Izvorni naučni rad
UDK 821.111(73)-31.09

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TALKING ABOUT VORTICES TO THE NEXT GENERATION: STRIKING SIMILARITIES IN THE INITIATION PLOTS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND SAUL BELLOW

In a peculiar short story by Saul Bellow, an elderly man tells his son of incidents from his youth dating back to his teenage years in 1933. In "Something to Remember Me By" (1990), the narrator Louie feels his son would profit from ethical instruction. Yet the sort of incidents he relates and the form of Bellow's initiation plot bear striking similarities to those found in William Faulkner's final novel entitled *The Reivers* (1962), written in the form of a grandfather's legacy to his grandchild occurring back in 1905 when protagonist/narrator Lucius Priest was eleven years old, relating memories stretching fifty-seven years, the same number of years that Bellow's Louie recalls past events. Both narrators disclose youthful indiscretions to the next generations in the hope of offering a moral compass to their betterment. In both cases, sinful mistakes in judgment become apparent to a parent or grandparent of the narrators' youth concerning alcohol, theft and sexual humiliation in a major metropolis where the boys lose innocence and dignity. This contribution compares comic initiation fiction by two major American authors nearing the end of their fiction-writing careers and suggests that the similarities merit attention than they have heretofore not received.

Keywords: *initiation stories, intertextuality, moral didacticism, William Faulkner, Saul Bellow*

1. Introduction

Initiation stories have been popular in American fiction: short stories such as N. Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," S. O. Jewett's "A White Heron," S. Anderson's "I Want to Know Why," E. Hemingway's "The Killers" or J. Steinbeck's novella *The Red Pony* exemplify classic ini-

tiation stories. Initiation stories frame events which transform and edify the young protagonist, transforming their self-understanding from innocence to knowledge of evil, sinning or guilt. A definition provided by literary critic Fiedler over half a century ago still appears as sound as ever: "An initiation is a fall through knowledge to maturity; behind it there persists the myth of the Garden of Eden, the assumption that to know good and evil is to be done with the joy of innocence and to take on the burdens of work and childbearing and death" (Fiedler 1958: 22). The fall is a shocking, violent or perhaps a sexual event, something previously unknown which becomes recognized and acknowledged, and the subsequent change in the youthful protagonist is permanent.

Two American short stories, R. P. Warren's "Blackberry Winter" and K. A. Porter's "A Grave," involve protagonists recalling initiations stories significantly later – thirty-five years later for the former and twenty years later for the latter, and as such somewhat resemble both Faulkner's and Bellow's fifty-seven-year long separation from the youthful events and their retelling. The elderly narrators in the initiation fiction of Faulkner and Bellow make an accounting of their transgressive experiences as ethical lessons, since they describe an experience which transitioned them to adulthood. Some similarities between southern Protestant and Jewish ethics show that the values these authors wish to inculcate into the next generations transcend region, religion and much though not all of their ancestral traditions. Both boys were not supposed to be away from home so long, and authority figures, a grandfather (Faulkner) and father (Bellow) preside over their families with austerity and strict rearing practices. Both boys disobey, cross the line, and defy the rules and family expectations, resulting in great disappointment. Looking back, the narrators Lucius and Louie function as informants of the distant past, spelling out what is most significant to them in their maturity. Bellow's narrator writes to his son, "you may choose to assume that nothing in particular is happening, that your life is going round and round like a turntable. Then one day you are aware that what you took to be a turntable, smooth, flat, and even, was in fact a whirlpool, a vortex…you don't talk about deaths of vortices to a kid, not nowadays" (Bellow 1994: 511–512), though now Louie thinks his son is old enough.

The two plots are entertaining comedies, with the more than half-century old moral indiscretions directed to the next generations' youthful interests which the elderly narrators believe their descendants will likely relate to. I argue that Bellow had no other president for an initiation story relayed by elderly narrators for the next generation which included embarrassing sexual improprieties with a prostitute except for Faulkner's *The Reivers* and that

similarities are so overwhelming that Bellow's short story may be read as a reception of Faulkner's final novel.

