

2010

# The Hero's Journey and the Role of Storytelling in Ron Franscell's Angel Fire

Mary Franscell  
*Fort Hays State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal\\_studies](http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal_studies)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Franscell, Mary, "The Hero's Journey and the Role of Storytelling in Ron Franscell's Angel Fire" (2010). *Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers*. 39.  
[http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal\\_studies/39](http://scholars.fhsu.edu/liberal_studies/39)

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Liberal Studies Research Papers by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

Mary C. Franscell

Dr. Hutchison

English 874 Culminating Experience in English

7 Dec. 2010

The Hero's Journey and the Role of Storytelling in Ron Franscell's *Angel Fire*

## REFLECTION

For my final project as a graduate student at Fort Hays State University, I am choosing to write a literary analysis of a novel that has not been analyzed before, *Angel Fire* by Ron Franscell. In choosing this topic as my project, I am seeking a unique challenge, and I have been motivated to seek out that challenge through a number of the classes that I have taken in my Masters of Liberal Studies program. The skills I bring to this project have been influenced by these same courses. Finally, my appreciation of literature has been greatly deepened as a result of the different works I have been required to study over the last four semesters, and those works provide a solid background for the analysis that I am preparing to do.

IDS 801 Introduction to Graduate Liberal Studies, Dr. Murphy, Spring 2009

This introductory course did exactly what it was supposed to do; it laid a solid foundation for all of the other classes that I took in this degree program, and it gave me a good base from which to branch out in my thinking and in my perceptions of what I studied during the rest of my degree. Early on, the comment was made that graduate students were expected to have greater clarity, precision, fairness, logic, and adequacy to the purpose at hand than undergraduate students do, and I made that idea one of my guiding concepts. Throughout my program, I have always striven to do everything that was asked of me and to do it to the best of my ability. It was my goal to have a straight "A" average, but beyond that grade goal, I wanted to be able to say

that I had always given my very best effort to every assignment, project, and test. I bring these motivations to my current project. Given the fact that I have had the unique opportunity in my life over the last eight years to get to know an author personally, I decided that I wanted to analyze one of this author's works of literature. Ron Franscell, who is now my husband, has published three books and will publish four more between now and October 2011. His first novel, *Angel Fire*, was critically acclaimed, and it is a novel that has a great deal of depth to it. I have chosen to analyze it by looking at the mythological allusions he makes, "mythological" being defined broadly as not only Greek/Roman mythology but also Christian and Arthurian legend. I then plan to examine the role of the stories that can be found within the novel's main storyline, as well as the autobiographical elements that can be seen in the work. Dr. Murphy's introductory course has given me the insight to see that no thought lacks value, and his course encourages me to think "out of the box" and to be creative in my approach to this project.

This introductory course also gave me three guiding principles that I have used in many of my other classes:

\*Wisdom requires a lifetime.

\*Understanding is an on-going process.

\*Knowledge is limitless.

It is my tendency to think that I need to know everything about my subject, and on nearly all of my papers in the last few years, I have ultimately had to "call a halt" to my research. Left up to my own devices, I would have kept researching until long after I should have already turned each paper in, and I would have had much information than I ever could have possibly used. (Well, all right, I usually still do have way more information than I can use. It is a lesson I am still learning.) In the case of my research on *Angel Fire*, I already have a 12-inch stack of papers I

want to read through and at least three books. IDS 801 reminds me that I can work to know what I know, but ultimately, my understanding of *Angel Fire* will not be finished with this paper.

IDS 803 Origins and Implications in the Knowledge Society, Dr. Morin, Summer 2009

Without a doubt, the most challenging and thought-provoking IDS class that I took was Dr. Morin's Origins and Implications of the Knowledge Society. Having spent the previous semester contemplating the meaning of life (literally, since we read Viktor Frankl's book) and what was important to me, Dr. Morin's Knowledge Society class did a wonderful job of bringing it all together and showing me how to apply this thought to our computerized world of today. One of the concepts that I found most interesting was the concept of bandwidth. Dr. Chris Crawford talked about how, in our technical world of today, we have removed ourselves from each other. We do not talk in person, his definition of a larger bandwidth; we talk on the telephone, which he says is of a lesser bandwidth. We do not talk on the telephone; we text. We do not text; we just check the Facebook status of our friends. Yet, just as it is more intimate to speak in person than to read a Facebook posting, so primary sources in research are generally better than secondary sources. I have been questioning whether or not my research is valid if I am simply talking to the author of the book. Yet the reality is that most people would give their eye teeth to talk with Faulkner or Hemingway and ask those gentlemen questions about their writing. I need to realize that I have a valuable commodity in the opportunity to talk with the author, and I need to take advantage of that wide bandwidth.

A second component of the Knowledge Society class that influences my project is the research paper that I did in intellectual property. My paper looked at what intellectual property is and why there are so many problems involved with intellectual property theft these days. As a result, I bring to this analysis a more thorough understanding of copyright laws and why authors

are so protective of their work. Having done this research gives me a deeper understanding of the challenges *Angel Fire's* author has faced during his career, and that understanding will hopefully make me a more sympathetic interviewer, as well as a more skilled one. It is my desire to approach gathering information from the book's author in the same way that I would approach any other author: to come with a solid body of knowledge on which I have built questions that I want to ask. This knowledge will come, in large part, from files that the author has shared with me, and I am deeply respectful of his work and that the fact that it is his property, more so since I did my research project for the Knowledge Society class.

IDS 804, Information Literacy, Dr. Heskett, Fall 2009

Before taking this course, I was unaware of what a wide variety of research resources were out there. This course was valuable due to all of the graduate level research techniques we were exposed to. I never really understood the difference between search engines and databases, and I also did not have a very wide array of resources at my fingertips. I used a number of Dr. Heskett's ideas in my research, including looking through the MLA Bibliography and different newspaper databases in my search for any information about *Angel Fire*. I was ultimately convinced, through the knowledge that I gained in this class, that there truly were not any published works of literary criticism pertaining to this novel, and I feel confident in stating that I am covering completely new territory in my analysis of *Angel Fire*, which was my goal.

ENG 812 Theories and Techniques of Criticism, Dr. Cummins, Spring 2010

Without a doubt, one of the courses I have taken that will influence my completion of this project is Dr. Cummins' Literary Criticism class. I had been exposed to critical literary theory before, and as a matter of fact, I had taken a course from Dr. Appleman herself two summers ago. I am ashamed to admit, however, that I had not really understood, prior to this class, how

critical theories worked and what the purpose was in utilizing them in literary analysis. Dr. Cummins did an excellent job of showing me the way, so to speak, and in the process, she provided a great deal of encouragement that helped me to grow as a critical reader and literature analyst.

In particular, Dr. Cummins' class gives me a role model for this project. Her class required a critical casebook, and I chose to do my casebook on Eudora Welty's novel *The Optimist's Daughter*. It was a completely fortuitous choice, for as I read the novel, I saw hints of autobiographical connections, hints similar to those that can be seen through *Angel Fire*. Reading *The Optimist's Daughter* then prompted me to read Welty's own autobiography, as well as an excellent biography written by a woman who had known her personally, Suzanne Marrs. I ultimately read more than twenty critical articles, although I did not use all of them in my casebook, along with numerous newspaper and magazine articles, blog postings, a number of Welty's short stories, a book of her photographs, and other informational sources.

What this project showed me was the excitement that can be found in totally immersing myself in a work of literature and in an author. Of course, in Eudora Welty's case, there is much more published information to be found than will be found on *Angel Fire* and on Ron Franscell, the book's author. The difference is that I will not have to go to another's book for biographical information, for example; that information can be gained through personal interviews.

The Welty casebook also introduced to me the concept of gathering visual images as a part of my research, and so I may ultimately include some visual images in my *Angel Fire* project. In the case of Eudora Welty, one propitious discovery that I made was that a line from *The Optimist's Daughter* had been placed on the front of Welty's headstone. I was just very intrigued by that fact, and yet that knowledge would not have been a part of my project had I not

been required to provide visual images. I can only imagine how images might affect what I learn about *Angel Fire*.

The most important effect of ENG 812, however, is of course the application of critical literary theories to my work. Historical and biographical influences, a psychological interpretation, and a study of the novel from the perspective of the archetypes to be seen are all possible in this project. I already know that Franscell was deeply influence in his writing by the concept of the hero's journey, and there are many, many mythological allusions to be found in the novel. However, as Franscell has a military background and as he grew up a child of the Vietnam War, those influences are, without a doubt, strong ones in the novel and good aspects to be studied in depth.

ENG 601, American Novel, Dr. Meade, Summer 2010

Dr. Meade's class was another favorite class that I took as part of my degree program. I enjoyed tremendously the works of literature that we studied, but I must admit that, at first, I was a little surprised that we were only reading three books last summer. One of them was a book I taught years ago to high school sophomores, and so I erroneously thought that I would not get much out of reading that book again. I figured, again erroneously, that the class would be a breeze.

Instead, Dr. Meade's loose assignments (basically, to read the books and watch for the culture, biographical, historical, and social influences on the novels) provided an amazing challenge for me. Seeing the books through different lenses, with respect to Deborah Appleman, was actually very challenging and interesting, and those different visions pushed me in my research and analysis of the texts in ways that I would not have thought possible. As a matter of fact, my first paper could have easily been twice as long as it was, for I simply got excited about

the topic, went overboard in my research (again), and then I had a great deal that I wanted to write about. My greatest fear, however, was that I was not truly writing at a solid graduate level. Dr. Meade alleviated my concerns on that score when he gave me an “A+” on my first paper. His grade gave me the confidence that I now bring to my current work, and I am thankful for that.

