Myth for the Masses: Erskine Caldwell's "Daughter"

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Raymond Williams, looking back over centuries of literature, established a difference between writers who resorted to myth, assuming “a subjective community where the specifics of actual societies are excluded as ephemeral or contingent” and appealing to the universal unconscious, and reformers seeking to unify the masses for social change, presenting the particulars of a society and specific social problems (The Country 246). In the case of Erskine Caldwell, the use of myth was in no way antithetical to his desire to promote social change, as the short-story “Daughter” will illustrate.

Erskine Caldwell’s social consciousness developed early. Born in 1903 in eastern Georgia, he accompanied his father, a minister, on visits to the rural poor; Ira Caldwell’s sermons and later, his column in the local paper dealt with issues like lynching, tenant farming, sharecropping, and malnutrition, and with Erskine he shared his doubts about the American capitalist system.1 Caldwell’s first published essay, “Georgia Cracker” (1926) is an indictment of Southern bigotry and injustices. Although he would never join the Communist party, he sought to write proletarian fiction in the 1930’s. In a 1931 application to the Guggenheim committee, Caldwell said he wanted to write on proletarian life in the South to “point out the direction the masses must take” (Miller 159). He aligned himself with the Communist party in the League of Professional Writers’ manifesto Culture and Crisis which he helped pen in 1932. While he also repeatedly insisted on taking his distance from the Communists and individualism in literary matters (Cook, Fiction 68), his famous dark, though grotesquely humorous, early novels are concerned with the oppressed. Tobacco Road (1932), about degenerate Southern sharecroppers, and God’s Little Acre (1933), depicting monomaniac small farmers and industrial workers, both illustrate the view Caldwell expressed in his New Masses book review about Edward Dahlberg’s From Flushing to Calvary (1932)—that hopelessness arising from capitalist exploitation was a characteristic of good proletarian fiction, for it showed the urgency of action more effectively than a hopeful vision and tone (Miller 166). Although Caldwell, who presented himself as “a
backwoods everyman who decried sophistication of every variety” (Miller 155), never theorized his use of myth, he dealt in all of its aspects to effect societal changes. He sided with anti-“moonlight and magnolia” Southerners (Miller 131), which suggests he saw myth as a popular belief or tradition embodying the ideals of society and shaping social behavior, and, in the particular case of the myth of the traditional South, as a fallacy to be exposed. On another level, Calder Willingham termed him the “True Myth-Maker of the Post-Bellum South” for the “truly “mythic” and “legendary” characters” in his immensely popular early novels (206-07). His appeals for social justice also tapped existing mythologies; Richard Gray, in “The Comedy of Frustration,” demonstrates that in his first novels Caldwell used poor whites as grotesques to show how different reality was from the agrarian ideal of the yeoman farmer, concluding that “Caldwell—in every one of his finest stories—is trying to draw us back steadily into the world of Jeffersonian myth” (232).

We find all these workings of myth applied to reform in the short story “Daughter,” published in Anvil in 1933, the year Jack Conroy founded the little magazine advocating proletarian values. Presenting what was to become an iconic figure in a recognizable social context and a given economic situation, Caldwell exposes Southern myths to draw readers back to a democratic ideal consonant with a unifying national myth, and pins a leftist resolution to a crisis reminiscent of ancient legends, making his point unmistakable by taking the device of repetition to new artistic heights. Its hopeful emphasis on the righteous power of the working class distinguishes “Daughter” from Caldwell’s other sharecropper stories, but its directness seems to justify Barthes’ statements in Mythologies on the transparency of leftist myth, which shall be examined here.

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In the first paragraph of “Daughter,” Colonel Henry Maxwell, who lives in “the big house,” calls the sheriff at sunrise to take Jim to the jail in town. As the townsfolk crowd around the jail to ask Jim why he is inside, we learn that Jim is a sharecropper for Maxwell; his daughter had been complaining of hunger for so long that he “couldn’t stand it,” and shot her: “I’ve been working all year and I made enough for all of us to eat [...] but they came and took it all away from me. I couldn’t go around begging after I’d made enough to keep us.” Colonel Henry Maxwell has been “taking all the shares” because a mule died at Jim’s; the assembled townsfolk decide Maxwell has acted unfairly and get ready to “Pry that jail door open and let Jim out [...]. It ain’t right for him to be in there,” as the outnumbered sheriff leaves them to it.

