The Segregated Town in Mid-Century Southern Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how southern novelists at mid-century used the fictional small town to critique racial segregation. Depictions of segregated towns across a selection of representative fictions share a typology of people and institutions – what I term offices – that combine to make these towns seem integral and functioning. In the segregated southern town, the community is contaminated by segregation and the paradoxes it engenders are revealed through the typology I uncover and explore in this thesis.

The racial landscape of Maxwell, Georgia in Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944) exposes how points of intersection in the town's supposedly rigid racial geography highlight the weakness of segregated structural integrity. In *The Hawk and the Sun* (1955) Byron Herbert Reece examines the relationships of a farmer and a teacher with other offices, representatives of the bank and the church, in the Appalachian town of Tilden, Georgia. Carson McCullers set each of her novels in the town of Milan, Georgia but this consistency only becomes clear in *Clock Without Hands* (1961), in which she focuses on the roles a judge and a pharmacist play in defining the town's collective identity. The courthouse square in William Faulkner's Jefferson, Mississippi represents the identity of the town and, in *The Reivers* (1962), a narrator attempts to rewrite the history of the town by insinuating himself into Faulkner's existing typology. In *A Different Drummer* (1962) William Melvin Kelley positions his imagined town of Sutton, in an unnamed southern state, at a moment of historic change and explores this change from the vantage point of the archetypal porch of a general store. This thesis contributes to a developing literary history of racial segregation by conducting detailed close textual analysis to argue that the ostensibly benign setting of the small town exposed the fallacies upon which the segregated South operated.

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To my parents
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INTRODUCTION

A Typology of the Fictional Segregated Town

Immediately following the opening credits of Frank Capra's 1946 film *It's a Wonderful Life*, a close up shot of a street sign informs the imagined viewer "You are Now in Bedford Falls."[1] It is a visual symbol of inclusion in the small American town. A montage of Bedford Falls' institutions follows this shot, including a pharmacy, a bank, and a boarding house, while the voice of the proprietor is heard petitioning God for mercy for George Bailey, played by James Stewart. In a very few images, Capra presents a typology of the American town, suggesting that Bedford Falls is integral and effective because the community and its infrastructure of buildings and services operate as one.

The litany of the town's offices that Capra presents suggests a model for reading the culture of the American town. *It's a Wonderful Life* depicts a supposedly typical American town in the immediate post-war period as the site of personal difficulties (the plot's catalyst is Bailey's decision to commit suicide) that can be overcome through the successful cooperation of each of the town's inhabitants and the spaces they occupy professionally. A similar typology exists in fiction that focuses on the specifically southern town but in the context of racial segregation depicts the town as coercive. In this thesis I enumerate and examine a typology of the fictional southern town – different from Capra's American archetype because it is governed by the principles of racial segregation – for what it reveals in the work of mid-century southern novelists, and explore the ways in which authors use it in adopting different narrative strategies that

[1] Frank Capra, *It's a Wonderful Life* (RKO Studios, 1946).

critique racial segregation. In this Introduction, I outline significant terms that I return to through the remainder of the thesis and locate the novels under study in their historical context, before exploring the meaning of three crucial elements of this typology of the southern town in mid-century novels. Through close examination of the offices of the courthouse, the bank, and the restaurant or café, I outline how segregation is shown to permeate the political, economic, and social lives of the town's inhabitants.

Underpinning this typology is what I term segregated integrity, a paradox at the centre of the fictional southern town, or what William Alexander Percy described in 1941 as "the basic fiber, the cloth" of the South, as constructed of "three dissimilar threads and only three," namely, wealthy and poor whites, and African Americans.[2] Percy's image of a cloth woven of three threads that maintain their distinct integrity even while they contribute to a larger whole is useful for understanding how segregation is fundamental to the paradoxes inherent in the social and physical architectures of the fictional southern town. Sharon Monteith articulates paradox as a defining feature of the setting, when she asserts that "the small-town that is celebrated in much American fiction is revealed as a paradox in its southern incarnation: as beloved but benighted, close but repressive, coercive and resistant; a complex constellation of class and racial clashes and collaborations."[3] This complex constellation is dramatized at mid-century because it is the moment in which segregation is most deeply ingrained

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[2] William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (New York: Knopf, 1941), 19.
[3] Sharon Monteith, "Southern Fiction," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction*, ed. David Seed (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009), 89. Robert Penn Warren, in *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* (1956) describes the "bitter catalogue of paradoxes" that supports segregationist ideology, including the conviction that African Americans are unclean juxtaposed against white dependence on African American nurses and cooks. Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* (Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher Books, 1994 [1956], 19.

in the American consciousness and because it is a time when intellectuals and politicians, as well as novelists, developed spatial metaphors to either defend or challenge the racial status quo.

In Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944), the fictional town of Maxwell, Georgia operates as a unified whole even while it is rigidly divided into 'White Town' and 'Colored Town.' The paradox of an integral whole that is built on the principle of segregation can be represented metaphorically as a diseased body, in the case of Byron Herbert Reece's *The Hawk and the Sun* (1955), or as a landscape seen from the air, in Carson McCullers' *Clock Without Hands* (1961). Integrity can be invented, as in the tale told by William Faulkner's final narrator in *The Reivers* (1962), or destroyed, as by the protagonist of William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1962). In each instance, mid-twentieth-century southern writers critique racial segregation by first establishing an archetypal small southern town as a whole and functional unit in order to expose the inherent social and moral flaws of its construction. Because, as Eudora Welty wrote in 1965, "a plot is a thousand times more unsettling than an argument, which may be answered," novelists explore the injustices of segregation by putting them under scrutiny within the limits of the small, coercive, and close-knit southern community. In advancing a typology of the fictional segregated town, this thesis examines how the town can be read as a model for social and racial critique at the historical moment when segregation was most deeply entrenched in the South.[4]

Using close textual analysis, I argue that the physical shape of an invented southern town should be read as a critique of segregation. Authors

[4] Eudora Welty, "Must the Novelist Crusade?" *The Eye of the Story: Selected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Vintage, 1979 [1965]), 150.

invent semi-urban communities and spaces that depict the instability of segregation as an organising principle. By "semi-urban" I mean that the fictional towns under study feature the services and amenities expected of an urban centre but without the anonymity of the city: people in these towns have access to modern facilities and institutions but are also known by – or at least known to – all of their neighbours. By using the term town, then, I can incorporate a range of spaces and communities between large villages and small cities in the South that relies on an architecture of segregation to maintain a solid southern identity.[5]

My typology includes the offices, institutions, and public spaces that work in tandem to ensure the smooth running of the town, notably set around a town square or main street where the courthouse, police station, bank, restaurant, chemist, post office, and lawyer's office are typically located. Here, I use the term office to denote a local institution that is a component of the town. The word reflects both a building (such as the town jail) and the townsperson responsible for it (the County Sheriff, for example). When all offices are taken together and amalgamated, they form a typology that is recognisable across depictions of the southern town in mid-century fiction. While I draw on Scott Romine's conception of community, particularly his contention that "insofar as it is cohesive, a community will tend to be coercive," I depart from his contention

[5] Conceptions of the American town and especially the southern town largely originate in a trend in academic writing beginning in the 1920s with Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merell Lynd's studies of "Middletown" and expanding into the South at mid-century. John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (1937) and Hortense Powdermaker's *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (1939) share a subject, the town of Indianola, Mississippi, rendered in Dollard's book as "Southerntown" and in Powdermaker's as "Cottonville." For more, see Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harvest Books, 1956 [1929]), and *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1937), Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town, 3rd edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1957 [1937]), 1n1; Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993 [1937]), xliv.

that a community "resists mapping in a strict sense."[6] On the contrary, a combination of textual mapping and close textual analysis reveals the ways in which these fictional towns coerce their populations, black and white, to maintain a space constituted according to white supremacist ideology and expectations.

This typology proliferates in novels at mid-century because it was the historical moment by which segregation was most deeply ingrained in the American imagination.[7] The mid-century moment was described by contemporary commentators as "a halcyon period for the exponents of gradualism in the handling of the South's racial problems"[8] and the moment at which "the South and the Negro […] faced their greatest crisis since the days of reconstruction."[9] In studies of the period, this sense is continually reiterated as when John Egerton describes it as "the generation before the civil rights movement," and Grace Elizabeth Hale identifies a "project of racial making" during what Neil McMillen terms "the age of Jim Crow."[10]In these

[6] Scott Romine, *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 2, 4. James McBride Dabbs locates the idea of the town as coercive in a history of the North, and not the South, writing that "one of the main reasons for the town was the Puritan desire for religious and moral control; this could be much better maintained in a town than in a sparsely settled countryside." James McBride Dabbs, *Who Speaks for the South?* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), 14.

[7] By 1947, arch-segregationist politician Theodore Bilbo was able to take segregation for granted, writing that the "Principle of segregation of the white and Negro races in the South is so well known that it requires no definition." Theodore G. Bilbo, *Take Your Choice: Separation or Mongrelization* (Poplarville, MS: Dream House Publishing Company, 1947), 49.

[8] Hodding Carter, *The South Strikes Back* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 11-2.

[9] Howard Odum, *Race and Rumours of Race: Challenge to American Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1943), 4. As early as 1889, George Washington Cable anticipates a similar personification of the South when he described how resistance to the Civil Rights Act of 1875 imagined the South as an integral unit under threat: "Says one opponent, imputing his words to a personified South, 'Leave this problem to my working out.'" George Washington Cable, *The Silent South* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969 [1889]), 47.

[10] John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1999 [1998]), xii; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

interpretations, the mid-century South was a proving ground for ideas of race and segregation and this is reflected in contemporary fiction of the segregated town. Every such depiction of the small southern town features a divided geography that supposedly maintains distance between the town's two racial groups, or what Brian Norman identifies as "a cartography of racial division," one of three characteristics that define what he terms the "segregation narrative."[11] The apex of racial segregation at mid-century is explicitly depicted in the imagined geographies created by the authors I examine.

The narrative convention of a racially divided cartography is not without precedent. As literary critic Edd Winfield Parks noted in 1934, this same bifurcation did, of course, mark out real southern towns as different from small towns elsewhere in the United States: "perhaps the most notable physical characteristic that differentiates these southern towns from those of any other section is the presence of the Negro. Each town has its Negro section, usually given such expressive names as 'Black Bottom,' or 'Nigger Hill.'"[12] Parks interpreted this regional distinction as a positive one, declaring:

> These titles might imply that the Negro is badly treated, but this most certainly is far from true. He is segregated, socially, but in all other respects he is a normal, and generally, a happy part of the community, with his own school and churches. For the small-town Negro, also, is not

[11] The other defining features are "an aesthetics of fear, and crucial scenes of cross-racial contact." Brian Norman, *Neo-Segregation Narratives: Jim Crow in Post-Civil Rights American Literature* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 10.
[12] Edd Winfield Parks, "Towns and Cities", *Culture in the South* ed. W.T. Couch (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 515.

philosophical, and he remains unworried over subtle distinctions of racial equality or of right and wrong.[13]

In the same moment, W.T. Couch asserted: "bad as conditions are for the Negro … his condition in the South is generally better than anywhere else on the face of the globe."[14] While Parks and Couch articulated a belief that African Americans were happiest in their proverbial place in the small-town South, they each described the black subject as the object of white organisation, rendered in the passive voice so that whites are implicitly staged as innocent of racially oppressing blacks. Parks' passive voice suggests that African Americans are "badly treated" and "segregated" by an unnamed force, and for Couch, "bad conditions" exist independently of white southerners making them so. That each of these essays appears in a collection titled *Culture in the South* (1934) indicates the degree to which southern culture and identity at mid-century was enmeshed in how race defined a person's 'place' in the southern town.

Writing in 1937, anthropologist John Dollard held white southerners responsible for segregation when he described how "whites and whiteness form an inseparable part of the mental life of the Negro. He has a white employer, often white ancestors, sometimes white playmates, and he lives by a set of rules which are imposed by white society."[15] In *Long Black Song* (1972), Houston A. Baker, Jr. asserted that "culture, like race, is little more than a superstition for most whites…. The standards of white Americans are neither objective nor

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[13] Ibid.
[14] W.T. Couch, "The Negro in the South," 477.
[15] John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town, 3rd edition* (New York: Doubleday, 1957 [1937]), 1.

universal; they are simply subjective and white."[16] This is also true of fiction at mid-century, which challenges the universality of the white subject position in the fictional southern town. In the fiction I have selected as most revealing authors expose and critique the failure of the region's dominant racial politics and resist the racial status quo of their period by imagining a setting that showcases its instability. These novels reveal how authors were deploying the setting of the town as part of an aesthetics of anti-segregation. Critique of the politics of segregation unsurprisingly centres on the courthouse square, the element of my typology that stands for the town's government.

At the political and legislative core of the typology, and therefore in the physical centre of the town, is the central courthouse square where local politicians conspire to maintain a geography of racial difference. The southern courthouse is often associated at mid-century with a political demagogue. In V.O. Key's terms, the southern demagogue is a "caricature" of a "southern ruling class dedicated to reaction, intent on the repression of little people, both black and white."[17] Typically, these political spokesmen are figures of fun, "fabulous characters" who "have trod the southern political stage to the accompaniment of hilarity."[18] Sterling Fishman's definition focuses on the demagogue's ability to influence his constituency, first by proposing a "popular crisis of psychology," then inventing a scapegoat to blame, and finally, insinuating himself as the remedy for that crisis.[19] The demagogue is epitomised, in fiction, in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* (1946), but in *Clock Without Hands* the politician is

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[16] Houston A. Baker Jr., *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1972), 9.
[17] V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation: A New Edition* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984 [1949]), 1.
[18] Ibid, 3.
[19] Sterling Fishman, "The Rise of Hitler as a Beer Hall Orator," *Review of Politics* XXVI (April 1964), 250-52.

combined with the small-town judge and the political and legal identities of the town combine to enforce racial integrity in the community. The building of the courthouse, then, is conflated with the small-town politician's role as rabble-rouser and mediator of the town's collective consciousness.

The politician's influence over his constituency reinforces white supremacy in the southern town and the courthouse represents one element of a political mechanism that runs throughout the town and into the rest of the nation to ensure the continuation of a conservative shared identity. As William Peters described in 1958:

> from the southern clique of Senators and Representatives in the Congress, through the leaders of business and industry, … and the small-town professionals, tradesmen, laborers, and farmers who make up the bulk of the membership of the White Citizens Councils, … there are groups at work to preserve segregation in which any white southerner, whatever his social or economic status, may participate.[20]

As well as conflating rich and poor whites in the endeavour to preserve white supremacy, Peters sees segregationist resistance to desegregation as a series of small-town institutions, working in concert to maintain a status quo, a sentiment examined in journalist Dan Wakefield's report on the activities of the White Citizens Councils, *Revolt in the South* (1960), when he observes: "The white front is so united in many southern towns that the law and civic leaders are often

[20] William Peters, *The Southern Temper* (New York: Doubleday, 1959 [1958]), 39.

dedicated first to their racial commitments and second to the duties of office."[21] The local courthouse is one point on a spectrum of oversight that reaches from the spaces of the federal governmental to the private spaces of personal opinion.

Just as the courthouse and politician work together to define the town's racial politics and boundaries, the bank and banker police the town's economic identity. Economic inequality in the South is explored in the representation of financial mechanisms of the fictional town. White power relationships in the town's culture restrict African Americans' capacity to own property and earn a living, as W.T. Couch observes: "In order to buy a farm a Negro must first have the approval of the community. Often the purchase will have been made at the suggestion of a white man who wishes to do a favour to a Negro who he likes."[22] Such an African American would also be dependent on segregated institutions of finance capitalism. In Reece's *The Hawk and the Sun*, the focus of Chapter Two, the banker Mr. Darlington thinks of the town of Tilden as a "machine" that works best when the townspeople recognise their respective places in the capitalist system and this mentality is shared by other bankers in fictions about the southern town.

The bank in Thomas Wolfe's fictional Libya Hill, the setting of *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), is described in terms that might be better suited to a church or other sacred place: "The Citizens Trust maintained its usual appearance of solid substance, business-like efficiency, and Greek-templed sanctity. Its broad, plate-glass windows opening out upon the Square let in a

[21] Dan Wakefield, *Revolt in the South* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 46.
[22] W.T.Couch, "The Negro in the South," in *Culture in the South,* ed. W.T. Couch (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 451.

flood of light, and the whole atmosphere was one of utter clarity."[23] While Wolfe's reverence for the bank is ironic, it signals the degree to which Libya Hill is defined by the pressures of its economy, as worship of capitalism gives residents the illusion of "clarity". Echoing English poet John Keats (who imagines an antique urn asserting that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty") Wolfe ventriloquizes the bank's "broad plate-glass windows opening out upon the Square" which "seemed to say: 'Here is the bank and here are all the people in the bank, and all the people in the bank are openly at work. Look, citizens, and see for yourselves. You see there is nothing hidden here. The Bank is Libya, and Libya is the Bank.'"[24] Here the town is a metaphor for its inhabitants' need to labour and make money and the voice of the bank is deceptive and exploitative.

The power of the small-town bank over African American residents is replicated in the intra-racial class structures of the South that also governs cross-racial attitudes. In a 1967 essay, William Melvin Kelley asserted "There is no such thing as a good white liberal – not because of the evil of whiteness, but because of the evil of the concept of liberalism itself."[25] For Kelley, the problem with white liberalism was rooted in class relations and exploitation as well as in racism: "the white liberal… is not usually a white of the lower-class, but of the middle-class… within the white world, he must stay on the good side of the Big White Man, for he hopes to one day be one himself."[26] In *Killers of the Dream* (1949), Smith articulates the intra-racial class dynamic in the form of a fable: "Once upon a time, down South, Mr. Rich White made a bargain with Mr. Poor

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[23] Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again* (London: Penguin, 1970 [1940]), 335.
[24] John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990 [1820]), 288-9; Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, 335.
[25] William Melvin Kelley, "On Racism, Exploitation, and the White Liberal," *Negro Digest* XVI:3, Jan. 1967, 10.
[26] Ibid, 8.

White."[27] While Smith condemns wealthy whites who manipulate poor whites to exploit blacks, Kelley expands on the metaphor to articulate his distrust for well-intentioned middle-class whites as well. Smith suggests that the "bargain" could be altered: "It never occurred to Mr. Rich White that with a bargain the Negro could help him make money. It never occurred to Mr. Poor white that with a bargain the Negro could help him raise wages."[28] In contrast, Kelley would reject the terms of the bargain entirely in favour of a newly conceived "economic unit which can bring an end to exploitation."[29] Kelley's formulation would amount to a complete reconsideration of southern capitalism, embodied in a typology of the fictional southern town by the office of the bank.

The town's economic policing of its population is paralleled in restrictions on socialising. At the social centre of the town, restaurants and general stores or drugstores that serve food to the public cater to a single racial group and codify separate racial identities in the typical fictional town. As well as serving food, these establishments are centres for socially like-minded townspeople, and are portrayed in fiction as focal points for racial action. For example, in Lucy Daniels' *Caleb, My Son* (1955) a group of frustrated young black men meet at a side street café to make plans to protest segregation by subverting the town's racial etiquette by beginning romantic relationships with white women, while a group of white men meets in the backroom of a drugstore to plot the murder of an African American man in McCullers' *Clock Without Hands*. Often, the general store or café features a porch where townspeople, segregated by race and by gender, meet to talk and tell stories. In Kelley's *A*

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[27] Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream: Revised and Enlarged* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963 [1949]), 154.
[28] Ibid, 157.
[29] Kelley, "On Racism, Exploitation, and the White Liberal," 9.

Different Drummer, such a porch is the primary site of the narrative and a space in which white men relate their town's history to each other and, at the novel's climax, form a lynch mob to kill a radical African American clergyman.

These social spaces in the town suggest how the struggle for desegregation can be understood as a contest over space in the world of the novel. In her cultural history of segregation signs, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (2010), Elizabeth Abel notes the peculiar physical intimacy that eating spaces represented for the segregationist:

> Both integrated and differentiated, bounded yet partially permeable, the physical body is a central image of the social body; bodily orifices stage and represent defining, vulnerable, hence carefully regulated, points of entrance to or exit from social wholes. Ingestion figures absorption into the social body; hence, sharing a meal, or even an eating space, performs a more charged symbolic function than common labor or travel on a common carrier.[30]

In this formulation, shared social space equates to intimate cross-racial interaction. If the careful regulation of the physical body correlates to the regulation of the social body, this contravenes racial etiquette. This sensual anxiety on the part of white diners corroborates Mark Smith's argument that segregationist ideology was emotional and sensual before it was intellectual: "People supported segregation without really thinking why. They simply 'felt' it was right. Feeling, not thinking, was segregation's best friend" and the intimate

[30] Elizabeth Abel, *Signs of the Times: The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 163.

public eating space had an especially acute impact on segregationists' feelings about race.[31]

These spaces were the target of anti-segregationist activism in the mid-century South, as Zoe Trodd notes: "Whether participating in Freedom Rides, bus boycotts, sit-ins, or street demonstrations, civil rights activists battled for space. This was the physical space of buses, public schools, and lunch counters."[32] As well as physical spaces, segregated literary spaces were contested sites in which writers "fused these literal and figurative notions of space into an aesthetic of spatio-symbolism" to protest racial segregation whereby "one element of this desegregation aesthetic was the spatialization of social margins [leading to a] literary landscape of manholes, coalbunkers, sewers, kitchenettes, shacks, and boxes."[33] Depictions of the public eating space in novels of the segregated town should also be understood as part of a literary aesthetic of protest in which the supposed integrity of privileged white space is challenged. Cross-racial encounters in social spaces are especially likely to cause a crisis in the system of racial etiquette on which the fictional southern town operates because of the intimacy such meetings suggest.[34]

Cross-racial interaction in these towns is always mediated by an intricate system of racial etiquette and white and black writers consistently find ways to

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[31] Mark Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 115.
[32] Zoe Trodd, "In Possession of Space: Abolitionist Memory and Spatial Transformation in Civil Rights Literature and Photography," in Brian Norman and Piper Kendrix Williams, eds. *Representing Segregation: Towards and Aesthetics of Living Jim Crow and other Forms of Racial Difference* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 223-245, 223.
[33] Ibid, 223, 224.
[34] Contests over the specific space of the town is central to Thomas F. Haddox' conception of the "white civil rights novel," which he defines as a novel "set in small southern towns and their environs, [that] foreground the mores and politics of race relations, and… present these relations not as a metaphysical given… but as a problem that requires attention." Thomas F. Haddox, "Elizabeth Spencer, the White Civil Rights Novel, and the Postsouthern,"*MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 65:4 (December 2004), 561-581, 561.

undermine these rules of etiquette in their depictions of various institutions in towns. As well as traditional forms of policing, interactions between the races are policed by custom and public opinion, notions of racial etiquette, or what Bertram Doyle defined in 1937 as "forms of deference and recognition, repeated and imitated, [which] soon crystallize into those conventional and obligatory forms of expression we call 'etiquette' or social ritual."[35] Doyle saw such rules of etiquette as a positive force in the segregated community: "A society or community […] may be said to have obtained stable equilibrium when all the social distances are known and every individual is in his place."[36] The humiliating aspect of this 'etiquette', strategically evaded by Doyle, is powerfully articulated in Richard Wright's essay, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow" (1938), when the author recalls a story in which he avoids either the "distasteful" option of deference to white men or the "dangerous" one of resistance but acts as though losing control of the items he is carrying occupies his attention, or in Smith's *Strange Fruit*, when a black character meets his sister's white lover on the street and thinks "Be goddam if you'd call him mister."[37] The complex system of racial etiquette suggests why one cultural critic can misread the politics of race by failing to analyse the subtext of demographic data: "If blacks were tolerated in the southern town, they were restricted by Jim Crow practices to their own distinct places. In the small towns of the Midwest, North, and West, there was more typically no place at all for blacks."[38] Rather

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[35] Bertram Wilbur Doyle, *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South: A Study in Social Control* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1937), xviii.
[36] Ibid, xii, xviii.
[37] Richard Wright, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow," *Uncle Tom's Children* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991 [1938]), 15; Lillian Smith, *Strange Fruit* (Orlando, FL: Harvest, 1992 [1944]), 13.
[38] Miles Orvell, *The Death and Life of Main Street: Small Towns in American Memory, Space, and Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 134.

than ‘tolerating’ an African American presence, white southerners in small towns required it in order for the town to function which it would, as long as ‘appropriate’ cross-racial behaviour was maintained.

In James Loewen’s research on “sundown towns,” what he describes as “towns that are all white on purpose,”[39] he overlooks racial etiquette’s capacity to determine cross-racial behaviour when he identifies the disproportionate prevalence of sundown towns in the North and West:

> Most Americans have no idea such towns or counties exist or think such things happened mainly in the Deep South. Ironically, the traditional South has almost no sundown towns. Mississippi, for instance, has no more than 6, mostly mere hamlets, while Illinois has no fewer than 456.[40]

It is logical that the South, which has depended on the exploitation of black labour more than any other region in the U.S., would be less inclined to entirely prohibit African Americans from towns. In fact, racial division is a crucial component of the often-examined southern sense of place.

The place of the small town has been understood in southern literary studies as challenging the notion that the South moves at a different pace from the rest of the nation or, as Lucinda MacKethan summarises in *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (1980): “time and progress belong to the world outside, or so the myth goes on the plantations or in the small, sleepy Southern towns that are popular images of the South, time is held

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[39] James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, (New York: Touchstone, 2006 [2005]), 5.
[40] Ibid.

back by the places themselves."[41] This myth is inadequate for a study of how segregation is explored by writers of the fictional southern town at mid-century. Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr. writes, "To celebrate place suggests celebrating stasis and the status quo, perhaps one reason that segregation, with its barriers controlling not only movement in space but also within the social and economic spheres, seemed so natural in the South."[42] The novelists I study do not celebrate place or the social status quo in their depictions of the small town, nor is this thesis a celebration of the life of the small town. Rather, the novelists manoeuvre the trope of the small town to make of it a critique of the status quo. While each of the fictional towns I explore reverts, to greater or lesser degrees, to the existing racial order, the novelists succeed in undermining the stability and morality of that order in the imagined worlds they create.

While the spatiality of these fictional towns is significant in my interpretations of them, spatial theory will be used sparingly in the current study. Whether through Homi Bhabha's conception of the "Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process" or Doreen Massey's idea of space as "the sphere of continuous production and reconfiguration of heterogeneity in all its forms," theorists helpfully illustrate how processes of conflict texture and define fictional and real space.[43] However, because I want to excavate how conventions of the fictional town develop in the work of individual authors, and how these conventions cohere into a literary tradition of protest, the analysis in this thesis is lead by the internal logic of each

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[41] Lucinda MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 181.
[42] Robert H Brinkmeyer, Jr., "Marginalization and Mobility: Segregation and the Representation of Poor Whites," in Richard Godden and Martin Crawford, eds. *Reading Southern Poverty between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 223-238, 225.
[43] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 37; Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2005), 61.

fictional space. Building on Thadious Davis' notion of the "southscape" or "a geography of race and region" that positions the South as "a social, political, cultural, and economic construct but one with the geographic 'fact of the land'" I aim to uncover how the 'construct' of the fictional town can operate as an aesthetic protest against racial segregation.[44]

Rather than following theoretical conventions for understanding southern space and place as established by spatial theorists – as sound and useful as such conventions can be – I prefer to draw on the formal and structural dimensions of texts to derive from those conventions a map for understanding how specific sites in the fictional South operate and what their deployment by a range of authors can be said to mean. Close textual analysis of the literary techniques that authors deploy in imagining southern towns contributes to an examination of space in southern literature about southern place by exposing the mechanics of how place in fiction is made to resonate with racial and social crises in the mid-century South. Literary theorist Franco Moretti deploys literary maps as a means of subjecting "the reality of a text" to "a process of deliberate reduction and abstraction."[45] In this thesis, I replace Moretti's "distant reading" with an adaptation of the more conventional close reading to elaborate the formal strategies that authors employ to make their fictional settings work against segregation.[46] Moretti's critical project is, at least in part, driven by a skepticism regarding close textual analysis and analysis of the minutiae of literary form that is not wholly undeserved. In the American context, close reading has been

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[44] Thadious M. Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 2.
[45] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005), 1.
[46] Ibid.

contaminated by its origins among the southern conservative New Critics of mid-century.

These southern New Critics – including Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransom, and Robert Penn Warren – were so apolitical in divorcing literature from its social, political, and historical influences as to constitute a radically conservative approach to text, and one of the key aims of this thesis is to recover a racially calibrated mode of close textual analysis that may uncover strategies of protest that are present in the text but have been prone to being overlooked by earlier formalist southern scholars. While, as an editor, Ransom admonishes critics not to "content themselves with what is manifest and for everyone to see" this sense of the interrogatory does not extend to uncovering covert negotiations of racial politics in southern texts.[47] The New Critics obscured or derided elements of political and racial protest in the novels and poems they studied. For example, in the early 1960s, during a moment of escalation in the black freedom movement, Brooks establishes a view of the text as something necessarily divorced from its political context:

> …it is for something else that one looks when he comes to estimate the achievement of the serious writers of our times – something more inward than a tract – something deeper and more resonant than a tirade against a particular abuse. One looks for an image of man, attempting in a world

[47] John Crowe Ransom, "Introduction," *The Kenyon Critics: Studies in Modern Literature from the Kenyon Review*, ed. John Crowe Ransom, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1951), vii-x, viii.

increasingly dehumanized to realize himself as a man – to act like a responsible moral being, not to drift like a mere thing.[48]

While Brooks' idea of the role of the author is lofty and idealistic, it is too vague to be of much critical use. Without defining in greater detail what he means by "inwardness" in opposition to a tract or how "depth" is measured against reflection on a specific social issue, Brook's romanticised description of fiction's place at mid-century rings hollow.

In fact, by describing in such vague terms what literature ought to do, Brooks underlines his conviction that literature should not engage with politics or protest (either as a tract or a presumably shallow tirade). Still earlier in his critical career, Brooks was keen to exclude from literary canons any text that he perceives to be inherently progressive, as when, in 1948, he condemns as "*sentimentality*" and "propaganda" the poetry of white and black American Marxists Genevieve Taggard and Langston Hughes. Brooks critiques this poetry as problematically biased in its politics and thematically selective, writing: "the experience established involves illegitimate exclusions and a special posing in a special light."[49] On the other hand, poetry by conservatives – including fellow New Critics Ransom and Allen Tate – is not judged to be contaminated by any such bias, suggesting that literature becomes propaganda for Brooks not by virtue of featuring political subtext, but only if such subtext is at odds with the critic's own convictions.

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[48] Cleanth Brooks, *The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 4.
[49] Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (London: Poetry London, 1948), 58, emphasis in original.

Perhaps understandably, the role of the New Critics in American intellectual history remains contested, with some scholars describing their innovations as a "revolution in criticism," or "brilliant and courageous," [50] while others critique the movement as "an imposing and repressive father-figure" to contemporary literary scholarship that was "almost-fundamentalist" in its efforts to divorce aesthetics from issues of race, gender, and class.[51] More recent southernists have adapted close reading methodologies in explicit service of Marxist and/or racially progressive critical programs. Richard Godden describes how:

> … close reading yields not some new account that the text may be made to bear, nor even an expression of interpretive freedom born in a spirit of ludic dialogue between author and recipient… [but rather] demands that the reader attend closely in order to recover… inferences of a tale that is not being told.[52]

As is often the case in southern writing, the tales that are not being told by the narrators of the five novels I explore revolve around racism and its challengers. Only through a racially calibrated revision of close reading, one that rejects and corrects the conservative project of the New Critics, does the fictional town

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[50] William J. Handy, *Kant and the Southern New Critics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1963), vii; William E. Cain, *The Crisis in Criticism: Theory, Literature, and Reform in English Studies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 95.

[51] Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (London: Athlone Press, 1980), xii; Angie Maxwell, *The indicted South: Public Criticism, Southern Inferiority, and the Politics of Whiteness*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 25.

[52] Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4.

emerge in these, and other, novels of the mid-century South as a device for challenging racial segregation.

The innovative narrative strategies that authors develop in tandem with their fictional towns include, as I discuss in Chapter One, the adaptation of personal pronouns to incorporate an imagined reader into the mindset of fictional southerners living under segregation. In that chapter, I argue that Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* depicts a paradigmatic segregated town that operates according to the interaction of a wide range of offices. Smith develops a town, Maxwell, Georgia, that features virtually every aspect of this typology. Maxwell is drawn in great detail and Smith's portrayal of the town's places, spaces, and inhabitants is an elaborate critique of segregation as a structuring principle for such a community. Smith's steadfast refusal, as an activist, public intellectual, and a citizen, to capitulate to segregation is made explicit in the novel, where she deploys the literary techniques of free-indirect discourse and the rarely-used second-person narrative voice to incorporate an imagined white reader into the town's social economy. Smith invents a town through which to confront an imagined reader with the injustice of racial segregation. She achieves this confrontation by exposing how segregation permeates every aspect of southern community and deploying narrative techniques that close the dramatic distance between the imagined reader and her fictional characters.

Other novels address fewer institutions in more detail and explore how components of the typology I identify in Smith's novel interact to produce integral, semi-urban wholes. In Chapter Two, I discuss how Byron Herbert Reece examines the relationships of a farmer and a teacher with other offices, especially the banker and the clergy. Reece's Appalachian town of Tilden,

Georgia is constructed as a discrete, organic body that is diseased by racial terrorism. Reece portrays a community built on segregation that is physically and morally rotting in order to explore how individuals may nevertheless resist racial conformity. Reece shows how the offices of the town most clearly associated with cultivation and the future– specifically, a farmer and a teacher – come into conflict with institutions that represent the town's moral and economic status quo, represented by a clergyman and a bank manager. Reece's typology of the fictional town draws on a complex symbolic schema that is consistently reinforced by less esoteric representations of those individual characters who take action against white supremacy.

Carson McCullers' town of Milan, Georgia, the subject of Chapter Three, is governed by the institutions of the law and medicine, as portrayed through the friendship between a judge and a pharmacist in *Clock Without Hands*. I argue that McCullers' previous novels were all set in Milan, even though their town settings were left unnamed, but that this continuity only becomes legible in her most direct portrayal of the theme of desegregation and her imaginative portrayal of the historical announcement in the Supreme Court case in *Brown v. Board* (1954). *Clock Without Hands* has been relatively neglected in McCullers criticism in relation to her other texts, and I argue the novel is the culmination of a fiction cycle in which McCullers traces the changing racial and social moods of a Georgia town. In this reading, comparisons with McCullers' earlier novels reveal how *Clock Without Hands* contributes to a wider literary project and in this way McCullers' fiction may be read as a cohesive whole.

In Chapter Four, I explore how William Faulkner addresses the pivotal role that a town's courthouse square plays in its imagined collective identity by

portraying its relationship to processes of history-making when, in *The Reivers*, a narrator attempts to rewrite the history of the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. In *The Reivers*, an aging white resident of a Jefferson nursing home, Lucius Priest, tells his grandson a story of Jefferson. A comparative reading of Priest's description of the town against representations elsewhere in Faulkner's oeuvre reveal that Priest is intentionally misleading his grandson by offering an idealized narrative of the segregated South in the early twentieth century. By leaving textual 'clues' for an imaginative reader to follow, Faulkner reasserts the racially brutal history of the town that Priest attempts to suppress.

In Chapter Five I argue that William Melvin Kelley positions his imagined town of Sutton, in an unnamed southern state, at a moment of historic change when the state's white citizens are forced to consider the events that lead their African American neighbours to abandon the South entirely. To do this, Kelley imagines the porch of a general store as a town's social hub that brings together white men in a wide array of social positions. Kelley's representation of the southern town is a radical reimagining of the typical segregated town in fiction. While each of the white authors studied in detail imagine, to one degree or another, how the southern town can progress beyond segregation, Kelley's *A Different Drummer* depicts a resolute rejection of liberal principles in favour of a massive black exodus from a fictional southern state.

I conclude the thesis by tracing the image of the field, a discrete unit of agricultural land, which is evident in each novel under discussion, as a metaphor for racial change in each of the fictional towns I map. I chart a shift in representation away from a narrative of progress to one of stark and immediate racial change. This typology is an implicit critique of segregation because the

authors use it to uncover how every aspect of southern community is contaminated by segregation and the paradoxes it engenders.

Across the chapters that follow, I uncover a narrative of mid-century southern fiction that consistently rejects the notion that segregation is a permanent or effective principle for defining southern identity at mid-century. In each of the fictional towns that I explore there are textual indicators that the South's racial order is threatened by drastic change, and it is only in the setting of the town that this change can be mapped via all of the institutions that collectively form the basic unit of space in southern fiction: the small town.

CHAPTER 1

The White Town/Coloured Town Paradigm: Lillian Smith's Maxwell

On May 27, 1961, white southern author Lillian Smith received a telegram from James Farmer, national director of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), urging her to attend an "emergency meeting of [the] CORE advisory committee" in New York. Farmer requested Smith's "immediate advice and help" because the Freedom Rides[1] were at "a decisive stage."[2] Three years later, shortly before the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Smith received another telegram, this one from then President Johnson, informing her that he would be establishing a "community relations service [to] assist communities in preventing and resolving racial disputes."[3] Johnson asks Smith to join, writing: "I urge you as a private citizen to use your leadership in the meantime to prom[o]te a spirit of acceptance and observance in your own community and business area."[4] In pencil, on the reverse of Johnson's telegram, Smith drafted her response, that she would be "honored" to serve in such a capacity and that she would do "all she could as a

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[1] Raymond Arsenault describes how the Freedom Rides, a series of events in 1961 during which white and black civil rights activists challenged segregation on interstate bus services, marked a departure for the civil rights movement, writing that "the Freedom Rides sent shockwaves through American society" and that "nothing in the recent past had prepared the American public for the Freedom Riders' interracial 'invasion' of the segregated South." Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3. Other detailed accounts of the Freedom Rides include political scientist David Niven's *The Politics of Injustice: The Kennedys, the Freedom Rides, and the Electoral consequences of a Moral Compromise* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003) and chapters in Catherine A. Barnes, *Journey from Jim Crow: The Desegregation of Southern Transit* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 157-175, and J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 239-253.

[2] Telegram, James Farmer to Lillian Smith, May 27, 1961, box 2, Correspondence, C-K. Lillian Smith papers, MS1283. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

[3] Telegram, Lyndon B. Johnson to Lillian Smith, 1964, box 2, Correspondence C-K, Lillian Smith papers, MS1283. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

[4] Ibid.

citizen and a writer to help."[5] What emerges from this correspondence is an image of Smith as repeatedly called upon to offer a practical contribution to the movement in the early 1960s. That Smith considered her efforts to relate to the roles of "citizen and writer" begins to suggest how the novelist, memoirist, and journalist understood her written output to be an extension of her moral and practical commitment to desegregation.

This commitment to activism and writing is anticipated in the novel through which Smith rose to national prominence, the controversial and popular *Strange Fruit* (1944). Within a month of its publication, 140,000 copies were in print and within ten months the novel had sold almost half a million copies, figures which Lawrence P. Jackson identifies as "blockbuster statistics."[6] Indeed, it was the number one fiction bestseller of the year.[7] Along with high sales figures came more than a little notoriety; Smith's indictment of the South's segregated system meant the novel was banned in Boston on March 20th, 1944, from the mail by the Post Office Department in May, and unofficially in Detroit by "gentleman's agreement."[8] In her later non-fiction writing, Smith was vocal in seeking an immediate and uncompromising end to segregation, rather than a gradual decline. While *Strange Fruit*'s role as an extension of Smith's politics has been examined by critics including Richard King, Will Brantley, and Robert Brinkmeyer Jr, the novel's paradigmatic setting of the small southern town has yet to be fully explored.[9]

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934 – 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 181.
[7] "The Best Sellers of 1944," *College English*, 6:6 (March 1945), 356.
[8] Anne C. Loveland, *Lillian Smith: A Southerner Confronting the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 71-2.
[9] Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South 1930-1955* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 173-192; Will Brantley, afterword to *Now is the Time* by Lillian Smith (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004 [1955]), 121-

This chapter examines Smith's literary techniques as they converge with a desegregationist project. I explore how Smith's aesthetic experimentation, particularly her depiction of public and private spaces, and experimental use of the personal pronoun, combine to create a paradigm for a working, segregated community, while at the same time her fiction exposes the inherent flaws in that system. In this chapter, I explore how Smith's politics and aesthetics merge in her construction of Maxwell, as a typical fictional town in which every element is designed to uncover and undermine the principles of racial segregation. Smith's focus in *Strange Fruit* is on the entirety of Maxwell's landscape, from the uninhabited swamp that delimits the town inwards to points at Maxwell's centre where the nominally divided 'White Town' and 'Colored Town' meet. Every element of the landscape is imagined as facilitating segregation, even as Smith continually exposes the town's failure to effectively separate the races. By exploring Smith's conception of Maxwell as similar to, but distinct from, real southern towns and by charting how *Strange Fruit* depicts the failure of segregation as a structuring principle I argue that Maxwell constructs a typology of the fictional southern town that would be replicated in novels I examine later in this thesis.

From the outset, Smith maps Maxwell as a town that is racially divided, and represents the divisions as spatial and ideological. The presence of conflict defines the town in Smith's novel and such conflict is pivotal in spatial theory, whether in Michel Foucault's description of the "heterotopia" or in bell hooks'

145; Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

notion of “a place of struggle.”[10] More interesting to me than these theoretical framings are the ways in which the author positions her characters’ internal lives in and against the contested space of the town. Smith interrogates these divisions through the perceptions of inhabitants on either side of the town’s colour line and her composition of Maxwell draws from her lived experience in small southern towns while remaining a work of the imagination. Smith consistently exposes the racial barrier as porous: the division between ‘White Town’ and ‘Colored Town’ is artificial and permeable, as exemplified in scenes that take place on the borders of the two supposedly distinct spaces. Smith constructs Maxwell is as a *pars pro toto* synecdoche for southern towns and her development of characters operates according to a similar series of synecdoches that represents a range of ‘types’ in the southern town. Smith also deploys the second-person personal pronoun to incorporate an imagined reader into the subject positions of her characters.

The novel traces the consequences of an interracial relationship between black domestic servant Nonnie Anderson and white doctor’s son Tracy Deen. Nonnie is pregnant with Tracy’s child and wants to have the baby. Tracy, whose relationship with Nonnie has largely been a diversion from the expectation of his mother and Maxwell’s white community that he will marry Dorothy Pusey, decides to pay Henry, his servant and childhood friend, to marry Nonnie and raise the child as his own. Nonnie’s brother Ed, recently returned from his job in Washington, DC in order to take Nonnie north, discovers the pregnancy and the plan and murders Tracy. While Ed flees north alone, Maxwell’s white community must find a scapegoat for the murder. Henry is lynched by a mob of

[10] Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (Spring, 1986), 22-7, 22; bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 145.

poor white workers and this reinstates the social order of the town that had been threatened by Tracy's relationship with Nonnie.

The novel features a large cast of characters, black and white. Every element of Maxwell's social order contributes to its apparent integrity, both in the sense of the town as a functioning whole, and its shared morality. The primary industries of Maxwell and its surrounding area are the production of lumber and turpentine, and the farming of cotton. Tom Harris, the owner of the town's sawmill, is the town's biggest employer. He is an outwardly liberal white southerner, having funded the black doctor Sam Perry's education. While Sam administers medicine to the town's black population, his white counterpart Tut Deen enjoys much more wealth and prestige within the community. The Deen family is among the most respected in the town and the overbearing Alma Deen, Tracy's mother, is the arbiter of the family's image and its place within the community. Tracy, a veteran of the First World War, is struggling to find a place within Maxwell appropriate to his family's prestige and Alma's expectations. His sister Laura has recently returned to the town following her education at Columbia University in New York City. Laura, to whom Maxwell now feels alien, is also struggling to find her place there and to come to terms with her lesbianism. The Deens live in a "yellow" house on College Street, at the centre of White Town, suggesting tarnished whiteness or political and social cowardice. [11] Conversely, Nonnie and her family live at the very edge of Maxwell, in Colored Town. Nonnie and her sister Bess are both educated at historically black Spelman College in Atlanta but now work as domestic servants for the town's

[11] Smith, Lillian, *Strange Fruit* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1992 [1944]), 100. All further references to the novel will appear parenthetically.

wealthy white families, their education providing few employment opportunities in Maxwell.

Making Maxwell

Smith's Maxwell is an invented space. Any resemblance it may bear to real towns that the author lived in is secondary to the construction of a unique fictional identity but it is built at every level to approximate the working social order of a typical southern town. Smith locates Maxwell within a real American geography but establishes its shape, population, and collective identity by charting the personality of the town and its population in great detail. She is painstaking in texturing the layers of economic, social, and cultural facilities appropriate to its size in order to maintain racial division and uphold a white supremacist ideology. The town's white supremacist identity (and progressive threats to that identity) are mapped in the space of the fictional town.

The novel's opening line introduces a symbolically divided town: "She stood at the gate, waiting; behind her the swamp, in front of her Colored Town, beyond it, all Maxwell" (1). The line enacts a spatial symbolism of the town, establishing a divided Maxwell. The syntax engages directly with the town's ironic name. The phrasing of the sentence – "... Colored Town, beyond it, all Maxwell..." – not only removes African American domestic space and social experience from the sanctioned definition of the town proper but also suggests that, other than the geography of racial segregation ("beyond Colored Town"), everything in the social order of the South is faultless ("all [is] Maxwell"), while the phrase "all Maxwell" also suggests that the town is integral, even as this suggestion is belied by racial division . Nonnie's position at a gate represents

decision or indecision. Rather than a gate that opens to allow entry, this threshold operates as a site of potential. A threshold can allow progress in either direction and thresholds proliferate in the novel. They signal that the town of Maxwell is on the brink of progress or regression and Nonnie, as yet only identified as “she”, occupies a literal location between Maxwell and the swamp, as well as a symbolic location on an ambiguous path. Nonnie’s position at the gate is supplemented by the fact that she is in the early stages of a pregnancy that represents the merging of two supposedly distinct communities. Finally, Nonnie occupies a liminal space because the text has yet to identify her; she is defined only by gender and location.

The paragraphs that follow this opening sentence establish a coercive composite voice for the town that defines Nonnie in its own terms and denies her the privilege of self-identification. She is described and defined by different groups in the town’s population in turn. Throughout, however, she remains static on the threshold. The external definitions do not affect a change to her intellectual or physical position. Over the course of these few paragraphs, which also provide a panorama of the town, pronouns function to complicate the various images of Nonnie. Each of the voices imposes a definition and a sense of ownership. The people and institutions of Maxwell collectively judge and objectify Nonnie. The first group given a voice is obviously white:

> ‘That’s Nonnie Anderson,’ they would tell you, ‘that’s one of the Anderson niggers. Been to college. Yeah! Whole family been to college! All right niggers though, even if they have. Had a good mother who raised her children to work hard and know their place. Anderson niggers

is alright. Good as we have in the county I reckon' (1).

In being the first to name her in the text, this section of the white population of Maxwell establishes its right to judge Nonnie and her family personally and socially within the parameters set by race. Nonnie is considered a constituent of the town ("good as we have in the county") but not on equal terms. She is not part of "they" who define her, nor is she the "you" who would be told. The passage supposes an individual white speaker (as suggested by the first-person singular pronoun in "I reckon"). However, this individual is representative of a much larger group of which he or she is a member, addressing another person or persons ("they would tell you"). Nonnie is evaluated according to white expectations of the social and economic roles of African Americans in the segregated town. Her work ethic and family heritage mark her as a functional component of the town. Her place in the town is inherently racist in its construction; she is a "good nigger."

The next social group to identify and assess Nonnie's character and her position within the town is black but no less hostile: "'Stuck up like Almighty, Nonnie Anderson,' some colored folks said, 'holding her head so highty-tighty, not like Bess. Bess common as dirt, friendly with folks'" (1). This group of African Americans is suspicious of Nonnie's aloofness and favours her sister's humility. A third group of Maxwell residents, also black, voices a more benevolent opinion of the same aloofness and recalls the same trait in Nonnie's father. Next, the upper-class white women of Maxwell judge Nonnie based on a perceived lack of deference:

> 'Biggety thing,' white women said, 'I wouldn't have her in my house with all her college airs.' But most said it enviously, for women on College Street and the side streets knew that Mrs. Brown's servant Nonnie was the best servant in Maxwell unless it was her sister Bess (1-2).

Nonnie's employers, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, compliment Nonnie's work in a way that is embedded in a white supremacist thinking: "Nonnie's a good nigger, alright" (2). Next, Nonnie's dead mother Tillie is portrayed – in the past tense – talking to her shy and reserved daughter, while the final group to assess and identify Nonnie objectifies her sexually:

> And white boys whistled softly when she walked down the street, and said low words and rubbed the back of their hands across their mouths, for Nonnie Anderson was something to look at twice, with her soft black hair blowing off her face, and black eyes set in a face that God knows should have belonged to a white girl (2).

The predatory sexual identification of Nonnie in this passage seems almost to defy speech. The young men whistle and mumble "low words", which could be interpreted either as whispered words or base swearing, to denote their desire for her. Due to the syntax employed, the men seem at once to be part of a group but also individuals. They are described rubbing "the back of their hands across their mouths," rather than the back*s* of their hands: the number of persons is confused. They have multiple mouths but act as if with a shared hand. The implication is

that the town of Maxwell exists, paradoxically, as an individual entity and as a multitude. The judgement of Nonnie is in the hands of Maxwell's individual inhabitants and its collective.

