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# "Downtrodden Characters" and the Journey of the Mythic Hero: A Reading of Dave Smith's Onliness

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"Downtrodden Characters" and the Journey of the Mythic Hero:  
A Reading of Dave Smith's Onliness

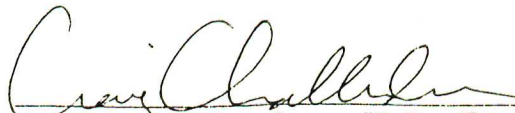
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"Downtrodden Characters" and the Journey of the Mythic Hero:  
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## Introduction

Despite the ten years that have passed since its publication, critics have written relatively little about Dave Smith's 1981 novel Onliness. Scholars seem to have avoided it despite its prominence as the only novel to date of a poet whose recognition includes being twice a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Indeed, the characters and events found within Smith's novel would overwhelm and perplex the casual reader: garage mechanics living in an old chicken shack with parts of dismembered cars as its furnishings; a one-armed prostitute who operates out of a glittering bus; and a simpleton who fancies not only shot putting but also a woman named Promise Land who rides a pink, Harley Davidson motorcycle.

While critics, Smith included, usually focus their scholarly considerations upon his poetry--his novel and essays have only been treated in reviews--the commentary regarding Dave Smith's literary influences also applies to his fiction. Smith himself recognizes two literary influences that consistently affect the creation of his protagonists and their circumstances. Structurally, Smith's works cleave to the pattern of the journey of the mythic hero set forth in Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949), and as a Southern writer, Smith finds himself able--even drawn--to

employ grotesque elements in the formation of his characters. An interdependency develops, moreover, between these two features in Onliness.

In The Hero with a Thousand Faces Campbell identifies universal patterns of psychological development early in the natural human life cycle as decisive factors inherent in mankind's myths and dreams; maturation includes a disruption of dependency upon mother in order for any "hero" to enter into the realm of his father in his society:

The dependent child and its mother constitute for months after the catastrophe of birth a dual unit, not only physically but also psychologically. . . . The unfortunate father is the first radical intrusion of another order of reality. . . . He, therefore, is experienced primarily as an enemy.

(Campbell 6)

In its small world the infantile mind, Campbell surmises, associates the maternal figure with "good" and the paternal figure with "bad." The two influences are at odds from an early stage, and, later in life, when the hero is to become a part of the male adult portion of society, a break with the mother is a prerequisite. The young hero's mind already understands this transgression as brutal or forceful rather than natural. In myth and dream, then, mankind struggles with and attempts to amend this duality.

The individual hero knows he has lost touch with some

part of his existence, and he unconsciously desires to rediscover and capture that lost aspect of himself. However, he is an integral part of society and has duties there, and the myths of his society are developed to inspire him to fill the progression of roles it presents to him. The "prime function" of mythology, states Campbell, is "to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back" (11). As personal loss of an aspect of the individual self accumulates over generations, entire races feel a primary loss deep in their history. Man devises mythological tales which describe the trials and journey one must undergo to recapture the missing part of the society or the self in order to explain to himself the disquieting duality in his individual and collective existence.

The journey of the mythic hero attempting to recover some lost truth universally leads him through certain stages. Campbell identifies similarities between myths of all societies and defines specific stages of this journey and the accomplishments of the mythic hero in each stage. Dave Smith admits that the prototypes for his fictional characters are "heroes to [him]. . . in the sense that Joseph Campbell means with the heroic figure" (Qtd. in Balakian 233). In search of some truth larger than himself, then, Billy Luke Tomson, the heroic protagonist of Onliness, passes through the stages discussed in The Hero with a Thousand Faces: "separation from

the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return" (Campbell 35).

According to Campbell's outline, the separation or departure of the mythic hero from the world he inhabits begins with a call to adventure; a character known as the herald usually reveals some world or force that the conscious hero does not understand, yet finds alluring. Destiny summons the chosen hero and he goes, although not always immediately. The hero might desire temporary return to the familiar things and places; self-interest is an easily conquered refusal of the call, and sometimes this delay provides opportunity for "a providential revelation of some unsuspected principle of release" (Campbell 64) which inspires the hesitant hero.

After a hero responds to the call, fate produces a character to provide him with protective aids and to advise him that "all the forces of the unconscious [are] at his side" (72) to be used to his benefit. The hero is now ready for the crossing of the first threshold of his journey, passing through to the realm of the unknown. As he takes this risk, the hero becomes selfless, loosing himself from the restrictions of his personal interests. The crossing of the threshold from one world into another can actually allow the hero, "instead of passing outward, beyond the confines of the visible world, [to go] inward, to be born again" (Campbell 91) in a belly-of-the-whale rebirth experience.

Once he has arrived safely, the hero undergoes a series



of trials which initiates him to the knowledge available in this realm. The grand achievement here is "dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past" (Campbell 101), the reconciliation of forces set in opposition in the hero's personal past and the past of his society. The hero usually encounters a goddess who, by virtue of her feminine nature and the hero's association of that with his infancy, represents promise and available knowledge. An inevitable union with the goddess puts the hero in the position of his father, who still represents "bad" to him. To make peace with himself for becoming associated with the side of his existence associated with evil, the hero must make amends with this father, placing himself at the father's mercy, and reconcile himself to becoming one with him. Once the hero has regained the lost good and made peace with the evil in himself, he has gained that which he sought when he crossed the threshold into this unknown realm and is able to return to his own world with his boon for its inhabitants.

However, the hero who has attained what he and his society desired might prefer to linger in the fruitful realm rather than undertake the task of delivering this boon effectively. Eventually, though, heroes return by one route or another, regaining ego on the way. The crossing of the return threshold reveals, finally, that the two worlds were at one time merely separate parts of the same world; with this knowledge the hero becomes adept in both realms.

Myth and the goals of myth as indicated in Campbell's journey imply that mankind has lost an original closeness with the non-physical self. According to Flannery O'Connor's 1960 essay "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction," the grotesque character allows the Southern writer to meet certain demands of Southern society which force him to see beyond the physical and make what he finds there more relevant than the physical to his audience (40-45).

In a study titled The Grotesque (1972), Philip Thomson identifies a "confusion between a sense of the comic and something--revulsion, horror, fear--which is incompatible with the comic" (7) as the primary trait of any grotesque work. The nature of the grotesque is physical "in an immediate and vivid way" (8). The effect of the grotesque is achieved in part from presenting these physical events and descriptions "within a realistic framework, in a realistic way" (8). The grotesque can merely make the audience see the world "from a fresh perspective which, though it be a strange and disturbing one, is nevertheless valid and realistic" (17) or, as is probably the case with the Southern grotesque on the whole, the artist may employ it "to bewilder and disorient, to bring the reader up short, jolt him out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world and confront him with a radically different, disturbing perspective" (58).

The Southern writer has developed an ongoing relationship with the grotesque through the strife, maladjustment, and

disorientation which tend to precede and coexist with the grotesque in life and literature. In an essay titled "The Grotesque: An American Genre" (1962), William Van O'Connor identifies some of the causes for the prevalence of the genre in the South.

