

# **ROOTING MEMORY, ROOTING PLACE**

## **Regionalism in the Twenty-First-Century American South**

**CHRISTOPHER LLOYD**

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Ph.D. English and Comparative Literature

I hereby declare that all of the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Christopher Lloyd. October 2013

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## ABSTRACT

Lewis Simpson first used the term ‘postsouthern’ to define the state of the American South in an era of postmodern capitalism. The recent swathe of transnational and transcultural theory has much bearing on this notion, as any questioning of the nation and its borders must have concomitant effects on those regions within it. The U.S. South is one such region that has long endured questioning of its contours, whether geographical, cultural, or ideological. Simpson’s ‘postsouth’ has gained much traction, influencing much critical writing that requires us to look to a deterritorialized global South.

My thesis interrupts this axiomatic view offering readings of various twenty-first-century cultural texts from the region as evidence of a more complex, and lingering regionalism that is surely not postsouthern. In the course of my readings, I utilize strands of cultural memory studies to anchor the varied texts to a particular place. I argue specifically for a ‘rooted’ and ‘placed’ dynamics of cultural memory (as working through texts), thus re-rooting and locating the South and its memory-work. The regional remembrance found across different media ballast my claims of a South far from disappearing.

In the first chapter I reveal how in two contemporary novels about slavery the institution’s potency in cultural memory continues to be worked through literary texts. In the second, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is shown to reveal a very complex, yet nonetheless, regional biopolitical sphere of African-American life. Thirdly, I look to the Southern gothic and read Sally Mann’s photography through this genre lens to show the machinations of the Southern past working in the present. In the fourth chapter, I look to two novels that trace the very ubiquitous narrative of return to the South. My conclusion ties together the strands of thought that foreground bodies, memory, landscape and the very present past.

**PLEASE BE WARNED THAT THIS THESIS CONTAINS IMAGES SOME MIGHT  
FIND SHOCKING AND DISTURBING**

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The past is a heavy place

- From a Tracy Emin quilt

“All I know is you livin in the past. I’m livin in the past. History done swallowed you up cept  
you don’t know it”

- Cormac McCarthy, *The Stonemason*

# INTRODUCTION

## THE REGION AND BEYOND

### From the South to the Postsouth

[T]he quality that most truly sets the South apart from other regions [is] its sheer investment in the meaning of itself.  
 – John Jeremiah Sullivan<sup>1</sup>

## THE ‘POST’

Lorrie Moore’s novel *A Gate at the Stairs* tells the story of Tassie, a babysitter for a white couple in the American Midwest who adopt a black child. On a number of occasions, Tassie looks after the child while the parents converse downstairs with a number of their friends. Parts of the novel are heard lines of dialogue from these conversations. One nameless character raises the theory of America being ‘post-racial’. Another replies: ‘Postracial is a white idea [...] It’s like postfeminist or postmodern. The word *post* is put forward by people who have grown bored of the conversation’ (original emphasis).<sup>2</sup> This notion will be the starting point for my discussion of the South in the twenty-first century. Although the character’s formulation of ‘post-racialism’ being a ‘white idea’ is of much interest, I also want to unravel what this idea might mean in relation to the South. More specifically, I want to investigate how this could be applied to the notion of what it is to be postsouthern. Current scholarship on the region tends to fall into this theoretical mode.

The first use of the term can be attributed to Lewis Simpson who argues in *The Brazen Face of History* (1980) that by the end of the twentieth century, in an ‘existentialist America’, the

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<sup>1</sup> John Jeremiah Sullivan, ‘How William Faulkner Tackled Race – and Freed the South From Itself’, *The New York Times*, 28 June 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/magazine/how-william-faulkner-tackled-race-and-freed-the-south-from-itself.html>> [accessed 11 October 2013]

<sup>2</sup> Lorrie Moore, *A Gate at the Stairs* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 186.

region entered the ‘postsouthern age’.<sup>3</sup> Simpson claims that the ‘epiphany of the southern literary artist will not be repeated’; that is, the ‘Renaissance will not come again’ signalling a possible end to past understandings of the South.<sup>4</sup> I will look below at the Southern Renaissance, but interesting here is merely to note the originary usage of the term. Postsouthern has subsequently gained many meanings and inferences, but common to them all is the sense that we are in a time in which we need to talk about the region in non-exceptional, non-totalizing terms. While I would of course agree that the reification of the South is – and has been – problematic, this thesis signals a different understanding of what constitutes the region culturally in the twenty-first century that does not rely on the prefix ‘post’. I do not resist *all* aspects of the postsouthern, merely those that seek to unravel the region beyond its placedness, especially in relation to a located cultural memory. I will outline this following a summation of the critical field into which I am writing.

If, as Moore’s character says, post-racial is a white idea, this introduction wants to posit that postsouthern can be a problematic idea formulated within the realm of ‘transnational studies’ in which any nation must be defined and informed by elements beyond its perceived borders. Critical theory, in this regard, has turned generally to notions of (de)territorialization and the centrality of borders (and their deconstruction). This attention to the multitudes of place, rather than the assumed stasis of them, feeds into the larger interrogation of global flows and forces. I explore here how the regional is constructive of the national – America is shaped by its internal structures of regionalism – and thus any theoretical mode that deconstructs the national frame or border will correlatively problematize internal ones. This questioning and deconstructive urge of contemporary theory should, I think, be complimented by more local and region-specific analyses.

