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## Amy's Men, or Wounded Masculinity in Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden* (2002)

Frédérique SPILL

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"Please," I said, but whether my word was spoken to Holland or Billy I couldn't certain say."

Ron Rash, *One Foot in Eden* 91

- 1 Published in 2002, Ron Rash's first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, is built on a succession of five first-person narrators. Four of the five narrators are men: the third and fourth narrators are respectively a "husband" and a "son," namelessly presented as such in their section's heading—with a definite article and a capital letter—, forthrightly pointing out how essential a value filiation is. As is necessarily the case with a son's story (which is, by essence, second and secondary), the son's narrative comes after the father's and it is to be implicitly compared to it. The first and the fifth narrators are lawmen, the High Sheriff and his Deputy, also introduced through their social functions rather than their individual names. Male representatives of the law thus contain the novel, which tells the flowing story of a murder and crime investigation in the Appalachian Mountains in South Carolina in the 1950s—a historical context that is identifiable as some of the male characters have recently returned from the Korean War. The dénouement of the detective story, soon to be relegated to a mere pretext for the development of existential considerations about nature, man and his place in the world,<sup>1</sup> occurs about two decades later, as images of the Vietnam War haunt the minds of television viewers. Though not playing a direct operational function in the plot, wars are part and parcel of its subtext, delineating, between the lines, a world in which masculinity is constantly and violently tested, thus verifying Marilyn Wesley's argument in *Violent Adventure* that "stories of war link the ideals of particular communities to the promise of male maturity and masculine empowerment" (83).
- 2 Deep in the mountains, in a strongly rural community, a murder was committed because a woman—who is also "the Wife" (59)<sup>2</sup> in the story—finds herself torn between two men as a consequence of her frustrated desire to become a mother. This woman is named Amy Holcombe and hers is the only female voice that is to be heard in the novel. Her

monologue, which occurs in the second position, is also the most thought-provoking from our perspective since it results from a man's creation of a woman's perception of her prominently masculine environment. Indeed, with Amy, Rash—obviously a male author—reveals his ability to render a woman's most intimate thoughts and sensations and to create a language for them: Amy's monologue is a key moment in the development of the narrative inasmuch as it allows for the emergence of a singular, sometimes discordant voice, against which the four other masculine voices—the voices of her and her world's men—collide, as their portrayals gradually take shape. Women and men, whether it is in life or in fiction, can hardly be considered as belonging to separate spheres. Likewise, masculinity and femininity are best defined as “more or less symmetrical pendant[s],” a notion that Abigail Solomon-Godeau develops as follows: “masculinity is, like femininity, a concept that bears only an adventitious relation to biological sex and whose various manifestations collectively constitute the cultural, social, and psychosexual expression of gender” (71). Refuting the temptation of essentialist definitions, Solomon-Godeau also recalls that like femininity, masculinity is a construct that is subjected to change as in the case of most “fluid and contradictory [realities]” (Connell and Messerschmidt 836). This idea sprouted from Raewyn Connell's pioneering 1995 essay, *Masculinities*, whose title straightforwardly announces that masculinity cannot be conceived in the singular, but necessarily takes a plural form. The varied range of masculine figures evolving in *One Foot in Eden* certainly confirms the idea that “[m]asculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time” (852).<sup>3</sup>

- 3 In *One Foot in Eden*, masculinities emerge from the way their representations are made to contrast with one main evocation of femininity; they result from the way Amy's vision(s) of herself and of her men interact with the way the latter deal with her and envision her. In other words, Amy's perception of her men is as relevant to the analysis of the figures of masculinity in *One Foot in Eden* as are the diversified ways in which men construct their identities around her. Likewise, their very evolution throughout the novel verifies that masculine identity is “always being a provisional accomplishment within a life course” (Connell and Messerschmidt 843). As this paper's approach claims to be literary rather than sociological, it will focus on the shifting textual representations of masculinity emerging from Rash's writing. Much in the way of Noel Polk in his study of masculinity in Faulkner's *Snopes Trilogy*, this analysis will examine “the degree to which the problematics of masculine enactment and empowerment undergird [Rash's] work, the extent to which his characters feel bound, thwarted, and driven by cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, definitions that prescribe certain performative features of each and that proscribe numerous other acts that would in effect cancel out the performances of the prescribed” (Polk 46). Through the juxtaposition of Amy's eyes and voice with those of her (and other) men, Rash draws a composite, multifaceted picture of southern masculinity across generations. Billy, Amy's husband, is depicted as a modernized version of the Fisher King, the wounded king of the Grail legend whose kingdom has become a wasteland as a consequence of his ailment. While his work as a farmer is deeply affected by the endless drought, Billy is crippled and sterile, an irreversible after-effect of polio; he also has a symptomatic speech impediment. Though a veteran notorious for his manly violent outbursts, Holland Winchester—Amy's temporary lover and remedy to Billy's sterility—turns out to be objectified and manipulated and will ultimately be sacrificed. As he reluctantly grasps the guilty secret of his own origin, Amy's son, Isaac, is racked with uncertainty. So is the Deputy, though for different reasons, as he is made to witness the complete flooding of an ancestral region in the

name of progress.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the Sheriff is undoubtedly portrayed as a wise and compassionate figure with heroic traits; yet, he too fails to perform his role both as a justice and as a husband: his investigation is scattered with personal reflections about his estranged wife and their crumbling marriage.

- 4 While *One Foot in Eden* depicts a man's world characterized by manly heroes and a great deal of harshness and uncontrollable violence, confirming the notion that "tales of male heroic action are historically the most ancient, universal, and prevalent forms of narrative" (Wesley xi), the novel's male characters invariably appear to be wounded and dysfunctional in one way or another. Consequently, more often than not, their sense of balance is quite precarious, as suggested by Rash's choice of a title. Meanwhile, Amy happens to be empowered by men's very weaknesses. However, it would be much too simplistic to suggest that Rash merely evokes a redistribution of power and a reshuffling of prerogatives in favor of women at the time. While the novel's characters bear witness to the significant changes experienced by the Appalachian South from the 1950s on, their trajectories suggest that such progressions profoundly changed the traditional definitions of both masculinity and femininity at the time. The interplay of multiple visions in *One Foot in Eden* therefore evokes a complex depiction of southern masculinity, which is shown as being in flux, probably in transition<sup>5</sup>—undoubtedly having a hard time redefining itself.

