

The Christ-figure of the American West: A Study in the Use of Typology in Glendon Swarthout's *Bless the Beasts and Children*

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Abstract:

Typology is simply defined as the study of types and an interdisciplinary area of knowledge which can be widely encountered in anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, psychology, statistics, theology, architecture, sociology and politics. In literature, it is both a structural device for novelists and a mode of interpretation for researchers. As such, some researchers tend to apply typological interpretation to works of literature whose writers have not intended to structurally use typology in their productions in the first place. Others highlight the use of typology in literary texts whose writers have been deliberate in using typology as a structural device in their works. The present paper belongs to the second camp. It ultimately aims to show the use of typology as a formal principle in Glendon Swarthout's *Bless the Beasts and Children*. Swarthout was intentional in relying on typology. He delineates his protagonist as a Christ-figure of the American West depending on the picture of Jesus Christ as sketched in the New Testament and resting on four technical strategies. The study typically adopts typological criticism as an approach for argument and a backbone for its methodology. It concludes that Swarthout uses typology to prefigure a Christ-figure in his novel for secular purposes related to his mind, time and environment.

Keywords: *adolescents; buffalo; Christ; typology; West; Bible.*

مسيح الغرب الأمريكي: دراسة في استخدام الترميط في رواية "باركوا الوحوش والأطفال" للكاتب غليندون سوارثاوت

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(مُلخَصُ البَحْث)

يُعرف الترميط ببساطة بأنه دراسة الأنواع وميدان معرفة متعدد التخصصات يمكن مصادفته بشكل واسع في علم الأنسان والآثار وعلم اللغة وعلم النفس والإحصاء واللاهوت والهندسة المعمارية وعلم الاجتماع والسياسة. في الأدب، يُعد الترميط وسيلة بنائية يستخدمها الروائيون وأسلوب تفسير يعتمد عليه الباحثون. ومن هذا المنطلق، يميل بعض من الباحثين لتطبيق التفسير الترميطي على نصوص أدبية لم يكن لكتابتها نية مسبقة في استخدام الترميط كوسيلة بنائية في نتائجهم. في المقابل، يسلط بعض باحثون آخرون الضوء على استخدام الترميط كوسيلة بنيوية في نصوص أدبية كان لكتابتها نية واعية في توظيفه في أعمالهم. تدرج هذه الدراسة ضمن الاتجاه الثاني، إذ تهدف في نهاية المطاف لإظهار استخدام الترميط كحجر أساس في رواية "باركوا الوحوش والأطفال" للكاتب غليندون سوارثاوت، إذ كان سوارثاوت متعمداً في اعتماده على الترميط عندما رسم بطله وكأنه مسيح الغرب الأمريكي، متكئاً على صورة السيد المسيح كما رسمها الإنجيل وعلى أربعة استراتيجيات فنية. تتبنى الدراسة النقد الترميطي نهجاً لجديتها وأساساً لمنهجيتها، وتخلص إلى أن سوارثاوت استخدم الترميط لتصوير شخصية شبيهة بالمسيح في روايته لأغراض علمانية ترتبط بعقليته وزمانه وبيئته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مراهقون، جاموس، المسيح، ترميط، الغرب، الإنجيل

Introduction

When used as a formal principle in literature, on one hand, typology functions as a structural device and narrative design through which authors develop characters, themes and symbolism. It can vigorously organize the framework of a literary work, granting authors the chance to embed deeper layers of meaning within their works. This is principally marked in texts where a character is built on the biblical image of Jesus Christ whose life and attributes foreshadow what the journey of the fictional character will be (Auerbach, 1953: 11-5).

On the other hand, typology can also function as a hermeneutical approach. It was adopted previously as a method of interpreting and discerning the relatedness between the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). It was first inaugurated by Saint Paul and developed later by the early Church Fathers and biblical scholars as a method of reconciling the laws, prophecy and history of the Hebrew Scriptures with the teachings and narratives of the Christian

Scriptures (Abrams & Harpham, 2012: 180-1).

According to typology, the key events, actions and persons in the OT are regarded as *figura* (Latin for 'figure') which prefigures those events, actions and persons in the NT that are related to them in some function, aspect, or relationship. This means that everything that occurs in the OT is a type or an adumbration of something else enumerated in the NT. Besides, everything that occurs in the NT is an antitype or a realization of something else in the OT. The OT *figura*, prefiguration, or type, then, is a promise or prophecy that is fulfilled in the NT in accordance with a plan which is everlastingly present in the 'mind' of God but reveals itself to humans only in the two biblical revelations separated by a period of time. To mention but a few examples of typological interpretation: Adam was believed to be a type, or alternatively, a *figura*, shadow, or image of Christ. The creation of Eve from Adam's rib is also cited as prefiguration of the blood that flowed from the side of the

crucified Christ. The tree which bore the fruit during Adam's original sin is considered analogous to the Cross that bore Christ, the Redeemer of that sin, as its fruit. An important thing to be taken in consideration is that typological interpretation actually differs from allegorical interpretation because typology is horizontal and correlates items in two texts, presumably OT and NT, which are chronologically separated, while allegory is vertical and unveils multiple layers of meaning in a single text (Abrams & Harpham, 2012: 181-2).

The prefiguration, thus, is something historical and real which announces something else, or a figure, which is separate in a span of time from it. The relationship between prefiguration and figure, or type and antitype, is not a causal one, nor simply one of linear continuity or historical sequence; there is a resemblance of form and pattern between the two persons or events. The relationship is actually that of promise and fulfillment because the antitype is reckoned as the hidden significance and the goal of the

type. As such, the antitype is the prototype, and not the reverse. In other words, the type is not the model because the relatedness between the two events is teleological; the emphasis is thrown upon the later event not the first. Accordingly, the model is located in the future; the earlier event is recognized as its copy (Downing, 1968: 14). Northrop Frye states that "typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future" (1982: 80).

The word 'figure' gives the suggestion that the pattern related to Christ and reflected to certain extent in literary works is not an archetypal nor timeless one because it belongs to a certain historical life whose historicity cannot be ignored as it is fundamental to the intended correspondence. In other words, Christ of the NT is not an archetype nor a myth because he demythologized in his life the myth of a redeemer and lived as a person involved in a certain series of events clothed by uniqueness, particularities and historical

reality. This means that the resemblance between the NT Christ and the literary Christ-figure is interpreted according to typology despite the fact that the literary Christ-figure is historically not actual. In other words, Christ of the NT can be a *figura* that prefigures and typifies the Christ-figure of literary works even if the latter is fictional (Downing, 1968: 13-24).