If the postsouthern is to be at all interrogated, it could occur primarily on a terminological level. A similar questioning has occurred in postcolonial studies, of which one argument I will briefly utilize here. Ania Loomba writes that ‘the prefix “post” complicates matters because it implies an “aftermath” in two senses – temporal, as in coming after, and ideological, as in supplanting’.<sup>5</sup> The ‘post’ in postcolonial, thus, must always be called into question as a ‘too-quick enlargement of the term [...] can indeed paradoxically flatten out both past and contemporary situations’.<sup>6</sup> While this has ramifications for global study, it also has

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis P. Simpson, *The Brazen Face of History: Studies in the Literary Consciousness in America* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 269.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

significant bearing on my complicating of the term postsouthern. Indeed, as Loomba continues, while the term postcolonial is ‘useful in indicating a general process’ around the world, ‘*if it is uprooted from specific locations, “postcoloniality” cannot be meaningfully investigated*’ (my emphasis).<sup>7</sup> I draw attention to Loomba’s use of ‘rootedness’ not only because she sees no problem in holding onto locatedness and roots to talk about certain locations, but because she further stresses the need to reinforce certain places and their histories which can (but not always) be flattened out and lost in the totalizing terms of a ‘post-’ world.

It is in the framing of this argument that my thesis uses strands of memory studies to argue for a rootedness to the South that the postsouthern does not always acknowledge or accommodate. While the postsouthern calls into question the various ways the term ‘the South’ has been deployed, and to what ends, I suggest that we also look to the roots of place, through the roots of memory. If the culture of the region continues to work through and embody located cultural memories, then surely the South’s identity is sustained in particularly located ways, as well as trans-regional ones. One of the key postsouthern critics I will investigate is Michael Kreyling, who asks: ‘Does invoking “the South” put one in possession of the real thing, or is that real thing always already a derivation, or [...] a derivation of a derivation?’<sup>8</sup> Kreyling’s sense of the South’s memories also follows this postmodern logic. He argues – as I will explore at length – that the region’s memories are now floating, disconnected from their place(s) of origin. It seems the South now lives in its reproductions, narrations and derivations. My thesis questions this claim, using memory to root place and root the South in various, subtle ways that are different to Kreyling’s suggestions. To get to this argument in fuller terms, I follow Lorrie Moore’s character, investigating the ‘conversation’ about the South, of which critics might just have grown bored. This in turn will lead us into the large field of transnational theory that the postsouthern partly emerges from; this, then, will lead us to Southern studies, and eventually the terms of my analysis.

## **A HISTORY OF SOUTHERN EXCEPTIONALISM**

The South has a history of uniqueness. The investigation into what constitutes the South and where (if anywhere) it lies has been a long-standing one in literature of and on the region. Richard H. King correctly states, ‘Certain questions will simply not go away, questions like:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Kreyling, *The South That Wasn’t There* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2010), p. 164.

what is the South? Who is a Southerner? What is Southern literature?’<sup>9</sup> That these questions are still in circulation testifies to the significance and centrality of regional identity to the South and its commentators. Indeed, my thesis is that the South is continuously re-rooted by its placed and located memories and not always opened up and out beyond its borders by deterritorializing forces. One of the defining features of the postsouthern movement is that it depends so wholly on something that we call ‘the South’ however constructed or imaginary. For Jon Smith, ‘the South’ is ‘a meaningless term, naming nothing but fantasies’, but nonetheless he acknowledges the potency and power of it and its centrality to cultural study.<sup>10</sup> It is as though no matter how we try to move beyond (post) the South, a regional tangibility remains present. If, as the transnational turn that I will explore suggests, the South is a region ultimately to be problematized and unravelled, why are the questions King asks so persistent and difficult to dislodge?

Some early historical answers to King’s questions can be posed by turning to the South’s self-narration from the seventeenth century onwards. I do this through references to both writers from the time and later critics who explore their ideas. From the region’s beginnings as a coastline of the colonial ‘new world’ project, the southern states took on a particular identity of their own. Richard Gray explains that the ‘concepts and beliefs’ the early Virginians, for example, ‘provided a foundation for the defence of agrarianism in the South, during the period when that region was forming consciousness of itself’.<sup>11</sup> We will see below that this land-centred identity became more prominent in later years. It is worth signalling that the idea of Southern difference or particularity entered culture from an early point, thus testifying to its long-standing significance as a defining concept. As the nineteenth century progressed, the Southern sense of itself sharpened into focus. In 1816, for example, cultural figures were ‘attempting to explain Virginia’s backwardness in cultural matters’.<sup>12</sup> A consequence of this burgeoning sense of Southern distinctness is that the region adopted a firmer stance of difference and particularity. Gray tells us that ultimately the Southern ethos was grounded, literally, in ‘an idealization of agriculture’.<sup>13</sup> This land-centred view of the South in distinction to the North is arguably one of the most central parts of Southern identity; from slavery onwards, the South was the soil.

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<sup>9</sup> Richard H. King, ‘Allegories of Imperialism: Globalizing Southern Studies’, *American Literary History*, 23, 1 (2010), 148–158 (p. 148).

<sup>10</sup> Jon Smith, *Finding Purple America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Hook, ‘Fugitives and Agrarians’ in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, ed. by Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 420–435 (p. 420).

<sup>13</sup> Gray, *Writing the South*, p. 39.

Though problematic, this narrative has taken firm hold in the region even until this day; I am not, however, re-asserting this ideology in my thesis.