The old agricultural system depleted the land and poverty breeds abnormality; in many cases people were living with a code that was no longer applicable, and this meant a detachment from reality and loss of vitality. (6)

The Southern author, specifically, employs the physical grotesque as a vehicle to the non-physical realms of the journey of the mythic hero.

Flannery O'Connor observes that the Southern writer "is forced from all sides to make his gaze extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that realm which is the concern of prophets and poets" (45). She cites two aspects of that writer's society which encourage the grotesque. First, the "Christ-haunted" (44) Southern writer still has at his disposal the theological aspect of man which his Southern reader will understand. Although he "isn't convinced of it, [the Southerner] is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God" (45). Unconvinced, for whatever reasons, yet aware of this ancient link, the Southerner is perplexed and haunted by it; the region's writer can call upon that awareness of incongruity,

through the grotesque, to enable his reader to ponder events in a spiritual realm which haunts him merely because of its existence. This spiritual realm is the dominion wherein the mythic hero's deeds are accomplished.

The second and more direct reason Flannery O'Connor cites for the Southern writer's employment of the grotesque is the precedent itself.

The writer is initially set going by literature more than by life. When there are many writers all employing the same idiom, looking out on more or less the same social scene, the individual writer will have to be more than ever careful that he isn't just doing badly what has already been done to completion. (45)

Such is the case in the South. Dave Smith finds himself writing in the wake of this tradition of the grotesque in Southern literature and uses it to his advantage in Onliness. Smith's characters, as Geoffrey Harpham says in his On the Grotesque of those of O'Connor, "pursue the invisible with carnal eyes" (186); they are heroes, despite the nature of their approach, because they do pursue.

Onliness unfolds the events of the journey of Billy Luke Tomson to, through, and out of the small Virginia town of Chapel. Garage owner Tom Zucold brings Tomson, an orphan by nature, to Chapel, rechristening him The Grip as he does so. The beautiful Promise Land enlightens The Grip to a non-physical part of himself, his onliness, that he has never

realized before, and the hero becomes occupied with identifying this part of his being through the characters he encounters: Promise Land herself; the hook-handed hooker Merci and her mother-of-pearl bus, The Confessional; pool hustler and local quasi-mythic being The Carolina Kid; and car mechanic, father-figure Tom Zucold. The consequences amount to what Tom O'Brien, in the 15 November 1981 New York Times Book Review, calls "the stuff of myth and symbol" (14).

The purpose and experiences of Smith's protagonist parallel the intent and three main stages of Campbell's journey of the mythic hero. Furthermore, the grotesque characters and setting of the novel, which Smith's Southern background generates, are the impetus behind the significance of this journey, rendering the spiritual aspects of existence vital to the journey, in the words of Philip Thomson, "within a realistic framework, in a realistic way" (8).

Smith has realized the possibilities inherent in the monomythic hero and their relationship to the literary tradition of his region. The grotesque, by exaggerating physical inadequacy, draws attention to the importance of the spiritual by, according to Philip Thomson, "bring[ing] the reader up short. . . and confront[ing] him with a radically different, disturbing perspective" (58). The mythic hero's quest involves non-physical--spiritual--enlightenment for mankind, which recognition of the spiritual actuality of man must precede. Smith employs Campbell's monomythic journey

template to guide his hero's realizations and accomplishments in Onliness; the progress of the novel's grotesque hero, then, is easily analyzed in terms and increments which Campbell has set forth in The Hero with a Thousand Faces.

## Chapter One

### Pilgrimage as Departure

A journey is imminent for Billy Luke Tomson from the start of chapter one, "The Pilgrimage." Smith's chapter title does not indicate the reason for the hero's pilgrimage, but a suggestion lies in Campbell's assurance that the potential mythic hero or his society "suffers from a symbolical deficiency" (37), a natural cause for dissatisfaction and subsequent action. Tomson has never known or "set eyes" (Smith 5) on his deceased father, and "so far as his momma [is] concerned he [is] his father" (5). Because his mother "never snapped" but "just locked in" (6) after her husband's death, suppressing her maternal instincts in her relationship with her son, Billy Luke never developed merely a child's affinity for Katie Tomson. Instead, he was a combination of poorly prepared parent and ill-treated ward.

As he packed he remembered all the times he had searched out her bottles and broken them. At some point he accepted her drinking, so she drank more in defiance. She'd thrown him out of the trailer five or six times in the last two years. Once she'd pitched his daddy's seabag out after him. (6)

Lacking typical maternal nurturing and paternal intrusion into the mother-son relationship, Billy Luke Tomson never formally enters the male aspect of his society, but is expected to fulfil a role which usually falls to more adequately prepared, adult males. His pilgrimage involves an understanding of both sides of the schizophrenic expectations previously placed on him but without the benefit of didactic experience. Billy Luke Tomson inherently desires closure to the parental relationship cycle in his life: both maternal woman and advice-giving man from whom he may gain knowledge of a proper approach to the situations the adult male world presents.

The work of other mythologists outlines and strengthens the same tendencies in myth and myth-based ritual as does Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces. For example, Jane Ellen Harrison's Epilegomena, a summary of many years of research on the genesis and effects of Greek religion, particularly clarifies the rationale behind some of the aspects of Campbell's journey and their origins.

Harrison asserts that the origin of religion is social (xxii). A totem is a family that takes into consideration "the supposed kinship of man with various plants and animals" (xxiii); family or group or tribe is associated with a plant or animal, setting its members off from other groups in society, in the origins of the faith. Relationships developing among humans in these families are particular to gender.



Specifically, the young boys in a family are merely young males to the father, but to the mother they are sons also (xxv). An intimate relationship exists there, and its intensity, in conjunction with the lack of intimacy with the father, irreversibly affects the young boy.

Despite a lack of intimacy between father and boy, James George Frazer mentions in The Golden Bough that the corn-god, symbolic in some belief systems of the father in the totem, will die in ritual: "he [gives] his own body to feed the people: he die[s] that they might live" (437). This may apply not only to the hero's natural parents, but to those parental figures he encounters on the journey.

Before commencing his journey, however, physical peculiarities compound and exaggerate Tomson's "symbolical deficiency" (Campbell 37); in contrast to his undeveloped emotional and spiritual self, Billy Luke stands physically large--six feet, ten inches tall. Verbal communication rarely extends beyond "yessir," but physical aggression comes easily to Tomson when an unsettling situation arises. Oddly equipped as he is, survival and proper non-physical development become questionable for Tomson. The successful pilgrimage must take him to a setting as grotesque as himself, a setting Joseph Campbell describes as "of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delight" (58). Simply stated, Billy Luke Tomson is not equipped to make discoveries on the non-physical level in

a place that cannot tolerate him on the merely physical level.

The hero leaves his mother's trailer with intentions of joining the Coast Guard, "like his daddy" (6).

It was foggy when Billy Luke Tomson stepped on the bus and he was sleepy so he did not notice he had gone to Raleigh instead of Elizabeth City. An old woman riding next to him asked when he was born and he said November 19 and she said oh-oh, a bad day to travel. He remembered that after he got off in Raleigh. (8)

This mishap corresponds with the preliminary stages of Joseph Campbell's Call to Adventure, wherein such a "blunder" can lead the hero to "an unsuspected world" (51). Once inside this world, Tomson encounters "forces that are not rightly understood, . . . the opening of a new destiny, . . . [and a] herald" (51) who prepares him to make the transition required for this new destiny.