## Brazen, Rambunctious Masculinity

- 5 As the novel begins, Sheriff Alexander's quiet evening at home is interrupted by a knock at the door: his Deputy needs his help because "[t]here ha[s] been trouble in the upper part of the county at a honky-tonk called The Borderline" (3). The Sheriff consequently has to give up "a good book on the Cherokee Indians [he]'d just started" (3). Before leaving the house, he observes that his wife, Janice, has already fallen asleep over another book entitled *History of Charleston*. Beyond their mere function as part of the exposition, such details directly say something about man, woman and the representational expectations associated with them; they will, moreover, soon develop into hints at upcoming evolutions in the plot. What should first be noticed is the fact that both the Sheriff and his wife read history books, thus contrasting with our current activity as readers of Rash's fiction. At the same time, through his characters' reading selections, Rash proclaims his awareness of the region's history, in which his own stories are consistently anchored. The Sheriff and his wife are quite differently engrossed in different types of history books: while he frustratingly abandons his reading of a "good book" about the indigenous history of the United States prior to white domination, his wife's choice is of a much more tamed version of history and civilization as she reads about the urban development of a city reputed for the refinement of its culture and architecture. The symbolical remoteness of the city of Charleston, the oldest and second-largest city in the state of South Carolina, is exemplified in Rash's work by its being a mere, faraway (and in this case, bookish) reference, which his characters never actually approach. It is quite obvious that the Sheriff's wife is but moderately captivated by her reading. The couple's conflicting interests and their growing disaffection, which is confirmed as early as the novel's third paragraph, is therefore immediately suggested. The Sheriff and his wife somehow belong to different times and worlds; they do not seem to have much in common anymore: "I looked at Janice, the high cheekbones and full lips,

the rise of her breasts under the nightgown, and despite everything that had happened, and hadn't happened in our marriage, desire stirred in me like a bad habit I couldn't get shed of" (3). Though the Sheriff's desire for his wife pathetically persists, the cultural gap that separates them can no longer be bridged. As Sheriff Alexander leaves the house to enter the dark wild night and perform his duty as a law enforcer, his wife's sleep remains indifferently unperturbed. While throughout the novel the Sheriff is quite systematically portrayed as an outdoorsman by taste or necessity, as the first-person narrator of the novel's first section, he hardly ever pictures his wife out-of-doors. Janice is, indeed, pretty much confined to the interior world of the *domus*. But she radically differs from Amy Holcombe and other female characters in the novel insofar as her domestic life is unhappy and her leisure despondent.

- 6 When the Sheriff and his Deputy reach the Borderline, they are faced with the manly world of "beer and blood" (4), a monosyllabic, alliterative, liquid pair that encapsulates a logic of excess and evokes the correlation between inebriation and violence, two chief ingredients in the demonstration of a brazen form of virility. The name of the place where there has been trouble that needs to be taken care of is in itself very suggestive. As an adjective, "borderline" designates something that is situated at or near a border, which is symbolically the case here: the joint is located in a remote place outside of town, in the dark depth of a silent night. As such, it indicates the frontier between civilization and the wilderness; a privileged place for man's innermost drives to be given free rein, quite in keeping with the psychological meaning of "borderline" designating temporary instability. Therefore, in Rash's world, because of their bubbling violent urges, men seem particularly prone to enter the category of "casualties." It is therefore extremely meaningful that *Casualties* should be the title of Rash's second collection of short stories, published in 2000. The fate of the casualties of Rash's fiction is explicitly depicted in his 2006 novel *The World Made Straight*:

Casualties of his own prideful recklessness, they ran vehicles into trees and bridge abutments, crippled themselves in rock quarries, got knifed or shot in roadhouse parking lots. Easy enough to argue that Leonard performed a public service by selling them alcohol and drugs, merely speeding up the process of natural selection. (74)

- 7 Though it takes the radically different form of a comic piece, "Waiting for the End of the World," a story collected in *Burning Bright*—Rash's 2010 collection—, conveys an atmosphere that conjures up the figures of "the various casualties of the evening" (187) in a way that echoes the opening of *One Foot in Eden*. It is obvious enough that late night in Appalachian honky-tonks is a period prone to casualties of all kinds, the victims of inebriation, outbursts of violence or both: "Casualties were propped up in chairs, though a few still lay amidst shattered beer bottles, cigarette butts, blood, and teeth. It was as close to war as I'd seen since the Pacific" (4). This prolonged enumeration of parts and bits—further suggested by the alliteration in [b] and by the succession of monosyllabic words evocative of fragments—conjures up images of post-battle chaos. From the center of that scene emerges a battered version of the traditional effigy of the Marlboro man, whose original version is forcefully evoked in Barbara Stern's deconstructive analysis of a famous ad:

The Marlboro Man is shown nearly full face in a 1990 ad featuring a head and upper-body shot that dominates the right side of a full-page ad. [...] He is wearing a shearling jacket with traces of snow in the folds, a dark shirt whose collar is visible, brown gloves, and a white cowboy hat. His hands are folded on top of each other,

and he is facing left, gazing away from the camera. The hair that can be seen is dark and neatly trimmed, and his brow is furrowed, with a deep crease between his eyes. He is suntanned, with deep wrinkles in his eye area and a five o'clock shadow. His cigarette is held firmly in his lips, pointing toward the letters "Marl" in the brand name—the only letters that can be seen, for he is standing in front of the others. Since the 1960s, this figure of "a silent cowboy" has been an acknowledged symbol of masculinity [...]. He is a lone man on the frontier bent on taming the wilderness [...], a modern reworking of a cultural icon descended both from the cowboy in frontier lore (Daniel Boone, Paul Bunyan, and Buffalo Bill Cody) and from the "man's man" hero found in the works of Melville, Hemingway, and Mailer. He embodies the macho values of the Wild West: an outdoorsy cowhand, usually smoking, who frequents wild and lonely places. (558)