In literature, the Christ-figure is generally defined as a character who exhibits within the limits of his literary environment an affinity or a correspondence with the story of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Christian Bible (Foster, 2003: 66). Some religiously-committed novelists attempt to create a proper Christ-figure in their religious fiction. They endeavour to support the message of their narratives by applying certain Christ attributes to their human yet saintly protagonists. These novels belong to the tradition of social gospel which aims to improve society. The most famous ones are Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward's *A Singular Life* (1894), Charles Sheldon's *The Crucifixion of*

Philip Strong (1894), Harold Bell Wright's *The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907), and Upton Sinclair's *They Call Me Carpenter* (1921) (Detweiler, 1964: 11). These novels call for the churches to eliminate doctrinal dissimilarities and organize faith resources in rigorous efforts in order to redeem the Christian nation from the sins of wealth and moral vice (Evans, 2017: 18).

However, the inadvisable use of Christ-figure in these novels, which have a predominantly religious symbolism, is different from the use of Christ symbolism in novels written by secular novelists. The Christ-figure of secular novels, such as Billy Budd in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (1924), Jim Casy in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), and Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951), are employed by distinguished authors to elucidate a private viewpoint which scarcely relates to Christianity or even opposes it. Religious novelists who attempt to create a Christ-figure find themselves tangled in an uneasy theological commitment. Therefore, the

creation of Christ-figures is perhaps a task that only secular writers can perfectly accomplish because they simply do not have religious commitment that deters their imagination (Detweiler, 1964: 11).

Principally, Glendon Swarthout (1918-1992), a Southern American university professor, novelist and screenplay writer, was not religious (Dempsey & Dempsey, 2016: 137-8). However, he rests on the biblical story of Christ in his *Bless the Beasts and Children* (henceforth, *Bless*) (1970) to create a Christ-figure for secular purposes. Set in the American West, the home of pioneers, cowboys and Indians, *Bless* speaks of five misfits and their leader, ages 13 through 17, housed at a summer camp in Arizona, called Box Canyon Boys Camp, and their mission to save thirty buffalo from a preserve after they witness, a day before, an annual three-day savage buffalo slaughter, or "hunt", organized by the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Dumped at the Camp by their over-privileged yet inattentive parents, who are

very busy with their own lives, the adolescents suffer degradation and mistreatment from almost everybody inside the Camp. However, they, filled with nausea, embark on an epic quest dotted by many obstacles which result in the accomplishment of their errand but not without casualties (Constantakis, 2009: 76).

Bless is generically classified as a coming-of-age novel. In a coming-of-age novel, a protagonist endures tremendous difficulties and trials, at the end of which he has grown more mature and stronger. It is usual for the protagonist to undergo hardships and sufferings that test his endurance and readiness to succeed (Constantakis, 2009: 76). The coming-of-age genre is based on the German *bildungsroman*, or formation novel. Coined by the German philologist Karl Morgenstern in 1819, *bildungsroman* refers to a story whose protagonist departs youth for maturity. Basically, the young character, who is at odds with his society, sets forth on a journey by leaving home. He faces tribulations and tests and eventually emerges as a sentimentally mature adult (Bryfonsk, 2013: 9).

Traditionally, English writers complicate the character's journey with struggles from outside the self. On the other hand, German writers tend to emphasize the internal battle of the protagonist. As a result, the quest of the hero can be viewed as a quest for life's meaning or a vehicle used to carry the social and moral opinions of the author (Milne, 2009: 45). Novelists in the United States initiate a comprehensive tradition which makes their protagonists fight internally and externally to achieve their goals. Such a tradition can be found in the earliest examples of American coming-of-age novels such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* (1959) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) (Snircova, 2018: 26).

In his *Bless*, Swarthout seems to embrace the American tradition of coming-of-age novels where protagonists simultaneously struggle with the vicissitudes of their inner psyche and the obstacles of the outer world they live in. However, he clothes it with

Western American costume. He is classified as one of the Western novelists who successfully crafts cowboy sagas and rarely strays beyond craggy buttes and arid prairies. However, he comes up with new content and message about summer camps for Western adolescents and buffalo hunts. In his handling with summer camps, he depends on an experience his son, Miles, had at a summer camp in Arizona. Summer camps specialized for boys of affluent families who desired their urban children to be morally, mentally and physically strong through developing their sentimental resources, learning skills and disciplinary awareness in naturalistic settings. As to his dealing with the buffalo slaughter, Swarthout relies on his personal observations to the actual practice conducted in the West of the United States. These staged slaughters have been used for many years in the American West as a technique to limit, or to thin, the numbers of buffalo herds since their populations have increased profusely. After the publication of *Bless*, the practice continued to happen, especially in

Arizona, but with less barbarity (Constantakis, 2009: 76-9).

This paper is framed to study the protagonist of Swarthout's *Bless*, John Cotton, as a Christ-figure. The reason behind this consideration is the uncanny resemblance between the story of Cotton and the narration of Jesus Christ as depicted in the NT.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a book, Miner (1977) collects eleven studies conducted by different authors. The studies tackle different literary uses of typology for religious purposes in works of literature from the Middle Ages to the present time. In the close of the book, Miner warns against the dangers of using typology in literature as it may usurp the place of literary muse. Authors (Edwards, 1948; Tuve, 1982; Hagstrum, 1964; Alpers, 1967) also studied the adaptation of typology by poets, such as Edmund Spenser, George Herbert, John Milton and William Blake, who wrote on religious themes. Other authors (Robertson, 1950; Robertson, 1969) assume that secular medieval literary works, such as the *Roman de la Rose*, the works of Chrétien de

Troyes and the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, were written to harbour typological modes of moral and theological references. However, there has been a controversy on both the validity of applying typological interpretation to secular literary works and the benefit of investigating it in such works (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Swarthout's *Bless* proved itself as a successful secular novel in which typology is a backbone. It was a bestseller when it was first published in 1970. The novel was so successful that it was made into a movie the following year of its publication. Before and after *Bless*, Swarthout wrote screenplays and novels, many of which also proved themselves as big successes and made into movies, but *Bless* took the lead among them. It is still a very popular and continually printed novel (Constantakis, 2009). In a survey done by *Journal of Reading*, it is chosen from among 600 novels by school students as one of the fifteen novels which are mostly read in the seventies of the previous century (Larocque, 1974). Moss

labels it as a “1970 hit” (2018: 60).