Tomson's unsuspected world is the U.S. Army. Physical harm done to a fellow basic trainee presents him to his herald, Staff Sergeant Roosevelt Franklin Davis: "he would never know how a sequence of arbitrary and random decisions, mistakes, and circumstances had led him to one of those men who, in a brief time, change our lives" (Smith 9). Davis changes Tomson's life when he gives him something on which to concentrate his physical overzealousness and potential.

SSGT Davis, it turned out, was the Fort Jackson track coach. Billy Luke Tomson, the SSGT saw overnight, could

put the sixteen pound shot with extraordinary thrust. . .

. . . "Trainee Tomson, I admire your style. . . . I'm

gonna make a man out of you." (10)

Discipline presents Tomson the opportunity to focus his attention on his goal of becoming a man. Davis begins to make it possible for Billy Luke's destiny to encompass his desire for non-physical manliness.

Campbell would view Tomson's momentary regression to his former ways of physical unrestraint, reflected in the rage-induced harm done to others and a shrugging off of all he has gained in the two years he has spent with SSGT Davis, as a Refusal of the Call to adventure. Billy Luke injures a homosexual who has made advances to him (10-11), "essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest" (Campbell 60). But violent acts against others have led him to Staff Sergeant Davis in the past, and now one leads him to "a speedy for-the-good-of-the-service discharge" (Smith 11) and opportunity to proceed towards his destiny. Although he temporarily refuses the knowledge and ability he has gained, Tomson has a knack for doing so at beneficial times. Perhaps this is true because of a foundation that his grandfather laid for him as Billy Luke left home to join the Coast Guard.

Campbell's monomyth allows for encounter with "a protective figure. . . who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass. . . . Such a figure represents. . . the benign, protecting power of

destiny" (69, 71). The pertinence of the advice Luther Miller gives his grandson foreshadows his destiny. Miller knows his grandson's preoccupation with his father and is aware that Katie Tomson is "always at him" (Smith 5) as if he is her spouse reincarnated. He tells Billy Luke "'Yore life is about to start.' . . . 'Get the hell away [and] go live your life'" (6, 7). The old man also advises that Tomson "learn something" (7), which he does in the Army. This advice, taken consciously or not, enables Billy Luke to aspire beyond the Army track and field team and is perhaps the most valuable advice in the formation of the hero's destiny.

Finally, Luther Miller warns his grandson: "Leave women alone as long as you can. . . . If you can stay away from women you'll be a better man than the rest of us" (7). Although this advice has no significance in the Departure stage of Billy Luke's journey, he is to recall it later. His destiny requires interaction with the opposite sex, and forbidding such encounters emphasizes the destiny's perplexity.

Once the hero has these helpful amulets of his destiny at his disposal, he is prepared to meet with "the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (Campbell 77), a figure who can point out to the hero the limitations which his present sphere of being will create for him in this unknown zone. Billy Luke Tomson's threshold guardian is SSGT Davis. As is appropriate for a threshold

guardian, Davis should not be challenged, "and yet--it is only by advancing beyond these bounds, provoking the destructive other aspect of the same power, that the individual passes, alive or in death, into a new zone of experience" (82). To challenge Davis is to incur the wrath of a demon.

"I will tame yore monstrous ass," SSGT Davis said. Then he threw open the door, walked into the cell, told Tomson to stand at attention, and when Tomson did the SSGT jumped up and punched him on the jaw. When Tomson awoke he was lying in the sun in a great field of asphalt. . . . "I am one badass nigger sergeant. Boy, get up and do it quick." (Smith 9)

However, it is necessary for Billy Luke Tomson to disturb him in order to find out what is yet to come.

Tomson does pass into the new zone of experience by the end of "The Pilgrimage": he is alive upon arrival in a place where, as Campbell warns it will be, "the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit" (51). Alive, he is reborn and baptized in a number of senses. Tom Zucold picks up Billy Luke Tomson as a hitch hiker as he drives toward home, Chapel, Virginia. Tom Zucold, as defensive and snappy as a secondary threshold guardian might be, shakes hands with Tomson.

"That is some mother handshake you got there, sport," Tom Zucold said.

"Name not sport," [Tomson] answered.

"Bet me it ain't. Didn't think it was. . . . Name must be The Grip," Tom Zucold said, and the man who stood in the snow and was named Billy Luke Tomson climbed up and into the rear of the panel truck. He was already The Grip. (12)

Christened The Grip, Tomson is borne into Tom's hometown in slumber, "stretched out like a corpse. . . dead to the world" (13) in the back of the truck. As Campbell describes the moment, it "amounts to a dying and a birth" (51).

The one distinct advantage The Grip will have in this new realm of existence is the lack of ego which rebirth affords him. He needs to grow on a non-physical level: to start afresh is to his benefit. Tomson is ready to face his destiny. Campbell makes the assertion that that which has to be faced in this new realm is "somehow profoundly familiar [only] to the unconscious--though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality" (55). This situation attests to the effect of the grotesque as Philip Thomson outlines it: "jolt[ing the reader] out of accustomed ways of perceiving the world" (58). The conscious, associated with the physical, perceives the hero's destiny in much the same fashion as the physical-oriented old realm of existence perceives the hero himself. The grotesque and the purpose of the journey of the mythic hero intertwine as the hero enters The Belly of the Whale. Campbell allows for a journey where,

"instead of passing outward, beyond the physical confines of the world, the hero goes inward, to be born again" (91), and this is what Tomson does in Onliness; the journey is on a non-physical level.

Smith uses the grotesque as a vehicle to aspects of existence beyond the physical for the sake of the journey ahead of his protagonist. The physical rebirth into the town of Chapel, where the grotesque prevails, allows the hero to develop on a spiritual or mental level because, with the physical homogeneity he has found in his new surroundings, attention can turn to the non-physical. The grotesque plays a role in the transferral from one realm of existence to another within the journey of this hero. "The Pilgrimage" over, he is prepared to act upon the deficiency in his life. The foster-family figures he finds in this "landscape of symbolical figures" (Campbell 101) will parallel the parents he has left behind; with their assistance, he will overcome his physical self and discover non-physical fulfillment.

## Chapter Two

### Chapel: Trial and Initiation

Once Campbell's hero has crossed the first threshold, he finds himself in the belly of his own whale, a "landscape of symbolical figures" (101) whose every aspect of existence is "curiously fluid [and] ambiguous" (97). Here his discoveries of ordinate truths will be made. These characters will present the hero both pitfalls and insight to these truths. Thresholds remain to be crossed, each more significant than the last, as each step of this journey brings him closer to initiation into a realization of his non-physical goals.

The hero dwells in this place and interacts with its citizens for the benefit of his own spiritual knowledge. He must encounter women, some of whom are unable to recognize more than his physical best interests, and others who can satisfy the spiritual needs he has, and he must make an exclusive decision as to which woman will have complete influence over his accomplishments. The hero will study, formally or informally, under a father figure who can prepare him for the physical aspects of the journey and what follows by teaching him a trade and supplementing the guidance and feel the father has betrayed him when he realizes that the



older man does not, because he is unable, prepare him for all he will encounter in the physical realm of his existence. When the hero can come to terms with the qualifications of his mentors, he can also accept himself and understand that which he set out on the journey to realize.