Expectations about the South are redirected in this short story so as to “point out the direction the masses must take” in actuality. De Tocqueville was told that the Northerner was animated by the spirit of enterprise, the Southerner by the spirit of chivalry: Clement Eaton, in The Mind of the Old South, elaborates upon this Southern ideal. “[T]he country gentlemen [...] cherished a set of values that were different from those of the North [...] notably a deep sense of obligation to the family and a willingness to put one’s life in jeopardy for the sake of honor. [...] Many Southerners had a high sense of pride in regard to money matters; they did not wish to appear petty or mean in financial transactions” (267, 288-89). In Writing the South, Richard Gray accounts for the Southern ethos by the twin influences of the aristocratic planter and the yeoman
farmer. The antagonists in “Daughter” are avatars of these types, and one might expect Colonel Maxwell, a landowner and an officer, to have integrated codes descending from the planter and Jim, the poor white, from the modest farmer—and foresee that Maxwell would act with honor, Jim with canniness. Instead, Maxwell is prompted by greed and does not treat his dependents fairly, so that the only recourse left for the cropper is to kill a child whose fundamental place in the family unit was clear in its appellation “Daughter.” Colonel Henry Maxwell’s flouting of common decency suggests that the Southern code of honor and “noblesse oblige” is a myth. “Daughter” is, in this respect, reminiscent of William Faulkner’s story “Wash,” where Wash Jones takes a scythe to Colonel Sutpen, whom he had imagined “bigger than this hyer durn country” (543), because Sutpen is more concerned about a horse than about the newborn daughter he has sired on Wash’s granddaughter Millie; seeing Sutpen and others like him as “bragging and evil shadows” (547), Wash is shot after killing Millie and her child. In “Wash” and “Daughter,” the dependents act according to a righteous code although they kill. Caldwell makes Jim the sharecropper the figure of the deserving worker, who does not fall far short of the ideal: he has worked unstintingly on land that is not his. His sense of honor and independence forbids him to beg; even murdering his kin, one might argue, was motivated by devotion for his daughter whose pangs he wanted to end. His daughter died pure, whereas Jeeter Lester’s daughters in Tobacco Road are forced to marry at twelve in order to eat or to seduce a brother-in-law for his green-turnips. In the story “Masses of Men,” published in Story in 1933 and reprinted with “Daughter” in Kneel to the Rising Sun (CS 448-458), a little girl is sold into prostitution by her mother to feed the family. More than a Soviet poster, the worthy Jim evokes the independent yeoman farmer, whose log cabin origins are a means of identification across the political spectrum in America, and whom Jefferson believed to be the most virtuous of citizens. His worth emphasizes the degradation of conditions he and other farmers face, made clear by the repetition of “hungry,” but also of the repeated complaints concerning “the shares” and “the mule.”

In The Mind of the South, W.J. Cash distinguishes between the relatively few aristocrats and the more numerous men of humble birth who achieved fortune and constituted the ruling class of the great South, with the brutally unscrupulous “horse trader” type prospering fastest in what was still, until the mid-nineteenth century, nearly a frontier environment (19). Then an increasingly nouveaux riche South, partly to counter the world’s disapproval at its continuing use of slavery, adopted the fiction that “every planter was in the most rigid sense of the word a gentleman,” enabling it “to sneer down the Yankee as low-bred, crass, and money-grubbing” (61). Cash confirms that around the turn of the twentieth century, due to the exhaustion of plantation lands in the South and the staggering demand for expensive fertilization, the drop in the price of cotton, the insolvency of the banking system and the decline in food crops, there was a change in the relatively recent aristocratic ideals of the planter class; even as the myth remained strong, landowners fell back upon the frontier qualities that had contributed to the rise of the ruling class in the South in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: “For here […] was created a world in which the hard, energetic, horse-trading type of man was remorselessly indicated for survival” (149). By the 1920s and 30s, according to Cash, circumstances for the landowning farmer were so stretched that he could not get by without grinding or cheating his dependents. A cropper might earn ten cents a day per member of his family, and find himself with nothing left when
accounts were settled at the end of the year, or even remain in debt to the landlord year after year (281-82). This is the situation shown in “Daughter.”

