

THE WANDERING EYE: DREAMING THE GLOBE  
IN FAULKNER AND WALCOTT

By

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For David Hassinger, in memoriam:

*A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE ARCHIPELAGO

*That man's the best Cosmopolite,  
Who loves his native country best.*  
—Tennyson, *Hands All Round* (1852)

*...to question  
the congruence of the complement is vain, if it exists.*  
—Marianne Moore, "The Steamroller" (1915)

In 2002, while I was living in the Russian Language House at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, I received Édouard Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1999) as a birthday gift from one of my housemates, a young Belgian woman. An unlikely set of circumstances, to be certain, but an even more unusual confluence of locales, encompassing Russia, Portland, Belgium, Alaska (my own point of origin), and, of course, the South and the Caribbean, the subjects of Glissant's text. I confess that at first I was unsure of what to do with the book. I had always been interested in Faulkner, but was unaware of Glissant, and even less aware of what a volume focused solely on the most prominent Southern novelist by one of the most prominent Caribbean poets and theorists signified. I failed to realize it at the time (how could I?), but this incident, rather than any of my subsequent academic interests, served as the germinal beginning of the current work, not less due to the circumstances of its delivery than the content of Glissant's book. The event above came about through a seemingly random set of

coincidences stretching across the entire hemisphere, culminating in a single object, a book.

It was only much later, when I became acquainted with Glissant's theories of relationality, that the irony of this moment's cosmopolitanism became clear to me, how uniquely fitting it should be that his book, stressing the ways in which Faulkner's deep-seated concern with his own region resonated not only across the Caribbean, came to me via a vast network of interconnected secondary regions. I could not help feeling, to some small extent, that my own readings, my own work, were somehow implicated in this web of influence. My reading of Glissant, though predicated on his linkages between regions, had its base in my own regional affiliations. In this sense, it was largely an inversion or misreading of *Faulkner, Mississippi's* influence on Faulkner criticism, not to mention Caribbean literature. The recent "postplantation" line of reasoning in these fields attempts to accomplish the opposite of my initial interpretation—liberating the involved regions from confinement within their own boundaries, marking the respective idiosyncracies of the South and the Caribbean as not purely Southern or purely Caribbean concerns, but part of an interregional set of common affinities. Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island* (1996), and, on the Southern side, Deborah Cohn and Jon Smith's *Look Away!* (2004) and its somewhat less widely-read cousin, Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith's *South to a New Place* (2002), major works appearing (in English) within a ten-year time frame (1995-2005), all attempted to disassemble, in one way or another, the notion that literary study of either region need necessarily confine itself to that region. Taken as a whole, these works accomplished a twofold purpose: first, they liberated Southern studies from a deadening



insularity, a self-devouring concern with its reactionary roots in a history of overprivileged, conservative, and vaguely racist white men, and, second, they moved Caribbean studies from a specialized niche into the critical mainstream, permitting it to be addressed in the context of United States and Latin American literature without necessitating an in-depth postcolonial theoretical armature.

On the surface of things, this critical turn seems to have accomplished both of its goals, if we are to judge purely from the volume of excellent studies treating the South and the Caribbean in concert in recent years. George Handley's *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas: Family Portraits in Black and White* (2000) was perhaps one of the first, but by no means the last; to name only a few, the last four years have given rise to Jeffrey Folks' *Damaged Lives: Southern & Caribbean Narrative from Faulkner to Naipaul* (2005), Valerie Loichot's *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* (2007), Hosam Aboul-Ela's *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariategui Tradition* (2007), and, more generally, Scott Romine's *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (2008).<sup>1</sup> All of these studies have positively contributed to the academic apprehension of the two involved regions. All of them, in a manner of speaking, continue the work of *Faulkner, Mississippi*, wearing down the previous stereotypes of the South as an unassailable regional monolith and the Caribbean as a loose association of unparseable

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<sup>1</sup> Romine's volume, it can be argued, only deals with the Caribbean tangentially, and concerns itself primarily with Southern modes of self-invention and postmodern self-referentiality; however, in listing it with the above works, I am more concerned with the avenues for future criticism it opens, the possibility that, as Romine notes, the South offers "an expanded potential for what Glissant calls a poetics of relation" (234).

cultures: master themes are identified, shared histories are explicated, tentative lines of migration and influence begin to appear on maps.

I in no way want to lessen this accomplishment. However, it seems to me that a large part of what attracts Glissant to Faulkner and the South as a whole in the above volume is not merely the lines of relation between these entities and his own Caribbean heritage that he traces, but their status *as* monoliths, as indelible markers of particular regionalisms.<sup>2</sup> What interests Glissant about the South and Faulkner's apprehension of it is the region, intact, complete with its defeats, its misguided beliefs, and its past sins; he views Faulkner as a writer who "tirelessly took the side of the South, with its prejudices, its limits, and its unbreachable silences" even as he wrote "gloriously of the South's losing battle in the War of Secession" (*Faulkner, Mississippi* 17). These regional particularities, far from forbidding the South's inclusion in wider postplantation syntheses, bring Faulkner's South in line with the intent of Glissant's global epic, which "encapsulates and expresses the instincts of people brought together in one place by a shared threat or a common defeat," as well as its twin, the "less engaging, more solemn" epic tradition (19). Though Glissant is intrigued by the postplantation similarities that make both Faulkner and his Caribbean kin such as St. John Perse, "men on the edge of a caste, in a space where all is about to crumble," he is perhaps equally attracted to the specifically Southern dilemmas of Faulkner's fiction, his questioning of "the supreme institution of [the] Southern community," itself an "unsurpassable a priori" (21). To some

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<sup>2</sup> Admittedly, these are subjective judgments; as Glissant notes, he and his companions, being as they were "under the spell of William Faulkner's works," find that they "conferred upon [Mississippi] an absolute weight of representation for the Deep South" (9). What seems a grand cultural boundary line to Glissant is a simple way of life for others, if the boundary carries weight at all.

extent, then, the recent postplantation studies have committed a common error in reasoning. Drawing heavily on not only Glissant's ideas of relationality, but also latter-day theories of globalization and cosmopolitanism such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), they seem to have reached the conclusion that regionalism and global relation are mutually exclusive, that combining the South and the Caribbean within a single postplantation interpretive scheme necessarily requires the effacement of regional distinction, while, in Glissant's interpretation, their relationship is more that of symbiosis, with the region and the globe maintained as separate, inviolable entities within the framework of "word-totality," a concept to which I shall return repeatedly in this work.

Glissant's study is thus both a transplantation of Faulkner into various interregional contexts and a reinforcement of the integrity of his home region. The author emerges in *Faulkner, Mississippi* as a tortured figure, haunted by the injustices and troubled history of his region, like his Antillean counterparts, but nonetheless inextricably bound to that region. This places him in a position of uneasy dissociation from and simultaneous troublesome attachment to the South, occupying the same ontological space as the Caribbean chroniclers of exile and errantry of which Glissant has written in *Poetics of Relation*. This position is utterly essential for Faulkner's address of the thematic problems he grappled with throughout his career; Glissant writes:

If Faulkner had disassociated himself from the reality of the South, if he had passed judgment and come to conclusions, the a priori question no longer would have made any sense, and his works would have been reduced to a 'realist' manifesto with no repercussions. Had he put his life as a Southerner into the cause, he could not have offered an objective view on the quivering question of the South's legitimacy. Had he abandoned the South, in his heart or mind, or simply in everyday life (for example, by leaving it to travel the world), then the question would have

died out, having received his answer. As it is, the epic questioning of the Genesis of the South, of its identity and legitimacy, can be found neither in a triumphal certitude nor in a detached indifference (*Faulkner, Mississippi* 23).

What this passage serves to confirm, as I have stated earlier, is that the potential for intercultural comparativity between the South and the Caribbean derives not only from the respective regions' implication in large historical and postcolonial ("postplantation") schemes, but their insistence on being distinct entities within those schemes. The universalizing, "epic" valences that Glissant finds in Faulkner are contingent, ironically, on Faulkner's uneasy subject-position as regards his own rooted identity, an identity that depends heavily on the same ossified set of regional assumptions that the aforementioned postplantation critics have labored to disavow. This creates the "vertigo" to which Glissant alludes in Faulkner's regionalism—his seemingly contradictory status as a simultaneously local and global author. Glissant wonders how his works, "so densely populated, so indisputably articulated around a country's specific realities" can "derive from the most abstract and idealistic principles of Western civilization and its hiddenmost motives, while also subjecting them to criticism" (117). The query has widespread implications: how can one author, one work, remain locally rooted while existing in a necessarily cosmopolitan, diffracted state of exile? How can the literature of one region be profitably compared with another, participating in a postcolonial continuum, while preserving regional distinction? How can a region encompass, synthesize, something of which it itself is a part?

To a large extent, the current work is designed as an answer to Glissant's question. It advocates a return to the region in studies of the U.S. South and the Caribbean in several respects: as the nexus of contact for global events and literary

trends, as a site of comparativity for other regions, and, ultimately, as a self-consciously bounded, isolated, and full-formed microcosm stubbornly distinct from the world at large. My primary goal is, ultimately, a modest one: I merely want to suggest that, just as cosmopolitanism in its simplest sense implies being a “citizen of the world,” equally at home in any part of it, the term also bears the necessity of being a citizen *in* the world, bound to and acted upon by a multitude of regionalisms. Globalization theory, particularly Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the rhizomatic construction of postcapitalist societies, implies an infinite (and infinitely interchangeable) refraction of the region within the prism of the globe, yet this has caused some critics, postplantation and postsouthern critics in particular, falsely to assume either the death of the region, or else the region as drained of identitarian meanings and thus interchangeable with any other region. On the contrary, I theorize that though globalization fosters regional connectivity, it does not defeat regional comparativity, to wit, the notion that regions have sufficient self-contained integrity to justify their juxtaposition with other regions. Nor does it preclude individual identification, particularly in literature, with such bounded regions.

My secondary goal, at once more ambitious and more contentious, is to suggest that literary space is particulate, not interstitial. That is to say, each literary locale, with its accompanying perspectives, identities, and *mis-en-scenes*, is a discrete unit in itself, and what we call textual creolization, hybridization, and relationality are heterogenous mixtures of these units rather than points of mediation between locales. The variety of locales, histories, and perspectives entailed by literary cosmopolitanism are a juxtaposition and admixture of these units rather than an escape to a place that belongs to

neither of them. Or, put another way, literary space is comprised of an infinity of locales, and the literary journey, whether transpiring in metaphysical space (as in *The Odyssey* or *Moby-Dick*), a more labile realm of memory and imagination (the space of *Omeros* or Sebald's *Vertigo*), or a mix of the two (*Heart of Darkness*, *Palace of the Peacock*) is not the story of a progress toward, away from, and between a set quantity of stable nodes—Troy, Ithaca, etc.—but the successive occupation of manifold distinct locales that *are* germinally both Troy *and* Ithaca, the wine-dark sea cross-sectioned and portioned into a limitless array of breakers.

I insist on this subdivision of literary space for three reasons. First, regarding literary locales as composed of an array of other encapsulated locales makes these respective temporal locationisms infinitely accessible, able to be invoked or inhabited at any point of the literary text rather than confining themselves to thematic necessity; this interchangeability of locales permits, for example, Dickens's famous Megalosaurus on the streets of London or Melville's incarnation of colonial Others on the deck of the Pequod.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, in uniting distant locales through language, particulate literary space exposes the act of literary creation, particularly the manner in which literature crafts regional ideals, as fundamentally fabulative, a process of creating, refining, and recombining existing elements within a common code, the regional *parole* to which the world constitutes a *langue*. Finally, particulate literary space, in eliminating the theoretical distance that marks locales (and texts) as inevitably confined to their identitarian contexts, suggests infinite comparability. If each locale is equally accessible

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<sup>3</sup> In *Bleak House* (1853): "As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill" (Dickens 1).

within the literary text, the text itself can be situated within any number of its constituent contexts, and juxtaposed with similarly recombinant texts. Far from sequestering the literary work within fixed and rooted points, particulate literary space enables textual proliferation (Benítez-Rojo's repetition); it exists within a texture, a fabric of convergent subject-positions.

Literary space is thus the inverse of Einsteinian space-time, which rejects the concept of a stable *now* or *here* insofar as "now" is in the perpetual process of becoming "then," and "here" constantly transforming into "there," as well as the opposite of that much-abused (by literary critics) staple of quantum physics, the Uncertainty Principle, which states that measurement of any given particle can tell us only where the particle *was* at some point, not precisely where it *is*. Contrary to the laws of physical space, in the literature that this dissertation studies, "not-there," "not-yet-there," and "no-longer-there" is always another manifestation of "here." The subject that notes the presence of an "elsewhere" must acknowledge, as they do so, that they are located someplace that the elsewhere is not. While Chick Mallison and Gavin Stevens, for example, speed out to Beat Four to examine Gowrie's grave in Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), they, like all literary travelers, do not pass through an open world without boundaries, but inhabit a succession of images, a collection of regions congealed into paintings:

now he could see the white bursts of dogwood in the hedgerows marking the old section-line surveys or standing like nuns in the cloistral patches and bands of greening woods and the pink and white of peach and pear and the pinkwhite of the first apple trees in the orchards which last night he had only smelled; and always beyond and around them the enduring land—the fields geometric with furrows where the corn had been planted when the first doves began to call in late March and April, and cotton when the first whippoorwills cried at night around the beginning of May a week ago: but empty, vacant of any movement and any life (143-144)

Chick is not between but among the images that comprise this still-life; he sees and recalls in the ordering of the hedgerows other spaces, other times: the smell of apples a night ago, the call of whippoorwills a week ago and doves a month ago, the ordered and ordering fragments of the “enduring land,” each particulate and distinct in themselves. Faulkner’s reference to the land existing “beyond and around” the specific components of that land that he delineates suggests not an interstitial region mediating among these localized representations but a further proliferation of those locales, an unarticulated array of further bounded regionalisms. Faulkner’s representation of the process of the literary journey emphasizes its subdivision into microlocales rather than its foray into “empty” space, for the very notation of liminality, of betweenness, must be formulated from some position.<sup>4</sup> The liminal space is still a space.

It logically follows that, if there is no literary “empty space,” no interstitial location between other particulate locations, and if those locations are infinitely accessible, literary representation necessarily makes locales contiguous with each other. In a word, it eradicates the distance between them, and indeed forecloses on the very notion of distance. What it retains instead is difference, the varying characteristics of the regions it represents as forming points of interregional comparison. Juxtaposing

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<sup>4</sup> In this we find also a critique of the commonly-stated thesis that globalization represents a world in which there exists no “outside,” no position from which that world can be assessed, since the subjects who might do so are always already implicated within its all-devouring mechanisms. See J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (1996), which attempts to give capitalism an “identity crisis” by delineating the aforementioned “outside” and thus making it only one alternative to global control among many (260-263). However, while Gibson-Graham finds the local to be an insufficient point of critique for the global inasmuch as the former is created by and theoretically subservient to the latter, I would prefer to read the local as the (empowered) arbiter of the global; since the locale is constituent of, and possessed of access to, every part of the globe, it becomes the means by which that global ideal is formulated (145).



dissimilar regional representations can thus create the illusion of distance in the literary text, as when, in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Faulkner describes “that dead summer twilight—the wisteria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies—attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room, across this strange iron New England snow,” the locales are combined yet their fundamental “strangeness” is preserved, there is a sense of intervening space (141). Yet it remains only this—a sense—as Faulkner’s text cannot adumbrate distance itself, only a series of dissimilar locales.

Likewise, in Derek Walcott’s *The Bounty* (1997), the poet reflects on “a passage with a bridge, one the / desperate memory fastens on even as it passes all the / other possible places; why this particular one? / Perhaps because it disembodies, it neutralises distance / with the shadows of leaves on the road and the bridge in the sun” (27). These lines, with their implied mimetic reference to a literal subject (a road) and metonymic reference to the poetic act itself (the “passage” as a fragment of poetry) constitute a commentary on the particularity, as it were, of literary space. The poet’s memory bears the burden of selecting this individual locale from among many on the grounds that it eliminates distance, but what it more properly eliminates is *difference*, the quality that all of the other extant locales, discarded by the poet, enforce. In the end, the bridge that the poet selects is no more or less “distant” from the remembered landscape than any other, since all locales are theoretically available for selection; its claim to elide that distance instead creates the illusion of the proximity and separation of literary locales. Literary space is thus less a dislocation than a perpetual relocation, an arbitration of endlessly proliferating particles.

All in all, this approach perhaps shares more with Wai Chee Dimock's methodology in *Through Other Continents* (2006) than any other, both in terms of the aforementioned connectivity and in terms of interdisciplinary inflection. Theorizing that the term "American literature" is "a simplified name for a much more complex tangle of relations," themselves "a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures," Dimock's comparativity emphasizes confluences of influences, textual circulations, and authorial intentions over a superficial junction of one or more regions or time periods; literary evolution, she states, happens not along a unitary line but in the omnidirectional relational space of "deep time" (3). Dimock derives her methodology, as have many subsequent scholars in the humanities and social sciences, as well as her spiritual predecessors, Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Édouard Glissant, from chaos theory, specifically Mandelbrot's ideas of fractal geometry. Dimock, positing that literary study "is energized by the feedback loops between the very large and the very small," capitalizes on the fractal's invocation of "the geometry of the irregular and the microscopic" inasmuch as "it is only when the scale gets smaller and the details get finer that previously hidden dimensions can come swirling out" (77). For Dimock, "small" instances of literary interchange—Emerson reading a certain Islamic holy text at a certain time, for example—eventually betray the same level of complexity and connectedness that more sustained, career-long affinities suggest.

While Dimock tends to focus on authors, however, the current work examines regions. Like the writers of "American world literature" that she discusses, the regions I examine here serve as the focal point of multivarious and discrete international

influences. Yet, while the excavation of these influences serves to destabilize and unsettle what is meant by “Emerson’s work” in the above example from Dimock, in my study, such complexities, paradoxically, serve to reinscribe the bounded region itself. In fractal terminology, if Dimock’s approach represents a spiral fractal (figure 1), an infinite line enclosing an infinite area, my own methodology is more similar to a fractal curve (figure 2), an infinite line surrounding a finite area.<sup>5</sup> While in both visual representations the models display a similar intricacy at all levels of magnification, a similar *mis-en-abyme*, the latter remains definitively bounded while the former expands into infinity.<sup>6</sup>

My study thus benefits from the interregional, transhistorical, multidisciplinary framework established by extant theories of literary development as a system governed by chaos; more to the point, however, I am interested primarily in how this chaos acts on the (b)ordering and superimpositional identities of regions. This interplay is commonly symbolized in current scholarship, particularly that which focuses on the Caribbean, by

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<sup>5</sup> My title is meant to evoke some of these significances. Just as the “wandering eye” suggests an increasing degree of interregional locationism, a movement away from a single, self-contained position, it is also meant to suggest the stable center of the hurricanes endemic to the regions here studied, the essentially stable (yet mobile) stillness that must be present for the storm’s fractal, chaotic forces to exist. Like the works that I study, the tropical storm is a confluence of oppositional currents.

<sup>6</sup> Simply put, the former envisions a spiral composed of an infinite quantity of smaller spirals, *mise-en-abymes*; zooming in on any portion of the fractal thus reveals further spirals extending into smaller and smaller spaces, while, by the same token, zooming out causes these spirals to extend into larger and larger areas. The fractal curve, on the other hand, takes an existing area (usually a geometric shape) and subdivides that shape into progressively smaller incarnations of itself. Thus, zooming in on any part of the curve reveals more iterations of similar shapes, but those shapes will not exceed the boundaries of the original template. The fractal curve is altogether closer to Mandelbrot’s conception of an infinite (fractal) coastline; he states that “the length of a typical coastline is very great and so badly defined that it is probably best to regard it as endless.” See Benoît B. Mandelbrot, *Die fraktale Geometrie der Natur*, Reinhilt Zähle and Dr. Ulrich Zähle, eds. Basel, Boston & Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1999, pp. 38. Cited in D’Hulst et al pp. 113.

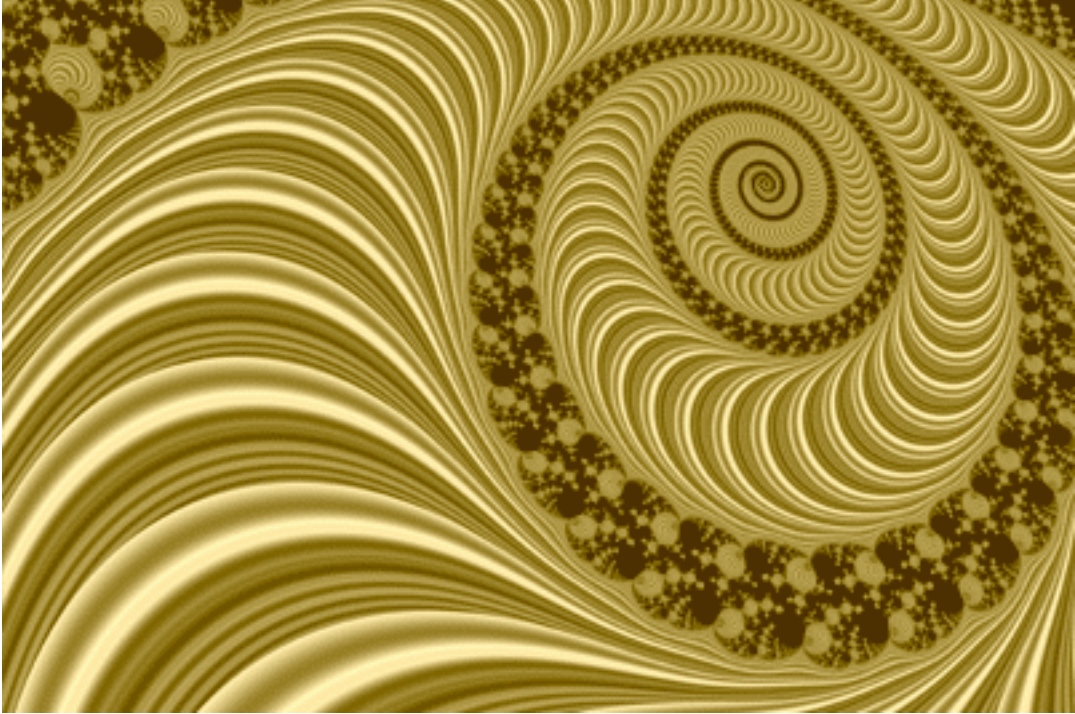


Figure 1. Spiral Fractal (Marian Spiral)

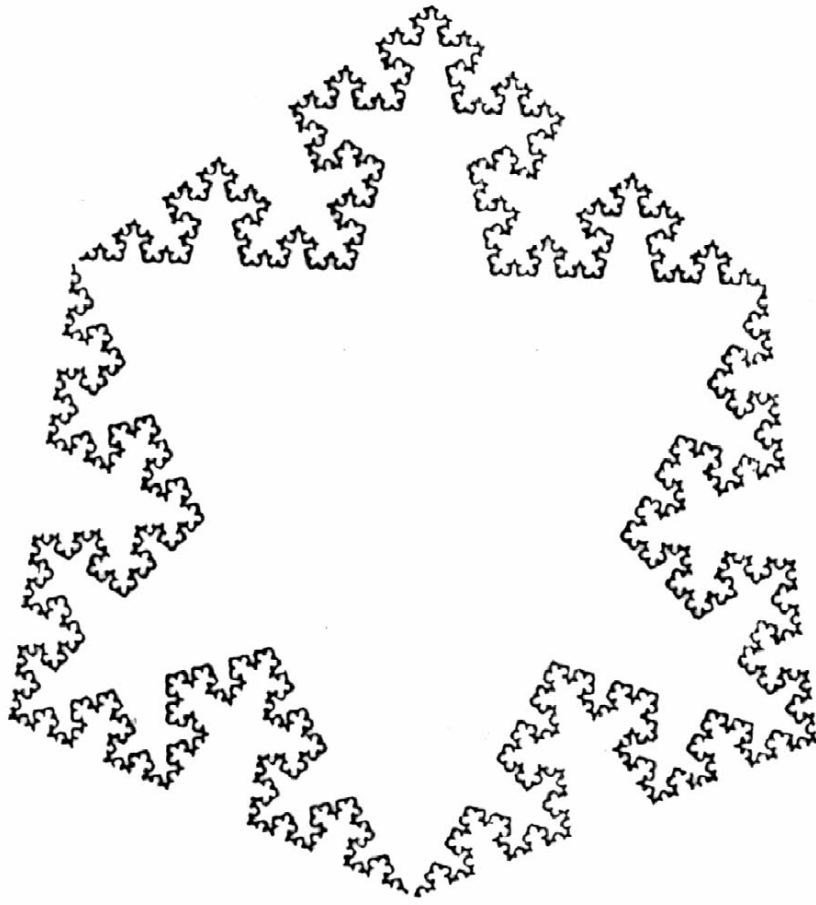


Figure 2. Fractal Curve (Koch's Snowflake)

the metaphor of the island, representative of, as Ottmar Ette writes, “a certain sense of order on a particular island” while simultaneously testifying to “a (world) consciousness of other islands where other orders prevail” (D’Hulst et al 110). Ette finds in the concept of the island both “an isolated separateness from the Other” and “a variegated relationship *with* the Other,” lending credence to the idea of an archipelagic world, whether it is “self-contained” or “communicates with other regions” (111, emphasis in original). It would seem that, even as chaos theory inscribes a centrifugal spiral, it suggests a corresponding return to the bounded, ordered region from which these valences proceed; chaotic geographic destabilization implies corresponding ideas of regional order. The efforts of contemporary theorists of literary chaos such as Ette or Benítez-Rojo, then, do not so much drive the idea of the region toward relativity or, as the latter has it, “nothingness,” so much as delineate the “opening[s] upon unexpected corridors allowing passage from one point to another in the labyrinth,” not *antiregionalism* but *connected* or relational regionalism (Benítez-Rojo 3). With the diffuse, randomized replications of the repeating island comes an equal (and not wholly opposite) comparative regional imperative, an explication of the specificities that proliferate across the surface of the globe.

To regard the world as comprised of an endless proliferation of interconnected regions, in a word, to ascribe to an archipelagic world-view, as the current work does, necessitates a comparative methodology. Ette, for instance, naturally arrives at this conclusion through his emphasis on the island as the site of not only regional boundedness but of connections between regions: “every translocal, transregional, transnational, transareal and transcontinental research on the western hemisphere ought to

question regional thought patterns from a comparative perspective and ought to link up individual regions” (D’Hulst et al 132). However, the comparativity that Ette endorses is notably dissonant from the vanguard of comparative disciplinarity; rather than suggesting connections across national, linguistic, cultural, or even geographical boundaries, as comparative literature traditionally conceived might, Ette’s comparativity acknowledges that the island “is not a firm and stable thing” and requires an unorthodox “vectorial” perspective that emphasizes its status as “a place of movement” not strictly confined to traditional comparative gestures (122). The troubled, indeterminate boundaries of the island/region, its infinite linkages with other locales, and its scattered, unpredictable manifestations in myriad contexts would seem to undermine any study that professes to encompass two or more regions. In other words, to attempt a study of “the South” and “the Caribbean” begs certain questions: where does the author draw the boundary between these two regions? Does he or she wish to make large syntagmatic claims about the regions’ development over time or attempt a more paradigmatic study of parallel “moments”? Does he or she take account of the staggering diversity of cultures, languages, and even governments that can reasonably be crowbarred into either of these two regions? For these reasons, this study relies less on historiography than close reading; rather than attempt an elaborate project of border-drawing resulting in labyrinthine definitions of each region, it focuses on the region as incarnated in the work of two authors, each with highly individuated ideas of their regions rooted in specific eras. In this sense, I am less concerned with the totality of regions *per se* than in the mediation of regional data through the individual consciousness.

Given this methodological bent, it would be remiss of me not to take account of my own regional affiliation, for, as will soon become clear, to write of the nature of regionalism, whether individuated or collective, necessitates an interrogation of the writer's most immediate conceptions of the relationship between "home" and "elsewhere." My home region, as I have mentioned earlier, is the Far North, not the amorphous and ideologically charged North of Faulkner's fiction or the evocative "inferity of ice" of Walcott's Alps but the restless subarctic hamlets of rural Alaska, just north, latitudinally speaking, of St. Petersburg, with little enough in the way of what the rest of the world shorthands as "civilization" between my parents' homestead and the pole. I thus have no innate locational connection between myself and the regions I here study, and much as I would like to claim, as Faulkner does for Quentin and Shreve, the elision of "half a continent," indeed closer to half the globe, through "a sort of geographical transubstantiation...which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature," I feel the need, if only briefly, to justify my personal interest (Faulkner 208). Even if distance drops out of the equation in literary space, as I have suggested, explicating and delineating notions of difference and congruence remains essential for comparative study, and thus it may be necessary for me to articulate some of the same (dis)junctions that give rise to my own interest.

From the accounts of contemporary theorists who deal with the Caribbean in particular, it might seem that the remoteness of the Alaskan archipelago (an ironic appellation, as the etymology of the term "Alaska" suggests "the mainland," or, more literally, "that against which the action of the sea is directed"), its convergence of United States, Russian, Canadian, and Pacific Rim cultures, its multivarious colonial history

(Russian, British, U.S., and, innocuously enough, Spanish), and the bulk of its interior, the concept of which is so essential for writers such as Wilson Harris and Euclides da Cunha and which is dotted with highly individuated microcosmic societies, islands in themselves, would lend themselves to profitable intercultural analyses. Walcott writes, in “Meanings” (1970), that “an archipelago... is bound to be a fertile area, particularly if it is a bridge between continents, and a variety of people settle there” (*Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* 49). All of the same could be said of Alaska, but time and time again, in popular rhetoric, public perception of certain political candidates, and in my own conversations, the suggestion is reinforced that my home is generally viewed as a frozen wasteland, replete with bears but with little resembling civilized culture, or, worse, as some sort of odd, rugged touristic paradise where the most pampered visitor may sip fine wine in the shadow of a glacier, all the comforts of home located just within the rented cabin’s sliding glass doors.

In all accounts, the notion of an authentically Alaskan—or, indeed, authentically Northern—culture are completely lacking. If Van Wyck Brooks could claim, in a now-hoary collection of essays, that, while the Old World had “trained gardeners” and the New only “cowboys and a flag,” I might remark that Alaska, in our cultural imagination, seems to lack even the cowboys, and the flag itself is less a metonym of national unification and patriotism than a reviled symbol of the concerns of others who would presume to speak for the nation (*America’s Coming of Age* 75). At worst, then, I wonder that I might be seen as some variety of schizophrenic cultural parasite, the overenthusiastic Shreve to the tortured Quentins of the regions I study. For such has been the common interpretation of the Far North, Canada perhaps less so than less populated



areas, in literary criticism. Donald Kartiganer, for example, interprets the relationship between Quentin and Shreve in *The Fragile Thread* (1979) thus:

Almost as deeply as Quentin confronts his ambivalence toward the South, Shreve confronts an absence, something about love of land and heritage and community which, as a Canadian, he feels is no longer a living part of his character... What better balm for the man without heritage than to see himself as *possessing* it, even as he is so hopelessly cut off from it? (96)<sup>7</sup>

I am less offended by Kartiganer's assumption that residents of the Far North necessarily exist "without heritage" (for, as I have noted, this is a common charge) than I am irritated by the implication that they, like some abominable variety of cultural lamprey, must latch onto the *real* "love of land" and "community" possessed by people elsewhere. Such an assertion implies not only that there *is* no authentic culture in the indicated region, but also that there will *never* be, and its residents had best scramble to take ownership of other, more valid extant regional identities, as if involved in a game of musical chairs.

Thus, when Walcott states, in his Nobel Prize speech, that "there can be virtues in deprivation" and speaks of the island and its people as "blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance," I am tempted to lay claim to the same sentiment (*What the Twilight Says* 84). Where public opinion seems to parse the lack of significant sites of artistic production, a polygonal colonial history, a long history of extractive resources, and an increasingly tourism-centered economy as salt in the furrows of the growth of any authentically Alaskan culture, I would interpret these elements, the same elements to which Walcott, Faulkner, and others so profoundly reacted, as potential. Not the

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<sup>7</sup> Kartiganer's assumption is now somewhat dated, but the sentiment is still very much alive in regards to *Absalom, Absalom!* in particular; in a book published this year, Hosam Aboul-Ela theorizes that both Quentin and Shreve exist in "dependency situations" vis-à-vis the culture of the North and the United States respectively, and react to this dependency by "attending an elite Northern U.S. university" (*Other South* 143).

potential of iconoclasm, critiquing mainstream lines of thought and interpretation from a perpetual Outside, but finding in them the means of accessing, surveying, and remaking one's own cultural materials, the wide North as a site for the play of, as Barry Lopez has it, imagination and desire.<sup>8</sup> Such potential makes the author the arbiter of his or her own cultural virtues and the region itself a constant signifier that remains subject to interpretation. It liberates the region, in other words, from the political, social, and historical predestinations conveyed to it by the regional archive, and instead denotes individual (literary) creation, whatever it might extrapolate, as the generator of further regionalisms. In short: the region is not simply what historical interpretation has called it, but what its living interpreters choose to make it.

Such a regional philosophy helps, in part, to explain my selection of authors and texts in this work, a decision that rests inevitably on the placement of each of these

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<sup>8</sup> Lopez's *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986) remains the strongest articulation of the aesthetic character of the Arctic today, taking as its origin point the notion that the land is empty, barren, or—simply put—uninteresting, and proceeding both to show that it is indeed *not* (being, in fact, possessed of incredible biotic and cultural diversity) and yet, in its “emptiness,” nonetheless serves as a vehicle with a theoretically infinite number of tenors, an immense canvas on which a history of human ambition and aesthetic interpretation is painted. This function of the Far North is still very much alive in both the public imagination (witness the wildly varying interpretations of Alaska accompanying Sarah Palin's vice presidential bid—most prominently, the variance between the state as one of the sole regions for the exercise of rugged U.S. self-sufficiency and a frontier lifestyle and the contrasting interpretation of it as bleak, blank, giving rise only to furred wildlife and clueless government officials) and in the academic imagination. Glissant himself, for instance, writes in *Caribbean Discourse* (1981, trans. 1989) of the hold that the unarticulated land exerts on his own imagination: “It is valid to introduce into our vision of Caribbean landscape—mountains and seas, sand flats, contorted hills—the same swirling movement of the Quebecois landscape. It is said that in certain parts of northern Quebec, as no doubt in the steppes of Russia, you lose a sense of direction and have no sense of moving forward. I am curious about how the imagination functions there... I say to myself: ‘I would like just once to feel myself part of such unrelieved vastness, to experience what rhythm of life it imposes.’ What rhythm of speech rises in you” (172-173).

authors at the head of their own regional canons as well as their extended readership across national and cultural boundaries. When Faulkner and Walcott attain their positions of global prominence (signified informally by the increasingly vast body of criticism surrounding their work and formally, perhaps, by their respective Nobel Prizes), even as their poetic eyes, prompted by pressures to speak more and more in their capacity as “global authors,” wander to increasingly far-flung regions and times, they always cast those eyes back to their regions, those places shorthanded as “home,” though it is a very different place from whence they began. Different, I say, not only in terms of the environment itself, which tells a familiar narrative of modernization, industrialization, environmental depletion, and technological connectivity, but also in terms of creative signification—Faulkner’s revision of the South’s aristocratic, mannered complexities into the chaotic, imbalanced concepts of tragedy and comedy, or Walcott’s initial exuberant self-inclusion within the cycles of his island’s nature giving way to his deep insecurity toward those affiliations. These authors’ respective bodies of work, then, provide unique insights into the relationship between local and global representation and suggest a more fluid, adaptable idea of regional identity than has been offered in many existing works of regionalist criticism. The complex (and often troubled) relationship between Faulkner and Walcott’s persistent regional attachment and the effort of academia to square their work with broader contexts of world literatures is, perhaps, part of the reason behind why contemporary criticism has enthusiastically compared multiple authors from the Caribbean and other American regions but has not yet produced a study of any length comparing these two authors in particular.

All the same, there are perhaps other reasons for the lack of comparisons of Faulkner and Walcott. There is little evidence that the latter ever read or was influenced by the works of the former.<sup>9</sup> There is still less to suggest that Faulkner was particularly concerned with or versed in the affairs of the Caribbean, a thesis fortified by his misdating of the Haitian Revolution in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Faulkner was of course a self-confessed “failed poet,” only dabbling in verse after the earliest years of his career, while Walcott has focused largely on poetry and drama, with comparatively few excursions into essay-writing and fewer still into fiction. And still more obvious points of disjunction: Walcott as a self-identified black colonial subject and Faulkner as an explicit participant in structures of white dominance in the South, Walcott’s far-reaching participation in literary communities and societies and Faulkner’s ardent withdrawal from the same. Yet, both deal with similar (post)plantation and (post)colonial issues; both attempted to come to terms with similarly traumatic histories in their literary writings; both profess a constant (and constantly changing), wholehearted attachment to their home regions, with these histories intact, even if the sentiment seems outdated or reactionary. These similarities themselves may be enough to justify the current study.

Nonwithstanding these compelling affinities, it may be more productive simply to embrace the differences, the contradictions, of these two authors rather than attempt to squeeze them both into a spurious congruence. Such an acceptance of oppositional elements is ultimately in line with my larger methodology, which has become, though not by design, deconstructionist, at least on the surface. By this I mean that my textual and

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<sup>9</sup> A colleague who has interviewed Walcott recalls asking him about precisely this connection and reports that he has some familiarity with Faulkner’s work, though he does not number among the author’s many major influences. This colleague also gave Walcott a copy of *Absalom, Absalom!*, though Walcott has seemingly not yet read it.

critical readings most often tend to find fundamental contradictions or paradoxes within the texts themselves which act to counter, undercut, or even dissolve the ostensible “meaning” or “intent” of those texts. For example, in my third chapter, I find that Walcott’s alleged goal to speak “truly” or “plainly” for his home region, independently of any contrived poetic utterance only exposes the language he uses to delineate that region as incontrovertibly literary, that is, as artifice. His regional writings, then, undo what they mean to accomplish. However, while a deconstructionist critic might use this opportunity to explicate how “meaning” as an epistemological category is thus fundamentally inaccessible or obscured, I would say that, for Walcott, the meaninglessness of this meaning is, in itself, a different kind of meaning. I do not wish to burrow too deeply into deconstructionist terminology for fear of obscuring my own meaning. However, I will state the conclusion that my dissertation suggests vis-à-vis regionalist self-effacements succinctly: I am dealing with texts and contexts that, through close reading, reveal themselves to be fundamentally contradictory in concept. It is in the dialectic of these contradictions that the text itself, as concept, functions. The text, replete with its own antitypes, serves as the *telos* toward which this dialectic functions.<sup>10</sup>

The contradictions and paradoxes I have mentioned above manifest themselves in this work as means of accessing and drawing parallels between individual regions. The central deconstruction I would like to outline is how the notion of regionalism itself acts as a means of interacting with and even fostering the circulation of the text in a global context in these authors’ works; the region implies, even creates, the globe. I should

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<sup>10</sup> The language of this methodology will become very important later in this dissertation, particularly in my second chapter, in which I will denote parallel international interpretations of Faulkner’s work as constituting individual strands of this dialectic.

state, as a precondition for these conclusions, that this dissertation did not begin as a series of reflections on, much less a defense of or *apologia* for literary regionalism. My intent at the outset was to examine how Faulkner and Walcott, who began their respective careers as regionally recognized writers with avowedly local foci, gradually came to be seen as cosmopolitan authors with global scope and focus. My assumption was that, with their inclusion within a global literary canon, their concern with the region would persist largely as an illusory self-image of regional confinement, as with Faulkner's repeated assertions, in his later career, that he was only "a farmer who writes," or else as a necessary counterpoint and remedy to soulless networks of global interchange, as in Walcott's late emphasis on St. Lucia as a place of blessed insignificance. It was only after considerable research and re-reading that I determined both of these premisses to be faulty. Though the region is, indeed, transformed in the work of these writers, it still retains its significance, its particularities, what Benjamin would call its "aura"—however, this aura is created discursively, rather than by a set of reductive or identitarian intractibilities. Rather than abandoning or incontrovertibly altering their representations of these particularities, Walcott and Faulkner are concerned with *preserving* what they perceive as regional integrity by adapting it to the rhetoric of globalization. Any study of their literary home regions is, implicitly, also a study of their conception of the world at large, and their regionalism is not opposed to globalization so much as symbiotic with it. Viewed in this light, the current work has broad implications not only for the writings of these authors in particular but for the very nature of regional thought in the past and today.

This work's theoretical influences stem less from Derrida, de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and other theorists (including the Formalists) who attempted to expose and reconcile, or more frequently problematize, textual contradictions and oppositions than from recent theorists specializing in the conceptual categories of spatialization, globalization, and cosmopolitanism. Benedict Anderson is the obvious progenitor for this recent critical turn to space, distance, and global locationism, but the call to *make* this turn was sounded perhaps most clearly by Michel Foucault in "Of Other Spaces," which appeared in 1986, three years after *Imagined Communities*, in which the author proclaimed: "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space... We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). Foucault's suggestion that such elements as "storage, circulation, marking, and classification of human elements" within a global context, that is, humanity considered as mediated by *space*, should take prominence over models of societal or literary evolution, humanity mediated by *time*, is compelling when taken in the context of postmodern meditations on globalization and postcapitalism, not to mention the practice of comparativity, long dominated by chronological models of similarity, disjunction, or evolution (23). Natalie Melas capitalizes on this spatial turn in comparative literature in *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison* (2007), in which she notes that "where comparison was once indissociably temporal—a matter of development through time—it now seems firmly if indistinctly associated with space" (4). Melas rejects the "hierarchical scale" encouraged by the chronological model, in which "differences" must "occupy fixed places" in favor of a spatialized model that

“withdraw[s] the discriminating evolutionary hierarchy from the geography of the globe as one might lift a distorting temporal veil to reveal space as such” (29). This interrogation of space not as binding dichotomy (a la Habermas) or as contextualizing trope but, rather, *in its function as* physical distance is one of the organizing principles of the current work, which rejects the common literary impulse to view regionality as the site of a nebulous universalism or as an antiquated antiglobal chronotope in favor of casting it as the site of unique means of interregional literary play.

Nonwithstanding the above influences, I find Foucault’s call to reexamine “the form of relations among sites” within the epoch of space yet more compelling than his attempt to supplant time with space, for it is almost prescient of the later attempts of Glissant in particular to reemphasize the paradoxes and potentials of interregional comparison (23). As I have already hinted, Glissant is perhaps the single figure who exerts the most influence over this dissertation. Part of my use of Glissant is simple convenience, given his long-standing interest in Faulkner and the interface between Southern and Caribbean literature (though, as I will later note, Glissant is hardly the *only* critic who voices this interest), and part is due to his persistent concern with regional identities, what J. Michael Dash calls “the structuring force of landscape, community, and collective unconscious” (*Caribbean Discourse* xii). Yet, I use Glissant’s theories extensively not because he presents unified, coherent portraits of how Caribbean (and Southern) regionalism functions; the opposite is in fact true, and Glissant, though a provocative and powerful thinker, is, it must be said, a rather schizophrenic theorist. His commentaries on Caribbeanness, like those of Wilson Harris, are fragmentary, dissociative, brought forth in fits and starts, some of which seem to be self-reflexive



critical dead-ends.<sup>11</sup> In this fragmentation, Glissant could be said to be mimicking his subject, for the Caribbean that he represents is itself polygonal, illogical, a region of endlessly proliferating connections, yet this illegibility is difficult to translate into future critical discourse. In a word, much of Glissant's writing is not difficult to understand but is nonetheless difficult to *use*. For this reason, perhaps, contemporary theory has latched onto the term "relation" in particular as his "major" theoretical perspective, and indeed the concept has proven immensely valuable for ongoing critical work of which this dissertation comprises a part. However, in using Glissant to help excavate the regions I study, I want to suggest that the region is in itself an uncanny space, an area of deep and abiding uncertainties, a site of both modernist metanarrative and postmodernist polyreferentiality. Glissant, more so than any other major theorist, is concerned with presenting these contrarian impulses.

Thus building on a foundation of inherent paradox and indeterminacy, I excavate some of the essential distinctions vis-à-vis literary regionalism to which I have alluded here in my first chapter, "Five Theses on Literary Regionalism and Two Types of Regional Transformation," which puts forth a basic definition and origin point of the region as it appears in literature. Regionalism, I theorize, can be most succinctly defined as a fetishization of a locale, an attribution of unquantifiable essences to the metaphysical space of the region. Positing the rise of regionalism within Enlightenment discourses of Newtonian natural science and climatological anthropology, I depict it as a distinctly *stylistic*, not thematic, phenomenon, one that need not necessarily be reactionary,

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this aspect of *Caribbean Discourse* in particular, see Román de la Campa, "Resistance and Globalization in Caribbean Discourse: Antonio Benítez-Rojo and Édouard Glissant" in Arnold, Rodríguez-Luis, and Dash, *A History of Literature in The Caribbean* (1994), pp. 100-102.

regenerative, or antiquarian. In fact, as I go on to argue, regionalism does not oppose global paradigm shifts such as nationalism or globalization but, rather, is transformed in crucial ways by their development. I discuss “originary” and “epistemological” transformation of the region within these contexts, showing how, amid the forces of globalization, the region refetishizes itself by apostheosizing its author or integrating itself within global schemata.

My second chapter, “Totalitarian Faulkner” further interrogates the interface between regional writings and their global circulation through a study of the reception of certain Faulkner novels abroad. In particular, I focus on the little-studied early German translations and interpretations of *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*, efforts that were accomplished at the height of Nazi control of the German publishing industry. My reading of the German interest in Faulkner, as well as the later Soviet interpretations of some of the same novels, suggests that they constitute a very different instance of Faulkner’s globalization than criticism has thus far noted. While, at least since Cowley’s *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), Faulkner has enjoyed a reputation as an aregional international modernist whose works accrue merit based on their stylistic and artistic innovation, the interpretations emanating from these nations suggest an attraction not to Faulkner’s modernism but to his regionalism, specifically, to the reactionary aspects of that regionalism which have historically proven difficult for Faulkner criticism to address. I use Glissant’s concepts of the *totalité-monde* (world-totality), *echos-monde* (world-echoes), and *chaos-monde* (world-chaos) to examine the possibility of a synthesized model of Faulknerian criticism that takes into account not only his modernist but also his regional internationalism.

The possibility of regionalism acting as a necessary element of totalized literary globalization is further borne out by my third chapter, “For My Own Race / And the Reality: Walcott’s Narratives of Normative Regionalism,” which considers the possibility in Walcott’s poetic works, particularly *Omeros* (1990) and *The Prodigal* (2004), of the region acting as a necessary counterpoint to, if not an escape from, the forces of globalization and cosmopolitanism. Through a typology of Walcott’s various poetic personae, I show how the region emerges in his writing as the prime locus of literary writing, yet seemingly also elides literariness itself by creating a primitivistic ideal outside of the scope of mimetic (or “mimic”) writing. I ultimately suggest a revision of Glissant and subsequent Caribbean critics’ work on Caribbean relationality insofar as the region, in Walcott’s writing, moves both centrifugally (relationally) outward, implicating other regions, other contexts, and centripetally (anti-relationally), consciously excluding such possibilities. However, rather than the entirely self-contained, poetically unenhanced region *qua* region that Walcott attempts to make of it, St. Lucia, in his later writings, appears as a “phantasmal root,” making the region itself, independent of any elaborations, less important than the idea of that region within a global context. Walcott, to his credit, realizes this, yet finds this idea nonetheless worth pursuing.

With this foundation of my studies of the nature of globalized regionalism in general, and in Faulkner and Walcott’s work in particular, in place, my fourth chapter, “Postplantation (dis)unities in *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Gulf*, and *Omeros*,” unites the two authors within what has been called the “postplantation” region, the South and the Caribbean viewed through the lens of their mutually traumatic histories. Although I find the postplantation thesis a compelling interpretive framework for addressing these

writings in tandem, I also critique the concept by suggesting that, paradoxically, critical efforts to unite the regions and thus eliminate interregional distance also reify that distance. This reification occurs through two primary channels, which I call the interhistorical approach and the narrative approach. Through a reading of the Haitian section of *Absalom* alongside certain poems from *The Gulf*, I show how fictional representations of each of these regions tend to displace the site of *true* historical trauma onto the other, in the end speaking more to their own lack of articulation of those traumas than any essential observations on the history of their regional counterparts. My reading of Haiti in *Absalom* continues alongside Walcott's *Omeros*, arguing that each of these texts attempts to fill the traumatic gaps of "archival" history, a history comprised of facts, numbers, and dates, with narrative glosses, ultimately suggesting that the fiction created out of the past is more valuable than straightforward adherence to historical data. However, though this mode of writing tends to make the traumatic past readable, capable of interpretation and synthesis, it is crippled by its knowledge that the reading it gives is only *one* interpretation. Implicating other regions in a narrative history, then, ultimately makes those regions cogs in a machine constructed by the "home" region. However, I endeavor to make clear that the distance that is thus reinforced through postplantation syntheses does not lead to regional stagnation but, rather, suggests the inscription of regional particularity within intercultural frameworks.

I examine the ultimate fate of this regional particularity in my fifth chapter, "Epic Death and Reincarnation: Recovering the Region in *Go Down, Moses* and *Omeros*," which reads the regional affiliations of its two texts within the spectrum of the ostensibly "rooted" epic (as founding story / societal chronicle) and its contemporary links to

writing of exile and diasporism, what Ottmar Ette has called “literature without a fixed abode.” My contentions in this chapter are twofold: first, I mark the epic itself, in its attempt to establish or fortify a particular region, as a text that in fact is designed to *deprive* itself of that very region, as in the questing narratives of the *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*. The epic, I argue, is less a monoglossic, triumphalist tale of static cultural origins than a deeply unstable meditation on the absence of those origins, a protracted search for a region that signifies only in its absence, which finds a correlate in its strong concern with summoning and speaking with the dead as embodied in the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*. Secondly, I attempt to show that both *Omeros* and *Go Down, Moses*, as modern texts that engage strongly with epic traditions and concerns, follow epic standards by representing the region as always already departed, yet offer their own dialogic (literary) representations of that region as a new discursive founding-story. In this manner, these writings both continue a historical tradition of epic regionalism and resuscitate that regionalism within broader spectra of cosmopolitanism and the decay of regional distinction.

Both my conclusion, dealing with Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1979) and Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full* (1998), and the dissertation as a whole thus come eventually to emphasize the inseparable dialogism, though not the congruence, of the region and globe. My study of Lovelace and Wolfe shows that even texts that avowedly seek to delineate *only* regional particularity or global indeterminacy ultimately implicate their opposites. To write of, in essence to broadcast, seemingly exclusive regional tropes, as Lovelace’s novel does, is to globalize those tropes, to place them within the context of international interpretive schemata. Conversely, to situate oneself in dislocated global

space, as in Wolfe's novel, is also to place oneself within a context of explicitly or implicitly inscribed regions; seemingly aregional systems of global commerce reveal themselves to be reliant upon, even generative of, regional boundaries. Ultimately, I want to suggest that regionalism and globalization form an intractable dialectic; though they are inextricably linked, they nonetheless remain ontologically distinct and resonant in literature. They are, in Melas's phrase, locked in comparative incommensurability, producing "a generative dislocation without silencing discourse or marking the limits of knowledge" (31). To examine the region is to dream the globe, and to exist on the globe is to reinscribe its regional dichotomies.

## CHAPTER II

### FIVE THESES ON REGIONALISM AND TWO TYPES OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

*In August in Mississippi there's a few days somewhere about the middle of the month when suddenly there's a foretaste of fall, it's cool, there's a lambence, a luminous quality to the light, as though it came not from just today but from back in the old classic times. It might have fauns and satyrs and the gods and—from Greece, from Olympus in it somewhere.*

—William Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University* (1959)

It is perhaps no coincidence that three of the most important books in the history of globalization theory, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), and Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000), chart the decline of the dominance of the static, unitary nation-state; this has long been an axiom of globalization studies. Perhaps more surprising is their shared assertion that, as the nation-state declines, the significance of the region increases, either as the site from which global force-lines proceed or as a potential site of resistance to those same forces.<sup>1</sup> This paradigm shift has extended to literary studies as well. Robert Jackson, in *Seeking the Region in American Literature and Culture* (2005), has alluded to the “increasingly dissatisfying and problematic” results of nationalizing perspectives on literature, suggesting that regionalism is a more appropriate framework for addressing some of the same issues (25). No less could be said of David Jordan's claim, in his introduction to *Regionalism Reconsidered* (1994), that regionalism offers a “counter-voice” to the “cries

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most straightforward endorsement of regionalism (or tribalism) as a counter or means of resistance to globalization is Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995), which indelibly divides the two world-systems.

of alienation and despair” that accompany widespread capitalist development, or Francesco Loriggio’s denotation, in the same volume, of “the assessment of literary regionalism” as “a major project of our *fin-de-siècle*” (xv, 3). Given this resurgence of the region, the lack of a theoretical consensus toward addressing regionalism in literature and the dearth of simple definitions of the same is, frankly, stunning. There seems to be no clear, cohesive agreement on the nature, origins, or even continued existence of regionalism as an entity, and even its ontological status is uncertain. Is it a theme? A genre? Or something less quantifiable?

Given this indeterminacy, preparatory to my forthcoming discussion of the rise of and reaction to globalization in Faulkner and Walcott’s work, it seems appropriate to advance several foundational ideas on the history and nature of regionalism and the role it plays in these authors’ careers. These theses might be called iconoclastic insofar as they, on occasion, prioritize what regionalism is *not*, in light of how criticism has traditionally defined the term, over what it might be. Yet my intent is less to tear down each of the theories of regionalism alluded to here (though some of them have perhaps worn out their welcome) than to revise the focus of those theories. For reasons that will become clear, these theses circumscribe a model of regionalism that is inclusive insofar as it dictates that regionalism need not *necessarily* conform to certain standards. Nevertheless, if they may be taken as a proscriptive model, they counterindicate much of what has been said both recently and historically on the subject. I make no apologies for this, for the term “regionalism” has very nearly passed the point at which it needs to be critically revised and reached the point at which it needs to be resurrected. When regionalism is not referred to in contemporary criticism (as in Robert Dainotto’s *Place in Literature*, 2000,



which aims to look with a “somewhat colder eye” at regionalist theory) in a largely pejorative sense, or in the guise of nauseating “down home” narratives, or as a vanished literary relic of the nineteenth century (as in Stephanie Foote’s *Regional Fictions*, 2001), it generally manifests itself as a heavily romanticized, deeply indeterminate, and antiquated “attachment to the land,” as in H.L. Weatherby and George Core’s *Place in American Fiction* (2004), invigorating and elemental, but nonetheless a bit old-fashioned, a bit outdated, running somewhat counter to “high” art, like a Pepperidge Farm advertisement during a commercial break in the middle of *Metropolis*. These theses are designed, to some small extent, to counter these prevailing views.

### **1. Regionalism in its simplest sense is a fetishization of a locale.**

Fetishization, in this sense, largely means the attribution of manifold characteristics to the region that do not strictly fall within the realms of physicality, politics, culture, demographics, and related elements, ephemeral and intangible values that add “hidden” significance to the land.<sup>2</sup> The nature of this hidden significance is fundamentally unstable. Louis Rubin, for example, has written that the characters of *Ulysses* need not be merely *in* Dublin, but *of* Dublin, a process that he describes as “like building a bridge, or creating a platform that will reach out from a recognizable substantial place into what until then has been empty air” (*Place in American Fiction*,

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<sup>2</sup> The term “fetishization” has a long critical history, but its most pervasive modern usages likely stem from Marxism (commodity-fetishism) and psychoanalysis (paraphilia). In this chapter, I am primarily using the term in a Marxist sense, in that fetishization leads naturally to a reification of the region (that is, treatment of the object—the region—as if it were a subject). Freudian fetishism bears resonances for my study as well, but as it relies upon a stable role for the unfetishized sex-act (that is, reproduction), it has less correlates in regionalism; it is difficult to denote precisely what a similarly static role for the region might be.

19). Joyce's locale is undeniably real, yet it is comprised of more than its streets, buildings, and bridges. It bears some indelible and intangible stamp that makes it, in Rubin's phrase, "not only geography and history" but "a way of looking at the world" (17). Rubin's wording, insofar as it suggests that regionalism is *not only* a mundane set of criteria, but *something* else in addition, is a common rhetorical move among regionalist critics. In the same volume of essays, Weatherby and Core suggest that "place is not *mere* setting in the sense of a static background but an essential constituent in what Andrew Lytle deems enveloping action" (11, emphasis mine). Similarly, George Garrett finds in the writing of Southern regionalists in particular "something else to offer," something "beyond the ritual celebration of the flora and fauna" (*Place in American Fiction* 45). It is this "something else," with all of its nebulous baggage, that many mid-twentieth century critics were likely attempting to access when they attributed human agency to geographical locations in works such as *Ulysses*, marking Dublin as a character in Joyce's narrative. Leigh Anne Duck has linked the critical tendency to fetishize place with the accompanying tendency to anthropomorphize place, stating that "those who want to speak of place as a character" are likely wanting to prove that "place is not merely a matter of 'background' or 'setting'—that it is in some sense an active presence in a literary work" (*South to a New Place* 48).

Duck's commentary on the "character" of place intersects strongly with the vanguard of regionalist criticism, in which it is easy to detect a bifurcation of regionalist typologies: a purely "descriptive" mode of addressing the region opposed to a "symbolic," or fetishized, methodology. Though it is difficult to pinpoint the tenor of this symbolism, it is clear that it offers *something* that "mere" description lacks.

Likewise, Peter Nicholls has made a distinction between Pound's conception of representations of the world as "something static, which might be felt to 'contain' and perhaps immobilise the mind" and those that signify "something 'beyond themselves'" (*Locations of Literary Modernism* 163). In theory and criticism, this division has often been framed as the opposition between place and "space," place and "background," place and "setting," or place and any number of other bland, unvarnished nouns; Arnold Hoffman writes: "it is only when scene is identified with place that the full powers of the literary imagination are challenged and used" (*Place in American Fiction* 4). "Place" here is space with value added, or rather, space represented in such a way to inspire "imagination."<sup>3</sup> As I have already suggested, "place," in its association in the minds of many critics with regionalism, comes across as something of an anachronism, largely due to what Harry Harootunian calls "the increasing contemporary turn toward space and the resulting strategies of this move based on the elucidation of spatial categories" ("Space-Time" 23). If space is contemporary, globalized, and static, place is obsolete, localized, and indeterminate, the "proper" bailiwick of regionalism traditionally conceived.