On his road of trials in Chapel, The Grip does encounter all of Campbell's characters and situations; he functions as admirably as he does, in spite of his grotesqueness, precisely because his grotesqueness assists him. In Chapel it is The Grip's slowness that is his most helpful attribute. A handicap outside of Chapel, where hesitation was interpreted as affirmation of stupidity, his slow reactions give him time to think through situations before he gets a second chance to act upon them. Although his exceptional strength was a dangerous aspect of The Grip's persona outside of Chapel, the same strength that put him in Fort Jackson's base disciplinary company and later had him discharged from the service affords him admiration in this "landscape of symbolical figures" (Campbell 101).

The Grip's sluggish wit is most beneficial in his relations with the women he meets in Chapel, as haste in action with the wrong one could seal for him a less than heroic fate. Two women present the hero with a tangle of situations and decisions to make while in Chapel; the local Promise Land, who is simple, open, and encouraging with The Grip, finds competition from Merci, a hook-handed prostitute

who lives and works in a glistening pearl-shellacked bus called The Confessional, when she has mechanical problems that keep her in town long enough to try her charms on The Grip. Each woman promises him some hope of a future in one form or another: Merci presents him with the opportunity to be her driver when she leaves Chapel, an offer which includes "a job and good money and some outstanding fringe benefits" (95), and Promise Land attracts him in an intellectual sense as well as a physical sense. In particular, she illuminates him with her ideas about "onliness":

A man with a harsh nasal voice was singing about being a carpenter and asking a woman if she would have his baby. Then he told the woman that he had given her his onliness.

. . . . .

"What is onliness?" The Grip asked.

. . . . .

"It's hard to explain, you see," she said. "It's a little like your soul--if you believe in souls--and a little like your personality. Oh gosh, I can think of twenty reasons why it isn't like either. . . . It's like a whatness of a thing, if you see what I mean. What makes an elephant is elephant onliness, if elephants have that. . . . But for you, there is certainly an onliness, a youness." (107, 108)

The decisions the hero must make concern not only the

possibilities these women present, but the options which Tom Zucold furnishes as well.

Although The Grip's slow-wittedness might aggravate Tom Zucold at times, his super-human strength compensates for it. Zucold admires the advantages the hero has over him because of his strength and urges him to develop it, through shotputting, for use in a number of tasks and undertakings. Tom teaches The Grip his own trade at his own Bowie Garage in Chapel, educating the youngster in the ways of the world as he has experienced it; the two function as a unit for a majority of the time The Grip spends in town, Zucold including the hero in his own struggles, aspirations, and desperation. These physical tests and exercises, though, are not sufficient instruction to prepare The Grip for what he will inevitably encounter with the women he must confront, and the relationship becomes strained as the hero surpasses his mentors' understanding of some aspects of themselves as individuals.

As he comes to realize that the woman he worships as Goddess and his fatherly mentor are two parts of a complete unit, The Grip also comes to a better understanding of himself in relation to them and all he has learned from them. As he leaves Chapel he has fused himself with their orphaned offspring: "they wouldn't give up. 'Bet me,' he said. 'Billy Luke Tomson don't give up'" [emphasis added] (262). He eventually is more than the man he was when he came to Chapel

as a result of what he discovers through his confrontations in this place.

Perhaps all women encountered on the journey possess qualities of both the Goddess and temptress to varying extents; in some women, one or the other is dominant. One of the trials the hero must face is the selection of the one woman whose promise of truth he wishes to pursue, for all-- here, both--offer an alluring promise or end, some of which are less than heroic in nature. Only the questor who considers this trial carefully and labors to make the wise decision finishes his journey as a true hero. In the course of his initiation, many physical adventures parallel the discoveries made by the conscious soul; in his dealings with women on his journey, the hero must realize, accept, and carefully evaluate the consequences of the complex intentions and nature, on both a physical and a non-physical level, of the potential goddesses he encounters. Of course, the ultimate end of the heroic journey is acceptance of and into the place of the father in society; temptation by woman is part of this initiation, though the realization of previously unrevealed truths results in a feeling of revulsion towards the father, who has had to leave the hero to learn these truths on his own.

When he must make the decision between two women and the bounties they possess and represent, The Grip feels "that the whole of his life has constricted to this one moment" (Smith

95). Promise appears at the garage to offer The Grip a chance to get away from Tom Zucold for an afternoon: "for the first time in months he smell[s] flowers and grass and pine" (39) and is grateful, as well as in awe of her self-assuredness and her physical beauty. At the end of their motorcycle ride he propositions her in his own crude way, already in love with her.

Although Tom Zucold scolds The Grip for his distracted actions in the days following this outing, this chiding does not compare to the accusations he makes of the next woman to enter the garage--Merci: "'Poison,' he said. 'Ittis one of them that is poison'" (47). In the first three days that her bus is parked in the Bowie Garage lot for repairs, Merci raises money to pay for the repairs with her unique method of confessing men. Her charms easily interest The Grip, recently awakened to the allure of the opposite sex:

The Grip thought she looked like one of those women that Bob Barker was always hugging on TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES. Except she really didn't look like them, or like anyone he had ever seen. How can this one be so different from Promise Land, he wondered. Women, he had always thought, were women, not very different from each other as men were. . . . He thought Mohair. He wasn't sure what mohair was but Tom Zucold had told him that fine Cadillacs used to have it for seats. One of these days, Tom Zucold said, he'd find one of those

Cadillacs and they'd spend days feeling mohair on their skins. The woman was the closest thing to mohair that The Grip could imagine. (48)

Although The Grip is infatuated with her ways because he has never known a woman who acts or dresses as she does, Merci is irritated when he responds to her advances and appearance in his naive fashion: "'Watchit fatso,' she snarled and nipped out of reach. 'Ain't no tomater here, you know. Think this is some kind of fish market?'" (48-9).

The frequency and casualness of his encounters with Merci overwhelm The Grip's senses and occupy him during Promise Land's absence over the next few days. Merci is finally able to lure him into her bus one night under guise of a motherly figure. The Grip has fallen and cut his head, and she offers to treat the wound with first aid supplies she keeps on the bus. He is impressed when she refers to her clients as gentlemen: "'Say gentlemen?' The Grip said, thinking of the Montgomery Ward catalog he had scoured. He wanted to be a gentleman and dress like those models" (81).

The promise of the status of gentleman seduces The Grip to stay after his wound has been treated, but his slow and awkward actions provoke Merci to treachery, and he is not promoted to the rank of gentleman on board the bus. In addition to her uncomely actions this night, The Grip encounters a feature he has not noticed while observing her lips, thighs, and breasts: Merci is equipped with a hook in

the place of one hand. The woman he has thought to have body parts "perfect. . . [like things] he had only seen in magazines and dreams" (72) is physically flawed. Her actions and this new discovery provoke The Grip to announce that Merci "ain't normal" (85).