- 8 Though the Marlboro Man Stern thoroughly describes corresponds to a 1990 version of the myth (and she dates its symbolical impact back to the 1960s), most of its main components are somehow recognizable in the first fragments of Holland's portrayal as an uncouth young man marked by experience, a lone wolf looking for trouble, several decades earlier. Such echoes are further suggested by the fact that local trouble at the Borderline should instinctively be associated with "the Pacific" and the much more large-scale conflicts in which men are sent to fight—a device that, right from the start, imbues both the plot and the conception of masculinity underlying it with a universal dimension, a mix of aggressiveness, rough talk, hard drinking and smoking, in the midst of other ingredients.
- 9 In *One Foot in Eden* the typical Marlboro man has obviously seen better days;<sup>6</sup> moreover, ironically enough, he is a Winchester. As he first appears in the novel, Holland Winchester is immediately associated with trouble and violence, both present (in the form of degenerating drinking bouts) and past (through war reminiscences), an impression that is confirmed by a quick onomastic analysis of his name. A very meaningful choice of a last name for a rowdy male character, Winchester first evokes firearms and ammunition, thus eliciting images of outdoor sports (like hunting and rifle competitions) and belligerent images of self-defense. At the same time, since Winchester also designates a famous cigarette brand,<sup>7</sup> the (now somewhat outdated) association of virility with smoking is repeated and corroborated. Yet the fact that the first mention of cigarettes—a phallic object *par excellence*—in the narrative should take the consumed and shrunken form of "butts" is ominously noteworthy as the whole novel resonates with the motif of symbolical castration. Finally, with its Dutch resonance, Winchester's first name—Holland—injects more extensive and somehow contradictory connotations (the peaceful images of tulips and windmills stereotypically associated with the Netherlands) into the typical representation of masculine Americanness suggested by his last name. Part of the rich complexity of Rash's writing sprouts from his awareness of and active fight against what Trent Watts identifies as "the tendency to stereotype southern white men as either particularly good or particularly bad [which] follows an American tendency since the Civil War [...] to see the (white) South variously as the repository of the nation's virtues, its aberrant backwater, or its pathological doppelganger" (4). As often with Rash, characterization is a process in the making, spawning fluctuating effects and, sometimes, assembling seemingly irreconcilable elements.
- 10 This is how the full figure of Holland Winchester first appears, emerging from a scene of utter chaos:  

He nodded toward the corner where Holland Winchester sprawled in a chair like a boxer resting between rounds, a boxer in a fight with Jersey Joe or Marciano.



Holland's nose swerved toward his cheek, and a slit in the middle of his forehead opened like a third eye. His clenched fists lay on the table, bruised and puffy. He wore his uniform, and if you hadn't known Holland was sitting in a South Carolina honky-tonk, hadn't seen the Falstaff and Carling Black Label signs glowing on the walls, your next guess would have been he was still in Korea, waiting at a dressing station to be stitched and bandaged. (4-5)

- 11 This first full-length portrait of Holland Winchester is ironically a portrait of a man "sprawling" rather than standing, obviously not at his best. The close-up on his bruised face, which conjures up a fantastic, three-eyed and weird-nosed creature, confirms this impression. The precipitated dislocation of his body, whose slow yet inexorable decomposition constitutes one of the novel's most arresting time markers across the decades covered by the plot,<sup>8</sup> is thus foreshadowed. Yet Holland's being associated with famous heavyweight boxing champions endows this overwhelmingly lackluster picture of virility with surprisingly positive undertones. It suggests that Holland will soon be ready to return to the makeshift ring and fight again. Though injured by the strikes that have been thrown, Holland's fists are still "clenched," eager to deal more blows, thus pointing to his determination and fearlessness.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, his wearing his army uniform when he goes out to get boozed-up can certainly be interpreted as a proud assertion of manly experience, a way for Holland to claim his superiority over men who did not take part in the war or were not lucky enough to return home apparently safe and sound. The pride he takes in his army uniform hence implies that he regards his war experience as "a reliable means to both personal authority and public righteousness" (Wesley 83). The association of masculinity with violence that lies at the core of this tableau is, once again, imbued with a universal dimension, as South Carolina and Korea are evoked within the same sentence and the reader, whatever his/her background, is called out to in the form of an everybody-encompassing you. Finally, while the beer brands advertised contribute to the local color of the scene, it is significant that demonstrations of virility, whether on the front or in a forlorn honky-tonk, should similarly require stitching and bandaging. The "beer and blood" cocktail makes the borderline between here and there a very thin one, suggesting that male showoffs are analogous all around the world.
- 12 Soon after the initial introduction of this particularly rough masculine specimen, the plot of *One Foot in Eden* revolves around Holland Winchester's disappearance (his absence being highlighted by his prior loudness) and the subsequent investigation of the case by Sheriff Alexander. The reader retrospectively understands that the initial scene at the Borderline is the first of the novel's numerous flashbacks: in the present of narration of the Sheriff's monologue "two weeks later" (7), Holland has been missing for a day or so. The opening considerations can thus retrospectively be identified as corresponding to the Sheriff's remembrance of his last encounter with Holland, undercut with his own reflections about returning from war and the damage involved. It is therefore a startling experience for the reader to understand that the man that is so vividly depicted in the novel's opening pages is missing and probably dead. In fact, as the Sheriff starts pondering the situation, Holland's widowed mother, Mrs. Winchester, with whom he has been living since his return from Korea, expresses the intimate conviction that her son has been killed:  
"Holland Winchester's missing," Bobby said. "His momma's got it in her head he's been killed."  
Bobby sounded hopeful.  
"You don't think we'd be that lucky, do you?" I said. (7)



- 13 The acknowledgement of Holland Winchester's disappearance generates an unlikely sense of optimism, which is conveyed by the syntactic proximity of the adjectives "hopeful" and "lucky." It soon appears that though Holland came back from war as a charismatic figure, both the law and the community the law stands for are quite eager to be rid of him, mostly perceiving him as a nuisance. Though she can provide the law with no evidence for her motherly intuition, Mrs. Winchester also thinks she knows who has killed her son and has a hunch about why he has been killed: "'You go see Billy Holcombe,' Mrs. Winchester said. 'He's the one knows where Holland is'" (13). In a series of mirror effects in which one masculine figure is prone to substitute for another, the reader's attention shifts from Holland to Billy. Meanwhile, the two of them appear as twin figures, with a few decisive variations. Though they are about the same age, went to school together, grew up in similar environments and end up making love to the same woman, they are to be distinguished by one essential distinctive feature, best encapsulated by the notion of potency. Billy's story is that of a man who kills the potent figure—his brother, his enemy—that outshined him. It is the story of a man that literally and symbolically robs his double of what he lacks, thus partially making up for his wounded self-image.