In the nineteenth century, the South's marginal status only became more entrenched and regionalism became more definitive. Teresa Goddu explains that at this time, 'The South's oppositional image [...] served as the nation's safety valve: as the repository for everything the nation is *not*, the South purges contrary impulses' (original emphasis).<sup>14</sup> This contrasting image of the South filtered not only through society, but in the nation's literature and culture. Southern writers were understood to embody all of America's 'contrary impulses' in their literature, and thus the South was seen as marginal site onto which fears and anxieties could be projected. A writer like Edgar Allan Poe, for example, can serve as indicative of the way literature from the region was understood generally. Poe's work has often been remarked upon for its strangeness and otherness, partly because of the difficulty in 'placing' his writing in a definable location. For the North, and the American canon, 'the problem of Poe', Goddu tells us, 'can be solved either by defining him in oppositional terms – identifying him with slavery and the South – or by removing his history and regional identification entirely'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we can see how a certain literary difficulty – how to define and understand Poe – can be solved through regional placement, and marginalizing him. The oppositional strategy of containing Poe in the South is one national process of utilizing the region as a 'repository' for everything that is other and aberrant.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Civil War broke out and divided the American nation, thus cementing a regional identity of opposition tightly into place. The North and South became visibly oppositional in every sense, and this difference was definitively demarcated in politics, culture and society at large. Much Southern literature after the war – after defeat – retreated into its regional borders and mourned what was seen as a loss of identity. As slavery was abolished and Reconstruction dramatically altered the region, the (white) South's ideological stance was often what is termed the 'Lost Cause'. In lamenting the loss of the South's perceived character, Lost Cause ideology re-inscribed Southern distinctiveness and regionalism. Even while the South was being Re- and de-constructed, a certain idea of the region held strong.

This conceptualization had ramifications throughout the next century too, as in the Agrarian movement. This group of intellectuals are probably the most significant voices in

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<sup>14</sup> Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 76.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

defining and vocalizing Southern identity, thus important to outline, and ones that specifically build upon and exemplify the land-based identity introduced above. In the 1920s and 30s a cultural and intellectual period known as the Southern Renaissance bloomed. Central to this movement was a collection of writers and critics known as the Agrarians. *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), authored by 'Twelve Southerners', is a collection of essays that spoke to the group's Southern land-based ideologies. Though there was contradiction and difference among the twelve, their philosophy was always rooted in the Southern land. The region existed from the ground up; and principally, this was contrasted with the society of the North. Northern industrialization and capitalism were antithetical, in the Agrarians' view, to Southern values. 'They denounced', Eugene Genovese writes, '[capitalism] for alienating human beings from community life and, indeed, from their own nature'.<sup>16</sup> The Twelve Southerners state in their introduction that each of their essays supports the 'Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Agrarian depiction of the North was set up in stark contrast to the land-based community-oriented, 'slower' society of the South. The authors list 'manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love' as all 'suffering' from the forces of modernization and capitalism, exemplified by the Northern states.<sup>18</sup> In his essay, Andrew Nelson Lytle famously writes: 'A farm is not a place to grow wealthy; it is a place to grow corn' and later 'A stalk of cotton grows. It does not progress'.<sup>19</sup> Here Lytle illuminates the central creed of the Agrarian movement: growth (that which is natural) is Southern, progress (that which is unnatural) is Northern. *I'll Take My Stand* was intended then, Andrew Hook explains, 'to demonstrate that the Southern tradition, and the Southern way of life, based on its agricultural economy, somehow offered a desirable alternative to the modern, industry-based society that had come to characterize the rest of the United States'.<sup>20</sup> At the heart of this Agrarian ideology, therefore, is not only a staunch conservatism that is resistant to the forces of modernity, but also a Southern mythologizing that reified the region and its supposed grounding.

Though the Agrarians were the most visible and identifiable mouthpieces for one prevailing white ideology of the time, their work was part of a larger network of literature that is called the Southern Renaissance. Richard King's famous book on the movement, *A Southern*

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<sup>16</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievements and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Twelve Southerners, 'Introduction' in *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), pp. ix-xx (p. ix).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Nelson Lytle, 'The Hind Tit' in *I'll Take My Stand*, pp. 201-245 (p. 205 and p. 207).

<sup>20</sup> Hook, p. 430.

*Renaissance* (1980), suggests that the writers of this period were ultimately ‘engaged in an attempt to come to terms not only with the inherited values of the Southern tradition but also with a certain way of perceiving and dealing with the past’.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in the early twentieth century, Southern thinkers were conscious of the historical tradition and narrative of the South. It was Allen Tate, one of the central voices in this period, who ‘fresh from the Agrarian enterprise [...] had the greatest influence in defining the literary period and giving it an identity’: in his spelling, the ‘renascence’.<sup>22</sup> Indirectly quoting T. S. Eliot, Tate argues that after the First World War, the South ‘re-entered the world’ while simultaneously giving a ‘backward glance’; this glance ‘gave us the Southern renaissance, a literature conscious of the past in the present’.<sup>23</sup> Tate’s renaissance was born ideologically from the Agrarian movement and manifestos, rooted in the Southern land and the Southern past. Tate (and others in this wave), Richard Gray writes, shared ‘a deep distrust of modern times’ and had a ‘longing for a lost rural and traditional order and a usually unstated racial exclusiveness’.<sup>24</sup>

Related to this, we should note those writers included in the Renaissance are unanimously Caucasian men, even though there were many other important literary voices working at the time. Patricia Yaeger in particular has noted the Renaissance’s absences, as well as the solidification of this in later criticism. An example of this double-absence is Richard King’s book which omits female voices. This is because, Yaeger writes, ‘According to King, southern women did not, for the most part, write with the same “historical consciousness” that inspired male writers’;<sup>25</sup> in King’s words, ‘[women novelists] were not concerned primarily with the larger cultural, racial, and political themes’ that he sees as central to the Renaissance’s key narrative: the ‘Southern family romance’.<sup>26</sup> African American writers are absent from King’s overview too, because he suggests that for them, ‘the Southern family romance was hardly problematic. [...] Their great theme was the attempt (literally) to escape the white South which had historically oppressed their people’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O’Connor, Richard Wright or Zora Neale Hurston are excluded from King’s Southern canon;

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<sup>21</sup> Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Robert H. Brinkmeyer, ‘The Southern Literary Renaissance’ in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South* ed. by Gray and Robinson, pp. 148-165 (p. 149).