In contrast to the judgment he passes on Merci, the next time The Grip sees Promise Land he detects that she is "the very same as those women he had seen in Tom Zucold's Montgomery Ward catalog, the women who were obviously the best and what you would order if you could order them" (94), what Campbell calls "the incarnation of the promise of perfection" (111). The hero is confronted with a decision between Merci, whose presence on the garage lot has given her an advantage with him over Promise Land that she ordinarily would not have, and Promise Land when the two meet and confront one another's reputation in Chapel. Merci offers The Grip a job driving her bus, an opportunity to leave Chapel; this would mean leaving not only Promise, but Tom Zucold as well. As he stands "halfway between the two women" (95), he actually decides, at this point, between staying and going rather than between the two women, although the former will decide the latter for him. His decision is to stay with Tom Zucold, his adoptive father. From this point on, Merci's appearance seems to deteriorate. The hero notices wear, signs of age, wrinkles, and bruises on her once-perfect person as well as a voice that is "weaker, as if she were fading out"

(101) as Merci becomes nothing more to his purposes than a revolting reminder that "everything [man] think[s] or do[es] is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh" (Campbell 122).

In Campbell's version of the heroic journey, the ultimate crisis in the adventure is the hero's meeting with the Goddess, which ends in a figurative marriage of the two. The Goddess represents all womanly forces to the hero: "mother, sister, mistress, bride. . . . She is the incarnation of the promise of perfection" (111). The hero's longing for his lost ideal of the mother of his infancy leads him to the quest; the woman he finds on his journey is a "curiously fluid, ambiguous form" (97), initially a sisterly guide in the strange land, later a bewitching companion with whom he eventually unites for the sake of his own spiritual growth. The confrontation with this promising, all-encompassing being in this place of "organized inadequacies" (111) signals for the hero that a return to the soul's lost agape with the physical world is possible and imminent.

The hero's memories of the mother may not be entirely blissful, however--the failings of the mother of his infancy also remain in his subconscious. Her role in the "initiation of [the hero's] mind into the nature of the visible world" (113) makes the hero recall not only hazy, idyllic memories of the world as it was originally encountered, but also



subsequent deficiencies which inspired the journey. The Goddess has the omnipotent ability to bestow all life-giving sustenance, including the knowledge necessary for a heroic return to society, but she can in a parallel fashion reflect the mother's shortcomings in her abilities and existence in order to thwart and challenge the hero as he strives to learn this life-giving knowledge. Only those patient enough to fathom her complexities--good and bad, mother and lover--have the understanding necessary to pass what Campbell calls "the final test of the talent of the hero to win the boon of love" (118) which he has sought, in his society and in this "landscape of symbolical figures" (101), since infancy.

Once Merci is found inadequate for The Grip's journey, his relationship with Promise Land can flourish. Her perfection is more substantial than the merely physical beauty that, supported by no other attributes, vanished quickly from Merci. Four specific occurrences during his next outing with Promise advance her position in his esteem, the last one their figurative marriage begun. The first of these is her definition and description of onliness, the first non-physical aspect of himself ever explained to him and, although the concept of onliness does not then make complete sense to The Grip, the key to his journey.

The Grip selflessly and symbolically sacrifices his own safety for Promise's during a rowboat ride when he drags her from the river after she falls overboard. Having taken this

risk for her sake, proving himself worthy of the privilege of adoration, Promise Land reveals herself to him and he revels in her physical beauty: "How futile the other woman seemed in memory now! How could he have imagined she had been perfect?" (115). He accepts Promise as "the incarnation of the promise of perfection" (Campbell 111) and they commit themselves to one another with a physical act expressive of their spiritual reliance.

Campbell notes that "one must have a faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy" (130); this faith is established and then tested in the course of the journey. The father, who has been selective, "admitting to his house only those who have been thoroughly tested" (133), obviously approves of the hero of the journey and deems him worthy of tutelage in his home. The father figure will give himself over to the adopted hero, "the techniques, duties, and prerogatives of his vocation" (136) passing on to the younger man to bring him into the world of other men.

Tom Zucold includes The Grip in almost every aspect of his life once he takes him in. The Grip lives with Tom, learns his trade and philosophy, reaps the benefit of lessons learned from his past experiences, and shares--and defends--his dreams. Zucold is constantly "programming" himself to fulfil the "plan" of his existence in accordance with a motto posted in the garage: "KEEP IT TIGHT, THINGS GO RIGHT" (19):

"Everybody got a plan into him, see. Ittis like a hydraulic system in a car. Keep it tight, keep the pressure making it what it supposed to be and everything be fine. Plan is don't let things sag, don't loaf. Got to be what you are. Same thing true for human folks." (20)

Tom decides that part of The Grip's programming is supposed to be his shotputting, so he encourages him in his endeavors there. The hero's natural bulk and strength are attributes that Zucold has been denied, and he admires them in his new-found ward. Not only does his strength prove useful in the garage, but his abilities with the shotput give The Grip an activity with which to focus his mind as is necessary in his programming. What Zucold lacks in stature and physical strength he makes up in stamina and spirit; however, no power or size can keep the man's dreams from falling apart. Tom Zucold's dreams crumble while The Grip is with him in Chapel. The father has "[given] his own body to feed the people" (Frazer 437). The hero, although almost as involved in the dreams because of his loyalty and dependency as is the old man, is strong enough spiritually--as a result of sacrifices made for the sake of his enlightenment and his subsequent discoveries on his journey--to see beyond the dreams and to manage himself through the destruction of each one.

The first of Zucold's dreams to shatter is his infatuation with a local pool hustler, The Carolina Kid. The

Kid is an aging artist whose reputation is legendary, from his years of victories, due to his hand-hewn cues, to his impeccable dress as he plays. Revered as a savior by many locals, The Kid is a part of daily life for Zucold. Once Tom hears The Kid is coming to play at a local Moose Lodge hall, he focuses his every effort and attention on the event: "'He is coming. I kept the faith and he is coming'" (30). Daily admiration and mention of the poster of the figure that hangs in the garage become more intense, as does the personal programming of The Grip's foil, Tom Zucold. All is for naught, however, as The Carolina Kid becomes inebriated at the Moose Hall and cannot play. All bets placed on him are lost, including almost six hundred dollars wagered by Tom and The Grip, and a fight sends both men home with injuries.

The beating they take, both physical and emotional, is a turning point for each of the two men:

Tom Zucold had not been the same man since the Moose Hall. The Grip knew that he had not only grown sharper, more edged, but he behaved in an increasingly bizarre manner, and he seemed more depressed, darker, intense.

. . . It seemed to The Grip more and more that the old man could not tell what was happening from what he imagined was happening. (169)

The failure of The Carolina Kid to live up to expectations Zucold had of him is a blow to his senses which, following the intense adulation prior to the night at the Moose Lodge,

marks the beginning of a decline in the father figure's power and capacities. The hero, while Zucold's facilities are shutting down, is realizing a consciousness he has not previously known:

He had been better programmed even than either one of them had thought, so it took The Grip only a few days to shake the soreness of the beating and in a week the bruises were only a memory. . . . The Grip could not remember feeling better in his life, tighter, more tuned and happy. But he felt that something was about to explode. It was a sourceless fear and he was able to dismiss it most of the time. (156)

The defeat of Tom's life-sustaining savior figure triggers the collapse of other morale-supporting dreams. The Bowie Garage, which is nostalgically, sadly, named after the stables where the horses the young yet too-big-for-the-saddle Tom Zucold had hoped to jockey as a living were kept, "had died and was lingering in nervous spasms" (156).