As can be seen, my coursework in a number of classes essentially created the “perfect storm” that gave me the idea to analyze *Angel Fire*. I enjoyed my research and analysis so much for other novels that I thought it would be an exciting process to apply the same techniques to *Angel Fire*, the caveat being, of course, that *Angel Fire* has no critical articles written about it. However, there is plenty of other information out there, as well as a wealth of detail to be found in the book itself. I have no doubt that I will enjoy this analysis, and it is clear to me that nearly all of the courses I have taken in my MLS degree program have been giving me tools that will aid me in my analysis of *Angel Fire*. These classes have also helped me understand the level of rigor necessary for the work I am undertaking, and they have helped me be ready for this project both mentally and emotionally.

## ABSTRACT

Critical analyses of major works such as *The Grapes of Wrath* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* are legion and easy to find. However, analyzing a literary work of merit that has never been critically interpreted is a challenging task requiring creativity and a deep understanding of the novel. The plot of *Angel Fire* by Ron Franscell (1998) follows the hero's journey model first explored by Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1953). Franscell uses that model both as an overall frame and in stories-within-the-story, incorporating short, widely varying vignettes throughout his overall plot, which ultimately explicates the power of storytelling in our lives. These stories, with their mythic roots, are carefully incorporated into the novel's subtext and combined with numerous intriguing details to make *Angel Fire* a novel that has a timeless quality. My analysis of Franscell's work breaks down the novel into the stages of Campbell's hero's journey, examines the different stories that Franscell tells in the book and their purpose, and looks at the meanings to be found in the names he uses. I also discuss the book's authenticity, the autobiographical influences to be seen, and the themes to be found in the book. Ultimately, it can be seen that Franscell was successful in achieving his goal of telling a timeless story that is one of merit and one that readers can make personal connections with and enjoy, long after the novel has been finished.

## RESEARCH ESSAY

As a high school English teacher, one of the methods I have often used to help my students feel more comfortable in my class and to help them see me as a person, rather than as an august authority pontificating from her podium on high, has been to tell stories. Many of my tales come from my life and my experiences, but I also tell yarns of, and on, my friends, my family, and my co-workers, and from both history and current events. Many of my accounts have a moral, something that I want my students to learn, but I also tell my stories to entertain, to show myself as a real human being, and to bring light and life to what can often be the tedious study of vocabulary, ancient works of literature, and obscure poems. This love of storytelling extends itself to the love of other good chronicles. I read voraciously, and my favorite books tend to be those whose events continue to roll around in my head long after I have finished reading the book. Very often, I almost feel myself haunted, in a good way, by these stories. It is as if I am carrying around dozens of other people in my head whose lives continue on long after I have finished reading their books. This can be credited, in large measure, to the quality of the novels that I have read. One such deeply involving tale is the novel *Angel Fire* by Ron Franscell. The plot of *Angel Fire* follows the hero's journey model outlined by Joseph Campbell many years ago. Franscell takes that model and uses it as a frame, incorporating short, widely varying vignettes throughout his overall plot. These stories, carefully incorporated into the backdrop of the hero's journey and combined with numerous intriguing details, make *Angel Fire* a novel that has a timeless quality to it.

*Angel Fire* is the saga of two adolescent brothers, Daniel and Cassidy McLeod, who live in the small town of West Canaan, Wyoming. Sons of the local newspaper publisher, Archie, they had lost their mother Annie to cancer when she was very young and the boys even younger,

Cassidy four and Daniel seven. Daniel is a natural storyteller and also the epitome of a big brother, looking after Cassidy and trying to help his little brother deal with the pain of losing their mother. The book begins in 1957, when Annie has been dead four years. Daniel is eleven years old, Cassidy eight. The reader is introduced to the water tower, one of the key locations in the book, in the first chapter, and Daniel's storytelling prowess is also seen in this chapter. Three other chapters are set in this idyllic 1957 time period, but the majority of the book takes place in 1995, 38 years later, as Cassidy works to deal with other losses besides the death of his mother. Daniel had died, everyone thought, in 1971 in Vietnam, but suddenly, in June 1995, he has returned to West Canaan. Unfortunately, he is not the Daniel of old. Instead, he is a catatonic specter of his former self who gibbers in Vietnamese, runs from loud noises, and seems often otherwise unaware of his surroundings. Cassidy longs to connect with his older brother, the person he admired most in the world, but he cannot break through Daniel's walls. As Cassidy tries to help Daniel, he is forced to face the pain of his losses that he has tried to hide from for many years, beginning with his mother's death and culminating most recently in his second divorce.

The story of *Angel Fire* is one that Franscell dreamed of writing for many years. Initially, some of the storyline was conceived when he visited a memorial to Vietnam War veterans outside of Angel Fire, New Mexico (Franscell Interview with Kelly Milner Halls). His story idea evolved dramatically from his first initial vision, but he kept the term "angel fire," incorporating it into the novel in a number of ways, and, of course, making it the book's title. A professional journalist who has been writing since he published his junior high's first newspaper when he was thirteen years old, at age 37 Franscell made a list of accomplishments that he wanted to achieve in his life. He told book reviewer Mieke Madrid, "I wanted to set a goal that I

could measure, and writing a novel was number one on the list. Until I wrote a book, I wasn't going to be a 'real writer.'" While working full-time as editor and publisher of the *Gillette News-Record*, a daily newspaper in Gillette, Wyoming, Franscell began writing *Angel Fire* in 1994 and finished it more than two years later. That work included scrapping the first six months' worth of writing. "Shifting gears from newspaperman to novelist was a lot more difficult than I thought," Franscell told reviewer Kim Antoniou. Book reviewer Ken Blum, who admires Franscell's work, notes the difficulties Franscell faced. "No type of writing is more befitting of Red Smith's famous quote," Blum comments. "There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at the typewriter and just open a vein.'" However, Franscell persevered in his quest, and after 38 rejections, *Angel Fire* was published by Laughing Owl Publishing in 1998 (Blum).

### **The Journey of a Hero**

To say that Franscell's goal was simply to write a book would be understating his master plan, however. Franscell's ultimate desire was "to tell a story that had the feel of a classic story, even though it was set in contemporary landscapes. . . . *Angel Fire* was deliberately plotted in the rhythms of mythology," he tells interviewer Linda Davis Kyle. Franscell wanted his story to be a timeless one, and so he created a plotline that mirrors the hero's journey discussed by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell spends 391 pages in this tome ruminating on the role of mythology in our world today, not just as it applies to writers but more as it applies to life in general. He notes, "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward," and echoes of these elements can be found not only in *Angel Fire* but in most successful stories (Campbell 11). As Campbell explains, "Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile

or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan” (38). Campbell divides this journey into three areas: separation, initiation, and return, and Franscell took those steps and expounded upon them in a workshop that he created a number of years ago and that he still teaches periodically today (Campbell 30, Franscell “The Hero’s Journey: Summary of the Steps”). These steps are clearly seen in *Angel Fire*.

Daniel and Cassidy, *Angel Fire*’s two main characters, are each on an odyssey, their own hero’s journey. Both of them take the steps that Campbell, and later Franscell, outlines, although Daniel does not take the steps in quite the same order as found in the Campbell outline, nor does he complete his journey. In the first stage of the journey, Separation, both hear the Call to Adventure, “the point in a hero’s life when he is first given notice that everything is going to change” (Franscell “The Hero’s”). Cassidy’s journey begins when he gets a phone call in 1995 and he hears a strange voice saying the Vietnamese words, “*Toi da tim ban,*” which translate as “I have found you” (Franscell *Angel Fire* 49; Franscell Author’s Notes and Papers). He soon learns from Miss Oneida, a woman in West Canaan who served as a mother figure to the boys after their mother Annie died, that Daniel has come home. Cassidy immediately leaves San Francisco to return to West Canaan (Franscell *Angel* 57). His journey back to Wyoming leads Cassidy to cross The First Threshold, “leaving the known limits of his comfortable world” (Franscell “The Hero’s”).

Daniel’s journey, on the other hand, begins more than 24 years earlier when he goes to Vietnam as a reporter. “Daniel wasn’t crazy. He had just been too fresh and too adventuresome to stay in Saigon . . . He humped and hopped choppers upcountry to where the action was . . . nearer the heat, closer to Heaven by way of Hell” (Franscell *Angel* 19-20). And Daniel certainly finds the heat, in a small Vietnamese village named Ba Troi. Crossing this threshold takes

Daniel into the “Belly of the Whale,” as Franscell calls it, “the final separation from the hero’s known world and self” (Franscell “The Hero’s”). In Ba Troi, Daniel witnesses a My Lai-type of massacre, and he never recovers from the awful event (Smith 293). Franscell’s description of this massacre is vividly horrifying, and while difficult to read, the reality imparted to the scene helps the reader to see why Daniel would have been so terribly affected by the events (Franscell *Angel* 22-6). This experience essentially marks the end of Daniel’s life as he knows it because even though he survives the massacre himself, he is never the same. He literally goes insane as a result of what he sees in Ba Troi.

In Cassidy’s case, nothing quite so dramatic happens. However, the Belly of the Whale can also be seen as simply one’s lowest point, and Cassidy is at a terribly low moment in his life just before he gets the telephone call telling him that Daniel has returned (Franscell “The Hero’s”). Cassidy’s wife has left him, he is unable to write the book that he has been trying so hard to finish, and truly, his spirits cannot get any lower. Cassidy was waiting “to be rescued by his own ghosts,” and Daniel’s return is exactly that for him (Franscell *Angel* 13-5).

Campbell’s second stage of the hero’s journey is Initiation to which he refers as the “trials and victories of initiation” (Campbell 36). In the Initiation stage, the hero must face a number of challenges and tests on his way to his goal. It is in this stage that the hero’s journey is more clearly seen for Cassidy than it is for Daniel. Cassidy’s Road of Trials is the tests that Cassidy must face as he tries to help Daniel and, in the process, learn Daniel’s story (Campbell 97; Franscell “The Hero’s”). Franscell illuminates this concept by having Cassidy make the literal journey by driving home to West Canaan to San Francisco. As he crosses The First Threshold, Cassidy is tempted along the way by a young woman in Salt Lake City, helpfully named Callie by Franscell after Calypso, the sea-nymph who so entranced Odysseus that he stays with her for

seven years before finally leaving her to return to Ithaca and his wife Penelope (Franscell *Angel* 61-2; Gayley 331). Cassidy also has Campbell's Meeting with a Goddess, the Tia Lazarus character who becomes his love interest (Campbell 109).