7 In *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell advocated solutions for “Jeeter, and scores of [other tenant farmers]”: “Co-operative and corporate farming would have saved them all” (63). In “Daughter,” Caldwell shows the working-class responding to a landowner’s injustice by refusing what they call “the State’s [...] grudge against Jim” and taking the law into their own hands, not to lynch the murderer but to free him. The implicit point is that masses capable of such discernment and momentum should organize to ensure that tenant farmers and sharecroppers get a fair deal, restoring true democracy—with the support of readers from all walks of life, for the distance from the agrarian and Jeffersonian myth of an independent, productive citizen rewarded for his honest labor on the land has been made apparent.

8 Appealing to a high and middlebrow audience who would still have had a classical education in early twentieth century America, the story also resonates with classical mythology to validate the crowd’s uprising. Greek myth clears the starving Jim of blame, for being under evil influences. Some sources say Hunger, the daughter of Night, a poor advisor, dwells in the antechamber of Hell (Commelin 219); others say the goddess of starvation is related to a cohort of disasters, being the daughter of Strife, and sister, among others, of “murders” and “man-slaughters” (Hesiod l.226-232). Now, it is as if Jim were pursued by the Eumenides, the deities to whom humans were supposed to leave the vengeance of crimes against kin to the extent that he cannot eat the breakfast the sheriff brings, although he has been hungry for days, and that there is no water in the jail bucket, although he is thirsty, recalls the torments described by Robert Graves for breaking taboos (Graves 396). What is more, Poverty, in Greek myth, is the daughter of Luxury and Idleness (Commelin 435)—but the industrious Jim has starved, so that the dishonorable Colonel Maxwell may continue to live well. Maxwell has profited from the blindness of Ploutos, who gives indiscriminately to the undeserving. Clearly, human justice can be more lenient with Jim. This comes across in Caldwell’s use of repetition, too.

9 Scott MacDonald states that Caldwell has made the greatest use of repetition since Gertrude Stein. He uses the device to convey aspects of a character’s personality, to establish simple settings reflecting unsophisticated lives, or to reflect a movement back to the starting point, emphasizing immovability or a contrast. MacDonald’s study of “Country Full of Swedes” shows repetition conveying an insane frenzy, while its use in “Candy-Man Beechum” and “The Fly in the Coffin” recalls the triumph of the spiritual and jazz against societal oppression (209-10, 218). Repetition in “Daughter” conveys something of all of these elements. But it also makes the story an obvious artifact and increases its political force.

10 The scene and the protagonists are referred to over and over: the cell with its pail, window and bars and the jail yard, the street, the vacant lot, the men and boys and automobiles and horse carts outside, the characters of Jim and the sheriff, and allusions to Colonel Henry Maxwell and Daughter all recur (Jim and Daughter are only once given full names, after four pages: “Word had spread all over town by that time that Jim Carlisle had shot and killed his eight-year-old daughter, Clara” (268). Their names bring to mind ancient lineage and the old world as well as an American town in Pennsylvania founded by pioneers known as the site of a Civil War skirmish in which the Confederate cavalry withdrew. As if addressing a jury of peers, Jim answers the men at the window
who repeat, “It must have been an accident, wasn’t it?” as the Sheriff blurts out variations on “Now, just take it easy, Jim boy.” Repetition establishes Jim’s character and dilemma, the “particulars” of his lot. In incremental variations, Jim tells the men, “Daughter said she was hungry and I just couldn’t stand it no longer,” and refuses their repeated, belated offers of food for Clara: “I made enough working on shares, but they came and took it all away from me. I couldn’t go around begging after I’d made enough to keep us. They just came and took it all off.” Penalized for the Colonel’s mule’s death whereas it was too old to be of any use, he chants: “The mule dropped dead […]. It just dropped dead” (268). Repetition establishes the mood of the crowd, who repeats “It don’t seem right…” about Clara’s death and about the State having a grudge against Jim, and opines that “Henry Maxwell didn’t have no business coming and taking all the shares. He’s got plenty of his own. It ain’t right for Henry Maxwell to come and take Jim’s too” (268). As in “Country Full of Swedes,” repetition is used to create a sense of frenzied agitation. Throughout the text, more men come to the jail: “… everybody in town had heard about his being there…”, “Word had spread all over town by that time…”, and the ensuing pandemonium is given a blow by blow description, with the repetition of verbs like “to push,” “to elbow,” “to shout” conveying the growing force of the disapproving townsfolk. Moreover, repetition highlights change. In the din, Jim repeats his line “Daughter woke up this morning saying she was hungry,” even though he can no longer be heard. That his final words should be so similar to his first drive home the logic that to suffer from hunger when one has worked honestly is unacceptable as, with “a crowbar that was as long as he was tall […], [a] six-foot crowbar”, a townsman proceeds to pry the jail door open to let Jim out; and the sheriff leaves, ending the protracted struggle with the crowd, repeating his trademark, “Now, take it easy, Jim boy” (270), now that the tables have been turned and he has been deposed of his power and function.

