

NORTH OF MYSELF: A REFASHIONING OF MASCULINITY IN TWO BESTSELLING NOVELS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz
University of Pittsburgh, PA

This article traces a number of striking similarities between two novels: José Luis Sampedro's *La sonrisa etrusca* (1985) and Pat Conroy's *The Prince of Tides* (1986). Both of them portray their heroes' problematic transitions from their rural Southern cultures to a Northern metropolis. More interesting and transcendental, though, is the two characters' inner journeys to retrieve some aspects of their identities that they had not been fully aware of before. Moving to a different environment and meeting other people have the unexpected effect of producing a profound transformation in how these characters understand their own masculinity. By the end of the novels, Salvatore Roncone and Tom Wingo can hardly be said to be the same men they were at the outset of the story.

Somewhere I had lost touch with the kind of man I had the potential of being. I needed to effect a reconciliation with the unborn man and try to coax him gently toward his maturity.

Pat Conroy, *The Prince of Tides*

Although one can be a man and still... I don't know, but I feel something new inside, coming to life, slowly emerging... What is it? Well, you understand me. [...] Something soft and tender is growing inside me...you know... I used to laugh at the idea: women's affairs! ...but it is there now, that little lamb, there...¹

José Luis Sampedro, *La sonrisa etrusca*

¹ All the translations from José Luis Sampedro's novel are my own. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Departamento de Educación, Universidades e Investigación of the Basque Government which awarded me the grant (MV-2004-1-12) that has allowed me to carry out the research necessary to complete this contribution.

Recent research on issues of masculinity has shown that whatever is significant in this area of study involves both men's personalities and their social relations in specific contexts (Pleck 1981; Farrell 1986; Connell 1995). Thus, instead of thinking of sex roles as pre-existing and static conventions which are passively internalized and enacted by subjects, it is crucial to explore how those norms are constantly being refashioned in social practice in different places and time junctures. Literature offers in this regard an invaluable source of materials, as it frequently captures those points of inflexion in which traditional concepts of masculinity come into crisis and new forms of male identification emerge. Peter Murphy (1994: 6) notes that "Literary representations of manhood have both relied on dominant cultural assumption about masculinity and exposed the untenability of those assumptions." Usually, the emergence of new models of masculinity is linked to movements or changes in the class structure, concepts of femininity, the distribution of labor, political representation, or just in some behavioral patterns. Of course, such changes become most prominent when a person who has been reared in a particular cultural milieu moves to a different social environment where gender relations do not follow the same blueprint. This is the case of the main characters in José Luis Sampedro's *La sonrisa etrusca* (1985) and Pat Conroy's *The Prince of Tides* (1986), who are taken by circumstances early on in the novels to social environments in which they will see their understandings of masculinity profoundly transformed.

One first important observation to be made about the protagonists of both novels is that their move to a distant and utterly different region of the country takes place at a particularly trying moment in their lives. In chapter one, Tom Wingo is informed by his mother, Lila, of his twin sister's suicidal attempt in New York City. If that were not enough, he has been drenched for sometime in a midlife crisis of self-doubt that has left him unemployed and has come close to destroying his marriage. According to Burns (1996: 111), although Tom "tends to lay the major blame for this failure in his emotional maturity on Lila, yet he knows also that it stems in a large part from his own insecurity and inability to be open about his feelings." Indeed, the major plot of the novel shows Tom's efforts to explain those feelings to his sister's psychiatrist, Susan Lowenstein, in order to help her figure out the cause of Savannah's psychosis. Salvatore Roncone's problems in Sampedro's novel are of a different nature, though no less serious. The opening chapter depicts him and his son, Renato, driving north, toward Milán, where the old man is going to have a series of checkups to try to abate the effects of a terminal cancer in his stomach:

The son begins to worry again about his father's grave illness, which is the reason why he is taking him to the physicians in Milán, and he blames himself for having forgotten it for a while on account of his own problems. Truly, his wife's possible transfer to Rome is of great importance to him, but his father's illness marks the very end. He turns affectionately towards the old man. (14)

Curiously, what troubles Salvatore most is not the fast progression of his illness or those visits to the physicians but, rather, the idea of having to spend some months in the North, away from his cherished Roccasera, in the mountains of Calabria. Like Tom Wingo, who proclaims early in the book that “I am a patriot of a singular geography on the planet. I speak of my country religiously; I am proud of its landscape” (6), Salvatore fully identifies with his native South and the move to Milán is an excruciating test to his patience.