Nonnie's position on the threshold at the beginning of the novel is also mirrored in Tracy's conception of their relationship as a path he chooses to take. When Tracy returns from the First World War, his hope that he could have a conventional relationship with Nonnie is dashed by his return to a system of segregation: "Now sign says: *Road closed*. Better detour" (62). That Tracy thinks about his future as a linear path indicates his investment in white Maxwell's conventional racial narrative. Here, the reality of segregation prevents Tracy from considering a future with Nonnie. Later, after Tracy has committed to Reverend Dunwoodie's plan to buy Nonnie's compliance by having Henry marry her, the imagery of the path is more aggressive and hostile: "Nonnie was only a name today. A name and an obstacle. A colored girl blocking a white path" (97). While Nonnie is defined from the beginning of the text as poised at a moment of decision, Tracy is figured as subject to determinism because he is forced to follow the 'path' the town expects of him.

In this intriguing opening scene, Smith establishes a paradigm for understanding her fictional southern town as based simultaneously on the organising principle of a racial binary and her characters' capacity to cross that binary. By providing a catalogue of social types in her opening pages, Smith stages her construction of the geography of the town as central to the narrative. Incorporating a range of voices from different racial and social strata, Smith indicates the incorporation of a typology of the southern town into her plot and narrative structures. By exploring her town in this way, Smith underscores the

invention of the town even while, elsewhere in the novel, she complicates its inventedness with references to landmarks in a recognisable southern geography.

The verisimilitude with which Smith imposes her fictional town of Maxwell on an actual map of the United States is striking, with real Georgia towns and northern cities alluded to throughout the novel. Whilst Maxwell is a construction of Smith's imagination, elements of its geography resemble towns in which the author lived and she sites her town within a recognizable U.S. context. Real places are described in relation to Maxwell to locate the town geographically. For instance, Alma Deen's parents are from the town of Hawkinsville in the centre of Georgia and, as a young child, Tracy is taken to Hawkinsville by his grandmother (77). In a sense, then, Tracy is partly raised within the real geography of the state. The time he spends in Hawkinsville contributes to Alma's troubled relationship with her son: "Tracy never seemed quite hers after that. He belonged to Mother" (78). Other characters also remove themselves from Maxwell to real world locations. As a child, Henry lives in the Deens' back garden with his parents, Mamie and Ten McIntosh, who leave Maxwell for a cotton farm in Baxley when their son is a teenager (114). This move is precipitated partly by Ten's disability – he loses a leg in an accident in Harris' sawmill – and partly by the oppressive atmosphere of living in the white family's back garden (114). Shortly before they move, Ten has an argument with Mamie in which he says he "hate[s] livin in Deen's back yard. Told you a hundard time it'd be better in the quarters where we'd be free to do as we like" (113). Baxley is a space located outside of Maxwell's coercive environment and the McIntoshes' move there signals an escape from their place within the spacialised racial hierarchy of the town.

The university town of Macon is positioned further north of Maxwell (332) and is also the source of Alma Deen's wealth, because it is there that she owns "nigger shanties" (187). Macon figures in the novel as a source of racial exploitation as well as a point of departure from the southern part of the state. Each of these real towns situates fictional Maxwell within the state of Georgia and the presence of each in the text also underlines the invented nature of Smith's town by imagining it as a contact zone with real world racial and social dynamics.

Outside the state of Georgia, Smith is influenced in her writing by memories of her hometown of Jasper, Florida. In her preface to *The Winner Names the Age*: *A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith* (1978), Smith's partner, Paula Snelling, suggested an experiential, regionally-derived grounding in much of Smith's writing:

> The sights, sounds, smells, the cadences of speech, body language, rituals and rotes of her region entered her bloodstream in childhood and give sensory verisimilitude to her writings. She did not sever this taproot, although her early, hometown search for the *whys* became a worldwide and lifelong quest.[12]

The verisimilitude Snelling discerns is drawn organically from Smith's "hometown" experiences, not only her experiences in either Jasper or the couple's chosen hometown of Clayton, Georgia, but from the "taproot" of living in towns that are as "typical" as these. Such towns provide the groundwork

[12] Paula Snelling, Preface to *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*, ed. Michelle Cliff, (New York: Norton, 1978), 11.

through which Smith is able to access the social construction or "rituals and rotes" of such southern towns. Smith draws on her experiences for verisimilitude in her writing, but she does not engage in direct textual representations of her "hometown" South.

Nevertheless, in the same preface, Snelling suggests that "[t]he Maxwell Georgia, of her novel *Strange Fruit*, so far as it had specific geographical location and cultural milieu, was the town she left at age seventeen and to which she never returned."[13] The novel's critics – and Smith herself – also situate Jasper at the centre of the novel's imaginative construction. Jasper, in northern Florida, does not share a "specific geographical location" with Maxwell. It does, however, share a racialized construction and a town-wide identity based on that racial division. The root of Maxwell's relationship with Jasper, then, is that they are each, for Smith, typical of towns that appear to be whole but are actually based upon a principle of fracturing, mandated by racial segregation. When Smith describes her childhood in Jasper by calling it Maxwell, she uses a fictional canvas as a means of exploring the very real crisis of segregation.

In the theatrical programme for Smith's 1945 Broadway adaptation of the novel, the author contributes a short introduction to the town of Maxwell, Georgia. In this piece, Smith erodes the division between the fictional Maxwell and her own experience of growing up in Florida: "When I was a child in Maxwell, I lived on College Street where oak trees make cool paths for children to run on, and moss shuts the glare of sun from their eyes. […] This was my town."[14] Smith describes Jasper as the basis for her invention of Maxwell but she highlights the importance of creative invention in her composition of the town. In

[13] Ibid, 12.
[14] Theatrical Programme, "Maxwell Georgia", p. 4, box 40, folder 23. Lillian Smith papers, MS1283. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

a letter from 1961, Smith also describes how she felt like a "complete stranger" when she returned to Jasper as an adult.[15] In spite of the distance that the adult Smith felt from Jasper, the act of writing *Strange Fruit* strengthened her bond with that town, as when Smith describes the novel as "removing a long amnesia about [her] hometown."[16] By inventing a new town, Smith is able to access a relationship with a real town more fully, but the fictional town remains primary. As a result, Smith's construction of Maxwell allows her to rediscover Jasper in an ancillary sense. As she muses elsewhere, "men imitate art, art does not imitate men; everyday reality is bred from dreams, not dreams from everyday reality."[17] Smith's construction of Maxwell as a representative town in its own right is more significant than any "representative" relationship to Jasper. In a sense, then, Jasper is, in Smith's description of it, modelled on Maxwell rather than the reverse. Only by inventing Maxwell as a synecdoche is Smith able to translate her personal development in the real segregated town of Jasper.

Smith's memory of Jasper does dictate its mapping in the novel as a series of concentric circles. As Smith remembers: "Rimming the town like a shadow were the quarters where colored folk lived and at the edge of the Quarters a little unpainted church where they worshipped and sang."[18] Smith repeats this description in an article entitled "Life with a Best-Seller" where she describes her memories of the small-town South: "I can see even now the Negro shanties, rimming our town like a deep shadow and the big homes under oak

[15] Lillian Smith, "Extracts from Three Letters," in *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*, ed. Michelle Cliff, 215.
[16] Ibid, 214.
[17] Lillian Smith, "The Role of the Poet in a World of Demagogues," in *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*, ed. Michelle Cliff, 163.
[18] Theatrical Programme, "Maxwell Georgia", p. 4. Lillian Smith Papers.

trees on College Street."[19] Smith uses strikingly similar language in the novel to describe how domestic servants return home to "the cabins rimming the town, a shadow behind Maxwell" (117). The similarities in these textual palimpsests of Jasper and Maxwell indicate the importance in Smith's conception the circular geographical pattern of the towns. In all three cases, as one moves away from the centre of the town, the conditions become worse and the people poorer.

As in Smith's autobiographical account of Jasper, the outer ring of Maxwell is a series of black cabins, and beyond these cabins is a swamp. The swamp is the outer limit of the town and defines Maxwell spatially. The swamp also limits the town's identity in that it contrasts with the highly regulated space of the town proper. This series of circles begins with the town's most privileged spaces, and spreads outward such that each layer marks a greater degree of disavowal of the town's identity. If the white wealth of College Street is the image Maxwell most wants to portray to itself, then each layer beyond is progressively less incorporated into the identity of the town.

The swamp is an ambivalent metaphor in the novel, at once representing the limitation and possibility of movement away from the town. It acts as a border, encircling the inhabitable space of the town with uninhabitable wilderness and contains Maxwell in spatial but also ideological terms. As Anthony Wilson argues in his cultural study, the swamp can be the site of "alternative memory, independent of the white patriarchal master narrative."[20] The swamp represents a space apart from the coercive and restrictive conventions of the town. The swamp is the absence of the town and while this

[19] Article, "Life with a Best-Seller", *The Atlanta Journal Magazine*, January 14, 1945, p.5-6, box 46, folder 11. Lillian Smith papers, MS1283. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.
[20] Anthony Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), xv-xvi.

means that it offers less security, it also offers more freedoms since disavowal enables at least as much as it inhibits. Primarily, the swamp offers a means of escape from the town's racial rules.

It is for this reason that Nonnie is attracted to the swamp; her attraction derives from a connection she appears to have to its wildness. It calls to Nonnie: "it says, 'come here, come here, come here'" (4). The affinity Nonnie feels is inaccessible to Tracy, though, who sees only the ecological fact of the landscape: "'You hear it?' she whispered. 'Nope. Nothing but the frogs croaking, and the dogs'" (5). Tracy is unable either intellectually or emotionally to inhabit a space outside of the regulations of Maxwell, whereas for Nonnie, a space distinct from those regulations is compelling. For Tracy, the swamp serves simply to demarcate the space of Maxwell as "civilised" territory. For Nonnie, on the other hand, the absence of cohesion is the absence of coercion. Tracy is afraid that Nonnie "might get lost" in the swamp (5), but Nonnie is "just visiting" the swamp as she would a neighbour (4).

Of course, swamps in southern culture are connected to the history of enslavement. In the Antebellum period, the southern swamp represented a dangerous space, but one which could be used by the enslaved to evade capture. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856) features a community of escaped slaves living in the Great Dismal Swamp area of Virginia and North Carolina.[21] The swamp is a means of escaping the confines of Maxwell and this is precisely the quality that attracts Nonnie. Tracy's

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[21] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) [1856]. Historians have examined the role played by swamps within the Underground Railroad. See for example: E. Dolores Preston Jr., "The Underground Railroad in Northwest Ohio." *The Journal of Negro History* 17:4 (1932), 409-436; George Hendrick and Willene Hendrick, eds, *Fleeing for Freedom: Stories of the Underground Railroad as Told by Levi Coffin and William Still* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003).

investment in the social order of the town inhibits his understanding of the swamp and also represents a barrier between himself and Nonnie that is analogous to the constructed barrier based on race. In this reading of the swamp, Tracy remains contained by Maxwell, where Nonnie's place in the town is less fixed. Here, Smith's depiction of the swamp is what Wilson calls a "signifier of subversive ambiguity" that "presents subversion as a losing battle" and Smith makes it clear that the power in the town, as opposed to the swamp, sits with Tracy and not with Nonnie.[22]

Just as Tracy is unable to share in Nonnie's experience of the swamp, Nonnie knows that "Tracy lives in a white world", epitomized in the novel by the elite white enclave of College Street (123). Along College Street are the homes of Maxwell's wealthiest white inhabitants, many of whom provide employment for black domestic servants, including Bess and Nonnie. Elsewhere on the same street is Maxwell's economic and social centre, where businesses and amenities are located. College Street, then, is the centre of Maxwell both residentially and commercially and is crucial to the typology of the southern town of which it is a component. Because the families who live on College Street are representative of Maxwell's leading citizens, and the businesses on College Street are representative of Maxwell's provision of amenities to residents of the town and the surrounding county, College Street is emblematic of Maxwell's collective identity.

Maxwell's main street shares its name with the main street in Macon. The fictional College Street differs from its real world counterpart in at least one important way, though, as Macon's College Street takes its name from Mercer

[22] Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture*, 124.

University, whereas higher education is conspicuously absent from Maxwell. Characters who receive university educations have to travel elsewhere in the state or the country. Bess and Nonnie are educated at Spelman (20) and Smith's representation of college graduates working as domestic servants contributed to the controversy surrounding the novel. Then Director of the NAACP, Walter White, expressed disbelief that an educated black woman like Nonnie would submit herself to Tracy as she does in the novel. Smith, formerly a welcome guest at Spelman, was discouraged from visiting after her portrayal of Bess and Nonnie.[23] Laura, among the most educated characters in the novel, studies at Columbia University (51), while Sam has studied medicine in Philadelphia (38). The absence of a centre for higher learning in the town contributes to the sense in which education is seen as a dangerous asset to black southerners. Both Sam and the Anderson sisters are judged according to the effect their education has on their personalities: Sam is described as "one nigger a college education didn't ruin", because he "knows his place" (37). Black people in Maxwell are discouraged from developing the critical faculties necessary to question and navigate the town's deleterious social conventions. Despite the absence of a centre for learning, the "College Street crowd" is at the top of Maxwell's social order (44). The group is defined in contrast to the town's poor white population. For example, poor white mill worker Willie Echols despises "College Street folks with their airs and their money!" (117) Class tension is at the centre of College Street's place at the top of Maxwell's social hierarchy. In this way,

[23] See Loveland, *Lillian Smith: A Southerner Confronting the South*, 75. Smith's connections with the university persisted despite the controversy; she encouraged the casting of Dorothy Carter, whom she met while Carter was a student at Spelman, as Bess in the Broadway adaptation of her novel.

elements of the prestige of a university are maintained by the town even though no such facility exists there.

Tracy, and other wealthy whites in their twenties, are the “College Street Crowd” despite Tracy’s having attended college for only a few months before dropping out (61). Another member of the College Street crowd, Prentiss Reid, described as “Maxwell’s radical”, is the editor of the local newspaper but does not print his own political views in the *Maxwell Press* (45). The newspaper is described, rather, as furnishing the needs of the local community and propagating the political and social integrity of segregation:

> Prentiss Reid’s *Maxwell Press* observed the publishing amenities of southern tradition, with proper space given to church news, to Society, to the Democratic party, to White Supremacy, to the protection of the freedom of big business, to farm interests, home hints, and obituaries. Only upon younger and less powerful ears than those of his advertisers and readers did his tongue drip its acid (46).

Reid flatters southern traditionalists while proclaiming a more radical set of beliefs in private. Smith portrays Reid as a hypocrite rather than a proponent of change: the “acid” that his tongue drips lacks the impact that his newspaper would otherwise allow. While other small-town narratives, such as Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Hodding Carter’s *The Winds of Fear* (1945), figure local newspapermen as potential instigators of progressive social change, Smith’s representation of Reid satirizes moderate southern journalists, and anticipates a later essay she would publish in *The South Today* called “The

Right Way is Not the Moderate Way" in which she asserts that "moderation never mastered ordeal or met a crisis successfully."[24] In this exploration of local media in the novel, Smith establishes the newspaper as a part of the typology of the fictional southern town that fails to challenge its racial status quo.

As well presenting the illicit and hidden lives of the College Street crowd, Smith represents the segregation of the business area of the street as undermining its more generally appealing image. Ed considers Maxwell in the context of other American urban centres and notices a single defining difference:

> Ed stood on the sidewalk. In front of him was the garbage-heaped alley of stores facing College Street. He could have been looking into a back alley of Washington, New York, anywhere. To the right of him four stores separated Salamander's Lunch Counter (colored) from the white people's Deen's Corner Drug Store. Now he looked straight into Georgia (8).

The town's segregated business centre is visualised as an example of how College Street's image of itself is fragmented. The "garbage-heaped alley" suggests refuse and unsanitary conditions, and the separate eating facilities on the street signal fracture. Ed's cynical presence at the centre of College Street indicates a failure of the integrity of Maxwell's wealthy whites. The repetition of the verb "look" also highlights Ed's role as an observer. Having returned to the town after an absence, Ed recognizes the details of the coercive structure upon which Maxwell is built. The explicit signposting of segregation is the key difference between Maxwell and Ed's adopted home of Washington, DC.

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[24] Lillian Smith, "The Right Way is Not a Moderate Way," in *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*, ed. Michelle Cliff, 68.

Ed's presence on College Street is an example of uncontrolled black presence within Maxwell. This undermines the apparently racially discrete integral design of "White Town." Ed's visible racialization as black highlights the contrast in Maxwell's social system. He is described as "a black digit marked out in white chalk" (8). Ed's visibility is at odds with white Maxwell's reluctance to see him: "he wasn't there on the sidewalk. He never had been there … he just wasn't anywhere – where those eyes looked – where those damned eyes –" (8). Even in his childhood, Ed represents a threat to the town. For example, his mother, Tillie, sends him to Washington, DC at the advice of Pug Pusey, Dorothy's father and Ed's employer at the grocery store: "'Better get your boy out of town, Tillie,' he'd said, 'the boy's itching for trouble. He's not a bad boy – just restless'" (21). This description suggests Ed is an irritant and his "itching" a threat to himself and to the stability of white Maxwell. His return foreshadows a destabilizing of the town's social order and his perspective on College Street signals a failure in the racial division on which the town is built.

College Street represents the heart of Maxwell's white collective identity and Ed's presence exposes the inherent instability of racial division as an organising principle in the fictional town's geography. Further from the town's social centre, the spaces in which 'White Town' and 'Colored Town' meet consistently undermine the supposed separation of white and black. Through the interstitial spaces of racial intersection, Smith depicts a counternarrative to the town's collective identity that interrogates Maxwell's fiction of racial separation by exposing the town's colour line as characteristically porous.

On the Porous Colour Line

While the division of Maxwell into "White Town" and "Colored Town" is a vital component of its identity, College Street is the necessarily integrated centre of the town's social and commercial life. The division of the town along racial lines is as implausible as it is necessary. Throughout the novel, Smith offers examples of the inherent permeability of the colour line. The specific geographical point at which White Town and Colored Town meet is the home of white spinster and "dope fiend" Miss Ada (128).

While a relatively minor character in many respects, Miss Ada and her house occupy singularly significant roles in the racial geography of the town. Because her home marks the point at which White Town and Colored Town meet, it lies on the periphery of each. Socially and geographically, Miss Ada and her house represent a line of demarcation between Maxwell's two halves. As a result, Miss Ada's house is disavowed by both groups. As the most abject white resident of Maxwell, she is not included in the community of White Town and yet as a white woman, she cannot be included in the community of Colored Town. As an unmarried older woman, Miss Ada fits the trope of the spinster that is common in southern fiction in this era. A spinster may represent an investment in the South's confederate past, as in the case of William Faulkner's Emily Grierson, who lives in a "big, squarish frame house that had once been white […] set on what had once been our most select street," or the development of a progressive southern racial politics, as in the case of Faulkner's Miss Eunice Habersham, "a kinless spinster of seventy living in the columned colonial house on the edge of town."[25] Miss Ada's rejection by the town is less reminiscent of either of these 'types' of spinster. However, it does anticipate the widow Mrs.

[25] William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily" in *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1930]), 119; William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust* (London: Penguin, 1966 [1948]), 75.

Dubose in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1961), who is described as "nasty."[26] Miss Ada's position between the two populations makes of her an object of fear and curiosity. Ed, walking home from College Street, remembers "his boyhood habit" of ceasing to whistle as he walked past the ironically named Evergreen Cemetery and the equally haunting home of Miss Ada (13). The two characters differ in the degree to which they are rehabilitated: before her death, Mrs. Dubose overcomes her morphine addiction and her role in the town of Maycomb, Alabama, changes. After her death, she is described as "a lady."[27] While Lee's character is eventually reincorporated into the white community, Smith's Miss Ada remains abject and frightening throughout.

At this location between White Town and Colored Town, Henry coerces naïve domestic servant Dessie into having sex with him, but in order to have illicit sex, the couple must remove themselves from their own black milieu without penetrating the white area of the town: "They went out by the A.M.E. Church, past the white graveyard, arms around each other, walking more slowly now, Dessie hesitating, dragged back by a conscience never long at ease. Under the cedars in front of Miss Ada's she paused" (239). Dessie's conscience, which "drag[s]" her backward toward Colored Town is appeased by the liminal space of Miss Ada's property. Only in this space on the periphery of each of Maxwell's communities can Henry successfully seduce Dessie. When they finish having sex under a palmetto bush the couple walks back past Miss Ada's house, from which vantage point Dessie first sees Tracy's corpse (239). The path by Miss Ada's facilitates both intra-racial sex and the hiding of Tracy's body. As an unavoidably porous space between Maxwell's two discrete and nominally

[26] Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (London: Arrow Books, 1997 [1961]), 119.
[27] Ibid, 124.

segregated populations, Miss Ada's house is the scene of behaviour unsupported by either set of rules but prefigured on them. The murder is a direct result of the harmful psychological impact of segregation on both Tracy and Ed, on their respective sides of Maxwell's colour line.

While the wealthy homes on College Street epitomise the surface identity that defines Maxwell, this façade conceals sexual, racial, and gender tensions. As the Deen family sits down to breakfast, the scene is almost idyllic: "It was the kind of dining room one associates, perhaps too glibly, with a southern accent" (63). The room epitomises the genteel myth of the South while also satirising the "glib" way in which northerners may have imagined the South. The scene is undermined by the family's secret lives: Tracy's romance with Nonnie, and Laura's secret lesbianism are incongruous with the superficial image of the wealthy southern home. Another staple of the southern myth is satirised in this scene as a means of challenging the commonly held image of southern gentility. Tut has to change his clothes before work because "his seersucker coat looked mussed" (63). The seersucker suit, which is a common image of white southern men, is "mussed" and, as a result, the image falters. Just as Tut's coat fails to live up to its purpose, so does the image of the happy southern family home. Laura, who has been educated in New York and lives uneasily now in the southern town, wears "bifocal glasses" at breakfast (64), which present two parallel but different images to the wearer and the duality of the white southern home. Laura, unlike the rest of her family, has tried to rectify her poor sight, and by extension, insight, and, as a result, sees two images in contrast. The white home, as it is represented in *Strange Fruit*, operates as a similarly bifocal paradigm. Beneath

the surface image of racial homogeneity, wealth, and a happy family life, the white home is compromised and haunted, by a repressed black presence.

This compromise means that the space of the white home can be the scene of two concurrent but opposed narratives, the co-incidence of which silently testifies to the inherently non-segregated status of the white home, dependent as it is on black labour. Black cooks and maids are a feature of Maxwell's white homes, and their lives follow broadly similar patterns: "Out of the back doors went the cooks home to Colored Town. Some with bundles under their arms for the family they'd left there" (116). The home lives and work lives of these women are divided, as suggested by the phrase "the family they'd left there", indicating two separate personae. The presence of concurrent and oppositional narratives echoes W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double-consciousness" which holds that African Americans, unlike whites, have access to how the United States is perceived by both races. [28] Blacks must simultaneously see themselves through their own eyes and as they are perceived by whites. Smith directly alludes to the concept in the text, when Bess expresses her frustration at being black in the segregated South to Sam: "It *would* be so simple, Sam, to be white. I'm so tired of being two people! Sometimes I get mixed up myself" (293, emphasis in original). Bess's experience as a domestic, a job that requires her to perform roles defined by her race and gender at odds with the roles she plays in black Maxwell would seem to be an overt engagement with Du Bois' theory of black life in the early part of the twentieth century. The houses on College Street are defined as much by the presence of these employees as by the whiteness of their inhabitants.

[28] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Dover Thrift Editions, 1994 [1903]), 3.

Sharon Monteith has described how white writers have typically depicted black domestic servants as extensions of, or foils for, the concerns of white characters: "A shift toward recognizing and representing forms of resistance in the behaviour of black women working in white homes is not so discernible in white-authored literature, where the modifications to the mammy image and its contemporization tend to affect the *physical* characterization of the domestic."[29] In *Strange Fruit*, Bess's complexity marks her as an unconventional domestic servant in novels by white southern women because of the degree to which her thoughts are articulated both internally and in her dialogue with others. In other mid-century fiction of the segregated town, relationships between black domestic workers and their employees are represented through a failure of communication, as in Mary Fassett Hunt's *Joanna Lord* (1954), in which a black domestic servant is described as "so close to the family and yet apart. Always on the outside looking in, as puzzled by them as they by her."[30] Diane Roberts, in *The Myth of Aunt Jemima* (1994), reads in Smith's work a reinscription of the "mammy" stereotype:

> While [Smith] laboured to challenge the stereotypes of race and gender in the South, she reinscribed the quintessential racist image of the Mammy, praising in much of her work the maternal black woman who loves all children, black or white, a source of comfort, though a 'haunted' figure to the white child of privilege.[31]

[29] Sharon Monteith, *Advancing Sisterhood?: Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 104.
[30] Mary Fassett Hunt, *Joanna Lord* (London: Hutchinson's Universal Book Club, 1957), 34.
[31] Diane Roberts, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (London: Routledge, 1994), 183.

Bess, however, does not comply with the category of the archetypal and racist "Mammy" and Roberts allows that Bess is "an astute reader of how little her culture has changed."[32] This imbues her with a level of insight and self-knowledge that is also atypical in white representations of black domestic workers, and with the exception of Laura, a rare quality in a citizen of Maxwell. A scene from the novel in which Bess recovers from a day's work in a white home plays with the imagery of sight and insight in order to represent Bess as having a deeper internal life than is typically the case for such characters: "Bess laid the wet cloth across her eyes. Coolness drove the pain into her neck" (15). Bess then ruminates on Nonnie's relationship with Tracy. Her act of temporarily blinding herself by placing the cloth on her eyes not only indicates a rare moment of rest but also highlights her capacity for insight. By covering her eyes, Bess privileges her internal life and her insight into the lives of her family members. Through Bess, Smith engages with the black domestic servant as a trope. She subverts typical representations by creating a character whose internal life is developed at least as much as her role as a mere image in a white home.

The division between diverging narratives within the space of the white home is nowhere more clearly exposed in *Strange Fruit* than in the scene following Tracy's death in which Nonnie's grief and that of her employer, Mrs. Brown, occur simultaneously within the Brown home. Mrs. Brown, who has very little claim to grieve for Tracy, compared to his lover, is very vocal about the personal difficulty his death has caused her. Conversely, Nonnie grieves in silence. Mrs. Brown's grief is represented in counterpoint to Nonnie's internal monologue, in which she repeats conversations she has recently had with Tracy

[32] Ibid, 185.

and Ed:

> 'I'm sorry, Nonnie, to c-cry–before y-you–like thi–this – It's–I'm up-upset – A death always up–I try–so hard–not to–give in–know Boysie's my-my cross–t-to bear–he's such a sweet b-baby–I–shouldn't–'
> 'He is, Mrs. Brown.' *…you can't think things out down here that's the Bible name for it there're others you'll hear them all I'm going clean from now on Dorothy a ring back to Washington to live decently I've fixed that…*(316).

While Mrs. Brown's grief is protested loudly, Nonnie's grief is presented as so deep as to defy speech: even in her interior monologue Nonnie does not articulate her mourning but is only able to repeat, and dwell upon, the words of others. The outward display of emotion is shown, through counterpoint, to be superficial. The submerged emotions that Nonnie must hide as a result of the unspoken prohibition against emotions crossing the colour line, are the result of a real personal connection between Nonnie and Tracy. Nonnie's grief is typical of the manner in which her relationship with Tracy has remained secret. Had it been public knowledge, their long-term affair would have threatened both of their reputations.

Nonnie and Tracy's affair is a taboo in each of their respective communities. Their sexual relationship must be hidden from Maxwell's white and black communities even after Tracy has died. Tracy's behaviour is prohibited, but tolerated, by white Maxwell. He must take pains to hide his affair, despite the fact that sexual encounters between white men and black women

form part of the expected development of Maxwell's white youth. The location most often used by Tracy and Nonnie for their affair is unincorporated, even into peripheral Colored Town. An abandoned cabin to the rear of the Anderson house is a viable space for an interracial affair because it is fully incorporated by neither White Town nor Colored Town. Closer to the swamp than any other property described in the novel, Aunt Tyse's cabin, as it is known, is as far removed from the social conventions of Maxwell as one can go without entering the swamp. When Tracy returns from service in the First World War, he and Nonnie resume their relationship in their private space: "Down the old path, beyond the grape arbor, through the field, to old Aunt Tyse's deserted cabin. The grass had grown high around it, as if no one had been there in the years he had been away" (55). Aunt Tyse is not mentioned in the novel except through the naming of her former home. The repetition of the word "old" in the passage above may indicate that the cabin is a relic of the antebellum period, with "Aunt" and "Uncle" the appellations given to older black people before and after Emancipation. As the grass suggests, Aunt Tyse's cabin is a place used only by Tracy and Nonnie; only through their use of the cabin is it incorporated into the structure of Maxwell. The cabin functions in its own right as a synecdoche for the greater degree of freedom, not least sexual freedom, white men are able to experience across the colour line. Tracy's relationship with Nonnie is attractive to him because it grants him greater liberties than his life on College Street. When Tracy visits Nonnie, he is always "glad to be back in a world where nothing was ordered as in white Maxwell" (135).

In a conversation with Tracy, Brother Dunwoodie, the leader of a Methodist revival that has come to town, shows that he is well aware of

opportunities for illicit behaviour on the other side of the colour line: “Now there’s another sin. Lot of men, when they’re young, sneak off to Colored Town. Let their passions run clean away with them. Get to lusting – burning up! And they get to thinking… they’d rather have that kind of thing than marriage” (87). Although Dunwoodie doesn’t explain exactly what he means by “that kind of thing” he does not need to. The “sin” of exploiting Colored Town is expected among young white men like Tracy. Dunwoodie even offers a solution to the issue of Nonnie’s pregnancy that will preserve Tracy’s reputation in White Town and Nonnie’s in Colored Town: “Find some good nigger you can count on to marry her. Give […] her some money. They all like money – all women like money, no matter what color!” (100).

Just as Aunt Tyse’s cabin is available to meet Tracy’s personal needs, the moral order of white Maxwell secretly accommodates his affair with Nonnie and when Tracy’s body is found, there is a tacit understanding among Maxwell’s white men as to the circumstances of Tracy’s death: “Many a man in Maxwell knew why Tracy was killed on the Old Town road, though of course the women didn’t. Yes, she must have done it. That Anderson girl” (300-301). Although secrecy is a necessary part of Tracy’s relationship with Nonnie, it is essentially another one of Maxwell’s social conventions. That Maxwell’s white men know not only that Tracy is having an affair but also with whom, indicates the specific role cross-racial sex plays for the town’s white men and the degree to which it is mediated by racial etiquette. While Tracy’s relationship with Nonnie, and her pregnancy, is the cross-racial relationship around which the narrative revolves, Tracy’s role does not contravene the town’s rules because, as a white man, his freedoms are always greater than those of Maxwell’s black citizens. Cross-racial

relations do not necessarily constitute a threat to the structures of segregation: Tracy's behaviour is acceptable to at least a segment of white Maxwell. Elsewhere in the novel, however, Smith develops spaces in which segregation's reach is interrogated. While Smith presents a permeable colour line as a means of exposing the fiction of the separation of the races, it is at the level of the individual that she begins to propose the means for resisting the system. The purpose of the Methodist revival is to unite Maxwell's white community exclusively and to support the town's structures of white supremacy but the inherent permeability of the town's racial divide means that the sermons and music are audible to Maxwell's black inhabitants too.

African American religion in Maxwell operates on a principle of inclusion, even when it is, by necessity, segregated. The naming of the town's leading black church, the "African Methodist Episcopal Church", suggests an erosion of theological difference (12). The white population of the town is religiously divided between Methodists and Episcopalians, whereas for Maxwell's African Americans, Christianity is unified by race and but not subject to a denominational divide. The name of the church also suggests Pan-Africanism in its privileging of the term "African" at the same time as it merges the theological positions of the Methodist and Episcopalian faiths.[33] If, then, Christianity in Colored Town operates on a principle of inclusion within the black community, the white religious revival is pointedly established in isolation from the rest of the town.

[33] In Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952), Haze Motes establishes the "Church without Christ", satirizing southern religious conventions. *Strange Fruit* engages with southern religious conventions, but in an inclusive rather than satirical style. *Wise Blood* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008 [1952]), 71.

The revival is held in a large, white tent, a construction that serves to contain a select group within an emblem of whiteness. The white revival tent, filled with white worshippers, and "white singing to Jesus" (3) is erected at a spatial, ideological and theological remove from Maxwell's black population. It is intended as a white monument to faith, in which people come together despite differences in class but within carefully defined racial and religious terms. The class dynamics within the tent are observed differently by white characters who have different investments in the revival. Alma Deen, concerned with the responsibility of wealthy whites to poor whites, implicitly understands the revival as a venue for class superiority. With more than a hint of condescension, she tells Laura: "It's a community project […] All of Maxwell has not had your opportunities. […] It is especially those poor mill people who need God" (66). Brother Dunwoodie is more concerned with the personal and financial success of his meeting than anything, and sees the class dynamic within the tent as an indicator of his own success:

> He was preaching this morning on Christian Stewardship, following it with two propositions slanted to appeal to the more solid portion of Maxwell's citizenry. For, however many mill people were converted, a revival could not be called a success in Maxwell until the prominent citizens, some of whom had drifted away from the church, were returned to the fold (248-9).

Dunwoodie appears more like a salesman or a political demagogue than a religious leader. He is clearly more concerned with making "the Lord's business"

a lucrative one (248). The revival tent stands as an emblem of white integrity and isolation. One of the means by which the revival promotes its message among the congregation is through religious singing. While this religious music is intended to affect Maxwell's white elite, sound cannot be segregated.

The sounds of the whole of the town of Maxwell travel indiscriminately to its most extreme point, the Anderson home at the edge of the swamp. For instance, that the clock of the town courthouse can be heard striking the hour incorporates the Andersons into Maxwell (41). The implication is that black characters are included within the symbolism of American justice and integrity but are resolutely situated on the periphery. Similarly, the sounds of "White Town" permeate the barrier between the races in a manner that undermines their separateness. Nonnie, standing at the gate, becomes incidentally involved in what is intended as an entirely white social interaction: "Across the town came the singing. A white singing to Jesus. An August singing of lost souls. A God-moaning. August is the time folks give up their sins. August is a time of trouble" (3). "August" here has multiple meanings. As an adjective, it evokes the seriousness of southern Protestantism while also echoing the narrative's temporal setting in the month of August, when the southern climate is most overbearing and oppressive. The religious singing permeates the town, and is present throughout the events of the plot. The singing, which represents the failure of separating the town's white and black populations, contributes to the structure of the text. Although this "white singing" is presented as exclusionary, it is uninhibited by the symbolic barriers of segregation. It is accessible even to those it attempts to exclude.

Just as music refuses to abide by the town's division, so does silence: "The town was quiet now. White Town. Colored Town. And Nonnie standing there at the gate had not heard the preacher's words. But her mind was full of revival sounds as after a fire bits of ash float for a long time through the air" (132). Religion is racialized. The singing is given a racial identity, a property alien to something as ephemeral and bodiless. The potential for singing to permeate the barriers of race travels in both directions. Laura listens to black music in her home, just as Nonnie experiences white music in hers: "Sometimes across town you'd hear the colored folks singing, and the slow rise and fall of it would be as sweet to your ears as Mamie's slow deep breathing used to be when you lay against her soft breath" (246). Sound, a sensory experience beyond the remit of segregation, is incompatible with the revival's exclusionary methods. Religious music is an experience shared by southerners on either side of the colour line: "you could fill in the words you couldn't hear. Anybody born in Georgia could fill in the words" (125).

The black population of the town, exemplified by Nonnie, is unintentionally incorporated into the revival. In some cases this incorporation can take the form of voyeurism. Ed, the black character who feels most divorced from the conventions of life in Maxwell because he has experienced city life elsewhere, has a fascination with the revival that develops from his antagonism to the town's white population:

> Eddie watched the meeting. Night after night he came and watched the meeting. As you'd see the boys around town watch the screened box at Rainey's market, where sometimes there'd be a captured coon, or a rattler

> coiled in a corner, or some rabbits. You'd stand there and watch the animal, maybe feed it something. Maybe just watch. Not thinking much. Not feeling much (215).

In this metaphor, Ed's perception of Maxwell's whites is alternately as a threat (a rattlesnake), benign (a rabbit), or restrictive (the double meaning of the word "coon" suggests Ed's entrapment by the town's racist order). The phrase "captured coon" resonates with coon's double meaning as an abbreviation of racoon and as a derogatory term for a black person. The "captured coon" in this extended metaphor anticipates the eventual capture and murder of Henry later in the novel and, when coupled with the image of the snake coiled in readiness to attack, suggests the nascent lynch mob present at the revival meeting. The combination of the second person pronoun "you" and the conditional tense, as in "you'd", in this passage extends the act of voyeurism beyond Ed's experience of the revival meeting. By using the second-person pronoun, Smith also implicates her imagined reader within the disinterested spectatorship of the captured animal.

The compulsive way in which Ed watches the revival meeting, "night after night" suggests a curiosity, bordering on fascination, with white Maxwell. Ed finds himself at turns affected by the community atmosphere of the meeting and indifferent to it:

> And sometimes Ed didn't feel, didn't think, then sometimes he felt what he believed the white folks were feeling. Or most of them. Sometimes you felt against your mind. Against all you knew. Against all you believed. Yet, there it was (215-6).

Ed is emotionally involved in the revival against his will and against the apparent segregation of the revival's congregation. Ed's emotional response runs contrary to his rational distaste for the revival – "against [his] mind" – however it is inevitable. Ed's experience of the revival shows the colour line to be unavoidably permeable both to those, like Brother Dunwoodie, who want to maintain a racially integral religious congregation and to Ed, who desperately wants to remove himself from the confines of Maxwell and its racial order.

There is at least one member of the congregation unwilling to remain complicit in Dunwoodie's lectures. After Tracy's murder, Dunwoodie delivers a sermon in which he exploits the town's fear.[34] For the most part, the congregation raucously appreciates the speech. Despite the favourable consensus, Smith presents a single character who resists Dunwoodie's manipulation:

> Mrs. Henderson laid down her hymnbook and gathered up her gloves. It was only her civic sense of duty that had made her attend the revival services. This, tonight, was too much. She smoothed down her Episcopalian bosom and walked out into the night (309).

Mrs. Henderson refuses to be complicit in this display of demaguogery. Her protest signifies a refusal to imply consent by her continued presence. She is compelled to participate in the revival due to a "civic sense of duty" toward the

[34] Sterling Fishman's definition of demagogue focuses on a politician's ability to influence his constituency, by proposing a "popular crisis of psychology", inventing a scapegoat to blame, and finally, insinuating himself as the remedy for that crisis. Dunwoodie's manipulation of the townspeople certainly identifies him as a religious demagogue. Sterling Fishman, "The Rise of Hitler as a Beer Hall Orator." *Review of Politics* XXVI (April 1964), 250-52.

town's collective social rituals, despite the fact that her Episcopalian faith marks her as already ideologically opposed to the Methodist revival.[35] As she leaves in protest, she is mocked by the preacher and the congregants: "'For some,' Brother Dunwoodie spoke at last, slowly, 'the Gospel of Jesus is too strong meat for their po' sick souls to stummick'. Mill folks tittered, and two girls stood, the better to see her as the lady went, a little rapidly now out of the door" (310). Dunwoodie maintains authority over his congregation by expanding his rhetoric to include scorn for those who find him unconvincing. Moreover, he increases the level to which his audience are attracted to his rhetoric by indulging their desire to humiliate one of their number. Through the figure of Mrs. Henderson, Smith presents a model of Christian protest against segregation. By presenting a character willing to suffer scorn for maintaining moral principles, Smith shows how the rhetoric of demagogues can be manipulative and compelling but also how it may be resisted.

In Smith's depiction of the revival tent, an apparently exclusionary space is shown to contain the seeds of protest and resistance within it. Smith suggests that the segregated institutions of the South inevitably incorporate all southerners. Nonnie and Ed's experience of the revival indicates its failure as a model for segregation. In the figure of Mrs. Henderson, Smith reduces the space of resistance to an individual subject. The smallest physical space in the town, the individual person, is the site Smith develops to promote an aesthetic of empathy with the individual residents of Maxwell. Through this aesthetic of

[35] Strict adherence to Christian teaching has already been marked out as antithetical to the ideology of the town, despite Dunwoodie's revival, earlier in the novel when atheist Prentiss Reed quips "If you practiced the teachings of that man Jesus here in Maxwell, we'd think you were crazy" (46). The revival's denomination is alluded to when Dunwoodie tells Tracy that he worked with his grandfather: "Everybody knew Grandpa, everybody who was a Methodist – and that meant half of Georgia" (83).

empathy, Smith incorporates an imagined reader into her desegregationist project.

The (Inter-)Personal Pronoun

Although *Strange Fruit* is ostensibly a third-person narrative, the second-person singular personal pronoun, "you", is deployed liberally throughout. It typically acts as a conversational replacement for the more formal third-person, gender neutral personal pronoun "one." However, the function of this pronoun in *Strange Fruit* is purposefully ambiguous. As well as signifying the thoughts of an individual character, it addresses the novel's imagined readership directly. Consistently, the pronoun is used to trouble ideas of regional and racial separation and to invoke a public space for the novel's political concerns. Scott Romine describes Smith's *Killers of the Dream*'s as a "rubric of the Southern Sociological autobiography, a genre that places the autobiographical 'I' in a certain varying relation to 'the South' as a dual act of self-expression and social commentary."[36] Where *Killers of the Dream* deploys the first-person singular pronoun to simultaneously express and comment, *Strange Fruit* deploys "you" to express a wide range of characters while contributing to Smith's wider desegregationist social commentary.

In her foreword to the 1961 reissue of *Killers of the Dream*, Smith describes the text in terms that solidify this conflation of personal and public experience: "this is personal memoir, in one sense; in another sense, it is Every Southerner's memoir."[37] *Strange Fruit* challenges the southern exceptionalism

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[36] Scott Romine, "Framing Southern Rhetoric: Lillian Smith's Narrative Persona in *Killers of the Dream*." *South Atlantic Review* 59:2, (May 1994), 95.
[37] Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream; Revised and Enlarged* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963 [1949 & 1961]), 11. Emphasis in original.

that marks the South as the nation's problem region in contrast to the cosmopolitan North. Writing in the program for the novel's Broadway adaptation, Smith explicitly expands the harmfully divisive racial system of the segregated southern town to the rest of the United States:

> It may be that these characters have a lot of kinfolks up North… Or it may be that Maxwell is not just the town in Georgia they came from but every place on earth where there are walls, rough and jagged or smooth and invisible, which shut human beings away from each other and from a world in which they should feel at home.[38]

Here, Maxwell is clearly figured as a synecdoche for any number of places built on the premise of segregation in any guise. While Smith extends the metaphor to "every place on earth", her primary example is with segregation's "kinfolks up North." Given that the play was performed, and therefore the programme read, in New York City, her readership in this case is clear. The novel could be read in any part of the country; the play is specifically sited in the North. This means that Smith is addressing a northern audience in this piece of writing.

In the novel, lynching is described, through Laura, as a disturbing but undeniable fact of southern community: "her mind knew that this is what happens down here in our South sometimes. This is what happens. And she had wondered which of the boys and men she knew belonged to the Ku Klux Klan... which ones of them would take part in a manhunt" (325). The statement that "this is what happens" and the first-person plural pronoun "our" function

[38] Theatrical Programme, "Maxwell Georgia", p. 4. Lillian Smith Papers.

together to include an imagined reader in the narrative of southern racial violence. The pronoun "our" is expansive in this usage. It incorporates, or implicates, a community external to the South within the social structures that facilitate racial violence within the region. Smith troubles the conception of the South, discussed later by Leigh Anne Duck, as "an effective container for the nation's disavowed antiliberalism."[39] Smith removes the geographical distance between the reader and the southern town in order to prevent the deferring of responsibility.

In discussing the intersection of space and temporality in the novel, Duck reads the novel as persisting in a view of the South as a temporally backward cultural space while it also erodes the symbolic spatial barriers of the region: "Disputing the idea of absolute cultural barriers between the U.S. South and other spaces, *Strange Fruit* nonetheless insists on the experience of temporal distance in shaping one's responses to others and even one's sense of self."[40] For Duck, Smith represents an alternative means of addressing her region in her writing. Smith's novel evokes a "provincial cosmopolitanism" which constitutes "more limited, varying, and contingent forms of local affiliation, including the ways in which people in nonmetropolitan areas may be nonetheless interested in or attached to diverse broader social networks."[41] Smith's adaptation of the second-person voice serves to play with distance. While the temporal remove that Duck describes contributes to self-reflection, the linguistic move of the second-person voice applies an empathetic impulse to that self-reflection. By simultaneously expressing a third-person and a second-person narrative voice,

[39] Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 7.
[40] Ibid, 196.
[41] Ibid, 177.

Smith develops a framework of inclusion that implicitly critiques the myth of personal and social integrity upon which segregation is founded.

For example, Nonnie's feelings about her pregnancy (3), Ed's conflicted feelings about returning home (8), and his feelings of grief at the passing of his mother (10) are all rendered through the second-person voice. Pregnancy, grief, and ambivalent feelings about one's home are not racialized experiences. By using these prisms to present her African American characters, Smith removes racial difference as an obstacle to empathy. Emotion is presented as shared and as failing to abide by a colour. The experiences of the town's wealthy white population, such as Alma's menopause (71), Tracy's memory of military service (48), and Laura's growing awareness of her own sexuality (241), also implicate an imagined reader within Maxwell's white community. This act of inclusion serves to create an imaginative space for cross-racial identification. In response to Tracy's murder, the use of this technique implicates an imagined reader both within a process of community grieving and, again, erases the distance that a non-southern reader might experience with regards to the segregated South in the 1940s. Laura's grief and her regret that she and Tracy were not closer is rendered in the second-person in order to encourage empathy (190-1). Tracy's murder causes Tom Harris to consider his own children and whether or not his parenting has been effective in keeping them safe: "Tom sighed. It made you wonder about your own boys. Wonder if you had done as well by them as you might" (301). This sentence begins by identifying Tom in the third person. Immediately, however, the voice shifts to the second. The subject of these sentences begins as the fictional Tom Harris before shifting to address an anxious parent. By

representing feelings of parental responsibility, Smith extends moral culpability for Tracy's death.

Although examples proliferate, a scene in which Tracy recalls combat in France during the First World War is characteristic of the manner in which Smith's "you" transcends the divide between the personal and the public. Tracy's fellow soldier, an idealist from New Jersey, anticipates an egalitarian America after the war:

> That sounds good, you [Tracy] said, but you [the New Jersey native] don't know the South, you don't understand us. We'd never let the Negro into that world and I'm not so sure you up in Newark would either. We'd never let the Jews in, a Swede from Chicago said, not in my town. We'd never let the Japs and Chinks in, somebody from California yelled (49).

This passage suggests a standard of bigotry across the United States, even though the groups excluded differ from region to region. The absence of quotation marks and the manner by which the dialogue runs together formally suggest a blurring of regionalism as a container for racism. The passage constructs an American psychology of exclusion throughout the nation and not only in the South. The first sentence's ambiguous inclusion of the word "you" both implicates the reader in Tracy's thoughts and accuses the same reader of ignorance over the southern racial dilemma. The supposed "you" is simultaneously included as a southerner and as a northerner in the same sentence. The implication is that a reader of *Strange Fruit* is asked to exercise empathy with a diverse range of characters, regardless of the contexts of region or race. Linguistically, this

suggests a didacticism that makes use of the novelistic narrative form to promote empathy for southerners living under segregation. The conflation of persons (and of reader and fictive subject) is evident in the novel's depictions of racial and sexual violence. The disturbing consequences of the system of southern apartheid are also represented such that the reader is implicated by their inaction in efforts to dismantle such systems. This situates the novel's formal strategies within a paradigm of empathy that encourages the imagined reader to consider the agenda expressed in Smith's narrative style.

While critical attention to the novel's formal strategies has tended to be lacking, Judith Giblin James asserts that:

> [The novel] develops a complex philosophy of social and psychological determinism through subtle and adroitly managed narrative techniques – particularly the use of close third-person narration to produce an effectively controlled stream of consciousness for the principal characters.[42]

What James describes as "tightly controlled", I would describe as mediated: the narrative voices of these primary characters are inflected and manipulated by a third-person narrator using the techniques I have described. This mediation both mirrors the coercive nature of the southern town and encourages resistance to segregation.

As well as appealing to commonly shared experiences, Smith's use of "you" also implicates her reader in some characters' horrific behaviour. When

[42] Judith Giblin James, "Carson McCullers, Lillian Smith, and the Politics of Broadway," in *Southern Women Playwrights: New Essays in Literary History and Criticism*, ed. Robert L. McDonald and Linda Rohrer Paige (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 46.

Tracy visits Nonnie to unburden his own conscience and to deliver money in exchange for her silence, he arrives in a drunken state. He drinks heavily in advance to psychologically distance himself from the implications of his behaviour (196). Tracy tries to ignore his romantic history with Nonnie and to dissociate himself from his affection for her by referring to her as “nigger” (197). Tracy defers his sense of responsibility both his own personal life and his place in infrastructures of inequality. Tellingly, while he is preparing to confront Nonnie and evade responsibility for his unborn child, “Maxwell was on his side” (184). Rather than a transgression of personal and social responsibility, Tracy’s decision to hide his indiscretion signifies conformity to the social expectations of white Maxwell. Bolstered by the consensus of the town’s white elite, which includes his mother and Preacher Dunwoodie, he succeeds in altering his perception of Nonnie, dehumanising her and allowing himself to think of her in terms of property and ownership while still maintaining a belief in the genuine nature of his romantic feelings for her: “You’re mine – even if you’re just a little nigger, you’re mine and I love every inch of you” (198).