2. Chivalry and Maturity of a Gentleman in Faulkner's *The Reivers*

Published shortly before his death, Faulkner's final novel *The Reivers* presents the scheming Boon Hogganbeck's plan to "borrow" i.e., use without permission, bank director Lucius "Boss" Priest's new car, a Winton Flyer, to drive from their home in Jefferson, Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee with the explicit purpose of visiting a "whore house" run by Miss Reba. Faulkner replicates childhood memories in forty-one-year-old Boon Hogganbeck who works at the Priest family livery stable, personalities from Faulkner's youth in Oxford, Mississippi "like Buster Callicoat in Murry Falkner's stable" (Blotner 1974: 691). To keep out of trouble, Boon needs the connivance of young Lucius Priest, the grandson and namesake of Jefferson's banker and automobile owner "Boss" Priest, the scion of the white aristocracy. Boon arranges eleven-year-old Lucius to come along with promises of thrilling automobile adventures and to teach Lucius how to drive the car. Boon seeks pleasure in Memphis while young Lucius is manipulated to experience the adventure of driving a fast new contraption called an automobile with grown-ups. An easy mark for Boon's scheme, Faulkner's main theme is the complete loss of Lucius's innocence through initiation. Accompanying them on this journey for forbidden fruit is an African American stowaway, Ned McCaslin, Lucius's grandfather's coachman, who seeks an escape from his daily drudgery, and according to a Faulkner biographer, resembles "a good deal of Uncle Ned Barnett with something of Chess Carothers" (Blotner 1974: 691) of Faulkner's own youth. As E. Moses puts it, "Lucius is intelligent but innocent, Boon is stupid and also innocent, Ned is intelligent, experienced, and morally responsible, and except for a few minor altercations along the way, they all get along together fine" (Moses 1974: 315). A corollary is Faulkner's southern concept of "the gentleman" and those traditional virtues the now elderly Lucius spreads in narrating the seamy side journey to and the various vicissitudes in Memphis of his youthful experiences to his grandchildren fifty-seven years later in 1962.

Upon arrival in Reba's cat house after a number of comic journey adventures, eleven-year-old Lucius encounters Boon's lady friend, the youthful and sweet Everbe Corinthia, or "Miss Corrie," whom he quickly idolizes and with whom he falls in love. However, Miss Corrie's 15-year-old nephew Otis tells Lucius that Corrie sells her body for a living, and he earns his own money from her by offering men and boys a voyeur's experience of her labors to his

customers. Naïve Lucius denies that it was possible and audaciously attacks the bigger and stronger Otis to protect Corrie's honor, so Otis impulsively knifes him in return. When Miss Corrie comes to treat Lucius's injury, she notes his chivalrous act, though it is not clear why to Boon regarding all the specifics as Lucius leaves some things unsaid (as any Southern gentleman should), though it is clear enough to Miss Corrie. About this sudden violence, Levins writes that "perhaps it is because of his innocence and idealism that Lucius conceives of the world in chivalric terms. From the moment he first meets Miss Corrie in Reba's Brothel he makes it his task to protect her good name" (Levins 1976: 178). Romances highlighting chivalric heroes such as Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* were especially popular among the youth in the South. Already "by the 1840's substituting a southern plantation for a Scottish castle allowed [southern] audiences the same balance between remote fantasy and comfortable reality…" (Glazer and Key 1996:14). As Lucius holds back from discussing the precise cause of the fight while Miss Corrie bandages his wound, Boon comments on the fate of Lucius: "Eleven years old and already knife-cut in a whore-house brawl…" (Faulkner 1969:118).

