

Final Written Report

Professional Development Grant

“Temple Drake and Carrie: Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* as Horror”

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This final report addresses the results of a professional enhancement project funded by an ATU Professional Development Grant. This report follows the instructions provided in the Guidelines for Professional Development Grants.

A. Title Page (see above)

B. Restatement of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

Abstract of conference paper presented:

Faulkner wrote that his novel *Sanctuary* was the “most horrific tale I could imagine.” The novel has long had a central place in discussions of the Southern gothic, a category I need not explain here. And I, among others, have previously connected it with film noir, linking Temple Drake with that genre’s femme fatale. But what has not previously been recognized, in spite of Faulkner’s “horrific,” is the connection between this novel and contemporary horror film. In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender and the Modern Horror Film*, Carol Clover’s list of the film *Carrie*’s topics immediately reminded me of Temple Drake: “prom queens, menstrual periods, tampons, worries about clothes and makeup.” Stephen King, the author of the source novel, states that it is, in part, about “what men fear about women and women’s sexuality.” Admittedly, tampons are an anachronism in 1931, but the rest stands. Faulkner scholars acknowledge that the fear of women and their sexuality lies at the heart of, not just this novel, but the majority of his fiction.

My linking *Sanctuary* with horror films like *Carrie* does not align me with the misogynist bent of much male commentary on the novel, beginning with Cleanth Brooks’s essay, “Discovery of Evil,” in which he ties what he considers Temple Drake’s

evil to “the true nature of woman” in general: “Men idealize and romanticize women, but the cream of the jest is that women have a secret rapport with evil which men do not have, that they are able to adjust to evil without being shattered by it, being by nature flexible and pliable.” Clover asserts that Carrie is a “monstrous hero,” a “female victim-hero (the hero part always understood as implying some degree of monstrosity).” In spite of Brooks’s view of Temple Drake, most students readily see Temple as a victim in the events at Frenchman’s Bend, events that conclude with her rape and kidnapping by the murderous psychopath Popeye, followed by her incarceration in a Memphis whorehouse. What is less persuasive is calling her, by the end of the novel, a hero, since her perjury in Lee Goodwin’s trial results in his brutal lynching. Whatever sympathy she has garnered from readers until that moment is difficult to maintain; granting her heroic status seems a travesty to be resisted. But perhaps there is more behind that resistance.

Clover asserts that “there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male . . . [,] mobile heroism wanting male representatives, and passive dank spaces wanting female ones.” In spite of the gendered paradigm Clover posits, Temple’s ultimate monstrosity (whether from a generic textual antipathy toward female sexuality in general, or her specific actions in the courtroom) seems as accepted as her victimization, certainly in the majority of criticism and student response. What is most in question is any means by which we can consider her heroic. Clover’s “Final Girl,” who turns to defeat the male killer in films like *Halloween*, uses his own phallic weapons against him, becoming a kind of masculinized substitute for the male viewer who can thus safely identify with her. No such heroism is available for Temple, and

perhaps that is a source of the horror she engenders in so many male readers: she is alive as the novel ends (although not triumphantly by any means), whereas both Goodwin and Popeye are dead, and yet she is still unquestionably female and therefore beyond such identification. Although the gendering of identification is a mainstay of film criticism, it rarely appears in literary analyses, and would for this novel offer another way to view Temple's "horrific" status.

#### C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the American Literature Association conference in Washington, DC, and presented my paper there. I flew out of Little Rock on May 21, 2014, and returned on May 26, 2014.

#### D. Summary of Experiences

My primary teaching area within literature is modern and southern American. I am the primary teacher of Modern American Literature, a required course for all our majors, and the only teacher of our course on southern literature. I also have consistently taught our introduction to film course, and numerous special topic film courses, among them a course on gender and horror. This paper is a confluence of those interests. In addition to presenting my paper, I was able to attend numerous other panels relevant to my teaching and scholarship.

#### E. Conclusions and Recommendations

The other two presenters on my panel had published several books, and gave me more than a positive response to my work. In fact, I was encouraged to expand the paper into

an article and submit it for possible publication in an essay collection, *Faulkner and the Gothic*. Without the funds I received from the ATU Professional Grant, I would not have been able to attend the conference.