Ultimately, Tracy’s dehumanisation of his lover – and his drunkenness – emboldens him to sexually assault Nonnie. The description of the attempted rape is presented as though Tracy is having an out-of-body experience: “He saw somebody pulling at her dress, fumbling with buttons, tearing it from her shoulders” (198). Tracy is able to avoid responsibility by deferring agency and action onto another person, the “somebody” he apparently witnesses assaulting Nonnie. Tracy convinces himself that not only is he not the person assaulting Nonnie but that he is also morally vindicated by imagining that he is resisting the actions of the aggressor:

> Saw somebody tearing her blouse off, tearing her skirt off, pulling at cloth until there was nothing between his hands and her body. He saw a man – couldn't see much, couldn't see much – a man above her, saw him press her down against the floor - don't do that! – saw him press her body hard – saw him try and fail, try and fail, try and fail… (198)

Tracy reassures himself of his innocence by claiming that his vision is impaired ("couldn't see much, couldn't see much") and by silently ordering the "man" to desist ("don't do that!"). In this instance, Tracy is a parody of Americans who nominally advocate racial equality while remaining complicit in national structures of white supremacy. Tracy, the person completely responsible for this assault, allows himself to believe in his own innocence. By presenting this scene in the second person, Smith makes responsibility more difficult to evade for her reader.

The scene culminates with Tracy's realisation of his own culpability. Tracy performs remorse over his brutal acts while remaining at a psychological distance from his actions. He hears: "a deep harsh cry – she's crying – no, it's you crying – it's you – you couldn't – you – couldn't – couldn't ... you couldn't – you couldn't – you couldn't –" (198-9). The abundance of dashes and ellipses in this passage denotes psychological turmoil. Here, Tracy's sense of self is dislocated in an extension of Smith's use of the second-person device.

In counterpoint to this description of white male heterosexuality, Smith also uses "you" to imagine a black male fascination with white women from the point of view of Ed:

> You'd always wanted to know a white girl. You knew their brothers, you'd played with them as kids, sometimes gone fishing. But you never knew a white girl. You'd have to be a house boy, or cook or gardener, to know a nice white girl in Maxwell. And even to know the whores in the hotels you'd better be a bellboy (216).

The separation of the races and the sexes are interconnected phenomena. Ed is, as a child, allowed to interact with white boys his own age but only for activities appropriate to age and gender such as fishing. In later life, a black man's freedom to interact with white women is dependent entirely on menial employment. Women, too, are divided along lines of social position. "Nice" girls in Maxwell are wealthy enough for their families to employ a number of servants; prostitutes on the other hand must suffer the indignity of sharing servants, the bellboys who serve all of a hotel's inhabitants. The word "know" takes on a sexual as well as social implication in this passage. Wanting to "know" a white woman, both in the biblical, sexual sense and the platonic one is prohibited, equally, by Ed's race and gender. By creating a space of empathy between Ed's cross-racial desire and an imagined reader, Smith undermines common stereotypes of sexually voracious and predatory black men.

"You" also creates empathy in Smith's depiction of Laura's lesbian desire for her friend Jane. Alma's description of lesbians is vehement in its disgust and rigid in its enactment of sexual normativity: "Now Mother lowered her voice: 'There're women who are – unnatural. They're like vultures – women like that.' Mother's face had grown stony. 'They do – terrible things to young

girls' (243)." The word "Mother" operates, in this passage in a manner comparable to the expansion of the second person elsewhere. By designating Alma as "Mother" the text directly invokes Laura's subject position by using a term that denotes their personal relationship. The capitalisation of "Mother" functions on at least two levels. As her name – which recalls the phrase *Alma Mater* – suggests, Alma's position of matriarch in the Anderson family is total. She is not only the family's primary breadwinner but she is also the family's most powerful person. Secondly, Alma's maternity is expanded by the capitalisation of "Mother" to become an emblem of (domineering) motherhood. The word also works as a synecdoche, as Laura's 'mother' symbolises the idea of 'Mother', making Alma a symbol for matriarchy. By articulating an archetypal lesbian relationship that is inherently predatory, Alma suggests homosexuality is intrinsically exploitative, especially toward vulnerable "young" women. By focalising this scene through Laura's perspective, Smith again places an imagined reader within an empathetic relationship with a character who is being repressed.

Laura's developing understanding of her own sexuality is described using the second-person personal pronoun in order to create understanding of the paradoxical normalness of her queerness. This suggests the turmoil that her sexual identity causes: "Laura moved restlessly. Lying awake, like this, did your feelings no good" (241). Yet her friendship with Jane highlights the ways in which Laura's particular experience of romantic feelings coincides with more typical narratives of falling in love as well as highlighting the huge personal significance of Jane to Laura, as a kindred spirit within the confines of claustrophobic Maxwell: "There was so much you could say to Jane that you had

never been able to say to anyone" (243) Laura's intellectual relationship with Jane is figured as itself an unusual experience in Maxwell.[43] The pair is marked as different for their artistic and intellectual tendencies, as well as Laura's representation as different due to her sexual attraction to Jane. This suggests that race is by no means the only criterion for exclusion in the social order of Maxwell. Nonetheless, Laura's difference, articulated both by her artistic pursuits and her sexuality, also intersects with her racial politics. Laura is more likely to oppose Maxwell's racism, as when she visits Tom Harris in an effort to protect Henry from lynching (295). By shifting focalisation, Smith undertakes a clear exposition of the problem of lynching from the perspectives of two white southern liberals. Where Smith creates empathy with racially liberal positions, she also explores the exploitative use of the direct address.

Smith also shows how the same empathetic technique she uses in *Strange Fruit* can be manipulated by demagogues. Brother Dunwoodie's sermon following the murder of Tracy is a case in point. In the wake of white Maxwell's discovery of Tracy's body, but before the lynching of innocent Henry, the religious revival meets for a last time. This meeting, however, is markedly different: "There would be no singing service tonight" (307). The tension arising from Tracy's murder and leading up to Henry's suspends the town's social rituals and temporarily disrupts the permeability of racial barriers that the singing services had heretofore represented. Brother Dunwoodie's sermon makes use of recent events to further compel his congregation into contributing financially. At this point the narrative shifts into a free-indirect association with the preacher and confuses the barrier between direct and indirect speech (307). As the sermon

[43] A passage from Laura's internal monologue suggests the intellectual satisfaction garnered from her friendship with Jane: "And you knew you could talk to Jane, you could tell her about your sculpture and your verses, about your fears and your feelings" (246).

becomes more aggressive, Dunwoodie exploits the anxieties of Maxwell's white parents:

> 'Oh, my friends... my heart is bleeding for the unsaved of this town...
>
> 'You wives... where are your husbands...?
>
> 'You mothers... where are your boys...?
>
> 'Where were they last night, and the night before... and the night before? Do you know?'
>
> His despairing eyes plunged into the white faces straining up toward him (308, ellipses in original).

Dunwoodie feigns personal attachment ("my heart is bleeding") before accusing the women of the town of ignorance regarding their own families. By continuing to move the parameters of what constitutes sufficient knowledge ("last night, and the night before...and the night before"), Dunwoodie makes it more difficult for mothers to be completely certain that their sons are safe and morally secure. The mass of "white faces" into which Dunwoodie speaks suggests a unified community, drawn together by race, their faith in his rhetoric, and a shared obligation to their children: "You Christian mothers would go down into hell to save your boys' souls. Wouldn't you?" (308). It is at this point in the sermon that Mrs. Henderson takes her leave.

While Smith has shown the degree to which the creation of empathy can be manipulated by demagogues, she simultaneously proposes a means of resisting that coercion. Dunwoodie's rhetorical techniques are superficially similar to Smith's, but Smith is careful to contrast the ways rhetoric can be co-

opted for different agendas. Although Smith describes sites in Maxwell with the potential to facilitate resistance, at the novel's close, the town's segregation remains intact and unthreatened. While this return to relative harmony appears to suggest the impossibility of change, Smith's narrative temporality provides the space for change in the future.

Smith ends the novel with a series of vignettes that represent the town of Maxwell in repose. These vignettes show the population of the town accommodating the emotional trauma of the murders of Tracy and Henry. Notably, only characters who remain within the confines of the town at the novel's end are represented here; Ed, who has escaped to the North, leaves unobserved by the omniscient narrator. Residents at virtually all points on the town's racial and social spectra are examined in repose. The narration observes each character or family at face value, continuing the novel's theme of the tension between surface and subtext. Temporarily troubled, the façade of stability recovers. The two deaths threatening the stability of the town's identity effectively cancel each other out and balance is restored. Ed's murder of Tracy results from his psychological removal from the ideological confines of the town. As an effective outsider, Ed is unable to stomach the social and sexual conventions of the town that Tracy exploited in his relationship with Nonnie. Henry's lynching serves to re-instate the racial and economic security of the town's poor white population. Henry's death acts as a pressure valve for the white community's racial tensions and allows the town's industries to maintain their captive and subservient black labour force. The town has experienced, to borrow Richard Slotkin's term for the settling of the West, "regeneration through

violence."[44] In the southern context, generative violence strengthens the power of white men, for, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown observes, "Southern males sometimes believed that a little home violence went a long way to ensure loyalty and inspire healthy respect. If it worked with blacks, it surely would help with meddlesome women."[45] W. Fitzhugh Brundage has interpreted this white male violence as upholding what he terms "community honor."[46] As these historical perspectives suggest, violence in Maxwell shores up the town's segregated social order and buttresses wealthy white men's position at the top of that order.

Where the novel's opening narration establishes Nonnie's role in the community through an almost Cubist portrait of how she is perceived by the town's residents, Smith's closing narration mirrors this technique by creating a series of static images of the town as it would like to be seen. However, the symmetry of the novel's opening and closing is disturbed. While the opening description of Nonnie presents a composite image of the perception of the character by the town at large, the closing images combine to present a composite image of the town itself. The latter is undermined by readerly knowledge of its secrets, so that an imagined reader progresses from being informed by the town to an understanding of how Maxwell works.

This series of vignettes begins with the architects of Henry's murder. The lynching party is described returning home: "As night fell, Bill Talley and Dee and the others went to their homes back in the county or to the sawmill and Ellatown" (346). The lynching party is marked, through the town's geography, as

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[44] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 5.
[45] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 283.
[46] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 52.

belonging to a poor and working-class population. These white men are agricultural and industrial workers and their return home signals the re-inscription of the town's economic system. Talley's return is a performance of superiority and inferiority as well as the most acute example in these closing portraits of the division between the town's surface identity and the submerged truth of events. Talley, who has clearly been central to the lynching, feigns ignorance to his black servant Lias: "'Well, Lias,' Bill said, 'I heard they burned a nigger over to town today,' voice mighty casual'" (346). Talley intimidates Lias while simultaneously performing his innocence. Lias, in turn, performs the role of a dedicated and submissive servant, even while his actions indicate an underlying unease or anger: "Lias's hand fumbled for the bridle" (346). While Talley is threatening his employee in a "mighty casual" way, Dee listens to the exchange and laughs twice (347). Talley's innocence is, to Lias, as clearly a performance as Lias' nonchalance is to Bill and Dee. Bill's pretence at ignorance is facilitated by Dee's laughter: through Dee's subtle indication of his own part in the lynching, Talley is able to simultaneously protest his innocence and exhibit his guilt. The underlying threat in Talley's behaviour is understood by Lias as a means of ensuring a stable black workforce for Talley's cotton crop:

> 'Well,' said Bill, 'Reckon we better get to pickin, a Monday.'
>
> 'Yessuh, Boss.'
>
> 'Reckon you can round up plenty hands, don't you? Won't be no trouble about gittin plenty?'
>
> 'Nossuh, Boss. Can get all we can use, yassah.'
>
> Dee laughed, walked away (347).

This ostensibly simple exchange between a white landowner and the black manservant seeing to his horses is, typically in *Strange Fruit*, laden with meaningful subtext. While the lynching itself is not described in the text, its aftermath is shown in the relationship between an employer and his labour. Beyond the heinous act, the lynching works as a boon to Maxwell's structure of segregation. For Bill Talley, the lynching of Henry has served its proper function. His previously waning pool of labour has been intimidated. The return to this relationship between employer and employees marks a re-inscription of the South's coercive agricultural system.

The other branches of Maxwell's social infrastructure are shown to return to a state of normality. In the Echols family, poor white employees at the lumber mill, the proliferation of cheap black labour threatens their ability to earn a living wage: "Willie's all time talkin bout organizin. I tell him he's wastin his breath. All Tom Harris ud do would be to turn him off and hire a nigger in his place" (351). Simultaneously, the lynching is celebrated for maintaining the order of white supremacy: "It was a sight that nigger! Swingin there. Got what he deserved. What every one of em deserve" (352). While the Echols family recognises the importance of organised labour in gaining greater financial security for themselves, they subscribe to the racial structures that enable their own exploitation.

Despite his "radical" politics, Prentiss Reid is shown preparing another diluted issue of his local newspaper even in the aftermath of a lynching. Although Reid is perturbed by the lynching, he refuses to change his practice of accommodating white supremacy: "*The Maxwell Press* aims to please" (367).

Brother Dunwoodie is concerned only with the potential impact of “this trouble” on the success of his revival (358). While Sam is clearly disturbed by the events of the preceding days, he is shown working in his medical practice as usual (358-9).

After the individuals and families of the town are visited in their homes, the narrative adopts a broader perspective and examines the town as a whole, exploring the integral typology of the town after having examined a range of its component offices. In a manner that recalls my reading of Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life* in the introduction to this thesis, Smith blends the people and places of Maxwell to offer an image of their collective will. The town is presented using pathetic fallacy: “and after a time Maxwell Georgia slept. As still as only the weary can be, it lay – splotched dark against flat stretches of cotton; tied to them by roads which wound their white threads through cotton fields, past black pinelands, around ponds, under great oaks, on, on, on, in the night” (368). The town’s deep sleep suggests peace. The town and surrounding rural areas are presented as either black or white. The whiteness of the cotton and blackness of the pine are fundamentally connected. Although this image seems to support the premise that the town’s corrupted order will remain unchanged, there is some doubt: “Covered by darkness, Maxwell slept … in tired peace” (368). Although the sleep described is deep, the town’s peace is “tired.” The town in repose suggests that the “weary” system of segregation might in the future come to an end. Smith’s choice to set the novel some twenty years before its date of publication can be read in this light to indicate the possibility for change in the present of the 1940s. While change might be for good or bad, the novel’s temporality can be interpreted as optimistic and, writing more than a decade

later, Smith would be in a position to assert that “Men have dreamed, for thousands of years, of a time when all people would be accepted as persons; […] That age has now come. We have all we need to make it a reality for the earth’s people.”[47] Smith’s optimism in the wake of the decision in *Brown v. Board* (1954) is anticipated by *Strange Fruit*.

Following this series of vignettes, the narrative shifts to consider the Anderson sisters. As another day’s work begins for them, the rhythms of the town return to normal: “Everything would be the same – as it always was” (371). This sentiment of a lack of change is at odds with other images in this closing scene. Dessie arrives at the Anderson house with her clothes covered in dirt. At Bess’ instruction, she washes her skirt before going to work: “‘I’d wash *good* if I were you. It’ll make you feel better.’ Dessie washed good” (370). This is an image of cleansing and of renewal. While Maxwell has, for the moment, returned to its old system, the implication is that southerners like Dessie, Bess, and Nonnie are working to improve their lives. The novel’s very last image is of Dessie, the youngest of the three women, crossing the threshold of the Anderson house: “Dessie stumbled on the rickety steps, righted herself, came running down the path. She had gone back for her hat. It was perched on the side of her head, three roses bobbing up and down as she walked, breasts bobbing up and down in soft unison” (371). The path to the Anderson home, which has represented Nonnie’s indecision, is now being navigated by a younger generation of black southerners. The three roses on Dessie’s hat echo the three women depicted in this final scene. That the novel closes with an image of Dessie’s body, active and in motion, reads as an indicator of hope in positive future change.

[47] Lillian Smith, *Now is the Time*, 73.

Providing a broad panorama of the offices that underpin the typology of fictional southern town, *Strange Fruit* establishes a paradigm for understanding a body of fiction that uses the setting of the southern town as a tool for exploring racial segregation. Narrative techniques that incorporate the diverse voices of the people of Maxwell coincide throughout with scenes that represent the crucial spaces of the typical southern town. As a result, Maxwell is navigable: its landmarks are positioned in relation to one another and an imagined reader is invited to participate in the social life of a southern town. To the same degree that Smith provides a thorough overview of the workings of the fictional town, Byron Herbert Reece, whose novel *The Hawk and the Sun* (1955) is the subject of the next chapter, offers a town that is built upon a framework of symbolism. The offices of Reece's town of Tilden, particularly church, banking, and education, can all be read as symbolic rather than as the type of figuratively "typical" institutions that Smith imagines in *Strange Fruit*.

CHAPTER 2

The Man in the Centre and the Man at the Edge: Byron Herbert Reece's Tilden

Driving along U.S. Route 19 between the Neel's Gap mountain pass and the small north Georgia town of Blairsville, a traveller would pass through a stretch of road that in 2005, was named the Byron Herbert Reece Memorial Highway.[1] Reaching Blairsville, the same traveller could visit Reece's home on his farm nearby, which has been made a state heritage site, to walk a trail through the beautiful surroundings and purchase Appalachian crafts in the gift shop.[2] Despite this evidence suggesting that the novelist and poet is remembered as an icon of northern Georgia's cultural heritage, Reece has had little place in southern literary studies, with literary critics rarely turning to him as a significant southern novelist. The main image that has so far formed of Reece is that of a rustic mountain-bard, whose writing is somehow 'authentically' simple. However, by reading Reece's exploration of racial segregation through a typology of the southern town, an image emerges of an author who is both experimental and engaged with contemporary racial politics. Reece's second novel, *The Hawk and the Sun* (1955), is a complex indictment of racial violence in the life of the fictional town of Tilden, Georgia, on the day in which the white community bands together to lynch the town's last African American resident.

Regional memory of Reece is conflated with tired stereotypes of 'traditional' southern Appalachia, as in Tom DeTitta's play *The Reach of Song:*

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[1] Ken Stanford, "Byron Herbert Reece Highway Dedication," *Access North Georgia*, August 22, 2005, accessed June 5, 2014, http://www.accessnorthga.com/detail.php?n=128071

[2] The Byron Herbert Reece Society, accessed June 5, 2014, http://byronherbertreecesociety.wordpress.com/farm-2/

An Appalachian Drama (1990). Billed as "Georgia's state historical drama," the play suggests a state-level sanctioning of its image of Reece.[3] The play represents southern Appalachia in the middle of the twentieth century as a rural space reluctantly undergoing a transition into modernity. Reece serves as the play's "ghost narrator," and observes the rural community.[4] The characters, all of whom are contemporaries of Reece, remember him nostalgically:

> Byron Herbert Reece could best tell the story of our mountains. His words hold the truth of yesteryear; his life was our lives, too, growing up on a farm in the shadows of Blood Mountain, and going through so many of the changes that we all faced. But what made him different started with him standing and watching, noticing – seeing the spirit into every little thing he came upon.[5]

This speech, spoken by a character named Nell, unironically catalogues a number of clichés of southern Appalachia, all of which are refracted through Reece and his work as a poet. DeTitta privileges oral storytelling as an almost sacred art form by asserting that Reece's words "hold the truth" of the region's history. Reece is figured as an extension of the landscape, which itself is made sacred by the character Reece who "see[s] the spirit into" it. The play consistently portrays Reece as a romanticised figure almost indistinguishable from the equally romanticised region. As DeTitta's Reece says: "A man's got to be married to

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[3] Jim Clark, "A Kindred Spirit Moving: The Rural Ethos of Byron Herbert Reece, Wendell Berry, and James Agee," *Black Earth and Ivory Tower: New American Essays from Farm and Classroom*, ed. Zachary Michael Jack (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 157.
[4] Tom DeTitta, *The Reach of Song: An Appalachian Drama* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1990), 29.
[5] Ibid, 21.

something in this life, and I suppose I am married – to farming and writing."[6] 'Marrying' Reece to southern Appalachia holds his career in suspended animation; his work cannot be read as innovative or probing so long as it is only as a signifier of a lost past.

Close textual analysis of Reece's under-read novel *The Hawk and the Sun* suggests a much more complex author, committed to critiquing racial violence through the medium of a heavily symbolic literary style. In particular, the novel depicts the life of a town as it collectively acts to commit a lynching. Some time prior to the events of the novel, a white woman from Tilden, Hester McCracken, has given birth to a mixed-race child. The white community of the town demands that the father of the child come forward. When the child's father, whose identity is never disclosed in the narrative, does not make himself known, the white residents of Tilden begin to terrorise the town's black population. Eventually all but one member of the black community leave the town forever in what becomes known as the "Exodus", cursing Tilden as they do.[7] Dandelion is prevented by a disability from leaving with the others, remaining an uneasy neighbour of the rest of white supremacist Tilden.

On the day in which the novel is set, Dandelion encounters a white woman, Miss Ella, while she is suffering a psychotic episode in her home. He fears for his life when he is seen leaving the house by one of Ella's neighbours who disseminates the rumour that Dandelion has raped Miss Ella. As the news spreads through the town, a group of white men, including a respectable farmer named Abraham, forms a mob to lynch Dandelion. The local history teacher, Professor Gaines, tries to prevent the murder by appealing to the town's most

[6] Ibid, 39.
[7] Byron Herbert Reece, *The Hawk and the Sun* (Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher Books, 1994 [1955]), 32. All further references to the novel will appear parenthetically.

respected figures, a banker and the reverend of the First Church of Tilden. Finding no help, the professor and his young son Farley, attempt to hide Dandelion from the mob. Another resident of the town, the hunter Nimrod Anse, refuses to join the mob, remaining outside the confines of the town. Farley, who has had sexual encounters with two other children, a girl named Rhoda and a boy named Jonathan, is morbidly intrigued by the prospect of the lynching. As the mob finds Dandelion and prepares to kill him, Abraham sees the error of his ways and refuses to participate, removing himself from the mob shortly before they kill Dandelion brutally and graphically. Farley's fascination turns to horror as witnessing the lynching impels him to comprehend the lack of any essential difference between the races.

After Dandelion's murder, the only non-white inhabitant of Tilden is McCracken's son Gin, known as Cracker to the whites of Tilden. He is a character who could be all too easily overlooked in a first or superficial reading of the novel because he is described as neither black nor white. Following the lynching of Dandelion, Tilden is racially integral and the final image of the novel – Abraham watching a hawk flying in the fading sunlight – suggests that a degree of insight might be afforded to the town's surviving residents in the aftermath. This final image gives the novel its title, although its original title, *Tents toward Sodom*, suggests a town infiltrated by 'evil.' Offering the alternative title at the request of his editors, Reece calls it an "accessory after the fact", facetiously alluding to his use of the imagery as a dénouement.[8]

The Hawk and the Sun tends to be read as an example of trends in southern literature at mid-century more often than it is explored at length on its

[8] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Louise Townsend Nicholl, 26 January 1955, box 12, folder 6. Byron Herbert Reece family papers. MS 3055. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.

own. For example, Nancy Tishler reads the novel as emblematic in writing about lynching and in her interpretation, Dandelion is figured as a "sacrificial hero,"[9] while Floyd Watkins describes the novel as one that "idealizes the Negro and condemns the white" in what he calls "racism" in southern fiction.[10] Watkins criticises what he sees as an imbalance in novels like *The Hawk and the Sun* that "depict a number of bad white people but no bad Negroes and no wrongs committed by Negroes at all."[11] In part, the novel's appearance in little more than overviews of southern fiction stems from a misconception at mid-century that Appalachia does not share the same problems with race as the rest of the South, as when James McBride Dabbs contends that "one would hardly expect a story of Southern Appalachia to be concerned with the civil rights movement; there are too few Negroes there."[12] On the contrary, Sharon Monteith interprets the novel as an example of a racial conscience in white southern fiction, with Reece, "making visible the ideology according to which lynching crimes could be ritualised as the white community's defense against a mythologised racial enemy within and allowed to go unpunished— though not forgotten."[13] Monteith delineates the novel as a story of how "the sole remaining black resident of a sleepy small town becomes the scapegoat for fears that pulse below the community's calm surface."[14] I expand on Monteith's reading of the novel here and the project of "making visible" the crime of lynching, by uncovering a

[9] Nancy Tishler, "The Negro in Modern Southern Fiction: From Stereotype to Archetype," *The Negro American Literature Forum* 2:1 (Spring 1968), 4.
[10] Floyd C. Watkins, *The Death of Art: Black and White in the Recent Southern Novel* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1970), 3, 1.
[11] Ibid, 28. Watkins also includes Carson McCullers' *Clock Without Hands* (1961) and William Faulkner's *The Reivers: A Reminiscence* (1962) within this category of "racist" fiction.
[12] James McBride Dabbs, *Civil Rights in Recent Southern Literature* (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1969), 79.
[13] Sharon Monteith, "Southern Fiction," in *A Companion to Twentieth-Century United States Fiction*, David Seed, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell-Wiley, 2009), 91.
[14] Ibid.

pattern of metaphors of sight and insight that Reece employs and to elaborate on how the community's collective anxieties result in the murder of Dandelion, by tracing how Tilden operates on the strict understanding of each individual's role in the town's social order.

I begin by outlining how Reece constructs his town through biological language, making Tilden symbolically analogous to a living body and signalling that Tilden is a space diseased by racial violence, in what I read as an implicit critique of southern segregation. The biological underpinnings of the town are supplemented by a symbolic framework in which Reece stages forces of insight and brightness (typified by the farmer Abraham), against those of imperception and darkness (embodied by the lynch mob). Finally, I argue that Mr. Gaines, the town's history teacher, represents the limitations of exploring racism through an entirely symbolic lens. Reece counterbalances his immersion in allusion and symbolism with this character, who eschews his inclination to understanding life as symbolic and allusive in favour of taking practical action to prevent the lynching.

Living (in) Tilden: The Town as Organism

The town of Tilden is represented as a complex organism with a number of social and economic regulatory systems and Reece imagines the shapes and movements of the town as functions of an organic body. In doing this, he represents segregation as akin to a physical threat. Reece's characters act as a body with a single will to uphold Tilden's white supremacist sensibilities. Reece uses biological imagery to depict a town that acts as one to repel Dandelion, who is figured in the extended metaphor of the body as a dangerous, infectious

irritant. Reece's use of organic language makes Tilden a community that perceives itself as "diseased" by the presence of Dandelion when it is really suffering from the effects of vicious rumour and mob violence.

The town is represented as an autonomous urban unit within a decidedly rural setting and its components work to facilitate its operation like the interconnected organs of a complex organism. While each of the towns I examine in this thesis is, to varying degrees, self-contained, Tilden is notable for being discrete and is not described in relation to other places in the South or the United States. The town's restrictive design and the containment of its population are more acute than in Smith's Maxwell, which is contained by the swamp. In Tilden, "There was little in the town to lure outsiders into it, but for all of that the inhabitants could think of no very good reason for leaving it" (19). The population is in "balance" and "remain[s] constant" (19).

The town's location in the Appalachian Mountains of north Georgia facilitates its isolation, because the geographical fact of the mountains limits the town spatially: "Behind Tilden mountains low and rounded rose on three sides. Not close, but like a distant irregular semicircular wall thrown up against invasion from the outside world" (19). The language of "invasion" suggests a town under siege, figuring it as isolated, embattled, and demanding protection in much the same way as contemporary segregationist rhetoric imagined the South as a region imperilled by outside threats. "Invasion" also suggests infection from outside sources and the mountainous landscape functions as the town's immune system. That the mountains are "thrown up" against invasion imbues the abstract town with agency and suggests that the town has engineered its own defences. Rather than the town standing as a human construction within nature, the

implication is that nature has been made to serve the collective purpose of the town's population. Ironically, the depiction of a "siege" within the novel occurs inside the limits of the town with the "invading" presence the town's white population, not outsiders.

In this structuring metaphor, Reece's Tilden is an integral, functioning organism, as is the disease that threatens it. There is a constant tension in the novel between Dandelion's being figured as a disease that threatens the white body of the town and the lynch mob being a malevolent organism threatening the moral structure of the town. It is significant that while Reece was writing the novel, his own body was under attack from a malevolent organism. In a letter to Elliott Macrae, president of his publisher, E.P. Dutton and Company, in July 1954, Reece asked for an advance to pay for tuberculosis treatment:

> I can see why you might be reluctant to invest more in the manuscript under the circumstance of my illness. The fact is, though, that the novel stands a better chance of coming to completion now than it ever did before. I can't do anything but write now. I can do that, though of course I must go slowly. I can't afford to break down any of the hard-earned healing that has taken place in my lung.[15]

Without wanting to overstate the effect of Reece's illness on the vocabulary of the body used in the novel, this passage, from a letter that would have been physically difficult to write, clearly indicates that sickness and the ability of a single component of an organism – in his own case, the lung – to endanger the

[15] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Elliot Macrae, July 26, 1954, box 12, folder 5. Byron Herbert Reece Family Papers. MS 3055. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

entire body was painfully resonant for Reece, as was the notion that a hostile organism (the mycobacterium tuberculosis) could invade and threaten the human body. The novel was written in part while Reece was resident in a sanatorium receiving treatment for tuberculosis and in this letter he is acutely aware of his own body's vulnerability. Reece would leave the sanatorium, against the wishes of his doctor, shortly after the writing of this letter. Four years later, he committed suicide when his symptoms returned more aggressively than before.

Though Reece was personally struggling with disease during the composition of *The Hawk and the Sun*, his depiction of disease in Tilden is structural rather than biographical. The town itself is decaying, and individual components are described as organic systems in disrepair, but the confrontation of any particular character with their own mortality is not central, as it is in Carson McCullers' *Clock Without Hands* (1961) discussed in the next chapter. When characters are depicted as diseased, their affliction is rendered symbolic. In the case of Dandelion's mother Hattie, her syphilis is understood by the town's white population to be a manifestation of her sin: "It was said that [Dandelion's] lameness resulted from the pleasure his mother took in men" (16). The disease from which Hattie suffers, and its legacy in Dandelion's disability, serves to make evident the cross-racial sexual practices of the town, and her disease has also "withered the pride of many white men" (16).[16] The taboo of racial mixing that leads in turn to the "Exodus" of the black population and to

[16] At the time of the novel's publication, the Tuskegee experiment had been underway for more than twenty years. Researchers at the Tuskegee Institute observed 399 black men with syphilis, and a control group of 201 uninfected men, all from Macon County, Alabama. Even after penicillin had been introduced as a successful treatment for syphilis, it was withheld from the infected African Americans. Harriet Washington, in *Medical Apartheid* (2007) interprets the Tuskegee experiment as "one signal instance" of African Americans being exploited by immoral and criminal medical testing within "a centuries-long history of such abuse." Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 10. See also James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: Free Press, 1981).

Dandelion's murder, only prohibits sexual relationships between black men and white women.

Hattie's disease is mirrored in the squalid living conditions she and her son endure. The nameless street on which Dandelion lives is described as a "poor street, pocked with potholes", articulating the town's unequal infrastructure as visible scarring (24). The plumbing of the first house Dandelion passes on his "circuit" (17) of white Tilden is described as "a network of exposed bowels" (22). This house is occupied by a bitter white woman who desperately wishes for Dandelion to commit an act that might be construed as a sexual advance so that she can have him lynched. In an instance of pathetic fallacy, her house is given a physical intimacy like that of a human body: "The Negro kept his eyes averted from the house as he passed out a sense of innate decency, turning his gaze from it as he would from a wind-lifted skirt" (22). Dandelion's house is "ill-kept", suggesting both his poverty and the town's treatment of him as a disease; this phrase could refer to a poorly-maintained property, or to an illness perpetuated by the white community because Dandelion is 'kept ill' by white policing of his lifestyle.

While the "niggertown" area of Tilden, and its edges, is described as sick and disease-ridden, the well-maintained white enclave of Maple Street is "the heart of the town," suggesting both its centrality and its role in circulating malevolent bodies through the rest of the town (17). The very history of the town charts its development from a single-cell organism: "The nucleus of the town had been an inn, a gristmill, and a forge" (46). The description of Tilden as a growing organism underscores the 'blight' of segregation on southern community. The social inequality of the town is geographically manifested and Reece highlights

this inequality by depicting the varying degrees of decay from Tilden's most affluent "heart" to its rotting edge. As a result, Tilden emerges from this organic vocabulary as a town that is simultaneously sick and growing. Growth is obviously not necessarily positive; organic growth can be found equally in viruses and bacteria. This form of growth can indicate either the development of a healthy body or a malevolent one. The immediate outcome of the town's growth is into a space devoid of black residents. Reece's indictment of the lynching of Dandelion suggests the potential for positive growth beyond racial tragedy.

In Tilden, Reece crafts a southern community that is primed for positive growth even in the face of violent consensus. In order to indicate the potential for change, Reece opens his narrative in the early morning, which symbolizes a moment of transition into the new. Just as Smith's *Strange Fruit* begins with a lone figure on a threshold surveying a segregated town, *The Hawk and the Sun* opens with Tilden being surveyed by a lone, unidentified male. Unlike the earlier novel, however, this man will not be identified in the course of the narrative. Rather, he is a *pars pro toto* synecdoche representing any and every white male inhabitant of the town. This character's lack of specificity enables Reece to focalise the specifics of the town's landscape and people through a lone, anonymous representative. The opening line of the novel establishes an atmosphere of vulnerability, while also shaping the town: "It was three o'clock, and as the tide of darkness rose again over Tilden and flowed westward after the ebbing moon a man stood in his open doorway and looked out upon the dark street" (13). The man is not identified but the town is, privileging the collective unit rather than the individual component. The unnamed man and the named

town operate together and neither would be legible if not for the presence of the other, as is the case in theorist Michel De Certeau's idea that space "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it" and is "actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it."[17] The "open doorway" and the "tide of darkness" foreshadow change and the early hour and the "ebbing" of the moon suggest vulnerability to such change.

The scene precedes the dawn of the day on which the novel is set and Reece establishes his fictional town is at peace, before compelling it into conflict. The unnamed figure who observes the town is associated with the unregulated natural world as incorporated into the highly regulated town: "He had planted the maples when they were seedlings along the frontage of his own lot and remembered the whole file of them along the street, from leapfrog height" (13). While the neat line of trees may contribute to the order and even the homeliness of the town, disordered woodland is symbolic of the space beyond the reach of the town. The organisation of the maple trees marks the town as an organic unit built on structured biological systems. The unincorporated space of the neighbouring countryside is distinct from the identifiable characteristics of the town. Past the point on the town's periphery to which Dandelion has been consigned, the town "lost its character as a street a hundred yards beyond, becoming suddenly a winding dirt road that idled into the countryside" (24). The town's identity, then, is focused on its prestigious white centre, degrading as it spreads westward, until it is almost unrecognizable in the "niggertown" slum, and completely so beyond it. In the unnamed figure's memory, the planting of maple trees resonates with the naming of Tilden's main thoroughfare, Maple

[17] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.

Street. Just as Smith's College Street forms the social and economic centre of Maxwell, Tilden's Maple Street, and its central square, form Tilden's "heart" (17). The maple tree is an organism that defines the town not only by giving its main street a name, but more importantly, by being the spine of its "maple-lined street" (147).

That Maple Street runs through the centre of the town further accentuates the peripheral identity of the nameless street on which Dandelion lives: "A quarter of a mile beyond the white woman's box-square house the street of no name on which the Negro Dandelion walked entered Maple Street, street of the best houses in Tilden, which ran all the way through the town, serving as its central axis" (29). The term "axis" suggests both dynamism and machinery; Maple Street is the stretch upon which the rest of the town turns. This description of Maple Street foreshadows Reece's depiction of the banker, Mr. Darlington, a resident of that street, as a key figure in the town's capitalist mechanism. The "white woman's box-square house" that Dandelion must pass as he enters the "enemy territory" of white Tilden, marks the outer limit of the white centre and signals the threat that centre poses to Dandelion (21).

The area in which Dandelion lives is on the disavowed and derelict periphery of the town's municipality. The mass migration of the town's black inhabitants has caused an enormous demographic shrinkage in the "niggertown" slum, leaving Dandelion alone and the slum neglected without a population to maintain it. As a result, the white centre of the town is afforded increased purchase on the town's social and cultural identity. Dandelion alone lives on "Tilden's decaying edge", a precarious location when "edge" is redolent of

tension and of blades, including the one that is used to emasculate Dandelion at the novel's end (48).

By cutting off its diseased edges, the white supremacist "heart" of the town rejuvenates itself and strengthens the geographic and ideological core of its identity. As a body, then, it becomes stronger, having eliminated the threat to its racist ideals. Its quasi-biological systems of circulation and regulation thrive after the destruction of the 'threat.' The economic life of the town moves along a "one-way flow" into the centre, suggesting the flow of blood in the cardiovascular system and recalling Dandelion's 'circuit' of the town (54).

Information and labour are effectively pumped through the town to the places they are needed to feed specific functions of the town. This circulatory system also disseminates opinion throughout the town and Reece describes the propagation of the rumour of Miss Ella's rape in these terms and imbues the rumour with its own independent physicality: "This news, for it was no longer rumor, with a will and strength of its own and almost as if it had a tangible presence, traveled from the side streets of Tilden inward toward the centre of the town" (95). The rumour spreads like a biological agent in a bloodstream until it reaches its destination at the central nervous system: "at last it reached the square itself" (96). If racial anxieties are passed through the body of the town like a virus, then the disease is aided by Tilden's southern climate. Without the heat of the August day, the maintenance of Tilden's "life" would be less volatile: "[Abraham] thought of the time when winter would hold sterile dominion over the earth" (27).[18] In contrast to "sterile" winter, Reece reminds the reader, in a pointed sentence on the same page, "This was August," that alludes both to the

[18] Ironically, the absence of a 'sterile' winter foreshadows Dandelion's emasculation.

month of the year and the seriousness of the crime that is about to be committed (27). Heat encourages the growth of organisms such as bacteria and Reece positions of white racial terrorism as the disease most threatening to the southern town.

The town's 'systems', then, work together to maintain its white supremacist ideology in perfect health. Figures in the town regulate its conscience by enabling it to defer responsibility for social issues. The white widow, known to the town as Aunt Angelicia, is an example of an individual whose place within the social order is fixed and clear. Her charity to cats is a sanctioned deferral of an issue distasteful to the town:

> She often owned as many as fifteen or more and neither she nor anyone in Tilden thought it was strange that she should keep so many. She was able to keep them and it seemed to Tilden that she was only doing right by the homeless when she adopted the stray cats of the town (34).

Angelicia's role within the town is as a caretaker for unwanted pets and her home on Maple Street a locus for abandoned cats. By using the phrase "it seemed to Tilden", Reece combines the opinion of each individual resident into a single collective person in a *totem pro parte* linguistic synecdoche that highlights white Tilden's collective identity. Angelicia is the caretaker of the town's biological nuisance and takes care of its abdication of responsibility for the animals. While she is aware that her neighbours "quietly" abandon unwanted cats on her property, their ignorance of her knowledge allows them to defer responsibility to her for the animals (35).

Angelicia's home is an illicit repository for unwanted bodies when cats are "dropped … over the wall of the garden" (35). Reece's choice of the passive voice further removes individual responsibility from owners by displacing the individual who abandons the cats. Angelicia's home is a regulatory system that maintains the balance of Tilden's cat population. She collects the biological refuse of the town, but she is nonetheless entrenched within the community's collective will. Indeed, she is as invested in her community's norms as any other resident of Tilden: "Aunt Angelicia was not a thoughtless woman, yet she accepted for her own the mores of her group without undue examination to determine whether they were right or wrong, just or unjust, merciful or unkind" (35). She lacks the capacity for perception that Reece grants to other members of the community who dissent, among them Abraham, Anse, and Gaines. Angelicia, then, is an individual who embodies the collective by carrying out her function while simultaneously adhering to a community-held belief, and by specifying that she is "not thoughtless" Reece represents her conformity as a wilful act.

However, Reece implicitly criticises Angelicia's unexamined adherence to Tilden's white supremacist norms by describing it as a superficial trait: "She wore the status quo as a cloak, and the cloak changed little in style, only gathering a frill here and there or dropping a pleat or pucker, alterations that could be effected without change in the basic cut of the garment" (35). Angelicia's "cloak" of normalcy is contrasted to the progressivism Reece celebrates in the teacher and the farmer. The verb form of the word "cloak" suggests masking and the avoidance of the moral insight that Reece advocates. The town is figured as obscuring or cloaking questions of what is "right or wrong, just or unjust." The implication for the working organism of the town is

that intolerance is a garment that changes little over time but may ultimately be removed. Angelicia's role regulates the town's systems, but does not threaten its ideological identity.

The nuisance of the stray cats also is symbolic because they suggest how Tilden's non-white inhabitants are also without an appropriate role in the town's social economy. The missing cat, Tawm, is described as "fixed" in another foreshadowing of Dandelion's emasculation at the hands of the lynch mob that suggests labour and usefulness by suggesting that Tawm's ability to reproduce made him 'broken' (42). Tawm and Dandelion are each prevented from procreating because they threaten to change the town's demographic character and to exceed their roles in the organism of the town. Similarly, Gin, is forced to live in a "shed-room of the pastor's house" because having a home in either the white or black section of town would commit him to a racial identity (189). By forcing him to live on Reverend Carhorn's property, the town contains the problem of his identification. This ensures that each of the town's groups is consigned to a discrete and definite space and Tilden successfully maintains its racial geography. Space within the town is accounted for, and each belongs in his or her place. Dissent from this organisational principle leads to the erasure of the dissenter's place, and this process is described as having occurred following the "exodus" from "niggertown." The black escapees remove themselves, as an organ is removed from a body. The process of 'amputation' results in the town adapting itself physically to compensate. The town also shrinks to conceal its loss and it is only from the outside that the organism's workings are seen clearly.

As a result, the countryside that circles the town and marks its limits is ideologically distinct from the town proper. As the African American residents

of Tilden are leaving the confines of the town, they curse it: "Once beyond the abruptly ended street, in reach of the woods to hide, they turned and shouted a volley of curses back into the town" (32). It is a gesture that anticipates, on a smaller scale, the mass migration from a fictional southern state imagined in William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1962), the focus of the final chapter of this study. In *The Hawk and the Sun*, the African American population is neither in the woods nor in the town. They level their curses from a space neither incorporated into nor external from the identity of the town. The proximity of the woods gives the cursing blacks security from the retribution of the town's whites but their literal position not-yet-in-the-woods enables their curses to be heard by Tilden's white inhabitants. Neither fully included in the town, nor yet fully clear of it, they are able to curse from a uniquely liminal place granted by their situation beyond the town's literal and figurative periphery.

If the mountains are a barrier "thrown up" by the collective will of the town to protect itself, then the African Americans at the very limit of this protection are able to circumvent the coercive social systems of the town only by leaving it. The mountains also provide a space from which to understand the town. The blacks leaving Tilden see it most clearly as they curse it. Nimrod Anse, who refuses to take part in Dandelion's murder, is also granted perspective due to his vocational situation on these mountains to the west of the town. On the day in question, unlike the other residents, who are increasingly aware that Dandelion will be murdered, Anse is "awake and aware" from the beginning of the day (18). Nimrod's name is a biblical allusion to Noah's great-grandson who is described as "a mighty hunter before the Lord" in Genesis, suggesting a

similar degree of sight to his namesake in Tilden.[19] Both the hunter and the fleeing black citizens stand on the mountains, which are simultaneously of and not of the town, and see the workings of its organs and another biblical allusion makes sense of this similarity because the biblical Nimrod is grandson to Ham who is "cursed" by his father and sentenced to being "a servant of servants" in what was interpreted by slave-owners as biblical evidence for white supremacy.[20] Theologian Everett Tilson, writing in 1958, rejects a similar interpretation of Ham's story as a defence of segregation, writing that

> Specialists in the interpretation of biblical literature insist that the author of [the Genesis] narrative never intended or attempted to give us an account of the separation of men on the basis of their physical characteristics. Indeed, the writer very seldom takes note of any racial difference at all, and then, significantly enough, not from the viewpoint of racial purist, from the viewpoint of the geographer.[21]

Tilson, like Reece, critiques the deployment of the Book of Genesis as a means of bolstering white supremacy. While Tilson overtly undermines segregationist readings of the Bible, Reece does so implicitly, by ironically figuring Nimrod Anse as an allegory.

The "exodus" of Tilden's black population is preceded by a siege of "niggertown." The white population sections off the black population, isolating it within the already isolated space of Tilden. To borrow the novel's discourse of the body: "niggertown" is a limb starved of blood. This spatial containment

[19] Genesis 10:9. All Biblical references are to the King James Bible.
[20] Genesis, 10:6, 8.
[21] Everett Tilson, *Segregation and the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 21.

serves to enforce the binary division of the town. Because no individual "culprit" is discovered as the father of McCracken's child, "blackness" itself is criminalised. In the absence of a single "guilty" party, all black residents are made entirely guilty and the slum is made a prison: "The second night after Hester McCracken's death a file of cars drove slowly through niggertown and wherever there was a black face at a window or behind a door watching, the fear… sprang full blown into obsession" (31). Residents are forced to hide in fear, unable to survive without the amenities at the centre of the town.

The infrastructure of segregation persists even after the "exodus" of the town's black population but continues to undergo a process of erasure. After this mass movement, the town inherits the curses of its former black residents and the mixed-race child of Hester McCracken. After the African American population has left the town, their former homes remain empty and uncared for. On the morning of the murder, Abraham stands outside Dandelion's shack and looks upon "the empty shanties that had comprised niggertown before all the colored people had left suddenly in the night" (51). Linguistically, "niggertown" has ceased to exist: the shanties "had" comprised the area. The past tense in this passage of free-indirect discourse, focalised through Abraham, supposes that it is the population, "all the colored people" of Tilden, that defines the character of an area, and in turn, that area's relationship to the town as a whole: the presence of a black population *had* constituted a racialization of space within the town. However, the shanties that comprised the racialised infrastructure have persisted, and with them, a physical structure of racial division. This has left the town of Tilden ambiguously segregated: the infrastructure of segregation, particularly the second-class housing, endures as does the designation of that area despite the

absence of the black population that defined the town as segregated. In their absence, the homes fall into increasing disrepair. This abjection is described in terms that suggest the decomposition of a body: Dandelion lives in a "rotted house on the outskirts of Tilden" (15). After the forced migration, the slum is left to rot and, presumably, fall away from the "healthy" body of the white town. This very visceral symbol is supplemented by symbolic motifs that Reece borrows from his reading in ancient and medieval literatures. For Reece, allusion is a means to explore the positions of his characters and to recast the ethical question of segregation as a matter of perception.

A Word that was Not a Word: Tilden's Symbolic Grounding

If Reece presents Tilden as an organism that has developed into its coercive shape, then the lynch mob it produces is a microcosmic expression of that same coercive identity. The mob is a single organism, composed of component individuals. Since Tilden is a body shaped by a collective will of white supremacy, the town's lynch mob is a smaller body with the same motivations. In Reece's depiction of the mob's formation he repeats the symbolism of a working organism on a smaller scale.

As each man joins the mob, the mass becomes increasingly distinct from any of its individual parts:

> Those first to arrive had formed a nucleus and the cluster grew by additions to its periphery. Soon the group began to move, the man at the centre turning in an effort to see each new arrival at the circle's edge and

> each man in his place, until the whole mass was a great spring winding itself (122).

The lynch mob resembles a single-cell organism, with a nucleus around which the mass of white men collects. As the cell grows outward, the organism becomes more complex. The mass is self-sustaining, capable of "winding itself" and driven by a single representative, "the man at the centre", who maintains his individuality as a means to focus and galvanize the shared will of the mob. The mob's ideological strength derives from this lack of individuation; a threat to this collective is an ideological threat to the mob.

When, shortly before Dandelion's lynching, Abraham takes his moral stand, the mob is described as an organism losing one of its components: "'Wait!' a voice said, and looking up the Negro Dandelion saw that the mob-face had spawned out of itself a new face, a face like its own but different, kinder" (165). Only after Abraham speaks out is his individual body differentiated from the body of the mob. The description of the lynch mob as a synecdoche is anticipated by the circumstances surrounding the black "exodus" of Tilden: "The reverend Elder Pate went among his flock and exhorted but no one, man nor boy, came forth to claim fatherhood of the half-black child and the scapegoat that was secret among them bloated on the fear of the guilty until it grew out of size and became them all" (31). The unwillingness of the father of McCracken's child to come forward causes the guilt to spread to all of the town's black men. This foreshadows the way in which Dandelion's perceived guilt for the rape of Miss Ella causes the white men of the town to merge into a single, unified organism, with the exceptions of Abraham, Anse, and Professor Gaines. Abraham's act of

resistance to the mob mentality and his suddenly acute separation from the group puts him temporarily in danger: "He moved without fear but with slow, deliberate care from the menace that had shifted momentarily from the Negro to himself" (166). He is watched in silence as he leaves the mob and is threatened for his individuality by a man who traces his movements with a shotgun (166). Abraham does not define or influence the shared will of the mob; its focus continues to be directed by its charismatic leader.

The leader, a man named Harker, rallies the town's white male population into a unified whole with the express purpose of lynching Dandelion. Harker is literally and figuratively at the centre of the expanding mass of the mob when he instigates the hunt for Dandelion through charismatic speech:

> Suddenly the man in the center, who had been one of the first arrivals, began to speak. It was as if by centripetal force he had been thrown to the center of the circle and by this given authority. His name was Harker, and he was a big, dark man whose voice rang resonant and deep as if it came out of a well (122).

In a novel in which audible speech is consistently obscured or made ambiguous by narrative strategy, the emphasis on Harker's voice is telling. His "authority" comes as much from his deep and resonant voice as from his locating himself at the centre of the mob. His voice proclaims his power over the whole of the mob and positions him as the leader of the group. His voice, more so than any actual words he speaks, allows him to direct the actions: "The first word he spoke was

not a word. It was a heavy raw command that sounded something like *Haak!*" (122-3). He takes "command" of the mob in an act of speech and of voice.