The interaction of Lucius's initiation and his code of conduct is accentuated when Lucius continues to champion Corrie, who after careful consideration, then pledges to stop selling her body and henceforth to reform and live a virtuous life, as she informs the disbelieving Boon repeatedly: "I've quit! Not any more. Never!... I'm going to get a job. I can work" (Faulkner 1969: 144). Miss Corrie is transformed back to Everbe; she had been placed as a twelve-year old orphan into the world's oldest profession by an "aunt." In the novel, a corrupt sheriff, "almost as big as Boon and almost as ugly" (Faulkner 1969: 127) is set to run everyone in jail unless Miss Corrie sleeps with him. In the center and climax of this novel of initiation, the vulgar law enforcement officer gets his way, making Lucius hate everything and everyone: "hating all of us for being poor frail victims, of being alive, having to be alive – hating Everbe for being the vulnerable helpless lodestar victim, and Boon… [and Blacks] for being where they had to, couldn't help but watch white people behaving exactly as white people bragged that only Negroes behaved" (Faulkner 1969: 129). With his increase of knowledge of evil comes Lucius's rite of passage and a corresponding loss at the climax almost at the exact middle point of the novel: "I knew too much, had seen too much. I was a child no longer now; innocence and childhood were forever lost, forever gone from me" (Faulkner 1969: 129).

At the end of *The Reivers*, Lucius recalls overpowering feelings of guilt for the unbecoming behavior he knew was unacceptable for the storied reputation of the Priest family. He had already acknowledged that he would return

home "not with honor, perhaps not even unscathed" (Faulkner 1969: 156) because the eleven-year-old did not safeguard the family name and the respect that goes along with it, all the honorable traits earned by ancestors over a century that are particularly esteemed in the higher society of the South. Lucius refers to honor destroyed in these occurrences: "chivalry: to shield a woman, even a whore, from one of the predators who debase police badges by using them as immunity to prey on her helpless kind" (Faulkner 1969: 130). In spite of her best intentions to free herself from that sordid life, Miss Corrie falls victim to a wicked society. The gentleman concept is again fostered as Lucius's grandfather, over the final few pages of the novel, offers Polonius-like advice to his guilt-ridden grandson. Young Lucius confesses his numerous unethical transgressions that he and the two companions had been engaged in over the previous four days such as stealing a prized automobile for days, gambling and visiting a Memphis brothel. After his grandfather explicitly tells him never to forget what transgressions he has committed, considering his rank and station in society, the self-abnegating boy Lucius feels horrible living with that shame, poignantly insisting that he cannot live with that shame.

> "How can I forget it? Tell me how to."
> "You can't, he said. "Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It's too valuable."
> "Then what can I do?" (Faulkner 1969: 221)

His grandfather insists that Lucius remember what he has done and live with the knowledge of his transgressions, but the boy feels that he cannot handle all the guilt. Grandfather Boss Priest responds: "Yes you can," he said. "You will. A gentleman always does. A gentleman can live through anything. He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences, even when he did not himself instigate them but only acquiesced to them, didn't say No though he knew he should. Come here. […]" (Faulkner 1969: 221)

Before this reconciliation and coming to terms with his misdeeds may happen, Lucius feels so ashamed of himself that he can hardly live with himself. This sentimental narrative depicting details of Lucius's redemption for notorious acts of fifty-seven years earlier concludes *The Reivers*, focusing on the memory of his long-deceased grandfather consoling him and ameliorating his suffering, insisting that he live with his sins and learn from them.

The ensuing grandfatherly advice on how to live and behave like a pillar of society is, according to Eyster, Faulkner's personal narrative, i.e., offering his own personal values rather than a *bildungsroman*: Lucius recalls "for his grandson an important distinction between 'then' and 'now', 1905 and 1962,

Lucius emphasizes his present awareness of responsibility for past actions." (Eyster 1992:17). He has become the master of his past, a view he has evolved to accept over years of salient maturation, following the Southern gentlemanly code of behavior. The overall effort for the novel's protagonist is to pass this ethical edification to his descendants.

