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CHANGING PATTERNS OF SOUTHERN LADY'S INFLUENCE
FROM THE OLD TO THE CONTEMPORARY SOUTH
IN ELLEN GLASGOW'S AND WALKER PERCY'S ŒUVRE

In the antebellum times patriarchs believed that the Southern lady defined the image of the South itself, as she was inseparable from her background (GLASGOW, *A Certain Measure*, 82). The myth of the Southern lady, invented and sanctioned by Southern gentlemen, created an image of an aristocratic, pure, loving, and submissive lady. Her apparent duty was to play an ornamental role in her husband's house; however, in a larger perspective, her maternal devotion and moral uprightness were to guarantee perpetration of white hegemony.

Southern patriarchs did not want to waste all the virtues which they had been ascribing to their women through the myth of the Southern lady; therefore, in order to create a practical reason for upholding the myth, they attributed mysterious power and great significance to her demeanor—to her influence on a husband, family and society in general. The mythical image of woman as an innocent and inferior creature was enriched by her miraculous power to wield influence upon those less perfect around her. However, this imposed myth forced ladies to choose the “right” behavior in spite of themselves, or of their desires and hopes, “the Southern woman, who had borne the heaviest burden of the old slavery and the new freedom, was valued, in sentiment, chiefly as an ornament to civilization, and as a restraining influence over the nature of man” (GLASGOW, *A Certain Measure*, 97-98). Therefore, from the beginning a woman's role was to inspire and tactfully mend her husband's ways. Virginius Littlepage is an obvious

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example: “he was one of those Virginian pillars of society that [were] held upright less by singleness of heart than by the firm support of a woman’s influence” (*They Stooped to Folly*, 3).

The Southern belles in the Old South were *a priori* satisfied with their position so they did not question it. In her œuvre, Ellen Glasgow often has recourse to a presentation of a changing conception of female heavenly influence which reflects metamorphoses in Southern mentality. On the pages of her early novels, readers are acquainted with satisfied womanly women who sacrifice their lives in order to “bring out the best in a man” (*They Stooped to Folly*, 87). All ladies who adopt the doctrine that one of their main objectives in life is to reform a man must be acquainted with Reverend Mullen’s sermon, in one form or another: “What womanly woman desired was to remain an Incentive, an Ideal, and Inspiration” (*The Miller of Old Church*, 130). They all might honestly believe that there is “no end to the influence of a good woman” (*They Stooped to Folly*, 173).

Female waiting was elevated to some sacred ritual as it reflected the subtle and prolonged influence a lady was supposed to have on her husband. With the new morality during the era of the New South women no longer “waited silently for what they wanted, spinning their intricate webs with the eternal patience of nature” (*They Stooped to Folly*, 303), which caused apparent and justifiable regrets among patriarchs. Virginius Littlepage deplores the situation because for him

there could be nothing nobler in women than the beauty of long waiting and wifely forbearance. ... Never had woman appeared more desirable, never had she exerted a finer influence upon manners and customs, than in those legendary periods when she had disposed her limbs in the classic posture of waiting. (*They Stooped to Folly*, 333)

Victoria Littlepage’s life exemplifies the changes the myth of female influence has undergone starting in the postbellum era. As befits a Southern belle, Victoria has been trained to inspire men for betterment:

In her youth all that a lady needed to learn ... was the easier process of how to become an edifying example. As a bride, she had fervently longed to soothe and tame, as well as inspire, Virginius; and though she would have died sooner than admit the fact, the first year of her marriage might have been less disappointing if he had magnanimously cultivated a lower nature. (*They Stooped to Folly*, 210)

Undeniably it takes two to tango, and as much depends on a lady's convincing ability to influence as on a gentleman's willingness, or unconscious agreement, to be molded by his better half. Mr. Littlepage boasts: "[a]ll men do not react in the same way to an influence. They are not all blessed with my aptitude for perfectibility. ... Only it crossed my mind that it really takes two to make an influence" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 80-81). Even though Victoria says she has "ceased to try to change [Virginus's] point of view about anything" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 177), she "steadfastly ignored her failure, and had preserved, with unaltered sweetness, in the pretense that Virginus and marriage and human nature in general were all exactly what she wished them to be" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 73-74). Convincing herself that her life with Virginus is satisfying, and abiding by the mythical influence she is supposed to exert on her husband, Victoria discovers this role to be tiring and unrewarding:¹ "she had done her best to live up to what a husband of the nineties expected, though she had found, as she so often reminded herself, that being an influence is very exhausting" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 191). By questioning the female influence, Victoria asks: "after all, what is the right kind of woman? And why should any kind of woman be responsible for the moral sense of a man?" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 146). She questions the very assumptions of the myth of the Southern lady.

Quite interestingly, Mrs. Littlepage has more tangible influence on Virginus after she is gone from his life. Victoria's death transforms her into a restraining power over her husband's life. A dull existence with the exacting and perfect Victoria gives Virginus an excuse to flirt with Amy Dalrymple, while Victoria's death reveals his total lack of understanding and appreciation of his wife's goodness (*They Stooped to Folly*, 318). Thus, Virginus seems to fall into the category of men who, according to Louisa Goddard, "seem never to fall in love with their wives until they have lost them and can fit them into a halo" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 330). Virginus idealizes the late Victoria to the point of erasing her perfections that have abashed him, "[c]rowned, radiant, incomparable, a new Victoria, one whom he had never even imagined," "who resembled the actual Victoria as little as a star resembles a glowworm, had won at last his unalterable fidelity" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 320).