11 Repetition gives “Daughter” unity and direction. Caldwell’s repeated vernacular or Vox Pop—“It don’t seem right,” “I just couldn’t stand it no longer” (267)—which Williams warns is a “linguistic contrivance for political […] reach and control” (The Politics 80), might be irritating but for the contrapuntal, musical effect of the montage of selected passages, which gives the text rhythm and form, renders it as memorable as a lively performance, and identifies it as a modernist, expressionistic artifact. When asked by interviewer Richard Sale whether he strove for an incantation effect by repeating key words or statements several times, Caldwell, who had earlier claimed that he didn’t know why he wrote as he did, said only: “Well, there’s artistry in words, of course, but then you’re getting very close to preciousness. You’re writing style rather than content, and to me content is far more important than style” (Cook, Fiction 47). But the repetition functions as what in a theatrical context Brecht was to call the Verfremdungseffekt, sometimes translated as “distancing effect,” in which the audience is prevented from sympathizing with the characters and the action in order to make them understand intellectually the problems exposed, creating the conditions for analysis and reform. And “Daughter” had a chance to function as a drama—Caldwell donated the rights to the Workers Laboratory Theater to adapt as a benefit for the Daily Worker, furthering the cause of working class solidarity (Miller 222). 6

12 “Daughter” was reprinted as the opening piece in Proletarian Literature in the United States, a collection edited by Michael Gold and other radicals in 1935. That same year, the story was included in Caldwell’s Kneel to the Rising Sun and Other Stories, a work leftist critics praised, as it continued to shatter Southern myths with tales on poverty,
lynching, racism, and white degenerates without the sexual prurience which they had felt cheapened the cause in the novels. The ending on a feeling of brotherhood distinguishes “Daughter” from the earlier novels and the many stories in which (usually black) sharecroppers are expropriated or punished by the law and lynched rather than supported by mobs: in “Saturday Afternoon” (1929—CS 28-33), a good Negro cropper is lynched for talking to a white woman; in “Kneel to the Rising Sun” (1935—CS 641-64) a Negro is lynched for speaking out for the rights of a white man who betrays him; in “The People Vs. Abe Lathan, Colored” (1939—CS 474-81), a Negro cropper is expropriated and jailed for having no place else to go; in “The End of Christy Tucker” (1940—CS 263-68) a Negro refuses to be whipped for not buying at the plantation store and is shot by the plantation owner who says he threatened his life. And in the 1940 novel Trouble in July, the entire southern community becomes a lynch mob for Sonny Clark, a black man accused of raping a white woman, who only withdraws her false charge after his death. Within the short form of “Daughter,” solidarity among the working class is undisputed; landowners who do not care if children starve are the root of all evil. That the people’s mythologized, just power may apply to real social ills, may in fact save future children, is suggested in the author’s note preceding “Daughter” in a later compilation, Jackpot: “Does it make any difference, after all, whether an event actually happened or whether it might have happened?” (263)

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13 Yet this purpose recalls Roland Barthes’ proposition in Mythologies that since the language of myth is essentially conservative, truly revolutionary language cannot be mythical because man uses it to transform the real and not to preserve it in images. If a woodcutter fells a tree, Barthes says, when he speaks of the tree he is talking about his action on the tree, the tree is not an image as it can be for one who describes or celebrates a tree (145-46). “It is because it generates speech that is fully, that is to say initially and finally, political, and not, like myth, speech which is initially political and finally natural, that Revolution excludes myth. [...] the bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; revolution announces itself openly as revolution and thereby abolishes myth” (146). Myth exists on the left, admits Barthes, and he cites “a sanctified Stalin” (147); but though all myth works from simple images such as caricatures or symbols, conservative mythologies, which hide their bourgeois sources, enjoy infinite variety, while leftist speech produces “threadbare myths” which “point to their masks” rather than seem organic and inevitable (127, 147-49). Barthes, for whom mythical language may speak through words, photographs, paintings, posters, rites, objects, or other constructs, is not exclusively concerned with literature, but does mention fiction in connection with Jules Verne, seeing in his ships substitutes for the bourgeois fireside (65). He mentions that the objects which left-wing myth has to take hold of are rare, “only a few political notions,” unless it has “recourse to the whole repertoire of the bourgeois myths” (147).

