

FINAL REPORT

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT PROJECT

"The Web Pulled Askew: Masculinity, Marginality, and Materiality in *All the King's Men*"

Dr. Deborah Wilson

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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:

Although admittedly aware of the father's position at the center of his work, Robert Penn Warren and his critics seem unaware of the limited and limiting positions his women characters occupy. In the logic of *All the King's Men*, which makes history linear and directional, women are consistently motionless and directionless. Early in the novel, Jack Burden glimpses a nameless, unknown woman from the window of a train, and in another scene, he and Stark's entourage ride past farmhouses in which Burden imagines another woman, lying in bed, waiting for the man in motion, whose car engine/phallus "gets big" as he passes her by while the flies circle over her, signifying her status as flesh, drawn to her because she also signifies the death Jack equates with her motionlessness. These women, constructed as outside history, embody the "obscure and necessary [phallogocentric] logic" that results in Jack's handing Anne over to Willie, cementing the homosocial bond between Jack and one of his fathers. Jack sees Anne as merchandise, an object of exchange, and their relationship as a monetary transaction. The other significant woman in Jack's life, his mother, is a "blank space" to him (at least, until he learns she loved the Judge) because he sees her, too, as an object of exchange. In a more extreme marginalization, the major black character in the Cass Mastern story (the only section of the novel that considers race) is the silent and completely commodified Phebe.

Jack offers a spider web as the metaphor for the network of relations that makes up a world that is given, unified and whole. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf offers a similar yet significantly different web, one that is "the work of suffering human beings, . . . attached to grossly material things." Jack's godlike eye seems blind to the material

conditions that produce the network of gender and power relations in the world he narrates.

C. Brief Review of Professional Enhancement Opportunity

I attended the American Literature Association Annual Conference in San Francisco, CA, and presented my paper there. I flew out of Little Rock on May 22 and returned on May 26, 2008.

D. Summary of Experiences

My primary teaching area is American literature. This is the primary conference in that field. Not only did I manage to get positive feedback on my paper, I was also able to attend numerous other panels relevant to my teaching and scholarship.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

Without the funds I received from the ATU Professional Grant, I would not have been able to attend the conference. The paper I presented is part of an ongoing larger project I hope to publish.