¹ In a critical opinion about her daughter's influence on Martin — "Mary Victoria tries to rule him by reason alone; and reason, however admirable it may be, is the last thing men ever look for in women" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 254) — Victoria offers a subliminal message about the proper elements that should be employed while influencing a male. It should be a mixture of reason, love and a lot of patience and waiting.

Accusations might be made against Victoria's rising awareness of the futility of female influence (she probes into it when she faces the terminal illness) but without a general open-mindedness, carefully hidden from patriarchs under the surface of a dull and perfect exterior, and a questioning nature Victoria would not be able to shed her youthful belief that it is "natural for every woman to believe that love, especially if it is her love, will work a miracle in a man" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 197). Even though Victoria has a soothing influence on Virginius's habits, she never manages to fully change them. It is therefore most likely that if she knew Mr. Crowborough she would agree with his biting opinion that: "No woman alive ever changed a man's habits" and all she could do was to hide them (*Life and Gabriella*, 155).

Although the assumptions of the myth of female influence were noble, they are perverted in the hands of overzealous ladies who want to correct their husbands' behavior or when gentlemen are unable to withstand the pressure of influence. Mary Victoria who sees her husband, Martin Welding, as perfectly malleable material is a viable example. She believes him to be a fallen archangel whom she will correct even if he does not want it (*They Stooped to Folly*, 73). Mary Victoria's life is devoted to doing good; she is decorated in the Balkans for her war service, but her compulsive reforming of others is not solely her inner call. Victoria, her mother, admits that it isn't Mary Victoria's "fault if she is the kind of woman who becomes an inspiration to others" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 117) — there is no sense denying it, as it is the upbringing and indoctrination which metamorphose Mary Victoria into a monster of influence. The more others lend themselves to her influence, the more reassured in her actions she is; she craves "complete domination of the world within reach of her influence. The wider her sphere of inspiration becomes, the more flattering it is to her vanity" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 132). Martin stops trying to live up to the exalted idea of the perfect life of the Southern gentleman. All he does in his marriage is disabuse Mary Victoria of her mistaken belief in male perfectibility.

Mary Victoria assumes that it is her right, privilege and duty to shape others' lives, even if it means imposing her vision of their lives on them. Her influence foreshadows women who more consciously deploy this myth of their influence to their own advantages, namely the victimizers. Even though some men question female influence, the majority of patriarchs agree to accept the heavenly and soothing female influence either because they are naïve or because to believe otherwise would mean defying the very assumptions of the myth they have created and upheld. Thus, from Victoria Little-

page's compulsive and "ardent desire to soothe, to ease, to comfort, and if necessary, to convert to some higher ideal" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 226), which sends Virginius through "the painful process of being molded into an ideal" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 73), it is but a small step to victimization. In this vein, perfect and exacting wives turn their husbands' lives into hell.

Although female influence is correcting by nature, it is often smothering as well, even if sometimes ladies are not aware of this. The New Southern ladies are more aware of the ways they can utilize their influence. Surely Charley Gracey also could imagine a happier life than that with Jane, his exacting wife. She apparently marries Charley in order to reform and inspire him, and only this can give her pleasure and fulfillment in marriage. Mr. Gracey confesses his fatigue with Jane's incessant correction: "I haven't eaten a thing I cared about, nor drank a drop I wanted, nor used a bad word I was fond of, since I married, without being nagged at about it. She loved me for my vices, and yet she hasn't let me keep a single one—not even the smallest—not even cigarettes. Nag!" (*Life and Gabriella*, 49). Charley is aware that he is not an angel; however, no man is able to withstand this influence. He complains to Gabriella, his liberal thinking sister-in-law, "[i]t's her infernal virtue I can't sand, Gabriella. No man could stand it without taking to drink" (*Life and Gabriella*, 48). It comes as no surprise, once Charley's conversion to the right ways is successful, that Jane looks for other potential victims of her suffocating influence: "she appeared ever so slightly, and in the most refined manner possible, to revenge herself on the other members of her family" (*Life and Gabriella*, 503).

Even if the outcome of Jane Gracey's reformation of her husband is painful and protracted, the motivation behind it is noble—to mend Charley's ways and consequently bring him closer to the image of the impeccable Southern gentleman. This cannot be said about Angela Gay of *The Miller of Old Church*, though. She sacrifices the lives of two gentlemen in her family to her comfort and to her perverted vision of the world. Mrs. Gay chooses to exert a soft yet overpowering influence, which gave "a sensation of being smothered in scented swansdown" (*The Miller of Old Church*, 317), on her male relatives as she realizes that "[i]ndirect influence alone remained to her, and she surmised that her ultimate triumph would depend upon the perfection of her indirectness" (*The Miller of Old Church*, 326). By insinuating purity, weakness and inferiority, Angela Gay is able to terrorize her family. Her brother-in-law, Jonathan, sees through the idealization of the Southern belle and her angelic status but he is still totally devoted to Angela; she

“represented, indeed, the spiritual influence in his life, and there was no one on earth whose respect or affection he valued so highly” (*The Miller of Old Church*, 102). Her softness and delicacy get her further than any obvious nagging, “if she’d been bold and bad instead of soft and good, she couldn’t have done half the harm!” (*The Miller of Old Church*, 175). Mrs. Gay simply smothers with good intentions. Frederick McDowell rightly claims that in depiction of Angela Gay Ellen Glasgow captures an interesting process: “woman as ‘inspiration’ is transformed into a woman as ‘devourer,’ and she destroys without ever having had to exert herself” (*Ellen Glasgow*, 98-99).