Bless is praised for its emotional intensity, psychological impact and literary merits (Bridgers, 2001; Broderick, 1995). Donelson reckons it as “an intelligent and exciting book of wide appeal to anyone who likes nature or adventure or ecology or good writing” (1972a: 738). In other places, he regards it as “a funny and tragic tale” (1972b: 202) which tells its readers “what it means to be an alien in the world” (1974: 406). Savage describes it as “a Western in a modern setting which defines the pioneer heritage in terms of man’s abuse of nature” (1972: 80).

Bless is also hailed for dealing with adolescents’ issues brilliantly and is considered one of the best studies of adolescence (Pipes, 1970; Carlsen, 1976; Davis, 1982; Muller, 1974). In a review, Conner regards it as “an excellent example of literature *about* adolescents rather than literature *for* adolescents” (1972: 139, original italics). Limbacher classifies it as one of “the classics as well as award-winning adolescent

literature” (1981: 88). Ascione describes it as “a wonderful counterpart to Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*” (2005: 81).

Unfortunately, *Bless* has not received the academic attention it really deserves despite the merits it has. There is no single focused academic study or comprehensive article which is completely devoted to it, neither of its protagonist as a Christ-figure nor of anything in it. The available materials, printed and electronic, include reviews, compact views, summaries, marginal mentions and internet discussions. The reasons which explain such ‘neglect’, as it were, are actually vague. One reason could be the accusations of language obscenity and violence incitement which were directed to the novel and led to its censorship from high schools curricula (Sova, 2006; Donelson, 1972c). Another reason could be that authors just forgot about Swarthout in spite of his fame. Dempsey and Dempsey list Swarthout as one of the “famous and forgotten authors” (2016: 136).

This study hypothesizes that there has not been a proper academic paper which tackled

the use of typology in Swarthout's *Bless* or the presentation of its protagonist as a Christ-figure. Subsequently, it attempts to fill up this academic gap.

METHODOLOGY

In fact, there are many literary approaches which are related to typology in a way or another that can be safely applied to *Bless* in terms of its content and form such as myth or archetypal criticism and postsecular readings. However, typological criticism is the literary-theological methodology used in this study and the backbone of its argument. Typology seems as a useful tool to examine how Swarthout presents in his *Bless* a Christ-figure of a special brand after depending on four technical devices. The reason behind such perspective is the fact that typological interpretation can help readers understand how a piece of literature can exploit a similarity to Christ which is both integral to the literary work and also gives full justice to the historicity of Christ as a biblical personage.

Swarthout deliberately and obviously projects the creation

of his protagonist on typology where he uses Christ of the NT as a *figura* that typifies the figuration of his protagonist. Hence, two categories of typological markers will be selected. The first category includes the thematic and structural correspondences between the literary Christ-like figure and the biblical type. The second encompasses the textual associations which are deeply imagistic and symbolic. These two categories are intermingled because they trace the development of the hero and his final fulfillment. As such, an act of juxtaposition will be conducted between a *figura* and a figure in terms of circumstances, actions and motives. The findings are presented in terms of correspondence and purpose.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A novelist who intends to use Christ as a type for his Christic protagonist must be familiar with the NT (Hofer, 2003: 6). Swarthout, as his son, Miles, reports, was familiar with the Bible which he considered the most sublime story ever told. However, he was not really a religious man. He did not go to

church nor did he profess any faith. Nevertheless, he certainly espoused the principles of Christianity. The Christian references, patterns and themes in *Bless*, as Miles emphasizes, are “*deliberate*” to help readers understand the messages of the novel (1970: xxxi, original italics). Swarthout never declared that he was intentional in using typology as a narrative framework in *Bless*. He never disclosed that he used the biblical Christ as a prefiguration to figure the character of his protagonist. However, there is confluence of textual, structural and thematic evidences which prove his use of typology as a formal principle and the Christhood of his protagonist.

In *Bless*, the Christian presence is crystal clear. It is, in Sanders’ words, “as obvious as a hymn refrain” (1989: 82). Right from the beginning, Swarthout crowns his novel with an invocatory title which harmonizes with biblical register and seems like an opening to a sermon. Swarthout’s son, Miles, states in an introduction to the novel that the title was “divinely inspired” (1970: xvi). The title

is, in fact, a spiritual plea to stop brutality and violence against both the buffalo and adolescents who are both warehoused and unappreciated despite the redeemable innocence they have (Schwartz, 1979: 154).

The idea of an innocent or pure way of seeing the world is often linked to children who carry that kind of innocence in how they experience things. Within the Christian tradition, this kind of vision has long been connected to the belief that children exist closer to the original purity of the Garden of Eden. It refers to that early and untouched state before the fall of man which refers to a time when humans, animals, and nature lived together in peaceful harmony. That pure innocence is regarded as a resonance of a missing world in which everything was still whole, peaceful, and reconciled (Frye, 1990: 86).

Bless opens with a melancholic and elegiac description of Box Canyon which insinuates that the environment strongly refuses silence when innocence is unfortunately lost. In many ways, this environmental

reaction is similar to the biblical laments in which the cosmic elements mourn alongside the believers as in the case of Jeremiah 4:28 (NRSV, 2021). The narrator reflects,

In that place the wind prevailed. There was always sound. The throat of the canyon was hoarse with wind. It heaved through pines and passed and was collected by the cliffs. There was a phenomenon of pines in such a place. When wind died in a box canyon and in its wake the air was still and taut, the trees were not. The passing trembled in them, and a sough of loss. They grieved. They seemed to mourn a memory of wind (Swarthout, 1970: 1).

This description, however, brings into mind the garden of Gethsemane in Kidron Valley in which Christ suffered agonies before his arrest (Matthew, 26: 36-46, Palmer, 2020; Luke, 22: 39-46, Palmer, 2020; Mark, 14: 32-42, Palmer, 2020; John, 18: 1-11, Palmer, 2020). In fact, one of the most powerful and haunting biblical references comes from Christ's time in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to Mark, Jesus informs his

disciples, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death" (14: 34). Luke adds more intense emotional weight: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (22: 44). Lund points out that "Christ's sorrow in the Garden of Gethsemane" can be viewed "as an intense, current emotional sensibility, as a foreseeing of future pain, as an awareness of the burden of both present and future" (2010: 152). John Cotton, 15, the Christ-like protagonist of *Bless* who has the same initials as Jesus Christ, experiences the same emotional burden and melancholy as it comes to the errand he has assigned for himself (Constantakis, 2009: 67-8).

However, *Bless* then moves to a troublesome yet indicative vision. After seeing the buffalo slaughter, Cotton has a detestable dream in which he has seen the boys and himself as hunted buffalo killed one by one by their parents. The narrator explains,

Cotton dreamed of them being penned like beasts and murdered by their own parents.