Although it is rooted in the vocal, Harker's charisma is also silently physical. After a member of the mob makes a sick joke about hanging Dandelion, Harker silences the crowd:

> Laughter in basso and treble voices greeted the man's words. But Harker lifted his hands and held them palms down at the height of his breast for a long moment. The eyes of the crowd fastened upon the stalled hands that remained poised until they had drawn the last shred of sound from the men gathered in the mill yard (123).

This physical gesture demands silence from the crowd and marks Harker's authority as predicated on the physicality of the "big, dark man." Even while his physicality demands compliance, his power over his own speech, and that of the other men assembled in the mob, forms the core of his authority and charisma: "When all was silent, Harker pushed his hands downward with a sudden violent motion and spoke: 'All right, let's go get him!' he said" (123). Harker has seemingly absorbed the power of speech from those around him and consolidated it. Through a violent physical gesture, he channels the collective (or collected) voice of the mob into a violent linguistic gesture. He is a conduit for the will of the mob, absorbing and emitting the raw material of its members.

Harker is made symbolic of English language traditions of oral storytelling. "*Haak!*"– the word that was not a word – is a modern variation of the Anglo-Saxon word "hwæt", an exclamation used to begin Old English

narrative poetry. Like Harker's "*Haak*!", "hwæt" is a word that is not a word: it is no longer used in modern English and its traditional usage communicated urgency and demanded attention rather than carrying out a descriptive function. Probably the most famous instance of "hwæt" in English literature is the opening line of *Beowulf*, the story of a hero slaying a monster. Reece ironically figures Harker – whose name can thus be read as a noun meaning a person who harks – as the instigator of a heroic narrative poised to vanquish the 'monstrous' Dandelion.[22]

The very name of the town also has a medieval provenance: in Middle English, tilden is a verb meaning "pitch" as one would a tent. The name of the town works in concert with the novel's original title *Tents toward Sodom* to suggest that Tilden, like Sodom, as a doomed and wicked city. Another precedent for the town's name arises from more recent, and more local, historical sources. Samuel J. Tilden's closely contested presidential campaign against Rutherford B. Hayes precipitated the Compromise of 1877 that officially ended Reconstruction. Tilden, a New York Democrat, conceded the election to Republican Hayes in exchange for the removal of federal troops from the former Confederacy. Among mid-century historians of the South, Tilden, and the Compromise, were understood to signal a moment of transition in the relationship between North and South. C. Vann Woodward viewed the election as a turning point in the developing identity of the postbellum South, writing "A great deal more was at stake in the winter of 1876-1877 than the question of which of two citizens, Samuel J. Tilden or Rutherford B. Hayes, would occupy

[22] For more on the usage of hwæt in Anglo-Saxon narrative, see George Walkden, "The status of hwæt in Old English." *English Language and Linguistics* 17:3 (2013), 465-488.

the White House."[23] John Hope Franklin figures Tilden as an electable democratic candidate with progressive potential, calling him a "widely respected reform governor of New York" who had "no taint of disloyalty or wartime Copperheadism."[24] Historians view Tilden's campaign as a turning point in southern history. By naming his town Tilden, Reece balances the symbolic with the historical. Tilden, like the New York governor, is representative of a moment of potential progressive change and a potential shifting of ideologies in the South. With similar resonance, Shelby Foote names a small-town bank manager Lawrence Tilden in *Love in a Dry Season* (1951).[25] These twinned allusions in Reece's choice of the town's name represent an interrogation of southern traditionalism, either as medieval inheritance or nineteenth-century Lost Cause. Reece refracts this interrogation through a character who epitomizes continued belief in these principles.

Harker's rhetorical power constitutes a nuanced allusion to medieval narrative conventions. While Reece's reading in medieval literature is evident from this passage, so too is his immersion in a mid-century southern intellectual life. Reece's depiction of Harker's place "in the center" of the mob is also reminiscent of W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941), which includes a chapter entitled "Of the Man at the Center."[26] Cash's chapter addresses the almost mythical figure of the agrarian ideal: "a backcountry pioneer farmer or the descendant of such a farmer."[27] Cash's description of this ideal, an idealisation he implicitly rejects, is markedly inflected by the South's supposed

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[23] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South; 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 23.
[24] John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction: After the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 211, 212.
[25] Shelby Foote, *Love in a Dry Season* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1951]), 95.
[26] W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, New York: Vintage, 1969 [1941], 30-60.
[27] Ibid, 30.

medieval inheritance. Cash criticises the Nashville Agrarians' attempts to "reassimilate" the medieval English "squire" into the image of the man at the centre.[28] In Michael O'Brien's terms, *The Mind of the South* "is a book about the southern Zeitgeist and its ability to transform both the perception of the individual and socioeconomic realities," while James C. Cobb writes that "Cash's book would become the most widely read and influential attempt to unravel the mystery of southern white identity."[29] Reece's depiction of Cash's 'man at the centre' bears out each of these interpretations of *The Mind of the South*, because it focuses on the perception of the individual and collective white identities of Harker and the men who surround him. Reece reimagines Cash's famous phrase to critique the agrarian romanticisation of the medieval.

While at Young Harris College, Reece taught classes on the history and development of the modern English language from a number of sources, including Latin. In his lecture notes, Reece outlines the influence of Anglo-Saxon language and history on Modern English: "There are about two thousand Anglo-Saxon words in the language. The Romans left Britain in 449 A.D. By 600 three tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes had established themselves on the island. Their fused dialects became the English Language."[30] Reece clearly knew, and taught, late-medieval English and his readings of medieval literature influenced his invention of Tilden. The breadth of Reece's interests marks him as a southern novelist who is aware of his place in a literary community.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Michael O'Brien, "W.J. Cash, Hegel, and the South," *The Journal of Southern History* 44:3 (August, 1978), 382; James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183.

[30] Lecture Notes, box 6, folder 7. Byron Herbert Reece papers. MS 56. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

The stylistic ambiguity in Reece's representation of spoken discourse is inconsistent with traditional uses of speech as a convention of Appalachian literature. Richard Gray, tracing trends in literature of southern Appalachia from the 1920s, identifies speech as a defining feature in the construction of Appalachian characters. Speech, specifically idiom, comes to denote authenticity and regional specificity:

> This originating interest in speech anchored the hymn to the mountain man in something very basic and quite specific: the words of the southern highlander *were* his world, the contention was. His way of life was caught and explained in the still living tissue of his language; and what that language disclosed was a story of survival against the odds.[31]

Reece upends these conventions by making his characters' speech ambiguous and dangerous. If the mountain man as constituted through speech is typically a metaphor for "survival", Dandelion's predestined death implies a failure of this metaphor. As a southern intellectual, Reece manipulates motifs of southern personhood to better reflect the region's ambiguity. His thought is expressed through allusive engagements with myth and oral narrative.

Reece's reading in medieval literature and language, then, lends his representation of the lynching an added allusive dimension. Through an understanding of Harker as symbolic of an oral narrative tradition, Reece compounds his interrogation of the lynch mob with a symbolic criticism of it. Indeed, Reece conceived of the novel as highly symbolic. It is through this

[31] Richard Gray, *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 232.

symbolism that Reece positions his novel as a critique of the racial order of the South in the 1950s. While Reece made few public comments on segregation, his private correspondence is valuable in extrapolating the intersection of symbolism and race in his conception of *The Hawk and the Sun.*

In a letter to a former student at Emory University in 1956, Reece explicated the novel's symbolism and subtext and deliberately cautioned his student against relying too much on an author's interpretation of a work:

> I don't want to be either evasive or coy. The trouble is I can't say what the book means without using as many words as the book itself uses. I think it is impossible to give a very just paraphrase [of] any extended work in a few words, but of course it is possible to say <u>something</u> about the meaning. I would preface these few remarks by saying that whatever light a statement from me may throw on THE HAWK AND THE SUN it will not be the whole meaning which is illuminated. All of the meaning of any work does not reside with the author, or derive from his intention. The reader makes an indeterminate part of it.[32]

While Reece made no attempt to fully explain the "meaning" of the novel, he does shed a "light" on the structure of the text, "illuminat[ing]" his use of certain motifs in the novel. Southern novelist William Goyen, in a review of *The Hawk and the Sun*, highlights this symbolic binary, writing that the novel "is a frozen landscape of blocks of color and textures where light breaks over and darkens over" and likens Reece to a "checker player" who moves his characters along the

[32] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, box 1, folder 2. Byron Herbert Reece papers. MS 56. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

dark and light squares of a board.[33] Significantly, the language of "illumination" foreshadows the allusive project Reece outlined:

> THE HAWK AND THE SUN is, of course, deliberately symbolic. As for its symbolic structure, I have read about, or perhaps seen a picture, of a representation of Ammon-Re that once stood in Thebes. This representation shows Ammon-Re with a sun symbol and a falcon. No doubt the attribute assigned to Re shifted over a period of time, but Re is the Father-god and the sun god and is or may be interpreted to be time. The sun illuminates. As for the falcon, or hawk, it is noted for its power of sight, hence its use in hunting. The falcon, then sees what the sun illuminates. Illumination and perception are both joined in Ammon-Re.[34]

Reece's assertion that the novel is "deliberately" steeped in symbolic imagery suggests this schema as a prism through which to understand the text. Alongside his engagement with medieval texts, Reece draws symbolic language from ancient Egyptian mythology. His attention to two particular symbols, a sun and a falcon, suggests how individual objects within the novel are specifically resonant. These particular symbols are also clearly reflected in the novel's title.

The Hawk and the Sun received its name shortly before the novel went to press but Reece continued to use the working title, *Tents toward Sodom* until a very late stage in the composition. In January 1955, Reece received a letter from Louise Townsend Nicholl, his editor at E.P. Dutton in New York, requesting that

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[33] William Goyen, "Headlong Toward Catastrophe," *New York Times Book Review*, September 11, 1955, 4.

[34] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, Byron Herbert Reece papers.

he give the novel a title that will “make it easier to sell!”[35] Reece considered a number of alternative titles for the work and made the decision in collaboration with Nicholl. Among his ideas were titles that mirrored the syntax of *The Hawk and the Sun*, including: “The Seed and the Harvest”, “The Shadow and the Substance”, and, more explicitly, “The Nigger in the Hills,” each of which suggest balance or division in the same way that the syntax of the phrase “the hawk and the sun” does.[36] Other options that Reece feared had the “Wrong Emphasis” included: “The Lynching” and “The Lynchers,” highlighting racial violence as a structuring principle in the novel.[37] In his letter to Nicholl, he indicates a preference for “The Hawk and the Sun”, thereby foregrounding his symbolic strategy in the novel’s title. Reece was less sure of another option, “Dream of Darkness,” writing that it “seems vaguely familiar, but perhaps I have in mind [William] Styron’s ‘Lie Down in Darkness.’”[38] A final draft of the novel, marked “Copy for the Press” and dated “1/25/55” has the title *Tents toward Sodom* typed and struck through with the final title *The Hawk and the Sun* handwritten underneath.[39] Since the letter in which Reece suggested the final title *The Hawk and the Sun* is dated January 26 1955, it can be inferred that the handwritten change was carried out after the date on which the draft was received. In each of these possible titles, Reece foregrounds biblical allusion and mythological symbolism. The often brutal physicality of the novel is grounded in symbolic concerns. In particular, the imagery of light and perception persists

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[35] Letter, Louise Townsend Nicholl to Byron Herbert Reece, 21 January 1955, box 12, folder 6. Byron Herbert Reece family papers. MS 3055. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Copy for the Press, January 25, 1955, box 10, folder 3. Byron Herbert Reece papers. MS 56. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

through the fictional day over which the narrative takes place. If the statue of Ammon-Re that Reece describes compares to any figure in the text, it is Abraham. Like Ammon-Re, Abraham is distinguished as a father and his recognition of the hawk at the novel's end, signifies insight.

Reece structures the novel to reflect the principles of illumination and perception, as he describes:

> The story begins in darkness but progresses as the sun rises and reaches a climax shortly after noon, while there is plenty of illumination to aid perception. It closes in darkness. But this darkness is of night, and of course it will be dispelled with the return of the sun.[40]

Abraham's decision to leave the lynch mob will impact the moral standards of his sons:

> Before threat he, a simple man, had found the strength to believe the truth, and something was added to the heritage of Abraham's sons, and his sons' sons and daughters still unborn, that would bestead them in dark hours in the future that was theirs (191).

Abraham's ability to recognise, or "perceive", what has been "illuminated" is a trait that will assist future "chosen" generations in recognizing good and evil. Abraham believes that the hawk he sees at Dandelion's lynching is a manifestation of God: "Well, I can say what I believe. I saw the hawk and it was

[40] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, Byron Herbert Reece papers.

not a hawk" in phrasing that recalls and invert's Harker's 'word that was not a word' and positions Abraham as Harker's moral opposite (191). This symbolic divinity is very different from the religion exemplified by Tilden's organised institutions. Reece reconfigures a spiritual and moral response to segregation through this imagery.

Reece's reading of darkness as temporary and "dispelled" by the sun may suggest that the novel ends on a note of optimism; Abraham's ethical stand and his commitment to his sons mark a positive shift for the future of the town. However, just as the sun will rise the following day, it is bound to set. The ending, then, is ambivalent and denies either optimism or pessimism in isolation. Abraham's sons and their families are, however, granted the necessary tools to compete with shadow and darkness. Reece also describes Abraham as biologically attuned to this ethical shift and he and Professor Gaines as alike in their capacity for moral insight. In contemplating this aspect of the novel, he expands on his conception of the two characters:

> I think I needn't pursue this symbolism any further except perhaps to say that at the scene of the lynching the farmer Abraham (the father of the strong sons) has the power to believe the truth only after the arrival of the hawk, the power to see. It doesn't seem inconsistent to me to say that he got this power from the impulse of life in his cells while the professor of history got it from the study of history.[41]

[41] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, Byron Herbert Reece papers.

Abraham, simultaneously witnessing the sun and the bird of prey, is analogous to the mythical figure of Ammon-Re in Reece's conception of the Egyptian deity. The Greek god Amun, who was a local deity in Thebes, became, in the fifteenth century BCE, fused with the Egyptian god of the sun, Ra. The twin traits of historical insight, indicated throughout the novel with Gaines's interest in Thebes, and the light of the sun, combine in a single deity. When petitioning Carhorn for assistance, Gaines thinks of Ra within a pantheon of ancient gods who "wore averted faces" in the presence of "the shrine of the Unknown God" represented by Carhorn's inaction (140). The sun god, in Gaines' imagination, refuses to see the injustice of Carhorn's religion. Here, the symbolic illumination of the sun is hindered by the refusal to perceive.

On the other hand, the symbolic interaction of illumination and sight combine in Abraham who is depicted as deeply invested in the cultivation of the landscape and of the next generation of white southerners. Professor Gaines, albeit in a different way, is also invested in the education of a new generation, because he sees his job as "the cultivation of the mind" (181). He and Abraham mirror each other in their roles as symbolic cultivators. As a farmer and a teacher, each of these men cultivates a culture of moral insight in the segregated South and Reece, who worked as both a farmer and a teacher was well placed to identify this connection.[42]

These "cultivator" characters are committed to using their insight to improve the material social order of the town. Nimrod Anse is aware from the novel's beginning that the lynching of Dandelion is a threat to the moral centre of the white community. Anse is singularly resistant to joining the amalgamated

[42] Raymond Williams draws attention to the etymological relationship between "culture" and "cultivation." See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014 [1976]), 85.

body of the mob precisely because he is a hunter: "Finally, with the exception of Anse the hunter who preferred the blood of the fox, the men were all going in the direction of Clifton Mill" (98). As a hunter, Anse is made analogous to a bird of prey, because he is already invested with insight, as is the hawk of the novel's title. As well as lending Anse similarities to his biblical counterpart, Reece positions the hunter in symbolic opposition to Harker. Nimrod from the Book of Genesis appears as a character in the *Inferno* section of Dante Alighieri's allegorical epic poem *The Divine Comedy* (c. 1320) and is blamed for the fall of the tower of Babel, being described as "Nimrod, to whose evil thought is due / that more than one tongue in the world is spoken."[43] When read in light of Harker's similarity to the *Beowulf* poet, Dante's Nimrod signifies both a failure of speech (contrasted to Harker's capacity to speak for the community), and the invention of dissenting perspectives. Each of these resonances with Dante is manifested in Reece's Nimrod, who silently refuses to join the single-minded mob. I read Nimrod's silence in *The Hawk and the Sun* as an individual protest against the lynching of Dandelion. However, Reece presents two other characters, whose protest moves beyond silent inaction.

It is with Gaines and Abraham that Reece places the responsibility for the community's moral wellbeing:

> And in light of this [symbolism] it appears that the book is not primarily a statement on the race question, though it is that to the extent that such an interpretation applies, it is a criticism of life on a considerably wider basis. This makes the book pretty pessimistic, but there is no room in it

[43] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, trans. Courtney Langdon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), vol. 1 (*Inferno*), Canto XXXI, lines 358-9.

> for hopelessness. There is professor Gaines, steeped in history which is at once the lesson itself and the instrument for viewing the lesson of men's living together. There is the farmer Abraham, the father of life (you remember the promise made to Abraham on the plains of Ur) who has the strength to believe the truth.[44]

Considering the relative scarcity of statements on race in Reece's non-fiction writing, this letter to his student is useful for how it situates "the race question" as a theme that is consciously explored in the text. Although Reece may not consider it to be the primary focus of the novel, it is explored at length. With this letter, Reece intervened in a wider conversation about art's role in the face of segregation at mid-century. Rather than race being merely symbolic, he also explored the symbolic and material issues that arise from segregation. Further evidence of this concern with the author's historical racial context is rare in his published poetry, but at least one example survives in his unpublished verse.

Reece's poem "A Ballad of Robert Mallard" (1949) is quite unusual within his body of verse because of its engagement with contemporary events in conjunction with more ethereal imagery of religion and the natural world. Reece wrote two letters to friends in late March 1949 in which he explained that he had been working on a "ballad of protest" called "A Ballad of Robert Mallard."[45] Reece's use of this phrase, "a ballad of protest", in both letters suggests that his composition of the poem was conceived as formally different from his other

[44] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, Byron Herbert Reece papers.

[45] Raymond A. Cook and Alan Jackson, eds., *Faithfully Yours: The Letters of Byron Herbert Reece* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 2007), 63, 65.

ballads. In one of the letters he is clearly outraged by the murder of African American Mallard in Toombs County in eastern Georgia, on November 20 1948:

> If you followed [Mallard's] story in the newspapers the title will explain the ballad… His widow became hysterical at the trial and wept, and men in the courtroom snickered at her grief. When I read that I was thoroughly and truly ashamed that I was a member of the human race and wanted to beg every dog's pardon I met for days afterwards.[46]

From this letter, Reece seems to be *compelled* to protest the violence of the South by adapting a literary form with which he was comfortable, the ballad, into a literary "protest".

Formally, the poem juxtaposes traditional balladic techniques with politicised prose. The poem is structured in seven sections, each composed of quatrains traditional to the ballad form. Within these quatrains, Reece interleaves lines that reflect on the facts of Mallard's murder with parenthetical phrases featuring abstract and traditional imagery. In this way, Reece combines contemporary commentary with formal traditionalism. Each section begins with a short prose preamble outlining the narrative of Mallard's murder and its aftermath followed by the body of the poem. For example, Section V begins with a description of the scene in the courtroom that Reece had commented on in the letter: "On the witness stand Amy Mallard grew hysterical from grief while recounting her story, and several men in the courtroom snickered out loud."[47] By beginning each section of the poem with a prose preamble, Reece grounds the

[46] Ibid, 65.
[47] Poem, "A Ballad of Robert Mallard," box 7. Byron Herbert Reece family papers. MS 3055 Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

traditional form of the ballad and its symbolic language within the specific case of Mallard's murder and his wife's testimony.

Although the poem was never published, Reece's outrage at Mallard's murder and his composition of a literature of "protest" are manifested in the fictional account of Dandelion's murder in *The Hawk and the Sun*. The poem, like the novel, employs motifs of sight and perception. In a stanza that depicts Amy Mallard escaping the scene of her husband's murder, Reece anticipates *The Hawk and the Sun*'s reliance on imagery of predatory birds and of sight:

> The widow Mallard is black of skin,
> (Fly, little birdie, and succor find,)
> She flees from the hooded murdering men.
> (Black is her color but grief is blind.)[48]

Formally, "A Ballad of Robert Mallard" explores the tension between early modern literary forms and social commentary but Reece recasts the traditional ballad through symbols of perception to focus on racial terrorism. Later in his career, he employed similar techniques to reflect on the town of Tilden and, using the same language of perception, grants his character Abraham "the strength to believe the truth" he sees. The "truth" that Abraham comes to realise is not only the literal, material fact of Dandelion's innocence, but also the 'truth' of racial tolerance. Reece's description of Abraham as the "father of life" in correspondence with his student makes even clearer an already obvious allusion

[48] Ibid.

to the biblical Abraham in the character of the farmer. Reece's process of composing *The Hawk and the Sun* highlights Genesis' role as an intertext.

The novel's original title is taken from a phrase in the King James version of the Book of Genesis and, aside from minor typographical changes, the changed title is the only major difference between the "copy for press" bearing the original title and the text published in 1955 as *The Hawk and the Sun*. Reece's allusions to Genesis as an intertext persist in the novel parallel to the symbols of the sun and the bird of prey. Reece's Abraham repeatedly names his sons to reassure himself: "And immediately there was in his mind the roster of his sons' names: John, Isaac, Richard, Ranse, Alfred, Fedder, Frank" (51). In the novel, Abraham's second son shares a name with the biblical Abraham's second son, and the character's commitment to raise his sons to possess insight mirrors the biblical figure's commitment to building a just nation and the promise of futurity.

Reece's reading of Genesis permeates the novel. One such example centres on the siege of niggertown. This fictional siege may have a biblical analogue in a number of sieges of Jerusalem. The first, the siege of the city of Jebus by King David resulted in the city's renaming as Jerusalem.[49] The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II twice lay siege to and sacked the city: the first such siege led to exile in Babylon and is described in 2 Kings 24:10-16. The second results in the destruction of the city and of the temple of Solomon.[50] After it was ended, the people of Jerusalem began to starve: "The famine was sore in the city so that there was no bread for the people of the land."[51] The theme of starvation is echoed in *The Hawk and the Sun* when white racial terrorism

[49] 2 Sam. 5:6-7, and also 1 Chron. 11:4-5.
[50] Jer. 52:12-13.
[51] Jer. 52: 6.

emerges in response to the birth of McCracken's child: "from that time no colored person dared go into Tilden for supplies and finally all began to starve" (31). However, given Reece's acknowledged debt to the story of Ammon-Re in the composition of the novel, the siege of Jerusalem carried out by Egyptian forces is a likely analogy. Moreover, this biblical siege seems to be precipitated by homosexuality: "And there were also sodomites in the land: *and* they did unto all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel."[52] The "Ammonite kings" with which the professor of History is so enamoured in the novel are alluded to in analogy to the white inhabitants of Tilden who starve out the town's black population. The invading and brutal forces within the town are the same white citizens who define Tilden's sense of itself.

Reece inverts this biblical narrative in another way too when he depicts a progressive scene of same-sex intimacy. The two young boys, Farley and Jonathan, have recently had sex and biblical imagery is invoked ironically: "Lot's visitants did not appear. Neither did anything prophesy of the sacrificial wife, a savor of salt wasted on the sterile plain" (178). Reece's representation of same-sex desire in the novel rejects the narrative of the biblical text in which this "sin" precipitates the fall of Jerusalem.

Reece recounts the stories of Genesis in his novel and adds to them a genesis of his own: he depicts the inception and growth of the town of Tilden through an oral narrative passed down through generations. As well as a physical mapping of the town, Reece adopts a historical mapping from its founding and situates Abraham as the arbiter of the town's history**.** Reece imagines a history of

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[52] 1 Kings 14:24.

Tilden from its inception through to August 19th when the novel is set, in a passage focalised through Abraham, who is an overseer of the town's history. Observing the landscape of the town compels Abraham to consider its development. He "could see the town, now bathed in light, lying below him and he began to cast back in his mind to bring together all the fragments of its history which he knew" and the light precedes Abraham's ability to see the town's past (46). The narrative shifts from Abraham's thinking about the town's development into the direct representation of a conversation between its founders. Abraham's claim to knowledge of the town's history has been passed down through generations, for "Abraham knew from the telling of an ancestor" (48). In spite of Abraham's temporal remove from Tilden's founding, the story includes direct speech between the town's namesake, Melvin Tilden, and a "damn good" blacksmith named Anders who work together to build the foundations of the town (49).

Abraham's understanding of the history of Tilden emerges from an immersion in oral storytelling: "Abraham remembered his ancestor telling and telling of it with repetition of the minutest detail in the manner of the very old" (50). The "very old" recalls not only medieval conventions of storytelling, but also the mythology of Ammon-Re and of Genesis' story of biblical Abraham's founding of Judaism. The history of Tilden, then, is constructed through the repetition of oral narrative, just as Melvin Tilden makes the settlement a town by building an inn named "The Traveller's Rest" (50). The naming of this inn, which suggests both migration and the interruption of mobility, ironically transforms an area through which people passed into an organised community. This oral narrative is an act of invention as it relates how the "the crossroads

became a town," and indicates the role of choice, symbolised by the crossroads, in the town's identity (50). The town's architects, Tilden and Anders, are both white men, and the implication is that choice is limited to individuals like them that continue to populate Tilden, but is withheld from non-white residents.

The only non-white inhabitant of Tilden after the "exodus" and the murder of Dandelion is not a resident of "niggertown", not because he chooses to avoid it, but because he is at the mercy of white Tilden. Gin McCracken is left behind by the African American residents in much the same way as their curses are and, after the events of the novel, the future of racial division within the town rests with how the white residents react to him. Abraham's conception of the "exodus" and of McCracken are synchronised when he considers the black section of the town:

> He stood a moment in the street before Dandelion's house and looked about him. Up and down the street on either side stood the empty shanties that had comprised niggertown before all the colored people had left suddenly in the night.
>
> And left their curses upon the town, thought Abraham.
>
> And left as Tilden's ward Hester McCracken's bastard, a whinny-voiced idiot who had a purplish-black skin, in color like the face of a strangulated man (51).

The passage is spread across three paragraphs, the latter two beginning with the word "and." It is grammatically irregular to begin a sentence, let alone a paragraph, with a conjunction. However it is common in the Bible for verses to

begin with “and”, another stylistic flourish that connects Reece’s text with Genesis. As well as this allusive effect, his choice of “and” highlights the contingency of each of the passage’s three statements, allowing it to read as an inventory of the town’s inheritance from the departed black population: the abandoned shanties, their curses, and the care of the “ward” Gin McCracken.

The repetition of “and” also makes each of these three factors contingent on the last: the emptying of residential space leads to the cursing of the town and Gin McCracken is suggested to be an extension of these curses. In this way, the abandonment of the black section moves through the present into the town’s possible future, because the absence of the black population and the presence of their curses will continue to permeate Tilden. The word “ward” denotes responsibility, at least as much as it does an educational relationship. Gin’s similarity in appearance to a “strangulated man” makes the affiliation between the town and its “ward” suggest constraint at the very least, as when a hand constricts a throat, and at the very worst, death, as well as foreshadowing Dandelion’s later death by hanging. Gin’s continuing presence in the town makes impossible an evasion of the racial terrorism of the past.

Abraham conceives of Gin in physical opposition to his own sons: “To balance and outweigh the vision of the misshapen half-black child, Abraham thought of his own strong sons, each of them sturdy and straight and the flesh of them barley-gold in colour” (51). This comparative description operates on the principles of balance and imbalance. In Abraham’s effort to “balance” the image of Gin with that of his sons they are described using similar formulations: while Gin is “purplish-black”, Abraham’s sons are “barley-gold”. These descriptive compound words, held in balance by a hyphen, lie on opposite sides of a colour

spectrum. However, as well as trying to balance his thoughts, Abraham attempts equally to "outweigh" these thoughts, a term that suggests imbalance. Gin's description is consequently marked by an asymmetrical quality: imbalance exists in conjunction with balance. Gin's physical asymmetry, his "misshapen" body, and the fact that he is "half black", are outweighed by the physical stability of Abraham's "sturdy and straight" sons.

As much as Gin is physically opposed to Abraham's white sons, he is marked as different from Dandelion. When they meet, Dandelion taunts Gin about his indeterminate racial identity and neither recognizes the other as belonging to his race. Their respective physical disabilities (rather than their shared racial heritage) place them on shared ground: "the two, both maimed, stood a moment in immortal light and stared meanly at each other" (76). Their "maimed bodies" mark out these characters as different from the rest of the community, at least as much as the colour of their skin. Their physical impairments also symbolise their threat to the structural security of white Tilden's conception of the town. Gin's persistence in the town symbolises a continuing politics of oppression in the South. Abraham's "strong sons" however, symbolise a parallel continuation of resistance to oppression. While Dandelion's story is a tragic one, Reece provides a framework for progressive change even while he presents the graphic brutality of the current racial order.

"Let Him be Dandelion": Grounding the Symbolic

Even while Reece embeds his social critique in a web of symbolism he refuses to allow this symbolism to displace the implications of a metaphorical body that regulates itself through lynching. Reece's characters, particularly Miss

Ella and Professor Gaines, resist the diffusion of their circumstances into abstraction by eschewing the romantic allure of medieval precedents. Reece presents the immediate and physical concerns of the town, in terms of its economic and religious systems, as antithetical to solid moral positions. Reece does not allow the symbolic schema that structures his narrative to become an alibi for the racial concerns that it reflects and explores. By focusing on the South's economic and religious institutions, embodied in the physical buildings of a bank and a church, Reece pointedly aligns his symbolic narrative with the region's material infrastructure.

When Ella remembers her past romance she thinks herself to have been "A silly girl to be setting a man a love-trial and he no knight nor of the age of knighthood" (106). Ella, who is unusually well educated by the standards of the community, has insight into the medieval codes' incompatibility with contemporary society. Harker, by contrast, symbolises an investment in the persistence of outmoded mores.[53] Ella's home marks her out from the rest of the community. The physical conditions and spatial location of her house signal her discomfort within the social and geographical constraints of Tilden: "Where she lived alone near the widening of the world into the limitless country beyond the borders of Tilden, her neat small house bulged with books" (59). The syntax 'bulges' with alliteration, echoing Ella's pushing of Tilden's ideological boundaries and complementing Reece's rhetoric of the body, because "bulge" suggests obesity and inflammation. The word "limitless" not only reinscribes the

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[53] Harker can be read as representing what George Lipsitz has termed a "possessive investment in whiteness" because of his unexamined capitulation to a perceived 'tradition' rooted in medieval Europe. In Lipsitz' formulation, whiteness is the "unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations." George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 1.

space beyond Tilden as free from ideological restraint but also underscores the town's spatial and intellectual limits and the widening of the world suggests the narrowness of Tilden.

Just as Smith's Miss Ada lives on the line of demarcation between Maxwell's White Town and Colored Town, Reece's Miss Ella and the otherwise unnamed "iron-jawed woman" live at the outer limit of Tilden's white community. Each woman is somewhat removed from the rest of white Tilden: Miss Ella by her mental illness and her creative personality, and the iron-jawed woman by her position at the bottom of the town's class hierarchy. As Reece writes: "Miss Ella lived on a cross street that connected Center Street with the fringe of the town where the Negro himself lived" (76-7). Her home, then, lies at the literal and figurative intersection of Tilden's "best houses" and its slum at the fringe. She is literally placed off-centre, suggesting that her personality is incompatible with white Tilden's preferred self-image. The ambivalence of this interstitial space in Tilden is made manifest in the depiction of the incident in which Dandelion observes Miss Ella suffering a psychological episode. The encounter, which precipitates the lynching, is described in two succeeding chapters from two different perspectives, each of which deploys a markedly different formal strategy. The first account is drawn from the experiences of Miss Ella and the iron-jawed woman; the second is focalised through Dandelion's experience as he moves from his home to the edge of white Tilden. Chapters XV (85-88) and XVI (89-92) portray the scene differently and it is the differences in perspective that lead to Dandelion's punishment for a crime that has not been committed by him, or indeed by anybody else.

The earlier chapter is marked by uncertainty and focalised through an unreliable character when Ella "lay in the rigors of madness" (85). Although the omniscient narration is exact about the scene's temporal setting at "eight o'clock on that morning of August 19th", this precision does not penetrate the consciousness of the scene's primary subject: "Time meant nothing to Miss Ella because she could not extricate the present from the past" (85). Ella's physical location, as suggestive of her place on the social periphery, is something of which she is only dimly aware during the episode: "Sometimes it occurred to her briefly that she was in her house on the extreme edge of Tilden" (86). Ella is largely unaware of her own place in Tilden's structure and even less aware of a visit from Dandelion when an erotic memory causes her to shout ecstatically: "She saw the burning face before her and because of the urge to affirm, she said loudly: Yes, yes, yes" (88).[54] Although her speech is audible, even "loud", it is not rendered in quotation marks, leaving the act of speech as ambiguous and confused as her state of mind. In counterpoint, the later account of the same scene is characterised by a false certainty: the poor white woman who "witnesses" Dandelion's attack is adamant about the crime. When Dandelion innocently carries out his regular chores for Ella, she suddenly screams, making Dandelion flee in panic (90).

The working-class white woman who is left unnamed throughout the novel is deeply invested in asserting her superiority over Dandelion. The purposefully ambiguous events of the novel's previous chapter are interpreted here, in no uncertain terms, as the reason to have Dandelion lynched. Seeing Dandelion leaving the house provides her with all the evidence she needs to

[54] This textual allusion to James Joyce's Molly Bloom is further evidence of Reece's immersion in twentieth-century literature.

make the accusation: “As he ran he glanced at the house nearest Miss Ella’s and saw that the iron-jawed woman who did the cleaning there was standing on the back stoop with a broom in her hand. She was looking directly at him, her broom poised. Suddenly she shouted to him” (91). Before the woman even speaks to Dandelion, her broom is “poised” to carry out a violent act of rebuke and she has all she needs to charge that Dandelion has raped Ella. The woman is compelled by a perverse desire for Dandelion to have raped Ella and to be murdered for it: “Meanwhile the iron-jawed woman from the house next door hurried into Miss Ella’s house, and when she saw her lying senseless among the dishevelled covers she was sure that her dreadful hope had been realized. But because she needed corroboration she began to question Miss Ella” (91). The woman is so motivated by the desire to have been witness to sexual violence that her “dreadful hope” affirms her belief; Miss Ella is sought out only to corroborate “the facts” as she has already interpreted them.

When she asks if Ella has been raped, she interprets Ella’s ecstatic utterance as affirmation: “‘Yes, yes, yes,’ Miss Ella said. But she spoke to the figure with the face of fire that moved in her fantasy” (92). While the rendering of this same act of speech in the previous chapter does not include quotation marks and is understood as certainty, “Yes, yes, yes” is expressed in this scene with the punctuation of direct speech. The woman who interrupts Dandelion’s chores in Ella’s house is invested in his “crime” to the degree that the ambiguity of the exclamation in the earlier chapter is eroded. In her eagerness to criminalise Dandelion, the woman imposes certainty both on her interpretation of the events and by the manner through which her interpretation is conveyed in the mirroring of the incidents in the text.

This fractured representation of Dandelion's visit to Miss Ella's home facilitates the act of violence that ends the fracture of the town along racial lines. With Dandelion's murder, "niggertown" is no longer a container for the town's disenfranchised black community. This leaves the "iron-jawed woman", embittered by the fact that only Dandelion is afforded less respect than herself, occupying the new outer limit of Tilden's periphery. Reece makes it clear that her act of witnessing stems from her insecurity about her place in the racial order of the town. Earlier in the novel she watches Dandelion as he begins his circuit of jobs and is enraged that their positions are similarly on the fringes of the town: "And I a white woman, she thought in a final flare of rage against the Negro Dandelion. She had equated their tasks in her mind and found them the same except that his were a little the more menial" (23). The woman resents Dandelion because she is forced to work as a domestic servant despite her race, and her low prestige in the town's social order is mirrored in her physical situation and underlined by the absence of an exploitable black workforce in the town. She is positioned at the very edge of white Tilden and, because unnamed, represented as a non-entity in the social order of the white community; Farley, as a member of a respectable white family, thinks of her only as "a large raw-boned woman he had never seen" (102). The material facts of the woman's poverty and the correlative location of her home combine to make her embittered.

Reece depicts the lynching of Dandelion as intrinsic to the economic and cultural life of the town. The "web" in which Dandelion has been caught is bound up in the economic and material systems of the town that demand his death in payment for his supposed crime. For example, Professor Gaines is initially reluctant to involve himself with the practical workings of the town

because he is more comfortable in his internal, intellectual life but sees himself as duty-bound to attempt to save Dandelion's life: "He was not by nature a Samaritan. He felt that it was his duty to try to save the Negro Dandelion, to try to extricate him from the web which not justice but circumstance had woven about him" (125). Gaines commits to intervening in the physical, rather than symbolic in order to save Dandelion.

In his efforts to prevent the lynching, Gaines, known most frequently in the text as "The professor of History at Tilden High" or "the father of the boy Farley", appeals first to the Reverend Mr. Carhorn, pastor of the local Baptist church, who is unwilling to involve himself in preventing the lynching. Carhorn, second only to the banker Mr. Darlington in the town's esteem, is a highly respected member of the white community and his residence on the square attests to his prestige:

> The Reverend Mr. Carhorn, pastor of the imposing stone church that stood, as befitted its place of importance in the lives of the people of Tilden, only a block away from Mr. Darlington's bank which occupied the central position of the south side of the square (138).

Carhorn's spiritual authority is understood as secondary to Darlington's material and economic authority; his church is prestigiously placed because of its proximity to the bank and Carhorn is represented as physically joined to the building, suggesting that the authority of the "imposing" place is what gives him prestige within the town. As Carhorn welcomes Gaines and Farley into the church, he and the building form a single body: "He began to swing his big body

about as if it were hinged to the door jamb and he was opening himself inward" (139). Carhorn's self is made indistinguishable from the material edifice of his office, the church. The phrase "the church" is a common *pars pro toto* synecdoche because a single building comes to represent the whole of the religious institution. In this portrayal, religion is figured as a concrete, worldly institution rather than the metaphysical spirituality Abraham experiences at the novel's close.

Carhorn is unwilling to reconcile physical violence with the esoteric spiritualism of his congregants: "He could not bring himself to believe that the people of Tilden who sat in his congregation with such quiet hands could turn them to the lynching of Dandelion" (142-3).[55] Carhorn refuses to help Gaines in any material way and simply prays for Dandelion's safety (143). Carhorn is comforted by the symbolic implications of the lynching, and allows them to override the material implications of the act: "I am going to let him be Stephen and be stoned, and be Paul and be persecuted, and be as Christ and be crucified" (144). Throughout the novel, Gaines' knowledge of history has allowed him to escape the material world, except as it is analogous to history, Gaines constantly "repatriate[s] all people he met to the kingdom of Thebes" (57). In his meeting with Carhorn, however, and faced with Dandelion's murder, he now refuses symbolism and allegory. Rather than allowing Dandelion's death to remain a symbolic act for Carhorn, Gaines insists on keeping it within the material realm: "Let him be Dandelion and be saved" (144). Like Ella, Gaines' education allows him to pragmatically engage with tradition. Gaines' appeal is unsuccessful, but

[55] This phrase echoes the eccentric character Wing Biddlebaum in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) who "talked much with his hands" and "wanted to keep them hidden" to avoid betraying his secret homosexuality. Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 1995 [1919]), 10. In both Anderson's and Reece's novels, hands represent a suppressed secret in a small, rural town.

he has rejected the esoteric defence of lynching offered by Carhorn. Through Carhorn and his personification of the church, Reece critiques the whole religious institution for its collective inaction in the face of racial terrorism and the social order of segregation that facilitates it.

Following his meeting with Carhorn, Gaines meets with the local banker Mr. Darlington and appeals for his help in an obtuse manner. Gaines uses the metaphor of economic commodities to attempt to convince Darlington to intervene to prevent the lynching. Darlington is initially confused at the absence of customers in his bank because the impending lynching has emptied the town centre of its population, with most of the men who would ordinarily be contributing to the economic life of the town (centred on Darlington's bank) hunting Dandelion. Darlington walks through the square in an attempt to understand the change that has come over the town's population:

> A little before the professor of History at Tilden High left the Reverend Mr. Carhorn kneeling in the sanctuary of the great stone church, Mr. Darlington summoned his second vice-president to watch the tellers while he made a discreet excursion into the streets to see what he could learn about the odd circumstances that had emptied the square of the town and left the bank inactive, like a piece of machinery made idle because the raw material that poured into its maw to be transformed in its noisy interior into shapes strict and foreign had ceased flowing from its source (154).

This long sentence, which opens Chapter XXV, describes the simultaneous actions of three of the novel's characters: Gaines, Carhorn, and Darlington. The length of the sentence reflects the ways in which the individual actions of the people of the town interact with and inform each other. The verbs used to describe the movements of these characters highlight their respective roles within the community. Gaines 'leaves', suggesting both his continuing action on Dandelion's behalf and his habit of removing himself from the life of the town to the safety of 'history'. Carhorn "kneels", marking him as the person responsible for the spiritual health of the community but also as unwilling to take any decisive action against the men of the town in order to save Dandelion. Finally, Darlington 'summons' his employee, marking him as a leader within the community, his position at the economic apex of the town affording him authority over the behaviour of others. The beginning of the sentence portrays the town as a unit that is intrinsically dependent upon the cooperation of its members.

Another effect of the sentence's length is that it marks out Darlington, who is the subject following the first clause, as a dynamic personality; he is a central component of the mechanism of the town and is continually moving to maintain and exploit Tilden's economic resources. Stylistically, the sentence is kinetic, moving quickly through the events of a short period of time. Two of the three men addressed, Gaines and Darlington, are similarly kinetic and are represented as themselves in motion and the long passage corroborates Darlington's reputation as Tilden's 'captain of industry.'

The people of the town are described in a simile as akin to commodities within an industrial framework; they are like "raw material" fed through a

machine to produce an end product. The machine is further described through a metaphor. Reece uses the word “maw” to denote the point of entrance into the industrial mechanism, suggesting a carnivorous animal feeding on the “raw material” of the people of the town. The bank, at the figurative and literal centre of the town, is here a metonym for the economic order of American capitalism in the mid-1950s. Through free-indirect discourse, Reece shows Darlington as limited as the arbiter of commerce in a small community: “He always felt somewhat cramped in his activities by the smallness of the town of Tilden” (154). Here, the smallness of the town is figured as physical constriction and Darlington feels “cramped”. Despite the limitations of the small town, Darlington sees himself as a component in the economic function of the entire state:

> Ah, well, he was really part of the financial machinery that geared contemporary life and time. He was a vital cog in a vast machine, and though there were innumerable other cogs the breakdown of one, of his own bank, would affect the power of the whole machine. All the gear wheels intermeshed (155).

Darlington sees his role in the town’s financial life as a defining feature of “contemporary life and time.” While “life” refers to the common-place interactions of people in capitalism, contemporary “time” has perhaps a more sinister resonance. Darlington’s vision of working people as raw materials to feed a machine is indicative of a contemporary ethos and the ideological basis of the contemporary moment. Just as the time of a single day defines the narrative’s

parameters, the economic systems of both the United States and the South define the contemporary moment of Dandelion's lynching.

Darlington considers his part within the national and local integrity of the United States and the town of Tilden, respectively. The fact that this character, an emblem of capitalism, thinks of his community in terms of its mechanical function critiques southern capitalism as underpinned by racial segregation. Because Darlington sees each of the members of the community as interchangeable commodities contributing to the functioning of his "machine", Gaines couches his request for assistance as the exchange of commodities when he appeals to Darlington's sense of himself by calling him "master of both those who buy and sell" (156). Gaines stages his appeal to save Dandelion's life as a commercial transaction, asking Darlington to sell him a bucket of blood or buy from him a bone (156). In order to impress upon the banker the importance of his intervention, Gaines facetiously figures Dandelion's life as a commodity to be bought and sold: "The body of a man is capital also. It is invested in the labor that produces wealth" (158). By engaging the banker in his own logic, that of the machine requiring raw materials, Gaines re-imagines the lynching as an entirely material transaction in order to (unsuccessfully) co-opt the town's capitalist centre to his own ends.

Darlington is ultimately frightened and bemused by Gaines's offer to buy or sell the life of Dandelion. The banker's refusal to enter into such a contract, reminiscent as it is of Shylock's "pound of flesh" in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, is also made as if a human life were a commodity to be bought and sold: "His voice was cold, remote, and withdrawn; he spoke in the tone he used to deny a loan to a man he considered a bad financial risk" (158).

Darlington accepts Gaines' premise because it is offered in the appropriate register, but refuses to help. Darlington's tone of voice suggests finance capitalism; it is "withdrawn" like money from his own bank. Even while Gaines's reduction of Dandelion's life to a financial opportunity is made in bad taste and in bad faith, it is not for this reason that the transaction is declined: Darlington does not deny the fact that Dandelion's body and labour are commodities, only that they are valuable enough to save.

Reece figures Dandelion ironically as a financial commodity throughout the entire novel. His lynching, rather than constituting a digression from the town's capitalist order, is an extension of it. At the beginning of the novel, the sleeping inhabitants dream about their personal desires fitting in a figurative and literal economy of the town. They are figurative in that the commodities they desire can be understood as pertaining to emotional fulfilment, and literal because the items desired are also commodities available to consumers within the town:

> Somewhere in the town, one dreamed of Thebes. One dreamed of a tin of snuff, another of the cat Tawm's arch and spit of pride; and one, sleeping or waking, dreamed of the flesh and bones of the blonde boy Jonathan as he, integer, moved separate but indivisible from the life of the town which the sun created anew each day into the definition of light (14).

This passage is a catalogue of the desires of some of the novel's primary characters. It is Dandelion who dreams of snuff, the one luxury item on which he

spends the small profit from his labour. An undated draft of the novel, fairly close to completion, shows Reece's handwritten changes to a small number of such scenes. At this point in the composition of the novel, it was still entitled *Tents toward Sodom*. The description of Dandelion's labour, as it relates to his ability to purchase snuff, is expanded in the draft. The typed description reads: "Without snuff it was a long time until eight o'clock." Underneath it in pencil, Reece added: "It was a shed to clean, it was a chicken to dress, it was wood to cart; without snuff, etc."[56] The passage, appearing in the final text, reads "It was a shed to clean, it was a chicken to dress, it was wood to cart; without snuff it was a long time till eight o'clock" (17).

Reece changed the statement from a short, declarative sentence, to an inventory of jobs. The addition of a semicolon, which brings the sentence's two separate clauses together, makes the sentence a narrative of time and effort being spent. In this formulation, both time and effort are commodities. The time "until eight o'clock" is more difficult for Dandelion to pass because he lacks the funds to buy his one luxury and the expansion of the sentence reiterates the duration of that time. By lengthening the sentence, Reece highlighted the length of the time between sunrise and 8am. The expanded sentence also clarifies the translation of Dandelion's labour (cleaning sheds, dressing chickens, carrying wood) into its equivalent purchasing power, the snuff. This contingent relationship between his work and his ability to buy snuff marks Dandelion and his labour as commodities within the economic structure of the town equal to the value of the tobacco. Fittingly, Dandelion must complete his circuit of jobs before 8am because this is when the town's shops open: his working day precedes the beginning of the

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[56] Manuscript Draft, *Tents toward Sodom*, box 9, folder 6. Byron Herbert Reece papers. MS 56. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the University of Georgia Libraries.

working day for the town's shop owners and his physical comfort, aided by the snuff, is dependent on the "circuit" of their workday as much as that of his own.

Dandelion's fixation on snuff is echoed disturbingly toward the novel's end. After the leader of the lynch mob has brutally emasculated the beaten and dying Dandelion and "cast[s] away" his dismembered penis, Dandelion's heart stops. After his masculinity has been destroyed, and his life is ended, Dandelion is bodily and spiritually removed from the town: "With his heart's stoppage whatever meagre dreams had animated his spirit were snuffed utterly" (176). Dandelion's death is described as the "snuffing" of a candle, while the novel's opening makes clear that his one "meagre dream" was snuff. Although the word "snuff" appears alternately as a noun and a verb, Reece echoes "snuff" as a signifier of a tobacco product with 'snuffing out a life.' Reece imbues Dandelion's death with the traces of his life as a commodity to the economic structure of the town and his dependence on the smallest of commodities provided by that same structure. The snuff that compelled Dandelion to visit Ella's house is recalled in the fatal repercussions of the visit, marking both the tobacco and Dandelion's body as disposable commodities. As a result, Reece's appeal against racial violence enacted through a schema of symbolism is never divorced from the economic reality of the South during segregation. While Dandelion's death is a symbol of a morally bankrupt southern town, it is also a representation of the inherent violence of an economic system in which lynching is a means of regulating labour and consumption.

Reece, who worked both as a farmer and an educator, represents characters in each of these roles in an aesthetic that combines a concern with both the physical and the metaphysical. By having each of these characters act

against type, Reece calls for a reimagining of the southern town's cultural systems and by merging the characters' material and intellectual vocations. The two characters are treated as synecdoches for individuals who wish to make material change in the segregated South and they represent two components of a typology of the fictional town that refuse to capitulate to the collective identity that is enforced by other elements of the same typology, especially the banker and reverend. As Reece wrote in a letter in 1956, "all books worth a damn are symbolic at least to the extent that their characters and incidents stand for something beyond themselves, stand for the experience common to us all."[57] Reece's characters "make a stand" for racial justice and in turn they "stand" for other white southerners' capacity to slowly change the segregated racial structure of the region.