At first, these two characters’ critiques of the big northern cities are aimed at their external appearance. They miss the purity and calmness of a landscape which, although it could occasionally prove hazardous, has converted them into the sturdy and disciplined individuals they believe themselves to be. Tom’s references to his homeland are usually wrought in lyrical tones:

I grew up slowly beside the tides and marshes of Colleton; my arms were tawny and strong from working long days on a shrimp boat in the blazing South Carolina heat. Because I was a Wingo, I worked as soon as I was able to walk; [...] I was born and raised on a Carolina sea island and I carried the sunshine of the low-country, inked in dark gold, on my back and shoulders. (1)

The South is associated in their minds with particular smells, colors, food, housing, vegetation, etc. It is no wonder, then, that their journeys to the frigid and anonymous northern cities are experienced as a severance from what is a very integral part of their identities. As Renato and Salvatore get closer to the urban center, the old man’s feelings of anxiety and discomfort grow unbearable:

Here begin the suburbs and the old man looks suspiciously, one way and the other: the walls, dilapidated hangars, shutdown workshops, the tenements, building sites, puddles... The smog, the rubble and filth, lonely and sinister streetlights. Everything seems inhumane, sordid, and hostile. When he rolls down the window, a kind of moisture, stinking of garbage and chemical waste, gets into his nose. He unbuckles and feels a bit relieved because he can now react more quickly against any other threat. (17)

The number of ways in which the city disconcerts and arouses strong feelings of alienation in Salvatore and Tom would be too long to list here. Suffice it to say that the latter is convinced he could fill the Yellow Pages in Manhattan with reasons. As a matter of fact, both protagonists have the impression that they fall short of an adequate vocabulary to express the outrage and animosity that these cities are able to conjure inside them: “It is an art form to hate New York City properly,” says Tom. “So far I have always been a featherweight debunker of New York; it takes too much energy and endurance to record the infinite ways the city offends me” (32). Now, despite these repeated allusions to the ways in which the very physiognomy and organization of the cities make them furious, the reader soon realizes that what really disturbs these southern men is the fact that they can

rarely see eye to eye with urbanites in what concerns such issues as education, gender politics, health care, or social manners.

Sacvan Berkovitch (1986) describes ideology as a system of interrelated ideas and beliefs by which “a culture tries to justify and perpetuate itself.” To a great extent, it is the “web of rhetoric, ritual, and assumptions,” which this critic views as cohering and coercing particular communities, that prevents Tom and Salvatore from coming into a fluent dialogue with their compatriots up North. Several scholars have recently claimed that, despite all the talk about the global village and the homogenization of American culture, there are still features of the South “which retain the grip on the imagination of its people” (Gray 2004: 8). This is definitely the case of Tom, but also of Salvatore, who can turn really sarcastic when he points out the type of worries that seem to occupy the minds of city-dwellers. One of his obsessive concerns throughout the novel is that his grandson, Brunettino, will never become one of them:

[P]ray to God that he does not end up like one of those Milanese, so insecure behind their ostentatious façade, always afraid of what they don't know, and that is the worst part: scared to death to arrive late in the office, to have their business taken over, to see their neighbors buy a better car, to have their wife demanding too much of them in bed... The old man sees it his own way: “They are never themselves, always dangling. They are neither female nor male; they never reach full maturity but they stopped being children long ago.” (49)

