Greetings fellow Rawlings Society Members:

I am rather at a loss for words as I sit to write my final presidential letter for the Rawlings Society newsletter. I am very much looking forward to our upcoming meeting in Deland. The program will provide us with yet another great set of events to edify and to entertain. It will, as always, be a wonderful time! Yet I feel great sadness knowing that our fellow Society member Phyllis Hansen will not be with us at this meeting. Like many of you, I will miss her as a friend, and the Society will miss her tiresless efforts and advocacy of Rawlings' legacy. I am sure the same is true for the Friends of the Farm. I know I can speak for everyone when I wish Phyllis' family my most heartfelt condolences, and I hope that in their grief they may find that most divine peace that passes all human understanding.

We are approaching an important moment in the history of the Rawlings Society. Perhaps the source for this portentous emotion stems from the inches of snow remaining on the ground here in the mountains, or from the dire financial circumstances of the domestic violence shelter for which I serve as board president, or from the deep concern I have for Carol and David Grantges, Buddy Bass, and all the other members of the Society who struggle with ill-health, or perhaps it results from the imminent passing of my own time as the president of the Society and as the co-editor of the Journal of Florida Literature (a position I must yield because of my own struggle with time).

But the sense of coming change does not leave me without hope, for as Thomas Carlyle once said, “the world is a place of Hope.” Flo Turcotte will take on the presidency of the Society this April in Deland. Flo is a wonderful person and a capable scholar who will bring new energy and focus to the leadership of our group. I know she will be terrific, and as a group we need to let Flo know the direction we would like to take. Various efforts in seeking new members taken on by Shirley Thompson, Sandra Bimah, and others also suggest that there is plenty of interest in Rawlings to keep the ship of her legacy afloat and her community of aficionados thriving.

So I look to our gathering in Deland, where we will discuss the future as we enjoy the present and remember the past. These eighteen inches of snow will surely melt, for the answer to Shelley’s immortal question—“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”—is yes. April is on the way, and I can’t wait to see you all. Please take care and travel safely and don’t forget to make those reservations and to register early!! With very best wishes for the coming Spring.

Dr. Brent Kinser, MKR President
From the *Construction and Decoration of Masculinity in the Yearling.*

A few years ago some of the most elderly members of the international audience tuning in for the Academy Awards must have had a small shock. As the camera panned over a large assembly of former Oscar winners, it stopped for a moment on a rather dumpy-looking man who was revealed to be the same Claude Jarman who won best supporting actor for his portrayal of the young boy in the film version of *The Yearling.* Jody, it appears, had indeed survived the death of his home and become a man.

Most people, if they know the tale at all, have it from the movie—the book after all, we think, was for children. It is true author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote the story (published in 1938) in some part “for boys” on the suggestion of her editor, Maxwell Perkins (1), as a result of this decision, the profanity she had used in her earlier work South Moon Under (1933) was taken out. Increasingly, however, Rawlings came to see that the story as it developed was taking its own form, and it eventually became a book about how boys must become men. Her earlier description of the book as depicting a “brief and tragic idyll of boyhood” had become something more ambitious.

This has always been an inhibiting factor in terms of both the book’s and its author’s reputation. Although there was food for a while a vague for Rawlings’s 1942 memoir Cross Creek (again, mainly because of the movie version), Rawlings has suffered a long decline from the period of her popularity. She was not included in the recent *Norton Anthology of Southern Literature,* and even though Rawlings repeatedly focuses on both sides of gender issues, she is not a presence in the groundbreaking work on gender in Southern Literature edited by Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (2).

I am unable to go into the myriad ways in which Rawlings has much to say to contemporary issues here; she could and should be taught, for instance, not only in courses on Southern, women’s, and American literature but also in classes dealing with environmental issues, the proletarian novel, folklore, and the short story. Perhaps one reason, however, that she has not been taught in women’s studies classes is that her focus on gender in her major novels is usually on males. Her masterwork is paradigmatic in this respect and has much to contribute to the burgeoning new discussion on the construction of masculinity.

The *Yearling* presents a quite complex study of this process, which gets set in motion through Jody’s relation with his father, Penny, but also with his hardened mother, Ora, with other boys and with his backwoods neighbors, and with Nature itself. Many of the modes of characterization prove markedly Friedman and have an erotic subtext. Further, Rawlings was working to see the pitfalls and problems in the stereotypes of masculinity she considered, and provided an antidote of types by limning the quite unusual but highly satisfactory, approaches to masculinity fashioned by Penny. And, they are balanced by the same quartering that provides for the development of sympathy, loyalty, spirituality, gentleness, and respect. Rawlings, more so than any other woman writer of her time, appears to understand the ambiguous nature of American manhood—how the world insists on one quality one minute and the opposite the next. Jody learns from his father how to navigate successfully between these needs, although the final lesson is that a harsh world dictates an early end to the wondrous elements of childhood for those bound by poverty.

—John Lowe

From *The Mississippi Quarterly* 57.2 (2004): 231