3. From Undressed to Crossdresser: Bellow's "Something to Remember Me By"

"Something to Remember Me By" begins with Louie explaining the events surrounding his loss of innocence. "My mother died when I was an adolescent. I've often told you that. What I didn't tell you was that I knew she was dying and didn't allow myself to think about it…" (Bellow 1994: 512). The narrator indicates that his misbehavior might be understood as his way of denying the impending death of his mother. The old man recalls his experiences fifty-seven years ago: departing home for school in February, 1933, a senior in high school, completing the day's classes, stopping by home for a bite to eat and see his mother (who no longer is capable of speaking). Then later in the afternoon he earns money delivering bouquets to different neighborhoods of Chicago. His salary plus tips earns him a dollar each afternoon.

After delivering a bouquet of lilies to a funeral almost in progress with a deceased young woman's open casket, Louie reflects on his girlfriend Stephanie, even though the young woman does not look at all like Stephanie, the sylph he regularly meets and enjoys kissing on a park bench. He witnesses the anguish of the deceased woman's mother, but makes no connection with this grieving woman nor to his own mother who was slowly dying at that same moment. "I wasn't the object of the woman's severity, but her face somewhat frightened me. She leveled the same look at the walls the door. I didn't figure here, however; this was no death of mine" (Bellow 1994: 516). At no point does the seventeen-year-old make earnest connections regarding the feelings of a close family member as his own mother lays dying. He gets five dollars for the lilies plus a generous tip and is free for the rest of the day, and shows an odd lightness of mind and character in this encounter with death.

Instead of returning home, he decides to visit his brother-in-law, Philip Haddis, a dentist whose nearby office Louie enters. Philip, though, is nowhere to be found, so Louie walks to a colleague sharing offices with him, a gynecologist named Dr. Marchek. Here Bellow's story turns almost surreal: "…I went in I saw a naked woman lying on the examination table… Wires connected her nice wrists to a piece of medical apparatus on a wheeled stand" (Bellow 1994: 518). The easygoing Philip had earlier referred Louie

to Marchek's "research project…The naked woman then, was an experimental subject" though he indicated that the project "was measuring the reactions of partners in the sexual act…This is for kicks, the science part is horseshit" (Bellow 1994: 519). Hence the teenager recognizes that the quack doctor, Marchek, pays people from the street to have sex and is nothing more than a sordid voyeur and pervert, a scene of execrable revulsion akin to the experience Lucius felt in Reba's brothel in Memphis, echoing Faulkner's Otis who earns cash for voyeurs watching Miss Corrie at work.

At her request, Louie sets her free from the wires binding her to the table, a chivalrous act though Louie feels sexually aroused while seeing and briefly touching her nakedness and perhaps more like de Bracy feels for Rowena, although the denial of "compensation" comes in an altogether different form than in Scott's *Ivanhoe.* "At the moment, a glamorous sexual girl had me in tow. I couldn't guess where I was being led, nor how far, nor what she would surprise me with, nor the consequences" (Bellow 1994: 522). Like Lucius, Louie was led astray by someone older, more experienced, and ready to use him as a Jewish knight falling victim to "la belle dame sans merci." Louie accordingly gets his due.

She brings Louie to an apartment house "occupied by transients," walking him past a crap game and a multitude of drunkards. Arriving at her room, she tells Louie to undress while she readies herself in the bathroom. "My heart had never beaten as hard as this…The woman had said nothing about money. Because she liked me. I couldn't believe my luck…" (Bellow 1994: 525). Suddenly she reappears before the naïve boy, though still dressed in a winter coat. She grabs his clothes (with money and house keys), tossing them out the window down to the alley where a man gathers them; the woman rushes down the hall and vanishes. "I was as naked as the woman herself had been in the doctor's office, stripped of everything, including the five dollars I had collected for the flowers" (Bellow 1994: 526). Finding only a flimsy dress, he exits the building in the cold winter weather, and at the dental office Louie finds his brother-in-law had already locked up and left. Thinking of where his brother-in-law might go, he tries a speakeasy where a huge Greek bartender held all the power. As Kremer puts it, it is "an epiphanic instance of the protagonist's diminished self-image arising from a misadventure with a rapacious prostitute" (Kremer 2000: 340–341).