<sup>23</sup> Allen Tate, ‘The New Provincialism: With an Epilogue on the Southern Novel’, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 21, 2 (1945), 262-272 (p. 272).

<sup>24</sup> Richard Gray, *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2000), p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing 1930-1990* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>26</sup> King, *A Southern Renaissance*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the import of this cannot be overstated, for even while King's book necessarily explores key dynamics of Southern fiction from this period, it simultaneously excludes much of the complex intellectual and creative work from voices that were also interrogating and fleshing out the region and its identity.

There are many critical surveys that rectify the Renaissance's absences, installing black and marginalized writers to the centre of Southern identity. Farah Jasmine Griffin's "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" documents the prevalent African American narrative of migration that she sees as dominating black fiction from the twentieth century. This narrative form charts movement from the South, usually after a pivotal (traumatic) event, to the North, and investigates the new urban landscape. Much like slave narratives of the nineteenth century, the migration narrative shares 'notions of ascent from the South into a "freer" North', Griffin argues.<sup>28</sup> This simplistic binary, however, is troubled by Griffin as she understands that the South, for many black writers using this narrative mode, is more complex than simply a place of racist violence to escape. The South, she writes, is often 'a place that housed the values and memories that sustained black people': it is a 'home of the ancestor, the place where community and history are valued over Northern individualism'.<sup>29</sup> Here Griffin touches upon something important that is valuable for this survey. In suggesting that the North-South divide – and the ideological and cultural associations of both – is not simply the product of a conservative Agrarian mythology, but prevalent in other areas of Southern society, Griffin requires us to understand the weight of specific regional narratives and self-conceptions. If the South as place – as distinct, historically-informed, community-based – cannot be collapsed into whiteness (these are not solely white Southern ideas), to talk of the South in regionalist terms is not to assert one racially-blind monolith. To talk of the South in this way is to understand a pervasive and complex tangle of cultural roots that are fundamental to the region and its identity throughout history.

In outlining this historical narrative of the South, I acknowledge some long-standing notions that have become cemented in the region's identity. I am not, however, attempting to inscribe this South here. Postsouthern critical theory is doing much, as we will see, to unravel these supposedly static ideas of the traditional South. This thesis argues for a regionalism that engages in a dialogue with the South's past and sometimes re-tells stories that are inflected by the ideas outlined above. While some postsouthern writing suggests that it engages with these notions too, my argument would be that some particular postsouthern analyses (inflected by

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<sup>28</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" *The African-American Migration Narrative* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

radial deterritorialization and postmodernism) do not always account enough for the deep regional ties and roots of the contemporary South. The twenty-first-century South, I posit, is *not* an Agrarian one like that above; while it most certainly is historically-informed, it is not race-amnesiac, industry-phobic or land-idealistic as the above ideologies are. The South is more complex than this and always has been. What my thesis intends is to muddy postsouthern waters (in their most radical form) from completely dissolving the region as a distinct geographical and cultural identity (which it has the capacity to do).

Turning now to two disparate texts, the thesis I am proposing can be stated in other terms. Erskine Caldwell's first essay in the photo-text (with Margaret Bourke-White) *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1936) is full of his characteristically wry prose. 'The South', he begins, 'has always been shoved around like a country cousin', immediately signalling the cultural awareness of the South's marginal status.<sup>30</sup> Further on, he creates a litany of names for the region that signal the perspicuity of difference and particularity in the creation of Southern identity: 'It is the Southern Extremity of America, the Empire of the Sun, the Cotton States; it is the Deep South, Down South; it is The South'.<sup>31</sup> While there is much to comment on in terms of Caldwell's stance regarding the South – the book as a whole is a complex and ambiguous work – I want to take from this list of names the weight and persistence of 'The South' as a culturally organizing principle and a geographical location. *You Have Seen Their Faces* was published in 1936 and thus could be argued to fairly inadequately account for Southern identity today; in fact, there are a number of ways in which this narration of the South is akin to the problematic ones outlined above. However, I want to twin Caldwell's inventory with a contemporary writer from the region. In the 2007 edition of *New Stories from the South*, George Singleton published the story 'Which Rocks We Choose'. In the afterword, Singleton explains the origins of the tale, situating his contemporary South at a particular cultural juncture. He writes that because 'enough has been written about the Old South', '[he] needed to write about a New New South'.<sup>32</sup> Demarcating a difference from the 'New South' of the twentieth century, Singleton's idea of a 'New New South' relies upon an understanding of historical continuity in addition to the movement to futurity. Historical and contemporary Souths align here. He continues by describing his local town in South Carolina where

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<sup>30</sup> Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White, *You Have Seen Their Faces* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> George Singleton in *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best, 2007* ed. by Edward P. Jones and Kathy Pories (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2007), p. 296 and p. 297.

in the span of a few blocks, I can visit a Confederate museum (Old South), a New York Style Wigs (New South), and forty-seven Starbucks (New New South) [...Also] I got people who buy guns at the flea market (Old South, New South, New New South).<sup>33</sup>