This argument continues to enjoy some measure of critical popularity, as evidenced by Barbara Ladd's recent dolorous observation in *PMLA* that Southern studies had yet to eschew completely the much-reviled category of place in favor of a

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<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the importance of imaginative spatiality, these categories are not exclusive; it is not essential that a given area be unanimously designated "space" or "place" in the same sense as the immutability and exclusivity of Mircea Eliade's "sacred" and "profane" spaces act to "obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to 'found the world' and to live in a real sense" in terms of ordered human civilizations (*The Sacred and the Profane*, 23). Rather, "place" and "space," being discursively created, act to delineate and texture broad, subjective interpretive zones.

wholehearted embrace of space.<sup>4</sup> So the place/space argument may not be as fossilized as its critical heritage might suggest. Édouard Glissant, for instance, who has been (rightly) praised for granting critics in the Caribbean, the South, and elsewhere new ways of theorizing and assessing spatial and intercultural relationships, has denoted a division between ecological envisionings of the land that are “conceived of as a by-product” of “sacred” ideas of territorial possession and belonging, and similar yet opposite ecological inclinations that criticize such mysticism and thus “act as politics” (*Poetics of Relation* 146). Though Glissant’s proclamation bears myriad resonances, some of which I will treat later in this chapter, we can take account, even at a cursory examination, of the fact that there are two means of relating to the land in his statement: one that denies any essentializing, mystified connection and another that promotes the same. Glissant’s rhetoric bears more than a passing relationship to the “place/space” dichotomy. In *Poetics of Relation*, the region appears as a crucial site for post-diaspora, globalized identity formation, yet this presentist perspective draws on much older critical discourses.

Glissant’s invocation of old place/space debates is even stronger in his *Caribbean Discourse* (published in French in 1981; first English translation 1989) in which he notes, in language that should now be familiar, that in postcolonial discourses that attempt to reclaim lost identities, “the relationship with the land,” especially when the community is alienated from the land by external forces, “becomes so fundamental... that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character.

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<sup>4</sup> Though Ladd suggests in “Literary Studies: The Southern U.S., 2005,” that “space” may be a more profitable interpretive mode than its counterpart vis-à-vis Southern studies, she also conceded, at a conference in 2000, that “‘place,’ unlike ‘space,’ situates, and it does so richly and diversely. It locates things in regions whose most complete expression is neither geometric nor cartographic” (*Faulkner in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 201).

Describing the landscape is not enough” (105). Again, Glissant is describing a postmodern, postcolonial Caribbean in which the concept of regional belonging is inextricable from complex racial and political dilemmas, yet in doing so he reproduces the language of the vanguard of regionalist criticism. Perhaps drawing on Glissant’s assertions, George Handley and Elizabeth DeLoughray, in *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2005), have claimed that, as opposed to North American landscapes that ecocritics view as “devoid of human history and labor,” Caribbean locales bear indelible marks of “colonization and forced relocation,” forcing their beholders to ponder “what might be considered a natural landscape” (2). Again, in a surprisingly contemporary text, we see the delineation of two distinct conceptions of the region: one that privileges essential and fundamental intangibles, and one that excludes the same.

I have, perhaps inadvertently, shifted the above discussion of “place” and “space” to incorporate the third term “region,” to which I will primarily refer in the remainder of this work. My justification for this terminology is at heart simple: while “place” and “space” suggest a mystified / demystified binarism, “region” would seem simultaneously to implicate both place and space, both a static area or volume and a more labile, less sharply delineated “atmosphere.” The region is thus a space of *différance*, neither one nor the other, and yet both, its meaning perpetually deferred.

Yet, as with Derrida’s term, the disadvantage of “region” is its inherent and imminent spiral into indefinability. The Oxford English Dictionary places the earliest uses of the term in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and notes that its etymology shows affiliations with “regere,” “to rule,” which also gives rise to “regent” and related terms, suggesting the

region as a governed area, separated from similar areas by monarchical allegiances.<sup>5</sup> However, as we shall see presently, with more widespread and nuanced modern conceptions of the nation-state comes the fundamental precept of the region as itself constituting a *part* of a kingdom or rulership. In fact, the OED notes that “regionalism,” arising in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically denotes “the theory or practice of regional rather than central systems of administration,” establishing a basic opposition between “national” and “regional” allegiances. Yet, when the region is conceptually separated from the nation, the term becomes progressively fuzzier; the OED defines it as “a more or less defined portion of the earth's surface.” This denotation is not, in itself, adequate to the task of assessing the region; Australia, for example, is a clearly defined portion of the earth’s surface, yet it contains distinct environmental and cultural “regions” within its borders.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Northern Ireland is not a *geographically* distinct section of the earth’s surface but has rigid and distinct juridical and cultural boundaries. Even from a basic definition, then, arise major and seemingly irreconcilable questions: where are the borders of the region? What sort of borders are they, and who defines them? There are at least as many exceptions as adherences to any tentative rules we might advance.

Robert Jackson calls the region “maddeningly difficult to define in critical terms” and correspondingly states that “‘regionalism’ defies generic labeling and requires a distinct approach” (*Seeking the Region* 5). Likely acting as a catalyst to Jackson’s frustration is the implied relativism of the region. One of the side effects of Anderson’s

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oed.com/>, Vanderbilt Library proxy accession date 17 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> It may be, with the increasing emphasis on the instability of coastlines ushered in by chaos theory and “island” studies, that in fact this example is not as stable as it seems. However, as I have noted in my introduction, even if fractal curves inscribe lines of infinite length, they enclose regions of finite area, suitable to be defined and juxtaposed with other hybridized areas.

*Imagined Communities* (1983) was a fundamental destabilization of definitive geographic boundaries for the nation, and much of this discourse has bled over into regionalism. Stan Smith has stated that nationhood is not a “natural” construction but “a work of artifice, for the nation has to be ideologically ‘uttered’ to be validated,” and it is likely that the region obeys similar laws—it does not exist until “uttered,” or conceived as a site for the exercise of the imagination (*Locations of Literary Modernism* 123).<sup>7</sup> Yet, in regionalist fiction in particular, we see an assertion of the importance of spatial locations insofar as they are juxtaposed with other locations, the resonances of particular hills, valleys, or even city neighborhoods.<sup>8</sup> I would like to suggest here that the ontological characteristics of the region obey rules roughly akin to those governing linguistic signs; though its relationship to its signified elements (populations, areas) is highly relativistic, even arbitrary, it defines itself both positively, as consisting of a certain set of geographical and ideological (as opposed to linguistically morphological and phonetic) elements, and negatively, as lacking or rejecting elements that define other regions.<sup>9</sup>

Linguistics, at least since Saussure, has been fond of denoting a privative opposition (that is, something defined by its possession of what something else lacks) as

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<sup>7</sup> Welty, innocuously enough, has also noted the importance of the utterance in forming regional identity, wondering whether part of the “magic” of a particular place lies “in the *name* of the place—since that is what *we* gave it?” (“Place in Fiction” 119).

<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps most evident in Caribbean literature, where the subjective values attached to each region are distinct by virtue of their very static geographic boundaries (the shores of the island). However, geographical separation is essential for much Southern literature as well. See, for example, Faulkner’s description of Beat Four at the beginning of *Intruder in the Dust*, or Toni Cade Bambara’s portrait of the disjunction between South Atlanta and the city proper in *Those Bones are Not My Child* (1999).

<sup>9</sup> For more on spatial ideologies, see Erik Bulson’s *Novels, Maps, Modernity* (2007), in which the author argues that all representations of space in fiction are ideological inasmuch as they are “influenced by the culture, history, economy, and politics of a particular time and place, they reflect ways of seeing the world” (11).

central to the formation of discrete phonemes. Saussure defined, in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), a language as “a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others,” and phonemes themselves as characterized by “not... their own positive quality but simply by the fact that they are distinct. Phonemes are above all else opposing, relative, and negative entities” (114, 119). The same could be said of the ontological formation of the region. For example, the region of “the South,” as many recent critics have labored to explain, has different boundaries depending on whom you ask, yet it must necessarily incorporate a set of unique elements (a plantation economy, a proliferation of Waffle Houses) and exclude other elements (early industrialization, hockey). Thus, the region exists both as what it is (the South is the South) and what it is not (the South is not the Midwest). As Richard Gray writes, regions enjoy a “mutually determining, reciprocally defining relationship. The South is what the North is not, just as the North is what the South is not” (*South to a New Place* xvii). This is still not a static definition of the region any more than structural linguistics adumbrates a static definition of the sign. However, if the region is, as I have suggested, reciprocally defined, it must comprise a quantity of definitive, distinctive characteristics that separate it from other regions, dialogically created as those characteristics may be.<sup>10</sup> The work of literary regionalism is simply to represent these traits as fundamentally mystified.

Here I must note an important caveat. Though the region may absorb mystical valences, for the most part it grants them only a local habitation, not a name; the region is not the abode of spirits, at least not visible ones. William Cronon has suggested, in

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<sup>10</sup> Or, as I will state again in this work, the region relies on the globe, just as the globe relies on the region.



Wordsworth's wilderness poems, themes "akin" to those of "the Old Testament prophets as they conversed with their wrathful God"; this I do not argue, but I would like to underscore Cronon's qualifying "akin" by suggesting that, even if the Romantics and later poets found these themes, they were similar, not equivalent, to the tangible manifestations of divinity in holy doctrine (*Uncommon Ground* 74).<sup>11</sup> The same seems to also be the case with more recent regionalist poetry, including but not limited to Derek Walcott's meditations on St. Lucian landscapes. Walcott has suggested, in reference to these settings, that their innate spirituality is more deistic than sectarian. "Nobody can go by the Pitons," he stated in an interview with George Handley, "and not be really moved by the power they emanate. The same thing would be true of any other sacred location that has become cherished for some vibration it gives off" (*Caribbean Literature and the Environment* 128).<sup>12</sup> Walcott's statement is a prime example of the mystical qualities commonly attributed to particular regions; though universal, they are nonetheless nonsectarian, a sort of egalitarian "vibration," forceful, yet invisible and immeasurable. Like Faulkner's peculiar light in August, to say that regional mysticism moves in mysterious ways vastly underestimates the phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> Walcott's vibration and

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<sup>11</sup> Cronon sets foot on well-trodden ground as regards the Romantics in this passage; see M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, 1973.

<sup>12</sup> The Pitons are the two volcanic spires that dominate the north and south ends of St. Lucia. They hold immense symbolic significance for Walcott's poetry, and great spiritual significance for native religion.

<sup>13</sup> Much of this unspecified spirituality can be traced to early American rhetorics of what Sacvan Bercovitch calls "outmoded, quasi-biblical forms" that lent "a system of sacred-secular symbols" to a populace increasingly "intent on progress" (*Rites of Assent* 34-35). Bercovitch notes a distinct split between medieval Catholicism's tendency to grant "sacred places" direct Biblical relevances (such as Canaan) and post-Reformation insinuations upon exactly the opposite, advancing the idea that "the only Canaan in this

Faulkner's illumination are exemplars of what I will refer to here as secularized regional mysticism, the presence of uncoded symbolic properties in a metaphysical landscape. Such properties in regionalist literature generally take the form of truncation and elongation of space, romanticization of landscapes and valorization of the lives of those who populate them, and the projection of human, superhuman, or subhuman characteristics onto the region. Thus I arrive at the basic definition of regionalism on which the remainder of these theses will depend: that which *sanctifies without naming*.

In formulating the theses to come, I will largely be discussing the U.S. South as my fetishized region *par exemple*, and a few qualifying remarks on this decision may be in order, as the South is, like any region, immensely slippery and seemingly subjective. Part of my reasoning in making this choice has to do with the Southern region's troubled relationship with U.S. nationalism, which I shall return to in greater depth later in this chapter. In addition, the scope and extent of the South's repeated insistence upon fetishized generalisms as constitutive parts of its identity also make it an ideal subject. Michael Kreyling has noted that "students and critics of southern literature" have been vigorously "schooled" in the belief that their subject "is not invented by our discussions of it but rather is revealed by a constant southern identity" (ix). This contention, against which Kreyling fulminates in *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998), is both "one of the perennial claims of the South and its literature," compromising a fundamental truism in the work of Louis Rubin, Cleanth Brooks, and other writers of the Agrarian school of criticism, and an implicit privileging of the epistemological category of "southern identity" (xi). If this identity is necessarily immutable (as in Rubin's writing especially),

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world was the kingdom within" (ibid, 76-77). This secularization of "sacred places" certainly played a key role in shaping the eventual nebulosity of regional mysticisms.

it must comprise qualities distinct from and in addition to the sum total of such mundane criteria as geographical, cultural, and economic distinction. In essence, to insist on a “constant southern identity” is to grant certain intangible and individualized qualities to the region—to fetishize it. In this methodological camp, we can place not only the aforementioned critics, but also much more recent writers. Sharon Monteith and Suzanne Jones, for instance, in *South to a New Place* (2002) have stated, with a seeming absence of all irony, that “the southern landscape has always meant more than the sum of its parts,” cheerily noting that “for nonsoutherners traveling through the South, it is often the bloody past that remains the most pervasive” (6). Though Monteith and Jones ambitiously claim to have “collected essays that tie the mythic southern balloon down to earth,” they overlook the fact that the earth, in its capacity as *southern* earth, is always already mythic; its mythic qualities, discursively, are constitutive of its regionality (10).

## **2. Regionalism has its roots in post-Enlightenment reconceptions of the location of spiritual forces.**

I might remark here that this claim might appear overly contentious to both critics of Enlightenment thought and those who study regionalism as a genre, which, by consensus, seems to have arisen at a distinct period in the nineteenth century, in the writing of Sarah Orne Jewett, Twain, Stowe, Chesnut, and others.<sup>14</sup> Yet, these writers are by no means the first to deploy the locale in the manners that I have outlined above. Nor are they even the first to compose literature that deals with specific, bounded regions in detail. Leo Marx, for instance, has traced the “pastoral strain” in American literature

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<sup>14</sup> See *Place in Literature*, 27-28.

back to Vergil's *Eclogues* owing to its "symbolic landscape, a delicate blend of myth and reality" that proved relevant to the "American experience" (19).<sup>15</sup> Even so, Marx acknowledges that a "fully articulated" pastoral idea did not arise in the United States until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup> This is attributable in large part to "the great revolution in science and technology we associate with Sir Isaac Newton," which in turn led to "a massive shift in prevailing ideas about man's relations to nature" (74). Later critics would pinpoint the Enlightenment as the era in which, as Greg Garrard theorizes, ideas of "the organic universe" and the planet's role as "nurturing mother" to the human race were abandoned in favor of "a universe reducible to an assemblage of parts" (Garrard 61-62). Indeed, the opposition between broad scientific and fetishized local systems of knowledge is a remarkably persistent idea, one that steadfastly refuses to vanish from critical discourse. Scott Romine finds in the rhetoric of the Southern Agrarians the notion that "scientific representation of the South amounted to, in effect, an apostasy against their theory of mythic emergence," while the editors of *Caribbean*

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<sup>15</sup> Marx's use of the term "pastoral" is idiosyncratic, and differs significantly from the pastoral ideal that I shall mention in passing later in this paper, as a regenerative return to a romantic, idealized landscape. Marx's primary subject, as the passage here indicates, is not so much the American "version" of the same pastoralism that concerned, for example, Spencer, but rather the development of a collective idea of the human place in nature in "American" literature. In this sense, it is reasonable to discuss Marx's pastoralism alongside my own conceptions of regionalism, though comparing that regionalism to historical poetic deployments of the term raises certain issues, as I shall note later.

<sup>16</sup> *The Machine in the Garden*, 73. Marx's comment on a 1787 letter from Thomas Jefferson to an associate are instructive in this regard; Marx states that Jefferson's belief that a ploughman will give a better answer to a moral question than a professor relies on "a somewhat obscure metaphysical link with 'nature'" that is similar to the fetishization of place I have already discussed. What is more intriguing, however, is Marx's observation of how the "unspoiled American landscape" is "peculiarly conducive to the nurture of the 'moral sense'" (130-31). This suggests that morality stems from the land's relationship to its inhabitants, not the other way around.

*Literature and the Environment* lamented that “the systemization of natural history” during the eighteenth century “contributed to the erasure of indigenous knowledges” (*South to a New Place*, 29-30; DeLoughray 7). Humanity gained natural science during the Enlightenment but lost something else, these authors imply; something intangible and perhaps only accessible through poetry and other humanistic arts. It is easy to surmise how, with the dominance of language and formulae designed to encompass and demystify the natural world, the brand of regionalism that Marx discusses could sink into what he calls a “decadent convention.”

There has thus been no shortage of critical synchronisms between the rise of Enlightenment scientific discourse and the decline of ideas of natural spirituality. Yet, I would like to suggest, the scientific revolution did not destroy the “old pastoralism” and its idyllic, if outlandish, visions of lackadaisical Edens, but merely redirected it into new channels. An early indication of this was the reimagining of nature as the domain of the sublime, those “other aspects of Nature, with which physical science does not deal,” and the poet as “the highest, best, and truest interpreter” of that sublimity, as Alfred Austin wrote in an 1877 piece in the *Contemporary Review* (Mazel 55). The rise of the sublime, William Cronon suggests, allowed for an interpretation of nature in which “the supernatural lay just beneath the surface,” not a place of “satanic temptation” but a “sacred temple” (Cronon 73, 76). Yet, this temple was not devoted to a particular god, as I have already suggested in regards to regionalism’s emphasis on unspecified spirituality. The sublime, at least in the Kantian sense (purposiveness without purpose) provided an attractive target for post-Enlightenment fetishizations of the locale insofar as it provided for symbolic and mystical valences outside the bailiwick of pervasive natural sciences

without insisting on direct affiliation of those symbols with individual religious systems.<sup>17</sup> François Pitavy, for example, suggests that the idea of the U.S. frontier created a “*sublime space*,” represented in literature in general and Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* in particular as “a myth divested of religious meaning but not of the sense of the sacred—a secularized version of the Old Testament God” (*Faulkner and the Ecology of the South*, 90, emphasis in original). The land may be symbolic or metaphorical, but the tenor of its metaphors is fundamentally obscure.

With the advent of the idea of nature as an immense, interconnected system, able to be quantified, observed, and altered according to static rules, the door to a symbolic conception of the region was opened. The land itself had “moral,” “metaphorical,” or even “spiritual” significance; these effects were not conveyed to it by a higher power, or by visible spirits. These significances appear in Marx’s account of the “poetic metaphors” of the New World, “imaginative constructions which heighten meaning far beyond the limits of fact” as well as in David Jordan’s description of United States regions during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as “symbolic ground upon which forces of conquest were rationalized” (43, *New World Regionalism* 5).<sup>18</sup> Thus the rise of science encouraged the

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<sup>17</sup> Kant stated, in *Critique of Judgment* (1790), that fine art possesses qualities that are not capable of being subsumed within the greater “meaning” or “purpose” of the art-object, but rather operate in mysterious ways that suggest such a unitary explanation. I read his statement, in the context of the sublime, as suggesting meanings that elide singular exegetic systems; the art-object functions in ways that are not strictly apprehensible by science or other holistic interpretive schemes.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Kowalski has taken this argument one step further in claiming that “until the middle of the nineteenth century, the central dilemma of American literature was how to divine and adequately honor the spirit of places whites ostensibly owned more and more of, but did not yet imaginatively possess” (*Regionalism Reconsidered*, 35). Such an argument underscores the colonial undertone of U.S. regionalism, but such Frostian contemplation of the dictates of imperialism forges an unsteady relationship between the nation and region. Leigh Ann Duck has somewhat more flexibly cast the problem as “a

birth of the region as it would persist in literature: not as evidential of divine forces or the uncertain epistemological home of supernatural entities but as the locus for the play of symbolic properties.

It seems clear, then, that the ideological roots of regionalism are in the mid and late 18<sup>th</sup> century, when organized natural science impinged upon earlier pastoral conceptions of divine landscapes. Yet, regionalism did not simply arise as a reactionary counterpoint to these new discourses. On the contrary, the Enlightenment provided not only an idea against which regionalism could argue, but an ideological germ for conceptions of fundamentally mystical relationships between individuals and the land. I am thinking in particular of Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), specifically Books 17 and 18, in which the author studies the relationship between climate and government and agriculture and government, respectively.<sup>19</sup> The central contention of these two chapters can be adumbrated by the author's claim that "the effeminacy of the people in hot climates has almost always rendered them slaves; and that the bravery of those in cold climates has enabled them to maintain their liberties." Montesquieu's analysis is, as one might expect, highly deterministic, taking as given the fact that

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determined effort to produce a coherent spatial identity" which in turn produces "aestheticized representations of a national landscape imbued with intimately felt group meaning" (29). For more on this subject, see Cecelia Tichi's *Embodiment of a Nation* (2001) and Myra Jehlen's *American Incarnation* (1989).

<sup>19</sup> "How the Laws of Political Servitude Relate to the Climate," and "Of Laws in the Relation They Bear to the Nature of the Soil." <http://www.constitution.org/cm/sol.txt>, accessed 17 March 2009. Montesquieu is perhaps the most well-known, yet hardly the first, writer to posit a correlation between climate and politics; Eduardo Cadava, in *Emerson and The Climates of History* (1997), for one, has traced the idea back to Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle. However, despite these early instances and the examples offered by multiple sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers, he states that these theories "blossom most fully in eighteenth century writers" and "perhaps most importantly" in Montesquieu's work (20).

“political servitude does not less depend on the nature of the climate than that which is civil and domestic” and that the fertility of the soil naturally encourages “subjection and dependence.” The fundamental assumptions under which such statements operate are, perhaps, not worth investigating in much detail. More intriguing is Montesquieu’s statement that the presence of slavery (or liberty) is “an effect which springs from a natural cause.” Though such musings do reflect, as Loriggio terms it, a “rigid positivist determinism,” in which individual action and effort is determined by the conditions under which the subject lives, they can also indicate “a more loose and more complex interactive symbiosis between individual and ecosystem” (*Regionalism Reconsidered* 14). In other words, though Enlightenment climatological discourse outlined a perhaps unsatisfactory one-to-one correspondence between natural causes and political effects, the concept that the land acted in manifold and often mysterious ways upon the ideals of its people in an unquantifiable manner proved remarkably persistent. Certainly, it appeared prominently in such 20<sup>th</sup>-century political regionalist texts as Euclides da Cunha’s *Os Sertões* (1902) and C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* (1938). In fact, in the first half of the twentieth century, it was still to some extent acceptable to attribute the literary portraits of particular regions and their inhabitants to the contours of those regions’ geographies, as Melvin J. Vincent claimed in a 1936 article, stating that regionalism was in part “the resultant product” of a particular regional society as that society has been “influenced by the physical environment of that region” (Mazel 336).<sup>20</sup> Or, more bluntly, Mary Hunter Austin’s 1932 essay, in *English Journal*, decrying “the general American inability” to conceive of subjective identity as largely “arising, as

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<sup>20</sup> Certainly the concept of geographical determinism played some role in the functioning of Agrarian and Neo-Agrarian thought during this period as well.



people truly and rudely say, in our ‘guts,’ the seat of life and breath and heartbeats” (Mazel 263).

Such arguments would seem commensurate with the culmination of 19<sup>th</sup>-century ethnological sciences, or at least with the twilight of U.S. naturalism, and as such, in some capacity, seem relics of less complex knowledge schemes. Yet, these grounds for future discussions of fetishized means of relation between the individual and his or her environment have proved useful for more recent criticism as well. As recently as 2002, in *South to a New Place*, Scott Romine has noted that “traditional” conceptions of regionalism imply “a kind of geographical determinism; a regional text is assumed to display certain characteristics deriving from place” (27). While Romine is hardly a neo-determinist himself, I might remark that his contention seems less to insist upon the obsolescence of direct geographical correlates for social behaviors than to suggest that those same behaviors still carry some weight, dialogically created as they may be. The persistence of determinism is even more strongly felt in Caribbean studies, which has long labored to recollect, as Handley and DeLoughray write, a “human history” buried by the “tremendous tropical indifference of the Caribbean environment” (*Caribbean Literature and the Environment* 3).

More than virtually any region, in fact, the Caribbean has labored to banish, or else redeploy, the onus of climatological determinism, while simultaneously (and paradoxically) lending credence to the same.<sup>21</sup> In almost the same breath that Handley and DeLoughray enunciate the tension between the turmoil of history and its backdrop of

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<sup>21</sup> This conflict persists in the touristic mass-market rhetoric surrounding Caribbean locales, which portray each of the islands (seemingly without discrimination) as defined by a leisure that the climate seems to naturally encourage. See Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*.

perpetual effacement, they decry the contention of Enlightenment-era thinkers that “the fertility of the tropics ‘retards the progress of nations towards civilization’ and degenerates ‘intellectual faculties,’” calling such concepts denigrating “colonial hierarchies” (7). No less troublesome are Walcott’s repeated references to the same determinisms, his comments that “tropical islands, of course, have one climate and should produce a common temperament in their people,” and that Caribbean poetics constitute “an aesthetic based on vegetation,” producing, like the South, “convoluted,” “Baroque” literary works owing to its “thick and rich” soil (*Caribbean Literature and the Environment* 54, Baer 91-92). Admittedly, Walcott’s words certainly carry some ironic (not to say self-deprecating) tones, as when, in *Omeros*, he suggests that: “a climate / as monotonous as this one could only produce / from its unvarying vegetation flashes / of a primal insight like those red-pronged lilies / that shot from the verge, that their dried calabashes / of fake African masks for a fake Achilles” (*Omeros* 229).<sup>22</sup> Whether ironic or sincere, however, it seems clear that the Enlightenment discourses to which I have alluded continue to exert influence over the manner in which the region is imagined.

The first regionalist texts thus dealt either with the myriad (and, often, nebulous) ways in which the region “cultivated” its inhabitants or how it transformed, again in ways that were not always easily definable, its immigrants, visitors, and tourists. Witness Robinson Crusoe, who metamorphoses from a faithless, befuddled layabout to an exemplary man of reason and religion as a result of his island years. Less overt but no less invested in the same paradigm were the later Romantic discourses on the *locus mundi*

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<sup>22</sup> Lance Callahan has also noted Walcott’s belief that, to some extent, “cultures are originated ‘by the force of natural surroundings’” (*In the Shadows of Divine Perfection* 54). Callahan is citing Walcott’s essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” (1974).

and, still later, the conflict in the naturalistic works of Norris, Dreiser, and London, among others, who placed their characters in a delicate balance between instinctual and rational impulses. Yet, even Norris stated that his interest in San Francisco stemmed not from a fascination to catalogue local materials or to expose the manifold corruptions he found there but from “the desire to capture what he described as an ‘indefinable air’ that gave San Francisco a distinct character” (*Regionalism Reconsidered* x). Even if, in these works, the subject is wholly the product of his or her environment (although this is seldom the case), the process by which they have *become* that product is fundamentally mystified.

### **3. Regionalism need not be confined to rural locales.**

Of the critical axioms regarding regionalism I have cited thus far, by far the most persistent are the assertions that regionalism’s proper bailiwick is the rural locale and, as such, the movement primarily concerns itself with, as Cleanth Brooks writes, “the minority culture of the province” combating “the dominant rootless civilization” (“regionalism in American Literature” 35).<sup>23</sup> Such an argument rests primarily on the historical aspects of regionalism, arising as it did against the backdrop of large social and technological developments, most prominently industrialization and urbanization.

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<sup>23</sup> I have selected Brooks’s statement from many similar claims owing to his relentless championing, especially as regards Faulkner, of rural (and usually socially conservative) values over the dire influence of the city. Brooks certainly shares this sentiment with the Nashville Agrarians, who have contributed much to the endurance of the conceptual urban / rural divide. However, the idea itself is much older; Cronon has traced “the belief that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living” to Rousseau, while Leo Marx suggests an incipience in earlier conceptions of the Great Chain of Being (*Uncommon Ground* 76).

Jordan, for example, follows long-standing theses of literary modernism when he notes the “divisive force” of Great War technologies that “alienat[ed] individuals and communities from the land they inhabited,” and the contrastingly beneficent forces of regionalism that offered an “antidote” to these disjunctions (*Regionalism Reconsidered* xi). Leigh Anne Duck has traced the regenerative aspects of regionalism further, into the late nineteenth century, during which the region came to be identified with “roots and stasis” as opposed to “national economy and culture,” the realm of the “changing metropolitan centers” (*The Nation’s Region* 59). The watchwords for such historical images of regionalism are “roots,” “stasis,” and, above all, “balance,” with the implication that overwhelming modernization disrupts global distribution of urban and rural areas, or, more to the point, the values associated with those areas.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, regionalism, even when deployed with such regenerative phraseology (which we might deem “pastoral” regionalism in its recourse to an untainted Golden Age of nature), is less a “counter” or “antidote” to modernizing forces than it is a mediation of those forces. Even regional narratives that seem to exist entirely apart from, and are thus innocent of, the values of the city by representing locales that, Foote claims, “seemed to have ‘escaped’ the dubious improvements of a stronger and more integrated urban economy” are nonetheless conscious of the act of escape and the presence of something to escape *from* (3). Even pastoral regionalism, which *seems* to offer solace or remediation for urban life, is nonetheless as concerned with that life as narratives that deal explicitly with the city. “‘Balance and equilibrium’ for the nation,” Duck writes, is

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<sup>24</sup> Such a rhetorical move likely owes much to another of the historical characteristics of regionalism, the notion that life in moderately rural (though not wild) locales encouraged an ideal “middle state” between urban ratiō and rural irratiō. See *The Machine in the Garden*, 100-101.

less a question of a unilateral, unequal battle between rural and urban settings than it is a question of “providing rural areas with productive access to modernization and cosmopolitan approaches to social life, and urban areas with access to ecological and cultural values that might counter the overwhelming influence of capitalism” (59). In the same vein as these spurious “escapes” from urbanity I might place treatises on the U.S. frontier which elide the civilizing and expansionist imperatives of the same in favor of a “wild freedom” that offers “a highly attractive natural alternative to the ugly artificiality of modern civilization,” as Cronon has it (*Uncommon Ground* 78). The irony of such representations, naturally, is that “wilderness came to reflect the very civilization its devotees sought to escape” both practically and ideologically, owing to its unique tailoring to fit the expectations imposed upon it by individuals (*Uncommon Ground* 78).<sup>25</sup> Far from exerting a universally salubrious influence upon those overweary of city streets, then, ostensibly regenerative regions simply provide a space against which the despair of those streets can be reflected. Positing an “outside” space unaffected by the march of modernity is essentially an attempt to sequester that modernity within its most simplistic, overt symbols: the skyscraper, the automobile, and the locomotive.

It seems clear that there is at least some *thematic* distinction to be made between regional literature that overtly attempts to be a counter to the forces of urbanity (which we might call “pastoral” regionalism) and that which does not seem to be concerned with the urban / rural distinction at all. This is not a common idea among contemporary

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<sup>25</sup> This irony is only part of what Cronon calls “the trouble with wilderness,” which is as much of an ontological as a practical problem. Cronon argues that wilderness only fulfills “unspoiled” roles for those who have essentially already been spoiled by civilization, since “the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land” (80).

critics, who largely attempt to make *all* regionalism pastoral. Jordan has stated that it is “clear” that “regionalism is more than just nostalgic ‘local color’” and “comprises a dynamic interplay of political, cultural, and psychological forces” (*Regionalism Reconsidered* ix). Yet, the notion that regionalism is little more than, as Denis Donoghue writes, “a theory of pastoral” that “offers even cruel people the paradigm of a new beginning, in which they learn a language not the vernacular, not native but chosen, a lover’s secret idiom,” has been remarkably difficult to shake (*Place in American Fiction* 143).<sup>26</sup> Such approaches are strikingly similar to Marx’s writing on the pastoral, which is “generated by an urge to withdraw from civilization’s growing power and complexity,” offering “an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural,” a sentiment that seems, in relation to more contemporary schemes of the many facets of regionalism, almost quaint (9).<sup>27</sup>

It is not immediately clear why the region, if it need not necessarily be confined to a given *setting*, must absolutely conform to a given *theme*. Moreover, though I have noted already that regionalism involves a fetishization of locales, in literature in particular it would be impossible to regard any of the values in question as emanating from any source beyond that of the regional subject. When authors write of values that

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<sup>26</sup> Jordan’s statement is essentially a reprisal of his perspective in *New World Regionalism* (1994), in which he writes: “it seems increasingly clear that regionalism means more than just ‘local colour’; it involves a dynamic interplay of political, social, and psychological forces, which in turn impart an aesthetic tension to textual representations of regionalism” (3).

<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that its primitivist or regenerational aspects render pastoralism irrelevant to theory; for example, Judith Fetterley has written that, by dissolving binary oppositions and destabilizing the definition of centers and margins, pastoral regionalism can serve feminist aims: “Regionalist writers provide a different model of story-telling. Constructing women as story-tellers, they also present story-telling as an activity designed to include rather than exclude, to heal rather than harm” (Fetterley 891).

are “inherent” to the landscape, it should be clear to the attentive reader that said values are anything but. Rather, they arise only through the medium of the author, and even then, usually, only through long (and deeply subjective) contemplation. Traditional “place” theory recognizes this subjectivity as essential to the creation of place in literature. Yet, by a common sleight-of-hand, it oftentimes elides the subjective origins of fetishized place by regarding mystification as proceeding organically from the land itself, rather than from the mind of the author. This is evident from even a cursory reading of Eudora Welty’s “Place in Fiction” (1956), often regarded as *the* quintessential statement on the subject.<sup>28</sup> Welty’s essay would at first seem to be the epitome of appeals to “natural” organic value in the land itself, a reactionary, even Neo-Agrarian, championing of the value of good, honest soil when compared to the godless metropolis; Welty claims that a sense of place, “as essential to good and honest writing as a logical mind,” needs “the warm hard earth underfoot, the light and lift of air, the stir and play of mood, the softening bath of atmosphere that give the likeness-to-life that life needs” (128). However, on closer inspection, “Place in Fiction” is less a reactionary call for a desubjectified agrarian aesthetic than an exposition of the act of writing about place as fundamentally subjective and fabulative. Welty opens her essay by noting that art “is

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<sup>28</sup> Significantly, Welty discards the term “regional” as “careless,” claiming that it “fail[s] to differentiate between the localized raw material of life and its outcome as art,” and suggesting that it is altogether “an outsider’s term” having “no meaning for the insider who is doing the writing, because as far as he knows he is simply writing about life” (132). Though the meaning of the region, especially in literary circles, has changed considerably since “Place in Fiction,” Welty’s statement would nonetheless seem to reveal a deliberate naïvete toward the task of the writer; even if authors believe that they are “simply writing about life,” they are nonetheless aware of existing frameworks of regional identities. Though Welty herself may not have adopted an explicit orientation toward “regional” issues, she was nonetheless aware of “The South” as a regional construction, and “Mississippi” even more so. Claiming an aesthetic independent of regionalism does not preclude the existence of literary regions.

never the voice of a country; it is an even more precious thing, the voice of the individual” and that place itself is concerned with the local because “*feelings* are bound up in place” (117, 118, emphasis in original). Welty’s emphasis on *feeling*, like her later insistence that place must mirror the author’s “intent and meaning,” reveals the literary region as less “natural” and more constructed, a product of deeply individuated writerly impulses (122). For Welty, the writer must employ the “illusion” that the created literary region is equivalent with the objective world, working “in a state of constant and subtle and unfooled reference between the two,” though the ultimate product is pure artifice: “though [the author] must know all, again he works with illusion” (125, 122).<sup>29</sup>

We must therefore regard any “inherent” or “natural” moral or ethical values represented in literature as endemic to a particular region as ultimately authorial attributions. The same landscape that is vivid and evocative in one account may become hostile and abstract in another. The bestowal of regenerative values to a particular landscape must be simply another fetishization of that landscape, with the ostensibly “intrinsic” origins of those values being merely an intensification of, rather than an exception to, this axiom; nature, and the regenerative valences attributed thereof, is simply what its observers make of it. Such, at least, was William Cronon’s central contention in *Uncommon Ground*, which caused considerable unrest in ecocritical circles upon its publication in 1995 owing to its suggestion that, *contra* the long-standing environmentalist assumption that nature is “an uncontested and transcendent category

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<sup>29</sup> Welty’s brief mention of the “history” of literary regionalism is also surprisingly similar to my own denotation of it as unspecified fetishization of landscape; she claims that, “from the dawn of man’s imagination, place has enshrined the spirit; as soon as man stopped wandering and stood still and looked about him, he found a god in that place; and from then on, that was where the god abided and spoke from if ever he spoke” (123). The unnamed “god” of Welty’s primordial regionalism still persists in many forms.



whose appeal is so compelling that no right-thinking person could resist it,” we might better conceive of it as “a human idea, with a long and complicated cultural history which has led different human beings to conceive of the natural world in very different ways” (Cronon 20). Yet, perhaps all that the dissonance between Cronon’s repeated claims that nature is “profoundly a human creation” and, for example, Helen Tiffin’s insistence that “the ontological existence of nature-in-itself is an indisputable fact” shows is that it is impossible to take any claims of overarching values attributed to nature for granted, even the seemingly unimpeachable axiom that “nature” as a category does not depend on these claims (Cronon 69, *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* 199). The ostensibly curative aspects of the region are no exception.

What of the claims that regionalism offers a means of *collective* atonement or recompense for large societal ills and sins? I am thinking particularly of the discourse between regionalism and postcolonialism, in which the region, and, more to the point, the reverence held by the subject (assumed, in this case, to be aligned with the colonized) toward it, serves as a balm to the violence, to paraphrase Said, inflicted upon it by the vicissitudes of nationalism. Such, at least, seems to be the perspective of Dainotto, whose *Place in Literature* offers regionalism as an alternative to “imagined—let alone imposed—‘colonial’ identity” (6-7). Theorizing that regionalism and history are fundamentally opposed, he snidely prophesizes that, “whereas history can accept no coexistence but only brutal selection—what, in a word, is called ‘hegemony’—the literature of place and region will transform the entire planet into a happy coexistence of

different regional traditions, each valid in its ‘place’” (15).<sup>30</sup> Dainotto’s skepticism is, perhaps, welcome given the often offensively glowing endorsements of regionalism in contemporary criticism, but he flattens the playing field too much when he defines regionalism, again ironically, as “a pastoral sensibility untouched by the evils of history and sheltered from the latter within the ‘boundaries of some sort’ of place” (9). To confuse pastoral and nonpastoral regionalism is one thing, but to claim that the region is designed to salve the wound of traumatic colonial history on the one hand and portray it as a zone ignorant of the influence of that same history on the other seems little more than an endorsement of intentional amnesia. However, amnesia is anathema to the regionalist writer. Paul Lyons notes that the regional “struggle[s] of peoples committed to place in specific locations” have histories in and of themselves, and the “identification of Americans with region” is hardly a “recent phenomenon” (*South to a New Place* 98). Even setting aside the historical legacy of regionalism, however, Dainotto’s claim that regionalism’s response to postcolonialism essentially amounts to an effacement of history seems to belie the inherently archival nature of such responses. Since societies do not author texts collectively, it falls to the colonial and postcolonial subject, with his or her individual apprehension of the fetishized valences of the landscape, to invest that landscape with historical valences, even if those values, like Glissant’s “mystical” ecology, are fundamentally exclusivist. Thus, to study the author is, implicitly, to study the deeply subjective web of moral, aesthetic, ethical, and historical values conferred by that author upon his or her home region. If the postcolonial / regionalist text *does* enact the collective remuneration that Dainotto claims, these values likely emanate from

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<sup>30</sup> Note that this is a *very* different conclusion than Glissant reaches, in that the latter’s “mystical” ecology is designed to create a *different* form of hegemony.

particular choices on the part of the author, not some nebulous amnesiac imperative of atonement.

#### **4. Regionalism is a style, not a theme**

This thesis should follow naturally from the principles I have thus far established—the lack of a governing theme or set of themes for regionalism, the relativism of the locale, and the subjectivity of its modes of expression. But the term “regionalism” is almost universally acknowledged to denote thematics not stylistics, creating the ideal of a work of literature that is concerned with or “tied to” the region rather than dealing with a variable subject in a regional *manner*. By a “regional manner,” I do not mean to invoke the picaresque and vernacular “horse sense” that allows the regional subject, despite his or her many wanderings, to discover that their original (and often vilified) hamlet contains all of the answers to life’s mysteries but, rather, to suggest that regionalism as an entity is less topical than methodological, the “certain way” of reading and relating of Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* (1997), for example. Benítez-Rojo defines Caribbean cultural production as founded on “performance,” or “the execution of a ritual” in which the “certain way” in which actions are performed is more important than the thematic focus of those actions (11). I wish to make something of the same argument in regards to the necessity of a regionalist style in general. As I have already suggested, thematic and locational criteria for defining the region are fundamentally inadequate, and to avoid abandoning the term to circular discursivity, we must uncover aspects of regionalism that do not depend entirely on subjective judgments.

Casting regionalism as primarily a *style* has some critical precedent. Scott Romine, for example, has implicitly made something of the same argument in his suggestion that “‘sense of place’ often seems to imply being located not merely in a distinctive region, but in a distinctive way” (*South to a New Place* 23).<sup>31</sup> Romine’s conception of regionalist styles largely derives from reactionary, postnational assertions of enduring regional identity that attempt to create “a condition of pure textuality impervious to material, ideological, or even cultural content,” such as the popularity of grits among upper-middle class consumers (37).<sup>32</sup> Grits, readily available in almost any supermarket across the United States, carry little remaining regional currency. It is possible to eat them ignorant of any of the associations with the South that they hold, yet, when consumed in a certain *way*, that is, with a certain self-awareness (ironic or not) of their historical regional affiliation, is a means of performing and thus reifying Southernness.

In the same camp are Amy J. Elias’s comments on *Southern Living*, the “stylization” of which she believes “substitutes for heritage as an index of southern identity,” linking southerners to the South not by “family history,” “residence,” or “employment” but by participation in a Southern “lifestyle” (*South to a New Place* 257). In this manner, as with Romine’s regionalism within the context of widespread consumer

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<sup>31</sup> In something of the same vein, Dainotto has made the case for regionalism as a mode of reading rather than a self-contained genre, claiming that regional reading, so to speak, is a strategy for mining existing pastoral works in search of curative values that might counteract the assorted crises of modernity. See *Seeking the Region*, pp. 6.

<sup>32</sup> For Romine’s meditations on whether these forms of “content” still exist vis-à-vis the South, see his most recent work, *The Real South* (2008). Note that much of Romine’s theoretical underpinning is derived from Benedict Anderson’s assertion that communities are distinguished less by any objective criteria than by the “style” in which they are imagined.

culture, it becomes possible to *be* Southern independently of Southern locationisms or identity politics. Though both Romine and Elias's ideas are deeply rooted in the specificities of the era of globalization inasmuch as they deal with stylistic regionalism as a response to the dissolution of regional specificity that endures such vicissitudes as the increased relativity and subjectivity of globalized regions, their ideas have broader applications to literary regionalism. If we are to forge a meaning of the term "regionalist" that relies neither on exclusivist thematic or material guidelines, nor fundamentally vague interpretive strategies that are construed as communal, we must turn to the realm of stylistics.

The benefits of a stylistic definition of regionalism should now be clear: making the term applicable to a broad range of narratives, rather than to those that deal only with a narrowly conceived (yet never entirely clearly defined) topic circumvents the pitfalls of both pastoralist proclamations of regionalism's regenerative properties and its genre-based confinement to previous centuries. Perhaps the most profitable means of describing the nature of regionalism would be to place it in an analogous relationship to realism, insofar as they are both means of conceiving of the world in literature without any specific designation of what part of the world is thus implicated.<sup>33</sup> Loriggio has made something of the same proposal in *Regionalism Reconsidered*:

to locate each of the regions of a world within that world would entail various operations, operations of the kind required to locate each of the

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<sup>33</sup> Of course, "realism" is used to denote both a certain set of stylistic guidelines and, on occasion, a certain historical genre; though it is possible to consider regionalism in the same manner, there have already been a number of skilled studies of regionalism in its capacity as a genre, such as Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (2001) or Richard Lehan's *Realism and Naturalism* (2005). Although these influences are inescapable, I am more concerned with showing how regionalism operates independently of its historical generic denotations.

worlds within the realms of possibility. As many devices are needed to establish the singularity of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County as are needed to properly represent the life of another planet in fiction, or the 'realness' of realistic, actual-like worlds, or the 'fictionality' of a fictional world, or the 'supernaturalness' of supernatural worlds. (9)

Loriggio's "operations," though the term is somewhat indeterminate, I take to suggest an agglomeration of detailed mannerisms, intricate settings, and historical backdrop, among other things, that act to create a sort of regional ideal ("singularity") in Faulkner's fiction. What is at stake is not necessarily making Yoknapatawpha *real* per se, but infusing it with sufficient descriptive scope and depth to endow the area with some sort of additional significance, the same value-added significance we have seen at play in other accounts of regionalism.

The regionalism/realism comparison may merit further qualification, as the two may appear, on the surface, to be almost diametrically opposed, considering regionalism's insistence upon intangible, invisible values and realism's exclusion of the same. At worst, this comparison might obscure both categories by suggesting that one ill-defined style might be akin to another, since one of the few areas of agreement among critics of realism seems to be that the phenomenon is impossible to formulate without "controversy," and thus remains "a rather vague term," inextricably tied up in "the central question of what constitutes reality" (*In Defence of Realism* 189, *Concepts of Realism* 1, *Realism* 3). Substituting the term "region" for "reality," however, results in a situation not unlike that currently suffered by the term "regionalism." Historically speaking, realism, like regionalism, rose to prominence in parallel to natural science owing to its promise, as Jennifer Carol Cook suggests, to, "like science, employ disinterested rationality to represent life as it really was" (*Machine and Metaphor* 3). Also like

regionalism, realism as a genre has been cast as somewhat “outmoded,” exploited, as Raymond Tallis bitterly proclaims, by “talentless millionaire hacks who sell their worthless products in millions.”<sup>34</sup> Though realism’s insistence upon objective, quantifiable reality seems at first difficult to square with regionalism’s intangible values, it may be worth recalling that many regionalist texts make the same claim even as they fetishize their chosen regions, and even the most rigorously objective realist texts do not constitute, as Jane Thraikill argues, “photographic representations of a real world” so much as “condensations and expansions of human thought, sentience, and experience” (*Affecting Fictions* 26).<sup>35</sup> Realist texts, like regionalist texts, must incorporate both subjective and objective representation.

If the reader is prepared to grant what I have claimed above, to wit, that regionalism is fundamentally a stylistic methodology that operates parallel to, yet somehow in conjunction with, realism, it is essential to consider what a regionalist style might look like. As a guiding principle, it should not produce too much disagreement to suggest that the regionalist style lays claim to localized (and ultimately privileged) structures of knowledge. In their most primitive form, these structures adumbrate regional landmarks, traditions, speech patterns, and material culture.<sup>36</sup> More essential

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<sup>34</sup> *In Defense of Realism*, pp. 1. Tallis is, I should note, employing a deliberately exaggerated, somewhat dated parodic depiction of the proliferation of realist styles; however, he purposefully opens his study with this hyperbolic description in order to show that stylistic realism need not be used in service of this ostensible aim.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan Simmons, writing on Charles Chesnutt, has come to something of the same conclusion concerning stylistic realism: “some degree of fidelity to facts—both as recorded and as perceived—seems minimally to be required... flights of fancy, while not strictly excluded, are subject to suspicion” (*Chesnutt and Realism* 4).

<sup>36</sup> Witness the interviews with Faulkner on the University of Virginia radio station in which the interviewer grills the author on the meanings of several local terms (*Faulkner in the University* 125-127).

than the specificity of these knowledge systems, however, is their representation as self-sustaining phenomena. That is to say, they are not called into being *ex nihilo* by the author and do not exist dependent upon the functioning of the narrative—the author may describe, or even create, the region, but the region itself is larger than the artist’s creation in that its distinctive features persist beyond the narrative’s conclusion.<sup>37</sup> In this, regionalism shares even more ground with realism, which relies upon, as Dario Villanueva claims, “a univocal reality which precedes the text” (*Theories of Literary Realism* 15). The regionalist narrative presents the subject, be it a character or the author, as a participant in, rather than the supreme arbiter of, the execution of that narrative.<sup>38</sup>

This stylistic criterion for regionalist narratives further refines my definition of the category, for it is wholly possible for a literary work to fetishize a locale while constraining that locale to authorial control. Perhaps the best example of this quasi-regionalist style is that of travel literature, in which the landscape possesses values beyond the purely descriptive, yet those values are confined to the psyche of the traveler.

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<sup>37</sup> This assertion has seen considerable play in Faulkner studies in particular, in which critics have been fond of taking the author’s Yoknapatawpha works, in sum, as a holistic portrait of a region. John Lewis Longley, Jr *The Tragic Mask: A Study of Faulkner’s Heroes* (1957), for example, claims that “the Compson saga is greater than the sum of the significance of the individual Compsons. Their family history in turn is symbolic of something in the larger corpus of Faulkner’s entire work. Even the most casual reader of Faulkner soon comes to realize that the novels and stories form an interlocking and interconnecting whole; that they reinforce and complement each other” (223). This is a common apprehension of Faulkner’s work.

<sup>38</sup> This claim may create some anxiety in the reader as regards Faulkner in particular, owing to his much-vaunted status as “sole owner and proprietor” of Yoknapatawpha, and his claim that he could move the residents of his “postage stamp” of land around as if he were God. Yet no single one of Faulkner’s narratives provides an omniscient view of his fictional county; the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha and the behaviors of its citizens are not wholly encompassed by any text. Rather, each novel provides a different cross-section of the county, and even when taken together, these sections do not add up to a whole; the region is larger than itself.



Henry James's *The American Scene* (1907), for one, attributes "some mystic virtue to the very name of Virginia: this instinctive imputation constituting by itself, for that matter, a symptom of a certain significance," a significance that is perhaps not unfamiliar to later critics of Southern literature, yet one that steadfastly refuses to reveal itself, presenting instead "shallow vistas" and "loose perspectives" that are "as sadly simple as the faces of the blind" (266). Only when the author labors to uncover it does it manifest itself, leading James to conclude that the "American view" requires an intelligent consciousness, "like a fond investor," to "spend on it, boldly, ingeniously, to make it pay" (267). Only when this happens do "a hundred grand historic connections" establish themselves "quite thrillingly" (266).<sup>39</sup> Though such a work clearly deploys regionalist ideas inasmuch as it fetishizes landscape, it does not necessarily conform to a regionalist style.

We might place, in the realm of poetry, Pound's *Cantos*, William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, and Charles Olson's *Maximus* in this same vein. The landscape in these works reveals its fetishized valences only after, and perhaps as a result of, sustained poetic effort on the part of the author (à la M.H. Abrams). Furthermore, once the work plays itself out, the regions that prove evocative for that work fade away; they are inconsequential in comparison to the significance that they hold for the author. For these reasons, the primary narrator of the regionalist text is almost always a native of the region, not a visitor or tourist. While it is essential for the native to conceive of the region's continued self-sustenance and self-perpetuation, the visitor is more concerned

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<sup>39</sup> No less could be said of Romine's claim, in *The Real South* (2008), that travel narratives by Tony Horwitz and V.S. Naipaul realize that "recovering the South's deep structure requires the filtration of global market pressures" (62).

with the immediacy of experience, and the functioning of the region as it relates to them during the duration of their stay. This is, roughly, the dichotomy outlined by Elizabeth Spencer, substituting the terms “place” and “landscape” for the “place / space” dichotomy I have already noted:

When place turns into landscape does something weaken? Yes, it does. To speak of a landscape means the speaker is no longer in it. A farm owner never speaks of his property as landscape. It may be one, but only to a visitor, or someone who used to live there (*Place in American Fiction*, 63).

Duration, or residency in Spencer’s estimation, is not a prerequisite of regionalist narratives, but in order for the fetishization of landscape contained within that work to be apprehended as more than a “fancy” or “impression” on the part of the author by its audience, a significant amount of time spent in the region (ostensibly to establish a “connection” with it) is a general regionalist rule. What is essential, however, is that the process of fetishization manifests itself as natural, that the regionalist style elides its status as style.

## **5. Regionalism is opposed neither to nationalism nor to globalism.**

My final thesis might seem at first to be a contradiction of the edicts of one or more of my previous theses. After all, social and intellectual systems of organization based on “artificial” ephemerals (the boundaries of the nation state or economies of information) would logically appear to be at odds with models of self-identification based broadly on the relationship of the subject to absolute, deterministic elements congealed and shorthanded in references to “the land.” Indeed, even the most basic configurations of regionalism as a genre *or* as a style usually take *a priori* the fact that the region, whatever it might encompass, is not contiguous with the nation. Leigh Anne Duck notes

that “even studies focused on regional transformation” have traditionally positioned the United States South “in a different framework from national or global change, elucidating a specifically southern version of the tension between modernity and traditionalism” (9). The nation and the region, Duck suggests, require different interpretive schemata owing to their irreconcilable differences. Duck is not alone in this assertion. Barbara Ladd also attributes considerable importance to the origins of the word “regionalism” as a “response to the centralizing discourse of state-sponsored nationalism,” while Richard Gray has commented that the term is largely a measure of the extent of any given “deviation from the national norm” (*South to a New Place* 51, xiv). Others have cast the national / regional divide in the South particularly somewhat more unkindly, usually suggesting, with C. Vann Woodward, that “nationalism sweeps everything else before it,” leaving those with regional attentions “oppressed” by their own “unimportance” (Woodward 63).

Regionalism’s relationship with the forces of globalization has been no less troubled. Latter-day critical attention to Anderson’s ideas of “imagined” global communities and more recent cosmopolitan theories mark a decay in claims of regional “attachment” or “rootedness.” The immediate response to this decline of literary regionalist determinism might be to claim that nationalizing and globalizing forces have eroded or even somehow abolished regionalism on the whole, claiming, as Thomas Bontly does, that, as “the internet, the interstate, transcontinental air travel, and the culture they have spawned have all diminished our sense of purely regional identities,” the term itself carries strong connotations of obsolescence (*Place in American Fiction*, 201).

The U.S. South provides an intriguing perspective on this dichotomy in that it represents the U.S. region that has most vigorously (and violently) attempted to distinguish itself from a singular national identity. The relationship between Southern regionalism and U.S. nationalism has received more attention in criticism than virtually any regional/national dichotomy. Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, in *Locations of Literary Modernism* (2000), for example, have traced back to the Agrarians the notion that regional literatures centralize what U.S. national literature acts to decentralize: the existence of communal traditions, beliefs, and idioms (20). This is perhaps unsurprising; more unusual is the amount of attention devoted to the role of the South in its capacity as a region in the *formation* of U.S. nationhood. I am thinking in particular of Jennifer Rae Greeson's "The Figure of the South and the Nationalizing Imperatives of Early United States Literature" (1999) and Leigh Anne Duck's *The Nation's Region* (2006).<sup>40</sup> Of the two, Greeson's article is more overtly historicist in its claims, seeking to trace the formation of U.S. nationalization to an early "intra-national, regionally inflected symbolic geography, in which the terms 'South' and 'U.S.' formed an ideological juxtaposition," while Duck performs a more transhistorical survey of largely canonical Southern authors (211).<sup>41</sup>

While other critics have praised the manner in which regionalism ostensibly preserves cultural multiplicities within the broader framework of the ideologically unified

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<sup>40</sup> To be fair to some of the critics I have quoted in this section, I should note that Greeson and Ladd's ideas are becoming more common in academic discourse. For example, Gray supplements his comments on regional "deviation" from a national "norm" with the claim that those same deviation have, by a "strange but common irony," have "helped to determine" that norm (*South to a New Place* xiv).

<sup>41</sup> Dainotto's interest is also in how "regional fiction" came to represent "various sections of the consolidating nation" (4). It seems clear that regionalism bears more than a tangential relationship to the process of nationalization.

nation, for Greeson, the case is exactly the opposite: early U.S. nationalist rhetoric is able to assert unity specifically because it denounces certain practices of its regions.<sup>42</sup> Championing ideals of democratic subjecthood for the nation as a whole meant “differentiating the figure of the south from the new national idea writ large,” and subsequently “quarantining” the troublesome aspects of a colonial economy and society (slavery, exploitation, dynastic social structures, etc.) within the region of the South (213). This is an almost paradoxical view of the nation/region divide insofar as it suggests that the region *defines* the nation by not being *of* the nation. Given the idea of reciprocal national distinction that I have already mentioned, in which the nation is defined in part by what it is not, we are left with a model of the relationship between the nation and its regions that looks suspiciously like the relationship between one nation and others. The nation creates the region just as the region creates the nation, both entities existing in a syntagmatic, dialectic process of identity-formation.

But it will not suffice, as Duck argues, to simply make the nation congruent with the region, or the processes of nation-formation with the rise of the region. First, and most obviously, Duck notes that only the nation is associated with “central government,” while the regions contained within that nation do not constitute “bureaucratic political entities” (29).<sup>43</sup> Though Duck deploys some of the same strategies—and language—as Greeson when noting the tendency, for example, in twentieth-century audiences to

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<sup>42</sup> Certain critics have suggested that the theoretical cultural and ethnic diversity and tolerance advertised by a nation composed of differing regions may be spurious. George Handley, in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* (2000) has asserted that “U.S. culture perpetually blinds itself to difference by means of pretended incorporation of symbolic difference within its boundaries” (140).

<sup>43</sup> Duck notes that the Confederacy is the (brief) exception to this rule. It may be that sections of a nation at civil war may simultaneously occupy the epistemological categories of nation *and* region, but this may be too large a subject to address here.

“contain the abjection represented in [Erskine] Caldwell’s work both in the distanced space of the South and in a specifically regional time, one distinct from that of the modernizing nation,” or in noting the persistent nationalizing trope of the “backward South” that “presented racial violence and disfranchisement as the distinct domain of an anachronistic region,” her aims differ significantly (94-95, 215). Though Duck acknowledges the old dichotomy between the “backward South” and the “enlightened nation,” she also notes that this model does not hold up under scrutiny, failing to “incorporate a conceptual structure for assessing an ongoing conflict between prominent cultural and political models of national affiliation” (3). The final term—affiliation—is key to Duck’s argument, and though she somewhat uneasily acknowledges that such an approach might serve to “idealize regional cultures,” she contends that ideological constructions of region/nation distinction must necessarily rely upon “the idea that the nation-state and its regions mobilize fundamentally different and temporally coded forms of affiliation” (4-5). Though these differing “modes” need not necessarily be harmonious, they also need not be oppositional. The most profitable means of regarding the relationship between nation and region, then, may be one of symbiosis: while the region relies on the nation to govern general *coded* means of affiliation, as well as, I may venture to say, overarching moral and ideological systems (such as democracy), the nation relies on the region to embody *uncoded* patterns of affiliations against (or through) which it may define itself.

I have already spoken, at the beginning of this chapter, of the intersection of regionalism and globalization. However, in light of my discussion of regionalism and nationalism, it may be worthwhile to ask briefly whether these two processes do not share

something of the same relationship, with the region to some sense creating the globe, which in turn partitions and defines the region. Globalization theory, in conjunction with postmodernism, has been almost unanimous in its call for a return to the region. On the surface, the reasoning behind this is simple. As Mike Featherstone notes in *Global Culture* (1990), the dismantling of Lyotardian metanarratives that accompany postmodernism implicitly encourages a new focus on localized truths (2). In the same vein, Anthony Giddens's *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) states that the very definition of globalization is that of the institution of new webs of influence between local and global events (64). Such a configuration emphasizes seemingly scattered points of reference, yet each of these points are indivisible regions in themselves. And, of course, recent years have seen a profusion of interest in local commerce and activism—the possibility of, as the slogan goes, thinking globally and acting locally.

