

THE PORTRAYAL OF RURAL LIFE IN AUGUSTUS BALDWIN LONGSTREET'S *THE FIGHT*

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Abstract

*This study is the result of literary research which focuses on the portrayal of rural life in Georgia during the early nineteenth century in the short story *The Fight* written by AB Longstreet. This research focuses on the story by the author using humorous way to depict the given circumstances. This study was conducted by applying qualitative method and analysed by using the Expressive theory by MH Abrams. The result of this study shows that : 1) The spirit of Nationalism appeared implicitly in that story through the idea of militia, 2) The language that used by the characters also indicates how the situation was 3) The narration indicates that Georgia at that time is more developed than other counties since their religion and education had spread well in the county for that barbaric act was rarely happen.*

Keyword : *Rural life, old southern, humor, AB longstreet, the fight.*

1. Introduction

Romanticism is a movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that marked the reaction in literature, philosophy, art, religion, and politics from the neoclassicism and formal orthodoxy of the preceding period. (C. Hugh Holman and William Harmon.<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng372/intro-h4.htm>). In America, it began in the early nineteenth century, as a fresh new vision surprising artistic communities and individuals. But there is one important difference: Romanticism in America coincided with the period of national expansion and the formation of characteristics American voice.

As the nation expanded the area, rural area developed well in America. One of the counties was Georgia, where

had been the hometown of the author Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. In his stories, he kept telling about the life of people in Georgia. He then published *Georgia Scenes* that consists of eighteen short stories, and of them is *The Fight*. Through *The Fight*, he wants to show how rural life in Georgia looked like by using old southwestern humor. Therefore this paper entitled *The Portrayal of Rural Life in Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's The Fight*.

Biography of the Author

Augustus Baldwin Longstreet born in Augusta, Georgia, 22 September 1790; died in Oxford, Mississippi, 9 September 1870, was graduated at Yale in 1813, studied in the law-school at Litchfield, Connecticut, and was admitted to the bar in Richmond County, Georgia,

in 1815, but removed to Greensboro, Georgia, where he soon rose to eminence in his profession.

At an early age he began to write for the press, and he made speeches on all occasions through his life. His pen was never idle. His chief periodical contributions are to be found in "*The Methodist Quarterly*," "*The Southern Literary Messenger*," "*The Southern Field and Fireside*," "*The Magnolia*," and "*The Orion*," and include "*Letters to Clergymen of the Northern Methodist Church*" and "*Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts*." His best-known work is a series of newspaper sketches of humble life in the south, "*Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, etc., in the First Half Century of the Republic, by a Native Georgian*," which were collected into a book that appeared first; at the south and then in New York (1840). A second edition was issued in 1867, and though it purported to be revised, he would, it is said, have nothing to do with it. It is said that he sent men through the country to collect and destroy all copies of the first edition. This book is full of genuine humor, broad, but irresistible, and by many these sketches are considered the raciest, most natural, and most original

that appeared at the south before the civil war. He also published "*Master William Mitten*," a story (Macon, Georgia, 1864). Many unpublished manuscripts were destroyed with his library during the war.

Old Southwestern Humor

The tradition of laughing at the diverting antics of southern frontier folk continues into the nineteenth century with the rough and raucous humor of what used to be called the Southwest (Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri). Between 1830 and 1867, writers of Old Southwestern humor recorded and amplified upon the oral tradition of folk humor they heard in the frontier regions of the South. Pivotal to the popularity of this body of humor was William T. Porter's magazine *The Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature and the Stage*, which circulated between 1831 and 1856. Porter sought out and cultivated new humorists, helping many of them break into print. The most famous examples of this body of Southern Humor are Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Fight* (1835), William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones's Courtship*, and George W.

Harris's *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spurn by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool"* (1867). (Beilke: 2001).

Their humor, often considered to be "classic" southern comic expression, has been described as masculine, exuberant, ribald, high spirited, realistic, exaggerated, bragging, boasting, cruel, brutish, grotesque, violent, conservative, and subversive. The sketches and stories are diverse, but they tend to portray common themes and situations such as odd local customs, fights, hunting, prank, religious experience, and courtships. More striking than the events portrayed, however, are the rough, lower-class, usually white characters described: frontiersmen, yeomen farmers, crackers, backwoodsmen, hillbillies, and poor whites who enjoy fighting, boasting, drinking, gambling, and other form of carousing. (Beilke: 2001)

Whereas the characters described in this genre are lower class and sometimes "uncivilized" as to appear barely human, the writers of this genre tended to be well-educated professionals of a conservative political bent. Kenneth Lynn argues persuasively that these gentlemen portrayed the rough and tumble antics of these frontiersmen as

comic for political reason : to show the dangerous results of Jacksonian democracy (Lynn : 1959). The Old Southwestern humorists contrast the rationality and restraint of conservative gentlemen with the raw, violent excesses of unfettered barbarians.