Singleton's awareness of his Southern locale is thus one permeated by Southern history and the places that Southern identity has been. Though very much in the twenty-first century, Greenville, South Carolina bears the traces of history – the 'Old South' – as much as it lives in the contemporary world of the 'New New'. His sense of these identity layers 'emanate[s] from the daily time-travels' he experiences.<sup>34</sup> This time travel cannot but remind us of Faulkner's oft-cited 'The past isn't dead. It's not even past' which will quietly frame this introduction and the chapters to follow.<sup>35</sup>

In light of Singleton's acknowledgment of a 'new new' South, rather than the current terminology of a postsouth, my thesis can be further outlined. While the postsouthern move points out a very real Southern experience today, we will fail as Southernists if we do not pay attention to the very particular and located *places* of Southern culture.<sup>36</sup> The time travel of George Singleton could be read as a way of opening out our notion of the South into postsouthern territory, but we can equally move in the opposite direction and pinpoint clearer regionalist conceptions of the South today. To get to this, the scope of transnationalism requires outlining because this theoretical mode has a causal effect when talking about regionalism. As I will show, the national and the regional are intimately linked, and thus to talk of transnationalizing the nation is to also put into question internal identities such as the region. Katherine Henninger succinctly writes, 'As the South becomes increasingly "Americanized" – and America becomes transnationalized', Southern discourses will be put into question.<sup>37</sup> Only through understanding the transnational turn so widespread in literary studies today – particularly American – can we see the move to the postsouthern clearly and in context. I signal here again that I am not rejecting the transnational and postsouthern moves entirely; I would not suggest that these modes of analysis are not necessary or pertinent today. I am, however,

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<sup>33</sup> Singleton, p. 297.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Vintage Classics, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> It may be useful to note here something about Southern geography. While I could elucidate and map those states that I consider to constitute the South – that is, upholding the Mason-Dixon line, but acknowledging that parts of Texas are surely not the South (they are south-west) and that West Virginia is (specifically an Appalachian South) – it is nevertheless problematic to do so. My resistance of the postsouthern does not mean that I am denying postmodern geographies, such as the delimiting effects of mapping borders. Where Texas and Mexico border, for example, necessarily has involved negotiation and struggle historically. Thus to limit my South to a precise geography is only to weaken my thesis. In essence, the South I look at is one necessarily rooted, but rooted in land(scape), history, memory, culture, society and community, not solely a map.

<sup>37</sup> Katherine Henninger, *Ordering the Façade: Photography and Contemporary Southern Women's Writing* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 11.

problematizing and complimenting the tendencies of this movement which might overlook lingering regionalism and local difference in favour of globalism, or post-regionalism: these claims will be, of course, fleshed out as the review of the field is outlined below. In order to make these connections I turn to Neil Campbell's study of the American West which usefully provides a way to bridge the gap between the regional and national; he ties the national narrative to a regional one, thus illustrating the complex relationship and interplay between the two.

## MAPPING REGIONALISM

Neil Campbell's *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (2008) will function here as a work that connects transnational theory to ideas of regionality. Campbell's West is a thoroughly deterritorialized one that exists not as a singular entity, but in multiple and plural senses. The West has long been figured in romantic and mythic ways in the American imagination, and one of Campbell's aims is to deconstruct these impulses to abstraction, and reconfigure the region as a pluralized – often fictionalized – location, forever in flux.

Campbell's analysis of the West hinges on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome that is proposed in their study *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). Identifying their ideas through the figure of the rhizome (a model of thought that is open, interconnected and always tangential), Deleuze and Guattari pose the idea that unlike a tree's roots, which cement the tree in one position burrowing deeper and deeper, the rhizome moves outwards. '[A]ny point of a rhizome', they write, 'can be connected to anything other, and must be'.<sup>38</sup> This connectivity, without beginning or end, is linked to the model of a geographical plateau which is 'always in the middle'; consequently, for them, 'a rhizome is made of plateaus'.<sup>39</sup> Deleuze and Guattari thus suggest that as a system of thought, the rhizome is the most exemplary as it embodies the numerous and complex directions in which cultural and social forces flow. They add another image to their list – the fold – which is that (im)precise location where things overlap, connect and mix. Like the rhizome, Campbell explains, the fold reaches to 'a world full of curves and textures, folding and unfolding so that the inside and the outside become inseparable and interconnected into an infinity of possibilities'.<sup>40</sup> Their interrelated images of thought (rhizomes, plateaus, folds) knit together to form various ways of looking at the world

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<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Neil Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West: Representing the American West in a Transnational, Global, Media Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), p. 36.

through a particularly postmodern lens of multiplicity and nonlinearity. Deleuze and Guattari abstractly sum up their notion by indicating that we must ‘Always follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong and relay the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and tortuous of lines of  $n$  dimensions and broken directions’.<sup>41</sup> The ramifications of this trope within national and transnational theory are consequently numerous.

To return to Campbell, although he acknowledges the importance of reading regions for their fixity, ‘the search back to find origins and essences is only one approach in a complex space of migratory, hybrid cultures that extends both within and without the region’.<sup>42</sup> Therefore he prioritizes, following *A Thousand Plateaus*, seeing the West (and regions generally) through a rhizomatic lens of thought that charts multitudes. Furthermore, he writes that we must see the West as being ‘always already transnational’, mobile and fluid from the beginning, ‘a traveling concept whose meanings move between cultures, crossing, bridging, and intruding’.<sup>43</sup> Thus, though the West has existed in the popular imagination as a particular region of the United States, replete with iconic mythology, Campbell argues that it has always been a site of multiplicity: in movement, culture, ideology, location. For example, the concept of Manifest Destiny has long been integral to the ideological dimensions of the West. John O’Sullivan’s ‘Annexation’ (1845) argues for the integration of Texas into the Union so that the burgeoning American population might ‘overspread the continent allotted by Providence’.<sup>44</sup> Annexing Texas, O’Sullivan signals, installs the acquisition of territory (providentially-written) into American identity. The West solidified in the American mind as a figure for freedom, possibility and boundlessness through both literal and imaginative westward expansion. Manifest Destiny was one intellectualization of this westward progression, but the ideas at the heart of this became – and still are – entrenched in the region’s identity and cultural perception.