It must be said, however, that even given these axioms, concerned as they are with the possibility of profitable interchange between globalism and regionalism, the relationship between the two is generally represented as adversarial. Scott Romine, for instance, in *The Real South* (2008), has noted in the titular region a “recursive retreat to the local” in order to combat “the homogenizing pressures of a global economy” (1). At first glance, it is indeed difficult to avoid regarding such abominations as mainstream country radio, NASCAR, and Larry the Cable Guy as anything other than polemic and somewhat hackneyed stabs at developing reactionary shibboleths to maintain the gap between regional culture and that of the nation as a whole. Yet, Romine's view is somewhat more optimistic. Though he notes that territorial regionalisms tend to rely on Benjaminian patterns of cultural reproduction insofar as they posit the destruction of

intangible regional qualities (such as we have already seen) by pernicious modern (or global) forces, he finds in those same forces the potential for reinventions of the region. He concludes by stating that regional “essences, central themes, and nationally resonant dramatic roles” do not become obsolete with the advent of new technologies, but rather become the new “materials out of which cultural reproduction proceeds, if in less totalizing ways than in more homogeneously territorial projects of culture” (233). In Romine’s interpretation, as with the discourses between regionalism and nationalism I have cited, as in, to return to an earlier thesis, the intersection of regionalism and modernism (or industrialism), we see ostensibly oppositional forces acting on regionalism in ways that are less destructive than transformative. The remainder of this chapter will concern itself with exploring the nature of such regional transformations.

### **1. Originatory Transformation**

Owing to their seemingly oppositional status, regionalist narratives have historically been deployed to combat the physical or ideological decentralization that accompanies globalizing forces. Glissant calls this means of regional transformation an effort to “reactivate” basic values of “tradition and abdication” while simultaneously “appealing to a withdrawal reflex” (*Poetics of Relation* 147). As Glissant makes clear, straightforward escapism is not the only way in which regionalism battles its ostensible demons. Rather than simply accept regionalist withdrawal from global empty centers, which, as I have already stated, is less a relationship of opposition than mediation, it may be more productive to suggest methods by which it reacts to and revises itself to incorporate ideological shifts over time, as essentialist and exceptionalist narratives decay



and the region realizes that its elaborately constructed fetishizations may not hold. This is not to imply that the regionalism that I have explored in the above sections is simply obsolete; on the contrary, fetishized landscapes continue to appear in literature both in their most traditional manifestations, as “auras,” “atmospheres,” or “feelings,” and in reinscriptions of their very old roles as mystified, “sacred” places. Foucault has noted these enduring significances in “Of Other Spaces,” suggesting that, even in the twentieth century, space is “still not entirely desanctified,” despite an existing “network of knowledge that enables us to delimit or to formalize it,” a network that, he claims, reaches back as far as Galileo (23). Foucault postulates that public and private space, family and social space, and leisure space and work space, as well as physical locations such as cemeteries, nursing homes, and hospitals, are “still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred” (23). The guiding principles of regionalism writ large that I have already explored are still well in place. Yet, this endurance does not obviate the drive of literature to maintain the regions that it fetishizes; if anything, it forces the process of that fetishization to seek different modes of operation that are not inscribed within social norms / state apparatuses. In short, Foucault’s sanctification is another means of normalizing space, establishing certain rules of occupancy, visitation, and behavior, yet the literary region thrives on exceptionalism, the concept that *this* region is unlike others, that it possesses certain ephemeral properties that make it unique. The categorization and standardization of globalized social spaces thus presents a distinct obstacle to literary regionalism.

The primary reaction of the region to these forces is schizophrenic. The region, threatened with the loss of its center—that is to say, its unique, intangible qualities—

frantically searches for other, more fortified, centers to appropriate.<sup>44</sup> In their most simplistic forms, these new centers are simply more isolated, more specific, and generally more resistant to change than their predecessors. The region, persistently threatened by soulless, devouring cultural agencies, simply retreats further into itself, further toward increasingly specific and locally coded forms of reference, Glissant's "withdrawal reflex." Romine suggests that regional difference is preserved through "multiple efforts to carve out symbolic territorialities of ever-increasing specificity" (230).<sup>45</sup> Although Romine's point is salient, I might remark that this strategy of vouchsafing regional distinction seems a bit like attempting to escape a sinking steamer by standing on the smokestack; to assert that any extant region is immune from the secularizing forces of science / modernity / globalization owing to its inviolable isolation or specificity is quixotic at best. Globalization, after all, proceeds by incorporating *all* regions, no matter how isolated or idiosyncratic, within common networks of exchange and information. If a particular region seems immune to these connections, it seems most likely that that region has simply not yet been globalized.<sup>46</sup> But Romine is not incorrect; his only error

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<sup>44</sup> The language I am using here is intentionally Derridean; a surprising quantity of studies of regionalism use deconstruction as their dominant theoretical framework. The character of most of these studies, if I may be permitted to anthropomorphize regionalism for a bit longer, is to suggest that regionalism is always already decentered, never confident in the boundaries or solidarity of its chosen region, and thus exhibits traits of Derridean *différance* insofar as it perpetually *is* what it *is not*. See Dainotto, pp. 11.

<sup>45</sup> It seems, in Romine's study, that this move is largely oppositional and reactionary. "Although Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn call for southern studies to look away from traditional boundaries toward other Souths—hemispheric, global, postcolonial—there remains no shortage of southern writers who look closer to home to micro-Souths that remain distinctive, exotic—even quaint" (155)

<sup>46</sup> The common axiom that globalizing forces are omnipresent and all-devouring is somewhat exaggerated; it is difficult, for example, to convince a resident of Coldfoot, Alaska (population 13) of the incipient arrival of Wal-Mart. Yet, while the hamlet may

is in not extending the aforementioned chain of ever-increasing specificity to the individual. The ultimate result of progressively microcosmic visions of literary regionalism is not a minute region but an indivisible, individuated apprehension of the region. In the originary mode of transformation, the site of fetishization moves from the region to the author, and the landscape does not produce or exude special significances; rather, they emanate from the author's unique apprehension of that landscape.

The return of regionalist focus to the author has attained prominence in recent years largely because this approach, unlike Romine's concentric escapism, allows for mediation of, rather than outright opposition to, the forces that are ostensibly destroying the region. Romine has found in Tony Horwitz's *Confederates in the Attic* (1998) and V.S. Naipaul's *A Turn in the South* (1989) a certain admiration for "the redneck, the tobacco farmer, Civil War reenactors, country music singers, and rebel flag warriors" owing to the fact that they "provide access to a foundational culture story" by "filter[ing] out disorganized data as white noise" (62).<sup>47</sup> As Romine's argument proceeds, it becomes evident that it is the role of the individual—implicitly, the author—to not only filter out this unnecessary data, but also to mine existing traditions for data that *is* relevant. "Closer inspection," he suggests in regards to Naipaul, will "ensure the legibility of the old frontiers and their identitarian effects" (82). What is most intriguing about Romine's examples is the fact that not *all* of the methods deployed by

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evade such forces for the time being, it would be myopic to claim that it is permanently *immune* to their influence.

<sup>47</sup> Romine's "white noise" is likely a nod to Delillo inasmuch as it signifies "global market pressures" that must be tuned out as a "preliminary move" to "excavating the real South" (62).

decentralization are necessarily threatening to the region; rather, the dichotomy of “harmful” and “harmless” elements of the same must be parsed by the individual, the author. Thus, the particularist mediation of extraregional encroachments is not a nullifying but a reappropriating force, adapting global elements for use within the region.

In making these claims, I do not wish to enact a return to the Joycean artist-priest, endowed with near-superhuman capacities of reason, perception, and cultural spokespersonship. Rather, I want to suggest that, in regards to regionalism, we might twin Barthes’s death of the author with what might be called the rise of the major figure, the writer who does not necessarily speak of the region with absolute authority (thus avoiding intentionalist mind-puzzles) but nonetheless is apprehended by a reading public *not strictly confined to the region* as representative, as Naipaul has acidly described Walcott in a recent essay, “a kind of model, in the eyes of people far away.”<sup>48</sup> The elevation of the regionalist author to this position is the first step in congealing, filtering, and ultimately validating the region itself, in essence creating a pliable (and fungible) region that can be integrated within the pressures of decentralizing forces.

The valorization of the literary artist, even if we take Shelley’s 1819 proclamation in “Defence of Poetry” that poets are the “unacknowledged legislators” of the world as an origin point, has a long history. However, I will largely be dealing with Faulkner for the remainder of this section, for some of the same reasons that I primarily dealt with the South in previous sections: the progress of Faulkner’s career, for one, reveals an intriguing dialectic between regional and national canon-formation. Faulkner also brings

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<sup>48</sup> “Caribbean Odyssey,” <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,2155514,00.html>, accessed 28 August 2007. Kreyling has explicated the concept of the major figure to some extent in regards to Faulkner in *Inventing Southern Literature*.

the issue of the endurance of the region to the forefront, since, as I will show, much of the critical interest in his work emanating from the South was designed to not only validate the region in the eyes of the nation, but ensure its continued legibility for years to come. This is no less true as regionalism responds to globalizing forces today than it was when regionalism was responding to modernization nearly eighty years ago in the writings of the Agrarians.

Of the general prominence of Faulkner in Southern literary studies, little enough need be said. When Frederick Hoffman wrote, in *The Art of Southern Fiction* (1967), that part of his concern was to “make room for more and younger writers by avoiding the ever-present temptation to concentrate upon the great genius of modern Southern writing, William Faulkner,” what is particularly notable is that then, in 1967, Faulkner was already the hegemon against which an established literary region felt the necessity of defining itself (162). It has been even easier for more recent authors, with the benefit of hindsight, to note Faulkner’s prominence within the Southern canon. Kreyling states concisely that “Faulkner said it all for southern literature,” given the “near-universal acknowledgment” of his aesthetic skill (*Inventing Southern Literature* xv). Even with forty intervening years between the state of Southern studies today and *The Art of Southern Fiction* and ten years between today and *Inventing Southern Literature*, it should produce little argument to claim Faulkner as the major figure of Southern literature, no matter how the boundaries of the field are marked.

But this is only the first step. The second is to elevate the status of the major figure’s work from being merely “representative” (bearing in mind the old regionalist divide between the purely representative, that is to say, mimetic, and the intangibly

valued) to being somehow “mythic” or “legendary.” For Faulkner, this critical precedent was set very early, in Malcolm Cowley’s *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), which made the case for the author as “an epic or bardic poet in prose,” and a “creator of myths that he weaves together into a legend of the South” (xxx). Cowley is hardly alone in this claim among both early and recent criticisms of his work. Among the former, perhaps the most pervasive instance is Rubin’s *Southern Renaissance* (1953), in which John MacLachlan, among others, suggests that there is “nothing” between the people of Yoknapatawpha and “the elemental forces of the universe” but as recently as Glissant’s *Faulkner, Mississippi* (2000), there is still a lingering “aura” of Faulkner’s works that elevates all of the minutiae of his life “to a state of splendid indifference, so that they transcended their origins” (Rubin 107, Glissant 14).<sup>49</sup>

This mythologizing of the author has several primary functions. First, it casts Faulkner—and, implicitly, the South—as an arbiter of the cultural values of both the region and the nation as a whole on account of being, as Mark Royden Winchell has said of Brooks’s criticism of Faulkner, “so rooted in a particular region that he was able to expose the shortcomings of the larger urban and commercial culture” (*Reinventing the South* 131). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the joining of Faulkner’s works to classical myth serves to bolster the integrity and endurance of one literary region with the cultural products of another. Such was certainly the case with *Southern Renaissance*, which borrows heavily from Allen Tate’s classicism (among other Southern authors) in

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<sup>49</sup> The volume in question (Rubin), it may be prudent to note, differs from contemporary criticism on Faulkner to the point of inspiring apoplexy. In particular, MacLachlan’s insinuation that, in Yoknapatawpha, “there is no segmentation, segregation, of caste, class, sex, of age from youth or male from female or white from black, to prevent a whole view of life as a whole [sic]” runs counter to more recent observations on Faulkner’s work (107).

suggesting the viability of Southern literature by likening it to particularly Greek literary styles. In that volume, Robert D. Jacobs claims that “tragedy, in its old sense” helps “tremendously” to explicate the “essential moral conflict” at the heart of “Faulkner’s legendry of the South” (173). Understanding classical forms, Jacobs hints, is essentially to understand Faulkner’s work, and vice versa; Faulkner becomes a canonical classic dramatist *post facto*. Neither does Jacobs hesitate to borrow from other historical origin points for Faulkner’s myth, suggesting that *Absalom, Absalom!* represents “the Renaissance ethos rather than the Greek” and making Thomas Sutpen symbolic of “Modern Man” (186). Through an appeal to universalized, historical, “mythic” modes of thought, by the channeling of those modes through the works of a single author, this tactic makes an argument for the endurance of the region.<sup>50</sup>

But even this does not plumb the extent of authorial fetishization, at least in regards to Faulkner. Sublimating the regionalist writer into a “mythmaker,” and the region into a place worthy of myth does not protect that region from demystifying forces; if anything, it primes it for a new identity as a “fallen” or “faded” place. Southern studies in particular have a long history of this form of representation. The region can better sustain itself by insisting, with the author as its proxy, that it is somehow immune to these forces; thus, the author himself becomes a figure beyond the influence of the demystifying forces of globalization, modernity, and even science. This may seem to be a ludicrous contention, especially as regards Faulkner; though the claim could be made that he was somewhat exempted from the technological and societal advances transpiring during his time (owing to his famous reclusivity) for at least *part* of his career, was he not

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<sup>50</sup> For a much more complete example of the “mythologizing” impulse in regards to a specific Faulknerian text, see Francis Lee Utley, *Bear, Man, and God* (1964).

still a metaphysical *subject*, to whom the laws of both social and natural science still applied?

Historical Southern criticism responds: not entirely. Kreyling denotes, with a heaping portion of irony, the “basic question” that “has always followed” Faulkner’s career: “how did this man write these books? Did God go back to the well again and plant a genius in north Mississippi in the first half of the twentieth century, as he had in Tuscany in the fifteenth?” (131). What seems to be a tongue-in-cheek extension of a Faulkner-Michelangelo comparison for Kreyling was a matter of some weight for earlier Southern critics. This argument was perhaps stated most concisely by Donald Davidson in his 1951 essay “Why the Modern South Has a Great Literature” and reprinted in his unambiguously titled *Still Rebels, Still Yankees* (1957), where it appeared as a challenge to entire rational thought systems: “suppose, then,” Davidson writes, “I turn to sociology and ask whether it can account for the appearance in Mississippi, of all places, of William Faulkner, in the three decades between 1920 and 1950” (162). The suggestion, of course, is that traditional, demystified explanatory schemes (such as sociology) cannot account for the peculiar type of genius that Mississippi conveyed upon Faulkner. Much of Davidson’s query can be written off as simple post-Agrarian reactionary bluster; in the same volume, he goes on to claim that North Carolina lags behind other Southern states in the production of great literature owing to the fact that it is “industrialized” and “fanatically liberal,” and gloats that, while the South has “produced William Faulkner,” for Northeastern critics to find a “comparable” author “they have to go to more backward times and read Henry James” (165).



The insinuation that Faulkner, and the South in general, has somehow exempted themselves from sociological explanative schemes has attracted some further attention. In *A Southern Renaissance*, Howard Odum readdressed Davidson's querying of Faulkner's Mississippian genesis as "a sort of specific corollary" to the imbalance between the South's production of "great literature" and its situation in the "lower quartiles" of the nation's "general socioeconomic culture" (84-85). However, Odum's argument amounts to little more than a valedictory refetishization of the Southern landscape, the "terrors" of its "quicksands," the looming "cedars and columned houses," behind which "anything can happen" (97). Eventually, Odum suggests that "Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha was symbol of frontier [sic], a frontier echoing both primitive and civilized heritage," and, given this profusion of ephemeral values, Davidson's query was "little more than rhetorical" (97). Odum's response to Davidson represents the ultimate stage of originatory transformation—given the overwhelming genius of the major figure, given the unique and "symbolic" regional conditions under which that figure arose, the petty complaints of demystification become immaterial.

Indeed, *Southern Renaissance* as a whole, beyond any traction that its actual arguments may lack, functions as an important artifact of originatory transformation. Kreyling marks the volume, in its 1953 context of the rise of organized study of Southern literature, the popularity of Faulkner, and widespread reinscription of Agrarian ideas, as a statement of the "cultural unity, longevity, and maturity" of the South as a whole (61). Certainly the book's editors were not shy about making this statement. Louis Rubin states in the introduction to the original edition his belief that it "provides the first reasonably thorough treatment of the literature of the modern South," and in the

introduction to the second (1965) edition, though admitting that many of the essays may have become “dated” or even “chauvinistic,” asserts that they are nonetheless “of the kind that endure,” and admits a certain “satisfaction” that “it stands up as well as it does twelve years after it first appeared” (v, ix). This is, in essence, the theoretical triumph of authorial fetishization over the denigrating influence of regionalism’s foes. After all, if Rubin is correct, the overriding, antisociological claims that the volume makes about Faulkner, based as they are upon intangible elements of the Southern region, constitute a strong statement on the “endurance” of the region. Though more recent critics have challenged the validity of originary transformation as a means of fostering the endurance of any particular region, the specific situation today as regards Faulkner can be fairly accurately summarized by Scott Romine’s anxious query, in 2002, as to whether southern literature can “survive indefinitely in a parasitic, parodic relation to the ur-host, ‘Faulkner’” and, implicitly, the question of whether “regionalist literature” can “endure” (*South to a New Place* 40). Romine concludes, somewhat unsatisfyingly, that “it is surely too soon to tell” but also hints that “reports of the South’s demise have been greatly exaggerated” (40). I would simply like to supplement Romine’s question by stating that, if the interpretive framework I have laid out here is viable, the set of values that critics have attached to Faulkner as the South’s “major figure” will have a direct bearing on the continuing unity and character of the region.

## **2. Epistemological Transformation**

The second mode of regional transformation that I would like to address overlaps with the first inasmuch as it seeks to redefine the criteria used by demystifying forces to

assert the dissolution of the region, yet its methodology is quite different. Instead of insisting upon the major figure's (and, implicitly, the region's) immunity to demystification as I have shown in regards to originatory transformation, epistemological transformation aims to change the way that the region is conceived by using the language and logic of that region's rivals, namely, the matrix of globalized, decentralizing forces that insist on a lack of regional determinism, with the aim of preserving the region's continued existence. Within the framework of globalization, this preservation largely becomes equivalent to fungibility; if the region can be quantified, revalued, and "traded" in a manner that preserves its original fetishized mystique, it becomes immune to global forces that seek to commodify (and, implicitly, destroy) that mystique. An early sign of the rise of these tactics at the end of the second world war was the mid-twentieth-century proliferation of area studies, the grouping by academia of regions into what the editors of *Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World* (2003) call "relatively large geographic regions that possessed some cultural, historic, and linguistic coherence," with the eventual aim of what Alan Tasman calls the ability to "know, analyze, and interpret foreign cultures" (2, 184). The promise of area studies was the dispensation of globally relevant data on various world regions without impinging on the unique cultures of those regions, as Harootunian states, the provision of a "framework and perspective for the establishment of a proper study of comparative societies" ("Space-Time" 26).

There are, however, many problems with the area studies approach, not least of which is its tendency to flatten distinctive ethnic, cultural, and even national zones into generalized areas and, as R.A. Patel notes, enforce "binary oppositions between an essentialized and totalized West and its equally essentialized and totalized other(s)"

(*Beyond the Area Studies Wars* 66).<sup>51</sup> Such an approach also privileges the “supposedly universalizing forces of globalization” and insists that distinct yet adjacent regions must be homogenous, thus coming across as somewhat “anachronistic” (*Localizing Knowledge* 3). What area studies *does* demonstrate, however, is one mode of reconceptualizing the region in a way that makes it globally relevant, an attempt to uncover “new perspectives on globalizing societies, nations, and cultures” in ways that are “multiple and variable” (*Localizing Knowledge* 13, *Learning Places* 1). This mode of inquiry perpetuates regional fetishization to some extent in that it attempts to account for elements of the region that drop out of the equation in demystified discourses; what it lacks is a means of accounting for varied, subjective interpretations of those regions.

A potentially more attractive, less exclusivist means of reimagining the region is that offered by environmentalist discourse, which suggests that individual locales have unique and distinct “natural” value independent of any benefit they may offer to the global economy. Such an approach rejects globalizing forces such as capitalism, mass media, and politics as “anthropocentric,” as Robert Kern has it, and seeks to enact “a movement from the human to the environmental, or at least from the exclusively human to the biocentric or ecocentric” (*ISLE Reader*, 267). The suggested payoff of this approach, as Handley and DeLoughray contend, is that “learning an aesthetic appreciation of nature’s otherness may help to preserve local particulars” (23). Realizing, to rip a page from Walcott’s history of activism, that a particular site has “spiritual,”

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<sup>51</sup> This shortcoming is perhaps most visible when applied to the areas denoted, loosely, as “Latin America” and “The Caribbean,” which subsume vastly different regions within singular categories, particularly when these “areas” are juxtaposed with “North America,” which almost exclusively refers to the United States.

fetishized significance may prevent a multibillion-dollar corporation from building a hotel there.<sup>52</sup>

The fundamental paradox in these ecocritical interpretations is that they seem to agree on the necessity of granting “value” to nature, but the suggestion that nature could become “commodified” is anathema. As Greg Garrard has wisely (if somewhat dolorously) noted, “any environmental trope is susceptible to appropriation and deployment in the service of a variety of potentially conflicting interests” (*Ecocriticism* 14). Simply insisting that humans must realize the manifold values of nonhuman objects does not dictate the manner in which those objects are valued, or by whom—preservationist rhetoric designed to protect an endangered environment may just as easily be deployed by a monomaniacal corporation to very different ends. As a response to this, the most practical (if disillusioned) ecocriticism realizes that, regardless of how revolting the commodified plastic replications of the wilderness found in the Nature Store at the mall are, and quite aside from the fact that tourism brochures that advertise “unspoiled” nature miss the point entirely, human interaction with nature is never unmediated, but inherently possessed of tangible values. Jennifer Price has made the claim that, “we inevitably invest nature with meanings that define both the natural world and our place within it,” and that, to survive globalizing forces, “‘nature’ has to mean something that people can convert to human artifice, make into livable cities, and consume” (*Uncommon Ground* 201). This might seem at first to be a supremely cynical view of nature—the

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<sup>52</sup> Or, in the case of Walcott’s protest against the Hilton Jalousie, perhaps not. The Jalousie, constructed in 1992 between the Pitons, the St. Lucian mountains that hold (as we have seen) such immense significance for Walcott and other residents, garnered explosive and extensive protest from the poet. See George Handley’s “Derek Walcott’s Poetics of the Environment in *The Bounty*” in *Callaloo* 28:1 (Winter 2005), pp. 201-215 for a basic summary of the conflict.

contention that natural elements that contain fundamentally unquantifiable aesthetic or spiritual value must be commodified to retain that value—but commodification is the logic of globalization.

The necessity of difference between amorphous and quantified valuations of nature is inherent in environmental rhetoric, yet such statements may not be as ecocentric as they believe. In a foundational essay of the ecocritical movement, Glen Love attacks “the notion that human beings are so special that the earth exists for our comfort and disposal alone.”<sup>53</sup> Nature-oriented literature, Love contends, offers a “needed corrective” to this idea in its “regard” for the “non-human.” At first glance, Love’s statement seems to be a simple attack on anthropocentrism—arguing that trees, fish, moss, wombats, and any other natural objects *ad infinitum* possess intrinsic value. However, these valuations only constitute a further humanization of nature insofar as they place the responsibility for determining those values squarely upon the (human) individual. All plants may be valuable, in other words, but an old-growth spruce might be more valuable than a potted philodendron, and a brick made of red clay that bears the stain of “anthropocentrism” may be less valuable than a riverbank of the same. Any revaluation of nature must necessarily attribute *static* rather than *subjective* values to natural phenomenon if it is to survive an endlessly appropriative methodology.

Cautionary examples of global appropriation of subjective valuations of nature can be found not only in the aforementioned touristic travel literature but also in the writings of such American environmental figures as Emerson and Muir, whose “quasi-

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<sup>53</sup>“Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism.” <http://www.usu.edu/westlit/pastpresadd1989.htm>. Accessed 12 September 2008.

religious” sentiments toward the wilderness, Kenneth Olwig has found, eventually “are used to adorn the interpretive sepulcher of many modern national parks” (*Uncommon Ground* 401). For Olwig, the Parks Service is synecdochal for larger trends of commodification of wilderness spaces insofar as it portions out and demarcates certain areas as fit for consumption by the public at large. Such is at least partially the case, as the Service’s list of criteria for designating national parks asymptotically approaches subjective valuations of natural aesthetics and other ephemeral values, yet eventually insists upon static values for individual areas.<sup>54</sup> The region, in Parks Service rhetoric, is folded into the “resource,” a term that is never fully defined, yet applies, in part, to any “outstanding site” that illustrates the “characteristics of a landform or biotic area,” whether that area is “still widespread” or “a rare remnant.” Subsequent criteria include the area’s possession of rare plants or animals, endangered species, and abundant fossil deposits. Though the Parks Service’s list of criteria does suggest inherently subjective aesthetic values, including “outstanding scenic qualities” and “spectacular vistas,” not to mention more ephemeral criteria for determining “Cultural Areas” such as “feeling” and “association,” it also packages those values for consumption within the framework of the “resource.”<sup>55</sup>

Many contemporary critics have begun to regard the region-as-resource more favorably in recent years. Gordon Sayre, for example, while complaining of the Sierra

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<sup>54</sup> “Criteria for Parklands,” <http://www.nps.gov/legacy/criteria.html>. Accessed 14 September 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Owing to the Parks Service’s imperative of consumption and public use of resources, among other reasons, many ecocritics find Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) altogether more attractive for establishing standards of valuation for natural landscapes. For more on the clash between radical environmentalism and the Service in particular, see Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire* (1968).

Club's extortion of donations using "aesthetically composed photographs taken at moments of ideal lighting and weather," nonetheless acknowledges that the "aesthetic pleasure" deriving from such tactics is more "broadly appealing" than an ecological claim to "the importance of a tract of wilderness habitat" (*ISLE Reader*, 103). Likewise, Rick Van Noy has suggested that categorical and cartographic portionings out of natural space stretching back as far as the nineteenth century makes the land "less awesome and sublime" to individual subjects, but, in "shift[ing] the focus of the sublime from the feelings inside the perceiver to an aspect of the landscape itself," such efforts open the possibility of static valuations and eventual preservation of that landscape (*The Greening of Literary Scholarship* 183). Thus, we can conclude that epistemological transformation is essentially a process of reinscribing the fetishized, inherently subjective values attached to the region within ostensibly static, objective value systems, systems that can appropriate the rhetoric of globalization.

As a coda to these ideas of regional transformation, I might note that both originary and epistemological transformation rely on inherently individualistic, oftentimes literary, apprehensions of the region—Faulkner's fiction, for instance—yet in asserting the legibility and endurance of that region in the face of globalizing imperatives, they must necessarily elide such subjective assessments by either elevating the subject to the role of communal myth-maker or rewriting the region itself as a site of communal consumption. Or, put perhaps more kindly, such desubjectification opens possibilities for conceiving of regional literatures comparatively, as interacting with the literatures of other regions. Djelal Kadir has suggested that any narrative that enacts "projective fetishization of landscape and economic desire" can fall into the trap of forbidding



“corroborative or disconfirming reference to anything concrete outside itself” (“America and its Studies,” 17). To avoid such solipsisms, regionalism must objectify itself, adopting a mode of self-reference that can enact profitable exchanges with other such modes. The methodology of globalized regionalism is largely a process of normalizing and, ultimately, effacing the particulars of subjective literary experience. The major questions that remain, then, are how the author and his or her reading public react to this process of standardization, and how global agencies deal with the aspects of the author’s subjective experience that are not easily rewritten into hegemonic global value systems; in short, how individuated literary regionalisms become global regionalism writ large. I will address this process in the chapters to come.

## CHAPTER III

### TOTALITARIAN FAULKNER

*I wrote that book in 1932 before I'd ever heard of Hitler's Storm Troopers, what [Percy Grimm] was was a Nazi Storm Trooper, but then I'd never heard of one then, and he's not prevalent but he's everywhere.*  
—William Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University* (1959)

#### 1. The Nazis, the Soviets, and Other Partial Interpretations

“Percy Grimm,” a section of *Light in August* (1932) that was later included in *The Portable Faulkner* (1946), created a character that Faulkner would later, in a 1945 letter to Malcolm Cowley, call a “Fascist galahad [sic] who saved the white race by murdering Christmas,” and note, with a degree of odd glee, that he had “created a Nazi before [Hitler] did” (*Faulkner-Cowley File* 32). The characterization seems to have struck a chord in the author’s mind, for he would later claim, in response to a student’s question during a class conference at the University of Virginia, that Grimm was a prototypical “Nazi Storm Trooper,” and, moreover, a type found “everywhere, in all countries, in all people” (41).<sup>1</sup> The comparison is overt enough, considering Faulkner’s characterization of Grimm in *Light in August* as consumed by a “sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American uniform is superior to all men,” with of course the

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<sup>1</sup> In his response, Faulkner arguably deflects the brunt of the student’s question, which deals with the prevalence of white supremacist groups in the South, with the weak assertion that Percy Grimm is not a Southern but a universal trope. I will treat the logic of similar displacements of racial trauma on Faulkner’s part in an upcoming chapter.

substitution of rabid pro-American sentiment for German (426-27). It seems almost too self-evident to note that Faulkner does not treat Grimm particularly favorably in *Light in August*, or in his subsequent comments on the character, that he did not truly believe that Grimm was “sav[ing] the white race” through his actions or that such supremacist methods were even desirable; Grimm is defined not only by hatred but also myopia, resorting to violence after mistaking an ex-soldier’s anti-French sentiments (the soldier “made some remark to the effect that if he had to do it again, he would fight this time on the German side and against France” [426]) for anti-American sentiments, and is eventually condemned by Faulkner to be eternally haunted by his murder of Christmas. The much-quoted final paragraph of the Grimm chapter of *Light in August*, in contrast to the frenetic action of its preceding text, refers to the slain Christmas’s “black blood” as “musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant” (440). Though it pours from Christmas’s body “like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket,” it undoes his violence not with a bang, but with a whimper (440).

Such, at least, is the most immediate and most common interpretation of Percy Grimm, commensurate with the Faulknerian tendency to create monstrous characters (Popeye, Thomas Sutpen, Flem Snopes, Jason Compson, an assortment of Bundrens, etc.) for the purpose of (ostensibly) decriing their actions. Faulkner seldom levies direct condemnation on any of these characters, granting instead that responsibility to the reader. In Christmas’s case, in fact, Grimm seems to receive less reproof than tacit compliance, aside from the horrified reaction of one his fellow “Storm Troopers” to his decision to castrate Christmas, from the townsfolk for his actions. Gavin Stevens, in fact,

so often the restrained, reasoning voice in Faulkner's fiction, colors Christmas's end as a charitable release from his savage "black blood" that "swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment" (425). Christmas, Stevens theorizes, in the end "crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death" (425). We could interpret these instances as another attempt at deliberate irony on Faulkner's part, a gruesome parody of white supremacist mentality, but suppose we read the text innocent of any of these inversions—from the perspective, in other words, of the Nazi *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (RSK), the government body tasked with the organization and control of literature under the *Kulturkammer*, the larger entity for cultural promotion and supremacy, from 1933 to the end of the second World War. From this perspective, we might surmise, the end of *Light in August* becomes less of a denunciation of the dangers of white supremacism and interracial violence and more of a narrative of the necessity of racial purity and the dire effects of miscegenation. The textual evidence for this reading is there; its deployment, as I have noted, depends heavily on the reader.

The theoretical RSK reading of *Light in August* that I have outlined is not an idle suggestion. Faulkner's text was translated into German and circulated by Rowohlt Verlag, a major publishing house in Berlin, in 1935, concurrently with French translations and significantly earlier than its translation into any other major language

(the next would be Spanish, in 1942).<sup>2</sup> This text's appearance in this context at this time seems to trouble the interpretation of *Light in August*, as Faulkner seemed to attempt later in his career, as a warning of burgeoning seeds of international fascism. Starting in 1933, the German nationalist "Action against the Un-German Spirit" burned over 100 million volumes of allegedly anti-German texts, including not only texts in German, but such major U.S. works as *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Call of the Wild*, and *The Jungle*, while *Light in August* received not only a pass, but an active endorsement (in the form of a translation). The text achieved popularity in a literary atmosphere that Frank Mankiewicz, an American critic performing a survey of German literature from 1933 to 1938, described as "uncompromising subordination under the will of the Führer" in which "the directives governing literary production are clearly stated" and must be "rigidly enforced" (Mankiewicz 182).<sup>3</sup> The "directives" to which Mankiewicz alludes can be fairly accurately surmised by the contemporary reader, but it may be worthwhile to restate them: "Literature... must express the attitude of the German people towards life, not that of the individual"; said literature "is to find its main-spring in the essential,

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<sup>2</sup> Even more surprising than this text's appearance at this time is the fact that the translation seems to adhere fairly strongly to the original text. In particular, the line in *Light in August* that describes Christmas's "black blood," in its persistence in the minds of Christmas's killers, as "of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant," a line that we might presume would inspire a violent reaction in the RSK censors, seems to have received a more or less literal translation in Franz Fein's 1935 version. Vera Kutzinski notes the German translation's naming of the "black blood's" "dignified quietude," its knowledge of "its own triumph" (419). See William Faulkner, *Licht im August: roman*, trans. Franz Fein. Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 1935.

<sup>3</sup> The Nazis were altogether suspicious of the literary profession as a whole. In 1936, as Anthony Fothergill notes, Joseph Goebbels, head of the Ministry for Public Education and Propaganda, "declared that henceforth the term 'art criticism' and its equivalent 'literary criticism' were to be legally banned from usage in the press, as such terms were an expression of an 'overwhelming Jewish artistic foreign infiltration'" (Fothergill 145). In place of criticism, Goebbels offered "Kunstabetrachtung," which amounts to "art appreciation," or public endorsement of acceptable forms of creativity.

undiluted part of the German people”; and “the attitude towards life shall not be pessimistically humble, mournful, or passive, but brave, optimistic, heroic” (Mankiewicz 183). That *Light in August* could appear in German under the above literary standards, with the assumption that it *is* indeed a denunciation of Grimm’s supremacist ideologies, seems either the result of a certain highly selective mode of interpretation on the part of those in power, or else a heroic attempt on the part of Rowohlt to slip such an aberrant text under the radar of the Party, to circulate it in defiance of unbearably restrictive standards.

*Light in August* was not an isolated incident; in fact, the case of *Absalom, Absalom!* is even more puzzling, and deserves investigation in greater depth. In March 1938, Rowohlt Verlag also put out Hermann Stresau’s translation of *Absalom, Absalom!* into German.<sup>4</sup> While *Light in August* had produced disappointing sales figures (8,500 sold in the first printing, 2,500 in the second, both in 1932), *Absalom* was even less popular, and was virtually unknown abroad.<sup>5</sup> The more internationally-known *The Sound*

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<sup>4</sup> This translation has scarcely been mentioned in any recent scholarship in English. Monika Brückner, in the appendix to *Faulkner: International Perspectives*, brought its existence to my attention, and it has received cursory mentions in some international surveys of Faulkner’s work, but sustained critical interest is largely absent. Eberhard Boecker’s *William Faulkner’s Later Novels in German* does not mention the book; it notes that “Faulkner is probably, next to Hemingway, the American author most read in Germany,” yet does not describe why this is or the origins of German translators’ interest in Faulkner (Boecker ix).

<sup>5</sup> Sales figures for *Light in August* from *New Essays on Light in August*, Michael Millgate, ed., New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Joseph Blotner notes a mere 10,000 copies of *Absalom* sold by the novel’s third printing in November 1936, and marks Clifton Fadiman’s claim in *The New Yorker* that *Absalom* was “the most consistently boring novel by a reputable writer... during the last decade” as representative (Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* 377). *Gone With the Wind*, by contrast, which was also published in 1936 and relied, at least, on some of the same conceptions of the Southern Gothic manifest in *Absalom*, sold over one million copies during its first six months on the market.

*and the Fury* had not yet received a German translation (and would not until 1956), and the first translation of *Absalom, Absalom!* into another major foreign language would not appear until 1950 (Spanish). And, while *Light in August* might have been feasibly integrated into fascist ideological systems, it seems somewhat more difficult to integrate *Absalom*, with its obsessive, archival concern with the specificities of the South, with the same, and, to adapt the language of the RSK's standards for literature, it seems even less "brave," "optimistic," or "heroic" than the former text, with not even an equivalent of the redemptory subplot of Lena Grove and Byron Bunch to disrupt its "horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs" (80). None of this data gives any suggestion of how a translation of a virtually unknown book could appear, under the aegis of one of the country's largest publishing houses, under the most infamous totalitarian regime in history. The simple fact of the translation gives rise to innumerable questions.

It may be that *Absalom* was the beneficiary of some rare German aficionado of Faulkner's work, some, we might say, equivalent to Malcolm Cowley, determined to rescue the author's novels from obscurity on the basis of their artistic merit. Hermann Stresau, the translator of *Absalom* into German, offers an attractive prospect, though little of him is known to English-speaking audiences. Anthony Fothergill's *Secret Sharers: Joseph Conrad's Cultural Reception in Germany* (2006) is, innocuously enough, perhaps the most substantial commentary on the man and his work in English. Fothergill calls Stresau, a librarian who was fired for alleged Marxist sympathies in the early days of the Nazi regime and took up a career as a freelance writer and critic in Berlin, an "articulate but 'ordinary' commentator of the period" (Fothergill 135). The narrative of Stresau's career, according to Fothergill, is that of a calculated process of deploying "nuances and

ironies” to make his work acceptable to Nazi censors (Fothergill 138). Stresau’s writing on Conrad, Shaw, and other major writers, Fothergill contends, betrays a keen “awareness of the forms of expression it must adopt to be readable to those ‘in the know’ while not attracting the blue pen of the [Nazi] censor” (Fothergill 138).<sup>6</sup> It is clear from Fothergill’s account that Stresau’s personal beliefs, as well as his literary tastes, did not exactly conform to the cultural standards set out by the National Socialists, and he was engaged in a perpetual struggle to conceal and dampen those opinions while still earning a living in the literary profession. But what of his translation of *Absalom*?

Stresau’s diary, *Von Jahr Zu Jahr* (1948) offers few answers, instead concerning itself primarily with the day-to-day political events in Berlin during the 1930s, when Stresau was working to produce his translations and criticism, and, as such, evinces deep doubt and fear about what was happening in Germany during that time. There is less mention of literature, Stresau’s work, than one might expect; Stresau states that he believes that “people are more important than what has been written.”<sup>7</sup> What is certain is that translating *Absalom* was, unsurprisingly, a struggle for Stresau, and demanded many months of his life. At the end of April 1937, he wrote: “The translation of *Absalom* consumes all my energy—this book cannot be translated. One has to re-poeticize it [nachdichten] with a concentration that is completely exhausting. It is impossible to complete this task by the required deadline” (Stresau 135). The reader is led, perhaps, to

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<sup>6</sup> I should mention here that Fothergill is partially reacting to the assertion that Stresau crumpled under pressure from the Nazis when he published pieces attacking the very authors whom he professed to appreciate elsewhere; the “nuances and ironies” that Fothergill mentions ostensibly transforms these denunciations into sly expressions of support.

<sup>7</sup> This and all following translations from the German have been provided to me by Vera Kutzinski of Vanderbilt University. I extend the warmest thanks to Professor Kutzinski for her efforts.



assume that there was something about *Absalom* that held Stresau's interest so intensely as to warrant such a laborious process. However, the diary is not forthcoming on this subject. One of the only indications of the significance that Faulkner's work held for Stresau is an entry from the middle of June, 1938, in which Stresau reflects that:

the effect of books, especially those by the likes of [Ted] Hughes and Faulkner, is completely disproportionate to their significance. It is only decades later that it occurs to some literary critics that such books see things as they are and contain warnings to which no one listened at the time. (Stresau 171)

All that we can assume from this statement is that Stresau found in Faulkner's writing a sort of prophecy or "warning," that it saw "things as they are," and that he believed it should attract more attention than it did. Stresau's language, however, establishes a double bind when viewed in the context of *Absalom*'s circulation within a German reading public in the mid-Thirties. In order for the text to appear in this environment, it required a small circulation, a confinement to special interest circles (providing a potential explanation for why "no one listened" to Faulkner), yet if its distribution was more widespread, it would likely have attracted attention from the censors. Fothergill takes care to claim that, under the RSK's influence, certain ostensibly dissenting texts were permitted, provided that they did not circulate widely: "there was space for such cultural opposition... so long as the opposition remained, from the regime's point of view, relatively 'quiet' and restricted to a small circle of intellectuals" (Fothergill 136). Fothergill's narrative of Stresau's literary career is that of a determined yet oppressed renegade intellectual, one who waged a sort of, in Fothergill's phrase, "cultural guerrilla warfare against the Nazis," and who was able to slip ostensibly aberrant texts under the nose of Party censors through a combination of careful irony and limitation to a small,

specific readership (Fothergill 137). We might reasonably place his translation of *Absalom* in this same vein.

But this seems, from evidence elsewhere in *Von Jahr Zu Jahr*, to be a weak rationalization. Stresau was offered a contract for the translation of *Absalom* (600 Reichsmarks, roughly equivalent to \$250 U.S., or \$3600 in present-day purchasing power) by Rowohlt Verlag at the end of January, 1937. Stresau remarked that Rowohlt's stipend was "damn little, but I have to take it, there is no choice," signifying his struggle to obtain a stable income (Stresau 131). Stresau, otherwise jobless during the war, found himself at loose ends, unable to earn a living, vaguely critical of the Nazi regime yet unwilling to oppose it openly. It seems clear from his diary that translating Faulkner was simply a (desperately needed) job for him, not an ideological statement. More contradictory of Fothergill's "guerilla warfare" thesis, however, is the fact that Stresau did not spearhead the initiative to translate *Absalom*; Rowohlt Verlag did (Stresau 131). Ernst Rowohlt, head of the publishing house, and his (illegitimate) son, Heinrich Ledig-Rowohlt, had a longstanding interest in American authors such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and Sinclair Lewis; together, they produced the postwar series "Rowohlts Rotations Romane," or "rororo" for short, serving as both Germany's first paperback series and what Martin Zähringer calls "a solidly built literary bridge across the Atlantic."<sup>8</sup> Rowohlt, being a large-scale publisher of mass-market titles, seemed altogether more motivated by sales potential than the necessity of circulating

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<sup>8</sup> Taken from the brief history of Rowohlt compiled by the Goethe-Institut (<http://www.goethe.de/kue/lit/thm/mes/en3607042.htm>, accessed 17 March 2009). Though Rowohlt Verlag remains a major German publishing house and continued to turn out translations of Paul Auster, Thomas Pynchon, and Cormac McCarthy (among others) into the 1990s, English accounts of its affairs remain quite rare.

“underappreciated” texts. They ordered the translation and publication of *Absalom* in hopes of making money, not bringing a neglected author to light.

When I first began to investigate the early German translations of *Absalom* and other texts, I committed a crucial, though common error, one which Faulkner criticism as a whole has made for decades and continues to make today: the notion that widespread early circulation of Faulkner’s work, owing to that work’s unrecognized aesthetic power, needed only a catalyst, a champion, in order to proceed. This is a fallacy because, as Lawrence Schwartz notes in *The Creation of Faulkner’s Reputation* (1988), Faulkner’s circulation, even in his capacity as an ostensible avatar of high modernism, is dependent not only on the efforts of individuals such as Cowley, but extremely specific contextual criteria. The answer to the mystery of *Absalom*’s German translation lies not with singular, heroic enemies of oppression and proponents of Faulkner’s work such as Stresau, but with the calculus of determining reception and marketability practiced by Rowohlt Verlag.<sup>9</sup> We can reasonably assume that Rowohlt’s interest in Faulkner stemmed from his subject matter rather than his stylistic innovation, as French literary interest, especially the well-documented fondness of Sartre, Camus, and others, did. *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*, by widespread critical consensus of the time, were perceived as evincing much bolder stylistic innovation than either *Light in August*

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<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, Rowohlt had a bit of a reputation for publishing works that did not perfectly fit the criteria outlined by the RSK. Thomas M. Bredohl notes that, between 1933 and 1944, the publishing house turned out 47 books by alleged “undesirable” authors (Bredohl 544). Ernst Rowohlt, head of Rowohlt Verlag, was expelled from the RSK (effectively amounting to a ban on his publications) in the summer of 1938, allegedly for circulating the work of a prominent Jewish scholar under a pseudonym. See Glenn R. Cuomo, *Career at the Cost of Compromise: Günter Eich’s Life and Work in the Years 1933-1945*, pp. 115. These actions, however, seem relatively unrelated to their efforts to publish Faulkner in German.

or *Absalom, Absalom!*. George Marion O'Donnell, who would later become an ardent supporter of Faulkner's works, noted in a 1936 review of the latter text that the author was "still experimenting with form," with the implication that he had not yet found a completely acceptable style, and found "major artistic defects" in both *Light in August*, which he stated "does not stand the test of rereading," and *Pylon*, calling it "probably the worst of Mr. Faulkner's novels" (Inge 143).<sup>10</sup> O'Donnell's remarks on *Absalom*'s style were somewhat kinder than those of his contemporaries. A.B. Bernd noted (pejoratively) that "occasional strings of words" in the text "seem as relevant as the major output of Gertrude Stein," and called the novel's construction "lamentable" (Inge 141). On the whole, the contemporary critical interpretation seems to have been that, in Bernard DeVoto's phrase, the text was "not... so darkly refracted through distorting lenses as *The Sound and the Fury*" (Inge 145).

What all of this evidence seems to suggest is that, contrary to the well-entrenched narrative of Faulknerian criticism that marks his early work as masterpieces of high modernism waiting to be discovered by a rare, forward-thinking intellectual, there were *thematic* aspects of his fiction that appeared to be a positive investment to publishers working under restrictive governmental standards and catering to very different audiences. Juergin C. Wolter, in *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia* (1999), offers a possible explanation for the RSK's interest in, or at least tolerance of, *Absalom*, writing that "Nazi officials misinterpreted Faulkner's regionalism as akin to the Nazi 'blood-and-soil' ideology; thus they took Faulkner for a conservative agrarian whose *Absalom, Absalom!* argued in favor of racial purity and against miscegenation" (Wolter 146).

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<sup>10</sup> Coincidentally, *Pylon* was the third of Rowohlt Verlag's pre-war translations of Faulkner's works, appearing in 1934.

Wolter's "misinterpretation," perhaps, stems from a longstanding critical weariness of linkages between Faulkner's writing and that of the Vanderbilt Agrarians; even in 1987, Cleanth Brooks called the link between Faulkner and the Agrarians' "passionate devotion to the land" a "fairly obvious generalization" (*Prejudices, Predilections, Firm Beliefs* 11). It would seem that any analysis of such similar themes in Faulkner's work and its German interpretations would suffer under a similar onus of exhaustion. No one, it would seem, has any remaining patience for retreading the Faulkner—Agrarian connection.<sup>11</sup>

More importantly, however, Wolter's claim shows a reluctance to associate Faulkner with the more reactionary elements of Agrarian writing, their intolerance, insularity, hostility, and prejudice; thus his explicit denotation of the Nazi reading as a "misinterpretation." Robert H. Brinkmeyer notes in *The Fourth Ghost: White Southern Writers and European Fascism, 1930-1950* (2009), that the Agrarians' juxtaposition of "the unstructured decadence of city life" and the "virtuous stability of rural life," as well as their glorification of "like-minded folks living intimately in touch with the land" in some critical accounts "seemed to echo, however distantly, the Nazis' celebration of blood and soil" (43). Associating Faulkner with the Agrarians on the basis of their common glorification of regional identity thus indirectly implicates certain cryptofascist

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<sup>11</sup> Thadious Davis, in *Games of Property* (2003), fairly accurately summarized the stagnation of pure regionalist (and, implicitly, reactionary) interpretations of Faulkner's work: "Since the late 1970s and 1980s when interdisciplinarity and theory, along with black studies, women's studies, and cultural and gender studies produced new Faulkners, all of whom are resistant to closure, the old Faulkner has happily been retired" (3). My intent here is less to resurrect the "happily" departed Faulkner of the Agrarians than to suggest that even the aspects of his fiction that literary criticism is eager to discard (racism, sexism, classism, and a host of others) constitute a means of textual proliferation. Even if the Agrarian Faulkner has been "retired," in other words, this does not necessarily mean that his presence was (and, perhaps, is) not felt.

tendencies, however misguided those parallels might be.<sup>12</sup> More critically palatable are attempts such as Michael O'Brien's to link the Agrarians' writing with "literary modernism's invocation of the romantic myth of the organic *volk* as a standard from which to view with irony the modern decline and disillusionment" (*Faulkner and Modernism* 24). Modernism, again, manifests itself here as a means of artistically and indirectly addressing troublesome political views. But here is the crux of the matter: even attempts to associate regressive Agrarian ("blood and soil") aspects of Faulkner's fiction with the edicts of modernist style inadvertently implicate the author in the totalitarian interpretive schemes that arose as a result. Brian Vick finds in the same concept of the *volk* as O'Brien considers the seeds of German nationalist "xenophobic proclivity" through its "historicist fascination for nature, the deep past, folkways, and organicism" ("The Origins of the German Volk" 241). Even if Faulkner comes to the *volk* through (ostensibly politically neutral) modernism, this does not discount the above elements in his fiction, elements that were read into Nazi ideology by the RSK with well-known results. What the Faulkner-Agrarian-*volk*-modernist link does, then, is circumlocutively sequester Faulkner within the realm of an artistic movement rather than a potentially troublesome political association.

It is my contention that, rather than attempt to make the Nazi reception of Faulkner's works square with existing critical schemata, we must accept it for what it is: a recirculation of Faulkner's particularized regional themes, preserved as such, in other contexts. Wolter derives his above "misinterpretation" from Peter Nicolaisen's essay

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<sup>12</sup> Brinkmeyer has examined the origins and potential effects of drawing these connections in *The Fourth Ghost*, which endeavors to show that "the ghostly presence of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany" were a central concern in the careers and writing of Faulkner, Wolfe, the Agrarians, and others (2).

comparing Faulkner and the fascist-sympathetic Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun in Waldemar Zacharasiewicz's collection *Faulkner, His Contemporaries, and His Posterity* (1993). Nicolaisen's work serves, ironically (for it treats the situation in Germany only tangentially), as perhaps the most substantial commentary on Faulkner's reception by the Nazis. Nicolaisen asks, compellingly, whether "Faulkner's references to the community, to the soil and to the earth [are] to be understood in the same international 'agrarian' context in which we probably have to read Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil*" (97). Nicolaisen concludes that, in Faulkner's work, "the roots linking one with one's native soil are never idolized in the same way as they are, say in many German novels of the 1920's and 1930's," yet the "roots" in both cases are similar (97-98). What Nicolaisen suggests, in essence, is not an ideological congruence between Faulkner's novels and those of certain German nationalists, but rather a recurrence of the same elements in these varied writings. He makes the claim, in other words, that the very relationship between Faulkner's characters and their home region, with all of its associated baggage, constitutes a different means of "internationalizing" Faulkner. Faulkner is thus a global author not merely because of his fulfillment of certain aesthetic criteria, but also because his regional specificities could be integrated in a variety of contexts.<sup>13</sup> Or, to reinvok

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<sup>13</sup> Nicolaisen's source for the Faulkner-Nazism link, Heinrich Straumann's 1968 German-language volume *William Faulkner*, makes clear the rationale behind the Nazis' adoption of these specificities. Straumann claims that the early German translations of Faulkner's work was due to "an error in interpretation on the part of those who were in power at the time. They believed to recognize in Faulkner's work above all an echo of the blood-and-soil mystique, a rejection of the belief in progress, a validation of rural, conservative, even aristocratic views, and, in one case, even a warning against racial mixing" (46). Though Straumann, like Wolter, denotes the Nazi reading of Faulkner as an "error," the grounds for that error are firmly rooted in regional distinctiveness. A suspicion toward "progress," a rural economy, a tendency toward conservatism, and an

Faulkner's claim to protofascism in *Light in August*, we might say that such regionally rooted elements as Percy Grimm's theoretical membership in Southern white supremacy organizations find themselves repeated "everywhere, in all countries, in all people."

If the interest that the Nazis showed in Faulkner's work was a purely isolated incident, if they were the only international readers who were attracted to his regionalism for its own sake, the objection might be raised that this is simply a statement of Faulkner's seemingly infinite comparability, one interpretation among many that holds no more currency than any other, a vestigial "misreading." However, the instance I have outlined above seems to find a curious parallel in Soviet interpretations of Faulkner's work, which also discounted his value as a modernist writer in favor of a more straightforward incorporation of his regional representations and their own. Though the Soviets did not translate and publish his work nearly as quickly as the Germans, aesthetic comparisons of Faulkner's work and that of several major Russian novelists (Dostoevskii in particular) are common, and date back at least to an anonymous reviewer's comment, in a contemporary review of *The Sound and the Fury*, that he had in that text "out-Russian[ed] the Russians." Comparative criticism has also been hesitant to note similar themes in the writing of Southern regionalists and their Soviet counterparts due to some of the same difficulties that minimized the Faulkner-Germany link. As early as 1936, for example, Robert Penn Warren was endeavoring to dissociate "regional" writing from "proletariat" writing in "Literature as a Symptom." Warren's argument was, as Brinkmeyer has noted, primarily an effort to shield the Agrarians from the increasingly widespread insinuation that their reactionary agendas shared key concepts with

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aristocratic social structure are all extremely familiar elements to those who study the literature of the South.



worldwide authoritarian governments. This is perhaps clearest when Warren attributes a “bias toward industrialism” to the “proletariat” writer, and a corresponding “agrarian bias” to the “regional” writer (*Who Owns America?* 273). Though Warren wishes to preserve “the attempt of the writer to define his appropriate relation to a special place” embodied in “regional” writing, he claims that, to the proletariat writer, “this attempt smacks of antiquated religion, patriotism, or even fascism; for the proletarian movement is itself international in its reasoning” (272). More compelling than Warren’s attempted intervention in the debates of his time is his implicit denotation of regionalism as *confined* to the region in opposition to proletariat writing, which is by nature an international intersection of many readings. Though Warren’s dichotomies now appear dated and ideologically charged, they were nonetheless indicative of a much broader reluctance to associate U.S. regionalism, in its concern with essentialized “places,” with Soviet writing, which ostensibly implicated a wider-ranging intellectual and political agenda. Examining Soviet criticism within the context of United States regional writing, then, can help to alleviate this constructed distance.

Moreover, Soviet readings of Faulkner offer an intriguing parallel to his early German circulation since, like the latter, the Soviets regarded his modernist sensibilities as wholly unimportant or at least unattractive, preferring instead to capitalize on regionalist and realist parallels between Faulkner’s writing and that of their own novelists. Sergei Chakovsky notes that, during the 20s and 30s, “Faulkner was almost uniformly regarded in the USSR as a decadent or modernist writer,” and, indeed, as late as 1948, Soviet critic V. Rubin claimed that “the novels of Faulkner are the brood of rotting capitalist society with its noxious, putrid morals. The moods and motifs

cultivated by him serve the aim of demoralization, the perversion of the reader” (*Faulkner: International Perspectives* 215, 177). However, in the decades that followed, Faulkner’s regionalist sensibilities proved more attractive to his Soviet readers. Chakovsky traces Soviet concern with Faulkner’s regionalism through the 60s and 70s, finding in a 1966 essay by Yasen Zasursky a downplaying of his relationship to the “masters of European modernism” in favor of his connection to the “American soil” and “the historical fate of the country as a whole as well as that part of it—the South—with which Faulkner is connected by indissoluble social and spiritual ties” (220). Throughout the span of years of Chakovsky’s focus, there is a persistent Soviet tendency to overlook, as Georgy Zlobin did in 1975, “the muddy jumble of Faulknerian words and the mannered rhetoric characteristic of Southern prose” to discover the “golden vein of genuine talent moving from gothic depths to the actual truth of life and art” (181). Tellingly, Zlobin also designates Poe, Twain, Warren, McCullers, and O’Connor (coincidentally, all of whom have been called Southern regionalists in some capacity or another) to be greater influences on the author than Joyce and other high modernists. It would seem that, to some extent, Soviet interpretations of Faulkner followed a course opposite to that of U. S., French, and Spanish criticism: while the latter endeavored to incorporate him within existing frameworks of stylistic modernism, relating him to Joyce, Woolf, Proust, and others, the former eschewed such comparisons in favor of Faulkner’s regional or Agrarian sentiments.

The Soviet interpretation of Faulkner, like the Nazi interpretation, seems to have at least a tentative grounding in the text. In fact, certain U.S. critics have noted the kinship between Faulkner’s regionalism and some themes in Soviet literature. M.

Thomas Inge and Joseph Blotner in particular have capitalized on the congruence; the former states that “the matter of Mother Earth, which is so prominent in Sholokhov and other Russian writers” forms an “important link between Faulkner and Russian literature,” and notes Faulkner’s reliance on “the general attitude and philosophic disposition of the writers known as the Southern or Vanderbilt Agrarians” that validates such a comparison (*Faulkner: International Perspectives* 186).<sup>14</sup> Blotner, for his part, recalls a journey made to Tolstoy’s house during a Faulkner conference in the Soviet Union, stating that he and his companions travelled “south through white birch forests and fields where groups of men and women wielded scythes and rakes” (“Faulkner in the Soviet Union” 469). The connection between Faulkner and Russia’s peasant poet is implicit; both of them are, in Blotner’s account, “farmers who write.” The comparison is clearly there to be made, yet even in a 1997 essay titled “Faulkner and Proletarian Literature,” John T. Matthews, though noting that “[Faulkner’s fiction] treats so many issues central to proletarianism, and does so with at least a keen sense of the injustices suffered by individuals under plantocratic and later mercantile capitalism,” eschews Soviet interpretations of Faulkner’s work in favor of that produced by Communist-sympathetic American journals (*Faulkner in Cultural Context* 169). Though Faulkner’s ties to proletariat literature, if they exist, would seem to be greatly relevant to certain aspects of Russian literature, this connection is repeatedly downplayed. Despite the fact that comparisons of Faulkner’s novels and certain of those of the Soviet Union may help,

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<sup>14</sup> Inge has repeatedly pursued this line of comparison. In Zacharasiewicz’s volume, he notes the commonality in Faulkner and Sholokhov of an “attitude toward the land, a set of ideas about the proper relationship between man and the land and the virtues of the rural way of life. These ideas may be loosely associated with the interrelated set of beliefs we have come to call in this century ‘Agrarianism’” (134).

as Sanja Bahun claims, break out of “the unwitting simplification of Faulkner’s own cultural position as an a) Anglophone, or b) (more narrowly) American, or c) (even more narrowly) Southern writer,” any extant cultural, contextual, or political similarities between these works are frequently neglected in favor of studies that emphasize artistic or modernist congruences (“Faulkner, Фолкнер, Folkner, Fokner” 4).