By the virtue of perfectly embodying the myth of the Southern lady, these women subconsciously plague their patriarchs with the demands of living up to this idealized vision. Meekly accepting her position not only does not deprive the Southern lady of her privileged influence on males but enhances it. A belle is to inspire her man with her goodness, innocence and virtue. When she rejects her role she is deemed a hindrance: “[t]here were myths that made willful, inconvenient women into ‘impediments’ and docile women into ‘inspirations’” (THIÉBAUX, 141-2). This relegation of women to the status of either a stimulus or an obstacle in gentlemen’s lives is wittily commented upon by Ellen Glasgow:

Fallen from its high estate, damaged by time and chance, and debased by ignoble adversity, this once supreme cult lingered on as a popular superstition until, at the end of the First World War, the inferior myth of woman as an impediment was born of an irregular union between democracy and disenchantment. (*A Certain Measure*, 231)

Egalitarian and feminist thought of the second half of the twentieth century would verify and augment Southern mythical female influence.

When Mary Victoria of *They Stooped to Folly* realizes her husband is impervious to her inspiring, yet corrective, influence, she does not feel disheartened. She simply changes the object of her inspiration as she admits to her father: “Even though I have lost love, I may still become a power for good in the life of my child” (350). This avowal is symptomatic of Southern white women whose maternal role explains their meddling in other people’s lives. Moreover, motherhood defines a woman’s role in society — household servant, bearer of children and carrier of traditions for the next generations. Maternity has been the noblest calling for the white Southern woman since the Old South; however, the concept of mother looks different across the social lines.

When aristocratic or upper-class Southern belles become wives and mothers, their other social traits are annihilated. They have to subordinate all “their needs, dreams, and desires and ambitions to those of their husbands and children, ... [have to] labor without complaint, love selflessly, expecting respect and gratitude in return, but not real power” (TRACY, 120). Patriarchs perceive motherhood as a sacred occupation, which demands from a woman total abdication of her personality and interests. Southern gentlemen, being highly traditionalist, appropriate this patriarchal explanation of the destiny of a woman's life. Therefore, maternal functions determine woman's existence and subservient position in both family and the society.

According to the patriarchal paradigm, motherhood brings tangible rewards to women. Loss of health and energy are apparently compensated by affection and the satisfaction of having well brought-up offspring. Motherly love and influence is, however, a double-edged sword. Apart from the obvious beneficial effect on a child's psyche in terms of morality and emotionality, affectionate demonstrations of love towards sons are depicted as emasculating, corruptive and infantilizing (TRACY, 105). As much as emotional frigidity is a vice, possessiveness towards children is not a desirable feminine trait either. In some cases the mother's possessiveness proves stronger than the man's love for a lady.

Ellen Glasgow chooses to present, in more detail in her fiction, mother-daughter relations, which more clearly demonstrate the ambiguity of motherly love and influence. From a patriarchal standpoint, the mother is to instruct her daughter how to gracefully accept her future role as a wife and mother.² Lucy Pendleton, Virginia's mother, indoctrinates her daughter with the belief that wifehood and motherhood are a woman's sole aim in life; she ignites in Virginia an evasive reality and enhances her distaste for change. Employing her mother's strategy of not seeing the sham, Virginia prefers not to see Lucy's sacrifice; hence her mother's “pathetic cheerfulness, so characteristic of the women of her generation, was the first thing, perhaps, that a stranger would have noticed about her face; yet it was a trait which neither her husband nor her child had ever observed” (*Virginia*, 35). Glasgow presents the strains and burdens of Lucy Pendleton's life, yet Virginia, with her

² Nancy Chodorow points to that mother's role in developing “expectations of women's unique self-sacrificing qualities” (*The Reproduction of Mothering*, 23). Ellen Glasgow seems to show this model when her fictional mothers do not support their daughters in their process of self-becoming. They encourage their daughters' sacrifice and submissiveness so that patriarchs can maintain their position.

deeply inbred evasive idealism, never notices her mother's martyrdom. Lucy never teaches her daughter how to see and think for herself; thus, her duty, seen from a patriarchal perspective, is fulfilled—she brings up another generation of Southern belles who will never challenge patriarchal assumptions. Thus, as Linda Wagner explains,

[t]he chief role of these sanctified wives and mothers in Glasgow's early fiction is to provide stability for their less complacent daughters, the willful 'modern' women—Mariana Musin, Rachel Gavin, Virginia Pendleton, Gabriella Carr. Mothers give love and fearful wisdom; their advice conveys vividly the social and familial expectations for the heroines. (19)

In reality, daughters do not need placatory explanations and deception but rather encouragement to rebel against the patriarchal system. Therefore, as daughters accept their mothers' lot, and as mothers do nothing to change their daughters' fate, these mother-daughter relations are pro-patriarchy and thwart female development and liberation. Virginia cannot win her husband back and compete with another woman, as her "conception of what being a wife and mother [means] absorbs all her strength and potential as a human being" (WAGNER, 46). Her maternity and housewifery make her look dowdy for her husband (THIÉBAUX, 105) and her outdated ideas make her too conventional for her daughters to even consider asking Virginia for advice.

Ellen Glasgow's oeuvre provides a general overview of genteel mothers, of whom Lucy Pendleton seems to be the most benign example. The fragile ladies find great power in motherhood, which robs them of individuality, by perpetrating evasive idealism. Ellen Glasgow's troubled relationship with her mother, Anne Jane Gholson Glasgow, finds its way into her creation of neurosthenic, depressive, and tyrannical mothers who through self-sacrifice take revenge on patriarchal oppressors and are highly ineffectual in changing the fate of their daughters (DONOVAN, 130). Mrs. Carr finds masochistic pleasure in the marital problems of her younger daughter, Jane Gracey, who under her mother's tuition becomes "the frozen image of martyrdom" (*Life and Gabriella*, 3). Mrs. Burden is anxious for her daughter to show signs of remorse and pain, which are traditionally expected from a woman once she falls into ruin, because according to her it is "immodest to recover from a seduction" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 121). In this context, Milly Burden's criticism of her mother should not come as a surprise: "I don't even like her. She ruined my life. I had a right to my life, and she has ruined it" (*They Stooped to Folly*, 27).