In this novel, the fictional southern town is built from the ground up on a structure of symbolism and allusion. Reece imbues the typology of the southern town with an allusive subtext drawn from ancient and medieval literary texts and every element of Tilden and its population can be mapped onto the symbolic schema that the author outlines in his correspondence but this detailed symbolism does not exist in a contextual vacuum. Reece's interpretation of the texts to which he alludes is consistently textured by an exploration of the contemporary southern moment in which real-life murder, like that of Robert Mallard, goes unpunished. Reece's Abraham represents a symbolic cultivation of racial change in the segregated South just as Gaines stands for non-symbolic, direct individual action against racism. In Carson McCullers' *Clock Without Hands* (1961), the individual's responsibility in the face of racial terrorism is

[57] Letter, Byron Herbert Reece to Jimmy Winn, November 11, 1956, Byron Herbert Reece papers.

even more explicitly explored. McCullers' final novel puts all of her previous fiction into perspective as an extended portrayal of people making a stand against segregation. Only with the announcement of the Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board* is the author's fictional town of Milan, Peach County, Georgia, fully defined. Where Reece's farmer and teacher represent symbolic types, McCullers invents a pharmacist and three lawyers through whose stories she maps gradual racial change.

CHAPTER 3

The Milan Cycle: Carson McCullers' Milan

One of Carson McCullers' earliest short stories, published posthumously as "Untitled Piece" in *The Mortgaged Heart* (1972), rehearses some of the characters and scenarios that would form the basis of the author's first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940).[1] In the story, a white man named Andrew Leander arrives, drunk and aimless, in a small southern town. Leander arrives at the railway station restaurant "in a drunken turmoil," and bears more than a passing resemblance to the character of Jake Blount in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.[2] In the story's closing dialogue, Leander approaches a young boy working in the restaurant, confused at where he has found himself: "I got off the bus half drunk. Will you tell me the name of this place?"[3] If Leander gets an answer, it is not reported in the story. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, too, the small town setting is not named, nor are the small-town settings of McCullers' subsequent long works, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1941), *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), or "The Ballad of the Sad Café" (1952) ever explicitly named. Ostensibly, these texts share similarities of setting and of theme, but are set in distinct, separate southern towns. To the contrary, I argue that McCullers' novels are best understood as parts of a narrative cycle that is made coherent by a shared setting, and that *Clock Without Hands* (1961) operates as the culmination of what I term the Milan Cycle. Through close textual analysis of *Clock Without Hands*,

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[1] The manuscript of the story is undated, though the editor of *The Mortgaged Heart*, McCullers' sister Margarita G. Smith, is certain only that the story predates *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and was likely written between 1935 and 1936. Margarita G. Smith, "Editors Note" in *The Mortgaged Heart* (London: Penguin, 2008), 21.
[2] Carson McCullers, "Untitled Piece", in *The Mortgaged Heart*, 111.
[3] Ibid, 135.

McCullers' final novel, I show that the author's earlier fiction can be retrospectively understood as contingent parts of a larger narrative.

It is only with the publication of *Clock Without Hands* that a town is attributed with a name: Milan, Peach County, Georgia. In this chapter, I argue that the "nameless little town" in which Leander arrives in "Untitled Piece," and the town in all the novels that follow, share a single fictional setting. McCullers' longer works are set in or around Milan, Peach County but this is only discernable in the moment that the town's legal order is forced to change because of the announcement of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. In *Clock Without Hands*, McCullers depicts a town in the midst of racial change. Although Milan is only named in her final novel, McCullers positions Milan on a political trajectory beginning in her earliest novels and ending with *Clock Without Hands*.

Despite the excitement of "hordes of eager readers" for the publication of McCullers' first full-length novel in over a decade, critical reception of *Clock Without Hands* was generally lukewarm.[4] Reviewers were sympathetic to McCullers herself, with Orville Prescott writing that "to praise her book would be a pleasure. Unfortunately that is not possible. *Clock Without Hands* is not a successful novel."[5] Building on the reputation of her earlier work, critics appreciated her plotting, with Charles Rolo describing the novel's "craftsmanship [a]s impeccable."[6] However, Irving Howe mourned what he saw as a decline in stylistic quality: "in her past work she could carry off almost anything through the virtuosity of her language," describing *Clock Without*

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[4] Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, September 18, 1961, 27.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Charles Rolo, "A Southern Drama." *The Atlantic*. October 1961. Accessed on 27 August 2015. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1961/10/a-southern-drama/376251/

Hands as "an unadorned and scrappy scenario for a not-yet-written novel."[7] This idea was echoed in Louis D. Rubin's description of the novel as "the annotation of an idea instead of something involving created characters and a story,"[8] and Donald Emerson's interpretation of the novel's politicisation as a harmful influence on the author's established style when he wrote that "Mrs. McCullers is most herself as the novelist of inward experience, but in *Clock Without Hands* she attempts to add another dimension by making her characters stand for the whole South. It is a mistake. The private and the symbolic roles are not fused; the individual and the representative do not merge."[9] Professional readers were almost unanimous in their lack of enthusiasm, even as this scepticism was always couched in respect for earlier work. However, professional writers gave the novel no warmer reception.

Even among McCullers' friends and peers in southern literature, the novel was roundly criticised, with Tennessee Williams regarding the novel as inferior to McCullers' earlier fiction and only relenting from "begging" her to delay publication over fears that in her poor health she could not take the rejection.[10] Less delicately, Flannery O'Connor thought so little of *Clock Without Hands* that she told a friend that she believed it to be "the worst novel [she had] ever read."[11] Even Lillian Smith, a close friend who had received similar dismissals of her work, judged it to be "the least real of any" of McCullers' novels and queried whether McCullers was "so much a part of the intellectual

[7] Irving Howe, "In the Shadow of Death," *New York Times Book Review*, September 17, 1961, 5.
[8] Louis D. Rubin, "Six Novels and S. Levin." *The Sewanee Review* 70:3 (Autumn 1962), 509.
[9] Donald Emerson, "The Ambiguities of *Clock Without Hands,*" in *Wisconsin Studies in Contemporary Literature* 3:3 (Autumn 1962), 16.
[10] Virginia Spencer Carr, *The Lonely Hunter: A Biography of Carson McCullers* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 490. Williams found the portrayal of Sherman, particularly in Chapter 4 in which Sherman and Jester discuss Sherman's sexual abuse, "especially objectionable."
[11] Flannery O'Connor, In *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1988), 446.

and psychological climate of New York City" that she had lost her ability to write convincingly about the South.[12]

On the contrary, I read *Clock Without Hands* as the novel in which McCullers' treatment of the South as a setting and the political crisis of segregation most visibly coincide. Because McCullers makes clear in this novel that all her fiction has been centred in one southern town, the texts that Smith might call more "convincingly" southern offer texture to *Clock Without Hands* and add depth to the places and people it depicts. Despite Irving Howe's critical review of the novel, he does draw attention to the significance of its setting to its plot: "a small-town American version of Tolstoy's great story, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich.'"[13] What makes the novel a story of the southern small town rather than Howe's generically American one is the way that racial tensions reshape the social and physical architecture of Milan.

Clock Without Hands follows eighteen months in the life of small-town pharmacist J.T. Malone from his diagnosis with terminal leukaemia, to his death on Monday, May 17, 1954, the day on which the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board* is announced. When Malone is diagnosed by his friend, Dr. Kenneth Hayden, he is compelled to confront the white supremacist ideas that he has always taken for granted. Malone's confidant, Fox Clane, is a local judge and former member of the U.S. House of Representatives for Georgia who maintains a culture of of reactionary segregationist politics in the town. Despite, or because of, his extreme segregationist views, the judge employs an orphaned young black man named Sherman Pew as his personal secretary. Sherman is the son of a

[12] Lillian Smith, "Letter to Margaret Long, Sept. 10th, 1961," in *How Am I to be Heard? Letters of Lillian Smith,* ed. Margaret Rose Gladney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 284.
[13] Howe, "In the Shadow of Death," 5.

black man who, years prior to the events of the narrative, the judge's son Johnny defended against a charge of murder. Humiliated by the defeat of his progressive ideals, Johnny commits suicide leaving his then-unborn son, Jester, in the judge's care.

Jester grows up believing in the judge's racist politics until, at the age of seventeen, his developing progressivism and romantic infatuation with Sherman Pew force him to confront the paradoxes in the judge's two-tiered system of justice. Meanwhile, the judge plans to exploit his power in local and national politics to enact starkly racist, neo-Confederate policies. Chief among these plans is the reintroduction of the Confederate Dollar as legal tender in the United States, which would make the judge a very rich man. When Sherman is expected to write letters, dictated by the judge, demanding that white southerners receive monetary restitution for slaves emancipated during the Civil War, he is disgusted and commits to political activism. Beginning by watering down the judge's insulin (an act of sabotage that has no effect on the judge's health), Sherman eventually takes the bold and deliberate step of renting a home in a white neighbourhood. The judge, whose paternalistic feelings toward Sherman are shaken by Sherman's act of civil disobedience, calls a meeting of the town's white men in which Malone is chosen to bomb the rented house. Malone refuses to take part, not as an act of conscience but in fear that his soul will be damned. When another member of the lynch mob inevitably takes Malone's place, Sherman is killed in the bombing. By the end of the novel, when the *Brown* decision is announced, Malone dies and the judge's political power in Milan has been neutered, suggesting that an older generation of southerners is slowly making way for a new wave of southern whites, epitomised by Jester.

The town of Milan in which Jester matures is, in my reading, recognizable as the same as earlier settings in McCullers' writing. Specific places, including the First Baptist Church, the New York Café, and the outlying hamlet of Forks Falls, all of which appear in her last novel, are also mentioned or described in earlier narratives. By tracing the continuity of these individual locations, a larger continuity of setting becomes apparent. As well as McCullers' setting, comparative character studies of John Singer from *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and J.T. Malone in *Clock Without Hands*, demonstrate that the town of Milan as inextricably connected to the protagonists of novels also set there.

The Milan Cycle: Re-Setting McCullers' Novels

In this chapter, I propose a model for reading McCullers' fiction as an extended narrative cycle that ends with a novel depicting a major shift in the town's segregated order. Charting the process of the town's construction across novels leads to an exploration of connections across texts that suggest spatial continuity and provides textual evidence that the town with which McCullers' has been concerned in her fiction has always been Milan. Such continuity is meaningful only in the context of *Clock Without Hands*, the novel that connects these threads and most overtly portrays Milan as a town undergoing a process of desegregation. Through close textual analysis of the novel and the narratives that precede it in the cycle, I identify a pattern of continuity in both setting and character development that is contingent because each insight into the town is influenced by earlier portrayals and McCullers shows a typology of the fictional southern town in the process of evolving.

From the beginning of McCullers' career, the invention of a town was a prominent characteristic, as evidenced by the narrative strategies she deployed in her construction of characters. In the opening line of her first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, she foregrounds the importance of the town in that novel's structure: "In the town there were two mutes, and they were always together."[14] Although not named, the town is introduced to an imagined reader before even 'the mutes', Singer and Antonopoulos. With this sentence, the novel begins with an allusion to the fairy tale form; two declarative statements are joined, with each providing the essential details of setting and *dramatis personae* without designating either with names. The definite article suggests the conditions of fairy tale by underscoring 'the' town as representative of all towns.[15]

By establishing the setting as archetypal in this way, McCullers is able to return to the same unnamed town repeatedly to explicate its dimensions in greater detail in subsequent novels, examining different dimensions of the social life of the town from text to text. Even when Milan is not the primary setting for a novel, as is the case in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, the town is never entirely absent. This novel is set in the years before the outbreak of the Second World War in a military camp in the South, located near an unnamed small town described as "a dull place."[16] The setting compares with the real Fort Benning, a military outpost outside Columbus and can be read as McCullers thinking through the broader social landscape of her fictional town-in-process. The town that serves as the setting for McCullers' other novels is looked at askance in this novel, which is set in federally operated space just outside of the incorporated

[14] Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (London: Penguin, 1961 [1940]), 7.
[15] While the definite article ordinarily creates specificity, I read it here as pertaining to a thing rather than an example of a type of thing. A contemporaneous example of such usage is found in the title of Robert Penn Warren's *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New York: Random House, 1965).
[16] Carson McCullers, *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (London: Penguin, 1968 [1941]), 7.

limits.[17] Only by having established Milan as a setting in her previous novel is McCullers able to obscure it in her second to explore a space contingent upon but separate from the town.

Elsewhere in her fiction, McCullers depicts the town in a state of flux as a pathetic fallacy that mirrors her characters' development. For example, Frankie Addams, the protagonist of *The Member of the Wedding*, makes her personal confusion manifest in the town's constituent parts: "She went around town, and the things she saw and heard seemed to be left somehow unfinished, and there was the tightness in her that would not break."[18] The "unfinished" feeling is certainly a projection of the adolescent Frankie's insecurities onto the infrastructure of the town in which she is a reluctant resident. Frankie's feeling of incompleteness may also be read as a self-conscious allusion to McCullers' ongoing project of elaborating her 'unfinished' fictional town as it evolves from text to text. Later in the novel, as Frankie leaves for her brother's wedding, her emotional relationship to the town is again suggestive of McCullers' act of fabricating it: "At that still hour the sky was the dim silver of a mirror, and beneath it the grey town looked, not a real town, but like an exact reflection of itself, and to this unreal town she also said farewell."[19] By figuring it in Frankie's imagination as an unreal reflection of real towns, McCullers allows Milan to move with the developing personalities of her characters while its own identity remains somewhat stable. A sense of narrative stability allows texts that appear

[17] In this regard, McCullers anticipates other southern novelists who have used similar settings to view the southern town indirectly. William Styron explores a peace-time military camp during the escalation of the Korean war in *The Long March* (1952), and John Oliver Killens maps the training of African American soldiers during the Second World War in *And Then We Heard the Thunder* (1963). In each of these novels, soldiers stationed at the camp interact with neighboring southern towns.
[18] Carson McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1946]), 32.
[19] Ibid, 167.

to move away from Milan as a setting to remain grounded geographically and thematically by the structures put in place in earlier novels.

For example, a smaller population and sparse distribution of amenities mark the setting of "The Ballad of the Sad Café" as different from Milan but McCullers situates the novella's hamlet in the same fictionalised geography. In this case, the relationship between the archetypal town, Milan, and the smaller town is equivalent to the relationship in size between novel and novella. "The Ballad of the Sad Café" opens with a description of all of the systems and amenities present in the larger town but in condensed form. It is described in relation to other places in the state and, crucially, is connected to its neighbouring towns by transport infrastructure: "The nearest train stop is Society City, and the Greyhound and White Bus Lines use the Forks Falls Road which is three miles away."[20] The town is indirectly connected to "society" by these avenues of movement that are accessible to residents even while they are some distance away. The town, which lacks any explicit geographical detail, is almost certainly in Georgia: when the townspeople imagine Amelia being executed, she is "electrocuted in Atlanta."[21] Society City and Forks Falls do not have any real-world counterparts and are not locations in a real Georgia geography as is Atlanta. Instead, their names suggest community and divergence respectively and locate this hamlet on the same map of McCullers' Georgia as Milan and within the same themes of isolation and community to which McCullers consistently returns.

As well as establishing the parameters of this smaller town, the opening scene of "The Ballad of the Sad Café" returns to a feature of the fictionalised

[20] Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (London: Cresset Press, 1958 [1951]), 9.
[21] Ibid, 22.

landscape first established in an earlier novel. The Forks Falls Road on which the chain gang is forced to work leads from the unnamed hamlet to the fictional town of Forks Falls and this same town appears in a number of stories told to Frankie Adams by her housekeeper Berenice in *The Member of the Wedding*. In one such story, Berenice visits family in Forks Falls and feels like an outsider "praying in a church where the congregation was strangers to [her]."[22] This positions the town of Forks Falls as distant both from the town of Milan in which Frankie lives, and the setting of "The Ballad of the Sad Café." In both cases, then, Forks Falls represents a neighbouring town through which to define the primary setting in both texts and against which the population of either town defines itself. These two fictional locales are positioned in geographical relation to each other more clearly than to any recognizable location in the real state of Georgia. Highlighting this connection rather than placing the towns in relation to real-world locations suggests McCullers' primary engagement with inventing rather than representing the southern town. The unseen Forks Falls does not appear in *Clock Without Hands* but is the earliest appearance of recurring locations in her work through which an attentive reader is able to chart a continuity of setting across her fiction.

The first building in Milan to similarly recur is the First Baptist Church. It appears in both *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock Without Hands*. As in Reece's Tilden, Milan's religious centre plays a significant role as monument to wealth and social standing rather than as an avenue for spiritual deliverance. The First Baptist Church is represented as an important social and geographic anchor for the people of Milan in both *The Member of the Wedding* and *Clock Without*

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[22] McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, 123.

Hands. Jan Whitt draws attention to the confluence between the churches in both novels, noting that "churches were a central part of McCullers' fiction, just as they were the centre of the southern communities she knew."[23] In *The Member of the Wedding*, the First Baptist Church is described briefly but its role in controlling the town's profitability is highlighted: "The clock in the tower of the First Baptist Church clanged twelve, the mill whistle wailed."[24] The church works in tandem with the town's centre of industry to mediate time for the workers; lunch is announced with spiritual as well as commercial authority.

In *Clock Without Hands,* the architectural detail of the church is described in far greater depth than in previous texts. Facing his mortality early in the novel, Malone takes comfort in the physical building of the church rather than in faith in the religion it symbolises. The material façade of faith is more reassuring to Malone than promises of salvation:

> Malone sought comfort in the church. When tormented by the unreality of both death and life, it helped him to know that the First Baptist church was real enough. The largest church in town, taking up half a city block near the main street, the property on off-hand reckoning was worth about two million dollars. A church like that was bound to be real. The pillars of the church were men of substance and leading citizens. Butch Henderson, the realtor and one of the shrewdest traders in the town, was a deacon and never missed a service from one year to the next – and was

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[23] Jan Whitt, "The Exiled Heir: An Introduction to Carson McCullers and Her Work," in *Reflections in a Critical Eye: Essays on Carson McCullers*, ed. Jan Whitt (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2008), xviii.
[24] McCullers, *The Member of the Wedding*, 79.

> Butch Henderson a likely man to waste his time and trouble on anything that was not as real as dirt?[25]

The phrase "real as dirt" serves as a reminder of Malone's mortality in spite of his attempts to seek solace in the material world. The size of the building devoted to worship instils faith in Malone, as does its ability to amass a fortune. His faith has no spiritual basis; it is built on pragmatism and a desire to be successful in the community.

The "white columns" holding up of Milan's church do not denote the architectural element popular in Greek Revival churches throughout the South but rather, race and social prestige. McCullers puns on the racial group to whom respect in the church is afforded, as well as conflating the social and architectural properties of the building.[26] The church is also a source of reassurance to Malone when he learns of his disease: the stability of the building and its respectable congregants reinscribe Malone's belief in the "real." The repetition is also a pun on "real" property, the real estate on which the church is built and the industry in which one such "pillar" of the community, the realtor, makes his living. Malone's "spiritual" life is at odds with the town's economic system. Respect for success in business is, early in the novel at least, Malone's most accurate barometer for personal fulfilment. In this regard, Malone's reaction to the social infrastructure of the small town is consistent with a paradigm McCullers develops in earlier work: the church is a means of critique in *Clock Without Hands* in a way that it was not in *The Member of the Wedding*.

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[25] Carson McCullers, *Clock Without Hands* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1961]), 14. Further references to the novel will appear parenthetically.

[26] As I described in the previous chapter, the phrase "the church" is a *pars pro toto* synecdoche that places the responsibility of a religious denomination on its architectural representative.

Another node of continuity that connects McCullers' final novel with earlier fictions is how characters explored social anxieties and racial tensions. The New York Café provides a social hub for maladjusted characters in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* but when the café reappears in *Clock Without Hands*, it does not serve the same narrative function. In the later novel, the judge meets his friends for drinks and to play poker in the "back room" of the Café (53,164,177). The New York Café is one of a number of places in which the judge expresses his politics to his neighbours, as when he speaks to "audiences in Malone's pharmacy, in the courthouse, in the back room of the New York Café and in the barbershop" (164). Because of the judge's influence on the space, it has a more conservative atmosphere than when Biff Brannon owns it in *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*.

By 1953**,** when *Clock Without Hands* begins, the café is not connected to Brannon as proprietor, the implication being that the Café's role as a meeting place for the town's misunderstood and oppressed residents has been overcome by white supremacy. In *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Biff defends his benevolence in opening his doors to misfits and the oppressed, and offering service on credit, telling his pragmatic wife "I like freaks."[27] In *Clock Without Hands* the atmosphere Biff created of diversity and tolerance is replaced by the Judge's white supremacy. The changing role of the Café in Milan is a measure of the community's political temperament.

In *Clock Without Hands*, the Café is a haven for the judge and like-minded constituents. In contrast, the city of New York is persistently figured as the judge's idea of a decadent "Babel" (40). The judge recalls with horror how he

[27] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 17.

saw an interracial couple in New York, casting the city as the spatial representative of his deepest racial anxieties (40). The judge expresses his confusion at Johnny's defence of Sherman Jones by telling Jester that "it was as if he were talking to a panel of New York Jew lawyers" (169). The judge's racism and anti-semitism require the idea of New York as a foil and the judge's imagination fixates on the city as the antithesis of his beliefs. The judge effectively reverses the principles of southern exceptionalism by painting the North as a horrifying but distant space of racial and sexual permissiveness. The judge finds it unthinkable when his grandson expresses eagerness to visit New York City as soon as he can (40). For Jester, the northern city is a valuable proving ground for his ideals even if its namesake café is presided over by his grandfather.

A comparison between characters' developments in McCullers' first and final novels indicates that *Clock Without Hands* represents a point of transition in which progressive change can be more easily realised than at any previous point in the fictional town's history. Indeed, from its earliest iteration, Milan is characterised as an arena in which the political tensions of the moment are played out. In Brinkmeyer's view, in *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers "recasts the rise of Fascism in Europe in a small southern town fractured by change and beset with numbing alienation."[28] It results in the failure of the novel's most politically motivated, progressive characters – alcoholic white drifter Jake Blount and African American physician Benedict Mady Copeland – to consolidate their efforts to organise against racial segregation.

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[28] Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 239.

Blount and Copeland are isolated by social beliefs but when they have the opportunity to meet and discuss Marxist[29] ideas, all that results is a "long, exhausting dialogue" during which they are unable to agree.[30] If Jake Blount bemoans "The strangled South. The wasted South. The slavish South,"[31] but is unable to effect radical change, his failure is overwritten by Jester Clane. In *Clock Without Hands,* Jester has the potential to effect legislative change in the racial order of the South. Jester is a corrective to well-intentioned but impotent Blount and Copeland and has a greater degree of insight than either of his predecessors. At the end of the Milan cycle, he is in a unique position to foster (albeit still gradual) racial change.

Toward the end of the novel, while flying his family's plane, Jester sees the town from above. From the plane, Jester sees Milan as a productive whole and is better able to understand how its workings are flawed. The altered vantage point allows Jester to rethink his conception of Milan: "From this height you do not see a man and the details of his humiliation. The earth from a great distance is perfect and whole" (202). Jester's aerial view is 'grounded' when he considers the rift between his idea of Milan and that of his grandfather's:

> Looking downward from an altitude of two thousand feet, the earth assumes order. A town, even Milan, is symmetrical, exact in a small grey honeycomb, complete. The surrounding terrain seems designed by a law

[29] Blount confides his politics in Singer, saying: "Over there in my suitcase I have books by Karl Marx and Thorstein Veblen and such writers as them. I read them over and over, and the more I study the madder I get" and Copeland goes so far as to name his son Karl Marx Copeland. McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 64, 74.
[30] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 260.
[31] Ibid.

> more just and mathematical than the laws of property and bigotry: a dark parallelogram of pine wood, square fields, rectangles of sward (202).

While the symmetry might be interpreted as an allusion to the racial myth of "separate but equal", the design of the town from this perspective overcomes its design along segregationist laws of property and bigotry. This perspective throws into relief the view of the town from closer to the ground in which the decidedly and fundamentally asymmetrical principles of segregationist law, overseen by Jester's grandfather, continue to define the character of the town. Jester's unique insight and his intention to translate his political convictions into a legal career modelled on his father's, position him as capable of effecting change with more success than the quarrelling radicals of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*. The activism that is germinal in McCullers' first novel has the potential to be actualised in her last.

The typology of the fictional southern town that I identify in earlier chapters is shown, in analysis of McCullers' work, to develop over time when the author returns to individual offices during different historical moments. Milan's racial identity changes in parallel to the recurring offices and *Clock Without Hands* is the novel in which these narratives of racial and formal development are simultaneously visible. Only by understanding each novel as a point on a trajectory can this narrative be charted and the trajectory understood as it is woven through the texts.

Sartre's Knife and Sherman's Eyes in Malone's Milan

Despite Jester's unique perspective at the end of the novel, the character who most closely reflects the town's unexamined white superiority is J.T. Malone, whose name differs from 'Milan' only in the placement of vowels. Malone is the character at the social centre of the novel and his struggle with racial politics provides an insight into the waning power of white supremacy in McCullers' town. Malone matures from an unexamined belief in white supremacy to a position of scepticism, if not outright rejection, of that belief. Rather than rejecting his bigotry, Malone arrives at ambivalence. His is not a "conversion … from racism to something approaching racial enlightenment" that Fred Hobson identifies in white southern autobiographies, but it is a pivotal personal change for the character.[32] By his death, Malone is unwilling and unable to take action against white supremacy, but he has also lost the will to support it. He is forced to reassess the conventions of his community, even though that reassessment falls short of a complete rejection. The implication of Malone's political ambivalence is that the passing of his generation will allow a new generation of southern whites, typified by Jester, to mature along the same ideological trajectory.

Malone's development is paralleled by the town of Milan, which is poised for gradual but progressive change. But, because Malone experiences the changes in his personality, he also witnesses the shifts the town is undergoing and undergoes a process of defamiliarisation as the town, and his own body, is increasingly alien to him. Malone is a locus for the town's identity at this point in the Milan cycle in contrast to an earlier anchor of Milan's social sphere, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*'s John Singer. Singer and Malone are points at

[32] Fred Hobson, *But Now I See: The White Southern Racial Conversion Narrative*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 2.

different ends of the town's literary life. Malone is more internally focalised than Singer and this allows McCullers to structure her final novel around his personal development, where *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is driven by other characters' misguided perceptions of Singer. In his review of the novel, Orville Prescott describes the novel as "about death, the fear of death and the approach of death, and also about the necessity of self-realization in the midst of life."[33] This observation hints at McCullers' preoccupation with existentialist philosophy in her construction of Malone. The dynamic by which the health of the town is mirrored in Malone extends to his place of work. Malone's pharmacy is a building around which the rest of the town orients itself and through which the people of the town navigate Milan spatially. It is a public social venue in which people meet to drink Coca-Cola and gossip but also as a medium through which to understand Malone's confused mentality in the months following his diagnosis.[34]

While Singer has negotiated Milan's political crises at an earlier point in the town's fictive chronology, his character is developed along decidedly different lines to Malone. These two characters are similar in that they each anchor the events of their respective novels and each stands at the centre of the town's social circle at different points in its development. An unexpected change in the town's weather anticipates a significant change in each character's personality in the months leading up to his death. The change in Singer is

[33] Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, September 18,1961, 27.

[34] A fictional building that similarly refracts and contains local narrative in another southern novel is the Beulah Hotel in the fictional town of Clay, Mississippi in Eudora Welty's novella *The Ponder Heart* (1954). The hotel in that text is the source of local gossip, mediated by its proprietor, and the novella's narrator, Edna Earl Ponder. This, alongside McCullers' "The Ballad of the Sad Café," is an experiment in exploring southern narrative through a single building. In each novella, events are grounded by these lone buildings, mediated by the experiences of their proprietors, through which entire fictional towns are concentrated.

anticipated by an unusually ferocious season: "The town had not known a winter as cold as this one for years… A change came over Singer."[35] Midway through the narrative, this change denotes the beginning of a severe depression that leads eventually to Singer's suicide. Malone's pivotal change also signals his mortality and is anticipated not only by an extreme winter but by an equally extreme end to the season: "The winter of his fortieth year was an unusually cold one for the Southern town – with icy, pastel days and radiant nights. The spring came violently in middle March in that year of 1953… diagnosing spring fever, he prescribed himself a liver and iron tonic" (7). In both cases, the men's experiences of extreme winter are mediated by the personified town: the first is described as being 'known' by the town while the second winter is judged by the standards of Milan rather than any objective measure. In this way, McCullers ties each of her characters' fates to the town of Milan.

While in each novel exceptional weather patterns symbolise a turning point for a major character, in Malone's case this technique is elaborated through the "violent" arrival of spring. By erroneously prescribing medicine for spring fever, Malone actively works against these changes in his character and his home to hinder the passage of time and he is figured as a character concerned to halt change both in himself and Milan.

In contrast, McCullers' stated conception of Singer is decidedly at odds with her later treatment of Malone as the subject, rather than object, of narrative attention. By this, I mean that the shift in narrative focalisation from Singer to Malone is the same as a simultaneous shift from a character upon whom meaning is imposed by the rest of the population of Milan to one who is characteristically

[35] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 175.

self-constituted. In an outline for the novel that would become *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, McCullers describes her idea of Singer as an object of others' interpretations:

> The parts concerning Singer are never treated in a subjective manner. The style is oblique. … Except when he is understood through the eyes of other people the style is for the main part simple and declarative. No attempt will be made to enter intimately into his subconscious. He is a flat character in that from the second chapter on through the rest of the book his essential self does not change.[36]

Singer has a gravitational pull that attracts the other characters in the town, anchoring them emotionally and spatially and competing interpretations of Singer's personality orient the rest of the novel's characters and structures the social geography Milan when "all the characters are singly drawn toward one man, the deaf-mute Singer, who stands bewilderedly at the novel's centre."[37]

Other characters revolve around Singer even while he is relatively oblivious to their conceptions of him. When Singer writes a letter to his institutionalised friend Antonapoulos, he addresses it to "My Only Friend," suggesting that the bond the other characters feel to Singer is one-sided.[38] His own feelings toward the group that relies on him become clearer as he thinks about its members coldly as "the black man, the young girl, the one with the

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[36] Carson McCullers, "Author's Outline of 'The Mute' (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*)," in *The Mortgaged Heart*, 138.
[37] Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 211.
[38] McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 188.

moustache, and the man who owns the New York Café."[39] Singer's candour is only reported when the *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter's* omniscient narrator observes a written account of his feelings. Where Singer's subjective experience of the town is not directly rendered in first person narrative, the omniscient narrator of *Clock Without Hands* consistently depicts the narrative through Malone's subjective understanding.

By focusing on Malone's personal development, McCullers reiterates the subjective focus of his depiction, especially compared to Singer who is continuously interpreted by others. This divergence is highlighted through McCullers' engagement with European existentialism, especially as a means of understanding the impulse toward white supremacy. McCullers anticipates Malone's quasi-existentialism in an essay in which she discusses the psychological roots of white supremacy:

> For fear is a primary source of evil. And when the question 'Who am I?' recurs and is unanswered, then fear and frustration project a negative attitude. The bewildered soul can answer only: 'Since I do not understand 'who I am,' I only know what I am *not*.' The corollary of this emotional incertitude is snobbism, intolerance and racial hate. The xenophobic individual can only reject and destroy, as the xenophobic nation inevitably makes war.[40]

In what is perhaps the author's most searing published indictment of racism, she locates the imperative to racial violence within a perverted subjective experience

[39] Ibid, 189.
[40] Carson McCullers, "Loneliness... an American Malady," in *The Mortgaged Heart*, 266.

of the world without absolving “the xenophobic individual” of responsibility for their actions. The violent affirmation of identity based on opposition – what one is not – leads, in McCullers’ argument, to a community of shared xenophobic principles:

> After the first establishment of identity there comes the imperative need to lose this new-found sense of separateness and to belong to something larger and more powerful than the weak, lonely self. The sense of moral isolation is intolerable to us.[41]

In this description, the existentialist impulse to self-determination can lead to bigotry in an unthinking adherence to harmful and hateful social conventions. When Malone is initially diagnosed with leukaemia he conforms to this mentality, even as his illness demands a reconsideration of the social principles he has taken for granted, he remains afraid of moral isolation and maintains his friendship with the judge and his unspoken adherence to white supremacy.

By drawing on existentialist thought, McCullers compels Malone to confront the subjective underpinnings of his hitherto unexamined white supremacist ideology. Sunita Rai has traced existentialist currents throughout McCullers’ work, with particular attention to how notions of the absurd relate to specific characters. Rai’s analysis is primarily concerned with the thematic development of tropes within the fiction that are influenced by existentialist ideas. However, an excavation of the specific principles of existentialism that underpin Malone’s character has yet to be conducted and the direct correlation

[41] Ibid, 265.

between major texts in existentialist philosophy and the novel has yet to be explored.[42] In my reading, existentialism is a means through which McCullers portrays a character as he re-evaluates his racist beliefs.

McCullers draws on the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Søren Kierkegaard in her construction of Malone in order to figure him as a character undergoing an ideological change. Sartre's philosophy serves not only as a lens through which to understand Malone's awareness of his mortality, but also as an ethical paradigm, because Sartre's ethics are predicated on the rejection of tradition. In *Existentialism and Humanism* (1948), Sartre explains his epistemology as predicated on the idea that existence precedes essence and uses the example of a paper knife. The paper knife, for Sartre, is an object for which essence precedes existence because the function of cutting paper is incorporated into the knife's design before the object itself is made:

> If one considers an article of manufacture – as, for example, a book or a paper-knife – one sees that it has been made by an artisan who had a conception of it; and he has paid attention, equally, to the conception of a paper-knife and to the pre-existent technique of production which is a part of that conception and is, at bottom, a formula.[43]

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[42] Sunita Rai reads the existentialist dimension of the novel as an extension of what she see as the novel's theme of the "lonliness that results from man's alienation from his own self," but does not excavate the significance of this reading to the construction of Malone's character. Sunita Rai, *Carson McCullers: An Existential Approach* (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 2001),

[43] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1980 [1948]), 26.

In counterpoint, people are not created by design and each individual's essence is developed after birth. Ethically, this means that each individual is responsible for how their actions impact others and forces personal moral responsibility.

McCullers explores this set of ideas by depicting Malone, by the end of his life, as at last able to confront his past beliefs rather than unthinkingly taking them for granted. When Malone learns of his leukaemia, he fixates on a paper knife in his doctor's office becoming "fascinated and obscurely distressed" by it (10). McCullers' choice of this particular object at the moment in which Malone begins to contemplate his life and its end, seems more than coincidental. The knife is alluded to a total of eight times in the opening chapter alone, making the paper knife an emblem of Malone's leukaemia and his discovery of his illness. Initially, Dr. Hayden avoids making eye contact with Malone by distracting himself as he "handled a paper knife, gazing intently at it as he passed it from hand to hand" (8). The seemingly innocuous object fascinates both doctor and patient at precisely the moment when neither feels able to comprehend the gravity of Malone's diagnosis.

Malone attempts to mediate his reaction to the news through recourse to a stable narrative of white supremacy. It is a desperate attempt to reaffirm essentialist beliefs after being confronted by the fact of his mortality**.** Remembering the "Jew grinds" who supposedly robbed him of a "fair chance" of succeeding in medical school, Malone suddenly notices that Hayden is Jewish (12). Striking out against the difficult-to-process diagnosis, Malone directs his prejudice to Hayden in order to invalidate the abilities of his diagnostician. Malone's defamiliarisation of his relationship with Hayden is an initial coping mechanism:

> Hayden was a good customer and a friend – they had worked in the same building for years and saw each other daily. Why had he failed to notice? Maybe the doctor's given name had tricked him – Kenneth Hale. Malone said to himself he had no prejudice, but when Jews used the good old Anglo-Saxon, Southern names like that, he felt it was somehow wrong (12).

Malone's familiarity with Hayden is expressed through their shared geography; they each work in the building that houses Malone's pharmacy. Despite this familiarity, the free-indirect narration makes it clear that Malone now feels "tricked" by Hayden's religious background, which runs contrary to Malone's conception of southern tradition. As a first recourse, Malone depends on traditions of white supremacy, in this case anti-semitism, as a means of deflecting his diagnosis.

As well as being "mesmerised by the paper knife", Malone's discomfort manifests itself physically: "Malone sat taut and waiting, one leg wrapped around the other and his Adam's apple struggling in his frail throat" (8, 9). The conspicuous allusion to Malone's Adam's apple draws attention to the biblical creation story in juxtaposition to his fixation on the Sartrean paper knife. These two forces operate against each other in the scene as Malone is torn between essentialist and existentialist epistemologies. The description of his Adam's apple "struggling" suggests an insecure grasp on the faith and belief systems on which Malone has previously relied. Indeed, discomfort with his Adam's apple is among the initial symptoms that cause Malone to seek medical advice,

suggesting insecurity in essentialist preconceptions: "His temples were shrunken so that the veins pulsed visibly when he chewed or swallowed and his Adam's apple struggled in his thin neck" (7). Malone's leukaemia is presented repeatedly as a threat to the traditionalist, white supremacist modes of perception upon which he has always relied. The moment of Malone's diagnosis is rendered via two totems or fetishes – the paper knife and the Adam's apple – each of which represents an epistemological decision that the character must make in the face of his illness. His diagnosis can be read as the failure of an engrained belief system to process the shock of mortality, demanding that he reassess that which he has taken for granted.

Shortly after his medical appointment, Malone seeks Judge Clane's advice. During this meeting, Malone's anxiety about his illness is reflected in how he dwells again on the image of the knife: "Malone paled at the unconscious image of a doctor's office with the smell of ether, the children's cries, Dr. Hayden's knife and a treatment table" (57). The paper knife looms in Malone's anxiety, implicitly embodying the existential decisions his disease will force him to make. These unsettling thoughts make Malone "pale," drawing attention to the connection between his mortality and his whiteness, as the verb and adjective forms of the word pale coincide. Malone reacts physically to his disease as his complexion changes and reacts psychologically by becoming more racially whitened. Indeed, leukaemia itself denotes a symbolic failure of whiteness, as the disease leads to the production of defective and harmful white blood cells.

Through the depiction of Malone's leukaemia, McCullers inverts blood's typical racial-metaphorical cargo. Where the anxiety of (visibly) white southern bodies being contaminated by non-white heritage, or 'blood,' is commonplace in

the twentieth-century South, Malone's body is diseased by whiteness itself: his white blood cells attack his body. Because Malone is a symbol of the town of Milan, the leukaemia can also be read as the failure of whiteness to regulate the racial order of the town. Judge Clane is unwilling to see the common metaphor subverted, and is unable to comprehend Malone's illness as arising from his blood: "A *blood* disease! Why that's ridiculous – you have some of the best blood in this State" (18). By wilfully confusing the figurative and literal connotations of the word blood, the judge demonstrates the degree to which whiteness and wellness are conflated in white supremacist thought.

Whiteness and blood are equally potent symbolic markers for race in the twentieth-century South. This is especially true in the early part of the century when "blood", as Jay Watson summarises, "was the most dangerous thing going, the culture's most loaded and coercive metaphor."[44] Watson's statement is grounded in a wide-ranging body of scholarship that addresses the figurative meaning of blood in southern historical and literary contexts as a metaphor, in John Duval's terms, for "a belief that identity is a hereditary essence… [that] moves through the pages of southern literature."[45] This trope of an essential identity is undercut in *Clock Without Hands* when Malone's literal blood fails him while his figurative blood remains relatively stable. Commonly, the presence of "black blood" threatens the supposed superiority of white heredity and figuratively burdens the identity of a visibly white character. As Werner Sollors describes in his writing on mixed race characters in literature by white writers,

[44] Jay Watson, *Reading for the Body: The Recalcitrant Materiality of Southern Fiction* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 137.
[45] John N. Duval, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 16.

"black blood" when it is "understood as genealogical essence is such a liability" to mixed race characters as to inform their behaviour at every level.[46]

The idea of blood is a corollary to the question of agency as it determines a character's identity without his or her volition. For Sollors, "involuntary descent relations are associated with blood and material substance" while voluntary, or "consent," relationships have no such association. This locates Malone's blood disease, metaphorical as it is, as a matter outside of his control.[47] Read this way, the reactionary idea of blood as inevitable essence is a literal threat to Malone's life, in tandem with the town of Milan's racial crisis, which is typified by Malone's growing self-awareness. His experiences, as both a healthcare provider and healthcare receiver, contribute to his depiction as an increasingly confused character struggling with a changing existential self-definition.

Sartre's covert presence in the novel's opening chapter establishes a pattern through which Malone's struggle with cancer can be interpreted as an unwilling engagement with existentialist angst. Later, during a stay in hospital, Malone begins to read Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* (1849).[48] In November 1953, Malone's third doctor, Dr Milton (whose name resonates with the English poetic tradition and, implicitly, an imagined Anglo-Saxon identity while also distinguishing him from the Jewish Dr Hayden) insists on a second

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[46] Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68.
[47] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press,1987), 150.
[48] McCullers is not alone among her contemporaries in portraying sickness and defective blood at the same time as the author is suffering from serious ill health. Susanna Gilbert has identified a relationship between Flannery O'Connor's lupus and the trope of blood in her work, writing that, "blood, like lupus, is systemic, everywhere and anywhere in O'Connor's work" Gilbert argues that blood in O'Connor's fiction operates both literally and metaphorically: "Obviously, blood was not simply an abstraction for O'Connor but a highly visible physical presence in her life." Susanna Gilbert, "'Blood Don't Lie': The Diseased Family in Flannery O'Connor's *Everything that Rises Must Converge*," *Literature and Medicine* 18:1 (1999), 126.

stay at the vaguely named City Hospital. Uninterested in a pulp detective novel that, by virtue of its genre, follows a linear and progressive plot, Malone is instead drawn to Kierkegaard's title: "The next time the aide came around with the books, Malone returned the mystery and glanced at the other titles; his eyes were drawn to a book called *Sickness unto Death*" (129). Malone's terminal illness resonates with the book and its language. While skimming the dense work, Malone is struck by a particular passage:

> From the wilderness of print some lines struck his mind so that he was instantly awake. He read the lines again and then again: *The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed*. If Malone had not had an incurable disease those words would have been only words and he wouldn't have reached for the book in the first place (130, italics in original).

The statement has a transformative effect on Malone, causing him to become "instantly awake" and the very language is defamiliarised in the process of the words becoming more than "only words". Just as the diagnosis compels him to consider Hayden's paper knife, his stay in the hospital compels him to learn about despair.[49] Repeatedly, then, a narrative of growing existential awareness characterises Malone's relationship with other characters and his town, as his

[49] Lillian Smith calls this intrusion of Kierkegaard on Malone's convalescence a "blunder", complaining that it was unrealistic to "say [Malone] picked out of the reading cart in a small city hospital in a Ga. town one of Kierkegaard's books." Smith, "Letter to Margaret Long, Sept. 10th, 1961," 284.

progression toward death instigates significant changes in ideology and personality.

If Malone's fixation on the paper knife is a symbol of the construction of his identity in opposition to essentialism, then the judge's assertion of the implicit powers of blood are challenged. The novel's complex negotiation of the metaphor of blood is complemented by Malone's job as a pharmacist and his position in the typology of the town; his role in Milan and that of his pharmacy are both indicators of the changing attitude of the people and the town of Milan. McCullers designs Malone's drugstore as a social centre for the town and as a spatial representation of its proprietor's subjectivity and the office of the pharmacy symbolises the town's collective moral health. Spaces within the building symbolise different elements in Malone's growing self-awareness. In the architecture of the town, Malone's pharmacy and ubiquitous segregation are equally fundamental to its character.

The building that houses Malone's business takes on the characteristics of its proprietor in its internal division. As well as housing the doctor's office in which Malone is forced to reassess himself, the pharmacy is divided between the public, outward facing storefront, and the shady, private "compounding room" in which Malone meets with the judge and prepares prescription medicines (16). Sharing the space with the doctor who diagnoses his cancer is the earliest indication in the novel of the building's symbiotic relationship to Malone, underscoring the degree to which building and inhabitant are merged in a typology of the southern town in fiction.

When Jester walks through the town, the pharmacy is featured as a locus for the town's activity:

> He left the bus at the corner of J.T. Malone’s drugstore which was in the centre of town. He looked at the town. On the next block was the Wedwell Spinning Mill. From the open basement window the heat from the dye vats made wavy lines in the sweltering heat. Just to stretch his legs he strolled around the business section of town… Jester circled back to Malone’s drugstore thinking of a cherry coke with cool crushed ice (90).

As he takes in the town, Jester uses the pharmacy to anchor his walk through its “centre”. Shortly afterward, Jester contemplates the inherently segregated structure of Milan’s physical layout:

> So it would go on, Jester knew. The hulking, dimwitted coloured boy begging from the beggar. Tipped panama hats, the separate fountains for white and coloured people in the courthouse square, the trough and hitching post for mules, muslin and white linen and raggedy overalls. Milan. Milan. Milan (91).

The detail of segregated water fountains in the courthouse square underscores that racial segregation is at the civic and legislative heart of the town. The local seat of governmental oversight and of justice, upholds the physical framework of segregation that defines Milan and the clothes the townsfolk wear are material indicators of class and racial inequality, whether muslin, linen or overalls. The town only functions through a rigid system of inequality. Before the

announcement of the *Brown* decision, the town seems to Jester to be irredeemably engineered by racial segregation.

Segregation is at the centre of Milan's architectural design, just as Malone's business is the locus for its social and business dealings. Following his diagnosis, Malone seeks reassurance in the physicality of the town:

> In spite of the weakness of his disease, Malone was restless. Often he would walk aimlessly around the streets of the town – down through the shambling, crowded slums and the cotton mill, or through the Negro sections, or the middle class streets of houses set in careful lawns. On these walks he had the bewildered look of an absent-minded person who seeks something but has already forgotten the thing that is lost. Often, without cause, he would reach out and touch some random object; he would veer from his route to touch a lamp post or place his hands against a brick wall (13).

This route marks out the social inequality in the organisation of the town, as he passes residential areas set out for poor whites, poor blacks, and wealthy whites, respectively. The pathetic fallacy of the narrator's description of "careful lawns" suggests a precarious social position for the town's middle-class community, whose status is dependent on the continued existence of crowded slums. The town is animated by the principles of racial and social inequality and the description of the slums as "shambling" suggests a neighbourhood in motion, presumably against the "careful" middle-class homeowners. As he figuratively maps the social architecture of the town, Malone feels an implicit need to

connect physically with the structures of Milan. Seeking a tactile relationship with the town's lampposts and brick walls, Malone reaffirms his connection, even as his route negotiates the town's economic and social imbalances. Defamiliarised in this moment, Malone begins to question the caste system according to which it operates. This is seen most clearly in his first meeting with Sherman, which is abrasive and disconcerting and shows how his growing self-awareness does not eradicate deep-seated racial prejudice.

In an "unpaved alley" Malone believes he can hear strange footsteps and see unsettling shadows. Frightened, he crashes against Sherman: "He turned so suddenly that he collided with his follower" (15). This meeting unnerves Malone in the same way that the presence of the paper knife in Dr. Hayden's office has. Sherman's appearance is accusatory, signalling the inescapable fact of 'miscegenation' that threatens the discourses of white 'integrity': "Except for his eyes, he looked like any other coloured boy. But his eyes were bluish-grey, and set in the dark face they had a bleak, violent look. Once those eyes were seen, the rest of the body seemed also unusual and out of proportion" (15). Sherman's blue eyes arouse Malone's prejudice, and Malone criminalizes his mixed-race heritage: "the impression on Malone was such that he did not think of him in harmless terms as a *coloured boy* – his mind automatically used the harsh term *bad nigger*" (15). Malone's stigmatising of Sherman incorporates Malone in the system of inequality that mediates all cross-racial encounters in the segregated South. Malone and Sherman are represented as sinister doubles, sharing a particular and significant trait: "the eyes of both were the same grey-blue and at first it seemed a contest to outstare each other" (16). Their shared trait implicates Malone, who usually thinks himself "lenient" in matters of race (16).

In a novel that McCullers dedicated to a psychotherapist, her friend Mary Mercer, it is easy to read the "unpaved alley" in which Malone and Sherman meet as a repressed psychological space. The "doubling" of the characters, who share *unheimlich* similarities in their eyes (their modes of perception) lends itself comfortably to a psychoanalytic reading. However, as compelling as such an approach might be, it runs the risk of deploying the idea of the "gothic" as an umbrella term for racial and psychological tensions in southern fiction. As well as the psychoanalytic dimensions of McCullers' description of this meeting, the architectural and material facets of the town contribute to a more nuanced perspective on race in the encounter and in the novel. Malone is unwilling to accept his similarity to Sherman and only the omniscient narrator observes that the characters share the same coloured eyes. Malone may be interacting with the racial structure of Milan in a new way but the racist foundations remain.

The place in which Malone and Sherman meet is figured as adjoining, but separated from, the familiar space of Malone's drugstore, to which he subsequently retreats: "He was relieved to get out of the alley and enter his safe, ordinary, familiar pharmacy" (16). The shortcut Malone takes signifies a secret, repressed, space, making his meeting with Sherman even more unsettling. The abrupt and uncomfortable encounter in the alley underlines the process of defamiliarisation Malone begins in Dr. Hayden's office, and marks the space around the pharmacy as a porous barrier between the racially bifurcated town and the strictly white interior of the pharmacy. As the novel proceeds, private space in the building is more sinister to Malone. It is the site in which a group of white supremacists decide Sherman's fate after he deliberately crosses the town's colour line by renting a home in a white neighbourhood.