14 I have shown that Caldwell delved into this repertoire. “Daughter” is consistent with a conservative Agrarian ideology. Indeed, a consideration of proletarian productions of the time suggests that they adapt an ethos of conservative values such as love for the family and desire for the betterment of the children, or belief in God, to expose social conditions. Jack Conroy’s “A Coal Miner’s Widow” and “The Iron Throat” by Tillie
Lerner, published alongside “Daughter in Proletarian Literature in the United States (57-62 and 103-10), respectively show a son’s love for the widow who kept the family together through hard work and a miner’s reluctant love and hope for a better life than his for his child; the heat of the house, the laundry, the iron and the rails in the first, the whistle and coal dust in the second, serve as symbols of the protagonists’ unhappy lot that will need to be changed by social justice, contrasting with the green lawn and sprinkler of the well-to-do woman and child in Conroy’s story, and the boss’s white tablecloth in Lerner’s. When in Uncle Tom’s Children (1938) Richard Wright has the old black woman of “Bright and Morning Star” give up her sons to Communist organizing, and sacrifice her own life to shoot a traitor, he gives legitimacy to the cause that made her sons rebels by showing it blend with her cherished religion, thus establishing her as a martyr. Showing such affections, aspirations and capacities to be universal, as is the longing for “what’s right” or the quality of honor in “Daughter,” is an effective strategy. These literary works of the thirties contribute to a cumulative mythology, typically by addressing the themes which Walter Rideout has identified in radical novels: strikes, the development of class consciousness and conversion, bottom dogs, and the decay of the middle class (171, 181 ff.). Among the themes of “Daughter” are the moral decay of the ruling class and mass conversion to social justice. Notwithstanding its craft and the wealth of detail and symbol with which such motifs (a young man’s discovery of the decay of the middle class and conversion to solidarity) are treated in stories like Thomas Wolfe’s “The Party at Jack’s” (1939), the overall limitation of these four themes in proletarian literature seems to bear out Barthes’s theory of the relative paucity of leftist myth.

Raymond Williams’ view of a conflict in the twentieth century between the collective consciousness of myth and the mass consciousness of reformers whose works sought social means of change also makes leftist myth something of an oxymoron, stemming from contradictory impulses which Williams had placed in the city: “Out of the cities […] came these two great and transforming modern ideas: myth, in its variable forms; revolution, in its variable forms. Each, under pressure, offers to convert the other to its own terms. But they are better seen as alternative responses” (The Country 247). Yet this better enables us to judge the achievements of Caldwell, who from out of the rural American South, became celebrated as a natural mythmaker when he most desired social change. I have given examples of how he worked upon existing myths yet presented the specifics of an actual society to promote change on what might be considered an ephemeral problem. As a result, “Daughter” aggrandizes the subject of his early novels, the cropper, who was to become a new mythic Southern figure. According to Dan Miller, Caldwell was largely responsible for the iconizing of sharecroppers in the thirties—after he wrote two series on the South for The New York Post in 1934, which were reprinted as the pamphlet Tenant Farmer and included in his book Some American People (1935), sharecroppers were made “the heroic, beleaguered subjects of documentary films, newsreels, and even a Rockwell Kent commemorative Stamp. Caldwell’s Post series had played a central part in making the Southern sharecropper the most visible symbol of Depression woes” (222). A 1937 volume with photographer Margaret Bourke-White, You Have Seen Their Faces, the first of many works to illustrate the plight of croppers in the South, made that figure starker still. Moreover, as concerns “Daughter,” the relatively limited presentation of the socio-economic issue allowed Caldwell to attain what analyst Dominique Clerc Maugendre calls the essence of myth, “an element of abnormal exceptionality […] that remains
insistent, identical, as time passes” (6)—infanticide, the persecution of the small by the mighty, forgiving a wrongdoer are archetypal situations, found in legends and the Bible, that impact the imagination and reinforce the effects of the other myths that Caldwell reworks.