Presenting the vast maternal influence of ladies who lack the power and the will to guide their daughters into the future is Glasgow's calculated strategy to covertly undermine the long-established image of mothers perpetuated by the myth of the Southern lady:

By slanting her readers against the very women characters who should be beloved and respected, and by allowing these women to glimpse the promise lost for themselves, Glasgow establishes sympathy with those female characters who are trying to exist outside the tradition—she in effect justifies the rebellious daughters. (WAGNER, 19)

By hampering the emotional and intellectual development of their daughters, genteel mothers become carriers of white supremacy. They are the link between the generations and fail to improve the lives of the next one. Adrienne Rich explicates that “[t]he most important thing one woman can do for another is to illuminate and expand her sense of actual possibilities. ... As daughters we need mothers who want their freedom and ours” (246), and mothers in Glasgow's fiction fail to give either. The resultant mother-daughter rift at the turn of the century between the generations of ladies is inevitable as

daughters began to experience their mothers' lives as oppressive. Mothers, ignorant of the new world their daughters wished to enter, pressed inappropriate advice and sought to control where earlier they had gently aided. Many mothers experienced as a personal rejection their daughters' repudiation of the domestic role they, the mothers, had so faithfully followed. Harsh generational conflict broke forth as psychological factors compounded institutional change. (SMITH-ROSENBERG, “Hearing Women's Words,” 33)

Motherly love, and resultant motherly influence, becomes an insurmountable obstacle on the way to self-discovery of the young Southern ladies. Milly Burden's exasperation with her mother's impact on her life (“After being by myself, I could bear mother-love so much better”) dismays Mrs. Victoria Littlepage: “Bear mother-love! What an idea! What an expression! Surely civilization was in imminent danger if the noblest sentiment of the race, and not only of the race but of all sacred and profane literature, had become a burden instead of a blessing to the young” (*They Stooped to Folly*, 241).

The ideal of Southern female influence not only survives into the second half of the twentieth century but flourishes. Southern ladies personify modes

of existence to their patriarchs — they either enhance or hamper gentlemen's growth. Female inferiority deprived belles of the privilege of choosing their own way of life in both the Old and New South; and even though in more contemporary times Southern women can decide about their own destiny, personal or professional, they still do not seem to have gone as far as gentlemen have. In the realm of fiction, for instance in Walker Percy's oeuvre, women still are, according to Timothy Nixon, deployed as inspirations or hindrances to male characters (50) who are struggling with identity crises in a world ruled by moral and gender relativism. In this sense, Southern ladies in the second half of the twentieth century, as presented in Walker Percy's fiction, can be easily categorized into two groups, or influences: the "doubles," women who manage to turn men back onto the right path of life and "false doubles," women who are true impediments to a gentleman's path to a harmonious life with himself, the myth and the reality. Even though some of Percy's female characters are by no means models of virtue (THARPE, 27), at least in the traditional understanding of the word, if we treat the past morality and the paradigms of behavior as a yardstick to which existing situation could be compared and found wanting, they, for instance Kate Curter of *The Moviegoer*, Ellen Oglethorpe of *Love in the Ruins*, and Allie Huger of *The Second Coming*, still manage to reform and inspire modern Southern gentlemen.

Percy inherits the postmodern perspective on the dichotomous female influence, either of inspiration or hampering, from past times. However, he adds a religious dimension to women's role in gentlemen's lives. "Female characters in Percy's writing," as Nixon notes, "are inspirations or hindrances to male characters searching for truth; they are not spiritual questers themselves" ("The Exclusionary Nature of *The Moviegoer*," 50). The role of a woman in postmodern times is to inspire a gentleman to take on the new role; however, Percy never allows a lady to participate fully in her partner's spiritual and social awakening.³

Kate Cutrer's influence on Binx has been widely commented on by critics; however, as far as its corrective value is concerned, the critical response is not so homogenous. On the one hand, Gary Ciuba sees Kate as submissive and dependant, claiming that "Kate searched for a lord who would authorize her to act by becoming the center of her life, and she apparently recognized Binx's transcendent egotism. Yet in choosing the moviegoer as her divine

³ Gary Ciuba notes that "women of faith as Kate, Ellen, and Allie are depicted as still living amid the ruins of these final scenes, they never achieve a religious understanding that receives the same affirmation in the novel as the spiritual vision of Binx, Tom, and Will" (21).

mover she reduced belief to mindless idolatry" (89). It is difficult to agree with Ciuba's opinion, as he excludes from the analysis of Kate's behavior the intentionality of her posing as inferior. Believing that Kate inspires Binx by obediently abiding by the patriarchally ascribed role for her underestimates the complexity of Kate's psychological strategy. Kate accepts her subordinate status in order to compel Binx's feelings of superiority and consequently his protective instincts towards those weaker than him. Nixon remarks that "Kate's inspiring Binx comes about because of her vulnerability and passivity. Finding someone more despairing than himself seems to be what leads Binx to his salvation" (58). Thanks to Kate, he can re-embrace the social position which he rejected once his identity crisis sent him on the search. "As a southern gentleman, Binx may now make decisions, take responsibility, be gentle but authoritative. At the end of the novel, then, both are climbing into the shell of southern tradition in the hope of surviving the middle of the twentieth century" (JONES, 7). Kate is the reason for and catalyst behind Binx's changes⁴ but the dependence, guidance and protection is not one-sided. They save each other from despair by understanding the problem; thus, their dependence becomes mutual.