"That's right, Sheriff. You would know. You was in the World War" (6) : Masculine Self-definition and War

- 14 As often in Rash's fiction, the past experience of war plays a fundamental part in man's self-perception and self-definition. If the performance of "manhood acts" (Schrock and Schwalbe 284) traditionally involves "higher levels of risk-taking behavior, including drinking, smoking, and reckless driving" (Schrock and Schwalbe 289), going to war can certainly be regarded as a climactic occasion for a man to perform his manhood. This somewhat romantic notion lies at the core of Ernest Hemingway's introduction to the 1955 edition of *Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time*, which starts from the premise that "all men from the earliest times we know have fought and died" (xi) and develops along the idea that war is where a boy sacrifices his "great illusion of immortality" (xii) and enters the cohesive community of mature men. This happens at the very moment the urgency of his experience of the front makes him accept his own finitude, their common lot, allowing him to assert his courage: "Whatever I had to do men had always done. If they had done it then I could do it too" (xii). Imperceptibly shifting from the plural of "men" to the "I" of his own war experience, what Hemingway thus emphasizes is how mimetic a construct masculinity is: other men are needed for man to shape himself by imitation or distinction. According to Marilyn Wesley, male characters are likely to "make use of violence as a means of attempting to transform impossible situations and limited selves" (31): as a context generating paroxysmal, large-scale violence, war can therefore be interpreted as "the traditional formula of [...] masculine initiation" (83). Reciprocally, the absence of commitment in a collective political conflict generates an unendurable sense of frustration.<sup>10</sup>
- 15 In *One Foot in Eden*, the war the men who are in the know obliquely refer to as "the Pacific" (4) in the present of narration of the first three sections is clearly identifiable as the Korean War (5). Yet the different generations of men represented in the novel each occur to have known their own "Pacific": "I stared at what looked like light dried-up figs. I knew what they were because I'd seen such things before in the Pacific" (6). Sheriff Alexander's experience of the Pacific—that of World War Two—allows him to understand the meaning of Holland's gruesome trophies. Holland Winchester, who has only recently

returned from the front, embodies aggressiveness at its peak as he proudly shows off the dried up ears he cut off the men he killed in Korea and which he carries everywhere with him in a pouch that also holds his Gold Star as testimonies of his active competence as a soldier: “‘There was some said it was awful to cut the ear off a dead man,’ Holland said. ‘The way I see it, taking his life was a thousand times worse and I got medals for that’” (6). What Marilyn Wesley identifies as “the paradox of virility” is thus pointed out. Sheriff Alexander certainly stands for a much more sedate version of veterancy, as the sword and rifle he brought back from World War Two imply. Significantly, Holland’s Gold Star will become the evidence of his presence, disappearance and crucial role in Amy’s life; about two decades later, it will also trigger Isaac’s reflection about the identity of his father. But in the novel’s last and most recent timeframe, about two decades after Holland’s murder, Isaac’s Pacific is an experience by proxy derived from the media coverage of the Vietnam War. It is consequently tempting to make an analogy between the South China Sea—Isaac’s own substitutive version of the Pacific—and his indirect, proxy experience of war. Just as Isaac’s experience of war is peripheral, the South China Sea that borders Vietnam is, indeed, a marginal sea that is simply part of the Pacific Ocean. As for Billy, the most conspicuous feature of his portrayal as a young man is his frustrated war experience: he has known no Pacific at all. His masculinity has therefore never been tested. This hole at the core of his capabilities as a man radically challenges Billy’s self-perception:

[U]nlike Holland I didn’t know if I was a brave man. I’d gone down to Greenville and they’d turned me down, 4-F. I hadn’t had my grit tested the way Holland had in Korea. I didn’t know what I’d do if Koreans came screaming and running toward me, certain to kill me if I missed or my gun jammed. I didn’t know if I could kill a man. What I did know was if Holland didn’t leave something would have to be settled one way or another. (124-25)

- 16 Billy’s thinking of himself in comparison with Holland (whose name keeps popping up in his mind and discourse) confirms how much he considers the latter as a rival, constantly fueling and renewing his sense of humiliation. Holland’s successes in the army and with Amy point to Billy’s own failures as he is successively turned down by the institution and by the individual (their mirroring one another is suggested by the echoing names: army / Amy) that most matter to him. In Billy’s eyes, whenever Holland comes near, trouble approaches: “Even when Holland was having his way with another man’s wife he was too proud to skulk around back like a hound stealing eggs from a hen-house. No, that wasn’t ever his way of doing things” (124). Billy’s frustration with himself is amplified by his helpless admiration for his rival’s pluck and manliness: his angry inexperience of war thus operates as a metaphor of his incompleteness as a man. This innate sense of masculine competition—or *cockfighting* (the pun is too tempting)—is a recurring feature of grit literature, where bloody sports of all sorts are legion. Harry Crews, a particularly provoking grit lit writer prone to opposing his characters in violent contests as in *A Feast of Snakes*, also ponders about the values making up manhood in his essays and interviews; it is revealing that he should conclude his inventory of those values with a reference to the army. The following quote is taken from an article entitled “The Violence that Finds us”:

Violence, like many other things in this world, comes in various and sundry flavors. Perhaps the bitterest of them has to do with rites of passage, that small period when a boy is supposed to become a man. I don’t know a hell of a lot about manhood, wherein it lies or what it’s made of. I’ll leave that question to better minds than mine—the fem libbers, for instance. They could tell you in a New York minute. But whatever it is, a good part of it seems to be bound up with violence of

one kind or another, on football fields, high school and college wrestling mats, karate dojos and—God help us all—the Armed Forces that defend this land of ours.  
(Crews)

- 17 However, though he relentlessly measures up against him, Billy does not really try to compete with Holland, who he keeps imagining as exceptionally strong, rough and big-mouthed,<sup>11</sup> somehow knowing the fight is lost in advance. The list of Billy's existential doubts is marked by the haunting repetition of the phrase "I didn't know" (124-25): it is an inventory that contrasts with his only certainty that, as far as Holland and him are concerned, there is one too many of them. There is, therefore, only one imaginable remedy to Billy's eroded masculinity and derelict self-esteem—getting rid of his encumbering double.
- 18 Every effort is made to suggest that Holland Winchester is Billy's antithetical doppelgänger. The successive narrators' insistence on Holland's innate savagery certainly makes it easier for the reader to accept his being murdered, though as a result of Billy's very personal (and certainly dubious) sense of retribution. Yet, things are substantially more complex than they seem at first glance. As Billy, the character that is in the best position to elicit the reader's sympathy, turns into a murderer, the obvious villain is killed at point-blank range; but not before instilling doubts in the reader's mind about how to understand his villainy. Indeed, at the end of his last conversation with the Sheriff, while the two men evoke their war experiences, Holland adopts an attitude that contradicts his bragging rambunctiousness when he suggests that he considers himself the mere instrument—let alone the victim—of context and hierarchy: "All I did was what they sent me there to do" (7). His words assume that, as a "good soldier" (recalling Ford Madox Ford's ironical choice of a title for his 1915 novel), he killed out of obedience to higher commands: what we readers might have been quick to interpret as his rather immature readiness to flare up and fight may actually have been determined and conditioned by circumstances that are impervious to his free will as an individual—law and order. The idea that the atrocities of war contribute to shaping characters while aggravating certain individual leanings thus emerges, interfering with the reader's temptation to understand the characters' doings in an ingenuous way: Holland cannot altogether be considered a villain; he is also a damaged home-comer, thus entering the long gallery of literary war veterans turned unsuited for collective life as a result of their experience on the front.<sup>12</sup> While the definition of masculinity in *One Foot in Eden* steadfastly resists simplistic categorizations, ambivalence once more proves to be a chief feature of Rash's art of characterization. The Borderline, the honky-tonk evoked in the novel's initial scene, thus conjures up a conclusive significance: as referring, in a general way, to an intermediate position or state that is not fully classifiable as one thing or another, the expression relevantly applies to the manifold representations of masculinity in *One Foot in Eden*.