2. Method

This research was conducted using a qualitative research. The data were taken from the analysis document and material from library and internet research. The main source for this paper is short story *The Fight* written by Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. This paper also uses *theory of Expressive* accessed from internet.

The Expressive theory of art was born of the Romantics movement, approximately in the 18th century. It was a critic that reacted against 18th century Classicism and placed individual at the center of art. According to this theory, Art was seen as the means of portraying the unique, individual feelings and emotions of the artist and good art should successfully communicate the feelings and emotions which the artist intended to express (Abrams: 1953). The strengths of the Expressive theory of art are particularly in its commitment to the

communication of the artist's feelings and emotions to others and its benchmark that good art depends on successful communication so that the recipient is similarly affected by the same emotion or feelings.

3. Hasil dan Pembahasan

The Fight as a Humor

The Fight is one of the sketches or short stories in the book *Georgia Scenes* (1835) also written by A.B Longstreet. Unlike any other writers, Longstreet wrote in distinctive and innovative form. He makes different choices of language and genre than their contemporaries (Paul P. Reuben, <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/chapter3/intro.html>).

Longstreet experienced the South at the turn of the nineteenth century, and wrote and published his most significant work, *Georgia Scenes* (1835), to capture rural Georgia as he remembered it. He was ahead of his time as both a literary realist and a writer of local color and dialect, imbuing his work with regional characteristics as a means of documenting Georgia's rapidly disappearing frontier. While noting in his preface that he hoped *Georgia Scenes* would find its rightful appreciation in posterity, Longstreet

likewise strove for and succeeded in entertaining his contemporary readers with his humorous anecdotes and hand-drawn illustrations depicting brawls, horse trading, foxhunting, local militia drills, and characters from all levels of Georgia society. The two primary narrators in *Georgia Scenes*, Lyman Hall and Abraham Baldwin, are polished town gentlemen who frequently interact with and observe characters whose manners and customs Longstreet associated with hardy, pioneering Georgian settlers.

In *The Fight*, one of Longstreet's more famous stories, the readers are treated to detailed descriptions of a gory fight between Bill and Bob. Much of the humor derives from the contrast between the narrators' elevated rhetoric and untutored vernacular and wild excesses of the local yokels. The narrator, ruminating on the probable outcome of the brawl, resorts frequently to Latin expressions such as *a priori* and *adgumentum ad hominem*, while the local characters prefer a more earthy linguistic style: "Them boys think I mean that Bob will whip". And where the narrator speaks of opponent's "adroitness in bringing his adversary to the ground," the characters say "by the time he hit the

ground, the meat would fly off his face so quick, that people would think it was shook off by the fall”.

The Fight as the Portrayal of Antebellum Rural Georgia

The first two characters mentioned in *The Fight*, Billy Stallions and Bob Durham, drawn as a leader of different battalions. Through these characters, Longstreet wanted to show the idea of militia, that at that time, the Georgia was having a complicated politic situation against the Nation that later would grew into a war. The state of Georgia and its political happenings in the early nineteenth century were much like that of the entire country. Young and inexperienced in this new experiment of self government, those involved in state and national legislatures were in a constant attempt to establish and define the political powers allowed by their forefathers.

Rivalry is also seen in this short story. As stated in the first paragraph that they both “had acquired the mastery of his own battalion”, but since they are in the opposites side of the Courthouse, and they lead different battalions, they consequently “were but seldom thrown together”. Still on the first paragraph, the

narrator even raises a question, “Which is the best man, Billy Stallions (Stallings) or Bob Durham?”, although he then clarifies that the question would have never been answered. In the second paragraph, it is seen that the two characters are being compared, both physically and achievements.