Southern traditions "deprive Kate of the chance to seek identity and autonomy while offering Binx that very opportunity. For the tradition of the southern lady, though not of the southern gentleman, is a tradition that specifically denies the self" (JONES, 8). Ellen Oglethorpe of *Love in the Ruins* serves as the same catalyst for Tom More's, her boss and later husband, move to an ethical plane with all its responsibilities and duties. The character of Miss Oglethorpe would benefit from a closer presentation;⁵ otherwise she just falls into one of the categories of women who affect Tom's life. Nonetheless, she is a salutary influence on Tom by bearing in mind present actions and their future consequences. Ellen gradually becomes more than just a secretary. She embodies the spiritual journey Tom has undergone throughout his life: from over-spiritual and romantic wife Doris, through lustful Moira and Lola, who both symbolize "man's fate, his inherent com-

⁴ Nixon claimed that "Binx's cousin Kate, on the other hand, inspires him with the knowledge necessary to make his leap of faith," (51) "[l]ike so many deified female images in this culture, Kate has become the path upon which the male climbs to his transcendence" (57) and "Kate is an inspiration for Binx along his path to spiritual enlightenment. She is at other times the purpose of his enlightenment, when she needs protecting" (59).

⁵ Tharpe opines that in *Love in the Ruins* "women are hardly more than types, even his prim nurse Ellen. Moira is a dumb blonde, Lola is the embodiment of sensual potential, and Ellen is the sturdy keeper of the keys" (28).

mitment to sex” (THARPE, 82), to a more traditional vision of a woman — Ellen. Even if she is not conventionally religious, “[i]t somehow happens that the strict observance of her religion gives her leave to be free with her own person. Her principles allows her a kind of chaste wantonness” (*Love in the Ruins*, 155). Jac Tharpe brilliantly describes Ellen as “a good Presbyterian who settles for no nonsense in either religion or sex. She is designed to have children, not indulge in the flesh for the pleasure of it” (83). This description of Miss Oglethorpe shows signs of the past vision of the Southern lady so prolifically portrayed by Ellen Glasgow. The shift from the sensual Lola and Moira to the religious and spiritual Ellen marks Tom’s transcendence of the aesthetic life, worthy of Don Juan and Faust, and his embrace of his new-found identity and peace in love and marriage to Ellen.

By their enlightening influence Kate Cutrer, Allie Huger, and Ellen Oglethorpe save their male counterparts. Religious though she is, Ellen is conspicuously absent from the final scene of *Love in the Ruins* as if she does “not consciously and completely participate in the holy kingdom that seems to be the particularly male province” (CIUBA, 167-168). She can save the abstracted Tom as her religiousness is very pragmatic:

Ellen’s emphasis on obligation is precisely what the reckless More needs. The failed physician and lapsed Catholic must return to his practice — the everyday duties of being a doctor and a disciple. Tom concludes that her good works and his faith might have enabled the two of them save Christianity; instead, their achievement is less grandiose. They simply save each other. (CIUBA 160)

Their mutual love and ultimate devotion makes it possible for them to rise from the ruins of love. Nonetheless, as in case of Binx and Kate, a woman is the gate to transcendence but she is never allowed to enter it; Gary Ciuba explicates this paradox in reference to their love: “The love of Tom and Ellen makes it possible for Tom, but not for Ellen, to live in a world of extraordinary unity, where opposites converge in the life of consecrated flesh — the Eucharist and the feast of the Incarnation” (CIUBA, 168).

The love and devotion Kate and Ellen bestow on their partners symbolizes their integrity and emotional preponderance rather than a forced abidance by the patriarchally accepted relations between men and women. Allie Huger of *The Second Coming* is another double of her male counterpart. She is the first female in Percy’s fiction given her own voice in the narrative. Will’s relationship with Allie is based on getting to know each other and

honoring the gender differences, as well as partnership and seeing each other as individual personalities which in itself requires respect towards the other person. It is quite possible that they understand each other so well because they both have problems with the surrounding world and understanding what is exactly expected of them. Deprived of Allie's presence and her positive influence, Will is trapped again in acting roles ascribed to him by others. As Will cannot locate himself in the outside world without Allie's help, he again mistakenly tries to make everybody happy with his old patterns of unauthentic behavior. Unknowingly, Allie becomes his savior—the sheer memory of her presence in his life sets Will's moral compass right.

Their self-giving and helping each other enables them to start the journey of coming fully into consciousness. They both need each other; Will needs Allie to lift him up when he falls during his fugue states and she needs him for interpretation. As Allie appears to be a sign from God for Will, he makes a choice to live with her and God; "Allie is Will's second coming. Since the same apocalyptic rhythm has shaped her search, Percy's doubles find their consummation in each other. And this love leads to the clearest intimation of God's entry into their lives" (CIUBA, 218). However, like Kate and Ellen, Allie is not fully a religious searcher, she is just a path to transcendence for Will as her love strengthens Will's ability to make choices as well as his acceptance of responsibilities. Thanks to communication, understanding and an ability to empathize they share a communion of minds.