Likewise, when Tom and his brother Luke travel to New York for the first time to attend one of Savannah's poetry readings, they feel completely out of place among their sister's acquaintances. They are looked upon as backward rednecks too deeply rooted in the bigoted racial and gender ideology of the South to be able to adjust to the far more liberal attitudes in the Big Apple: “Our maleness irradiated unconsciously through Savannah's world and troubled us greatly, because at that time we were too thick and innocent to understand the nature of our sister's problem with the world of men” (36). Although it is true that Luke's reaction to city life is much more antagonistic than his younger brother's, there is no question that Tom also finds it difficult to feel at ease in that context. It is interesting to note that, as the two passages above make evident, while issues of class and education interfere with the heroes' relation to the new environment, it is questions of gender that most prominently mark the difference between the dominant worldviews in the two regions. Michael O'Brien (1996: 5) points out in the introduction to *Southern Writers and their World* that, although earlier literature and criticism in the South tended to focus on the old warfare of race, more recently the spotlight has been on “the still more ancient warfare of genre, newly configured and placed to the fore.”

Conroy's and Sampedro's strategy to show their protagonists' awakening to new possibilities with regard to their sex roles and gender relations is fairly straightforward. By bringing them into environments where they are gradually

released from the norms and expectations that had characterized their behavior back home, they will start discovering new dimensions of their manhood that they had not been able to develop—or even aware of—before. As the epigraphs at the outset my paper suggest, Tom and Salvatore sometimes feel that a strange creature is beginning to form inside them which has little to do with the kind of men that they had been in the past. Predictably, when they first realize that this metamorphosis is starting to take place, a sort of terror invades them as they are faced with the fact that this was not the blueprint they had been told to follow. At one point, Tom confesses to Lowenstein that he feels extremely vulnerable, since that new role, which circumstances are forcing upon him, was not on the original script: “Now I’m in the process of falling apart. That’s never been a role reserved for me. My family has always expected me to be the tower of strength, the man with the whistle, the good coach” (67-68). Incidentally, a substantial part of Tom’s account of his childhood misadventures and family history centers on the type of pressures that he and his siblings were subjected to in order to become the boys and girl that the surrounding society expected. Shirley Abbott (1983) showed over two decades ago that sex role enforcement was particularly rigid in the South and, in most cases, the basic role-concepts taught to children remained embedded in the assumptions of every member of that culture. Seemingly, things were not much different across the Atlantic, for Salvatore also experiences an existential vertigo when he discovers that he is undergoing a profound transformation in his son’s flat in Milán. His change is also painful at first since the cultural images of strength, domination, toughness, and virility are deeply branded on his mentality. Nevertheless, his progressive familiarization with city ways and, especially, his daily involvement in the care of his grandson will eventually reshape his masculinity. For example, he feels terribly clumsy and ashamed when his coarse hands—which are more like “claws”—fail to tie the tiny buttons on Brunettino’s vest:

Profound sobs upsurge in the old man’s chest; but his shocked manliness represses them immediately... Yet an overwhelming tenderness drags him into a calm sea where—unexpected dolphin—the following words jump up: “Brunettino, what are you doing to me?” (74)

In various ways, Tom’s interviews with Susan Lowenstein and Salvatore’s dedication to his grandson’s upbringing will bear the surprising effects of modifying a great deal how both men understand their masculinity and allowing them to foster a number of unknown potentials in their personalities.

It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that this self-reinvention takes place overnight. As Brannon (1976: 41) rightly remarks, the influence of sex roles and gender biases on people’s lives is incalculable and it would be naïve to believe that their mentality and the social system can be easily changed by adopting novel alternatives. Being older and, generally, much more stubborn and narrow-minded, Salvatore’s shift towards an emergent masculinity—one less based on patriarchy,

domination, and violence—proves a much harder task. His son's northern wife, Andrea, is driven to the edge of desperation by the old man's archaic ideas about sex roles and class divisions. Andrea's attitude to her father-in-law is more understandable when the narrator gives us enlightening glimpses of the way Salvatore usually reads the reality around:

Eventually, the daily bath revealed to the old man that Brunettino does not only possess very promising genitals, but also that he already has true erections and, then, he touches himself and smells his little fingers with a beatific smile on his face. “¡Bravo, Brunettino!” the old man told himself after the surprising discovery, “¡you are as manly as your grandfather!” (51)