Why should this be so? One possible explanation is that Faulkner’s writing simply did not appear as prominently in certain regions, certain languages, that his internationalization was sporadic and naturally encouraged certain circulations while excluding others. Let us examine the translation dates for the major Faulknerian texts in several world languages:<sup>15</sup>

	<i>SF</i>	<i>AILD</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>LIA</i>	<i>AA</i>	<i>GDM</i>	<i>AF</i>
<b>English</b>	1929	1930	1931	1932	1936	1942	1954
<b>French</b>	1938	1934	1933	1935	1953	1955	1958
<b>Spanish</b>	1947	1942	1934	1942	1950	1955	1955
<b>German</b>	1956	1961	1951	1935	1938	1953	1955
<b>Japanese</b>	1954	1959	1950	1961	1957	1973	1960
<b>Russian</b>	1973	1978	1981	1974	1980	*	1965

This is in fact an uneven account, but not in the manner that the above interpretation

<sup>15</sup> Translation dates obtained from the appendix to *Faulkner: International Perspectives* (proceedings of 1982 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference), Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie, eds., 1984, as well as Pia Maseiro’s “Comparative Chronological Chart of Faulkner’s Translations” in the Autumn 2000 issue of the *South Atlantic Review*. Notations for titles of books are standard: *SF* (*The Sound and the Fury*), *S* (*Sanctuary*), *AILD* (*As I Lay Dying*), *AA* (*Absalom, Absalom!*), *LIA* (*Light in August*), *GDM* (*Go Down, Moses*), and *AF* (*A Fable*). This chart is intended to only provide a basic outline of translation dates, and elides some of the more interesting minor data, such as the fact that “That Evening Sun” was translated into Russian in 1934, roughly concurrently with the earliest Faulkner translations elsewhere (only the French version of *Sanctuary* precedes it). *Go Down, Moses* did not receive a full translation in Russian until 2003, though it appeared in a 1987 volume of his collected works.

suggests. It shows a strong French interest in many of Faulkner's early "artistic" texts (*The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*), and a somewhat delayed but fairly comprehensive Spanish interest in all texts; these trends are well-known. However, the German and Russian reception seems to proceed in almost the opposite manner; the "artistic" texts are translated later than their more "regional" counterparts. What I want to suggest in regards to Faulkner's world reputation is that, ironically, our attempts to "internationalize" him by tracing the strong and well-known connections between his work and the artistic concerns of authors writing in French and Spanish methodologically exclude certain other international connections. When we speak of Faulkner as an "international" or "world" author, we are more properly speaking of him as an author who shared certain affinities with certain authors from certain nations, all highly selective comparisons. In other words, painting Faulkner as part of an international modernist literary community consisting of, among others, Hemingway, Joyce, Stein, Eliot, Camus, Sartre, Fuentes, and García Márquez, tends to exclude him from membership in a different community, that of Tolstoy, Sholokhov, Hamsun, and the RSK.

What is at stake in these dual and seemingly mutually exclusive interpretations of Faulkner's career, I want to emphasize, is *not* whether Faulkner or his writing had any real or perceived kinship with either the Nazi or the Soviet regimes; if anything, Faulkner "avoided Germany as much as possible" and had a "violent antipathy to things German" for many years after the War, and uttered a number of well-known (though altogether generally mild) imprecations against Communism during his time as a "public figure" (Hamblin & Peek 145). In addition, as Lothar Hönninghausen notes, the aristocratic sentiment that the Nazis found attractive in Faulkner's writing is not between a

theoretical group of racially pure masters and their physical and intellectual inferiors (as in Nazi rhetoric) but precisely the opposite, his outcast, intellectualized heroes share with Thomas Mann an “aristocratic sense of distance from the ‘others,’ their normal and healthy fellow humans, the ‘blond and blue-eyed’” (Zacharasiewicz 29). Rather, my concern with these instances is how they form a countercurrent to the traditional narrative of Faulkner criticism, how they constitute what might be called a secret history of Faulkner’s work. It is “secret” not due to its obscurity, its distastefulness, or its overshadowing by more in-depth and complex receptions of his writing in more well-documented regions and contexts—the aforementioned French connection, or the many studies that bring together Faulkner and Latin American authors such as Fuentes or García Márquez, or the burgeoning comparisons of Faulkner and the Caribbean of which this study constitutes a part—but because it evinces a connection that cannot be adequately interpreted using the dominant modes of criticism of Faulkner’s work.

## **2. Chaos, Echoes, Totality**

To uncover all of the contours of the “secret history” I have noted above is beyond the scope of the current work. Rather, I would like to dedicate the rest of this chapter to showing how it need not be secret, and indeed how it serves as a necessary contribution to the critical image of Faulkner as an international author. I have written above of the fallacy in critical work on the author that has thus far prevented this: the notion that Faulkner’s texts evince a certain aesthetic unity that justifies his inclusion within circles of international modernism, and that this inclusion necessarily precludes his circulation on other grounds. This fallacy is part of a deeply-rooted and persistent

critical imperative, reaching back at least as far as New Criticism, to regard some aspects of his writing (including those that might have proved intriguing to the RSK and Soviet Americanists) as distinct from and independent of Faulkner's high modernist sensibility.

This is the same "questionable assumption" that John Matthews notes: the idea that

to the extent a work possesses political or social interests of representation, its devotion to aesthetic form seems somewhat beside the point; and to the extent the modernist work revels in its apparent formal autonomy, its interest in social or cultural contexts seems marginal (175).

Thus we receive dozens of volumes of criticism on Faulkner's stylistic innovation, dozens more on his concern with race / class / Communism / etc., and few blendings of the two. Contrary to this trend, Matthews hopes to prove that Faulkner is "*as modernist working much closer to the projects of social and economic critique so central to the proletarian movement*" (175, italics in original). Similarly, critics such as Brinkmeyer have tortuously attempted to derive from Faulkner's relatively scarce commentaries on international politics and his even scarcer mentions of those issues in his fiction an image of the author as more keenly attuned to global politics than appearances might indicate. Brinkmeyer exhaustively tracks international concerns in Faulkner's writing with the eventual goal of showing that "his postage stamp of Mississippi soil was by the 1940s imprinted with a foreign postmark," and portrays him as "a man who by the mid- to late 1930s was publicly taking a stand against Fascism" (202, 179). At no point in Brinkmeyer's or Williams' analyses, however, is there the suggestion that Faulkner's avowed *lack* of concern with international politics, his self-conscious withdrawal from his seemingly unavoidable status as a global author, may be in itself a means of inclusion within a certain global context. There is instead the sense that, if Faulkner was concerned with distinctively regional themes and styles, those concerns must either be independent

of, or else contextualized within, a matrix of national and international events. To rephrase an earlier argument: if Faulkner had some kinship with the Agrarians, it must be within the context of either international aesthetic concerns (the romantic *volk*) or broad-based intellectual schools (antimodernism, environmentalism, etc.). The implication is that Faulkner's regionalism *qua* regionalism is incompatible with globalization and the ideological schemes that attend it.

I want to dismantle this notion. In the pages to come, I hope to show that, rather than serving as an obstacle (or antidote) to Faulkner's internationalism, his concern with the region in itself acts as a necessary motive force for the same. Detailing the means by which Faulkner's regionalism, rather than his aesthetic concerns (Cowley) or a particular set of political or economic circumstances (Schwartz) gives rise to his international reputation can grant us a new perspective on his status as a "global" author.<sup>16</sup> Suppose, first of all, that we conceive of regionalism not as a fundamentally opposed ideology to globalization that offers a reactionary voice of dissent to its progress, but as a necessarily alternate epistemology that, *along with* globalization, leads to a dialectic of global

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<sup>16</sup> The notion that regionalism can exist in a complementary, if not mutually constitutive, configuration to globalization has received some critical support, and is even adumbrated by Benedict Anderson's statement, in *Imagined Communities*, that cosmopolitanism creates a world of "finite, if elastic, boundaries" formed by a multiplicity of national self-imaginings (7). Anthony Appiah, for example, proposes the concept of "rooted" cosmopolitanism, or "cosmopolitan patriotism," a system in which "*everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own" (*Cosmopolitics* 91). Arturo Escobar also notes the importance of "the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness, sense of boundaries, and connection to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed and never fixed" (*Localizing Knowledge in a Globalizing World* 37). Rooted cosmopolitanism, however, seems to rob both of its constituent concepts of any appreciable weight: if rootedness and rootlessness are unproblematically compatible, even interchangeable, the ontological state of being either rooted or rootless, attached to a particular region or else wholly unaffiliated, would not seem to constitute any strong statement of self-identification or being.



identity. This is, in a manner of speaking, the viewpoint of Édouard Glissant, who has written of the *totalité-monde*, the totality of the world, in which all elements signified by the term “world” converge, all knowledge systems, histories, races, senses, and places. Glissant cannot himself conceive of a panoptic world-view (the *totalité-monde* is inherently defiant of comprehension—just as the eye cannot view every point on a sphere at once, the mind cannot encompass all aspects of the world simultaneously), yet this does not prevent him from positing the idea of the *totalité-monde* as a *telos* toward which the conflicting systems of “scientific rigor” and “baroque derangement” can proceed (*Poetics of Relation* 91).<sup>17</sup> Since the *totalité-monde* is inherently incomprehensible, neither Glissant nor his readers can possess it; what they possess instead are *échos-monde*, “unities whose interdependent variances jointly piece together the interactive totality,” among which are Faulkner novels and Bob Marley songs (92). The connections that *échos-monde* establish are not, as the above example suggests, overt; they are not direct citations or influences but separate and conjoined “pieces.” Glissant names in the same breath “the architecture of Chicago and just as easily the shantytowns of Rio or Caracas” as varieties of *échos-monde*, and the comparison is not immediately apparent (93). The shantytowns were likely not built with Chicago’s skyscrapers in mind, or vice versa. The link, rather, is one of functionality. Both skyscrapers and shanties serve to house and employ vast numbers of people, albeit people of widely varying national and economic status, in different manners (vertically, at great expense in planning, materials, and construction, and horizontally, according to the dictates of necessity). We might call

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<sup>17</sup> This is some sense an oversimplified version of Glissant’s argument, which by no means confines itself to the globalized world of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but invokes (post) Enlightenment thought in its concern with world-systems insofar as “science” and “derangement” can be roughly parsed as “ration” and “irration.”

them different reactions, neither wholly voluntary, to the imperatives of globalization. The clearest incarnation of this perspectival (reactionary) view of *échos-monde* in Faulkner's works is likely *The Sound and the Fury*, in which each of the Compson children reacts in different ways, at different positions in space-time, and with different types of narration to the static narrative events (*fable*) of the story: the sale of the pasture to the country club, Caddy's infidelities, Quentin's suicide. However, Glissant, in his inclusion of Faulkner's works in his list of *échos-monde*, is likely thinking, as in *Faulkner, Mississippi*, of *Absalom*, and its replication (echoing) of the societies and conflicts of the Caribbean in the South.

Though Glissant does not acknowledge it, he is likely also thinking of Faulknerian motifs when he states that *échos-monde* revive "an equilibrium and ability to endure... Individuals and communities go beyond vainglory or suffering, power or impatience, together—however imperceptively" (95). The concept of endurance, so hugely important to many of Faulkner's works and a focal point of the Nobel Prize speech, receives new relevance when we regard it in the light of Glissant's *échos-monde*.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the parallel means by which *échos-monde* function, Glissant notes, they intimate endurance inasmuch as they represent an "optimum," that is, a means

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<sup>18</sup> Endurance is, indeed, such a central concept in Faulkner's writing that supporting this claim should scarcely be necessary, but a brief précis may be helpful. The clearest figure of Faulknerian endurance is almost undoubtedly Dilsey in *The Sound and the Fury* (as Faulkner himself claimed in the appendix to the novel), but we need not look far to find further examples: Lena Grove and Byron Bunch in *Light in August*, Ike McCaslin in *Go Down, Moses*, Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust*, and perhaps even Jim Bond, who, at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!*, Shreve predicts will "conquer the western hemisphere."

of dealing with common issues and concepts.<sup>19</sup> The subject's cognizance of simultaneous and parallel *échos-monde*, which we might also, for the immediate example at hand, term "alternate modernities," permits a vision of the *totalité-monde* as comprised not of primitivisms (Glissant would say "classicisms") outside of the bounds of a nation, race, or language, but of multitudinous interpretive strategies. These strategies, in Faulkner's work, tend to manifest themselves as aspects of modernism, differing yet parallel means of narration, mimesis, and constructions of history.

Regardless of the multiplicity and parallelisms of *échos-monde*, Glissant claims, all of them fall, loosely, within the bounds of "science," or rationalism; they are all means of studying and reacting to the world analytically, according to a system. The structure of a novel, even one as seemingly disorganized as *Finnegans Wake*, constitutes one or more systems. The architecture of the Sears Tower constitutes another. But rationalism is, as Glissant is fond of reminding his readers, only one of the axes on which a path to the *totalité-monde* can be mapped. The other, the baroque, is inherently *antirational*, allowing for noncausal relationships, psychological depth, the "proliferating contact of diversified natures" (78). This is the realm of Glissant's third world-system, the *chaos-monde*. The *chaos-monde* is "all the elements and forms of expression of... totality within us; it is totality's act and its fluidity, totality's reflection and agent in motion" (94). Rather than being a mere expression of arbitrary, destructive forces at work in the world, however (as Glissant helpfully notes, "chaos is not 'chaotic'"), *chaos-monde* is the acknowledgment of the legitimacy or poeticity of all forms, even those that seem not to

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<sup>19</sup> In the Chicago-Caracas comparison, we might term these common issues overpopulation, urbanization, and industrialization—this is a fairly concrete example. In regards to, for example, *Finnegans Wake*, which Glissant also cites as an example of *échos-monde*, the issues are far more complex.

lead toward, or openly contradict, a *telos*. *Chaos-monde* disassembles notions of static aesthetic or interpretive norms, evidencing the “inexhaustible” imagination of totality.

Far from being mutually exclusive, however, Glissant’s chaos and order complement each other, jointly forming an experience of *totalité-monde*. Simply put, *échos-monde* shows how issues common to multiple worldwide regions are addressed using different methodologies in different contexts, while *chaos-monde* permits the proliferation of those contexts and issues in unpredictable ways. In a manner of speaking, if Faulkner’s international modernist reputation is concerned with the ways in which his writing mirrors that of other modernists, or even, as mid-20<sup>th</sup> century critics were fond of claiming, that of classical and Renaissance writers, we might call the manner in which that reputation proceeds a manifestation of *échos-monde*; the notion that Faulkner grapples with issues shared by his contemporaries and predecessors, issues that we might thus shorthand as “universal,” working toward a common goal, enduring common vicissitudes. By contrast, the German, Soviet, and U.S. Agrarian regionalist interpretations of Faulkner’s work suggest the parallel progress of a very different reputation in ways that are ultimately more in tune with *chaos-monde*. These are interpretations that are determined less by the author’s stylistic or thematic congruence with other authors than by the dictates of specific and widely differing politically-inflected ideological systems (fascism, Southern Agrarianism, Communism), proceeding in unpredictable, even seemingly illogical, ways. The two, I would like to emphasize, are interconnected and exist in a reciprocal relationship, in the same manner as the region and the globe embody a type of mutuality. As Lawrence Schwartz argues in *Creating Faulkner’s Reputation*, the author’s status as a modernist exemplar is heavily contingent

on a unique set of political and cultural circumstances endemic to the Cold War-era United States in addition to aesthetic reevaluations such as Malcolm Cowley's.

Cowley's 1946 *Portable Faulkner*, in fact, might be said to constitute the fracture line between regional and modernist reception of Faulkner's work, between echoes and chaos. The dominant critical interpretation of that volume has always been that Cowley, in Michael Kreyling's words, "rescued" Faulkner's work by "normalizing" his "fragmented narrative sequence" and

relating his fiction to American history without the obvious intermediaries of Confederate myth or Mencken's obnoxious cultural triumphalism... largely because of *The Portable Faulkner*, readers began to treat Faulkner as an authoritative voice on the South's historical record as an American, not a third-world, barbaric, place (*Faulkner in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 19).

For Kreyling, the troublesome aspects of Faulkner's regionalism had to be minimized in favor of the more nebulous playing-field of "American history"—the extent to which the South serves as a valid backdrop for this theme is also the extent to which it is distinctively "American" and not "Southern." Elsewhere, Kreyling notes that the publication of *The Portable Faulkner* brought on a "near-universal acknowledgement of [Faulkner's] literary power" (xv-xvi). Kreyling has strong support vis-à-vis both his claim for Faulkner's modernist reputation growing in inverse proportion to his regionalist reputation and the universal appeal and influence of *The Portable Faulkner*; Schwartz calls that volume "the catalyst that began the novelist's literary reputation" (99). Cowley, Schwartz argues, championed Faulkner because he found the author compatible with "a group of writers who... were artistically unmoved by social concerns" and claims that "Faulkner had to be resuscitated because he was connected to the nineteenth-century heritage of Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and James, and he was also intimately tied to the

European moderns” (106). Schwartz’s ultimate view of Cowley paints him as an “idealist” who “placed art above politics, and who claimed that literature in its fully realized form was universal and apolitical” (112).<sup>20</sup> These comments on Schwartz’s part provide an inroads for *Creating Faulkner’s Reputation*, as Schwartz’s volume argues for the influence of the very same politics and social concerns that Cowley’s interest in Faulkner seemed to neglect.

I would like to emphasize that *The Portable Faulkner* relies not only on the aesthetic, modernist unity of Faulkner’s works, but on the specific regionalist consciousness that gave rise to those same works. Leigh Anne Duck has suggested that Faulkner “seemed an ideal national writer” for Cowley because “his haunted Southerners, like Hawthorne’s haunted New Englanders, revealed a structure through which national ‘myths’ might be affecting contemporary lives,” combining, rather than separating, Kreyling’s conception of Faulkner’s Southern history and its competing, overarching “American” history (*Faulkner in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 91). For Duck, a “strong sense of regional particularity” is integral to Cowley’s collection inasmuch as Faulkner’s “fascinat[ion] with a localized history” made him “particularly sensitive to the effects of a specific cultural past within the space of individual consciousness” (91). All the same,

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<sup>20</sup>In the context I have established, this would seem to be a strange portrayal of Cowley, who was fiercely political in his early career, participating in mining strikes in Kentucky in 1932, and, ten years later, coming under investigation by the Office of Emergency Management for his alleged pro-Communist activities during the Thirties. The transcript of Cowley’s interview by that committee reveals that he “was attracted at that time by the Marxian theory,” and “believed that discussion of Communist theories would broaden out and loosen up the thinking here” (*Conversations with Malcolm Cowley* 21). However, Schwartz’s statement of Cowley’s apoliticism is the end result of his attempt to show how Cowley, in the post-war years, attempted to shake off his troubled political past in favor of a more neutral aestheticism. Whatever else might be said of *The Portable Faulkner*, it seems clear that Cowley did *not* attempt to “market” Faulkner as a preeminent commentator on international politics.

Duck does seem to fall back on something reminiscent of Kreyling's binarism, noting a critical turn toward viewing Faulkner's characters as "representative not of a regional pathology but of a national ambivalence toward tradition" (91). Though Duck sees an interrelationship between Cowley's international modernist concern with Faulkner and his consciousness of Faulkner's region as a valid means of access for national (or "universal") issues, she theorizes that Faulkner's regionalism *qua* regionalism is largely deadening, a "pathology" that must be, in a word, "nationalized" to constitute a valid contribution to the author's critical reputation.

What interpretation of Faulkner did Cowley himself espouse? While Duck's reading of *The Portable Faulkner* effectively accounts for Faulkner's persistent regionalism while paying service to Kreyling and Schwartz's narrative of Cowley's sympathy with his modernist leanings at the expense of his Southern peculiarities, it also shares with these readings the notion of regionalism as an obstacle to the author's internationalism. Duck's interpretation seems to be supported by Cowley's later writings on Faulkner, particularly in *The Faulkner-Cowley File* (1966), in which he suggests that Faulkner's "essential subject was not the South or its legend, but rather the human situation, 'the same frantic steeplechase toward nothing everywhere'" (17). In this volume, Faulkner's concern with the South becomes almost incidental; he adopts it as his subject because he "just happen[ed] to know it" and for his whole career "hoped that the material would have more than a regional meaning" (17). Even given Cowley's later comments, however, *The Portable Faulkner* tells a somewhat different story. At first glance, Cowley's collection of Faulkner's writing denotes that writing as constituting "a labor of imagination that has not been equaled in our time" and calls the author "an epic

or bardic poet in prose” and a “creator of myths,” statements that seem entirely in line with the common interpretation that Cowley wants to essentially decontextualize Faulkner and discuss his works as the exemplars of stylistic modernism that he wanted them to become (*Portable Faulkner* 2, 23).

The “myth” that Cowley saw in Faulkner’s writing in this collection was “a legend of the South,” and the “labor of imagination” was “to invent a Mississippi county that was like a mythical kingdom, but was complete and living in all its details” and “to make his story of Yoknapatawpha County stand as a parable or legend of all the Deep South” (23, 2). Cowley’s phrasing in the latter instance is significant. Faulkner’s work, Cowley suggests, is emblematic not only of a relatively normalized and poorly delineated U.S. region, “the South” in general, but the *Deep* South, the region stripped of the bothersome influence of modernity, the tricky gray areas surrounding Texas and Maryland, the enigma of Florida, and the sprawling hulk of major cities such as Atlanta. The term “South” may be evocative, but “Deep South” is more so by volumes. The generalities of the region “South,” a point on a compass or the legend on a map, give way to a “deepness” that fuels Faulkner’s imagination. Cowley makes a point of noting, in *The Portable Faulkner*, that the author “has a brooding love for the land where he was born and reared and where, unlike the other writers of his generation, he has chosen to spend his life” (19). Cowley, in a seeming contradiction of the Faulkner-as-international-modernist interpretation, here makes a distinct division between Faulkner and his contemporaries.

This would not be the last time that such a strategy saw critical play; Faulkner’s theoretical isolation, the notion that his talent had developed independently of, and thus



enjoyed certain benefits over, the more community-oriented literary projects of his modernist contemporaries would later be extensively used by Agrarian and neo-Agrarian Southern critics. Rather than enforce such an agenda, however, Cowley's repeated mention of Faulkner's (Deep) Southern origins is likely designed to capitalize upon what small successes Faulkner's Southern novels (*Sanctuary* in particular) had enjoyed by invoking the Gothic resonances of Southern regionalism. Though Cowley *did* seem to want to make the case for Faulkner as an international modernist deserving of widespread critical attention, he also did not want to discount the author's status as a Southern regionalist, and the popular interest that attended that label. Only twenty years later, when he reflected on the experience of compiling *The Portable Faulkner* in *The Faulkner-Cowley File*, would he couch his interest in Faulkner purely in terms of international modernism to the exclusion of Southern regionalism. Rather than casting Faulkner's regionalism as a speed bump on the road to international recognition, then, Cowley's volume calculatingly deployed it as a means of achieving that goal. Like Glissant's *échos-monde* and *chaos-monde*, these two interpretations are mutually dependent.

### **3. Regional Schizophrenia: The Nobel Prize Speech and *A Fable***

Even given the dominant critical paradigm I have noted above, the drive to remove Faulkner from his Southern context as a point of necessity for placing him within a modernist context, there remains a strong critical drive to, in a manner of speaking, return the author to this same context and in doing so reify the South within schemes of national and global exchange. Even more compelling are the critical studies that

capitalize on precisely those elements of Faulkner's fiction that seemed, to Cowley and the New Critics, to act as an obstacle to his globalization. For example, African diaspora academics such as Glissant and Houston Baker find his strong regionalist, even Agrarian, themes a potent commentary on how U.S. literary history and popular imaginings of literary tradition tend to minimize troublesome racial themes in favor of politically neutral assertions of aesthetic value. Postsouthern critics such as Martyn Bone have also linked the regionalist 'sense of place' essential to Faulkner's fiction and certain of its varied international interpretations to 21<sup>st</sup>-century reconceptions of place within the context of real estate and remappings of urban spaces. In these manners, I might note, we see the "secret history" to which I have alluded above returning to popular academic discourse, which has begun to realize the inextricability of Faulkner's modernist and regionalist sentiments. In other words, as I will show in regards to Walcott in an upcoming chapter, we see the region continually reassert itself synonymously with, and indeed contingent upon, the regional text's international circulation.

What is particularly intriguing about the modernist relationality and corresponding regional isolationism in Faulkner's career is that it operates not only contextually, in terms of critical readings and interpretations of his work, but also textually, in the author's later writing and subsequent comments on the role of the writer. To many of his readers, the blending of these two elements may seem to be evidential of a sort of regional schizophrenia, in which the form and function of the same region repeatedly changes, and the region continually and unexpectedly intrudes on narratives that seem predominantly concerned with international (high) modernism. In assessing Faulkner's views toward the region in his later career, we might do worse than to

examine his most famous epigraph, emanating from a 1956 interview with the *Paris Review*:

I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it, and by sublimating the actual into [the] apocryphal I... opened up a gold mine of other peoples, so I created a cosmos of my own. I can move these people around like God, not only in space but in time too (*Lion in the Garden*, pp. 255).

If we read the above comment on Faulkner's part within the context of the efforts of Cowley (among others) to interpret the author's regional concerns as a point of access for "universal" meanings, we might find in his stamp / cosmos rhapsodizing strong evidence for the sublimation of his regionalism into the spectrum of international modernism. However, it is important to remember that Faulkner is making this statement in 1956, after his reputation as a modernist, by most accounts, had already been made. The statement is thus less a strong assertion of Faulkner's dedication to and realization of the potential of the region than it is a retrospective reconstruction of what he found, or would have liked to find, in that region. The moment is typical of Faulkner's later career: though he seemed to embrace his post-Nobel status as a respected modernist writer, he repeatedly returned to his region in unexpected ways.

Faulkner was fond of calling himself a "failed poet" in order to dismiss his earlier (pre-*Sartoris*) works as ultimately unsatisfactory flights of fancy. I might invert this claim by stating that, in his later years, Faulkner was a failed modernist to the extent that he was unsuccessful participant in the broad-based elements of international artistry that the country required of a modernist of his stature. In this vein, Michael Kreyling has suggested that, in his later career, Faulkner was less a cultural crusader than a writer consumed by deep-seated ambivalence on all topics of national interest (*Faulkner at 100*,

23).<sup>21</sup> It would seem that, despite his work for the State Department and his many overseas visits and speeches, whatever Faulkner may have been in his later years, he was not a policymaker. Barbara Ladd notes that, though he agreed to chair the writer's group portion of Eisenhower's People to People program, an organization designed to promote the spread of pro-American propaganda abroad, he remained "uncomfortable in the role of public man and ultimately disappointed in the results of his efforts to use a national voice" (*Resisting History* 80). His suggestion that all American books should be stamped "True" or "Not True" prior to their inclusion in foreign libraries and his advocacy of "a year of American silence" to promote "international understanding" serve as further proof to Ladd that "he did not take his charge too seriously" (80-81).<sup>22</sup> This brand of half-joking fatalism informed virtually all of Faulkner's public statements in the late 1950s, most prominently his address to the National Commission for UNESCO in 1959,

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<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that, even if Faulkner *did* in fact have nothing definitive to say about United States policy, this did not prevent those in power from leveraging his international reputation into ideological talking points. For example, Helen Oakley's "William Faulkner and the Cold War: The Politics of Cultural Marketing" theorizes that Faulkner's 1954 visit to Brazil was part of a larger "anticommunist plot staged by the U.S. government" in order to "eliminate what was perceived as the infiltration of communism from Latin America" (*Look Away!* 413, 412). Even if Faulkner did not have strong anti-Communist sentiments, his great cultural currency could be bent to a nationalistic purpose. Kreyling takes note of this fact in *Inventing Southern Literature*, writing that, in Faulkner's later years, "the needy causes of southern literature, the Department of State, and other official cultural interests loaded the author with claims of 'Faulknerian' wisdom that the writer often found beyond his desire or inclination to fulfill" (129).

<sup>22</sup> Faulkner was, on the whole, reluctant to support or critique *any* form of government. In response to a question about Communism he received during a colloquium at Nagano, he stated "I don't like any form of totalitarian government," "I thought that communism in theory would be very good for people," and "democracy as we talk about it in my country is a very clumsy, inefficient way for people to govern themselves, but so far I don't know a better one" (*Faulkner at Nagano* 130-131). This is hardly the language of a cultural crusader, even one who, shortly after speaking at Nagano, stated that the then-state of world politics was "one ideology against a simple natural desire of people to be free" (Meriwether and Millgate, 199).

at which he proclaimed: “The last sound on the worthless earth will be two human beings trying to launch a homemade space ship and already quarreling about where they are going” (*Essays, Speeches, Public Letters* 167).

What seems like an innocuous and ironic moment in Faulkner’s public life is in fact a telling incident of the author’s late self-fashioning and self-citation. The scenario—and even the language—of the UNESCO address is the same as that of the Nobel Prize Speech, which I must give more attention here as Faulkner’s most cited reaction to global politics, if it is a reaction at all. In the speech, *pace* Faulkner’s comments to UNESCO, the last sound left in “the last red and dying evening” is that of man’s “puny inexhaustible voice, still talking” (*Essays, Speeches, Public Letters*, 120).<sup>23</sup> Combine this ethos of endurance with the presence of apocalyptic menace (“there is only one question: when will I be blown up?”) and the primacy of universalized elements (“the old verities and truths of the heart, the universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed”) and it is easy to see how, in Raoul Grunquist’s phrase, the Nobel Prize recipient is both universalist and universalized—they acknowledge that, owing to the nature of the award, they must necessarily speak to a wider audience (Faulkner: “using this moment as a pinnacle from which I might be listened to”) and immediately adopt their own writing and ethos to suit that audience.<sup>24</sup> In Faulkner’s case, we see a philosophy that he did not seem to hold so sacrosanct that he was unable to satirize it at the UNESCO meeting nine years later instantly being recast as a powerful statement of Cold War-era terror and the dominance of American values. Priscilla Wald,

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<sup>23</sup> In Gray, *Mastery’s End*, pp. 239.

<sup>24</sup> “Does it Matter Why Walcott Received the Prize?” in *Research in African Literature* 25 (1994). Cited in Grimwood pp. 239.

for one, has seen in the Nobel Prize speech and subsequent statements by the author (*The American Dream: What Happened to It?*, Faulkner's unfinished, scattered work of political and social commentary) a move toward transmuting the South's shameful past into a cautionary example through which the American Dream can be "renovated and globalized," resulting in "an America that is feared worldwide not because of domination, but because it demonstrates the practice of freedom" (*Faulkner's Inheritance* 38).

What is perhaps most intriguing about Wald's claim is the manner in which it replicates the movement I have noted on the part of Faulknerian criticism away from his associations with the South and toward his inclusion in international modernism. However, here the contemporary movements of globalization, resistance to "domination," and "freedom" stand in for the aesthetic integrity that proved so attractive to Faulkner's New Critical champions. And, as with the New Critics, there is an unacknowledged undercurrent, a regional attachment that this interpretation overlooks. In fact, several critics have noted the discrepancy between Faulkner's statements in the Nobel Prize speech and his regional (not to say Agrarian) sentiments. Michael Grimwood, for one, has called the Nobel Prize speech an expression of doubt rather than an affirmation of the writer's role in society (Grimwood 304-305). Shelby Foote is even more directly critical of the sentiment of the Nobel speech (though he acknowledges that his position is "heresy"), claiming that the gap between the stirring message of the speech and the pessimistic slant of Faulkner's novels acts to "underrate the thing he did best and to overrate the thing that caused whatever flaws there are in his later work" (*The South and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha* 163). Foote sees Faulkner, in the Nobel speech, "delivering himself of something that would be the most effective and what would strike people as

expected once they heard it” (162). The latter statement on Foote’s part is compelling inasmuch as it suggests the Nobel Prize speech is less a stirring, impassioned defense of principles that Faulkner held dear than a prepackaged, carefully formulated appeal to public opinion, and Faulkner himself less an astute commentator on worldwide literary and political events than a regionalist fish out of water.

This interpretation seems to be supported both by Faulkner’s repetition of the language of the Nobel Prize speech in his UNESCO address and within the text of *A Fable* (1954). Toward the end of that book, we find the corporal and the old general discoursing on what might reasonably be called the fate of all mankind, a topic that leads to what must surely rank among the most bizarre passages in any of Faulkner’s novels: the old general’s postulation of an apocalyptic future, “the entire earth one unbroken machined de-mounted dis-rivered expanse of concrete” in which the only sound is the “polysyllabic and verbless patriotic nonsense” bellowed by the machines that have subjugated the human race. Yet, the old general continues, man will survive these travails

because he has that in him which will endure even beyond the ultimate worthless tideless rock freezing slowly in the last red and heatless sunset, ... his puny and inexhaustible voice still talking, still planning; and there too after the last ding dong of doom has rung and died there will be still one sound more: his voice, planning still to build something higher and faster and louder, more efficient and louder and faster than ever before (353-54).

And, bringing conclusion to the entire scenario, the general claims: “I respect and admire him... Because man and his folly—’ Will endure,’ the corporal said. ‘They will do more,’ the old general said proudly. ‘They will prevail’” (355). There are many potential explanations for why Faulkner chose to repeat the language of his Nobel Prize speech in

the text of *A Fable*, but perhaps the simplest is one that appealed to both Faulkner and his critics: the author wrote what he knew, and he knew that the aforementioned speech had been almost universally praised. The remainder of *A Fable* seems to bear out this contention: Faulkner knew something of World War I, knew something of the French and something more of airborne warfare, but little enough of British and German combatants, who appear in the novel as little more than cardboard confections of U.S. stereotypes.

But Faulkner also knew the South, for better or worse, and did not hesitate to narrate it, even in contexts that did not seem to support it. In the middle of the novel, the primary war story is interrupted, for a period of over sixty pages, by the far-fetched tale of a stolen (three-legged) race horse and its comic grooms. The whole affair begins when: “the van containing the horse and the two grooms, the white one and the black one, plunged through a flood-weakened trestle: out of which confusion and mischance were born the twenty-two months from which the English groom emerged at last a practicing Baptist: a Mason: and one of his time’s most skillful manipulators of or players at dice” (153). If this sounds like the setup for a typically Faulknerian tale of thieving, scheming, and general mischief, it’s because it is precisely that; all of the elements of his major writings are present in this narrative. They include, but are not limited to, the Southern setting, the mad chase after escaped livestock, the quixotic triumph of said horse over wave after wave of competitors, even a stirring man-against-the-mob scene in front of a courthouse that seems ripped from the pages of *Intruder in the Dust*. The seemingly derivative aspects of the narrative are perhaps not entirely coincidental; in fact, this entire section of the novel dates back to 1950, when it was published as a short story under the



title “Notes on a Horse Thief.”<sup>25</sup> Gary Harrington, in *Faulkner’s Fables of Creativity* (1990) notes that *A Fable* underwent “an extraordinary number of rewritings and revisions” before publication, and the book is certainly lengthy (and uneven) enough to support a diversion of this magnitude (95). Moreover, the horse thief episode in *A Fable* provides a potent reminder of how, even as Faulkner attempted, as Kreyling writes, to fashion “a complex fable of self-representation to an audience that had been schooled to expect of ‘Faulkner’ what Irving Howe (and many others) called the ‘big book,’” he continued to veer toward regionalism.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly to his earlier works, critical irritation at whatever stylistic failings *A Fable* possessed paled in comparison to the discomfort and even outrage toward the concept of mixing regionalism and international modernism that his readers displayed. Lothar Hönninghausen was speaking with diplomatic aplomb when he stated, at the Faulkner and War conference, that the presence of the “tall tale” of the racehorse in *A Fable* “has upset many readers,” gamely attempting to prove that “Faulkner has made every effort to integrate the alien race-horse plot into the World War I plot” (*Faulkner and War* 128). Other readers were far less forgiving of Faulkner’s diversion. Cleanth Brooks, in *Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* (1978), blustered: “what is this account of a string of equine miracles doing here?” and stated that the story is likely to “promote a certain queasiness in the serious reader” (233). The dominant critical trend, *pace*

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<sup>25</sup> See Robert W. Hutten, “A Major Revision in Faulkner's *A Fable*,” *American Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 2. (May, 1973), pp. 297-299.

<sup>26</sup> *Inventing Southern Literature*, pp. 137. Here I should note that Kreyling distinguishes, in the author’s later career, between “William Faulkner” and “Faulkner,” the former being the man himself, subject to his own peculiar desires, idiosyncracies, and failings, and the latter the composite image that his critics made of him: a chronicler of the South, an international modernist, and, ultimately, an astute commentator on the whole swath of the human experience. Here, of course, Kreyling is discussing the latter identity.

Hönninghausen's attempt to represent the two as compatible, seems to be that there were essentially two inherent master themes in Faulkner's fiction: one that seems avowedly concerned with regional particularities and one that makes strong statements on worldwide literary or social phenomena. David Minter accurately summed up the competing global / regional aspects of the text in *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (1980), in which he stated that *A Fable* signified Faulkner's desire to move "from modes of fiction that made 'nothing happen' toward modes that were at least arguments for change," yet in doing so unsuccessfully attempted to master "a literary mode that was less congenial with his talent" (200).

The allowance for the possibility of regional writing itself constituting a form of global engagement in Faulkner's Nobel Prize speech is, perhaps, why that speech attained such popularity while *A Fable*, with its synthesis of local and global concerns, was an almost unmitigated critical disaster. V.S. Pritchett, in a 1954 piece in *The Partisan Review*, made reference to *A Fable*'s "rather laden majesty" through which "a universal subject has been treated as the compendium of a word-drunk mind" (Claridge 221). Peter Swiggart's *The Art of Faulkner's Novels* (1962) calls it a "splendid failure," noting that it "suffers from poor organization and rhetorical excess," yet nonetheless "represents the author's most impressive dramatization of moral and philosophical themes that dominate his later fiction" (194, 184). Kiyoko Toyama, in *Faulkner and the Modern Fable* (2001) noted that it has been predominantly "neglected or ignored by critics and readers alike," and tallies unfavorable commentaries from such Faulkner luminaries as Noel Polk, Andre Bleikasten, and Joseph Blotner (124). Even the perennial Faulkner advocate Cleanth Brooks, a lifetime enemy of what he viewed as the increasing secularization of literary

writing and, one would expect, a proponent of such an avowedly theological text, admitted, in 1978, that “it is not easy to be fair to this novel” (*Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*, 230). The difficulty that these critics feel in attempting to account for the horse-theft section of *A Fable*, and, on a larger scale, the corresponding difficulty they find in squaring the internationalist bent of the text with Faulkner’s more avowedly regional works, is the same difficulty to which I have alluded elsewhere in this chapter of synthesizing the “modernist” and “secret” histories of Faulkner’s interpretation. To combine the two within one master interpretation, aside from the possibility of deep-seated literary schizophrenia on Faulkner’s part, seems impossible. To maintain both the regionally specific, localist narrative and the more far-reaching global commentary as mutually exclusive and oppositional encapsulated entities, on the other hand, would seem to destroy the unity of the text and lead to unsatisfying conclusions: Faulkner’s work can only deal with the region and the globe separately, as inviolable monoliths that have no bearing on each other.

Glissant and other contemporary theorists have suggested that literary regionalism and globalism, whether in terms of the text’s address of worldwide themes or its circulation within international circles, are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent, a theory I have returned to on several occasions within this work. Faulkner’s works, and the critical corpus that surrounds them, seem to bear out this assumption, but the combination of his regionalism and globalization seem not to result in any comprehensible final product. Purely regional apprehensions of his work are represented as adversarial to, and consequently sundered from, proclamations of his inclusion in either international modernism or global affairs, and when they share textual space in *A*

*Fable* without the intermediating (and regionally deadening) force of “universalism,” the text ceases to cohere and becomes equivalent to Glissant’s unparseable totality. There is, as I have noted earlier, no critical scheme that can account for this discrepancy, no logical way to incorporate both the regionally-inflected German nationalist interpretations of Faulkner’s work and his corresponding reputation in the framework of international modernism, just as there is no way to reach Glissant’s world-totality without the presence of the complementary and mutually inviolate routes of echoes and chaos. A synthesized vision of these categories, as Quentin’s father states in *Absalom, Absalom!*, simply does not explain. Though, as I have stated in this chapter, the literary region and world seem to be mutually dependent, mutually necessary, they do not combine in any legible, logical manner.

If this conclusion seems incomplete and unsatisfying, it may be due to the fact that it is provided, in a manner of speaking, by the unreadable logic of totality itself. Glissant’s *totalité-monde*, inherently incomprehensible, always inscrutable, always apprehended only partially, originates from contrary and irreconcilable forces, just as a total vision of Faulkner’s work derives from the intertwining, though not the union, of mutually incompatible interpretations. That vision is both totalizing, revising his works to fit into an international aesthetic continuum, and totalitarian, deriving from a regionalism that stubbornly refuses to be integrated into that scheme. Ultimately, my argument is less about the specificities of Faulkner’s unique position in the eyes of literary critics than it is a narrative of the process of interpretation, particularly comparative interpretation, itself. To make the text part of an internationalized and seemingly logical literary community, comparable with other communities elsewhere, is

to derive a fractured and ultimately incomplete vision of the world as comprised of such communities. By the same token, to insist that the author remain wholly confined to the region, foreclosing on the possibility of interregional comparativity, dooms that author's texts to an insular exclusivity. Totality itself, unsatisfying and illogical as it may seem, is reached only through a dialectical relationship between both the international echoes and the particularities and contradictions of the region.

## CHAPTER IV

### “FOR MY OWN RACE / AND THE REALITY”: WALCOTT’S NARRATIVES OF NORMATIVE REGIONALISM

*All day I'd looked in the face  
What I had hoped 'twould be  
To write for my own race  
And the reality*

—William Butler Yeats, “The Fisherman” (1919)

#### 1. The Inviolable Island

I would like to begin this chapter where many studies of Walcott’s poetry seem to end: the last lines of *Omeros* (1990), which eschews the densely layered, erudite, and far-reaching style of the previous eight thousand lines in favor of sparer, impressionistic strokes. Rather than dwelling upon the poem’s constantly shifting poetic vistas, “the nesting sills of Ulissibona,” “sun-drizzled Howth,” or the “charted views / from pigeon-stirred Trafalgar,” Walcott returns to St. Lucia, where the poem began, and an idyllic portrait of Achille cleaning a recent catch of fish (189, 200, 194).<sup>1</sup> The initial stanzas deflate much of the heroic language that has been applied to the poem’s characters in the three hundred preceding pages; the “triumphant Achilles, / his hands gloved in blood,” walks through the motions of his simple, relatively unromanticized task, a far cry from the trope of the heroic fisherman that *Omeros* has created, with shoulders like “knobs of

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<sup>1</sup> William Logan, in a New York Times review of *The Bounty*, marks the narrator of *Omeros*’s tendency “to gallivant from city to city like a poet on a reading tour” (<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/06/29/reviews/970629.29logant.html>, access date 30 March 2009). Suffice it to say that nearly every reader of that text has marked its pronounced tendency toward cosmopolitanism, yet not every reader is entirely complimentary in their assessment of it.

ebony,” his “hard fists” enclosing a “mossed rope as bearded as a love-vine” (324, 129). And then the much-cited final lines, setting a scene and then leaving it to its own devices: “Night was fanning its coalpot / from one catching star. The No Pain lit its doors / in the village. Achille put the wedge of dolphin / that he’d saved for Helen in Hector’s rusty tin. / A full moon shone like a slice of raw onion. / When he left the beach the sea was still going on” (325). Readers of these last few lines have not failed to note their emphasis on an idyllic domesticity that would seem to offer a counterpoint to the larger events of the poem. All of the elements of a peaceful evening meal, not excepting the means of cooking it (the coalpot) are present, while the romanticized conflicts of the text (Achille’s feud with Hector, symbolized by the tin) exist only in memory. Lance Callahan has echoed much critical sentiment when he claimed, in *In the Shadows of Divine Perfection* (2003), that the final section of the poem “reads with a remarkably unforced quality, not striking the ear as some sort of versification workshop, but rather possessed of an elegant fluidity,” creating a space in which “the primacy of the kinetic [is] suspended, and immediate insight made possible” (46-47, 108). After much wandering, it would seem, the poet has finally returned home, to the place where simple, honest representations of his native landscape are the only really desirable ones, and a native audience, like Yeats’s idealized reader, content with a poem “as cold / And passionate as the dawn,” the worthiest necessary. Such a sentiment, it would seem, is in tune with the Odyssean themes of the poem, its ever-present concern with homecomings.

The final lines of *Omeros* are in many ways a tangible culmination of the poet’s repeatedly stated ambition, both in and outside of the text, to compose simple, unadorned verse, a style that mirrors the “green simplicities” of the island (187). In *Midsummer*

(1984), for instance, he suggests a normative St. Lucian reality, “untranslatable in verse or prose,” that feels no “need for art or medicine, for Prospero’s / snake-knotted staff, or sea-bewildering stick” (48). More accurately, the end of *Omeros* might be said to arrive in the *middle* of such desires, since Walcott can be found, in *The Bounty* (1997), seeking “an acre of sunlight and salt wind. One acre / only, and nothing beyond that, with my own version / of the world beyond,” and proclaiming even as recently as *The Prodigal* (2004) that his “deep delight lay in being dated” (34, 6). One of the central paradoxes of *Omeros*, and of Walcott’s career as a whole, is the tension between the poet’s ostensible desire to remain confined to the locale, and, correspondingly, compose verse that deals explicitly with that locale in an unvarnished manner, and his continuous thematic movement into areas progressively more distant from that locale, using ever more complex poetic language to refer to it. In the early “As John to Patmos” (1948), for example, he writes: “so shall I voyage no more from home; may I speak here / This island is heaven,” yet, almost in the same breath, metaphorizes that same locale seemingly automatically, in the juxtaposition of its “sparse-powdered sky” with the “dustblown blood of cities” (*Collected Poems* 5). It seems evident, when we consider Walcott’s career as a whole, that no matter how much he seems to desire an ametaphorical style, he nonetheless finds that style somehow inadequate. Even in *Another Life* (1973), in which the poet remembers: “I rendered / the visible world that I saw / exactly,” he states that this localist mimetics “hindered me, for / in every surface I sought / the paradoxical flash of an instant / in which every facet was caught / in a crystal of ambiguities” (*Collected Poems* 200). Walcott’s desire to both capture every “facet” and “ambiguity” of his subject, elements that generally lead his attention away from the subject itself, and his



simultaneous claim not to stray far from home seem to create an unworkable poetic perspective.

Returning to the last lines of *Omeros*, now with a somewhat less optimistic eye than Callahan's, the disjunction between the passage's apparent desire to speak plainly and openly about the region seems distinctly at odds with not only the bulk of the poem, but also the poet's career as a whole. While Walcott might claim, in *Omeros*, an attraction to "an epic where every line was erased / yet freshly written in sheets of exploding surf" and "never alter[s] its metre / to suit the age, a wide page without metaphors," he also represents the region as almost involuntarily generating classical allusion and reference: "yesterday these shallows were the Scamander, / and armed shadows leapt from the horse, and the bronze nuts / were helmets, Agamemnon was the commander / of weed-bearded captains" (296, 35). Natalie Melas thus finds, in *All the Difference in the World* (2007), the ending of *Omeros* to be less concerned with representing Achille "in some unencumbered, original condition, apprehensible in his totality as 'just a human being'" but rather evocative of infinite comparativity: "similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*" (168). What Melas sees as a final reinscription of the polyreferential character of *Omeros*, however, certain other critics have called a certain falsity on Walcott's part. Paul Jay, in "Fated to Unoriginality: The Politics of Mimicry in Derek Walcott's *Omeros*" (2006) claims that, "to the degree *Omeros* endorses a poetry of the actual over a poetry of metaphor, it seems to me it produces an ending not quite earned" and that Walcott's classical references are "simultaneously employed and rejected in a somewhat disingenuous way" (554). Jay qualifies his criticism by stating

that this apparent contradiction “does not mean the poem has failed in evoking something essential about the Caribbean” (554).

Jay’s statement serves as the argumentative germ for my discussion of Walcott. My central claim in this chapter is that Walcott, like Faulkner, found his international reputation inextricable from his unique brand of regionalism. However, *unlike* Faulkner, who labored, and ultimately and inevitably failed, to integrate the two, Walcott insists on the primacy of a conscious regionalist primitivism that marks the region as inviolate and necessarily distinct, continually separating the island from the globe at large. In Walcott’s claim to an underlying set of localist truths that supercede his tactics of modern and postmodern reference and pastiche, we see a distinct, yet correlative, means of authorial reaction to the globalization of the local. At the center of the issue, I will show, is the possibility (or lack thereof) of Walcott “speaking truly” for the region despite the demystifying and remystifying forces of global circulation and intercultural reference, in other words, to “evoke something essential about the Caribbean.”

The evidence for casting Walcott as a thoroughgoing regionalist, even a primitivist, is strong even when we consider his pervasive cosmopolitanist sentiments. As Walcott’s poetic eye wanders, it seldom fails to reaffix itself to a definitively St. Lucian landscape. In *The Bounty*, for example, he apostrophizes: “My country heart, I am not home till Sesenne sings, / a voice with woodsmoke and ground-doves in it, that cracks / like clay on a road whose tints are the dry season’s, / whose cuatros tighten my heartstrings” (31). Sesenne (Marie Selipha Sesenne Descartes), a St. Lucian folk singer, also appears in *The Prodigal*, as we shall see later, in the same context of indelible

linkage to the flora, fauna, and contours of the local landscape.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, her singing serves as an elemental filament, in both cases, between the poet and his home region. “Wherever I have gone,” Walcott writes, again in *The Bounty*, “I watch the bright wires follow / Sesenne’s singing, sunlight in fading rain, / and the names of rivers whose bridges I used to know” (31). The theme of stitching and weaving, so crucial in *Omeros*, where it represents both individual innovation (in the Penelope / Maud Plunkett comparison as well as Walcott’s incidental references to “stitch[ing]” a wound into Plunkett’s “character” [38]) and cross-cultural concurrences (the sea-swift “sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle’s line” [319]), reprises its role here. Sesenne’s voice is here interwoven with personal memory and local authenticity; no matter how far the poet wanders, the stanza implies, he can follow the thread of the voice home, like Theseus in his labyrinth. Other sections of *The Bounty* reinforce the concept of the island as a normative subtext to the poet’s wanderings. In that volume, he notes, somewhat dolorously, that “The days would darken with cold, more leaves would die / behind fences, the fog thicken, but beyond them was the good island” (52). The ostensibly static, normative island acts as a counterweight to both the ravages of time and Walcott’s potentially traitorous cosmopolitanism.

The prevalence of the normative island, usually shorthanded as “home” by both Walcott and his critics, leads to the widespread interpretation of Walcott as a fundamentally regional, if eclectic, writer. Even as Walcott uses “canonical Western forms and themes,” Paul Breslin writes in reference to *Omeros*, “he almost always applies them to local details, as though testing their universality” (*Nobody’s Nation* 47).

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<sup>2</sup> Sesenne appears elsewhere in Walcott’s writing as well; for example, in the Nobel Prize speech, he exegizes several lines from one of her songs.

Peter Erickson, writing on a different text (*Tiepolo's Hound*), reaches something of the same conclusion in a 2005 essay, stating that the function of the paintings embedded within the far-ranging poem is to “serve as a marker, a placeholder, a groundwork, that maintains the figure of home until the poetic text can fully embrace it” (225-226).<sup>3</sup> This is a strong interpretation made stronger by Walcott’s own statements on the concept of home, his claims that “I’ve never felt that I belong anywhere else but in St. Lucia. The geographical and spiritual fixity is there” (*Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* 79). The region *qua* region, these interpretations imply, survives whatever delocalizing and relocalizing sentiments that the poet may espouse in his omnidirectional poetry, acting as a correlate and counterweight to the operations of the literary journey.

And yet, almost in the same breath that Walcott insists on the normative, constant concept of the region, he acknowledges that, to some extent, the region is insufficient. “This afternoon,” he muses in a 1986 interview with Edward Hirsch, “I asked myself if I would stay here for the rest of my life if I had the chance of leaving. The answer really is, I suppose, no... And yet the more I come back here the less I feel that I’m a prodigal or a castaway returning” (*Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* 79). Even if the region represents “spiritual fixity” for Walcott, his own attitude toward that same region is disproportionately mutable. The force that St. Lucia exerts upon him is not constant but contingent on his own interpretation of himself as a “prodigal or a castaway.” From this we might conclude that, as a general rule, Walcott’s “natural” attachment to his home region is, to some extent, less important than his poetically *constructed* attachment.

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<sup>3</sup> On occasion, this critical tendency leads to larger claims about cultural allegiance and perspective; for example, Lance Callahan, in *In the Shadows of Divine Perfection*, finds in *Omeros* Walcott’s validation of a “‘Caribcentric’ perspective” (41).

However powerful the concept of the underlying, ever-present normative island may be, then, we must acknowledge it to be to some extent a misinterpretation; rather than relying on a singular, static vision of his home region, we might better take his region as essentially chameleonic, in alignment with Antonia MacDonald-Smythe's general assertion that "the expansive geography of Walcott's imagination has necessarily generated myriad subject positions in relation to provincialism" (88).

Here, however, I would like to take the argument one step further by reassessing the very notion of "home," which has generally been parsed as Caribbean fixity by critics, in Walcott's poetry. What Walcott is in fact seeking, I want to argue, is a discursive notion of "home," a poetic ideal, rather than a "real" (and stubbornly unromanticized) region. This is a concept that, despite its simplicity, has seen little play in Walcott studies; critics of his poetry prefer to note, with Rei Terada, that his career shows a growing "yearning after international community," expanding its scope of reference yet maintaining the normativity of his "home" region.<sup>4</sup> MacDonald-Smythe has also seized upon the notion of a capacious border-crossing community in Walcott's writing, stating that "the world, transfigured through art, becomes a province and Walcott can insist: 'My community, that of any twentieth century artist, is the world.'"<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, such an intercultural sentiment does not seem to be entirely at odds with the notion of the normative island given the Odyssean homecoming themes in much of Walcott's poetry, most notably *Omeros*. However, such theories of Walcott's cosmopolitanism, even his rooted cosmopolitanism, tend to make St. Lucia an ossified

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<sup>4</sup> Terada cited in Pollard, pp. 148. In her own volume, Terada writes: "Walcott's mimicry grows more fully 'American' with the years, expanding its possibilities of reference" (10).

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald-Smythe 100. Walcott quoted in *Conversations With Derek Walcott*, pp. 83.

symbol, consistently bearing the same significances throughout his career and within individual works; they generally do not take into account the region's endlessly shifting meanings for the poet. In this sense, they might be said to "flatten" St. Lucia to a perhaps unnecessary extent, denoting regionalism, as we have seen in other contexts, as primarily an outdated counterdiscourse to the rhetoric of global movement and comparativity.

We might revise these theories by taking into account Édouard Glissant's assertion, in *Caribbean Discourse*, that a "natural" history of the Caribbean is impossible and that authorial attachment to the region is thus more a question of what the subject can tolerate or synthesize. In this light, Walcott's notion of an elemental connection to his home island might better be seen as a particular variety of authorial construction, or *performance* (63-65). The concept of performance is not unknown to Walcott, either in its obvious significance to his dramatic career or as a means of conceiving of the multitude of poetic identities, or personae, that he puts forth over time (on which more later)—we might say that he regards the processes of writing, reading, and speaking poetry as separate performances in themselves. In an October 2008 interview with the *Guardian*, he marks his oft-cited "The Schooner *Flight*" as a "dramatic poem," and marks his use of dialect as the engine that drives that drama: "whenever a persona arrives, the expression of dialect is, in a way, an expression of different personae."<sup>6</sup> Such a statement emphasizes the performativity of the poem inasmuch as it links utterance and role. Walcott goes on to draw a more direct connection between originality and performance, stating that the "basic language" out of which dialect emerges "comes out of a dramatisation through the medium of masks or faces or characters...to be true to the

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/oct/04/poetry.derekwalcott>. Access date March 18, 2009.

interior tone of reflection you need to know the exact measure of the sound you are reflecting.” Walcott’s use of dialect in this instance (and, perhaps, others) seems to be the inverse of the usage of many of his contemporary Caribbean poets (Edward Brathwaite, for example) in that it does not suggest access to authentic, uniquely Caribbean forms of identity, but rather serves as a form of “performing” Caribbeanness.<sup>7</sup> Walcott’s premise that comprehension of the “exact measure” of language precedes dialect in some of his poetry implies that there are performative aspects to ostensibly regionally determined language patterns. Normativity here is not located in specifically regional elements but in the synthesis of master-narratives from which regional styles derive.

I have spoken earlier of how certain aspects of Faulkner’s regionalism came to be viewed as antithetical to his status as an international modernist. It may be possible to make something of the same argument in regards to Walcott. If this is so, what general category of modernism would Walcott fall into? Critics have extensively traced his kinship with many exemplars of European and U.S. high modernism; the congruity of his poetic sensibility with the work of Eliot, Stevens, Pound, Auden, and Dylan Thomas is particularly well-documented.<sup>8</sup> The most compelling bond of all may be his relationship to Irish modernists such as Joyce and Yeats; Charles Pollard notes that Walcott “renews and broadens” Joyce’s cosmopolitan modernism by “representing how the Caribbean experience has been shaped by the myths and histories of Europe, Africa, and the New

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<sup>7</sup> My intent here is not to make an essential point about Walcott or his contemporaries’ use of dialect in their poetry, as there have been a great multitude of far more complete studies of precisely these elements. Rather, I simply mean to invoke dialect as one of many ways in which Walcott performs regional affiliation.

<sup>8</sup> See Terada, *American Mimicry*, and Pollard, *New World Modernism*.

World” (198).<sup>9</sup> If we take the principles of a modernist aesthetic, as Pollard does, to comprise “the simultaneity of tradition, the defining of artistic maturity as the assimilating of all cultural sources, and the valorization of history,” then Joyce’s modernism and Walcott’s own seem to share considerable overlap (200). Pollard’s Walcott-Joyce comparison raises several intriguing quandaries: is it important to distinguish, as J. Michael Dash does, between “the first moment of modernity in the Caribbean” and “the far more important second moment of a Caribbean appropriation of the modern” (15)? If so, is it critically valid to equate this appropriation with traditional modernist intertextuality? Or might it be more profitable to associate, as many recent critics have, Walcott’s modernism with specifically Caribcentric styles, or, more generally, “alternative” modernities that, as Ato Quayson claims, “are not easily assimilable to the history of the West in any straightforward way” (31)?