The national and the regional are thus shown in some ways to be intertwined. The relation between the two serves to show us how one depends on the other. Connecting this to the South, Richard Gray’s theorizing of the nation’s dependence on the region as a marginal site for definition comes into sight here. Gray writes that long has the regional inherently defined the national: ‘The “central” or “mainstream” culture defines and maintains its centrality through a measured series of contrasts and comparisons with its “regional” counterpart’.<sup>45</sup> In the case of the West, this is slightly different as Campbell tells us that America embodied its founding

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<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> John O’Sullivan, ‘Annexation’, *The United States Democratic Review*, 17, 85 (1845), 5-10 (p. 5).

<sup>45</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, p. 2.

expansionist ideologies in the region in an exemplary way. Other regions, like the South, operate in the way Gray suggests; as he writes, ‘The South *is* what the North *is not*, just as the North *is* what the South *is not*’ (original emphases).<sup>46</sup> In both cases, the regional and national are forever linked.<sup>47</sup> Thus, thinking about trans- or post-regionality – as Campbell does – is caught up in the narrative of the transnational and transcultural: the movement I outline below. Returning to Campbell’s thesis though will flesh out his definition of a post-West further, which is useful in grounding my postsouthern survey.

Following his discussion of Deleuze and Guattari, Campbell employs theories of transnationalism and deterritorialization to problematize the notion of the West. Deterritorialization unravels the very fabric of regionality, collapsing its borders and reconfiguring any sense of place or locale. Thus, any singular notion of a region will be disrupted. Following postcolonial theorists such as Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhaba, Campbell relies on the idea of a ‘third space’ or ‘contact zone’ to imagine regions, never solidly in situ, but always as a borderland or middle-ground. The work of theorist Gloria Anzaldúa can be brought in here as her most important book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is concerned with life on the border of Mexico and America. Borders, for Anzaldúa are places set up to delimit and define: ‘to distinguish *us* from *them*’ (original emphases).<sup>48</sup> She continues, however, by discussing how borders are always in a transitory state and that they always function pluralistically. Borders, thought to contain and define (which they do to some extent), are areas of movement, blurring, and ambiguity; this is central to Campbell’s thesis too. Judith Butler usefully consolidates this in writing that borders are not only the most ‘populated site[s]’ of a country, but could be seen as ‘the very definition of the nation’.<sup>49</sup>

Overall, this newly modified way of thinking about regionality – transnational, deterritorial, multiple, always a borderland or ‘third space’ – ‘confronts the essentialist tendencies of a rooted sense of place’, disturbing notions of a defined region.<sup>50</sup> It also disturbs the defined social and ideological conceptions of place: disputing the prevalent models of thought themselves that can so often become axiomatic. We must pay attention to the limiting constraints in thinking about regionalism, Campbell says, and chart how a region like the West (or South) is uncontainable. To return to Deleuze and Guattari: in *A Thousand Plateaus*, they create a litany

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 500.

<sup>47</sup> See also: Leigh Anne Duck, *The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2009) and John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America* (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1974).

<sup>48</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), p. 25.

<sup>49</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 49.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell, p. 70.

of postmodern demands – ‘Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! [...] Don’t be one or multiple, be multiplicities’.<sup>51</sup> For many of the Southern texts I examine, this list has importance, but time and again, as I will show, the texts fail to listen, burrowing into, and finding the roots in, Southern soil and Southern memory nonetheless to rethink and remember what it means to live in the American South in the twenty-first century.

The transnational theory below follows Deleuze and Guattari to these rhizomatic ends. To fully understand the transnational and transregional, I offer a brief overview of this field beginning with its most recent theoretical ignition in the wake of 9/11. Again, I am not negating this move, but suggesting the ways in which this has affected the postsouthern turn, which in some senses does not always acknowledge the lingering regionalism that is noticeable in Southern culture today which I want to foreground. This is not to replace or reject the transnational, transregional or postsouthern, but to add to their analyses with more localized readings.

## **GLOBAL MATTERS: THE TRANSNATIONAL TURN**

The terms ‘postnational’, and (more often) ‘transnational’ are widely used in current critical theory of American Studies. This broadening field has gained much prominence and weight in the past ten or so years, reignited in part by the terrorist attacks on September 11. America’s borders were instantly revealed to be less secure than imagined, and a dialogic relationship with the outside world was revealed. America’s links with the rest of the globe were always there, but this singular event helped to re-establish the notion that America was not, and has never been, a nation separate and distinct from the world around it. This section will outline the broad trends of global geography and deterritorialization, so as to ground – in all senses – the postsouthern and its concerns with unravelling the idea of ‘place’.

