The Theatre of Religion: Jimmy Swaggart Within American Myth Discourse.

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The theatre of religion: Jimmy Swaggart within American myth discourse

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The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1992
THE THEATRE OF RELIGION:
JIMMY SWAGGART WITHIN AMERICAN MYTH DISCOURSE

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the myth of the self-made man in American popular culture and how Jimmy Swaggart, the renowned televangelist, manipulates this myth in representing himself as an American hero. Central to such inquiry is Swaggart's use of theatrical device in promoting his heroism. Three fundamental questions provide the focus for investigation: 1) How in general does the creation of myth serve the needs of culture? 2) How specifically does the myth of self-made-ness benefit American culture? and 3) How is Swaggart able to participate in this powerful myth (especially using theatrical modes) in order to gain cultural sanction? In addressing the first two questions, this project constructs a myth theory based primarily on ideas advanced in Roland Barthes' Mythologies. For the last question (which mandates a look at the way Swaggart is "read" by both secular and evangelical factions), the ideas contained in Michel Foucault's three masterworks Madness and Civilization, Discipline and Punish, and The History of Sexuality prove especially useful. Foucault's discussion of the sacred position of the madman in medieval contexts, for example, gives us a productive analogue for exploring Swaggart's relationship to the secular media. In terms of his evangelical readership, Swaggart's attempt to advertise himself as a martyr is illuminated by Foucault's explanation of the "technique of confession" in Western culture. This
project concludes that the on-going carnival of Swaggart's sexual improprieties will prove problematic to his survival as a practicing televangelist. However, Swaggart's iconic presence (like that of Elmer Gantry or Aimee Semple McPherson) will live on in the American mind as simply an updated version of the mad religious performer.
INTRODUCTION

Jimmy Swaggart, born and raised in Ferriday, Louisiana, initiated an evangelistic ministry in 1953 that would culminate in world-wide exposure, making him one of the "star" religious figures of our time. He has been both lionized and vilified; but regardless of the nature of his reception, his media image has made him a virtual American icon. The propagation of the Swaggart image may be attributed, in large part, to Swaggart's theatricality. Until his first confession to immorality in 1988, Swaggart's brand of theatre obviously had a powerful effect on the American public. Arbitron ratings reveal that by 1987 Swaggart's weekly program (a video reduction of his crusade messages) had become the number one religious program, reaching 2.1 million households on a weekly basis. Indeed, even after Swaggart's 1988 disclosure, his programming still was aired regularly in American markets. If the religious community has become wary of Swaggart (in the wake of his second confession in 1991), secular society remains fascinated with the Swaggart persona, providing ample newsprint and video coverage to the on-going circus of Swaggart's life. The phenomenon of Swaggart's persona thus merits further study, particularly in relation to theatre and to his positioning within American (popular) culture. We can begin our investigation by stating the important (perhaps obvious) fact that
Swaggart is a product of his culture and that whatever fame/celebrity he has achieved has occurred within and because of this specific cultural context. It is therefore our goal to examine not only how Swaggart's climb toward "stardom" capitalized upon popular American ideology but also how American culture has utilized Swaggart to reproduce and affirm its most esteemed values and beliefs.

Cultural theorist Tony Bennett provides a productive mode of analysis for exploring Swaggart and his cultural contexts. In Popular Culture and Social Relations, Bennett defines popular culture in dynamic terms, as a matrix of negotiations where "dominant, subordinate, and oppositional" values compete for hegemony. Bennett further notes that "the theory of hegemony opens up the field of popular culture as one of enormous political possibilities." Accepting Bennett's use of the term "political" in its broadest sense, as any social/ideological conflict, we see that Swaggart (in his struggles with numerous factions/interest groups) has become nothing if not political. Swaggart's combativeness stems to a great extent from his working class roots and his entrenched Puritan ethic. Evincing a rigid, fundamentalist mindset, Swaggart's ministry has become, in Bennett's terms, an endless "negotiation," one that sets Swaggart in a conflictive relation to Jews, Catholics, mainline Protestant denominations, secular humanists, gay

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rights activists, feminists, etc. Leading the vanguard of working class evang­elicals, Swaggart acts as a perpetual adversary to "worldly" systems (typified in Swaggart's mind by the American media, which he defines as generally liberal and therefore "sinful"). But in this process of "negotiation"/contest, where Swaggart lobbies for his fundamentalist viewpoints, Swaggart ironically seeks to gain a general credibility in culture. Swaggart's "negotiations" thus revile the broader social order, while he himself desires its confirmation, sanction, and benefits.

Framing Swaggart within a context of popular culture, therefore, mandates an examination that addresses Swaggart's relationship to evangelicals and the secular community as well. Importantly, even though Swaggart and secular society have been at odds, both have managed to co-opt one another (on a fundamental level). On one hand, Swaggart (although ostensibly eschewing worldly riches) has embraced the secular (middle class) notion that "more is better." His lifestyle is opulent. Swaggart's description of his "two-bedroom cottage" (symbol of the American working class family) belies the fact that it encompasses 10,000 square feet and lies on some of the costliest property in Baton Rouge. On the other hand, secular society has co-opted Swaggart mainly for his "entertainment" value. Antonio Gramsci addresses this
phenomenon of co-optation (his term for it is "consensual hegemony") in *The Prison Notebooks*. Here Gramsci states that the delicate balance of hegemony is best achieved when the ruling class is able not only to justify "its dominance but manages to win the active consent [my emphasis] of those over whom it rules."\(^8\) Swaggart and American secular society join in such a relation. While rejecting out of hand the principal prescriptions of secular thinking, Swaggart gives "active consent" (if on a pre-cognitive level) to its fundamental materialistic philosophy. In other words, Swaggart attacks secularism while allowing it to define the parameters of his own existence.

The reason that Swaggart can "buy into" the ideology of capitalistic success (the founding concept of American secularism) is that he co-opts the "myth" which confirms it: the myth of the self-made American and his rise from rags to riches. Accepting "myth" as an idolized narrative through which a culture affirms its values and practices, we realize the extraordinary power of this particular myth in the American mind. Here we find the common man who by "luck and pluck" rises to success. Illustrations of this venerated hero are prolific in American culture, evidenced in the idealization of Honest Abe, who ascends from his rural beginnings to the presidency. Within the myth of self-made-ness, success is thus perceived as the distinct
prospect of every American. The following pages will show how Swaggart uses this inordinately powerful myth to secure and validate his own position in American popular culture.

Central to this discussion will be an inquiry into Swaggart's employment of theatrical device (scripting, role play, staging, etc.) in his evocation of self-made heroism. A focal aspect of Swaggart's theatricality is "costuming" (a concept taken from Roland Barthes that touches on the notion of self-presentation within social contexts). Costuming/persona thus provides a unique mode of analysis in attempting to define Swaggart's myth-making (theatrical) agenda. This study advances the premise that Swaggart, while perhaps not consciously admitting an overt manipulation of theatrical elements, still uses them intuitively in presenting himself within a discourse of mythic self-made-ness.

Chapter One will discuss this myth of the self-made American in depth, its infiltration in our society, its paradigmatic structure, and its antecedents in the American experience. We will begin by building a theoretical definition of myth using Roland Barthes' Mythologies. According to this text, myths are stories that affirm a culture's belief systems. Investigating the American myth of the self-made hero as a story of cultural affirmation, we will then examine how the American hero myth reflects a pan-cultural formula (as analyzed through the work of
Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, and Northrop Frye). At this point, a matrix of seven "tropes" will be constructed which defines those elements essential to the myth of self-made-ness. These tropes can be summarized as follows: 1) The self-made man arises from common origins, 2) He is anti-intellectual, 3) He sees the necessity of hard work, 4) Hard work is perceived as a virtue, 5) Labor brings rewards, 6) The Self-made individual participates in a journey that concludes with success (and self-knowledge), and 7) Obstacles must be overcome before the journey's success is assured. We will then explore how the myth of self-made-ness manifests itself in American theatre through the "Jonathan" figure (also known as the "stage Yankee"); our discussion will specifically address The Contrast, Liberty in Louisiana, Fashion, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The Octoroon. Attention will also focus on how the individualist theme is extenuated by the emergence in 1867 of Ragged Dick, the Horatio Alger "hero" who pulls himself up by his own bootstraps. Reinforced by such real-life figures as Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Will Rogers, et al., the myth of the self-made individual becomes by the beginning of the 20th century a valorized belief in American thought.

The second chapter shows how Swaggart, through his rhetoric, appropriates and deploys the myth of self-made-ness. Swaggart's autobiography To Cross A River provides a
basis for this discussion. Investigation will explore how Swaggart manipulates the seven tropes in his autobiography, attempting to present himself as a model of the self-made individual. In this regard, Swaggart plays heavily on the journey trope, providing ample commentary on his rise from poverty to religious stardom. The Satan/Jerry Lee Lewis binary also becomes important, providing Swaggart the requisite obstacle(s) he must overcome on his way to success. Discussion will also indicate how Swaggart cements his heroic myth image by employing the rhetorical devices of symbolism, stereotyping, and metaphor.

The third chapter offers an intensive exploration of Swaggart's "readership," detailing how both secular and evangelical communities co-opt the Swaggart persona (albeit for different reasons). At the center of this analysis is the spectacle of Swaggart's image/body. Along these lines, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish* prove most helpful to this analysis. Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, for example, in its discussion of the *Narrenschiff* (Ship of Fools), offers an analytical frame for addressing Swaggart's problematical position within American secular culture. The medieval madman, while exiled from the bounds of the city, is set on a perpetual voyage, gaining for the madman a sacred aura. Following Foucault's definition of madness as any behavior not reflecting the sanctioned "norm," Swaggart can be
compared to Foucault's madman. Interpreted by secular society as non-rational/mad (especially after his two confessions), Swaggart is ultimately consigned to a theatrical frame (the field of mad play).

Chapter Three further explores the relationship of Swaggart to his evangelical community. We can again employ Foucault in discerning exactly how evangelicals "read" Swaggart. The idea of the disciplined body in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* sheds light on Swaggart's "usefulness" to evangelical culture, in this faction's perception of Swaggart as both High Priest and Moral Judge.

Chapter Four extends an investigation into the way Swaggart asserts his status as a self-made hero through performance. Specific emphasis is given Swaggart's evangelical audience and his pre-1988 persona. Consequently, we will explore how Swaggart manipulates theatrical signals (space, acting, and plot) to reinforce notions of his heroism. Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* provides a unique analytical tool for our investigation. Following Carlson's lead, we see how Swaggart manipulates the various spaces of the Crusade coliseum to reaffirm himself as the Model Pilgrim in his journey from this world to the next. Roland Barthes' theory of costuming (taken from his *Critical Essays*) moreover informs discussion of Swaggart's
"actors," prompting questions as to their relative truth or duplicity. And finally, C. S. Pierce's tertiary definition of the sign (Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce/eds. Hartshorne and Weiss) offers an analytical format for investigating the meaning of Swaggart's Crusade platform.

The events following Swaggart's 1988 confession to moral failure are taken up in the fifth chapter. We will attempt, by way of hypothesis, to ascertain whether Swaggart can continue to participate in the myth of self-made-ness. It appears at this writing (spring, 1991) that the carnivalesque continues to inform the Swaggart phenomenon—in the wake of both the Gorman trial and Swaggart's recent episode with a California prostitute. Two nationally televised confessions (February 1988 and October 1991) provide ample evidence of Swaggart's self-theatricalization. Here, Foucault's ideas on confession (The History of Sexuality) are especially applicable. As Foucault states, the import of confession from ancient times has been to "emancipate truth." Additionally, confession is a discourse which replicates the act of martyrdom. Swaggart, as stated, has already perfected a discourse of martyrdom and simply continues it through a self-reflexive/self-aggrandizing baring of the soul. Swaggart's seeming need to confess before a voyeuristic television audience is spectacular; but it is exactly this
unsolicited spectacle of the intimate which signals madness to "normal" society. If theatre is the province of mad play, then Swaggart has only served to entrench himself ever deeper as a religious performance artist.

It can be seen then, as Swaggart moves to entrench his persona within a discourse of mythic self-made-ness, that American culture plays a dynamic role in the Swaggart phenomenon. In fact, Swaggart's (re)creation of the self-made hero, in his real-life enactments, is dependent upon American belief systems. Swaggart thus finds himself in a kind of symbiotic embrace with culture. In his Renaissance Self-Fashioning, Stephen Greenblatt defines "self-fashioning" in terms of "the cultural system of meanings that creates [my emphasis] specific individuals [in our case, Swaggart-as-hero] by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment." In this light, Swaggart can participate in the myth of American heroism only as his culture allows that participation. Swaggart's self-fashioning (as hero) is made possible only because there is already in place an American "system of meanings" concerning heroism, from which Swaggart can draw the particles of his own self-fashioning. Only in this way (as American culture defines and confirms the authenticity of Swaggart's persona) can Swaggart become a "historical embodiment" of the self-made hero.
The significance of this project therefore lies in an investigative approach that addresses Swaggart within a (necessary) context of popular culture. Studies to date have undertaken only a rhetorical analysis of Swaggart's messages. While these studies are fruitful, one realizes that Swaggart's iconicity rests on other (much broader) issues as well. Thus we arrive at three central questions which provide the focus of our commentary: 1) How in general does myth serve the needs of the (popular) culture which creates it? 2) How specifically does the myth of self-made-ness serve American culture? and 3) How is Swaggart able to manipulate this powerful myth for his own ends? This study will attempt to answer these questions, demonstrating that Swaggart's immense popularity/notoriety issues from the fact that he does participate in myth (to wit, the myth of self-made-ness), aided in this enterprise by a manipulation of theatrical device (scripting, role play, staging, etc.). No study to date has explored Jimmy Swaggart in these terms. Beyond its specific critique of the Swaggart phenomenon, the study aims at a larger significance— that is, the creation of an analytical model that would allow investigation of other ostensible non-performers who seek to mythologize (theatricalize) themselves in their search for cultural sanction.
NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1 The term "icon" as it is used in this project is defined as any widely recognized image to which culture attaches instant meaning.


5 Bennett xvi.

6 "Co-opt" as it is used in this project means to embrace or "buy into" ideas or values not originally part of one's own belief system.


8 Antonio Gramsci, Selections From the Prison Notebooks, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971) 244.

CHAPTER I
THE SELF-MADE MAN IN AMERICAN MYTH

Viewing Jimmy Swaggart through the context of American popular culture provides a unique analytical frame for investigating the Swaggart persona as "text." An understanding of Swaggart is thus predicated upon an understanding of the cultural dynamics that inform and fashion his star status/iconicity. Such an investigation begins with a consideration of how American culture "reads" Swaggart. In his 1991 Theatre Journal article "Historiography and the Theatrical Event: A Primer with Twelve Cruxes," Thomas Postlewait offers a general account of semiotics and textual production; he states: "The historian should recognize that the documents [here Swaggart-as-Text] articulate their possible meanings according to the codes of the era. These cultural and symbolic codes—not just language but gesture, body, clothes, manners, conventions, traditions, taboos, and social, political, and religious practices—all constitute how, what, and why anything means."\(^1\) Here, Postlewait explains the foundation of "readership." A culture can only read a certain text (person, event, idea, material object, etc.) through its particular cultural filters (Postlewait's term is "codes"). "Cultural and symbolic codes" become interpretive grids which make texts meaningful. Given Postlewait's analysis, America can make
meaning/sense of Swaggart only by viewing him through its code-oriented matrix. This perception informs the main work of this chapter: to discover the cultural and symbolic codes/filters that enable America to make meaning of the Swaggart persona.

An exploration of cultural readership is perhaps best forwarded by the examination of cultural myths. As beliefs which affirm social values, definitions, ideologies, etc., myths often translate into powerful code systems which invest texts with meaning. The Swaggart persona proves a case in point. This writer finds that the intensely powerful American myth of the self-made man in American thought unifies a nexus of symbols and codes that govern the reading of Swaggart-as-text. Swaggart's participation in this discursive field in part accounts for his "legibility" and consequent "stardom" (at least before his two catastrophic confessions). If we accept Geist and Nachbar's basic premise in The Popular Culture Reader, that myth is the stuff of which popular culture is made,2 the myth of self-made-ness proves itself a particularly useful cypher in reading/interpreting the Swaggart persona.

Before exploring the nature of the self-made myth (along with the role of the self-made hero) in American thought, however, it is necessary to outline a general theory of myth (including attention to what myth is and how myth works within a culture).
I. Building A Myth Theory

In *American Myth, American Reality* James Oliver Robertson identifies myths as "stories . . . attitudes extracted from stories . . . 'the way things are' as people in a particular society believe them to be . . . the models people refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior."³ Robertson's discussion underscores two basic features: myth as belief and myth as model. Linguistically (as well as conceptually) "beliefs" and "models" presume patterns that simplify reality and render complexities manageable. Robertson, in fact, observes that myths in "literate societies like [the United States] are not easily separable from ideologies."⁴ Myths (as beliefs) thus appear as pervasive ideas, expressing "the way things are" within a culture. Robertson's assertion that myths are also models, further implies that myths are socially "constructed," shaped by culture into stories for the purpose of confirming cultural values.

Both Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss corroborate Robertson in emphasizing the constructed-ness of myth. These theorists designate myth as simply another kind of (constructed) language. In *Mythologies* Barthes sees myth as a "system of communication . . . a message."⁵ Levi-Strauss relates in *Structural Anthropology* that "myth is language; to be known, myth has to be told."⁶ This
"constructedness" of myth opposes pure phenomena (experiences or occurrences unmediated by thought, perception, etc.). Myth, importantly, is processed phenomena, representing the way a culture chooses to perceive itself. Thus, myth reveals itself as created for the maintenance/propogation of self-affirming beliefs. Here, the tremendous political potential of myth surfaces, since myths work to include/validate all those who share belief systems, while excluding any heterodoxy. Myth can be regarded as a tool of hegemonic authority, employed by the dominant group for the protection and furtherance of its own interests.

In Mythologies Barthes offers an analytical model that bears upon the constructed-ness of myth and its political ramifications. Barthes employs a number of rhetoric-based figures to explain the working of myth; the most useful include: identification, quantification of quality, tautology, proverb-as-fact, and the evaporation of history. (Barthes' particular concern with bourgeois myth proves especially applicable to Swaggart's pop culture notoriety).

1. Identification. Barthes states, "the petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other . . . . because the Other is a scandal which threatens his essence."7 The "other" is fundamental to any myth system
because myth includes/validates those holding like beliefs and ostracizes/invalidates all others. Thus, Barthes shows myth to be political, clarifying his thought in these terms: "The Other becomes a pure object, a spectacle, a clown." In other words, the other is expunged of any of viability. As object, spectacle, or clown, the other is relegated to the realm of the non-real (and is thus cognitively perceived as false).

2. Quantification of Quality. Returning to Saussure's model of the sign, Barthes shows that myth construction involves a group of signifieds that are fused (abnormally) to a particular signifier. For Barthes this constitutes a hyper-signifying state where the brain short-circuits, refusing to "see" a signified except in terms of a certain set of signifiers. For example, the notion of a Basque chalet (signified) is triggered in Barthes' mind (and supposedly in every Frenchman's mind) merely by seeing a certain kind of sloping roof (signifier A) in combination with visible beams (signifier B). Thus the quantification (signifiers) of a certain quality (signified) becomes inseparably coupled. Barthes also describes it in these terms: myth meaning is "relieved of its fat," expressing itself in "caricature, pastiches, symbols." In essence, Barthes states that myth works through stereotypes and archetypes. Thinking is made simple for the reader, and all complexity is reduced.
3. **Tautology.** Linguistically, tautological argument involves circular reasoning and, as Barthes indicates, takes "refuge behind the argument of authority."\(^{11}\) It is the "just because" response to the "why" question. Basically, tautology provides an irrational defense disguised as rational apologetic. Tautology assumes paramount importance in an exploration of the self-made hero. For example, the working class suspicion of intellectualism is useful to Swaggart (as part of the self-made myth) because it plays on an unspoken tautology: intellectual pursuits (higher degrees) are "bad" simply because they are intellectual.

4. **Proverb-as-Fact.** The crucial aspect of any myth belief system is its acceptance as truth. Proverbs, taking the form of aphorisms and maxims, encapsulate myth/truth statements validating the correctness of the myth message. Barthes states, "Bourgeois ideology invests in this figure [proverbial thought] . . . universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world."\(^{12}\) The result is that myth becomes accepted as truth on a non-rational/supra-rational level, assigned a position of inviolability in the gridwork of cultural meaning.

5. **Evaporation of History.** Barthes indicates that culture, in sanctioning its myths, erases any memory of the myth's origin. This collective amnesia thus eradicates the notion that myth messages are either contingent or
arbitrary, making them appear to be true for all time and place. The presupposition is that myth-as-truth "can only come from eternity."  

The political implications of Barthes' myth model are evident. Bourgeois hegemony (which we will refer to hereafter as the power of the secular populace) is confirmed through the exploitation of various rhetorical figures. These figures (which construct myth) function as a screen, suppressing any thought system that does not affirm secular ideology. As a process of (political) self-affirmation, myth becomes dynamic, taking on the nature of polemic. Significantly, a group of active verbs emerge from Barthes' analysis: 1) Identification eradicates the belief system of the other, 2) Quantification of Quality reinforces one's own myth symbols and codes, 3) Tautology defends its belief as rational, 4) Proverb-as-Fact accepts its myths as true, and 5) Evaporation of History assumes this truth is absolute (eternal). These active rhetoric-based figures disclose how quickly and thoroughly myth statements can become entrenched in the cultural/political order, transforming themselves into a collective analogue of the way a culture chooses to define itself.

Barthes' model therefore proves useful to this study in two ways: by showing the constructed-ness of myth, and by revealing myth's role in consolidating the power of the secular community. Both contingencies become important to
an analysis of Jimmy Swaggart's involvement in the myth of the self-made American hero. Constructed by the broad secular populace to affirm various aspects of its identity, this myth becomes central to American thought. As this project will show, Swaggart's stardom (before 1988) is engendered in large part by his (seeming) ability to manipulate elements of this powerful myth (especially through theatrical means), making credible to a secular readership his persona as the paradigmatic self-made hero.

II. The Self-Made Hero Defined

The myth of self-made-ness has taken various designations in American literature. Robertson, for instance, refers to the idea of the self-made hero as the myth of individualism.14 An analysis of Swaggart, however, demands a more encompassing terminology, one that includes not only notions of individualism, but also other essential ideas/features (called tropes) which will be delineated presently.

The concept of the self-made man is so deeply entrenched in American culture that it has become this century's single-most valorized model of success. Reflecting Barthes's theory, we find this myth appears always "true" in the American mind, having ostensibly issued "from eternity." In order to fully comprehend how this myth has so pervasively infiltrated cultural thought,
one is obliged to trace its influences first from a pan-cultural perspective, and then to explore its antecedents in the American experience. Throughout this discussion, attention will focus on the American version of the self-made hero and its utility in the reaffirmation of peculiarly American ideology.

Initial investigation of the self-made myth reveals the "journey" as an essential element in the emergence of American heroes. The hero may progress from rags to riches, from failure to success, from self-doubt to self-assurance, etc. This mythic constituent—the hero's journey—is actually pan-cultural, witnessed in myths throughout the world. Although much scholarly work has been done on the hero and his journey, the most prominent (and useful to this discussion) is found in the research of three theorists: Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, and Northrop Frye.

Joseph Campbell's comparativist approach uncovers a basic pattern in all hero myths. The following passage, quoted from Campbell in Robert Segal's *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction* capsulizes this pattern:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation-initiation-return: . . . A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.15
Claude Levi-Strauss, reviewing Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, notes a plot scheme that largely replicates Campbell's:

After the "initial situation" has been explained, a character [hero] goes away. This absence leads to some misfortune, either directly or indirectly (through the violation of an interdiction or obedience to an injunction). A villain enters the scene, receives information about his victim, and deceives him in order to cause him harm... The hero reacts negatively or positively on his own or by means of supernatural help... [whereby] the villain is defeated... [and] the hero starts on his way home. [Levi-Strauss observes that a marriage often ends the hero's journey.]

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye corroborates the work of Campbell and Propp. Charting the various shapes and forms of mythic narratives, Frye reduces plot to three main stages: the hero's perilous journey, a critical struggle, and finally the exaltation of the hero.

The elements common to the analyses of these three scholars enable us to abstract a simple narrative line: the hero leaves his home, encounters obstacles, overcomes them, and returns home to either reward or acclaim. A uniquely American version of this hero myth is crystallized in the Horatio Alger figure, the street urchin who by "luck and pluck" overcomes an assortment of trials (among them the temptation to steal) and is "rewarded" with status and wealth. Alger replicated his own format endlessly, creating an astonishing canon of 114 books (from 1856 with...
Bertha's Christmas Vision to 1910 with Robert Coverdale's Struggle. Each story proved a variant of a formulaic plot: a poor but industrious lad rises not only from rags to riches, but as Carl Bode suggests, from "rags to respectability." The most famous of these books, Ragged Dick or Street Life in New York (1868) follows the fortunes of Ragged Dick from his penury as a boot-black in the streets of Manhattan to his incarnation as Richard Hunter, Esquire. His economic rise results directly from his industry and unflagging honesty. The following passage exhibits Alger's celebration of such virtue:

"Now, in the boot-blacking business, as well as in higher avocations, the same rule prevails, that energy and industry are rewarded, and indolence suffers. Dick was energetic and on the alert for business, but Johnny [Dick's sluggish sidekick] the reverse. The consequences was that Dick probably earned three times as much as the other."

The Alger formula follows the pan-cultural hero quite closely, especially in terms of the hero's success. America gave Alger's hero overwhelming sanction, evidenced by the legendary success of Alger's books (with printings even as late as 1928). The Horatio Alger model stands as a potent representation of the mythic hero because it not only propagated an image that fascinated the American mind well into the twentieth century, it valorized a character type existent long before Ragged Dick's appearance in 1868. It is clear why the Alger hero should have such magnetic appeal to nineteenth century America; the concept of self-
made individualism (upon which Alger's hero is built) was engrained in the earliest figurations of American culture.

The myth of self-made-ness, in fact, evidences a group of binaries set in motion by the initial Atlantic crossing of Britishers into the New World. The established English community became polarized to the new American village where a living had to be hacked out of the wilderness. The entrenched (though oppressive) stability of monarchical rule was replaced by the instability of new, perhaps confusing freedoms that mandated individual determination and initiative. Personal invention replaced ancient tradition. The prospect of seemingly endless frontiers set itself in direct contrast to the feudal boundaries of the Old World. Thus, a new prototype emerged on the American scene: the rugged, self-made individualist, suspicious of any authority but his own, wary of high culture (linked in his mind to the despotism of kings), and indifferent to academics (which were of no use in taming the wilderness).

Defining this early American character type, Robertson establishes a tertiary model composed of three sub-prototypes: the backwoodsman, the frontiersman, and the pioneer. According to Robertson's analysis, the myth of self-made individualism, reflected in these types, had solidified itself in American thinking by the time of the Revolutionary war.
Each of the three sub-prototypes emphasizes a different aspect of the individualist model. Robertson suggests, in fact, that there is a kind of ameliorative progression—from backwoodsman (least civilized) to frontiersman to pioneer (most civilized)—within the larger paradigm, mirroring the evolution of American society in general as it becomes increasingly "civilized." A spatial/temporal movement is evident as the virtual heathen (backwoodsman) comes out of the wilderness, builds settlements (on the frontier) and then "civilizes" himself (as the pioneer). But the journey is also mystical, replicating the pilgrim's journey away from evil/heathenism toward morality/God.21 The untamed, amoral environ of the forest (wilderness) is ultimately replaced by the ordered, moral structure of the pioneer home.

Robertson explores the nature of each of the sub-prototypes. Drawing upon pre-Revolutionary writings (especially those of Virginia planter William Byrd), Robertson describes the backwoodsman as bereft of a "proper place in any society" (140). The backwoodsman "slept in the raw" and around him accumulated stories of "pagan ways" (138). Like Cooper's fictional Leather Stocking, the real backwoodsman became dispossessed by civilizing influences and escaped into the forest (wilderness). Thus he lived by his wits (139).
In contrast to the backwoodsman, who was a loner and constantly on the move, the frontiersman was a family man and primitive farmer (141). Like the backwoodsman, the frontiersman was a heathen, not knowing "Sunday from any other day" (141). Robertson describes frontiersmen as "exotics . . . castaways," having been rejected by the civilized order as "too uncouth, too dirty, too uneducated, too primitive" (142). Robertson also emphasizes that, although the frontiersmen did have families, they were loners within the family unit, a phenomenon caused primarily by the codified separation of roles—the women bearing the weight of household duties while the men hunted and provided shelter (142).

The pioneer in Robertson's analysis carried the "Puritan work ethic to the frontier" (145) as the final step in the civilizing process. As the third rudiment of the individualism model, the pioneer brings not only stability, but a level of rude culture to his settlement. In this way, Robertson states, the pioneer is "the last postulate in the logic by which Americans reconciled their wilderness and their civilization" (144).

Robertson's tertiary model of the early American individualist thus points to the beginnings of Alger's nineteenth century hero. Already evident is the hero's journey, ending in "success" as the pioneer establishes a permanent home (the one absolute in the civilizing
process). The alacrity with which American culture came to valorize the pioneer as hero is understandable, for this type, in essence, made the New World "work." The idea of the heroic pioneer therefore gained cultural function and value. He was the town-builder, the survivalist who could fight against an Old World order. Without him, America might have ceased to exist. Thus, as early America reached for an identity, it chose the self-made pioneer as its prototype of self-definition. To be American was thus bound in the notion of being self-made.