Certainly a Caribcentric or “alternative” version of Walcott’s ostensible modernism underscores Pollard’s emphasis, in *New World Modernisms* (2004) on the “anxiety” of modernist writers in the Caribbean toward “the history, language, and ideology of colonialism,” an anxiety that leads to those writers’ tendency toward “creolizing imperial and ancestral sources of culture to resist colonial domination” (18). These ideas have been circulated among many critics of Caribbean literature, perhaps most importantly by Simon Gikandi, who writes that creolized Caribbean modernisms

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<sup>9</sup> Certainly Walcott found intriguing parallels between his own attempt to chronicle the idiosyncrasies of a postcolonial island and the corresponding project of Yeats, Joyce, and Seamus Heaney, among others. Much of the incidental Irish imagery in *Omeros*, for one, no doubt derives from this connection—Maud Plunkett’s origins and the Glendalough and Dublin sections of the poem come to mind. For a somewhat cynical review of the Walcott-Yeats congruence, see Helen Vendler, “Poet of Two Worlds,” *The New York Times Review of Books*, 4 March 1982.



develop as “a narrative strategy and counter-discourse away from outmoded and conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing cultural structures” (*Writing in Limbo* 5). I would like to suggest that Walcott’s modernism manifests itself less as a Caribcentric inversion (and, implicitly, parody) of the imperialistic elements of high modernism than a perpetual preference for the narratives of other regions. Unlike Faulkner’s modernism, which seemed to operate parallel (and sometimes in opposition) to his regional affiliations, Walcott’s modernist sentiments could more properly be phrased as a proliferation of widespread regionalisms. Casting modernism, in Walcott’s work, as a longing for other places both aligns him with the cosmopolitan, highly citational methods of Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and others and exposes the fundamental regional ambivalence that dominates much of his work. In truth, such a sentiment both serves as the driving force behind such deeply intercultural Walcott works as *Omeros* and *Tiepolo’s Hound* and suggests a variety of regional determinism that Walcott has been unable to escape, for to make his modernist style an inherent preference for *elsewhere* implies the existence of a region from which such an othering impulse can operate. For the works of Homer, Milton, Yeats, Auden, Joyce, and the many other influences that converge in Walcott’s writing to be called “elsewheres,” there must be a valid, central region from which these “elsewheres” depart. Similarly, if we are to call Walcott’s modernism an “alternative” or “parallel” modernism, we must acknowledge that such phraseology locates the “true” site of modernism, to which Walcott’s project forms a correlative, in other regions.

This idea has a long history in Caribbean literary theory, even apart from the prevalence of the parallel themes of exile and relationality noted by many critics. George

Handley notes, in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* (2000), that “the Caribbean’s prodigal desire for the exotic” runs the potential risk of “condemn[ing]” the subject to “a perpetual preference for a different story” (115). Handley’s proclamation, though it is directed toward the Caribbean in general, bears distinct resonances with Walcott’s career. Walcott himself notes, somewhat obliquely in *Another Life* (in which he describes himself as “a prodigy of the wrong age and colour”) and more directly in “What the Twilight Says” (1970) that he felt in his early work a “yearning to be adopted” and situated himself predominately within a European literary legacy, “legitimately prolonging the mighty line of Marlowe, of Milton” (*Another Life* 145, *What the Twilight Says* 27-28).<sup>10</sup> Such an attitude, even retrospectively constructed, should be familiar to readers of Naipaul, for example, or Mittelholzer, or any others of the group of Caribbean expatriate writers of the mid-twentieth century.

What differentiates Walcott’s prodigal modernism from the work of these authors, however, is not the fact that he, in opposition to their migrations, remained at home (for much of his life he did not), or that he persistently deployed a style or theme that offered a regionalist counterpoint to more widespread foreign forms, but that he came to regard his own set of poetic (modernist) devices, in their multiplication of regional narratives, as diluting the concept of a singular “home” region. In this assertion I differ from the vanguard of Walcott criticism, which generally represents Walcott’s far-reaching, citational modernism as forming a hybridized identity for the region. Pollard, for example, claims that Walcott’s repetition of “modernism’s ambivalence” brings about a

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<sup>10</sup> J. Michael Dash phrases Walcott’s pervasive concern with far-flung literary references somewhat more kindly: “his insistence is consistently on the brilliant nonoriginality of Caribbean culture. His emphasis is not genealogical but intercultural” (98).

“new, multicultural ideal for the region,” while Richard Pattenon has placed the site of “artistic interpretation” in the Caribbean in the realm of “political fragmentation, ethnic multiplicity, and historical discontinuity,” polygonal lines of force that artists unite into the “lineaments of a culture” (*New World Modernism* 39, *Caribbean Passages* 6). My argument might even be said to oppose Glissant’s relational poetics, which both marks intercultural reference as endemic to the Caribbean and suggests that the essence of Caribbean art lies not in normative centers but in the interplay of widespread peripheries.

*Pace* all of the above theories, we find in Walcott’s writing, and particularly in his poetry, the articulation of a region that is deliberately and consciously *non*-relational. And further: relying on my earlier definition of modernism as a longing for elsewhere, I might venture to call this region *anti*-relational insofar as it issues continuous reprimands to the poet’s schemes of comparative writing. At least up until *Omeros*, these reprimands take the form of doubt and anxiety on Walcott’s part, as he repeatedly insists that the region does not need, and even actively resists, the assortment of references, particularly classical concurrences, which he has endowed upon it. In a telling stanza late in the poem, amid references to “All that Greek manure under the green bananas,” Walcott puts the following query to himself:

There, in her head of ebony,  
there was no real need for the historian’s  
remorse, nor for literature’s. Why not see Helen  
as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow,  
swinging her plastic sandals on that beach alone,  
as fresh as the sea-wind? Why make the smoke a door? (271)

The smoke of the last sentence, a reference to a much earlier section of the poem, is the junction, the interface, between the unadorned, impressionistic present and the mythologizing drive of the poem, the difference between Helen as a “real” (albeit

fictional) resident of St. Lucia and her status as a symbol of, alternately, Helen of Troy, the island as a whole, and any number of other manifold significances.<sup>11</sup> It is, in essence, the ligament between vehicle and tenor; if the smoke is *not* a door, not an engine for driving intercultural reference, there is only Helen herself, “as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow.” Here, and elsewhere in *Omeros*, Walcott longs for this demythologized aesthetic, neurotically wondering: “When would the sails drop / from my eyes, when would I not hear the Trojan War / in two fishermen cursing in Ma Kilman’s shop?” (271). Yet this is a crisis that the text itself, not its ostensible normative reality, creates. Walcott is not the passive mediator of existing comparative regionalisms, but the generator of that comparativity; as Melas notes, his repeated deployment of “a resemblance that is precisely *not* proper to the thing being compared” in itself constitutes “a gesture of appropriation,” albeit one that denies “the logic of ‘property in the sense of possession’” (164). This appropriation results only from active poetic *bricolage*, not the inheritance of specific, time-tested, ossified cultural linkages.

## 2. Performance and Personae

With the fabulative nature of his regionalist poetics in mind, it may be more appropriate to consider not *whether* Walcott chooses to proclaim a natural attachment to his region, but to what extent and in what forms he decides to broadcast that attachment. As my forthcoming survey of his early career will show, the evolution of Walcott’s regionalism is less a question of the rise or decay of poetic allegiance with his home

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<sup>11</sup> Literally, when Helen passes through the smoke, “yesterday these shallows were the Scamander, / and armed shadows leapt from the horse, and the bronze nuts / were helmets, Agamemnon was the commander / of weed-bearded captains” (35).

region than the progressive and performative alteration of his subject-position vis-à-vis that region. For, even from the very beginning of his career, even in the unpublished poems that he penned as a teenager, his writing was always already international. In many ways, Walcott's childhood and early career provide correlates for this hybridization; born half-white, to affluent parents, and the recipient of a European-inflected education, first in St. Lucia and later in Jamaica, his earliest work, as Bruce King, author of the biography *Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life* (2000), claims, involved "consciously modelling his poetry on earlier works," a cycle of admiration for and subsequent mimicry of prominent European poets (22). King describes Walcott in these early years as "feverish, elated, intense," and "finding parallels" between the canonical poetry he was exposed to and his local environment, as articulated in "As John to Patmos": "He had a vocation, like John, but his was to hymn St. Lucia" (48). However, this localistic sentiment, King notes, gradually declined as Walcott realized that a career as a poet would entail relocation, perhaps even the assimilation of another "home" culture. Moreover, in the history that King constructs, not emigrating from the region would have meant career suicide for Walcott, as it entailed actual suicide for Harold Simmons, a painter, educator, and early mentor to Walcott: "After some decades of community leadership... Simmons died, a drunk, rejected by local society, an illustration to Walcott of what happened to West Indian artists who remained at home" (26). Though Walcott's early poetry created of St. Lucia "a self-enclosed world of himself, his friends, the landscape, the sea, peasants in the distance, [and] tourists on the fringe," the poetically vibrant region was also "impoverished, without jobs, a place to leave in search

of work, qualifications, adventure... Life was elsewhere. Culture was elsewhere. History was elsewhere” (28).

It seems evident that Walcott’s eventual departure from St. Lucia for college in Jamaica was both a major event in his career and, to some extent, an inevitability. Upon leaving St. Lucia for Jamaica, King writes, Walcott was “of two minds”: though he “loved St. Lucia and had already decided that he was to be its artist,” he also “was becoming bored and was anxious to move on” (81). Ironically, the most effective way for Walcott to speak with the voice of the region was to leave it. Though the small volume of poetry (*25 Poems*, 1948) and the multiple community theatre productions he created while at home established him as a prominent local artist, even a prodigy, it was not until he journeyed outside of the Caribbean that he was seen as emblematic of the region. The publication of *In a Green Night* (1962), almost universally acclaimed as a defining moment for Caribbean poetry, was brought about only through the connections that Walcott made in Trinidad and, later, New York. In a review of that volume, the venerable C.L.R. James wrote: “We have produced a poet, an authentic poetry-centered poet. Whatever else we do or do not do, that is something... For centuries we used the language and literature of the English people. Now we are adding to it. Let no one underestimate what this means, to them, to us, and to other English-speaking peoples” (King 185). King calls James’s statement a “declaration of independence” for Caribbean postcolonial subjects, but *In a Green Night*, both in the conditions of its production and in its relentless reliance upon European literary forms (even the title derives from a Marvell poem), might very nearly be called a declaration of *dependence* (185). Though *In a Green Night* does indeed valorize the region in such poems as “The Harbour,” which

reflects: “The fishermen rowing homeward in the dusk, / Do not consider the stillness through which they move,” or “To a Painter in England,” in which the poet reminds an artist imprisoned by the “strict, grey industry / Of cities of fog and winter fevers” of “personal islands / For which Gaugins sicken,” there are also, in this volume, such poems as “Return to D’Ennery, Rain,” with its agonized query: “O God, where is our home?” and its counterbalancing of the regionalist fervor of the “passionate exiles” with “sorrows,” “horror,” and “bitter devotion to home,” and the ironic “Prelude” that bitterly notes how visitors to the Caribbean view its residents “only / In tourist booklets, behind ardent binoculars” (15, 16, 34, 11).<sup>12</sup> These poems suggest neither an entirely regionalist nor wholly cosmopolitan sentiment; rather, they pull in both directions. Such bifurcated force-lines are familiar to critics of Caribbean modernism; as Gikandi writes, “Caribbean writers cannot adopt the history and culture of European modernism, especially as defined by the colonizing structures, but neither can they escape from it because it has overdetermined Caribbean cultures in many ways” (3).

As with *In a Green Night*, Walcott’s later poetry does not seem to involve a conscious rejection of either regionalistic or cosmopolitan sentiments. Many critics of his work have thus had difficulty tracing any such distinctive shifts across the course of his career. Rei Terada theorizes that, in his early work, Walcott applies “canonical Western forms and themes” to primarily “local details, as if testing their universality,” while in his more recent poetry his subject matter “ranges beyond Caribbean settings,” yet addresses those locales in a more regionalistic manner (47). This claim seems to be borne out by

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<sup>12</sup> V.S. Naipaul, in his essay “Caribbean Odyssey” (2007), wrote that the “stillness” lines, among others in the volume, inspired regional pride in even his comparatively flinty heart, causing him to “understand how important Pushkin was to the Russians, doing for them what hadn’t been done before. I put the Walcott as high as that.”

Walcott's statement, in "The Muse of History," that "the older and more assured I grew, the stronger my isolation as a poet, the more I needed to become omnivorous about the art and literature of Europe to understand my own world" (*What the Twilight Says* 63). If Walcott became "more omnivorous" in his later work, we must acknowledge that to some extent he was omnivorous to begin with, as my reading of *In a Green Night* suggests. I would assert, in response to Terada and Walcott's analyses of trends across the author's career, that regardless of any increasing or decreasing degree of intercultural reference, what Walcott's later career doubtlessly incorporates is an ever-increasing sense of lack: the lack of stable origins for Caribbean writers, the lack of a historical literary tradition in the same, or, in the words of his Nobel Prize speech, "not enough books," "no theatres, no museums, simply not enough to do" (*What the Twilight Says* 73). This theme of lack leads directly to one of Walcott's most prolific poetic forms of orientation toward the region: that of the Caribbean writer as an Adamic figure who, as Breslin writes, "circumvents the Anglo-American burden of literary influence" by virtue of his unique origins and locale, and describes his terrain "as if for the first time... Eluding the names given by others, the Caribbean Adam is free to name things for himself" (2). The (theoretical) intellectual vacuity of the Caribbean setting that proves so irksome for writers such as Naipaul becomes an opportunity to reinvent and to create anew for Walcott. "If there was nothing," he writes in "What the Twilight Says," "there was everything to be made. With this prodigious ambition one began" (4).<sup>13</sup> The "ambition" of the Adamic author, Breslin claims, is not only a refiguration of "the theological topos

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<sup>13</sup> This sentiment is echoed in the Nobel Prize speech: "Yet, deprived of books, a man must fall back on thought, and out of thought, if he can learn to order it, will come the urge to record, and in extremity, if he has no means of recording, recitation, the ordering of memory which leads to metre, to commemoration" (*What the Twilight Says* 73).



of Christ as the Second Adam, come to restore a fallen world,” but the possibility of transforming a traumatic history into a source of strength (103).<sup>14</sup> The Adamic theme is pervasive in Walcott’s later poetry, particularly in *Another Life*, wherein he writes, in an apostrophe to Dunstan St. Omer: “We were blest with a virginal, unpainted world / with Adam’s task of giving things their names, / with the smooth white walls of clouds and villages / where you devised your inexhaustible, impossible Renaissance” (294).<sup>15</sup> Such is the basic nature of the Adamic symbolic identity—owing to the vicissitudes of colonial history and the (theoretically) unblemished canvas of Caribbean literary society (*a la* Naipaul), the Caribbean author must create *ex nihilo*, raising lush vegetation where nothing before bloomed.<sup>16</sup>

The lack felt by Walcott’s Adamic persona reappears in his second major poetic identity, that of Crusoe, yet Crusoe introduces the possibility of this lack being filled not by individual invention but through *bricolage*.<sup>17</sup> Crusoe, unlike Adam, who requires

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<sup>14</sup> In regards to the latter point, Breslin writes: “The newborn Caribbean Adam arrives in the burial clothes of the past. He has experienced what Glissant calls a nonhistory, but he must turn it from a wound into an enabling privilege, from *blessure* to blessing” (6).

<sup>15</sup> In *Omeros*, a much later text, the Adamic theme is still prevalent, yet, significantly, appears predominately in reference to the Plunketts’ attitude toward the St. Lucian landscape, as when Maud whispers: “‘It’s so still. It’s like Adam and Eve all over,’... ‘Before the snake. Without all the sin’” (63). It is difficult to read Dennis and Maud as Adam and Eve without some measure of irony, a measure that expands in scope significantly when Dennis is tempted to “dare [God’s] indignation / at a second Eden with its golden apple” by Maud’s snake-shaped golden bracelet, metonymic for Helen, who covets it (96-97).

<sup>16</sup> For a much more thorough explication of the Adamic theme in Walcott’s poetry, see George Handley’s *New World Poetics: Nature and the Adamic Imagination of Walt Whitman, Pablo Neruda, and Derek Walcott* (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Though Adam and Crusoe compromise the majority of Walcott’s symbolic identities and are most fruitful for my argument, I should here make reference to the figure of Philoctetes as well. In Walcott’s more recent writing, the wounded castaway takes precedence over Crusoe; Breslin finds in Philoctetes Walcott’s acknowledgement of the “formerly tacit ironies of his Adamic stance,” a more direct expression of themes that had

nothing for his creative processes, requires knowledge of the world as a precondition for knowledge and subsequent chronicling of the region. Walcott deploys Crusoe roughly from *The Castaway* (1965) to *Omeros* (1990), wherein it becomes much less prevalent. Of his two poems and one essay that explicitly focus on Crusoe and the countless other references to the character in varied media, perhaps the most that can be said is that Walcott adopts a variety of perspectives toward Defoe's protagonist. In "The Figure of Crusoe," Walcott finds in the title character elements of God, Columbus, Adam, a beachcomber, a missionary, and Defoe himself (Hamner 35). In the same essay, Walcott calls his own use of Crusoe "various, contradictory and as changeable as the Old Man of the Sea" (Hamner 35). However, it seems fairly evident that, by definition, the Crusoe persona begins his enterprise in an environment bereft of the comforts that he has become accustomed to in his previous life. Yet here Crusoe departs significantly from Adam, for, while the latter seems to require a *tabula rasa* upon which to sketch his vision, the former gradually comes to believe that there are certain materials available on the island that can be adapted to his ends. This realization necessarily comes about only after the subject has been deprived of the virtues of the ostensibly barren island. In "Crusoe's Journal," Walcott writes: "The hermetic skill... never surrenders wholly, for it knows / it needs another's praise / like hoar, half-cracked Benn Gunn, until it cries / at last, "O happy desert!" / and learns again the self-creating peace / of islands" (*Collected Poems* 94). Here, Walcott references the well-known passage of Defoe's novel in which Crusoe

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previously languished dormant: "In Crusoe, Walcott found his Caribbean second Adam, whose shipwreck so radically separates him from his past that he seems to have none. But his Philoctetes still suffers from the sundering violence of the Middle Passage; only when that wound heals can he be Adamic" (246, 249). For more on Walcott's use of Philoctetes, see *The Hybrid Muse* pp. 62.

comes to the realization, after accidentally drifting away from his island, that “we never see the true state of our condition till it is illustrated to us by its contraries, nor know how to value what we enjoy, but by the want of it” (149). Neither Crusoe nor Walcott properly realize the virtues of the island until they are deprived of them. Stewart Brown, in an essay on the figure of Crusoe in Walcott’s early poetry, notes that the poet’s “Adamic rebirth” comes about only after the “desolation of arrival” at the site of historical amnesia has been “endured” (Spaas & Stimpson 214).

A large part of what makes Crusoe attractive to Walcott is his simultaneous usage of both local objects and imported knowledges, fashioning from both a viable, even comfortable, means of island life. Though he uses native materials, Crusoe is nonetheless, Breslin notes, “a man with a past, whose responses to island solitude depend both on the economic rationalism he had learned in England and on the objects he has salvaged from the wreck” (103). The parallelism between Crusoe’s deployment of his European education to address the new complexities of island life and Walcott’s own use of his Old World learning in a Caribbean context could not be more pronounced.<sup>18</sup> What results from this hybridity of cultural tools is a form of poetic *bricolage*, in which, Walcott writes in “Crusoe’s Journal”: “even the bare necessities / of style are turned to use, / like those plain iron tools he salvages / from shipwreck, hewing a prose / as odorous as raw wood to the adze” (*Collected Poems* 92). It is these found objects that comprise the fundamental units of Walcott’s own poetry, enabling a poetics that does not create out of nothing, but uses whatever materials have washed ashore: “out of such timbers / came our first book, our profane Genesis / whose Adam speaks that prose” (92).

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<sup>18</sup> *Another Life* describes the author’s experience with the St. Lucian system of education in much more detail.

Creation, for Walcott and Crusoe both, is less generation than a process of assemblage that includes both native and foreign materials—this represents a distinct shift from Walcott’s earlier ideas of Adamic creation, for Adam now speaks the “prose” of both inherited and borrowed forms. Breslin, in turn, finds in both Crusoe’s experience and in the careers of various West Indian writers the primacy of assemblage: “fragments of European (or African, or Indian) culture, torn from their origin, have to be put together by an ad hoc *bricolage* and made to function in their new context” (105). Crusoe is a potent symbol for Walcott not merely because he finds in native materials the basic components for authentically local creation, but also because he is a skilled synthesizer of global cultures, able to identify, adapt, and use a great variety of foreign tools that he has scavenged. As I have stated earlier, the region and globe are mutually dependent, interreliant, and Crusoe provides an essential unification of both of these entities in his fusion of local, New World subjects with far-ranging Old World techniques.

Given this reciprocity, it is myopic to regard Crusoe, as Ian Gregory Strachan does in *Paradise and Plantation* (2002), as a purely European trope that must be imported, an individual who possesses “nothing less than absolute power,” and must “reestablish what he regards to be the natural order,” triumphing over the chaos of the native inhabitants with the twin irons of Enlightenment reason and Protestant work-ethic (46, 50). While Strachan claims Crusoe as a wholly foreign archetype that Walcott “revises” just as he “revises the Caribbean paradise,” Walcott’s interpretation of Crusoe is somewhat different (197). Calling him, in “The Figure of Crusoe,” “a more real symbol than critics claim for Prospero and Caliban,” he notes that, *contra* the popular interpretation of the character as an exemplar of Western imperialism, Crusoe “does not

possess the island he inhabits. He is alone, he is a craftsman, his beginnings are humble. He acts, not by authority, but by conscience.”<sup>19</sup> The ostensible “appropriation” of Crusoe is not a problem for Walcott for the same reasons that he can claim unironic ownership of the poetry of Marlowe, Milton, and others: hybridity is, theoretically, an intrinsic aspect of the poet’s personality, not a distinct, adopted perspective.<sup>20</sup>

We must nonetheless acknowledge that Crusoe is not a “natural,” “intrinsic” form of Walcott’s relationship to the region any more than Adam is, or any of the other variety of poetic personae that he has generated as a means of addressing the region are. For this reason, among others, Crusoe’s conscious regionalist *bricolage* fades, in Walcott’s later career, into more varied *stylistic* means of addressing the region. As I have claimed in

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<sup>19</sup> Hirsh interview quoted in Breslin, pp. 230. The latter quote is from “The Figure of Crusoe,” pp. 98-99. Walcott is somewhat swayed by the notion of the poet as governing creator-god (Prospero / Caliban) on the order of Leo Marx’s interpretation, in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), that “Prospero’s situation is in many ways the typical situation of voyagers in newly discovered lands” owing to those lands’ “remote setting, the strong sense of place and its hold on the mind, the hero’s struggle with raw nature on the one hand and the corruption within his own civilization on the other, and, finally, his impulse to effect a general reconciliation between the forces of civilization and nature” (35). However, his Crusoe-figure lacks the ostensible distance from and eventual mediation and control of nature that Prospero evinces; rather, for Crusoe, all materials, all concepts, are pre-existent. Walcott’s Crusoe apprehends objects not within their potential (vanished) usage within Marx’s “corrupt” civilization, but rather according to their immediacy and immutability within his own world. In short, there is no separation between nature and civilization for him. The valences of “civilization,” as I have already suggested, manifest themselves only in terms of *lack*.

<sup>20</sup> Walcott thus circumvents the common anxiety of postcolonial authors toward using cultural materials borrowed from civilizations that they find oppressive by claiming intrinsic ownership of those sources. For doing so, he has repeatedly come under attack from both critics such as Helen Vendler and contemporary poets such as Edward Brathwaite. This is not to say, however, that Walcott *never* appropriates literary sources in an anxious or even parodic manner. “Alterity implies alteration,” states Bill Ashcroft in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002), “and no European theory is likely to be appropriate in different cultural circumstances without itself undergoing radical rethinking” (Ashcroft 32). Though Walcott would no doubt disagree with the basic premise of Ashcroft’s argument, that same argument does hold true for some of his references. His use of Melville in *Omeros* is a good example.

my first chapter, style supercedes theme in enduring portraits of the region, and Walcott's works from *Omeros* onward are excellent examples of this turn. In his last two decades of writing, his personae which insist on the necessity of direct locational and thematic ties to the region in the form of crafting regional master narratives (Adam) or displaying command of a variety of the manifold cultural influences on the region (Crusoe) decay in favor of a single metapersona: the omnipresent poetic eye that finds the region scattered across the globe, and binds these regional echoes back to a single locale through the medium of style rather than comparative thematics. In concrete terms, the metapersona manifests itself as the poetic "I," who occupies, as one might expect, more than a little of the same ground as Walcott himself, but might more accurately be described as a conflation of his assorted personae, and, as such, an elaborate fiction, for, as he comments in *Omeros*, "every 'I' is a / fiction finally" (28). Though the metapersona enjoys a common psychological and even, at times, autobiographical frame of reference with the poet, it also interacts with fictional characters, travels rapidly through time and space, and stages dramatic dialogues with both shades of the past (such as Homer) and inanimate objects.

Moreover, the metapersona is convinced, unlike its subservient personae, of the omnipresence of the region, and the possibility of accessing that region not only through physical presence but also poetic invention. The first manifestations of this mindset, indeed, precede *Omeros*, and can clearly be detected in, for example, *Midsummer* (1984). While riding to LaGuardia airport, the narrator mistakes "a swash of green-painted roof" for the sea, and is briefly borne backward into a marine reverie; his ears become "shells," his eyes "a watery green," his blood "royalled by that blue." This doubling back is

brought to a close by the narrator's assertion that "midsummer is the same thing everywhere," and the kinship he feels with ancient Greek seafarers has no bearing on the indivisible nature of either region; it is only the *manner* in which one sea puts him in mind of another (and, indeed, a third) that suggests an essential connection (34). The moment is emblematic of the metapersona. Though the necessity of *thematic* attachment to the region, either in the form of physical presence or direct treatment of its features, culture, and inhabitants, lurks in the back of the metapersona's mind, this objection is squelched by a *stylistic* union of the region and its simulacra. No less could be said of Achille's reflection on the congruence of certain African and Caribbean dances in *Omeros*:

Achille saw the same dances  
that the mitred warriors did with their bamboo stick  
as they scuttered around him, lifting, dipping their lances  
like divining rods turning the earth to music,  
the same chac-chac and ra-ra, the drumming the same,  
and the chant of the seed-eyed prophet to the same  
response from the blurring ankles. The same, the same (143).

The regional specificities of the African dance, embodied in the details of the performers, eventually fade into a congruence of regions; the fundamental point of comparison is not the specific accoutrements of each performance, but the manner in which they are performed.<sup>21</sup> The "seed-eyed" prophet of the final lines sonically evokes the "prophet" of

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<sup>21</sup> The bamboo stick of the indicated passage suggests the limbo-stick, a connection that, if valid, indicates a unique usage of cultural history on Walcott's part. The origins of the limbo-dance are not definitively in the African continent; though some have placed it there, others have called it inherently West Indian or, less commonly, Latin American. Wilson Harris has used the uncertain symbology of the limbo-stick to great effect in many essays, calling it "not the total recall of an African past... [but] rather the renaissance of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures" (*Selected Essays* 152). For Harris, the limbo-stick emerges as a powerful metaphor for Caribbean syntheses of

St. Lucia, Seven Seas, and visually echoes his blindness. By the end of the stanza, with its sensations of blurred motion, the reader occupies the same position as he or she will at the end of the poem, in Achille and Philoctete's Christmas dance. Thematic disjunction has been erased by poetic style, making the two dances complementary repetitions of each other.

As I suggested earlier, it may be most profitable to regard Walcott as independent of, rather than intrinsically tied to, his "home" region, and the metapersona's valuation of style over substance is evidential of this shift—by insisting that the manner in which intercultural cross-reference is performed is more important than the divergent natures of the constituent cultures, Walcott both supercedes and retains the boundaries of the region, allowing its repetition across time and space. It is this repetition, or, as many critics of Walcott's poetry have termed it, this mimicry that consumes much of Walcott's later career. Rei Terada has performed what is almost certainly the most in-depth study of mimicry as applied to Walcott; her *Derek Walcott's Poetry: American Mimicry* (1992) postulates that, if mimesis is the representation of reality in literature, mimicry is "the representation of a representation, a repetition of something itself repetitious" (Terada 1). Terada's study implicitly favors the means of representation over what is represented. Charles Pollard has also claimed that, for Walcott, "there are no core cultural identities, only the representation of other representations" (*New World Modernisms* 34).

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African and New World cultures; he places its origins in the holds of Middle Passage slave ships, itself a somewhat dubious historical claim (does the dance develop independently on many separate ships or transmit itself from the occupants of one ship to proliferate across the entire region?), yet an evocative appeal to the manner in which transitional identities manifest themselves in enduring cultural traditions. Whether Walcott's placement of the limbo in Achille's vision (if that is indeed what it is) is an inadvertent anachronism or a more complex meditation on the uncertain origins of certain archetypal rituals is open to discussion.



Let us look at a more concrete example of this mimic style's elision of distance. In *Omeros*, Maud Plunkett complains of the monotony of the weather in St. Lucia, longing for a more drastic change of seasons, and the weather, obligingly, alters itself to suit her desires: "Then, soaked like paper, the hills were a Chinese scroll / and she saw a subtlety where none was before. / Bamboo strokes. Wet cloud. Peasant with straw hat and pole. / Fern spray. White mist. Heron crossing fresh waterfall" (*Omeros* 49).<sup>22</sup> It is extremely likely here that Walcott is here not relying on his own knowledge of Chinese poetry (there are few, if any, references to the same, or to individual Chinese poets, in any of his other poems), but is instead working from Ezra Pound's spare, impressionistic conception of Chinese poetry, especially that of the "Seven Lakes" Canto (XLIX): "Autumn moon; hills rise about lakes / against sunset / Evening is like a curtain of cloud, / a blurr above ripples; and through it / sharp long spikes of the cinnamon, / a cold tune amid reeds" (Pound 244).<sup>23</sup> The effect of the similarities between these lines is thus not to suggest large, comprehensive parallels between feudal China and modern St. Lucia, but to adapt the *style* of the one (through the work of Pound, a U.S. / "world" author, the third point in the triangle) to address the other. What is important is not the regional congruence (or lack thereof), but the way in which the relation is made.

We are left, in Walcott's career from *Omeros* onward, with the cosmopolitanist sentiment, informed by an omnivorous stylistic diet, that has appeared so prominently in recent criticism, with the poet who realizes, in *The Bounty*, that "that rusted bucket is not

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<sup>22</sup> For more on Walcott's relationship with Pound, see Breslin, especially pp. 60-64. There is more than a hint of a parodic relationship here, particularly in the passage's excessively pastoral images ("peasant with straw hat and pole"), yet in Walcott's poetry parody and genuine poetic affection oftentimes blend almost seamlessly.

<sup>23</sup> I will leave the ideological and methodological difficulties of working from Pound's conception of Chinese poetry to the imagination of the reader.

a funerary urn” but also believes that “the Caribbean dreams / of the Aegean, and the Aegean of reversible seas” (62). For Walcott, cultural sympathies with more than one region are “an ambiguity without a crisis” owing to those regions’ union through poetic invention (Hamner 51). Such a perspective is common in Caribbean literature and theory, which, with significant exceptions, has long labored to disassemble notions of reductive nativism, preferring to cast Caribbean society as a convergence of multiple spheres of influence. Even older Caribbean theorists such as Alejo Carpentier (who George Handley claims, in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* [2000], eventually comes to endorse the “dialectic relationship” of “European imperialism” and “black Caribbean resistance” [Handley 120]) and C.L.R. James generally find surveys of extra-Caribbean politics, literature, and society indispensable when addressing ostensibly “native” social phenomena. The “strange San Domingo society,” James wrote in *The Black Jacobins* (1938), “was but a garish exaggeration, a crazy caricature, of the *ancien régime* in France” (57). James comes to the conclusion that understanding the colonial society of revolutionary Haiti is impossible without a concurrent understanding of the situation in France.

To some extent, such a perspective simply reinforces the pervasiveness of the colonial heritage in Caribbean society, and the impossibility of Caribbean amnesia toward the same. In a more general sense, however, these theories, in their delineation of the necessity of considering one region in the context of another, are an extension of Benedict Anderson’s theories of cosmopolitanism and his somewhat less publicized notions of the regional native, who, he states in a 1994 essay, is always already “colonial and creole, a white-on-black negative” and the very concept of “nativeness” by nature

“unmoored, its real significance hybrid and oxymoronic” (“Exodus” 316). Anderson could very well be writing specifically on Walcott, whose “conscious hybridity,” as Belinda Edmondson suggests in *Caribbean Romances* (1999), results in poetry that is of multiple regions, yet *contained* by none of them (Edmondson 199). The mimic metapersona stylistically unites these varied regions in a manner that, though decidedly constructed, as an instance of poetic invention, is nonetheless static in its reference to a specific region.

Walcott thus cuts the Gordian knot of interreferentiality versus regional boundedness through stylistic mimicry, but this does not wholly dispel the lurking doubt I have noted earlier that the very poetic practices that he has deployed to describe his island constitute a certain irresponsibility on his part. If anything, it causes the necessity of regional boundedness or regional “faithfulness” to reassert itself all the more strongly. The crisis moment for the return of the bounded, self-contained region in Walcott’s later poetry is *The Prodigal* (2004), and the metapersona’s anxious contemplation, early in the volume, of whether “frequent exile turns into treachery” (6). This doubt, which drives so much of *The Prodigal*, is predicated by the metapersona’s belief that nativism is inherently destabilized and hybridized, and the corresponding knowledge that many of the occupants of his “home” region do not feel the same way. Indeed, the charge of *The Prodigal*’s “treachery” has been driven home to the poet throughout his career by critics from both the Caribbean and elsewhere; as early as 1957, Norman Rae somewhat woefully declared, in a review of one of Walcott’s plays, that the author had “fallen fatally in love with the outward conventions of the classical theatre as expounded primarily by Aristotle.” (Hamner 113). The thrust of Rae’s objection would plague

Walcott's reception for decades to come, in the work of other critics. In a 1971 essay titled "Walcott versus Brathwaite," Patricia Ismond, a graduate of and future professor at the University of the West Indies, noted with some remorse that Walcott had become "a type of poet's poet, the kind of luxury we can ill afford," citing the "European literary postures he continues to assume" as ample evidence (Hamner 220).<sup>24</sup> Among U.S. critics, a somewhat similar accusation came from Helen Vendler in a 1982 review of *The Fortunate Traveler*, which looked askance at Walcott's use of Yeats (among others), wondering why, as a West Indian poet, he should remain, "even as a fully developed writer, peculiarly at the mercy of influence" (26).<sup>25</sup>

These concerns underlie, if not undermine, the metapersona's hybridity, and, as I have mentioned earlier, their conflict comes to a head in *The Prodigal*. Like many of Walcott's previous work, the poem is far-ranging, not adopting a Caribbean setting in any manner until roughly halfway through, having already made stopovers in Switzerland, Italy, Latin America, the United States, and elsewhere. This prodigality, the "frequent exile" of the beginning of the poem, creates one form of anxiety. More profound, however, is the metapersona's suspicion that its stylistic union of varied locales may be

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<sup>24</sup> It seems evident that Douglas Crimp's claim, in *On The Museum's Ruins* (1993) that "the strategy of appropriation no longer attests to a particular stance toward the conditions of contemporary culture" either does not hold currency for Walcott's career in particular or is overridden by the necessity of politicizing and nationalizing even poetic discourse in the Caribbean (126).

<sup>25</sup> Vendler undoubtedly understands that neither Yeats nor the Ireland that he contemplated could reasonably be described as immune to (foreign) influence, yet she attacks Walcott for occupying a similar position vis-à-vis his home region and reading public. I would prefer, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, to place Walcott not in a derivative configuration to Yeats and his contemporaries, but rather to suggest that they felt the weight of some of the same poetic imperatives.

fallacious, nullified by the lingering mental presence of its own “home” language.<sup>26</sup> The metapersona, though avoiding direct deployment of such regionally rooted styles for the bulk of the poem, nonetheless feels itself innately attracted to them:

Prodigal, what were your wanderings about?  
The smoke of homecoming, the smoke of departure.  
The earth grew music and the tubers sprouted  
to Sesenne’s singing, rain-water, fresh patois  
in a clay carafe, a clear spring in the ferns,  
and pure things took root like the sweet-potato vine.  
Over the sea at dusk, an arrowing curlew (70).

Walcott here makes claim to a distinctly localist conception of the poetic act on several levels: linguistically (“fresh patois”), sonically (“Sesenne’s singing”), and topically (the abundance of native vegetation). The net effect is the alliance, as we have seen elsewhere in Walcott, with an authentic, localized poetics. Rather than being written into being, the poet’s subjects, all “pure things,” “grow,” “sprout,” “take root,” and “spring” from the “earth” and the “clay.”

But the poet scarcely advances this claim before he begins to question it. A few lines later, speaking of himself, Walcott writes: “does he, still a child, long for battles and castles / from the books of his beginning, in a hieratic language / he will never inherit, but one in which he writes / ‘Over the sea at dusk, an arrowing curlew,’ / his whole life a

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<sup>26</sup> Little has been written on *The Prodigal* since its publication. What has appeared thus far, largely in book reviews, is decidedly oriented toward the volume’s (self-proclaimed) status as the final book of a long and distinguished career, a set of observations that anteceded the announcement of Walcott’s next volume, *White Egrets*. There is a sense of culmination, of conclusion, in the reviews that the deep-seated and multifaceted anxiety of *The Prodigal* perhaps does not support. Rarer are the reviews that note the continuation and transformation of the issues and poetic personae that have consumed so much of the aforementioned career. Willi Chen, in a March 2008 review of the book in the *Trinidad Guardian*, notes that, in *The Prodigal*, Walcott “is no longer the joiner-craftsman who creates furniture of diction with motices, creaseless, well-knitted joints. Now he has loosened up as a carpenter of words” (23).

language awaiting translation?” (70).<sup>27</sup> The rebuke offered by these lines is not the *thematic* difference between the “battles and castles,” implicitly, elements of a classical European heritage, and island culture, but the *stylistic* tone of those elements, the “hieratic language” that is not part of the poet’s “natural” register. It is, in short, a rebuff of the metapersona’s methodology of stylistic unification of varied regions. This anxiety, however, is a mere echo of the fear, expressed several pages earlier, that the poet has somehow been untrue to the “natural language” of the region:

Is every noun: breakwater, headland, haze,  
seen through a gauze of English, a bright scrim,  
a mesh in which light now defines the wires  
and not its natural language? Were your life and work  
simply a good translation? Would headland,  
haze and the spray-wracked breakwater  
pronounce their own names differently? (61).

The objection is complex. Bearing in mind the importance of the cross-cultural filament that I have already noted in both *Omeros* and *The Bounty*, to have this same uniting “gauze” now obscure an innate regional stylistics is to undermine the very methodology that the metapersona uses to formulate itself. The shift of the “light,” so important to the poetic genesis points of *The Prodigal*, from “natural language” to the “mesh” of interculturalism is thus a claim far more damning than the simple linkage of thematic

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<sup>27</sup> In this passage in particular we see many of the classically odic qualities of the poem surfacing. In *Seas and Inland Journeys* (1985), James Applewhite finds in many “late career” Romantic and post-Romantic odes the desire “to live, even as an adult, in a continuation of the child’s perhaps mythologized proximity to the generative source” in tension with several other alternatives: a potential reconciliation “with time, adulthood, and diminished contact with inspiration through an elegiac acceptance,” an “attempt to bring about through art a regeneration of time-bound society,” or, finally, the possibility that “society, human history, consciousness in time, are inevitably corrupt and in need of replacement” (29-30). All of these potential solutions are explored to some extent in *The Prodigal*; Walcott’s eventual conclusion is something of a synthesis of them.

exile and treachery.<sup>28</sup> Its true threat lies in the suggestion that even a narrative that confines itself thematically to a carefully delineated region may elide the “innateness” of that region.<sup>29</sup>

*The Prodigal*, to some extent, invalidates the metapersona’s notion of thematic disjunction balanced by stylistic unity that we see in the works that precede it. This, on the surface of things, might be seen as another instance of Walcott’s common poetic vacillation, in which he implicitly or directly revises what had at first seemed a static viewpoint. Yet his rapid shifts of perspective in regards to the notion of “truly” addressing the region are more profound than this, as he repeatedly attempts to deliver the charge of regional “treason” from a desubjectified position. In fact, in his later works, it is the region *itself* that complains of Walcott’s tendency to attribute manifold significances to it. In *The Bounty*, he is accosted by a cantankerous bougainvillea on an “ochre road.” From the “aghast” mouth of the plant comes the imprecation: “ ‘We offered you language early, an absolute choice; / you preferred the gutturals of low tide sucked by the shoal / on the grey strand of cities, the way Ireland offered Joyce / his own unwritten dirt road outside Choiseul’ ” (32). The plant’s objection is amplified by the

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<sup>28</sup> *The Prodigal* echoes long-standing tropological norms in making light synonymous with poetic inspiration and invention. However, it also appears in the text as an almost metaphysical origin point for the poet and his work, most overtly in the lines: “I lived in two villages: Greenwich and Gros Ilet, / and loved both almost equally. One had the sea, / grey morning light along the waking water, / the other a great river, and if they asked / what country I was from I’d say, ‘The light / of that tree-lined sunrise down the Via Veneto’ ” (28).

<sup>29</sup> There are, needless to say, many problems with Walcott’s appeal to a “natural” language, and the fact that its very definition seems to rely upon an anthropomorphism (the landscape “pronouncing its name” differently) lessens the poet’s anxiety. However, as Walcott’s concern with Adam seems to suggest, the concept of a natural language, in which the namer instinctively *knows* the right names of flora, fauna, and landscape, is attractive to the poet.

grimness of the tide-sucked “gutturals” and the bleak “grey strand” of the cities that the poet ostensibly prefers, enforcing, as we have seen elsewhere in Walcott’s poetry, the contrast between the vibrancy of the island and the gloom of the industrial city (London is the archetype). Despite the poet’s frenzied assurance that he has tried to remain true to both regions, and that he assumed that “all the trees of the world shared a common elation / of tongues,” the plant continues its diatribe, insisting that it remains “unuttered, undefined” (32).

The fundamental irony of this passage, of course, is that the plant speaks with the voice of the poet (as well as the fact that the ostensibly native bougainvillea, like the breadfruit and other common Caribbean foliage, is in fact endemic to another region, and bears the name of its European “discoverer”), as is also the case in *The Prodigal*, when the poet must respond to the “correcting imprecations of the high palms,” which, of course, have intimate knowledge both of Walcott’s career and the actual content of the current volume of poetry. The palms complain:

‘You are all mistaken, that is not what we are saying,  
our prayers are not for you, there is nothing imperial  
in our plumes, not for the horsemen of Bornu,  
and the shells have no secret, and all your pages flutter  
with the hysteria of parrots. Listen, we have  
no envy of the white mountains, or of the white horn  
above the smothered inns, no envy of the olive  
or redoubtable oaks. We were never emblems’ (76).<sup>30</sup>

The palms are an emblem of poetic non-emblems in the same manner that the end of *Omeros* is a poetic representation of a lack of poeticity. Thus, much as Walcott seems to want to posit the ametaphorical language of the region as a counterpoint to his modernist

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<sup>30</sup> The palms’ reference to “the white mountains” and “the smothered inns” is a recollection of the Zermatt section of *The Prodigal*, which rhapsodizes on these landscapes.



sensibilities, his replication of that language seems neither confined to the region nor bereft of symbolism. As Rei Terada has noted in Walcott's poetry as a whole, the world without metaphors "almost immediately reveals itself as the world *of* metaphors," and "the poet cannot imagine the 'green world,' nature in the absence of rhetoric, without imagining it through rhetoric," and, in regards to *Omeros* in particular, "by appearing to model 'real' St. Lucians upon fictional Greeks, Walcott suggests that 'life' imitates 'art'—and thereby distracts the reader from the fact that what he calls 'life' is already 'art'" (161, 185).<sup>31</sup> Like Faulkner, whose internationalizing impulse often resulted in further regional affiliation, Walcott's efforts to escape or "unlearn" his own modernist relationality through a return to the unmediated language of the region only reveal that region as a site for the further exercise of relation.

### 3. "Something Essential"

The circularity of regional reference alluded to above seems to thematically refute Paul Jay's contention that, despite its inherently multicultural, metaphorized status, Walcott's poetry nonetheless bespeaks some essential truth about the Caribbean; if even Walcott's attempts to discard his variety of cultural influences result in a further prominence of those images, the notion of "speaking truly" for the region seems defunct. However, metatextually, in its suggestion that Caribbean poetry is always already hybrid and multicultural, this "something essential" gains further currency, as Jay astutely points out through reference to Appadurai, Benitez-Rojo, and others. The "something essential"

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<sup>31</sup> I will return to the idea of the automatic metaphor later in this chapter, particularly in my discussion of *Omeros*, but here I am primarily interested in how Walcott deploys the concept in reference to his own role as a poet rather than the world at large.

that Jay wishes to invoke is ultimately a statement of the categorical *lack* of Caribbean essentialism, its derivation from a multitude of centrifugal, hybridizing influences. Less well-documented, however, aside from appeals to the cultural integrity offered by *négritude* and diasporic archivalism, is the corresponding, centripetal force that draws the globalized Caribbean writer back to the region. Walcott is not the only writer who feels this force. Even V.S. Naipaul, with his famous distaste for the Caribbean in general and his home island of Trinidad in particular, felt this drag to some extent. In *The Mimic Men* (1967), one of his most-cited denunciations of the bastardry of Caribbean society, the protagonist, Ralph Singh, though eventually convinced that the best prospect for voicing his postcolonial concerns is uncompromising alliance with the colonizers, feels a peculiar attraction to his much-vilified home region. When Singh first arrives in London, his impression of the city is, as we might expect, favorable, yet oddly emptied of the markers of global connectivity and import that he expects to find there. While he first proclaims: “here was the city, the world... Excitement!” his continuous efforts to discover and encounter “the god of the city,” its “heart” meet with failure, for the god is “elusive,” and the “factories and warehouses, whose exterior lights decorated the river,” while picturesque, are “empty and fraudulent” (23). Singh contemplates “famous names” as he roams the deadened streets of the city, but notes, sadly, that “the magic of names soon faded” (23). In a move seemingly atypical of Naipaul, Singh finds himself “longing for the certainties of my life on the island of Isabella, certainties which I had once dismissed as shipwreck” (32). Though Singh’s “certainties” are not the same as the “green certainties” of St. Lucia in *Omeros*, the narrative is roughly the same: overweary of travel, disillusioned by the offerings of the world at large, the subject comes to desire a

stable center. If the text creates the image of a wholly cosmopolitanist, multicultural, mobile subject, it must also acknowledge the theoretical existence of a wholly bounded, regionally attached, and culturally unitary subject.

Thus, I would like to suggest a second “something essential” about the Caribbean that is evoked by Walcott’s dual focus on the necessity of “speaking truly” for the region and the subsequent primacy of foreign discourse in that same process: Caribbean relationality implies its opposite. In the writing of Édouard Glissant, who consistently championed relationality, with its ties to Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic thought, as a means of regarding the world as composed of not “things that are foreign” but “shared knowledge,” the concept of centripetal regional attachment is a bugbear (*Poetics of Relation* 8). Glissant’s relation, like the rhizome, eliminates the need for centers from which to draw comparisons to other centers; “when we speak of a poetics of Relation,” he writes, it is not necessary to consider “between what and what” (27). He at first states that relation is “not just a specific knowledge, appetite, suffering, and delight of one particular people,” but also “knowledge of the Whole,” but is by and large suspicious of defining relationality as constituted in part by regional boundedness (8). It is in the centripetal drag, the “interactions of memory and place,” he theorizes, that “things irreconcilable for both poet and storyteller are perpetrated” (40). Glissant “mistrust[s]” the “dazzling clarity” of the “Antillean locus” in Saint-John Perse’s writing, and wonders whether his “memory for detail” is not in effect deployed “in order to ward off something else: the temptation of something stirring for so long in the background of the Caribbean landscape?” (40). We might ask the same question of Walcott: are not the particularities of his regional representations another means of accessing fundamentally relational

elements? I would answer: yes and no. Though, as I have stated earlier, insisting on the anti-relationality of the region only exposes its relational elements, this variety of relation suggests, indeed is called into being by, the faith in a singular regional root that eludes patterns of rhizomatic relation. This phantasmal root, by nature both stable and destabilized, designates the poet as simultaneously bounded and endlessly connected, existing simultaneously in the center and the periphery, not within an endless network of peripheries. In Foucault's terminology, it is the site of heterotopia, the space that, though serving as a space through which all extant "real" spaces are "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" and thus existing "outside of all places," constitutes a distinct space in itself ("Of Other Spaces" 24). Heterotopia reinvokes the significance of manifold external regions even as it itself fulfills the function of an individuated region.

Peter Hallward has noted something akin to this bifurcation in *Absolutely Postcolonial* (2001), which posits the "singular" and the "specific" as opposing postcolonial perspectives. While singular individuation, Hallward writes, "proceeds internally, through a process that creates its own medium of existence or expansion," the specific mode "operates, through the active negotiation of relations and the deliberate taking of sides, choices and risk, in a domain and under constraints that are external to these takings" (xii). Hallward summarizes: "*The specific is relational and the singular is non-relational*" (xii, italics in original). The relational aspects of Walcott's cosmopolitanist writings, which would fit easily into Hallward's loose designation of the specific individual as "one that exists as part of a relationship to an environment and to other individuals," have received much attention; what is more intriguing is the

concurrence of Hallward's "singular" individual, who "like a creator-God transcends all such relations" and certain of Walcott's personae (1). Certainly Walcott, especially when donning his Adamic garb, is intrigued by the possibility of a junction between the poet and Hallward's "creator-God," but eventually realizes, through his union of Adam and Crusoe in a single metapersona, that this is a constructed rather than a heaven-ordained position, reliant on other cultures, other perspectives, to fully articulate itself. In doing so, and in exploring the metapersona's deep-seated anxiety toward the potential of "betraying" the region, Walcott unsettles the very notion of regional attachment. He does not fall wholly within the framework of Hallward's "singular" authors, who must "transcend their worldly or specific place [to] gain access to the truly Creative," and do not refuse "any specific position or interest in relation to other positions, other selves, places, histories, and so on" (5). Nor does he wholly confine himself to a "specific" space that denies "interests in relation to other interests, the space of the historical as such, forever ongoing, forever incomplete" (5). The region, in Walcott's writing, is a place that simultaneously relies upon and actively resists relationality. It is an area that both gives rise to and offers a constant rebuke to modernist interreferentiality and postmodern pastiche.

The simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal elements of Walcott's poetics ask fundamental questions about the nature and possibility of referentiality in regionalist literature. A fundamental axiom of even the most spare, impressionistic, ostensibly mimetic poetry is that it undermines its claim to "direct treatment of the 'thing,'" to cite the Imagists, through its very status *as* poetry. Pound's investment in the possibility of one-to-one correspondence between life and language in his concern with ideogrammatic

Chinese verse, the long-standing attempt in United States poetry, with Williams as perhaps the exemplar, with the unadorned minutiae of everyday life, the consistent aromanticism of Olson's "everyday" poems, and countless other examples implicitly reinforce their status as elaborately constructed language even as they seem to strain toward direct mimesis. This quandary has relevance to my discussion of literary regionalism inasmuch as it suggests that, to some extent, to write about the region is to fetishize it.

I believe that Walcott realizes this, which is part of why I also believe that he never, at any point in his career, seriously believed that he could access the indivisible, authentic essence of the region in this manner; like Yeats, who claimed attachment to an audience that was "but a dream," Walcott maintains ownership of a region that he knows to be ultimately confined to the realm of discourse. His assertions, most prominently in *Omeros*, *Midsummer*, *The Prodigal*, and *The Bounty*, that he wishes to "speak truly" for the region are, he realizes, posturings. In *Midsummer*, he professes an ardent wish for "a tone colloquial and stiff, / the brevity of that short syllable, God / all synthesis in one heraldic stroke, / like Li Po or a Chinese laundry mark!" (9). Though the desire seems to be genuine, the parodic tone, and the bathos of the Li Po / Chinese laundry comparison, suggests that Walcott does not believe such an impressionistic "synthesis" to be feasible. And, indeed, several lines later, he writes: "When I was greener, I strained with a branch / to utter every tongue, language, and life at once. / More skillful now, I'm more dissatisfied. / They never align, nature and your own nature" (9). Walcott's sly reference to the supposed naivete of *In a Green Night* and his "nature/nature" disjunction highlight the constructed nature of his own work; however, they also do not lessen his

dissatisfaction. This is, in itself, not a catastrophic realization, and does not invalidate the poet's overall enterprise. At no point does Walcott insist that the years he has spent seeking the aforementioned synthesis have been wasted. Rather, the expenditure of that effort in itself is a worthy pursuit. The poet calls, in *Omeros*, the practice of rhyme "the language's / desire to enclose the loved world in its arms," and I might extend this philosophy to the possibility of regional reference as a whole in his work (75). Walcott's language does not, ultimately, enclose the loved world, though its desire to do so is redemptive.

## CHAPTER V

### POSTPLANTATION DISUNITIES IN *ABSALOM, ABSALOM!*, *THE GULF*, AND *OMEROS*

*Bridges join but they also separate.*  
—Jeanette Winterson, *The Passion* (1997)

#### 1. The Postplantation Thesis

The narrative of any set of interregional comparativites would seem to rely on a history at least as old as the regions themselves, or at least some measure of contact between them. Though it may be theoretically possible (excepting, for the moment, the lack of parity in the documentary archive) to draw parallels between Olmec and ancient Greek civilizations, New World studies typically mark the pre-Columbian period as the antecedent context to the comparative text. Interregional literary studies take *a priori* the notion of interregional knowledge, if not colonialism; contact prefigures comparison. To pinpoint the origins of the U.S. South-Caribbean connection, then, would be at best a Sisyphean labor, for such an effort ends, ultimately, in the grey regions of interSouthern traumas—parallel histories of slavery, exploitation, revolution, and racial violence. Somewhat easier to pin down is the point at which critical narratives that involve both regions begin to shift away from an emphasis on the exoticism of the indicated regions, an exoticism that, for all its paradisaical implications in touristic literature, Agrarian rhetoric, and the regions' respective epistemological transformations, is inextricable from the aforementioned traumas, resulting in literature of horror, grotesquerie, and bloody revolution dating at least back to Crèvecoeur's *Letters from An American Farmer* (1782)



or Leonora Sansay's *Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808).<sup>32</sup> This is not to say that such narratives are dead; on the contrary, both the Edenic and grotesque apprehensions of the South and the Caribbean are alive and well in both mass media (*Caribbean World* or *Garden and Gun*, for example) and more avowedly highbrow literary representations (Madison Smartt Bell's recent Haiti trilogy). Yet, there is a distinct point at which the exceptionalism and exoticism of critical apprehensions of these regions begin to shift toward interpretations that portray them as integrated within the broader spectrum of "literatures of the Americas."<sup>33</sup> In terms of this general trend, there are worse theoretical points of origin than the space between Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* (1990, 1997 English translation by Betsy Wing) and Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993). Both of these texts, in their emphasis on specific cultural patterns over regional or national alliance, a prioritizing that congeals in the centrality of the metaphor of the slave ship, move toward generic syncretism.

These texts contributed much to the proliferation of what would later be called hemispheric studies, in which both Southern and Caribbean literatures were implicated. Direct linkages of these literatures were somewhat slower in coming, and it took no less than Glissant's *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996, 1999 English translation by Lewis & Spear)

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<sup>32</sup> As regards Crevecoeur, I am thinking particularly of Jennifer Rae Greeson's contention that the indicated volume provides one of the earliest examples of the South's emergence as exotic antitype to the North.

<sup>33</sup> The only reasonable explanation that I can offer as to why Southern literature, which is no more a constituent of "the Americas" than literature from other U.S. regions, should be so emphatically included in this categorization while other U.S. literatures remain comparatively isolated, is that "literature of the Americas," like "American literature" is a construction that inherently relies upon certain geographical, historical, social, and economic factors, the delineations of which are never entirely clear, and the South thus would seem to lend itself to this ideological construction on account of what the editors of *Look Away!* call its "literally uncanny (*unheimlich*) hybridity" (9).

to bring about serious literary interest in the comparison. Five years later, Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn's *Look Away!* (2004) sounded the call for Southern studies to look farther South for new perspectives on old problems. That volume, with its polemics against Agrarian and Neo-Agrarian narratives of Southern exceptionalism, "wish[ed] to refute for good the fetishization of community, hierarchy, place, and so on of another 'Dixie'-titled anthology: the paradigm of white southern nativism, *I'll Take My Stand*" (13). In the years following *Look Away!*, volumes of criticism on Southern literature have found the influence of Caribbean (and Latin American) writings almost inescapable, either through relying directly on the work of (primarily) Glissant, Carpentier, and C.L.R. James, or else by contextualizing their own work within the framework of recent volumes that do. At first glance, however, the relationship between the regions does not seem to be symbiotic, for while Southern studies has long labored under the stereotype of insularity, inertia, reactionary politics, and the prevalence of (dead) white male privilege, Caribbean literature seems to rely on precisely the opposite: multiculturalism, postcolonial racial empowerment, and interregional / global migration.