The voices of Chicagoans add to a dark mood or sense of humiliation though as retold sound hilarious. Louie feels chagrinned dressed in women's clothes, and the Greek bartender stares at his attire: "It's for the boudoir, not winter wear. You don't have the shape of a woman, neither. The hips aren't there. Are you covering a pair of knockers? I bet not. So what's the story, are

you a morphodite? ...one thing I'll never believe is that you're a young girl and still got her cherry" (Bellow 1994: 531).

According to Gordon, however, the sense of shame may be sourced in Louie's neurotic character (Gordon 1995: 60). Though not nearly so poignantly as Lucius expresses his shame to himself at the climax of the novel's conflict or to his grandfather in the conclusion, Louie does judge himself harshly: "I had no sympathy for myself. I confessed that I had this coming, a high-minded Jewish school boy, too high-and-mighty to be orthodox and with his eye on a special destiny. At home, inside the house, an archaic rule; outside, the facts of life. The facts of life were having their turn (Bellow 1994: 532).

Bellow presents his not very likeable narrator Louie in a comic way, revealing Louie's relief when by his soon-to-be widower father expresses his maladroitness. There was no confession by Louie in 1933 and he never comes clean except to his son fifty-seven years later: "At home, what story would I tell? I wouldn't tell any. I never did…While I believed in honor, I often did lie" (Bellow 1994: 538). In contrast to Faulkner's sentimental ending with Lucius crying to his grandfather, Bellow undercuts any fearful moment which centers on his mother, i.e., that his mother may have died. By getting punched in the face by his father when he arrives wearing a dress well past hours, Louie is reassured, knowing that his mother still lives, as he knew his father would not punch his son had his mother died. The self-centered bookworm is dramatically shown to be ignorant of how the exterior world really operates, and this eye-opening initiation brings about maturity, despite or perhaps because of his father's violence. Only in his old age does Louie become cognizant of his dying mother's fate: "Failed my mother! That may mean, will mean, little or nothing to you, my only child…" (Bellow 1994: 539). The repeated interruptions of the action in "Something to Remember Me By" with literary references or out-of-order memories is representative of "Bellow's short stories [which] are punctuated by qualifications, parentheses, and afterthoughts, resulting in fiction that appears to be constantly in process, revising and rerevising, compulsively second-guessing itself" (Brauner 2017: 164).

4. Comparison and Conclusion

In comparing the two plots, several common characteristics emerge. The two narrators are informative, instructive and entertaining. Both protagonists are named after their grandfathers while both fathers are named Maury. Faulkner was named after both his grandfather and great-grandfather while Bellow's Yiddish birth name, Shloimke, anglicized to Solomon was not his grandfather's name (Mikics 2016: 35). The Southern narrator Lucius interacts as a boy with

his grandfather and relates this history to his grandchildren, covering five generations by skipping his father Maury Priest as well as his own children, i.e., direct descendants above and below Lucius on the Priest family tree. As a boy Louie has direct interactions with his father and informs his own child of the experience of his mother's final days, consequently cutting down the number of generations Faulkner deploys, as the Bellow's grandparents were completely unknown to the Canadian-born Saul, for they had never emigrated and continued to live in the Soviet Union. While maintaining the same time period of fifty-seven years separating the narrations' retellings from the events of the crises, both elders confess their sins in order to make the next generation comprehend that any sinning they might commit is likely to be milder in comparison, and they wish to transmit this experience before it is too late to do so.