All of them cried out in a babble of id, ego, odor, blood, and the madness of men while Dionne Warwick ululated soul and Roy Acuff sang of sin and redemption. It was a catharsis by voice, and in vain (Swarthout, 1970: 4).

In his dream, Cotton opens the door of analogies wide open. When he imagines himself as a victim of slaughter, he actually identifies his Christic self with the buffalo which Swarthout describes as “the blood of every *lamb*” (Swarthout, 1970: 102, emphasis added). His sympathy with animals hints to the generosity and innocence of his character which are prerequisites for a Christ-figure. Later, the narrator specifies him as the most affected one among the boys after their witnessing the buffalo slaughter: “Cotton hunkered down opposite. What the boy had been exposed to that day had probably hit him harder than any of them” (Swarthout, 1970: 9).

Christians often picture Jesus at his birth lying quietly in a manger, surrounded by animals, not just as background, but as silent companions to a sacred moment. From the second

century onward, early Christian writers saw in this scene a fulfillment of Isaiah 1: 3 (NRSV, 2021), where the ox and the donkey recognize their master and his crib. This image suggests something profound: those animals, in their own way, are attuned to the divine, responding with instinctive recognition where humans often fail. Later, in the Gospel of Mark (1: 13), Jesus is described as being with the wild beasts during his forty days in the desert. There is no sense of danger, only peaceful presence. In Matthew 23: 37, Christ speaks with aching tenderness, comparing his longing for Jerusalem to a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. The image is intimate, maternal, and deeply protective. These moments, taken together, reveal a thread of sympathy woven through Christ’s life, an unspoken bond with animals that reflects not only humility, but a shared vulnerability and gentleness, and this is exactly what Cotton has (Farrington, 2012: 7).

Cotton is identified with Christ by having the same attitude towards outcasts. Christ, as the Gospel of Luke

tells, is a friend of outcasts and accepts numerous kinds of people who have been despised and shunned by others such as a leper (5: 12-15), a paralytic (5: 17-26), a tax-collector (5: 27-32), a fallen woman (5: 36-50) and a demoniac (8: 26-39). These outcasts are recognized as rejects or failures by society and not worthy of attention or inclusion. Christ embraces them with love and compassion. He then converts them into better beings (Kim, 2010: 235).

Inside the Camp, the adolescents divide themselves into six teams according to wish and acceptability. Then, they compete for eight weeks in different sports and crafts. None wishes to accept six of the adolescents because they are ineffectual and possess no athletic skills. They are the weakest team and, accordingly, named "the Bedwetters." The only normal one among the six adolescents is Cotton. Gerald Goodenow, 14, is a weeper who is dismissed from two teams because he wets his bed. Billy Lally, 11, is also a bed-wetter, a thumb-sucker and a bad dreamer who is hauled out from his team because he sleeps under his bed. Stephen Lally,

14, suffers from tantrums that none of the teams seems to tolerate. Lawrence Teft, 14, is a tooth-grinder who cries much even in his sleep. Sammy Shecker, 14, is a nail-biter and a Jewish braggart who is thrown out of four teams. The five misfits are treated like failures and none of the teams seems willing to take them under its wing. The narrator clarifies,

Cotton's group was unique. They moved in with him because no one else would have them. They were known variously as the Weirds, the Screwups, the Locos. They were the bottom of the barrel (Swarthout, 1970: 13, original italics).

When Cotton comes, he accepts and welcomes them in his team. He sees the latent good in them and feels proud of them. At the close of the novel, they are no longer the useless misfits and the rejects that their families and camp teams had equally excluded (Bridgers, 2001: 126-8).

Speaking of the fellowship, it can be noticed that both Christ and Cotton have disciples who are obedient yet unintelligent. The Canonical Gospels speak of twelve disciples who follow

Christ and travel with him wherever he goes (Green et al, 2013: 204). According to Mark, these disciples are remarkably bovine (4: 13; 4: 35-41; 6: 52; 9: 9-10). However, Christ chooses to be their leader, around whom they gather and from whom they receive instructions (Köstenberger, 1998: 141-2). According to *Bless*, Cotton has five disciples who follow him in the journey from the Camp to the buffalo preserve. Cotton's disciples are also obtuse but they never desert Cotton as Christ's disciples did when Christ was arrested. From the very outset of the novel, Cotton shines as their leader. He organizes and directs every segment of their mission. Like Christ, Cotton accepts others despite their differences. The narrator points out,

They wearied, they sickened, they gave Cotton a royal pain in the rear. Okay, he said to himself, okay, let's just see. Let's turn off the damn set and see if they can survive on the real thing. Let's stick the horse opera back in the can and see if they're grown-up enough to live in this world. If they aren't, if they poop out now, the hell

with the whole operation and the hell with them, too, because if they aren't, after this summer and all I've done for them, they really are born losers, they really are dings (Swarthout, 1970: 59-60).

According to the Canonical Gospels, Jesus does not choose the strong, the rich, or the respected as his disciples. He chooses fishermen, tax collectors, and ordinary yet flawed people. The boys in the novel, awkward, sensitive, and ridiculed, reflect this same idea. They are the last ones society would choose, yet they become the ones who witness and follow a kind of moral and spiritual awakening through Cotton. Despite their initial cowardice or immaturity, they are the ones who carry the meaning of his sacrifice forward. Their growth and moral awakening make them mirrors of the disciples who only began to understand after Christ's crucifixion (Smallbones, 2019: 54-5).

Cotton is Christlike in another aspect. Among the trees of Gethsemane and accompanied by his disciples, Christ, knowing he is about to be arrested, becomes "sad"

(Matthew, 26: 38), “distressed and agitated” (Mark, 14: 33). He orders his disciples to watch and pray. However, they fall asleep (Matthew, 26: 40; Luke, 22: 45; Mark, 14: 37). Cotton, after the horrific dream, wakes, among the pines of Box Canyon, confounded and breathless. He finds his personnel, who appear like his disciples, around him sleeping. The narrator clarifies,

Cotton woke with a cry. His forehead, palms, and inner thighs seeped sweat. He disgusted himself. He was fifteen, the oldest, too old to have bad dreams. He checked the time. It was five of eleven. He had been asleep less than half an hour. Hoisting himself on an elbow, out of habit he checked his personnel. Goodenow, Teft, Shecker, Lally 1—where was his brother? Then he remembered: Lally 2 had moved pillow and sleeping bag under his bed at lights out. ... All present, sir, and accounted for (Swarthout, 1970: 2).

