

# Lights and Shadows

---

Volume 19 *Lights and Shadows* Volume 19

Article 17

---

1975

## The Misogamist or A Three-Part Study in Crime and Retribution

Whitney T. Dooley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dooley, W. T. (1975). The Misogamist or A Three-Part Study in Crime and Retribution. *Lights and Shadows*, 19 (1). Retrieved from <https://ir.una.edu/lightsandshadows/vol19/iss1/17>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by UNA Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Lights and Shadows* by an authorized editor of UNA Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact [jpate1@una.edu](mailto:jpate1@una.edu).

**THE MISOGAMIST  
OR  
A THREE-PART STUDY IN CRIME AND RETRIBUTION**

*by Whitney T. Dooley*

PART I: THE DEED

The road was a narrow red slash between the Georgia pines that bordered the winter dormant fields. The frozen soil glinted here and there where the sun melted away the early morning mist. Brown stubble from last year's crop stood in ragged lines on the stony hillsides that rose on either side of the road. Mrs. Baker viewed the hollow from her house, perched on the highest ridge, and shivered, not so much from the icy weather as from the cold that Captain Baker's absence brought. Two hundred miles south, he was lining the remnants of his unit into ranks as ragged as the stalks of corn his wife and daughter had toiled over the previous summer. The house itself was a modest clapboard affair overlooking a three acre field of hard flinty soil. As was usual in those times of trial and hardship, the house had a grayed about the edges, dilapidated appearance. Four years of no maintenance had let the porch sag. The roof was uneven from lost shingles, and here and there the dark mouth of a broken window stood out in the morning sun. The barn which stood close to the road that bordered the property, some hundred yards from the house, was in considerably worse condition. Not that it mattered. All of the animals but a sway-backed mule had gone along with their master to be ground up in the war effort.

The Yankee presence had made itself felt in the wind between the cracks in the walls and in the poor food that the absence of men created. With regret Mrs. Baker thought of her daughter, Sarah, a pretty sixteen, and of the barn dances and hayrides

she'd miss with all the young men in the region gone to the fighting.

"Mother, come away from the window and do stop brooding," Sarah's voice broke her Mother's reverie.

"Oh, I'm sorry, darling. I was just thinking."

"Worrying is more like it. You've been distracted since we got the news about Atlanta."

With a sigh, Mrs. Baker turned her attention to helping her daughter heat water for washing their ragged clothes, and for making the corn gruel that would be their meager breakfast. Had she remained at the window another few minutes, she would have seen a more tangible evidence of the Yankee presence on the road below.

Two Union soldiers, coming around the bend in the road at the head of the valley, spied the house and began a plodding progress toward it. They were bummers in Sherman's Army and an oddly matched pair: one, a native New Englander with a mean streak a mile wide; the other, an Irish immigrant whose big frame held enough kindness for the two of them.

Sean Connor had found his way into Sherman's Army as a rich man's proxy. Poor Irish immigrants provided excellent cannon fodder for a reasonable price. The banker who avoided conscription through Sean had paid him a mere fifty dollars.

Billy Markham had always been a rounder, a wild one from the time he surmounted the barrier of puberty until he completed the cycle of his life. He was known for his fighting

and drinking, and among the village girls, he enjoyed the reputation of a stud. He was, however, not overly bright and fell prey to an attractive widow, who under a pleasing exterior concealed a temperament similar to the member of the arachnid family that bears the same title. Marriage did not suit Billy. His newly found spouse had definite ideas about his making a living and she expressed them in no uncertain terms. Even the consolation he found in sex was ruined when she became pregnant. He chafed and smouldered under her domination. The infatuation he had taken for love was rapidly transformed into a burning resentment. Unlike most people, Billy greeted the shelling of Fort Sumter with a feeling of relief. He enlisted in the cause to save the Union to get away from his wife.

They stopped below the house and from a thicket near the barn surveyed the farm, looking for evidence of food stores or livestock. Stamping their feet against the cold they debated the worth of exposing themselves to possible rifle fire from a Southern farmer, against the plunder that might be found in the house.

"Well, it don't look like much to me, Billy, lad, and I'll wager there's nothin' here to interest General Sherman. So let's be movin' on."

Billy was about to agree when Sarah stepped out on the porch for wood for the stove.

"Jesus Christ," he breathed as they watched her fill her arms and reenter the house. "There might not be anything to interest General Sherman but from the looks of those petticoats there's something here to interest me," Billy said as he headed across the field.