The collapse of one more of Zucold's dreams stills the spasms of the garage and its owner. Tom's fears of an imagined Citizens Committee of Chapel and its plans to destroy the garage for their own purposes give him the momentum to fight back at actual plans from without which might have been connected to this committee if it did exist. When his perception of reality dims, Zucold transforms the garage into a fortification and wages an actual, physical war

on the non-existent committee:

"They after me, Grip. They after me and the Bowie Garage and the onliest thing stop 'em is money and we done lost it all. . . . They gone have to kill me before they taken the Bowie Garage. Ain't going to no goddamn jail neither. Man's garage his castle."

(170, 171)

The Grip, who realizes that Zucold has "entrusted [him] with the symbols of [the] office [of manhood and responsibility]" (Campbell 136) as Campbell foretells he will, stays with Tom through the ordeal out of duty, despite having told him that there "ain't no committee. You just crazy" (173).

Ultimately, Tom's war is his end, but he tests his son's trust in his mercy to his final moments. As Tom points a loaded flare gun at him, the hero professes this faith in the bolder man's love and trust in his mercy:

Tears began to trickle down his massive face but not in fear. He knew that there had been a man in the shell that pointed the flare gun, a man who had bet everything and lost, a man who had been the nearest thing he would ever have to a father.

"[The Carolina Kid] coming," The Grip said again, his voice breaking some now. "Man can't get to the top alone. Some things you just got to believe in no matter what. You showed me that. You and [The Kid]." (248)

Tom Zucold becomes expendable, having not only passed on to

the hero all that he could in this life, but also having earned his love and respect, in spite of his shortcomings, for having done so. The Grip realizes his kinship with the father and acknowledges this in his actions, sitting in Tom's chair and donning his baseball cap in his absence.

However, the father represents and passes on "contradictions, good and evil, death and life, pain and pleasure, boons and deprivation" (Campbell 145) which he does not acknowledge until initiation has commenced. The "benign self-giving aspect of the archetypal father" (140) is contaminated as "the dragon thought to be Sin" (130), which the hero discovered through identification of and relations with the true Goddess, compounds the father's persona. The hero's vision of the father becomes blurred as he sees him in this new light; he must make peace with himself by making peace once and for all with his father. The wise hero will realize that "the ogre aspect of the father is a reflex of the victim's own ego" (129) and of his ego's renderings of the father's role, beginning in the nursery, in the tumultuous situations in his life which led him to the journey. But, Campbell notes, "for the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears but a bliss-yielding, perpetual manifestation of the Presence" (148). Realization of the dual nature of the father unites him with the dual-natured mother in the hero's understanding of his journey; the two are so

similar as to be mutual examples of one nature.

In the course of the days they spend together as master and student in the garage, Zucold preaches numerous lessons, and many of these deal with women, as The Grip's attention is focused upon women most of the time.

Women, [Zucold] had learned all over the world, were nothing but a pain in the ass, some worse than others. He hadn't been busted from Master Sergeant Zucold to Private Zucold, then retired, for his soldiering, but because of that woman in Paris. (52, 53)

Try as he might, though, he cannot convince The Grip of his warnings; this is a lesson that he must learn through his own experiences, just as Tom has himself. When the young man, in awe of Merci as she flaunts herself in front of him, blurts out that he "wants her," Tom warns, to no avail, "No you don't, you just think you want it. Ittis nothing but trouble beginning to end" (70).

The trouble the hero ultimately finds with Promise, the woman he does "want" and does "get," is her previous relationship with Zucold himself. Campbell foretells that this relationship--"bewilder[ing], . . . disorient[ing]" (Thompson 58), grotesque--will result in revulsion (Campbell 122) as a necessary part of atonement with the father. In the course of conversation, someone mentions Promise Land's mongoloid child, the not-a-nigger-girl The Grip has seen around the garage. The child's parentage is questioned, and



someone says "'research says it was somebody named Zucold'" (235). Although knowing this makes the hero want to "scream at the old man. . . [and] punch his face" (238), he cannot leave him as he plans to do: "It seemed so simple--all he had to do was leave. Why didn't he just do it, then? Because it [would] kill him if [he left]" (239). Love and loyalty to the father figure outweigh his fury about the nature of his lover's relationship to the two men.

The hero's eventual ability to understand the conjunction of the two parents and the dual nature within each member of the pair assists him in transcending his physical self and attaining the spiritually oriented truth for which he searches. Understanding of this nature makes the hero "more than man" (Campbell 154); he is glorified as apotheosis, acceptance of this understanding and its implications upon his own nature, occurs.

By the novel's conclusion, the hero has accepted the details of reality as they have been revealed. The Grip accepts the good and the bad aspects of his goddess and his father figure; this is represented in his assumption of responsibility for their child. He cradles the child after it receives an injury and notes that "it was Tom Zucold's howling and Promise Land's that he held" (260). The hero has come to terms with and accepted the entire nature of the man and woman who have meant the most to him and has taken the burden of this nature onto his own shoulders:

Miraculously reborn, we are more than we were. . . .

The childhood parent images and ideas of "good" and "evil" have been surpassed. We no longer desire and fear; we are what was desired and feared.

(Campbell 162)

The outcome of the hero's trials in Chapel is the attainment of the ultimate boon for mankind. The Grip builds on Promise Land's concept of onliness, "a little like your soul, . . . a little like your personality" (108), the non-physical part of a person, and identifies the actuality that is, as Tom Zucold had told him early in his stay in Chapel, "laid out ahead of us if we got the sense to see how" (17).

Promise Land replies to one of The Grip's announcements of his love for her with the fact that onliness "keeps us separate when love tries to bring us together. . . . There's a kind of special you inside yourself, a kind of tiny faceless you that nobody can touch even if they want to" (157, 158). Campbell asserts that "the woman is life, the hero its knower and master" (120), which implies that, although people can yearn to acquaint themselves with one another, they cannot mingle their spiritual selves because they are not of like constitution. The non-physical aspect of the self cannot be possessed by another; all people have in common the fact that they can never have the non-physical self in common. The one part of human existence that unifies the members of the race is their spiritual individuality and

independence.

Nevertheless, there is always a primal urge to try to capture the onliness of another, whether the individuals involved know what this onliness is or that it exists or that they are yearning to attain it. The sense of something unattainable dwelling close at hand instigates people to act as, in The Grip's words, "freaks" (183); both the contestants in the stunts on TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES who perform ridiculous and often embarrassing acts which entertain the audience and the characters in Blue Moves, the plotless yet action-filled X-rated movie he sees with Promise, strike the hero as taking action for a reason, but without direction. These futile victims of the stimulus of the unattainable non-physical being within all people are freaks because they make wild physical motions in no direction; they have no inkling that there is another plane on which to move.