When Jesus finds his disciples asleep, and Cotton finds the boys asleep, both moments point to the loneliness of the one who sacrifices, and

the inability of others to stay morally or spiritually awake when it matters most. The use of sleep in these scenes is not just physical tiredness, but a deep metaphor for human failure to witness, to support, and to understand until after the loss has occurred (Moltmann, 2004: 80-1).

Christ and Cotton share the same wilderness experience before they begin their ministries. As the Synoptic Gospels narrate, Christ spends forty days in the wilderness to prepare for his errand (Luke, 4: 1-2; Matthew, 4: 1-2; Mark, 1: 12-13). In the dark piney woods of Flagstaff, Cotton engineers the mission of rescuing the buffalo after discussing the timings, transportation and distance with his disciples. The narrator comments,

Cotton came among them, holding back, and they bunched up around him *in the dark woods*, shivering and uncertain until, that close, they could almost smell his pride in them, his excitement and desire. Then he let them have it, his voice low but so charged with passion that it prickled the hair on their heads. “You damn betcha. Let’s

go, men” (Swarthout, 1970: 14, emphasis added).

This moment is crucial because it triggers the hero-making process in the middle of his coming of age. As such, both Jesus and Cotton experience a period of solitude in the wilderness, and this parallel is rich with symbolic meaning. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus enters the wilderness to fast, to be tempted, and ultimately to prepare for the sacrificial path ahead. The wilderness becomes a space of testing, isolation, and spiritual sharpening. Likewise, Cotton’s journey through the physical wilderness mirrors a deeper moral and spiritual trial. Surrounded by fear, weakness, and misunderstanding, he emerges as the one clear-sighted figure willing to bear the burden of sacrifice. In both narratives, the wilderness becomes a sacred space, not of escape, but of transformation, where true leadership and spiritual strength are revealed (Neufeld, 2007: 147-8).

Cotton is akin to Christ in thaumaturgy. The Canonical Gospels speak of different and numerous miracles that Christ performed, among them are the

healing of the sick and the resurrecting of the dead (Green et al, 2013: 594). When the adolescents first come to the Camp, they are essentially in psychoneurotic pain due to the neglect they have suffered from their families. Inside the Camp, their psychoneurotic wounds are deepened due to the odious handling they receive. It is Cotton who cures them from their psychoneurotic illness, from loneliness and emptiness, because his leading makes them heroes worthy of respect and pride. Though he himself is unloved and unwanted by everyone, he manages to resurrect them from the subjectively emotional stagnation and the psychoneurotic abyss in which they have dwelt. When Goodenow attempts to drown himself in a lake and later tries to hang himself, it is Cotton who makes him stop in an act that is figuratively analogous to resurrection (Lenz, 1980: 676).

The narrator gives a heartbreaking yet justifiable first impression about the boys. He propounds, “*they were doomed by the establishment to be the Bedwetters, the dandiest collection of dings ever to be*

inflicted upon Box Canyon Boys Camp” (Swarthout, 1970: 38, original italics). Afterwards, he changes his perspective, resembling them to cowboys in Western American movies, “this is the marrowbone of every American adventure story. ... This has ever been the essence of our melodrama: some men with guns, going somewhere, to do something dangerous. And so they were” (Swarthout, 1970: 23-4). While Cotton does not perform miracles in the literal sense, his presence in *Bless* carries a symbolic form of thaumaturgy. Like Christ, he brings about transformation, not through supernatural power, but through moral conviction, selflessness, and sacrificial leadership. Biblical miracles often serve to awaken spiritual insight rather than merely display power. In this sense, Cotton’s “miracle” lies in his ability to awaken courage in those who were once incapable of it. His influence reshapes the group, mirroring the redemptive power of Christ not through spectacle, but through love and sacrifice (Twelftree, 1999: 35-109).

Similar to Christ, Cotton has a familial conflict. According to

the Gospel of Mark, Christ is in conflict with his family because they do not understand him and cast preferential allegations on him. However, he rejects their claims firmly (Soares-Prabhu & D’Sa, 2003: 136). While he spends most of his time teaching and preaching, his mother and “brothers” attempt to “restrain” him because they believe he is “out of his mind” (Mark, 3: 20-32). Swarthout speaks of a conflict Cotton has with his family represented by his four-time-married mother. Cotton enthusiastically wants to join the Marines to fight for his country in the Vietnam war, an honour that he long dreamed of. However, his mother confronts his desires with vigorous refusal. She wants to constrain him though he wants to defend his country in the same way Christ’s family press on Christ though he wants to spread his religion (Constantakis, 2009: 72).

According to the introductions of the gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, Christ does not have a biological father (Nuurnberger, 2007: 61). Saint Joseph, the carpenter, appears in the Gospels of Luke (4: 22) and

Mathew (13: 54) as the adoptive father who has raised Christ and showed all aspects of tenderness towards him (Callahan, 2011: 78). *Bless* does not speak a word about Cotton's father. It only speaks of his stepfather, his mother's husband from her second marriage. This unnamed stepfather, who works as a manufacturer, treats Cotton warmly and desires to be his custodian (Constantakis, 2009: 72).

Amid their journey to the buffalo preserve, the six adolescents are hindered by two local cowboys who attempt to turn them in. Before they can obviate the two cowboys, the adolescents fabricate a good story in which they claim they are a music band from Los Angeles called "Before Christ" and the proof is the "BC" embroidered on their jackets (Swarthout, 1970: 44). The insignia "BC" essentially stands for Box Canyon. However, when read through a symbolic and Christological lens, it invites deeper interpretation. As a historical abbreviation for "Before Christ," "BC" can represent the boys' state of moral and emotional disarray

before encountering Cotton's redemptive influence. Much like the disciples before their transformation through Christ's teachings and sacrifice, the boys live before Cotton in a kind of spiritual immaturity marked by fear, shame, and alienation (Versluis, 2018: 2).