It is Tia who helps Cassidy have his Atonement with the Father, Campbell's step in the journey in which "the hero must confront whatever holds the ultimate power in his or her life" (Franscell "The Hero's"). Throughout Cassidy's life, what has dictated his responses to everything around him has been his desire to avoid pain. He lost his mother, and that loss alone is enough to forever scar him, to wound him in a way that most people probably cannot understand. Daniel had tried in the past to take away this pain by telling Cassidy stories, but the pain is always there, festering, like a gash that never heals. That unhealed gash keeps Cassidy from being able to see that he cannot help Daniel after Daniel returns to West Canaan. Cassidy keeps trying to solve Daniel's problems, to break through the barriers, to find what he had lost so many years ago, but he finally is forced to realize that nothing is going to bring Daniel back to what he was.

In one of the novel's climactic, although very quietly restrained, scenes, Cassidy takes flowers to the graves of his loved ones in the Mount Pisgah cemetery. Looking at his mother's grave, he says, "I loved you, Mom, and I never meant to hurt you" (Franscell *Angel* 254). When children lose people they love, they often grow up believing that, somehow, they brought about that person's loss, and this is certainly the case with Cassidy. As a little boy, "The talk of her cancer was beyond him. . . Cassidy only knew that something consumed her. Maybe it was him. Maybe, he thought, he'd needed her too much and his dependence ate her away." As a result, "Cassidy never wanted to lose someone close to him again, nor to be so close that he might consume another loved one" (5). This sheer pain was what Cassidy has to move past, and his

Atonement makes that possible. Franscell reinforces the point when he even has Cassidy, at long last, go to his father's grave and tell Archie a story that he never knew about an occurrence in Daniel and Cassidy's childhood (259).

Some of Daniel's steps in the Initiation stage can only be guessed at because so much of what happens to him after Ba Troi is unknown. It is clear, however, that he goes through the step of Atonement, for it is in this stage that Daniel faces his demons. The book's penultimate chapter switches perspective, and suddenly, while most of the rest of the book had been told in limited third-person narration from Cassidy's point of view, this chapter looks more closely at Daniel, and the reader is privy to Daniel's thoughts. Finally, and sadly, Daniel's insanity is revealed, and the reader understands, in a way that perhaps Cassidy will not, how tortured Daniel is and how it simply is not possible for anyone to help him. To atone, Daniel has to show "the Lost One," Cassidy, that "the dead forgive you," and for Daniel, there is only one way to do this (Franscell *Angel* 270-83). However, Daniel is not completely successful in his Atonement because his ultimate goal is to make Cassidy whole, and he has not done that. Only Cassidy can make himself whole, and there was no way for the insane Daniel to understand that solving Cassidy's problems is not his role in life. In many ways, Daniel still thinks of Cassidy as his little eight-year-old brother, and similarly, Daniel still thinks from the perspective of the eleven-year-old who is trying to be the best big brother he knew how to be, even though that means, in his ultimately tortured mind, killing himself to save Cassidy.

Daniel's death is his Apotheosis, his "deification," and in this state, "the hero is in heaven and beyond all strife." In his death, Daniel's journey ends, and so his hero's journey fails, for he does not reach the Ultimate Boon, "the achievement of the goal of the quest" (Franscell "The

Hero's"). But Cassidy, the novel's primary hero, is still on his journey, and Franscell is ready to take him home.

Cassidy and Daniel can be seen as such close brothers that they are actually two halves of the same whole, and so, while Daniel does not complete the Campbell model of the hero's journey, Cassidy does, thus causing *Angel Fire's* storyline to still fit into Campbell's framework. "One knows the tale;" Campbell wrote, "it has been told a thousand ways," and Franscell is striving to tell his story in the same pattern, yet in a totally different way, for while he seems to create a symbiotic relationship for the two brothers, at the same time, Daniel is clearly Cassidy's mentor, one of the people who shows Cassidy how to travel the road of life (Campbell 387). "Sometimes, the mentor is one who has gone before and failed," Franscell explains in an interview in October 2010. "Daniel represents what happens if you are ultimately unable to detour around your pain" (Franscell Personal Interview).

After Cassidy's Atonement, The Return, the third stage of the hero's journey, occurs very simply. Cassidy goes back to California in what perhaps can be seen as synonymous with Campbell's Magic Flight stage, but he is quickly going to be Rescued from Without by Tia, whom he marries and, in so doing, becomes Master of Two Worlds (Franscell "The Hero's"). Choosing to love Tia demonstrates that Cassidy has finally resolved his mother's loss. He explains this himself in the book's Epilogue, which switches to a first person narrator:

Pain is part of me, part of my comfort.

I spent a lifetime dancing around it, whirling fast enough to blur the ache. I still dance, but slow enough to feel the earth beneath my feet, close enough to know I'm not alone.

And I'm not sad anymore.

Why? Because pain is the price we pay for memory. (Franscell *Angel* 284)

As Franscell writes, “The hero has become comfortable and competent in both the inner and outer worlds,” and with this positive self awareness comes the final step of the hero’s journey, the Freedom to Live, “living in the moment, neither anticipating the future nor regretting the past” (“The Hero’s”). Cassidy has found contentment and the love of a good woman, and he is eagerly anticipating the birth of their first child. To close the circle, Tia and he are returning to live in the McLeod family home, located, appropriately enough, on Ithaca Street, Ithaca, of course, being the name of Odysseus’ home. The hero’s journey is complete.

### **The Significance of Names AKA One Hundred Rooms**

Franscell does nothing by accident, and his placement of the McLeod house in West Canaan on a street named Ithaca is very purposeful. This street name is one of a number of markers that Franscell creates in order to signify the journey that he has his hero make. In many small ways, he gives the perceptive reader hints that the story they are reading is, essentially, the same story that readers have been reading since Homer wrote *The Odyssey*. Franscell told book reviewer Kim Antoniou, “I felt like I’d built a house with 100 secret rooms. . . You’re welcome to go through this house to your heart’s content, but I don’t think you’ll find all 100 rooms. And that’s OK, because I think it stands on its own as a nice little story.” Some of these rooms are more obvious than others. When Daniel returns to West Canaan, crouching in the shadows, for example, “The nine o’clock siren sang over West Canaan as it had almost every night for three generations” (Franscell *Angel* 51). Odysseus hears sirens as well at one point in his journey, and in *The Odyssey*, the Sirens “had the power . . . of charming by their song all who heard them, so that mariners . . . cast themselves into the sea to destruction” (Gayley 328-9). As West Canaan is

ultimately the scene of Daniel's destruction, it makes sense that sirens beckon him home as he returns.

Franscell also offers hints in the names that he chooses for his characters. Many of these names have some sort of mythological basis. One of the tactics Franscell adopts in his name choices is anagrams (Franscell Personal Interview). The name of Calvun LaForge, the clubfooted auto mechanic, is an anagram for Vulcan, the Roman god of fire, hence the LaForge surname, which also connects with the fact that Vulcan was the blacksmith of the gods (Gayley 24). Similarly, Calvun is the repairman of everything in West Canaan. Franscell extends the analogy by having Calvun be born with only half of his foot (Franscell *Angel* 209-10).

Twin Tommy Gannemon is an anagram for the name Agamemnon. Twin Tommy returns from the Vietnam War to find his wife with another man and is killed by the two of them, similar to how Agamemnon returns to Sparta and is murdered by Clytemnestra and her lover. Furthermore, both Tommy and Agamemnon are murdered while they are taking baths after a long journey (Franscell *Angel* 139; Gayley 314).

Another mythological reference can be seen in Herman Searcy, the postmaster of the town. Franscell names him Herman in homage to Hermes, the Greek messenger of the gods, which makes sense for a postmaster, especially one who "steadfastly believed he was the True Messenger" (Franscell *Angel* 148). To complete the parallel, Herman wears wingtip shoes and has "feathery tufts of unruly gray hair that sprouted over his ears," much like the wings that Hermes sports on his ankles and his hat (Franscell *Angel* 147; Gayley 34).

The town's hardware store, Thorson's Hardware, harkens to Thor, the son of the Norse god Odin. One of Thor's most precious possessions is a hammer, hence the connection of his name with a hardware store (Gayley 376). Franscell explains in an interview, "I was starting to

populate these places with names that had this invisible subtext. It meant nothing if you didn't care. If you did care, it meant something" (Franscell Personal Interview). All of these little references are examples of what Franscell talked about in the Antoniou interview when he talked about building the "house with 100 secret rooms." He tucks in little hidden messages to please himself, and it is his contention, as he told Antoniou, that not all of his secret references will probably be discovered, but perhaps a few will be recognized by the more perceptive readers.

Franscell also uses a number of traditional Christian allusions. Mount Pisgah, the town's cemetery, is one of the names actually explained in the book's text. "The cemetery took its name from the biblical mountain slope where Moses first saw the Promised Land" (Franscell *Angel 3*). West Canaan is another Biblical allusion, Canaan being the Promised Land that Abram journeys to with his wife Sarah (*New American Standard Bible*, Gen. 12:5). Calling the town West Canaan seems to suggest that here, in West Canaan, the residents are actually on the other side of the Promised Land, to the west of it, having moved further past the Promised Land as they gained peace and fulfillment. Jack Lazarus, the young writer who came through West Canaan in Cassidy and Daniel's childhood, eventually hides himself, considering his life a failure. His surname pays homage to the fact that, through an accident of fate, his career is resurrected, and the publishing of his book gives him immortality, just as Lazarus is brought back to life by Jesus (John 11: 43-4). Jeremiah Kipper, Tia's first love, is named after the Biblical prophet Jeremiah who is appointed to do as he is told. "Everywhere I send you, you shall go," the Lord tells Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1: 7), and so Kipper also wanders "in a quixotic quest for meanings that always evaded him" (Franscell *Angel 91*).