Yet, despite their ostensibly oppositional relationship, there is a tendency among critics who study these regions and prominent Caribbean writers alike to somehow "claim" major figures, particularly Faulkner, for the Caribbean, and thus suggest patterns of interregional reliance.<sup>34</sup> Glissant is perhaps the strongest proponent of this practice,

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<sup>34</sup> I use this tendency as an indicator of the proliferation of the postplantation thesis, yet it is worryingly one-sided; though, as I will show presently, there have been multiple attempts to describe Southern authors as Caribbean, making Caribbean authors Southern is almost unheard of. Rather, the methodology of New Southern studies seems to be to detail the interest of canonical Southern authors in Caribbean locales and, on occasion, literatures. Time is likely to tell which of these modes of operation will prove most fruitful for future scholarship.

placing a visual and thematic comparison between Faulkner and Saint-John Perse at the head of the first chapter of *Faulkner, Mississippi*, and making the U.S. a collection of “archipelagoes,” composed of “truly autonomous regions,” each of which, like Yoknapatawpha, is “a composite culture that suffers from wanting to become an atavistic one and suffers in not being able to achieve that goal” (21, 115). Glissant explicates this archipelagic vision of the conjoined continents to a greater extent in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989), calling the Caribbean Sea “the estuary of the Americas,” and suggesting that the region, in its capacity as “a multiple series of relationships,” embodies an “openness” in the individual isolationism of its constituent parts endemic to the New World: “It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. A Caribbean imagination liberates us from being smothered” (139). Glissant sees his own interest in Faulkner, then, as less a reappropriation or postcolonial revisionist attempt to rewrite, revise, or destroy an existing canon than a commentary on the infinite relational possibilities of interregional comparison. Glissant is, however, not the only major literary figure who has drawn the Faulkner-Caribbean connection; Gabriel García Márquez has also commented at some length on these correspondences. García Márquez states that Faulkner

...has seemed to me to be a writer from the Caribbean. This became more apparent when I tried to describe settings and characters from Macondo, and I had to make a great effort to keep them from resembling those of Faulkner... A few years went by before I discovered the key to the problem; the Caribbean is poorly delineated. It is not a geographical area around the sea, but, rather, a more vast and complex region, with a homogenous cultural composition which extends from northern Brazil to the U.S. South. Including, of course, Yoknapatawpha County. Within this realistic conception, not only Faulkner, but the majority of the

novelists from the U.S. South, are writers possessed by the demons of the Caribbean. But it was Faulkner who showed me how to decipher them.<sup>35</sup>

García Márquez's statement, like Glissant's reflection on Yoknapatawpha as a distinct yet composite "autonomous region," is an excellent example of what has been called, at least since Benítez-Rojo's 1996 *The Repeating Island*, "archipelagic" thinking, the theory that culture (and literature) reproduces itself not at the level of the nation, but rather through a proliferation of particulate zones of cultural contact. To claim, as García Márquez does, the South (as manifested in Faulkner's fiction) as part of the Caribbean is essentially to eliminate the distance between them; the Caribbean region blooms steadily outward until all adjacent (and even distant) locales become incorporated within its "boundaries." It is a statement, in other words, of the proliferation of "Caribbeanness" rather than the antiquity of self-contained Southernness. What justifies the elimination of distance between the South and the Caribbean (as well as the Caribbean and Latin America, according to García Márquez) is the multifaceted, unpredictable way in which the "repetition" of particulate cultures proceeds; Benítez-Rojo's concern with fractals and chaos theory as well as Glissant's ideas of the chaotic "baroque" artistic consciousness, which Walcott also seized upon when responding to an interviewer's observation that Fuentes had claimed García Márquez, Carpentier, Walcott, Césaire, and Faulkner as Caribbean authors, drawing similarities between the Caribbean baroque and Mississippi soil: "it's thick and rich and things grow in it very fast. The shape of what grows out of it

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<sup>35</sup> Deborah Cohn's translation of Garcia Marquez from *A Faulkner 100: The Centennial Exhibition*, Thomas Verich, ed.

is convoluted, like the plants of the Caribbean. They're Baroque plants" (*Conversations With Derek Walcott* 91).<sup>36</sup>

Literary criticism has hardly turned a blind eye to these prominent archipelagic linkages of the South and the Caribbean. Valerie Loichot, in *Orphan Narratives* (2007), has stated that Morrison, Faulkner, Glissant, and Perse "are linked not by a unifying desire but by a shared experience of the abyss," capitalizing upon the aforementioned emphasis on inter-American experience of trauma in Glissant and Gilroy. Glissant writes in *Relational Poetics* that the title concept is "greater from having been at the abyss," a statement that I will return to in greater depth later, and in *Caribbean Discourse* that the Caribbean, particularly the French Caribbean, "is the site of a history characterized by ruptures and that began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade. Our historical consciousness... came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterizes what I call a nonhistory" (8, 62).<sup>37</sup>

The concept of the "void" or "abyss" of New World history, the lacunae that contribute to its forgotten "nonhistory," has thus achieved considerable circulation; it is, perhaps, attractive to contemporary criticism owing to its address of both the traumas of subjugation as explicated in much postcolonial scholarship and its comparative,

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<sup>36</sup> Walcott's usage of the term "baroque" is, perhaps, a bit ambiguous, but it is most likely impacted both by its most common usage (suggesting excess or overornamentation) of the word and Glissant's extensive use of the same term to indicate those counterrational, chaotic forces that, in dialogue with rational Enlightenment discourses, comprise the *telos* that spirals toward "totality."

<sup>37</sup> Also, in Walcott's Nobel Prize speech: "Antillean art is [the] restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent" ([http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1992/walcott-lecture.html), accessed 31 March 2009).

unificatory philosophy that works profitably within postnational conceptions of literary creation. This idea has been perhaps most effectively deployed by George Handley in “A New World Poetics of Oblivion,” which appeared in Smith and Cohn’s *Look Away!*. Theorizing that large historical trauma “is often beyond representation because the lived realities were either initially understated or erased in historical documentation” as well as “the daunting task of simply finding adequate forms of representation with which to sum up such atrocities,” Handley marks the task of the contemporary New World writer as largely defined by amnesia and loss (*Look Away!* 26). However, rather than consign such writing to circular lamentations, militant resistance, or immobilizing ennui, Handley sees the “void” of history as endlessly productive of new narratives that are not necessarily compensatory, but rather concerned with forging new affiliative and intersubjective links between those who feel the pressure of this lack.

Loichot’s “acknowledgment of a common lack” and Handley’s corresponding references to “voids” and “oblivion,” implicitly humane and historical lacunae brought about by centuries of oppression in both regions, are common points of comparison between the South and the Caribbean; Barbara Ladd has also noted that “the tracks and traces” of “human migrations” (implying both the African diaspora and the displacement of slaves, slaveholders, and creoles by large social phenomena such as revolution and civil war) between the two has resulted in a collective redrawing of cultural space that ties “the U.S. South to the Caribbean and to the eastern portions of Central and South America to form a transnational Plantation/Postplantation region” (Loichot 19, *Faulkner*

*in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 31).<sup>38</sup> And, most recently, Hosam Aboul-Ela's *Other South* (2008), under the principle that there is "a connection between the colonial economy and the production of culture," depicts Faulkner's South as "a postplantation, multiracial colonized region," a region that is better addressed using Faulkner's socioeconomic portraits of life in Yoknapatawpha (verisimilitude) than "an Agrarian / New Critical aestheticism" (14, 36). Ladd and Aboul-Ela's use of the term "postplantation" is key, as it has come to signify the belief, in all of these critical recombinations of the South and the Caribbean, that similar material circumstances, experiential background, or demographic makeup give rise to comparable literatures. We may shorthand these factors as "history"—since the South and the Caribbean seem to have similar (traumatic) histories, their people have a similar experience of that history, and tend to produce similar "postplantation" literatures.

In this chapter, I would like to outline two critiques of the postplantation thesis, as manifested in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and two works by Walcott, *The Gulf* (1969) and *Omeros* (1990). All three of these texts treat, in one way or another, the linkage of the South and the Caribbean through the medium of shared postcolonial trauma, and all attempt to address that trauma through gestures that might be called compensatory, acting to alleviate the burden of the past through various interpretive strategies. The first of these strategies, which I will call the interhistorical approach, names the traumatic histories of the respective regions as indelibly linked and mutually constitutive, whether as contextual mirrors of each other or as direct contributors to their

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<sup>38</sup> Ladd, in the same talk, states that though certain Faulkner novels such as *A Fable* adopt varied settings, they remain "authored by an Other American" and remain as much "'novel[s] of the Americas' as *Absalom, Absalom!*, *Requiem for a Nun*, or *Go Down, Moses*" (41).

present-day conditions. Making the regions interreliant, however, also encourages what I call displacement, the minimization and erasure of the trauma of one region through transplantation of it onto other locales, again either directly or metaphorically. The second strategy, which might be called the narrative approach, involves a conscious or unconscious misreading of the events of history with an eye to constructing a new past of shared trauma among the Americas, predicated on the idea that there is a fundamental “unthinkability” to traumatic histories, a void that must be written *around* rather than incorporated directly. This approach allows for a view of each region as replicating (or, as Benitez-Rojo would say, repeating) the traumas of its twin, but, in transmutating history into a writerly (parafictional) story, capable of being revised, reinterpreted, and misread, this methodology paradoxically transforms this history into a caricature of itself, a cipher that promotes only a narrative, rather than a static, vision of the synchronicity of the regions. Both of these methods, I theorize, further refine the idea of the “phantasmal root” that I have examined vis-à-vis Walcott’s poetry inasmuch as they suggest a simultaneous bounded attachment to and interregional constellation containing a particular locale. Ultimately the argument of this chapter echoes my epigraph: in bridging distances, postplantation comparativity also creates those distances.

## **2. Interhistory and Displacement**

I begin with Faulkner’s text on account of the fact that it has become almost canonical (if there is a postplantation canon) within these interpretive schemes—*Absalom, Absalom!* has proven almost equally productive and frustrating for critics who trace connections between the South and the Caribbean, and has given rise to a



correspondingly extensive body of critical work. But let us begin with the text itself. The reader learns, even before Quentin's account of Sutpen's time in Haiti (Quentin being the *fourth* narrator of this story, hearing it from his father, who inherited it from Quentin's grandfather, who in turn heard it from Sutpen—none of these narrators is entirely reliable), that Sutpen has acquired money, slaves, and the ability to speak “a sort of French” from some location to the south of Yoknapatawpha. This evidence, in itself, does not dictate Sutpen's presence in the Caribbean, as all three of these assets could have been gained at any number of points around the Gulf Coast, still within the boundaries of the slaveholding South; the revelation that Sutpen's architect came from Martinique comes later. Rather, it is the character of Sutpen's slaves, apprehended by the residents of Jefferson as more brutal and animalistic than any of the more “domesticated” local slaves, that marks his origin story as incontrovertibly exotic. These are men (and two women, Quentin's father takes care to note) that Sutpen would use to “drive the swamp like a pack of hounds,” one of whom a local hunter stumbles upon lurking in “the absolute mud like a sleeping alligator,” and the speech of whom the astonished denizens of the town, having presumably little familiarity with Creole French, misidentify as “some dark and fatal tongue of their own” (27). The exoticism lies not merely in the slaves' sublime subhumanity, however, but in their capacity to perform actions that none of the “local” slaves in Jefferson could; the residents of the town theorize, in reaction to the astonishing fecundity of Sutpen's crops, that his slaves “had the power to actually conjure more cotton per acre from the soil than any tame ones had ever done” (56-57).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Faulkner's later reference to “sugar cane sapling size and three times the height of a man” growing in Haiti is probably an oblique linkage to the agricultural skills of Sutpen's

Ferocity, brutality, bestiality, even the hint of vague supernatural powers: the qualities of his servants infuse Sutpen's own origin story with these same elements.

Such is the background the reader receives prior to finally being told, much later in the text, that it is indeed the Caribbean, particularly Haiti, from which Sutpen has derived his slaves, his fortune, and one of his sons.<sup>40</sup> In addition to its utilitarian function for Sutpen, however, Haiti constitutes an imaginative double to the South in the functioning of *Absalom's* narrative. Sutpen's West Indian scheme, in its origins and its eventual bloody conclusion during the slave revolt (in addition to the more far-reaching consequences brought about by the child he conceived there), displaces the South as the *true* site of exploitation, danger, and economic risk and reward. This is reflected in the structure of Sutpen's rise and fall; in a sense, we might say that his narrative as a whole is simply the culmination of the events he set in motion on the island, events founded on both economic and sexual objectification and exploitation.<sup>41</sup> More to the point, however, Haiti is the site of the most protracted and concerted racial violence in the text, with Sutpen's continuing forceful subjugation of his (Haitian) slaves in Mississippi a virtual continuation of, rather than separation from, the brutality of his Haitian endeavor. In terms of textual function, Haiti is predominantly a "theatre for violence and injustice and

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slaves mentioned here; evidently, they are trained in some mystical tropical method of cultivation (202).

<sup>40</sup> This is a potential point of contention, as it may be legitimate to consider Clytie, who is born of one of Sutpen's Haitian slaves, as a Creole West Indian; her mother is Haitian, yet she is conceived and born in Mississippi. Whether Clytie can thus be regarded as Haitian herself is open to interpretation.

<sup>41</sup> Hosam Aboul-Ela, among others, strongly insists on the centrality of this section of the novel to the story at large, noting that the "ramifications" of the Haiti sequence "affect developments throughout the novel," and that the passage thus plays a "germinal role," "hover[ing] above the reconstructed narrative, supplying a cohesion that temporality cannot" (130, 148).

bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty,” its soil “manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation,” while the South is surprisingly muted, “the civilized land and people which had expelled some of its own blood and thinking and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer” (202). Such, at least, is the interpretation passed down from Quentin’s grandfather to his father and on to Shreve.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, the South in Faulkner’s fiction as a whole (in *Go Down, Moses*, for example) betrays some of these same significances, yet in *Absalom* the traumas of historical racial violence are displaced almost entirely onto the Caribbean.

There are two immediate answers to the logic of this decision, both unfavorable to Faulkner. The first is that the author simply did not know enough about Haiti to offer a cohesive, accurate portrayal of its historical woes. This position is fortified by his misdating of the Haitian Revolution, which I will treat in more depth later in this chapter.<sup>43</sup> Such is the perspective of Maritza Stanchich, who, in a 1996 article in

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<sup>42</sup> As a matter of fact, almost all of *Absalom*’s commentary on the “savagery” of Haiti seems to come from General Compson rather than Sutpen himself; Quentin’s grandfather interprets the Haitian setting, as well as certain of Sutpen’s reactions to it (most prominently his reaction to sugar, which I shall discuss later) as intrinsically tied to narratives of subjugation, hatred, and vengeance. Unfortunately, this does not work strongly in service of any exegesis of Haiti’s textual role; most of General Compson’s characterization, here and elsewhere in Faulkner’s fiction, is concerned with his status as a “founding father” of the Compson family and his affiliation with certain (aristocratic, military) aspects of the Old South. From this we might tentatively conclude that Faulkner’s attribution of the “darkness” of Haiti to this character in particular marks his attitudes as more deeply rooted in Southern soil and thus more widespread than any subjective axe-grinding on the General’s part, yet this reading is subject to interpretation.

<sup>43</sup> There is also considerable resistance to this perspective. Many critics have attempted to show, through both textual and extratextual evidence, that Faulkner did indeed understand more about the state of affairs in Haiti during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century than he lets on in *Absalom*. See John T. Matthews, “Recalling the West Indies: From Yoknapatawpha to Haiti and Back,” which finds in certain biographical details as well as stylistic tactics a keen awareness of the Haitian situation on Faulkner’s part. Matthews

*Mississippi Quarterly*, declared that “by far the most marginalized character in *Absalom, Absalom!* is the West Indies, the source of Sutpen's wealth, the site of his original sin” (606). Stanchich portrays Sutpen as the latest in a long string of both real and fictive exploitations of the island, endeavors that essentially see the region as a simple site for colonial violence. If Faulkner was indeed underinformed about Caribbean history, it stands to reason that he would either fill the gaps in the historical narrative with what he *did* know of colonial violence in the South, or else regard the violent past in that region as simply an amplified version of the same.<sup>44</sup> The second direct answer to *Absalom*'s displacement is that Faulkner is a revisionist who wishes to minimize the trauma of the South's history by juxtaposing it with traumas that he perceives as more severe. This is the charge introduced (though eventually fulminated against) by Richard Godden in “*Absalom, Absalom!*, Haiti and Labor History: Reading Unreadable Revolutions” (1994), in which he notes that Faulkner effectively “rewrites one of the key facts of nineteenth-century black American history, in what looks suspiciously like an act of literary counterrevolution” (685). Godden claims that Sutpen's slaves are “historically free and yet doubly constrained,” laboring under the onus of both Sutpen's regular violence toward them and *Absalom*'s narrative, which marks them as slaves despite their legal emancipation (689).

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even goes so far as to suggest that he uses a native Haitian expression—“the farming of bones” to refer to sugar agriculture in *Absalom* (255).

<sup>44</sup> Again, Matthews goes to some length to show what knowledge Faulkner had of Haiti and its history. He cites in particular three instances of indirect contact between Faulkner and the West Indies: longstanding U.S. military presence in Haiti that cultivated a certain image of the nation in the minds of the public, Faulkner's scriptwriting experiences in Hollywood that brought him into contact with more far-reaching Caribbean and Latin American storylines, and his specific work on a screenplay (*Slave Ship*) that dealt with a slave-smuggling enterprise between Africa and Cuba.

Both of these readings, I believe, make valid points. While I am not quite ready to claim, with Stanchich, that Faulkner's text replicates the same colonial oppression of Haiti that it purports, in the eventual undoing of Sutpen's scheme by the actions he performs there, to decry, I am aware that any elision of historical racial trauma on Faulkner's part does not speak strongly to his desire to do so. All the same, it may be more productive to consider the Haitian section of the novel in light of what its explication, or rather its *lack* of explication, can tell us about how postplantation history manifests itself between the South and the Caribbean. Though, as George Handley notes in *Postslavery Literatures in the Americas* (2000), the representation of Haiti in *Absalom* leaves much to be desired as a self-contained description of the Caribbean, it nonetheless functions as a strong statement of how "Haiti and the sea it inhabits" comes to serve as "a scapegoat for the barbarism and violence of the United States' own slavery system" (136). The issue at stake is less Faulkner's attempt to divulge some essential truth about Haiti than the *Southern* methodological imperative to address, however indirectly, its own history through the invocation of another region.

It may be most productive to reexamine the relevant sections of the text in this light. The frame of the Haitian segment is Quentin's grandfather's recollection of a story told to him by Sutpen during a hunt for Sutpen's escaped architect, who proves remarkably adept at evading the pair, their dogs, and the wild slaves alike: "He went to the West Indies... that was how he said it. He and Grandfather were sitting on a log now because the dogs had faulted. That is, they had treed—a tree from which he (the architect) could not have escaped yet which he had undoubtedly mounted... it was three hours before they comprehended that the architect had used architecture, physics, to elude

them” (192-193). The architect (who, as Faulkner mentions earlier in the novel, comes from Martinique) eludes his captors in something of the same manner that the Caribbean section of the novel as a whole steadfastly refuses to be explicated—Sutpen and General Compson briefly acquire the trail, then lose it, with only enigmatic clues as to how it proceeded.<sup>45</sup> Correspondingly, the tale that Sutpen tells is illuminated only in isolated fragments, certain significant moments that its subsequent tellers extrapolate into narrative. Quentin’s grandfather recalls that Sutpen told him

not how he managed to find where the West Indies were nor where ships departed from to go there, nor how he got to where the ships were and got in one nor how he liked the sea nor about the hardships of a sailor’s life and it must have been hardship indeed for him, a boy of fourteen or fifteen who had never seen the ocean before, going to sea in 1823... [there was nothing of] what had happened during the six years between that day when he, a boy of fourteen who knew no tongue but English and not much of that, had decided to go to the West Indies and become rich, and this night when, overseer or foreman or something to a French sugar planter, he was barricade in the house with the planter’s family (193, 199).

Certain extremely significant (for Quentin and Shreve) elements of the story receive only the briefest mention, such as Sutpen’s acknowledgment of Eulalia Bon, the planter’s daughter and future mother to Charles Bon: “the girl just emerging for a second of the telling, in a single word almost, so that Grandfather said it was like he had just seen her too for a second by the flash of one of the muskets” (201). The narrative here is brought to (both literal and figurative) light in brief bursts; just as Eulalia’s face is only visible in isolated flashes during the revolt, the narrative of Sutpen’s experience on the plantation only arises sporadically and incompletely.

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<sup>45</sup> There is a further parallel and irony in the fact that the architect has not simply outrun or outlasted his captors, but has deployed the most “rational” of all methods—applied science—to escape. This methodology stands in stark contrast to that of the wild, also Caribbean-raised slaves, which operate on pure instinct, hinting that there is more to the region than appearances might indicate.

The details given by Sutpen are thus insufficient to the role of the Haitian section in the novel as a whole; General Compson's constant complaints that Sutpen does not tell the whole story are a clue to this lack. However, it is worth recalling that the story of Haiti undergoes four iterations in *Absalom*, from an initial teller clearly unwilling to explain himself fully, the hearer of which must almost forcibly convince that teller to adopt "some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity," down through generations progressively more explicative in their attitudes toward history, until it reaches Shreve, constructor of the most elaborate historical narratives of all (199). Haiti, then, becomes not only a potential repository for inflated, neocolonial visions of trauma, the opaque, primitive heart of darkness that the story's interpreters seem to make of it, but also a necessary plot device, the hidden link that not only suggests, but *requires* interpretation on their part.<sup>46</sup> After all, as Quentin's father states in a crucial passage, the existing historical evidence, "a few old mouth-to-mouth tales" and a collection of "letters without salutation or signature," is itself inadequate to the task of addressing history's lack of narrative, a lack that the interpreters of Sutpen's story feel most keenly in the Haitian section of the novel (80).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> The "heart of darkness" is not an idle comparison; several of Faulkner's descriptions of Haiti, particularly Sutpen and the planter shooting their rifles "at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself, lancing their little vain and puny flashes into the brooding and blood-weary and throbbing darkness" seem to derive directly from Conrad's work (204). In particular, this passage echoes Marlowe's observation of the French ship quixotically "firing into a continent" (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Stories*, Gene M. Moore, ed. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995. pp. 41). Faulkner's admiration for Conrad's writing is well-known.

<sup>47</sup> Coincidentally, Glissant designates "the *longing for history*" and the search for the "true origins" of the Sutpen family as central to the task of *Absalom* (*Caribbean Discourse* 79, italics in original).

Asserting that the physical evidence of the past “just does not explain,” but is nonetheless somehow “meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces,” Quentin’s father can regard history, with all of its gaps, as a series of “shadowy and inscrutable and serene” symbols set against the “turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs” (80). The *physical* evidence of the Sutpen story amounts to only a few documents, and those not even seen by all of the story’s narrators and one crumbling house with several of Sutpen’s scions cowering within; these elements, in themselves, do not constitute a unified narrative. Haiti becomes one of the primary sites for the fleshing-out of this incomplete story. Yet it would seem, at first, quixotic to attempt to compensate for the lack of detail in one story (Sutpen’s time in Jefferson) through reliance on an even less-articulated narrative (his time in Haiti). What the Sutpen story’s narrators, even Shreve, who has an artificially-inflated Hollywoodesque conception of the region (““Jesus, the South is fine, isn’t it. It’s better than the theatre, isn’t it. It’s better than Ben Hur, isn’t it”” [176]), *do* possess is a conception of the historical narrative of the South, the traumatic lineaments of which hang heavy over the text, yet are never fully explicated. Instead, we receive from Quentin’s grandfather a narrative of *Haiti*, rather than the South itself, as a tortured, oppressed region, the earth that “still cried out for vengeance,” having been “manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation” (202).

Though Haiti might appear at first to offer simply an opportunity for Faulkner to erase the traumatic history of the South in favor of a reinscription of that trauma onto other regions, closer examination reveals the two locales, partially by virtue of those very shared traumas, to be congruent; the history of Haiti *is* the history of the South, and vice



versa. Consider the advice that Sutpen, then a boy, received from his layabout father upon deciding to embark upon his grand scheme: “If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn’t it?”, to which the young Thomas Sutpen responds in the affirmative (192). The exchange is immensely revealing of the function of Haiti in the novel. First, it enacts the displacement to which I have alluded above by marking the West Indies as not the authentic generator of the power and cultured affluence (“fine rifles”) that Sutpen seeks, but rather the “nearest thing” to those elements. While Sutpen’s scheme must necessarily play itself out in the South, it borrows a simulacrum of moneyed Southern society from the Caribbean plantation, an ostensibly equivalent region to its continental twin and at the same time more savage, primal, and elemental, a region where the historical traumas that are (for the most part) muted in the South, buried beneath the abundance of pervasive (yet thus far unarticulated) historical data, still exist in the open. Moreover, Sutpen’s father’s by-any-means-necessary wording (“borrow or steal or make”) invokes narratives of New World colonial traumas, also originating in West Indian contact and culminating in theft and depletion of native land, a vital theme in Faulkner’s work and another crucial element of Sutpen’s design, as Shreve postulates that he “skuldugged a hundred miles of land out of a poor ignorant Indian” (145). What Faulkner’s use of Haiti in *Absalom* does, then, is transform the text from an allegory of the South to an extensive tale of traumatic syncretism between the Americas.

In this syncretism we find, ultimately, the justification for *Absalom*’s logic of displacement. Though the South shares a traumatic (postplantation) history with the

Caribbean, the narrative of Southern trauma is wholly known, and thus deadening, to its explicators. This is most evident in the descriptions of Quentin and Rosa Coldfield in the first chapter; the former's body is described, in a well-known passage, as "an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth" (7). The "stubborn back-looking ghosts" who infest Quentin's consciousness gaze "with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever [of the Civil War] and into the disease [of slavery] with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence" (7). To dwell upon, or to romanticize, the traumatic history of the South is, for Faulkner, to fall into a vicious cycle of guilt and obsession, while to ostensibly escape from or progress beyond that trauma is to transfer it to the infinitely accessible realm of memory, and thus commemoration. Rosa Coldfield provides a cautionary example of the dangers of articulating this history; hysterically concerned with, as Quentin claims, the quandary of "why God let us lose the War," she believes that "only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women" can Sutpen's memory be purged (6). Haunted by this traumatic imperative, Rosa herself decays, obsessed with her own vengeance and suffering; Quentin, on the other hand, gives the "ghosts" that inhabit the halls of his memory voice only through reference to other historical figures and, I might reasonably claim, other regions. When he restates his grandfather's belief in the "darkness" of Haiti, its traumatic history, we must assume that to some extent he is speaking not only of something that he views as intrinsic to the Haitian landscape, but also something endemic to the *South*. Haiti thus functions not simply as a necessary plot element, and not simply as a scapegoat for the hidden traumas of the South in the text, but as a means for the Sutpen story's

narrators to come to terms with their own troubled histories with some measure of ironic distance.

We can find a mirror of *Absalom*'s focus on the "dark" histories of the South and the Caribbean in *Omeros*'s persistent idea that a common legacy of historical trauma unites regions such as the South, the Caribbean, and classical Greece; Walcott speaks, for example, of "tense / Southern towns and plantations" defined by the rupture between the ideology of "Athenian principles and pillars" and the praxis of "convicts and emigrants who had fled / persecution and gave themselves *fascēs* with laws / to persecute slaves" (*Omeros* 206). Ancient Greece and the antebellum South, in their elision of racial trauma with a veneer of genteel intellectualism, become, through *Omeros*'s persistent rhetoric of the "reversible world," a mirror of the Caribbean, in which Walcott finds classical apotheoses underlying the extant trauma, poverty, and subjugation: "all that Greek manure under the green bananas."<sup>48</sup> Walcott's poetry as a whole is rife with such correspondences, prompting many critics to read his work profitably alongside, for example, Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island*. Such readings provide a powerful means of addressing the polyreferentiality of his texts since they circumvent many of the perennial obstacles of comparativity. The irreconcilable contextual differences between the Caribbean and the Aegean, for instance, are less detriments to the juxtaposition of the regions as a whole than they are an opportunity to cast those same regions as part of an overriding *weltanschauung*. For example, a brief sojourn in the South in *Omeros* causes Walcott's metapersona to meditate on

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<sup>48</sup> *Omeros* 207, 271. The "reversible world" is itself a recurrent rhetorical turn in Walcott's poetry, with different locales and time periods commonly referred to as the "reverse" or "inverse" of others. For example, in *The Bounty*: "In maps the Caribbean dreams / of the Aegean, and the Aegean of reversible seas" (62).

...the Greek revival  
carried past the names of towns with columned porches,  
and how Greek it was, the necessary evil  
of slavery, in the catalogue of Georgia's  
marble past, the Jeffersonian ideal in  
plantations with its Hectors and Achillesees,  
its foam in the dogwood's spray, past towns named Helen,  
Athens, Sparta, Troy. (177)

The Greece / Caribbean / South connection is even more direct here, as the individual components of the twinned concepts of ration and trauma are replicated and repeated across the three regions. The South repeats Greece, which in turn surrenders its "Athenian principles" of the earlier passage to "the Jeffersonian ideal," while the simultaneously Greek and Caribbean characters appear ambiguously in all three regions. The "marble past" becomes both the site of classical and postcolonial trauma.

Compelling as such readings are, we should take care not to conflate repetition with displacement. I want to suggest that, though Walcott's poetry in general and *Omeros* in particular incorporate something of Faulkner's methodology in *Absalom* insofar as they reach a point of synchronicity between shared regional exploitations and traumas, in much of his writing dealing with the South, he also replicates Faulkner's displacement of problematic pasts onto other regions. To make this case, I will be looking closely at *The Gulf* (1969), as it is perhaps the Walcott text that addresses itself most directly to the difficulties of such a practice. *The Gulf*, almost in direct inversion of the methods of *Absalom*, presents a normative Caribbean region in which traumatic histories are either nonpresent, erased by the violence of their own methods, or else normalized, absorbed and folded into the standard practices of everyday life. The South, however, appears in the volume as the regional embodiment of all of these vanished horrors; while Caribbean history is still, in some sense, the blank slate that *Absalom*

makes of it, it nonetheless acts in *The Gulf* to remedy its amnesia in regions that it perceives as its mirrors.<sup>49</sup>

A few remarks on the construction and composition of *The Gulf* as a volume may be in order. The arrangement of its constituent parts shows a definite progress through certain master themes, though all of them arise out of a collective knowledge of postcolonial trauma. The first poem in the volume, “Ebb,” is already looking backward from a present in which the damage inflicted by civilization is all too visible: the “suburban shoreline” of the Caribbean “littered / with rainbow muck, the afterbirth / of industry,” and idyllic, romanticized visions of history are beyond the point of easy access—“The schooner’s out too far, / too far that boyhood” (9, 10). The tone and form of this poem, and the poem that follows, “The Corn Goddess” is deeply akin to that of U.S. confessional poetry from the 1950s and 60s. The influence of Lowell’s “For the Union Dead” is particularly strong in “The Corn Goddess,” the lines “chrome-tooled cars / lathered like estate horses nose the shallows,” along with the mentions of oil in the previous poem, directly echoing the final lines of Lowell’s work: “giant finned cars nose

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<sup>49</sup> In noting the Caribbean’s appearance, in both of these texts, as a type of *tabula rasa*, I am aware that I am treading perhaps uncomfortably close to the common stereotype of the region as bereft of any significant historical (or cultural) events whatsoever, Naipaul’s famous assertion that historical Caribbean lacunae stem not only from trauma, but from insignificance: “the history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told. Brutality is not the only difficulty. History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies” (*The Middle Passage* 29). Yet for both Faulkner and Walcott, the choice of a Caribbean locale is deliberate, and those locales themselves deliberately inflected by a history, even if that history is defined by lack. That is to say, even if these authors do agree with Naipaul’s statement (though it seems fairly clear that they do not), they find the very insignificance of Caribbean historical data to be itself worthy of engagement; as I have noted earlier, a conception of lack can also be an ethos of potential.

forward like fish; / a savage servility / slides by on grease” (11).<sup>50</sup> The immediacy of the Lowell references in these first two poems, combined with the direct reference to “Old Carlos Williams’s cat’s foot” in the next poem, “Metamorphoses” creates a tangible tension with the fundamental ambiguity of the locales of these poems; in contrast to the typical regional specificity of Walcott’s shorter works, which frequently situate themselves in space and, often, in time as well by their very titles (in *The Gulf* alone, for example, we find such titles as “Guyana,” “Landfall, Grenada,” and “Homecoming: Anse La Raye”), the initial poems of *The Gulf* occupy interchangeable locations.<sup>51</sup> The foliage in “Ebb” suggests a tropical location, but the specific cultural background of “The Corn Goddess,” like its pantheistic title, is vague. In short, these are poems not of a specific bounded region but of the Americas in general, wearing their literary influences on their sleeves but also marked by a fundamental relativism, a suspicion toward the forces of regionalism and essentialism, that reinforces the possibility of their wider (comparative) applicability.

I have discussed the arrangement of these initial poems at some length not simply because their simultaneous affinity with (evinced by the poet’s license to borrow liberally from its still-evolving poetic movements) and distance from (in their hesitancy to identify with any region directly) what Walcott would later call the “archipelago of the Americas,” seems in line with Faulkner’s absorption and subsequent marginalization of

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<sup>50</sup> The friendship and poetic kinship between Walcott and Lowell are well-documented; see, for example, his essay on Lowell in *What the Twilight Says*.

<sup>51</sup> Walcott’s reference to “Carlos Williams” is intriguing in itself, as it recalls Williams’s Latin American heritage (his mother was Puerto Rican), as well as his long-standing concern with that region, on which *The Gulf* also frequently dwells. The form of the reference (a colloquialism followed by a paraphrase), however, is Poundian, adding to the pervasiveness of the U.S. influence in these early poems. Neruda is also a continuous (though not as directly acknowledged) influence on these poems.

Haiti within the narrative of *Absalom*, but also because the double regionalist consciousness that the construction of *The Gulf* erects from the beginning presages the volume's eventual schizophrenic fusion of the Caribbean in its title poem and the three that succeed it: "Elegy," "Postcards," and "Blues." In these poems, as I will show, the colonial traumas that the author finds inescapable (and beyond revisionist reproach, as in "Ebb") become dislocated from their Caribbean context and displaced onto the imaginative landscape of the South.

The Gulf itself throughout the volume is a tremendously significant and multi-layered symbol for Walcott, one that would take an independent discussion to excavate completely; Patricia Ismond calls it, in *Abandoning Dead Metaphors* (2001), "an outstanding example of [Walcott's] genius for completeness of statement through metaphor" (127). On the most superficial levels, however, the Gulf is, of course, a geographical location, the Gulf of Mexico, as well as the pregnant distance between cosmopolitanist and regionalist lives embodied in Crusoe's "between me and thee is a great gulf fixed," a frequent Walcottian epigraph, the distance between poetry and perception, black and white, life and death, and lastly, most evocative of all, the ligament between the Americas, the void that both joins and separates the regions.<sup>52</sup> It is this last significance that I would like to investigate in greater depth.

"The Gulf" is among the most complex and intricately elegiac of Walcott's poems—the elegy is not only for the ostensible *telos* of poetry and its hallowed characters, which appear as the Lowellian "uninstructing dead," but seemingly the entire

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<sup>52</sup> For more on Walcott, Crusoe, and the metaphorical Gulf, see Stewart Brown, "Between Me and Thee is a Great Gulf Fixed": The Crusoe Presence in Walcott's Early Poetry," in Spaas and Stimpson, eds., *Robinson Crusoe: Myths and Metamorphoses* (1996), 210-224.

American archipelago, “these detached, dividing states” (30, 29). Wracked by racial tension, “the smoke of bursting ghettos,” environmental degradation (“an air, heavy with gas” and “the new clouds over Texas”), rampant consumerism (weak airport coffee, filling-station signs), and pervasive historical and literary amnesia, the States seem almost sepulchral, a “cauldron boiling with its wars,” a “cloth-bound mummy with self-healing scars” (28).<sup>53</sup> Yet, in the center of the poem, the poet seems to look away (to repeat some of the Civil War-era resonances that Walcott excavates) from the shattered nation as a whole: “the South felt like home. Wrought balconies / the sluggish river with its tidal drawl, / the tropic air charged with extremities / of patience, a heat heavy with oil, / canebreaks, that legendary jazz” (29). What is striking about Walcott’s description of the South is that it represents a confluence of elements that could be either Southern or Caribbean—the climate, the architecture, the agriculture—and distinctively Southern phenomena—jazz, a hybridized Southern musical form, and the Mississippi River, a waterway beyond the scope of island drainages. The overall effect is not dissimilar to the work performed by the first few poems of *The Gulf*, the concept of simultaneous rootedness and indeterminacy, the region as distinct and bounded while also interreferential, international, an archetype.

Thus, when Walcott writes “the South felt like home,” he is doing more than simply suggesting a similar set of material and mental circumstances for the two regions. Firstly, his proclamation that the South “felt like” home, rather than actually *being* a real or symbolic place of potential residence, invokes what the editors of *Look Away!* (2004) refer to as “the South’s literally uncanny (*unheimlich*) hybridity,” its status of being, in

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the irony of the “filling” stations and their capacity (or lack thereof) to fill the Gulf, see Ismond, *ibid*, 127.



Walcott's case, both "home" and not, both Caribbean and non-Caribbean (Smith & Cohn 9). However, given the fundamental instability of the term "home" as regards Walcott's work that I have noted earlier, it may be more profitable to regard the notion of home in this section of the poem as an emblem of domesticity, comfort, safety, and, implicitly, inertia.<sup>54</sup> If this is the case, the South as represented in "The Gulf" becomes not the region of superficial similarities to Walcott's "true" home region, but the place in which the traumatic tensions and racial anxieties of that region are brought to light. Walcott writes: "But fear / thickened my voice, that strange, familiar soil / prickled and barbed the texture of my hair, / my status as a secondary soul" (29). While the South seems to offer a regionally rooted counterweight to the otherwise baneful portrayal of the United States at first (the "air, heavy with gas" of the second section of the poem, dealing with Texas, compares unfavorably to the "heat, heavy with oil" of the third, which focuses on the Gulf South), closer inspection reveals the region as the tensest locus of racial tension in the poem, the place where the poet notes, characteristically adopting a fragment of the regional dialect, that "there's no rock cleft to go hidin' in" (29).

The magnitude of Walcott's displacement of the "true" site of racial division in "The Gulf," as well as in the volume as a whole, becomes clear when we take certain other of *The Gulf's* poems into account. "Blues" in particular, though set in Greenwich Village, invokes in its title and in the typified ("Just playing rough, / like young America will") hate crime of its subject—"they beat this yellow nigger / black and blue"—invokes the litany of similar incidents in Southern history (35, 34). Here, the South becomes

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<sup>54</sup> The term is further destabilized in "The Gulf" by the early lines of the fourth section: "I have no home / as long as summer bubbling to its head / boils for that day when in the Lord God's name / the coals of fire are heaped upon the head / of all whose gospel is the whip and flame" (29-30).

metonym for “America,” its ostensible tolerance, the seemingly welcoming character of the region in “The Gulf,” disguising the violence of “Blues.” More to the point, the Caribbean poems of *The Gulf*, in contrast to those set in the U.S., deal much less directly with racial tension and trauma. In “Air,” the narrator acknowledges the presence of a dark past for the “rain forest,” but ultimately is less concerned with explicating that past than noting how it is elided; the slaughtered Arawak “leaves not the lightest fern-trace / of his fossil to be cultured / by black rock, / but only the rusting cries / of a rainbird” (35). George Handley writes that New World history “is often beyond representation because the lived realities were either initially understated or erased in historical documentation,” and the primary response that “Air” offers is a somewhat romanticized restatement of that lack (26).<sup>55</sup> In the poem’s oft-cited final line, “there is too much nothing here,” comes the key to *The Gulf*’s logic of displacement. Unlike the South of *Absalom*, whose traumatic past produces tangible reminders in the present day—stories, artifacts, even living descendents—regardless of the paucity of those reminders, Walcott’s Caribbean cannot entirely remember the darkness of history. Or, as Walcott states in “The Muse of History,” “amnesia is the true history of the New World” (*What the Twilight Says* 39). “Too much nothing” thus indicates both a lack (not enough of anything) and an overabundance (more of one thing than can conceivably be used)—there is not enough

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<sup>55</sup> This is a major theme in much of Walcott’s poetry and also emerges strongly in “The Muse of History.” He has addressed the concept of historical amnesia perhaps most directly in “The Sea is History,” which, while it finds the traumatic memory of such horrors as journeys on board slave ships (“the packed cries, / the shit, the moaning”) impossible to forget, also finds itself distanced from those traumas, only able to relate to them as preformed metaphors, each event labeled with the name of a book of the Bible. In this poem, “history, really beginning,” is located only as a creation of the present, the “dark ears of ferns / and in the salt chuckle of rocks / with their sea pools,” the “rumour without any echo” (*Collected Poems* 364-67).

evidence, not enough reminders of the hidden past in the present, but also too much of that past to be adequately synthesized by *any* effort in the present.

“Air” is a far cry from the burning ghettos of “The Gulf” and the bloody sidewalks of “Blues,” which immediately precedes it. The juxtaposition is deliberate; while the Southern incarnation of racial trauma embodies visible terror, violence, and physical threat, the Caribbean mirror of the same, Walcott suggests, is calmer, introspective, elegiac but not immediate. Without enduring markers, living histories, of its defining traumas, the reality, the directness, of the Caribbean’s racial violence is displaced onto the South. At stake in this displacement is not simply Walcott’s observation, upon turning from the Caribbean to the massacre of Native Americans on the Great Plains in *Omeros*, that “when one grief afflicts us we choose a sharper grief / in hope that enormity will ease affliction,” but also the fundamental nature of interhistorical displacement in both Walcott and Faulkner’s work (181). In *Absalom*, Haiti provides the necessary narrative space for the hidden, obscured, and uncertain aspects of Sutpen’s design; likewise, the South in *The Gulf* in some sense provides an imaginative backdrop for the play of what the traumatic, enigmatic history of Walcott’s Caribbean lacks. The methodology of displacement, in its cultivation of a certain concurrence of traumatic history among varied American locales, offers the promise of not only comparativity between those locales, but also the possibility of collectively coping with that trauma, of making the past more than what George Handley calls an “empty space,” a “series of untranslatable hieroglyphs” (*New World Poetics* 6).

Glissant has examined this possibility to a greater extent in *Caribbean Discourse*, in which he terms what I have referred to above as “displacement” as a somewhat more

ontologically neutral phenomenon of “diversion,” defined as “the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed” and employing the methodology of a search “*elsewhere* for the principle of domination, which is not evident in the country itself: because the system of domination... is not directly tangible” (20). In *The Gulf*, this intangibility manifests itself as a physical archival lack, a dearth of artifacts, records, and extant reminders of trauma, while in *Absalom, Absalom!* the intangibility is more a product of narrative; embodiments of certain histories (those of the South itself) are simply nonpresent, excluded from either speech or textual mention by the author or the nature of the story itself. The unity of the textual artifact and the intractability of history, respectively, could be seen to lead to a praxological paralysis, with displacement / diversion a simple reinscription of that immobility, yet Glissant believes that these strategies can “*lead somewhere* when the obstacle for which the detour was made tends to develop into concrete ‘possibilities’” (22). That is, even if the void of history suggests helplessness, the interregionalism promoted by displacement carries the potential of adapting external coping strategies. Glissant notes that “Caribbean intellectuals” have used diversion “*to find another place*: that is, in these circumstances, to link a possible solution of the insoluble to the resolution other peoples have achieved” (23). Finding “outside” solutions to endemic traumas does not make those traumas any less immediate or any more irreconcilable, but it can suggest concrete solutions for voicing and interpreting lack.

What displacement tends to elide is the specifics of individuated traumas among its constituent locales. George Handley writes, in the essay I have cited near the beginning of this chapter, that the postplantation thesis “should not become justification

for assuming that one can find facile homogeneity in the Americas.” That is to say, regarding individual locales with traumatic histories as essentially interchangeable, with their respective pasts easily displaced onto each other, can lead to “an elision of important regional differences” (25). Displacement of one regional history that perhaps lacks (as Walcott’s does) full explication onto another region bears the same risk as Handley’s concept of misguided New World regionalism, ostensibly a means of “resist[ing] colonial discourse” by “speaking from and to those circumstances that have been passed over,” that both works violence on the land itself by making it “an eternal sign, emptied of history” and, more insidiously, establishes a false history for the region that “mythologizes a new origin in a New World place in order to establish rootedness and therefore further contributes to New World amnesia” (35, 36).<sup>56</sup> What this amounts to is that postplantation synchronicity, though it might, through displacement, endeavor to fill the gaps of one traumatic history with the matter of another, in the end serves only to lay bare its own devices, underscoring the historical lacunae and amnesia that made such displacement possible. We might conclude, then, that Faulkner’s transferral of the “real” source of the trauma and violence of slavery onto the Caribbean, and Walcott’s removal of true, visible, immediate racial conflict from the Caribbean onto the South, both speak more to their respective “home” regions’ attempt to internalize their own fundamentally obfuscated histories than to any authentic claim to interregional historical

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<sup>56</sup> I should note here that Handley is using the term “regionalism” in a manner somewhat different to my own use of the term; in fact, he breaks with the bulk of regionalist criticism by separating regionalism, which he denotes as the tendency to mythologize (and thus ossify) a common past among residents of a particular area, from a more abstract and environmentally conscious attachment to place. New World writers such as Walcott, Whitman, and Neruda, Handley argues, produce regionally-inflected poetry that nonetheless labors under no illusions of “ownership” of either the land itself or its history.

synchronism. In attempting to bring about interregional homogeneity, they emphasize their differences.

### 3. Narrative and Archival History

I have spoken in the previous section of what might be called *Absalom's* compensatory means of narration, the drive on the part of Sutpen's interpreters to alleviate the lack of extant historical data through theory and conjecture, obsessively tying up all of the narrative loose ends, which in part helps to account for the elements of the story that are displaced onto Haiti, as well as the troubled role that the island plays in the text. Yet, at the end of the novel, we are left with what might be called the ultimate loose end—the presence of Jim Bond at Sutpen's Hundred—upon which relies Shreve's final stab at Quentin and Quentin's maniacal self-assurance in the novel's last line. ““You've got one nigger left,” Shreve reminds him, “ ‘One nigger Sutpen left. Of course you cant catch him and you don't even always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you've got him there still. You still hear him at night sometimes. Dont you?’” (303). The horror that Quentin feels at Shreve's assertion stems not only from his implied fear of miscegenation on a grand scale (shared, of course, with the Sutpen family, especially Henry, with whom he is doubled throughout the text), but his concurrent fear that there are elements of the Sutpen story that actively refuse to be incorporated within the narrative that he has constructed—Shreve's assertion that he cannot “use” Jim Bond for anything. Quentin essentially abhors the concept of history *qua* history; if that history cannot be incorporated into an interpretive scheme, rewritten as narrative, it functions only as his father's intractable vision of the past, “a dead time” populated by “distinct,

uncomplex” characters (71). It is precisely this historical illegibility, or, as Handley would say, the void of history, that Jim Bond represents. He is both a chronotopic embodiment and reminder of Sutpen’s “design,” the sole surviving resident of Sutpen’s Hundred on whom the weight of explicating that history falls and a dead sign, his worldless moaning signifying, to invoke another Faulkner text, nothing. Jim Bond simultaneously *must* signify and *cannot* signify an elaborate historical narrative. The “must signify / cannot signify” epistemological status is shared, as I shall note presently, by Haiti in *Absalom*, and is a hallmark of the historical voids I have mentioned above. We thus might conceivably mark Jim Bond’s appearance at the end of *Absalom* as these voids being made manifest and immediate, an immediacy from which Quentin (though, significantly, not Shreve) shrinks in the novel’s final passages.

Jim Bond’s presence at Sutpen’s Hundred indicates, as Shreve hints, that the novel’s narrative cannot fully encompass the (albeit fictional) stuff of history. Perhaps more damning than the idea that there are certain aspects of the past that remain illegible, however, is Mr. Compson’s suggestion, nearly lost in his description of the incompleteness of the Sutpen story, that the events of the past “dont explain and we are not supposed to know” (80). This claim adds “*should* not signify” to the above dichotomy; Mr. Compson believes that the past has structure (as opposed to the present, which he finds to be filled with “diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag” [71]), but also that at least part of that structure is purposefully (though to what purpose is uncertain) obscure.<sup>57</sup> Laboring against this idea are not only

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<sup>57</sup> Mr. Compson’s “grab bag” comment is twinned with Quentin’s remembrance, in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), of him teaching his children that “all men are just

Quentin and Shreve, but Rosa Coldfield, who Shreve claims “refused at the last to be a ghost” and, even at the end of her life, “couldn’t reconcile herself to letting [Sutpen] lie dead in peace” (289). The presence of Jim Bond at Sutpen’s Hundred requires these three characters to acknowledge at last what they have feared (except Shreve, who seems to take a certain perverse delight in the revelation) since the beginning of the novel: that certain aspects of history refuse to be rewritten into narrative and are, as Mr. Compson claims, simply “mischancings.” This leads to a further paradox within the novel: the alteration of history itself, which actively resists any constructed narrative to fit the dictates of that narrative.

Sutpen recalls, from his time in Haiti, more than anything the smell of sugar burning; the destruction, by rioting slaves, of the plantation that he oversaw imprinting forever on him “the rank sweet rich smell as if the hatred and the implacability, the thousand secret dark years which had created the hatred and the implacability had intensified the smell of the sugar,” so much so that Quentin’s grandfather recalls that Sutpen never took sugar in his coffee (200). Significantly, Sutpen does not shy away from other plantation products that have a similar traumatic history: cotton, tobacco, and all of the other raw and processed products of the Southern economy pass through his hands during his time managing his dry-goods store. Rather, it is the sugar alone, specifically the Caribbean-grown, “secret,” “dark” sugar, that proves too tainted even for him. If we take Rosa Coldfield’s bitter proclamation that “*surely there is something in madness, even the demoniac, that Satan flees, aghast at his own handiwork, and which God looks on in pity*” at face value, we might reach the conclusion that sugar, in part,

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accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away” (175).



represents that pinnacle of colonial horror that even Sutpen cannot address (134). If we juxtapose this unthinkability with, as I have already noted, the absolutely essential status of the West Indies within *Absalom*'s narrative structure, the deliberate irony of Sutpen's early idea of the West Indies as a place "to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn't matter how, so long as the man was clever and courageous" becomes clear; Haiti is the place in the text that both *must* and *cannot* be articulated (195). To invert Mr. Compson's phrase, it doesn't explain, but we are supposed to know.

This imbalance between what *must* and what *can* be told uniquely lends itself, I would argue, to Faulkner's famous "misdating" of the Haitian Revolution, a somewhat kind appellation, since from the text it seems unclear whether the Revolution happens at all, whether misdated or not. What is clear is that Sutpen serves for a time as overseer on a Haitian sugar plantation and helps its owner put down a slave rebellion at some point during the late 1820s (193). Of course, such a rebellion occurring during the 1820s would have been quite impossible, since the Haitian Revolution, which abolished both slavery and the planter class, precedes these events by a full twenty years. Critical attention to this error is roughly divided into two camps: those who view it as unintentional, and portray Faulkner as misinformed, and those who see it as a deliberate attempt on the author's part to make some variety of statement on, for example, the contradictions and ahistoricism of empire.<sup>58</sup> Into the former camp fall many avowedly postcolonial studies that underscore the Caribbean as the marginalized Other of the South, an arrangement in which Faulkner's involvement is implicit, but not to the extent that it prevents *Absalom* from making some essential observation on the nature of the region. Hosam Aboul-Ela,

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<sup>58</sup> This is a paraphrase of George Handley's argument vis-à-vis the misdating. See *Postslavery Literatures*, pp. 137.

for instance, states that, though Faulkner was “confused about the exact dates” of the Revolution, he was keenly attuned to “the role White privilege played in the colonial economy,” which is of course a “simple yet crucial interplay” (*Other South* 153). The latter camp labors to endow the misdating with somewhat similar significances, but under the premise that, as Richard Godden writes in a widely-cited 1994 essay, “Faulkner knows more than enough about San Domingo to put its revolution in the right century” and thus reads the misdating as evidential of some unique artistic project undertaken by the author (“Unreadable Revolutions” 686).

Vera Kutzinski attempts to square the circle of these varied interpretations in a 2001 essay, in which she notes the common argument that Haiti in *Absalom* is “the kind of ‘wild alien space’ traditionally conducive to romance and adventure, as well as to colonial (and more contemporary) encounters of the imperialistic kind with which we have ample familiarity” (65-66). Confident that there is “a more productive way to read Haiti in this novel,” she suggests, in a reading informed by Benítez-Rojo, that the historical inaccuracy vis-à-vis the region in Faulkner’s novel

loosens the first black republic from its moorings in place and in a certain kind of historical specificity and, conceptually speaking, sets it afloat in the Sargasso Sea. We can well imagine that it even drift into the Atlantic, where it travels north and east on faster, even more treacherous currents (66).

The narrative fragmentation, exaggeration, and stereotyping of the Caribbean in *Absalom* become, for Kutzinski, an inroads for reading the region in other contexts, in something of the same manner that I have suggested the traumas of the South become transposed onto Haiti owing to the latter’s lack of articulation. However, I would like to underscore the fact that Haiti’s narrative disunity in *Absalom* is not an impediment to the region’s

repetition but a necessity; if Haiti appeared in the novel full-formed, detailed, rooted in its historical, social, and economic specificities, it would remain, as it were, an isolated incident.

Part of the function of the Haitian section of the novel, then, is to remind the interpreters of Sutpen's story that there are aspects of the past that must necessarily remain unknowable. Though Faulkner frequently declines or delays narration of the most violent or traumatic sections of his novels (Temple Drake's rape in *Sanctuary*, Quentin Compson's suicide in *The Sound and the Fury*, the slew of murders at the fishing camp in *Absalom, Absalom!*), preferring to reveal what happened during these scenes gradually and often indirectly, the scenes of *Absalom* set in Haiti are almost unique in that what transpires is *never* adequately narrated.<sup>59</sup> The reader never learns what happens when Sutpen steps out the door of the plantation house and "subdues" the rioting slaves; they do not even learn *why* the slaves are rioting in the first place, beyond Quentin's grandfather's interpolation that the "yet intact bones and brains in which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they trod still cried out for vengeance" (200). Haiti's past is evoked, but never narrated; insinuated, but never told. It is, in a sense, not only fruitful ground for Kutzinski's repetition and comparativity but also for the construction of narrative, a narrative that, as Faulkner's misdatings betray, tends to trump "actual" history.

Both Walcott and Glissant, among others, have echoed this sentiment by taking *a priori* the lack of a cohesive, unified history for New World writing, and Caribbean

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<sup>59</sup> There are, I should note, many exceptions to this rule in Faulkner's fiction, perhaps most notably the death of Joe Christmas in *Light in August*. What the visibility of this violence speaks about that text, and Faulkner's body of work as a whole, I will leave to the reader.

writing in particular, with the prime goals of that writing being the articulation of the borders of a fundamentally unknowable past and forging new creative works that accept this unknowability as given, thus enacting a distinct break from the abyss of history. Glissant finds the “knowledge of the Whole” brought about by Relation to be enhanced by the experience of “having been at the abyss,” since one experience of unspeakable and unknowable trauma, presumably, creates sympathy with another (*Poetics of Relation* 8). More intriguing still is Walcott’s claim, in “The Muse of History,” that the ancestors of both “torturer” and “victim” in the New World have an inescapable “horror of the past,” yet dwelling on that horror produces only “a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendents of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendents of masters” (*What the Twilight Says* 39). More complex and, ultimately, productive for Walcott is the notion of history as myth, in which “the method by which we are taught the past... is the same by which we read narrative fiction” (37).<sup>60</sup> History as myth, as narrative, is the only way for Walcott, like Faulkner, to address the void of the past. Or, in the terms that Handley sets out, “the past’s refusal to enter completely into representation” creates a referential quandary that “perpetually recreates a sense of place, generates the need for more stories, and will always highlight, self-consciously, one’s own desire for rootedness,” in essence demanding further fictional representation for the region (26, 40). We should be wary of terming this methodology “revisionism” or *apologia*, since what is being revised or explained is always already illegible. Revisionism implies the excavation of new historical evidence, or else a new

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<sup>60</sup> Bruce King correctly notes, in his biography of Walcott, history’s constantly evolving status as “fiction” in his writing, and his persistent focus on “immortal” art rather than history, which “changes according to those in power and its use” (464).

interpretation of existing evidence to produce a different result. Yet if there is insufficient evidence to begin with, literature, rather than historiography, rapidly becomes the operative scheme. A better term might be “narrative history” or even “compensatory narrative,” with the compensation designed to combat the lacunae that history leaves behind.

Yet, even given Walcott’s attempt, in “The Muse of History,” to make the stuff of history “an exertion of memory” and thus “subject to invention,” his respect for “the great poets of the New World,” prominently Whitman and Neruda, who maintain an “Adamic” ideal of *ex nihilo* creation out of the gaps of history, and his distaste for history’s urge to “condemn or justify,” which only leads to minimalizing, insufficient explanations: “this happened because of that, this was understandable because, and in days men were such,” he nonetheless feels in some sense that narrative history is inadequate (*What the Twilight Says* 37, 39). Nowhere in his work is this inadequacy more pronounced than in *Omeros*, in which the narratives that the author (and certain characters) construct out of the debris of the past consistently fail to compensate for its barrenness. *Omeros*, to be certain, addresses many of the same pressures as *Absalom* does—the imbalance between fact and narrative, the difficulty of directly enunciating historical traumas, and the pressure to recover history’s hidden motives and logics. We see this in Achille’s imagined voyage back to Africa to recover his lost father and name, amounting to a recreation, in miniature, of the Middle Passage and its resultant enslavements.<sup>61</sup> The text’s dominant attitude toward the place of St. Lucian (and, to a

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<sup>61</sup> While tending Plunkett’s pigs one day in an ironic re-enactment of colonial indenture, Achille literally effaces history, destroying a religious idol that he finds buried in the mud in one of his several (characteristic) displays of wrath: “A thousand archaeologists started

large extent, Caribbean) history within the larger scheme of global events seems to be a restatement of Walcott's portrait of the islands at the end of the Nobel Prize lecture: the idea that the islands and their residents are "blest by obscurity, cherishing our insignificance" (84). In *Omeros*, for example, Philoctete, laid supine by the pain of his wound, hears "Herdsman haieing cattle / who set out to found no cities; they were the found, / who were bound for no victories; they were the bound, / who levelled nothing before them; they were the ground" (22).<sup>62</sup> Philoctete's placement of the St. Lucian populace in a primarily passive configuration to major world events—large-scale construction projects and military conquests—is bolstered by Plunkett's succinctly stated belief that the "great events of the world would happen elsewhere," leading to the overriding idea that history *qua* history in the poem is something viewed from the outside, not participated in (103). St. Lucia drifts in the wake of history, feeling the motion of its passage, but for the most part the two are content to grant each other their due space, and the intersection of global and local pasts is perhaps more comic than anything: "If History saw them as pigs, History was Circe / with her schoolteacher's wand, with high poles at the fêtes / of saint-day processions past al fresco latrines" (64). Walcott's history, as I have already shown, is only useful insofar as it can be "used," transformed into a creative narrative of living characters and actions. What actual evidence persists is less important than the story that gives form to that evidence.

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screaming / as Achille wrenched out the totem, then hurled it far / over the oleander hedge" (164).

<sup>62</sup> This section of the poem is also notable in that it is perhaps the only rhyming triplet in the entire text, suggesting an incontrovertible parallelism between the cited projects of empire.

And so it might well remain throughout the poem, were it not for the efforts of Plunkett, who is convinced that “what the place needed / was its true place in history,” and, feeling “pity” for Helen (the name here, as elsewhere in *Omeros*, suggesting both the character, her mythic precedent, and the island itself), vows to reconstruct “not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen’s war” (64, 30). The his/herstory pun is the fracture line between Plunkett’s knowledge of *recorded* history and that which, in his subsequent endeavors, he attempts to bestow upon the region. The island’s “proper place” is a location in narrative history, freed of both traumatic colonial realities and the incompleteness of a conception of the past of the region as either fundamentally unknowable or else purely marginal.<sup>63</sup> Yet the Major’s project is quixotic. He soon finds that the records he retrieves from the local library are “factual fiction[s],” burdened by “the affliction / of impartiality; skirting emotion / as a ship avoids a reef” (95). Plunkett’s sorrow (“his book-burdened heart / found no joy in them except their love of events”) at this realization is twofold: first, he finds the evidence in the records insufficient to his purpose, namely, to prove Helen “not a fantasy / but a webbed connection,” and, second, he realizes that his endeavor is not historical *per se*; he cannot conceive of “how time could be reworted, / which is the historian’s task” (95). Eventually, he comes to regard his research as antithetical to this imperative; “history,” he reflects, “was a cannon, not a

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<sup>63</sup> Plunkett’s archival project can also be viewed as a means of eroticizing history, coupled with his abortive desire to sexually possess Helen, granting new significances to recorded / narrative historical opposition; while recorded history is comprised of dry, intractable facts, narrative history is loaded with sexual possibilities: “History earns its own tenderness / in time; not for a navel victory, but for / the V of a velvet back in a yellow dress” (103). In many ways, *Omeros* genders the parallel histories that it describes: archival history, the intractable dates and numbers that Plunkett comes to abhor, are implicitly masculine, while narrative history is figured as feminine. The complete extent of this gendered tropology, however, would require another work to assess fully.

lizard; De Grasse / leaving Martinique, and Rodney crouching to act / in the right wind” (92). Constructing the narrative that he desires out of the evidence that history provides him is more properly the bailiwick of fiction, the fiction of a colonial ancestor with which Plunkett eventually contents himself coupled with the two brass regimental buttons that he scavenges from the town’s refuse pile.