As in *Strange Fruit* and *The Hawk and the Sun*, the irreconcilable racial tension that builds in a town predicated on racial inequality eventually explodes in sanctioned racial violence. The conspirators in Sherman's murder convene in Malone's drugstore, making it the scene of Malone's final stand against the mob-mentality fostered by his friend Judge Clane. The meeting takes place in the compounding room in the rear of the pharmacy, rather than the public-facing part of the store in which customers are attended to and drinks served. The back room is described in terms that highlight its covert atmosphere: "It was a very small room, separated from the rest of the store by a wall of medicine bottles. There was just enough room for a rocking chair and the prescription table" (16). The cramped, dark room signifies its proprietor's private impulses, and is also the place where Malone and the judge share racist conversation. The wall of glass bottles suggests a fragile barrier, reiterating the porous division between the races throughout the rest of the town. The divided sections of the pharmacy have different atmospheres in a literal sense, and their separate aromas compete: "The electric fans on the ceiling churned the mixed odours in the place – syrupy smells from the fountain with the bitter medicinal smells from the compounding section in the rear" (16). The smell of each distinct space signifies its specific role in the identity of the building. The saccharine smell of the public-facing storefront suggests an artificially pleasant atmosphere that is juxtaposed with the bitter and unpleasant odour of the back room. The pleasant smells hide the bitter processes that take place behind the proverbial curtain.

In the compounding room, Malone gains a new perspective on the men who meet in his store to decide Sherman's fate which 'compounds' earlier stages of self-realisation into a pronounced scepticism as he "recalled something

unpleasant about each of the men he met that night" (192). The compounding room in which Malone previously found Judge Clane's ideology convincing, now fosters a different perspective for Malone on the town's white community. Having been assured by Judge Clane that the men are upstanding citizens, Malone is now able to see the men who make up the mob in a new light: "Those gathered in the drugstore were all ordinary people, so ordinary that he usually didn't think of them one way or the other. But tonight he was seeing the weaknesses of these ordinary people, their little uglinesses. No, none of them were leading citizens" (192). Malone's life in the white community is once again defamiliarised as his condition worsens in what the omniscient narrator calls Malone's changed "frame of mind" as he moves closer to death (192). Confronted by the "fraternity of hate" the men symbolise, he is unable to carry out the murder that he has been chosen to commit (194).

Malone's decision to refuse to commit murder is as much an act of self-preservation as it is evidence of developing tolerance: "'Gentlemen, I am too near death to sin, to murder.'… He went on in a stronger voice, 'I don't want to endanger my soul'" (195). The strengthening of Malone's voice signals a newfound willingness to confront the town's white supremacist ideology even though Malone has nothing left to lose, including his life. While this language of "sin" appears to assert a Christian ideology, this is less than certain. Unable to understand Malone's change of mind, one of the conspirators asks: "What the fuck is an immortal soul?" (194). Malone's response indicates his shift in thinking: "I don't know… But if I have one, I don't want to lose it" (195). Malone remains uncertain about religious ethics but he is unwilling to "sin"

against either religious or secular morality, suggesting that the progress he has made over the course of the novel is a turn from total intolerance to ambivalence.

Even as Malone refuses to personally carry out the bombing, it is clear to him that somebody else will do so in his place. Therefore, Malone's decision not to murder Sherman falls short of a commitment to prevent the murder from happening at all. Malone's deepening understanding of his racist beliefs encourages a shift in his personal ethics, and the landscape of Milan that has been so closely connected to the character is, in my reading, poised to follow suit. However, his knowledge that the murder will go ahead without his direct participation indicates he is compromised by the ideological structures under which he has grown up, and that it is only after his death that a new generation of white southerners will be able to move away from a white supremacist climate that finds expression in the formation of a lynch mob. This shift is indicated by Judge Clane, who is unseated over the course of the novel from his position as the town's political and legal figurehead.

Political Currency in the Peach County Courthouse: The Three Houses of Fox Clane

Milan's political structure in *Clock Without Hands* is typified by one person, the judge and former congressman Judge Clane. At the beginning of the novel, the judge is dominant in every sphere of politics: the personal, the local, and the national. Each political sphere is embodied by a building, namely, the judge's home, the Peach County Courthouse, and the US Capitol Building. In each space, the judge's agenda is the presiding ideology and he is able to make his bigoted beliefs into political realities. As the novel progresses space is seen to

undergo an ideological shift during which the judge's dominance is irrevocably undermined. In this way, the politics of the town is represented in the process of gradual change. McCullers establishes the judge's neo-Confederate, racist understanding of politics and of the law only to undermine his dominance as the narrative unfolds.

The judge imagines his beliefs as analogous to the physical structure of the town of Milan: "The wind of revolution is rising to destroy the very foundations on which the South was built" (17). The metaphor of the foundations of the South makes the space of the town inextricable from the mentality that the judge propagates among the people of the town. The judge's fear of civil rights legislation changing the character of the region is expressed as a threat to the material buildings of the town of Milan. The judge is a monument to the political structures of Milan, inventing and then enforcing the racial principles on which the town operates. As the judge's role as figurehead begins to shift, Milan undergoes similar changes. The judge's "ornate Victorian house", an edifice to white supremacist politics, is known mockingly as "The Judge's White Elephant'" (155). The house represents a heritage that is predicated on the destruction of southern property during the Civil War, and not the supposedly prelapsarian ideal South through which the judge plans to literally profit. The phrase 'white elephant' denotes an object for which cost exceeds value; it refers to an expensive burden whose cost is not proportionate to its worth. The house, then, is symbolic of the judge's outmoded, and increasingly costly, ideology of white supremacy being devalued nationally, while the phrase "white elephant" resonates with the White House and parodies the judge's involvement in the federal government.

The sanctity of white supremacy in the judge's home is threatened when he employs Sherman as his secretary. Initially, the relationship between Sherman and the judge is cordial, as the elder statesman behaves paternalistically, and Sherman is content to work as his personal secretary and amanuensis. Despite an initially warm relationship, the judge does not hesitate to order Sherman's death for renting a home where white segregation mandates that he should not. Alice Walker was conflicted when reading the novel, as Sharon Monteith has uncovered in an examination of the writer's papers.[50] She wondered "how [to] explain the seeming paradox of a man like the Judge" who treats Sherman "as if he were his own son" before ordering his execution.[51] Walker did not answer her own question but in Monteith's analysis, the complex relationship between Judge Clane and Sherman is an example of how some white writers "grapple most revealingly" with the "apparent paradoxes" of cross-racial behavioural codes.[52] The white home in southern fiction is necessarily a site of cross-racial interaction due to the practice of hiring black domestic servants, particularly black women and in her study of interracial friendship in southern fiction, Monteith argues white-authored representations of black domestic workers are defined by "whether the black characters are sealed imperviously within such [domestic] situations or whether the writers choose to grapple with the cultural hermeneutics that underlie the association."[53] Sherman's decision to manipulate the Judge's exploitation of him with an act of sabotage locates his representation within the

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[50] Alice Walker, quoted in Sharon Monteith, "Civil Rights Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*, ed. Sharon Monteith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 169.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Sharon Monteith, *Advancing Sisterhood? Interracial Friendships in Contemporary Southern Fiction* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 103.

second of Monteith's formulations and suggests that McCullers does not condemn Sherman's subversion.

Sherman increasingly exploits his position of domestic power to undermine the judge's authority and even his health: "Finally he did something. When he gave the Judge his injections in the morning, he substituted water instead of insulin. For three days that went on and he waited. And again in that creepy way nothing seemed to happen" (186). Although ineffective, Sherman's attempt to harm the judge is a radical infiltration of the judge's most intimate space. Sherman uses his access to the judge against him and is able to threaten the integrity of the judge's very body by withholding insulin.

Leaving his job and renting a home in a white neighbourhood, Sherman ceases to be tolerable within the judge's conception of the town's racial order and when Sherman purposefully inserts himself into the town's white spaces, outside of a domestic or subservient role, he comes under threat of violence. Jester visits Sherman to urge him to leave his new home to avoid the bombing that will kill him, but he is met with disbelief: "'Leave my furniture?' With one of the wild swings of mood that Jester knew so well, Sherman began to talk about the furniture… in an ecstacy of ownership, Sherman seemed to have forgotten all about the fear" (196). Having invested in his own domestic space, Sherman is unwilling to forsake his home even for his own safety. Sherman is safe while at work in "The Judge's White Elephant" but by creating his own monument to domesticity he is endangered by the town and the judge's racial double standards. While McCullers positions Sherman's decision not to flee as an implicit critique of racist values, she allows Jester to interrogate them within the protected space of the Clane family home.

Intra-racial and cross-generational conflict erupts during a debate between grandfather and grandson concerning the correct way to practise law. An epistemological rift emerges as the judge sees nothing contradictory in enforcing a two-tiered system of justice while Jester refuses to accept it should not change:

> Jester said: 'I still think that as a judge you judge one crime in two different ways – according to whether it is done by a Negro or a white man.'
> 'Naturally. They are two different things. White is white and black is black – and never the two shall meet if I can prevent it' (39-40).

Jester and his grandfather have opposed concepts of jurisprudence. The judge's baldly racist ideas hold sway because he is in a position to practise his legislative agenda. In fact, the judge plans a return to Congress precisely in order to effect a change to national laws:

> I am going to have a bill introduced in the House of Representatives if I win the next election that will redeem all Confederate monies, with the proper adjustment for the increase of cost-of-living nowadays. It will be for the South what F.D.R. intended to do in his New Deal. It will revolutionise the economy of the South. And you, Jester, will be a wealthy young man. There are ten million dollars in that safety box. What do you say to that? (37).

Part of the judge's motivation for the bill is to provide Jester with a substantial inheritance, a financial legacy. However, the historical narrative of the Confederacy's defeat means that Jester will inherit worthless objects because the Confederate Dollar was never tied to a stable economic resource such as gold.[54] Even while accepted in transactions, it was a currency by fiat, meaning that its value was imposed solely by governmental decree. Ironically, then, the value that the judge is attempting to reassert in his plan for the currency was never fixed or stable, even in the Confederacy.

It is only in the judge's neo-Confederate mentality that Confederate dollars are of any value and Jester, who has inherited more of his father's ideals than his grandfather's politics, knows that the bills lack any intrinsic worth. Judge Clane's plan – in a perversion of African American calls for reparations for slavery– is based on the principle of white southerners' inheritance of the profits of slavery.[55] The judge's proposed fiat revolves around his perceived right to be compensated as a white southerner: "He began to talk about reparation for burnt houses, burnt cotton, and to Sherman's shame and horror, of reparation for slaves" (140). This strange plan is itself a Clane family heirloom: beginning with

[54] Marc D. Weidenmier, "Turning Points in the U.S. Civil War: Views from the Grayback Market," *Southern Economic Journal*, 68:4 (April, 2002), 877.

[55] The movement for reparations for African Americans began in earnest with the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1865, immediately before the end of the Civil War. The Bureau oversaw the transfer of agricultural lands to formerly enslaved southerners. By 1960 the forms that reparations would take had changed toward systemic reform, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s economic strategy "largely revolved around more welfare services and more job opportunities" for African Americans. Charles P. Henry, *Long Overdue: The Politics of Racial Reparations* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 42, 58. From the perspective of Critical Whiteness Studies, Jennifer Harvey has argued that white Americans have been and continue to be "unjustly enriched" by the exploitation of African American and Native American labour and land and that the redress of this exploitation is imperative. Jennifer Harvey, *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice Through Reparations and Sovereignty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 144. More recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates has renewed interest in the question of reparations in an article in *The Atlantic* in which he traces the history of the movement for reparations and asserts the need for "a national reckoning" to redress America's history of racist exploitation. Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations" *The Atlantic*, June 2014. Accessed 8 November 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/

the judge's grandmother during Reconstruction, the Clane family has been amassing millions in Confederate dollars. The judge takes great pride in this history: "There are ancestors of vision in our family – remember that, Jester" (37). His admonition to "remember" his ancestors may serve just as well to promote a social conscience in Jester rather than to indoctrinate him in white supremacy. By rejecting his grandfather's intentions for him at the heart of the family home, Jester begins to subvert the abiding political identity of the house itself, challenging his grandfather for mastery of the ideological space. Jester's act of subverting the racial politics of the judge's house is preceded by a similar act of subversion carried out by his grandfather years earlier, albeit in a different type of House.

During the novel's fictive present, Judge Clane is a former congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives. As well as being a Representative, he is representative of a southern type within the town and society at large. He is a parody of the southern demagogue, as already discussed, and his overblown manner is successful in compelling the people of Milan to agree with his politics, early in the novel. But the judge is a former representative, maintaining the respect of the office while carrying little or no influence beyond the territory of Milan, which suggests that his ability to speak for the South is waning. Like his white elephant home, the judge's value is decreasing. In the fictive past, however, when the judge leaves the physical space of the town of Milan to represent that same space in federal government, he infiltrates the federal space of Washington D.C. with his small-town ideology.

The judge describes himself as a "Southern patriot," despite having been elected to the federal government. He sees his role in Washington as defending

“the noble standards of the South” under siege by the same federal government (29).[56] The judge is respected in Milan because he was a congressman, even though he was obstructionist during his time government. Jester explains his developing progressivism to the judge by remembering a story of the judge’s time in Congress:

> That time I heard about when that Negro from Cuba was making a talk in the House I was so proud of you. When the other congressmen stood up you sat back farther in your chair, propped your feet up and lighted a cigar. I thought it was wonderful. I was so proud of you. But now I see it differently. It was rude and bad manners (32).

In this story, the judge subverts the federal space of the Capitol Building in Washington by refusing to conduct himself appropriately. While in the Capitol Building, the judge represents the geographical territory in which Milan is located in order, also, to propagate white supremacy in the government. The judge minimises the spatial distance between Milan and Washington by replicating the small town’s politics in the nation’s capital.

The act of putting his feet up on the bench in front of him is a performance of the judge ‘making himself at home.’ The intimate, private acts of putting one’s feet up and smoking delegitimise the space of the Capitol Building as a site for international and cross-racial diplomacy. By positioning a congressman as a governmental force in opposition to desegregation, McCullers reflects the degree to which each branch of federal government had moved, or

[56] James C. Cobb defines “southern patriotism” as “loyalty to the collective southern white cause” and as being historically contingent on Confederate nationalism in *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 59-60.

failed to move, against segregation by her time of writing. As Mark Tushnet notes: "President Harry S. Truman's order desegregating the armed forces placed one branch of government on the side of civil rights. *Brown* placed a second branch there, leaving Congress as the sole holdout."[57] In Sherman's words, the judge's planned legal action, were he to return to Washington, would "turn back the clock for a hundred years" (141). In an allusion to the novel's title, this statement also focuses the conflict between the judge and Sherman as a debate regarding the ownership of history.

In his plan to reinstate Confederate currency, the judge is represented as a neo-Confederate, using his political power in service of a twentieth-century version of Confederate nationalism. Paul Quigley has argued for an understanding of Confederate nationalism predicated on a psychological rationalisation: "Surely here [in the Confederacy] more than anywhere nationalism was an artefact, the deliberate, self-conscious intellectual creation of cultural and political leaders, designed to rationalize political independence."[58] In the judge's imagination, the South is a conquered 'nation,' and he is attempting to employ the same techniques as Confederate leaders to galvanise a regional identity based on white supremacy over blacks and southern supremacy over the North. The judge is a fictional representative of the neo-Confederate imagination that Quigley describes as having a unique and myopic interpretation of the Civil War: "White southerners used highly selective memories of slavery and images of the Confederate war effort as a romantic 'lost cause' to fashion a new kind of regional identity" drawing on "the belief that shared victimhood and suffering

[57] Mark Tushnet, "*Brown v. Board of Education*," in *Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History*, ed. Annette Gordon-Reed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 160.
[58] Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130.

united white southerners in a sacred community of sacrifice."[59] The judge's misapplication of historical understanding is not surprising because, by the middle of the twentieth century, the Civil War held hugely emotive significance. Published in the same year as *Clock Without Hands*, Robert Penn Warren's *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961) treats the conflict as a singularly evocative historical event in the American imagination, writing that "the Civil War is our only 'felt' history – history lived in the national imagination."[60] Warren, whose politics had shifted further to the centre-left by this point in his career, acknowledges the racial successes of the war as partial: "the Civil War abolished Slavery, even if it did little or nothing to abolish racism."[61] An emotional engagement with the meaning of the Civil War is, according to Warren, a common response on either side of the colour line, depending on the degree to which race is considered a part of the Union directive during the war. This contestation of meaning further erodes the judge's intellectual ownership of the town's political mentality and its perception of the Civil War.

In the novel, African American memory of the same period focuses on heroic 'anti-slavery' figures. The Civil War plays a vastly different role in Sherman's imagination to the one it plays in the judge's. Union victory in the Civil War is intrinsic to Sherman's conception of American national identity and his own personal identity. For instance, when Sherman mails a letter to Marian Anderson, whom he imagines to be his mother, he addresses it directly to "Madam Marian Anderson, The steps of the Lincoln memorial" (96). Sherman's fantasy family is tied up with his fantasy of American history, with Lincoln the great emancipator. His disgust with the judge's plan for 'reparations' is

[59] Ibid, 217.
[60] Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1998 [1961]), 4.
[61] Ibid, 7.

articulated through recourse to two recurring figures in American history: "Well, Abe Lincoln freed the slaves and another Sherman burnt the cotton" (141).

Implicit in Sherman's naming is a celebration of the role played by General William Tecumseh Sherman in the destruction of the Old South. His naming was an act of African American public memory prevalent among postbellum black southerners. Sherman's name is acknowledged by the judge as being a common tribute to the Union general: "After Sherman marched through Georgia many a colored boy was named for him. Personally I have known half a dozen in my lifetime" (173). McCullers positions the judge's and Sherman's narratives of the Civil War in direct and overt conflict. The judge's distaste for the "half a dozen" Sherman namesakes he has known echoes white supremacist writing of the period, as when Daniel D. Workman conflates Sherman's role in southern history with cross-racial sex and mixed-race southerners: "It is obvious that a number of half-breed Yankees were left among the Southern Negroes in the wake of marauding Federal troops who ranged the South under the command of William Tecumseh Sherman and other despoilers of the land."[62] The judge and Sherman represent opposing perspectives on southern history that converge on the controversial figure of the Civil War general.

The themes of generational conflict and the law are decidedly related, as in the Judge's memories of his son. In her portrayal of Johnny Clane, McCullers represents a new generation of southerners adopting more tolerant, liberal racial politics. The judge recalls how concern over his son's apparent "Bolshevism" was allayed by his participation in traditional southern institutions: "He had always consoled himself by the fact that Johnny was young, was a quarterback

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[62] William D. Workman, Jr. *The Case for the South* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1960), 219.

on the University of Georgia Football team, and that the fads and fancies of the young pass quickly when reality must be faced" (162). The judge understands the University of Georgia as an acceptable locus for the formation of a southern identity shared by himself and his son. However, the judge cannot conceive of a different racial identity developing within that space and understands "reality" only as subscription to his own political ideology. The judge is unable to reconcile Johnny's identity with his own and the generational rift remains a concept Judge Clane cannot accept (162). That such a generational rift is visible to the judge during Johnny's education suggests that the generational difference will manifest itself in the way each Clane conceives of the law. These differences come to a head in the Peach County courthouse, a symbolic site in Milan.

The stage for one of the novel's most significant cross-generational debates on race takes place in the Peach County courtroom during the judge's tenure. As I discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the courthouse is a component of a typology of the fictional southern town that represents the town's politics. While defending Sherman Jones, Johnny's interpretation of the law comes into conflict with the judge's belief that his is the only viable opinion. While the judge rationalises racist judgments by thinking of himself as "only an instrument of the law," he makes legal decisions based on "the law and the customs of the state" (158). On the contrary, when Johnny defends Jones, he appeals solely to the basic tenets of American law, urging his father and the jury to assess his client's guilt through recourse to federal law, rights, and justice.

In the judge's estimation, Johnny makes the mistake of treating the people of Milan as if they are capable of understanding the law: "He argued as if those Georgia crackers, millhands, and tenant farmers were trained jurors of the

Supreme Court itself. Such talent. But not a grain of common sense" (166). The judge sees Johnny's unwillingness to pander to the largely poor and entirely white jury as lacking in 'common sense'. By refusing to trust the law to serve southern custom and speaking to this jury as though it were any jury in the U.S., Johnny makes demands on the people of Milan. Johnny erodes the supposed difference between North and South and implores the people of Milan to reject southern exceptionalism to perform their civic duty (170). These arguments rely on the cornerstone of federal law and when Johnny appeals to the Constitution it reflects his desire to implement national conventions within the local sphere. McCullers depicts a rift in federal and local law that, at this point in the narrative chronology, Johnny is unable to overcome. The practical implementation of the Constitution is overwritten in the community by the mechanism through which the provisions of the Constitution are withheld from black citizens:

> No Negro in Peach County had ever voted. A schoolteacher had registered and been turned down at the polls. Two college graduates had been turned down likewise. The Fifteenth Amendment of the American Constitution had guaranteed the right to vote to the Negro race, yet no Negro Sherman had known or heard tell of had ever voted (143).

The judge, in his role as adjudicator of the law, allows these racist facts of the legal system in Peach County to supersede the Fifteenth Amendment and the judge's idealistic son commits suicide after losing the case, effectively refusing to practise a law governed by racist southern traditions, especially when it is presided over by his demagogue father. McCullers implies that Jester's growing

legal awareness will provide a continuation of Johnny's agenda and she achieves this in part through the repetition of a particular document across each of the three generations: The Gettysburg Address.

McCullers deploys Lincoln's address as a mobile intertext at various points in *Clock Without Hands*. The changing narrative context alters the specific meaning of the otherwise unchanged text of President Lincoln's speech and the shifting contexts suggest the gradually changing attitudes of the southern town. The text is recited inside the local courthouse at different moments in the course of Milan's historical and political development, taking on new meanings with each iteration. McCullers weaves the speech through her novel and it touches on each generation of the Clane family as they assert their political and ideological identities.

For Judge Clane, the speech is worthy of respect primarily as an example of rhetoric. Despite his deeply-held, conservative convictions on the South's supremacy over the North and his belief in the Lost Cause narrative of the Civil War, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is deeply engrained in the judge's identity. As a pseudo-intellectual, the judge is fond of reciting or paraphrasing 'great' works of literature and has Sherman read aloud to him. The judge's desire to be at the centre of a performance, and his affinity for pomp, lead him to recite even texts he finds politically distasteful: "The Judge never needed a second invitation to sing or recite or otherwise exercise his voice for an audience" (171). He enjoys performing the speech because he believes it to be rhetorically accomplished, despite his political convictions to the contrary of Lincoln's. The judge's son Johnny has a vastly different relationship to the speech and attempts to invoke it, alongside his appeal to the Constitution in his unsuccessful defence of Sherman

Jones. In opposition to his father's superficial reading of the text, Johnny intends to employ the speech as a legal precedent in defence of Jones but is prevented when the judge raps his gavel in response to the opening phrase "Four score and seven years ago – " (171). The judge's interruption prevents the remainder of the speech from being included in the Court record. However, in retelling the story he piques Jester's curiosity and must continue the recital himself.

At first, Jester is unfamiliar with the speech because he "did not know clearly what the quote would be" after his grandfather begins (171). The speech is absent from Jester's education, which has been administered by his grandfather with a vested political and financial interest in the history of the Civil War. For Jester hearing the speech for the first time is clearly affective: "Jester listened with tears of glory in his eyes" (171). Despite the comically melodramatic description of Jester's tears of glory, the speech makes him feel closer to his father and signals his allegiance to progressively understanding the law. Across three generations, the speech comes to mean vastly different things and McCullers shows its place within the legal system of Peach County, represented in the space of the courthouse, as changing over time. The most significant context in which the speech is reiterated is as a direct response to the *Brown* decision when the judge is ironically rendered speechless in the face of the announcement.

The decision is anticipated early in the novel, but as a fantasy, an event beyond the realms of the reasonable, when the judge is in conversation with Malone:

> J.T., have you ever stopped to consider that the South is in the vortex of a revolution almost as disastrous as the War Between the States? […] The wind of revolution is rising to destroy the very foundations on which the South was built. The poll tax will soon be abolished and every ignorant Nigra can vote. Equal rights in education will be the next thing. Imagine a future where delicate little white girls must share their desks with coal black niggers in order to learn to read and write (17).

Later, the judge repeats his fears to his grandson, who inverts the paradigm: "How about a hulking white girl sharing a desk with a delicate little Negro boy?" (30). The judge's position is destabilised by Jester's inversion and by the very rhetorical forms that he manipulates to sway people. The proleptic detail of this allusion to the likelihood of the *Brown* decision mirrors the historical process which C. Vann Woodward articulates, writing that "never had the [Supreme] Court moved more deliberately" than in the 1950s with the *Brown* case, in order to ensure that the decision would be effective and far-reaching.[63]

In fact, the *Brown* decision is anticipated even earlier in the novel, in the way in which Johnny conducts his defence of Sherman Jones by asserting to the jurors that "the Constitution itself is on trial" and reciting the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments to them (171). In the case of *Jones v. the People*, Johnny unwittingly predicts the same arguments that the Warren Court would later detail in the *Brown* case. The court's opinion in the latter case also cites the Fourteenth Amendment as the grounds on which African Americans are

[63] C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow; Second Revised Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966 [1955]), 146.

guaranteed equal provision under the law and specifically in education.[64] In an insult to the judge, Johnny begins to recite Lincoln's Address, compounding his strict reading of the Constitution with a 'non-southern' reading of the history of the Civil War. McCullers deploys Johnny's defence of Jones as an unsuccessful rehearsal of the ideas of the desegregationist legislation that would follow in the wake of *Brown*. In this moment of inter-generational conflict, the judge retains the position of power in striking down the defence, although it is a power he will not hold later in the text when the Warren Court's decision is imposed.

The judge is much less willing than Malone to relinquish power over the character of the region and the town. By the middle of May 1954, following his refusal to murder Sherman, Malone's health is failing rapidly. Segregationists knew the day on which the novel is set as "Black Monday," and the phrase was the title of a segregationist pamphlet published in 1955.[65] By concluding her novel on this momentous day, McCullers subverts the white supremacist imagination of "Black Monday" as a terrible day because it begins the process of desegregation, and instead portrays it as the date of a more personal tragedy, when J.T. Malone dies. Malone's anxieties of race and status appear to have faded as the *Brown* decision is announced and as he nears death. McCullers underscores Malone's altered ideas because his imminent death has thrown into relief the pettiness of the judge's ideology: "But his livingness was leaving him,

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[64] The opinion reads: "Therefore, we hold that the plaintiffs and others similarly situated for whom the actions have been brought are, by reason of the segregation complained of, deprived of the protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment." "The Unanimous Decision of the Supreme Court in *Brown V. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas* (1954)," in *Debating Southern History: Ideas and Action in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Bruce Clayton and John Salmond (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 172.

[65] John Bell Williams, a congressman from Mississippi, first used the phrase "Black Monday" in this context on the floor of the House of Representatives on May 19, 1954. Neil R. McMillan, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994 [1971]), 17n6; Tom P. Brady, *Black Monday* (Winona, MS: Association of Citizens' Councils, 1955).

and in dying, living assumed order and a simplicity that Malone had never known before" (208). In a state of frenzy, the judge visits Malone: "Sputtering, incoherent with anger, the Judge told about the Supreme Court decision for school integration" (206). But Malone is unmoved.

After receiving a cold reception from Malone, the judge rushes to the Peach County courthouse to take part in a radio broadcast condemning the *Brown* decision. In his state of agitation and in spite of himself, his powers of rhetoric and leadership fail him:

> So, angry, defiant – expecting at any moment a little seizure, or worse – the Judge stood with the microphone in his hand and no speech ready. Words – vile words, cuss words unsuitable for the radio – raged in his mind. But no historic speech. The only thing that came to him was the first speech he had memorized in law school. Knowing dimly that what he was going to say was wrong, he plunged in.
>
> 'Four score and seven years ago […]' (207)

The judge is unable to reflect on the announcement of the Warren Court using any of the language with which he is most familiar. The *Brown* decision forces the judge to abandon the rhetoric of race he has imposed on Peach County during his tenure as judge and he unwillingly falls back on the foundational texts of his education in law. The judge's confused mental state is rendered by McCullers' omniscient narrator, as in the phrase "But no historic speech." This line fails as a sentence because it begins with a preposition and lacks a verb and a subject. Two parenthetical clauses, removed from the main body of the text by dashes, signals

the judge's failed attempt to think coherently about the announcement. With the *Brown* decision, the judge's interpretation of the law in Milan is overwritten by a federal edict and he is left an intellectual blank slate, parroting the doctrine against which he has always struggled. The recurrence of the courthouse as a setting calls attention to Johnny's invocation of the Address in the earlier case and suggests the changing political context of the town in the intervening years. Having once stopped the address from being spoken in his courtroom, the judge is now unable to stop himself from reciting it. He is an automatous mouthpiece in favour of the law that he despises because his political currency at home, in the town, and in the nation has been eroded over the course of the narrative.

The judge recites as much of the Gettysburg Address as he can, even while being prodded off stage by his own supporters. As he recites, he is subject to increasingly violent attacks from the crowd and eventually forced to realise the shift in roles: "The old judge stood at the microphone with the echo of his own words ringing in his ears and the memory of the sound of his own gavel rapping in his courtroom. The shock of recognition made him crumble, yet immediately he shouted: 'It's just the other way around! I mean it just the other way around! Don't cut me off!'" (208). The novel ends with the judge physically unable to articulate anything but a doctrine of federal government and racial change. If Judge Clane continues to be a representative of Milan, his role has changed with the federal decision that will fundamentally undermine the system on which the town rests.

McCullers charts the development of Milan's political identity by showing how three sites, the judge's home, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Peach County Courthouse adapt, in spite of the judge, to the changing

racial politics of the South at mid-century. Tellingly, the black radical Sherman is killed while the white would-be lawyer Jester survives to fight for his convictions within a legislative rubric. By representing the town of Milan at various points on a trajectory of racial progress, McCullers implicitly reflects a gradualist ideology in which desegregation can be realised by attrition over a period of time.

At the end of *Strange Fruit* the characters of Bessie, Nonnie, and Dessie figuratively cleanse themselves of the town's racial violence in a scene I have interpreted as signalling an optimistic future for Maxwell. In *The Hawk and the Sun*, a moment of personal change is made more explicit when Abraham commits to extricating himself from the town's racial violence and to encouraging future generations of his family to promote racial tolerance. Where in Smith and Reece's novels the ideological positions that underpin the typology of the typical southern town in fiction are challenged by the actions of a small minority of white characters, McCullers dramatises the gradual shift of an entire town. McCullers exposes her town's social and physical architecture to the gradually changing racial politics of the region in order to depict a community and a town in increasing flux over the course of four novels. Although Milan is a stable feature across McCullers' fiction, it is nonetheless a town in process, as it moves gradually away from white supremacy the judge's attempts to conserve white supremacy fail in the character's final act of speech. The protagonist of William Faulkner's *The Reivers* (1962) also commits to speaking for his small town home as a means of ensuring that Jefferson, Mississippi maintains a white supremacist collective identity. While Faulkner's narrator, Lucius Priest, is more

successful than Judge Clane, his backward-looking narrative is undermined by

Faulkner's extensive mapping of the fictional town of Jefferson.

CHAPTER 4

Breaking the Pencil: William Faulkner's Jefferson

On June 14th 1962, William Faulkner's publisher at Random House, Bennett Cerf, received a letter from Benjamin Aslan regarding the "musicalization of Mr. Faulkner's work" *The Reivers* (1962), which had been published earlier that month.[1] The letter apparently followed a telephone conversation between Cerf and Aslan and negotiations for an adaptation were far enough along for Aslan to enclose copies of a proposed agreement. Judging from Cerf's response, Faulkner was amenable to the suggestion and it seems likely that the adaptation would have gone ahead, had the author not died following a horse-riding accident less than three weeks later on July 6th 1962.[2] The Nobel laureate's fiction does not, at first glance, seem appropriate subject matter for musical theatre and it is difficult to imagine another of his novels being 'musicalised'.

Faulkner's final novel has long been understood, thanks in part to the intervention of the author, as a more easily digestible and humorous work by an otherwise 'difficult' modernist. This chapter interrogates this impression of the novel by offering a reading of *The Reivers* as a complex and ironic exploration of backward-looking white supremacist narratives of southern history. By the early 1960s, the typology of the fictional southern town that Faulkner had been exploring in the Yoknapatawpha cycle for decades has become a metafictional device through which an attentive reader may interrogate the reliability of a narrator. In particular, Faulkner's depicts Jefferson's courthouse square, the

[1] Letter, Benjamin Aslan to Bennett Cerf, June 14, 1962, MS1408, Box 52.
Random House Records, 1925-1999, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library. Thanks to Nick Witham for generously sharing research conducted at the Random House archives.
[2] Ibid.

centre of the town's social and physical landscape, as a contested space that defines the collective identity of the town.

Set in a Jefferson nursing home in 1961, *The Reivers* begins with the phrase "Grandfather said," and is the reported "reminiscence" of an elderly white Jeffersonian named Lucius Priest. Priest is a member of the "cadet branch" of an established Jefferson family, the McCaslins, who feature prominently in *The Unvanquished* (1938), *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948).[3] In the novel, Priest relates incidents from his childhood in 1905 when he steals a car with the help of *Go Down, Moses*' Boon Hogganbeck and drives it to the Memphis brothel of Miss Reba, who featured in *Sanctuary* (1931). The pair discovers a stowaway on their journey in the form of Lucius' African American relative, Ned McCaslin, grandson to McCaslin patriarch Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin. Unbeknownst to Lucius and Boon, Ned trades the car for a horse that he intends Lucius to race in order to win back the car and to earn the money that Ned's cousin Bobo Beauchamp needs to repay a loan shark. Through shrewd gambling, Ned profits from the race, rather than Lucius' own grandfather, Lucius "Boss" Priest, the owner of the stolen car. Lucius returns to Jefferson having learned a lesson about becoming a "gentleman" and it is this lesson that he seeks to impart to his own grandson in 1961.

The novel features three characters, each of whom share the name Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin Priest, in a confusing manoeuvre on Faulkner's part that recalls the two Quentin Compsons in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), as well as signalling the Priest family's commitment to notions of tradition and patrilineal heritage. As well as three characters sharing the name – the

[3] William Faulkner, *The Reivers* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 21. All further references to the novel will appear parenthetically.

grandfather who narrates the story, his own grandfather, and the grandson to whom he narrates – one of the three Luciuses also relates the adventures of his past self, introducing a fourth personality named Lucius Priest. For the purposes of this chapter, and in order to avoid (further) confusion, I refer to the narrator, as he is narrating, as Priest; the younger self he describes as Lucius; and his grandfather as Boss Priest. As this summary might suggest, the novel is full of adventure and hijinks that are unusual in Faulkner's corpus.

In an account of Faulkner's only public reading of *The Reivers*, at West Point on 19 April 1962, roughly a month before the novel was published and another month before the author's death, David L.G. Arnold describes the text as comparatively remarkable within Faulkner's oeuvre for its simplicity, comparing it explicitly with the ostensibly more complex *Go Down, Moses* (1942), and calling *The Reivers*,

> an affirmitive statement about human potential, a contrast to earlier formulations, like "The Bear," in which the possibilities of education and initiation are questioned. In *The Reivers*, Faulkner seems to be revisiting old scenes of tragedy and reshaping them, creating forms which will allow him to realize his greater sense of optimism for human fulfilment.[4]

Arnold's interpretation of the novel may be influenced by Faulkner's performance of the extract he chose to read, a relatively exciting passage depicting a high-stakes horserace. In his introduction to the reading, Faulkner prepared his military audience for an aesthetically uncomplicated scene: "I will

[4] David L.G. Arnold, "Preface to the Second Edition," in *Faulkner at West Point,* eds. Joseph L. Fant III and Robert Ashley (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002 [1964]), xi.

have to skip about a little to read about a horse race which to me is one of the funniest horse races I ever heard of."[5] This impulse to read *The Reivers* as "far removed" from the experimental, 'difficult' and complex novels of Faulkner's earlier career characterises much of the criticism written in immediate response to publication, as well as in the decades following. John E. Bassett, for instance, is misdirected by *The Reivers*' ostensible simplicity, despite acknowledging the novel's framing technique of 'Grandfather said' as a means of creating a critical distance within the text:

> Since no other signals in the book indicate irony between grandchildren and grandfather, or the reader and grandchildren, the narrative voice is fully reliable – without even the distancing in Huckleberry Finn governed by Huck's youth, for Lucius is a mature man not a teenager when speaking.[6]

That any narrative voice can be "fully reliable" is a difficult claim to substantiate, particularly given that the tension between Priest's maturity and his staged adolescence is one source of narrative irony, because it creates a disconnect between the moment in which the narrative is staged and the moment that the narrative depicts. Bassett reinforces his contention by claiming that *The Reivers* is "the least ironic of Faulkner's novels."[7] Instead, I read the divide between Priest and Lucius, the younger self he endeavours to depict, as evidence of the dramatic irony at the centre of the novel's aesthetic strategy.

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[5] Joseph L. Fant III and Robert Ashley, eds., *Faulkner at West Point* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002 [1964]), 5.

[6] John E. Bassett, "*The Reivers*: Revision and Closure in Faulkner's Career," *The Southern Literary Journal* 18:2 (Spring, 1986), 54.

[7] Ibid.

Faulkner stages a similar distance from his fiction elsewhere in his public writing, when he propagates an image of himself that is divorced from the 'intellectual' practice of writing novels. For example, in an often-referenced letter to the editor and critic Malcolm Cowley, Faulkner claims:

> It is my ambition to be, as a private individual, abolished and voided from history, leaving it markless, no refuse save the printed books; I wish I had had enough sense to see ahead thirty years ago and, like some of the Elizabethans, not signed them. It is my aim, and every effort bent, that the sum and history of my life, which in the same sentence is my obit and epitaph too, shall be them both: He made the books and he died.[8]

Here, Faulkner espouses a romantic view of his career as a novelist and short story writer and in his choice of the verb "made" suppresses the intellectual character of the labour of writing fiction. Far from erasing his signature on the works, this letter is an effort to cement his name in the canon of American literary modernism. In this letter, pertaining to Cowley's editing of *The Viking Portable Faulkner* (1949), Faulkner protests too much that he desires privacy while simultaneously promoting a book for which his surname stands as the title.

Faulkner also anticipated a response to his final novel that would interpret it at face value. Despite displacing himself from the writing, Faulkner facetiously insisted that the cycle's future would be comprehensive and encyclopedic, as in an interview with Jean Stein for *The Paris Review*: "My last book will be the Doomsday Book, the Golden Book, of Yoknapatawpha County. Then I shall

[8] William Faulkner, "Letter to Malcolm Cowley," 11 February 1949, in *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (London: The Scolar Press, 1977), 285.

break the pencil and I'll have to stop."[9] Faulkner's humorous suggestion that a hypothetical novel that encyclopaedically depicts the history of Jefferson would force him to cease writing, wilfully neglects the persistence of ambiguity and partial histories depicted across his work. The metaphorical breaking of Faulkner's figurative pencil underscores his singular claim to authority over Jefferson, the town of which he is "sole owner and proprieter."[10] In this formulation, only Faulkner, with his metonymic pencil, is entitled to develop the ongoing history of his fictional town, rendering Priest's attempts to do the same as ultimately fruitless.

Readers were inclined to minimize or neglect the novel's racial subtext. Indeed, a surface reading of *The Reivers* does not offer a significant engagement with the South's civil rights crisis even though it is published at a moment of escalation and, among immediate reviewers, a consensus emerged that *The Reivers* was a more easily digestible, less intellectually strenuous, version of 'Faulkner'. In the case of novelist and literary critic Granville Hicks, who presumed *The Reivers'* "minor" standing within Faulkner's corpus, the novel permitted, or even demanded, that a different set of criteria be employed to read it: "Once one accepts the fact that *The Reivers* isn't a major Faulkner novel, nor, I should say, was meant to be, one can settle down to enjoy it, for minor Faulkner may be very good, and this is."[11] In this reading, accepting that *The Reivers* is a superficial text is a prerequisite to reading it at all.

[9] William Faulkner, with Jean Stein, "The Art of Fiction," in *The Paris Review Interviews, Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007 [1956]), 57.
[10] "Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi," reprinted in *Faulkner*, ed. Robert Penn Warren, (New Jersey: Spectrum, 1966), 303.
[11] Granville Hicks, "Building Blocks of a Gentleman," *The Saturday Review*, June 2, 1962, 27, reprinted in *William Faulkner: A Literary Companion*, ed. Nicholas Fargnoli, (New York: Pegasus, 2008), 522.

In 1962 Hicks implored readers to use different methods of reading for this novel compared to other texts by Faulkner and this sentiment was consistently expressed by reviewers on the novel's publication, when they highlighted the novel's pretensions to the adventure genre, calling it a "gentle comedy of rustic rustlers", "a boy's adventure story," and "an excursion into the pleasures of fantasy."[12] Reviewers also commended the novel as a departure from Faulkner's experimental modernism, with John K. Hutchens describing it as "a happy holiday" from Faulkner's regular style; Clifton Fadiman writing that "there is no Faulknerian brooding" in the novel and James B. Meriwether characterising it as "low-voltage Faulkner."[13] This impulse to read *The Reivers* as a superficial adventure tale has been replicated in the work of critics down the decades. As Lothar Hönnighausen asserts, "Most critics duly acknowledge the humour in Faulkner's last novel… while they tend to ignore its violence."[14] On the other hand, Joseph Urgo reads the novel's comedy as an end in itself rather than an extension of social engagement, describing it as "a humorous book about automobile and horse theft" and asserting that "the humor in *The Reivers* does not run too deep."[15] Readings such as this suggest that Priest's misdirection achieves a degree of success in recasting the history of Jefferson in a sanitised, even harmonious light. Priest dilutes the existing history of Jefferson by

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[12] James B. Meriwether, "Faulkner's Gentle Comedy of Rustic Rustlers," *Houston Post*, July 1, 1962, "Now" Section, 30, reprinted in Fargnoli, 540; George Plimpton, "*The Reivers*," *New York Herald Tribune Books*, May 27, 1962, 3, reprinted in Fargnoli, 520; Irving Howe, "Time Out for Fun in Old Mississippi: William Faulkner's New Novel Celebrates Three Innocents Play Hooky from Life," *New York Times Book Review*, June 3, 1962, 1, 24-25, reprinted in Fargnoli, 532.
[13] John K. Hutchens, "*The Reivers*", *New York Herald Tribune*, June 4, 1962, p.21, reprinted in Fargnoli, 533; Clifton Fadiman, "*The Reivers*" *Book-of-the-Month Club News*, July 1962, reprinted in Fargnoli, 538; James B. Meriwether, "Faulkner's Gentle Comedy of Rustic Rustlers," *Houston Post*, July 1, 1962, "Now" Section, 30, reprinted Fargnoli, 542.
[14] Lothar Hönnighausen, "Violence in Faulkner's Major Novels," in *A Companion to William Faulkner*, ed. Richard C. Moreland (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 247.
[15] Joseph Urgo, "Introduction: Reiving and Writing," *The Faulkner Journal* 13:1-2 (Fall 1997/ Spring 1998), 3.

selectively depicting elements from that history that he finds appealing and by revising those elements that he does not. As a result, Kevin Railey interprets the text as "a deeply romantic, nostalgic vision of people's places and possibilities in society."[16] In each of these assessments, the novel's generic involvement with the adventure tale supersedes readings of any possible political or racial subtext and each reading overlooks the potential for irony discernable in the text that is made visible when the novel is read through the lens of the segregated town.

I argue that Lucius Priest's 'reminiscence' of the southern town lacks veracity even while any depiction of Jefferson is necessarily – and obviously – fictional. Priest enters into a pedagogic contract with his grandson by supposedly imparting the wisdom of an older generation of white southerners. In turn, the grandson presents an imagined reader with a misrepresentation of the history of Jefferson. Debating which of these fictional characters is responsible for the presented text cannot yield a satisfactory conclusion without a representation of their meeting in a nursing home in 1961. The narrative of *The Reivers* studiously neglects such a representation. Regardless of which Lucius Priest, grandfather or grandson, is responsible for the narrative, its claim to fictive truth is more tenuous than almost any earlier story, precisely because Priest's tale is contradicted by pre-existing narratives of Jefferson in earlier novels and short stories. By reading the tension between *The Reivers* and the other instalments in the Yoknaptawpha cycle, the collective identity and composite history of the town itself is legible in opposition to the white supremacist surface narrative. In particular, the space of the town square, that recurs prominently across narratives

[16] Kevin Railey, *Natural Aristocracy: History, Ideology, and the Production of William Faulkner* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 169.

of Jefferson, is positioned in this instance as the contested centre of the town's identity.

Squaring the Cycle: (Re-)Centring Jefferson

In his interview with Jean Stein, Faulkner confided a realization he had some way into writing the cycle that "by sublimating the actual into the apocryphal [he] would have complete liberty to use whatever talent [he] might have to its absolute top", particularly because of the freedom this would grant him with character development: "I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too."[17] Faulkner comically compares authorial certainty to God-like omnipotence over the fictional lives of characters. What Priest achieves with his narrative is a similarly egotistical power over his relatives and neighbours but Priest's ministrations are transparent in comparison. Priest recasts the history of Jefferson, shifting events and characters around to his own profit and to compel his grandson to subscribe to the same set of beliefs to maintain his stake in the town's segregated social economy, in what Owen Robinson has termed "a challenge to the younger man to attempt to empathise with the age gone by that he has little contemporary means of understanding, an age that is nevertheless crucial to his own life as a Southerner."[18] I would add to Robinson's reading that Priest's monologue to his grandson is also a challenge to the grandson's "means of understanding" contemporary Jefferson. Priest makes this challenge by reformulating the town's geography, specifically the courthouse square that represents the civic and social heart of Jefferson.

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[17] Faulkner with Stein, "The Art of Fiction," 57.
[18] Owen Robinson, *Creating Yoknapatawpha: Readers and Writers in Faulkner's Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

In *The Reivers*, the town square is the site at which Priest makes a claim to speak for the history of the town of Jefferson. Priest co-opts the history of the fictional town by foregrounding the elements of its development that suit his blinkered perspective, and evading or obscuring the moments in the town's history that trouble his nostalgia. As well as co-opting the pre-existing history of the fictional town in Faulkner's earlier novels, Priest manipulates that history in an attempt to coerce his grandson into accepting a reactionary perception of Jefferson. A similar character in Shelby Foote's fictional Mississippi Delta town of Bristol also stands for a community's sense of progress: "Major Malcolm Barcroft… was an institution in Bristol, one of the final representatives of what the town had progressed beyond."[19] Unlike Barcroft, who has died by the beginning of the narrative, Priest actively seeks to reconstitute the narrative of his life and that of his town in his final days by claiming ownership of its history.

By reading Priest's description of the square in light of its construction elsewhere in Faulkner's fiction and its understanding in discourses of segregation at the time, I argue that Priest attempts to insinuate his idiosyncratic revision of the town's history into the compound representation of the square within Faulkner's corpus. By compound narrative, I mean the aggregate representation of the square that is evident through reading its recurrence in the cycle. Aside from in Faulkner's work, the town square is among the most iconic signifiers of the small "typical" southern town and its deployment by Priest signals an attempt to co-opt the figurative foundation of the small southern town. Priest chooses to depict Jefferson's town square because it represents a nexus of commercial, social, and administrative resources for the community, as I will show.

[19] Shelby Foote, *Love in a Dry Season* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1951]), 3.

Priest's is not a narrative of the community, but an idiosyncratic, personal narrative staged as community-sanctioned. Rather than drawing on the cumulative authority of the town of Jefferson, or at least its white population, Priest manipulates the history of that community for his own ends. The idiosyncrasy of Priest's story is apparent because earlier texts about Jefferson deploy this type of community-based narrative. The story "A Rose for Emily" (1930), for example, is narrated in the first-person plural narrative voice, depicting what "we [the town] believed" about Emily Grierson's love-life, while another short story, "Dry September" (1931), is narrated by a single member of a lynch mob who is never differentiated as an individual, but records what "the town" sees and says about an unattractive and unmarried white woman who has accused a young black man of rape.[20] A third story, "Death Drag" (1932) depicts the "composite" narrative of the town as it witnesses an airshow; the unnamed – representative, rather than individual – narrator describes the amassed spectators as "groundlings, dwellers in and backbone of a small town interchangeable with and duplicate of ten thousand little dead clottings of human life about the land."[21] In this depiction, the population of Jefferson is 'interchangeable' and ill-defined, making the town of Jefferson 'typical' and representative of southern towns at large. In contrast, Priest's rigidly individuated self-constructed town is not the sum of a mass of parts but of his singular interpretation of its history.

The same community voice that provides the narrative foundations for the short stories is present in Priest's retelling of the town but, crucially, his voice stands apart and his actions are not endorsed by its population. That Priest

[20] William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily", in *The Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage, 1995 [1950]), 122; Faulkner, "Dry September" in *The Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, 174.
[21] William Faulkner, "Death Drag", in *The Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, 197-8.

does not have the confidence of the town he represents is evidenced when Lucius surreptitiously prepares to steal his grandfather's car: "I went back home, not running: Jefferson must not see me running: but as fast as I could without it" (55). Lucius must maintain appearances for the sake of the collective identity of the town, especially because his actions, in this case, are illicit. Paradoxically, then, Priest asserts his right to represent Jefferson while simultaneously depicting his younger self in negotiation with the rigid social expectations of the town, as symbolised by its central spatial hub. In *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), the construction of the courthouse and its square is represented as the foundational moment of the town of Jefferson: "'We're going to have a town,' Peabody said. 'We already got a church – that's Whitfield's cabin. And we're going to build a school too soon as we get around to it. But we're going to build the courthouse today… Then we'll have a town.'"[22] Peabody, a medical doctor, acknowledges the typology of the southern town as a benchmark for the settlement. The church, a makeshift religious institution, is privileged over the courthouse, Jefferson's social and local government centre, and both are lent more prominence than the school, the institution of education. But it is with the construction of the courthouse square that Jefferson is defined as a town: "We've already even named her."[23] More than a decade before the publication of *The Reivers*, Faulkner positions the courthouse and the square in which it is built as the apex of the constellation of amenities that makes Jefferson a town.