Cotton is Christlike in his handing a sacrament to his disciples. The Canonical Gospels (Luke, 22: 7-30; Matthew, 26: 17-35; Mark, 14: 1-26; John, 13: 1-30) and the Corinthians (11: 23-26, Palmer, 2020) speak of the Last Supper, the last Passover Christ had before his crucifixion. However, only the Synoptic Gospels evidently narrate that Christ hands his twelve disciples a cup of wine as a sacrament and asks them to share it among themselves as a sign of the new covenant (Luke, 22: 14-20; Matthew, 26: 26-28; Mark, 14: 23-25). After the six adolescents free the buffalo from the pens, Cotton offers them "three small bottles of whiskey" (Swarthout, 1970: 91), and orders each one of them to drink a half. The narrator reflects, "They made a *sacrament* of it, there in the dark beside the empty pens, the

others waiting respectfully while each one drank and puffed out his cheeks and swallowed hard to keep from choking” (Swarthout, 1970: 91, emphasis added). While Christ’s gesture is sacred, symbolic of divine sacrifice and redemption, Cotton’s is grounded in the rawness of their reality. The whisky lacks the purity of a sacrament, yet it functions as a moment of human connection, shared courage, and unity. This segment of *Bless* is highly significant as it accentuates the events and foreshadows the imminent crucifixion of Cotton (Sanders, 1989: 82).

Both Christ and Cotton have tested their disciples. Some Gospels of the NT (*e.g.* John, 6: 1-15, 25-29; Matthew 28: 18–20; Acts 1: 8, Palmer, 2020; Romans 7: 18–19, Palmer, 2020) tell of certain tests that Christ exerted upon his disciples to verify their understanding of his teachings and to see how they would behave toward him in adversity and prosperity. Cotton situates his disciples under some tests. Before they witness the buffalo slaughter, he, in the fourth week, orders them to go with

him to town, Prescott, after Camp lights go off, to watch a movie. They delightedly obey though going out of Camp at night is strictly unpermitted. In the sixth week, Cotton embroils them in a bet with the strongest team, the Apaches, to reach the Mogollon Rim in a hike an hour faster, a tough bet that they strenuously win. After the initiation of the mission and on their way to the buffalo preserve, Cotton informs them that he will abandon the mission. They stubbornly disagree and head towards the preserve. He joyfully rejoins them and reflects,

I didn’t mean it, I wasn’t flaking out, I was just putting you over a barrel to see what you’d do and now I know! You’re great, you guys, great! Now we really can hack it, we can hack anything—because you finally don’t need me or anybody anymore! We’re finally honest-to-God committed to something better than that peepot and we did it ourselves! So let’s go, goddammit (Swarthout, 1970: 63).

Like Christ, Cotton’s suggestion of stepping away pushes the boys into a space

where they must decide for themselves. Will they give up, or rise to the moment? Their decision to keep going without his prompting marks a profound change. Much like the disciples who gradually grew into their calling, the boys begin to act with conviction, no longer just following, but believing in the mission as their own. Cotton's apparent doubt is not weakness; it is a catalyst, designed to draw something deeper out of them. This quiet test, then, becomes a moment of moral awakening (Farmer, 1997: 60).

The goal of the Box Canyon Boys Camp is the creation of cowboys. The inherent promise of the camp is that it can shape the same heroic and iconic character defined by Western cowboy. However, called Bedwetters, the six characters of Swarthout's novel do not start the journey as any sort of champions; the camp fails to lead them to the path of heroic cowboys. Swarthout presents his own heroes as ordinary boys who have to demonstrate the possibility of being ordinary heroes. The sacrifice of Cotton at the close of the novel cannot be considered the heroic choice expected from cowboys.

Therefore, the author openly clarifies that these adolescents, and Cotton in particular, have successfully found their heroism buried down within themselves and not through the stratagem of the cowboy motif. Consequently, Box Canyon Boys Camp is presented as an atypical summer camp although its motto is: "*Send Us a Boy—We'll Send You a Cowboy!*" (Swarthout, 1970: 12, original italics). Thus, the adolescents are no longer "losers" and "dings" (Swarthout, 1970: 60). They accomplish personal perfection and this accomplishment paves the way for the departure of their Christ because they are completely enlightened (Bridgers, 2001: 125).

Like Christ, Cotton suffers treachery which leads to his death on a mountain. According to the Canonical Gospels, Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, betrays Christ and identifies him to the Romans who arrest him immediately (Luke, 22: 47-48; Matthew, 26: 47-50; Mark, 14: 43-46; John, 18: 1-8). When the buffalo are outside their pens, the six adolescents discover that the preserve is circled by a strong

chainlike fence. They attempt to break it but in vain. Hence, Cotton jumps in “a *Judas truck*” (Swarthout, 1970: 96, emphasis added) aiming to hit the fence so as to make a hole in it for the buffalo to pass through and he succeeds. Then, horning, he chases the herd to boom it through the hole. The narrator describes the breakout of the buffalo gracefully: “They made a splendid thunder. It pulled down temples. It smote the ears of gnats and governments. It caused an impious planet to slip a cog. It must have been heard in heaven” (Swarthout, 1970: 125). Outside the fence, the *Judas truck* never stops till it hits rocks leaving Cotton dead on its wheel. As Judas betrays Christ, the personified *Judas truck* fails Cotton. Christ is crucified on the Cross on the mountain of Golgotha (Luke, 23: 32-33; Matthew, 27: 32-5; Mark, 15: 21-24; John, 19: 17-18) and Cotton is crucified on a truck on the Mogollon Rim. Like Christ’s death, Cotton’s results in triumphal victory (Sanders, 1989: 82).

In fact, the use of the *Judas truck* carries a layered irony that deepens its symbolic

resonance. Originally designed to distribute feed, a gesture of care and sustenance, it becomes the very vehicle that enables Cotton to free the buffalo, only to lead to his own death. This transformation mirrors the biblical figure of Judas, who, though once a trusted disciple of Christ, becomes the agent of his betrayal. In both cases, what was once part of a trusted system, whether a companion or a tool of provision, is turned into an instrument of destruction. Yet, as with Christ’s crucifixion, Cotton’s death through the *Judas truck* becomes a redemptive moment. His sacrifice secures the liberation of the innocent, echoing the Christian narrative in which betrayal, suffering, and death paradoxically become the pathway to salvation. The name “*Judas*” thus serves not merely as a historical or agricultural reference, but as a deliberate symbol of moral inversion where betrayal and death become bound to acts of ultimate grace (Dao, 2024: n.p.).

Following in the steps of Christ, Cotton sacrifices his life for others. According to the

theology of the NT, Christ brings, in his death, redemption and salvation for his fellow-men (Green et al, 2013: 178-190). Cotton's death also brings redemption and salvation for both the buffalo and the adolescents. Cotton succeeds in saving the souls of about fifty buffalo. The narrator comments, "it was gloriously finished and the buffalo were *free, free, forever free*" (Swarthout, 1970: 126, emphasis added). As for the adolescents, Cotton's sacrifice "*freed them, too, forever*" (Swarthout, 1970: 126, emphasis added). They are now the heroes of grace and humanity. Novels which revolve around a Christ-figure are generally characterized by the presence of the theme of redemptive suffering and a protagonist who is ready to receive suffering or death for the sake of worthy ends and transcendent values (Dillistone, 1960: 22). Cotton's presence, like Christ's, initiates a journey toward moral awakening, courage, and sacrifice. His leadership in the wilderness, his willingness to bear the burden alone, and his eventual death parallel the Passion narrative.