In generating a comprehensive definition of the self-made hero, several organizing elements emerge from Robertson's analysis. The self-made individual is a loner. He makes a spatial/temporal journey, escaping into the wilderness and reappearing as the new pioneer, ready to build a civilization. At first he is unwashed and "uncouth," disdaining organized religion (and by association all academia). But his final state is one of moral stability as he takes his place in the community. The essential trait of the self-made (pioneer) hero thus becomes his propensity for hard work. In effect, the new American republic stands or falls on this one contingency—whether or not a man is willing to commit himself to intense labor.

An analysis of the self-made hero is further illuminated by the work of American historian Robert.
Bellah. Bellah and his colleagues, in their landmark work *Habits of the Heart* (1985), address the question of individualism and set forth two principal influences that shaped the prototypical American individual: the Puritan ethic and republicanism. These two ideological systems explain, on one hand, how pervasive a tradition individualism had become even before the Revolution, and on the other, how the Swaggart persona, as representative of the individual prototype, could be attractive to both puritan/fundamentalists and republican/secularists in the late twentieth century. Historian William Woodward glosses Bellah's thesis in his article "America As A Culture (I)" (*Journal of American Culture*/1988). Woodward notes that Puritanism in early America promoted "the autonomy of the individual" even within its restricted religious codes.25 Puritan culture sanctioned the drive for success, a feature perhaps best exemplified by John Winthrop, whose work brought him both spiritual and material gain. But Puritan "success" was tied primarily to the betterment of the community where one's newly found American freedoms could provide "opportunity for moral action."26

The "republican tradition," which took its cue from "classical sources," also informed the development of individualism. As Woodward explains, the nation's founders (typified by Jefferson) invoked the old idea that "the free
individual must participate in public life as a virtuous citizen."27

The formations evident in the works of Robertson and Bellah speak to the emergent outlines of a cult of individualism. A variable of success is added to the notion that hard work is not only mandated but valorized in the New World. A syllogistic line of thought is thus established in the American mind: if success is engendered by hard work (in operation for communal good) then success itself (fused with the idea of social ethics) becomes a virtue. Consequently, this notion of virtue as an aspect of work plays an increasingly central role in the American evolution of the self-made myth.

The writings of Benjamin Franklin indicate that the self-made hero had taken hold in American thought by Revolutionary times. Franklin, writing only two decades before the war, had fully assimilated these notions of the self-made individual. An avowed Deist, Franklin issued a call for (virtuous) self-motivation that bordered on the "religious." Poor Richard's Almanac (1758) evidences Franklin's catechism: "God helps them that help themselves," "Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee," and "Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do today."28 Madonna Marsden observes in "The American Myth of Success" (Popular Culture Reader, 1983) that Franklin's maxims, propounding thoughts so fundamental to the American
experience, have virtually "become the credo of the American cult of upward mobility."\(^2^9\) The expression of "upward mobility" certainly contributed to the success of Alger's Ragged Dick; this feature also provided a unifying chord in the way Americans "packaged" (assimilated) the heroic narratives of such real life figures as Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Huey Long, and of late Jimmy Swaggart. Echoing these perceptions, Woodward argues that America's "self-identification has embraced . . . three themes: progress, promise, and participation."\(^3^0\) That is, the future always promises something better. In Woodward's estimation, "The American dream of Progress has been a millennial vision, explicitly religious; for others it is a secularized variation" borrowing ideas from the "pseudo-scientific determinism of the Darwinians."\(^3^1\) Again, the religious and the secular each contribute to and validate the individual's determination to succeed. In effect, "upward mobility" becomes the specific (and thoroughly) American transmutation of the pan-cultural journey of the paradigmatic hero. The hero's temporal/spatial journey is transformed (in American culture) into the notion that the self-made American must always be moving "up." Now embedded in secular middle class ideology, this concept is taken to be truth, and founds an entire pop culture regime of self-help/self-actualization programs. The idea that
the self-made hero must always be climbing (literally or metaphorically) upward, we owe in large part to the power of Franklin's maxims.

Such examples testify to the extraordinary dynamic of the self-made myth in American culture. Reflecting cross-cultural antecedents, the self-made hero finds his way into American thought, defining from the very inception of our nation's history a prototype dear to the American mind. Crystallized by Franklin's time as an iconic image to be venerated and imitated, the individualist hero establishes himself as America's touchstone of self-identity.

What then are the principal features of the self-made hero as he operates within a discourse of American myth? A definition/portrait of the self-made hero may be solidified within a system of seven tropes. As created by this writer, these tropes reflect general perceptions of the myth of self-made-ness as evident in current American thought. These tropes can be summarized as follows:
1) The self-made hero rises from common origins,
2) Identifying himself as non-aristocracy, the hero values homespun wisdom rather than book knowledge, 3) He sees the necessity of hard work and embraces his work with determination, 4) Hard work becomes a quasi-religious ethic, therefore deemed a virtue, 5) Virtuous labor is rewarded with success of various kinds, 6) The hero makes a temporal, spatial, and/or metaphorical journey (typically
alone), gaining knowledge and/or wealth in the process, and
7) Obstacles which impede the journey must be overcome
before success is gained.

Confirming Barthes' myth analysis, these tropes
suggest that America has constructed this powerful hero
myth in order to affirm its own self-definitions; moreover,
America now accepts this myth as unequivocally true. The
power of any cultural myth is dependent upon its acceptance
as truth; and as Barthes' observes, culture builds into its
myths rhetorical defenses which disallow any falsehood.
This defense mechanism is exposed quite clearly in an
examination of the self-made hero on the American stage.
With its heavy reliance on archetypes and stereotypes, the
American theatre has created a valorized (material) model
of self-made individualism, fashioning for America a
sanctioned national persona around which to rally. In this
way, theatre abets the process of myth-making and upholds
self-made heroism as an ideology that is absolutely true--
issuing directly, as Barthes would say, "from eternity."

III. The Self-Made Hero in American Theatre

One can always turn to the theatre in order to discern
how a culture perceives/defines itself. As a venue for
cultural symbols and codes, the theatre reduces reality to
the metaphoric, the metonymic, the iconic, the
stereotypical, the archetypical, attempting as Barthes
suggests to "understand reality more cheaply." In short, theatre exists as a showcase for cultural belief systems. This phenomenon of self-revelation/exhibition becomes no less apparent in the American theatre.

The earliest representatives of the self-made hero in American theatre may be labeled individualist "types." Probably the first instance of this type was Jonathan, Royal Tyler's comic Yankee, who made his first appearance in The Contrast (April 16, 1787). During the next hundred years, a number of Jonathan look-a-likes would follow, all embodying the common features of the self-made hero in one form or another. The Jonathan characters (often called "stage Yankees") exemplify Stephen Greenblatt's idea of "self-fashioning" wherein a culture perpetually reaffirms its ideology by "creating" (through education or other means) those individuals who embody this ideology. The individual, shaped by "the cultural system of meanings," thus passes "from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment." The Jonathan archetype manifests this uniquely American "self-fashioning"--as an identity which the new republic could champion in its process of self-invention. Seen in terms of Saussure's sign, the "Jonathan" persona becomes the sign of individual American initiative, its stage image the signifier of the new self-determined republic. The seven tropes provide various signifieds which allow America to "recognize" the self-
determined hero. From these tropes/signifieds, it is possible to develop an analytical grid in establishing the nature of the successive "stage Yankee" characters.

Jonathan's first appearance on the stage bespeaks the degree to which the myth had already taken hold in the American mind. Importantly, all seven tropes that organize the self-made hero inhere in Tyler's Jonathan. As evidenced in The Contrast, Jonathan is born of common origins. Most of the comedy of the play, in fact, spins from Jonathan's (new world) rusticity, which opposes Jessamy's (old world) pretense of aristocratic "manners." The Act II/scene 2 Jonathan/Jessamy encounter instantly establishes this dichotomy. With marriage imminent, Jonathan will receive as dowry "twenty acres of land--somewhat rocky though--a bible, and a cow" (61). Jonathan's grassroots status, seen in his lack of possessions, is also mirrored in his lack of schooling. He declares, "I can't speak them lignum vitae words" (60) and mistakes Jessamy's use of "gallantry" for "girl huntry"(61). Jonathan's Act III/scene 1 description of his encounter with the actors at the theatre makes evident his illiterate upbringing (65). When the curtain rises, Jonathan believes he is looking "right into the next neighbor's house"; he is unable to distinguish a theatrical enactment from a real event. But Tyler's Jonathan possesses native wisdom. Debunking Jessamy's high-tone
wordplay, he quips, "What the dogs need of all this outlandish lingo?" (60). Bred on fundamental democratic ideals, he also makes it plain to the effete Jessamy that "we don't make any great matter of distinction in our state, between quality and other folks" (60, 61). Tyler cleverly brings together a work ethic and its associative virtues. Jonathan is proud of his farm [common roots] upbringing (60) and declares himself "a true blue son of liberty" [invoking patriotic sympathies] (60). The images associated with farm life are those of intense labor. Tyler emphasizes this point when Jonathan discloses that he was released from military service to take care of his mother (60). Thus patriotism, dedication to parents, and hard work unite to form a composite portrait of American diligence. And Jonathan's ultimate success is founded, not only on this conception of diligence, but also on Tyler's implication that virtue is its own reward. By staying true to his "true love" (61), Jonathan can look forward to the rewards of a virtuous marriage.

Jonathan's journey from country to city also brings revelation. Jonathan's ultimate wisdom rests in his discovery that elegance and refinement do not necessarily denote inner goodness. In fact, Jonathan's final assessment of city life surfaces as he castigates Dimple [urbanite] for supposedly harming his officer Colonel Manly. Jonathan, with righteous initiative, barks, "Gor!"
I— I wish he did [want to fight]; I'd shew him Yankee boys play, pretty quick" (76). This statement also reveals "Yankee boy" temerity which will be replayed ad infinitum on the American stage for the next hundred years.

James Workman's Liberty in Louisiana (1804) recasts the Jonathan character as the Yankee "Irishman" Phelim O'Flinn. Workman's drama is important to the canon of "Yankee" plays because it solidifies the concept that common origins promote honesty. Coming from an even more impoverished beginning than the original Jonathan, Workman's O'Flinn makes conscious choices (obviously guided by an unerring inner sense of honesty) that bring him to a successful end.

The play's polemic, that a free society and its laws are "security against oppression," juxtaposes O'Flinn (a rascal with a good heart) to Don Bertoldo (a Spanish judge with an evil heart). Several of the myth tropes are recognized in O'Flinn. Ex-owner of a "grog-shop," O'Flinn represents the lowest rung of society. He drinks too much and lives by his wits. Like Tyler's Jonathan, O'Flinn's speech is colloquial, often laughable: "Devil burn me if ever I'll die again of the yellow fever as long as I live, unless I can't help it" (26). But his native wisdom is evident, especially in his expressions of the difficulty in being poor but honest: "Well, when I get rich, I'll turn very honest all at once, and pay off all my debts. Eh!
Phelim, will that be right? No, by my soul, it would be a piece of barbarous cruelty to a great many worthy jontlemen [sic] that live so genteel and so splendid, honest souls, without ever paying any debt at all" (62). In another instance, O'Flinn recounts being denied food by a "rich blackguard" from Tennessee. Workman implicates O'Flinn in a myth discourse by dichotomizing rich and poor (implying evil and good). This polarity is furthered by O'Flinn's juxtaposition to Don Bertoldo. O'Flinn, a beggar not above stealing for food (27), is contrasted to the wealthy Bertoldo, who exacts the harshest payment from creditors (71). Thus, Workman reincarnates Shylock (in Bertoldo) by introducing a familiar apologetic: the spirit of the law versus the letter of the law. In this context, such apologetic plays directly into the the making of American myth where the poor (but honest) individualist is extolled.

Poverty and honesty, in fact, conflate to form the foundation of O'Flinn's "virtue." Contrasted to Bertoldo, who is duplicitous and self-deceived, O'Flinn admits his mistakes and seeks correction by marrying (and taking responsibility for) the pregnant Lucy (97). His reversal is complete when he confesses, "I'm thinking that roguery, after all, is a troublesome, disagreeable, unprofitable business . . . . I believe we had better leave off our tricks, and turn honest in downright earnest" (99).

Workman gives O'Flinn the power to choose honesty over
"roguery." Thus, Workman's play reveals that the self-made hero possesses not only native wisdom, but also native honesty. This decision-making process is reflective of O'Flinn's journey, metaphorical in nature, where hard-won experiences become the mile markers between ignorance and wisdom, innocence and maturity.

By mid-century the heroic Yankee had found a permanent place on the American stage. A subtle shift occurred, however, in the nature of the character (who had become by this time a kind of crusader for truthfulness and right living). One of the finest examples of this truth-seeking hero is found in the character of Adam Trueman, the pivotal figure in Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (1845). Adam Trueman displays all seven tropes defining the heroic image in American lore. In Mowatt's play, the old world/new world dichotomy is again explored, where old world artifice is contrasted to new world virtue/honesty. But the idea that the self-made American hero should be "true" (evidenced through the implication of Trueman's name) now becomes paramount, providing the impulse for *Fashion*'s conflict. The Adam Trueman character, in fact, confirms the honesty/truth component as an essential facet of the American discourse of virtue/hard work. From the "lesson" of George Washington who "could not tell a lie" to the advent of Honest Abe, honesty encodes itself as basic to the hero model.
Adam Trueman, like Jonathan and O'Flinn, is cut from plain cloth. The power of his character arises directly from the land (he is a wealthy farmer) and from his colorful, but utterly frank opinions. Like his two stage cousins, Trueman sets himself against superficiality, a trait embodied in Mrs. Tiffany. Here, Mowatt varies the traditional binary, truth or fiction, by juxtaposing truth or "fashion," (ie., Trueman versus Mrs. Tiffany). Mowatt's play, in effect, mounts an all-out attack on dishonesty; for example, Trueman asks: "Why the deuce can't you speak the truth, man? but it's not the fashion, I suppose!" Trueman warns Gertrude (who is later discovered to be his granddaughter), "Never tell a lie girl! not even for the sake of pleasing an old man!"(55). In Mowatt's purview, losing the ability to discern the true from the false indicates a move toward immorality. In one instance, when Mrs. Tiffany declares Trueman "fashionable," Trueman retorts, "And pray what is fashion, madam? An agreement between certain persons to live without using their souls! To substitute etiquette for virtue--decorum for purity--manners for morals!"(70).

Trueman differs from his two stage forebears, however, in his social ascendancy. His (virtuous) labor has paid off; he becomes a wealthy landed farmer with social status. Trueman's disclaimer that he "never coveted wealth," though he found himself "the richest farmer in Catteraugus" (85),
validates the self-made myth, confirming that hard work results in success. Giving Trueman status, Mowatt fortifies Trueman's homespun wisdom as eminently credible. From a semiotic standpoint, therefore, mid-century American audiences could receive Trueman's dictums as oracular, replicating a discourse that had already become, as Barthes would state, "eternal." Trueman's mandate to Mr. Tiffany, for example, summarizes the entire trope system of the self-made myth (emphases are mine):

You must sell your house and all these gew-gaws, and bundle your wife and daughter off to the country. There let them learn economy, true independence, and home virtues, instead of foreign follies. As for yourself, continue your business—but let moderation, in future, be your counselor, and let honesty be your confidential clerk (91).

This speech, positioned at the end of the play, represents Mowatt's ultimate fiat to forsake artifice (as essentially un-American). Its reception as "truth" is evident, observed in Mowatt's own account of the way Trueman was embraced by an adoring public.39 Again America, in the guise of Adam Trueman, found an iconic image around which to rally in its on-going desire to define a national character.

The foregoing passage also illustrates the condition of Trueman's "journey" in Fashion. Trueman's advice that Tiffany should return to the country reminds the reader that Trueman himself has come from the country (as a kind of rural prophet to city dwellers). His progress from the
country [rural/natural environs] to the city represents the symbolic distance between honest labor and immoral ease. Returning to the country, as Trueman suggests, would represent for Tiffany a kind of mythic homecoming (an exodus from "foreign" city life back to the simple virtues of the country). This spatial device, in effect, becomes a metaphor for the entire play. Country/city is metonymic for truth/dishonesty. And Trueman's final speech reinforces this dichotomy: "We have kings, princes, and nobles in abundance--of Nature's stamp, if not of Fashion's" (92).

George Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) provided the American public yet another important variation on the popular stage Yankee. The Jonathan character in Aiken's play is transformed into Phineas Fletcher, Eliza's sage accomplice who aids her escape across the ice. Phineas' significance to the evolution of the stage Yankee involves his functional role as savior. Possessing not only honesty and an innate sense of truth, this newest Yankee metamorphoses into a savior figure, able to appraise circumstances and effect change by sheer force of his will. This up-dated version of the heroic individualist obviously seized the imagination of the nation (perhaps since the nation at this time was in much need of "saviors.") The appeal of the Phineas character is evident, and by 1900 he had become the most widely seen of all stage Yankees; in
fact, Daniel Gerould calls *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in American Melodrama "the greatest success in the history of the American theatre." Adapted from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Aiken's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* endows Phineas, as the self-made individual, with all the requisite elements of the American myth; all seven myth tropes are operative. A large part of Phineas' appeal is his grassroots "Kaintuck" lingo, superbly drawn from Stowe's novel, showing the extraordinary comic potential of Appalachian dialect.

Phineas' first speech highlights his common origins: "That thar river looks like a permissuous ice-cream shop come to an awful state of friz," thus setting him at odds to anything effete or artificial. Once again, unschooled/native wisdom triumphs over book learning.

Phineas, for instance, dallies with Eliza's antagonists, relying solely on native wit:

- **Haley:** Say stranger, you haven't seen a runaway darkey about these parts, eh?
- **Phineas:** What kind of a darkey? .  .  .  Kind of tall?
- **Haley:** Yes.
- **Phineas:** With brown hair?
- **Haley:** Yes.
- **Phineas:** And dark eyes?
- **Haley:** Yes.
- **Phineas:** Pretty well dressed?
- **Haley:** Yes.
- **Phineas:** Scar on his right hand?
- **Haley:** Yes, yes.
- **Phineas:** Well, I ain't seen him (96).

Like his comic predecessors, Phineas wields power/control simply by applying an instinctive intelligence.
Neither colloquialism nor banter, however, undercuts Phineas' sagacity. Indeed, his role as Eliza's "savior," masterminding her escape into Ohio, gives his words double weight. Remembering that Stowe's novel and Aiken's play were viewed as precipitous factors in America's Civil War, one can imagine how easily the following words from a character like Phineas could infect the nation: "Any man that owns a boy [negro] like that, and can't find any better way of treating him, than branding him on the hand ... deserved to lose him" (93).

Phineas, like his stage antecedents, links himself to the work ethic of myth discourse. The signals in Aiken's play are subtle, but nonetheless striking. First, Phineas' on-stage actions demonstrate his boundless energy. In the space of four short scenes (the sum of Phineas' role), he accomplishes the following: hides Eliza and engineers her escape from the tavern (I,iv); hides George beneath a trap door, diverts the antagonist Haley by circuitous repartee, manages to get George out of the tavern, imprisons Haley and company beneath the same trap door out of which George has just escaped (II, iii); accepts the role of guide as Eliza and George flee into the hills (II,v); prevents George from being wounded, seizes Loker and pitches him over a cliff (II, vi). Phineas is nothing if not busy (implicating hard work/virtue trope). The second indicator of the work ethic is Phineas' religious alignment. Phineas
becomes a Quaker at the end of Act II and thus exhibits his affinity for hard work, a quality admired and mandated by the Quaker faith. Phineas' ultimate "success" is seen in his marriage to a Quaker bride and his triumph over the slavers. Phineas, thus assuming the mantle of the self-made man, is conceived as symbolically virtuous through a succession of "victories" engendered by selflessness and determination.

Aiken, again implicating myth discourse, devises antipodal terminuses in his deployment of the journey trope. Phineas begins his role in the play in a tavern (emblematic both of American capitalism and of worldly pleasure) but ends on a hilltop (religious image signifying hope). He is last seen in a tableau involving Eliza, George, and the Child. Phineas' initial image as a rugged backwoodsman is thus transformed to that of a pious Quaker. And finally, he exchanges bachelorhood for marriage. Aiken's telescoped sense of action is intensified by Phineas' repeated warning to "Vamose" (used five times in four scenes). Thus, the idea of haste (non-procrastination) defines Phineas' metaphorical and spatial journeys, with the (ultimate) implication that he has traded this present world (system) for the next.

By the eve of the Civil War, the self-made hero had become a venerated "type" in American drama. Having developed by this epoch a complex persona, the stage Yankee
transformed himself into a gentle moral judge, using his own unerring honest virtue either to counsel or pass sentence on the morally/legally wayward. One of the finest (culminating) examples of the self-made hero as judge is Dion Boucicault's Salem Scudder (The Octoroon/1859). Ever adept at translating popular thought into good theatre, Boucicault produced his own stage Yankee, turning the Phineas (Savior) model into the Moral Judge persona.

On the eve of the Civil War, Dion Boucicault's The Octoroon was given its New York premiere "at the packed Winter Garden on December 6, 1859, only a few days after the execution of John Brown." Reflecting theflammability of the times, Boucicault's play was indeed timely, managing to appease sentiment on both sides of the slavery issue. Boucicault's success in this regard was due primarily to his Scudder character, who became a functional diplomat, arbitrating legal/moral rights. Indeed by Act IV, Scudder serves as a mediating judge, checking the vigilante crowd and their desire to lynch the Indian Wahnotee. Self-appointed, Scudder is a remarkable "natural" investigator. To M'Closky's claim of Wahnotee's guilt, Scudder rejoins, "Say what you know—not what you heard" (140). When the crowd presses for Wahnotee's death, Scudder responds with homespun eloquence, "This lynch law is a wild and lawless proceeding . . . yonder, a poor ignorant savage, and round him a circle of hearts, white
with revenge and hate, thirsting for his blood... It is such scenes as these that bring disgrace upon our Western life" (140). Through what can only be termed a coup de theatre, Boucicault reinforces Scudder's credibility by aligning his judgement with that of God. In this instance, Scudder discovers a photographic plate (from a camera he himself had created) that has recorded M'Closky in the very act of murder. Scudder hands down his verdict: "The eye of the Eternal was on you—the blessed sun in heaven, that looking down, struck upon this plate the image of the deed" (141). Scudder's voice functions as that of the Almighty dispensing judgement. Boucicault completes Scudder's "virtue" by giving him an affinity for hard work. Scudder is, in fact, the mainstay of the Terrebone plantation; the owner Mrs. Payton declares that Scudder has "worked like a horse" (105). As inventor, moral judge, and diligent laborer, Salem Scudder (after foiling the antagonists and returning Terrebone to its rightful owner) is "rewarded" with stability and wealth.

Indicating Boucicault's "new" Yankee, elements of self-denial and salvation mark Scudder's journey in The Octoroon. The nature of this journey is first spatial, New York to Louisiana, at the end of which Scudder castigates himself as a factor in Terrebone's ruin. In his metaphorical journey from plantation overseer in the first act to moral judge in the last, Scudder continues to offer
himself as a scape goat: "I brought half this ruin on this family, with my all-fired improvements. I deserve to be a nigger this day--I feel like one, inside" (130). This sort of self-effacement draws audience sympathy and renders Scudder at once real and immensely complex. Ultimately, the Scudder character is processed as a Christ figure, the sacrificial lamb whose end is one of triumph.

Although other stage Yankee stereotypes could be explored in relation to a myth discourse arising from an ideology of the self-made American, the five foregoing represent innovative examples in American theatre. Each successive stage Yankee not only mirrors cultural perceptions of the myth of self-made-ness and heroic individualism but also makes the hero progressively more complex. Starting as the ingenuous Jonathan, the heroic individualist ascends to the rank of moral judge by the eve of the Civil War. Given the inordinate power of theatrical spectacle, the Yankee persona (self-made hero) provides America with a dynamic (three-dimensional) persona/icon by which it can define a national character. Thus the self-made hero myth, which finds impetus in drama even from earliest days in the nation's history, becomes by the mid-nineteenth century a fully fleshed icon in American theatre.

As this investigation of Swaggart's participation in the myth of the self-made hero continues, it is clear that
this powerful persona has supplied Swaggart a potent basis for his self-representation, a self-imaging that by its nature invites cultural sanction. An analysis of Swaggart's involvement in myth discourse, while complex, is simplified somewhat by a knowledge of this myth's influences/antecedents (which have been discussed in this chapter) and their extenuation into a twentieth century episteme. Finally, Swaggart's specific myth "story" is part and parcel of this myth progression, from its early fertilization in pre-Revolutionary America to its current manifestations in the late twentieth century.
NOTES: CHAPTER ONE


4 Robertson xv.


7 Barthes 151.
8 Barthes 152.
9 Barthes 127.
10 Barthes 127.
11 Barthes 153.
12 Barthes 154.
13 Barthes 151.
14 Robertson 147-157.
16 Levi-Strauss 120-121.
19 Carl Bode, intro., Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward ix.

20 Alger, Ragged Dick and Struggling Upward 8.

21 Robertson, American Myth 137-146. All additional references to Robertson's discussion of the backwoodsman/frontiersman/pioneer tertiary will be contained within the body of the text.


23 Benjamin Franklin, qtd. in Marsden 71.

24 Marsden 71.


26 Woodward 8.

27 Woodward 8.

28 Benjamin Franklin, qtd. in Marsden 71.

29 Marsden 71.

30 Woodward 1.

31 Woodward 2.

32 Barthes 153.


35 Royall Tyler, The Contrast, Representative American Plays, ed. Arthur Hobson Quinn (New York: Appleton, 1917) 59-62. All further references to this work will be contained within the body of the text.

36 James Workman, Liberty in Louisiana (Charleston, 1804) 100. All further references to this work will be contained within the body of the text.
37 Robertson, American Myth 11-14. See this section for a detailed discussion of symbolization and encoding inhering in the George Washington/cherry tree myth.

38 Anna Cora Mowatt, Fashion, Nineteenth Century American Plays, ed. Myron Matlaw (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1967) 49. All further references to the play proper will be contained within the body of the text.


41 George Aiken/Harriet Beecher Stowe, Uncle Tom's Cabin, American Melodrama 82. All further references to the play proper will be contained within the body of the text.

42 Myron Matlaw, preface to The Octoroon by Dion Boucicault, Nineteenth Century American Plays 97.

43 Dion Boucicault, The Octoroon, Nineteenth Century American Plays 97. All further references to the play proper will be contained within the body of the text.
The main work of this chapter will explore how Jimmy Swaggart is sanctioned by the American public, as his "story" replicates that of the mythic self-made hero. In Swaggart's autobiography *To Cross A River*, the text replays self-made heroism within a narrative structure. Swaggart follows a narrative progression common to most American hero stories that takes the hero from a point of origin (usually an impoverished/unstable state) to a final moment of success (when wealth or other rewards are gained). To understand the powerful role narrative plays in Swaggart's use of the self-made myth, it is helpful to review the dynamic part language plays in a culture's construction of its myths. Thomas Postlewait, in his *Theatre Journal* article (May, 1991), states that "we organize historical events [myth plots] into a sequence or story line that posits contiguous and causal lines of development."¹ These "causal lines" draw upon a "repertory of rhetorical and formal conventions."² In other words, cultural understanding of history/myth is possible only because of the language that "processes" it. Therefore, Postlewait deduces, "narrativity is not merely a technique, borrowed from literature, but instead a condition of our temporal understanding of individual and social experience."³ In essence, culture uses language as a way of organizing
experience. It uses the tools of language to "process" its beliefs into easily identifiable "packages." We see this effect especially in relation to America's "writing" of the self-made myth. Using Postlewait's terminology, American culture has organized the "story" of the self-made hero into a plot, evidenced by "contiguous and causal lines of development." In this way, language crystallizes the self-made myth by "constructing" it into an easily read story. Consequently, any American who mirrors the sanctioned storyline/narrative of self-made-ness will be read as a genuine version of the self-made hero.

Swaggart's autobiography relies on this constructed-ness of myth (through narration) as a primary way of promoting Swaggart's "hero" status. In fact, his book replays in detail the paradigmatic story of the mythic hero. On a purely narrational level, all seven myth tropes organizing the self-made hero are evidenced in To Cross A River. The content of Swaggart's story is thus identified by American culture as an up-dated variation of the self-made myth. An exploration of Swaggart's participation (through his autobiography) in the myth tropes will constitute the first part of our discussion. Analysis will then examine how Swaggart's use of rhetorical figures such as symbol, stereotype, and metaphor confirms Barthes' theory of myth operation. For example, Swaggart's book uses stereotypes that reduce "the other" to caricature,
thus reifying Swaggart's complex persona as more "real."

Rhetorical figures involve style; a discussion of both the style and content of *To Cross A River* is therefore necessary in understanding how Swaggart is implicated in the narrative of self-made-ness.

I. The Trope Matrix As It Informs Swaggart's Autobiography

The myth of the individualist hero is contained within a discernible storyline evidenced through seven essential tropes: 1) The self-made hero rises from common origins, 2) He is anti-intellectual, 3) He sees the necessity of hard work, 4) Hard work is deemed a virtue, 5) Labor is rewarded with success, 6) The Hero makes a virtual or symbolic journey, and 7) He must overcome obstacles before final success. The following investigation helps determine how these tropes inform the Swaggart narrative.