The readers are already aware of this; they have been informed of the insufficiency of narrative history fifty pages earlier in the poem, though they perhaps do not realize it before reaching Plunkett’s section. For this, they might be forgiven, as it comes obliquely, in the guise of an ancient bottle, retrieved from the sea floor and enshrined in the town museum. The bottle’s origins, its original use, are essentially unknowable: “It has been listed / variously by experts... but the glass was so crusted it was hard to tell” (43). Still, Walcott notes, its “myth widened its rings every century,” and the locals “kept their faith when the experts’ ended in doubt,” with legends of sunken treasure regularly luring a few seekers, including Achille (43). Here, as elsewhere in *Omeros*, we see the division between the incomplete evidence of the past, the realm of the historian, and the potential offered by a narrative view of the same. However, the joke, in this case, is on both the poet and the historian; the bottle signifies nothing, its symbolic crusting of fool’s gold leading both archival and narrative history to a dead end.<sup>64</sup> The bottle exposes the fundamental flaw in both of these methodologies: though archival history ostensibly leads to an *impartial* record of past events, it ultimately

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<sup>64</sup> This is, of course, the same wine-bottle that drifts away from the *Ville de Paris* following the death of Plunkett’s theoretical “ancestor.” However, the narrator dismisses this origin story, presented later in the poem as fact, as “nonsense / and far too simple,” capitalizing instead on the more fanciful stories that surround (encrust) the bottle. History pales in comparison to narrative.



provides only a *partial* interpretation of those events, hobbled by both the gaps in the historical record and its irrelevance to the progress of the present, and while narrative history compensates for these shortcomings by incorporating the fundamental lack evinced in that record into a compelling modern synthesis, it lacks accountability, providing only an image, a fictional caricature, of past events, subject to the whims of the present and neurotic reevaluations on the part of its author; as Walcott writes near the end of *Omeros*, he has “read and rewritten till literature / was guilty as History” (271). Ultimately, *Omeros* adopts something of the same attitude toward history that Faulkner’s text does: the realization that constructing a fictional narrative of history’s progress may alleviate its unknowability, but it also serves to underscore this lack; what any narrative provides is one vision of history among many.

#### **4. “I still felt that this had happened before”**

Near the conclusion of the Great Plains section of *Omeros*, in the wake of the frontier forts, torn treaties, and slaughtered natives, Catherine Weldon walks among the Indian dead. Though she does not know it, what she observes in the ransacked camp is a repetition of Achille’s discoveries in the similarly razed African village. Achille’s narration mirrors her own; he recalls: “A mongrel / and a child sat in the street, the child with a clay / bowl in its hands, squatting in the dust. The fanged growl / backed away from his shadow,” while Catherine states: “A starved mongrel / and a papoose sat in the white street, with a clay / vessel in the child’s hands, and the dog’s fanged growl / backed off from my horse” (145, 215-216). Snow has been substituted for dust, Native Americans for Africans, but the violence, the trauma, is the same. No less could be said

of the amnesia of narrative history toward these events, as the interchangeable Omeros / Seven Seas figure appears in both tableaux; Achille finds “Seven Seas foaming with grief” inside a ravaged hut, and reflects “He must be / deaf as well as blind,” while through the door of a tent Catherine glimpses “white-eyed Omeros, motionless,” and states: “He must / be deaf too, I thought, as well as blind” (145, 216). The literary chroniclers (embodied by Homer) in these passages appear only as insensate bystanders, powerless to tell or even gauge the extent of the damage that surrounds them. The only point of access to these traumas that the text provides is granted through fantasy; Achille’s phantasmagoric mental voyage and the metapersona’s historical reverie that carry the narrative to Africa and North America, respectively. All that varies between the two accounts is their respective narrators’ interpretations of the scenes. Achille finds in the destroyed village that “nothing was strange; it / was sharply familiar. They’d vanished into their souls. / He foresaw their future. He knew nothing could change it. / The tinkle from coins of the river, the tinkle of irons. / The son’s grief was the father’s, the father’s his son’s” while Catherine remarks: “this was history. I had no power to change it. / And yet I still felt that this had happened before. / I knew it would happen again, but how strange it / was to have seen it in Boston, in the hearth-fire. / I was a leaf in the whirlwind of the Ordained” (146, 217). While Achille sees in the suffering of his ancestors an indelible heritage of trauma that extends across generations to afflict him in turn, Catherine has only a vague apprehension of the repetition of trauma across time and space. She perceives the omnipresence of similar violence, but finds it “strange” that it should come home to her.

I conclude with the juxtaposition of these two instances in *Omeros* because they serve to underscore the twofold defamiliarization of postplantation regional comparativity. Though Catherine Weldon's experience of the repetition of Achille's transatlantic trauma strongly speaks to the power of the postplantation thesis to reconstruct, through narrative history and displacement, Glissant's "knowledge of the Whole," she cannot escape a concurrent feeling of distance, not simply in opposition to but *emanating from* the familiarity of the scene. Repeating the burning of the dead during the Plains massacre through the fireplace in Boston causes her to realize both that the regions act on one another through the mysterious machinations of a circular history and that Boston is irrevocably distant from the Plains, victim of its own specific traumas and rooted in a different conception of the past. Similarly, Quentin and Shreve's meditations on the intertwining of the South and the Caribbean in *Absalom* bring about both the conclusion that the two are inseparable, the narrative surrounding each being necessary to the other, and that the interdependent histories of the two regions will never produce a complete, synchronous narrative. I have claimed elsewhere that relationality implies its opposite, that recourse to omnipresent cosmopolitanism suggest corresponding drives toward regional boundedness, and I might now modify this thesis: to make a continuum of two regionalisms is also to reincarnate regional specificities. By making the South and the Caribbean a single entity with a single traumatic, postplantation past, critics reacknowledge their exclusivity, reify them as fundamentally distanced (and fetishized) regions.

The objection might be raised that this is too cynical an approach to bring about productive studies of postplantation history. To claim that traumatically linked regions

are, to some extent, exclusive of each other leaves us only with Handley's paralyzing, essentialist regionalism, in which every painful past exists in a vacuum and is thus inaccessible to large explanatory schemes. Or, put another way, this approach could be said to entomb both Faulkner and Walcott in their respective regions, linked by inescapable similarities, but unable to break out of their confines. Yet, a more pointed observation might be that it may not even be desirable to let them do so, running against the grain of proclamations of synchronicity (i.e., García Márquez). As I have mentioned earlier in this work, perhaps the strongest correlate to this methodology is Glissant's in *Faulkner, Mississippi*, which on a very basic level attempts a union of the South and the Caribbean through the medium of traumatic history. Yet, as I have noted earlier, he finds in the two regions a blend of synchronicity and difference:

...the same architecture, furniture, and rows of slave shacks, the same instruments of torture are found everywhere in the old slave order—the whipping bar, the stake, the collar restraints, and the suspension poles—you cite a whole list for a skeptical audience that does not wish to know that its history travels with the seas (29).

Glissant's observations encompass much of what I have discussed in the bulk of this chapter—the common trappings of a dark postcolonial past, the sharing of history across national and geographic boundaries, the incapacity (“a skeptical audience that does not wish to know”) to address the presence of that traumatic history. Though he marks the South and the Caribbean as regions “victimized by History where the histories of many people are intertwined,” his examination of Faulkner's concerns and body of work is a narrative that is equal parts familiarity and alienation (13). Upon nearing Lafayette County, Faulkner's home and the ostensible “basis” of Yoknapatawpha, Glissant and his companions are stuck by “an incomprehensible feeling of exoticism,” severed from the

familiar and comparatively welcoming “stretches of salt and fresh water” of Louisiana, a “tragic and irremediable thickness” that bears “an indefinable, engulfing menace” (7). In his subsequent experiences at Rowan Oak and neighboring plantations, Glissant extends this bifurcated line of thought; though he continually notes objects, mannerisms, and essences that could as well be Caribbean, he also notes that there is a palpable distance between his own experience and these elements.

In short, Glissant raises the possibility of reading Faulkner as a Caribbean author, but, paradoxically, at no point does he belong to any region but the South; *Faulkner, Mississippi* reinforces the congruence and dissonance of its author and its subject at every turn. It is a cosmopolitanist, postplantation interpretation that continually insists upon regional distinction. In Foucault’s terminology, Glissant’s writing seeks to establish “a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another,” drawing lines of exchange, contact, and influence, yet maintaining the sites from which those lines proceed as bounded regions (23). This is the same conclusion that my discussion of postplantationism in Faulkner and Walcott has endeavored to produce. The two authors employ much of the same methodology to address the same issues, relate to their respective regions in manners that are strikingly similar, and retrospectively regard those regions through the lens of world-totality with what appears to be the same eye. However, by noting these congruences, I am essentially emphasizing the distance between them; their capacity for comparison relies upon and thus creates a concurrent distance. No less could be said of my comparative project in general. Naming “Faulkner and Walcott,” as the title of this work does, both unites and separates the two authors; they are combined, placed together in the same breath, but

their combination relies on them each being distinct, separate, ultimately distanced from each other. Explicating instances of “equivalence that do not unify,” as Melas suggests, following Glissant, is also the process of uncovering the ““multiplied poetics of the world”” (*All the Difference in the World* 37). Making the act of literary comparison both a union and a division enstranges, eroticizes space, makes of it a location of play, not dominance.

## CHAPTER VI

### EPIC DEATH AND REINCARNATION: RECOVERING THE REGION IN *GO DOWN, MOSES AND OMEROS*

*Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch  
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.  
Kingdoms are clay.*

—Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623)

*The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.*

—Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1674)

#### 1. Dreaming the Region, Dreaming the Globe

In this work, I have attempted to portray the twin entities of the region and the globe as if they were complementary and mutually constitutive, whether in terms of rhetoric and stylistics in the case of the regionalist transformations of my first chapter, the interplay of internationalizing and localizing forces in Faulkner's work and its attendant criticism and Walcott's competing relationality and anti-relationality, or in the simultaneous union and disassociation of the Caribbean and the South offered by postplantation criticism. If we acknowledge that globalism and regionalism intersect synergistically, even dialectically, we must also take into account the fact that this progressivity necessitates the elision of certain outdated forms evident in each category. I have used the term "transformation" extensively in this work to designate the longevity of certain global or regional idioms within previously unthought interpretive schemes, but transformation necessarily implies that the object being transformed ceases to exist in its

original form. The literary lexicon, for example, has expanded in recent years to incorporate “New Southern Studies” and “New World Studies.” These critical schools bear the indelible marks of their predecessors, “American Literature” and “Southern Literature,” yet neither could be said to be equivalent to those older pedagogies. Such, at least, is the hope of those who proclaim their inclusion in these new interpretative schemata.

Bearing on this conception of the duality of transformative ideologies (introducing something new, leaving something else behind), this final chapter concerns itself with what happens when the formal and conceptual bases that underwrite the modern text dissolve, decay, or become unrecognizable. The decaying prototype in the case of the two texts I here study, Faulkner’s *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990) is the epic genre, and the static, unitary region that (as I will show) it attempts to create. Though both of these texts rely on the presence and stability of a historical epic origin-story, they realize that both the formal integrity of the epic style and the identitarian unity of the region that it delineates cannot be retained independently from the context of the classical epic; the contingencies of the epic’s existence are no longer applicable. In particular, Faulkner denotes in *Go Down, Moses* the manner in which the epic cultural relevances of the region vanish with the encroachment of modernity, while Walcott’s *Omeros* finds its own ambitions of recreating epic unities incommensurate with the loss of ancestral linguistic praxis. Both of these texts, then, could be said to engage in a perpetual process of mourning for the very epic traditions that they evoke. However, if they represent a form of epic death, they also enact an equivalent epic resurrection. Rather than relying upon the forced (and, ultimately,



defunct) unities of the historical epic, they offer their own discursive textual unity as the basis for transforming the literary form. Thus, the essential balance of the transformative methodology is preserved: something is lost, but something else is gained.

Preparatory to my address of these goals, however, is the task of defining the epic, both a seemingly simple and equally impossible endeavor. Ezra Pound, in his *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), compiled a one-line (anti)apologia for his mammoth *Cantos* that consists of roughly equal parts lucidity and antagonism, claiming: “there is no mystery about The Cantos, they are the tale of the tribe (194).<sup>1</sup> Whether this is an accurate description of the *Cantos* is open to debate. However, Pound’s phrase (“the tale of the tribe”) has been applied, in some form or other, to the epic in general by both popular and formal academia, by both Joseph Campbell and, for example, Raúl Marrero-Fente, who in *Epic, Empire, and Community in the Atlantic World* (2008) calls the epic the story of a hero whose actions “determine the fate of the tribe, the nation, or the human race” (24). Reyes Bertolín Cebrián has also termed the epic, in 2006, as an “exaltation of community identity values,” the “genuinely aristocratic practice” of elevating that community’s ancestors into mythical heroes (*Singing the Dead* 33, 39). Pound’s words thus retain strange currency today, even within the endlessly shifting meanings surrounding the term “epic,” which has long ago ceased to denote a static, historically rooted genre (long oral poems from the classical era up until around the medieval period)

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that, in typical Poundian fashion, the author did not invent the phrase *per se* but adapted (and gave oblique credit for) it from an address by Kipling to the Royal Academy in 1906. As is also typical for Pound, the phrase is somewhat altered from the original; though Kipling does indeed make reference to “the tale of the tribe,” Pound is likely recalling his claim that “the *Record* of the Tribe is its enduring literature” (emphasis added). See Rudyard Kipling, *A Book of Words*, 1928, <http://www.di2.nu/files/kipling/BookOfWords.html>, accessed 7 April 2009.

and come instead to signify a certain mode of writing, or at least writing that seems to have certain affinities with the epic tradition, if even that. In recent years, for example, the term has been applied to everything from *Battlestar Galactica* to Harry Potter, generally denoting simple bulk of content or number of characters. The forced synchronicity between “epic” and “large” or “elaborate” might be said to have inspired a corresponding reactionary drive to recover the term, to insist that it be reapplied to only “traditional” or “formal” epics.

But, it would seem, this is no solution at all, for the epic as genre, perhaps even more so than other genres, is extraordinarily poorly delineated. The problem here is not genrefication *per se*, but rather a certain degree of indeterminacy in the labeling of genres. An old critical saw denotes *Paradise Lost* as the last “traditional” epic, yet is it a “traditional” epic in the same sense as the *Aeneid*, or, even more tenuously, *Beowulf*? And would later works with “epic” themes or styles, such as Byron’s *Don Juan* or Keats’s *Endymion*, or indeed still more modern texts such as Williams’s *Paterson*, Hart Crane’s *The Bridge*, or even *Omeros* thus be “untraditional” or “modern” epics? The simplest solution to this quandary seems to be a poststructuralist liberation of the term “epic” from any contextual obligations, in essence dehistoricizing it—this move does permit “epics” of wildly varying types to be apprehended using a standardized vocabulary, but it also seemingly drains that vocabulary of any significance. If anything can be “epic,” in other words, the application of that term to *any* text would not seem to make any appreciable statement about the nature of the text itself. This state of being is hardly exclusive to the epic. As I have noted earlier, the ubiquity of such terms as “realism” and “regionalism,” for example, tend to dilute their impact and necessitate new

definitions, but the epic, being the oldest known form of literature, suffers under the onus of having been reworked, rethought, and reinvented so many times that a “pure” epic would seem by this point to be inaccessible.

The above ontological slippages in and omnipresence of epic terminology have provided ample fodder for those who seek to declare the form itself to be defunct, or at least sufficiently outmoded to make the concept of a (post)modern epic unworkable. The most straightforward line of reasoning regarding the death of the epic requires little refutation, as it seems to rest on the false dichotomy that the epic tradition must either live or die by its adherence to a dogmatic formal code. This is the argument of Donald Davidson in *Still Rebels, Still Yankees* (1957), who cantankerously proclaims that “the losses of poetry, under the literary regime, are in fact spectacular and disheartening. We have lost the epic entirely” (15). Davidson theorizes that “fake epics” such as *Faust* or Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, are simply “quasi-dramas, quasi-essays, which project a poet’s highly personal and subjective interpretation of experience. They have no capacity for existing independent of the printed page. They could not survive the tests which Homer, Vergil, and Dante have successfully endured” (15). Though Davidson rightly notes that more recent epics display a hybridization of literary forms not found in classical texts, I might note in response that Vergil’s epic, despite its many congruences, displays qualities that Homer’s texts lack, and *The Divine Comedy* relies on conventions that did not exist for either of these poets. Even among these three texts, we see an evolution of the epic tradition, and to insist on a single point of conclusion for that tradition would seem to eradicate the possibility of *any* literary form changing over time. “Modern” epics may not be epic in the same *manner* as their predecessors, but this likely

indicates the shifting meaning of the term “epic” rather than the death of the genre. As Jeffrey Walker, in *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem: Whitman, Pound, Crane, Williams, Olson* (1989), writes, “the central question is not whether it is possible to ‘write an epic’ in the twentieth century; the question, rather, is what the possibilities are for the kind of literary rhetoric the poets have chosen to adopt” (1).

The theoretical ossification and obsolescence of epic forms, then, might be said to indicate less of a “death of the epic,” as *Paradise Lost* often seems to herald, than a new age of lack of accountability vis-à-vis the epic. As Stan Smith writes in “Epic Logos: On Last Looking into Several Homers” (2006), the epic tradition, particularly that of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, “has become a blank sheet upon which each age inscribes its own image,” and Odysseus himself, the man of many masks, has also become “a man much translated, turned into other shapes although, unlike his crew, he is never physically changed into anything else, remaining stubbornly himself within his many transformations” (*Globalisation and its Discontents* 187, 195). The central paradox that Smith seems to be outlining is that, though Homer’s works have indeed seen many reincarnations over the years, the texts themselves survive, resolutely equivalent only with themselves and immune to any syntagmatic apprehensions. Epic nomenclature, while suggesting a certain schizophrenia of literary forms, also indicates a singular, self-contained genesis point, a resolutely rooted and historically bound text. To deploy the term “epic” is to adumbrate a large literary category whose sole unifying characteristic would seem to be a commonly accepted early textual heritage.

It is this very concept of singular, static origin points that has retained resonance within postcolonial literature and criticism, which continually endeavors to address its

own troubled origins. In areas whose racial and governmental composition evince multiple influences and sources, such as the Caribbean, in particular, epic origin stories speak strongly to theories of cultural (dis)unity. Glissant, for example, finding epic literature such as the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* “amazingly prophetic,” does not deny that the epic “tells of the community,” but only in the capacity that it relates “the community’s apparent failure or in any case its being surpassed” and ventures “beyond the pursuits and triumphs of rootedness required by the evolution of history” (*Poetics of Relation* 15-16). Elsewhere, in *Faulkner, Mississippi*, Glissant attempts the same rhetorical move, noting that “epic literature seeks to fortify a community’s identity and sense of destiny,” yet is “engendered naturally (or obscurely) from questionable or ambiguous victories” (18). In essence, though Glissant acknowledges the association of the epic with the origins of a single rooted race, he is most interested in how that rootedness arises from the epic’s chronicle of dislocation and defeat, as well as how it implicates other races, other regions—the *Iliad* as the story of the East meeting the West, for instance. In this way, though Glissant’s concerns remain incontrovertibly “epic,” like Shakespeare’s Antony he turns aside from the epic as symbol of cultural dominance, preferring to capitalize on the unimperial notion of “community.”

Glissant’s theoretical contemporaries in Caribbean studies have been similarly intrigued by epic literature, both through polemics on the order of Wilson Harris’s disassembly of the epic’s notion of “symmetry”—the balance between good / evil and mobility / inertia—in favor of a more chaotic, untraditional conception of narrative or through Walcott’s recreation of seemingly traditional epic aims in “What the Twilight

Says,” proscribing that every author must make a “journey to articulate his origins” (*Selected Essays 2, WTTS 5*).<sup>2</sup> I have written in previous chapters of the “void” of history in postplantation literature, and the linkage of this historical model to an epically-inflected search for origin stories on the part of many Caribbean authors has become a longstanding critical idiom.<sup>3</sup> Valerie Loichot has, in *Orphan Narratives* (2007), noted that Faulkner, Glissant, and others replace “nostalgic longing for the origin” in favor of “the acknowledgment of a common lack,” while Jeannie Suk, in *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing* (2001), has found in some of the same authors an epistemology “structured around missing origins, indirect approaches, and repeated departures” (19, 57). In fact, the opposition between *négritude* and its successors, *créolité* and *antillanité*, may well be phrased as different emplacements of epic origin-stories, whether on the African continent or in the West Indies, with all the kaleidoscopic cultural convergences that that genesis point might entail. The shifting search for racial or communitarian origins and the potential offered by the epic for articulating that search, as well as a certain measure of wariness toward the epic’s own Eurocentric origins, is one of the most pronounced and visible influences on the poetry of Walcott, Brathwaite, Harris, and many other Caribbean writers.

Yet the postcolonial Caribbean concern with the epic as origin story is altogether less concerned with redeploying the form with an eye to its historical function as “the tale of the tribe” than bending that function to incorporate many “tribes,” many origin points.

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<sup>2</sup> For a placement of this search for static origins within a wider framework of English literature, see James Applewhite, *Seas and Inland Journeys: Landscape and Consciousness from Wordsworth to Roethke* (1985). For more about the idea in the New World in particular, see J. Michael Dash’s *The Other America* (1998).

<sup>3</sup> For more on Pan-Africanism in particular, see Winston James, “The Wings of Ethiopia” in *African Diasporas in the New and Old Worlds: Consciousness and Imagination*.

In essence, what they seek to articulate is a *search* or *desire* for origins rather than the adoption or forging of a story that would fill an epic function. This is, of course, largely due to the absence of legible historical data in the Caribbean and the simple difficulty of referring directly to traumatic histories, as I have noted earlier, but there is also the implication that the classically conceived epic lacks the manifold cultural consciousnesses required to address the complexities of the region. The epic, as Bakhtin argues, is monoglossic, creating interpretive gaps between its characters and events and their modern readers, and thus fundamentally inaccessible, inapplicable to current events. Thus, though Caribbean literature is self-consciously fascinated with the epic's promise of stable cultural origins and racial unity, it is more properly concerned with the practice of ostensibly *anti-epic* forms, the writing of exile and exodus, which take *a priori* the notion of a lack of these unities.

Exile and exodus—two of the main modes of what contemporary criticism from Glissant onwards has been fond of including within the Caribbean condition, two complementary world-views that, with the increasing focus on “decentered” and diasporic literatures ushered in (in part) by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, have been finding much wider play in chronologically varied accounts of literature of the Americas. The latter-day critical enthusiasm for these types of writing stems largely from the potential that they offer for dislocating literature from one static genre, location, or timeframe, thus not only creating possibilities for interdisciplinary, multilingual, and comparative studies, but also invigorating canonical, generically entrenched works by suggesting polygonal influences and circulations. In a word, as Gilroy, Glissant, Dimock, and others demonstrate, dislocating literature provides new ways of addressing

that literature's complexities. Perhaps the most vigorous movement in this direction comes not from these critics, however, but from the German theorist Ottmar Ette, who has marked Caribbean writing, among others, as "literature without a fixed abode" that "has been generated through the tension of isolation and exile" (D'Hulst et al, 136). In his work, Ette labors to cast the literature of "persecution and exile, diaspora and migration" not as marginal texts to be "relegated" to "conceptual pigeonholes created especially for them," but as conceptual bases that "have long been the rule worldwide" (35).<sup>4</sup> Taking account of this "vectorization of literary production" through a "fully formed poetics of movement," as Ette has it, would allow literary studies to "decode the varied and complex literary figurations of the vectorial imagination that lies behind much of today's writing" (42). For Ette, as for the Caribbean writers I have cited, nationally and racially bounded narratives of literary history are inadequate to the task of addressing the complexities of global literary interchange and influence. In this respect, epically inflected writing, which avowedly confines itself to a singular race or culture, would seem to be the very figure of obsolescence, the antitype to postnational conceptions of literary evolution as practiced by Ette, Gilroy, Dimock, or Glissant. To make the epic hero a cosmopolitan subject, as Evelyn O'Callahan claims in *Caribbean Cultural Identities* (2001), "as much at home in Britain or the United States as in Guyana or St. Kitts or Antigua, and crucially informed by connections between the two worlds," would seem to defeat any notion of the epic as a foundation-text (78).

More to the point, these models of literary history might be said to foreclose on the very concept of regionalism itself. Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi, in *Recharting*

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<sup>4</sup> "Odysseus and the Angel of History: The Vectorial Imagination of Shoa Literature." Unpublished work; access provided by Vera Kutzinski, Vanderbilt University.



*the Black Atlantic* (2008) claim that Black Atlantic studies in particular seek to establish “a fluid domain that is often a palimpsest of places and times, of different seas that are separate and yet flow into each other,” a definition that would seem to open certain comparative critical doors, yet close others, in this case, the possibility of regionally-bounded studies (2). Alison Donnel has also suggested that, in *The Black Atlantic*’s emphasis on international mobility and decentralization, Paul Gilroy “offered a powerful redress to the claims of nationalism” that have acted as bugbears to New World studies, but has also “divert[ed] attention away from increasingly marginal texts focused on the located and the local” (*Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* 77). Writings “embedded” in a particular “island and region,” Donnel states, tend to be ignored in the context of postnational interpretive schemes (77). Donnel’s solution to this oversight is to suggest that “actually belonging somewhere specific... does not mean that you cannot belong to other places as well, both spiritually and emotionally,” thus delineating a form of “located cosmopolitanism” in which “agency and identity” are bestowed upon “those subjects for whom global mobility is not an option” (107, 113). Donnel’s suggestion is a strong proscription for studies that take globalization, and the infinite networks of mobility that it suggests, as a conceptual framework; these works often fail to acknowledge that many of the opportunities offered by these networks remain reserved for only a small percentage of the world’s population.<sup>5</sup> This is one inroads for a potential

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<sup>5</sup> For more on the exclusivity of global travel in the Caribbean in particular, see Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988). Walcott has also explored this concept in his volume *The Fortunate Traveller* (1983), and in subsequent comments on that volume: “basically, you are a fortunate traveler, a visitor; your luck is that you can always leave. And it’s hard to imagine that there are people around you unable, incapable of leaving either because of money or because of any number of ties” (*Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott* 79).

regionalist critique of postnationalism. However, I would like to suggest that regional narratives are not simply defeated or excluded by the rhetoric of exile and exodus, but in fact imply, and even enable, the existence of those rhetorics. Exilic (or “vectorial”) thinking does not preclude literary regionalism so much as reinvigorate it.

To further explicate this interrelationship, I turn to one of the most accomplished and widely-cited theorists of exilic identity, Edward Said. In “Reflections on Exile” (1984), Said denotes exile as an essentially involuntary and intractable ontological state, “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (173).<sup>6</sup> Though there are means of compensating for exile, Said theorizes, through, for example, the exile’s attempt to see him or herself as “part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people,” the “essential sadness” of exile “can never be surmounted” (177, 173). In a sense, however, Said is also describing a state of being that leads to the need for regional narratives; the exile, dispossessed of the normative region, undergoes a quest for its restoration and reclamation. As Said writes: “Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them” (177). Said might well be describing Odysseus, Aeneas, or even Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the hero divorced from his “native”

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<sup>6</sup> It may be important, however, to make a distinction between *types* of exilic and diasporic identity, as Glissant does in *Caribbean Discourse*, which notes that the difference between Jewish and African diasporism is that between “a people that survives elsewhere, *that maintains its original nature*, and a population that is transformed elsewhere *into another people* (without, however, succumbing to the reductive pressures of the Other) and that thus enters the constantly shifting and variable process of creolization” (15). Even independent of Glissant’s embrace of transformative identities, however, I might venture to assert that “diaspora” implies many races and cultures, each with a distinctly separate conception of “home” and “exile,” and to generalize them (as I have done in this chapter) constitutes a potential oversight. Nonetheless, my concern is more with the *concepts* of exile and exodus than any particularized movement of people through space, so perhaps it may not be too audacious to suggest generalized conclusions.

region mustering his forces in a protracted attempt to recover or reincarnate that region. In a way, then, the epic, even the representatives of the form that are self-consciously divorced from a particular locationality, serves as a deeply regional text inasmuch as it supplants the physical presence of the region with its constructed *image*. Encountering, Said notes, “the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation,” the exile allows the landscape of memory to take the place of a “real” territory; the region as a blend of landscape and authorial fetishization of that landscape (as I have shown in my first chapter) gives way to the region as pure fetish lacking a physical component (177). In essence, by decrying the lack of regional organic unity, “communal habitation,” the exile posits a (idealized, even fictional) region in which that organic unity is the norm. Or, put another way, “paradise lost” implies that there *is* (or was) a paradise. Nico Israel has taken note of this fact in *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora* (2000), in which he writes: “displacement begs the question of emplacement. It demands a sense of place” (15).<sup>7</sup>

We might say the same of Ette’s “vectorization” of literary production: though by nature decentered, emphasizing the movement of people and ideas beyond the confines of the region, it nonetheless relies upon that very region as the genesis and archive of that motion. This becomes clear in Ette’s “Islands, Borders, and Vectors” (2007), which

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<sup>7</sup> Timothy F. Weiss, in *On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V.S. Naipaul* (1992), has described exile as a similarly bifurcated state of being, constituting a commentary on both the land currently occupied by the exile and the reminders and remembrance of the “lost” place of habitation: “Although exile begins with a split, it carries the possibility for new exchanges and connectedness: the understanding of one’s self, culture, and society through the lens of other persons, cultures, and societies” (5). This idea, of course, has broad application in the field of diasporic literature as well; wandering or scattered communities seem to tend, in their writings, to posit a promised land, a site of glorious return and reunion.

states outright that the region (as manifested in the metaphor of the island) is “not a firm and stable thing” and “a place where diverse movements intersect and overlap” but also “a force field in which these movements are stored” (D’Hulst et al 122). Ette’s paradoxical definition of the island (as characterized by both movement and stasis) is in line with much contemporary Caribbean theory. What makes his assertion particularly compelling is the notion that the “placelessness” of exile and diasporism is not incompatible with regionalism. In fact, the former relies on the latter insofar as it requires “a place whose historically stored mobile pattern and vectors can always be called upon and retrieved” (D’Hulst et al 122). Though literary history may be defined by exile and exodus, Ette theorizes, it nonetheless exists among a proliferation of historically resonant regional sites.

Ette and his contemporaries are not alone in this line of reasoning. Current studies of global patterns of movement and the literature that attends them, once seemingly devoted to disassembling essentialist and identitarian conceptions of regional belonging, are now considering the possibility that this rootedness is inextricable from transregional migration.<sup>8</sup> For example, Paul Brodwin, in *Aftermaths: Exile, Migration, and Diaspora Reconsidered* (2009), has placed diasporic writing in an antithetical relationship to “collective identity” inasmuch as “the location of diasporas is (by definition) plural, fragmented, and open,” yet sees a new relevance for diasporic subjects’ “myth about their lost homeland” inasmuch as it provides a means of rooting their

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<sup>8</sup> Or, as Israel writes, “what might it mean to be ‘displaced’ amid globalization?” (12).

multivarious origins (55-56).<sup>9</sup> The regionally rooted diasporic text, for Brodwin, “emerges in and indexes a particular place” even as it accommodates its constituents’ “global conditions of life” (57). In Brodwin’s interpretation, as with the critics I have cited above, the proliferation of displacement, decentralization, and “placelessness” encouraged by global diasporas, symbolized for Gilroy and Glissant by the slave ship, the location in constant motion, is in fact a necessary component of “rooted” literature in the New World inasmuch as the region is illegible to the modern reader unless it is placed in the context of that dislocation. The rooted diasporic writer, like the narrator of *Omeros*, having “seen everything and gone everywhere,” is left to “cherish our island for its green simplicities,” to compose, as Walcott does, the regional text against a backdrop of perpetual motion (187).

In the concept of regionally-inflected movement, or, as some critics have termed it, “rooted cosmopolitanism,” we find a new relevance for epic literature in the context of the global networks that ostensibly undermine its fundamental concepts. The logic of exile and exodus, as I have shown above, emphasizes the *idea* of the region as a necessary correlate to the idea of the globe. These tactics are not at all opposed to the methodology of the epic, which creates the world in order to fortify the region, even as it maintains “world” and “region” as fundamentally opposed categories of existence. The wanderings of Odysseus and Aeneas in the classical epic, the journey of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the introspective, intellectual journeys of the Byronic, Wordsworthian, and Keatsian hero, and even the more erratic movement of the modernist epic, in Eliot,

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<sup>9</sup> Natalie Melas, in the same volume, claims that diasporic literature “construes the lost land of origin as a fixed site of, in Stuart Hall’s words, ‘some final and absolute Return’” (103).

Pound, Williams, and Crane, all transpire within global space, yet are inflected by the allegiance to, or faith in, the existence of a normative region, though the regions themselves, in these examples, are wildly disparate.<sup>10</sup> Homecoming is an essential component of both historical and recent epics, but to enact that homecoming requires the concept of home itself, and the knowledge, too, that the world contains regions that are *not* home. All epics, to some extent, might then be called rooted cosmopolitan texts, evincing a complex dialogism of region and world that outlasts the epic's function as "the tale of the tribe"; more even than a chronicle of a single race, culture, or nation, the epic is the story of a *region*, perpetually present even at the furthest extent of its hero's journeys, full-formed, often idealized or misapprehended, but resolute in its governance of the narrative.<sup>11</sup>

The methodology of the epic is not *confined* to the region *per se*. Indeed, just as its travels through the world are reliant to an extent on the normative region, its conceptualization of the region is reliant on the presence of a world that surrounds it. For this reason, the epic is fundamentally concerned not with the possession and fortification of the region, but the deprivation and loss of the same; the epic, existing in the broad expanse of the world, weaves a tale of mourning for the always-absent region. For, if the region is wholly possessed and present throughout the text, there is no contestation, no

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<sup>10</sup> Dimock has offered a somewhat different statement of the endurance of the epic in *Through Other Continents*, stating that the late-twentieth century epic is not dead, yet now emanates from many sources rather than constituting a "nation-narrative" (86).

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most prominent example of this characteristic of the epic, and that which has proven most resonant for the epics that followed, is *The Odyssey*, which is above all concerned with the endurance of the concept of the region even in the hero's journeys across a (small) globe, and eventually finds itself both reifying and deconstructing the notion of home. For this reason, perhaps, Homer's epic has proven immensely productive for postcolonial and diasporic criticism.

battles, no trials, no homecoming, none of the lineaments that outline either a classical or modern conception of the epic; rather, the form demands that the region must be sought, fought for, defended, destroyed and rebuilt. In other words, stabilizing the region necessitates that it first be *destabilized*. Epic regionalism, then, represents the region as always already vanished, in fact only signifying after its own departure, and thus perpetually mourns the region that it is ostensibly supposed to establish.

In the classical epic, however, the region is nonetheless starkly delineated, largely contingent on the borders of the territory, or else an unproblematic affiliation with a particular race or nation. Greeks, Trojans, Ithacans, Romans, Geats and Danes—all of these are relatively static categories, determined by blood and birth. The same cannot be said of the regions I am here discussing; regional attachment in the modern-day South and Caribbean is less determined than imagined. For this reason, I will here be treating epic regionalism as less the presence of a normative region *outside* of the epic, a history that must be established, chronicled, and refined in defiance of the lurking forces that herald its downfall or irrelevance but by the existence of the literary discourse of the epic itself. That is to say, “rooted” cosmopolitanism in the modern epic cannot rely on stable metaphysical regions, but only on the projected stability of *literary* regions that the epic itself creates. Paolo Bartoloni, in *On the Cultures of Exile, Translation, and Writing* (2008) has noted that the cosmopolitanist exilic subject “is utterly alone in the company of itself, grappling with a set of values that are neither recognizable nor comprehensible to anyone but the exile. Thus, the exile becomes its own world, its own community, the cipher and parameter, the ‘other’ of any comparison” (81). Bartoloni’s statement recalls Satan’s dubious reasoning, in *Paradise Lost*, that the region he longs for (Heaven) exists

within his own consciousness and is thus infinitely accessible. The homecoming that the epic enacts, I suggest, is less a return to a certain positionality than it is a recovery of an empire of the mind, or, as Bartoloni has it, “a return to pure language (home) by retracing the footsteps of its departure from home” (87). The “home” to which the epics I will presently study return exist only in the play of those epics’ language. In this manner, the lack of a single, stable region serves as the precondition for the establishment of Faulkner and Walcott’s epic regionalism. Only when the writer is deprived of the region that the epic is ostensibly designed to found can that region be reincarnated in language. Only after Satan is exiled from the “real” Paradise can he build a new mental Paradise that does not rely on reductionist notions of place.<sup>12</sup>

The region, in *Omeros* and *Go Down, Moses*, is thus a location that attains significance only after its own death, just as the region in exilic and diasporic writing only attains its full power through its chronicler’s exclusion from its boundaries. The epic regionalism that I discuss here can thus most succinctly be defined as *a protracted meditation on the loss of a region that the text itself creates*. The regional mourning of the global epic, however, derives not from the hero’s displacement from a (theoretically) “real” region, but rather the substitution of that region’s reality for its poetic image. For, as I have noted earlier, only in the absence of the (metaphysical) global region does the (poetic) region signify. I will show how this process functions in *Omeros* and *Go Down, Moses* by first examining a fragment of the *Odyssey*, specifically the beginning of the

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible to argue (along Stanley Fish’s lines of reasoning) that Satan’s foundation of a new Heaven within the confines of his own mind is in fact meant as a parody of a *truly* epic foundation story; however, Satan’s methodology does rely on a certain prioritization of individual invention over regional reliance; unlike Odysseus, whose goal is supplied by a presupposition of the constancy of Ithaca, Satan must rely on the “place” that he himself constructs.



eleventh book, when Odysseus and his shipmates visit the land of the dead.

I realize that in doing so I am breaking with the majority of comparisons of “modern” and “classical epics,” since the prevailing wisdom seems to be not Frank Moretti’s assertion, in *Modern Epic*, that modernist works make more sense if read in the light of say, Homer and Vergil than Joyce and Eliot, thus suggesting new paths of approach to classical texts, but rather Jeffrey Walker’s contention that the modern epic, and particularly the “American modern epic,” has “little to do with the traditions and conventions of the classical epic, however much the poets might have gestured ostentatiously toward Homer, or the Homeric (or even pre-Homeric) world” (Moretti 3, Walker 2).<sup>13</sup> Daniel Gabriel, writing of Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* in the context of the epic tradition, has also suggested that any replication of truly “epic” themes in that poem is less a direct *use* of epic elements than “a nostalgic gaze upon past epic and ‘perfect’ form,” an attempt to “shake off the dream of ‘wholeness’” that the epic presented (13). There is no denying that twentieth-century authors’ use of epic conventions has always been, in a word, ambivalent. However, taking this ambivalence as valid ground for foregoing any reading of the epics that serve as the ostensible genesis points of their modern counterparts represents an acute form of critical myopia. Moreover, it can lead to fallacious reasoning. In Joe Moffett’s *The Search for Origins in the Twentieth-Century Long Poem* (2007), for example, the author complains that Achille in Walcott’s *Omeros*

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<sup>13</sup> Dimock has urged a return to Moretti’s “word-system” in *Through Other Continents* (2006), suggesting that only this interpretive scheme can bear the explanatory weight of deep structural transformations: “The concept of a global civil society, by its very nature, invites us to think of the planet as a plausible whole, a whole that, I suggest, needs to be mapped along the temporal axis as well as the spatial, its membership open not only to contemporaries but also to those centuries apart” (5). In light of this claim, it should not be unthinkable to read Faulkner and Walcott, or other modern and postmodern writers, in light of classical writers such as Homer.

does not fit the mold of the traditional epic hero: “if Achille is to be seen as an epic hero, he is an odd one indeed. His over-valuing of the importance of naming represents a position which clearly offers little opportunity for advancement” (83). Moffett correctly notes the importance of naming during Achille’s phantasmic return to Africa in *Omeros*, yet neglects to observe the extraordinary importance of the same to many corresponding epic heroes, in particular Odysseus, who takes on many names over the course of his voyage, a voyage whose nature and length veritably pivots on the moment at which the hero speaks his true name to the Cyclops, within a text that does not hesitate to pun on and play word games with the etymology of its hero’s name.<sup>14</sup> Any study of modern epics, whether a record of convergences or divergences, must begin with those modern texts’ classical antecedents.

## 2. Regional Death

Thus, into the past to divine the future, just as, in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his shipmates, following Circe’s instructions, voyage to the land of the dead to consult the shades for advice, in particular the shade of the legendary seer Tiresias. Odysseus’s men, thinking at first that they are heading back to Ithaca, do not take this announcement particularly well. Odysseus observes: “They sank down on the ground, moaning, tore their hair” but also notes “it gained us nothing—what good can come of grief?” (Fagles 248).<sup>15</sup> The irony here, of course, is that the “good” that comes

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<sup>14</sup> Ὀδυσσεύς, literally, “one who gives or receives pain.” Ουτις, or “Noman,” as it is often translated, is a short version of the hero’s name that he slyly supplies to Polyphemous.

<sup>15</sup> I will be using Robert Fagles’s 1996 verse translation of the text for the majority of this study for the simple reason that it appears to me a good compromise between more self-consciously versified and terser prose translations. However, other translations do suggest valences not found in Fagles’s text, and to attempt to incorporate some of these

from “grief” is the information that Odysseus extracts from the dead, information obtained at great cost and through great peril. The shades, when they appear, conjured by rites of sacrifice and bloodletting, emit “unmeasured cries” that Odysseus describes as “so horrid that a bloodless fear surprised / My daunted spirits” (Chapman).<sup>16</sup> This is a voyage of necessity, not pleasure, a fact that is driven home some lines later when the ghost of Anticleia, Odysseus’s mother, approaches. Despite the fact that he has not yet heard of her death and clearly wishes to speak with her, he drives her off in order to wait for Tiresias. But the first shade of all that Odysseus meets and speaks with, before even Tiresias, is that of Elpenor, his recently dead comrade.

It is a strange moment. Elpenor himself bears virtually no significance in the text; his first mention is the description of his death perhaps a hundred lines earlier, in which the poet takes particular notice of his unnoticeability, denoting him as “none too brave in battle, none too sound in mind” (Fagles 247).<sup>17</sup> In his discourse with Odysseus, Elpenor describes the manner of his death (after overimbibing and unwisely deciding to sleep on Circe’s roof, he falls from a ladder while attempting his descent and dies of a skull fracture) and insists that Odysseus return to Circe’s island to perform his funeral rites for

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varied viewpoints, I will be referring periodically to; in chronological order, George Chapman’s 1857 verse translation (<http://www.bartleby.com/111/chapman24.html>), Samuel Butler’s 1900 prose translation (<http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.11.xi.html>), and Ian Johnston’s 2006 verse translation. Later on, I will also be making reference to Ezra Pound’s translation from Divus’s Latin version of the text in *The Cantos* and Randy Lee Eickhoff’s 2001 “modern translation” in prose, though considering these texts as “translations” alongside the others I have mentioned represents certain problems that will presently become clear.

<sup>16</sup> I have used Chapman’s translation here because it establishes thematic parallels that many more modern translations lack—Odysseus’s “bloodless fear” echoes the draining of the blood from the sheep his companions have killed, and his own “daunted spirits” reflect the army of ghosts that he surveys.

<sup>17</sup> Eickhoff translates this phrase as “not very good at weapons and a bit slow in the noodle” (194).

him.<sup>18</sup> At first glance, it makes little sense that Odysseus should value a conversation with a minor character, seemingly bereft of all textual significance, and not even possessed of a heroic death, done in as he is by “bad luck, and [his] own unspeakable drunkenness” above an exchange with Tiresias or any of the other multitude of shades that confront him (Butler). Many translations attempt to account for Odysseus’s seemingly counterintuitive actions by emphasizing the fact that Elpenor threatens him with a curse if he disobeys; Butler has him menace Odysseus with “heaven’s anger,” while Fagles has him claim: “my curse may draw god’s fury on your head” (251). Yet Odysseus is notorious for disobeying orders and threats alike, and it is unclear why he chooses to hear, agree to, and, indeed, perform Elpenor’s request over anyone else’s. A second common explanation is that Odysseus is compelled by an unshakeable bond of friendship between himself and his shipmates, and feels such pity upon seeing Elpenor in his current condition that he cannot fail to hear him. This interpretation is supported by Chapman, who makes of Elpenor’s final request—to have his oar planted above his tomb—a tender appeal to comrades: “fix upon my sepulchre the oar / With which alive I shook the aged seas, / And had of friends the dear societies,” as well as Fagles, who notes that Odysseus wept when he saw Elpenor, and “pity touched [his] heart” (Fagles 250-251).<sup>19</sup> Yet, as I have already noted, Elpenor seems to hold small significance for

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<sup>18</sup> Elpenor has been suggested as a prototype for Tim Finnegan, the protagonist of the Irish folk song that served as the loose basis for Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. Clearly Joyce was attracted by some of the same valences of this section of the *Odyssey* that I will presently note in Ezra Pound’s interpretation.

<sup>19</sup> In this respect, it is difficult to regard Eickhoff’s modernization of the text as not to some extent missing the point; Eickhoff’s Elpenor is acerbic, boastful, and hostile toward his former shipmates: “There, gather my body and burn it along with all the weapons I possess (unless my mates have gathered them to them, damn their wandering eyes and

Odysseus otherwise, and it seems unlikely that the bond between the two men is more profound than the filial connection between Odysseus and Anticleia, whom he ignores.

Here I might make several observations. Firstly, Elpenor's function in the narrative of the *Odyssey* is contained entirely within the circumstances and fallout of his death; he, like Ithaca for Odysseus, is a sign that signifies only in its own absence. Secondly, it would seem from a cursory reading that Elpenor is a character who specifically arrests and resists the epic narrative. He intrudes abruptly upon and gives pause to Odysseus's mission in the underworld, delaying his eventual meeting with Tiresias, and in fact undoes to an extent the narrative that has been constructed by insisting that Odysseus and his crew retrace their steps to Circe's island before continuing the journey. And, indeed, it may be that Elpenor is notable precisely *because* he offers a counterpoint to the cohesive epic tale that the *Odyssey* seems to present. David Ricks, in "Homer in the Greek Civil War" (2007) notes that Elpenor possessed "staying power" for the *Odyssey*'s audience "because of his lack of character; and perhaps for his operating as a symbol of the miscarrying of tradition, a case of a figure who does not benefit from—but who also escapes the trammels of—a grand narrative" (242). Yet, from another perspective, Elpenor serves as metonym for an absolutely essential aspect of the classical epic, represented on a larger scale by the journey to the underworld itself—the lamentable transformation of the real into the discursive, of human bodies, defined by action, into ghosts, defined by speech.

It is this aspect of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* that no doubt attracted many modernist authors, perhaps most prominently Ezra Pound, to the classical epic as a

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thieving hands) and place my ashes in a mound by the shore. Put my oar upon the mound that all who pass there might know that here lies a seafaring man!" (197).

whole. Modernism, with its tenuous balancing of archival knowledge of past literatures with avant-garde narrative fracture and disunity, felt a strong attraction to the metaphorical valences of conversing with the ghosts of the past. For this reason (among, perhaps, others) Pound chose to open his massive *Cantos* with his own translation (actually his translation of the Renaissance scholar Andreas Divus's own (Latin) translation of the same) of the first part of the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*. In Canto I, the journey to the underworld is also the drive of modernist literature into the epic past, borne by the same "ocean flowing backward" that carries Homer's mariners, and Elpenor, who is given more lines of dialogue in Pound's interpretation than Tiresias himself, becomes a (literally) haunting avatar of the precise mode of selective archival excavation of the world-text that Pound himself is enacting: he bids Odysseus to "Heap up mine arms, be tomb by sea-bord, and inscribed: / *A man of no fortune, and with a name to come.* / And set my oar up, that I swung mid fellows" (3-4, italics in original). Pound's interpretation of the inscription on Elpenor's grave is unique; Fagles translates this as "a man whose luck ran out," while Johnston describes it as "a memorial to an unfortunate man, / For those in times to come," and Butler suggests that the same will "tell people in days to come what a poor unlucky fellow I was" (Fagles 251, Johnston 202). In a sense, the remainder of Pound's *Cantos* are an extended elegy for Elpenor, the "unwept, unburied" fragment of the epic past, ignored by the narrative of history, brought forcefully into the present by poetry. Hugh Kenner, the eminent Pound scholar, found in the poet's bearing of figurative "blood" (Pound's own living writing, appearing in the modernist present) to the "ghosts" of literary tradition a movement away from the translation's status as a "specimen 'version of Homer' and toward "an exhibition of

‘Homer’ as a persistent pattern, ‘from which, and through which, and into which’ flow imaginations, cultures, languages” (*Pound Era* 149). Walker has also noted the significance of the archival nature of the underworld in Pound’s interpretation, stating that the poet “has descended into a modernist Erebus of ancient texts, of memorious tradition, to seek the requisite knowledge for a return to and restoration of his Ithaca” (89).

I have extrapolated on Pound’s interpretation of Homer at some length because it deliberately places remembrance and mourning, specifically the commemoration of a “real” history’s translation into discourse, at the heart of the epic tradition in the same manner as Faulkner and Walcott’s work does. Glissant, for instance, found “the capacity of the writer to descend, like Orpheus, into the underworld of the collective unconscious and to emerge with a song that reanimates the petrified world” to be a “shaping force” on postcolonial poetic discourse, as J. Michael Dash claims (*Caribbean Discourse* xiv). In addition, I have mentioned the primacy of mourning to the classical epic in passing, but it may be worthwhile to note here that this idea has some precedent in studies of Homer in particular. James Tatum, in *The Mourner’s Song: War and Remembrance from The Iliad to Vietnam* (2003), for example, has stated that “nothing is more crucial to approaching Homer and the arts that come from war than thinking back on loss” (xi). Nancy Sultan, in *Exile and the Poetics of Loss in Greek Tradition* (1999) has also placed the necessity of mourning and funereal practice, particularly those involving women, in a key relationship to the perpetuation of epic heroism, marking these ceremonies as necessary for “the hero’s immortal fame (*kleos*) to persist” (6). The most complete study in this vein, however, is Reyes Bertolín Cebrián’s recent *Singing the Dead: A Model for Epic*

*Evolution* (2006), which traces the origins of epic poetry itself to ancient Greek elegies and funerary laments, with a “narrative content” emerging only with the dissolution of the Greek hero-cult. Dissociated from its original function of praising or blaming the deified dead, Cebrián argues, the epic became “a work of art that was important not only because of the religious function it fulfilled, but also worth keeping because of its intrinsic value. In other words, epic was not only used to remember the dead hero, but became something that was remembered” (29).<sup>20</sup> I might expand on Cebrián’s notion of the epic as a “song of mourning” by suggesting that the form mourns for not only individuals, the heroic and unheroic dead, but also for regions, by displacing its heroes from their “natural” homelands and constantly erecting barriers to the reclamation and normalization of these locales, it invites the voicing of that lack in discourse.<sup>21</sup> The act of mourning itself is generative of the text’s poetry; if Odysseus did not constantly feel the *lack* of Ithaca, if he were ever permitted to forget it, there would be nothing left to tell. Ithaca is thus to some extent discursively created, and what Odysseus mourns is its descent into pure language, its transference from a region of “real” habitation to an enduring memory and concept.<sup>22</sup>

The same could be said of Faulkner and Walcott’s globalized epics. While their protracted cycles of mourning and remembrance are indeed epic in their foundation of a

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<sup>20</sup> An in-depth discussion of the origins of the classical epic itself is beyond the scope of this study; in citing Cebrián, I merely wish to emphasize that the epic has always been strongly intertwined with formal means of mourning and remembrance.

<sup>21</sup> In this, the epic again mirrors exilic and diasporic writing, in which Cristina Lombardi Diop-notes, “like ghosts returning from the past,” the bodies of migrants killed mid-journey and in foreign lands are “a ‘living presence of the past,’” retaining meaning “through the *work* they do by changing themselves (decomposing or posing themselves) to transform the present” (*Recharting the Black Atlantic* 168).

<sup>22</sup> In Milton, this concept manifests itself as the much-cited “fall from truth into language.”



discursive idea of the region, their truly epic quality is their measured lament for the discourse's replacement of the region itself. In this way, pronouncing the region's death is also a statement of that region's revival; yet this rebirth, as I have hinted earlier, is figured as loss. The poetry that the text offers, ostensibly a means of compensating for the lost subject, represents that subject's transformation into a discursive ghost of itself. Preparatory to making these claims, however, perhaps some commentary on the standard congruences of Faulkner and Walcott's texts to their epic traditions may be desirable.

For Walcott, the most immediate similarities to the classical epic, unsurprisingly, stem from *Omeros*, though its own status as an epic, whether traditional or "modern" is unstable. Moffett notes that the "inversion of Homeric themes and ideals" in *Omeros* "undermines the poem as epic in any conventional sense," while Lance Callahan's *In the Shadows of Divine Perfection* notes that Walcott himself has shown a "consistent and vehement resistance to calling *Omeros* an epic" (Moffett 83, Callahan 61). Other critical accounts, such as that of J. Michael Dash in *The Other America* (1998), have seen in Walcott's appropriation of the Greek epic a more complex "*imaginative construct*" that indicates "an intercultural matrix, the geographic correlative to the Caribbean archipelago" (99, italics in original). There can be little doubt that *Omeros*'s interaction with the epic tradition, regardless of whether the text itself can reasonably be considered as an epic, is varied and complex, and little doubt as well that this complexity has garnered a significant critical response. Yet the grounds for comparison of *Omeros* with other works in the epic tradition are inarguably present. Apart from the text's obvious adoption of Homeric names, characters, and locations, the poem is replete with formal linkages of its own project and that of the classical epic. The Homeric simile, for

instance, receives ample play, particularly (and fittingly) as applied to military movements: “You have seen pelicans veer over pink water / of an April bay. So, stem-to-stern, Rodney’s force / in a bracing gust followed *The Marlborough*” (84). The poem even provides its own version of an epic invocation, though the Muse being invoked in this case is Homer himself: “O open this day with the conch’s moan, Omeros, / as you did in my boyhood, when I was a noun / gently exhaled from the palate of the sunrise” (12). It is thus fairly easy to tally the simple parallels between Walcott’s text and its classical epic precursors; though the intent and effect of these parallels is open to debate, the claim that Walcott is an author who has repeatedly deployed and reworked epic parameters should generate little opposition.

For Faulkner, however, the issue is more complex. Certainly criticism of his work has long labored under the shadow of the classical epic, yet the congruences that this criticism seem to establish are more concerned with the epic *scope* of his works, the way in which they, like certain ancient epics, attempt to touch on an encyclopedic catalogue of values, cultures, and places.<sup>23</sup> When Cowley famously referred to Faulkner as “an epic or bardic poet in prose” in the introduction to the *Portable Faulkner* (1946), his intent was likely to maintain the writer as a comprehensive chronicler of the South rather than to suggest any formal or thematic consistency between Faulkner’s works and those of, for example, Homer. The same could be said of John Lewis Longley’s account, in *The Tragic Mask* (1957) of the “Yoknapatawpha Saga” as “congenial to the purely narrative, the epic, the bardic attitudes in the creation of literature” (220). This is not to say that

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<sup>23</sup> A large part of this misapprehension may be the long-maintained gap between prose and poetry in literary criticism; exegeses of both prose and poetry are generally hesitant to draw formal congruences from one to the other, and instead focus largely on theme or scope.

such direct thematic comparisons are not possible in Faulkner's work; in fact, there is a long tradition of linking the content of many of his major novels to those of classical epics. For example, Lynn Gartrell Levins, in *Faulkner's Heroic Design* (1976), finds echoes of pagan goddesses in Eula Varner, and, in a more common critical turn, echoes of the *Odyssey* in *As I Lay Dying*: "the Bundrens make the epic hero's pilgrimage to the land of the dead and thereby evoke Ulysses... as in the ancient epic, supernatural forces—gods, angels, and demons—interest themselves in the action and intervene from time to time" (105).<sup>24</sup>

Yet these, like my denotation of formal epic qualities in *Omeros*, are fairly commonplace observations. More intriguing is Glissant's comparatively recent attempt to link Faulkner's work to the epic in *Faulkner, Mississippi*. For Glissant, Faulkner's epic is "erratic and disturbed, touching on veiled or buried questions" (18). It maintains the "enclosed place" of the "traditional epic," paradoxically suggesting that, though "neither the wandering nor the affliction has an end," such an enclosed place "cannot be avoided"—indeed, the "faraways of Yoknapatawpha" perpetually "repel and repeat" it (229-30, 233-34). Glissant, like Faulkner's critics of previous decades, links the author's ostensibly epic sentiments to the scale or scope of his "saga," in a word, its enclosure, but it seems as though the region itself precedes its creation. Faulkner's epic, as he states earlier in the book, is not a triumphalist tale of heroic origins, not a bold founding story

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<sup>24</sup> More generally, see C. Hugh Holman's observation, in *Three Modes of Modern Southern Fiction* (1966), that: "William Faulkner has worked in some very old tragic traditions. His attitudes toward his characters and the plots which he weaves around them seem to reach back to the early Greek drama and to primordial mythic patterns; so that his characters tend to become great symbolic beings" (32). Comparisons of Faulkner's themes to those of classical epics are hardly difficult to uncover, particularly in criticism from the 60s and 70s, when the groundwork of Faulkner criticism was for the most part being laid.

but a deeply ambivalent chronicle of defeat and disillusionment. The Yoknapatawpha novels, for Glissant, do not constitute an originary epic. Yoknapatawpha precedes and exists outside of its own ostensible creation, and the “epic” that Faulkner fashions is less designed to articulate that absent origin than to attempt to address the troubles that attend its existence. In short, Faulkner’s epic in Glissant’s text looks quite similar to the “dispossessed” epic standard to Caribbean poetry yet, in this case, Faulkner is being dispossessed of the very region (Yoknapatawpha) that his epic literature might be expected to create. Glissant reads Faulkner as if his “epic” is part of the existing tradition of Caribbean epics of dispossession, looking back upon the origins of Yoknapatawpha, the region that his works seem to found, with anxiety and ambivalence, and, I might add, suggests that he is less in line with the “founding” or “mythmaking” drive of the epic than its retrospective, elegiac standards.