## Inventing New Ways of Being a Man : "Whose child is it?" (90)

- 19 It is, of course, very ironical that undesirable Holland Winchester should turn into a sudden object of desire in the novel's only monologue told from a female perspective. Amy's evocation of Holland's entrance into her life merges with her remembrance of the beginnings of her marriage with Billy, of their burgeoning desire to become parents, and

of their realization that they cannot, and will not, have children. The two men's duality, which is echoed by the symmetry of their respective first and last names—Holland Winchester and Billy Holcombe—, is thus confirmed. As frustration inexorably mars the young couple's happy life, in order to remedy the fact Billy "couldn't give [her] a child" (115) and satisfy her rightful desire to become a mother, Amy resorts to an elementary logic of temporary replacement, which she wants to believe is natural enough: "I made myself a *natural* sight around the yard and there was moments I felt his eyes full upon me" (80-81; my emphasis). Amy actually accounts for her seduction of Holland by advocating Billy's good, talking to him in direct speech though he is not present to hear her words: "'Whatever I do is for both of us, Billy,' I whispered. 'If there was another way, if there just was. But there ain't'" (81). Accordingly, the personal pleasure she soon finds in this arrangement takes on the cunning mask of common good, Amy's strategy resting on her innate sense of women's superiority over men. She characteristically describes men as easy prey that spontaneously listen to the voice of their desire and are quite effortlessly seduced by a woman's charms: "He's a man, a man's yearnings will take care of the what-after" (81). Rash once again artfully plays with stereotypes, which he is prone to reverse, in this case by evoking a woman's calculated objectification of a man's body. Amy's domination of the whole situation with Holland is highlighted by the contrast between her and Holland's reaction at the end of their first sexual intercourse. While Holland clearly expresses his enjoyment of the moment—"That was nice and pleasuring" (85), he says—, Amy makes any further exchange impossible by sending him back to work (and quite condescendingly so) as soon as they are done: "You best get back to your fence-making" (85). The all-pervading sense of complexity is further conveyed by the fact that while Amy's actions suggest that women are more malicious and probably less naïve than their male counterparts as far as matters of love are concerned, her reflections simultaneously reveal her awareness that the latter are likely to be swept by more powerful feelings: "I knew it was something more than I felt for him, more than maybe I could ever feel for him or any other man" (82). As she gradually gets used to Holland, Amy nevertheless admits, though through roundabout statements and negative clauses that still try to empty her emotions of their content, how she feels for him; she cannot help but acknowledge how much he arouses her: "his hand moved soft over me like he was gentling a newborn. It was no morning chill that made me shiver then or later when he unbuttoned the front of my dress" (86). Through Amy's senses, callous Holland thus turns into a gentle lover. The description of the first time they make love is erotically replaced with an ellipsis ("later"): it is suggestively reduced to the evocation of an unbuttoning and a re-buttoning. Holland's second visit "the next morning" (86) in a dressed-up version of himself confirms their growing fondness for each other, as the form "gentling" reoccurs: "I said it in a gentling sort of way" (87). Finally, the fact that Amy retrospectively blames herself for "[having] feelings for another" (95) acknowledges the turmoil generated by Holland: her relation to him is not purely practical, no matter how hard she tries to believe in that version. In the meantime, Amy's dealings with Holland, a provisional alternative to Billy, ingeniously elicit a woman's perception that no man is quite irreplaceable.

- 20 A metaphor of his impotence, Billy's injured leg (his own Achilles' heel)—a legacy of the polio bout that nearly took his life when he was a boy—operates as the most obvious substitutive symbolical representation of his impaired masculinity and deep-seated sense of emasculation: "my right leg lagged behind and never caught up" (121), he ponders

resignedly. In his monologue, Billy forcefully reminisces becoming “a county fair sideshow, something queer and hardly human” (122)—a self-portrait that highlights his *queerness* and that can be linked with Amy’s assumption that his uncommon kindness at the time he started courting her probably resulted from his handicap: “I wondered even then if the limp had somehow made him more kind and openhearted, the same way it had Matthew” (82). The comparison Amy makes between Billy and her impaired brother once again suggests how exceptional, from her perspective and in her world at least, a masculine feature gentleness is. It also confirms the initial contrast between Billy’s softness and Holland’s rough ways—a contrast soon to be undermined. At the same time, Billy’s admittance of his sterility (which, in the following instance, he articulates for the first time) may be interpreted as the first expression of the quality Billy so strongly doubts he possesses, that is courage: “Now as I laid in bed with Amy, I reckoned there was ways I’d never got up from that sick bed after all. Doctor Wilkins hadn’t said it but he hadn’t had to. That polio had gelded me” (122). The sense of humiliation and treason experienced by Billy as, taking Widow Glendower’s advice,<sup>13</sup> Amy literally selects Holland as a stud<sup>14</sup> to make up for his own deficiency, is heightened by the fact that his encounter with her was a decisive step in his painful attempt to salvage his self-esteem: “Then the time came when the shorter leg, the polio too, no longer seemed worth fretting over. Part of it was Amy” (121). Amy, too, is clearly aware of her contribution to the recovery of Billy’s dignity, an awareness that actually whets the reader’s understanding of her disloyalty. This is how she remembers her first encounter with Billy: “There was something wanting and needful in his eyes, like I was a lacking part of himself that he didn’t know was lacking till the moment he saw me” (82). The way Amy describes Billy’s burgeoning desire for her evokes Plato’s definition of desire in *The Symposium* as the tension toward self-completion—man’s urge to fill a constitutive “lack” by finding his better half—, while eliciting candid observations about man’s animal appetites. Meanwhile, Amy once again appears to be much more distanced and detached than her headlong male counterparts, who forever seem to be caught in a weld of conflicting emotions.

