is married and has three children.

with a house, the body which threatens his detachment and disturbs the peace of his mind.

As he hurries toward Mobile, Shiftlet encounters another "hitch-hiker"—he tells the boy at the Hot Spot Lucynell is a hitch-hiker—, which is his double. This encounter with a runaway boy is a reminder of what he has lost in exchange for the car. As Josephine Hendin aptly observes, the boy hitch-hiker "offers an objective recapitulation of his own abandonment of the security of Mrs. Crater's farm and... his own abandonment of his mother" (67). Shiftlet forsakes one hitch-hiker (Lucynell) and picks up another.

He moralizes to the boy about sweet motherhood, calling him "Son": "I got the best old mother in the world so I reckon you only got the second best" (CS 155). "It's nothing so sweet,' Mr. Shiftlet continued, 'as a boy's mother. She taught him his first prayers at her knee, she give love when no other would, she told him what was right and what wasn't, and she seen that he done the right thing. Son,' he said, 'I never rued a day in my life like the one I rued when I left that old mother of mine'" (CS 155). And he repeats what has been said of Lucynell at the Hot Spot: "My mother was a angel of Gawd." His memory of his mother makes Shiftlet depressed and sentimental; as he recalls his innocent childhood momentarily his eyes are "clouded over with a mist of tears" (CS 156).

This reminiscence of the mother figure deserves comment here, since it shows recognition of the mother's "central role in the socialization and supervision of children within the family" (Clinton 39). It is of special importance in the dramatic context of the story that Shiftlet's tribute to his tender and pious mother—"She taught him his first prayers at her knee, she give him love when no other would...."—is contradicted by the boy's "You go to the devil!" (CS 156), another recapitulation of his rejection of Lucynell the sweet innocent girl and Lucynell the formidable mother.

The hitch-hiker's "My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!" (CS 156) is indeed a parody done in black humor of "the popular and pervasive mother cult" (Clinton 39).

Likewise, Shiftlet's persistent denial of the significance of the heart (love)—as soon as he arrives at the farm he talks about the dissection of the heart in Atlanta—is also a negative testimony to his need of love (maternal love). He is hurt when Mrs. Crater (the formidable mother) tells him not to try to "milk" her too much. And at the same time Mrs. Crater's refusal of being "milked" too much can be regarded as a protest against the exploitation of mother cult, which in its practice has taken advantage of tender and pious mothers.

As Shiftlet races down the road to damnation, the innocent Lucynell is left asleep at the Hot Spot, in whom lies the only hope and redemption of the world suggested in the story; there is something untouchable about Lucynell, who is portrayed as innocence incarnate. In this respect, she is the Child asleep in the manger. There is no mother who bends over the sleeping baby; instead the boy at the counter is extremely gentle toward this "angel of Gawd": "The boy bent over again and very carefully touched his finger to a strand of the golden hair" (CS 155).

II

A similar pair of the displaced farm widow and her crippled daughter (Hulga/Joy Hopewell has lost her leg)reappears in "Good Country People." Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, her hired hand, together represent Mrs. Crater, the shrewd calculating mother without a conscience who sells her demented girl to the first man who comes to the farm. Like Shiftlet, Manley Pointer is an itinerant salesman, dealing in dubious commodities disguised as family Bibles, who also takes advantage of the mother and the daughter.

Twice failed in her marriage, Mrs. Hopewell cannot "forgive" her daughter with a Ph. D. in philosophy who remains unmarried at the age of thirty-two. For Mrs. Hopewell a single woman is an odd woman, a scourge upon the family. Woman's place is in the kitchen, which indeed is the stage of the story, where an interminable conversation is carried on. She secretly envies Mrs. Freeman, her social inferior, whose two daughters are the mother's pride: one is already married and pregnant, and the other has many admirers.

However, Mrs. Hopewell is no Mrs. Crater; she is liberal enough (at least so she regards herself) to believe that it is "nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had 'gone through'..." (CS 276). Hulga/Joy has a Ph. D. in philosophy, which leaves her mother at a complete loss: "... You could say, 'My daughter is a nurse,' or 'My daughter is a schoolteacher,' or even 'My daughter is a chemical engineer.' You could not say, 'My daughter is a philosopher.'" This is another illustration of gender differentiation practiced in society, from which Mrs. Hopewell is not free. She deludes herself, therefore, and hoodwinks to the hard reality with cliché responses such as "Nothing is perfect," or "*c'est la vie!*" Like Hulga's Ph. D. and her nihilism, the mother's facile optimism is no solution for life's problems.

