

Charlotte Corday, in preparing to stab Marat, cites Judith, slayer of Holofernes, as her inspiration, but her assumption of a martyr's role will accomplish nothing. By 1808, the date of the imaginary performance at Charenton, the legacy of the Revolution has been erased by Napoleon's bloody march across Europe. As Sade's production reaches its finale, the mad actors lead an uprising against their keepers, perhaps to reflect German dramatist Weiss's glum prediction that the cycle of repression and revolt is eternal. See Fig. 6.

**w.12 Welty, Eudora** *The Robber Bridegroom*. 1970. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.

■ Feared highwaymen, the Harpe brothers, William "Big" Harpe and Wiley "Little" Harpe, murdered and robbed travelers on the Natchez Trace in late-eighteenth-century America. Trapped in 1799 by a posse in the Ohio wilderness, Little Harpe escaped. But Big Harpe was less fortunate: his head was cut off by a man whose wife and child he had butchered. Four years later, Little Harpe and a member of the Samuel Mason gang he had joined decapitated their leader with an axe and carried their trophy, packed in clay, to Natchez to claim a reward. While awaiting their payment, they were recognized. Both were hanged at Greenville, Mississippi, in 1804; their heads were then severed and displayed as warnings to the miscreants of the Natchez Trace. See Otto A. Rothert, *The Outlaws of Cave-in-Rock* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1924).

The brothers Harpe (respelled Harp) appear in Eudora Welty's spellbinding novella *The Robber Bridegroom*, in which frontier legend blends with ancient myth. The king of the bandits, Jamie Lockhart, his face stained with berry juice to hide his identity, steals the beautiful Rosamond's clothing and then purloins her heart. Like Psyche, desperate to behold the features of her divine lover, Cupid, the beautiful Rosamond applies a brew to dissolve the berry stains and sends her gallant outlaw fleeing from her bed until all ends happily for the couple, who join the respectable merchant class of New Orleans.

In the course of his adventures, Jamie becomes the antagonist of Little Harp, who travels with a trunk containing the severed head of his brother, who vainly cries, "Let me out!" After they are captured by Indians seeking revenge for Little Harp's murder of a young girl of their tribe, Lockhart and Little Harp fight "the whole night through, till the sun came up," and Jamie kills his opponent.

In Welty's poetic version of the Trace, banditry and murder come to serve as symbols of the fleeting nature of human experience and joy as the seasons turn. Rosamond's father, the planter Clement Musgrove, ruminates: "Wrath and love burn only like the campfires. And even the appearance of a hero is no longer a single and majestic event like that of a star in the heavens, but a wandering fire soon lost. A journey is forever lonely and parallel to death, but the two watch each other, the traveler and the bandit through the trees. Like will-o'-the-wisps the little blazes burn on the rafts all night, unsteady beside the shore. Where are they even so soon as tomorrow? Massacre is hard to tell from the performance of other rites, in the great silence where the wanderer is coming."

In 1976 *The Robber Bridegroom* was first presented as a Broadway musical, with book and lyrics by Alfred Uhry and music by Robert Waldman. The decapitation theme is

sounded when Little Harp and the portable head of his brother sing: “Two heads are better than one, brother / When everything’s said and done.”

One of the most sensational events in the mythical narratives of Mississippi settlement that introduce the three acts of William Faulkner’s novel-drama, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951) is an escape of Natchez Trace bandits from the Jefferson jail. In time it was maintained that the imprisoned gang had included the Harpes: “twenty-five years later legend would begin to affirm, and a hundred years later would still be at it, that two of the bandits were the Harpes themselves, Big Harpe anyway, since the circumstances, the method of the breakout left behind like a smell, an odor, a kind of gargantuan and bizarre playfulness at once humorous and terrifying, as if the settlement had fallen, blundered, into the notice or range of an idle and whimsical grant. Which—that they were the Harpes—was impossible, since the Harpes and even the last of Mason’s ruffians were dead or scattered by this time.”

On the night of the sniper slaying of Medgar Evers in 1963, Eudora Welty wrote the short monologue of a bigoted assassin, “Where Is the Voice Coming From?” (*The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980]). The killer triumphs over his victim’s aspirations: “We ain’t never now, never going to be equals and you know why? One of us is dead.”

**w.13 West, Rebecca** [pseudonym of Cicily Isabel Fairfield] *The New Meaning of Treason*. New York: Viking, 1964.

■ The most detailed study in West’s revised book on treason is her consideration of William Joyce, known throughout England as “Lord Haw Haw” when he broadcasted for the Nazis during World War II. The conviction and execution of Joyce turned on the British court’s determination of a gnarled issue regarding the legal basis for allegiance. Born in Brooklyn in 1906, William was a U.S. citizen at birth, the son of a naturalized American from Galway and a Lancashire woman. At first glance, therefore, it seemed that Joyce committed no offense against England when he became a naturalized German in 1940 and undertook propaganda activity on behalf of his adopted fatherland. The court, however, found a duty of British allegiance arising from the fact that, after thirty years of residence in England, Joyce traveled to Germany and began his hostile activity while holding a renewed British passport that had not expired. Dame Rebecca approved, noting that a contrary ruling would have authorized resident alien spies to flit back and forth across the English Channel without fear of prosecution.

Facing the mystery of Joyce’s disloyalty, West perceives his sense of triumph over his own mediocrity: “His faint smile said simply, ‘I am what I am.’ He did not defend the faith which he had held, for he had doubted it; he did not attack it, for he had believed in it. It is possible that in these last days fascism had passed out of the field of his close attention, that what absorbed him was the satisfaction which he felt at being, for the first time in his life, taken seriously.”

Other traitors examined by West include Alan Nunn May, the Rosenbergs, Klaus Fuchs, Burgess and Maclean, George Blake, Gordon Lonsdale, and William John Christopher