I begin with a scholar of Southern studies, Richard Gray. In his book *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011), Gray’s thesis is that, after the September 11 attacks, ‘Americans [found] themselves living in an interstitial space, a locus of interaction between contending national and cultural constituencies’, and that it is this middle ground that needs to be represented and explored in contemporary literature.<sup>52</sup> His analysis, however, takes in much American fiction written after the attacks which is in his view limited by its parochialism. In an earlier essay, ‘Open Doors, Closed Minds’, Gray argues that in many of these novels, the crisis

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<sup>51</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 18.

of 9/11 has become ‘in every sense of the word, domesticated’.<sup>53</sup> For Gray, novels such as Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* centralize American place, experience and consciousness in the aftermath of the attacks, whilst seemingly ignoring the cultural and political implications that arose from the events. Gray writes that, particularly in light of the terrorist attacks, in which America ‘Fac[ed] the other, in all its difference and danger’, American writers should be concerning themselves with the interconnections of cultures and nations.<sup>54</sup>

The literature Gray seeks is, again to borrow Homi Bhaba’s term, interested in the ‘third space’ of culture: that middle-ground of mixity and plurality. Gray suggests that recent novels such as *Netherland* by Joseph O’Neill, or *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid are perfect examples of the deterritorializing, culturally mixed fiction he thinks is necessary in the aftermath of 9/11. Significantly, these texts for him share ‘a sense of *convergence*, and a belief in the hybrid as the only space in which the location of cultures, and the bearing witness to trauma, can properly occur’ (original emphasis).<sup>55</sup> In some ways, therefore, the contemporary turn in transnational studies is intimately connected to the events of 9/11. At least, it is the illumination of a global network by the attacks that has fostered a particularly new commitment to the transcultural, transnational space. Gray also posits that modern Southern writing that has its origins in transnationality is exemplary of his thesis. I will comment on this below, however, when returning to Gray’s thesis in closer connection to regionalism.

In ‘A Failure of the Imagination’ Michael Rothberg responds to Gray’s earlier essay, ‘Open Doors, Closed Minds’. Rothberg agrees with Gray’s call for literature of interconnected cultures, but he takes the argument further, claiming that ‘we need a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship’.<sup>56</sup> Where Gray praises immigrant writing that disrupts notions of the nation state, Rothberg fears this may risk re-domestication because the focus of literary studies will continue to be rooted in the local that looks outwards, rather than the opposite. He is more interested in ‘an intellectually and politically mature literature’ that seeks ‘riskier “foreign” encounters’ rather than remaining focused on the nation.<sup>57</sup> Critically, he writes that we should ‘pivot away from the homeland and seek out a centrifugal literature of extraterritoriality’.<sup>58</sup> American literary studies must not only, in this view, analyze writing that not only explores the tensions between inside and outside, but that radically alters the

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Gray, ‘Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis’, *American Literary History*, 21, 1 (2009), 128-151 (p. 134).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>55</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Rothberg, ‘A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray’, *American Literary History*, 21, 1 (2009), 152-158 (p. 153).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

frameworks of the idea of the nation. Extraterritoriality is the looking in from without, and looking out from within, whilst simultaneously problematizing the very coordinates of what we mean by ‘out’ and ‘in’.

Focusing on the importance of 9/11 in this critical field should be qualified a little, as many theorists of the transnational would argue that the global realm has been visible for some time. Paul Jay suggests in *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010) that transnational forces have been in operation since (if not before) the beginning of the colonial projects by Europe in Asia, Africa, Australasia and the Americas. Closer to the present, however, Jay suggests that the turn in literary studies to the transnational gained cultural traction in the 1960s. He writes that ‘The transnationalizing of literary studies has to be understood as the effect of a more complicated set of intersecting forces [...] operating both within and outside the academy’, such as progressive social movements (Civil Rights, women’s and gay rights, anti-Vietnam War protest) and theoretical notions of ‘difference’ (deconstruction, postcolonialism, feminism, race studies).<sup>59</sup> Thus, Jay argues against the idea that global readings of literature belong to a new age of international connections illuminated and epitomized by the events of September 11 and their aftermath. He is interested in the ‘fluid, historically innovative, and heterogeneous locations in which to situate literary and cultural analysis’, such as within the interconnecting forces of international literary production and circulation that date back to the colonial period, but are perfectly identifiable in contemporary literature.<sup>60</sup> One of Jay’s caveats is that he is ‘not insisting that we abandon older national models, but that they be supplemented, complicated, and challenged by newer approaches’ (original emphasis).<sup>61</sup> While the transnational writing below sometimes does this, my thesis intervenes here to reiterate the necessity of not ‘abandoning’ nationalisms and, I would add, regionalisms.

A clear example of this theory is Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s presidential address to the American Studies Association conference in 2004. Fishkin’s address suggests many of the paths that transnational studies can take, and the spaces that these routes open up. The key of the transnational turn within American studies, she says, is ‘not exporting and championing an arrogant, pro-American nationalism but understanding the multiple meanings of America and American culture in all their complexity’.<sup>62</sup> What Fishkin identifies here is central to much

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> Shelley Fisher Fishkin, ‘Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies – Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004’, *American Quarterly*, 57, 1 (2005), 17–57 (p. 20).

transnational criticism: there is a movement away from ‘inward-looking’, nationalist imaginings of the American nation, towards a more pluralistic understanding of it. The work that needs to be done in this field of study, she continues, requires seeing the interpenetrating forces inside and out of the nation. Fishkin’s noting of this is important for transnational studies, as it dislocates America from a central position within American studies.