Just as the cross becomes the ultimate Christian symbol of sacrificial love, Cotton's final act functions as the novel's redemptive climax (Versluis, 2018: 2).

Cotton is similar to Christ in the aftermath of his death. Sadness and gloom fill the atmosphere after the death of Christ. The veil of the Temple is torn into two parts (Mark, 15: 38; Matthew, 27: 51). As the Gospel of Matthew tells, "the earth was shaken, and the rocks split open, and the tombs were opened up" (27: 51-52). Such expression of parental sadness in the atmosphere also follows Cotton's heartbreaking death: "a sad wind sneaked out of the canyon below, moaning baby, baby, and the blues and trembling through the pines and fanning over the preserve in farewell. It grieved" (Swarthout, 1970: 126). The shift from cosmic upheaval to local lament reflects the novel's concern with wasted youth and the failure of the American West to protect innocence (Sanders, 1989: 82).

Some of the beholders of Christ's crucifixion are in deep sorrow. According to Luke, "they were turning away,

beating their breasts” (23: 48). The five adolescents are “in tears” and “bawling in their sorrow” as Cotton’s death “cracked their hearts” (Swarthout, 1970: 126). Christ on his Cross is surrounded by soldiers who crucified him (John, 19: 32-35). Cotton on the truck wheel is surrounded by men who attempted to deter the adolescents’ mission. The narrator describes their faces as “grim.” He continues, “some of them wore state uniforms. Some were sixpack city sportsmen and carried merciless rifles” (Swarthout, 1970: 126).

As Christ is dying, noon turns into darkness for three hours (Luke, 23: 44; Matthew, 27: 45; Mark, 15: 33). The six adolescents also face darkness of some sort. As they are heading to the preserve, “the presage of the night had changed. For three hours, through woods and towns and over mountains, they had been Godsped on their journey by the moon. It failed them now” (Swarthout, 1970: 64). This darkness actually foreshadows the coming of a plight where a Christ will be soon crucified. Ironically, the adolescents are heading to a preserve which

Swarthout labels “the killing ground” (Swarthout, 1970: 77).

Cotton echoes Christ in his transfiguration. Christ transfigures on a mountain in front of three of his disciples as he is praying and is declared as the Son of God by a heavenly voice (Luke, 9: 28-36; Matthew, 17: 1-13; Mark, 9: 2-8; 2 Peter 1:16-18, Palmer, 2020). According to Matthew, Christ’s “face shone like the sun, and his garments became bright as the daylight” (17: 2). According to *Bless*, Cotton also transfigures after his death. While lying on the truck wheel motionless, his disciples witness his transfiguration. The narrator reflects, “they had a last glimpse of John Cotton’s red hair *flaming like a torch* as the truck seemed to soar and dive and disappear” (Swarthout, 1970: 126, emphasis added). It can be easily noted that Cotton’s transfiguration is not heavenly, not radiant with divine approval, but born of the boys’ desperate need to see Cotton as more than a corpse. Literary Christ-figures often achieve glory not through miracles but through the perception of those who love them. Cotton’s torch-like hair is

both elegy and proclamation. It is a final image that sanctifies him in their memory, even as the American West would likely dismiss him as another lost boy. However, *Bless* closes as the beams of the sun filled the sky which suggests a rebirth and hope for a better future (Lenz, 1980: 676).

It becomes clear that Swarthout in *Bless* presents a stunning portrayal of childish innocence being physically and metaphorically slaughtered (Zeigler, 2022: n.p.). He also describes the buffalo slaughter graphically, picturing it as an inhumane practice where the poor animals are shot in places which are not fatal by amateur shooters, which increases their suffering till they die of bleeding. Bizarrely, audiences of all ages enjoy the bloody sights in a festive atmosphere. The buffalo, once wild and free across the open plains, are fearless not because they possess courage, but because they have never known the violence men carry within them. There is something deeply tragic in that image. The buffalo do not know that soon they will be slaughtered. Their innocence, quiet and

unguarded, feels almost sacred. In this way, their fate becomes a symbol of the violence that defined the violence of the American West through slaughter, dispossession, and domination. In the American West, the natural world is not crucified to save. Rather, it is crucified to own (Slotkin, 2000: 347-8).

Symbolically, events inside the camp are used frequently to expose the misconceptions of the American West. Swarthout alludes to the crucifixion of the “lamb” (Swarthout, 1970: 73) to lash severely upon the anthropology of the American soul and to sermonize that the thirst for blood is the drive behind actions of humans who are destructive despite the wealth God bestowed upon them (Constantakis, 2009: 79). He reflects,

There was more here than profaned the eye or ear or nose or heart. There was more here than mere destruction. The American soul itself was involved, its anthropology. We are born with buffalo blood upon our hands. ... A living buffalo mocks us. It has no place or purpose. It is a misbegotten child, a monster

with which we cannot live and which we cannot live without. Therefore we slay, and slay again, for while a single buffalo remains, the sin of our fathers, and hence our own, is imperfect. But the slaughter of the buffalo is part of something larger. It is as though *the land of Canaan* into which we were led was too divine, and until we have done it every violence, until we have despoiled and murdered and dirtied every blessing. ... We cannot bear the goodness of God (Swarthout, 1970: 72-3, emphasis added).

The reference to “the land of Canaan” carries significant Christian resonance. Within biblical tradition, Canaan represents the Promised Land, a place of peace and divine fulfillment, often understood typologically as heaven or the kingdom of God. Since Cotton is read as a Christ figure, then his sacrificial journey mirrors Christ’s own path toward death and resurrection. In this reading, Canaan becomes not just a geographical reference, but a symbolic space of redemption. Cotton’s death, like Christ’s, opens the way to spiritual awakening for the others, aligning the land of

Canaan with the Christian promise of eternal life after sacrificial love (Ansley, 2010: 209-10). When Jesus tells his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2), and the book of Revelation (21: 4, Palmer, 2020) promises “a new earth” where “mourning and crying and pain will be no more,” they actually speak of a Christian hope of transformation after suffering. In *Bless*, Cotton can be seen as echoing this Christ-like promise. Through his sacrificial act, he prepares a path not only to physical rescue but to inner transformation for the other boys. His death marks a turning point, just as Christ’s does, opening the way to a kind of promised land where innocence, courage, and care can survive. In this way, Cotton becomes a symbol of redemptive suffering, leading others toward a more human and more sacred existence (Greidanus, 2007: 641).