**Trope 1: Common Origins.** The idea of grassroots beginnings, essential to the mythic hero's persona, defines a national character. This foundational trope divides the "new" rustic American from the effete British overlord. Swaggart understands the near magic of this concept in the American mind and makes it an essential part of his autobiography. In fact, the book's central tension, the polar characters of Jimmy and his famous cousin Jerry Lee Lewis, is typified by Jerry Lee's wealth and Jimmy's inveterate penury (engendered both by his commitment to
preach and by his humble ancestry). Although the book is chronological in progression (starting with Chapter Two), Swaggart's first chapter acts as a kind of overture in which he initiates a discourse of money/poverty, retelling an incident occurring on the Assembly of God church grounds in which the rich Uncle Elmo (Jerry Lee's father) asks Jimmy to come to Nashville at Sam Phillips' bidding. The year is 1958 and Sam Phillips is, in Swaggart's words, "about the most famous record producer in the world" (20), having discovered Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Charlie Rich, and Jerry Lee. Swaggart "stages" this incident with broad strokes. He relates that as Uncle Elmo makes his astonishing offer, time seems to stop. "Even the sparrows in the nearby willow trees had stopped their twittering" (4). Swaggart struggles mentally: "Jerry Lee and I had been raised together . . . But things had changed. Jerry Lee was now big time . . . making more than twenty thousand dollars a week . . . I was struggling along on thirty dollars a week--sometimes even less--as a small time, wrong-side-of-the-tracks Pentecostal preacher" (2,3). Swaggart ultimately refuses the offer on religious grounds. However, this particular incident, positioned at the book's opening, carries important ramifications, not the least of which is Swaggart's self-fashioning (to borrow Greenblatt's idea) within a context of grassroots virtue.
Other homespun images abound. Chapter Two introduces the reader to Swaggart's father Willie Leon and grandfather Willie Harry, who come to Louisiana during the Great Depression, lured by the prospects of fishing and trapping (10). During one of the Concordia Parish dances, "which sometimes erupted into first-class brawls" (11), Willie Leon falls in love with his future wife Minnie Bell Herron, whose sharecropper family was "always on the brink of starvation" (11). Swaggart is careful to detail the rough-and-tumble milieu from which he springs, such as the incident in 1935 in which all his bootlegging relatives (to a man) are arrested by federal agents (11). Later in the 40's, Swaggart's grandfather serves as chief of police in Ferriday, a town where "you could hardly walk down the street without getting a beer bottle laid against your head" (25).

These images of rusticity become essential to Swaggart's self-defining project. By emphasizing his common beginnings, Swaggart positions himself alongside America's most lionized (common-man) heroes: Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln, etc. Swaggart keeps the idea of his initial rusticity a constant in his narrative. Although Swaggart has acquired a great deal of wealth by the book's end (implied by Swaggart's ownership of a private airplane), attention is diverted from this fact by Swaggart's numerous flashbacks detailing his impoverished
youth. Three pages before the book's close, for example, Swaggart stands in his new office. But he recalls amid "typewriters clattering, phones ringing," that he had "started out so small . . . back in the swamps preaching to stumps" (240). Through such devices, Swaggart is able to reify the idea of his early poverty, showing himself to be a credible common-man hero.

**Trope 2: Anti-Intellectualism.** Following a Stage Yankee/Ragged Dick discourse, Swaggart evidences a fundamental suspicion of "classical" learning and academic institutions. As William Woodward indicates in his article in *Journal of American Culture* (Spring/1988), repeated strains of anti-intellectualism appear in the American (mythic) consciousness. Explicating Daniel Boorstin's trilogy *The Americans*, for example, Woodward finds New World Americans to be "a practical folk, a people of Praxis, compulsively antitheoretical doers." Correlating such views with Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*, Woodward discovers that "utilitarian" and "expressive" individualism results as the self-made man rejects the academic collective. In this way, anti-intellectualism and individualism conflate, forming a unified sign of the American character. The repetition of anti-intellectualism in Swaggart's autobiography is both subtle and obvious. On one hand, Swaggart provides a number of signals revealing his distaste for the academic. Swaggart himself drops out
of high school at seventeen. He writes that he "didn't feel it was important" and that he had, in fact, "given up on school several years before," spending most of his time "in study hall reading books" (64). This last phrase implies that Swaggart deems self-education (reading books) a proper substitute for formal training and resurrects in the reader's mind images of Abraham Lincoln's self-motivated reading under the dim light of a coal-oil lamp. Swaggart embellishes this train of thought in depicting his job as a swamper in 1954. This vocation allowed Swaggart free time that he used for Bible study; it became, in Swaggart's estimation, his "Bible School" (84). Studying "in the swamps" reinforces Swaggart's links to Lincoln's rural education. Swaggart ultimately rejects his father's suggestion that he attend a formal Bible college. He states, "I was a high school dropout and the idea had little appeal, so I simply continued working with the dragline and preaching in services whenever I could" (84).

On the other hand, Swaggart inserts in his narrative more subtle cues which signal an essential distrust of academia. For instance, Swaggart's son Donnie transfers to Southwestern Bible College in Waxahachie, Texas, preempting his studies at Louisiana State University. Swaggart relates that at this point he and his wife Frances "felt an additional burden to pray for [Donnie]." He states, "Our prayers were answered in a marvelous way in 1974 when
Donnie married Debbie Robertson in a small Assembly of God church outside of Louisville, Mississippi. Later he left school and joined me in the ministry as director of our crusades" (230). The inter-weaving of ideas is subtle—the notion of "prayers answered" coincides with Donnie's marriage and entrance into the family business. But the implication is evident: formal schooling is diagnosed in the Swaggart mind as unimportant/irrelevant in the face of such "essential" issues as marriage and employment.

Imaging himself as the "anti-theoretical doer" (and thus a true self-made hero), Swaggart offers other signals in his discourse of anti-intellectualism. Pastor Hansel Vibbert of the Calvary Temple in Evansville, Indiana, invites Swaggart to preach a revival, comparing Swaggart's gospel style music (which he loves) to the more "highbrow" music normally presented in Vibbert's services. Vibbert exclaims, "I've heard this cold, formal church music so much it's killing me. You've got the life [emphasis mine] we need here" (150, 151). Again, the implication is evident: formal church music (associated with the academic seminary) is subverted in favor of Swaggart's untrained playing (the product of nightclubs where Swaggart initially learned his style) (51). The dichotomy of death/life is also implied in Vibbert's off-handed equation: Swaggart becomes Vibbert's personal musical redeemer, saving him from the "death" rattle of cold, musical formality.
Swaggart's validation of his untutored musical style extenuates a discourse which disavows formal schooling (making implicit his distaste for things intellectual). In this regard, Swaggart offers a revealing anecdote describing his brief attempt at piano lessons. He confesses, "The teacher was a stickler for playing 'by the book.' That was a bore . . . it didn't have any life" (42). Again the life/death binary is advanced, pitting lack of schooling against that which is learned "by the book."

This last image is replayed in a third, rather ironic, story involving Jerry Lee's cursory brush with formal training. After only a few lessons, Jerry Lee's teacher becomes frustrated with his not playing "by the book," after which Jerry Lee utters an obscenity resulting in the teacher's slapping him "across the face" (43). Swaggart thus valorizes his own native style by exposing Jerry Lee's similar experience. The reader is led tacitly to believe that genius need not have instruction, a view purportedly confirmed by Jerry Lee's ultimate stardom as a seminal figure in the rock-and-roll genre. Again, Swaggart depicts his life within a myth discourse of self-made-ness, installing himself as another essentially unschooled talent among America's self-made musical heroes (Woody Guthrie, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, etc.).

Franklin's admonition: God helps them that help themselves (Poor Richard's Almanac/1758). Seventy years after Franklin, Alexis de Tocqueville in Democracy in America (1835-1840) finds the former's work ethic entrenched in the American conception of self-determination. De Tocqueville submits a reason for the work ethic within the American character: "In America, most of the rich men were formerly poor; most of those who now enjoy leisure were absorbed in business during their youth; the consequence of which is, that, when they might have had a taste for study, they had no time for it." Study therefore becomes irrelevant in face of one's need for survival/hard work, engendering in the American nature a compulsion toward "self-actualization" (Bellah's term).

Swaggart exploits this aspect of the hard working American hero by dispensing carefully planted cues throughout his narrative. On a semiotic level, To Cross A River relies heavily on coded "triggers." For example, Swaggart gives the portrait of a character named Mother Sumrall (who started the Assembly of God church in Ferriday, Louisiana). On a particular occasion, Jimmy's Uncle Lee happens upon Sumrall as she is "pulling weeds with her bare hands on the vacant [church] lot" (13). Uncle Lee asks what she is doing. Swaggart conveys the following scenario: "'We're going to build a church here,' Mother Sumrall announced pleasantly, standing up and
wiping sweat from her face' " (14). The passage is encoded with four distinct "work" signals: pulling weeds, working with bare hands, building church, wiping sweat. But the signals of work carry with them a subtext of necessary labor. Swaggart, in essence, has created a symbolic pioneer woman, building from the ground up a dwelling (in this instance a dwelling place for God) with no tool but her bare hands. His coup is in calling his laborer "mother," in this context a sure (albeit sentimental) signal for female virtue. Her juxtaposition with "church" doubles her credibility as a sainted figure. Thus, in one well-crafted scene, Swaggart has managed to bring together the notion of hard work and its realization as virtue (implicating Trope 4 as well).

Swaggart's personal involvement in a work discourse is also carefully described. He relates an incident as a young teenager in his grandfather's grocery store—"behind the meat counter one afternoon scattering sawdust on the floor" (55). A man walks in and offers young Jimmy a weekend job playing piano in a Natchez nightclub. Swaggart describes himself as being "dressed in blue jeans and bare footed." Swaggart details his response: "'I go to school,' I answered wiping my gritty hands on the soiled store apron". At this point, Swaggart looks over at his grandfather (called Pa) who is "leaning across the meat counter" and who begins "adjusting pans of meat inside the
counter" (56). Jimmy finally refuses the man and the money, opting for the higher call of God, but runs "into the back room crying."

Like the passage involving Mother Sumrall, this scene is also thickly encoded with "work" signals. A small town grocery, owned by a single entrepreneur, is a scene of intense labor. The association of the sawdust image with those of bare feet, gritty hands with a soiled apron, invokes the daily trial of the "little man" trying to make ends meet. Swaggart again is heavy on implication. Sawdust provides a direct analogue to the earth, that which is fresh/natural. The bare-footed boy, drawing on the "natural" state of shoelessness, is a portrait out of Norman Rockwell. Thus, the common man/"little man" is again stereotyped as "natural," the salt of the earth, one remove from his pioneer forebears who built America. In this way, Swaggart recreates his early upbringing (indeed his own persona) in terms of a romanticized American past, weaving a subtext of grassroots goodness/honesty into his narrative. His retreat into "the back room" is a return to the bosom of the family (the sanctioned haven of goodness) which appears in Swaggart's book as antipodal to the evils of the world/Satan. Here again, Swaggart not only validates the work ethic but manages to organize it as a symbol of goodness/virtue.
To Cross A River sanctions the pioneer/Puritan work ethic as fundamental both to America's mental health and its survival. Although other examples abound, the two scenes described above are typical of Swaggart's validation of the necessity for work. Swaggart shows command of his signals, manipulating powerful images that trigger for the American mind a sanctioned view of the honest-but-poor laborer. In so doing, Swaggart implicates himself as a new model of the honest worker, providing evidence that his own self-made heroism is valid.

Trope 4: The Virtue of Hard Work. Closely allied to the previous trope, this trope follows the venerated idea that hard work is tantamount to virtue. Work-as-virtue conflates into an early self-affirming ideology, as seen in the writings of Benjamin Franklin, who espoused virtuous work as a kind of national religion. Trope 4 therefore functions as both a corollary and a required extension of Trope 3 in the matrix that defines the self-made hero.

The power of "virtue as work" in the national imagination can be illuminated by John Cawelti's writing on the American West. In The Six-Gun Mystique, Cawelti posits an "epic moment" in America's Western mythology. Popular iconography, fiction, television, and film have excerpted, in Cawelti's view, the "relatively brief stage in the social evolution of the West when outlaws or Indians posed a threat to the community's stability," molding this
specific moment into what has become, to Cawelti's mind, the "Western formula." According to Cawelti, the "epic moment" represents the "heyday of the open range cattle industry," a rather narrow time period in late nineteenth century America. This "moment" thus becomes encoded as formula Western because of "the ideological tendency of Americans to see the far West as the last stronghold of certain traditional values, as well as the peculiar attractiveness of the cowboy hero." In other words, America constructs a Western myth that affirms, as Barthes theorizes, collective cultural ideology. For Cawelti, this definitively "Western" myth is embedded in cultural thought to the degree that even "newer" Westerns are designed to have the look and feel of pre-twentieth century America. For example, costuming, even in Westerns set in a later time period, tends to mirror fabrics, colors, and styles of the late nineteenth century, standing as a "correct" realization of Western garb.

Cawelti's epic moment theory is particularly useful in defining America's notion of virtue and its implication in a discourse of hard work. The symbolic "moment" shifts, however, in relation to a mythologized vision of labor (that is honest/virtuous). Again, reflecting an anti-intellectual mindset in the early American character, the man who works with his hands is construed as virtuous because of his associations with what is basic, natural,
the earth. Manual labor is therefore "good" labor, antithetical to the mental/academic work of the marketplace (which becomes suspect as self-aggrandizing). Virtuous labor's "epic moment" thus situates itself in a pre-industrial America (a manual labor America)—where the methods of production (tools) are still wedded to means (individual human effort). Iconographically, the symbolic "moment" of honest labor materializes mythically in an America prior to industrialization, or in places industrialization has/had not yet reached—ie., the small American "hometown."

This is the hometown portrayed by Norman Rockwell, frozen in an "epic moment," which depicts the definitively "American" clapboard house or the cluttered general store. This is the hometown idealized in Hollywood iconography or in such television serials as The Waltons, Little House on the Prairie, Mayberry R.F.D., or Mama's Family. And such is the moment Jimmy Swaggart recreates in his mythologized past. In one vignette, for instance, Swaggart describes a return trip from an evangelistic meeting (130, 131). He is "nervous and upset," having just learned of his mother's heart attack during surgery. Wanting further news, Swaggart wheels into a gas station in the small Alabama town of Bay Minette to call home. At this point in the narrative, Swaggart insinuates his verbal triggers. It turns out that the gas station is operated by "Fred
Davidson, a man who had been saved [emphasis mine] in a previous revival meeting in Atmore" (130). Swaggart makes a call to his Aunt Stella who tells him of his mother's death. Swaggart relates the following:

I don't remember saying good-bye to Aunt Stella. I just hung up and stood with hot tears stinging my eyes, staring vacantly at the gritty, concrete service bay.

"What's the matter?" Fred asked, placing his hands on my shoulders.

I looked into his lined face, tanned by many hours of pumping gas in the bright sun. "My mother just died," I answered softly. He started crying too. "You know, I met her last year in Atmore. She and your dad. Is there anything I can do?"

I shook my head. "No, nothing" (131).

Like Mother Sumrall and Pa's grocery (Trope 3), the character of Fred Davidson provides a pivot around which Swaggart can invoke a mythic past. First, Davidson has been "saved" in one of Swaggart's crusades, becoming ritually "clean" in the process. One witnesses a sort of beatific Davidson, rendered virtuous, on one hand, by his conversion. On the other hand, Davidson's virtue is assembled through a pastiche of signals: the presence of the "gritty" service bay (echoing Jimmy's gritty apron), the tanned, lined face, and the gas pump all conspire to locate Davidson in a Rockwellian epic moment (the mythic hometown). But Swaggart goes further by endowing Davidson with the persona of counselor/priest. Davidson's hand on Swaggart's shoulder, his tears, and his soothing revelation
that he had actually met the mother reinforces his function as cleric (encoded for goodness/honesty/virtue). Thus Swaggart reaffirms an idea essential to the cult of heroism, that hard work (or the hard worker) is virtuous. The coincidental nature of this encounter is fact; but what Swaggart chooses to recount shows how an event can be re-invented/romanticized according to a myth vision that is culturally sanctioned.

Other signs conflating hard work and virtue appear. Swaggart consolidates his position through a series of self-referential statements. As a swamper in his early years, he wanders into a cafe, hears Jerry Lee on the juke box, and in a tone of martyrdom contrasts his lot with that of Jerry Lee's: "But what about me. Here I was, dressed in greasy overalls, my face covered with grime. All I could do was serve and obey [my emphasis]" (87). The implications are evident. By coupling "greasy overalls" (hard work) with "serve and obey" (meaning surrender to God's will), Swaggart advances the idea of his own martyrdom (engendering notions of sainthood and virtue).

In another instance, Jimmy is preaching a meeting in Ferriday. He spends a night in the newly purchased home of Jerry Lee's parents. Aunt Mamie (Jerry Lee's mother) tells Jimmy that his cousin has just negotiated a new contract that guarantees him twenty-five hundred dollars per performance. Swaggart fuses the notions of martyrdom and
virtuous labor in short order. Although he cannot feel the "Spirit" at this moment, he tells God that he will continue to preach—"if I have to patch my suits and put pasteboard in my shoes. I'm going to serve you" (99). The term "serve," the code for martyrdom/virtue, is advanced along with the para-signals of a poor working man's costume—patched suits and pasteboard shoe soles. These last images also invoke a 30's Depression discourse, gaining Swaggart double empathy.

Even as he implies an increased popularity in the late 70's and 80's (evidenced in To Cross A River by details of burgeoning crowds), Swaggart still carefully depicts himself as the virtuous hard worker. He makes statements such as the following: "Crisscrossing the southeastern states, we sensed the Lord was bringing revival. I never went the route some evangelists take—big cars, flashy clothes" (126). The active gerund "crisscrossing" conjures a quick-pace image of work. Swaggart ties this to his renunciation of cars and clothes (ostensibly rejecting emblems of the American dream) and thereby frames himself outside a world system of negotiation and greed (the sign of the virtuous monastic).

Swaggart has continued to cast himself as the poor hard-working preacher. He insists, for example (as of the summer of 1991) that his home is nothing more than a "two-bedroom cottage" (a a sign of the working class), ignoring
the fact that it encompasses 10,000 square feet and is set on some of the most expensive property in residential Baton Rouge (valued at 1.8 million dollars). Behind such statements is Swaggart's recognition that he must "advertise" himself as the (virtuous) hard worker, that is, if he is to continue to participate in a myth of self-made heroism.

**Trope 5: The Rewards of Labor.** Signs of success also offer strong validation (to both religious and secular camps) of Swaggart's hero status. *To Cross A River* ironically promotes this essential myth message without negating prior signals of Swaggart's repudiation of "worldly goods." For instance Swaggart provides subtle, cues, noted in the comment that by the late 1970's "[Swaggart's] meetings were consistently running four to six weeks now, something unheard of within the Assemblies of God" (169). However, Swaggart downplays the financial gain that would obviously follow such popularity by emphasizing the requisite work involved. Swaggart recreates another scenario from the late 70's. The scene encodes "activity" as the signifier of successful American business. Swaggart states, "I . . . wandered out of my office and into our main business room. People were scurrying everywhere, typewriters clattering, phones ringing" (240). Swaggart mentions no dollar figures--only a display of symbols that activates an almost cartoon image
of typewriters clattering and people scurrying—thus rendering the whole scene as ingenuous as a childhood game (where, incidentally, only play money is ever used).

Other success signals are evident: the Goya Street building "the size of two football fields" (231), the radio program on 550 stations (late 70's) (231), the beginning of the mega-crusades (242), and the privately owned DC-3 (242). Swaggart employs such messages in his autobiography to romanticize success without admitting the "dirtier" aspects of its dollar-value underpinnings. Swaggart's affinity for romanticizing (mythologizing) success informs one of the book's concluding quotes. From a poem given to Swaggart by fellow minister A. N. Trotter, the passage promotes true success in terms of a Bunyan-esque pilgrimage:

I can see far down the mountain  
Where I've wandered many years  
Often hindered on my journey  
By the ghosts of doubts and fears.

Broken vows and disappointments  
Thickly strewn along the way  
But the Spirit has led unerring  
To the land I hold today. (243)

Heavily encrusted with Biblical symbol, this passage conflates the notions of landholding (wealth) and its location at the pinnacle of a mountain (religious encoding for other-worldly hope) to propagote Swaggart's whitewashed version of success.

Thus Swaggart's autobiography suggests to his American constituency that (as a self-made hero) his labors have
been rewarded. He provides certain indications of his popularity and wealth while minimizing actual dollar figures. Symbols of success establish that he has achieved the American dream of personal wealth and status; but these ideas are conveyed in romanticized religious terms. Thus Swaggart becomes a newer (though not unacceptable) version of the individualist hero. American society thus accepts Swaggart (at least before his confessions to immorality) as the (hard-working/virtuous) self-made minister.

**Trope 6: The Hero's Journey.** Postlewait's investigation into the conceptual structures of historiography uncovers a predisposition in Western ideology, one that promotes ideas of change and revolution. He writes, "The word [revolution] is as pervasive in our discourse and thinking" as it was in the older Hegelian concepts of "progress" and "evolution." Particularly within the American system, "revolution" becomes a basic conceptual mode—from throwing off British rule to a renovation of the self, which is one of revolution's many twentieth century (connotative) manifestations. Postlewait's sense of "revolution" is thus teleological and mirrors the American idea of change, predicking a progress toward. The hero's journey in American lore thus becomes a prioritized facet of the hero myth because it re-invokes and replays the magnetic idea of revolution.
The journey of the American hero is therefore never merely spatial; it must also convey an idea of progress (either in terms of knowledge or of material gain). The Swaggart journey satisfies such a teleology of purpose through several variations: the journey from childhood to manhood, from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to fame, from ignorance to wisdom, from Ferriday to Baton Rouge to the world (spatial line), and finally from earth to "glory" (important in religious framing). The journey of the panchural hero (as discussed in Chapter One) helps delineate the larger outline of Swaggart's journey sequence. To reiterate, this model evidences a causal chain of events. From an "initial situation," the hero leaves home, prompted by either the "violation of an interdiction" or "obedience to an injunction," thus triggering a misfortune of some kind. The hero ventures into a foreign region (often of "supernatural wonder"); there he may encounter "fabulous forces" or a villain who "deceives him in order to cause him harm." The hero defeats the villain, often aided by the supernatural, and returns home to marry or to "bestow boons on his fellow man." In To Cross A River, Swaggart follows the above model with astonishing fidelity, especially in his use of supernatural agency.

The "initial situation" is conveyed in descriptions of Swaggart's common ancestry, his parents becoming Christians, and his routine of church going (9-20).
picture is idyllic and static. Swaggart relates, "Our home was happy and peaceful. I couldn't have been happier" (20). Swaggart is eight years old, and at this point, he experiences an epiphany. Standing in line at the movies one Saturday afternoon, Swaggart suddenly hears a supernatural voice that mandates, "Do not go in this place. Give your heart to me. I have chosen you a vessel to be used in my service" (21). Swaggart describes his reaction: "'I will, I'll do what you said,' I responded to the voice which I knew belonged to the Lord. 'I'll accept you' " (22). Although Swaggart does not physically leave Ferriday for another decade, his avowal of the voice's authority (along with his decision to quit the movie line) stands as a pivotal moment—the beginning of Swaggart's (virtual/symbolic) journey. The moment is also metaphorical, initiating a discourse that sets entertainment (worldly pleasure typified by Jerry Lee) against a religious life (Swaggart's "surrender to the call to preach"). In leaving the movie line, Swaggart signals his "obedience to an injunction," a turn that inaugurates a series of "misfortunes," all having to do with a martyr-like acceptance of near poverty (as discussed above in the poor-Jimmy/rich-Jerry-Lee dichotomy).

From this time on, Swaggart enters a "region of supernatural wonder," exemplified by numerous conversations with Deity (43, 99, 159, 166, 174, 182,
etc.). By 1953, Swaggart's preaching ministry leads him literally to leave home to explore foreign (non-Ferriday) "regions." At this point, Swaggart relates a series of demonic encounters in which Satan attempts to thwart his enterprise (54, 80, 92, 166). These encounters will be discussed as obstacles (Trope 7); but in this instance, they reveal Swaggart's duplication of the Campbell/Propp model and the hero's villainous assault.

Ultimately, the book presents Satan as defeated, having been silenced through supernatural means (the quoting of scripture, for example); and Swaggart portrays his final state (as of 1984) as one of triumph. Structurally then, Swaggart's narrative is a progress toward, an exigency, one recalls, if America is to read the hero tale as valid. The autobiography ends as Swaggart establishes a home base in Baton Rouge (the metaphorical home coming of the Campbell/Propp model). Evidencing Swaggart's (mythic) final state, the "bestowing boons" figure emerges as Swaggart extends his ostensible philanthropic courtesies to his world, typified by his free crusade performances. [Swaggart's present position in American culture is problematical because the myth has proven false (or is not reflective of Swaggart's true situation). The American public now understands (in the wake of his 1988 and 1991 confessions) that Swaggart's final state is not one of triumph over the villain (Satan).
In other words, the Swaggart myth was, after all, merely fiction—a construct. America, not willing to reevaluate/renovate the structure of the hero myth (which has pervasive sanction) therefore feels betrayed by Swaggart's use of it as "true."}

**Trope 7: Obstacles To Success.** Overcoming barriers on the way to success is dear to American thinking. From Lincoln's catalog of failures/hindrances in his journey to the White House to Ragged Dick's recurrent struggles to stay honest, the obstacle theme represents the hero's essential trial by fire. Echoing American antecedents (but especially following Campbell/Propp) Swaggart's use of obstacle chiefly involves the demonic supernatural. Three types of hindrance impede Swaggart's path (all Satanically influenced): signals from Jerry Lee, life-and-death battles, and actual Satanic visitations.

*To Cross A River* continually recounts Jerry Lee's attempts to draw Swaggart away from a religious life. An early example implies that Jerry Lee led Swaggart to rob local stores (46). Another instance from that period witnesses a talent show in which the same (demonic) "force" that grips Jerry Lee in performance also charges through Jimmy's body (53). Other sign/messages issue from Jerry Lee's direction. Swaggart as a poor swamper hears Jerry Lee's first hit "Crazy Arms" on a cafe juke box. During a meeting in which his offering totals $2.50, Swaggart
receives word that Jerry Lee has just signed a contract for $2500.00 per show. Traveling to meetings throughout America (by means of a worn travel trailer), Swaggart stops overnight at Jerry Lee's house, which is described as "an interior decorator's dream" (155). The lure away from religion (thus an obstacle to ministry) is evident in each of these scenarios.

Life-and-death battles constitute a discourse that Swaggart labels "demonic oppression" (172). Typically in these battles, the "devil" attempts to kill Swaggart or do irreparable damage to his ministry; through supernatural intervention, however, he is saved. Swaggart describes an incident in the early 60's in which God speaks to him while driving to a revival meeting, telling him that the "devil is going to attempt to kill you today" (166). Swaggart states, "It was like somebody had slapped me in the face. I was stunned" (166). But God intervenes, telling Swaggart to "claim divine protection" like Job. Swaggart does so and barely escapes a fatal accident (166). In another instance, Swaggart's call to the Almighty prevents him from drowning in a West Virginia flood (193). A third occurrence involves mail fraud, where thousands of pieces of mail (containing donations and record orders) were being consistently stolen. Swaggart prays and God corrects the situation. However, Swaggart adds, "But it [stolen mail] was a stern warning that the deeper we went with God, the
more severe the attacks of Satan would be" (227). Again, Swaggart depicts Satan as the great adversary, manipulating forms of oppression.

A final type of obstacle entails Satanic visitations (two are recounted in the book). Swaggart describes these lurid scenes in detail. The basic sequence of the scenario is the same in both: Swaggart is debilitated in some aspect, Satan uses this "down" moment to terrorize him, but by invoking the power of Deity Swaggart banishes the demonic visitor. The first visitation occurs before Swaggart begins his ministry proper. Struck by the realization of his imperfections, he falls into depression. In a moment of self-analysis Swaggart states, "I wanted to have a calm temperament, but I was fiery and explosive. I was constantly having to ask forgiveness for something I had done heatedly. How could somebody like me preach to thousands when I couldn't control my temper?" (79) One early morning "just before dawn" Swaggart lies half awake, half dreaming in his travel trailer. Suddenly he finds himself "in an old house with high ceilings," a place Swaggart realizes is "evil." He recounts the following: "Suddenly the door swung open and a hideous-looking beast stood towering over me. He had the body of a bear and face of a man . . . The beast was the picture of evil . . . I was helpless . . . The beast looked at me piercingly, as if to say, 'I have you now. This is the end for you.' He
slowly advanced toward me" (80). Swaggart searches for a
weapon, but when the "beast" is within reach of "an arm's
length," Swaggart instinctively intones, "In the name of
Jesus" (80). The demonic creature recoils, clutches his
head, screams, and staggers backward. Swaggart repeats the
injunction, "In the name of Jesus," and the beast is "swept
out the door" (81). Swaggart is miraculously released from
his self-condemnation, but issues himself a warning: "I
knew I would have to master these lessons--for they could
mean the difference between life and death" (81). Such a
statement underscores a motif of spiritual warfare,
furthering Swaggart's self-regard as a warrior engaged in a
life struggle.