Yet there are also women who seem to be false doubles for gentlemen: Aunt Emily and Binx's mother of *The Moviegoer*, Kitty and Rita Vaught of *The Last Gentleman*, Lola Rhoades and Moira Schaffner of *Love in the Ruins*, and Margot Lamar of *Lancelot*. They are true impediments on the gentlemen's paths to successful lives. Before Binx finds intersubjectivity in his union with Kate Cutrer, he has to fight two opposing influences of his mother and his Aunt Emily. Anna Castagna, Binx's mother, a Catholic and folksy nurse, marries into the Bolling family as a nurse to Binx's father. She is never accepted by her husband's kin because of her different cultural background. After Binx's father's death, she assumes her second husband's name, Smith—the name itself is symbolic of her changed social status. Once part of an aristocratic family, she is now a common woman who lives in a cottage near New Orleans. She becomes a very practical person, who rules out any considerations of God and religion and thus she "functions as an antithesis to the spirituality of her son" (NIXON, 55). As much as Kate is an inspiration for Binx, his mother becomes a hindrance as her vision of life

is steeped in immanence: “Binx dislikes his mother for her meniality. By being stuck in the everyday, she dissuades her son from transcending” (NIXON, 59). Luckily, with neither Aunt Emily nor his mother is “his rapport consistent and dependable” (HARDY, *The Fiction of Walker Percy*, 31). Therefore, he abandons the conflicting heritages and lifestyles as they do not offer much help for his tormented identity.

Caught in a vise between those two contradictory influences, Binx has to opt for one. The mother’s everydayness reminds him of a zombie state when one does not know one is in predicament. His Aunt’s Southern stoic tradition offers only grim pessimism and heroism in the face of death but it does not show him how to live the ordinary life. Aunt Emily awaits Armageddon to vindicate her low opinion about society in decline. Her certainty of actions and convictions affects others’ decisions as well. She is “seen as a force trying to prevent the protagonist from coming to fulfillment” (NIXON, 55). She concocts roles for people whom she could influence incommensurate with their true nature.

Her transformative command of the people around her lacks any contact with reality whatsoever: when she edifies Binx, for example, she does not even look at him (*The Moviegoer*, 27). The person whom Aunt Emily desires to affect most is Binx, the last male of the Bolling family. During the trip to Chicago, Kate and Binx unsuccessfully attempt to avoid the spurious conception of themselves which Aunt Emily imposes upon them; however, in the end they both manage to resist her influence to some degree, and become truly themselves. Emily’s dissatisfaction and disappointment with Kate and Binx is so strong that it impairs their assurance about their future.

Like the ladies in Binx’s life, women in Will Barrett’s life represent potential paths in life: Kitty Vaught offers clichéd and prosaic life whereas life with Rita Vaught would equal abstraction from himself. Each of them is a hindrance to the development of Will’s identity and integrity. Only in the middle age is he able to find the perfect partner — Allie Huger. Not much intellectual depth can be ascribed to Kitty, his first love, as she does not try to understand Will’s problem; however, what is worse her fancy for her lesbian ex-sister-in-law coupled with her proclivity for the common and clichéd become unbearable for Will. The posh and self-indulgent life of social stability, which Kitty wants to lure Will into, proves to be a death-in-life state (to use Binx’s expression). If Will were to choose the life of Kitty’s consumerism and materialism, his chances of leading life with a woman who understood him and was in harmony with him would be infinitesimal. And even if Will wants to continue mindlessly chasing Kitty, from the beginning the attempts

are successfully obstructed by Rita Vaught, Kitty's ex sister-in-law. Although a Georgian, Rita is a successful woman who pursues her professional career in New York. She manipulates not only Kitty, but also makes the rest of the family believe she is unselfish in her attempts to patronize them. She meddles in everybody's affairs to her own ends.

Just as Kitty and Rita Vaught act as distractions from Will's search for himself, Tom More's women, Moira Schaffner and Lola Rhoades, are both false doubles, diverting his attention from the ethical life he will finally embrace with Ellen. Moira, More's assistant in the Love Clinic, lives for rare perfect moments while Tom wants to share ordinary evenings with her (*Love in the Ruins*, 130). Despite this difference, Moira manages to occupy Tom's mind with her beautiful face and licentiousness. Her exclamations, such as "don't you just love that" (*Love in the Ruins*, 134), suggest her fake sentimental attitude to life. Even though Moira's shedding of sexual inhibitions appeals to Tom, her complacent existence in a consumer and pleasure-seeking society in the end bothers him. Lola Rhoades constitutes a similar diversion for Tom—his immersion in aesthetic pleasures (music and sex) effaces the responsibilities of a grown man towards those he loves. Her fake house, Tara, offers a probability of reliving the past once the world comes to an end. Her would-be agrarian paradise with material possessions, sensual music, bourbon and unbridled sex "tempts Tom to engage in aesthetic repetition or nostalgia" (THARPE, 159).

In contradistinction to the aforementioned women, Margot Lamar is a peculiar case of a false double who actively seeks to meddle in her partner's life. Gone is the subliminal message of the pleasures of sex and irresponsible life: Margot wants to transform her husband into another person. It is not that she enhances some of Lance's characteristics to ease his life disregarding his potential ethical and spiritual dilemmas (as Moira and Lola do to Tom), but that she creates a totally new identity for Lancelot. As the last scion of a once great aristocratic family, Lance looms in Margot's consciousness as an "animus-archetype."⁶ However, soon after their marriage, she is somewhat dissatisfied as he does not come up to her ideal of manhood. She begins restoring Lancelot to the image of an old school Southern gentleman. Margot undertakes the role of the Southern belle when she marries into

⁶ Elzbieta Oleksy remarks that "in the popular imagination, Sir Lancelot has a celebrated role as an ideal of manhood, not in the sense of masculine social action, but as an 'animus-archetype,' the archetype of manliness that inhabits the feminine imagination. At an early stage of their marriage, Margot looks up to Lance to fulfill this role" (163).

a WASP family, and this logically requires from her husband particular interests, hobbies and forms of behavior, which he lacks. Therefore, she conjures up from her memory a clichéd Southern gentleman as she has “passion for old ‘authentic’ things” (*Lancelot*, 80). Margot thrives in her marriage because she is “a collector, preserver, restorer, transformer” (*Lancelot*, 81), and Lance always provides opportunities for fulfillment of her desires. She disregards his needs and as long as he is satisfied with sex and booze, he is a malleable material.