Dumbfounded, Sean watched him go until he had covered a quarter of the field. He knew Billy's wild nature well enough to see what he planned. Rape was something Sean's conscience would not let him permit. "Be thinkin' of your wife and child, Billy," he called as he began a belated pursuit.

Billy turned for a moment and replied, "How many times do I have to say it, you stupid mick bastard? I'd rather burn in hell than do so much as think about that bitch and snottynosed brat."

"Then, be thinkin' of me fist atop yer head!" Sean bellowed as he broke into a run. Seeing pursuit, Billy made a beeline for the house, jerking the sling of his rifle off his shoulder so that he could hold the weapon at ready as he ran. The frozen soil crunched beneath their heavy boots as they leapt over the brown corn stalks. Their rasping breath hung suspended as clouds of icy mist.

Billy reached the house a few steps ahead of Sean, spun around and drove the butt of his musket into the Irishman's face. Connor might as well have run into a brick wall. His feet cleared the ground by a good two feet and for a second he was suspended in air, his body nearly horizontal. Then he struck the frozen earth and lay gasping, spitting up blood and broken teeth. Billy drew his bayonet from its sheath and grasping the hilt with both hands he fell on Sean, his weight driving the blade into the fallen man's chest. One great muscular spasm heaved through the Irishman's body. Then he lay still.

"Now, you son of a bitch, let's see you push me around anymore," Billy said as he wiped his knife on the dead man's coat. Returning it to his sheath he stood up and walked up the porch steps, heedless of his comrade's wide staring eyes and red blood and mingled with that harsh red earth.

The door was locked so he kicked it open. The Baker women were huddled in the far corner of the first room. Mrs. Baker clung to her pretty sixteen year old as if the force of her embrace could protect the child from any evil. Markham cracked her jaw with the heel of his boot, slamming her into the wall and away from her daughter. Grasping Mrs. Baker's hair, he dragged her into the middle of the room. Then he turned his attention to Sarah. She shrank away from him screaming.

"Shut up, you goddamned rebel bitch," Markham swore as he pummeled her face. "I'm goin' to show you what a real man feels like."

When swollen eyes and bleeding mouth had reduced her to quiet sobs he began cutting away her clothing with his knife. Occupied with roughly fondling her firm young body and dropping his trousers, he failed to notice Mrs. Baker crawl into the adjoining kitchen. Nor, as he was forcing himself between Sarah's thighs, did he notice her return. The shock of her burying the kindling axe in his head did capture his attention . . . for a moment.

## PART II: THE REPRIEVE

"Next, please," a hurried individual behind an enormous white desk called out.

A tall Negro stepped up and falling on his knees cried out, "Yahs, Lawd, ahs ready, Lawd. Mercy, Lawd, mercy."

With a look that said he'd seen it all before, the official said, "Please, son, let's dispense with the theatrics; we're in the middle of a rush. Ordinarily, we'd go through the expected social amenities and heavenly pageant, but wars always put us in a bind. Paperwork, you know. So, just give me your name and report to the first garden on the left. Your case will be processed later, and if you still want it you can have the full treatment, harps and all. Your name, son. I'm waiting!"

"Rufus, suh," moaned the Negro, wild eyed.

"Very good, Rufus. Now, if you'll move along I'm sure you'll find a good many interesting spirits with whom to spend a delightful few thousand years."

With no small amount of confusion, Billy watched the proceedings at the desk. "Where in hell am I?! he exclaimed. "What place is this?" he asked, his tone becoming softer as he glanced about. Vastness, great vastness, was the only word to describe it. That southern farmhouse had undergone a sudden, most remarkable metamorphosis. The roughbeamed ceiling was now a sparkling blanket of stars, and the threadbare carpet had been transformed into obsidian of blinding brilliancy. Nor was he alone. Thousands and thousands of men stood in queues about him. Considering the pain he'd felt before finding himself here, he was either dead, crazy, or both. The dialog at the desk about harps, gardens, and heavenly pageants seemed to indicate he'd gone to his reward. And considering the position he'd been in before making the trip, he was a little apprehensive as to what that reward might be. He determined that if this place was indeed Heaven, he would say nothing to enlighten the management about his qualifications for being

there. Judging by the overflow of applicants, he figured his chances for acceptance were fair provided he volunteered no information, and the white haired man . . . angel? . . . at the desk asked no embarrassing questions. He heaved a great sigh of relief when he passed in the same mechanical fashion as the others.