- 21 If Billy readily acknowledges the beneficial effect of Amy upon his self-image, he also owes his mending self-confidence to his own efforts. Indeed, the other “part” of Billy’s gradual recovery certainly has to do with his defiance of an unwritten law by buying property: “‘A Holcombe owning land,’ he said, then smiled. ‘You’re getting above your raising, boy’” (121); it is, of course, revealing that Billy should have bought land from a Winchester—in this case Joshua, the father—, thus foreshadowing and mirroring another Winchester’s later symbolical impingement upon his own territory by crossing a fence and “laying with” his wife. Billy’s becoming a landowner is, indeed, related to Amy’s later disloyalty through the image of the barbed wired fence whose posts Holland hammers into the ground throughout the first part of her speech, thus delimiting the boundary between Holcomb land and Winchester land. The fence and the approaching sound of “Holland’s hammer up on the ridge” (80) are made to play multiple symbolical functions: they first define the territory of desire and evoke its mounting tension as the threat Holland represents comes nearer. Secondly, the very existence of the fence somehow creates the need for transgression by materializing the moral limits that ought not to be passed, but that will be passed. Thirdly, while obliquely evoking Jesus Christ’s crown of thorns, the barbed wire also ominously foreshadows the way Holland’s corpse will be handled by Billy, while conjuring up the memory of Christ’s sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> The image of shifting boundaries finally echoes the unstable, indecisive contours of the

representations of masculinity in the novel. Significantly, there are several distinct consecutive stages in Billy's retrieval of his forever precarious sense of manhood, but it seems that every step he takes is simultaneously an improvement over his predicament and a renewed obstacle further hindering the completion of his quest. Marriage with Amy stirs but a short-lived joy that straightforwardly highlights his incapacity to father a child. Likewise, his becoming a landowner soon generates yet other trials: it brings Billy and Amy close to threatening Winchester territory; it exposes Billy to the test of extremely hard physical work. Indeed, the land he purchased cannot possibly be planted in its original state: it calls for a difficult clearing job. Clearing land alone therefore becomes another way for Billy to prove he is not a weakling:

I'd cleared that twenty acres by myself but for Sam, me and that horse yanking up stumps stubborn to come back as back teeth. It had been a man's work. You couldn't call no one a cripple who'd done it and it was like it hadn't been till then I'd truly got out of that bed I'd laid in so many years ago with my neck stiff as a hoe handle, my legs useless to walk on as two sticks of kindling. (121)

- 22 Nothing comes easy to Billy. His simple assertive paratactic syntax shows how he carefully takes one step after another, trying to persuade himself that he is capable; his essentially pragmatic vocabulary, in which tools and wood images are prominent, signals the limitations of his world and perspectives. Billy's whole life seems to be driven by his willingness to reverse the order of things and eventually straighten the sorry consequences of his original "bad luck" (14). He is overall described as a good farmer working hard to transcend both his shortcomings and the memory of the sickbed (the image strikingly recurs) that encapsulates his fate: he was sick and will be sick again, while Amy and her son will flourish. The serious illness Billy develops at the end of Amy's pregnancy can certainly be interpreted as an example of somatization: "By February I was no more able to raise out of bed than years back when I'd had the polio" (157). In just a few sentences, Billy conveys a condensed version of his sickness and recovery (they are detailed in Amy's narrative), also suggesting that he is caught in a vicious circle of frailty. Likewise, mirroring Billy's own shrunken condition, the dried up land is systematically opposed to the undeniable growth of Amy's child: "By then that baby was about the only thing growing" (116). Billy's portrayal continually contrasts him with others and evokes clashing features: infirmity and determination, limitation and resoluteness.
- 23 The decisive step in Billy's repossession of his endangered masculinity is definitely his becoming a murderer. His shooting Holland at point blank, a scene that is described halfway through the novel (126-27), is both the climax and the critical event around which the plot revolves. If, after much prevarication, Billy ends up killing Holland, it is basically because he has no other choice: he can no longer lie to himself, Amy's pregnancy having become too manifest to be overlooked. His taking up arms rather than words, an awkward silence allowing for the deferral of reality, is actually prompted by Holland's cheeky attempt to claim Amy and the child she bears as his own. The murder scene thus takes the form of a final showdown, in the course of which Holland, forever true to himself, imperatively challenges Billy to be a man and take action. Asking for some kind of judgment, Holland will immediately obtain it: "'Settle it now one way or another, Holcombe'" (126). Quite ironically, the loud-mouthed Holland is got rid of in a very abrupt way. Billy's monologue makes it clear that disposing of a corpse is a much more demanding task than putting an end to a man's life. In Gary Carden's three-part interview, Rash cunningly expands on how difficult it is to get rid of a corpse in times of drought, and what an exercise of imagination it was for him to decide what Billy would do



with Holland's corpse. After Holland's death, the emphasis shifts to the almost trance-like metamorphosis experienced by Billy as a consequence of his rival's disappearance: "All of a sudden my arms and legs got to twitching, as like parts of me wanted to shake free from my body and take off in all different directions" (127). The metaphor of shedding skin and turning into a new self is prominent, earlier references to snakes in the novel then making perfect sense. Moreover, the successive verbs of movement imply that after a protracted stasis Billy's body is literally set into motion. In the process, Billy becomes unrecognizable, both to himself and to Amy: "She looked at me like I was somebody she couldn't quite place. I was feeling a stranger to myself as well" (127). But he is confident that this feeling will wane: "It would take some while to get used to being a murderer" (127); the expression *matter-of-factly* suggests that such will now be Billy's identity. His monologue is likewise scattered with signs showing how he suddenly develops in "different directions." When the Sheriff later shows up, Billy displays a surprising assurance as he utters the lie he fabricated as an alibi: "It's my plow horse. He broke his leg yesterday. I said it pretty as a potato bug and I didn't stumble a word" (147). As the hurt leg image, now significantly applying to the horse rather than the man, reappears in Billy's discourse, stammering and limping, which are respectively defined as speaking and walking slowly or with difficulty, are associated semantically. Whereas there is little Billy can do about the way he walks, his overcoming his speech impediment can certainly be interpreted as compensating progress.