A second Satanic visitation occurs in 1958 during
Swaggart's first revival meeting in Sterlington, Louisiana.
He relates, "On the fourth night I became deathly sick with
pneumonia" and had to be taken to the hospital. Eventually
Swaggart returns home, but the pneumonia grows worse.
During this period, Swaggart falls into depression,
consumed by thoughts of Jerry Lee's success in rock-and-
roll. Swaggart recounts lying in bed on a particular
evening after Frances and Donnie had gone to a prayer
meeting: "All of a sudden it seemed the room was sinking,
as if it were an elevator going down a shaft, down, down"
(92). "Oppressive forces of hell" call out to
Swaggart: " 'Look at you,' the voices said, 'if your God is
so great, why doesn't He heal you? . . . You don't have enough money to pay your hospital bill . . . . Look at Jerry Lee . . . He used to be a preacher but he's gotten smart" (93). Swaggart reaches for the Bible which miraculously falls open to Joshua 1:9. This scripture reads, "Have not I [God] commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid . . . for the LORD thy God is with thee withersoever thou goest" (93). At this moment, Swaggart relates, "God's healing power surged through my body. It was like fire in my veins" (93). Again, as warrior, Swaggart "wins," reiterating his engagement with the paradigmatic villain/obstacle of the hero myth.

The presence and use of this trope (perhaps more than any other) secures Swaggart's place among self-made American heroes. The image of the American battling his way toward his goal is prized in cultural thought. American genius, after all, is only a blend of "pluck" and fighting persistence, an idea cemented forever in Thomas Edison's statement that genius is "two percent inspiration and ninety-eight percent perspiration." Thus Swaggart, fighting both the the lure of "worldly" fame and the attacks of Satan, is easily positioned within a discourse of self-made heroism.

All seven tropes essential to the self-made hero are clearly at work in Swaggart's autobiography. Emphasizing his common roots (Trope 1) through numerous flashbacks of
his impoverished youth, Swaggart sets the stage of his heroism. He bills himself as anti-intellectual (Trope 2), highlighting his self-taught musical abilities and his preaching talents, which were honed, not in a university classroom, but in a swamp. Swaggart portrays himself as a hard worker (Trope 3) who valorizes hard work as a virtue (Trope 4), showcasing himself as the poor-but-honest preacher. Swaggart also manages to present himself as successful (Trope 5) without destroying notions of his self-denial (a mandated aspect of the cleric/minister persona). An extremely persuasive aspect of Swaggart's self-made heroism is his multi-leveled journey (Trope 6), which takes Swaggart from Ferriday to Baton Rouge, from obscurity to world fame, from rags to riches, from earth to "glory," etc. Finally, Swaggart's position is secured within cultural myth by portrayal as the American fighting man, overcoming obstacles (Trope 7) on his way to success.

II. Rhetorical Devices in the Swaggart Narrative

Barthes asserts that myth is constructed of language. In order to affirm its fundamental values, ideologies, etc., culture creates its myths out of the raw materials of language. Barthes shows how myth is actually founded on rhetoric, and pinpoints several rhetoric-based figures that culture uses in its myth making. This study will focus on three rhetorical devices (symbol, stereotyping, and
metaphor) that issue from Barthes' model, revealing how Swaggart employs such devices for the confirmation of his own participation in the hero myth.

To gain understanding of the rhetorical devices used in *To Cross A River*, however, an examination of Swaggart's narrative style is helpful. An exploration of style reveals how Swaggart appeals to a working class, evangelical readership (with the presupposition that this faction will buy the greatest number of books). Stylistic considerations also mandate an investigation of the trigger images and catch-words that confirm (in religious terms) Swaggart's credibility to an evangelical audience.

Probably the most obvious feature of Swaggart's narrative is its absence of linguistic complexity. Foregoing quotations, for example, reveal simple syntax and word choice. Simple language automatically presupposes an essentially unschooled audience (or at least one that sanctions such writing as acceptable). Swaggart targets an audience that duplicates his own educational level and which is thus most likely to idealize lack of schooling (as valid myth). There are usage errors. In recounting a vivid sermon Swaggart states, "I exhorted the story of the woman who, etc." (196), missing altogether the meaning of "exhort" (to urge, advise, or caution). However, "exhort" as a rather high sounding Biblical term attests to Swaggart's supposed verbal facility, thus making him seem
sage through self-training. The artless repetition of words, as in the double reiteration of "constantly" within the space of three short sentences (12), reveals a lack of creativity. But it also raises the comfort level of an unschooled reader.

Stylistically, Swaggart's narrative also plays on a number of sentimentally charged "trigger" images. The sign/code of "light," for example, which becomes polyvalent through a range of signals (bright, sun, sunlight, day) is ubiquitously offered as a signifier of hope/goodness/warmth/salvation/love, etc. Confirming Bert O. States' observation that a sign can become "vacant" through overuse,13 Swaggart's deployment of a "light" discourse represents that kind of empty, all-purpose signal indigenous to romance novels (or poorly written religious poetry). It releases the reader from the rigors of thought. Swaggart describes a childhood interlude in Texas as follows: "Bright sunshine filled each day and the scent of citrus blossoms was constantly in the air" (15). Here, light equates with happiness. After Swaggart's epiphany at the movie theatre, he skips down the street singing, "I've got a home in glory land that outshines the sun." The conflation of "glory land" and "sun" contrasts to the darkness of the movie theatre from which Swaggart has just fled, thus dichotomizing the dark theatre (as a symbol of sinful pleasure) to the light of the outdoors (encoded as
"natural" and therefore "good"). Other subtle "light" cues abound. One recalls, for instance, how Swaggart uses sunlight to define the goodness of the common man: Fred Davidson's lined face, "tanned by many hours of pumping gas in the bright sun" (131). Or the moment in which Swaggart receives the gift of speaking in tongues: "I became aware of what seemed to be a brilliant shaft of light descending from heaven and focusing on me" (33,34). Swaggart's ability at manipulating trigger images is also revealed in the call letters of his Baton Rouge gospel radio station WLUX, lux being the Latin term for light. Swaggart's concluding poem finalizes light as a guiding melodramatic code: "But the Spirit has led unerring/To the land I hold today" (243). The poem leaves the residual idea that Swaggart will now exist in a perpetual day (light), free from the oppressive forces of darkness.

Swaggart is also adept at using catch-words/phrases to gain a hearing from his evangelical reader. For example, such sentimental catch-words as "surrender" (18), "the things of this world" (71), "the things of God" (76), and "live for the Lord" (88) provide evidence that Swaggart is a true "man of God" (an appraisal predicated on his conversance with religiously coded language). Through his stylistics Swaggart makes his evangelical audience feel comfortable. Through a clever use of elementary language, trigger images, and catch-phrases, Swaggart's narrative
validates itself before evangelicals as religiously "correct."

Swaggart also reinforces his participation in the hero myth through rhetorical device. Because myth is constructed from language, as Barthes shows, it is necessary to see how language (device) advances Swaggart's position within a heroic myth discourse. This study will therefore examine how myth messages, through the use of symbol, stereotyping, and metaphor, can reinforce Swaggart's heroism.

Swaggart's use of symbol appears most notably in connection to his cousin Jerry Lee. Swaggart depicts Jerry Lee as symbolic of "the other" or "the world" (reflecting Barthes' discussion of "Identification," where "the familiar" is validated by juxtaposing it to "the other"). Jerry Lee is Swaggart's "other," symbolic of easy fame, functioning as a constant (glamorous) lure from the rigid path of ministry Swaggart has chosen. Jerry Lee's presence in instrumental in this autobiography, so much so that he virtually becomes Swaggart's alter ego. Jerry Lee also embodies the warfare in Swaggart's own nature, seen in Swaggart's constant attempt to reaffirm that he has chosen the "right" path.

Swaggart's mother Minnie Bell and his wife Frances are also positioned as symbolic. In paying tribute to his mother and wife, Swaggart glorifies them, rendering them

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bloodless icons of idealized womanhood. He describes a scene in which his mother pushes "a steaming iron over a green print dress" (23). There is the moment she acts as Jerry Lee's confessor (122). Swaggart sums up his mother's life in this way: "In my first few years of preaching, she was a source of constant inspiration and strength. People loved her for the soft, tender way . . . Mama used that same touch on me . . . . It was the same strength and energy she imparted to daddy . . . she would be right there with her amen, encouraging him with all her heart" (129).

In Swaggart's depiction, Minnie Bell becomes a monolithic ideal. Frances is also elevated as an emblem of womanly virtue. In a number of discouraging situations, Frances is drawn as the super-wife--affirming her husband's desire to preach on a street corner (74), suggesting that they pray for transportation (76), seeing Swaggart through a debilitating sinus condition (34), defending son Donnie against a vicious school teacher (163). Rather than showing Frances in her day to day complexities, Swaggart has created a symbol for his myth-seeking audience.

Barthes' analysis (see "Quantification of Quality") illustrates Swaggart's symbolic treatment of his wife and mother. For Barthes, symbols become a kind of uncomplicated short-hand, providing the myth "reader" with easily identifiable "types." As symbolic types, the characters of Minnie Bell and Frances lose depth, causing
them ultimately, through their one-dimensionality, to represent non-presences. Swaggart's own persona consequently emerges as the most complex (and therefore the most interesting/dynamic) in the book. Masterful use of symbols thus places Swaggart at the center of his text's focus and aids in certifying his dynamic self-made persona.

Stereotyping also serves to strengthen Swaggart's heroism. The stereotype, as discussed in Barthes' theory of "Identification," validates the "familiar" by juxtaposing it to "the other." But the stereotype, in Swaggart's autobiography, also serves another function; it gives the reader a formula character (usually villainous) at which he/she can figuratively hiss. Swaggart thus provides a bit of "fun" for his readers, offering "types" straight out of the film noir. One example of Swaggart's use of a movie stereotype is witnessed during a meeting in which Frances defends Donnie's grades to an unfeeling teacher (162-164). Swaggart paints the teacher as the stereotypical wicked nemesis of juvenile fables. She is described as "matronly," a strong initial sign that opposes youth (presupposing curiosity, spontaneity, or joy). When Frances questions her about Donnie's failing grades (which Frances contends are incorrect), the teacher, according to Swaggart, "snaps" at Frances. Then Swaggart assigns the teacher a "strong, defensive attitude." To Frances' questions she gives "nervous" responses while "adjusting
her glasses." Thus the text replays the well-worn (but "fun") character of the evil teacher/governess who takes out her inner misery on her pupils.

In another instance, *To Cross A River* creates a court hearing in which a Baton Rouge businessman who opposes Swaggart's purchase of WLUX is described as "tall, boisterous, and constantly cursing" (220). In this man's desire to make "WLUX the number one rock music station in Baton Rouge," Swaggart can only perceive him as anti-religion, unprincipled, therefore uncouth (loud). A radio executive present in the hearing is also cast in opposition to Swaggart. "I noticed the radio executive squirming in his seat," Swaggart relates as the proceedings begin to turn in his favor. "He tugged at his shirt collar. Sweat appeared on his forehead" (222). Swaggart's depiction reproduces the pure caricature of a typical Hollywood bad-guy as he sweats and squirms, caught, as is the matronly teacher, in his own dishonest game.

Thus, stereotyping turns all those who oppose Swaggart into "the other" (the "bad guy") by denying these characters any complexity of thought or action. Indeed, throughout his book, Swaggart never accepts that a character can be anything but all good or all bad, certainly never any combination of the two. Following Jerry Lee's rise to stardom, Swaggart details an encounter in Jerry Lee's living room where he meets "a tall, swarthy man dressed in
a flashy azure blue suit" with "a hefty diamond on his pinky" (154). Identifying this individual as a Las Vegas club owner, Swaggart purportedly remembers the man's comments (although a space of twenty years separates the actual incident and the retelling). The club owner speaks in typical underworld lingo, "Some of these cats [rich patrons] think nothing of dropping several grand a night playing blackjack or roulette. It's peanuts to them . . . they're making so much dough" (154). Caricature is evidenced in film noir catch-words: "cats," "grand," "peanuts," and "dough." Swarthiness (dark skin) is an automatic signal of "the other," a negation of "whiteness" (predicating a white American hegemony). This image, coupled with the azure suit and pinky ring, replays the stereotypical underworld pimp.

In creating stereotypes, the text seems preoccupied with film-generated, underworld images. One recalls, for example, that in Pa's grocery (53), Swaggart perceives the Natchez club owner as a film gangster. Swaggart relates, "Something about this overbearing man with the slicked-down brown hair bothered me" (55). Swaggart desires to re-invent this character as "the other," implicated in gangsterhood. The requisite slick (dark) hair of the typical 40's movie gangster comes to mind. Swaggart deals in myth images which make his narrative easily assimilated through the framework of movie melodrama. With all
oppositional forces/characters consigned to a discourse of "otherness" or "badness," Swaggart whitewashes his own image. Thus, the reader assumes Swaggart to be virtuous (through his implied repudiation of these bad-guy stereotypes). In this way, Swaggart is able to fortify notions of his (virtuous) self-made heroism.

Metaphor is also essential to Swaggart's rhetorical enterprise. Although the text utilizes several metaphors, the central metaphor of the piano (as a vehicle to stardom) merits extended analysis. Both Swaggart and Jerry Lee are intensively involved with music (and with the piano as its agent). Swaggart's ambivalence toward Jerry Lee is crystallized in his sense of the piano's function (for Jerry Lee a tool for Satan, for Swaggart a tool for God). But Swaggart's reasoning is caught in a conundrum. His piano style duplicates Jerry Lee's; Swaggart is drawn to the boogie-woogie, though his Christian lyrics give the music Christian sanction. Swaggart provides ample evidence that the same musical style that makes Jerry Lee a rock-and-roll icon, also makes Swaggart a "star" performer on the Assembly of God circuit. One remembers, for example, Pastor Vibbert's praise of Swaggart's life-bringing music (151). Ironically, Swaggart lionizes Jerry Lee by glorifying the musical art (of which he and his cousin are both part). For instance, Swaggart relates the story of "an elderly black man in town everybody called Old Sam"
The two young cousins sit for hours studying Old Sam's left-hand piano technique, called the "walking left hand." When Swaggart and Jerry Lee take this rhythmic style to church, the pastor is offended. But, as Swaggart notes, "The people always loved it" (52). In a discourse of popular approval, Swaggart is seen at times (almost willingly) to fuse his persona with Jerry Lee's, the piano becoming a sign of that fusion.

The piano metaphor, however, is intrinsic to the ideological struggle which pulls Swaggart and Jerry in opposite directions. This struggle is typified both in a piano's theatricality and its use within religious services. Swaggart intimates such a dichotomy in an early reminiscence:

Jerry Lee and I both began to develop our left hands to play somewhat as Old Sam did. We were together every day and playing the piano most of the time. In fact, the keys on Jerry's piano ultimately wore down to the wood and turned swayback like an old, worn-out mule. My upright piano wasn't worn that much even though he and I were constantly playing it. I played the bass and Jerry Lee would do the treble at the same time. For a little added spice, we crossed our hands in the middle. (52)

This fusion of personae scripts itself as the piano duet of "blood brothers." One needs the other, playing bass and treble. Hands cross "in the middle." Yet, even in the cousins' unique bond, Swaggart can discern the future divergence in the kinds of success they will experience. In essence, the piano provides an organizing metaphor.
Swaggart notes that Jerry Lee's piano wore to the wood, reflecting excessive force (violence) of Jerry Lee's playing. On the other hand, Swaggart's piano (upright in aspect) is not worn, although Swaggart declares that it was being constantly played. Jerry Lee's forceful (crazed) use of this early piano predicates his continued violent use of it in the theatre (a realm which sanctions high-energy, irrational behavior). This idea is reinforced by Jerry Lee's first recorded song entitled "Crazy Arms," followed by the (violent) "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin On" (87, 88). The "uprightness" of Swaggart's piano portends its eventual utilitarian use in "winning souls." Swaggart continues this binary discourse in a description of an early 60's visit to his cousin's house. He states, "The concert grand piano was white and tastefully blended with the snow white shag carpet" (155). This image of a decorative piano (smacking of artificiality) contrasts to the somber Steinway (purely utilitarian) that Swaggart plays in his first Memphis recording session (145). Thus the tension between artifice and utility is extended through a dialectic of theatre/religion, wherein the ubiquitous piano becomes the metaphor (and locus) of ideological struggle.

In summary, Swaggart's autobiography To Cross A River, which involves Swaggart in a myth discourse, actually employs a conceptual matrix that is well entrenched in the
cultural mind. This matrix (constituted of the seven tropes defining self-made heroism) informs Swaggart's narrative, thereby positioning the author as a credible version of the self-made hero. Swaggart concerns himself with two readership factions: the evangelical camp and the secular community. To insure a wide evangelical readership, Swaggart employs not only an elementary style that makes his narrative easy to read, but also various trigger images and catch-phrases which certify that Swaggart is religiously "correct." The text uses several rhetorical devices (which do the work of reinforcing myth messages) to validate Swaggart's self-made heroism to American (secular) culture at large. Thus Swaggart's autobiography To Cross A River becomes a viable duplication of the self-made hero narrative, enabling Swaggart to define himself as simply an up-dated version of the mythic hero. How Swaggart's two confessions (in 1988 and 1991) affect his involvement in myth is indeed food for thought; but such an investigation (explored in Chapter Five) must take into account the degree to which Swaggart initially managed (especially through his autobiography) to establish himself within a discourse of heroism.
NOTES: CHAPTER TWO


2 Postlewait 176.

3 Postlewait 177.

4 Jimmy Swaggart, *To Cross A River* (Baton Rouge: Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 1984). All subsequent references to this work are notated within the body of the text.


7 Woodward 8.


9 Cawelti 307.

10 Cawelti 310-312.


12 Postlewait 175.

CHAPTER III

SWAGGART AS 'TEXT':

READERSHIP OF RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Jimmy Swaggart's autobiography *To Cross A River* involves the author in a myth discourse by manipulating the tropes defining self-made-ness, thus signifying to America Swaggart's own self-made heroism; the book clearly replays the "story" of the individualist hero. Our investigation now turns to how exactly Swaggart's participation in myth is received (or "read") within American culture. This chapter will therefore explore Swaggart's further use of signs in promoting his own self-made-ness and how those signs are read/interpreted by both secular and evangelical factions. We will see how each of these factions embraces/co-opts Swaggart as a self-made hero (albeit for divergent reasons), and by so doing, confirms aspects of its own particular belief systems.

The work of Michel Foucault, in his identification of the human body as a locus of power relations/struggle, provides a unique analytical lens through which one can view Swaggart's reception by both evangelical and secular communities. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault establishes how, in any given episteme (specific social context), the body becomes "directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it,
torture it; force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.¹ Foucault sees that "the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body."² Foucault echoes Postlewait's idea that no cultural "text" [here, the human subject itself] can have meaning unless it is interpreted within the context of its social codes. In Foucault, the subject/body "speaks" what the culture is about. Thus the subject/body, through its performance of ceremonies and "signs," defines the nature of its parent culture. For Foucault, the body becomes "useful" because it affirms the power of the dominant class/culture by demonstrating its own subjugation. What erupts from this double application of subjugation and productivity is knowledge—knowledge of the subject/body as it operates in and reflects social structures. Thus the Foucauldian body becomes eminently political, a tabula rasa for the inscription of social power within the context of any given episteme.

The spectacle of Swaggart's body/persona as a high-profile icon in American culture is reflective of Foucault's system. Given our foregoing investigation of myth as self-definition, one recognizes how Swaggart has become "politicized" as he participates in socially-generated myth. In brief, while Swaggart "uses" myth messages to popularize himself, America also "uses" Swaggart, for better or worse, to reaffirm its own
mythology. In Foucault's terms, as Swaggart furthers his media image, he has been "forced" to "emit signs" that reinforce the power of dominant institutions and ideologies.

This, in a general sense, is the nature of Swaggart's sanctioning by American culture. As Kenneth Burke would say, Swaggart as a "social symbol" has become "a kind of 'spiritual currency'--and a group of 'bankers' [dominant class]" manipulate this "medium of exchange to their special benefit." In this hegemonic relationship, the Swaggart myth/body (until 1988) flourished. What actually appears is a "consensual hegemony" (Gramsci's term) wherein we find a social symbiosis: culture co-opts Swaggart just as Swaggart co-opts culture. Swaggart, as the Foucauldian "subjugated" (culturally-encoded) body, is rendered "productive," a mechanism of myth's reaffirmation. Given these premises, a discussion of audience reception results, predicated on the fact that any co-optative process promotes a certain (necessarily biased) way of seeing/reading. "Readership" involves "filters," conceptual grids that lead the reader (like the myth-maker) to reestablish only what is believed to be correct, true, valuable. Thus (echoing Foucault) readership becomes political, allowing "in" only those signals which mirror a culture's belief systems. Alternative discourse is suppressed as the culture's dominant ideology is affirmed.
Two audience types become predicated in establishing the nature of Swaggart's co-optation: the evangelical faction and the secular community. The unrivalled popularity Swaggart experienced as a televangelist until his first confession in 1988 results from the sanctioning process of both factions (foregrounded by the mythos of self-made-ness). But once the myth of the self-made hero is in place, readership branches into two interpretive camps. Evangelicals "read" Swaggart as a spiritual/mystic hero (perceived alternatively as the Christological High Priest and/or Righteous Judge). Secular factions, typified by the American media, see Swaggart's self-made hero as theatre (engendering a discourse of liminality/madness).

I. Evangelical Readership

The Arbitron television rating system reports that in February, 1980, the Swaggart broadcast was seen in 1,986,000 households. By July, 1983, that figure had doubled. Just prior to the 1988 scandal in which Swaggart was photographed with a prostitute, Arbitron ratings reveal Swaggart's one-hour program was seen in 2.1 million households, ranking it first among religious programming. The 1983 WBRZ [Baton Rouge] documentary "Give Me That Big Time Religion" comments that during this time contributions poured into the Jimmy Swaggart Ministries "at the rate of more than one million dollars a week."
1986, revenues had leapt to an approximated 140 million dollars a year. Before 1988, Swaggart filled the nation's largest coliseums and arenas, averaging one three-day crusade each month, commanding capacity crowds of up to 30,000.

Such figures underscore the unmixed veneration Swaggart experienced from religious audiences (primarily evangelical) before his two catastrophic confessions. The question emerges: what exactly did religious factions "read" into the Swaggart persona? In initiating an examination of evangelical readership, one notes that the American myth of self-made-ness is also replicated in another heroic "story," that of Christ the Supreme Self-Made Hero. The Christological narrative matches the American hero myth trope for trope. Christ's (earthly) common origins, His inborn wisdom, His virtuous labor as the Divine Servant, His journey from Nazareth to Paradise marked by a series of obstacles (the most important being His crucifixion), and His ultimate "success" as the resurrected Savior confirm the myth pattern. The life of Christ becomes for the evangelical (indeed for all Christians) the model life, a pattern for organizing daily existence. Thus the myth of self-made-ness appeals to the evangelical world on two counts, as reflective of both the American hero and Christ. As Swaggart's media stardom rose in the early 80's, the evangelical world began to assess
Swaggart, not only in terms of purely American heroism, but also in terms of Christian heroism. In short, by valorizing Swaggart as a current version of the Christological Hero, evangelicals reinforced their own self-definitions (which are engendered by the Heroic-Christ model).

Two dynamic images/personae present themselves as basic to Christian ideology: Christ as High Priest and Christ as Judge. The conflation of the body of Christ and the body of Swaggart invites useful speculation. With his high profile grassroots/hard work beginnings, Swaggart becomes easily attached to the hard work/penitential ethic of priesthood. But Swaggart, as a "star" Christian, gains status as a priest of singular importance in the evangelical mind. Thus (for evangelicals) a discourse of High-Priestliness arises as Swaggart vaults into media consciousness.

The second aspect of the Christ-Hero persona (Christ as Judge) offers the evangelical world another image by which it can define Swaggart. By the mid-80's, Swaggart had already instigated an aggressive homiletics that took to task "humanistic" interest groups, as well as many members of his own sect. Swaggart thus managed to align himself with the Christological model, not only as a functional high priest, but also as a moral judge. The overwhelming number of his followers sanctioned Swaggart's
moral judgeship, raising him symbolically (in the evangelical mind) to high court status, making him Christ's heir-apparent.

An investigation of how Swaggart assumes the persona of high priest invokes the Judeo-Christian tradition of the Pentateuchal high priest, who officiates over the sacred sacrifices that expiate the sins of the community. Thus the high priest functions as a chosen mediator between God and man. Christ becomes in Christian lore a divine replica of the Pentateuchal high priest, establishing himself not only as the sacrifice, but also as the supreme mediator in Paradise.

The evangelical world easily reads Swaggart as a mediatory figure, standing half way between man and God. And Swaggart, finding himself enrolled in such a discourse, propagates signals which extenuate High Priestly drama. To reiterate, the Christological model replicates the persona of the self-made hero, allowing Swaggart to participate in this double role play. Thus Swaggart effectively taps into the three ritual/symbolic enactments circumscribing Christ's (heroic) journey: renunciation of the world (typified in a vow of poverty), act of sacrifice/martyrdom, and assumption of mediator/intercessor role in heaven.

Swaggart involves himself in a priestly discourse first by emphasizing signals that indicate his "vow of poverty." Having begun his life in real poverty, and

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having renounced the easy stardom of Jerry Lee, Swaggart's myth-making agenda refuses to let him relinquish his "poverty" monologue. A prime example of Swaggart's poverty script is seen in John Camp's 1983 documentary "Give Me That Big Time Religion." Camp interviews Swaggart and asks about his yearly salary. Swaggart states, "It's around 30,000, but that's not quite correct." Camp replies, "I was told $5,700 a month [$68,400 per year]." Swaggart ostensibly clears up the matter by noting that he does indeed receive $5,700 a month, but that he "turns around and gives $30,000 back to the ministry" as repayment for a loan made off ministry funds. (One notes that Swaggart does not willingly volunteer the larger figure.) Swaggart then offers an explanatory (confusing) hedge, stating he gets a "parsonage allowance" [no actual dollar amount stated]. Again, Swaggart uses Rockwellean images (ie., "parsonage") to conjure a sense of the American heartland, dispensing signals that suggest his continued simple lifestyle. What Swaggart does not say is that, just prior to the production of this video, he had purchased twenty-eight acres of choice Baton Rouge property for a cost of $400,000. On this site he would build two private homes (for himself and his son Donnie), with a total value at the time of this writing of $1.8 million. During the Jim Bakker scandal in 1987, Swaggart refers to his new house as a "two-bedroom cottage," again creating an
illusory "vow of poverty," completely side-stepping the issue that this house encompasses 10,000 square footage.\textsuperscript{11}

Swaggart also enacts an on-going scenario of martyrdom (entailing the concept of victimization). That his evangelical audience perceived him within such a frame (before 1988) is evident. This is witnessed in the "Letters From Our Viewers," a section devoted to audience response in Swaggart's ministry magazine \textit{The Evangelist}. In the May 1984 issue, for example, the following response comes from a writer in New Jersey [the column only provides the state from which the letter originates]:

Dear Brother Swaggart: I find great joy in the burden you have for helping the Catholics find the real truth . . . . You know, it's funny how the news media and people will criticize a minister, but yet they don't say anything about pimps who have luxuries—and murder and beat women to get those luxuries. People are so stupid.\textsuperscript{12}

In the same issue a writer from North Carolina responds as follows:

Dear Jimmy: Your voice pleading firmly but gently--tears in your eyes, compassion in your words--told me that Jesus through you was crying bitter tears of sorrow for me . . . . I have now been totally delivered from the homosexual lifestyle, the unclean spirit, alcohol, drugs, and all the depression that accompanied this type life-style.\textsuperscript{13}

The first letter sees Swaggart crucified on the cross of the media, an amoral organ (pimping/murdering for money). An analogy is drawn between Swaggart's cross and Christ's, at the foot of which soldiers gamble. Like Christ, Swaggart is suspended between two antipodes: his
higher calling on one hand and his media assassins on the other.

The second letter reveals Swaggart in Christological passion, sweating drops of blood in the garden. A martyr script is introduced, casting Swaggart as the sacrifice who heals (by virtue of his martyrdom) temporal problems: homosexuality, alcohol, drugs, depression, etc. Although these letters were carefully chosen out of hundreds for publication (in order to reify certain desired signals), they express an evident mindset regarding Swaggart's martyr/victim status. These kinds of responses are buttressed many times over by viewer/reader feedback. In a randon interview of crusade-goers, for example, John Camp asks an unidentified woman why she likes Jimmy Swaggart. She replies, "My heart goes out to him 'cause he stands up for the Lord." In statements like these, (which indicate audience sympathy/pity) viewers read Swaggart within a context of martyrdom. This particular statement is resonant with implication; as a lone pariah (with the inference that no one else is standing up "for the Lord"), Swaggart experiences a metaphoric "crucifixion" at the hand of the unsympathetic media. The woman's statement also carries a powerful subtextual agenda which is embedded in the idea that Swaggart not only "stands up for the Lord," but also stands up as the Lord. This sort of linguistic slight-of-hand uncovers the evangelical notion that
Swaggart duplicates the martyred Christ in his lonely martyrdom.

These responses do not occur without provocation. Continued exploration of Swaggart's myth-making agenda reveals the intense signals/triggers which engender the martyr discourse and Swaggart's enrollment as a "high priest." Yet one concedes that Swaggart, acting his role in a Christ/Hero myth, may only be speaking "texts" expected of the role. Returning to Foucault, one remembers that the body (as political) is forced "to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." This dynamic, in essence, informs Swaggart's relation to religious readership. Swaggart's emission of martyrdom "signs" accommodates the evangelical preconception of High Priestly behavior--while happily satisfying his own desire to participate in that behavior. Thus, Swaggart serves a very specific function in the evangelical community. Just as the self-made hero persona provided an image around which America could rally as it was defining a national character, so Swaggart's high priestly persona provides a heroic (Christian) image around which evangelicals can gather. As a "star" Christian, Swaggart becomes eminently qualified for such a leadership position in his role as the American evangelical high priest.

