

## GARNER'S FORGOTTEN NOVEL AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE STORIES

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Upon his death in 1979, Hugh Garner had achieved considerable popular success with a canon of more than seventy-five published stories, ten novels, hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, and numerous stage, television, and radio adaptations of his work. A winner of the 1963 Governor General's Award for *Hugh Garner's Best Stories*, the Toronto author is perhaps best known for his Depression era novel, *Cabbagetown*, which was first published in an abridged version in 1950 and republished in its entirety in 1968. This work, along with *Storm Below* and *Silence on the Shore*, enables Garner to claim legitimately a place among this country's realistic writers of the latter half of the twentieth century. This reputation has been further enhanced by his best stories, which are among those included in five separate Garner collections and published in anthologies in Canada and throughout the world.

The successful novels and stories notwithstanding, Hugh Garner all too often has been dismissed by literary critics as a minor writer. In large part this is due to the uneven quality of his work. While alive, he openly admitted that some of his literary creations were written out of financial need rather than for aesthetic reasons. Two of his early novels, *Waste No Tears* (1950) and *Present Reckoning* (1951), along with his later trilogy of mystery novels, which included *The Sin Sniper* (1970), *Death in Don Mills* (1975), and *Murder Has Your Number* (1978), would fall into this category. Principal among the novels perceived by many to be lacking in literary importance is *Waste No Tears*, a volume which has received only cursory mention in any literary evaluation of Garner's work.

Garner's *Waste No Tears: The Novel about the Abortion Racket* was published by News Stand Library of Export Publishing Enterprises in 1950. Although it was written after *Storm Below* and

*Cabbagetown*, Garner wrote it under the pseudonym Jarvis Warwick. In his autobiography *One Damn Thing After Another*, Garner refers to *Waste No Tears* as "a 250-300 page quickie novel" written in ten days to help fight off his family's "incipient starvation" (103). This pocket book edition is very rare and does not appear in the holdings of Queen's University Archives, the repository of the Garner papers. In fact, Paul Stuewe, in his 1988 biography, *The Storms Below: The Turbulent Life and Times of Hugh Garner* writes that "*Waste No Tears* is not listed among the holdings of any Canadian library" (228).

The novel received only passing note in Doug Fetherling's 1972 monograph *Hugh Garner*, and at that, its scarcity was its most significant attribute (32). It is referred to in the Hugh Garner section written by Stuewe in volume six of *Canadian Writers and Their Works* (1985) as a "book noteworthy only as an example of how rapidly a professional writer can produce hackwork when necessary" (114). Stuewe's discussion of *Waste No Tears* in his *The Storms Below* provides little insight into the novel beyond its illustration of Garner's commercial "professionalism" (107).

Despite being dismissed as a work of little interest by Stuewe and Fetherling, *Waste No Tears* is worthy of examination, if for no other reason, because of the strong relationship which exists between parts of the novel and three of Garner's better known stories. There is a definite correlation between specific plot situations and character interactions in "The Yellow Sweater," "Lucy," and "Mama Says To Tell You She's Out" and situations and characters in the long-overlooked Garner novel.

*Waste No Tears* was first published in July of 1950, and in *One Damn Thing After Another*, Garner admits to writing the novel during the winter of that year (102-03). Garner's preface to *The Yellow Sweater and Other Stories*, published in 1952, indicates that each of the stories, including the title story, was written between 1938 and 1950 (5). In "Notes to Accompany 'The Yellow Sweater,'" which appears among the Garner Papers at Queen's University Archives, Garner writes: "I no longer remember the time and place of writing this particular story, but my log book tells me it was sold first to *Chatelaine* magazine in April, 1951" (January 1970, [3]). In fact, this story, originally titled "A Break in the Journey," was submitted earlier than this and rejected by *Canadian Home Journal*, as indicated in a letter of rejection dated 6 March 1950 from editor Mary-Etta MacPherson. In *One Damn Thing After Another*, Garner

recalls "The Yellow Sweater" as one of three stories which he created in the 1940s and which "began the rounds of the magazine editors" around 1948 (45).

"The Yellow Sweater," then, pre-dates the composition and submission of *Waste No Tears*. Yet the novel contains a plot situation which bears a remarkable similarity to the plot of the story. In the short story, a middle-aged salesman stops for a young female hitch-hiker and ultimately makes sexual advances toward her. The salesman, who has a teen-aged daughter of his own, is rebuffed by the hitch-hiker, who has just run away from her aunt and step-uncle's farm. "It was a difficult story to write," noted Garner in a letter to Gladys Shenner of *Chatelaine* dated 16 January 1958, "for it contains the attempted seduction of a pregnant girl by a middle-aged man, and also overtones that are almost incestuous."

"I hate him," the hitch-hiker responds when the salesman enquires about the man to whom her aunt is married (*The Yellow Sweater and Other Stories* 15). During the attempted seduction that follows, the young girl cries out: "You're just like he was." "You're all the same." "You're the same as he was" (21). She then sobs, "Bernice! Bernice!" (21), as if to call her aunt. The implication, as substantiated in the excerpt from the Garner letter above, is that sexual advances had been made by the step-uncle toward the teen-aged girl.

In *Waste No Tears*, Garner has used the novel form to further develop the situation only alluded to in "The Yellow Sweater." In this work, too, it is a lecherous uncle who makes advances toward his niece living on the farm: "Her parents had been farmers in a small community about fifty miles from the city. They had been killed in a car accident about four years before, and she had gone to live with her aunt and uncle on another farm nearby. When she was fifteen her uncle had begun making passes at her" (138). The uncle eventually rapes the niece while the aunt is away in the city.