Yet when Lance discovers her infidelity, Margot becomes not only protector of the past, even though imaginary and fake, but also a devourer of the future. This is strikingly reminiscent of Mary Victoria of *They Stood to Folly*, whom Ellen Glasgow presents in such a light: “in Mary Victoria, the incarnation of feminine self-righteousness, he [her husband] finds both the protector and the devourer” (*A Certain Measure*, 242). Disappointed with Margot, Lance believes he has a chance to start afresh with the New Woman to create the new social order. In his confession, he admits: “I thought we were suited to each other—each stripped of the past, each aware that an end had come and that there had to be a new beginning” (*Lancelot*, 251). However, once Anna, an inmate in the Center for Aberrant Behavior, disagrees with Lancelot’s vision of human relations and challenges its basic assumptions, Lance sees her new-found self-assurance as threatening to his position. He compares Anna to Margot, and seriously wonders “Christ, do you think this is another woman trying to fix me up in a pigeonier?” (*Lancelot*, 252). In so doing, Lancelot unconsciously divides women into inspirations (preferably mute ones) or hindrances (those who have their own opinion and are not afraid to impose it on others).

Lance Lamar’s problems with women, visible in his attempts to categorize women rather than understand them, might stem from his troubled relationship with his mother. She has an influence on Lance’s emotional and moral development in his formative years; however, it can be said that it is a beneficial or conscious endeavor. Lily Lamar casts a shadow on Lance who is “first possessed by the anima with its womblike, mother-haunted vision of a past southern community of glory and pleasure, moves into possession by an archetype of the hero” (SPIVEY, 290). Mrs. Lamar’s mothering unintentionally results in reproducing the old Southern tradition which she, by her behavior, has implemented in Lance’s mind. In this sense, her influence on young Lance is a psychological process within the social mothering, rather than biological one. Through a process of edification, gentlemen are

supposed to learn to dissociate themselves from the feminine (which symbolizes powerlessness, emotionality and lack of defined identity). Young scions internalize gender-induced behavior through a series of dichotomies connected with their parents: man/woman, same/different, self/the other.⁷ Gentlemen measure their values and codes against the other—in this case the lady on whom they projected all the contrary values and codes.⁸ As long as she agrees to adopt the role of a lady, he can safely be a gentleman; however, in postmodern times when the gender roles become blurred, Southern gentlemen's identity is threatened.

In theory, by identifying himself with Maury Lamar, Lance should learn from his father how to gain and uphold authoritarian power in family and society. Yet his father's position is undermined by the other—by Lily's long-term affair with Lance's Uncle Buster. Mrs. Lamar's imperfect morality enfeebles Maury's image as a patriarch. Not surprisingly, Lance channels his anger and disappointment with the fatigued male authority into his negative attitude towards his mother. Mrs. Lamar's cuckolding of her husband sets a pattern for Lance's perspective on ladies—the distinction between a lady and a whore is blurred and thus the need arises for *The Third Revolution*. Lance's secret of female life (women desire violation) seems to stem from his need to punish his mother for betraying his father and shattering his own illusions. Lily's actions also add to the complexity of Lance's ambivalent attitude towards women. She, as "the other," is the agent of another of Lance's discoveries about Maury's weaknesses. Not only is his father revealed to be unable to defend his name, but also he is the cause of his own downfall—taking bribes does not necessarily raise him up in the eyes of his son. However, as in the case of cuckoldry, Lance blames his mother for revealing the secret to him. John Hardy explains that if "the discovery of the money in his father's drawer constituted, in some sense, as Lance obviously wants or needs to think it did, a 'loss of innocence,' it was his mother, 'the woman,' who directed him to it" (*The Fiction of Walker Percy*, 169). Thus, in

⁷ Nancy Chodorow explains the influence of mothering on the psyche of the children: "girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (*The Reproduction of Mothering*, 169).

⁸ Susan Tracy demonstrates that in antebellum literature the "myth of Southern lady presented her as the Other—the adored 'Virgin', revered 'Mother,' and dissolute 'Whore.' ... Constructing the woman as the sexual Other, man distances himself from her and what she stands for—femininity; she selflessly serves, he commands; she is fragile, he is resolute and courageous, she gives and preserves life—he takes it; she is naïve, he is worldly" (73).

this sense, Lily Lamar, as “the other,” upsets the balance between gender influences on Lance’s emotional and psychological development.

The mother-son relationship of Lily and Lance Lamars is far from an uncomplicated and edifying one. In the only article-length piece on Percy’s maternal figures,⁹ Shelley Jackson presents a model of the mother-child relationship which is “problematic to say the least. Mothers are either conspicuously absent from the lives of Percy’s protagonist, or, if they are present, they provide little or none of the nurturing traditionally attributed to maternal figures” (92). Lucy Hunnicutt, Will Barrett’s mother, is barely mentioned; Tom’s mother is virtually nonexistent in his life. The mothers who are physically present in their children’s lives fail to exert an essentially positive influence on their offspring. In *The Second Coming* Kitty does not prove herself to be a useful parent and in no way can she be regarded as a natural mother. In her behavior she rejects the notion that a woman’s internal desire is to become a mother. Her relationship with Allie is devoid of maternal love and influence, Kitty does not try to understand her daughter’s problems or communicate with her.