Angels are prominent in the novel as well. Archangel is the war name of the young man first killed at Ba Troi, and archangels, in general, are seen to be angels of a rank higher than

regular angels. In his *Dictionary of Angels*, Gustav Davidson explains that “in the Old Testament . . . David calls Michael ‘one of the chief princes,’ which is taken to mean one of the archangels.” Interestingly, however, Davidson notes that in the Koran, the archangel Michael is the “warrior angel who fights the battle of the faithful,” and Franscell’s character Archangel is very faithful to what he is doing, even if he does not agree with the overall purpose of the war (Davidson 51; Franscell *Angel* 18-9). Another angel name, although one with a vicious twist, is Mastema. Sergeant Mastema is perhaps the most evil character in the book, as he is the man who rapes a young girl in the midst of the Ba Troi massacre and then kills her brutally (Franscell *Angel* 24). Davidson defines Mastema as “the accusing angel; like Satan, he works for God as tempter and executioner; he is prince of evil, injustice, and condemnation” (Davidson 185). Later, Mastema comes after Daniel and makes it clear to Daniel that Daniel is now the enemy, that Daniel is in danger, and that he risks death if he tells the truth of Ba Troi (Franscell *Angel* 26-9).

Some of the names can be explained simply through knowledge of Franscell’s life and the people he has known. Annie McKenzie, Cassidy and Daniel’s mother, takes her name from Franscell’s first wife, Ann Kennedy Franscell, who, incidentally, was from Greybull, Wyoming, a small town in northwestern Wyoming. Annie, similarly, is “from the great basin on the other side of the mountains,” another way of describing Greybull’s location (Franscell *Angel* 4). Oneida Overstreet, the McLeod housekeeper, gets her surname from one of Franscell’s best friends, Jack Overstreet; similarly, Sam Whittington, the young man to whom Cassidy sold the *Republic-Rustler*, is named after another of Franscell’s good friends, Mark Whittington. Tom Matassa, Franscell’s grandfather’s best friend, is the source of the name of Cassidy’s book editor at Houghton Mifflin, Tommy Matassa. The photographer Hollis Adams’ name comes from a

combination of the names of Hollis Engley, a good friend of Franscell's who is a photographer, and the famous professional photographer Ansel Adams, whose work Franscell admires.

Flashlight Freddy Bascomb, who loves to catch kids making out in their cars, is named after Flashlight Freddie Van Horn, the old police chief in Mills, Wyoming, who, back in Franscell's high school days, did, indeed, like to catch teenagers who were parked. Fakey Dukas, the fat gravedigger, is the name of a former circus performer in Gillette. "He was famous around there for doing a series of back flips for the kids," Franscell says. "I just used his name because he [the book's character] is a fake, and I thought that would be a nickname he would be given if . . . we just accepted that he lied." The grave of Hector Feeney, an old bachelor storyteller, is one that Cassidy and Daniel walk by frequently in the Mount Pisgah cemetery, and a number of Heck Feeney stories are told in the book. Appropriately, Franscell actually did find this name on a tombstone (Franscell Personal).

Finally, because Cassidy is on a hero's journey, like Odysseus, Franscell picked Cassidy's name because he thought it seemed like a modern-day updating of Odysseus' name. Daniel's name choice should be obvious to any child of the 1970's. In his song, "Daniel," Elton John sings, "Daniel my brother you are older than me/ Do you still feel the pain of the scars that won't heal/Your eyes have died but you see more than I," and this song is the root of Franscell's choice to make Daniel the name of his main character (John and Taupin; Franscell Personal). Understanding these and other references gives *Angel Fire* a depth that might not otherwise be immediately apparent at first glance, and they help reinforce the hero's journey model that Franscell works so hard to follow in this novel.

## A Frame Story

A second major component of *Angel Fire* is the concept of storytelling and an understanding of the importance of stories in people's lives. Franscell explains, "We are transported by stories to places we've never been, times we'll never know, and introduced to fascinating people. . . . Once a beginning writer understands that he'll never tell a completely new story, he'll tell us something we've never heard, and there's a big difference" (Franscell Interview with Linda Davis Kyle). Franscell has always been attracted to storytelling, and indeed, his love of a good story was what encouraged him to go into journalism as a career (Franscell Interview with Kelly Milner Halls). This love of stories made him not only want to embrace the hero's journey in *Angel Fire* but to also tell as many different tales as possible. As Franscell explains to his publishers, Ham and Aleta Boudreaux, "If Campbell was right -- that myths endure because of familiar rhythms that transcend cultures and centuries -- *Angel Fire* should feel familiar to a reader, perhaps at [a] subconscious level" (Franscell "Reflections on *Angel Fire*: for Hamilton and Aleta"). The way that Franscell conceived of making the reader feel a sense of familiarity was to create the frame story, essentially, of Cassidy and Daniel, and then, within that frame, to tell as many stories as he could.

Hollis Adams, the photographer from Vietnam who comes to Daniel's funeral, tells Cassidy that Daniel was "quicksilver," or Mercury, which is appropriate since Mercury is the Roman god who delivers messages, and each of Daniel's stories delivers some sort of message (Franscell *Angel* 32). Some of the stories are funny, some are poignant. Some are retellings; some are "new" fiction written by Franscell. Some of the stories can be traced to Franscell's journalistic roots, and some point to a key concept that Franscell wants his readers to grasp. All of the stories, short or long, are engaging, causing a momentary digression from the main frame

of the story, Cassidy and Daniel's journey. In writing these stories, Franscell more deeply draws his reader into the book, giving those desired feelings of comfort and familiarity while simultaneously providing entertainment and food for thought.

One such story is the boys' bottle hunt (Franscell *Angel* 193-202). The bottles, when redeemed at the local store, will provide the boys with an infusion of cash that they can use at the county fair the next week, and their goal is one hundred bottles. After several hours of hunting, they find eighty-three, and while they are hungry for lunch, they decide to find seventeen more to reach their goal. Cassidy has been warned to watch out for rattlesnakes, but when he stumbles and falls to the ground, he discovers himself face to face with one of the biggest rattlers he has ever seen. The other boys have wandered off in their search, and so Cassidy is forced to listen to them calling out their bottle count as they find the last six bottles, all the way looking straight at the rattlesnake and expecting at any moment to be bitten. Fortunately, once the bottles are all found, Daniel realizes Cassidy's predicament and is able to rescue him by killing the snake. The kids then return to town so they can turn in their bottles to Art Rexford, the town butcher, and the person who counts the bottles the boys find and decrees how much cash they are to receive. Art Rexford's name is a veiled allusion to Arthur Rex, King Arthur, for Rexford functions as the receptor of the boys' Holy Grail, the bottles that they are seeking in order to gain the desired treasure. Vera Gwynne, the clerk at the market, echoes the name of Guinevere, King Arthur's wife. Franscell further explains, "We have young men who light out in search of a valuable vessel which they intend to redeem with the king . . . and on the way they encountered dragons [the snake]. They slay the snake. Daniel is the dragon slayer" (Franscell Personal). In retelling the search for the Holy Grail, in microcosm, Franscell gives *Angel Fire* a completely new story and yet one that feels nicely familiar.

By rough count, in addition to the story of Cassidy and Daniel, Franscell tells at least fifteen more stories within the frame of the novel. The stories range from several pages in length to just a few sentences, and they serve a variety of purposes. One anecdote carried throughout the book is Daniel's tale of Pledger Moon, an emancipated black slave who has all sorts of adventures. Any time that Cassidy is feeling lonely for his mother, Daniel's distracter of choice is to tell Cassidy another episode in the Pledger Moon saga, and Cassidy learns to beg for these stories. One of the Pledger Moon tales involves a night train whose engineer sees another train coming down the track in the distance, and so to avoid a collision, the engineer stops the train. The story's punch line is that there was no second train; the light they saw was the star of Venus close by the horizon (Franscell *Angel* 171-5). Franscell cribs this entertaining little vignette from Bill Nye's story, "A Headlight in View," but by the time he is finished with his Pledger Moon version, the new story is much longer than the original (Nye 79-81). Pledger Moon also teaches Cassidy about the ten memory stones, symbolic of the most important aspects of a person's life, and through Pledger, Cassidy learns that "the memories you have yet to know . . . the journey still ahead . . . is the most valuable" (Franscell *Angel* 207).

Several mythological stories are told, and Franscell even incorporates a story that he encounters in his day job when he is in the midst of writing the novel:

I read a news story about a bow-hunter who died in the forest. They found his body, but one arrow was missing from his quiver. After the funeral, his son went out to the forest to find the missing arrow and discovered his father's last shot had pierced the heart of a magnificent buck. I took the story and changed it a little, and it became a tender story . . . that tells us something beautiful about love and family. (Franscell Interview with Linda Davis Kyle)

In Franscell's modification, the news report becomes one that Tia's father, Jack Lazarus, writes when he is visiting West Canaan as a young man back in the 1950's. Tia finds the story, and its final line, "He knew he had only one shot, and it had to be true," causes her to think about the story as being a metaphor for life itself (Franscell *Angel* 101). Again, another departure from the frame that teaches a small lesson can be seen.

As mentioned, Franscell is a journalist, and in his career he has won more than fifty writing awards, many of them as a result of his own personal storytelling prowess. One example of his raconteuring skill is the legend he creates for *Angel* Fire about why the baseball field in West Canaan is called Moses Field. Cassidy retells to Tia Daniel's story of how, supposedly, a man named Moses had come to town many years before and challenged the townsmen to a baseball game. He agreed to play with any eight men in town against the best nine players of the town. Bets were made, and the game was soon played, but to everyone's surprise, Moses was winning easily. Finally, the pitcher threw a ball right at Moses' head, and he fell over dead. He was buried in the middle of the baseball field, which became known as Moses Field. "And if you play here, you've got to tip your hat during the game to old Moses," Cassidy tells Tia, and as they sit and watch the game, they see Little Leaguers unconsciously grab the brims of their hats, in effect tipping them to Moses (Franscell *Angel* 141-2). Like all successful legends, Franscell's story offers a perfectly plausible reason for why an action occurs and why the world is the way that it is, and this is the storytelling arena in which Franscell excels.