One of Salvatore's main obsessions throughout Sampedro's novel is to monitor his grandson toward a concept of manhood similar to the one that he had learnt in Rocasera. He repeats over and over again that he is not going to give up on Brunettino's education, for that would mean that his mother and the *dottore* could turn him into a “soft and sophisticated” Milanese. Of course, what the old man fails to notice is that he himself is also being re-educated by his assiduous contact with the child. Tom Wingo is also wrong initially in assuming that his conversations with Lowenstein have the purpose of helping his psychotic sister. However, he is quicker to realize that the person who is truly benefiting from the therapy is himself: “I was supposed to tell this woman my story in order to help my sister. But I had decided on a different strategy. I would tell her my story to save myself from myself” (67). In spite of Tom's consciousness that he is also in need of assistance, it is not so clear that he would be able to establish where his identity problems stem from. He claims on several occasions that it must be related to his parents' volatile personalities: a father who repeatedly harasses his wife and children to preserve his authority, and a mother more concerned with climbing the social ladder than with giving her children the support they need. On the other hand, the reader also learns that the hateful sexism that prevails in the Wingos' household is not limited to their family, but is part of larger social structures and cultural conventions. As Tom confides to Lowenstein a bit later:

“[W]e were born to a house of complication, drama, and pain. We were typical southerners. In every southerner, beneath the veneer of clichés lies a much deeper motherlode of cliché. But even cliché is overlaid with enormous power when a child is involved.” (109)

It is these “hegemonic fictions” about the strong and protective role of man and the fragile and submissive role of woman that have informed Tom's image of himself in his early years. As Silverman (1992) demonstrated in her ground-breaking analysis of male subjectivity, the very sense of reality men construct is heavily colored by cultural assumptions and beliefs that they inherit when they are still unaware of their process of socialization.

Although scholars such as Anne G. Jones (1996: 54) have argued that in the post-WW II years, male writers in the South began to allow “for crucial changes in traditional masculinity and addressing the changes in women,” it is evident that the clichés Tom refers to in the passage above are not completely out of the scene. Patriarchal power has been characterized historically by finding ways to sustain continuity even when some remarkable transformations were underway. In Conroy’s novel, for example, we come across as many instances of Tom’s inner regeneration via his “secular confessions”—and, eventually, his romance—with Lowenstein, as of his falling back on the norms and attitudes that he internalized as a young man. Thus, although he does follow Savannah’s advice of promoting gentleness and excellence among his pupils (490) when he is hired to coach Bernard, Lowenstein’s son, he also feels quite captivated by his elder brother’s and grandfather’s feats of male bravado when they have to recover the body of a fallen superior in Vietnam (541-43) and the old man’s driver’s license (552-57), respectively. As Tom admits several times, his parents had in fact succeeded in making him a stranger to himself, since too often we observe him “try[ing] to be someone else, liv[ing] someone else’s life” (343). Toolan (1991: 131) has observed in this regard that the typical Conroy hero “strikes a bad bargain” because he usually trades off feeling and sensitivity “in return for an identification with some cultural project that falsely promises to guarantee one’s immortality.” Tom Wingo is of course no exception to this axiom, although he is fortunate enough to see the nonsense of trying to act like an “Iron Man” when your inner nature is telling you to do otherwise. Salvatore, on the other hand, only counts with a very short time to heal the deep scars left on his subjectivity by the kind of demands a patriarchal system makes on its male members. His relationship with Andrea and Anunziata, the housemaid, becomes increasingly conflictive when they try to keep the child from him lest he should spoil him by excessive care and his out-fashioned ideas. It comes as little surprise, then, that the old man’s perception of these women should be one related to frigidity and oppression:

“She won’t go to see the Etruscans, of course. She doesn’t like them. She prefers the others. The Romans, Mussolini’s acolytes. Shame on her! The thing is that she’ll be away a few days; that she’ll let us enjoy our freedom... That’s it, free! It is really strange: a woman who doesn’t talk too much, who is always among big books, and the mere knowledge that she is there is like having the carabinieri after you... Oh, women! When they are not in bed, all they can do is to spoil everything! (122)

Used to his position of power and dominance in Roccasera, Salvatore has a hard time trying to adapt to the different sexual politics in his son’s house. Tim Carrigan et al. (1987: 92) have noted that masculinities are primarily constructed by power relations but also “by their interplay with a division of labor and with patterns of emotional attachment.” The old man’s angry reaction to his daughter-in-law’s ways is closely related to his displacement

from a privileged position and his lack of identification with any aspect of the context in which he is living now: “How could they be so stupid as to put the wine—even if it is sparkling—in the fridge? In Milán, everything is cold; I don’t quite understand why Renato was in such a hurry to go to bed with this Milanese” (150). As will be shown below, only when Salvatore finds a meaningful niche in this environment and discovers that the city has a number of precious things to offer to him do his views on gender relations begin to shift.

Interestingly, it will be two women who are going to open the heroes’ eyes to those secret potentials that they have failed to see in themselves earlier on. This is striking at first because both protagonists claim at several points in the novels that “[t]here is no way to understand women” (Sampedro 1985: 138) and, in fact, they have serious problems to open themselves up to characters of the opposite sex. Several critics have pointed out that this “habit of repression” and “a tendency to make cynical jokes when conversation touches raw nerves” (Burns 1996: 112) lie at the heart of these characters’ inability to build bridges between themselves and their female otherness. Tom complains that

“I have tried to understand women, and this obsession has left me both enraged and ridiculous. The gulf is too vast and oceanic and treacherous. There is a mountain range between the sexes with no exotic race of Sherpas to translate the enigmas of those deadly slopes that separate us.” (110)

Both protagonists tend to put the blame for this dysfunction on their relatives and the kind of social contexts in which they grew up. Evidently, neither South Carolina nor Calabria was the most hospitable region to accept any revisions of the kind of gender relations that had pervaded there for a long time. Savannah is very likely the character who most clearly discerns, but is also most seriously damaged, by the sexual politics that her mother and the southern society have tried to impose on all of them:

“[E]ven her [Lila’s] dreams smell like death to me. But I’m not buying into the program. I’m going to be whatever I want to be. In Colleton, everyone expects that you be a certain way and the whole town makes sure that no one deviates very far from that central idea. The girls are all pretty and perky and the boys all kick ass. No, I am sick of hiding what I really am, what I feel inside.” (469)

Although Tom’s attitude to these blueprints of masculinity and femininity is not half as negative as his sister’s, his memories of the episodes which have harmed Savannah so irreparably make him more aware of his own lack of commitment to the struggle for a change in paradigm. In remembering those episodes, he gains several important insights into the effects that the patriarchal system has had on his own masculinity. In his own words, his job as a male was “To be unreadable, controlling, bull-headed, and insensitive” (189). In the case of Salvatore, those initial steps toward the recognition of his limitations occur when he meets

Maddalena, a storekeeper, and Simonetta, Anunziata's young niece, who sporadically comes to help her at the Roncone's flat. Both women are perceived at first as models of southern femininity who allow Salvatore to travel back in his mind to his own region in earlier times. However, it soon transpires that neither of the two fulfills satisfactorily those outdated roles. Maddalena is the boss in the store and makes a cuckold of her husband, and Simonetta has a liberal relationship with his communist boyfriend, Romano. No wonder Salvatore starts to see her in a very different light after he learns about their unusual relationship:

The old man's gaze remains fixed, caressing, on Simonetta's buttocks. How perfectly molded, how feminine in their contour, and yet, they are shockingly innocent, like a boy's...! That is—and the old man hesitates, failing again to understand himself—yes, like a boy's, yet not innocent, but attractive. “What is happening to me?” he wonders again. “I always thought that the boundary was clear: a woman was a woman and a man was a man; and the rest is trash. So this...” (137)

Salvatore's dedication to his grandson and his acquaintance with these different models of womanhood begin to work the miracle of changing his understanding of his own masculinity. Nevertheless, his final conversion will only take place when he falls in love with an elderly woman, Hortensia, from whom he learns that submission, surrendering oneself to another, can be as gratifying—and even more so—than dominance.

