Wanton Woman: Sue Logue, Strom Thurmond, an the Bloody Logue-Timmerman Feud

Review by Steve Glassman – December 2007

The most violent and colorful chapter in American history was not forged in the Old West. For real nastiness, you have to look to the so-called New South, the period from the close of the occupation by Federal troops after the Civil War until the establishment of Civil Rights in the 1970s. To the rest of the country, the post Reconstruction South is conveniently typed as backward and ignorant–and rural and somehow out of step with the goings-on in the larger society. The glories of the Old West, on the other hand, are regarded popularly as the simple working through of Manifest Destiny. Those western achievements still linger grandly in the popular mind (if a bit embarrassingly in age more enlightened to the rights of the native inhabitants). But compare the literature of the Old West and the New South. In the former, you have Ned Buntline and hordes of dime novelists. The latter, on the other hand, produced William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor among dozens of other recognized literary whizzes all of whom, in one way or another, dealt with the social engine that produced a society so notably violent, unequal, and–magnificent.

Anna Flowers' true-crime book, *Wanton Woman: Sue Logue, Strom Thurmond, and the Bloody Logue-Timmerman Feud,* is reminiscent in many ways of Faulkner's ground-breaking novel, *Sanctuary,* one of the very first hard-boiled crime novels. In Faulkner's novel, set in Depression-era Mississippi (and Tennessee), Temple Drake, coed and vamp, creates all manner of havoc owing to her sophomoric hedonism. She stiffs college boys, goes off with an older man (when she knows better), and ends up raped by an impotent psychopath. The worst of her crimes

is allowing an innocent man be condemned for a deed she knows darn well he did not commit. This last skullduggery was dreamed up and carried through by her father, a judge while a broken Temple looks on without raising a hue or cry.

Wanton Woman is the tale of another judge, a man that only the most uninformed citizen of this republic is not acquainted with, Strom Thurmond. Most of us know him as the longest-serving U.S. Senator, but Thurmond's influence–in all manner of public offices-is felt like a lodestone throughout this book. The protagonist Sue Logue nee Stridham was a woman, who arrived on this mortal coil in 1896. Unhappily for her, she was born in the wrong time and place. The South Carolina of her youth was practically a feudal society. Her hand was given in matrimony by her father to a neighbor. The reason Sue appeared attractive to her suitor's family is that her prospective father-in-law wanted to reunite the property that belonged to his family estate. The marriage with Wallace did not take because Sue voracious sexual appetite literally scared hell out of Wallace, who shortly went into a sort of hermitage at the family's remote sawmill. Brother George, however, knew a good thing when he saw it. He and Sue developed a long-standing affair. Momma Anna, Wallace and George's mother liked Sue just fine, and not a word was said about this rather peculiar family arrangement.

Years go by. The family indulges grudges with neighbors and relatives as befitting a family of good standing in the rural South (or medieval times), and Sue becomes enamored of a young school teacher with the peculiar first name of Strom. Clearly, he's a young man going places. Sue, though not graduated from high school, sets her heart on becoming a school teacher. Shortly after Strom's election to the office of local superintendent of schools–and a steamy and on-again off-again fling with Sue–she is appointed teacher of the local school. A dozen more years pass. Strom is now a judge and the family enemies are in control of the school board. Sue is dismissed as a teacher. Worse, her husband of record is slain by one of the folks the clan is on the outs with.

By now it is the 1940s, and the modern world is beginning to impinge even on the Deep South. Brother George and wife-of-record Sue decide a straight-out assassination, the way matters of this sort had been handled for decades, might be messy and attract unhappy legal attention. So they enlist a nephew who was a policeman to find a hit man. The fee: five hundred dollars. Sue writes a check for her half of the hit man's charge. After a couple of months the policeman nephew sings like a canary. The local sheriff, a first cousin to George, goes unarmed to the family seat to collect George and Sue. After giving his regards to Momma Anna, the sheriff politely asks George and Sue to come along to the courthouse. George shoots him in the face, but the deputy–who was thoughtfully armed–returns fire. George is only grazed but the deputy and a family retainer are killed in the fracas.

George and Sue and the hit man are put on trial. The two lovebirds are only accused in the first trial of being accessories to murder, but they are convicted. Along with the hit man, they are sentenced to fry in the electric chair in January of 1943. In the scene that even Faulkner could not have conjured in a realistic way in a novel, Strom Thurmond, by now a state senator turned captain in the Army reserves, is charged with delivering Sue from the women's penitentiary to the place of execution.   He and Sue have one last sexual romp in the back seat while his longtime driver dutifully chauffeurs Sue to the so-called Death House. Although it is claimed Strom was pulling wires behind the scenes on her behalf, Sue was dispatched on schedule, the first woman put to death in South Carolina's electric chair.

Anna Flowers has produced a historical true crime book that is Southern Gothic in tenor and content. It is the sort of thing that Poe as well as a long line of Southern writers would look on with favor. Good going.