- 24 Billy's metamorphosis is accelerated by the necessity for him to take action as soon as possible: as heat, drought and Mrs. Winchester's suspicions tighten the knot around him, the decisions he has to make gradually take shape through an extended series of *couldn't* (128) and *can't* (129) that now forcefully delimit the scope of his possibilities rather than his incapacities. The psychological impact of his transformation soon comes to the surface as Billy shows an efficient practicality motivated by his clear awareness of the fix he got himself in: "The truth is I shot an unarmed man, a war hero, I said. 'That's the only truth a jury would care about'" (130). He consequently soon manages to overpower his and Amy's doubts and fears. From that moment on, what is striking is that whereas Amy is prone to make compromises with the truth or replace it with a lie<sup>16</sup>, Billy is in his own way ready to face his responsibility. Taking charge, he at long last becomes Amy's knightly protector: "It's better you not know" (129). Part of his protectiveness meaningfully consists in keeping her in the dark as to what he did with her lover's body. This pattern is repeated in the novel's penultimate monologue, confirming that after Holland's murder Billy no longer shies away from the truth. Indeed, as teenaged Isaac faces his mother with Holland's Gold Star—a testament to the latter's being his actual father—, Amy once again tries to escape the moment. Though who is actually responsible for what in the story certainly remains a key issue for both readers and characters, it is finally Billy that fully takes the blame for the whole situation. "Your momma didn't kill him. I did" (189), he tells Isaac, who then ponders: "A lie will always find you out, he once told me years ago. Whether he believed it then I reckoned he believed it now. He looked me dead in the eyes. Whatever he was going to say would be the truth" (189). The aphoristic dimension of Isaac's remembrance of Billy's teachings suggests that Billy acted as a trustworthy father figure likely to operate as an apt masculine model, thus exemplifying a situation that Raewyn Connell identifies as an ironical development: "One of the most effective ways of 'being a man' [...] may be to demonstrate one's distance from a regional hegemonic masculinity" (840), supporting the idea that admirable masculinity can also display itself through appeased, mundane practices like being a father and taking



care of a family. This notion is confirmed by the recurring association of the verbal form *knew* with Billy, a dependable source of wisdom in Isaac's section. As the novel draws to a close, Billy shows a keen sense of duty and obligation: "'I got to do it, Sheriff,' he said and lifted the other shovel from the truck bed" (193). Repeating the earlier scene in the course of which he interred the remnants of Holland's corpse (the latter—if this can be revealed at this point—actually spent considerable time tied high in a tree), Billy's firm declaration of intentions also reverses the earlier gesture, as his buried responsibility is finally about to be unearthed. As the novel achieves a long-delayed sense of completion, Billy therefore publicly comes to terms with his destiny.

- 25 Amy's monologue reveals how it took a final, decisive shotgun blast for her to resolve her conflict and realize how much she wanted Billy alive, her "most worse thought" (92) being that, after taking Holland's life, Billy would take his own life. Though a questionable term given the circumstances, Amy's "choice" between her two men is confirmed by the affectionate way she welcomes Billy when he comes back from the fields on the day of the murder: "I hugged him a long time. ¶...¶ Billy was Billy again" (93). Amy's response suggests that Holland's sacrifice was necessary for her to be able to reaffirm her affection and admiration for Billy and for him—a man again in her eyes—to be enough for her. The tautology marks the fortunate erasure of Billy's cumbersome double, though the latter will soon enough reappear through Isaac's eerie resemblance to his biological father. But for now, Amy and Billy can make love again, their intimacy made possible again by the disposal of the rival: "When Billy came to bed he nuzzled up close for the first time in ever a long while" (95). Billy's decision to condone Amy's treachery and accept Holland's child also takes shape through a series of hopeful symbols, among which the hand he lays on Amy's round belly and the crib he sets out to build. The fact that, at the end of his monologue, Sheriff Alexander should be contemplating Billy "through the bars" (56), forcefully encapsulates the problematic aspect of Billy's identity as a man, as the making of the crib, "[Billy's] hands shaping the future" (57), simultaneously conjures up images of "the jailhouse" (159) where he should lawfully end up. But this will never happen:

But I couldn't do that. No matter what Amy said that young one was Holland's too.  
The only way to do right by Holland was give his child shoes and a full belly and  
teach him how to be a man. To do those things I'd have to stay in this farm and live  
him for what he was—a son.  
I hadn't got away with nothing. (159)

- 26 Billy's masculinity is finally (these are the conclusive words of his monologue) reinvigorated by fighting the cowardly temptation to walk away, by the birth of a son (though not rightfully his, Amy, Isaac and him will end up forming a modern alternative family) and by the making of a vow. In order to be a man, he will be a good father to his rival's son.

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## NOTES

1. In a blog post entitled "Ten Books to Hold You Over Until 'True Detective' Comes Back," Alan Morgan writes: "Sheriff Alexander's race to uncover evidence before it disappears forever is a haunting, gothic tale, a one-man, period version of 'True Detective' set in Southern Appalachia." In that respect, the respective works of Ron Rash and the late William Gay have experienced similar treatments, notably in France, where the two writers are translated, read and much appreciated. But their works are consistently classified as examples of noir fiction, which, though not totally inexact, is both inaccurate and reductive. Rash's *The Cove* is the recipient of the 2014 French *Grand Prix de Littérature Policière (domaine étranger)*, which was awarded to Gay's *Twilight* in 2010.
2. Page references without other specific indication correspond to the edition of the novel mentioned in the bibliography.
3. In his extended review of publications emanating from men's studies, "Locating Masculinities: Some Recent Work on Men," Robert Nye describes Raewyn Connell's determining approach as follows: "Connell warns against transcultural or transhistorical concepts of masculinity, including biologically grounded theories based on genetics or hormones and the uncritical use of psychoanalytic theory. He prefers an analysis of masculinity as an object of knowledge based on the material circumstances that shape the 'relational concepts' of masculinity and femininity" (Nye 2005, 1940).
4. The flood narrative that underlies the novel and the water imagery associated with it are central to another article I wrote on *One Foot in Eden*—"Like a dam broke open': water imagery in Ron Rash's *One Foot in Eden*"—soon to be edited by Randall Wilhelm and Zachary Vernon and published by UP of South Carolina in the first volume of academic essays devoted to Ron Rash's work.
5. In "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts," Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe emphasize the principle according to which "[t]he process of learning how to signify a masculine self in situationally appropriate ways continues throughout life" (283).
6. Abigail Solomon-Godeau notes that because of its mild taste "Marlboro [...] was originally conceived as a woman's cigarette but it bombed on the market" (70). This makes "the testosterone-saturated imagery of the Marlboro man" (69) particularly ironical. In the short story entitled "A Sort of Miracle," collected in *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, a male character named Marlboro—an idle "lard-ass" (107)—appears as a paroxysmal version of the fallen icon.
7. The Winchester Repeating Arms Company, whose ancestor was the well-known Smith & Wesson partnership, was a prominent American maker of repeating firearms. Winchester cigarettes are produced by R. J. Reynolds, the second largest tobacco company in the United States, which is based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, in the vicinity of the territory described in Rash's fiction.
8. The phrase "blood and bone," which is the title of Brian Carpenter's introduction to *Grit Lit: A Rough South Reader*, effectively summarizes how Holland Winchester's body, then corpse, is dealt with in *One Foot in Eden*.
9. The persistency of such conflicting representations of masculinity in Rash's South is confirmed by some of his male characters in *The World Made Straight*. There are quite a few echoes between Rash's first and third novels. The portrayal of Hubert Toomey—a thug, a drunk and an addict

that, to his father's chagrin, escaped conscription in the Vietnam War—similarly educes a comparison with a bruised boxer: "His nose had been broken, maybe more than once, enough that it swerved to the right, making his whole face appear misaligned" (44). As for Leonard, one of the novel's two characters and main narrators, he owns "a Model 70 Winchester" (17) which significantly arouses the younger boys' admiration. But the rifle, now a key element of the interior decoration of Leonard's trailer—"What held Travis's attention lay on a cherrywood gun rack above the couch" (16)—merely serves as a way to show off a representation of masculinity that has much suffered, as suggested by the fact the rifle is ensconced in a cozy domestic environment.