A major theme is detailing to the next generation how poorly they treated their inheritance, i.e., the ethos they received from their ancestors, and how irresponsible they had been, and how the initiation brought their ignorance to their attention. Following his rearing to be a gentleman, Lucius convinces a prostitute, Miss Corrie, to give up her trade after he gets knifed to protect her honor. Correspondingly, Louie unstraps a tied up naked woman from a gynecologist's examination table who was left by herself. Louie regards himself as something of a chivalrous rescuer. However, rather than encourage her to pursue a different way, specifically a morally elevated way, to make a living, Louie follows his good act with an immoral pursuit of sexual gratification, following her to her own workplace only to get hoodwinked. For different reasons yet in remarkably similar settings of workplaces of prostitutes in a large metropolis, the two youths, Lucius and Louie, feel humiliated in their respective interactions with prostitutes. The moral tales unfold as challenging journeys far from home: interstate travel by car for Lucius and traveling an hour by public transportation (municipal trolleybus) while crossdressing for Louie, an obviously trying and humbling experience. Nevertheless, these incidents make for great comedy when told retrospectively years later.

Both Lucius and Louie are confronted with the sordid lives of the fallen. Lucius learns how Corrie was forced into her occupation by an "aunt" from an impoverished community in Arkansas, and before she had even reached her teenage years, Corrie had been engaged in the oldest profession. While no background to the unnamed prostitute is provided by Bellow's narrator, the experience of the utter misery of others is made manifest above all in the drunkard's neglected, hungry little daughters. Lucius is robbed of his granddad's new car (which is eventually won back) while Louie is robbed of his clothes and his money. In need of immediate revenue, Louie earns his streetcar fare by escorting the drunkard named Jim home while wearing a dress. Louie laments

his fate: “Instead of a desirable woman, I had a drunkard in my arms” (Bellow 1994: 535). At the passed-out Jim’s home, the Jewish teenager is relegated to cooking pork in a skillet for the drunkard’s two hungry little daughters. Only because he was robbed by a prostitute does Louie encounter the sordid conditions others live in up close.

Neither Lucius nor Louie blame others for their plight, and neither elderly narrator shows cynicism toward the younger generation that they may not take to the moral bearing of their respective initiation stories. The reaction of authority figures differ considerably – Lucius’s grandfather consoles him (after convincing father Maury not to whip the boy). Lucius confronts his sins through his grandfather’s almost Socratic dialogue while, upon his arrival home attired in a woman’s dress, Louie’s father viciously punches him in the face.

Lucius experiences violence, but he initiated it. Louie experiences violence only at the conclusion when he arrives home and his father punches him. As to the motives that make Lucius act as he does, he has been reared to act as a gentleman, and he fulfills – for the most part – these expectations except when he leaves home for a long trip to Memphis which he knew was wrong. Louie on the other hand does not have any tradition like Lucius in the Southern code of honor, though clearly, he has taken lessons about honor from a rabbi before his *Bar Mitzvah*, and he definitely read Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* and similar romances.

Moral digressions are cursorily confronted similarly by the two protagonists. Paternal correcting violence does not correspond to real or appropriate punishment: (Lucius) “if after all the lying and deceiving and disobeying and conniving I had done all he could do about it was whip me, then Father was not good enough for me” (Faulkner 1969: 220); (Louie) “My father rose from his chair and hurried toward me. His fist was ready…and when he hit me on the head the blow filled me with gratitude. If my mother had already died, he would have embraced me instead” (Bellow 1994: 540). For Lucius corporal punishment was worthless, for Louie it constituted boundless relief. Bellow biographers Atlas and Sorin indicate that Bellow engaged in heated arguments with his father Abraham over decades regarding his studies, vocation, politics, and other topics. In all likelihood, Saul Bellow could not conceive of a gentle, kindly consolation from a father figure. William Faulkner reduces the father’s role in his final novel who is subordinate to the grandfather Boss Lucius Priest, a man of opulence and immense authority. Both writers appear to project their fathers’ austerity in these plots with inflexible, strict personalities. While Faulkner’s protagonist has little interaction with his mother, the memoirist Louie casts Bellow’s own evasive actions during his mother Lescha Bellow’s final days of life in February, 1933 (Sorin 2024: 57–58).