Swaggart makes his martyr discourse efficacious by manipulating various kinds of signals. Three sources from
Swaggart's writings show how Swaggart extenuates the idea of his martyrdom. In the February issue of The Evangelist (1980), for example, Swaggart describes an incident on an airplane involving an in-flight movie:16 "Trapped as we were on this plane, I settled back to watch this particular movie. Within a matter of minutes there were several profane remarks. I removed the earphones and was happy to see Frances and those with us do the same" (6). But the movie still troubles Swaggart who then walks to the front of the plane, commenting to the stewardess that "it was the only place on the plane where I could escape the movie screen" (9). A heavily encoded binary underpins this vignette, that is, trap/escape, which has powerful ramifications in the evangelical mind. The dynamics of this binary issue from an escape scenario (out of earth into an apocalyptic heaven) which is familiar to all evangelicals. Swaggart adds a footnote: "Now the sad part of this whole story is that even Christians will smile at my 'narrowness.' Today preachers have stopped commenting on movies. They're part of the 'culture' now" (9). Recalling Foucault, we see that Swaggart participates in a "ceremony" of symbolic escape (by walking to the front of the plane), an action deemed "appropriate" for priests/ministers in the evangelical system. But Swaggart takes his "sign" further by implying that he alone stands ready to reject the world/"culture." Thus Swaggart shows
himself to be a martyr to his high priestly profession. The combination of trigger language, symbolic action, and diatribe provides unassailable "evidence" to the evangelical that Swaggart not only "speaks their language," but that he is participating in appropriate behavior for the Christological High Priest. Quite simply, Swaggart nails himself to his own crucifix.

By 1987 Swaggart had fine-tuned his pariah image, accomplished mainly through sermons and a series of tracts which took to task any sect not subscribing to his particular brand of Pentecostalism.17 In his statement, "I have fully resigned myself to the fact that organized religion will turn totally against me" (The Evangelist/May 1984),18 Swaggart evinces his typical move to segregate himself from the threatening "other." Spiritual High Treason (1987), a culminating work of that period, well displays Swaggart's increasing desire to showcase himself as a martyr. A diatribe against a host of contemporary philosophies/forces, Swaggart's book is rampant with such statements as these: "When you hear such terms as the power of positive thinking, the Kingdom Age, self-esteem, inner healing, or Christian psychology [original emphases], realize that you are being lured by a siren song . . . which is really an assault against the cross of Christ."19 The notable aspect of this warning is that it takes to task not only the self-help philosophy of middle class America,
but also the guiding ideologies of such highly respected ministers as Norman Vincent Peele (positive thinking) and Robert Schuller (self-esteem)—supposedly members of Swaggart's own religious camp. Swaggart's contention that their ministries are an "assault against the cross of Christ" concretizes the notion that Swaggart, like Christ, is misunderstood (and abandoned) even by the "inner circle." The passage's final addendum locates Swaggart as the target of "assault," imbricating Christ's alienation with his own: "Maybe I'm old-fashioned. Maybe my methods don't fit in with the modern way. To be frank, I'm glad. I never intended that they should."20 [Note: Swaggart's use of a martyr discourse increases after his 1988 and 1991 confessions. The martyrdom of this post-confession period will be discussed in Chapter Five in conjunction with Foucault's confessional technologies].

Swaggart also reinforces his position as the high priest to his evangelical constituency by enacting the role of the Christological mediator (implicating the notion of intercessor/confessor). Research on this subject quickly reveals Swaggart's belief that he is a chosen middle-man, linking God to His people. From the abundance of evidence confirming this perception, the following passage, excerpted from a video of Swaggart's 1987 Long Island crusade, is typical. Swaggart states:

A man wrote me the other day and said, "Swaggart," (he was angry), "You keep askin' me
for money. God didn't call you to save the world." Mister [Swaggart looks straight into the camera], that's exactly what God has called me to do. [Begins to pace the stage/voice rises] I live with it twenty-four hours a day. I go to bed with it at night. Some nights, some nights I will actually feel the lostness of the damned . . . I see it in my dreams [Swaggart paces/voice choked with emotion] . . . I wake up in the wee hours of the morning and I hear the voice of the Spirit, telling me—as He spoke to me on July 1, 1985—"Take the gospel by television to the whole world." And He said, "Do not fail me." I hear those words. I hear the stenatorian [sic] cry. I hear the call of the Spirit, "Do not fail me [Swaggart weeps openly/general applause]."

If Swaggart represents a kind of "spiritual currency" to his religious "bankers" (borrowing Burke's terminology), statements like the foregoing must greatly strengthen Swaggart's sanction as a Christ-appointed mediator within the evangelical community. The statement is spectacular. Swaggart does nothing less than conflate his own world-saving mission with that of Christ. Swaggart offers the spectacle of his own body as a materialized copy of Christ's, feeling (omnisciently) the "lostness of the damned" in his role as mediator. Swaggart thus seems to aim at becoming an inevitability in the minds of his evangelical audience. He plays heavily on implicature. By attaching a specific date to God's visitation, he enrolls God as an unimpeachable source, validating his own credibility. By reiterating God's direct mandate "Do not fail me," Swaggart leaves the impression that, were he to fail, there would be no one capable of taking his place.
Thus, Swaggart reveals himself as the single most important figure in TV evangelism. Swaggart thereby assumes the persona of the intercessory Christ, making himself utterly non-expendable within the evangelical system.

In Foucault's terms, Swaggart's body has become "useful." First in its/his "subjugation" (we might say "ownership") by his evangelical community, Swaggart reflects the belief systems of that community by "emitting signs" which indicate that he is the quintessential evangelical. Swaggart is "productive" to that community by providing a heroic image (now interpreted Christologically) to which evangelicals can refer in defining a collective persona.

Evangelicals also "read" Swaggart as a Supreme Judge (taking a cue from the Christ/Hero persona). In ever increasing salvos (prior to 1988), Swaggart blasts both secular and religious communities, alternately setting himself as a moral judge and a political lobbyist. Turning to Foucault's work on penal systems, one finds his discussion of Bentham's Panopticon relevant to the kind of "discipline" Swaggart coerces on his society. *Discipline and Punish* outlines the Panopticon model, created by Jeremy Bentham at the end of the eighteenth century, as a revolutionary mode of incarceration/surveillance. This model situates an unseen observer in a tower which stands at the center of a circle of cells housing criminals—the
insane, patients, schoolboys, etc. For each cell, two walls have windows, one wall facing the central tower and one directly opposite which causes the prisoner at all times to be "backlighted." In this way, the cells become "like so many small cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible." Because "visibility is a trap," the prisoner "inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection." Central to Foucault's Panopticon analysis is "the gaze," which entails both the gaze of the observer/institution/state and the reflexive gaze of the offender.

Swaggart can be (metaphorically) seen standing in Bentham's tower, a self-appointed moral/political judge, his "gaze" operative through television's penetration into the nation's households. By the mid-1980's, Swaggart "takes on" (in sermonic diatribes) such controversial social issues as abortion, homosexuality, pornography, education, "secular humanism," Communism, taxes, the Federal budget, energy, immigration, the environment, welfare, and women's rights. (See, for example, Elton Jerald Ogg, Jr.'s thesis An Analysis of the Political Content in the Televised Evangelism of Jimmy Swaggart (1987) for a quantification of time spent on such issues during the mid-80's.) Swaggart also criticizes any sect
that does not specifically mirror his own. 1983, for example, was a banner year in Swaggart's "judgement" on America. His airing of Auschwitz death camp scenes (where Swaggart implies the Jews brought death on themselves by rejecting Christ) and a unilateral castigation of the Catholic faith (including an innuendo against Mother Teresa) are cases in point.27 As Kenneth Woodward notes in his 1984 Newsweek article, "Swaggart's One-Edged Sword," the media reacts adversely to such antics, but to "his video congregation, the Pentecostal preacher from Baton Rouge, La., is the very mouth of God."28

Swaggart's judgement/gaze is nowhere more astonishing, however, than in his condemnation of fellow denominational ministers: to wit, the Reverends Bakker and Gorman. In this regard, the Panopticon system promotes an especially useful dialogue concerning the watcher and the watched and questions of the body laid bare in a spectacle of surveillance and self-management. Swaggart, watching (figuratively) from Bentham's tower, becomes the principal voice of judgment in toppling the ministries of both Jim Bakker and Marvin Gorman. The "bodies" of Bakker and Gorman are commandeered by Swaggart as objects of discipline; they also are displayed as cautionary "lessons" to the evangelical community, indicating that sin does not pay. Richard Ostling in his 1987 Time article "T.V.'s Unholy Row," details the intense "surveillance" applied in
Swaggart's bringing secret sins to light. Ostling quotes Swaggart's admission that he had forwarded rumors of Bakker's immorality to the Assemblies of God head office, noting Swaggart's addendum that the Bakker scandal was a "cancer that needed to be excised from the body of Christ." This perception regards Bakker's depraved body as a mockery of Christ's pure body and justifies its (ultimate) incarceration. In this instance, and in the case of Gorman, body spectacle becomes a textual motif in Swaggart's exposure of knowledge/truth. With Gorman and with Bakker, the body is sexualized, portrayed by Swaggart as (sexually) discontinuous with symbolic ministerial "celibacy." Carrying accusations of Gorman's illicit affairs to the Assemblies of God in 1986, Swaggart proves instrumental in Gorman's defrocking. In both these cases, Swaggart as Judge promotes himself as a lone vigilante for truth, the truth/lie binary acting as Swaggart's divining rod in his disclosure of secrets.

This sort of scripting is documented in Ostling's article. Swaggart is quoted as saying, "I confronted Dortch [Bakker's top administrator] about the Jessica Hahn thing. He flatly denied it. He lied to me." In retaliation, Norman Grutman [Bakker's lawyer] intimated that Swaggart planned a hostile "takeover" of Bakker's organization, and Grutman threatened to expose Swaggart's "dirty laundry" if such a coup were implemented. Ostling
relates that Swaggart, encountering Grutman's threat that "dirty laundry" would be exposed, "quickly challenged Grutman to reveal any dirty linen the lawyer might have 'to the whole world' " (Ostling, 64). Again, Swaggart offers truth as the infra-structure on which his credibility rests. One realizes the powerful effect such statements would have on a fundamentalist community, with Swaggart perceived as its *ipso facto* Minister-in-Chief.

Power/knowledge thus becomes the discursive foundation upon which Swaggart builds his inquisitions/defenses. Indeed, Foucault sees knowledge as the end goal of Bentham's prison (in Foucault's words a "laboratory of power"); one notes that as Swaggart places Bakker and Gorman within the Panoptic cells, he too, through power play, coerces knowledge/truth from the bodies of his "incarcerated" subjects.

Creating a self-made heroic persona that is acceptable to evangelicals, Swaggart thus moves to conflate the image of American heroism with that of the heroic Christ. He achieves this by enrolling himself both as high priest and as supreme judge. Swaggart's success is aided by the fact that evangelicals *desire* to read Swaggart as the Christological Hero. Swaggart consequently becomes (in Foucault's terms) "useful" to the evangelical community, not only as a mirror of its own beliefs, but also as a
persona, making credible the evangelical position to secular culture.

II. Secular Readership

The Foucauldian idea that the subject/body becomes "useful" to a culture (first in its subjugation and then in its productivity) informs Swaggart's secular readership just as it does evangelical readership. But the nature of Swaggart's "subjugation" and "productivity" changes within the context of secular culture. Basically a secular reading audience (which we can define in Burkean terms as the dominant class) "subjugates"/"purchases" the Swaggart persona in terms of theatre. The self-made hero thus becomes a parody of itself. The hero is not seen in the mold of a Lincoln or a Jackson, but as a Chaplin-esque tramp who becomes the (comic) Great Dictator. The dominant secular class therefore consigns Swaggart's ostensible heroism to a realm of fiction, his "productivity" residing in his entertainment value. We witness a performance discourse in which Swaggart is assessed, not as the self-made minister of heroic dimensions, but the self-made performer who plays roles at will, enacting an on-going process of (dramatic) self-invention. Accepting theatre as the province of mad play, we see why Swaggart is "useful" to secular culture. If theatre/madness is defined as the inverse of sanity/normalcy, Swaggart provides secular
culture an emblem of (mad) theatricality, defining what
sanity/normalcy is not. Ironically, secular factions
therefore sanction Swaggart's self-made heroism within a
context of performance. In Foucault's terms, Swaggart's
body/persona (as a theatrical essence) is able to "carry
out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" that not
only entertain, but also validate (through inversion) the
sanity/normalcy of secular culture.

There is much evidence which reveals Swaggart's
consignment within a theatrical frame. Kenneth Woodward in
his 1983 *Newsweek* article "King of Honky-Tonk Heaven"
provides a typical example of the way the secular community
(typified by the media) was "reading" Swaggart prior to
1988. 32 This article exemplifies any one of a number of
articles during this period, typifying the way Swaggart
was analyzed and burlesqued in media commentary. Woodward
selects moments from Swaggart's 1983 Birmingham Crusade,
first presenting Swaggart-the-huckster welcoming his
audience to "an old-fashioned, heartfelt, Holy Ghost,
heaven-sent, Devil-chasin', sin-killing, true-blue, red-
hot, blood-bought, God-given, Jesus-lovin' indoor camp
meeting!" 33 After diagnosing Swaggart's rhetoric as "pure
populist Pentecostalism" and his delivery as "showbiz
professional," 34 Woodward takes the reader through
Swaggart's service, highlighting a specific, climactic
moment:
"The monkey on the back, the torment of the damned . . . No scientific power can break the bondage of drugs!" Jimmy Swaggart is sweating now, waving his Bible, citing passages, begging, exhorting. He is creating his own ritual of purgation, a solo performance of Jacobean intensity . . . "I know a power!" he shouts, repeating it twice over as he sweeps across the stage . . . The crowd is amening and hallelujahing and raising both hands, palms out, in a born-again salute. Jimmy Swaggart doffs his glasses and wipes his face, apparently bawling like a baby. But his eyes are remarkably dry as he sneaks a glance at his gold Rolex watch.35

This passage defines the perceptual field in which Woodward places Swaggart: the realm of theatre. Woodward is like other media specialists of the period [see notes for various examples] who view Swaggart's stage presence as a self-conscious creation, a duplicitous "act" perpetrated on an innocent audience. Quentin Schultze notes in Televangelism and American Culture that from 1978 to 1988 media's burlesque treatments of televangelism increased as "powerful negative religious stereotypes were reaffirmed once again."37 In Bakker and Swaggart, for example, the media sensed a re-enactment of the religious charlatan, typified by Elmer Gantry and Aimee Semple McPherson. Noting the media's satiric disposition, Schultze writes: "Acting like parents, journalists took discipline in their own hands," denouncing T.V. preachers as "ambitious, manipulative, and hypocritical people preoccupied with sex, fame, and wealth."38 Woodward's article provides a case in point. For example, Woodward
indicates Swaggart's use of script, noting Swaggart's dizzying catalog of spliced adjectives: heaven-sent, Devil-chasin', sin-killing, etc. The list is pre-written and well rehearsed (see other examples of its use as in the 1987 Long Island crusade), delivered as a kind of Vaudevillean come-on. One realizes that Woodward is actually analyzing Swaggart's perlocutionary agenda [the intended effect of a speech act on its hearers]. The fact that "the crowd roars" indicates to Woodward that Swaggart has manipulated his audience; the moment, Woodward implies, has been "staged."

Woodward investigates other instances of scripting, as in Swaggart's use of the poetic catch-phrase: "the monkey on the back, the torment of the damned." Woodward is drawn to this particular phraseology because it evidences Swaggart's populist lingo, that is, a showman playing to the people. However, the most insidious use of "script," as noted by Woodward, is Swaggart's reiteration of "I know a power!" This phrase/moment reflects what Aristotle means by mimesis (actual enactment as opposed to diegesis, narration). The phrase is imbedded in action: Swaggart "shouts" as he "sweeps across the stage," seemingly energized by an unseen power. The coupling of word and action resonates for Swaggart's evangelical audience, creating a subtle implication; the preceding boast "I know a power" is taken to mean, "I know a power [which I am..."
currently calling down from heaven]." The phrase thus becomes a performative speech act, causing something to be done. Thus, Swaggart moves from diegesis to mimesis, participating in enactment—theatre's founding principle. Bert States speculates why this theatrical dynamic is so powerful. In mimesis, the audience recognizes "the "truth of the god that arrives on the stage," as if by a miracle the intangible is made tangible. Woodward, in effect, puts his finger on an ancient theatrical transaction, the watcher's willingness to believe the material witness of the "god's" arrival. Put in evangelical terms, the "Spirit" has arrived, and Swaggart is the conduit of its manifestation.

A final reference reveals much about Woodward's view of Swaggart's histrionics. Woodward notes that although Swaggart appears to weep, "his eyes are remarkably dry as he sneaks a glance at his gold Rolex watch." In this single image Woodward draws together the exigencies of the actor's profession: time and money. To Woodward, the watch symbolizes both Swaggart's need to compress his "performance" into a time structure and his imminent monetary gain. Using the gold watch to connote age-old images of greed and ruination, Woodward works to tear away Swaggart's mask. Ironically, the watch (perceived by Swaggart's "flock" as status) becomes (to the secular public) the mechanism of his betrayal.
The spectacle of Swaggart's body thus encodes itself as theatrical to a secular population. Rendered as such, the media (Burke's bankers) can enjoy it (and manipulate it) for its entertainment value alone. The self-made hero in Swaggart's hands becomes its own burlesque, providing secular (dominant) culture an undeniable "sign" of fictiveness. In this context, Swaggart's "usefulness" is apparent. Consigned as an "actor" within a discourse of theatre, Swaggart is immured behind a figurative proscenium. Secular society effectively turns Swaggart into "the other," allowing him to validate (through a display of his own theatricality/madness) its own sanity/normalcy. Importantly, theatre plays an essential role in this process; its particular involvement in the Swaggart phenomenon will focus ensuing discussion.

Victor Turner's *The Anthropology of Performance* provides understanding of (sanctioned) madness through its theory of "liminality." In Turner's system, a liminal zone is a space where "almost anything goes: taboos are lifted, fantasies are enacted . . . the low are exalted and the mighty abased." Turner cites Mardi Gras as a prime example of such liminal activity--sanity, for a time, is traded for insanity. In short, fantasy reigns. Turner's concept of liminality illuminates theatrical analysis. Turner's work invokes a discourse of sanctioned madness/theatre, opening an analytical window on Swaggart's
secular reception. Swaggart's theatricality is thus seen played out through various roles: as evangelist, as recording artist, as Jerry Lee's cousin, as business magnate, etc. However, Louisiana's own "theatricality" provides a most significant backdrop to Swaggart's performative career. Two key personae are indicative of the theatrical impulse that colors Louisiana culture: King Rex and Huey Long. The iconic presence of these two images pervades Louisiana lore, primarily through its associational links with histrionic/theatrical rulership (government). American culture at large is indeed inclined to define Louisiana in these terms. Numerous films, for example, portray the stereotype of a mad Louisiana (often using the Rex or Long personae as a focus for commentary). In such recent movies as The Big Easy, Angel Heart, Blaze, even JFK, Louisiana's madness is played out before a national audience. For the country as a whole, Louisiana conjures images of New Orleans and Mardi Gras—a period of sanctioned insanity. Through various representations, including the plays of Tennessee Williams, New Orleans has gained a preeminent mythic past, steeped in voodoo, prostitution, and underworld Jazz culture. New Orleans therefore presents itself as a marginal/liminal space outside the (ideological) bounds of mainline American culture. Mardi Gras becomes the perpetual metaphor by which New Orleans is defined, and King Rex (as Mardi Gras'
key figure) its symbol. Consequently, we see (echoing Turner) that Rex installs himself as the mad ruler of New Orleans' zone of liminality/madness.

Opposed to New Orleans, Baton Rouge (the seat of state government) proves the alternate component of Louisiana's Janus-face. The political heart of the state, Baton Rouge becomes personified by an image ostensibly in direct contrast to that of Rex—the suited politician. The prototype of this persona is found in the overwhelmingly powerful image of Huey Long. Although specifically dissimilar, the Rex and Long personae present a double portrait of madness that foregrounds any investigation into either Louisiana's entertainment industry or its political life. Judging from the carnivalesque atmosphere which surrounded the Long regime, we can even conclude that (metaphorically) Rex and Long are two halves of the same persona. Rex rules a kingdom of tricks, masks, madmen. Rex, metamorphosed in the Huey Long prototype, rules the same kingdom, but is re-costumed in lawyer's garb—the apparel of supposed logic and sanity. New Orleans and Baton Rouge are thus revealed as two halves of the Janus-face, the two faces of one madness.

American culture defines Louisiana as a dichotomy. It views the state as a dialectical union—New Orleans (the seeming Prodigal) and Baton Rouge (the responsible elder brother). However, after the regimes of its mad political
kings (again, Long as prototype), Louisiana unwittingly discloses its secret: the "brothers" are interchangeable. The Symbolic Politician, at any moment bereft of his suit, is Rex, the master of madness and revels. The United States knows this. It accepts Louisiana as a zone of liminal madness and sanctions it. Swaggart's iconic status in Louisiana culture (and his alignment with both Rex and Long), thus leads back to a consideration of how secular culture reads Swaggart within a discourse of madness/theatre.

This analysis presents the provocative idea that Swaggart is the mythic heir of Huey Long (Rex incognito), that the political visionary of the 30's is reincarnated as the prophet of armageddon. The Huey Long persona is reinvented in Swaggart. Within a Louisiana context, Swaggart's "ancestry" of self-made heroism parallels the origins of Long. In fact, Long's story also embodies all seven tropes of the self-made hero paradigm. Such works as T. Harry Williams' *Huey Long: A Biography* suggest how Long himself participated in (manipulated) the tropes identifying self-made-ness. Long's biography includes his "poor white" roots (a fabrication which belied Long's comfortable middle-class upbringing), his homespun oratory (signaling an ostensible rejection of intellectualism), his intense propensity for hard work, the "virtue" of his labor witnessed in his personal crusade to put "a chicken in
every pot," and his obviation of obstacles (usually in the form of large corporation collectives) in his momentous "journey" toward governorship. The similarities between Long and Swaggart are arresting. Both are common men from middle Louisiana, plain speaking, the people's friend, impassioned, selling "the deal," using hypnotic oratory, offering deliverance, ensconcing themselves within circles of power, approaching the tyrannical, clowning--all for the people. It is inevitable that the American secular community would draw comparisons between the mythic heroism of Long and Swaggart. Consequently, the evangelical picture of Swaggart as the Christ-Hero accrues secular associations, informed by influences of Huey Long.

Roland Barthes' comments on "costuming" are particularly applicable to an investigation of how secular society reads Swaggart (in relation to Long and to a discourse of madness/theatre). In "The Diseases of Costume" (Critical Essays), Barthes writes that a theatrical costume is "diseased" unless it portrays the essential spirit of the character who wears it. In this light, Huey Long as a construction was diseased. His costume (the self-effacing, logical suit) belied his agenda--to rule as Rex. He wanted to be king, to tear away the suit, the rational behavior, lawyer-reason. (The Rex construction is not diseased because it speaks what it is. Rex desires to rule and does.) Huey Long represents the
ultra-madness of the "elder brother," for he attempts to convince himself that he is other than he is. Long does not want to be governor; he wants to be Tyrannus. Thus Long is interpreted as the mad political king, his "madness" realized both in the duplicity of his "costume" and in his (hidden) agenda to exercise total power. Looking at Swaggart as Long's mythic heir, we see that Swaggart's persona, like Long's, is diseased. Swaggart also costumes himself in the rational suit, packaging himself as Lands' End or Norm Thompson. But Swaggart, like Long, desires to wear ermine. His agenda is also power, and his impulses are autocratic. Statistics documenting his massive media networking testify to his will to possess. Swaggart's desire to possess/control is also evident in his kinetic delivery (like Long's) and his ability to command the focus (at least until his second confession) of the thousands attending his crusades. Opposed to the King Rex persona (which does not evidence a duplicitous costume), we witness in relation to Long and Swaggart quite apparent costume duplicities/diseases. Swaggart, like Long, attempts to convince himself (and his public) that he is not what he is, providing evidence of his irrationality/madness. In short, as both Long and Swaggart invoke the myth of self-made-ness, madness becomes an organizing factor, an informing component of their personae.
To a secular public, however, Swaggart's madness springs from his theatricality. How is such a reading effected, especially given the Swaggart/Long conflation? Stated in Foucault's terms, we want to discover how Swaggart becomes "useful" to a secular constituency. Here, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* proves especially helpful, illustrating the relation between madness and theatre. Foucault suggests that leprosy, in the medieval episteme, was symbolic madness. The leper was banished to a realm outside the city's gates; but the leper's existence "was yet a constant manifestation of God, since it was a sign both of His anger and of His grace . . ."45 Importantly, the Huey Long persona functions as Foucault's metaphoric leper. Both Long and Foucault's leper are defined by an image of madness and of banishment. After the governorship was attained, factions began to discover Long's "costume" was duplicitous, evidenced in Long's amalgam of unlimited personal power and ruthless treatment of all opposition. Once such factions established that Long's costume was "diseased," his excommunication through assassination was mandated. Like Long, Swaggart can also be seen as Foucault's metaphoric leper. But Swaggart's banishment, in our time, is of a different nature. Swaggart's exile is best explained by Foucault's idea of banishment, which embodies a sense of sanctification in its ritual. Foucault's madman/leper is "saved by the hand that
is not stretched out." In other words, mercy is extended through judgment. In Foucault's argument, the citizen of God's kingdom requires the presence of the madman. The citizen is only able to define Truth/God by contrast; that is, society embraces madness as the definitional inverse of God. Therefore, banishment of the madman becomes a sacred ritual, and the madman is sustained in a sacred prison by societal consent.

Long, as the incognito Rex, had to be physically banished. However, the sacred aura of his assassination and his ultimate valorization remain in Louisiana thought. Long is either loved or hated—but always lionized. Swaggart as the incognito Rex has already been banished. This banishment is symbolic and has nothing to do with his ultimate "fall from grace." If the media (Burke's bankers) is the mouthpiece of the commissioning class (secular America), then Swaggart has been symbolically banished—censured as a fanatic, reviled as hypocritical, mocked as a flamboyant buffoon, thus "exiled" from the ranks of social credibility. However, in his banishment, he is still with us. Swaggart is the mad religious Rex, sanctioned as mad by the media. He is paradoxically provided an accepted zone (a prison). This "zone" (defined as the liminal space of "theatre" where the rational is overturned) constitutes the mad standard by which society inversely determines normalcy. Thus Swaggart's "usefulness" to secular society
becomes readily apparent. Just as secular society uses/co-opts the theatrical performer as the "commissioned" madman, so Swaggart is made useful, serving the entertainment need of the dominant (secular) class. The Swaggart persona, consigned in this way to theatrical discourse, assumes a privileged position in American thought.

Foucault's discussion of the Narrenschiff (Ship of Fools) in *Madness & Civilization* offers further insight into Swaggart's "exile." Foucault explains that in the Renaissance, madmen were often set adrift, consigned to a perpetual voyage beyond the margins of society. In Renaissance thought, the Ship of Fools, framed within the context of the sea, functions much like the theatre proscenium. Renaissance society looks out upon its mad members, defining its notions of rationality. What is perceived through the frame is merely a jeu (play) or a representation. For example, through the alienation of distance, the ship's madmen become (to society's normal citizens) only representations of madmen. The proscenium arch provides the same effect. The actor, stationed behind this frame, is "read" as fictive. He is not perceived as having a life of his own but as merely an essence which represents real life. The proscenium alienates the actor from his audience, increasing the sense of his fictive-ness, his representative-ness. Thus the Renaissance
madman, like the actor, is rendered fictive, consolidating his position within the cultural mindset.

A parallel phenomenon occurs with Swaggart. The television screen becomes the frame the sea-verge once provided, the camera's eye allowing access to the ship's interior (Swaggart's crusade services). As assessed by the secular community, Swaggart takes on a fictive nature, reinforced by the representational quality of video. Swaggart, once videotaped, becomes instantly "historicized." The Swaggart persona becomes nothing more than a narrative, a fiction, a theatrical jeu "commissioned" by secular/media factions. Swaggart may be switched on or off. He is thus perceived as allowable "theatre," consigned to a program slot. Thus Swaggart, metaphorically imprisoned, is "safe" in the same sense that Rex is safe. Rex is relegated to Turner's liminoid zone—the two-week space of Mardi Gras. Swaggart's liminoid zone is that circumscribed by the television channel, easily eradicated by the electronic channel switcher. Swaggart's self-made heroism therefore comes to be interpreted through theatrical framing (or fiction). The Swaggart-Hero evinces a "performative" essence (a fiction) in the secular view, easily seen as an object of entertainment, a target for burlesque.
In summary, Swaggart's validation by both evangelical and secular audiences is still dependent on his perception/readership within a myth discourse. However, the nature of that readership differs with each faction. The self-made hero, reincarnated within the evangelical community as the paradigmatic Hero-Christ, fuses with the Swaggart persona, providing the basis of his veneration in that camp. American secular culture also co-opts Swaggart as a self-made hero. In this vein, however, Swaggart's heroism is inscribed within a liminal zone of sanctioned theatricality. Such theatrical framing is inspired by the secular perception of Swaggart's "madness"/irrationality (engendered in part by Swaggart's likeness to the Long persona). Thus, Swaggart's self-made heroism is made useful to the broad spectrum of American culture--either as a copy of the heroic Christ or as a theatrical essence. This double usefulness goes far in explaining why Swaggart could achieve such stardom before his catastrophic confessions in 1988 and 1991, and how he could manipulate so effectively the tropes of self-made-ness, gaining for himself a wide, sanctioned readership in American culture.
NOTES: CHAPTER THREE


2 Foucault 26.


8 *Big Time Religion*.