Speaking of the technical strategies Swarthout rests on, it can be said that he is intentional in selecting the coming-of-age genre for his *Bless*. This is because this genre is in principle well-suited as a

vehicle for probing American national identity and culture because having a belief in self-invention and regeneration is a fraction of the American spirit (Bryfonsk, 2013: 9).

The best technique to present a coming-of-age novel is to build it on a sequence of events which is revealed in the story of Christ in the NT because that story seems inevitable and natural and provides a purely authentic *figura* for the novelist's narrative. This story, even if it is repeatedly told and retold, translated into different languages, interpreted, analyzed, applied in all categories of circumstances, still holds over its electrifying power to aspire, to illuminate, to interest. The story of Christ is actually analogous to the movement of human life and serves as a type or adumbration that can be wonderfully re-enacted in a new context. The novel, after all, is generally meant to enhance its readers' understanding and perspective of life. Therefore, there must be an authentic parallel between the events of the novel and the life situations of human existence (Dillistone, 1960: 11-14).

The novelist can write about his contemporary life using the story of Christ as an underlying prefiguration of his narrative. It is completely impossible for him to perform such an errand unless he wholeheartedly believes that the cornerstones of Christ's story do correspond to the general successive events which can be diagnosed in the biography of every protagonist who accomplishes an errand of redemption to his fellow people. The novelist can make his protagonist carry out such an errand consciously or unconsciously by following the steps of Christ and fashioning his life after the *figura* displayed in the NT. Thus, the protagonist dedicates himself to the service of his people and finds himself tangled in a series of temporary approval, increasing opposition, dereliction, anguish, and vindication which correspond to the biblical biography of Christ. However, the novelist has the freedom to transpose the all-important and original prefiguration into the frame of his mind and the setting of his time, omitting some irrelevant details and facts. He can put his Christ-figure in a clash with his

contemporaries to show how they would treat him (Dillistone, 1960: 19-21).

The best way to present Christ in a modern dress is the most indirect because the relation between the Christ of NT and the literary Christ-figure is not tailored according to identity but according to purposive correspondence (Wilder, 1958). This means that the Christ-figure should have his own genuine identity which illuminates, comments on the other characters' identities and belongs within the scope of his own story (Downing, 1968: 25).

A Christic protagonist is a final character. The events of the story have created ingredients in his nature which previously had been a mere possibility. The completeness of the protagonist is measured by the extent to which the possibilities are realized. Hence, the absence of a complete representation of Cotton at the outset of *Bless* could be because the protagonist was not intended to be complete until after the readers have seen him in action and the events of the story have awakened what was latent within his personality (Daiches,

1948: 98). Swarthout himself avers this tenet in a speech: "I came to believe profoundly that heroism lies latent in all of us, and all we need to evoke it is the right circumstances" (Dempsey & Dempsey, 2016: 138).

CONCLUSION

Swarthout presents *Bless* as a cultural text in which he describes the myth of the cowboy as a burden. An attentive critical reading of his fiction can easily reveal the skill, range and versatility which he uses to pass his message. As such, *Bless* can be viewed as a societal commentary on the illness of the American West, especially the destructive state of materialism on both land and people. The author provides his readers with an opportunity to understand the embedded and purposeful lesson he wants to convey. Using the image of the cowboy, he introduces three objections about the American West. First, he remonstrates summer camps regarding them as a factory of losers, not of cowboys. The six adolescents become heroes not as an outcome of the Box Canyon Boys Camp, but because they

depend upon their humanity and innocence. Second, he expostulates staged buffalo hunts calling for more human practices. Cowboys can offer alternative ways of thinning the poor beasts. Third, he complains that children of affluent western families do not get proper attention as far as their needs and potentialities are concerned. Actually, these social and humanistic objections are Swarthout's private points which are not Christian but secular.

Swarthout underscores his secular objections with the story of Christ which has never lost its illumination and receptive ears. People would love to read and understand a tale of salvation. Thus, Swarthout uses Christ of the NT as a type to build an antitype in the character of his protagonist. If readers are convinced by his artistic realization and fulfillment, they can understand his messages in better ways. Hence, he rests on genre-selecting, transposition, indirectness, and final completeness as technical strategies to make his Christ-figure appealing and successful.

In fact, Swarthout selects the familiar coming-of-age as a genre for *Bless* and brilliantly twists it into a deeply symbolic genre that suits both the Christ-figure story and the American ethos. Americans would love a story of persistent renewal and triumphalism which criticizes violence and brutality against environment and humanity. As to the content of *Bless*, Swarthout depends on transposition where he retains the original form of the NT Christ as a prefiguration of his protagonist. However, he changes the content of the Christ character in a way that makes the contexts of the two characters incompatible. Moreover, he strips some Christic attributes from his protagonist to make him look like a modern transfigured Christ. For example, Cotton does not speak in aphorisms and parables. Instead, he swears a lot.

Swarthout is indirect in his delineation of his protagonist as a Christ-figure. He never declares the Christhood of Cotton. Instead, he uses a sacrificial and redemptive theme. He hints to formal ingredients of the story such as

the valley, garden, attitude towards outcasts, psychological dimensions, centrality, disciples, wilderness experience, thaumaturgy, familial conflict, fatherlessness, ordeals, tests, betrayal, death and the aftermath of death. Moreover, he uses textual symbolism to refer to Cotton as a Christ-figure. These references include the use of initials (John Cotton's JC for Jesus Christ's and BC for Before Christ), transfiguration, calling the American West as the land of Canaan, labeling the buffalo as the lamb, sacrament, naming the truck as Judas and freedom after death. As to final completeness, the character of Cotton as a Christ-figure emerges from the events of Swarthout's story. At the outset of the novel, he is just a Bedwetter. As the novel moves, he is a leader. With the close of the novel, he is a martyr in the truest of senses. The outcome of the strategies Swarthout uses is a demythologized, humanized and de-Christianized Christ-figure based on the *figura* of the biblical Christ.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study is limited to the use of typology in Glendon Swarthout's *Bless* as a formal principle to build a Christ-figure based on the NT. In the future, scholars may analyze the themes of heroism, teamwork, friendship and naturalism. The adolescents' journey can be studied as a quest since the novel has all the components of quest narrative. Researchers could benefit from placing *Bless* within broader literary theory such as archetypal and myth criticism or postsecular readings.

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