“Billy ruled the upper battalion and Bob the lower. The former measured six feet and an inch in his stockings, and, without a single pound of cumbrous flesh about him, weighed a hundred and eighty. The latter was an inch shorter than his rival, and ten pounds lighter; but he was much the more active of the two. In running and jumping he had but few equals in the county; and in wrestling, not one. In other respects they were nearly equal. Both were admirable specimens of human nature in its finest form. Billy's victories had generally been achieved by the tremendous power of his blows, one of which had often proved decisive of his battles; Bob's by his adroitness in bringing his adversary to the ground. This advantage he had never failed to gain at the onset, and when gained he never failed to improve it to the defeat of his adversary. These points of difference have involved the reader in a doubt as to the probable issue of a contest between them.” (Longstreet : 150)

Though it is not told explicitly, but the sense that Ransy Sniffle ,as a busybody wealthy planter is very strong. He always pits the two characters against each other, so that they will meet in a

fight. Here, it is implicitly seen that Ransy, as a rich man, is jealous to both Bob and Billy. It is probably because physically he is not good as the two men. He also added that he has been thus particular in describing Ransy, for the purpose of showing “what a great matter a little fire sometimes kindleth” which indicates Ransy’s jealousy towards the two men.

Ransy is also a symbol of a rich people at that time as he was a wealthy planter. It indicates that in that time, Georgia was a big plantation area. Compared to the northern America, Southwestern was economically better. The plantation was done by the black people (slaves). Southwestern then became a proslavery area against the Northern that an anti-slavery. These problem then led to Civil War.

Women also play a role as a part of rural life in the era of Romanticism as Longstreet reflected in his work *The Fight*. It is said that each of the men has a wife, but they did not know each other. One day they went to the same store. At the same time, they ordered different things to Mr. Atwater, the owner of the store. Both of them wanted to be served first, and none of them wanted to budge.

As they started to insult each other, Billy Stallions came and forces Mrs. Durham back for he heard that she said bad words to his wife. What interesting here is the language used by the characters. Instead of using romanticized words, Longstreet chose to use abusive idioms. For example, Mrs. Stallions told her husband Mrs. Durham is an “impudent huzzy”. “Huzzy” comes the word “Hussy” which means a woman who is sexually immoral. So, “impudent huzzy” has a very negative meaning. Getting mad of what Mrs. Stallions has just said, Mrs. Durham replied to insult her.

“Who do you call an impudent huzzy, you nasty, good-for-nothing-, snaggle-toothed gaub of fat, you?”. (Longstreet:1850)

"Look here, woman," said Billy, "have you got a husband here ? If you have, I'll lick him till he learns to teach you better manners, you sassy heifer you!" (Longstreet : 1850)

These idioms are physically offensive. The purpose of Longstreet using this kind of language is to show that people sometimes forget how to behave when he/she is in anger. As a lady of white men, these two ladies should have acted like a lady. But instead they are quarreling in very bad language. This became a humor then because they are

quarreling for a trivial thing. The role of a wise man in a fight seemed cannot be separated from this story. And through the characters of this Squire Thomas Loggins who appears to be so wise, the author inserts humor to the story. The rest of the story is about the violence happened in the ring as the two men are having a fight. How Longstreet describes the situation is very humorous, yet very rude.

But at the end of the story, the narrator said that kind of cruelty was becoming less at that time because of the role of religion and education. It indicates that, in that era in Georgia, religion and education had been spreading well as they now know have better morality instead of being barbaric. It also indicates that Georgia is more developed than other new counties.

4. Conclusion

The Fight seemed to be a fresh story in the era of Romanticism since it is more likely to be realistic. It belongs to a book of humorous short stories entitled *Georgia Scenes* written by Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. The whole book tells about what happened in Georgia at that time, especially how the people in rural area lived. The spirit of Nationalism

appeared implicitly in that story through the idea of militia. This story represents the people who lived in that era; the wealthy, the poor whites, and the wise one. Jealousy, though a little, is seen in this story through the character of Ransy Sniffle, a rich yet busybody one, who has passion in fighting.

The language that used by the characters also indicates how the situation was. From the language they use when they are quarrelling, economic situation of the characters can be predicted as well as their education. Those who use bad language usually are the uneducated one, which also mean that they are financially not so good. It is also known that chivalry also happened at that era. The main two characters, Bob and Billy, were having a fight because of their wives and got provoked by Ransy Sniffle. From the story also, it is known that violence, at that time, is a both problem-solving and entertainment for some people.

The wise man also plays his role in this story for he gives advice that fighting is a bad business. He also made the characters realized their own mistakes. In the end of the story, the narration indicates that Georgia at that

time is more developed than other counties since their religion and education had spread well in the county for that barbaric act was rare happen. It shows that the story itself made a few time before the publication year of the book. However, consciously or not, that barbaric act sometimes still happen in present life.

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