The real Moses Field actually exists in Midwest, Wyoming, not far from where Franscell lived, and he says:

I remember going by there once, in the writing of it [the book], and it just clicked.

The whole back story just unfolded instantaneously in my mind how we were

going to give this place this deeper meaning. I am saying a lot in there about how I feel about this stuff. It's how we create legends, how it has to do a lot with how we believe and how behave, like the people would have created about this itinerant baseball player named Moses. The story is deliberately created to reflect that. (Franscell Personal)

This same feeling is the essence of the character of Daniel. Cassidy tells Tia how much Daniel loves the old myths, explaining, ““To him, they touched something common in people. It was like a rhythm that pulsed in every story that was ever told. Every story *he* ever told, anyway”” (Franscell *Angel* 161). That same rhythm pulses in Franscell's stories as well.

The genesis of a number of Franscell's characterizations is worth noting. Jack Lazarus is an echo of the beatnik writer Jack Kerouac. When Franscell lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for three years in the early eighties, he met Jack Kerouac's daughter, Jan, who lived there also. Tia's character is drawn directly from what Franscell learned of Jan Kerouac when they became friends during that time period. Franscell wrote of her that she “had a mind that danced all over the room, each step a tiny little mystery until she touched down lightly and moved on. Would that all we all lived life that way, with a famous name that sustained us and a talent for living.” Jan, sadly, died in 1996 at age 44, before *Angel Fire* was published, but like her father, she left behind a number of works which immortalize her, and Franscell used the character of Tia to further pay homage, in a sense, to Jan's memory (Franscell “Jan Kerouac Danced Through Life”).

The character of Colonel Thomas W. Marrenton, the man who finds Daniel in Vietnam and returns him to the United States, was modeled on a man whom Franscell met in Wyoming, Dr. Tom Walsh. This explains the Thomas W., of course. Franscell had contacted Walsh

initially in his search to learn if there was a Vietnamese translation of the word “Troy.” Walsh had been in the military for 37 years and eventually began financing his own trips overseas in search of American soldiers who had been lost or left behind after Vietnam (Crump). Marrenton came from Craig Marrenton, one of three Gillette soldiers who were killed in the Gulf War. “During the writing of this, I was fascinated with the war,” Franscell says, “. . . I had done something in [the newspaper] where I’d written about these three guys, and they all had family still there [in Gillette]” (Franscell Personal). Knowing these families thus caused Franscell to give one of the son’s names to Daniel’s rescuer.

The character of Frank de Sales is Cassidy’s mentor. He is likely modeled on Chuck Harkins, the longtime sports editor with whom Franscell worked in high school at the Casper *Star Tribune* and who encouraged Franscell to see that he had real writing talent. Franscell wanted Cassidy to have a mentor, and in creating Frank, he chose the name of St. Francis de Sales, the Catholic patron saint of writers and journalists (“St. Francis de Sales”). The characters of Frank de Sales, Col. Marrenton, Tia Lazarus, and others help build the frame of *Angel Fire* and give the book a solid foundation that resonates with readers.

### **Getting It Right**

For reporters, it is important to get the facts of the story correct, and for Franscell, even though he was writing a fictional story, he wanted to make sure he was setting up a location that was accurately depicted and that the events he described could have actually happened. For example, the boys go to the local Dairy Freez and buy chocolate-dipped ice cream cones, a concoction that Dairy Queen has served for many years. Franscell wrote this section and then some time later, he suddenly started worrying that maybe chocolate-dipped ice cream cones did not exist in 1957. After three days of research, he was able to find an expert who provided him

with the information that those kinds of cones had indeed existed at that time. “Throughout *Angel Fire*,” he told interviewer Kyle, “I can point out fleeting moments that required an enormous amount of research to lend credibility and authenticity, just so a reader wouldn’t say, ‘Aha! That couldn’t have happened’” (Franscell Interview with Linda Davis Kyle). Similarly, when the boys go to the movie theater to watch the John Wayne movie, *The Searchers*, Franscell made sure that it was a movie that really came out in 1956 (*The Searchers*). Franscell writes that the picture was “new” and then explains, “Actually, it came out the year before, but the Wigwam almost never showed movies when they were really new” (Franscell *Angel* 237). This time description jives exactly with when *The Searchers* was released. Annie gives Archie a book of poetry by Rupert Brooke for Archie’s birthday in 1953, and Franscell refers to Brooke as young, which indeed he was, as he died at the age of 28. Brooke’s poem “The Wayfarers,” a portion of which is quoted in *Angel Fire*, had been written between 1905-1908 and published in a 1916 collection of his poetry, so having Annie give Archer an inscribed copy of this book is also chronologically correct (“Rupert Brooke 1916 Collected Poems: Bibliographic Record;” Franscell *Angel* 154-5).

Another aspect of the book on which Franscell worked very diligently, with regard to authenticity, was the use of the Vietnamese words and phrases. A number of Vietnamese place maps can be found in Franscell’s files, and wherever possible, he refers to actual places. The region of the Ba Troi massacre, the Dak Po Ko River Valley, actually existed, for example. As he wrote, Franscell also worked on finding Vietnamese translations for other phrases and words he thought he might want to use in the book, such as “I love you,” “How far is it to heaven,” “angel,” “gangsters,” “brother,” and “baby,” consulting websites and the *Essential English-Vietnamese Dictionary*, but he was worried – again, the reporter in him coming out – that a

Vietnamese-speaking person might later read his book and say, “Hey, that’s not correctly translated” (Franscell Personal).

Serendipitously, during the time period when he was writing the book, Franscell was on a plane flying to Dallas when he found himself seated next to a young Vietnamese woman, Phu Mai Thuc Trinh. She did not speak any English, but she was able to read English, so Franscell wrote down some of the phrases he wanted to know the Vietnamese words for, and she wrote the translations down for him (Franscell Author’s). Later, armed with all of her translations, he went to several different Vietnamese chat rooms on the Internet, posted the phrases and their translations, and asked if the translations sounded authentic (Franscell Personal). He also sent an email to someone associated with the University of California at Berkeley regarding these translations (Franscell Message to Chuong Tran). This person helped him and also commented, “Remember that anyone can translate from other languages into Vietnamese, but how the translation end[s] up is very important. Meaning the usage of the words, if the words are uses correctly, then the meaning can be more elaborate and much more wonderful” (Tran). These words must have certainly encouraged Franscell in his search for authenticity regarding the words he used. “It never entered my mind to make something up,” Franscell says. “I remember thinking when I was writing some of those things about Hemingway writing Spanish into some of his books. There was an element of the ghost of Hemingway tapping me on the shoulder” (Franscell Personal).

Franscell was ultimately unsuccessful, however, in finding a Vietnamese translation for the word “Troy,” a detail that is vital to his hero’s journey concept. Just as the Greek city of Troy is the site of the Trojan War, which becomes “the theme of the greatest poems of antiquity, those of Homer and Virgil,” so Franscell wanted the name of the Vietnamese massacre site to

reflect a great battle that involved his hero (Gayley 279). Trinh could not translate this word, and apparently neither could anyone else. Finally, Franscell simply made up the name “Ba Troi.” “I knew that ‘ba’ was Vietnamese for ‘village,’” Franscell says, “and I wanted to refer mythically to Troy, so I just called it ‘Troi.’” Much later, Franscell learned that “troi” is “sky” in some Vietnamese dialects, and given the fact that he associated this village with angels, “Village of the Sky” is certainly an appropriate name for the site of such an awful event (Franscell Personal). Sometimes things work out the way they are supposed to.

The different locations in the novel also contribute to *Angel Fire*'s authenticity. Franscell wanted his description of Cassidy's life in San Francisco to be authentic, and he also had the ulterior motive of having Cassidy live in the house on Russell Street where Jack Kerouac lived at one time. So, he asked his friend Mark Whittington, another journalist who still lived in the San Francisco area, to go to Kerouac's house, write down what he saw, and then send his findings to Franscell. Whittington mailed an eight-page handwritten description, one that he apparently wrote as he was walking up and down the street, that forms the basis for the settings that Franscell creates in San Francisco, including Cassidy's – Jack Kerouac's – house, the Washbag, and Molly's Café (Franscell Author's; Franscell *Angel* 42-9).

One of the aspects of the novel that is most praised by reviewers is how Franscell describes Wyoming itself. Writing for the *Jackson Hole News*, Angus M. Thuermer Jr. says, “His descriptions reflect all the starkness and glory of the Wyoming landscape.” Clay Evans also praises the book, writing, “We who live here know that in quiet moments – and on tempestuous nights – the land, sky, and animals have . . . much to say . . . [Franscell is] evoking the sublime melancholy of America's least populous state.” Many of the locations are familiar ones, the water tower in *Angel Fire* being one of the most recognizable images. Franscell says,

“I knew that I needed something like that, something steeple-like. Most cemeteries in the arid West have water towers, ‘A’ because they are up on a hill and they have water towers that operate on gravity, and ‘B’ because cemeteries need a lot of water . . . every small town has one. . . . the preeminent symbol of small towns” (Franscell Personal). Pumpkin Butte, Crazy Woman Creek, and Dead Swede Flats, place names found in *Angel Fire*, are all actual locations in Wyoming, as is Gillette. West Canaan, of course, is fictional, but it is located very near to Gillette and is given a number of Gillette’s same attributes. Franscell’s descriptions of these locales are detailed, and, very often, beautifully descriptive. Setting West Canaan on the Wyoming prairie, he writes:

Beyond the trees . . . a velvety brown bolt of prairie cloth unfurled west to the Big Horns, where storms lingered before they burst onto the flats.