As to other influences besides Faulkner's on Bellow's short story "Something to Remember Me By," not much research yet has been undertaken. One exception is an astute Yiddish scholar, Wisse, who recently argued that Bellow's story follows a Jewish tradition of relating axioms to the next generation, and refers to "the punitive chidings of the 12th century philosopher Samuel Ibn Tibbon to the delightful story-filled notebooks of Glikl of Hameln five centuries later" (Wisse 2022: 164), but while moral teaching is lightly invoked in "Something to Remember Me By," in neither of those cited examples do sexual humiliations through prostitution remotely come into play, nor does voyeurism or parental violence, threatened or otherwise executed. According to Starck-Adler, these Yiddish narratives are works "of undisguised moralizing, mixed piety and fervor, miracles and magic practices, cosmology and demonology" (Stark-Adler 2001: 121) which is compared with I.B. Singer's fiction in her study. Moreover, a similar tradition of offering moral illumination (that Wisse offers as the Jewish or Yiddish literary roots Bellow has relied upon while writing his story) can also be drawn from a Southern oral (and literary) tradition as well. Mark Twain's famous *Old Times on the Mississippi* comes to mind. Both bittersweet works of fiction underscore a need to connect the youth of the next generation through story-telling traditions so that the older customs and practices of ancestors might be extended and maintained. Implicit is the dimension of passing domestic moral wisdom onward to the next generations before it is too late for the elderly to do so.

This story-telling method of the initiation allows Faulkner and Bellow to treat the anguish resulting from the crises of youth in a comic spirit. Both works show comic impulses that lead the reader to sense that the narratives are relayed to the next generations in a lubricious spirit. Nowhere is it evident that the plots were the results of a mood of deep melancholy. Alienation, lust and deception experienced or witnessed by the protagonists are related comically over five-and-a-half decades later by protagonists who not only survived to tell their tales but enjoy retelling their history. In the plots combining embarrassing episodes emphasizing sexuality and a humble return home, the narrators equate themselves with a maturity and a heightened perspective. In their old age, they see the events with a perspective they might not have understood fifty-seven years earlier. Accordingly, Lucius and Louie appreciate the regenerative value of memory as they remember not only their experiences but also their long-dead ancestors and their values.

Neither work offers to the next generation a frank discussion about sex. Boon does not candidly address the issue with Lucius as they enter and stay at the brothel but "circles the issue with wary and hilarious decorum" (Moses 1974: 316). Bellow does not venture even that far, but it is revealed that Louie

was still a virgin at age seventeen, and for that matter, no enlightening, "man-to-man talk" ensues in either work of fiction for the next generations either. An aristocratic Southern upbringing does not help address this issue, nor does, unsurprisingly in that era, Jewish adolescent bookishness.

The importance of family is apparent in both works. Yet regarding the significant role of Miss Corrie in *The Reivers*, family is also playing a role that places her agency into a most peculiar development from a youth abandoned to a brothel to marriage and childbearing with Boon. According to Hovet, "Female ties, caring for others and marrying are as prominent in [women's initiation stories] as adventure and test situations in male versions of initiation… women are not depicted as being free to venture out into the city in order to find themselves; instead, they are seen to search for a place where they can be protected, often in return for taking care of others" (Hovet 1990: 21) which precisely describes Miss Corrie's fate. The only agency she shows in Faulkner's novel is to leave the oldest profession (after Lucius is knifed in defense of her honor) and to sacrifice her body to the corrupt sheriff for the sake of numerous friends who would otherwise be arrested and jailed.