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16 These timeless allusions make up for the transparency of the revolutionary myth, the fairy-tale bluntness of the figures and the element of kitsch in the manipulation of expectations. Both essential and topical, “Daughter” is a fine example of the “conversion of myth to the terms of revolution” as it was practiced in the thirties, when radical literature had its largest audience and practice in the United States, and working within leftist myth to change society gave Caldwell’s writing its greatest force.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Beginning in 1926, Ira Caldwell wrote a weekly column entitled “Let’s Think This Over” for The Augusta Chronicle. Ira and Eugene Caldwell’s exploration of Southern poverty fueled the eugenics debate and, according to some commentators, indirectly helped pass sterilization legislation (Lombardo ch.3; see also Keely, “Poverty, Sterilization, and Eugenics in Erskine Caldwell’s ‘Tobacco Road’”). As Sylvia J. Cook has pointed out, the advocacy of eugenics was widespread in the early decades of the century and it was considered compassionate and progressive. Ira Caldwell, in a 1929 column, argued for the impact of the environment on degeneracy. In 1930 he published the disheartening results of his experiment with a family of destitute farmers which he
called “The Bunglers” in the magazine *Eugenics: A Journal of Race Betterment*, again insisting on the impact of poverty on development and character, but supporting sterilization in some cases. Although Erskine Caldwell presented grotesque rural figures, he wrote against the sterilization of tenant farmers in *Some American People* and consistently attributed the faults and disabilities of his characters or subjects to socio-economic factors, and as Keely admits, he showed other strata of humanity in a bleak light as well (Cook “Modernism” 70-71, Miller 125-26, Keely 42).

2. *CS* is the abbreviation of *The Complete Stories of Erskine Caldwell*.

3. A family stands by as rowdy Swedes settle in next door (1933. *CS* 3-17).

4. A black man in a hurry to see his girlfriend stops at nothing, not even when sheriff shoots him (1935. *CS* 23-27).

5. A black man hates flies, gets up out of his coffin because a fly was in there with him (1936. *CS* 576-79).

6. It is worth mentioning that, in contrast, both the stage and screen versions of *Tobacco Road* entailed a loss of political insight. The play “changed the characters’ motivations and revised Caldwell’s sociological beliefs,” and the film censored the suggestive sexual behavior and left-leaning political opinions contained in the novel, and, according to Caldwell, rejected “the reality of the story itself” with an absurdly falsified happy ending (Howard 61, 66).

7. This first work of photo-reportage on Southern rural poverty sold very well upon publication, was reviewed favorably by the left, and brought Caldwell together with Bourke-White, who would become his second wife. But besides the usual charge of libel from the South, it was criticized by other photographers and writers for its emotion and melodrama, and because Caldwell wrote the “quotes” himself. James Agee and Walker Evans, authors of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), attacked the book—whose popularity set the publication of their anti-documentary, planned for 1937, back by 4 years—for its exploitation of the poor (Miller 241). Cook argues that Caldwell and Bourke-White’s book shows a modernist sophistication in its recognition of the impossibility of “writing impersonally and scientifically about their human subjects” (Cook, “Modernism” 68).

8. “…ce qui fait l’essentiel d’un mythe, ce qui fonde son universalité, réside dans son caractère d’exceptionnelle anormalité. Un caractère qui se reproduira, insistant, identique au fil du temps.”

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**ABSTRACTS**

Dans « Daughter », publié dans *Anvil* en 1933, Erskine Caldwell remet en question la mythologie du Sud, réécrit la mythologie grecque, et crée un mythe nouveau. Son pauvre métayer Jim Carlisle, travailleur mais affamé, et trop fier pour mendier, est en prison pour avoir tué sa fille, qui s’était encore plainte d’avoir faim. Le propriétaire, le colonel Henry Maxwell, « prenait toutes les parts », tenant Jim responsable de la mort d’une mule. Caldwell déloure les attentes et use savamment de la répétition pour créer un mythe socialiste de la solidarité entre les travailleurs ; la foule rend justice elle-même, décidant que « ça ne semble pas correct » que Jim soit condamné.

J’explique brièvement en quoi la fin de « Daughter », motivée par un but politique, la distingue des nouvelles plus sombres que Caldwell écrit habituellement sur les métayers ; mais la vision désabusée du Sud est typique de l’auteur de *Tobacco Road*. Si ce récit semble confirmer l’opposition qu’établit Barthes dans *Mythologies* entre le mythe à gauche et le mythe conservateur, il illustre néanmoins comment Caldwell est devenu un faiseur de mythes.
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