After discussing at some length a number of ways in which concepts of masculinity may be modified—such as transformations in the structure of work or power—, Tim Carrigan et al. (1987: 97) conclude that “the strength of desire can also be a mighty engine of change.” As it often happens in race and class relations, the traditional divisions and identifications in a gender system can be profoundly affected by “lawless attraction,” which does not respond to the same logics we observe in other spheres. Something of the kind happens to Tom and Salvatore when they become gradually infatuated with two women who they did not find especially captivating at first. Tom, for example, thinks that Susan Lowenstein is too cold and impersonal. He soon realizes, though, that “The arch professionalism was just a frontispiece erected to ward off the discomposed superiority of men like me and her father” (193). It takes some time—and a few dinners out—before Tom steps out of his “self-made enclosure of impenetrable solitude,” where he withdraws every time a woman comes near. Nevertheless, when Susan reveals to him her own marital difficulties and her sense of failure as a mother, Tom begins to develop some affection for his sister's doctor which he thought he was unable to experience any more. Despite their nearly opposite backgrounds, a passionate love affair blossoms between the two which will help Tom come out with a series of feelings he was never capable of externalizing before: “Boo-hoo. Let me tell you something, Lowenstein. Being a man sucks. I'm so sick of being strong, supportive,

wise, and kingly that I may puke if I have to pretend I'm any of those things again" (439). Although Tom returns to his wife and daughters in South Carolina at the end of the book, it is more than clear that the woman who has made him believe in himself again as an individual capable of warmth and sensitivity is this New York psychiatrist. Before he leaves for the South, the protagonist admits to her:

"I adore you. You've changed my life. I've felt like a whole man again. An attractive man. A sensual one. You've made me face it all and you made me think that I was doing it to help my sister." (658)

Salvatore's first encounter with Hortensia, after one of his numerous brawls on the streets of Milán, does not provide us with any hints suggesting that the two will grow fond of and dependent on each other. However, the old man's later visit to her attic already foreshadows some of the peace of spirit and sense of security that he will eventually find in this old lady from Amalfi, near Naples:

The welcome is offered on the very corridor, as soon as one opens the door, by a scene of the sweet Harbour of Naples at eye level, with a calm Vesuvius, which is also a reminder that serenity is only worthwhile when there is fire underneath. Right after this vision, the old man feels in his native South, and much more so when he enters a dining-room full of light, although the sky is overcast. [...] This attic is like a beautiful pigeon house above the urban trap; that is why it is a warm shelter, even if now the rain keeps beating on the windowpanes. (141)

Thereafter, Salvatore's visits to Hortensia become more regular and he shares with her all his cherished secrets about his grandson's upbringing. Although his illness preys on him with unprecedented virulence in the closing sections of the novel, Salvatore's knowledge that he has found somebody on whom he can rely—even after he has departed—gives him renewed strength to carry on. When the symptoms of the disease's final stages become apparent, Renato and Andrea are quite astonished by the old man's resistance. Yet, the old southern lady is revealing to Salvatore that there are roles other than that of the warrior, fighter, and conqueror which he is well-qualified to play in life. While he never forgets completely his days as a daring partisan against the fascists, Hortensia teaches him that there are other facets of his personality that he has never set to work on or investigated, and that can be as rewarding. Salvatore is compelled to acknowledge near the end that when he was with his wife and cofighter, Dunka, he never suspected there were any other roles men could play: "You [Hortensia] possess me in all ways, fully surrendered, without conditions... Here, look at me, and I don't feel ashamed of having a woman at my side and not enjoying her sexually. Boy, have you changed me! With her it was just the opposite: I enjoyed her and never guessed there was so much more!" (316). If only for a very short while, Salvatore enjoys his role as a devoted and loving grandfather, and as a man who does not need to impose his own rule to feel fully satisfied. Like Tom Wingo, he manages to refashion his

understanding of what being a man means, and that fact gives him a freedom to act in alternative ways that he had never considered before.