Not realizing the significance of her actions, Promise explains something to The Grip that she learned in a class; it is the revelation to the hero that his own actions are with purpose. Promise summarizes the essence of what Joseph Campbell identifies as the journey of the mythic hero:

[The professor] was talking about this monomaniac guy, some Greek, I think, that elected himself to go on a trip and go hunting and had to drop down into some underworld and come back with some stupid message. . . . He said this trip was one that everybody took. (186)

Although Promise Land is not enthusiastic about the topic, either in class or as she relays it to The Grip, he decides that, although his lover is "certainly smart, . . . things [do] have meanings and it [is] important to try and find them" (187). The goddess of his journey inspires and enlightens him one final time, and he surpasses her wisdom as a result of his acceptance of the idea conveyed. The myth is a fragment of the soul life, and, as Freud says, "it is probable that myths correspond to the distorted residue of the wish phantasies of whole nations, the secularized dreams of young humanity" (Qtd. in Harrison xlviiii).

The hero has grasped the ultimate boon, and quickly he is ready to relay it to "whole nations" for their own benefit:

Maybe, he thought, there wasn't any language that said things the way a person knew things were, knew them inside. Maybe that was why the hum went on across the road, all those mouths moving and tongues slicking, because each of them saw a thing his way and had to believe others could see it that way too. . . . But none of them seemed willing or able to see this. Instead, it was him who was alone, apart, alone, wordless almost. And yet they needed him, he could see that now. . . . They needed what they didn't understand, a story and a mystery, to carry them along on the illusion of their own connection to the

fragility and danger of life. They were freaks not because of their size and shape or what they did or what they wore, he saw that now. They were freaks for the same reason that he was, that everybody was, because they stood utterly alone in the world. . . and the only thing they had to help them was words.

(254)

This knowledge is the "sustaining substance" (Campbell 181) the hero has been able to glean from the knowledge he has gathered from the mother and the importance of the father's dreams in his life. Not only does it "enlarge the pupil of the eye, so that the body with its attendant personality will no longer obstruct the view" (189), taking the boon to a non-physical realm, but it transforms his own grotesqueness to the non-physical as well. If the boon were personified, Saint Augustine's apostrophe from *Meditations* could be addressed to it from *The Grip*: "I have gone astray, . . . seeking thee with great anxiety without, when yet thou art within" (Qtd. in Harrison li).

Ultimately, the grotesque physical features that caused him to struggle in the strictly physical world outside of Chapel are to the hero's advantage in the setting of the belly of his whale. Once the physical world, where these afflictions are found, is dismissed as less significant overall than the spiritual or non-physical world of existence, the physical aspects of his handicaps become so

insignificant as to be no stumbling block at all.

### Chapter Three

#### Tomson's Return

Having reached the source of his quest and obtained its knowledge, the hero must return to his own world and enlighten its inhabitants. Campbell allows for uncertainty, hindrances, and interference in this stage of the hero's journey. In order for the quest to be significant or successful, the hero must see himself through the final trials and realize his accomplishments as he crosses the threshold back into his society, taking a part of the other realm with him. Although he doubts that his people will accept his boon, the hero must acquire confidence about his purpose. Once he does so, he is effective and can sense his potential abilities in both realms.

With the deaths of his mentors and the exhaustion of the wellspring of inspiration he has discovered in Chapel, The Grip slowly reconciles himself to a return to the world outside the town. As he prepares to return, however, he makes additional discoveries; not only does he comprehend something which is not readily understood, but he also possesses the ability to obtain and grasp other forgotten truths in the future if necessary.

The Grip has found physical comfort, admiration, and parental guidance for himself in Chapel, but these in themselves do not fulfil the largest goal of his quest. To feel complete satisfaction, he must share the revelation of the source of his previous unhappiness and unacceptability with others who still suffer from these burdens. Like others before him, he "doubt[s] whether the message of realization [can] be communicated" (Campbell 193) to a people who have not experienced it themselves, and considers settling in his haven. He realizes that the ignorant may reject his revelation:

[H]e had been set apart and made to know and to be what they never wanted to know or to be. If he walked across the road there would be some who would spit on him, many who would shrink from him, others who already waited for him with malice making them tremble.

(253)

Before coming to Chapel, The Grip was at a disadvantage due to the stigma of his grotesque appearance and mannerisms. In Chapel, he discovers that all people are grotesque due to the inevitable solitude of their soul-self and, in coming to understand this, he once again becomes the object of scorn and repulsion: he, a grotesque because of his discernment, dwells among people whose thin spiritual demeanors make them grotesque.

The temptation to remain in Chapel, "like a king on a



throne" (256), is echoed in one voice that reaches The Grip from the outside world. According to news reporter Mighty White, the hero "could [be] famous, . . . could [have] it made in the shade" (260) in Chapel. However, this same voice precipitates in the hero the realization that he has no reason to remain in this realm. Mighty White, collecting information for a news story on Zucold's war against all that he fears in society, allows The Grip to discover that he "can't say" (237) what it is that Tom Zucold wants or what he himself is fighting to help him realize. This discovery results in the conclusion of the hero's journey.

Tom Zucold compounds the beckoning from the outside world, confirming the fate of the hero. One of Tom's friends delivers an envelope to The Grip; the money Zucold left to be given to the hero will assist him on his journey, and the photos of the Bowie Garage--the embodiment of the old man's dreams--and Faith--the "not-a-nigger child" (255) of Tom and Promise--will serve him as amulets and inspiration in his crossing of the return threshold and in his ventures thereafter.

Once he is supplied with the tools necessary for return to "the long forgotten atmosphere where men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete" (Campbell 216), the hero must courageously take the initiative to make the journey, confident that his toils will not necessarily be terminated or lost once he leaves. With the crossing of the

threshold back into his world, Campbell's hero must become Master of the Two Worlds, able to make the transition from his abilities in one to the advantages afforded him in the other. To accomplish these with a sense of satisfaction, the hero must realize that he works for the benefit of many, not himself, and that the losses he feels as he leaves the realm of discovery are precisely what will allow him to survive and deliver his boon to others. The freedom to live that Campbell gives his hero depends upon these two matters.

The hero is "the conscious vehicle" (Campbell 239) of the boon; he is not the boon itself. His lack of self-consciousness or egotistical tendencies allows The Grip to realize that the truth he has discovered is what is of importance to others. The hero, that which is, is not important, but what he brings, that which is coming, is. The hero is finite, but the truth he brings is infinite, and his personal sacrifices as he retrieves this truth are for a larger good. The clock in the Bowie Garage "[goes] haywire" (202) and stops as the hero begins to realize the significance of his journey; the timepiece starts again (258) only after he decides to leave Chapel, magnifying the timelessness of his boon and its universal and eternal impact.

The hero, despite the universal significance of his quest, develops personal relationships with the people of his journeys. Although it is inevitable that he sever ties with

these individuals as his travels carry him away, the attainment of the boon he seeks will require great sacrifices of his hosts before his departure: "every creature lives on the death of another" (Campbell 238). The Grip is allowed to gain enlightenment through the efforts and relinquishments of his mentor, Tom Zucold. Although the death of the father-figure could be traumatic, particularly when the figure replaces a deceased natural father, the hero who is aware of the transcendence of his own self and satisfaction can recognize the death as merely another necessary sacrifice made for the benefit of the larger good rather than allow it to shatter his personal composure.