The third garden on the left was a very pleasant place, and indeed, there were a great many entertaining spirits with whom to spend one's time. After a few years of preliminary nervousness and worry about being found out for the murderer he was, or had been, Billy developed a very complacent smugness. After all, he must be a very clever creature to have lived a life of wanton self-indulgence and still made it into Paradise. He was to spend many smug decades free of his wife and any earthly cares. Had he not been so shallow he would have realized the great machinery of the universe was turning in its inexorable way to bring him to justice.

### PART III: RETRIBUTION

Billy's progeny flowered and in his name a line was formed. While his family grew from great, great grandfather down, the machinery of the universe was marking time in Billy Markham's case. In 1975, some 110 years after Billy's entrance to the place of final rest, Ernest Markham and his attractive wife, Mary, were approached by missionaries of the Church Of Jesus Christ Of Latter-Day Saints. Ernest was Billy's great, great grandson, and unlike his ancestor, a very conscientious individual. Billy's wild blood had been bred out of the family.

The missionaries were earnest, clean-cut young men who presented their church's case very effectively. The hope of new revelations from God offered by the Mormon church greatly impressed Ernest and Mary. They had become increasingly dissatisfied with their Episcopalian faith and becoming Mormons seemed a logical answer to their spiritual problems.

Ernest summed up their attitude by saying, "You know, Mary, if God spoke to man two thousand years ago and hasn't since, I would say that we've been shortchanged. And my God is not one to abandon us like that."

The doctrine of the Mormon Church that touched them most deeply was that once married in a temple according to proper ritual, they would be together forever, a promise their present sect could not offer. Ernest and Mary were very deeply in love and could hardly bear to be apart for a day's time. The risk of not being together in the hereafter was one they were not willing to take. The new direction from God and the strong family life offered by the Mormon faith was enough to interest them, but the promise of life together for eternity convinced them to embrace it.

Like all new converts, they began learning about their new faith and fulfilling their obligations to it with great vigor. In the course of their study they discovered that they were in a position to perform a cosmic good deed. A part of their study was to make a genealogy or family tree, and from it, determine if their ancestors were blessed with togetherness in Heaven. If

not, Ernest and Mary could stand in proxy for them in a wedding ceremony at a temple. Thus, grandmothers and grandfathers who had already gone to the other world could be assured of togetherness for all eternity.

In a year's time, the Bishop of Ernest and Mary's ward deemed them ready to travel to a temple and complete their work, as they had faithfully followed the scriptures and teachings of the Church. They were elated. Ernest took two weeks vacation from his job and he and Mary traveled to Salt Lake City to visit the Temple and be fulfilled in the promise of the church. The Temple with its six great spires reaching towards Heaven was a very majestic and beautiful place for them to consummate their love. Of all the wedding ceremonies performed there, other than their own, of course, the one which gave them the most pleasure was for Great-Great-Grandfather Billy Markham and his wife, whose life together in the physical world had been short, for great-great grandfather had been called away to suppress the great rebellion and had never returned. Ernest said to Mary as they made their journey home, "Isn't it wonderful that great-great-grandfather and grandmother can be together again after all these years?"

"Oh, yes, it is, dear. I'm so happy just thinking about it," she blissfully replied.

Billy was idly stretched out on the soft lawn of the garden enjoying a pleasant daydream, when a nearly forgotten voice brought him bolt upright.

"How dare you run off and abandon me with a two-month-old child and a crop to be planted? How dare you go traipsing off all over the countryside with no thought of your responsibilities at home? Did you think the angels would provide for us? Why, the baby and I nearly starved to death the second winter after you left. And I've been waiting for the chance to get at you all these years. You were lazy in that life but you won't be in this one. Now, get up and put this garden into apple pie order immediately, because we're going to be here together a long, long time!"

"My God!" Billy screamed as he looked around, "My wife!" and sure enough, there she was, squallin' brat and all, looking terribly triumphant. He fled to the wrought-iron gate of the garden, screaming like a stuck pig. But it would not yield to his frantic pressure.

"Official!" he yelled, "Official, Official, Official!"

Casually the spirit being who had admitted him strolled up to the gate and looked in.

"Yes, Mr. Markham?"

"Listen," Billy said frantically! "Listen, I don't belong here. I did horrible things in the other life, evil things. I was a terrible sinner, a murderer, a rapist. Take me out of here. Send me to Hell where I belong. Send me anywhere, just get me away from her."

The spirit gave him a mildly suprised look and said, "Why, Mr. Markham, I thought you knew. Hell is of your own making." And with that it disappeared.