To conclude, I will refer very briefly to a few of the changes we observe in the two main characters and which, in my opinion, are highly indicative of the profound transformations undergone by their concepts of masculinity. Perhaps these changes are more easily observable in the Italian old man because, as I have mentioned, his views seem particularly rigid and inalterable. However, his perception of the world changes quite dramatically when he falls in love with Hortensia and begins to share with her the future of his Brunettino. Throughout most of the novel, Salvatore has been waiting for the demise of Cantanotte, an old conservative who in a way has banned him from his own town. When that death finally happens, the protagonist is jovial for a while but, then, he surprises himself—and us—by feeling some kind of pity. In one of his monologues with his beloved grandson, he protests: “Not a word about compassion! I’m not evil, Brunettino; the thing is that man was my enemy. He exploited the lower classes and tried to kill me, do you understand?... How could I then feel pity for him?” (263). But the fact is that, as he admits a few pages after, Salvatore begins to see the nonsense of having lived a life in which warfare and animosity have been ever present. Thus, when Hortensia becomes a member of the family, even his earlier attitude toward his daughter-in-law and her city are going to be partly changed. Apart from his nocturnal meetings with his grandson, Salvatore’s work with a group of ethnologists and folklorists at the university also helps him look into the kind of man he was in Roccasera, and reconsider his position in the present. By the end of the novel, it is quite apparent that he is happy to expand aspects of his subjectivity that would have been unthinkable earlier on:

[I] also have some secret weapons, you know? If you need a grandmother, I’ll be that for you too, I’m already becoming one. Only in my upper half, OK? Hey, beware, I’m the same in my lower part! But in the upper... haven’t you noticed? Don’t you feel I’m softer when I cuddle you in my arms? A little bit, right? I’m growing breasts, and I’ll end up having them for you, my child... (280)

It is true that Salvatore’s bodily metamorphosis is probably being occasioned by the hormones he is receiving as part of his treatment. But anyhow, what seems more relevant here is that, far from feeling uncomfortable with the possibility of having to fulfill other roles, he appears to be quite satisfied with the idea. In a similar way, Tom Wingo also feels immensely grateful for being given a second chance to be the kind of husband he had wished to be: “Charming, sensitive, loving, and attentive to [his] wife’s every need” (28). But as Savannah had constantly reminded him, he can only be so when he releases himself from the straitjacketing that his family and the southern cultural blueprint for males have kept him in: “By illuminating the mordant, un glossed chronicles of the past,” Tom explains at one point, “I wanted to rediscover the spry, finger-popping, ambitious boy I had been

when I grew up..." (160). His sojourn in New York City, under the constructive influence of his sister's psychiatrist, allows him to do just that: to be open to everything, to leave behind the images of fortitude and control that have overshadowed all his other potentials. As Seidler (1989) emphasizes in *Rediscovering Masculinity*, one essential step to develop new concepts of masculinity is to abandon men's obsession with controlling their emotions and hiding the role of sexuality in how they see themselves. When Tom finally manages to overcome these two obstacles, not only is he able to forgive his parents for the damage done to their children but, more importantly, "he seems to accept, however ambivalently, that he has no duty to pretend that he was made in the image of his martyred brother" (Toolan 1991: 131) or any of the "heroes and gallant knights" in the history of his homeland. His masculinity is refashioned to include features such as kindness, submission, and a capacity to accept all the paradoxes in the universe. No wonder that even his perception of the Big Apple is diametrically changed when he takes Susan Lowenstein to "Windows of the World" to have their final dinner together: "New York was never the same city no matter how many times you saw it or from what angle. Nothing in God's world was as beautiful as Manhattan Island seen from above at night" (655). For a southerner who has declared himself a total stranger "in these glorious glass valleys," something must have been deeply transformed in his subjectivity to utter these words.

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