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*Drawing the Line: The Father Reimagined in Faulkner, Wright, O'Connor, and Morrison* by Doreen Fowler (review)

Lorie Watkins

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The cover of the journal 'Mississippi Quarterly'. The title is in a serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'The Journal of Southern Culture' is in a smaller font. There is a small logo in the center. At the bottom, it says 'Vol. 68, No. 1-2 Winter-Spring 2015'.

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JAMES H. HANCOCK, Johns Hopkins University

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Drawing the Line: The Father Reimagined in Faulkner, Wright, O'Connor, and Morrison*, by Doreen Fowler. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 184 pp. \$35.00 cloth.

DOREEN FOWLER'S *DRAWING THE LINE: THE FATHER REIMAGINED IN Faulkner, Wright, O'Connor, and Morrison* employs traditional lines of critical inquiry to quite unusual ends. It is, at base, an outstanding effort to read beyond the patriarchal function of the father to articulate other, more supportive roles that father figures play in literature and culture. Building upon the work of Jessica Benjamin and Julia Kristeva, Fowler utilizes familiar psychological and feminist tropes to new ends with remarkable clarity to reimagine the father as a "border figure" that not only makes and enforces boundaries, but also supports others in negotiating them. Boundaries are, as Fowler points out, a source of both division and connection, and they "achieve this seeming contradiction by being not one thing or the other but a composite of both." In the texts that Fowler examines, the father figure acts in similar fashion as he, like a boundary, "shares a relation with both one and the other, but is identical with neither" (6). In such a reading, boundaries become places of union rather than exclusion, and the resultant social and racial implications are profound. As Fowler puts it, "as more people on both sides of culture's binaries acknowledge that each one of us is the double of the other—both the same *and* different—step by step, together, we move closer toward a more equitable society" (143).

Fowler begins by engaging the problematic nature of identification, asking, "How and when is it permissible for one to say 'we' so as to express solidarity with those of different ethnic, gender, and sexual configurations?" (1). In short, how can one identify with another, yet avoid dominance and cultural appropriation? How does one balance "the need to preserve culturally defined differences and the need to overcome polarization" (2)? These are the questions Fowler brings to four coming-of-age stories by William Faulkner, Richard Wright, Flannery O'Connor, and Toni Morrison. The answers that she finds in this diverse group of writers center on the father figure's boundary-making function as these figures "introduce new subjects to boundaries that both divide and attach, and these porous boundaries enable an individual to have

commerce with others while still maintaining a different ethnic, raced, and gendered identity" (5).

Fowler begins with Faulkner in a chapter that focuses on Chick Mallison's relationships with Gavin Stevens and Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*. The narrative forces Chick to choose between Stevens's traditional model of identity and Beauchamp's more fluid one, an "alternative to a Western exclusionary model of paternal authorization" (16). Beauchamp, whose very existence defies traditional definitions of race and class, becomes for Chick "a father whose authority is not defined by an Oedipal threat" (30). In contrast to Stevens and the even more threatening father figure of Nub Gowrie, Beauchamp's example allows Chick to think about matters of race, class, and history outside of the dichotomies that trap his uncle, and, indeed, most of Jefferson.

The next chapter focuses on another racially liminal character, Boris Max, Bigger Thomas's Jewish attorney in *Native Son*. Max, Fowler argues, "straddles the border between white and black and introduces a boundary that enables individuation and social relations" for the isolated Bigger (17). Fowler suggests a biographical connection when she points out that in Wright's autobiography *Black Boy*, Wright's metaphorical hunger for a father becomes intimately connected to the hunger in his belly. In *Native Son*, Max fills this void for Bigger as he "embraces Bigger as a son" (71).

The father's role as mediator isn't always so pleasant, and throughout O'Connor's fiction the father figure appears as a very different sort of mediator. Fowler identifies a pattern in which a father figure invested with Christ imagery resists the role of mediator and brings with him chaos and exclusion. O'Connor often claimed that violence enables the action of grace, and her term for these unlikely "third-party figures" which enable that grace and transformation is "prophet" (74). Thus, "O'Connor's fiction recognizes both the fearfulness and the transformative possibilities of the borderline place, the place where self and other converge" (82).

Finally, in the chapter on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Fowler identifies two father figures, one of whom is actually a woman. This chapter shows how Denver's struggle to assimilate into the larger culture symbolizes the slave's struggle to integrate into American culture after the Civil War. Fowler notes, "for these ex-slaves to form social identities, someone, a father figure, must be the intermediary who introduces a border that

allows for both culturally different identities and for cultural relations” (19). Both Paul D and Amy Denver model for Denver “a mix of difference within sameness that is the key to becoming an individuated self within a racially heterogeneous community of male and female others” (94).

Concluding with an investigation of the role of the mediating figure in material culture, Fowler shows that social identities depend on a “threshold figure who is double, that is, who shares a relation with both one and the other” (19). She juxtaposes two of these figures, the nineteenth-century blackface minstrel and John Howard Griffin, the journalist who chemically colored his skin in the mid-twentieth century to pass for black so as to investigate race relations in the South from the inside. She concludes that both instances feature cultural appropriation, but Griffin’s experiment, documented in *Black Like Me* (1959), is also “a productive sharing of racial identities” (112). With this juxtaposition, Fowler circles back to the questions concerning cultural appropriation and dominance with which she began. She determines that this “sharing of different identities is not the end of different social identities; rather, it is the formula for new multicultural coalitions” (20). The figure enabling this convergence is the father, a mediator who supports rather than oppresses and transforms boundaries of separation into sites of opportunities—it is the father, reimagined, indeed.

*William Carey University*

*Lorie Watkins*

*African American Haiku: Cultural Visions*, edited by John Zheng. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016. 197pp. \$65.00 printed casebinding.

*AFRICAN AMERICAN HAIKU: CULTURAL VISIONS*, A RESOURCE FOR BOTH haiku studies and African American studies, includes ten essays selected by editor John Zheng to highlight “the five most celebrated African American poets in the tradition of haiku and in the variety and inventiveness of their haiku expression” (ix). The book begins with two essays about Richard Wright, whose interest in the haiku late in life informed his “aesthetic experience through . . . new insight into ego for a state of egolessness with nature” (x). It then addresses, again in two essays, the work of James Emanuel, a poet gifted in fusing the haiku and