Billowing clouds grazed across an endless blue sky like a herd of white buffalo. The emptiness of the place fled away from the lonely little town in every direction.

Cassidy was thrilled by it. He imagined the breeze swirling to life in the distant mountains, sweeping over the snow that still capped the highest peaks, and drifting down to soothe his sweaty face. (Franscell *Angel* 10)

Anyone who has ever been in Wyoming or on the prairies of Montana or Colorado recognizes the veracity and the majesty in such a description, for such is life on the Western plains.

Franscell himself felt that the Wyoming landscape was one of the most important aspects of the book, and it is not surprising that his love for Wyoming can be seen not only in *Angel Fire* but in his successive books *The Deadline*, *Fall: The Rape and Murder of Innocence in a Small*

*Town*, and *Outlaw Rockies*, a book to be published in September 2011. Franscell tells Ham and Aleta Boudreaux:

The role of physical surroundings in forming Cassidy's and Daniel's characters is undeniable and immutable . . . It is entirely natural for a Westerner to feel a kind of umbilical connection to his surroundings, as if separating them might diminish them both. In the same way that the South and its unique attributes became background characters in the great Southern writers' stories, the new breed of western writers can be defined by landscape. (Franscell Reflections)

This idea is echoed in an early line in *Angel Fire*, "In some places, men shape geography; in others, geography shapes men" (3). This concept also explains why Daniel's return to West Canaan makes so much sense. Most people want to end their days where they are comfortable, where they have the most powerful connections, and often that is home, wherever that home may be. Daniel's home is West Canaan, and so he has to go back there in the end. These feelings give an authenticity to *Angel Fire*, a deepness that enriches the work, for readers feel as if they have been there.

### **Life or Something like It**

Ultimately, the novel *Angel Fire* is best understood when analyzed from a New Historical perspective, especially taking into account the author's life. Knowing the author's biography and what has influenced him in the course of his life gives a depth to *Angel Fire* that might not otherwise be seen. Franscell himself has repeatedly denied that there is any connection between his life and the novel, and he made this denial again in October 2010 in a personal interview. However, as literary criticism theory suggests, understanding a work of literature also contains

an element of what the reader chooses to bring to that understanding, and the biographical lens seems a particularly apt one through which to view *Angel Fire*.

Evoking the Wyoming landscape where he himself grew up is just one of the many aspects of *Angel Fire* that has an autobiographical ring to it from Franscell's own life. However, it can be argued, to some good effect, that Franscell is talking about Wyoming, a state that even today, in 2010, has a population of only 493,782 people ("Wyoming"). There are just not that many places to go. So, for example, even though Archie, Daniel and Cassidy's father, went to the University of Wyoming and majored in journalism, just like Franscell did, to be fair, UW is the only four-year university in the state. Students who do not go out of state for school have only one choice if they want a bachelor's degree. Archie was in the Marines, while Franscell first went to Annapolis for two years and ultimately hoped to join the Marine Corps. Archie likes to watch the birds, and Franscell, even today, is an avid birdwatcher with three bird identification books on his windowsill and five bird feeders hanging outside in his back yard. Franscell wrote columns for the Gillette newspaper, as Archie did for his newspaper, but again, this is something that editors of newspapers generally do, and maybe it makes sense that most reporters type with two fingers. The most telling fact, though, is that Archie refers to himself as a "newspaperman." As Archie explains to Cassidy, "'Journalists are the soft-bellied sons-a-bitches who write supercilious pap for those ass-kissing magazines back East . . . You are a *newspaperman*, son, and don't you ever forget it. You are part of all those folks' lives out there'" (Franscell *Angel* 47). Franscell's bio on the back cover of *Angel Fire* demonstrates this parallel, stating, "He is a lifelong newspaperman." Like Archie and Cassidy, Franscell takes pride, and always has, in his profession and in the important role his work plays in others' lives.

Autobiographical elements can also be found in Cassidy. Cassidy lives in San Francisco, and Franscell lived in Petaluma, California, for a number of years, working at the *Marin* [County] *Independent Journal* not far from San Francisco. Cassidy has his first home run ball and a Royal typewriter on a stand in his office; Franscell does, too. Cassidy went on the road with Ronald Reagan, and Franscell was a member of the press pool when Reagan came to Wyoming in 1982. Cassidy plays James Taylor's music, one of Franscell's favorite musicians, and Cassidy's novels come "largely from the small-town landscape where he grew up," just as Franscell's do (Franscell *Angel* 15).

Some autobiographical elements can even be seen in the Jack Lazarus character. Lazarus writes using Biblical allusions "because he loved the texture of biblical language," and Franscell enjoys employing Biblical allusions, too, as discussed earlier (Franscell *Angel* 92). Lazarus' book *The Clever Dogs* was rejected by publishers 38 times, just as *Angel Fire* was, and, like Lazarus, Franscell feels "a *real* writer faced the first true challenge of telling a story that would survive him" (93). Franscell left Wyoming for a time to finish writing *Angel Fire*, going to Arizona, and Arizona was where Lazarus went to try to "smooth out [*The Clever Dogs*]' raspy, free-form edges" (93).

Interestingly, however, Franscell denies these autobiographical connections. He admits to Linda Davis Kyle, "A writer synthesizes his own emotions and experiences in his characters, so many of the things I write about in *Angel Fire* come directly from my life. . ." However, he continues, "If it appears that I identify with Cassidy, it's only an illusion, for the most part. As my main point-of-view character, I was in his skin more often than any of the others, and I like him very much, but his sadness is more than I could stand." He earlier makes a similar comment to Kelly Milner Halls. "Any writer draws on his emotions and his life for inspiration, but *Angel*

*Fire* is purely fiction. I see parts of friends and family in the characters, but no doubt, everyone I have ever known will see themselves in parts of this book where they are not.” His denials in 1998 are certainly firm, and they certainly sound convincing, but the evidence seems to suggest otherwise.

What is additionally interesting, however, and perhaps a little odd, is how prophetic *Angel Fire* became for a number of areas in Franscell’s personal life. Daniel went to college at Columbia University in Missouri, and Franscell’s daughter Ashley, not even in high school at the time that *Angel Fire* was published, later graduated from the same school, also with a degree in journalism. Unfortunately, Franscell’s first marriage ended in divorce several years after *Angel Fire* was published. His description of the ending of Cassidy and Barbara’s marriage, “there was no other man, no midlife crisis, no haunting past; they simply grew distant from each other,” basically matches what happened in Franscell’s marriage to his wife Ann (Franscell *Angel* 14). The two of them simply wanted different things for their lives. After the divorce, for several years, Franscell suffered from the same extreme sadness that Cassidy did. When he told Linda Davis Kyle, “[Cassidy’s] sadness is more than I could stand,” he was describing, unknowingly, his own fate, and indeed, for a long time, Franscell found the unhappiness he felt to be almost not survivable.

Cassidy’s third book is a “memoir about his childhood . . . about leaving home and finding your way back, separation and salvation” (Franscell *Angel* 44). Franscell’s seventh book, *Sourtoe*, tentatively set to be published in October 2011, is a memoir in which he addresses a journey his son and he take together to the Yukon in the summer of 2007, a journey in which they leave home, come back, and along the way, work to solve some of the problems that had occurred in their father-son relationship as a result of the divorce. This memoir also addresses

Franscell's feelings after his divorce and the soul-sucking sadness that he felt. His journey with his son also unexpectedly caused Franscell, however, to address a problem that he and Cassidy both possessed. After his mother Annie died, "Cassidy never wanted to lose someone close to him again," and that desire to avoid pain permeated his life (Franscell *Angel* 5). Similarly, once divorced, Franscell swore to himself that he would never go through such pain again and that he would never allow anyone to be as close to him as his wife had been.

In *Sourtoe*, the reader also learns that, in a climactic scene between Franscell and his son Matt, Matt calls his dad on his pain avoidance idea and accuses his dad of being afraid, of running away from what scares him. Ultimately, as a result of what Matt said, Franscell stops in Dawson City, a town in the Yukon Territory, and buys a ring which he later uses when he proposes to the woman who is now his wife (Franscell *Sourtoe*). Just as Cassidy was able to let Tia into his life and take a chance on their love, so Franscell was able to finally move away from the pain of his divorce and make a new life for himself with a new partner by his side. The prophetic aspects of *Angel Fire* are, essentially, unexplainable, but knowing them perhaps gives an even deeper depth to the personal connection that readers can make with this book.

### **The Moral of the Story**

Traditionally, English teachers ask their students to identify the theme of the novel, and yet, the meaning that one reader finds in a book may not be the same meaning that another reader finds. Authors write with purpose, though, of course, and one mark of a worthwhile work is one that delivers the author's message, or messages, clearly. Franscell says, "I didn't think I was going to be writing a book that a thousand years from now people would be reading in high schools and colleges, but once I learned why we keep reading *The Odyssey* thousands of years later, and why we keep telling these stories over and over again, I wanted [*Angel Fire*] to have

those qualities. I wanted it to have the texture and flavor of those stories” (Franscell Personal). In order to do that, Franscell chose to focus on ideas that would resound with his readers.

One of the major chords *Angel Fire* strikes is the pain of loss and overcoming that pain. At a very young age, Cassidy and Daniel suffer one of the worst losses possible, the death of their mother, and Cassidy, in particular, seems powerless to deal with his feelings as a result of this event. And because Daniel had been older than Cassidy when their mother died, “Daniel felt her presence, but Cassidy bore the burden of her absence” (Franscell *Angel* 5). Many years later, having had two marriages end, Cassidy is still feeling this pain and trying to reject any further memories that might cause further heartache. “Perhaps it was better that he didn’t watch his memories rot, Cassidy thought. They’d been green once, but now the only seasons that changed were his own. . . In the dead of night, furthest from the light, his miasma shrouded his sad equinox from view” (13). Later the reader learns that these memories “had become an anchor that dragged along behind him” (15).