9 *Big Time Religion*. All statistics in this paragraph are taken from this video documentary.


11 Garland 7B.


13 "Letters" 31.

14 *Big Time Religion*.

15 Foucault, 25.

16 Jimmy Swaggart, "Four Conditions For Being Included in the Rapture," *The Evangelist* Feb. 1980: 6-9. Other references to this article will be notated within the body of the text.
For examples of Swaggart's sectarianism, see the tracts Hyper-Faith: A New Gnosticism (1982) or False Doctrines in the Church Today (1984), both published by the Jimmy Swaggart Ministries in Baton Rouge, LA.


Jimmy Swaggart, Spiritual High Treason (Baton Rouge: Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, 1987) 98.

Swaggart, Treason 306.


Foucault. His complete discussion is contained under heading "Panopticism" 195-228.

Foucault 200.

Foucault 202, 203.

For his remarks on the "gaze," see Foucault 195, 207.


Woodward 65.

Ostling 60.

Ostling 64.

Foucault 204.


Woodward 89.

Woodward 89.

Woodward 89.

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Schultze 27.

Long Island video.


Woodward 89.


Foucault, *Madness* 7, 8.
CHAPTER IV
SWAGGART AS THEATRE: A SEMIOTICS OF PERFORMANCE

Throughout his career Jimmy Swagart has manipulated an "image" that draws upon the tropes defining the myth of self-made-ess. In this manner, he has advertised himself as the quintessential self-made hero. Investigation shows that both evangelical and secular communities have been willing to read Swaggart within such a myth discourse. But these two factions interpret Swaggart's heroic persona differently in relation to his "usefulness" to their divergent agendas. We have uncovered the various signals Swaggart has employed to gain a reading as the individualist hero. The signals explored to this point have been chiefly linguistic/rhetorical (witnessed through the narrative of Swaggart's autobiography, his sermonic statements, his textual commentaries, etc.). Swaggart's manipulation of the tropes of heroism, however, goes beyond the written or spoken word and are revealed also in performative aspects. This chapter therefore will examine the non-linguistic signs/codes Swaggart uses in his ministry, ones that work to reaffirm ideas of his self-made-ness.

Swaggart's crusades and his local church services (performance events) provide fertile territory for this investigation. Labeling these ministry events as "performances," we will discover how Swaggart uses
theatre to "package" his heroism, particularly in regards to his evangelical audience. Swaggart's performances are most intriguing since he must mask the fact that he is indeed using theatre to reify notions of his heroism—his evangelical constituency in great majority considers theatre to be "sinful."

In examining Swaggart's use of theatre, two kinds of performance spaces will be considered: the crusade coliseum (to be explored in this present chapter) and the Family Worship Center, Swaggart's local Baton Rouge church (examined in Chapter Five). Because the Jimmy Swaggart Telecast uses services from both of these arenas as the basis of programming, it is necessary to understand how the "performance" event works in each environment. This chapter will thus explore theatrical space, actors, and plot, drawing evidence from the video of Swaggart's 1987 Saturday night service of the Long Island Crusade. Chapter Five will use as a primary video source the 1988 Saturday night service of Swaggart's Baton Rouge Camp Meeting. [General discussion is grounded in the fact that the author, as an employee of the Jimmy Swaggart Ministries from 1980-1984, attended numerous services both in the coliseums and at Family Worship Center; therefore, personal observation will be the basis for much of this commentary. The above videos are cited only to provide specific
An analysis based in semiotics (sign/code systems which create meaning within a social context) proves particularly helpful in investigating Swaggart's use of theatre. Discussion will begin with an analysis of space, Marvin Carlson's *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* as reference. Roland Barthes' theory of costuming offers a unique analytical tool in exploring Swaggart's deployment of "actors," and finally considerations of plot will be advanced by looking at the views of Victor Turner. Together, these three theorists provide a strong analytical framework as we investigate exactly how Swaggart uses theatre in the orchestration of his performance events.

We must first reassert the alignment of the Swaggart persona with the mythic American hero. Any instrumentality Swaggart brings to bear (theatrical space, acting, or plot) is chosen/orchestrated either for the purpose of organizing himself as the center of focus as hero, or of replaying messages to his audience that reaffirm his participation in heroic narrative. Thus, the crux of this chapter has to do with plot; and a single, simple plot line emerges as the guiding principle behind all Swaggart services: the (valorized) journey of the self-made hero. Within the evangelical world, Alger's "rags to
riches" model is transformed into the Christological journey from earth to glory. Swaggart re-fashions the mythic journey of the Hero-Christ in terms of his own heroic journey toward heaven, employing a discourse of escape typified by the central symbolic event known to evangelicals as "the rapture." This event involves the idea that Christ can appear at any moment and rescue true believers from present world torment. The hero's journey is thus rendered an escape narrative. But Swaggart's audience sees itself making the same journey, reinforcing an empathetic relation with Swaggart, who is seen to be the Supreme Pilgrim. In Foucault's terminology, the spectacle of Swaggart's persona/body is made "useful" to evangelicals because he 1) reaffirms the self-made hero myth embraced by American culture at large, and 2) recreates "in flesh" the Paradigmatic Pilgrim dear to the evangelical community.

Therefore, plot becomes foundational to a discussion of both space and acting. While examining these two categories, the instrumental involvement of plot must be always kept in mind. For example, plot (based on the idea of escape) is advanced even as a frail grandmother struggles up a ramp-way to her seat; the act of "entering" the spiritually-charged atmosphere of the inner coliseum can be seen as a ritual escape from the world. In essence, in this realm where all theatrical systems focus on confirming Swaggart as hero, the performative elements of
both space and acting initiate and confirm a narrative dynamic (an escape plot based on the idea of a journey from this world to the next).

We can profitably begin an examination of Swaggart's theatrical space by first looking at the gigantic coliseums in which he chooses to "house" his crusades. Marvin Carlson's research concerning theatre buildings and their position within an urban context here proves helpful. In Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture, Carlson states that the "building or space in which theatre takes place . . . contributes to the meaning-structure of the theatre event as a whole."\(^1\) Carlson's analysis is extended to the theatre building's exteriority--its meaning as "a cultural monument, a site of display for a dominant social class," or its relevance "within the larger structure of the theatre's urban district or of the city as a whole."\(^2\) The theatre edifice is therefore full of signification, initiating a play of meanings well before a patron steps inside its doors.

Carlson's perceptions facilitate a critique of Swaggart's coliseum. Because of its immense size, the coliseum in America is typically placed in a city's non-suburban areas--in massive inner-city commercial complexes or at a city's margins. The coliseum location is "set apart" from daily life, remaining largely untrafficked, except for the special occasion which warrants an excursion.
to its district. A discourse of marginality thus arises in relation to the giant arena, which, in its alienation from the city's normative workaday order invites analysis as a zone of liminality (see Turner/Chapter Three). The coliseum (often built to resemble a massive, windowless bubble) turns an inscrutable face to the city, holding as secret the liminal activities of its interior. All things are possible in such a marginal edifice—the borderline illicitness of Rock concerts, the circus, or the gospel crusade where men in business suits speak in tongues. Like Turner's liminoid zone, where "ambiguity reigns," the marginality of the coliseum is sanctioned, provided a space by the city fathers. Offering the "secrets" of a Madonna or a Jimmy Swaggart, the coliseum is a city's monument to indiscretion. For the crusade-goer, the massive taciturnity of the coliseum holds a promise of spiritual "secrets." The mute bubble becomes the Christian liminoid zone, its penetration a ritual enactment of world-leaving. The prospect of witnessing sermonic revelation or "messages in tongues" (supposedly a direct manifestation of God's presence) only serves to reify a patron's sense of passing into another world.

Following Carlson's semiotic reading of the "articulation of space,"3 one can identify transitional zones inside the coliseum which further segregate the spectator from the outer world. Called "vapor locks" by
Carlson, these pre-performance zones provide time/space in which spectators may ritually "prepare" themselves for "their impending duties and pleasures as participants in the theatrical [crusade] experience." The crusade-goer first encounters the main concourse/lobby in which a configuration of tables has been established to market Jimmy Swaggart products. This marketing zone must be traversed before entering the performance arena. It also mandates decision: to buy or not to buy. Ministry artifacts (videos, cassette tapes, records) bear the image of Crusade "stars"—John Starnes, Janet Paschal, Swaggart himself—and whet the audience's appetite to see these personalities "on stage." But they also offer the patron, in Carlson's words, a chance to "prepare" himself for the ministry event. In one very real sense, the sale artifact extends a discourse of world-leaving by offering the patron an opportunity to "leave" his money at the table (which, of course, will aid the ministry's finances). In another sense, however, the "purchased" article gives the patron "permission" to enter (purging any impending guilt of not giving to the ministry), thus allowing him to focus on the "pleasures" of Swaggart's performance. The market zone thus offers a guiltless, "safe" passage into the performing area, the sale item acting as a kind of magical badge of entry.
For patrons who do not arrive early enough to be seated on the "floor" of the coliseum court, a second transitional zone presents itself. A series of ramp-ways and stairs carry the spectator to upper levels, other concourses, opening out into vomitoria at various heights in the building. Again, a discourse of world-leaving is implicated. The duress of the climb works like the sale artifact, providing the patron a chance to "commit" himself to the event at hand. The climb in its own way is a "purchase." And as the patron is elevated higher and higher within the realm of the building, the sense of trading worlds becomes physically manifest. Quite simply, theatrical space serves and advances a function; that is, in the Swaggart performance event, the myth of the heroic Christian journey from earth to glory is given spatial representation and enactment.

Once inside the coliseum's immense cavea, the spectator is confronted with a kind of circus-maximus—ten thousand people ringing a rectangular "floor" which has itself been filled with people. The atmosphere is both threatening and awesome (extra-normal), which again catapults the patron into a realm of other-worldliness. At the far end of the "circus," Swaggart's team has erected a platform reminiscent of the Greek/Roman rostrum; it is backed by massive ceiling-to-floor velours that act as its frons scaenae. The eye is drawn instantly to this area
through theatrical device: the stage is banded on its front side with dark blue cloth, but the stage floor itself is stark white. Moreover, banks of "electricals" flood it with white light. The stage is meant to reflect, to shimmer. Walls of dark blue velour frame the rostrum, creating an intensely illuminated diorama which draws focus from all vantage points. Such is the pulpitem Swaggart has created on which to act his passion.

The need for a lustrous rostrum becomes evident. Any spectator not within a radius of thirty feet of the stage will perceive it (and its actors) in miniature. Seen from such a distance, faces disintegrate, making the perception of movement essential. After Swaggart's entrance, it becomes clear that no one on the platform is moving but Swaggart. The orchestration of the event assigns Swaggart absolute centrality of space, carefully ensuring that his movements/actions/histrionics take precedence over all other activities on the platform. To be sure, Swaggart does allow various soloists (along with Frances) temporary focus. However, even during these solos, Swaggart sits at his piano just left of Center Stage. He shares focus with the soloists, ostensibly accompanying them while an organist and a keyboardist provide the actual instrumental support. Stationed at his piano, Swaggart seems to be a kind of impresario, an on-stage M.C. whose presence is always eminent. Frances is the only on-stage "character"
Swaggart allows a genuine solo moment. However, the moment is brief and is designed to "pluck" targeted emotional strings (as we will see presently in our discussion of "actors"). In all events constituting the crusade performance (with the exception of Frances's cameo), Swaggart functions as the conspicuous (entertaining) M.C. He makes introductions, summons soloists, interviews members of his family, jokes, advertises his Bible College, asks for money, preaches, and gives an "altar call." In short, Swaggart is simply the most fascinating element on his rostrum.

One realizes that the individuals on the platform are as much props as the other set pieces (greenery, instruments, etc.). The spectacle of Swaggart's "stage" is oddly static. Back-up singers stand mannequin-like. Their solo "turns" are also strangely bridled, usually executed without movement; their feet remain squarely planted Down Center. The organist, keyboardist, guitarists, drummer, and bass player all appear reined-in and over-controlled. Outfitted in dark suits and ties, they evince a sense of constriction and remain expressionless throughout the performance. Ten minutes into the "show," their presence seems to evaporate altogether. In short, Swaggart's stage is nothing more than a three-dimensional still life before which his dramatic monologue is conjured. Swaggart's "set," constructed in much the same fashion as he has
organized To Cross A River (i.e., to situate himself as the center of focus), shows that he is the only viable/complex element within its frame. In all this, however, Swaggart perpetrates a theatrical tour de force; and in doing so he plays with danger. Suppressing any competing element of interest, Swaggart of necessity must be the savior of the evening. He must single-handedly sculpt the crusade into a performance of memorable dimensions. If he succeeds, he becomes the "hero" of the evening, offering himself as the Hero-Savior exemplar. Indeed Swaggart embraces this "dare" in every crusade, and (up until his confessional period) he never met failure.

Manipulation of focus, however, is only one method that sets the stage for Swaggart's enactment of the hero-journey. Close inspection reveals that, through an adroit organization of "sectors" which lie along a lateral line from Stage Left to Stage Right, Swaggart has created nothing less than a simulacrum of the religious cosmos. Like the presentational medieval platform (bounded on one side by God's throne and on the other by Hell Mouth), the Crusade rostrum makes apparent/tangible a "route" which the Hero travels from this world to the next. A description of the stage's outlay and makeup of its key signs illuminates the rhetoric of Swaggart's presentation. The platform configuration evidenced during the Saturday evening service of Swaggart's 1987 Long Island Crusade will serve as basis
for analysis (this being a typical example of all Crusade settings). This investigation is supported by C. S. Peirce's sign theory, which posits three basic kinds of signs: the **iconic** (where the sign resembles in exact detail that for which it stands—a stage chair for a real chair), the **indexical** (where the sign uses a closely associated element as a stand-in for meaning—a cough to indicate illness), or the **symbolic** (where the sign is only arbitrarily linked with its referent—a black top hat to indicate the villain of melodrama).

Attention to the logistics of Swaggart's Crusade platform shows that the "family" sector is situated far Left. It consists of two contingencies: Swaggart's literal family, who are seated, and Swaggart's ministry "family" (his back-up singers/soloists), who stand at microphones. On this particular evening, not only Frances, Donnie, and his wife Debbie are present, but also Donnie's children—Jennifer, Gabriel, and Matthew. The strongest possible "sign" of a family is therefore offered for audience inspection—three generations of Swaggarts (plus close friends), all validating through their presence the ministry event. Moving along the platform toward Center, one encounters the performance sector showcasing the instrumentalists Up Center and Swaggart's preaching/performing area Down Center. The right edge of this area is bounded by Swaggart's nine-foot grand piano.
Moving past the piano, one finds the ministers' sector, a block of nearly fifty pastors representing the (mostly) fundamentalist/Pentecostal churches from the local area.

Kier Elam, following Peirce's notion of the iconic sign, would say that each sector of Swaggart's stage first possesses **iconic identity**. In other words, every artifact on stage represents itself. The spectator first assesses that Swaggart's "family" offers no duplicity. Blood relatives and close associates have arrived to represent none other than themselves on stage. The representation, one might say, is exact. Thus the spectator interprets Swaggart's "family" as unequivocally true. The same applies to the performance sector where real musicians are perceived as playing real instruments. Swaggart, as chief performer, performs only himself. The spectator spies no "other" instrumentalist or "other" Swaggart behind what is actually seen. The performance area is therefore witnessed as a true representation of itself where performers only perform themselves. In the same way, the ministers' sector is seen as true. Pastors from local congregations have come to the platform only as representations of themselves. No duplicity is noted. There is a direct equation in the spectator's mind between what the minister is and what he seems to be. Swaggart's entire stage thus achieves, in Elam's words, **iconic identity**, or the exact representation of itself. This is an important notion in dealing with the
evangelical mind. Anything taken to be fakery/untruth is immediately interpreted as "sin." It is to Swaggart's advantage, in producing an event that might in any wise be considered "performance," that he circumscribe that presentation with as many truth signals as possible. Otherwise, he would be dismissed by his own religious community as untrustworthy, a fraud. Swaggart escapes such censure by propogating "truth" signals which are absolutely impeccable.

Yet Swaggart's stage is far more than merely iconic. Is Swaggart's family, for example, only just a family? Why place them on the stage at all? And why so much family? Obviously there is something at work beyond the simple desire to "show off" next of kin. The reason becomes apparent: the presence of Swaggart's family is somehow tied in with Swaggart's desire for validation, specifically his validation as the Christological Hero. Therefore, his family becomes indexical—a family that is not so much his family as it is a model family. We see, in fact, an exemplar: the complete unbroken circle of husband Donnie, wife Debbie, and their three offspring. The Junior Swaggarts are offered as a living parable of the correctness of Christian marriage. And the display of three generations (not remotely touched by the "sin" of divorce) is a signal lesson to the Crusade-goer that Christianity pays. In other words, the event (in
spectacle) upholds one of the most valorized images in Christendom, that of the well-knit family unit. This indexical sign demands the attention of Swaggart's audience and elicits their total commitment to his every word. Through his indexical family, Swaggart progresses unerringly toward his sermon, a narrative in which he will fortify (rhetorically) his credibility as the spectator's Christian Hero.

Swaggart's own Down Center performing sector also proves to be more than just iconic. This perception approximates the moment when we glimpse a ballerina's musculature or the sweat on the face of a clown. The ruse of effortlessness is overturned by a sudden revelation of labor. This is where spectators find themselves in relation to Swaggart's performing space. As they travel through the evening with Swaggart, patrons sense the immense energy he expends. He loosens his tie. He wipes his face with a handkerchief. The audience realizes that Swaggart's performance space is also his work space. This is his job. As a laborer, he puts his shoulder to the wheel, investing himself in every moment of his crusade. However, Swaggart's "labor" is exhibitionistic, and at this point the iconic performing sector has now become indexical. Swaggart in essence says to his audience, "Evaluate the fact that I am working." Swaggart is indeed "up to something" in orchestrating the signs of his
spectacle stage. With indexical signals of the paradigmatic family in place, the spectator is induced to interpret "work" signals as also paradigmatic. In other words, Swaggart is presenting a living lesson, that hard work is valorous, using himself as the prime exhibit. It becomes evident that the indexical stage has an agenda—to reaffirm Swaggart by implicating the tropes of virtue and hard work that reflect the self-made hero.

The backdrop-deployment of fifty ministers indicates the stage's movement to the indexical sign. A central question arises: why seat ministers on the rostrum at all, and why so many? In face of prior indexical usage, the answer is not hard to ascertain. Swaggart has already made himself the object of a discourse of validation; a block of ministers who smile, clap, and nod their heads at Swaggart's every move provides further unimpeachable evidence of his sincerity/honesty. In addition, the ministers' block acts as a sort of spiritual "simon-says," inducing the coliseum spectators to imitate its signals of affirmation. On a sign level, the paradigmatic essence of family and work has already established what the spectator will "read" into the on-stage ministers. In short, they become stand-ins for every minister in the evangelical realm, thus a sign of the church world at large.

On this indexical level, Swaggart has not only managed to wring validation from his performing environment, he has
also effectively produced a spectacle copy of the Christian polis: family unit, work place, church. In essence, the spectator witnesses the full spectrum of his Christian world reconstructed through signs on Swaggart's stage. The triune emblem of family/work/church represents the venerated structure around which evangelicals organize their lives. Swaggart has indeed created no mean corpus of signs in aligning himself with the power center of the Christian faith.

The indexical nature of Swaggart's spectacle platform lifts it out of the realm of pure iconicity. As icon and index, it functions admirably. But it is on the symbolic level that Swaggart's performance ultimately achieves its aims. What is this symbolism and how does Swaggart approach it? In answer, let us look first at the carefully bisected space. The family (as representative of all families) is on one side; ministers (as representative of all ministers) are on the other. In between is a virtually empty area (Down Stage) except for the presence of the black nine-foot grand piano. Placed diagonally across the edge of the Swaggart's performing (work) sector, the piano acts as a literal demarcation line between this sector and that of the ministers. One recalls that Swaggart has always, and will in this service as well, offer himself as the self-made Christological Hero making a journey from earth to heaven. With this in mind, the spectator becomes
arrested by a symbolism that has apparently been in place all along. Scanning from Far Left to Far Right, the viewer sees that Swaggart has symbolically created the path of the Hero in his journey from this world to the next. This "path" works in the following manner. The implication of Swaggart's family as representative of all families completes itself in a logical addendum: all families of the earth. Thus at Stage Left Swaggart presents symbolic earth (realized dramatically through a display of three generations). At Stage Right sit the patriarchs of the church world in sacred convocation. Implications are evident: the idea of the "church" has from antiquity presented itself as an earthly picture of the heavenly realm. The "business" of ministers is mediation between God and man. The minister/priest enables man's escape into God's kingdom. Thus the ministerial block becomes the symbol for heaven itself, anchoring Stage Right squarely in the next world. In between the two terminuses is Swaggart's performance/work sector. His piano (the tool of his musical trade) informs the space. With earth and heaven in place, the symbolism of this area becomes undeniable. Quite simply, it encodes itself as the "track" Swaggart must follow before Paradise is gained. The gravity of the black piano becomes emblematic of Swaggart's "work." Its image, fused to Swaggart's angst--displayed throughout the service, becomes a sign/tool of labor. The
piano is Swaggart's charge. Ubiquitous in its presence, it is the weight which appears to keep Swaggart tied to his work space. Thus, the spectator interprets Swaggart's performance sector as a place of hard/intense labor. As a lateral path between earth and heaven, it functions as a kind of penitential trace which Swaggart must endure in his progress toward "glory."

With Swaggart's stage, we see that space indeed speaks, and speaks loudly. In creating a stage that is symbolic of the very journey he purports to make, Swaggart has engineered no small coup. Swaggart takes the spectator out of the ostensibly "real" into a realm where elements/people stand in for other (or absent) elements/people. In moving toward symbolism, Swaggart's stage approaches theatre where, in Peter Handke terms, stage light is a brightness masquerading as other brightness, a stage chair posing as another chair. With Swaggart's family, for example, is actually a stand-in for all families, we are induced to think of Swaggart's on-stage "characters" in terms of role play. It is important to reiterate that the evangelical spectator does not consciously perceive that individuals on stage are playing roles (pretending to be other versions of themselves than that which is apparent). However, it is clear that Swaggart must turn his players into versions of themselves, "characters" which the spectator can easily
comprehend. Rid of all complexity, the players become easily read "types" for Swaggart's evangelical spectators. Used to direct focus to Swaggart, these supernumeraries become streamlined, reduced to their function as validators of Swaggart's heroism. What Swaggart must offer then is a simplified, one-dimensional Frances or a Donnie or a Gabriel. To borrow Handke's term, Frances must pretend to be "other" Frances (not the complex, multi-faceted real Frances, but a cardboard Frances who typifies the virtuous, lovely, self-abnegating minister's wife). On Swaggart's (theatrical) stage, the "actor" as functionary merely plays a role.

Barthes' theories of costuming illuminate the role play in Swaggart deployment of on-stage "actors." As noted in Chapter Three, Barthes holds that a costume is duplicitous (he calls it "diseased") unless it portrays the essential nature of the character who wears it. This insight proves applicable to Swaggart's actors and their agendas. This analysis demands, of course, a conflation of costume and persona; but in Swaggart's case, the conflation is apt because of the seeming one-dimensional nature of the characters involved. Basically, duplicity in costuming issues from the single overriding aim of presenting Swaggart as "correct" (on various levels) before his evangelical audience. Interest here concerns how the costume deceives. These observations consequently allow
for an examination of Swaggart's business suit and its function on the Crusade stage.

By the time Jimmy and Frances enter the platform area, the service has been in progress for several minutes. Donnie makes preliminary announcements and the band plays a "warm-up" set of gospel tunes. The backup singers/soloists, family, and ministers are in place. All male members of Swaggart's team (on this particular Saturday of the 1987 Long Island Crusade) wear dark gray suits with muted-color ties. The regimented line of musicians seems better fitted for a board room than a performing arena. Donnie, who also appears in the requisite dark suit, extends the corporate image with his dispassionate opening monologue on sacrificial giving.

In this specific milieu, the suit as a sign becomes unnerving. The American business suit (through the aegis of pop culture iconography) has come to symbolize the rational, the powerful, typified by the lawyer's chamber or the corporate office. On Swaggart's Crusade platform the suit, in Barthes' purview, is a "disease" because it does not convey the essence of either the passionate gospel message (including its declaration in song) or the passionate messenger (Swaggart). Given Swaggart's particular brand of gospel blues (which is straight out of the Grand Ole Opry), one would expect to see his instrumentalists in cowboy boots and fringe. As the
service continues, the corseted effect of the suit approaches self-parody, a situation Bert States describes as the medium becoming the message, the form winking at the content. But this is precisely the performance's intention. The content of Swaggart's Crusade service is near-vaudevillean with a chain of solos, cameos (Frances, Donnie), interviews, and jokes—topped at the end by the unmitigated drama of Swaggart's sermon. The atmosphere is theatrically charged, manic with tears one moment, laughter the next, framed by Swaggart's bluster and the crowds' continuous applause. In other words, the Crusade's content speaks color, not the starkly muted blues and grays that dominate the costume palette. So why the business suit (which is emblematic of Swaggart's "packaging")? Swaggart chooses the "confirming" suit to distract his audience from the fact that what they are witnessing is theatre (bespeaking sin to evangelicals). The world of business, on the other hand, is a sanctioned order in the Christian mind, implicating tropes attached to the self-made hero: old-fashioned know-how, virtuous hard work, industry and success. Thus, the suit subverts vaudeville, and the audience rests easy.

The lie of the suit is nowhere more apparent than in Swaggart's own use of it. As the evening progresses, Swaggart struts and marches across the stage. He bends and bellows. The suit aggravates him. Swaggart unbuttons his
top shirt button and loosens the windsor knot. He is clearly at war with his suit. In fact, the suit mocks Swaggart's persona. He is too fluid, too entertaining, too exotic for what a suit "says." The form winks wildly at the content. But this is exactly the purpose of Swaggart's suit, to erase any consideration in the spectator's mind that he might indeed be a gospel Jerry Lee, a Gantryesque preacher-cum-clown. His suit scrambles the signals of showmanship, confuses the issue, and plots Swaggart along a matrix of rational intelligence, corporate power, and most of all sanity. What Swaggart must do above all, through the use of his suit, is defray any impression of mad play (the province of theatre). Swaggart treads dangerous ground, in this respect, attempting to ignore (and asking his audience to ignore) a growing mountain of commentary that has already labeled him as theatrical. And then there is the omnipresent image of Jerry Lee, a figure Swaggart seeks to elude by every possible means. The American business suit is the perfect decoy. Until Swaggart's confessions which, in effect, will denude Swaggart, evangelical audiences will never get past the counterfeit apparel. The powerful corporate magnate/preacher, non-theatrical and therefore honest, is reified as the true/sanctioned individual evangelicals have chosen to be their Minister-in-Chief.
Frances' costume incites an altogether different dynamic, with its obvious display of color, glamour, sexuality. Frances is clearly the most disquieting element on Swaggart's platform and appears in danger of unmasking Swaggart's own flamboyant impulses. Her persona/costume desecrates the minister's-wife archetype (the self-effacing, drab, utilitarian help mate of Rockwell's America). On this evening she wears an ankle-length gown, a pale peach lace-on-crochet design which has obviously been created for her (or is a one-of-a-kind purchase). Her hair has been highly coiffed for media exposure. She is, in short, a sparkling jewel set in the muted cushion of Swaggart's stage. The "diseased" nature of her costume issues from her positioning. First, she is the most arresting presence Up Stage. The light catches her blonde hair, causing her to trade focus with Swaggart. Her mascara-eyes flash intelligence, disdain, certitude. She is the sign of the American total woman. This "sign-ness" pinpoints the cause of Frances' duplicitous costume. One recalls that Frances participates in the symbolism of Every-Family. Thus, she is already regarded by her spectators through a symbolic lens. As a member of the archetypal family, she becomes the archetypal wife--but a wife who, in addition to being a homemaker, is also businesswoman, beauty queen, scholar, doyen of fashion, thin, and somewhere in her mid-thirties. (Frances states
in her cameo monologue that she is fifty this year, but she looks twenty-five.) Her costume is thus a carefully constructed deception because it indicates, as Symbolic Wife, that she is perfect. In short, the Frances "character" that Swaggart offers to his Crusade audience is a cardboard duplication of the mythic Total Woman. As is the case with Swaggart's suit, Frances' costume will arrest the myth-seeking spectator in its readership, causing the viewer never to perceive her as anything but the perfect helper to the perfect Hero.

We have seen that space and costuming conspire to produce plot—the self-made (Christological) Hero makes a journey from earth to heaven. Spatially, this is accomplished through a placement of symbolic artifacts/people along a linear platform which becomes a graphic representation of the Hero's path toward Paradise. Costuming serves to validate, from the spectator's perspective, Swaggart as worthy of Hero status. Only the narrativity of plot (through the means of careful scripting) remains as Swaggart's ultimate strategy in showing his audience that he is indeed the Paradigmatic Hero.