In "The Yellow Sweater," the salesman makes his advances after insisting that they pull off the highway onto a side road for a break in the journey. They park under some trees at the edge of a small wood (18-20). In *Waste No Tears*, the uncle attacks the niece for a second time, on this occasion when he has her alone in his car returning from town. The uncle does so after he "had parked on a sideroad" (138).

In "Lucy" and "Mama Says to tell You She's Out," Garner

reverses the process, using elements of plot first presented in *Waste No Tears* for the stories which followed. "Lucy" was first published in April, 1952 in *Canadian Home Journal* and is mentioned in Garner's correspondence only in that same year. It was later included in *Hugh Garner's Best Stories*. "Mama Says to tell You She's Out" was not published until 1966 with the appearance of Garner's third collection of stories, *Men and Women*. In a 27 March 1966 letter to the managing editor of Ryerson Press, the publisher of the collection, Garner notes that the story had never before been published. He goes on to tell Frank Flemington that it is one of four stories "written this month."

The narrator in "Lucy" recalls how as a young man he was attracted to Lucy, a married older woman who was "conscious that every man she passed on the sidewalk turned around to take a second look at her" (*Hugh Garner's Best Stories* 30). Although her husband made little money, Lucy always seemed to have sufficient income "to buy herself print dresses, costume jewelry and other doo-dads, while she was always sporting new pairs of cheap scarlet or 'snakeskin' pumps" (31). Lucy is constantly observed by the narrator talking and laughing with grocers, department store drivers, and the postman (33). After a time he finds out that the neighbourhood rumours are true and Lucy is having affairs with several men including a groceteria clerk and a dairyman (35-36). Tom, the narrator in *Waste No Tears*, lives in a house owned by forty-year-old Mrs. Nora Ranning: "Although she didn't work she had a fairly good income from some mysterious source." "Her evenings were taken up by a round of cheap parties, and while I was boarding at her house, she entertained a bewildering variety of boyfriends" (7).

In "Lucy," the narrator recalls "the tinkling music of her laugh" (32) and how she was "laughing and joking" (33) with neighbourhood men. She flatters the youthful narrator by saying what a "good-looking boy" he is. Ultimately she endeavours to seduce him by inviting him down to her apartment, but the narrator declines (34). In *Waste No Tears*, Mrs. Ranning is described in part as "a plump, laughing woman," whose parties emit sounds of laughter (7). She calls him "a good-looking devil" (8). Tom is seduced by the older woman after she falls drunk onto the steps of the house. When he approaches to help, "she began to laugh."

In both the story and the novel, the narrator sees the older woman many years later as a pitiful frustrated creature, even yet

attempting to attract men: "I knew now how tawdry she was," says the narrator in "Lucy," "and how empty her feelings were" (40). "Her beauty was looking pretty shopworn and she had put on a lot of weight since I had last seen her" (41). Of her laugh, he notes that "It was still clear and melodious, but it promised other qualities I had not noticed before. It was sinister. It had the most sinister sound I had ever heard" (43). When Tom in *Waste No Tears* sees Mrs. Ranning years later, he, too, finds her anything but attractive: "She was much older than she had been, not only in years but in appearance. I could hardly recognize the ripe buxom woman of my youth in this thin faded little woman who confronted me now" (63). The desperate Nora Ranning makes a pass at the narrator, causing him to see her in an even more pitiful light. It is the horrid laughter that lingers: "There is nothing more horrible than the sight of sex-hunger on the face of an old and worn-out harpy." "I . . . hurried away from her. I could hear her laughter as I walked down the street. It sounded like a rasping reminder of all the filth I'd ever known" (64).

In "Mama Says to tell You She's Out," John Thompson pays a surprise visit to a former navy friend whom he has not seen for years. He himself is surprised as he finds Bud's somewhat bitter separated wife, Lisa, and three small children living in an unkempt suburban house (*Men and Women* 18-21). Despite initial disappointment at not being able to see his friend, John acquiesces to Lisa's invitation and joins her for a drink. Although he is married, John then allows himself to be seduced by his friend's former spouse. He rationalizes the incident: "She was just too good-looking and—sexy to pass up. He no longer thought of her as Bud's wife, but as just another woman offering her favours to him, and a quite attractive woman at that" (26). This rationalization fails to allay his conscience and he is soon filled with guilt: "What was he doing here with this silly woman, the separated wife of a man who had once been his best friend? Why should he want to make love to her just because she was attractive and available?" (28). *Waste No Tears* depicts the narrator Tom Matterson as a man who gets involved in an adulterous affair. In his case, he rationalizes his affair with his married secretary Laura Allbright: "Only a fool or a prude would turn down what was offered him so generously" (68). Another similarity between the novel and the story lies in Tom's eventual feelings of guilt for his actions: "I felt a few qualms of conscience," he states at one point. Finally he

recognizes his own weak reasoning which justified his actions: "Such excuses have been the stage props of unfaithful wives and their lovers since the world began" (68).

The relationship between *Waste No Tears* and the three stories discussed is a strong one. In the case of "The Yellow Sweater" it appears that the novel borrowed heavily in elements of plot and character from the story. In "Lucy" and "Mama Says to tell You She's Out," it is the stories which show a recycling of plot situation and character interaction which were first developed in Garner's least known early novel *Waste No Tears*.

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