All people have had pain in their lives, of course, some more, some less, but ultimately, everyone is faced with the choice of either moving past that pain or choosing to wallow in it. Franscell uses Cassidy as an example of how, when people can finally find a way to accept their pain as a vital part of themselves, they can integrate the pain with their present day situation, find a way to be happy, and perhaps, one day, move past the pain completely. “Pain is the price of comfort,” Franscell says. “It’s the price we pay for memory. We cannot avoid pain to ensure comfort without stealing something from memory” (Franscell Interview with Linda Davis Kyle). At the beginning of the novel, Cassidy has writer’s block, having stopped writing after his wife left. In the book’s triumphant conclusion, he says, “I’m all right now” (Franscell *Angel* 284). When Cassidy struggles with writer’s block as he is writing his memoir, what is causing him

problems is the Pledger Moon story. “Whether he’d forgotten or whether Daniel had never told him, Moon’s fate was a mystery to him” (44).

By the end of the book, Cassidy has realized that he is Pledger Moon, the wanderer who needed to finally come home and find what was still there, whatever it was (285; 247). Like Pledger, he had detoured around his pain for many years, refusing to take it out and look at it, but if he wants to be a whole human, he must do exactly that, look at his pain and accept it. Cassidy says, “I am not sad anymore. Why? Because pain is the price we pay for memory” (284). Daniel spent much of his growing up years trying to help Cassidy have this realization, specifically by telling the Pledger Moon stories, but ultimately, Cassidy has to come to the realization on his own. Having come to that understanding, he can then make a new, much happier life for himself, one that involves marriage to Tia, children, and peace with himself.

A secondary theme found in the novel addresses the importance of having balance in one’s life. Cassidy’s pain causes him to lose his balance; it takes away his equilibrium, his sense that all was right with the world – not a realization that most four-year-olds need to have. Daniel faces the same loss, certainly, but he is able to find a focus, a reason for maintaining his equilibrium, in his desire to be strong for his little brother and to help Cassidy however he can. In explaining the gnats that they see one evening, for example, Daniel points out to Cassidy, ““They only live through the night, you know . . . Their whole life is one day and one night . . . These were born this morning and by tomorrow morning they’ll be gone. By breakfast time, there will be others to take their place. . . . It’s like a circle and it keeps going ‘til the days turn cold”” (Franscell *Angel* 164-5). Unfortunately, Cassidy would rather not talk about death, not even the death of gnats. He just cannot reconcile an understanding of death into his young life or find a way to balance that understanding by recognizing that some people die sooner than others,

and so his life view has become skewed. Franscell asks, “Is it not natural that if we, as humans, are always tilting toward some perfect balance, that the most important place for equilibrium – and the place where a loss of balance would be most heart-rending – would be in our essential relationships?” (Franscell Interview with Linda Davis Kyle).

Most thoughtful people occasionally have the realization that their lives, and perhaps their relationships, have gotten out of balance. People, for example, may give priority to their careers over their marriages, or they may give a very sick child priority over the healthy ones. The ways that life can get out of balance are multitudinous. Often, something drastic has to occur to bring about the ultimate recognition that balance must again be found in order for a healthy life to exist. Even though Daniel wants so badly to help Cassidy, he actually cannot even find balance for himself, and so his life ends. Cassidy, however, aided by his experience with Daniel, ultimately sees the balance that is necessary to happiness, and he successfully completes his journey to the happy life for which he has longed.

In the final analysis, Franscell is delivering the message that storytelling has value in people’s lives and that the stories people tell, in turn, say something about them – their hopes, their dreams, their fears, their reality. “Men have always placed story-tellers high in their esteem, and I do, too,” Franscell tells Kyle. “Whether we’re re-telling *The Odyssey* around a Greek campfire, listening to a preacher tell us a parable from the Bible, or watching John Wayne on the screen, it’s all essential mythology handed down in stories over thousands of years. . . . we carry [these stories] with us and pass [them] along. . . .They are the kind of stories that comfort us as long as we live, and then they outlive us.”

John Hanchette, a book reviewer for *USA Today*, wrote a review of *Angel Fire* that was sent out on the news wire and reprinted in a number of papers around the country. In this

review, he perhaps offers the best summation of how readers might feel when they have read *Angel Fire*:

Finishing *Angel Fire* leaves the reader with that feeling characteristic of many great reads – a sort of pleasing intellectual exhaustion, a feeling that one has literally climbed back into real life from the pages themselves. It’s a brief mood that finds the reader reflecting on not only the fate of the characters, but on the human condition. It doesn’t happen very often. It happened with this novel.

(Hanchette)

Daniel tells stories hoping to take away Cassidy’s pain, and in the same way, Franscell tells stories hoping to create a novel that resonates with his readers. In *Angel Fire*, he succeeded.

In the world of literary criticism today, great care is always taken to document and support what is being said about a work of literature by referring back to what has been written before and what other critics have seen in the piece being studied. Logically, if there is not a wide body of critical work, or even any criticism at all about a novel, a person wanting to analyze such a book is forced to be more creative in her approach and, in the process, to “step out on a limb,” as it were, in presenting her theories and ideas. In most cases, when critics are writing, they are presenting their theories without any first person contact with the author, and they, indeed, continue to present those ideas long after the author him or herself is dead. Yet most critics in 2010 would love to sit down with William Faulkner or Ernest Hemingway, for example, and pick their brains about what they wrote and why, hoping to get an honest response in the process, and using such a conversation with the author to inform them about the work they are studying. This does not presume to say that Ron Franscell is on the level of Faulkner or Hemingway, of course, but Franscell did give a critic the rare opportunity to ask every question

she had, and he answered those questions as honestly and completely as he could. Analyzing *Angel Fire* became, ultimately, not a matter of trying to figure out the book but, rather, of deciding what to ask so that the book could be understood more deeply and fully. This required multiple careful readings of the book, for the critic, in this case, was not coming to the author solely with questions; she was postulating theories of her own and working to discover through the questions she put to the author whether or not her understanding was correct.

*Angel Fire* is a novel with a great depth to it and one that can be read either from a surface perspective, enjoying the story of Cassidy and Daniel, or from a deeper view that gives the reader a better understanding of life, ideas for how to be a better person, and hope for the future, no matter how awful the past or present might be. When the stories of classic novels are reviewed, novels such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example, all of these novels have in common the hero's journey model, the idea that the main character was striving towards a goal and encountering obstacles along the way. As readers learn the stories of these characters, they also very often hear other stories as well: Huck Finn's funny vignette of the boys chasing the Sunday school children, Gatsby's war experiences, Simon Finch's house with the two staircases and his multiple daughters. These stories have an overall connection to the novel's message that may not immediately be clear but that can ultimately be seen. But furthermore, these stories draw the reader in. Very often, they comfort the reader because they have recognizable elements that are familiar, and they give readers a deeper level of enjoyment in their reading. Franscell creates the same situation with *Angel Fire*, and in doing this, he has written a book that causes the reader to take an enjoyable, worthwhile journey. The story is one that is challenging yet familiar at the same time, and one that will outlive all of us. Without a doubt, *Angel Fire* is a novel worth knowing.

## REACTION

I know the exact moment when I became aware of literary criticism. I was a sophomore in college when I discovered that other people had done the same work that I had been assigned to do, in that particular case to write an analysis of William Butler Yeats' poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." I was sitting in the library that day, struggling to write my paper, when a fellow student said, "You don't know what lit crit is?" Finding books full of explanations of the poem made me almost as if I was cheating to be reading what other people had written about the poem. I had never known that I could use the work of others to help me understand what I was reading and that such a process was accepted in the literary world. This knowledge was a revelation. To this day, I think about how easy some of my undergraduate English classes would have been if I had realized sooner that literary criticism existed.

At the same time, however, I have retained the feeling that reading what someone else has written about a work I have been assigned to critique is, still, somehow, "cheating," and I will admit that I can recall many a paper where I struggled to figure the literature out on my own. The "discuss the garden imagery in Shakespeare's *Richard II*" assignment from my junior year comes to mind. The Internet, of course, has made locating criticism much easier, but it was always rewarding to me when I worked through the literature myself and reached my own conclusions. If later I could get those conclusions validated by other, more sophisticated writers, so much the better, but for many years, I have probably failed to truly get the largest benefit that I could from literary criticism. Pretty consistently, I have worked to find my own understanding of a work of literature, and then, knowing that the professor usually wanted my writing to have critical support, I would go search for criticism that said what I already thought. Probably a backwards way to approach things, I am sure.

This habit was reinforced when I first began teaching high school English without a teacher's edition of the student textbook. The first six years that I taught, I did so without the benefit of any sort of teaching guide. I had to make up my own lesson plans, worksheets, and tests, which meant that first, of course, I had to read and understand the literature. If there were questions that the textbook listed for the students to answer, I had to figure out the answer, too, as I did not have an answer key. I rapidly learned to write my own questions, as many times, I did not understand what answer the textbook was looking for, and additionally, I often thought the questions provided were simplistic and surface. Another revelation occurred in my literary life when my school district went through a textbook adoption, and I finally was given a teacher's edition of the textbook. I immediately saw that, not to blow my own horn, the teacher's guide was not any smarter than me. In fact, I remember specifically that the discussion suggestions written by the textbook makers in the margins of "To Build a Fire" by Jack London were very similar to my own discussion starters, created when I began teaching that particular story years earlier, and in a number of places, my questions were better.

As a result, even today I do not usually bother with the teacher's edition. I do not need to be told what the story is about; I can figure it out for myself, and I am also able to figure out how I want to teach the literature and how to best help my students understand it.

Making a long story short, I enjoy analyzing literature on my own, without help, and this was the challenge that I saw in choosing to analyze the novel *Angel Fire* for my culminating experience. The idea of doing what had not been done before, writing a critical analysis of this particular novel, appealed to my sense of adventure.