Hulga/Joy's positive act of giving herself a name at the age of twenty—one may have offered her a new life away from the farm and the mother, because she christens herself into a second self. Yet ironically, her Ph. D. in philosophy and her new name deprive Joy Hopewell of a feminine gender identity. Thus, she repudiates the role of her mother's sweet good girl, which, however, is a mere gesture performed out of spite, as it becomes clear later in the story. And but for her weak heart, Hulga would be "far from these red hills and *good country people*" (CS 276. Emphasis mine) lecturing at some university. Fortunately, her bad heart

provides Hulga with a legitimate excuse to stay home, which shows Hulga /Joy's fear of independence and of growing up. So at her mother's house "she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it" (CS 276) which makes her look idiotic and like a child.

Her Ph. D. and the name "Hulga" have turned Joy Hopewell into a grotesque, less like other people ; she utters strange things, which however contain a ring of truth in them. She says to her own mother during a meal : "Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*?" Furthermore, she quotes Nicholas de Malebranche⁶), a Cartesian philosopher, "we are not our own light" (CS 276). Hulga has enough sense to realize that "we are not our own light"—that is lacking light we do not know ourselves—"Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*?"

Self-knowledge is a prerequisite for self-liberation and autonomous life. And O'Connor makes it clear through the narrative voice that the mother and the daughter are the one and the same person ; they are a mirror image of each other : "It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year [Hulga/Joy] grew less like other people and more like herself [Mrs. Hopewell] —bloated, rude, and squint-eyed" (CS 276). Which means that the daughter shares not only her mother's appearance but also her self-righteousness and pridefulness. Mrs. Hopewell's only resort in her misery—failed marriages, and her dependency on the likes of Mrs. Freeman, good country people—is that she is not "trash," an echo of Mrs. Crater's "You don't want none of this trash" (CS 151). Hulga/Joy has looked inside and seen what her mother really is. The mother figure is

6) O'Connor plays on the word, malebranche ; Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" has lost one arm. Also, Hulga can be grouped with him, as she too has lost one leg.

not the object of adoration in "Good Country People", either, if not ridiculed as in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." In "Good Country People," the indictment of motherhood is voiced by a daughter and not by a son, as in the former story. If the daughter does not idolize the mother, the daughter would not curse her own mother, as Shiftlet or the boy hitch-hiker does his mother, calling her names, a flea bag and a stinking pole cat.

As has been observed, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" closes with Lucynell stranded at a diner, whose deliverance is not guaranteed, and depends on the kindness of the waiter at the Hot Spot. Hulga/Joy's deliverance is likewise ambiguous in "Good Country People." Her foolish dream of "getting off" the farm with the Bible salesman ends in failure because her hope is founded on falsehood. When the Bible salesman asks Hulga her age, her instinct makes her tell him that she is seventeen. Moreover, she thinks that she has deceived the simple Manley Pointer, one of "good country people." But it is the knowing salesman who takes advantage of Hulga the philosopher and leaves her alone up on the hayloft *without* her glasses and her wooden leg, which have made her unique.

The seduction of Hulga/Joy is complete when she agrees to let Pointer see and then have her wooden leg. Carol Shloss observes that the theft of her wooden leg, which is "the only obliquely identifiable value in Hulga's sour life," breaks through "her detached and ironic self-image" (44). This weak-hearted, cool-headed atheist is moved by this seemingly innocent man with a sweet voice. She prides herself that "I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing" (CS 287), but she is not aware that her glasses are taken off. Hulga looks into the hollow sky and then down at a black ridge and farther into what appears to be two green swelling lakes. This landscape she sees from the hayloft does not strike her as anything extraordinary, for she seldom pays any close attention to

her surroundings (CS 287). She does not realize that the Bible salesman has taken off her glasses, that is despite her brag that she is “one of those people who see *through* to nothing,” she does not really see anything. Hence the following revelation sounds hollow: “She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. . . . It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously in his” (CS 289).

Soon Hulga becomes insecure; without her artificial leg which is the most sacred thing about herself, she feels “entirely dependent on him” (CS 289). The Bible salesman turns a devil and mesmerizes the philosopher Hulga into Joy Hopewell again, a sweet innocent girl, as her name suggests, the mother’s girl. She pleads to him to return her the leg: “‘You’re a Christian!’ she hissed. ‘You’re a fine Christian! You’re just like them all—say one thing and do another. You’re a perfect Christian, you’re. . . .’” (CS 290). But nothing moves alias Manley Pointer and she is left sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight.

Yet, the violence done to Hulga has transformed her back to Joy Hopewell, as she says that “It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.” She is naive enough to believe that Pointer is just a “nice dull young man” for it is Hulga/Joy Hopewell herself that is nice, dull, and innocent. She is the one who’d like to believe in one’s being good and simple. Just the same, Hulga now realizes at least that he is not so simple, which truth escapes the attention of Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman who remain unchanged; and their self-righteousness smells like the onion shoots they are pulling out in the pasture.