10. Pastor Boone probably conveys one of the most revealing examples of this feature in the post Civil War short story entitled "The Dowry," which is part of *Nothing Gold Can Stay*. Boone is, indeed, so haunted by the fact he was "spared the war's violence and suffering" (187), having relied on his pastorate to "appear neutral" (175) and keep his sympathies with the Union secret and silent, that he seizes the first occasion to make a redeeming sacrifice that will prove to himself and the world he is not a coward.

11. This is how Billy remembers Holland as a schoolboy in eighth grade, on a day he was unfairly punished by their teacher:

I recollect how in eighth grade we all had been cutting up in class and our teacher Mr. Pipkin picked out Holland to punish though he'd been at it no worse than the rest of us. Maybe it was because Holland was the biggest. Mr. Pipkin held up a roll of black electrician's tape and told Holland he was going to tape Holland's mouth shut. Holland was stout, six feet tall by then and a sure two hundred pounds but Mr. Pipkin was as tall and outweighed Holland to boot. Holland had stood beside his desk, his hands by his side, fisted and ready.

'You've no cause to punish me and not the others,' Holland said.

'You come up here now, boy,' Mr. Pipkin said to Holland.

'I'll not,' Holland said. 'You come on and put that tape on me if you reckon you can.'

(123)

This anecdote demonstrates that Holland is not and has never been easy to deal with and is not likely to accept unfair treatment. Rash's primary school teacher, Mr. Pipkin, is surely a wink at Charles Dickens's parish clerk who earns his living by teaching little boys in a little church and whose story is told—similarly in the form of an anecdote, almost an aside—in Chapter 17 of his own 1837 first fictional work, *The Pickwick Papers*.

12. While Donald Mahon in Faulkner's first novel *Soldiers' Pay* immediately comes to mind, one of the most striking recent examples of a damaged veteran coming home is probably to be found with Byron Aldridge in Tim Gautreaux's *The Clearing*. Rash's 2012 novel *The Cove* reinvests the motif of the war veteran, while homecoming is the theme of his allegorical short story entitled "Return," which is to be found in *Burning Bright*.

13. It is quite significant that Amy should turn to Widow Glendower for advice. Indeed, the pagan witch represents a much-resented alternative version of womanhood, to which Amy finds herself adhering, as she gradually frees herself from the traditional Christian models of motherhood she was brought up with. It is the Widow that quite spontaneously evokes Holland as the best remedy to Amy's frustration, thus indirectly admitting the limits of the magical herbal cures she is prone to administer. As she takes stock of her own evolution as a woman who has emancipated herself from her mother's narrow-minded teachings as regards a wife's marital duties, Amy somehow makes a feminist claim: "'Just lay there and let him have his way,' Momma had told me the day before I married, like it was a shameful thing for a woman to show a man how to pleasure her body. I was beyond such notions as that now'" (96). From that moment on, Amy's perception of her mother becomes extremely ambivalent as she regards the latter and her peers as an inescapable, yet outdated, reference, with which she learns to deal in a rather mischievous way. Besides making her pregnant, Amy's lying with Holland teaches her a thing or two she did not

even suspect ; she finds herself refusing the association of feminine pleasure with sin and guilt and advocating the reciprocity of pleasure. What is striking is that Amy is aware of the way she inherently changes even before she actually sleeps with Holland. As, getting ready to seduce him, Amy contemplates her face in the mirror she realizes that her face “[isn’t] the face of a girl anymore” (81). It is as though her innocence, which was not adulterated by her becoming Billy’s wife, was perverted by the very thought of making love to another man. The simple thought of it is enough to jeopardize her former self.

14. When Holland finally understands the whole situation and the part he was meant to play in it, he bluntly claims Amy’s child as his and expresses his indignation at having been used as a stud bull: “I’m not some stud bull you can use then take back to another farm” (126). This scene somehow reads as a reversal of the key moment in Faulkner’s “Wash” (or *Absalom, Absalom!*) when Sutpen affirms he considers Milly is worth less than a mare.

15. Right before the murder scene, the approaching sound of Billy’s gunshot foreshadows the impending denouement much in the way the sound of “Holland’s hammer that first afternoon” (91) stands for the imminence of betrayal.

16. “‘I could say I did it,’ Amy said. ‘I could say he raped me’” (130).

## ABSTRACTS

Ron Rash’s first novel, *One Foot in Eden*, evokes a crime investigation deep in the Appalachian Mountains in the 1950s: a man was murdered as a result of a woman and wife’s frustrated desire to become a mother. While the novel depicts a man’s world characterized by manly heroes and a great deal of harshness and uncontrollable violence, the novel’s male characters paradoxically appear to be wounded and dysfunctional in one way or another. The story of Amy and her men ends up highlighting how the traditional definitions of both femaleness and maleness then experienced unprecedented changes. The succession of homodiegetic narrators evokes a complex, kaleidoscopic depiction of southern masculinity, which is shown as being in flux, probably in transition—undoubtedly as having a hard time redefining itself.

Le premier roman de Ron Rash, *Un Pied au Paradis*, évoque une enquête criminelle au fin fond des montagnes appalachiennes dans les années 1950 : un homme a été tué en conséquence du désir de maternité frustré d’une femme, qui est aussi l’épouse d’un autre. Tandis que le roman dépeint un environnement essentiellement masculin où évoluent des héros virils qui se caractérisent le plus souvent par des comportements violents, les personnages masculins du roman semblent tous paradoxalement meurtris, voire dysfonctionnels. L’histoire d’Amy et de ses hommes met ainsi en lumière la manière dont les définitions de la féminité et de la masculinité font alors l’objet de changements sans précédents. À travers la succession des narrateurs homodiégétiques, c’est un portrait complexe et kaléidoscopique de la masculinité sudiste qui s’élabore—une masculinité fluctuante, probablement en transition, qui a bien du mal à redéfinir ses marques.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Un Pied au Paradis, masculinité contestée, guerre, symbole, microlectures

**Keywords:** *One Foot in Eden*, masculinity challenged, war, reversals, symbol, textual readings

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