The "plot" of Swaggart's Crusade service actually follows the basic plot line of all evangelical services. Reflecting Aristotle's notion of plot (as having a beginning, a middle, an end), several key events typify all
such services: preliminary announcements, the offering, singing, preaching, and the "altar call" (variously labeled according to religious affiliation as prayer line, decision time, trusting Christ, etc.). This formatted plot is driven by the fundamental presupposition that there are sinners (the unchurched) in the congregation who must be courted/persuaded to "come to Christ." The altar call provides a ritual moment in which the sinner steps from the old life into the new. Thus, the evangelical service sets up a discourse of world-leaving, with the convert shedding the profane for the sacred, crossing from a secular world system into the Kingdom of God. The signs attending this moment highlight the ritual as journey. In most evangelical situations, the spiritual initiate "walks the aisle" to the front of the church, a performative act which physicalizes the notion of crossing into another realm.

Swaggart's Crusade service replicates this ritualized chain of events. The Crusade-goer knows exactly what he/she will encounter plot-wise during Swaggart's service. Conceptually, the process of the service is easy to understand because it replays the familiar beginning, middle, and end of dramatic performance structure. Following Victor Turner, we speak here of "performance" in the "processual sense of 'bringing to completion' or 'accomplishing.' "11 Updating Aristotle, Turner contends that social groups impose a dramatic/processual structure
(beginning, middle, end) on events in order to make them comprehensible, an observation that proves applicable to the Crusade plot. Swaggart realizes that in enacting a performance with which his spectator's are intimately acquainted, he reinforces himself as a sign of the familiar. The outline of the Crusade service (as a sinner's journey toward heaven) already makes sense to the Crusade patron. As Marvin Carlson would state, Swaggart merely offers his audience "the play they [are] attempting to see." With the journey format thus in place, it becomes a relatively simple matter for Swaggart, the humble Sinner/Pilgrim, to solicit favor as the Heroic Model of that journey.

As stated, Swaggart's Crusade plot follows the beginning/middle/end format of the evangelical church service. This "processual" effect compares with the traditional dramatic plot schema that moves from exposition to inciting incident to climax to denouement. How does Swaggart, as the Christ-Hero, plot himself into this pattern? The service's exposition, initiated by Donnie's declaration, "And now, let me present to you your Evangelist and my Dad, Jimmy Swaggart," extends until Swaggart begins his sermon (inciting incident). As stated earlier, the concept of "rapture"/escape acts as a code which foregrounds the plot of the pilgrim's journey. During the exposition, this code signals the spectator that
the "play" he has come to see has begun. Donnie's introduction of his father is tantamount to a "curtain-up." During the ensuing exposition (which includes on this particular evening congregational singing, Swaggart's solos, appearances by Frances and the grandchildren, an offering, and solo numbers by members of the quartet), an escape "script" is summoned on five separate occasions. Escape functions as a sign in the Saussurean sense, divided into signifier and signified. One recalls that the "signifier" is the verbal/graphic conduit through which the "signified" (meaning) is expressed. As the expositional element of the service progresses, Swaggart's manipulation of the signifiers is arresting (whereby Swaggart seeks consolidation of his signified status as hero/savior).

Swaggart enters and instantly launches into three "worship" songs: "Jesus Is the Sweetest Name I Know," "Hallelujah," and "He Is Lord," a tune so widely familiar to the evangelical community that it has become something of a spiritual national anthem. The song is so pervasively powerful because it invokes the two essential ideas on which all of Christianity rests: the resurrection of Christ and His ultimate reign as Lord of the universe. The words are as follows:

He is Lord, He is Lord
He has risen from the dead and He is Lord
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.

The Third line gives a coded picture of the apocalyptic/next
world in which all kingdoms of the earth will be forced to recognize Christ's deity. Thus, within five minutes of "curtain-up," the Escape sign is already in play. In this instance, the specific signifier is the image of "every knee" bowing and "every tongue" confessing, which signifies to Swaggart's in-coliseum audience a soon-coming Paradise free of world anguish. However, we must look at what Swaggart has his audience doing while this song (as a sign of escape) is in progress. Ten thousand people, almost to a person, have raised their arms towards Swaggart's platform, supposedly "worshipping" Christ. This gesture, especially in Fundamentalist/Pentecostalist circles, means symbolic surrender to the will of Christ. But the meaning of "surrender" blurs, given the gaze of the "star" who is leading his audience in worship. One realizes that the Crusade patron is also "surrendering" to the will of Swaggart, investing implicit trust that he will "do them good," as he will state presently. Thus Swaggart, imbricating the pleasure of the sign (Escape) with an event that betokens surrender to Christ's/Swaggart's will, quickly confirms himself as the venerated Host of the evening.

Sign and action again fuse as Swaggart commands his spectators to greet their fellow Crusade-goers. During this general greeting, Swaggart leads the group in an up-tempo tune:
My Lord is coming back to earth again
My Lord is coming back to earth again
Satan will be bound a thousand years
We're gonna have no tempter there
After Jesus shall come back to earth again.

The song is sung ad infinitum, promoting a festival atmosphere in which the spectator becomes "the actor," shaking hands, laughing, hugging, and generally enjoying an unstructured moment in the Crusade arena. Again, the sign of Escape is promulgated, its significer being the "Lord's return" and its signified being the ultimate ecstatic of a world bereft of satanic influence. Here, Swaggart attaches extra significance to the pleasurable Escape sign by creating a momentary house party. Swaggart is simply establishing himself as the benevolent Host, rescuing his service from any hint of boredom. The party atmosphere thus confuses the matter of who exactly is the Savior. The spectator becomes thankful, not only for the Savior who is soon to return from heaven, but also the savior of this service—Swaggart himself.

Swaggart's next move gains audience sympathy through audience identification, using the powerful Escape sign once more in the process. As soon as the party-greeting has ended, Swaggart concludes the moment by saying, "He is coming back, and if you think we [my emphasis] were noisy then, you just wait until He splits the skies asunder, and mortality puts on immortality, and corruption puts on incorruption. That's the reason we [emphasis mine] call it
'rapture'—great joy." With several signifiers at work (images of Christ's return, splitting skies, immortality, incorruption) the Escape sign again looks forward to pleasure. But Swaggart manages here to include himself as part of the redeemed number through the reflexive "we."

Thus Swaggart positions himself as simply another (brother) pilgrim on the way to the promised kingdom.

The next instance of the Escape sign evidences a bait-and-switch tactic. Swaggart's careful "we" script is followed presently by Frances' own version of a "we" discourse. Frances states, "We'll never get to meet most you here [on earth] . . . but there will be a day that we'll be able to, and there won't be any time limit, and we can just sit down and be refreshed in the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." Just as soon as the audience has "bought" Swaggart's brotherly "we," Frances' use of the pronoun occurs almost without notice. But the import of Frances' "we" is not brotherly; it is royal. It segregates the Swaggarts from the crowd, implying a star status that will not allow intermingling with constituents/supporters at this point in time. In this way, Swaggart/ Frances employs an apocalyptic discourse (Escape) to reinforce notions of Swaggart's "difference," his royal station within Christendom, his heroism.

Before Swaggart begins his Biblical reading (inciting incident), a fifth iteration of the Escape sign is offered
for audience inspection. Dudley Smith, one of Swaggart's male soloists and the only Afro-American on the platform, sings a heavily encoded song, the first verse and chorus of which are as follows [all emphases are mine]:

Jesus is gone away to prepare for me a place,
There a home he built for me beyond the skies
I'll be ready for that day
When my soul shall fly away
To that mansion way over on the other side.
Well, the only thing better than talkin' 'bout heaven
Is when I walk those streets of gold
And I wear my long white robe
I'm gonna meet my Lord up there
At that meeting in the air
Ain't nothin' better than bein' there, etc.

The song is actually a montage of "shop-worn" phraseology (note emphases) taken from a canon of linguistic signals known to every evangelical. For example, in recalling such brush arbor tunes as "I'll Fly Away, O' Glory," or "There Is Going To Be A Meeting In the Air," (still used, by the way, in current church services), the spectator only has to put a new hat on an old idea. Smith's song is really nothing more than a placard of coded signifiers (note emphases) advertizing the pleasure of escape, depicted here as a heavenly homecoming. On this conceptual level alone, the song works to Swaggart's advantage, making him seem "correct" theologically. But Swaggart's performance accomplishes a kind of meta-textual coup, sending out far more startling (if subliminal) signals than we have at first realized. The tune, obviously, is a commentary about other-world homecoming. But the song's dialect (working
class colloquial) comments on the commentary, telling the spectator not only of homecoming, but the kind of homecoming he/she may expect. In essence, Swaggart's Crusade-goers will be ushered into a working class heaven, populated by the kind of plain folks found in heartland America. Thus Swaggart is revealed as a populist Pied Piper, leading his followers into the Land of the Familiar. For this his audience is grateful. The manipulation of this moment, however, holds another dimension in that Swaggart has placed this Woody Guthrie-esque tune in the mouth of a black man. His presence on Swaggart's "white" platform constitutes tokenism. Judging from the paucity of other black faces, even in the coliseum at large, Smith seems to have been commandeered, co-opted by the Swaggart ministry, as a sort of performing mascot. Swaggart's relation to Smith, as a colonial patron, becomes apparent to his largely white audience. This "boss" effect is made even more evident in Swaggart's consigning Smith a song which is in no sense Black, but folk-Appalachian--Swaggart becomes a powerful Pied Pier indeed. Swaggart's audience can now crown him as a virtual overlord who is able to make the "other" race(es) dance at his bidding. By following a scenario which re-enacts a kind of minstrel-show hegemony (wherein the black man performs under the aegis of white control), Swaggart certifies his "virtue" as a benevolent colonial master, allowing the "other" race position and
time in the performing circle. The implication of Swaggart's "virtue" in this regard is certainly not lost on his white spectators.

Thus, before Swaggart has even begun his sermon text, he has manipulated signs mandating his status as Hero. But the performance's ultimate agenda is to superimpose the Swaggart persona on that of Christ's, thereby assuring Swaggart's unshakable position of stardom in the evangelical world. This he will do through the "rising action" of his sermon and in the climax of his altar call.

Christ's journey from birth to the cross is a narrative of conflict; He battles first Satan, then the Jewish community, and finally his own disciples. As stated earlier, this journey, which ends in Christ's escape/triumph as He enters Paradise, provides the ideological model for every Christian. In his/her constant war against the secular world system, conflict actually becomes a metaphor for the Christian's earthly existence. Swaggart understands that this scenario provides the essential, organizing framework for the mindset of virtually every spectator in his coliseum audience. And this is the one plot/scenario Swaggart always "plays," regardless of his ostensible sermon theme. In this plot, Swaggart uniformly offers himself first as the Pardigmatic Pilgrim and then, through various rhetorical devices, as a facsimile of Christ Himself. Swaggart's leads his audience
to draw these kinds of analogies simply by recounting his real confrontations with interest groups, thereby spawning a discourse of perpetual conflict. On this evening however, Swaggart follows a different tack. In his sermon entitled "God's Plan of Redemption," he surveys (in a cursory way) the entire history of the Bible, relating the conflicts of key Biblical figures in their pilgrimage of faith. But one quickly realizes that Swaggart is not only providing commentary about these characters, he is acting them out. He starts with Abraham's mandate from God to murder his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar. Swaggart holds the knife aloft. When the substitutionary ram appears in the bushes, Swaggart (as Abraham) laughs with uncontrolled joy. Swaggart continues, describing a Jewish hut in an alien Egypt on the night of the Death Angel's passing. He is there. Swaggart weeps in thanksgiving that the Death Angel has passed him by. He vaults over several centuries, detailing the high priestly garments used in temple worship, garments so beautiful, Swaggart says, that "they beggar description." But as Swaggart wraps his own suit coat tightly about him, we realize he is the high priest. His voices quivers, delineating the swift judgement that awaited any priest who failed in his duties: "If he made the slightest mistake," Swaggart intones, "he would be atomized on the spot." Suddenly he is outlining the life of John the Baptist and his conflict with a
misunderstanding world. "I see it!" Swaggart shouts, making a startling shift into the first person. "I see it," says Swaggart, who has now become John the Baptist, witnessing the "dove" descend on Christ who stands in the River Jordan.

In these enactments Swaggart steals focus from his commentary about the characters by making his meta-commentary (acting of the characters) equally as thrilling. He scrambles his signals, causing his audience to feel that the success of his sermon rests on his role play rather than on his polemics. And then Swaggart employs the special ploy he has designed for this particular service: he suddenly dons the mask of Christ himself. He declares, "Our heavenly High Priest two thousand years ago laid aside his garments of glory and beauty. Paul said He stripped himself and went into the Holy of Holies." At this moment, Swaggart begins to remove his suit coat, actually becoming the doomed Christ, shedding his "garments of glory." He stalks the stage, bound by the constraints of the jacket (from which seemingly he cannot get free). Then just as quickly, Swaggart slips the suit jacket back on over his shoulder, his gaze turned upward. Swaggart's voice is emotional: "I know He came out [of the tomb] and put [back] on the garments of glory and beauty." The affirmation which Swaggart's audience accords to his other enactments is quickly transferred to this "rendition" of
Christ, engendering a "reading" which superimposes the Christ persona on Swaggart's. To his in-house audience, he has virtually become the risen Lord. In the evangelical firmament of "stars," what other more venerated personality could Swaggart hope to be?

Then comes the climax of Swaggart's "play," where he takes the sinner (as Symbolic Christ) through the portals of salvation. As noted, the altar call is an extremely powerful ritual (widely enacted in evangelical churches) in which the sinner "walks the aisle" toward the minister's platform, thus symbolizing through a spatial enactment the idea of world-leaving. Praying over the sinner, the minister is seen to "carry" him/her into a salvation experience. Swaggart uses this powerful ritual as a functional climax to his own journey as the Christ-Hero (within the context of the crusade service plot), metaphorically ending his journey in the Heavenly Kingdom as he carries his "sinners" across the threshold of salvation. Thus Swaggart gives his spectators (in Carlson's words) "the play they were attempting to see." Swaggart's pilgrimage is complete. His conflicts are over. He emerges triumphant as a Hero of gigantic proportions, a model of the truly self-made Christian, seen as nothing less than Christ's stand-in on earth.
In Chapter Five, we will continue an exploration of Swaggart's theatricality, with special consideration given to a discourse of confession and how that discourse works dramatically within the environs of Family Worship Center, Swaggart's local Baton Rouge church. Swaggart's confessional period, beginning in 1988, diverts the course of his myth-making, but it does not altogether remove him from that conceptual field. We will see that theatre continues to be a useful mode by which Swaggart affirms his heroism (even after his first confession); it is simply developed along different lines. But this newer "brand" of heroism takes its roots from his Crusade period, the aspects of which we have delineated in the foregoing discussion. One of these features is Swaggart's uncanny ability to create dramatic environs (not only in choosing the "marginal" arena, but also in orchestrating interior space). Swaggart's deployment of "actors" and plot provides evidence of his theatrical propensity, one that works for the reaffirmation of himself as the Christological Hero. Yet, in the midst of all these theatrical signals, Swaggart diverts the evangelical spectator from any hint that theatre is taking place. Swaggart, in short, seems curiously adept at masking his mask. We will see presently, in investigating Swaggart's post-confessional tribulations, that the adroit
manipulation of masks may mean the difference between life and death as Swaggart attempts to maintain the myth of his persona.
NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR


2 Carlson 8, 10.


4 Carlson, Theatre Semiotics 44.


12 Carlson, Theatre Semiotics, 17.
CHAPTER V

SWAGGART'S THEATRE OF POST-CONFESSION

Before his confession to immorality in 1988, Jimmy Swaggart was effectively able to anchor his persona in the venerated American myth of heroic individualism. Swaggart's success in large part resulted from his persuasive rhetoric and the adept theatrical manipulations that signified his self-made heroism. Understandably, in the wake of his first televised confession, Swaggart's positioning as a hero (particularly within the evangelical community) became immediately problematic. Once typically represented by photographs depicting him in histrionic fervor with a Bible held aloft, Swaggart's public image was now informed by the ubiquitous video-clip of his tear-lined face (showing Swaggart in mid-confession).¹ Magazines such as Time and Newsweek moreover ran photos of Debra Murphree, the New Orleans prostitute implicated in the Swaggart scandal.² Probably the most damaging to Swaggart's character/heroism was a set of photos showing Murphree in the same pornographic poses she had used in her liason with Swaggart (Penthouse/July 1988).³ Swaggart's 1988 confession (and the ensuing media probe surrounding his "fall from grace") was devastating to evangelicals who had come to regard Swaggart as their Minister-in-Chief. The Swaggart persona (as the self-made hero) was now called into question, particularly in regard to the "virtue"
trope. Once the hero's virtue is doubted (especially within the context of Christianity) the heroic persona collapses. Take, for instance, Trope 5: virtuous labor is rewarded with success. If Swaggart's "labor" is seen as tainted (no longer virtuous), then it can no longer be rewarded. In fact, since 1988 the evangelical camp has increasingly withheld "rewards." Four months after Swaggart's first confession, ministry donations plummeted from $500,000 (daily) to $100,000. The Arbitron rating service reported that within this same period Swaggart's TV audience had dropped from 2.1 million households (in February) to 928,000 (by July). Nevertheless, even at this point Swaggart still maintained a solid third position among religious programs. Although judgement within the evangelical community was forthcoming (as witnessed in Swaggart's defrocking by his Assemblies of God denomination), the above figures suggest that a large segment of evangelicals still embraced Swaggart as a treasured member of their community. How Swaggart was able to buoy his hero persona on a sea of troubled waters again bespeaks his ability to use the self-made myth to his advantage--and to turn it into hypnotic theatre. This chapter will present a perspective on Swaggart's heroic persona in light of his two confessions. In so doing, commentary falls into two parts: the first assesses the post-1988 period when Swaggart still attempted to maintain
the illusion of self-made heroism; the second investigates
the post-1991 period when Swaggart's mask was irrevocably
exposed.

I. The First Confessional Period: February 1988 to October 1991

In the days following news reports of his association
with a New Orleans prostitute, Swaggart found himself in a
precarious position. Censured by leaders of his own
denomination, he realized he must either move immediately
to fortify his position as a religious "star," or
relinquish his title, becoming simply another charlatan in
a long line of duplicitous preachers (Jim Bakker being the
most recent example). His decision was astonishing.
Instead of denying allegations of sexual misconduct, as
Bakker had done a year before, Swaggart chose a reverse
tactic: he orchestrated on national television a heart-
wrenching spectacle of confession (aired on February 21,
1988). The media saw instantly that Swaggart was creating
theatre. Richard Ostling, for example, in his Newsweek
article "Now It's Jimmy's Turn" (March/1988) documented
moments in which Swaggart's voice fell "to a hoarse
whisper, sometimes cracked with emotion." Ostling labeled
this program, in which Swaggart begs forgiveness first from
Frances, then Donnie, then from God Himself, as an
"extraordinary performance." Quentin Schultze in
Televangelism and American Culture also saw Swaggart's first confession as a "staged event." In a comprehensive analysis of this televised service from Family Worship Center (Swaggart's local Baton Rouge Church), Schultze noted that no shots even vaguely hinted at the presence of "disgruntled or angry congregants." In this telecast, one shot catches Donnie as he silently mouths the words, "I love you." The camera rests on Frances' affirming smile. The program does not end until it has recorded the concluding moment when thousands of Swaggart's "flock" surround him and Frances in a paean of forgiveness. Schultze saw that Swaggart's program directors had carefully planned every shot to advance a specific point: God has forgiven Swaggart; so should you.6 Arbitron figures bear witness to the fact that this spectacular confession worked. As Schultze observed, "[Swaggart's] repentence seemed real, even to many skeptics of televangelism."7

If media analysts such as Ostling and Schultze interpreted this first confession in terms of theatre, Swaggart's evangelical audience saw something else entirely. What Swaggart wanted them to see was the Paradigmatic Sinner, a heroic Swaggart who has the courage to confess before the nation his sexual dysfunction. Here is bravery capable of revealing the most sordid secrets of the inner self. Again Swaggart's performance manipulates
signals; he actually attempts to displace the gravity of his "sin" with the virtue of his confession. In this respect, Swaggart plays on the virtuous aspects of the self-made hero in order to re-introduce himself as a newer heroic exemplar of the Christian faith: the sinner who confesses. Noting Swaggart's ability to maintain his status as the third most-watched televangelist (at least until the 90's), one realizes the relative success of his attempts.

In choosing the spectacle of confession, Swaggart capitalizes on a current American self-reflexivity, one that obsessively seeks to understand personality through rigorous exposes, biographies, talk/interview shows, tabloids, political inquisitions, etc. This impulse undergirds such campaigns (promoted through television) as weight loss programs and self-motivational seminars. These projects highlight the presence of the confessor who lays his life bare before the nation and "walks through" the personal pain that produced this moment of "over-coming." One sees Richard Simmons as Diet guru, openly weeping with his "clients" as they confess to (past) uncontrollable binges. Tony Robbins shows testimonials of those who have lived lives of penury engendered by poor self-image. Confessional inquisitors proliferate on television--Oprah Winfrey, Geraldo Rivera, Phil Donahue, Joan Rivers, et al. This confession syndrome no less insinuates itself in the
evangelical realm. On a nightly basis one can view Pat Robertson's personal on-camera interviews or Robert Tilton's miracle documentaries. Foucault rightly observes: "Western man has become a confessing animal."\(^8\)

Swaggart's confession, in the context of a confessing society, may thus seem less shocking than it would first appear. For his evangelical readership, Swaggart participates in a time-honored form of religious expiation, as well as a ritual of purgation (confession) common in current American (popular) culture. It is imperative to state, however, that Swaggart's evangelical audience will perceive his confession as basically honest, unless it carries with it some tacit duplicity. In fact, Swaggart counts on this disposition in his audience in his 1988 Family Worship Center confession.

Swaggart's portrayal of integrity, however, invites concern that his confessional performance may hide a much more potent agenda. His "act of contrition" certainly wins him favor. But such spectacular contrition becomes suspect. Why, for instance, does Swaggart choose to expose himself to the entire nation? Why not opt for a quiet, non-televised service privy only to the Baton Rouge faithful? Why not issue a simple announcement to the newspapers detailing the content of his confessional sermon? The answers perhaps lie in the judge/confesser relation implicated in the very act of confession. As
confessor, Swaggart depends on his "judges"/viewers to grant him clemency. But Swaggart, whose media empire at this point circles the globe, must enlist as many judges as possible. In other words, to make his repentence "stick," he must be granted universal pardon. Thus Swaggart finds himself entangled in a delicate hegemonic imbroglio. He must momentarily relinquish power to his "judges" in order to remain ultimately powerful himself.

Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* addresses this sort of power relationship in defining the roles of confessor and judge. Focusing especially on the sexual confession in Western society (which has obvious links to Swaggart's situation), Foucault writes:

> The confession is a ritual of discourse . . . that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; . . . a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.9

Swaggart finds himself engaged in this sort of power relationship—on purpose. Swaggart actually "throws" power to his evangelical constituents, giving them the right of judgement, while abasing himself as an object of scrutiny—the dysfunctional patient. Swaggart, in essence, flatters
his evangelical audience. He suddenly makes them his overlords, his doctors, who, as Foucault states, must judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile. Here is the act of Oedipus (who blinds himself)—the tyrant turns himself into a spectacle of self-knowledge, allowing the polis judgement over him. Like Oedipus, Swaggart makes his own body a "theatre" of scrutiny. He invites his judges to take a long look at his sin—but also to witness his pain. In doing so, Swaggart depends on his judges' benevolence. By minimal self-sacrifice (confession), he hopes to avert a harsher, more destructive sentence (as given in Jim Bakker's case). Swaggart hopes to distract his religious audience from the dishonor of his sin by showcasing the virtue of his confession. The ploy works. It works, as Swaggart well knows, because his evangelical audience is more inclined to read his confession as a Richard Simmons session in soul-baring than as a true act of contrition. As seen in Foucault's statement, there is a difference. Within our pop culture episteme, the very act of confessing is exoneration, redemption, purification. There is no "other" penalty, no excommunication, no regime of penance. The act of confession is penance. The modern confessional "judge," in Foucault's terms, unburdens the confessor of wrongs on the spot, freeing him from any further responsibility. This, in essence, is the drama Swaggart enacts at his Family Worship Center in February of 1988--a
pop culture confessional designed to release him immediately from guilt.

Given the progression of events in Swaggart's defrocking (entailing his unwillingness to accept "discipline" from church patriarchs—and his refusal to step down from his pulpit), it becomes increasingly apparent that Swaggart intended a pop culture confession all along. In fact, a review of Swaggart's "confessional" discourse reveals that repentence is never actually his theme at all. The theme, rather, is martyrdom. Swaggart constantly situates himself as the innocent victim of Satanic plots instigated to topple his ministry. Swaggart becomes a martyr to the fight (with Satan). Importantly, as Swaggart re-vivifies a discourse of martyrdom/fight, he is actually again offering himself as the mythic self-made hero, implicating primarily Trope 7 (the hero encounters obstacles on his journey). Swaggart once more depends on his audience reading him as the hero who must surmount incredible barriers before reaching success. In Stephen Greenblatt's terms, Swaggart moves toward creating a "representation" of himself as a warrior, seeking in this way to garner sympathy. Thus from 1988 to 1991, a discourse of battle grows increasingly prominent as Swaggart's "characteristic mode of address to the world."^10

A proliferation of utterances documents Swaggart's battle discourse during this period. Through sermons, the
newspapers, pamphlets, and books, Swaggart promotes a rhetoric that foregrounds his war with Satan (and others). A common scenario, for example, depicts Swaggart discovering that Satan-inspired detractors are members of his own "tribe." This, in essence, is Swaggart's perpetual script. Although this scenario takes numerous forms, Swaggart's *The Cup Which My Father Hath Given Me* (published in the summer of 1991 just prior to his second confession) stands as the culminating document of this period, providing clear evidence that Swaggart sees himself under siege.

This book begins with a quote printed in bold typeface: "When you sit in the midst of wreckage . . . you have to realize that the fault and the blame are yours, no one else's!" The signature under the quote is Swaggart's. The reader thus believes the quote to be a kind of teaser, a thematic prelude. This statement presumes Swaggart's realization that one should take responsibility for one's actions. Nothing could be farther from the truth; this quote is a simple diversion. The evangelical thus misses Swaggart's real agenda—to detail his constant battle with Satanic forces. Swaggart reveals his martyr status in the first line of the Introduction. He writes, "This book is about spiritual warfare." Half a page later, he melodramatically depicts himself as a beleagured naval warrior:
Spiritually speaking, I have stood on the deck facing the enemy with shot landing and shells exploding in a conflagration all around me. I have seen the decks littered with the dead and dying as I have felt the ship literally sinking out from under me. And I think I can say as well, again spiritually speaking, that I have lost an arm or leg, and the scars will always be there as a reminder of the horrible conflict that gave no quarter.

Thus, Swaggart opens his book with a bit of theatre. He dons the costume of the Hero Warrior. He invents a scenario and a setting. He steps metaphorically onto the stage and asks his audience to believe in this new character he is playing. As in his televised confession, Swaggart offers the spectacle of his body to his "judges" for perusal. He indicates (metaphorically) that he has "lost an arm or leg," hoping to commandeer sympathy from an evangelical community already conversant with the rhetoric of spiritual warfare. The typical evangelical reader may consequently see this Hero Warrior as the real Swaggart. This is what Swaggart hopes. But closer inspection reveals that Swaggart has again assumed a role. Swaggart's histrionics are revealed as such because they so obviously contradict Swaggart's former role of Moral Judge (as seen in the cases of Bakker and Gorman). Swaggart has switched "scripts." He now asks his "judges" to ignore the guidelines he formerly used to discipline the immorality of others. Swaggart asks, in fact, that his judges not see him within a frame of immorality at all, but within the
context of a life-threatening war, one which, if he wins, will attest to his incomparable courage.

Swaggart masks the real issue of his immorality by an extended rhetoric of the embattled body. He writes, "To sit in front of a television set and to hear yourself described in the most debilitating terms . . . The shock of it numbs you . . . It's as though you are out of body, observing the horror taking place as if it's happening to someone else" (2). Swaggart even offers the spectacle of Frances' body for inspection as anguished co-warrior. The book details Frances' reaction to televised accusations of Swaggart's impropriety: "When she came to herself, she was on the floor having literally collapsed with her body racked in sobs" (2). Swaggart's theatricality is persuasive. By masking the cause of Frances' anguish (Swaggart's alliance with a prostitute), he throws focus onto the effect (his condemnation from the religious sector).

Swaggart's book next creates a scenario of Miltonic proportions, with Satan himself revealed as Swaggart's personal nemesis. Swaggart states:

I believe that God called me for world evangelism at a tender age. Even though I can't prove what I am about to say, I believe, that when this call was given, in the high councils of heaven Satan demanded of the Lord that he be given equal latitude as well. As stated, I can't prove this, but in my heart I believe this to be the truth . . . . The opposition from the powers of darkness from the very beginning has been so extraordinary that at times, emotionally, I have
felt I would be torn apart—and this has continued through the years. (56)

This statement includes an important subtext, that Swaggart suffers in God's cause. It is only because Swaggart has chosen to deny the world that Satan plots his destruction. Swaggart thereby places himself in no less august company than the Biblical Job, whom Satan also picked for special attack. Indeed, Swaggart catalogs the sufferings of Job, Paul, and Jeremiah—all having suffered in their pursuit of Godliness (51, 52). Likening his own tribulations to those of the Old and New Testament patriarchs, Swaggart installs himself in a kind of Warrior's Hall of Fame.