Miss Corrie's development from an abused child and a fallen young woman to an ultimate marriage with children has an echo with Leslie Fiedler's initiation definition, with marriage offering the happy ending expected in many works of fiction, though obviously the marriage may be just as redemptive for Boon as for Miss Corrie. Yet Southern society does not generally approve of happy endings for prostitutes, and religious Jewish society likewise does not approve of prostitutes in edifying initiation stories such as Bellow has written. The very conservative literary critic Ruth Wisse unconvincingly addresses the prostitute character in her essay on Bellow's story. In contrast to Faulkner's happy ending for the prostitute, Bellow's story keeps the mean and uncouth prostitute who makes off with Louie's money firmly occupied in her profession on the rough streets of Chicago, never to be saved from that life, a predictable and more realistic destiny. While Miss Corrie has experienced a horrible life of abuse since her early youth, she has remarkably few rough edges in her character to show for it and succeeds in leaving the profession to marry and establish a family, an unrealistic portrait, though as one critic points out, "there is an innocence in her that Lucius connects with" (Rollyson 2020: n.p.). It is unambiguously Miss Corrie's wholesome character that instigates the gentlemanly Lucius to violently defend her honor when Otis brands Miss Corrie a whore. While both young women have been exploited and abused, the character of Faulkner and Bellow's prostitutes show very little in common.

To sum up, the numerous parallels between *The Reivers* and "Something to Remember Me By" might not be coincidental, from the names of

protagonists' fathers, the narrators' named after their grandfathers, the fifty-seven-year spread from the crises to the narratives, the relaying of the initiation stories to the descendants, the attempts at chivalry, and their interaction with prostitutes which initiate the narrators. Yet, in this reception study, no proof of Bellow's acquaintance with *The Reivers* is a prerequisite. The relationship between Faulkner's novel and Bellow's story is not an issue of the author's viewpoint but the viewpoint of the reader – the receiver, who may employ the earlier text from the South to interpret the fiction with a Jewish protagonist published in the 1990s. While the reading of "Something to Remember Me By" as a reception of *The Reivers* presumes Bellow's use in the act of creating his story, this is not prerequisite to the reception in the act of reading. As Martindale asserts, "meaning is at the point of reception" (Martindale 2008: 3). No published study has compared these two fictional works of initiation before.

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RAZGOVOR O VRTLOZIMA ZA SLJEDEĆU GENERACIJU: ZAPANJUJUĆE SLIČNOSTI U INICIJACIJSKIM ZAPLETIMA VILIJAMA FOKNERA I SOLA BELOUA

U neobičnoj kratkoj priči Sola Beloua, stariji čovjek priča sinu o događajima iz mladosti koji datiraju još iz njegovih tinejdžerskih godina, odnosno iz 1933. U naslovu „Nešto po čemu ćeš me pamtiti“ (1990), narator Lui smatra da bi njegov sin imao koristi od etičkog obrazovanja. Ipak, vrste događaja koje opisuje i oblik Belouovog inicijacijskog zapleta imaju zapanjujuće sličnosti s onima iz posljednjeg romana Vilijama Foknera pod nazivom „Lopovi“ (1962), napisanog u formi đedovog legata unuku iz 1905. godine, kada je protagonisti/naratoru Lusijusu Pristu bilo jedanaest godina, pri čemu sećanja sežu pedeset sedam godina unazad, baš kao što je to slučaj i kod Belouovog Luija. Oba pripovjedača otkrivaju mladalačke nestašluke narednim generacijama u nadi da će im pružiti moralni kompas za napredak. U oba slučaja, nestašluci i greške u prosuđivanju postaju očigledne porodici naratora, a u vezi su s alkoholom, krađom i seksualnim poniženjem u velikom metropolisu u kojem dječaci gube nevinost i dostojanstvo. Autor ovoga rada upoređuje fikciju komične inicijacije dvojice velikih američkih autora koji se približavaju kraju svojih karijera pisaca fikcije i sugeriše da sličnosti zaslužuju pažnju koju do sada nijesu dobile.

Ključne riječi: *priče o inicijaciji, intertekstualnost, moralni didaktizam, Vilijam Fokner, Sol Belou*