As I began working through *Angel Fire*, what immediately became clear was that I had the ideal opportunity to create a model for my students of how I want them to approach

analyzing a work of literary fiction. Last spring, in my English 812 Theories and Techniques of Criticism class, the major assignment was to create a critical casebook on a novel of literary merit. Since completing that assignment, I have been working on how I could modify the assignment for use in my classroom with my Advanced Placement English students. I like the idea of having the students collect a number of pieces of literary criticism on one novel and then having them read and evaluate the novel. However, in the English 812 class, I had not really kept very careful track of my notes on the book, and so while I have the completed casebook that I can use as a model for my students, I do not really have notes to use for demonstrations and examples. With this in mind, early on I made careful typed notes of my analysis of *Angel Fire*. I had used this technique in a more limited manner, since the final papers were so much shorter, in my English 601 American Novel class last summer. For the *Angel Fire* paper, I expanded my notes to a great extent, creating separate files on Vietnamese names/words, locations, mythological references, stories in the novel, etc. I was careful to document page numbers for reference to the book, and I also used the notes to keep track of questions that I planned to ask the author when we sat down for our formal interview.

When working with my sources, I annotated them and then made careful notes about the quotes and ideas I found in each source that I thought might be applicable to the paper. I also kept very careful track of these sources. Everything was copied, labeled by author last name, and filed alphabetically. Then, when I needed the source, it was easy to find. I even created a color-coded highlighting system to help myself find quotes more quickly. Green was biographical, purple was mythological, orange was story-related, and blue had to do with authenticity. I used this same color system in my annotations of the novel, using colored Post-It notes to help track aspects in the book that I wanted to remember or investigate further. The

color system also came into play when I set up my outline of the paper, another aspect of writing that I am always encouraging my students to work on, and this will further aid my instruction.

Finally, as I wrote my paper, I found myself writing the paper in just the way that I teach my students to write their papers. I worked in sections, not always in the order in which my outline was set up. The body of my paper was written first, the introduction second, and the conclusion last. I took frequent breaks, worked with a thesaurus to avoid repetition, read what I had written out loud to myself to make sure it made sense, constantly searched for typographical errors, etc. As I did all this, I made frequent copies of my paper so that I could show my students the evolution of what I was writing. All of this work occurred, simply, because I practice what I preach. This means that I can return to my classroom and continue to ask what I do of my students, knowing that what I am teaching them works and that they can use the skills I am giving them to be successful at the college level.

It should be noted, by the way, that I have been talking to my students about this process as I have been completing it myself. They are currently unable to believe that anyone could write a forty-page paper and live to tell the tale. Their feelings and subsequent questions have sparked some wonderful opportunities for discussion of the differences between high school and college and what they have to look forward to when they reach their college years.

Of course, I would not expect high school students to attempt a work of this magnitude, and so it is not likely that I will use my finished paper, at least not the complete version of it, for instructional purposes in the classroom. My ultimate goal, however, is to connect my notes and record-keeping ideas developed for this project with the critical casebook concept from English 812, and in so doing, create a semester-long project for my English Advanced Placement students that will teach them how to do a more in-depth literary analysis. Most likely, I will take

a section of my analysis of *Angel Fire*, perhaps “The Significance of Names AKA One Hundred Rooms,” and use that smaller portion to demonstrate the kind of analysis I would be looking for from my students. Having all of the notes, the color-coding idea, the outline, and the progressing copies of the paper will help make my demonstration much more clear.

Now that my paper is complete, I feel much more confident about what I have done and how I approached this task. It is significant to me, however, that, early on, when I began this project, I was very insecure about the work I was doing. I struggled especially with the idea that I was creating questions that I would ask the author, for I felt that perhaps my scholarship could be demeaned due to the fact that I was married to the author. It seemed to me that someone could say that my close relationship with Ron Franscell invalidated my paper’s conclusions. My insecurity about my project, however, is an excellent reminder for me about how my students must often feel when faced with a new skill that they are trying to learn. In fact, graduate school in general has just been wonderful in that it has been so good for me to be the student again, rather than the teacher. I am not exaggerating when I say that many days, I would learn or study something the night before and then take that knowledge directly into my classroom the next day and make use of it somehow. I work hard to encourage my students, and this culminating experience was a positive reminder for me about how easy it is for students to get discouraged even though they are motivated and like their subject. I need to work harder to assure my students that discouragement is natural, but it does not mean that they should give up and wash their hands of what they are doing, which is, often, sadly, a very common reaction for teenagers these days.

In a desire to demonstrate in a very final way the validity of my project, I have done some research to see if there was a literary journal of some sort that might be interested in

publishing my paper. I like the idea of being able to hold up a magazine to my students and say, “And here is where my paper was published.” I found a list of literary magazines and went through the websites for about ten of them, but I did not immediately find any publication that I thought might be interested in my paper. *The American Scholar*, which is published by the Phi Beta Kappa Society, of which I am a member, is a possibility, but according to their website, normally the articles that they publish are about 4,000 words in length. My paper is 12,134 words, counting the Works Cited, so I would have to do some significant editing.

*Mosaic* was another possibility that I was interested in, as they accept essays up to 7,500 words in length, but they do not accept work that is part of a thesis, and I believe that this project falls into that category. *Mosaic* is a Canadian literary magazine, so that sent me off on another search to see if I could find a Canadian publication, but I kept running into similar length roadblocks. Another roadblock to publishing is the fact that *Angel Fire* is not a recent novel, having been published in 1998. The argument can be made that if the novel was going to be “discovered” by literary critics as a work of genius, this would have happened by now. As fewer than 50,000 copies of the book have been sold, magazine editors, rightly so, could make the argument that few of their readers would know the book and so would not be interested in reading an essay about it.

The final block in publishing my essay is, simply, my last name. If I was Ron Franscell’s daughter, it might be a little more legitimate that I was reflecting on his work, but a wife, realistically, is going to be seen as biased, and I understand that fact. I am proud of the work I did, and I believe that I did it, actually, with very little bias. My knowing that fact, however, is completely different from getting an editor to share that belief. I did toy with the idea of

submitting the essay under my maiden name, as Franscell has only been my last name for 29 months, but that seemed disingenuous, and so I abandoned that idea, too.

In the final analysis, however, the bottom line is that I enjoyed doing this assignment very much, and I am glad to be able to say such a thing about the last major work that I am doing for my graduate degree. There is a great deal to be said for getting enjoyment and pleasure out of one's work, and that is exactly what happened as I worked on this paper. I think that my paper will please my husband, who has not been allowed to read it yet, but more importantly, what I wrote pleases me. I set a challenge for myself, and I met that challenge. I will always be proud of that fact and of this project.

## Works Cited

- Antoniou, Kim. "Author: Book is like Building a House with '100 Secret Rooms.'" *The Prospector* [Glendale, AZ] 20-26 Nov. 1998: 27. Print.
- Blum, Ken. "Publisher Puts in the Hours to Get His Novel Published." *Publishers' Auxiliary* 11 Jan. 1999: 15. Print.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: MJF Books, 1949. Print.
- Crump, Carol. Obituary of Dr. Tom Walsh. *Casper Journal* [Casper, WY] 3 Jan. 2010. *Casper Journal*. Web. 10 Oct. 2010.
- Davidson, Gustav. *A Dictionary of Angels Including the Fallen Angels*. New York: The Free Press, 1967. Print. 51, 185-6.
- Evans, Clay. "Landscape is Character in New West Literature." *Sunday Camera* [Boulder, CO] 16 Aug. 1998: 5. Print.
- Franscell, Ron. *Angel Fire*. New York: Berkley, 1998. Print.
- . Author's Notes and Papers. Undated. TS.
- . "The Hero's Journey: Summary of the Steps." 2008. TS.
- . Interview with Kelly Milner Halls. 24 Feb. 1998. Email.
- . Interview with Linda Davis Kyle. 26 July 1998 – 2. Aug. 1998. Email.
- . "Jan Kerouac Danced Through Life." *News-Record* [Gillette, WY] 9 June 1996. Print.
- . Message to Chuong Tran. 16 Apr. 1996. Email.
- . Personal interview. 10 Oct. 2010.
- . "Reflections on *Angel Fire*: for Hamilton and Aleta." Feb. 1998. TS.
- . *Sourtoe*. Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot P, 2011. Print.

- Gayley, Charles Mills. *The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art*. Lexington, Massachusetts: Xerox College, 1893. Print.
- Hanchette, John. "A Good Look at the Human Condition." *USA Today* 25 Aug. 1998. *Gannett*. Web. Date of access unknown.
- John, Elton, and Bernie Taupin. "Daniel." *One Night Only*. *Metrolyrics.com*. Web. 25 Oct. 2010.
- Madrid, Mieke. "Wyoming 'Real' Writer Wins Recognition in Debut Novel." *Uinta County Herald* [Evanston, WY] 18 Sept. 1998. Print.
- The New American Standard Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1977. Print.
- Nye, Bill. "A Headlight in View." *Bill Nye's Western Humor*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska P, 1968. Print. 79-81.
- "Rupert Brooke 1916 Collected Poems: Bibliographic Record." *Bartleby.com*. *Bartleby.com*., n.d. Web. 30 Oct. 2010.
- The Searchers*. *The InternetMovie Database*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2010.
- Smith, Sally. "My Lai." *Dictionary of the Vietnam War*. Ed. James Olson. New York: Peter Bedrick, 1987. Print. 293-4.
- "St. Francis de Sales." *Catholic Online*. Catholic Online, n.d. Web. 28 Oct. 2010.
- Thuermer, Angus M. "Angel Fire Tells Story of Wyoming Brothers." *Jackson Hole News* [Jackson, WY] 23-29 Sept. 1998. Print.
- Tran, Chuong. Message to Ron Franscell. 18 Apr. 1996. Email.
- "Wyoming." *50states.com*. Marchex, n.p. Web. 30 Oct. 2010.