Yet which of Faulkner’s writings in particular is Glissant discussing? As I have noted before, though there is a long critical history of linking Faulkner’s work to the epic tradition, the term as applied to individual novels generally indicates a simple enlargement of scope or certain idiosyncrasies on the part of his characters. *Formal* similarities or specific thematic affinities are much less common, and comparisons between his individual works and historical epics (with the exception of *As I Lay Dying* and the *Odyssey*) are even rarer. Given these tendencies, we might well ask whether any single Faulkner novel can reasonably be thought to occupy a similar position to *Omeros*—a work that, if not a standard epic itself, a piece that at least engages strongly enough with both formal and thematic aspects of the historical epic to justify its inclusion within the epic tradition. *As I Lay Dying* offers a compelling prospect, but on a largely

superficial level; rather, I want to suggest that *Go Down, Moses* represents Faulkner's most complex interaction with epic literature. Previous critics, such as Francis Lee Utley and R.W.B. Lewis in *Bear, Man, and God* (1964) and Arthur F. Kinney in *Go Down, Moses: The Miscegenation of Time* (1996), have noted in the text the "epic hunt for an immortal Hunted Bear" that constitutes a "canticle or chant relating the birth, the baptism and the early trials of Isaac McCaslin," as well as how the text as a whole details the "saga of the McCaslin family" within a context of "grandeur and defeat" (Utley 167, 189; Kinney 3). However, these are observations largely oriented toward alleviating the inconsistencies of a rather scattered text, and what better way to do so than by relating *Go Down, Moses* to the (theoretically) most cohesive, unitary text of all, the classical epic? More intriguing are the parallels that take as given the fact, as Judith L. Sensibar notes, that "the novel does not cohere in any formal high modernist sense; rather, it deliberately does not cohere," for their concern with Faulkner and the epic is less motivated by the dictates of criticism and more linked to intrinsic similarities (*New Essays* 110). Both of these methodologies aim to create a surface-level congruence between Faulkner's text and the classical epic, and would thus seem to embody the most primitive form of comparativity: the creation of a simple tally of similarity or difference between two or more works.

In diverging from these projects, however, I do not wish to lessen or elide the presence of "traditional" epic elements in the text, elements that are perhaps stronger here than in any other of Faulkner's novels. For one thing, *Go Down, Moses* begins *in medias res*, as so many of its epic predecessors do; the first sentence introduces "Isaac McCaslin, 'Uncle Ike', past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a

widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one,” but quickly notes that the events immediately following are “not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin, McCaslin Edmonds” (3). The typical classical epic tends to establish the central hero of the poem immediately, only to reintroduce him some lines later after the groundwork has been established; the *Iliad*’s reference to the wrath of Achilles, for example, or the *Aeneid*’s recollection of “arms and the man” in its first line. While these heroes act as the primary agents of their respective poems’ events, the actions that define them require context to attain significance; Achilles’s wrath does not exist without the death of Patroclus. Similarly, Carl E. Rollyson Jr. has noted that, while Ike McCaslin is introduced before the events of “Was,” “we do not yet see the relevance that those events have for him” (*Uses of the Past* 145-46). The novel’s adoption of an epic structure can be partially accounted for by its corresponding affinity for binding together the ephemera of an older, more “heroic” time with the events of the narrative present, a bond that is created through an oral tradition:

And as he talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy know, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy’s present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted (165).

This is also the methodology of the epic, which reincarnates the vanished heroes (and regions) of the past within the discourse of the story. As in Pound’s *Odyssey*, here the “dead and vanished” men are given new life in the course of their telling and reemerge as enduring symbols, discursive entities that persist in the narrative present.

Criticism of *Go Down, Moses*, particularly that of “The Old People” and “The

Bear” has been fond of portraying the indicated sections as a sort of ecocritical fable, delineating the decline of the Big Woods, symbolized by the death of Old Ben, and its subsequent commodification and consumption, symbolized by the logging train. Yet, the more complex and, I believe, accurate critical commonplace represents the region, and its natural heirs, as already vanished at the start of these conjoined stories, with the narrative itself serving as a protracted period of reflection on their loss. While “The Bear” in particular does seem to chronicle the decline and eventual death of a single, static region, a recreation of the Edenic creation myth of sorts (complete with snake), even before this story has begun, Faulkner is representing the Big Woods as “that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes,” and the bear itself “too big for the very country which was its constricting scope... not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life” (185). Old Ben is, perhaps, an epic creature, but the correspondingly epic world of which he forms a natural part is already gone.<sup>25</sup> That “old dead time” is constantly evoked over the course of both “The Old People” and “The Bear,” but there is never any point at which it has the potential of its past prominence. Sam and Ike recognize this as surely as they realize that Old Ben is

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<sup>25</sup> The eventual parallels, when we take the rest of *Go Down Moses* into account, between Old Ben and Ike McCaslin himself are inevitable; like the bear, Ike represents the end of a tentatively epic lineage, a heritage that, in “The Bear,” he comes to repudiate. However, *Go Down, Moses* also disassembles the trope of epic continuity (Ike as the legitimate inheritor of not only his literal ancestors, but the line of Sam Fathers, just as in the *Odyssey* Telemachus represents the future generation of Ithacan rule) that it erects in “The Old People” in the penultimate section, “Delta Autumn,” which introduces Edmond’s miscegenated offspring as the sole fragment of Ike’s lineage. In this manner, the “epic” of *Go Down, Moses* further deconstructs what it establishes; Ike’s archival project in “The Bear” both reveals the origins of the McCaslin dynasty (if it can be so called) and, ultimately, prophesies its termination.

an inherently doomed creature: “ ‘Somebody is going to [kill him], some day,’” Sam states, to which Ike responds: “ ‘I know it... that’s why it must be one of us. So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer’ ” (204). What Ike shares with Sam Fathers is the knowledge that the land has been “already accursed even as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemotubbe’s father old Issetibbeha and old Issetibbeha’s fathers too held it, already tainted even before any white man owned it,” and sees himself, like Sam, executing outdated nativist rituals not to revive it, but in token of those times when such rituals held immediate meaning (248).<sup>26</sup> “Doomed” or “cursed” as the wilderness is in “The Bear,” the question becomes less *whether* the region and the “anachronisms” that populate it will survive and more in what manner and to what extent they will be translated into memory, as the text already seems to be speaking an elegy for the region at the moment that it comes into being.<sup>27</sup>

What replaces the region in these two stories is language, the recreation of the discursive ideal of that region in speech and writing. Orality in particular, as I have noted earlier, is a means of both recollecting history and emphasizing its passage, as when, while Lion lies dying, the men gather and “[talk] quietly of hunting, of the game and the dogs which ran it, of hounds and bear and deer and men of yesterday vanished from the

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<sup>26</sup> The “curse,” of course, is in Ike’s mind the taint of ownership, imposed on the region at the moment that its commodification was made possible. There have been many studies of this notion of ownership within the context of “The Bear”; see in particular Thadious Davis, *Games of Property: Law, Race, Gender, and Faulkner’s Go Down, Moses* (2003).

<sup>27</sup> In many ways, too, “The Bear” and “The Old People” do seem to serve as the simultaneous genesis point and elegiac remembrance of the region; the archival passages of the fourth section of the former story, stretching back to colonial and, indeed, pre-colonial times, as well as the evocative first sentence of the latter, “At first there was nothing,” suggest *Go Down, Moses*’s tentative status as an epic “founding” text, yet, as I have noted elsewhere, the notion of “founding” here is rather problematic (157).



earth” (238). In commemorating the past through language, however, the discourse of “The Bear” also mourns the departure of that past. Language itself appears in the text as a reduced echo of more totalizing, incontrovertibly absent means of accessing the region. Ike’s claim to organic connection with the land he inhabits, for instance, becomes “as trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson,” and those same records become, ironically, his only means of access to those claims, just as his only means of attempting an enduring reciprocal relationship with nature depends on his enunciation, at the end of “The Bear,” of the same words in the “old tongue” taught to him by Sam Fathers that Sam himself speaks in “The Old People” (165, 314). Likewise, the Big Woods themselves are “bigger and older than any recorded document,” their inherent preverbal ontology standing in stark contrast to their eventual verbal remembrance (183). The concept of the fall from truth into language in *Go Down, Moses*, however, receives its most comprehensive treatment in the discourse of the McCaslin cousins on Biblical meanings in the fourth section of “The Bear.” In this conversation, Ike theorizes that the writers of the Bible

‘were trying to write down the heart’s truth out of the heart’s driving complexity, for all the complex and troubled hearts which would beat after them. What they were trying to tell, what He wanted said, was too simple. Those for whom they transcribed His words could not have believed them. It had to be expounded in the everyday terms which they were familiar with and could comprehend, not only those who listened but those who told it too, because if they who were that near to Him as to have been elected from among all who breathed and spoke language to transcribe and relay His words, could comprehend truth only through the complexity of passion and lust and hate and fear which drives the heart, what distance back to truth must they traverse whom truth could only reach by word-of-mouth?’ (249)

In this passage, the “truth” that the text of the Bible puts forth is, in essence, a paraphrase and synopsis of “real” preverbal divine truth, mediated by “the complexity of passion and

lust and hate and fear” that afflicted its human authors. Language in “The Bear” is thus an inherently postlapsarian medium, its own proliferation serving as an act of mourning for something already lost. The irony, of course, is that “The Bear” is comprised of nothing *but* language and thus finds itself in the peculiar position of decrying the lack that it itself creates.

The implication of the text of *Go Down, Moses* in its own lacunae has attracted the notice of several critics. Judith L. Sensibar, branding the text as “a novel about loss and mourning,” suggests, as other critics such as Thadious Davis have, that *Go Down, Moses* acts a complex eulogy for Caroline Barr, the black servant whom many have viewed as Faulkner’s surrogate mother, the text itself serving as “both an act of true mourning and, in rare unguarded moments, of the liberation that true mourning brings. The mask of art permits Faulkner to articulate those conventions and explore the history of his complicity in them and the confusions, desire, hatred, and pain they cause” (*New Essays on Go Down, Moses* 101, 110).<sup>28</sup> Sensibar sees Faulkner, *qua* his role as a member of a (somewhat) aristocratic white Southern family, as possessed of a measure of guilt for his implicit connection to the oppressive apparati that ensnared those he loved, and *Go Down, Moses* as a step toward alleviating that guilt. More to the point of the language of the novel in itself creating the loss that Faulkner mourns, however, is John Matthews’ assertion in *The Play of Faulkner’s Language* (1982) that the text’s devices “mark the object of their mourning celebration as always already lost, and offer

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<sup>28</sup> Thadious Davis, too, has seen in *Go Down, Moses* not only an expression of Faulkner’s “inconsolable grief and shame” over Barr’s death, but a kinship between the text’s patterns of egalitarianism, remediation, and play and those of the Biblical story from which it derives its title (5, 41).

themselves as utterances that seem to fill up the voids” (213).<sup>29</sup> Matthews sees the very process of Faulkner’s writing as indicative of this loss: “To begin to write, to mark the page, *produces* the mood of bereavement, as if the use of language creates the atmosphere of mourning. Writing does not respond to a loss, it initiates it” (212). *Go Down, Moses*, and the two stories I have examined in particular, thus function both as a powerful repetition of the epic tradition by making their subjects into Elpenorian figures of loss and remembrance and as a dislocation of the true site of those epic mournings into the realm of language itself.

At first glance, it would seem that the methodology of Walcott’s *Omeros* is the opposite of Faulkner’s text. While Faulkner portrays the Big Woods as existing in a postlapsarian state of human language, at the beginning of *Omeros* it is the “language” of nature itself that has vanished. In Philoctete’s recollection of the canoe-building that opens the text, the death of natural entities is intrinsically linked both to the loss of the island’s indigenous languages and a vanished natural discourse; the old trees

endured the decimation  
of their tribe without uttering a syllable  
of that language they had uttered as one nation,  
the speech taught their saplings: from the towering babble  
of the cedar to green vowels of *bois-campêche*.  
The *bois-flot* held its tongue with the *laurier-cannelle*,  
the red-skinned logwood endured the thorns in its flesh,  
while the Aruacs’ patois crackled in the smell  
of a resinous bonfire that turned the leaves brown  
with curling tongues, then ash, and their language was lost (6).

This early passage establishes a congruence between the vanishing “language” of the trees and the vanished languages of the Aruacs, positing an earlier linguistic totality

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<sup>29</sup> Matthews makes a point of marking his study as a divergence from much of the existing criticism of the novel, stating that myth and ritual in “The Bear” are not “witcheries that can recover sacred origins” (213).

("that language they had uttered as one nation") that presages the text.<sup>30</sup> Walcott's repeated play on the word "tongue" marks the desolations of this passage as irrevocably linguistic, a parallel that the text never relinquishes, for the losses of regions, cultures, and races in *Omeros* are regularly described as not purely physical or psychological, yet also *verbal* elisions. This is most evident when, later in the text, Achille fantasizes a conversation with his unknown (African) father, Afolabe, in which the distance between them is figured as not only temporal, but linguistic; the only "interpreter" of his father's words is "the river with the foam / and the chuckles of water under the sticks of the pier" (136). Nonetheless, "time translates," and Achille, coming from a fallen world in which "we accept the sounds we were given," comes to lament the fact that "the deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave / us; trees, men, we yearn for a sound that is missing" (138, 137).<sup>31</sup>

It is this attempt to recover "a sound that is missing" that provides the driving force of the text as a whole, whether phrased as the narrator's pursuance of "the voice / that hummed in the vase of a girl's throat" or the poet's archival "recovery" of Homer, in whose writing he "catch[es] the noise / of the surf lines wandering like the shambling fleece / of the lighthouse's flock, that Cyclops whose blind eye / shut from the sunlight" (13). Much is made, too, of Homer's own supposed blindness, with the sightless Seven

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<sup>30</sup> The notion of an older, vanished "natural" language is refigured in a Native American context when the narrator, visiting a site on the Trail of Tears, hears "the water's / language around the rocks in its clear-running lines / and its small shelving falls with their eddies, 'Choctaws,' / 'Creeks,' 'Choctaws.'" (177).

<sup>31</sup> The very invocation of Achille's fallen language causes Afolabe's people distress; Afolabe asks: "And therefore, Achille, if I pointed and I said, There / is the name of that man, that tree, and this father, / would every sound be a shadow that crossed your ear, / without the shape of a man or a tree? What would it be? / (And just as branches sway in the dusk from their fear / of amnesia, of oblivion, the tribe began to grieve.)" (138).

Seas (among others) standing in for the Greek poet; until the end of the text, Homer exists as pure language, the missing sound to which I have alluded above. Moreover, Homer's speech is linked to the vanished language of nature, the lack felt since the poem's opening stanzas. The narrator addresses his textual predecessor:

‘I have always heard  
your voice in that sea, master, it was the same song  
of the desert shaman, and when I was a boy  
your name was as wide as a bay, as I walked along  
the curled brow of the surf; the word ‘Homer’ meant joy,  
joy in battle, in work, in death, then the numbered peace  
of the surf's benedictions, it rose in the cedars,  
in the *laurier-cannelles*, pages of rustling trees’ (283).

Thus, the poem is engaged in a perpetual process of mourning for dead languages, whether Greek or otherwise. Unlike *Go Down, Moses*, which decries its own language's implication in the departure of ideas of natural order, in *Omeros* the natural order itself is marked by a purer form of language, and Walcott's own writing, in its attempt to recollect or recover that language, emphasizes its lack.

However, *Omeros* shares with Faulkner's text the notion that the region is ultimately replaced by its discursive idea. Essentially, the poem mourns what the poet cannot grant the region: an epic founding story and enduring poetic representation on the order of a Homeric narrative. *Omeros*, by repeatedly constructing Homeric parallels, also constantly undermines those parallels by restating the *unepic* qualities of the region. The poem mourns the notion of epic regionality, the founding-narrative, even as it itself serves as a surrogate for that narrative.<sup>32</sup> This paradox is clearest near the end of the text,

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<sup>32</sup> In this sense, Walcott's language, like Faulkner's, could be said to be Elpenorian in that it expounds upon a discourse that attains significance only after its own passage. Walcott is clearly aware of the character; in fact, the colonial ancestor that Major Plunkett devises for himself suffers a remarkably Elpenorian death: after his vessel, the

when Homer himself appears, betraying a delicate mix of trepidation and irritation at Walcott's efforts to seemingly emulate his language. There comes a point when both Walcott and Homer are invited to chronicle the region that they behold; at the Greek's directive that " 'We will both praise it now,'" however, Walcott comments: "I could not before him. My tongue was a stone / at the bottom of the sea, my mouth a parted conch / from which nothing sounded" (286). Faced with the project of postulating a *literally* epic origin-story, the poet balks; the purpose of his text is not to speak *as* Homer, in essence, but to speak in Homer's wake. So the task of describing St. Lucia falls to the Greek poet himself:

*'In the mist of the sea there is a horned island  
with deep green harbours where the Greek ships anchor'  
and the waves were swaying to the stroke of his hand,  
as I heard my own thin voice riding on his praise  
the way a swift follows a crest, leaving its shore:  
'It was a place of light with luminous valleys  
under thunderous clouds. A Genoan wanderer  
saying the beads of the Antilles named the place  
for a blinded saint. Later, others would name her  
for a wild wife' (286).*

The irony here, of course, is that Homer himself is *not* speaking, but Walcott, who ostensibly is not up to the Homeric task, is ventriloquizing for the absent poet. In the end, then, *Omeros* seems to reproduce what it is intended to mourn: the region as it

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*Marlborough*, is rammed by an enemy ship, the *Ville de Paris*, a wave hits the deck, knocking him from the ladder he is climbing "against / the wall opposite, and as hard as he tried / to wade in its whirlpool of debris, the next wave sent / him against his own sword. It was a fatal wound / but he pulled out the sword" (86). Following the incident, Elpenor's fatal vintage even makes an appearance: "From the hull of the *Ville de Paris*, wine-bottles / bobbed in the wake, crimson blood streamed from the wood / as they drifted in the mild current from the battle's / muffled distance" (86). It is one of these same bottles, of course, that eventually resurfaces in the St. Lucian museum, giving rise to widespread speculation among the residents. Like his Homeric precedent, Plunkett's Elpenor gains significance in the unremarkability of his own death.

appears in “natural” discourse. Despite its pretensions, as I have noted in a previous chapter, to “speak truly” for the region, what the poem truly attempts to accomplish is a substitution of language for reality. While *Go Down, Moses* elegizes what it seems to establish, an epic origin-story for the region, *Omeros* endeavors to reestablish the epic language that it elegizes.

### **3. Regional Resurrection**

In a manner of speaking, all of the means of chronicling regional dissolution and departure that I have thus studied can be thought of as reinscribing the regions that they mourn in different contexts. All of them, not excepting the *Odyssey*, show their regions reacting to the pressures of the globe; all of them seem to mourn, dislocate, or even deaden the region, yet, in doing so, they proscribe a return to that region with all its complexities intact, a homecoming. The concept is a familiar one to the epic tradition that these works perpetuate, as well as the discourses of exile and exodus with which I opened this chapter. As I have attempted to show, to “found” the region via an epic origin-story is, in effect, to mourn that region’s absence; however, the inverse is also true: to endeavor to drain the region of significance by reducing it to “mere” language is also to grant new relevance to a regional discursive ideal. In essence, the forms that I have outlined here are defined by reciprocity. In studying how Faulkner and Walcott excavate and redeploy certain epic forms, forms that define and delineate dead traditions, vanished regions, we are in truth examining the enduring life that those “dead” elements possess. Within the ostensible possibility of regional death, like that of the death of the epic, is contained the possibility of resurrection.

Ottmar Ette, in “Odysseus and the Angel of History,” has linked the literature of movement, his “vectorial” writing “without a fixed abode” to literatures that overtly concern themselves with only one region. “Just as in escape, there is an element of *having* escaped,” Ette writes, “the homeland is preserved in the endless movement of exile,” as I have already shown in regards to Said and other exilic theorists (33). Ette sees in Odysseus, owing to his status as the “home-coming homeless one and the homeless homecomer” the embodiment of “an unending dialectic of homelessness” (34). Ette’s meaning, as I take it, is that epic literature, or literature that incorporates, replicates, and reinvents an epic tradition, is endlessly evocative of its own opposites. To describe wandering or exile is to suggest a homecoming; the writing of death is also that of life; the chronicle of the region implicates the globe; that which seems purely bounded, or infinitely fragmented and refracted, also envisions its own relationality or containment.

In this dissertation, I have considered two authors who might reasonably be called opposites: one white, one black, one primarily concerned with poetry, the other almost exclusively working in prose. In the manners I have outlined in this chapter and in those preceding, their works seem to evince a reciprocity similar to that which I have outlined above. Far from reaching a point of equivalence or existing in parallel, their respective writings form two distinct yet, in a way, mutually constitutive strands of the same thread. Thus, in the end, my study is less comparative than confabulative, showing the ways in which these authors’ writings intersect, contradict, and, in a way, reinterpret each other. This methodology, as applied to other writing, permits us to view disparate works not as constituting an artificially construed generic or locational whole, but as distinct and full-formed each in their own right, as islands caught in a common flow. In my conclusion, I



will show how this method of reading can be profitably applied to other texts.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: ATLANTA, PORT-OF-SPAIN, ANCHORAGE

*What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relationships. We all feel it, we express it in all kinds of hidden or twisted ways, or we fiercely deny it. But we sense that this sea exists within us with its weight of now revealed islands.*

—Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (1999)

#### 1. If It's Not One Thing, It's Another

Before I begin, I would like to undertake a brief exercise in literary style, which, throughout this work, I have identified as key both to the development of regional consciousness and the continuing legibility of that consciousness within interregional systems. Consider the following passage from an as yet unspecified novel, in which the protagonist remembers his grandfather:

this old man, stern and stiff and unbending, the last pillar of a falling building... remembering him still holding on then to the five acres of mountain and stone that had exhausted its substance, if it ever had any, years before he bought it, holding on with a passion so fierce that it blinded him to the dwindling size of the fruit the tired brown trees tugged out of the earth, as if the land, that mountain and stone land, held some promise that he alone knew of... that would be already lost to [his grandson] by the time he was old enough to understand; remained with the old man, kept as the photograph of a long departed lover from an affair itself lived, lost, gone—no, rather as the letter from that lover who never came, who had written fifty years before promising that she was coming, and who after fifty years he still kept waiting for, no longer really expecting her to turn up, but continuing to wait in that kind of active martyred hopelessness that seems a hope, reproaching her with his very patience and waiting for every minute of the fifty years, so that if she ever came he could say: I kept my part of the bargain; and if she never came his waiting would be a monument to his faith (50-51).

The language is, or would seem to be, unmistakably Faulknerian, as manifested perhaps most strongly in *Absalom, Absalom!* and subsequently deployed in most of his later works: the chain metaphors, in which the tenor of one device becomes the vehicle of the next, the endless clauses, the bombastic, overdetermined verbiage, and the contradictions, the second-guessing that invokes oral dialogue; all are familiar and standard in their usage here. Familiar, too, are the themes: the recalcitrant earth, the stubborn, quixotic farmer, the jilted lover, the ethos of endurance even in the absence of hope. The “falling pillar” of the metaphorical structure and the rocky, unproductive soil could even signify quintessentially Southern geographical and architectural trappings. In short, the grandfather in this excerpt could easily be Thomas Sutpen, and the narrator Quentin or Shreve. But this passage appears nowhere in *Absalom*, nowhere in Faulkner; in fact, it derives from Earl Lovelace’s 1979 *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, and describes Aldrick Prospect, a young resident of Port-of-Spain, crafting his dragon costume for Carnival.

I perform this stylistic illusion not to suggest an inherent formal and thematic connection between literature that excavates the history of the U.S. South and that which accomplishes the same in the Caribbean, though the congruences are certainly there, nor even to prove the influence of Faulkner on Lovelace and other Caribbean authors, though those connections are also valid.<sup>1</sup> Rather, my interest lies in how texts from both regions act to congeal these archetypes, bound by their familiar regional histories, into globally

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, in fact, the connections are almost too strong to miss; Lovelace’s description of the residents of his region’s attempts to resist centralized (national) control of their living spaces should be familiar to any reader acquainted with literary descriptions of the Lost Cause: the resistance force is “not so much guerilla as the last remains of a defeated army, that refused to surrender, indeed, to acknowledge defeat, that would keep on fighting even after hope for victory had ended, out of not knowing what else to do” (178-79).

relevant symbols. Aldrick “knit[s] into his dragon,” the same dragon that becomes such a comprehensive and redolent symbol of regional and cultural distinction during the celebration itself, his memory of his grandfather’s stubbornness, his embodiment of enduring, recalcitrant regional identities (50). The particularities of subjective Caribbean (or Southern) identities become inextricable from, woven into, representative cultural symbols. When Aldrick remembers his grandfather, when he weaves the constituent strands of that memory into the fabric of regional symbology, he is performing a quintessentially literary act. He is transforming memory into identity, just as Faulkner and Walcott, in the writings I have studied here, mediate between subjective experience and “objective” regional representation.

I have concluded, from my study, that these subjective / fetishized identities constitute a means of delineating and characterizing a region, and that, moreover, to inhabit that region, to interpret its significances, is dialogically to create (or “dream”) the world that surrounds it. The process of creating the dragon out of local materials (whether physical or psychological, contained in memory) is also the progress of creating the world that the dragon, as regional symbol, is designed to address. Thus, reciprocity, thus, dialogics, thus, *totalité-monde*. In this conclusion, I shall expand the arguments that I have made in regards to Faulkner and Walcott to encompass two additional authors, two additional texts: Lovelace’s novel and Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full* (1998). In choosing these novels, I have deliberately reversed the chronology of my two primary authors. Rather than reading a “classic” Southern author in tandem with a recent Caribbean author, I am here studying a “classic” Caribbean text alongside a recent Southern novel. In doing so, I do not wish to establish facile, historically imprisoned Faulkner-Lovelace

and Wolfe-Walcott linkages but, rather, to show that neither Faulkner nor Walcott serve as the origin or ending points of the regional comparisons I have established. I want to show that these texts, one an avowedly regionally bounded narrative dealing with a specific cultural ritual within a specific part of a specific city, and the other a clearly globally inflected novel portraying its city as primarily a confluence or nexus for interregional (and interracial) contact, imply their opposites. The regional text reveals itself as created by and creating a surrounding world, while the global text betrays a reinforcement of regional boundaries and affiliations. In this manner, these texts reenact Faulkner and Walcott's continuation of the dialogue of region and world, maintaining the ontological incarnation of both categories, their interreliance.

I will begin with Lovelace's text. On its most fundamental level, *The Dragon Can't Dance* is a collection of character studies of several residents of Calvary Hill, a slum in Port-of-Spain: Aldrick, the dragon dancer I have already mentioned, Fisheye, a thuggish steeldrum player, Philo, a calypsonian, Pariag, a transplanted Indian entrepreneur, Sylvia, the local beauty, and Miss Cleothilda, the matriarch of the Hill. The primary theme is that of each of the character's contributions to the Carnival celebration, and the eventual dissolution of certain aspects of that celebration (and the corresponding decline of the Hill itself as a unitary social structure) following local efforts to "clean up" the neighborhood, prompted in part by an inflammatory calypso by Philo himself. Given the novel's overt confinement to a particular region and social class, then, it is hardly surprising that the text has primarily been regarded in criticism as a fairly standard postcolonial narrative of Third World poverty and the vibrant cultural traditions that

nonetheless transcend that poverty.<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, in *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (2004), for instance, sees it as “an epic, singing the creole culture, restoring calypso, steelband, and carnival meaningfully to the living communities whose original self-expression they are, and celebrating the heroes and the crowds whose deeds went into the making of what we have of ritual custom and ceremony” (177). Though poverty is the subject of the novel, Ramchand acknowledges, Lovelace discovers “meaning and value” in the “fulfillment of cultural forms that have evolved out of the lives of the peoples who have met in these islands” (177). Jennifer Rahim, too, in “The Nation / A World / A Place to be Human: Earl Lovelace and the Task of ‘Rescuing the Future,’” claims that the author finds “tremendous wealth” in the “multiracial and multiethnic character of the region,” and that his work as a whole is constantly engaging with “the particularity and integrity of place,” with his novels existing in “a landscape of belonging where all are called to build a world in which to live and be fully human.”<sup>3</sup> This regenerative view of a “sense of place,” as I have noted in my first chapter as a (misguided) standby of regionalist criticism, is easily adapted to a facile resistance to

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<sup>2</sup> See Linden Lewis, “Masculinity and the Dance of the Dragon: Reading Lovelace Discursively” in *Feminist Review* 59, pp. 164-185. Lewis attempts an unsettling of gender roles within what she sees as the novel’s context of abjection and desperation. Lewis calls *The Dragon Can’t Dance* “a cultural *tour de force* of the political sociology of the Caribbean, and more specifically of the Trinidadian, working-class struggle for survival. It details the difficulties faced by a people in constructing and negotiating notions of community, and of establishing reproductive modalities of self-affirmation and survival under difficult circumstances” (165). The novel’s chronicle of poverty, it would seem, is in itself grounds enough for the text to be called a “*tour de force*.” The tendency in postcolonial studies to fetishize class division and, in doing so, make that division congruent with regional distinction, is a long-standing critical idiom.

<sup>3</sup> [http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume\\_4/issue\\_2/rahim-thenation.html](http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_4/issue_2/rahim-thenation.html), accessed 23 March 2009. C.L.R. James’s blurb on the book jacket, which seems to have been explicitly intended to be situated there (rather than emanating from a work of criticism or commentary) also states: “Nowhere have I seen more of the realities of a whole country disciplined into one imaginative whole.”

modernity / globalization. As Rahim notes, Lovelace balances his creolized, multiethnic characters with “fidelity to the importance of being rooted, for the traveller anchors somewhere, is shaped by some place and most [sic] assume the ‘responsibility’ of belonging to a place.”<sup>4</sup>

On the surface, then, *The Dragon Can't Dance* would appear to be a quintessentially regionalist text; it exemplifies the process of regional fetishization, sanctification without naming, that I have outlined in my first chapter. As I have mentioned earlier, this fetishization primarily manifests itself in the poverty and stark class divisions of the Hill's residents, who hold their very *lack* of wealth “as a possession, tending it stubbornly... clasping it to their bosom as a pass-key whose function they only half-remembered now, and, grown rusty, they wore as jewelry, a charm, a charmed medallion whose magic invested them with a mysterious purity, made them the blue-bloods of a resistance lived by their ancestors all through slavery” (24). Subjective regional affiliation here is talismanic, fundamentally mystified, evocative of common histories even if it does not explicitly name the means by which it functions. It is the formless faith of the Hill's residents in poverty as fetish that makes that poverty an enduring, collective regional symbol. Similarly, it is only “by faith” that Aldrick can “bring alive” his dragon costume from “scraps of cloth and tin” (49). The dragon

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<sup>4</sup> In the same journal issue, Merle Hodge has found similar regional distinction and vitality in Lovelace's widespread use of Creole English, which “incorporates into the narration the worldview and the individual speaking styles of the novel's characters,” while Nadia I. Johnson repeats a similar narrative of cultural longevity in Philo's calypsos inasmuch as they “provide a space conducive to resistance and allow for the construction of nationhood” rather than Aldrick's dragon dance ([http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume\\_4/issue\\_2/hodge-thelanguage.html](http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_4/issue_2/hodge-thelanguage.html), [http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume\\_5/issue\\_1/johnson-calypsonian.html](http://scholar.library.miami.edu/anthurium/volume_5/issue_1/johnson-calypsonian.html). Accessed 23 March 2009).

contains not only the physical evidence of a certain fixity in time and space, crafted as it is from the debris that Aldrick has gathered from around the neighborhood, but also the more malleable stuff of memory, including, as I have mentioned already, his grandfather, no longer “any kind of flesh and blood man” but rather “the symbol of an unyielding and triumphant martyrdom” (52). Moreover, like many of the interpretations of regional narratives that I have cited in this work, the Hill—and Aldrick’s dragon dance that seems to act as its ultimate expression of cultural validity—exudes a regionalism that appears to be reactionary, backward-looking, resisting both local and more widespread changes. When Aldrick dons his dragon costume in a ceremony ostensibly designed to link the Hill’s residents to “their ancestors, their Gods, remembered even now, so long after the Crossing, if not in the brain, certainly in the blood,” he also puts on a “sacred mask” that grants him the “ancestral authority” to embody a people whose “humanness” is “determined not by their possession of things” (134). Here, regional fetishization (the dragon-dance) seems to oppose, even rebuke, the contexts of commodification, capitalism, and globalization, those entities that value “possession of things,” in which it exists. However, Aldrick’s dragon speaks not only to the community that it is intended to embody, Aldrick’s constituency, as it were, but also to that community’s rivals, the “outsiders.” In appearing to resist global change, in its illusion of establishing a unitary, identitarian community independent of any contaminating contexts, Aldrick’s dragon in fact enters into dialogue with those contexts.

The seemingly culturally unitary, regionally bounded ceremony of Lovelace’s novel, then, betrays more of a labile, discursive relationship with the world outside of the region than a first reading might reveal. Indeed, the same cultural and literal materials



that Ramchand, for one, sees as giving rise to an authentically local ritual are themselves foreign, brought to the Hill by the transpiring of global events. The steel drums that come to signify Ramchand's "original self-expression" have their origins in "kerosene tins, biscuit drums, anything that could sound a note, anything that could ring; metal drums looted from roadsides, emptied of their garbage and pressed into service to celebrate the great war's end, and to accompany the calypsonian's instant song: It's your moustache we want, Hitler" (26). The story of the steel drums' beginnings (depleted fuel barrels from U.S. wartime presence in the Caribbean) is implicitly also the story of the "authentic" cultural rituals practiced by the residents of the Hill. Though they are literally bent to a distinctive, local purpose, their presence implicates the globe, and the song that the players tease from them is both regionally rooted and tacitly aware of its globalism. Nowhere is this fundamental interrelationship clearer than in the culmination of Fisheye's quixotic attempt to purge the Hill of both widespread (global) capitalist influence and local distaste for its residents' "thuggish" lifestyles. Noting with dismay that many of the steel drum bands had accepted (foreign) corporate sponsors, Fisheye decides that he "really wanted an army of warriors to take back the bands, to take back the streets and alleys, the hills and the lanes from the Fuller Brothers and Sampoco Oil, and Cicada Cigarettes" (84). What seems to be straightforward resistance, however (the region *versus* the globe), soon reveals itself as reciprocity. Aldrick, for example, allying himself with Fisheye's reactionary politics, attempts to set the region and globe in opposition to each other, but only succeeds in entangling them further. He claims that the Hill's localized rituals "ain't threatening" the sponsors at all: "All we thinking about is to play dragon. All we thinking about is to show this city, this island, this world, that we

is people, not because we own anything, not because we have things, but because we is. We are because we is” (125). Aldrick sees the Carnival celebration as entirely separate from the project of globalization, yet immediately acknowledges that the audience of that celebration is not simply the Hill or the city, but “this island, this world.” In his haste to exclude himself from global networks of exchange, Aldrick realizes that he is more properly wishing to enter into dialogue with them, to “show” something to the world at large.

In the end, even the dragon itself, which “alone was left to carry the message” of regional distinction to the public after all of the other rooted, distinctive cultural rituals have faded, is less a means of accessing a sequestered, antiglobal regionalism to a thoroughly globalized world, as the “weaving” of Aldrick’s stubborn, iconoclastic grandfather into its material would suggest, than it is a means of acknowledging and attempting to speak to that world (135). Dancing as the dragon causes Aldrick to reflect: “this is the guts of the people, their blood; this is the self of the people that they screaming out they possess, that they scrimp and save and whore and work and thief to drag out of the hard rockstone and dirt to show the world they is people... this is people taller than cathedrals; this is people more beautiful than avenues with trees” (137). Aldrick’s inner monologue exemplifies the laborious process of establishing subjectivity within global systems of valuation that would seem to defeat the same, but that subjectivity only exists in relationship to other, globalized subjectivities. Even Aldrick’s anthem for his “people’s” regional distinction implicates other locales and landscapes, the Eurocentric “cathedrals” and “avenues with trees.” The ultimate effect is not to reaffirm an encapsulated cultural identity, but to “show the world” that they are a distinct part of

far-ranging interpretive schemes. Though Lovelace's novel does indeed suggest a self-contained and wholly rooted regionalism, existing in stubborn defiance of the gnashing tides of globalization that surround its shores, even the most rooted, bounded region cannot exist in a vacuum; rather, it necessarily must dream, give form to, and enter into dialogue with the world outside its borders. This indelible symbiosis lies at the heart of *The Dragon Can't Dance*.

## **2. Everything Old is New Again**

What the above discussion of Lovelace's novel effectively amounts to, within the context of my larger study, is that literary regionalism, far from eliding or escaping the globalization that surrounds it, in fact grants the world beyond its borders a speaking (and listening) role—in attempting to tease out a certain regional thread from the global fabric that contains it, it finds itself further entangled. In this section, I shall attempt to show that the inverse is also true: crafting a narrative that seems to be wholly internationalized, unrooted, and dislocated, liberated of regional boundaries and affiliations, serves also to reify those regional associations in a global framework. To illustrate this process, I turn to Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full*, the massive 1998 novel about Atlanta that many have seen as exemplifying a new “placelessness” that opposes the existing canon of regionally rooted Southern literature.<sup>5</sup> *A Man in Full* implicates a host of widely varying characters who participate in perhaps half a dozen distinct narrative threads, but the overarching plot is that of Charlie Croker (a much-belabored play on the word “cracker”), an aging

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<sup>5</sup> Faulkner is, needless to say, one of these canonical archetypes, though Welty, O'Connor, and Warren are also commonly cited, and the Agrarians as a whole continue to exert a powerful influence over Southern regionalism as an ideological construct.

Atlantan tycoon, obsessed with maintaining his self-image of virility and dominance of the global marketplace, watching his empire falling into the ruin of outstanding debts to a firm called “PlannersBanc.” Subsidiary plots involve the efforts of Ray Peepgass, PlannersBanc’s chief loan officer, to devise elaborate schemes for Croker’s undoing, a rape scandal implicating the young white heiress Elizabeth Armholster and the black college football star Fareek Fanon, the trials and tribulations of Conrad Hensley, a worker in an Oakland branch of Croker Global Foods, and the political machinations of Atlanta Mayor Wes Jordan. The end result is the downfall of Croker’s enterprise, which, given his constant attempts to invoke and ironically adopt the lifestyle and mannerisms of the antebellum South, supports a reading of *A Man in Full* as a quintessentially “postsouthern” text.<sup>6</sup>

This is the point of entry for Martyn Bone’s excellent reading of Wolfe’s novel, “Placing the Postsouthern ‘International City’: Atlanta in Tom Wolfe’s *A Man in Full*,” which appeared in Jones and Monteith’s 2002 *South to A New Place* and subsequently in Bone’s own *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005). The “postsouthern” aspect of Bone’s argument relies on how Wolfe rejects the “(neo-) Agrarian representation of the southern ‘sense of place’” insofar as it is “anti-urban, anti-industrial and (however implicitly) anti-Atlanta” in favor of delineating “the capitalist production of place in the so-called ‘international city’” (210, 209). Bone thus finds *A*

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<sup>6</sup> The term “postsouthern” was first deployed, most critics agree, by Lewis Simpson in *The Brazen Face of History* (1980) to describe an increasing tendency in Southern letters during the latter half of the twentieth century to demythologize its past and dehomogenize its history, leading to parodic, postmodern inversions of formerly sacred tropes (258). The term has subsequently been used by Michael Kreyling, Leigh Anne Duck, and Martyn Bone, among others, to describe satirical themes that lampoon or play off of “distinctively” Southern techniques—organic, Agrarian connections to the land, for instance.

*Man in Full* to be a postsouthern reversal of Agrarian dichotomies of (rural) “place” versus (urban) “space,” stating, no doubt much to the chagrin of Donald Davidson, that, in the novel, the disembodied, unrooted entities of “real-estate development and multinational capital” come to “dominate the production of place” (211). The end result of these global influences, Bone theorizes, is that “there is no residual or unmediated ‘South’ that has escaped the effects of speculative capitalist development” (232). The Agrarian South of plantations, tight-knit communities, stark racial and spatial divisions, and indelible ties between places and individuals gives way to a cityscape composed of buildings such as the PlannersBanc Tower, “the epitome of placelessness in an ‘international city’ increasingly defined by global finance/capital exchange” (219-220). The South of the Agrarians, and the canonical regional authors that accompanied them, Bone suggests, has completely dissolved, the South’s ephemeral land-value (regional fetishization) fully replaced by global monetary value (real estate).<sup>7</sup> Scott Romine has also noted that, in Atlanta, “the ascendance of commodity form and concomitant amnesia segregates the city from the real South’s historically stressed terrain,” with the implication that the city constitutes the “fakest,” though the term is for him a loaded one, of all theoretically “Southern” places (*The Real South* 71).

Bone’s reading of the “placelessness” of Atlanta and, by extension, the elision of outdated, simplistic modes of regionalism by the panregional “international city” is thus a strong one due in large part to his skillful placement of Croker Global and

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<sup>7</sup> In response to Charlie’s assertion that the “spectacular view” afforded by his perch atop his headquarters, Croker Concourse, is essentially illusory (“The trouble with views is, after the first coupla weeks they don’t surprise you anymore... along about the 1960s, I reckon it was, folks discovered views, and that gave everybody one more thing to get competitive about”) Bone writes: “the *visual sense* of place itself has narrowed into ‘spectacular views’ of ‘Atlanta real estate’” (Wolfe 553-554, Bone 217).

PlannersBanc's concern with speculative real estate at the heart of the novel's portrait of Atlanta as a whole.<sup>8</sup> And Wolfe's novel, it must be said, never passes up an opportunity to represent Atlanta as less defined by any intrinsic connection between the land that it occupies and the nature of the city itself than economic ties of convenience; Atlanta, we are told, "had never been a true Old Southern city like Savannah or Charleston or Richmond, where wealth had originated with the land. Atlanta was an offspring of the railroad business" (9). Yet, balancing the placelessness, the indeterminacy of location, in the novel is a stubborn and enduring return to static boundaries of place, the reinscription of very old racial and geographic lines within the limits of the international city. Roger White, the young lawyer who winds up defending Fareek Fanon against Armholster's rape allegations, notes the presence of a boundary in Atlanta that looks suspiciously like not only the color line, but, in strange ways, the Mason-Dixon Line: "practically everybody in Atlanta old enough to care about such things knew that Ponce de Leon was the avenue that divided black from white on the east side of town... they might as well have painted a double line in the middle of Ponce de Leon and made it official, a white line on the north side and a black line on the south" (185). The "line" that White envisions is not only a reincarnation of familiar, spatially rooted racial categories, but a commentary on the impermeability of those categories; the "double line" that White

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<sup>8</sup> The name "PlannersBanc" is itself a strong symbol of the attempts made by the "international city," and particularly the Southern international city, to shake off its histories of land ownership and land fetishization; the corporation was originally known as the "Southern Planters Bank and Trust Company," but this name is discarded as being "too stodgy, too slow-footed, too old-fashioned, and, above all, too Old South. *Planters* was a word humid with connotations of cotton plantations and slavery. So Planters had been sterilized and pasteurized into Planners" (37). The subsumation of "Planters bank" into "PlannersBanc" is emblematic of the transformation of "southern" into "postsouthern."

envisions, the line that traffic may not cross, marks race—if not place—as the enduring regionalist force in the “placeless” city. Still more evocative is Mayor Jordan’s commentary on the city as he drives White around town in his limousine, part of which is worth a lengthy citation:

We’re driving up a paved-over foothill of the southernmost range of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This whole city is in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains... Atlanta’s elevation—Atlanta is up higher than any other large city in the country, with the exception of Denver. Most of the rest are at sea level. They’re ports. Even Chicago’s a port. Atlanta’s elevation is a thousand feet. That’s the average elevation, the one printed in the atlases. But some people in Atlanta are more elevated than others, and you know what they say always flows downhill (186).

Jordan’s interpretation of Atlanta’s “elevations” on one level exposes the international city as fundamentally illogical in design—unlike other loci of international commerce and transit, Atlanta is not ideally geographically placed. Just as its origins, as I have already noted, betray no essential connection between the city and its surrounding region, its location on the map would not seem to evince a regional affiliation.<sup>9</sup> However, Jordan also evokes a distinct and irrevocable *emplacement* of both Atlanta and its subsidiary regions. His linkage of the city and the Blue Ridge—the cultural heart of Appalachia—and attribution of static racial and economic spectra to specific areas of Atlanta would seem to mark the city as less randomly located and arranged than its ostensible dislocated “placelessness” might indicate.

Bone, though noting the enduring legibility of regional boundaries I have mentioned (he states: “it is possible to map the ‘historical continuities’ of racial segregation and geographical uneven development that yet survive within the

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<sup>9</sup> For more on the rise of Atlanta (and the South as a whole) as a site of economic expansion within global economies, see James Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-90* (1993), pp. 209.

‘international city’” [223])), is somewhat at a loss as to how they speak to the “placelessness” that he so skillfully outlines. Bone notes that *A Man in Full* “not only observes and represents Atlanta from within postmodern capitalist hyperspaces... [but] also reveals the ‘largely unknown parts of the city,’” though he finds a certain disingenuousness in the characters (and authors’) “sightseeing” trips to these underprivileged areas (221). All in all, Bone seems to want to subdivide Atlanta into the post-modern/southern capitalist downtown and the impoverished, genuinely Southern neighborhoods and outskirts, where “traditional ‘southern’ manual labor is still being performed” (229). Bone never fully explains this dialectic of place and placelessness; his intent seems to be to expose the illusory quality of postmodern hyperreality when put in the context of “real” historical and racial divisions. Atlanta, as he views it, exists in a tenuous and deeply segregated balance between its place in the world and its place in the South. It would seem that, in describing the global city, he happens again upon the region.<sup>10</sup> The theoretically “placeless,” spatially decentered Atlantan downtown, in its mediation of networks of global capital, creates huge imbalances of wealth and status among the residents of the city, which in turn leads to reified regions, the reinscription of very old race and class boundaries. This would seem to be a vindication of C. Hugh Holman’s stated belief, in “The View from the Regency Hyatt” (1972) that, though the third of his three inherent distinctive features of the South—a large African-American

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<sup>10</sup> This is further evidenced in Bone’s irritation at Wolfe’s “spatial fix” in his epilogue, turning Croker into a wandering evangelist in South Alabama and the Florida Panhandle. Bone writes: “Wolfe seems to have resorted to an escapist anticlimax... after seven hundred pages suggesting that there is no southern ‘sense of place’ unaffected by land speculation or real-estate development, the epilogue vaguely invokes a residual, rural ‘South’ that—unlike Atlanta, the investor land of North Georgia, or the plantations to the South—somehow remains outside the spatial realm of capital” (233).



population and legacy of slavery, defeat in war, and a largely agricultural economy—may eventually dissolve, the first two, both elements of an intractable history, would not (*The Roots of Southern Writing* 107). For all of its frantic meditations on omnipresent capitalism, *A Man in Full* nonetheless seems to rely on a certain static historical ideal of Southernness.

But there is more at stake here. The regionalism brought about by *A Man in Full*'s globalization is not simply a remnant of older, archetypically Southern boundaries and divisions, for the novel relentlessly and ruthlessly satirizes these standards in the many sections dealing with Croker's life at Turpmtine, the plantation manor that he resides in and maintains as part of an enormously misguided attempt to instill himself with a measure of what he sees as the masculine glory of the Old South.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the novel suggests an enduring regionalism that is inextricably bound to, even discursively created by, the globalized "placelessness" that dominates its cityscapes. In conceiving of himself as the monarch of Croker Global, *in its capacity as* a disembodied dislocated entity of transnational capital, Charlie Croker sees himself as the lord and master of an unending collection of discrete *regions*, controlling local lives in, for example, "fourteen key markets, from Contra Costa County, California, to Monmouth County, New Jersey" (43). In other words, the simple act of locating Croker Global in nonregional or antiregional space necessarily relies on its mediation and ideological creation of various regions. This connection is made tangible when Croker's decision to cut the operations

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Croker reflects, while surveying "This was the South. You had to be man enough to *deserve* a quail plantation. You had to be able to deal with man and beast, in every form they came in, with your wits, your bare hands, and your gun" (9). The irony, of course, is that Croker uses Turpmtine as a *quail* plantation, in essence a glorified private country club, rather than as a genuine economic enterprise.

budget of Croker Global Foods results in Conrad Hensley, a worker in the Oakland branch of that corporate entity, losing his job; decisions made at the “placeless” metalevel of global commerce have distinct resonances on widespread regional lives.

Moreover, conducting “global” business from one region necessarily implies others; in a curious moment of postplantation unity, Peepgass travels to the Bahamas to cement a shady business deal and rapidly finds that Nassau “wasn’t an enlarged version of anything, or not anything in the U.S.A.,” and expresses distaste at this “tiny, moldering old colonial capital with a lot of patched-up, painted-over buildings, cramped and crowded and leaning against one another for support” (535). Yet, what Peepgass sees as a fundamental regional difference also invokes regional *connections* within a global context: “ever since the Civil War, when blockade runners—such as Rhett Butler in *Gone With the Wind*—used the Bahamas as a safe harbor from which to do business with the Confederacy, Americans had been using the Bahamas to get around American laws” (535-36). The brief Caribbean section of *A Man in Full* suggests two essential truisms about the novel’s regionalist philosophy: first, even within schemes of global homogenization and corporate control, regional difference persists in unexpected forms, and, second, the legibility and impermeability of regional boundaries continue to serve distinct functions *within* those very schemes. Much as the “city fathers” of Atlanta real estate would like to conceive of themselves as existing beyond or above the very concept of regionalism, closer inspection reveals them to be mediators, not destroyers, of regional identity.

In addition, the very *concept* of existing in dislocated space seems to inspire in Wolfe’s characters a contrary, centripetal hunger for exactly the fetishized regionalism

that their roles in controlling disembodied global spaces would seem to elide. Croker is the most obvious example, clinging to Turpmtine even as PlannersBanc portions out and auctions off his more immediately useful assets. While being chauffeured down Turpmtine's main driveway, he rhapsodizes on the landscape:

The Big House at Turpmtine had been built in the early 1830s, with the low lines and deeply shaded wraparound porches and white clapboard siding and floor-to-ceiling double-hung windows of the true antebellum Old South... what a show it was! The driveway... curved for a mile through the pines before entering an avenue of live oaks planted so closely on either side that a month from now they would create a cool, dark, dense, green tunnel of foliage... the flower beds were ablaze with vivid red horseshoe geraniums, yellow bayberry bushes... and the flower he loved above all others, the early-blooming Confederate rose, which now, in the afternoon, was still white but which by nightfall would be a deep rose, in mourning, folks said, for the blood shed by brave Confederate lads in the Lost Cause. It was breathtaking—*breathtaking!* Charlie felt a catch in his throat (81).

The tone of this passage, of course, is satirical, poking fun at Croker's quixotic romanticization of the most overblown tropes of the Old South, and relentlessly punning on his eroticized attraction to the landscape (the anagrammatic "pines" and the "green tunnel" of the drive), but the effect that Turpmtine's environs have on him is undeniable; the very *idea* of the plantation grounds, though they may well be only a simulacrum of authentic, Agrarian attachments to place, providing something that his life as a broker of "views" lacks is very attractive to him. More surprising still is Peepgass's fetishization of those same views: "in the foreground, old Franklin down on his knees... the earth tones of his shoes... seemed to blend into the earth into which he was so diligently troweling... then came a dazzling band of royal blue, pink, and white flowers, then the dense dark green of the boxwood border... A fellow could learn to like this" (513). Even if Wolfe's novel does seem to (literally) foreclose on the possibility of "traditional"

regionalist relationships between subject and landscape, it does not prevent those subjects from fetishizing that landscape in very familiar ways: the “blending” of the groundskeeper with the earth and the organic borders of the lawn forming a *naturally* ordered space, for example, would seem to indicate that regional fetishization still exerts a considerable hold over the residents of the international city. Just as regionalism dreams the globe into existence, globalization sees itself as comprised of, and indeed giving rise to, untold regionalisms. The two philosophies, as I have attempted to show in this dissertation, are irrevocably entwined.

### **Coda: Anchorage**

Late June; Spenard Road; Anchorage, Alaska. The summer day lasts all evening and well into the next morning, the sky cycling through soft blues that make the horizon line a progressively deeper basin. At midnight, staring straight up at the (absent) stars will give the same impression as looking into very deep water from a great height. The mountains darken to mahogany and the sidewalks to a subterranean gray, but cars still crawl down Spenard without turning on their headlights, past increasingly improbably named structures: The Foxhole Military Surplus, Title Wave Books, Chilkoot Charlie’s, Mr. Whitekeys’ Fly-By-Nightclub. And, turning a corner, with no explanation, a windmill made of steel girders and outlined in neon lights, fifty feet tall, turning resolutely and improbably by hidden motors. Do all of these things—the log cabin bar run amok, the comedy club with a light airplane embedded in the wall, the miniature tent city with moose stenciled on the entry flaps, seemingly designed to bemuse tourists and bestow on residents a spurious idea of metropolitan distinctiveness—add up to a sense of

place? Or are they simply random fragments of capitalist kitsch, forcibly alloyed into a regional ideal, patchwork simulacra? I have no direct answer. Neither, seemingly, does the landscape, lovingly slathered in Impressionist hues, a mute presence past the borders of the city.

I am not attempting my own regionalist experiment. I am not trying to lay claim to a privileged knowledge, to fetishize the accoutrements of my own region. Such a project would be, no doubt, beyond my abilities. Anchorage is a very difficult city to romanticize. Sprawling within one of the largest city limit boundaries in the United States, replete with leftover military buildings and even more recent, hastily modernized structures constructed on the bones of their earthquake-leveled ancestors, it lurks furtively on the silted flats of Cook Inlet, a few feeble spears of neon against a perpetual subarctic dimness rolling for hundreds of miles before it encounters familiar names: Vancouver, Seattle, Toyko. It is, not to put too fine a point on it, an ugly city, a somber, pathetic city, all weathered, vaguely Post-Soviet concrete, slumping traffic berms, endlessly patched and salt-stained asphalt. In winter, stripped of their droves of tourists, the buildings sulk as if themselves paralyzed by the piercing cold, a gaudy collection of empty shells on the inlet's frozen shore.

The city itself, founded on the now-defunct fur and gold trades as well as the somewhat less defunct Alaska Railroad, by most rights should long ago have surrendered its position of global, or even national, prominence, dwindling to a tourist waystation or a military outpost. The vast oil reserves of Alaska's North Slope do not pass through it. The timber and fishing trades extract resources from elsewhere in the state. The seat of the state's government is over five hundred miles away. And so the city might have

remained, a glorified airport attached to a gift shop, were it not for the rise of the global marketplace. Twenty-five percent of the United States' international freight passes through Anchorage International, one of the five busiest airports in the world in terms of cargo.<sup>12</sup> The traffic is mostly East Asian, manufactured goods from Japan, China, and Taiwan, on account of it being, counterintuitively, faster to travel from the Far East to the West Coast cities through Anchorage than directly across the Pacific. The massive FedEx facility at Anchorage International alone can process thirteen thousand packages per hour. Moreover, the city contains both Lake Hood Seaplane Base, the busiest seaplane airport in the world, and Merrill Field, one of the largest small airplane runways in the world, making the city the heart that pumps blood to all of the state's roadless regions, an area only somewhat smaller than Mexico.<sup>13</sup>

The name "Anchorage" derived from nearby Ship Creek, the only ice-free river outside of the inlet deep enough for ships to anchor and exchange cargo or outfit themselves for exploration or colonization. The name is oddly appropriate today; Anchorage, like Atlanta, is a nexus, a place for materials—and people—to be dropped off and picked up again on their way elsewhere. Unlike Atlanta, however, this is virtually its sole function. Very few people now living in Anchorage were born there, and fewer still will spend all—or even the majority—of their lives there. It is a city of transients, oil and fishery workers on leave, military personnel, tourists. No one "lives" here; they only anchor for a while.

Yet, in this impermanence, there is an odd fixity. Just as the architecture of the Gulf Coast, in its classicism, recalls a colonial history, a tangible remnant of the past in

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<sup>12</sup> Now Ted Stevens International.

<sup>13</sup> Mexico: 1.97 million square kilometers; Alaska: 1.71 million square kilometers.

the present, the streets of Anchorage invoke settled and unsettled spaces, the land that feeds it and that it feeds in turn. The city would not exist without its situation among untold external regions, regions that fuel it with natural resources, tourist venues, military outposts, and foreign markets, and those regions, as we know them, would not exist without the city. To view, or to occupy, the city is to implicitly or explicitly acknowledge an immense complex of outlying regions and their multivarious influences. To create, or interpret, an idea of the city itself is to dream the globe that contains it.

Yet is the center empty? Does this local and interregional debris—the neon windmill, the giant fiberglass moose bedecked with sunglasses, the grim dodecahedron of the airport control tower—comprise a legible region in itself, or simply attest to the chaotic unfolding of the relationships between the faraway places of the world, an interregional museum? Does infinite comparativity, infinite global / regional intertwining, leave us with anything beyond an unparseable pastiche?

The answer to this question, I now realize, lies not in the specificities of the region itself, not in its landscape, the contours of its buildings, or even its history or the cultures of its people. Rather, it is contained within a deeply discursive, inherently literary act of individual imagination, a subjective mediation of the region's regionalism, as it were. The answer does not lie in the windmill on Spenard Road itself, for the windmill is only an eyesore; it lies instead in the narrative that I (or others) construct, of which the windmill is a part. Glissant has written, in *Caribbean Discourse*, that Caribbean landscapes “cannot be *de-scribed* but narrated in our special approach to writing” (153). Though these landscapes, as Glissant sees them, are inherently relational, implicating infinite similar and dissimilar places, what ultimately *matters* about any of

those landscapes is not their function as geographical archetypes or regionally resonant and distinct symbols, but the writerly narratives that emerge from the knowledge of these significances. What infinite comparativity, pure relation, leaves behind is individual invention, an Eliotic synthesis of, deference to, and ultimately surpassing of a given weave, a fabric of regions. Regional writing, then, is at heart an attempt to come to terms with Glissant's internalized sea "with its weight of now revealed islands," not innocent of the currents that flow among those islands but with its wide-ranging implications as precondition (139).

In this work, I have studied two authors and their associated regions at length. I have made claims about their work, their attendant criticism, and their spatialized identities. Some of these claims have been guided by extant criticism. Others have attempted to delineate the shape of criticism to come. No work—either of criticism or literature—exists in a vacuum, and every author hopes that his or her writing will help define and add to (or tear down) future or existing writing. Ultimately, however, this work is guided by selfish motives. I have written at length of Faulkner and Walcott's regional affinities and regional formulations because their respective enterprises delineate what I believe is a deep and enduring human desire, one that I myself feel the weight of: the need to exist in a place of one's making, a place imbued with significance by the *act* of making, not necessarily a physical place but the lasting idea of a place. I would like to think that the current work, in some small way, contributes to this goal.

Nashville, Tennessee

18 April 2009



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