On the other hand, in exchange for the humiliation she suffers alone on the hayloft, Hulga attains to knowledge, which is to lead her to salvation. Unlike Lucynell in “The Life You Save May Be Your Own,”

after a shock of recognition Hulga/Joy learns finally how to take care of herself. She has come to a realization that she is not so smart as she thought she was, and that she is no better than "good country people." The bitterness of this self-realization has its own reward ; she has looked inside and saw what she was not. Now it becomes clear that the accusation she has made of her mother's blindness and self-complacency is really directed to nobody but herself.

The mother and the daughter in O'Connor's stories examined above presents no pleasant picture extolling a harmonious relation between the two. They are rendered as formidable, determined, and un-sentimental women "with none of childish coy femininity sometimes associated with Southern women of their social standing" (Stephens 338). These prideful and self-congratulatory individuals are brought low in a most grotesque manner, as in the case of Hulga/Joy Hopewell in "Good Country People." O'Connor's fictional women are physically repugnant and their retributions at the end are made in such relentless way that any reader of her stories finds it hard to believe that the author has any sympathy toward her characters. The preceding discussion of the mother and the daughter has tried to show that it is the design of O'Connor's imaginative world and her vision of life which she saw in terms of damnation or salvation.

Flannery O'Connor has chosen woman rather than man as the recipient of grace, hence woman is more redeemable than man. Neither Mr. Shiftlet nor Manley Pointer will ever repent or mend his way. Whereas Lucynell is left intact at the Hot Spot to be taken care of, or hopefully to take care of herself. Hulga/Joy returns to her original self after the violence done to her. Like Lucynell deserted by her bride-groom at a strange diner, Hulga is left on the hayloft, but on her own farm.

As her critics agree, O'Connor knew from the very beginning exactly what was her theme. The doctrine of original sin was instinctual with her, as Martha Stephens notes⁷⁾, she also believed in the possibility of salvation, in the gratuitous working of grace in the lives of the prideful and the forsaken—Lucynell, Hulga/Joy and their likes. She used to tell her friends that "All human nature vigorously resists grace, because grace changes us and the change is painful."⁸⁾ Violence in her stories is done psychologically and spiritually, not the actual rape, which is only dramatically suggested, and symbolically enacted.

In Christianity and other religions, woman has traditionally been considered unclean, more sinful than man and therefore less redeemable. Given the scheme of things in O'Connor's works, it can be suggested that O'Connor in her study of faith and belief has created a new paradigm in which woman is made worthy of salvation. Her female characters are either physical or emotional grotesques (more often than not their grotesquery is both physical *and* psychological), which indicates their sinfulness, pridefulness, and self-righteousness. Hence woman is more likely to be saved, paradoxically, because of her sinfulness, pridefulness, and self-righteousness.

In *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne prepares the way to atonement for his adulterous minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, and condemns Hester Prynne in life here *and* hereafter. In her stories here considered and in many of her other stories, Flannery O'Connor has written a revisionist story of sin and salvation, and has demonstrated that her fictional women through their grotesquery—violence done by art—are transformed into something beautiful at the end.

7) "Flannery O'Connor," pp. 336-342.

8) Quoted in Stephens' "Flannery O'Connor," p. 338.

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要 約

〈落ちた偶像〉と南部女性作家（Ⅱ）

——フラナリー・オコーナーの短編にみる母と娘——

別 府 恵 子

この小論は、現実社会および文学において類型化されてきた「南部貴婦人像」とアメリカ南部女性作家たちの関わりを彼らの創造する女性像をとおして考察する論考の第二部である。前号の第一部では、キャサリン・アン・ポーターの女たち、特に作家の分身ともいえるミランダ・ゲイ（Miranda Gay）の成長過程を辿ることにより、家族の伝説に伝えられる「南部貴婦人」=the Southern Belle の実体が露呈されることを検討した。

本論では、フラナリー・オコーナー（Flannery O'Connor, 1925-64）を取り挙げる。オコーナーの短い生涯は、紅班性狼蒼という難病との闘いであった。彼女は寡作作家ではあるが、密度の濃い多くの優れた短編を生み出した。「私にとって人生の意味は、キリストによる救済という点にある」と作者自ら述べるように、オコーナーの作品はキリスト教信仰と魂の救いの問題を宗教的・哲学的に扱う。

“The Life You Save May Be Your Own” (1953) と “Good Country People” (1955) という二つの作品にみられる母と娘（それぞれの分身である女たち）の描写とその物語をとおして、オコーナーは墮落した人間がその（原）罪故に神の恩寵に預かるというパラドックスを提示する。

従来、キリスト教はじめ既成の宗教においては、伝統的に女は不浄なもの、従って「救い難し」とされてきたのであるが、オコーナーは、女たち——ルーシーネル母娘、ホープウェル母娘（とくに Hulga/Joy）——をあえて醜く、嫌悪すべき人間として描くことにより、逆説的に彼らが、神の溢れる恵に預かるという罪と救いの「修正パラダイム」をつくり出したといえる。