A similar lack of understanding for a child is displayed by Anna Castagna, Binx’s mother. However, Allie is misunderstood by Kitty as the latter does not care to learn anything about her daughter that would bring them closer together, whereas Anna’s isolation from Binx is caused by her prosaic life, drained of any intellectual and cultural diversity. She is trapped in an everyday life serving her husband and children; therefore, Binx’s accusations of his mother avoiding anything “exceptional and ‘stimulating’” (*The Moviegoer*, 138) are highly unjust. With a patriarchal and paternalistic attitude, “Binx acknowledges that the women are in some aspects dissimilar ... , yet when together in their place of domesticity, they are alike to him. These women are forced to deal with the mundane ... This mentality is what Binx despises in his mother” (NIXON, 54). Motherhood, with all the gender burdens commonly associated with it, severely reduces women’s chances of being a whole person. Anna Castagna, deprived of intellectual stimulation, “functions as an antithesis to the spirituality of her son” (NIXON, 55).

With women either as sexual objects, such as the secretaries, or trite mothers, or Aunt Emily, edifying those around her with platitudes, Percy

⁹ Shelley Jackson mentions that maternal figures are not necessarily female in Percy’s fiction (93). This was a very progressive idea of Percy’s, as traditionally both the biological and social function of motherhood was ascribed to women.

demonstrates that women cannot be companions or partners to wayfaring gentlemen, that they are impediments rather than inspirations to men. The dichotomous vision of ladies and gentlemen, or, as Percy depicts it, "woman as physical and immediate and man as spiritual and transcendent" (NIXON, 55), is transgressed only by women (Kate, Ellen and Allie) who are able to influence their men for the better.

Having traced the metamorphoses of female influence in the Southern society, a few conclusions can be drawn. First of all, the theory, the myth of a Southern lady's influence, and its implementation in the Old South rarely converged. The ideology maintained that ladies were much-needed incentives to patriarchs' indulgent behavior. In this sense, female correcting influence on the nature of men and female ability to forgive fed on the imperfections of male conduct. And Southern gentlemen were more than willing to provide their ladies with reasons to inspire and correct them. However, in practice patriarchs were less than willing to allow their women to restrain their nature and take away symbols of their privileged status in society. Therefore, the much-appreciated female influence existed only in the sphere of the mythical representation of the society. Secondly, the soothing female influence sometimes turned into a smothering one, when in the hands of ladies who wanted to revenge themselves on men. This was one of victimizers' weapons in an uneven fight for justice. Thirdly, motherly influence on maturing daughters has waned over the time. Modern mothers are often either ineffectual or absent. Often for the better, as genteel mothers not infrequently educated their daughters to accept meekly their position in family and society. In so doing, mothers thwarted female liberation and self-development.

Moreover, regardless of the era, Southern ladies' influence is subsumed under two categories depending on its usefulness to patriarchy. If a belle edified a man with her goodness, innocence and virtue, she was an inspiration. When she did not want to comply with the template of her influence, she was deemed an impediment. This dichotomy between inspiration and impediment translates into contemporary distinction between women who are "doubles" and "false doubles," in other words inspirations and hindrances. This categorization is based on the two roles women can play in men's life: they can either aspire to guide them and thus become moral signpost for men or they can hamper gentlemen's growth.

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WPLYW DAMY AMERYKAŃSKIEGO POŁUDNIA
NA PODSTAWIE TWÓRCZOŚCI ELLEN GLASGOW I WALKERA PERCY'EGO

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wpływu, jaki miała wywierać kobieta amerykańskiego Południa na najbliższe otoczenie. Ramy czasowe powieści Ellen Glasgow i Walkera Percy'ego, lata 1850-1980, w bardzo obszerny sposób obrazują zmiany zachodzące w postrzeganiu mitycznego kobiecego wpływu na dżentelmenów, rodzinę i społeczeństwo. Mit Południa, aprobowany przez patriarchów, dokładnie określał istotę tegoż wpływu. Jako przedwojenny ideał, dama amerykańskiego Południa miała inspirować, jak i delikatnie korygować nawyki patriarchów. Tak było w teorii, jednakże często realizacja idealistycznych postulatów rozmięła się z założeniami mitu. W praktyce dżentelmeni byli już mniej chętni, aby damy krępowały ich męską naturę. Niezależnie od epoki kobiecy wpływ był rozumiany jako pozytywny lub negatywny, w zależności od przydatności w patriarchalnej ideologii. Ciekawy wydaje się fakt, że podział na kobiecy wpływ jako inspirację lub przeszkodę tak zakorzenił się w świadomości Południowców, że w drugiej połowie dwudziestego wieku kobiety nadal inspirowały lub utrudniały dżentelmenom rozwój osobowościowy. Jednakże należy dodać, że wpływ kobiety Południa nie ograniczał się jedynie do mężów; damy również rozporządzały losem swoich córek. Matki często reprodukowały schematy patriarchalne, przez co utrudniały wyzwolenie kobiet z kajdan patriarchy.

Streściła Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis

Słowa kluczowe: świat arystokracji amerykańskiego Południa, literatura amerykańskiego Południa, mit kobiety Południa, powieści Ellen Glasgow, powieści Walkera Percy'ego.

Key words: the world of Southern aristocracy, literature of the American South, the myth of a Southern lady, Ellen Glasgow's novels, Walker Percy's novels.