The Grip acknowledges his indebtedness to and admiration for Tom Zucold in many of his actions as he leaves Chapel. The hero wears Zucold's hat and cares for his child in the novel's final pages, signifying acceptance of the roles of the male in society that he has discovered through the old man. The hero's re-baptism does not only coincide with his reentry into his own world; Tom's formative role is recognized as well, as the hero abandons his nickname and reclaims his ironic given name, Tomson. As he leaves Chapel, his success due in large part to Zucold's insight, love, and patience, the hero thinks of the demise of his actual father, whose bearing on his son's maturation is a foil to that of Tom Zucold, and whose own demise contrasts with Billy Luke Tomson's own prospects and outlook:

He thought vaguely of his father thrashing out in the Atlantic surf, the sounds of those girls [he had tried to save] screaming. Then there was only the darkness of water and the darkness of the ocean and his father felt himself sinking--just as [the hero] now felt himself going under. But he wouldn't give up. (261, 262)

Unlike either of his father figures, Billy Luke survives "through grace" (Campbell 216) and can build on the lessons they have afforded him to achieve universal enlightenment as he crosses the threshold which returns him to the human world he left when he entered Chapel.

In order for the hero to cross the threshold successfully to deliver his boon, he must make several decisions which amount to one significant discovery: "the realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know" (Campbell 217). Once the two worlds, divine and human, are reconciled in his mind, the hero can realize the answers to the smaller decisions which need to be made in order to cross peacefully and successfully. Despite this ancient kinship, thoughts from one world do not always make immediate sense in the other. Campbell identifies the task of transferring "back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark" (218) as the most difficult part of the journey. Indeed, as The Grip realizes the simplicity of the truth he has sought, he notes that for other people matters are still "all the same, the words

running together and changing everything until nothing [is] the way it had been" (254). The second matter is, in words that Campbell could have written for The Grip alone to utter, "Why re-enter such a world?" (Campbell 218). The hero must enter a world that is chaotic in comparison to that which he leaves, and he has no definite method of communication of his valuable baggage once he arrives.

When a hero does recognize that the two worlds were once parts of a whole, the steps he must take to reintroduce them to one another seem a less ominous part of the journey. After he imagines the despair-inspiring resistance that might meet him as he re-enters the human world and attempts to deliver his message, The Grip listens to conversations between people in this world, across the street from the Bowie Garage, "as if through a membrane grown suddenly thin" (253). The hero stands in a world others do not know, and he realizes that they do not know it because they are ignorant of its existence: the two commingle, as his abilities testify. The ideas he brings from the world of his gods are not native to the human world's language and understanding, but they will have to be communicated "in the only thing [people have] to help them tell" (254), their words, foreign though they are to the ideas relayed. The Grip realizes this translation will be a laborious one; it is his nature, the nature of the hero, to meet this challenge, for the benefit of those "men who are fractions" (Campbell 216), rather than to "commit the whole

community to the devil, . . . close the door, and make it fast" (218). He knows that people need "what they [don't] understand, a story and a mystery, to carry them along" (254), and that he can give that to them.

Campbell's final requirement for the hero crossing the return threshold is "a talismanic [item] from the soul's encounter with its other portion. . . [which betokens] that the reality of the deep is not belied by that of common day" (228), an item which proves and reminds the hero that the realm of the divine has been penetrated in order to obtain the truths the hero beholds. The Grip's talisman is Faith, the child of his mentors, whose name is evidence of his experience with the divine in Chapel as he brings her back to the human world.

The hero who accepts the terms of his return and makes the best of them, able to share his learnings and realize the interwoven nature of the two worlds, has mastered the ability to exist fully in both worlds and can, according to Campbell, "pass back and forth across the world division" (229). The Grip's comfort with the commingling of the two worlds--Mighty White as messenger from without, his ability to see and hear the human world from the divine, and the passage of Faith from one to another for her safe keeping--certifies him as a master of the two worlds. His discovery and mastery of his onliness have given him the confidence needed to ready him for "the great at-one-ment" (237), that which he will bring about

between the two realms as he mingles elements of one with the other.

The Grip is of one world, yet at peace in and with the denizens of another world, and he has overcome the elements of his person considered grotesque in the physical or human world to do this, transcending the physical into a realm forgotten to others yet still significant to existence. As The Grip decides to leave Chapel and the divine, Mighty White tells him he could have been famous had he decided to stay. The hero realizes now that Mighty's proposition is an inferior motive, although days earlier he might have considered staying if fame could bring him closer to being a gentleman like TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES' host, Bob Barker, or the men in the Montgomery Wards catalog. At the novel's completion, Billy Luke Tomson has realized a fundamental element of social function which mankind forgot long ago. When concentration shifted from the common good to personal advancement, the spiritual became an individualized interest. Contact with the intangible elements of the world also became a thing to be individually interpreted. The separation of non-physical selves resulted in what Dave Smith identifies as onliness: pieces of an ancient puzzle which no one knows enough about to attempt to make interlock. Smith's hero realizes the need for an individual who will overlook his personal interests in favor of the greater good. In becoming this self-sacrificing individual, though, he does not lose

himself but becomes more than what he originally thought he was. The journey of the mythic hero allows the hero not only to see a dimension of himself that the grotesque physical self had previously overshadowed, but also to realize the assets and allowances of his grotesque condition.



### Conclusion

Smith's novel merits the attention it has not widely received because it pivots on two characteristics crucial to twentieth-century man, characteristics which, when employed together as they are in Online, are more significant to the audience than they may be if presented separately.

The grotesque tradition in literature did not originate in Smith's age or region, but it has been smoothly incorporated into the works of the twentieth-century South. The grotesque reflects a condition with which the people of that region are familiar; otherwise, it would not have the popularity it does, nor would it be incorporated into works repeatedly over the span of a century. The characteristics of the grotesque and the resources which must be available to the employer of the grotesque in his audience's own experiences have become commonplace in aspects of everyday life; twentieth-century lifestyles spawn the grotesque. It is easier today to cordon off regions which would not be responsive to the grotesque than it would be to identify, as was done earlier in the century with the American South, societies which can relate to the genre. It could be said of

the pre-millennial world in general that the grotesque is reflective of the condition of matters, whether considered in an isolated area on its own, or in one area or level of society in contrast with another. Extremes are reached in every facet of life on every level of society, making conditions grotesque before the artist even touches them.

Also prior to Smith's work, Joseph Campbell outlined an itinerary which already existed in age old mythical traditions in his Hero with a Thousand Faces. The journey of the mythic hero had been proven functional and its ends attainable when Smith employed it in his 1981 publication. This journey, successful in numerous situations in the past, time-tested, is, on paper, one probable tool of alleviation for the twentieth-century's conditions.

The combination of these two literary techniques in one work is particularly appropriate lately. Much recent literature seems to be either a pessimistic overview of the twentieth-century condition or a half-hearted, half-investigated proposal of a solution to the situation in general. Little literature today touches upon both effectively.

A reading of Dave Smith's Onliness reveals an exception to this rule. The novel is reminiscent in its function of the German Rahmengesichte, or frame story, in which the reader is presented with a story within a story, the former exhibiting the moral or message praised and preached in the

latter. The story of Billy Luke Tomson is fiction, a myth, which tells the reader that myth similar to itself is necessary in order to overcome current situations--regional, nationwide, worldwide. That myth, of course, revolves around the mythic hero and his virtues and the significance of his accomplishments.

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