At various points in the extended Yoknapatawpha narrative, the square is the site of major events in the life of the fictional town. Faullkner's annotations of the map of the fictional Jefferson published with *Absalom, Absalom!*, describe

[22] William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*, (London: Penguin, 1960 [1951]), 28.
[23] Ibid.

the square in these terms: "Courthouse square where Temple Drake testified, & Confederate Monument which Benjy had to pass on his left side."[24] This commentary on the topography of Jefferson signals that the square, with its monument to the Confederate dead, is the focal point in the construction of the town's identity. Elsewhere, the square is the site of cross-racial tensions that threaten to spill into violence. In *Intruder in the Dust*, the town square is the venue for the intimidation of a black man, Lucius Beauchamp – another member of the extended Priest family – by a would-be member of a lynch mob: "A car rushed from nowhere and circled the Square; a voice, a young man's voice squalled from it – no words, not even a shout: a squall significant and meaningless – and the car rushed on around the Square."[25] This racial terrorism is absent from *The Reivers* but the same square that plays host to it in *Intruder in the Dust* reappears, suggesting the persistence of the town's capacity for racial violence, despite its role in the later novel as a stage for the performance of wealth and social standing. Despite Boss Priest's distaste for the car he is compelled to buy following a dispute with a competing banker, the family drives daily through the town, "always through the Square first," to ensure being seen by as many of the town's population as possible (39).

Among contemporary sociological accounts of the southern town, the ubiquitous town square is understood as integral to the commercial, local political, and social functions of the town. Courthouse squares ground southern towns as political, social, and economic entities, as when John Dollard describes the centre of 'Southerntown': "Adjacent to the business block a domed courthouse is set in a little park-like space, a spigot for administrative services to

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[24] "Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi," reprinted in *Faulkner*, ed. Robert Penn Warren, 303.
[25] William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*, (London: Penguin, 1966 [1948]), 49.

the county, for Southerntown is the county seat. On the cool side of the building, on a summer's afternoon, a few white men lounge and talk."[26] In this interpretation, the square is a landmark of the town's social and political identity as it is figured as a hub for commerce, local administration, and intra-racial socialising. Writing about the same Mississippi town, but giving it a different name, Hortense Powdermaker describes "the general layout of Cottonville" as "very simple": "The business district consists of four blocks grouped in a square. Running in three directions from it are the residential streets where the white people live."[27] These sociological depictions underscore the significance of the courthouse square in 'typical' southern towns as both a figurative and literal centre.

Even when the iconic town square represents unwelcome modernisation, it retains the dual significance of symbolising the town's economic and political lives. Robert Penn Warren describes a return to Nashville, Tennessee after a long absence to find the layout of the town having changed in only one particular, "going into the square where the big white stone boxlike, ugly and expensive Davidson County Court House now stands on the spot where the old brawling market once was."[28] While Warren is clearly less than thrilled with the architectural change, the description of Nashville's centre signals the square's dual responsibility to the commercial life of the town – the market – and to local and federal laws. The ability to narrate the square, then, is equivalent to authority over the town. The same piece of reportage, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South* (1956), contains a description of an encounter between Warren and a

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[26] John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, (New York: Doubleday, 1957 [1937]), 4.
[27] Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993 [1939]), 9.
[28] Robert Penn Warren, *Segregation: The Inner Conflict of the South*, (Athens, GA: Brown Thresher Books, 1994 [1956]), 9.

member of Mississippi's White Citizens' Council, during which Warren summarises the political aims of those who subscribe to massive resistance as "recreating an habitation for the values they would preserve, to achieve in unity some clarity of spirit, to envisage some healed image of their own identity."[29] For his part in *The Reivers*, Priest attempts to foster the unity that Warren describes by co-opting the town's social history and encouraging its citizenry into accepting his agenda. In short, Priest attempts to use his dialogue with his grandson to envision a fictional town that is as conducive as possible to the ideology of massive resistance to desegregation.

Almost as typical a feature in the southern town as the square itself is the Confederate monument standing in it. Hodding Carter writes fondly of these memorials, apparently considering them signifiers of the noble efforts of the Confederacy: "These weather-stained guardians, doing sentry duty above the inscriptions to the beloved dead, have earned the right to an unending vigil."[30] While Carter imagines these statues as deserving of respect, the monuments are more ambiguous signifiers for history and the southern town elsewhere in writing of the period. For instance, Ben Haas juxtaposes respect for the Confederate dead with the disenfranchisement of poor southerners when he opens his novel *Look Away, Look Away* (1964) with a description of the Great Depression in the 'typical' southern town: "You could see them in the courthouse square of every little Southern town, then, in the spring of 1932 – the dispossessed. With stunned eyes and unshaven faces, they lounged in ragged overalls and worn-out shoes on the courthouse steps or on the benches around the inevitable bronze Confederate

[29] Ibid, 55.
[30] Hodding Carter, "Statues in the Squares," in *This is the South*, ed. Robert West Howard (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1959), 239.

soldier."[31] The recurring trope of the monument to the Confederate dead that persists in fictional and non-fictional depictions of southern towns throughout this period signifies racialised southern memory. In Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (1937) a speaker looking out onto a Confederate graveyard considers nostalgia a force for arresting development: "The brute curiosity of an angel's stare/ turns you like them to stone."[32] In Tate's poem, the act of observing a monument to the past threatens to stifle contemporary action. The ubiquitous monument to the Confederate dead is an ambiguous signifier of the 'typical' southern town's past and constitutes a site of internal conflict over the right to identify the town's political and historical identity.

In *The Reivers*, Jefferson's town square is both the space through which Priest seeks to strengthen his narrative authority and a symbol of the town's collective identity for which Priest is unable to speak. In my reading, because Priest's narrative constitutes a prolonged act of evasion, he is selective about elements of the geography he wishes to represent as when he and Boon drive the car away from Jefferson avoiding the square: "if we go the back way, we can dodge the Square" (66). Using the back roads means that Lucius only describes those elements of the town that are conducive to his history.

The square is the recurring feature of Jefferson's physical architecture through which Faulkner makes his clearest statement of *The Reivers* as a departure from the chronology enacted across his other works. The novel's opening scene is the first of two different stories, with two distinct plots that Priest tells over the course of *The Reivers*. The first – and shorter – story relates Boon's failed attempt to shoot Ludus, an African American coachman who, like

[31] Ben Haas, *Look Away, Look Away*, (London: Peter Davies, 1965 [1964]), 1.
[32] Allen Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," In *The Swimmers and Other Selected Poems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 17.

Boon, works in the Priest family livery stables. The second story, which begins a week later and one year after the acquisition of the family's car, is the primary narrative of Boon, Lucius, and Ned – the trio of 'reivers' or thieves who lend the novel its title – and their journeys to Memphis and Parsham. After relating the first story of Boon's aborted murder of Ludus, Priest digresses to describe the introduction of the automobile to Jefferson in the previous year, 1904. The introduction of the car is the catalyst for the novel's main plot as it unfolds over the course of twelve of the novel's thirteen chapters, while the ancillary story depicted in Chapter One is self-contained and distinct from the narrative proper. This opening scene also provides a microcosmic exploration of the themes and narrative strategies Faulkner deploys in the novel as a whole (7-20). Tellingly, this rehearsal is sited at the geographical heart of Faulkner's fictional town, indicating that Priest's attempt to orient the space and social hierarchy of Jefferson is analogous to Faulkner's own construction of the town. In the ancillary narrative, Priest insinuates himself into the centre of Jefferson in order to cast himself as its representative by relating a childhood job collecting "freight bills […] around the Square" (7). This ostensibly trivial job functions to make Lucius appear indispensible to Jefferson's commercial centre. Even as a child, Lucius is employed as an overseer and mediator of the town's economic affairs, literally responsible for moving things around the town and exacting a price for the service.

Fittingly, this first narrative takes place entirely in the fictional town of Jefferson, while the rest of the novel is largely set outside its limits, and positions the text so that the town square becomes its geographical and ideological centre of gravity. The ancillary story rehearses motifs, metaphors, and narrative

strategies that persist, more elaborately, in the main narrative. By siting this first story in the square, Priest stakes his claim to representing the identity of the town and he makes the town's centre an emblem of its holistic identity as he seeks to co-opt both. This constitutes a revision of Jefferson's physical geographical centre as a space that is figuratively sanitised for Priest's use of it to his advantage. However, Faulkner peoples the square with characters from his fiction that pre-exist Priest. These characters, Isaac McCaslin and Boon Hogganbeck, and a character new to the cycle and only appearing in *The Reivers*, Ned McCaslin, hinder Priest's attempt to speak for Jefferson because pre-existing, or in the case of Ned, allegorical co-texts, supersede Priest's revision of Jefferson.

Comparative Boons: Unincorporated Characters and Faulkner's Parable of the Talents

The novel's opening scene depicts Lucius as a necessary part of the town's social centre and also articulates a version of Boon Hogganbeck that is contradicted by earlier, third-person portraits of the town. Priest attempts to re-vision Boon in order to make him, and the masculinity he represents, more palatable. Alongside this re-visioning, Priest seeks to neuter Faulkner's earlier depiction of Isaac McCaslin as an ascetic who rejects capitalism because of his shame over his family's racial history. Priest recrafts each of these characters into more appropriate models for white supremacist masculinity, but his attempts are undermined by Faulkner's already-established constructions of the characters and of Jefferson. Priest is unable to successfully incorporate Boon and Isaac into his story because they pre-exist it. Priest is unable to fully incorporate Ned into

his white-washed narrative because Faulkner constructs Ned intertexually by making him an allegorical figure outside of Priest's authority. Knowledge of Faulkner's town denies Priest the authority to tell Jefferson's history because a scene he describes in which Boon attempts to murder an African American man contrasts with a very different representation of the same scene earlier in Faulkner's fiction that resists Priest's revision.

In both versions, Boon, wronged by a black man, attempts to shoot him but misses five times and, instead, wounds a black woman who is walking past. While these details remain consistent, the particulars change drastically. The scene emerges in *Go Down, Moses* to explain Boon's poor marksmanship:

> He had never hit anything bigger than a squirrel that anybody ever knew, except the negro woman that day when he was shooting at the negro man. He was a big negro and not ten feet away but Boon shot five times with the pistol he had borrowed from Major de Spain's negro coachman and the negro he was shooting at outed with a dollar-and-a-half mail-order pistol and would have burned Boon down with it only it never went off, it just went snicksnicksnicksnicksnick five times and Boon still blasting away and he broke a plate-glass window that cost McCaslin forty-five dollars and hit a negro woman who happened to be passing in the leg only Major de Spain paid for that; he and McCaslin cut cards, the plate-glass window against the negro woman's leg.[33]

[33] William Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses*, in *Faulkner: Novels 1942-1954*, ed. Noel Polk (New York: Library of America, 1990 [1942]), 167.

In this scene, the McCaslin who pays for Boon's broken window is not Isaac but his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, because Isaac is a child during the incident. The onomatopoeic effect of this passage signifies the black man's gun failing to fire, but in missing the man, Boon hits a black woman in her leg.

This episode is depicted very differently in *The Reivers*. In the later rendition, Boon steals the gun from John Powell, a co-worker at Lucius' father's stable, rather than borrowing it from de Spain's coachman, and his dispute is with an African American co-worker named Ludus, left unnamed in the earlier telling. In the version recounted in *The Reivers*, Lucius pursues an enraged Boon and witnesses the episode in person:

> We hadn't even reached the end of the alley when we heard the shots, all five of them: whow whow whow whow whow like that, then we were in the Square and (it wasn't far: right at the corner in front of Cousin Isaac McCaslin's hardware store) we could see it (17).

The onomatopoeia represents five shots successfully fired by Boon's gun rather than five failed shots from his target's and Priest goes on to describe how "one of Boon's bullets (they never did find where the other four went) had shattered after creasing the buttock of a Negro girl who was now lying on the pavement screaming until Cousin Ike himself came jumping out of the store and drowned her voice with his" (17). An especially significant divergence in the two representations is the role that Isaac plays, both in the incident and in Jefferson's economic life. Rather than the property-eschewing Isaac of *Go Down, Moses*,

Priest describes him as owning property in the square, at the centre of Jefferson's social economy.

In contrast, Ike's earliest published appearance, in the opening pages of *Go Down, Moses*, immediately identifies him as a character who has removed himself from Jefferson's capitalist economy:

> McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike,' … uncle to half a county and father to no one … who in all his life had owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time, and this was the narrow iron cot and the stained lean mattress which he used camping in the woods for deer and bear […] who owned no property and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were.[34]

In this way, *Go Down, Moses* begins with a clear and unambiguous portrayal of McCaslin's ascetic lifestyle and his symbolic – and racially loaded – honorific status as "uncle" to Jefferson's white population. This depiction of Isaac predates his depiction in Priest's narrative and, because it is related by an omniscient narrator, has greater narrative authority to define Isaac in relation to the other citizens of the town. Priest, on the other hand, ensures that his representation of Isaac is less morally ambiguous.

Perhaps because of Priest's closer familial relationship, Ike is referred to as "Cousin Isaac", "Cousin Ike" and even "your cousin Ike", which establishes him as familiar and a relation to Priest's grandson as he is to Priest throughout

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[34] Ibid, 5.

The Reivers (17, 22, 23). Isaac is relegated from Uncle to Cousin and the principles he represents in *Go Down, Moses* are similarly undermined. The Ike of the earlier novel refutes all his worldly possessions in an effort to escape the shame of his grandfather's adulterous and incestuous affair with his enslaved daughter. While Priest does refer to Isaac's "abdication" of inheritance, he does not explain his cousin's act as a conscious refutation of ownership in the specific context of a shameful racial history (21). Instead, Isaac's act of repudiation is elided in Priest's conservative retelling, and is not permitted to undermine his white supremacist agenda. Ike's job in the town square is not itself a shocking revision of the town's history, but his ownership of the store is.

In *The Mansion* (1959), Isaac is also described as working in the hardware store Mink visits shortly before he murders Huston: "he crossed the Square and entered the hardware store where McCaslin was junior partner."[35] As in *The Reivers*, the hardware store is located on the courthouse square, signalling the significance of McCaslin's role in the town's economic infrastructure. However, in *The Mansion*, McCaslin is described only as "junior partner," in keeping with his reluctance to assume the full responsibility of material ownership. In this earlier rendition, McCaslin works in the store, rather than owning it. It is an inconsistency in Priest's narrative that a character who, from his earliest appearance in the cycle, is described as unwilling to own property, should own a business that sells material to others. The hardware store represents not only ownership but also the facility to maintain and create new items of property, and represents an investment not only in the real estate of the town but also in the town's collective ability to exploit black labour.

[35] William Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* (New York: Modern Library, 1994 [1959]), 706.

Between the two tellings of the shooting, the personnel is changed almost entirely, as is the date on which the incident is supposed to have occurred. *Go Down, Moses* makes it clear that Isaac gives up his inheritance in 1888 at the age of twenty-one, and the shooting is described as having happened some years earlier. In this narrative, Priest would not have been born, let alone capable of witnessing the events. What Priest describes as occurring in 1905 – "this was 1905, remember" – could not possibly have happened then, despite the narrator's insistence that it did (16).

Not only does Priest misrepresent Isaac as deeply invested in property, but he also depicts him as more concerned with the maintenance of his property than with the welfare of Jefferson's black population. Isaac drowns out the voice of the young black woman with his own, an action that symbolically undermines his decision to, effectively, speak for his African American relatives by renouncing the racialised burden of his inheritance. Priest alters Isaac to more easily fit his paradigm of southern masculinity in the early part of the twentieth century.

Isaac's deep involvement in the town's economic life coincides in this opening narrative with a legally suspect arrangement between Lucius' wealthy white family and their employees. Black and white labourers are subjected to the bargaining of wealthier white representatives of the Jefferson legal system. Through metaphor and creative interpretation of the law, Judge Stevens and Maury Priest establish arrangements that effectively constitute bonded labour. Stevens agrees to financially punish Boon or Ludus for doing anything that "don't suit" Maury (19). Stevens, notionally the representative of federal and local law in the town, is depicted by Priest as having a laissez-faire attitude and

exploiting black and white labour: “if such a bond is not legal, it ought to be” (19).

In this way, Boon’s identity within the town is conceived by Priest as itself a commodity jointly owned by a number of the town’s prominent families as his ability to work is legally owned by Maury Priest. Boon is a “corporation, a holding company in which the three of us – McCaslins, De Spain and General Compson – had mutually equal but completely undefined shares of responsibility” (21). Rather than a member of the community, Boon is “a mutual benevolent protective benefit association” (21). The description of Boon as a ‘holding company’ recalls Emily Grierson’s status as a ward of the town where she is described as “A tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor – he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron – remitted her taxes.”[36] In both cases, these characters are figured as economic commodities or unavoidable overheads in the financial life of the town rather than being conceived of as persons by the town’s population at large. As a result, Boon is effectively the property of the town in Priest’s revision of the cycle and Priest does this in an attempt to assert his authority over the town. Faulkner’s earlier work, however, has previously established a claim of authority over the depiction of Boon that conflicts directly with Priest’s.

In my reading, Priest’s story is one among a number of competing narratives that Faulkner deploys and which collectively constitute the fictional town of Jefferson by representing different corners of its history from text to text. In staging these discrepancies across his fiction, Faulkner positions Priest’s

[36] Faulkner, “A Rose for Emily,” 119-20.

narrative as one voice among many, each of which is of Faulkner's own invention. I interpret these discrepancies as indicative of a satire of white supremacist ideology in the South at mid-century drawn out of the dramatic irony present in Priest's retelling of Jefferson's story. Faulkner simultaneously invents an ideologically biased narrative and undermines it through the recurrence of tropes and characters that he defined earlier. Faulkner further undermines Priest's narrative by populating it with at least one Jeffersonian who does not pre-exist Priest and yet cannot be incorporated into Priest's self-sanctioned revision.

Priest's revision is evaded by the black Jeffersonians he describes, especially in the case of the character whose naming is most reflective of a personal relationship with the town, Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi. Ned cannot be successfully incorporated into Priest's self-sanctioned history because his relation to the Priest family is burdensome and his persistence in their daily lives is their inadvertant 'inheritence' from their philandering ancestor, LQC McCaslin: "…he – Ned – was a McCaslin, born in the McCaslin back yard in 1860. He was our family skeleton; we inherited him in turn…" (32). Furthermore, Ned is drawn through intertextual allusion to biblical sources and Faulkner positions him in opposition to Priest's conservative agenda. Subtexts such as those through which Ned's character is developed undermine Priest's claim to authority.

When the trio of reivers returns from Memphis to Jefferson, Ned makes his manipulation of the town's racist economy apparent and, I argue, Faulkner stages this manipulation as a biblical allegory, underscoring Ned's resistance to Priest's dominant narrative. This intertextual construction establishes Ned's

resistance as more than simply the mischief that Priest routinely incorporates into his paternalistic narrative. Ned's shrewdness also sets him apart from the Priest family's privileged position as employers.

Ned's self-interest is made legible when the novel is read through New Testament biblical analogues. Firstly, Ned, Boon, and Lucius' encounter with the "mud farmer" at Hell Creek bottom can be read as a parody of the Exodus myth and Moses' crossing of the Red Sea. Rather than a doorway to freedom, the "sea" the trio must traverse in order to reach Memphis is an exploitative, economic trap (82). Bobo Beauchamp's financial difficulties are consistently cast as analogous to the parable of the Prodigal Son, re-imagined in the context of race relations in the South. In Ned's words Bobo has, "give up Missippi cotton farming and take[s] up Memphis frolicking and gambling for a living in place of it" but when he returns to his employer, he is not welcomed back as in the Biblical narrative (272). Instead, Mr van Tosch assumes a paternalistic tone when discussing Bobo with Ned: "'But why didn't he come to me?' Mr van Tosch said. 'He did,' Ned said. 'You told him No'" (269). The capital N of Ned's final "No" is a typographical effect that represents the nuances of Ned's speech on the page and underscores the divergence from the source parable. Comparing this typographical effect with the starkly separated phrase that opens the novel, "Grandfather said", suggests that van Tosch's position as a benevolent patriarch is as unstable as Priest's claim to narrative authority.

More specifically, Faulkner develops Ned in a way that I interpret as highlighting Ned's challenge to Jefferson's social economy. Faulkner's use of biblical analogues conveys Ned's shrewd behaviour in the light of the New Testament Parable of the Talents, from Matthew, Book 25, and the related

Parable of the Minas in Luke, 19. In Matthew's parable, an absentee "lord" divides his belongings into talents, a unit of currency that represents the worth of 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius constitutes payment for one day's labour, a talent represents the worth of 6,000 days labouring, roughly sixteen and a half years. In an economy such as this, the equivalency between labour and capital is more direct and acute than in a modern capitalist economy: money is a more direct metaphor for time spent labouring.[37]

In Matthew, a landowner leaves five talents to one servant, two to the next, and one to the third "to every man according to his several ability."[38] The master's trust in his servants is predicated on their value as workers, with each entrusted with capital equivalent to the master's esteem. The first two servants invest the money and double its value before the master's return, while the third hides his talent for safekeeping. When the lord returns from travelling he rewards the first two servants for increasing his financial worth and punishes the third for failing to accrue interest. The third servant is described as "wicked and slothful" for failing to invest the money.[39] The details of the parable are much the same in Luke, in which a "nobleman" gives each of ten servants a pound, or Mina, and, upon his return, receives ten from a first servant and five from a second.[40] The first is awarded with dominion over ten cities in the man's kingdom, and the second with five. As in Matthew, a third servant is punished for returning his master's money without interest.[41]

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[37] This parable is the source of the modern English word "talent," suggesting that aptitude and the ability to earn money are etymologically linked.
[38] Matthew, 25:15. All Biblical references are to the King James Bible.
[39] Matthew, 25:26.
[40] Luke, 19:12-18.
[41] Luke, 19: 21-27.

Conventionally, these parables are interpreted as allegories about rewarding hard work and good service. Each parable ends with the master declaring that “every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him,” sentiments usually interpreted as encouraging people to make the most of their personal ‘talents’ and achieve success in their lives.[42] However, the mercenary punishment exacted by each biblical lord contradicts other biblical parables, especially Christ’s teaching that “blessed are the meek,” and that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,” that “the last shall be first, and the first last.”[43] These better-known ethical directives suggest that earthly structures of wealth are anathema to Christian morality, and that worldly poverty is rewarded while avarice is punished. In contrast, both of the Parables of the Talents or Minas seem to advocate brutal and violent punishment for servants who fail to return a master’s money “with usury.”[44]

In the parables, the rewarded servants do not profit from their shrewdness but from their master’s supposed benevolence. In contrast in *The Reivers*, Ned profits directly from his shrewdness and duplicity in the horserace, while Boss Priest makes a financial loss for having trusted his employee to serve Priest’s interests over Ned’s own. Ned anticipates this outcome early in the novel when he excuses trading the automobile for the horse, observing “it would have tooken a braver man than me to just took his automobile back to him. But maybe this horse will save you” (113). In my reading, Ned manipulates the parable’s mandate to usury to his own advantage as an excuse for his illicit behaviour. After Ned profits by betting on the opposing horse in the race against Acheron,

[42] Luke, 19: 26, also similarly phrased in Matthew, 25:29.
[43] Matthew, 5:5, Mark, 10:25, and Matthew, 20:16.
[44] Matthew, 25:27, Luke, 19:23.

he excuses his decision not to repay Boss Priest's investment in the race, alleging that it would be an "insult" to do so: "When I offers to pay his gambling debt, ain't I telling him to his face he ain't got enough sense to bet on horses? And when I tells him where the money come from, I'm gonter pay it with, ain't I proving it?" (284) Not only does Ned masquerade as a faithful 'servant' by pretending to return his employer's investment with interest, but he also takes advantage of the deference expected of him for his own financial interests. Ned has no reason to be anything other than self-serving, just as the biblical servant who refused to deposit money in a bank is not "wicked and slothful" but self-interested. In *The Reivers*, the Parable of the Talents is a metaphor for the exploitation of black labour in the South and for resistance against such exploitation.[45] Faulkner's rewriting of the parable inversely echoes Priest's rewriting of Faulkner's town. Priest's attempt to rewrite the town's history is an attempt to neutralize the racial complexes of the cycle but Faulkner ensures that the Yoknapatawpha cycle survives Priest's assault. Priest's revision of the cycle is mirrored in the novel's cyclical narrative structure too.

Just as prominent events and characters recur across various novels and stories, so too this novel is structured cyclically and in this way, Faulkner reasserts his claim to authority. The opening phrase, "Grandfather said," is echoed in its closing phrase (7, 284). On the first occasion it is printed in stark capitals, which with the inclusion of a colon, act as a visual marker of narrative distance (7). The phrase is separate from everything that follows and the immediate past indicated by the use of 'said' – the simple past and past participle

[45] Richard Godden, in *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* (1997) and *William Faulkner: An Economy of Complex Words* (2007) relates a series of Faulknerian vignettes as metaphors for the South's exploitative economy and establishes the means by which I understand this biblical metaphor. Nevertheless, this specific financial analogy is not discussed in either of Godden's studies.

of ‘say’ – suggests a temporal moment subsequent to that of the narration which is ‘past’ at the moment of transcription. The temporal confusion inherent in this ostensibly simple phrase serves to distance the grandson from the grandfather’s narrative, and the grandfather from the moment of narration. While Priest is careful to avoid locating himself in the present moment of narration rather than the historical moment being narrated, his removal from the idealised Jefferson he both depicts and seeks to represent is covertly signalled in the novel. Privileging Jefferson’s traditional treatment of elderly whites, Priest is bitter in his reference to nursing homes as “cubicled euphemisms with names pertaining to sunset” (45). Tellingly, this description is itself a euphemism, with Priest strenuously avoiding outright discussion of nursing homes, or suggesting that he is resident at the time of his narration, preferring to site his narrative in Jefferson’s central town square in the first instance.

In an echo of the novel’s opening phrase, *The Reivers* concludes when Lucius is introduced to Boon and Everbe’s baby, and is made aware that the child has been named in his honour:

> ‘What are you going to call it?’
>
> ‘Not it,’ she said. ‘Him. Can’t you guess?’
>
> ‘What?’ I said.
>
> ‘His name is Lucius Priest Hogganbeck,’ she said. (284)

This brief exchange also draws attention to the faux-orality of Priest’s narrative through repetition of the word “said.” The novel ends, as it begins, with reported

speech and allusion to earlier instalments in the cycle, as well as characters created by Faulkner that predate Priest.

While it closes the circular narrative of *The Reivers*, the exchange above also invokes earlier moments in the Yoknapatawpha cycle, signalling the novel as the culmination of a wider narrative. Everbe invites Priest to "guess" the name of her son, while readers of Faulkner's earlier works will be familiar with the name before it is even spoken, because Lucius Hogganbeck appears in Faulkner's published fiction earlier than Lucius Priest. Apparently inheriting his father's fascination with cars, Lucius Hogganbeck is described in *The Mansion* as the proprietor of an "automobile jitney" in Jefferson's town square before Mink Snopes murders Jack Huston, thereby locating him more securely in the economy of the town square than in Priest's recollection of collecting freight bills.[46] Within the chronology of *The Mansion*, this would locate Hogganbeck's taxi business in 1908, during Eula Snopes' pregnancy.[47] This timeframe would either make Lucius Hogganbeck a singularly enterprising three-year-old boy, or Lucius Priest an unreliable narrator.

Priest reworks the history of the town in order to communicate a narrative in which his white supremacist agenda is successfully imparted his grandson and in doing so, he restructures the physical layout of Jefferson at its very centre. Pre-existing histories of the town challenge his revisions and the courthouse square presented by Priest as the seat of his narrative authority is instead a textual rejoinder to Priest's attempt to co-opt the history of the town. For instance, when Priest locates Isaac McCaslin in the square's economic nexus, earlier representations of both the square and Isaac undermine his narrative. The

[46] Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, 709. A "jitney" is an illegal or unlicensed taxi service.
[47] "Snopes Geneology," in *Faulkner*, ed. Robert Penn Warren, 301.

superficial reading of *The Reivers* encouraged by its first critics overlooks how the meaning of the square within a typology of the archetypal fictional town can derail Priest's agenda, denying, as they do, that Priest has a political agenda at all.

Writing about another novel published in 1962, David Bradley condemned *The Reivers* as "less a reminiscence than an avoidance."[48] While I agree with Bradley's assessment, I argue that it is Priest and not Faulkner who avoids discussion of "a time when southern conflicts were so much a part of the national consciousness."[49] Bradley reads *The Reivers* in contrast to William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1962) and while Faulkner's last novel is "remarkably mute" on direct action against segregation, Kelley's first work of fiction is anything but.

In *A Different Drummer*, the focus of the final chapter of this study, a fictional southern town is the setting through which an African American writer is able to imagine immediate and wide-ranging action against segregation in the South. In the novel, every black inhabitant of a fictional southern state deliberately abandons their home. This mass exodus leaves white men like Lucius Priest to understand and record the history of race in the South.

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[48] David Bradley, Foreword to *A Different Drummer* by William Melvin Kelley (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), xxvi.
[49] Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

Knowing How to Curse: William Melvin Kelley's Sutton

In an essay for a 1968 issue of *The Partisan Review*, poet Calvin Israel recalls a chance meeting with William Faulkner in Washington Square Park in New York in 1956. The title of the article, "The Last Gentleman", suggests Walker Percy's 1968 novel of the same name and positions Faulkner as the last vestige of a southern literary aristocracy. Israel describes the aging Nobel Laureate as "a quiet center of great activity" amid the bustle of the city park.[1] When Israel notices Faulkner's "detachment" from people around them, he confronts the author about his stated views on racial gradualism to which Faulkner responds with the single word "Violence" before abruptly ending the encounter.[2] Israel underscores Faulkner's legacy as it was understood in the late 1960s: he is made redolent of a lost tradition and epitomises a failure to act against racial segregation.

Coincidentally, Israel's memoir of Faulkner is preceded in the same edition of *The Partisan Review* by "An Appeal" issued by John Young, Chairman of the Boston chapter of The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).[3] Young's letter makes a plea for aid to "Negroes in rural Mississippi areas subsisting partially on grass, and begging for food and / or money at Civil Rights headquarters in their various localities."[4] Poverty and hunger are presented as facts of life in the "various localities" of typical southern towns. In contrast to Israel's memory of Faulkner as unwilling to support the black freedom

[1] Calvin Israel, "The Last Gentleman," *The Partisan Review* 35:2 (Spring 1968), 315.
[2] Ibid, 318.
[3] John Young, "An Appeal," *The Partisan Review* 35:2 (Spring 1968), 314.
[4] Ibid.

movement, Young emphasises how a clear and present threat to black life exists "not in some economically backward country … [but] in the United States of America, the richest country on Earth."[5] If Young's and Israel's very different pieces of writing represent two voices in the discourse of race in the South at the end of the 1960s, the magazine's main feature, a symposium of black and white intellectuals on the topic of Black Power, represents still more voices. Included in the (all-male) group of black and white activists are Ivanhoe Donaldson and Abbie Hoffman, Norman Mailer and Nathan Wright Jr. and New York-born, African American novelist William Melvin Kelley. In his essay, Kelley aims his acerbic commentary on American race relations directly at an imagined white reader and he describes the emergence of the ideology of Black Power as a necessary outcome of racial difference, both cultural ("I thought that everybody knew the difference between James Brown and Elvis Presley, or Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle…") and historical ("Our ancestors did not want to come to the United States, yours did").[6] In this chapter, I argue that Kelley's first novel *A Different Drummer* (1962) represents a departure from the models of the fictional southern town explored throughout this thesis, because his fictional southern town of Sutton is constructed as a thought experiment concerning a hypothetical, racially separatist, reconstitution of the South's social landscape.

In the novel, Kelley imagines the literal manifestation of the intellectual difference along racial lines that he would later describe in "Black Power." It is a depiction of a typical small town that must come to terms with a new, mono-racial identity following the sudden departure of all of its African American citizens. In Kelley's short essay, he asserts an essential difference between white

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[5] Ibid.
[6] William Melvin Kelley, "Black Power," *The Partisan Review* 35:2 (Spring 1968), 216-17.

and black Americans that derives largely from his assessment of Old World traditions: "You remained, essentially, a European people. We remained an African people."[7] In Kelley's essay, one of the most fundamental issues of divergence between what he sees as white and black American cultures is the rift between the written and the spoken word: "You had books, libraries … And we, those of us whose ancestors came from Africa, we had, still have, an oral tradition."[8] It is this perceived rift in heritage, between the closed, written tradition, and the relatively accessible oral tradition that brings Kelley to his stark conclusion on the origins of the Black Power movement: "We are different."[9]

The juxtaposition of Israel's memories of Faulkner's detachment and Kelley's intellectual engagement with black power in the same issue of *The Partisan Review* is striking, especially given the further coincidence that Kelley's first novel, *A Different Drummer*, was published in the same year as Faulkner's last, *The Reivers* (1962). Kelley's remarks on orality and written discourse are anticipated and problematised in his first novel, in which white-authored narratives – both oral and written – about African American and southern histories consistently fail to account for the sudden departure of a fictional southern state's entire African American community. In particular, the community space of the porch of the town's grocery store is the hub for white narratives of the town and I read the men on the porch as microcosmic for the white men of Sutton. While the grocery store itself serves the function within a typology of the fictional southern town of providing food and other goods for consumption, the porch is a different element of the typology at which white men who represent different offices, and different social strata, congregate. While

[7] Ibid, 217.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

Kelley, like the white authors I have studied, imagines the town of Sutton as "typical" of southern towns, the larger context in which he places the town is atypical. Kelley imagines an entire American state that is decidedly different from any recognisable, existing state in the Union. He deliberately eschews representation of an identifiable southern state in order to better imagine the hypothetical ramifications of his invented exodus on the South and the rest of the nation.

As was the case with Lillian Smith and Carson McCullers before him, reviewers dismissed Kelley's narrative technique as secondary to his political engagement, and tend not to consider how the novel's form and plot are shaped by his racial politics. For example, *New York Times* critic Orville Prescott condemns the novel, writing that it "is not a fresh and imaginative story about a Negro exodus and all the dramatic, ironic and surprising developments that would follow. It is only another poignant study of the injustice and moral corrosion of race prejudice and racial discrimination" that fails because its author is "intensely interested in social protest."[10] Another reviewer in the same newspaper has a similar complaint about the novel, writing that Kelley "has put an effective prose style at the service of an aroused social conscience instead of his imagination."[11] This critical ambivalence to the novel is reflected in a tension between literary esteem and financial success: he was awarded $2,000 by the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1963, with judges commending the novel as a "considerable literary achievement, although not a commercial success"[12] but, as Eric Sundquist describes, the novel "faded from view after very brief

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[10] Orville Prescott, "Books of the Times," *New York Times*, June 8,1962, 29.
[11] Frank H. Lyell, "The Day the Negroes Left," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1962, 25.
[12] "Painter and Novelist Win Prizes," *New York Times*, April 16, 1963, 38.

acclaim."[13] More recently, critics have sought to recuperate Kelley's novel within the southern literary canon, with Trudier Harris describing *A Different Drummer* as "a fertile point of departure" for studying "the development of southern black fiction,"[14] and Eric Gary Anderson responding to Harris by decrying the "general critical ignorance" of Kelley and his work.[15] Rather than placing the novel in a temporal trajectory of the "development" of African American southern fiction, I trace the development within the novel of competing narratives of southern identity.[16]

When the novel opens the mass exodus is an event that has irrevocably altered the social makeup of the South, and is already a matter of historical record in the fictive present. An extract from the fictional *Thumb-Nail Almanac* with which Kelley opens the novel stages the fictive present as 1961 before the narrative proper reorients itself to June 1957, the month in which "*for reasons yet to be determined, all the state's Negro inhabitants departed*" (4).[17] The *Almanac* sites the narrative that follows in the same historical moment as William Faulkner's *The Reivers*' framing narrative, but while Lucius Priest seeks to co-opt the history of the South in service of segregation, Kelley explores a

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[13] Eric Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), 240.
[14] Trudier Harris, "William Melvin Kelley's Real Live, Invisible South," *South Central Review* 22:1 (2005), 26.
[15] Eric Gary Anderson, "The Real Live, Invisible Languages of *A Different Drummer*: A Response to Trudier Harris," *South Central Review* 22:1 (2005), 49.
[16] While Donald Weyl has read the progression of Kelley's "philosophy" from *A Different Drummer* through his later work as a shift toward more overt symbolism, Thomas H. Nigel locates Tucker Caliban in a narrative of "Bad Nigger" figures in African American literature, and Mark Bould has read the novel as a precursor to contemporary science fiction by African Americans, the current chapter locates the novel as a radical progression of the trope of the fictional southern town. Donald M. Weyl, "The Vision of Man in the Novels of William Melvin Kelley," *Critique* 15:3 (January 1974), 15-33; 15. Thomas H. Nigel, "The Bad Nigger Figure in Selected Works of Richard Wright, William Melvin Kelley and Ernest Gaines," *College Language Association Journal* 39:2 (December 1995), 143-164. Mark Bould, "Come Alive by Saying No: An Introduction to Black Power SF," *Science Fiction Studies*, 34:2 (July, 2007), 220-240, 228.
[17] William Melvin Kelley, *A Different Drummer* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989 [1962]), 4. Italics in original. All further references to the novel will appear parenthetically.

fictional past in which segregation is displaced within the confines of his invented state. Kelley depicts another narrative, presented to a group of white men on the porch of Thomason's grocery store in the small town of Sutton as they attempt to come to terms with the sudden departure of the black population. Mister Harper, the keeper of the town's collective memory, tells a tale of the antebellum South and a legendary black man, known simply as the African, who is sold to Dewitt Willson, the patriarch of the town's most prestigious white family. The African escapes, along with his infant son, and wreaks havoc on Willson's property, freeing local slaves. When the African is finally killed, his son is taken as Willson's property and Willson's son Dewey – who would go on to become a celebrated General in the Confederacy – names the African's child Caliban after the character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Generations later, "Caliban" has become the surname of a family of African Americans who continue to work for the Willson family until, in the fictive present, Tucker Caliban manifests his namesake's threat to Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on't/ Is, I know how to curse."[18] Tucker Caliban and his wife Bethrah destroy and abandon their property in Sutton before leaving the state forever. Kelley's Caliban salts the earth on the small farm he owns and burns his home to the ground before abandoning his town and state. Although Caliban never intervenes in the lives of the rest of the state's black citizens, every one of them follows suit and abandons the state in a mass exodus.

This fable-like plot has encouraged readings of the novel as an allegory for the black freedom movement, with Erica Edwards highlighting the novel's treatment of black leadership as a grassroots property dispersed through the

[18] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 1: Scene 2, Line 517.

members of a larger community, writing that "in *A Different Drummer*, the black residents who depopulate their segregated town are political agents arching toward something else in the interval between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, the here and the there, the shouted and the hushed."[19] In Edwards' reading, the exodus of the black people of Sutton forces them into an interstitial, undefined space, while Sundquist argues that, in the novel, "exile is presented not as a problem of epic global migrations but rather as a philosophical conundrum to be teased out on a local scale" in what he describes as "Kelley's Afro-Zionism."[20] In my reading, however, the black residents' action neither remains local nor is it merely a retreat into the liminal. Rather, the impact of the exodus from Kelley's invented small town, and his imaginary state, is felt in the rest of the nation, because it restructures the racial landscape of the entire United States by displacing millions of black southerners. More particularly, Kelley presents a white southern community that is entirely unable to understand the newly all-white space of the town of Sutton. Where Reece's *The Hawk and the Sun* depicts a white lynch mob enforcing racial integrity, in *A Different Drummer*, a group of white men is left at a loss to understand the actions of the town's African American residents whose exodus render the town wholly white. Where James Loewen conceives of "the sundown town" as one that is "all-white on purpose," in Kelley's Sutton it is the African American residents, not the whites, who desegregate the town "on purpose" and the white men of Sutton are forced to make sense of the new racial order [21]

[19] Erica Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapollis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 113.
[20] Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*, 240.
[21] James Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone, 2005), 5.

The cumulative voice of the white southern community is crucial to an understanding of the imaginative construction of Kelley's Sutton. Kelley's white men who congregate on the porch of the Thomason grocery store are presented as a microcosm of 'typical' southern white men. Kelley explores how a white southern mentality confronted with, what is to them, an inexplicable and sudden desegregation of the South. Kelley represents the process through which white children are socialised into the masculine community of the porch and examines the failure of a white-community narrative to account for black civil disobedience. The white men on the porch seek to understand the South's racial presence through recourse solely to the past and Kelley implicitly critiques this mechanism for understanding black subjectivity. The construction of this condensed and representative unit of the imagined southern white community is most fully realised when the group vents its frustration through the lynching of the last remaining African American in the town.

The Porch: Kelley's Microcosm of White Community

The spatial organisation of the town of Sutton is geographically and ideologically grounded in white-led narratives of southern history, similar to the one Lucius Priest invents in *The Reivers*. Kelley positions the men on the porch as observers of the passage of time and of the drastic change in southern demographics that he depicts, drawing as he does on the literary tradition of the southern porch in black and white southern fiction. Simultaneously, the voyeuristic group of men is itself the subject of observation as Kelley demonstrates the processes of socialisation that make up such a group. In particular, Kelley portrays Mister Leland's white southern childhood as a process

of development into the raced and gendered community of the porch. Kelley represents the porch as a venue for a second-person narrative voice when Harper directly addresses his neighbours with his story of the town and Kelley's literary technique exposes how contemporary white thinking on race fails to account for the sudden exodus sparked by Tucker Caliban.

Kelley's narrative of the southern town differs from the white-authored novels discussed elsewhere in this thesis because he refuses the paradigm whereby individual representatives stand for an entire community's capacity for change. Instead, he presents a white community that has already failed to accommodate sudden racial change. Kelley not only figures white southerners as incapable of overturning segregation, but also consistently negates their ability to narrate and define desegregation. *A Different Drummer* effectively addresses and discards the motifs for understanding segregation through the metonymic fictional towns that I have traced through *Strange Fruit* to *The Reivers*. While I have argued that white southern novelists were not, as David Bradley suggests, "remarkably mute" in representing segregation in fiction, none of the novels I have explored provide so stark a conclusion to segregation as Kelley's.[22]

In opposition to the paradigmatic treatments of the southern town, segregation in *A Different Drummer* is observed only in retrospect. Following a dispassionate historical record of local racial history, the narrative proper begins with the line: "It was over now" (5). The confused temporality of this brief and stark opening sentence features both the past and present, announcing the narrative's retrospective focalisation and the text's concern with the "now." Kelley imagines a South in which exploited African Americans are themselves

[22] David Bradley, Foreword to *A Different Drummer* by William Melvin Kelley, xxvi.

the architects of desegregation, and he does so by exploring the failure of the abandoned white community to understand the ramifications of the racial sea change. The imaginative experiment of Kelley's exodus is tested in the laboratory of the fictional southern town of Sutton. Kelley organises the entire town around principles of white supremacy predicated on a white-governed sense of southern tradition and the statue of General Willson in its square geographically centres the town. As in Faulkner's *The Reivers* and McCullers' *Clock Without Hands*, the town square, complete with Confederate monument, symbolises the ideological centre of the white population's collective identity. Radiating out from this centre is assembled a socially representative group of white men through whom Kelley explores the town's failure to understand or adapt to the exodus.

In the novel's fictive present, General Willson continues to anchor the town both spatially and ideologically, because the statue erected in his honour stands "in the center of town" (28). The nominally objective account of the town's history recorded in the almanac suggests that the process of becoming a symbolic ideological leader can be fatal: "*On April 5, 1889, having just returned from the dedication of a ten-foot bronze statue of himself which the townspeople of Sutton had erected in their Square,* [Willson] *was stricken and died. He is considered by most historians to have been, after Lee, the Confederacy's greatest general*" (4). This short passage describes, in very quick succession, Willson's transformation into the symbolic centre of his hometown, his death, and the subsequent academic consensus of his contribution to the Confederate cause. If the national memory of the Civil War remembers Willson as second only to Lee,

the town of Sutton remembers Lee as second only to Willson, because "Lee Street" runs east to west through the square that commemorates Willson (29).[23]

The town of Sutton is only described in relation to other places in the state. While General Wilson and Mister Harper are educated at West Point, the New York academy is not positioned in relation to the town or anywhere else in the state (3, 7). On the other hand, the grocery store porch on which Harper and the other white men congregate is defined as a point between the state's capital and its major port: "being on the Highway between New Marsails and Willson City, [the men] had watched the line of cars crammed with Negroes and enough belongings to convince the men that the Negroes had not gone to all this trouble to move a mere hundred miles" (6). In this passage, "the Negroes" are consistently figured as the object of the sentence, for which the white observers are the collective subject. This same position on the Highway recalls Dewitt Willson's search for his escaped enslaved African during which he and the militia he gathers are "camped a little north of New Marsails" (21). The narrative colonialism of Harper and the other men is thereby implicitly connected to Dewitt Willson's project of ownership over the African. In Harper's telling, the African is larger than life and capable of impossible feats and needs to be shot multiple times before succumbing to his injuries (23-4). Harper tells his take on the communal porch, between the commercial space of the grocery store and the highway. The porch is a space from which the white men observe and recall the state's shifting racial landscape while they remain physically and ideologically static. Within the geography of Sutton, the men on the porch are uniquely

[23] Kelley satirizes white memory of the Civil War by making the date on which Willson is "stricken" by an unnamed calamity precisely fifteen days prior to the birth of Adolf Hitler on April 20, 1889. Through this subtle analogy between the glorified leader of the Confederacy and another charismatic political leader in whose honour statues were erected, Kelley signals his satirical approach to "great man" histories.

positioned to witness and report the exodus. They occupy a space on the town's main road; they are stationary but they witness and comment on the movement of others and they are led by the most stationary of them all, the wheelchair-bound Mister Harper.

Kelley's Mister Harper, like Reece's character Harker, is the subject of nominative determinism, because his role in the community is to "harp" on the subject of local racial history. Harper is drawn in overt opposition to the mobile and migratory black population of the state: "So, thirty years before, he decided life was not worth meeting on foot, since it always knocked you down, and seated himself in a wheel chair to view the world from the porch, explaining its chaotic pattern to the men who clustered around him each day" (7). Harper's elected stasis signals his ideological opposition to the mobilisation of the state's African Americans who escape the "chaotic pattern" of the state.[24] Harper's belief that "life was not worth meeting on foot" suggests that he will be utterly incapable of composing a narrative to explain millions of people mobilising to extricate themselves from segregation As Stephanie Li argues, "Mister Harper's story reveals more insight into the nature of whiteness than into the reality of black subjects."[25] I would add that his narrative simultaneously buttresses a white supremacist ideology and seeks to maintain the town's existing racial epistemology.

Harper is only able to account for Caliban's sudden civic disobedience by pseudo-scientifically ascribing Caliban's rebelliousness to his African heritage. Harper insists on a biological imperative, saying "But the way I see it, it's pure

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[24] Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* also features a character who elects to maintain a physical impairment. The deaf character Singer is able to speak but remains mute rather than entering the community of the small town.
[25] Stephanie Li, *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 163.

genetics: something special in the blood. … It's got to be the African's blood! That's simple!" (8) Harper's insistence on a genealogy of dissent against the South's racial order is predicated on white racial anxieties evident in the novel's white community, because "black leadership," as Erica Edwards summarises, is "the white characters' worst nightmare and their preferred model for making sense of their social reality."[26] Harper is compelled to understand Caliban's act of disobedience, and the exodus it inspires, in an epistemology that can no longer adequately account for the fictional town's shared identity. Harper's insistence on old narratives and old modes of thought is analogous to his, and his observers', failure to metaphorically move with the times. If the Exodus narrative in African American culture represents, in Anna Hartnell's terms, "an entrance to and an exit from the privileged … terrains of US national culture,"[27] then Kelley's choice to locate his pseudo-Greek-chorus on the road to and through the town of Sutton allows the white men to observe the exodus from the state as a trajectory through US national and racial identity. By situating his abandoned white community on the porch, Kelley also reorients the typical significations of the porch in southern literature and culture.

Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon addresses, albeit in a sentimental tone, the symbolic connection between the southern porch and community-wide nostalgia when she writes:

> One prevailing notion that spans cultural boundaries and characterizes the South as a whole is that the porch, though used less frequently today than in the past, remains integral to a southern identity. Though we routinely

[26] Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, 149.
[27] Anna Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus: American Futures from Du Bois to Obama* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 16.

> sound the death knell of the front porch, it continues to endure – if not always in reality, at least in our memories.[28]

In this overview of the symbolic cargo of the image of the porch, Donlon replicates the nostalgic and utopian image of white southern community that Kelley undercuts in his deployment of the trope in *A Different Drummer*. Donlon proposes a totalising southern community, represented by the pronoun 'we,' defined by a stable and shared sense of identity and a collective and idealised vision of the past. As I argue in the previous chapter, these same presumptions and the same politics of memory underscore the narrative discourse Faulkner deploys in *The Reivers*. In that novel, Lucius Priest looks back over his life in the small southern town of Jefferson and in looking backwards forges his own idealised history of the South in the twentieth century. In *A Different Drummer*, Kelley creates and critiques a community of Lucius Priests who collectively and individually seek to understand a suddenly desegregated present solely through recourse to a heroic and digestible narrative of a coherent southern past.