Swaggart also experiences dreams in which he sees his nemesis face to face (30, 31, 73-76). He moreover has visions in which Christ appears, assuring Swaggart of heavenly assistance (8, 44, 73-76). What unfolds before the (evangelical) reader is a cosmic tug-of-war in which Swaggart fights, on one hand, to save millions of "souls," and on the other, wages war with Satan. The reader soon comes to the realization that Swaggart is the single most important Warrior in Christendom. If he fails, Christ's mission to save the world (through him) will be foiled for all time. For the typical evangelical reader, this rhetoric is both hypnotic and persuasive. The reader thus loses sight altogether of Swaggart's immorality; in short, Swaggart the sinner recedes before Swaggart the embattled hero.
This book, however, presents more diversions for Swaggart's religious audience. A particular ploy reinforces Swaggart's importance within a discourse of battle; Swaggart promotes himself as a kind of (Christian) military instructor, teaching lessons he has ostensibly learned in the heat of the fray. As a tactician of extraordinary insight, Swaggart relays privileged information for countervailing Satan. He states:

I realize that many Christians, when thinking of a wrestling match with demon spirits, see in their minds a strong, stalwart Christian standing proudly with head held high, saying with an authoritative voice, 'I rebuke you Satan.' However, to be frank with you, the conflict is seldom like that. Spiritual warfare at its highest level is a fight to the finish. Satan will either defeat you or you will defeat him (6, 7).

This passage implies that Swaggart, having been attacked himself by Satan, can justly warn his audience not to judge the true Warrior. It also implies that very few have ever experienced "warfare at its highest level." Few therefore can lay claim to understanding the magnitude of Swaggart's personal battle. Swaggart's "to be frank with you" is thus simply a code. It lets his reader know that tactical secrets are forthcoming; it also suggests that Swaggart alone is privy to these secrets. Since he has engaged in battles the common Christian will never encounter, Swaggart becomes a Professor Emeritus in the field of spiritual warfare. Swaggart offers his Warrior-Instructor costume to the evangelical reader as a sign of his self-made heroism,
ensuring his value to the Christian polis as a spiritual military expert.

Prior to his second confession in October of 1991, Swaggart's scripting provides an elemental theatrical grounding for the construction of his Warrior image. But other theatrical devices are brought into operation as well; and nowhere are these devices more evident than in the one-hour telecasts originating from Swaggart's local church, the Family Worship Center. In the wake of the 1988 scandal (and as a result of reduced numbers in Crusade audiences), Swaggart increasingly favors Family Worship Center as the site of his weekly program. Seating a maximum of seven thousand, the Center's auditorium is equipped with a series of masking partitions that can make the space appear smaller than it is—and thus more crowded than it is. This spatial/scenic dynamic becomes important as Swaggart seeks to maintain the illusion of numbers in his audience. A smaller auditorium (with one thousand in attendance) can be made to seem more crowded on camera than even a half-full coliseum (with, say, three thousand in-house). Quite simply, Swaggart more often chooses this smaller (friendlier) space in the days before his second confession. The interior design of Family Worship Center serves Swaggart well in his first post-confessional period. In fact, close examination reveals its eminent suitability for Swaggart's enactment of the self-made hero in his war
with demon forces. We must remember that Swaggart sees himself not only as a fighter, but also as a martyr to the fight, singled out for unique punishment by Satan. In the configuration of Family Worship Center's focal dais (a broad, open acting space replicating the thrust stage), Swaggart has invented the perfect arena for the symbolic staging of his martyrdom. A semiotic examination of the Family Worship Center's interior illustrates how Swaggart (by manipulating decor/design) can further a martyr discourse.

The central organizing element of Family Worship Center's interior is an octagon-shaped platform which sits in the center of the circular auditorium. Up Stage access to the octagon is provided by another oblong platform, one that links the central octagon to the choir/soloists, musicians, Frances, Donnie, and sundry staffers—all occupying the Up Stage area. Swaggart's "thrust-stage" theatre bears no small resemblance, in fact, to the stages employed by the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis and Canada's Stratford Festival. The audience faces the octagon thrust on three sides; and if one defines the Up Stage cadre also as audience, then a literal theatre in the round emerges. This configuration emphasizes the important point that Swaggart is surrounded by a sea of people. A far more intimate effect is achieved—one unlike that exhibited in Swaggart's Crusades where a proscenium-like stage serves to
distance Swaggart from the spectator. At the Family Worship Center, Swaggart is literally thrust into the audience's circle. If Swaggart approaches the edge of his octagon, for example, he can nearly touch anyone sitting in the front row. This intimate relationship between actor (Swaggart) and audience is of paramount importance in explaining how Swaggart successfully invokes his discourse of martyrdom.

Marvin Carlson's emphasis on the theatrical "articulation of space" informs our assessment of Swaggart's spatial manipulation. In *Places of Performance* Carlson observes that theorists and historians have always "stressed as central to theatre the implied dialectic of the space of the observer and the space of the observed." This dialectic, in short, foregrounds itself in a dialogue of power—the power of the spectator juxtaposed to the power of the performer. From the ancient Greek acting circle to the "found" spaces that house various contemporary productions, this actor-audience power dialectic is always at work, mitigating and ultimately shaping the meaning of the performance. As example, one might point to the ample power wielded by aristocratic audiences of the English Restoration, who had "permission" to stop any performer/performance at will. One could also consider the actor/audience relationship of today's Broadway theatre, where the actor seems to have ultimate
control, where the spectator sits in awe, paying homage to the actor as a "star."

This power dialectic is no less at work in Swaggart's Family Worship Center. Swaggart's stage arrangement replicates the kind of theatre space which has historically/archetypically situated the spectator as arbiter of power, placing the actor within the viewer's circle of "control." The ancient Greek theatre provides the chief antecedent for this model of spectator power. Significantly, for the ancient Greeks, the theatre (theatron) was not a place where one "acts," but "a place where one observes." This distinction bears great importance, for the theatre thus becomes the observer's realm, a habitation of his power, a space wherein he sits in judgement (as was certainly evident in the Greek practice of according prizes for theatrical excellence). The Greek theatre shows spectator "control" at one of its strongest historical moments. Examining Swaggart's octagon thrust, we see that he has virtually re-created the Greek theatron with its central acting circle/orchestra—a configuration which archetypically throws "power/control" to the spectator.

This question of who controls whom appears to be a recurrent concern in our exploration of Swaggart's theatre-making. In his February/1988 confession, Swaggart ostensibly allows himself to be abased by rendering himself
transparent to the nation. He "throws" power to his judges; but there is an agenda in this move. Realizing that Swaggart's "confession" is not contrition, but a perpetration of a martyr discourse, we see that Swaggart intends to flatter his "judges" by supposedly making them his masters. Swaggart engineers the same manipulation through the "messages" emanating from his theatron. Placing himself on a central dias, Swaggart seemingly (again) invests his spectator-masters with the power to judge. Thus Swaggart creates a great Theatre of Confession, replete not only with appropriate "scripts," but also with message-laden configurations (entailing actor/audience placement).

Creating a confessional environment as a kind of theatrical laboratory, Swaggart's performance necessitates the role of the spectator/judge in an ensuing discourse of martyrdom. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* addresses this symbiotic, judge/confesser phenomenon, an effect intrinsic to Swaggart's confessional theatre. Relating the way the sexual confession gained "scientific" status in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Foucault states, "The revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said. The one who listened was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth." Spectator/judge as "master of truth" is the role Swaggart
has created for every member of his in-house audience. As stated, "truth" for the evangelical mind proves the fundamental basis of one's credibility. The inverse of truth is lie (code for original sin instigated by the lie of the "serpent"). One's reputation/career stands or falls according to one's perceived truthfulness or duplicity. As noted in discussion of his Crusade stage, Swaggart must avoid the appearance of dishonesty in any form (including the evident display of theatrical signals). Thus, assigning "masters of truth" as part of his theatron decor, Swaggart plays a dangerous game. He runs the risk of being exposed as theatrical/sinful by his masters/judges. But Swaggart's open octagon militates against the sense that he has anything to hide. The open dais, in essence, denudes him. His body becomes a spectacle for scrutiny, begging evaluation. He offers himself up for judgement (like Christ offered himself to his accusers). Swaggart assigns his spectator/judges, in Foucault's terms, the task of "decipherment," supposedly releasing his secrets to them in a penitential act of auto-punishment. Swaggart hopes that his judges will decipher this as virtue or honesty or truth. In other words, Swaggart attempts to erase any evidence of "lie" by orchestrating his performance octagon as truth-engendering space.

On this level alone, Swaggart's open dais works to reify the essential honesty of his persona. But we recall
that in "confessing," Swaggart never intends to express actual guilt, but only to portray his martyrdom. We look at the open octagon again. We are suddenly struck with the fact that Swaggart has not only created a confessional laboratory, but also a kind of sacrificial altar—the perfect "stage" on which to enact martyrdom. For example, aisles radiate from the octagon thrust, each one stenciled with straight white ribbons. At the foot of the central octagon, the ribbons of each aisle culminate in a kind of Aztec pattern, resembling a tri-stepped pyramid, connecting the margins of the congregation with the perimeters of the dais. Above all, the Aztec-like figures remind one of Indian rites. The dais suggests an ancient Indian altar, broad and flat, upon which priest and sacrificial victim conspire together in the spectacle of sacrifice.

The octagon thrust is bare, bereft of the traditional church pulpit. It is a large, open performing space which allows Swaggart maximum freedom of movement. We sense that here Swaggart feels "at home" as he crosses and re-crosses the space. But the octagon reveals something else. The loneliness of the central performer (Swaggart) becomes apparent as he stalks the open space. His aloneness is made even more evident by the cavernous auditorium whose roof vaults ninety feet above Swaggart's head. This perpendicular space serves to dwarf Swaggart as he tracks across the empty circle of his platform. His space (both
horizontal and vertical) isolates him, pinpointing him upon the altar dais in his lonely centrality. The importance of the "altar" signal now becomes apparent. Within the context of Christian ritual, Swaggart is supposed to function as the priest (who ostensilby relays focus to the sacrifice). But in Family Worship Center ritual, Swaggart is the sacrifice, playing out a discourse of martyrdom, gathering empathy to himself.

The martyr role seems to hold the attention of Swaggart's public. Reviewing evidence from video sources during this period, one notes Swaggart's inevitable self-reflexive commentary on his martyr's fight with Satan. But the camera reveals general spectator approval of Swaggart's discourse, and shows relatively full houses, at least in the programs televised from Family Worship Center. Swaggart is also able to maintain a brisk Crusade schedule, even in the face of reduced attendance. Perhaps the most revealing statistics of this period come from Arbitron which, in July of 1991, ranked Swaggart seventh among the top ten religious broadcasters. Such statistics reveal that, in his "life-and-death" struggle with Satan, Swaggart was still able to capture the evangelical imagination. Through an elaborate "staging" of his Heroic martyrdom, Swaggart managed to divert attention from his immorality, replacing it with the virtue of a battle scenario.

Swaggart's duplicitous costume (the self-made hero as
martyr) nearly worked. During this time, the evangelical world watched the Swaggart persona with caution, albeit with interest. One might call this time a "grace period," with his religious community willing, for the most part, to give Swaggart the benefit of the doubt. Swaggart's second confession of immoral behavior, however, undermines this audience relation. Swaggart's revelation quickly subverts the "myth" of heroism, showing his "costume" to be untrue. And absence of truth (or lie) is the one unforgivable sin in the realm of evangelicalism.

II. The Second Confessional Period: After October 1991

Arbitron figures for the November 1991 rating period (a month after Swaggart's confessed rendezvous with a California prostitute) revealed that his telecast had fallen to 17th place among religious programs. Although Swaggart kept the amount of his monthly donations a secret after October 1991, by November 1 at least five broadcast firms had sued Swaggart for non-payment of back fees, indicating the duress into which Swaggart's finances had fallen. By the end of October, Swaggart's top ministry officials had resigned, and enrollment at the Jimmy Swaggart Bible College had fallen from 1,451 in the fall of 1987 to 370 by November 1 of 1991. Perhaps the most revealing sign of Swaggart's failing credibility was the mass exodus of Swaggart's Family Worship Center flock. For
instance, statistics show that by December his regular Sunday attendance had fallen to an average of 375 (in contrast to an attendance of five to seven thousand prior to February, 1988).  

The above figures argue that Swaggart is no longer able to "sell" himself as the self-made hero. His mask/costume is now deemed duplicitous ("diseased" in Barthes' terms). The martyr discourse is seen for what it is: a strategy designed to evade the real (and obviously recurring) issue of Swaggart's immorality. Swaggart is here sabotaged by his own ploy; he has already thrown power to his judges (Foucault's "masters of truth"). These evangelical judges, who remained remarkably lenient during Swaggart's first confessional (grace) period, now mandate punishment.

However, Swaggart (somewhat surprisingly) never relinquishes his attempts to affirm himself as the hero. In a display that can only be seen as grandly self-delusional, Swaggart never ceases to fashion himself as the Premier Christian Pilgrim. He does this by recalling the journey trope of the self-made hero, choosing to play its final episode: the hero returns from the fight, having gained privileged wisdom/self-knowledge. Thus Swaggart can magically turn his martyrdom into a discourse of victory. Swaggart perpetrates this new fiction by insisting that his second lapse with a prostitute has
become a crucible in which he has been purged of all arrogance and self-righteousness. Swaggart indicates that he has submitted to "counseling" by several "holy men of God." Swaggart paints a scenario of daily visitations by the Holy Spirit who comes to make him strong. This discourse is cemented by the fact, in Swaggart's estimation, that God Himself has visited and commanded him not to stop preaching.

A survey of Swaggart's polemics from the time of his second confession to the present (February, 1992) reveals the reiteration of a "victory" monologue. Fred Kalmbach's article in the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, entitled "Swaggart Tells Congregation He Won't Quit" (published on October 17, 1991, the morning after Swaggart confessed to his Family Worship Center congregation), indicates Swaggart's no-defeat stance. Kalmbach quotes Swaggart as saying, "He [God] said, 'You tell them that Thursday morning, you'll be making television programs . . . You tell them that come January of 1992, that the Bible college and seminary will open on time. And you don't quit.' "

By early November Swaggart had embellished this discourse so as to make the crucible of his second confession seem like God's special venue for new spiritual revelation. Swaggart's thirty-minute program A Study in the Word, recorded on November 3, 1991, provides evidence of this persistent "scripting." In this program Swaggart
recounts his 1953 dream where Satan appears to him with the "body of a bear and the head of a man." In this dream he battles Satan and wins. Swaggart gives an update, inferring that he presently experiences the same sense of triumph over Satan (as in his dream four decades before). Swaggart states: "I have that strength right now. It's gaining all the time." He assures his spectator, "I'm learning almost by the hour." Swaggart then offers the testimony/sanction of Deity (always his hidden ace when attempting to entrench his position). For instance, Swaggart indicates that when he had made a momentary decision to terminate his ministry after the California incident, God intervened. He quotes God as (ostensibly) saying, "So you're quitting! Why are you quitting? You had a bad day." The implication is that if God accepts so nonchalantly the fact of Swaggart's "sin," then neither should it cause him concern (nor, for that matter, the evangelical community). Swaggart follows this with a "prophecy" (the supposed dictum of God Himself as voiced by a spiritually alert "vessel") given during a recent prayer meeting. The prophet's words, which Swaggart believes are directed specifically to him, state: "What I [God] have blessed, nothing can curse." This divine fiat has added weight because the spectator is implicated in a subtle threat; if one dares to "curse"/judge/condemn Swaggart, he runs the risk of defying God. Were this statement
perceived by evangelicals as true, it would transport Swaggart past any essentially destructive criticism. This is the "magic" Swaggart still believes is possible. But Swaggart ignores the fact that he can no longer make his mask work. He is the Emperor without clothes. Self-deceived, he cannot see that any Divine vote of confidence he might now offer is merely construed as fiction.

This is the position in which Jimmy Swaggart finds himself at this present writing (February of 1992). With a dwindling audience and failing finances, Swaggart (and his image as self-made hero) is no longer convincing, no longer perceived as real. In the wake of his first confession, Swaggart hoped, as we have seen, to re-attach importance to the last journey trope (wherein the hero must overcome obstacles) and thereby confirm his position as the self-made Hero with a martyr status. This is the "script" Swaggart chose for his elaborately conceived Theatre of Confession. The martyrdom strategy appears to work—until his second confession of immorality in October of 1991 sabotages his (virtuous) role play. How Swaggart's "judges" will regard him from this point on remains to be seen; but the continuation of a preaching ministry appears problematic (probably ended on any but a local level), especially in light of Swaggart's evident (theatrical) duplicities.
NOTES: CHAPTER FIVE


3 Refer to Debra Murphree pictorial, Penthouse July 1988.


5 Ostling 46.


7 Schultze 85.


9 Foucault 61-62.


11 Jimmy Swaggart, The Cup Which My Father Hath Given Me (Baton Rouge: World Evangelism Press, 1991) viii. All ensuing quotes will be notated within the body of the text.


13 Carlson 128.

14 Foucault 66, 67.

15 Videos reviewed from this period are the following: Campmeeting 1988. Videocassette. Prod. Jim Records, 1988. and Campmeeting '90. Videocassette. Prod. Jim Records, 1990. The author was also able to draw conclusions about attendance from watching Swaggart's telecast on a regular basis and from attending several Family Worship Center services during this period.


18 Garland 2B.


CONCLUSION

Jimmy Swaggart has always displayed an instinct for creating good "theatre." In this respect, however, he has also walked a dangerous line, attempting to dissuade his evangelical readers from viewing him in theatrical terms. Before February of 1988, Swaggart was effectively able to scramble his dramatic signals, installing himself as the model Christian minister, saving "sinners" and castigating a world system gone awry. Ironically, Swaggart's secular readers have always perceived his theatricality; indeed, ample commentary has addressed Swaggart's antics as self-conscious performance. Thus as Swaggart climbed to "stardom," a dialectic arose between religious and secular factions. Each argued against the other that Swaggart was (or was not) a religious performance artist. Discussions before 1988 usually ended in a stand-off. The secular media typically saw Swaggart as a Preacher-cum-Clown, while evangelicals perceived him as the very emblem of God on earth. In the wake of Swaggart's two catastrophic confessions, however, it appears that evangelicals are now more prone to side with their secular counterparts. They too have come to regard Swaggart's virtuous ministerial image as merely an act, a "costume" which he has been able to put on or take off at will. Betrayed by Swaggart's role play, the evangelical community has itself relegated Swaggart to a discourse of theatre/madness. One recalls
that in evangelical circles theatre is rejected as "worldly" or "sinful" because of its perjorative association with fiction/duplicity/lying. If Swaggart has indeed been labeled "theatrical," this assignation clearly explains his harsh repudiation by evangelical constituents. At this writing, not even Swaggart's latest "script" (where he poses as the Warrior-Teacher dispensing the secrets of Satanic warfare) seems capable of recovering his former iconic charisma.

Looking back over the two decades preceding his 1991 confession, we see that Swaggart all along has erected scenarios before the American public that confirm his "credibility" and invite general approval. Importantly, the theme of the self-made individual has shaped and informed these many scripts/scenarios. As we have seen, this particular image of self-made-ness is so highly venerated in American thought that it has become one of our most prized national myths, dear to religious and secular audiences alike. Swaggart's rise to "stardom" in the 70's, therefore, may be in part explained by his adept manipulation of this myth and his self-presentation as the paradigmatic hero. Swaggart's autobiography To Cross A River well illustrates his rhetoric. Replaying all the essential characteristics (tropes) that define the self-made American, this text positions Swaggart within the same conceptual field as other American individualists such as
Abraham Lincoln and Will Rogers. However, in relation to his evangelical community (the population which will ensure his validation as a "true" minister of the gospel), Swaggart re-fashions the hero in Christological terms. Thus Swaggart moves increasingly toward a discourse in which he not only heralds the good news of Christ, but actually becomes Christ's stand-in on earth.

Swaggart attempts to become a facsimile Christ by situating himself within the Christian community as a kind of ex officio High Priest and Judge. Through a perpetual monologue in which he rehearses his renunciation of the world, his martyrdom, and then his status as God's special mediator on earth, Swaggart reinforces the notion that he is a functionary Christ. In stationing himself as Supreme Judge, however, Swaggart draws fire—especially from the media. As his attacks against various denominations and interest groups grow increasingly strident throughout the 80's, Swaggart opens himself to an onslaught of criticism (in such exposes as John Camp's Give Me That Big Time Religion).

The primary way in which Swaggart becomes the Christological Hero, however, is through an on-going script that details his journey from "earth to glory" (a religious version of the self-made hero's journey from "rags to riches"/failure to success). Swaggart uses the journey script to "advertise" the inordinately difficult obstacles
he must face along the way; these obstacles take the form of Satanic resistance, media slurs, and even criticism from within his own religious "camp." Swaggart thus employs these negative voices to reaffirm the idea that he is indeed the lonely pariah, in battle against sinful world forces. The evangelical community "buys" into Swaggart's manipulation of such scripts until 1991, pouring money into Swaggart's ministry coffers and filling his Crusade coliseums by the thousands during each Crusade weekend.

The journey script is propagated through several means—Swaggart's autobiography, sermon polemics, and through scores of tracts, books, and teaching tapes. Perhaps the most powerful venue for Swaggart's depiction of his journey, however, is in the organization of his Crusade platform. Investigating this "stage" setting in terms of its tri-level signification (iconic, indexical, and symbolic), one sees that Swaggart has created a graphic representation of the Christian's "route" from this world to the next. With his family as symbolic of all earthly families and his ministers as symbolic of the spiritual realm in general, Swaggart creates a literal trace from Stage Left to Stage Right which starts in this world and ends in Paradise. Placing himself within such environs, Swaggart shows himself to be the Pardigmatic Pilgrim.

Swaggart's attempt to manipulate the journey script does not stop with his first confession to "moral failure"
in February of 1988. He simply shifts focus to the obstacle aspect of the journey, playing heavily on the idea that he has become a martyr in his fight with (mostly) supernatural forces. In fact, Swaggart's "confession" is really only a plea for sympathy in his martyrdom--and not a genuine act of repentence. Along these lines, Swaggart tries to evade the issue of his immorality by a conceptual decoy: Swaggart, as God's unique Warrior, is made virtuous by reason of his martyrdom. Swaggart furthers this script by setting himself as a kind of Warrior-Instructor, dispensing privileged wisdom on spiritual warfare. The evangelical community seemingly goes along with Swaggart during this period, preferring (for the most part) to allow Swaggart this latest form self-presentation. Although Swaggart does have his religious detractors at this point (evidenced by a drop in contributions and viewership), the spectacle of his 1988 confession apparently coaxes sympathy from a large segment of his evangelical audience.

Swaggart's second confession in October of 1991, however, proves to be catastrophic. Evangelicals now perceive what the secular community has contended all along--that Swaggart has been employing theatrical device, using forms of scripting to create a valorous image, one which was, by all indication, patently untrue. Even in the wake of such universal condemnation, however, Swaggart still "plays" the self-made hero in his embattled journey.
Swaggart calls on God Himself to act as his character witness, offering divine testimony (through prophecy) as unimpeachable evidence. With an ostensible mandate from God, Swaggart opts to continue preaching. From all indications at this writing, however, it seems that Swaggart's national media empire will steadily crumble and is in danger of becoming merely a localized operation—if indeed it continues to exist at all.

As we have seen, Jimmy Swaggart throughout his career has attempted to advertise himself as the self-made American hero. Ironically, Swaggart's participation in this powerful myth has been both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, Swaggart's persona easily fits the self-made hero mold. His grassroots origins, anti-intellectualism, and hard work ethic easily duplicate the self-made model popularized through the Horatio Alger stories. And Swaggart's labor has paid off, making him the paradigmatic American "winner" in his rise from "rags to riches." In these instances, Swaggart's use of this myth as a mode of self-validation works exceedingly well. On the other hand, Swaggart misjudges the powerful role honesty plays in the self-made hero. The implication of the three middle tropes (necessity of hard work/virtue of hard work/rewards of labor) is that the hero comes by his success honestly. From Washington, who "could not tell a lie," to Honest Abe to the sanitized virtue of Alger's Ragged Dick, America
embraces the idealized concept/instance of a man who achieves success through honest means. This, importantly, is where the myth fails Swaggart. The pivotal moment is February of 1988. Up to this point, Swaggart's armor is impenetrable. The secular audience can find no actual duplicity; and Swaggart's evangelical audience refuses to admit that any exists. However, in 1988 the question of honesty proves the crack in Swaggart's armor. Betraying his office of Moral Judge (and the requisite virtue of such a high station), Swaggart reveals through his immorality that his own life has all along involved deception. Thus Swaggart's self-made hero image is desecrated. Missing the requisite component of honesty, he can no longer function within the idealized conceptualization of self-made-ness.

At this point, the Swaggart persona seems to re-align itself with that of Jerry Lee Lewis, inviting comparisons that range from the cousins' shared histrionic and musical abilities to common appetites for aberrent sex (recalling Jerry Lee's marriage to his thirteen year old cousin). Indeed, Swaggart begins to look increasingly like Lewis' theatrical twin. Ironically, as Swaggart's star begins to wane, Jerry Lee's star appears to be again on the rise. A renewed interest in Lewis as a patriarch of rock-and-roll has become apparent, evidenced in the feature length movie Great Balls Of Fire, rock-and-roll documentaries, and the rash of current commercials using original Lewis
soundtracks. The Lewis phenomenon easily invokes the truth/duplicity binary. How does Lewis differ from Swaggart (at least within the American consciousness), and why has America decided again to make Lewis an object of veneration? The answer lies in American ideas/ideals of honest behavior. We realize that Lewis has never denied his theatricality. By his flamboyant lifestyle, he admits that he is dramatic, outrageous, even mad. His costume, in Barthes' terms, is not "diseased" because it speaks exactly what it is. In Lewis, we find the self-avowed duplicity of the theatrical performer. If culture in general sees the theatre as a place where duplicity is sanctioned, Lewis' duplicity (in the American mind) is not dishonest. But Swaggart's duplicity is, for the simple reason that he has never billed himself as theatrical. Purporting to be something other than what he actually is (the religious theatrical performer, enacting roles and manipulating theatrical signals), Swaggart's costume is found to be "diseased." Passing judgement, the American public consequently denies Swaggart any further participation in the myth of the self-made (honest) hero.

Swaggart's iconic "presence" in the American mind, nevertheless, does not seem in any danger of vanishing. Exactly where has America positioned Swaggart in epistemological terms? To answer, we must look at Swaggart's concept of himself. We have witnessed
Swaggart's denial that he is in any way theatrical. We have also observed his profession of virtue. In both instances, Swaggart's attestations have been proved false. In the face of such unmasking, however, Swaggart still attempts to "sell" himself as both non-theatrical and virtuous. This obstinacy can only lead one to the conclusion that Swaggart is self-delusional, having constructed such an elaborate defense of lies that he can no longer perceive what is true. Society labels such behavior as unreasonable, non-rational, mad. This then is the sphere to which American society currently "consigns" the Swaggart persona: the discourse of madness. Swaggart, as the Foucauldian madman, is "subjugated" through his exposure and made "useful" to society at large. He now becomes a spectacle of mad play, thus allowing America to situate him alongside Elmer Gantry, Aimee Semple McPherson, Jim Bakker. As madman, Swaggart's life becomes to the American (rational) mind a constant burlesque, an endless exercise in self-parody. To his rational culture, Swaggart now represents the non-rational "other." As Foucault has indicated, the non-rational (subjugated) madman is always useful to hegemonic structures because he gives the ruler someone to rule--thereby validating the presence of the ruler. Thus Swaggart as mad Pentecostalist becomes an important figure within American hegemony: wearing his cap and bells, Swaggart shows "normal" society its normalcy (by
contrast to his own aberrancy). This is the nature of the iconic Swaggart as we move into the 90's.

We have seen in this project that Swaggart is able (at least until 1991) to certify his self-made heroism because of the way myth operates within culture: that is, the Swaggart persona (as it touches myth) is made possible because of the culture from which he arises. Our investigations into the work of cultural myth (and its relation to Swaggart) may therefore be summarized in these three dynamic statements: 1) Myth is created by culture in order to affirm its beliefs and value systems, 2) The myth of the self-made hero serves/affirms American culture because it provides a valorized persona around which the country can build a national identity, and 3) Because Jimmy Swaggart is effectively able to "package" himself as the paradigmatic hero (read by evangelicals in Christological terms and by secular society in terms of theatricality/madness), he is made "useful" to American culture at large.

Thus, reading Swaggart within cultural contexts offers a unique analytical frame through which the complexities of the Swaggart persona may be viewed. The conclusions of such an analysis, however, must ultimately rest on a ganglia of paradoxes. Swaggart's celebrity in American culture seems solidified, but for reasons he never
intended. The on-going "usefulness" of his image is insured by a (secular) society which Swaggart sought to reject. And the nature of this image (madness) is framed by evident theatrical signals which Swaggart always tried to deny. Such contradictions in Swaggart's character and self-packaging lead us to the ultimate irony: having spent half a lifetime attempting to define himself as a singular self-made hero, Swaggart has only succeeded in presenting himself as merely another in a long line of mad religious performers.
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VITA

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At the end of that time, Byars returned to Baton Rouge and began a teaching career on the secondary level. From 1974 to the present (1992), he has been extensively involved in Baton Rouge theatre both educationally and professionally. His pursuits include running his own Christian theatre company from 1983 to 1987 and intense involvement with Playmakers Children's Theatre of Baton Rouge, Inc. for which he has authored nine commissioned scripts.

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