The porch on which the action of *A Different Drummer* takes place is not the entrance to a private home but to a small business serving the practical needs of the community. This change in role marks the porch as different from home porches such as in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). In that novel, the porch is a linguistic synecdoche for the African American women who share it, as when the protagonist Janie walks away feeling "the porch pelting her back with unasked questions."[29] In this passage, the African American women on the porch metaphorically assault Janie with their gossip. On

[28] Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon, *Swinging in Place: Porch Life in Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 19-20.
[29] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (London: Virago, 1986 [1937]), 14.

the other hand, the porch in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* operates as a space of intimacy in a way that the porch in *A Different Drummer* does not. When Janie tells her story to her friend Phoeby the porch comes to signify their homosocial community, underscored by Janie's description of their dialogue: "mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf."[30] In Kelley's novel, the porch occupies a position in a typology that makes it primarily the site of commercial transactions rather than intimate friendships.

As the entrance to a business, Kelley's porch complies with other conventions of the front porch in the literature of the South, such as those depicted in McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1951). In this earlier novella, the porch is a space of community in which the white people of the fictional small town congregate, but it remains a space of potential violence, as in the reaction of the townspeople when the protagonist, Amelia, is insulted by her estranged husband: "So now if Miss Amelia had split open Marvin Macy's head with the axe on the back porch no one would have been surprised."[31] Here, the proprietor of the business to which the porch is affixed is suggested to have a symbolic ownership of her patrons and the image of the porch is more threatening.

The place of the porch in an iconography of the rural South is such that in Edward Albee's stage adaptation of McCullers' novella, the porch constitutes an important part of the visual grammar of the southern town in the staging of the play: "Miss Amelia's *house must be practical, in the sense that its interior will be used, both upstairs and down, and, as well, we must be able to see its exterior without entering it. The main street of the town runs before the porch of the*

[30] Ibid, 17.
[31] Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (London: Cresset Press, 1952 [1951]), 69.

house, parallel to the apron of the stage."[32] Albee's stage directions make evident the role of the porch as a means of visualising the intimate space of a home from the public space outside both by highlighting the significance of seeing inside Amelia's home without entering and through Albee's choice to stage the town's main street and the building's porch as two layers of distance from the apron of the stage and the viewing audience beyond. The staging helps to elaborate on Kelley's aesthetics of voyeurism in *A Different Drummer* and helps to explain the ways in which front porches operate as both intimate and public spaces. The porch's capacity to allow people to see inside the business from without is played out in particular in a scene in the novel in which Mister Leland remembers his first meeting with Caliban.

On a morning during the summer of 1956 Caliban is observed in the store by Mister Leland, who is playing outside: "Tucker Caliban entered the store and purchased a bag of feed, started out, then stopped and pointed to the window, speaking to Mister Thomason, who weighed out a full pound of peanuts and poured them into a brown paper sack" (49). The topography of the porch allows Mister Leland to see, but not hear, Caliban's interactions with the storeowner. Caliban's inaudible communication in this passage complies with Li's contention that Caliban "[a]lmost entirely renounces language, affirming that freedom will not be found in words but in action."[33] The geography of the porch enables Mister Leland to observe Caliban's actions without hearing his words. When Caliban presents Mister Leland with the bag of peanuts and instructs him to "Tell your pa I knows what he trying to do with you," the boy is initially confused, and his father's explanation that "Your mama and me is trying to make you a

[32] Edward Albee and Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café: Carson McCullers's Novella Adapted to the Stage* (New York: Scribner Classis, 2001 [1963]), 11, italics in original.
[33] Li, *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects*, 165.

passable human being" does not allay this confusion (49). In effect, Caliban is rewarding Harry Leland and his son for Harry's efforts in raising Mister Leland to eschew the overt racism of the other white men in Sutton, as when Mister Leland feels guilty for using a racial slur: "He had been told not to use NIGGER" (33, emphasis in original). This brief exchange on the porch elaborates on the process through which Harry Leland begins to socialise his son into the white community, represented by the men on the porch; Leland's parenting is an extension of a paradigm of racial improvement. However, Kelley undermines Harry Leland's gradualist pedagogy by showing how Mister Leland is implicated in existing paradigms of white male sexuality in the town.

As in the other novels I have analysed, unmarried women are spatially and socially marginalised in Sutton. Like Smith's Miss Ada, Kelley's Miss Rickett is maligned in the white community as a sexual predator. When Harry Leland's wife asks him to pay his respects to Miss Rickett because she is ill, he decides to avoid the woman: "*Let the boy do it; I'll send the boy over. That woman gives me the willies. I can't see how Marge can't know about her and what she does. But I know she wants a screwing and I ain't about to give it to her. I'll just send the boy*" (28, italics in original). While Leland doesn't expect his son to be a 'victim' of Miss Rickett's desires, he remains willing to sacrifice his son and, by extension, incorporate him into the town's adult sexual economy. By sending Mister Leland into what he thinks to be a "*she-lion's den*", Harry Leland implicitly sanctions his son's transition from sexual ignorance – what Marge Leland "*can't know*" – to mature, masculine sexual knowledge – "*I know she wants a screwing*" (29). Even though nothing happens to the child, Harry Leland is willing to sacrifice his son to the sexually predatory woman in order to

save himself from unwanted attention, and in doing so, he also introduces Mister Leland to the sexual norms of white masculinity in Sutton by failing in his own project of raising Mister Leland as "a passable human being".

This childhood sexual rite is explored and anticipated in "The Turtles" (1956), an early short story by Ernest J. Gaines, in which a young African American boy is pressured by his father into having sex with an unmarried woman, who lives "back in the fields" away from the rest of the rural black community, in order to make the boy "a man."[34] While Gaines' story depicts a reluctant son and a forceful father, in opposition to Kelley's characterisation of the Lelands, Mister Leland's proto-sexual encounter in *A Different Drummer* nevertheless suggests that the child is in the process of becoming another of the men on the porch, with all the ideological baggage that invokes.

The assortment of Sutton's citizens who congregate on the grocery store porch is carefully organised to cross the social barriers between the town's lower and middle classes. Crass Bobby-Joe McCollum, who spits and condescends to Mister Harper, is a crudely drawn archetype of a poor white while Loomis, who "had been upstate to the university at Willson," is representative of the town's white middle class (9,7). In racial politics, too, the group represents a cross-section of white attitudes to African Americans in the face of the exodus, ranging from conservative "righteous anger" to the racially moderate: "Harry Leland had gone so far as to express the idea that the Negroes had the right to leave" (6). Leland's position is marked as unusual in the manner in which the omniscient narrator describes a simple opinion on freedom of movement as having "gone so far". While the group is relatively inclusive, then, it remains restrictive; only

[34] Ernest J. Gaines, "The Turtles" in *Mozart and Leadbelly: Stories and Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2005 [1956]), 83,86.

working- and middle-class whites are included in the group and the abiding atmosphere is one of racial conservatism.

Nevertheless, the character of the group is mediated by Mister Harper and the social differences between the other men are rendered moot when he begins to speak. Harper's authority over the group is signalled when he begins his tall tale concerning the African. As the men "coax" Harper into telling the story, with each instance of reported speech signalled in the text by quotation marks, this practice abruptly shifts, following a line-break, as soon as Harper begins his narrative (8,9). Kelley allows the form of the novel to acquiesce to Harper's authority by altering the punctuation rendered in the text. These visual markers of textual difference subtly indicate a shift in narrative technique from an omniscient third-person voice to a second-person monologue in which Harper directly addresses the assembled group of men.

While relatively rare in literature in English, the second-person narrative voice is unusually prevalent in southern literature at mid-century, and I have already discussed how the second-person narrative voice operates in Smith's *Strange Fruit* to conflate the subject positions of fictional characters and an imagined reader. I have also examined how Faulkner's narrator in *The Reivers* stages his narrative for his grandson in order to predispose an imagined reader to his revisions. In *A Different Drummer*, the second-person voice operates along similar principles, as David Bradley recognises: "Kelley uses precisely the same techniques that Faulkner uses … and to precisely the same end: to humanize and sympathize characters whose points of view readers might have ignored."[35] By transposing Harper's narrative from reported speech into a direct address to a

[35] David Bradley, foreword, xxvii.

named group of narratees, Kelley incorporates an imagined reader into Harper's fantastical tale.

In contemporary southern literature, this form of direct address can be used humorously and to incorporate an imagined reader into the narrative. For instance, the opening line of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is comically metafictional even while it constructs a sense of intimacy with the eponymous character: "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter."[36] In this case, the fictional character directly addresses an imagined reader, inventing an atmosphere of hospitality in the first-person narrative. Elsewhere in the southern literary tradition, hospitality is used as a form of misdirection, as in Eudora Welty's *The Ponder Heart* (1954). In that novel, Edna Earle Ponder narrates her family history to a travelling salesman whose role the imagined reader inhabits. Set in a small-town hotel (a component of the typology of the fictional town that relies on movement through the the geography of the town), Edna Earl's narrative is masked in hospitality; like Lucius Priest's narrative in *The Reivers*, that hospitality allows the narrator to mediate the narrative as it is received by the narratee and, by extension, an imagined reader. In *A Different Drummer*, Harper excuses his tall tale by describing it as analogous to a biblical co-text: "You take the story of Samson. Might not all be true as you read it in the Bible; folks must-a figured if you got a man just a little bit stronger than most, it couldn't do no real harm to make him a whole lot stronger" (9). Harper directs his listeners, as well as the novel's imagined reader, to a particular mode of reading the narrative of the African.

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[36] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (London: Collins Classics, 2009 [1884]), 1.

The second-person narrative voice can also function to incorporate an imagined reader into a collective southern "memory", as in the section of Shelby Foote's *Jordan County* (1954) titled "The Freedom Ticket." This chapter features a monologue that depends on an imagined question asked by an addressee but unreported in the text: "You ask about that old time. It aint nothing I cant tell you. Kluxers, smut ballots, whipping-bees, all that: I'm in a position to know and I remember, mainly on account of my mamma."[37] In this passage, "memory" is a hereditary property: the narrator is able to remember because of similar stories his mother has told him. The narrative is instigated by an imagined question and relayed as though in response to that same fictional question. Similarly, Harper assumes the role of arbiter of Sutton's collective memory and the amassed white men consume his narrative as a founding text of the fictional southern town centred on the Willson family. This is evident in the culmination of the story, with the African's son being taken as the property of the Willson family: "Well, that's the story and you all know as well as me how that baby got named Caliban by the General, when the General was twelve years old" (25). The young Dewey Willson is twice described here as "the General" despite the anachronism that creates in Harper's story. This strange temporality, in which a twelve-year-old is a Confederate officer, underscores the degree to which General Willson is located as the defining figure in the town's collective history.

General Willson's place in the town's collective memory translates, in the novel's fictive present, into a geographical and social prestige for the General's descendants. One such descendant, David Willson, is figured in the text as even further removed from Caliban's departure than the white men on the porch who

[37] Shelby Foote, *Jordan County: A Landscape in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1992 [1954]), 225.

fail to make sense of it. In his depiction of the mass exodus and its impact on southern whites, Kelley satirises white southern liberalism, particularly in the character of David Willson. Willson's impressions of the event that sparks the exodus from the fictional state are registered in a personal diary in which he records his role in the social economy of Sutton. Willson is a component of the same cultural economy as the working- and middle-class men on the porch but is socially removed from them through his wealth, as when he relates a trip to town immediately following Caliban's migration, dated May 31st 1957: "I walked downhill and into the Square and across to the store. (There were two or three men and a boy there this morning, unusual for that hour: about 7:30. I did not speak to them of course; I do not know any of them. None work my land)" (152). In this brief passage, Willson inadvertently delineates his role in the white community of Sutton.

It is evident from his walk through the town's centre, past the statue of his ancestor in the square, that Willson is a component of the town's collective social identity, but the symbolic geography of his walk "downhill" underscores his position in the town's social elite. In the typology of the fictional town, Willson – the wealthy landowner – is dependant on and distanced from the other offices that make up the town. His habitual journey from his home to Thomason's, the town's social hub, indicates that he is included in the town's social and commercial economies, even while his status as a landowner and employer governs his relationship to his neighbours: whether or not he "knows" the men on the porch is contingent on whether they work on his land. That the description of the group is rendered entirely in a parenthetical aside underscores the social remove at which Willson observes his fellow townspeople. This

distance is compounded by the rhetorical addition in the journal entry of the phrase "of course," which takes for granted Willson's social distance from the men on the porch.

In the same diary entry, the manner by which Willson becomes aware of Caliban's migration supplements Kelley's construction of David Willson as a person *of* the white community of Sutton who is nevertheless consistently positioned at a remove from the men on the porch. A former journalist, Willson receives the news of Caliban's dramatic act from still another apparently dispassionate and factual source, a brief newspaper article. The newspaper, in turn, has received its information through oral narratives passed along by the men on the porch: "*Witnesses stated the fire was started deliberately by Caliban, a Negro, himself. Those interviewed said they had watched Caliban most of the day… Caliban was not available for comment*" (153). Willson is distanced from Caliban's mentality in at least two removes: the men who witness the event narrate their account to the local journalist who renders it into written text before Willson peruses it in his home atop a literal and figurative hillside, overlooking the white and black residents of Sutton who have had more direct access to Caliban's departure.

After this entry in Willson's diary, Kelley moves backward to explore earlier moments in David's life. Through diary entries from the 1930s, Kelley locates Willson on a contrasting, but parallel ideological trajectory to Caliban. Unlike the perennially silent Caliban, Willson writes anonymously in local newspapers, decrying what he calls "the corrosive effect of segregation" on the South (175). Upon being discovered and "blackballed" in the state's newspaper industry, Willson contemplates a move from the segregated South to New York

City, an act of migration that would have anticipated Caliban's departure from the state (175). However, the uncertainty of such a move with a pregnant wife dissuades Willson from action: "But I cannot pack up Camille now and make a total move. Suppose I could not get anything in New York. We would be even worse off. I have to find something here. Perhaps this will all die down, and someone will take a chance on me" (176). Willson chooses to content himself with patiently awaiting a shift in the state's racial temperament. Anticipating the possibility that the white supremacist backlash against his journalism will "all die down," Willson implicitly positions himself, in the privacy of his diary, as a racial gradualist and Kelley critiques Willson's beliefs by unambiguously contrasting him with Caliban. Caliban's personal situation at the time of the exodus is so similar to Willson's in the 1930s as to highlight the contrast in the courage of their political convictions: like Willson's wife, Bethrah Caliban is pregnant when she and her husband destroy their property and abandon the segregated southern town.

If, in the character of David Willson, Kelley satirises the figure of the wealthy white racial liberal, he is more critical of his representative poor white, Bobby-Joe. Although Harper's narrative of the town's collective memory upholds the state's white supremacist ideals, his presence lends the conversation on the porch "form and scope" (29). In his absence, the white men act violently on their white supremacist convictions and are marshalled by the uneducated and spiteful Bobby-Joe. Kelley's final chapter, "The Men on the Porch" depicts a southern town in which bigotry and racialised violence persist after desegregation. As in George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), the eradication of a colour line provokes a desperate white population to locate anyone who is

racially "othered" on whom to vent frustration. In Schuyler's novel, a white clergyman in the fictional southern town of Happy Hill prays for "a nigger for his congregation to lynch" after a new medical treatment has eliminated racial difference.[38] Similarly, the white men of Sutton alleviate their frustration by humiliating and lynching the last African American in the town, northern activist B.T. Bradshaw, who has come to the state to witness the aftermath of the exodus.

Bradshaw, the leader of the "RESURRECTED CHURCH OF THE BLACK JESUS CHRIST OF AMERICA, INC., NEW YORK CITY" visits the Caliban farm in an attempt to make sense of the exodus (70, emphasis in original). In Harper's absence, Bobby-Joe begins to fixate on what he imagines as Bradshaw's role as a leader of the exodus, saying "That nigger preacher come driving by here and we just sat here watching him like he was the President" (191). In the white imagination, black leadership can only be imagined in relation to accepted norms of representative governance, and Bradshaw is facetiously compared to "the President" as a means of incorporating the black freedom movement into those accepted norms. By scapegoating "agitators" or "fellows what come in and stir up trouble" (192), the white men seek retribution against Bradshaw as a representative leader of his race, even though Bradshaw merely "wishes he could say he had been the instigator" (197). In the absence of Harper as the group's moderator, Bobby-Joe takes over the role of the group's ideological leader.

As the last African American in the state, Bradshaw becomes the vessel through which the white men are able to vent the frustrations that have built because of the exodus. As Bobby-Joe says: "You fellows know this is our last

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[38] George Schuyler, *Black No More* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989 [1931]), 201.

nigger? Just think on that. Our last nigger, ever. There won't be no more after this … The only niggers we'll ever see, unless we go over to Mississippi or Alabama, will be on the television" (199). Kelley ends *A Different Drummer* with the suggestion that violent white supremacy would persist even in an all-white southern town. This dénouement locates the novel in opposition to the other texts I have discussed, each of which ends with the implication that the white South is making progress toward racial harmony.

Kelley's condensed white community serves as evidence in the novel that desegregation has not eliminated the racist, white supremacist epistemology from which segregation emerged. The small town of Sutton represents Kelley's convictions that white and black Americans are irreconcilably different and that racial segregation could not be ended by the efforts of well-intentioned white southerners. Kelley makes the men on the porch symbolically analogous to the unnamed state in which they are located; they remain constant even as they observe and react to the sudden movement of the state's African American population. Like their home state, the men in the town of Sutton can only look backwards and Kelley seems to hold little hope for the future of the town of Sutton. However, if the town and the state are both lost causes, Kelley's imaginative construction of the state suggests that the Union of which it is a component can still make progress in racial politics.

An Impossible State: Kelley's Invented South

Kelley invents an entire southern state and, in doing so, dispenses with conventions in southern literature I have discussed for the imagining of a fictional space on this scale. Kelley's invented and unnamed state is crucial to

understanding the repercussions of his fictional mass exodus. While the white town of Sutton is typical in its construction, the absence of African American subjectivity signals its difference from other typical southern towns. In imagining a thoroughly unique and idiosyncratic state in which to incorporate this typical fictional town, Kelley further problematizes the paradigm of the fictional southern town as synecdoche that I have explored through the preceding chapters. By expanding the imaginative work associated with inventing a segregated town to incorporate an entire fictional state, Kelley rejects a narrative of racial progress in favour of a complete overhaul of America's racial systems.

By imagining the exodus of an entire black population, Kelley severs ties between his novel and the facts of the segregated South, proposing instead a hypothetical, post-segregated, South. His state is an entirely imaginary construction, underscored by detailed citations of its dimensions, population, and identity. Kelley's description of the state's geography is so clear as to preclude any confusion with an existing southern state: "*An East South Central state in the Deep South, it is bounded on the north by Tennessee; east by Alabama; south by the Gulf of Mexico; west by Mississippi*" (3). This catalogue of the state's coordinates within the nation locates it, from the very beginning of the novel, in a geographically impossible position, wedged between Alabama and Mississippi. From the start, then, Kelley codifies his state as discrete from the geography of the region.

While earlier chapters have argued that analogues with real-world coordinates cement the invention of towns in southern fiction as synecdoches that are representative of "typical," real-world southern towns, Kelley's invention does not gesture towards any such coordinates, but is consistently

marked as atypical by its author from the novel's opening pages: "*Today it is unique in being the only state in the Union that cannot count even one member of the Negro race among its citizens*" (4). Kelley's state, then, is not offered as representative in the sense of being an archetype rather it is a prototype, explicitly figured as unlike any real world southern space. If, as Trudier Harris believes, Kelley "creates a mythical southern state to enact his narrative of black and white relationships,"[39] the imaginative construction of the unnamed state allows Kelley to contemplate a black-led revision of the South's segregated racial structure. Kelley's practice of inventing his hypothetical and impossible state operates along similar principles to the imaginative work of inventing southern towns to the other novelists. However, Kelley's politicised aesthetics are predicated on a separatist rather than an integrationist ideology.

In an essay published after *A Different Drummer* and following the legislative changes engendered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Kelley expresses a decidedly separatist ideology: "Separation is indeed the answer – not to flee the evil of whiteness but to create an economic unit which can bring an end to exploitation."[40] In *A Different Drummer,* Kelley dramatizes the "economic unit" that would be left in the wake of such an immediate separation. Through his imaginative construction of an all-white state, Kelley begins to develop an aesthetic to imagine an America devoid of racial segregation and bifurcation. While earlier chapters examine how authors return to fictional towns, Kelley's *A Different Drummer* signifies the beginning of a pattern that would continue across subsequent fiction.

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[39] Trudier Harris, "Salting the Land but Not the Imagination: William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer*" in *South of Tradition: Essays on African American Literature*, ed. Trudier Harris (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002 [1997]), 149.
[40] William Melvin Kelley, "On Racism, Exploitation, and the White Liberal," *Negro Digest*, January, 1967, 9.

This pattern is overtly constituted by linguistic experimentation. An alliterative pattern can be discerned when considering the titles of Kelley's books that follow *A Different Drummer*: the short story collection *Dancers on the Shore* (1964), *A Drop of Patience* (1965), *dəm* (1967), and *Dunfords Travels Everywheres* (1970). Through the repetition of the 'd' sound, Kelley suggests that his work constitutes a larger project with characters who appear in *A Different Drummer*, especially members of the Willson and Bedlow families who recur in later texts. I argue that because the titles echo the onomatopoeic sound of drumming, his first novel inaugurates an aesthetic predicated on linguistically constructed, racially separatist spaces.

The same separatist sentiments are evident in Kelley's dedication to *dəm*: "This book is dedicated to the black people in (not of) America."[41] This dedication asserts that America will not adequately incorporate an African American population. As such, Kelley's aesthetics gesture towards the invention of new systems of racially "integral" society. The title of Kelley's later novel is the idiomatic, African American pronunciation of the word "them", rendered in the International Phonetic Alphabet, suggesting that Kelley invents a linguistically constructed, imaginary America across his fiction which is inaugurated and codified in his first novel. Across his novels Kelley articulates a connected and revisionary view of American racial structures and the first building block he depicts, his imaginary state, departs significantly from existing literary tropes for imagining a fictional southern state.

While other fictional southern states either provide a setting for satire and comedy or are closely modelled on real states, Kelley's is a canvas on which he

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[41] William Melvin Kelley, *dem* (Saint Paul, MN: Coffee House Press, 2000 [1967]), v.

can explore the principles of segregated southern society even as they are being eradicated. With comedic and satirical fictional southern states, state names are themselves sources of comedy, as is the case with the slave state Apodidraskiana in English novelist Thomas Love Peacock's antebellum comedy *Crotchet Castle* (1831). In other cases, the comedy derives from a name's obvious relation to recognisable states, such as in Missituckey, the setting of the E.Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy Broadway musical *Finian's Rainbow* (1947). In this case, the comedy arises from the manner by which the naming of the state indicates a generally southern setting rather than specifying any particularities of location.[42] That Kelley's state remains unnamed, despite details of its constituent towns and cities being clearly depicted, indicates that the satire and fantasy that define the plot of *A Different Drummer* are never allowed to undermine the usefulness of his invented state by making of it a punch line.

The most famous fictional southern state to be clearly modelled after a real state is Thomas Wolfe's Old Catawba, a fictionalised representation of North Carolina, depicted in *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929) and also in the short story "Old Catawba" (1935). In the story, Wolfe describes the state's location, dimensions, and demographics in more oblique terms than Kelley does for his later imagined state:

> On the middle-Atlantic seaboard of the North American continent and at about a day's journey from New York is situated the American state of Old Catawba. In area and population the state might almost strike a

[42] A similar aesthetic practice of inventing a southern state between two recognisable, factual states is used as a trope in a novel published forty years after *A Different Drummer*, white novelist Michael Bishop's *Count Geiger's Blues* (1992). This superhero fantasy is set in the state of Oconee, located between Georgia and Tennessee.

> median among the states of the union: its territory which is slightly more than fifty thousand square miles, is somewhat larger than the territories of most of the Atlantic coastal states … Upon this area, which is a little smaller than the combined areas of England and Wales, there live about three million people, of whom about the third part are black. Catawba, therefore, is about as big as England, and has about as many people as Norway.[43]

While Wolfe's description is informative, it is full of prevarication. The details he provides add texture to the fictional state without ever firmly and unambiguously fixing any of its coordinates. Aside from the frequent choice of mediating phrases such as "almost," "about," and "less than," Old Catawba is geographically located in relation to New York based on the speed of travel on an unspecified conveyance. Wolfe does not even make his state average, as it "almost strike[s] a median" in terms of area and population, suggesting that even to make the state exactly average would be to make it distinctive. On the other hand, Kelley's description of his state is consistently definitive and eschews Wolfe's equivocations.

The state in *A Different Drummer* was admitted to the union in 1818, and this year's numerical symmetry and the rhythmic repetition of 'eighteen' echoes Kelley's title by suggesting the rhythm of a drumbeat. The state's motto, "*With Honor and Arms We Dare Defend Our Rights*" is immediately suggestive of a fierce local identity. The term 'rights' suggests the phrase "states' rights," especially when the "arms" alluded to likely signify the Civil War (3). The

[43] Thomas Wolfe, "Old Catawba," in *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987 [1935]), 214.

state's motto, then, resonates with its southern heritage and indicates a collective identity among the white population predicated on racial superiority and regional exceptionalism. The state's physical dimensions are catalogued with great detail, down to the last square mile, "50,163," and its population, according to data from the "*1960 Census, preliminary*" is given as "1,802,268" (3). These physical and demographic details recall Faulkner's map of Jefferson, in which a population and area, but no year, are detailed. Missing from Kelley's record but present in Faulkner's is a racial demographic. Faulkner's silent majority of African Americans is replaced in Kelley's almanac with the present absence of a black population.

Kelley's state is not only geographically positioned between Alabama and Mississippi but is, on every level, constructed as an amalgamation of the two most deeply southern states in the Deep South. Its motto is a conflation of Alabama's – "*Audemus Jura Nostra Defendere*," or "We Dare Defend Our Rights" –and Mississippi's – "*Virtute et Armis,*" or "By Valor and Arms." Kelley's motto, recorded in the almanac, compounds Alabama's state identity as defensive of local freedoms, with Mississippi's assertion of traditions of chivalry and, again, armed "defense" against the "invading" forces of the North. In addition, the history of Kelley's state within the United States falls between that of Mississippi, the twentieth state accepted to the Union in 1817, and Alabama, the twenty-second and accepted in 1819.[44] In area, Kelley once again locates his state in the space between Alabama, with an area of 50,744 square miles, and Mississippi, with an area of 46, 907 square miles. According to the US Census Bureau, the populations of Alabama and Mississippi in 1960 were, respectively,

[44] The state that historically emerged between Alabama and Mississippi was Illinois, the twenty-first state accepted to the Union in 1818.

3,266,740 and 2,178,141. Each of these numbers is considerably larger than Kelley's fictional population until the populations of African Americans (980,271 and 915,743, respectively) are removed from each state.[45] This would leave the population of Alabama, following a mass exodus, as 2,286,489 and Mississippi's as 1,262,398, and positions Kelley's fictional population of "*1,802,268*" as once again occupying a middle space between Alabama and Mississippi (3). Overwhelmingly, the various social and geographical dimensions of Kelley's imagined state signify the conflation of Mississippi and Alabama. Rather than this fact making the state analogous to either, Kelley insists on his own, newly defined paradigm of southern space and identity.

Kelley positions his state between Mississippi and Alabama not just geographically, but demographically, ideologically, and in area. In doing this, Kelley makes his state atypical: it is not a metonym for any southern state, nor is it a fictionalised version of a single, identifiable state. Rather, Kelley constructs an imaginary landscape in which segregation has been immediately and wholly dismantled by African American southerners. Within the novel, characters are described traversing the space of the state as when the middle-class white character Loomis travels "upstate to the university at Willson" (7) and when Dewitt Willson hunts the escaped African "all along the Gulf Coast almost to Mississippi and the other way into Alabama" (19). The narrative is bounded by the state, even as it ranges across Kelley's invented space. Having invented an integer, a complete and functional state-wide municipal and social complex, Kelley goes on to explore the hypothetical impact that a mass exodus from such

[45] Census of Population and Housing, 1960, accessed August 15, 2015, https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html.

a state would have on both the United States at large and the intellectual principles of the exodus narrative in African American culture.

In Kelley's manipulation, the trope of the exodus narrative departs from Robert J. Patterson, in whose analysis, "African Americans have long appropriated and typologically identified with [the biblical Exodus narrative] to argue that their civil rights are God-given and divinely protected."[46] In Kelley's novel, Caliban's instigation of the mass exodus from the state precedes failed white attempts to commit the event to written and oral narrative. Rather than a biblical Exodus narrative providing a textual basis for African American civil rights leadership, Kelley depicts a mass migration from the segregated South that produces a narrative of exodus rather than being constituted from such a narrative. While the biblical Exodus story is, as Hartnell summarises, "a myth central to America's national, religious and racial self-identity", Kelley proposes a new mythological centre for African American identity.[47] Due to the nature of the mass exodus, the impact of this new identity cannot be felt anywhere in the fictional state where it was developed. Instead, in the novel's fictive present, the unnamed state is uniquely ignorant to the changes that have occurred in African American ideology as a result of the exodus.

The state's racial 'integrity' is a matter of record by 1961 and the mass exodus that defines it is represented as being felt throughout the rest of the United States. When Wallace Bedlow, an African American leaving Sutton, is confronted by the group of white men on the grocery store porch, they ask where he is going, but they are already certain of the answer: "'You moving into the Northside?' The Northside was where New Marsails' Negroes lived" (56).

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[46] Robert J. Patterson, *Exodus Politics: Civil Rights and Leadership in African American Literature and Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 2.
[47] Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus: American Futures from Du Bois to Obama*, 1.

Initially the white men are unable to conceptualise a black migration in which one segregated town or city is not merely traded for another. Bedlow responds that he is moving to New York, leaving the men unable to respond except to say "Oh" (57). In this way, Kelley's vast and sudden migration ripples through the rest of the union, changing not only the demographics of his invented state, but of the real United States in which it is wedged. Kelley's narrative suggests that although the white population of the fictional state will not and cannot learn from its sudden desegregation, the rest of Union will be more capable of developing racial tolerance as a result.

In *A Different Drummer*, the fictional state is a crucible for a new racial epistemology and the southerners who migrate away from the state may propagate that new ideology to every state in the nation except the one that they have abandoned, as they "journey toward the state's borders, to cross over into Mississippi or Alabama or Tennessee, even if some (most did not) stopped right there and began looking for shelter and work" (5). The fictional state is the epicentre for a new mode of racial thinking, and Kelley depicts the dispersal of that mode as a radiation outward.

While Kelley refuses to leave any hope for racial improvement in the fictional town of Sutton, he simultaneously depicts capacity for fundamental racial progress, presided over by African Americans, throughout the rest of the nation. Through this expansion of narrative focus, Kelley extends the practices of imagining fictional small towns that I have discussed across this study in order to explore the ramifications of desegregation, not simply on a single, representative community, but on the entire Union. Kelley's aesthetic and political development of the fictional southern town is more wide-ranging than the literary projects of

the white novelists I have discussed and his departure from an ameliorative, integrationist mode of thought on desegregation coincides with his decision to construct a broader imaginative landscape through which to explore those ideas. The typography of the fictional southern town that I have charted in earlier chapters is both explored – in the portrayal of the porch – and exceeded in *A Different Drummer*.

Kelley's fictional town exists in a radically reimagined southern landscape: the author expands on the common deployment of the fictional southern town by imagining an outright and immediate end to its segregationist structure and would require the development of a new typology of the southern town. Sutton is incompatible with a narrative of progressive improvement and its fictional history bears out Kelley's radical racial politics. For Kelley, and in Sutton, nothing less than a total overturning of the architecture of the southern town is sufficient improvement for black Americans. Where Nonnie Anderson, the farmer Abraham, Jester Clane, and Ned McCaslin represent decisive shifts in their towns' racial landscapes, Tucker Caliban burns Sutton's racial architecture to the ground, ensuring that no one other than he may enjoy the product of his land.

CONCLUSION

(De)Generative Ground: The Field and the Segregated Town

Each of the towns explored in this thesis is the centre of activity for a wider rural, agricultural economy. As sociologist Thorstein Veblen wrote in 1927, the American "country town" exists in a symbiotic relationship to the neighbouring countryside: "To an understanding of the country town and its place in the economy of American farming it should be noted that in the great farming regions any given town has a virtual monopoly of the trade within the territory tributary to it."[1] In the specifically southern town, the surrounding farmland is even more closely tied to a town's identity, with John Dollard observing that "any study of the town inevitably involves the surrounding rural plantation region because the town itself is a depot for goods and services to the mass of the surrounding population."[2] Similarly, Hortense Powdermaker asserts that "The town is not, however, an entity distinct from its environs. Except for taxes and census returns, its borders mean little. In this agricultural region, town and countryside are interdependent."[3] In the fictional towns that I have explored in depth, the economic symbiosis shared with surrounding rural areas is a crucial element of a town's social identity.

In each of the novels, the image of a field – a discrete unit of productive agricultural land – is depicted at some point in the narrative as a symbol of the town's entanglement with or ideological development away from the system of

[1] Thorstein Veblen, "The Country Town" in *The Portable Veblen*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: The Viking Press, 1948), 412.
[2] John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday, 1957 [1937]), 13.
[3] Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993 [1937]), 7.

racial segregation. The field is a component of the typology of the fictional southern town that is present in each novel and that also symbolises a given fictional town's capacity for racial progress. Across the novels studied, the metaphor of gradual progress becomes increasingly inadequate and this is mirrored in the authors' need for a total reappraisal of the typology of the segregated town.

The trope of the field shifts in meaning across the novels I explore in detail when it develops from signifying the inevitability of gradual change to supplementing the idea that gradual change is inadequate. In the earlier texts, fields signify growth and development: they are sites of agricultural cultivation and also represent the germination of a town's collective identity.[4] In *Strange Fruit*, the image of the field suggests a cyclical narrative of white supremacist dominance in the town of Maxwell. In *The Hawk and the Sun* and *Clock Without Hands*, fields symbolise the gradual cultivation of new, racially progressive mind-sets among white townspeople. In different ways, authors position the field as a signifier of a fictional town's cyclical or progressive political development. In *The Reivers*, the resonance of the field is overturned. In that novel, a 'mud farmer' exploits his property to inhibit progress in a literal sense by arresting the development of drivers on the road from Jefferson to Memphis. Finally, *A Different Drummer* overturns the recurring image of the field when Tucker Caliban carefully sows salt into the field on his property, ensuring that the land is never fertile again. The progression of this trope across these texts suggests that imagery of complete overhaul is supplanting progressive racial change. The field

[4] Mid-century literature in English beyond the U.S. South positions the field as emblematic of colonial intrusion, as in Irish playwright Brian Friel's *The Field* (1965).

that surrounds the typical southern town ceases to be productive in the 1960s and becomes instead an emblem of a reimagining of race in the region.

In southern literature, the field is an obvious signifier of labour and productivity. In Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940), for example, a young farmer studying at the University of Mississippi in Faulkner's hometown of Oxford, is employed to prepare a playing field for American football. Labove, the farmer and student, is bemused that a prime stretch of arable land would serve no agricultural purpose:

> He didn't know then what a football field was and he did not care. To him it was merely an opportunity to earn so much extra money each day and he did not even stop his shovel when he would speculate now and then with cold sardonicism on the sort of game the preparation of ground for which demanded a good deal more care and expense both than the preparing of that same ground to raise a paying crop on; indeed, to have warranted that much time and money for a crop, a man would have had to raise gold at least.[5]

In Faulkner's fictionalised version of the real Mississippi town of Oxford, which is forty miles distant from the fictional Jefferson, the space of the field is removed from a recognizable agricultural economy, a development that jars with Labove's understanding of the economy of the rural town.[6] Once the field is stripped of its economic meaning, the object of the American football is similarly reduced when Labove, now a reluctant athlete on the University team, thinks of it

[5] Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* (New York: Modern Library, 1994 [1959]), 104-5.
[6] Ibid, 106.

as a “trivial contemptible obloid.”[7] At least as early as 1940, southern authors are exploring how the image of the arable field relates to the moral and social development of a small-town community.

The racialised exploitation of labour in the rural South is an extension of violent racial terrorism. For example, following the lynching of Henry McIntosh, Smith’s Maxwell begins to return to its former racially imbalanced state: Tracy’s murder is ‘avenged’ and Maxwell’s African American residents are terrorised into conformity in the town’s collective identity. In the aftermath, two men who had been instrumental in forming the mob that murders Henry return to town from the outlying site of the lynching: “Bill and Dee not talking, only hoofs and creak of wheels breaking the silence as the buggy moved under moss hanging low from great oaks, past ponds, past black clumps of palmetto… cotton fields… to the old house.”[8] In Chapter One I read the novel’s conclusion as a panorama of the town of Maxwell in repose and this brief passage maps Bill and Dee’s return from the countryside through the lush Georgia landscape. Smith’s inclusion of ellipses contributes to the portrayal of the return as the passage through space and highlights the cotton fields as the only natural marker that the men are not explicitly described as moving “past.” Instead, the cotton fields are held constant, and are the closest rural site to the “old house” that marks a return to the town. After the murder and lynching, the cotton field remains an undisturbed feature of Maxwell’s landscape and its symbolism for African American labour is strengthened, when Bill mockingly boasts that he will have “no trouble” finding African American labourers to pick his cotton, because they

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[7] Ibid.
[8] Lillian Smith, *Strange Fruit* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1992 [1944]), 346.

have been terrified by Henry's lynching.[9] Here, the field symbolises how the town's white supremacist collective identity regenerates with force following the threat that Tracy's murder constituted.

Elsewhere, the field can signify a productive organic cycle and suggest that the moral health of a fictional town is gradually improving. In Chapter Two I explore how Abraham in *The Hawk and the Sun* represents the potential for cultivation, both in agriculture and as the father of "strong sons" who are positioned to alter Tilden's racial ideology. More explicitly, Reece combines these elements of Abraham's character in a scene in which the farmer's responsibility to his fields is portrayed as an analogy to the father's belief in his sons. Abraham reflects that one of his sons "was a seed… in a pod of my flesh. For the farmer thinks in terms of planting and harvest and in that cycle of always-analogy, mostly the planting; the harvest is the Lord's."[10] Here, the cycle of planting and harvest of an arable field is an overt allegory for Christian morality, and of Abraham's conviction that "the Lord" will judge the "harvest" of his sons. The analogy of the farming cycle is implicitly tied to Abraham's role in encouraging a new generation of southerners to eschew racist violence, when, one page earlier in the novel, the omniscient narrator describes how Abraham has trusted the maintenance of his fields to his sons: "He had nothing to do before breakfast for he had entrusted the chores about the farm to his sons. Or rather they had inherited them on coming of age to do men's work, as Abraham had inherited the chores from his own father."[11] Early in the novel, Reece positions Abraham's sons as having begun to inherit their father's responsibilities to

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[9] Ibid, 347.
[10] Byron Herbert Reece. *The Hawk and the Sun* (Athens, GA: Brown Thrasher Books, 1994 [1955]), 27.
[11] Ibid, 26.

agriculture and to the crops and livestock on the family property. When, much later in the narrative, Abraham makes good on his moral responsibility by refusing to take part in Dandelion's lynching, the implication is that the agricultural cycle of the farm will be mirrored in his sons' moral identities. The image of the field is an extension of Reece's construction of the farmer as a proponent of racial change. Abraham's confidence in his sons' moral commitment to the culture of their community echoes McCullers' depiction of Jester Clane as a young would-be lawyer who is intent on improving his town's racial order.

In Chapter Three I examine a passage near the end of *Clock Without Hands* that describes Jester Clane's aerial view of Milan and its environs:

> Looking downward from an altitude of two thousand feet, the earth assumes order. A town, even Milan, is symmetrical, exact in a small grey honeycomb, complete. The surrounding terrain seems designed by a law more just and mathematical than the laws of property and bigotry: a dark parallelogram of pine wood, square fields, rectangles of sward (202).

In the chapter, I read this passage as an indicator of Jester's increasingly sophisticated understanding of his hometown's racial politics. In returning to the same passage now, the "surrounding terrain" of the town, or what Veblen might call the "territory tributary" to Milan, suggests a surface calm in the town that Jester will be able to disrupt. That the collection of fields and forests is described as a "parallelogram" suggests order, with four straight lines meeting at four corners, but it is also askew; the lengths of the line are uneven and unequal. That

the town's neighbouring fields are described as sward, an upper layer of soil covered in grass, suggests a productive and fertile layer of earth, but one that does not extend much below the surface. As such, Jester sees a productive surface layer of grass, on which livestock can graze, that belies the dirt underneath. McCullers lingers on this image of the field at the moment in the narrative when Jester's perception – and his commitment to a future as a liberal lawyer – is most clear and acute. The "product" of the field in this passage is Jester's growing self-awareness; as such, the image is generative in McCullers' novel and it indicates a more positive racial future for Milan. In contrast, the narrator in Faulkner's *The Reivers* seeks to halt any possibility of racial progress, and this desire is metaphorically alluded to in a scene in which the image of the field arrests physical mobility.

Early in young Lucius Priest's adventure, on reaching the outskirts of Yoknapatawpha County, he encounters a rural entrepreneur who has made a business of cultivating an impassable road and charging motorists for his assistance in driving through it. When Lucius, Boon, and Ned encounter a mud farmer, Ned is astonished that the white man "works this place like a patch just to keep it boggy" to extort money from the region's new automobile traffic.[12] Ned makes an overt comparison between the mud farmer's unproductive labour and conventional southern agricultural work: "This sho beats cotton. He can farm right here setting in the shade without even moving."[13] Social scientists allude to this scene as an expositional metaphor for finance capitalism, with economist Randall Bartlett reading the scene as an example of "ungranted event power"[14]

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[12] William Faulkner, *The Reivers: A Reminiscence*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), 82.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Randell Bartlett, *Economics and Power: An Inquiry into Human Relations and Markets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43.

that allows the mud farmer to profit from the trio's involvement in a crisis of his making, and legal scholar Fred S. Chesney deploying the scene as a metaphor for politicians' practice of "rent extraction", writing that "The essence of mud farming… is thus the mounting of a credible threat of loss, then selling back to those otherwise victimised reprieve from that loss."[15] While each of these perspectives positions the mud farmer as financially exploitative, the specifically racial dynamic of the exploitation is neglected.

Unlike these spatially abstracted readings of the scene, historian Howard Lawrence Preston describes how "unimproved roads were one of Faulkner's metaphors for a backward, underdeveloped South"[16] and others have read the scene as a narrowly avoided lynching in what they describe as an "undercurrent of menace."[17] In this reading, Ned capitulates to racial etiquette in his dealing with the mud farmer. As Barbara and Karen Fields describe: "This incident ends with a giggle; but it might easily have ended with fire and a rope."[18] Like the playing surface of the American football field in *The Hamlet*, the mud farm in *The Reivers* is profitable without producing any crops. Despite his exploitative and extortionate labour, the mud farmer maintains a position of privilege in the segregated social order and the fable of the mud farm resonates with Priest's attempts to halt southern history in his own metaphorical mud hole. The irony in Faulkner's depiction of the field is that what is a metaphor for growth and progress in novels by Smith, Reece, and McCullers instead becomes a symbol of

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[15] Fred S. McChesney, *Money for Nothing: Politicians, Rent Extraction, and Political Extortion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.
[16] Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 13.
[17] Barbara J. Fields and Karen Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London: Verso, 2012), 91.
[18] Ibid.

arrested progress. This resonance is drawn out still more overtly in *A Different Drummer*.

The catalytic moment in Kelley's narrative of escape from the southern town is Tucker Caliban's careful destruction of his own property. Caliban's action is directly compared to a typical agricultural labour (an onlooker thinks that it's "*Just like he's planting seed. Just like it's spring planting time*,") and his attitude is methodical and precise; he is "*not running out like a mad dog and putting down salt like it WAS salt, but putting it down like it was cotton or corn, like come fall, it's be a paying crop*."[19] Kelley's depiction mirrors Reece's earlier portrayal of a typical and progressive agricultural cycle, with the growth of spring and the harvest in autumn, but only to parody such a narrative of progress. Because Caliban sows salt in the same way that he might a "paying crop," Kelley suggests a radically different future for the fictional southern town. Caliban's final act as a resident of Sutton not only overturns existing trends in the depiction of the image of the field in southern literature but also ensures that it will never again be fertile in this case.

The novels explored in this thesis are narratives of cross-generational cooperation or rupture. In every case, the children of the southern town are positioned to make sense of its racial future. In Faulkner's and Kelley's novels both published in the early 1960s, the narrative of generational racial improvement has become less tenable. While Faulkner represents exactly how the young Lucius Priest would grow up to obstruct cross-racial understanding, Kelley's young Mister Leland is left without any African American neighbours on whom to exercise the tolerance he has learned from his father and Caliban. As

[19] William Melvin Kelley, *A Different Drummer* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989 [1962]), 40.

the metaphor of the field suggests, southern fiction by the early 1960s had reappraised the trope and imagery of the fictional southern town; writers would begin to draw on new forms and techniques to critique the South's racialised geography.

The trope of the recurring fictional town continued to be a favourite of southern writers, with Wendell Berry's Port William, Kentucky, Donald Harington's Stay More, Arkansas, Randall Kenan's Tims Creek, North Carolina, and Jesmyn Ward's Bois Sauvage, being four notable examples. Berry's and Harington's towns are sites through which their authors have interrogated narratives of southern history, returning to historical moments and local families as they move through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Kenan's and Ward's small towns, racial divisions persist, but African American characters' subjective experiences of the racial geography of the town are highlighted more than in the novels I examine. These diverse southern novelists inherit a tradition of imagining the small town as a model for the critique of white formulations of history and race, even after the typology I identify in earlier fictions of the southern town has become fragmented because of the demise of *de jure* racial segregation. This shift from legislated to extra-legal racism in the South and the nation does not mean that writers have stopped exploring racial injustice at the level of form.

Throughout this thesis, I have applied a racially calibrated adaptation of the method of close textual analysis – divorced from the methodology's roots in a certain pocket of mid-century southern conservatism – to explicate how a range of texts can be read as contributing to a literary tradition of protest. This methodology can be expanded upon by literary scholars and other Americanists

to elucidate the ways that American literature contributes to racial social movements. A pressing case in point is the current and ongoing Black Lives Matter movement that challenges police brutality in the South and across the United States. Innovations in literary form continue to feature in texts that overtly or covertly take white supremacy to task in the early twenty-first century and contemporary poets adapt traditional forms, especially the elegy, to interrogate police brutality in service of the contemporary movement.

While this contemporary verse differs markedly from the mid-century fiction I have drawn on in this thesis – in geographical as well as generic terms – racially calibrated close textual analysis continues to be an effective tool for scholars to understand political and aesthetic resistance to white supremacy. The Black Lives Matter movement has encouraged African American poets to reassess their engagements with grief. For instance, personal grief is translated into national protest when novelist Ward remembers the sentencing of the white drunk driver who killed her brother in her memoir *The Men We Reaped*: "*Five Fucking Years*, I thought. *This is what my Brother's life is worth in Mississippi. Five Years*."[20] A similar process takes place when African American poets deploy and adapt the traditional form of the elegy to reflect on the deaths of African Americans at the hands of police. Louisiana poet Jericho Brown's collection *The New Testament* features four poems titled "Another Elegy" but no original to provide the basis for variation.[21]

While the repetition of this title could suggest that young and violent deaths are inevitable, Brown's dedication of the collection to his cousin Messiah Demery, who died violently, couches the repetition in an aesthetic of protest.

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[20] Jesmyn Ward, *The Men We Reaped* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 235.
[21] Jericho Brown, *The New Testament*, (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2014), 8, 39, 51, 66.

Brown memorializes his cousin at the same time that he makes an aesthetic and political statement against the preponderance of black shootings. Danez Smith engages more directly with a high-profile victim of police brutality in "Not an Elegy for Mike Brown," from his forthcoming collection *Don't Call Us Dead* (2017). Smith figures the history of Western poetics as an ironic counterpoint to contemporary police violence, suggesting how contemporary poets are able to develop new traditions to articulate public grief:

> think: once, a white girl
>
> was kidnapped & that's the Trojan war.
>
> later, up the block, Troy got shot
> & that was Tuesday. are we not worthy
>
> of a city of ash? of 1000 ships
> launched because we are missed?[22]

Homer's *The Iliad* becomes a touchstone for Smith's public anger at the shooting death of Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2014, and the poet's allusion develops into a call for political action. Compounding the declaration that the poem is 'not an elegy', Smith rejects existing literary conventions and chooses instead to develop a new tradition as a means of artistic protest. Close attention to literary form allows scholars to better understand and express the aesthetic and rhetorical techniques of racial protest since racial segregation.

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[22] Danez Smith, "Not an Elegy for Mike Brown," *Split this Rock*, Aug. 15, 2014, accessed February 29, 2016, http://blogthisrock.blogspot.co.uk/2014/08/poem-of-week-danez-smith.html?spref=tw

Reading through the typology I have outlined in this thesis reveals how novelists at mid-century deployed the fractured elements of southern community as a metaphor for the fractured political framework of segregation. With a setting that can easily be taken for granted in novels of the South, these authors dramatised the irony of a community built on racial division. This typology has allowed me to show how the small town is more than a simple setting in southern fiction. The authors examined in this thesis developed new and innovative literary forms in their constructions of typical southern towns in order to show that the structuring principle of racial segregation could not bear the weight of the white supremacist identity that rested on it.

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