Fishkin continues by setting out some of the main paths that transnational study will open. Included in her exhaustive list are these directions: we will focus on the ‘endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders’; we will ‘pay more attention to figures who have been marginalized precisely because they crossed so many borders that they are hard to categorize’; and ‘interrogate the privileged position that U.S.-based scholars and publications enjoy in the field of American studies’.<sup>63</sup> Each of these directions is connected by its interest in borderlands, marginalization, and anti-essentialist leanings. ‘In the twenty-first century’, she concludes, ‘American studies is increasingly doing justice to the transnational crossroads that we are and, indeed, that we always have been at’.<sup>64</sup>

*Hemispheric American Studies* (2008), a collection edited by Caroline Levander and Robert Levine, contains a number of essays that continue this trend. ‘Hemispheric’ studies look outwards towards larger global influences and forces within American literature. In their introduction ‘Essays Beyond the Nation’, Levander and Levine discuss looking ‘beyond’ the ‘exceptionalist’ imagining of America to the wider hemispheres. Exceptionalism is a set of ideas that, from John Winthrop’s invocation of the nation as the ‘City upon a Hill’ onwards, seemed to set America apart from the rest of the world. Central to this has been a moral exceptionalism that has enabled America to carry out any number of actions antithetical to the very exceptionalism that legitimated the actions in the first instance. On this, Donald Pease discusses the years of the Cold War particularly, but what is pertinent to take from his discussion in *The New American Exceptionalism* (2009) is the idea that exceptionalism has been changeable over time and has been used by governmental policymakers ‘to address the change in geopolitical circumstances’: that is, using the myth often to legitimate certain unjustified or immoral actions.<sup>65</sup> The exceptionalist discourses of America have long been used to various political ends. What Levander and Levine suggest in their introduction is that such ‘self-imaginings’ should be

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 24, 30, 36.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 9.

recognized as such – imagined – not the ‘realization of an original essence’ that exceptionalist narratives imply.<sup>66</sup>

As Deborah Madsen, in her book *American Exceptionalism* (1998) explains, these narratives have ‘always offered a mythological refuge from the chaos of history and the uncertainty of life’, thus allowing the nation to ignore its reality by retreating into imaginative incarnations of itself.<sup>67</sup> This self-construction, Levander and Levine claim, is an ‘historical configuration designed to include certain groups and exclude others’, for example minorities and races within the nation itself (such as African Americans during slavery or the massacres of Native Americans).<sup>68</sup> Once this darker underside of (moral) exceptionalism is acknowledged, a greater understanding of the nation can be garnered. Paula Moya and Ramón Saldívar have also recognized the excluding forces of the exceptionalist myth embodied in the ‘limited’ scope of American Studies. The field of study, they claim, ‘has been complicit [...] in a historical forgetting – even erasure – of the violence, conflict, and discord that lies at the very heart of the making of the US nation state’.<sup>69</sup> If American Studies is to become ‘hemispheric’, then, it must first remedy its own historical self-creations within and without the academy.

Susan Gilman’s afterword to the collection is equally illuminating of this field. She contends that hemispheric study should not merely be something that maps outward – to different countries and nations – but maps backward and forward through time. The ‘hemispheric’, she writes, ‘should perhaps be defined [...] as a spatiotemporal unit’, connecting not only through place but time.<sup>70</sup> Literary studies needs, for Gilman, to ‘recognize the “palimpsestous” quality of the present, where multiple times exist simultaneously [...] or coexist as uneven temporalities’.<sup>71</sup> This is not merely in terms of American history living in the present, but other countries’ pasts and presents colliding and overlapping with it. Two good examples of this are the works of Paul Giles and Anna Brickhouse.

Paul Giles’ book, *Virtual Americas: Transnational Fictions and the Transatlantic Imaginary* (2002), enacts this hemispheric mode, investigating the intersections between American literature and its European counterpart. Giles formulates the idea of a ‘transatlantic imaginary’ – discussed elsewhere in his writing on the slave trade and more – which is the site of cultural,

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<sup>66</sup> Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine, ‘Introduction: Essays Beyond the Nation’, in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. by Caroline F. Levander and Robert S. Levine (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2008), pp. 1-17 (p. 5).

<sup>67</sup> Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 166.

<sup>68</sup> Levander and Levine, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> Paula M. L. Moya and Ramón Saldívar, ‘Fictions of the Trans-American Imaginary’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49, 1 (2003), 1-18 (p. 7).

<sup>70</sup> Susan Gillman, ‘Afterword: The Times of Hemispheric Studies’, in *Hemispheric American Studies*, ed. by Levander and Levine, pp. 328-336 (p. 330).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

literary and ideological exchange. American literature is, in this model, interconnected with that of Europe, and logically, anywhere outside of its borders. Written back and forth across the Atlantic, literature is porous and complex. Literature, furthermore, in Giles' book, is integral to the shaping of the nation itself. Related to Giles' book, but with a wider global reach, is Anna Brickhouse's study of nineteenth-century American literature and its transnational connections, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (2004). Her thesis begins with the proposition that the era of American letters that we traditionally understand as 'nationalist, monolingual, and geographically centered in the northeast' actually rested 'on a considerable network of transnational literary practices and affiliations that shaped' the era's canonical texts.<sup>72</sup> Thus, writers such as Whitman, Emerson, Beecher Stowe and others created texts that ostensibly seemed to comment only on the national, but were actually contingent on a number of international forces and places. The nation, Brickhouse writes, 'proves uneasily tied to the larger hemisphere even in its most exceptionalist incarnations', thus offering a way to read 'classic' American literature through a complex but revelatory transnational lens.<sup>73</sup>

One example of her theoretical strategy has a Southern literary text at its heart and so will be interesting here. Brickhouse reads the play *Ogé, ou, Le préjugé de couleur* by Haitian dramatist Pierre Faubert as intimately connected to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Charting the connections between the two texts, Brickhouse attempts to unearth the network of connections between Stowe's novel published in 1851 and Faubert's play that emerged only four years later in response to it. Brickhouse explains that Faubert 'recasts the domestic racial drama of what he calls *L'Oncle Tom* in a dramatic text that constitutes what [she] suggest[s] is perhaps the earliest literary response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel in the francophone Americas'.<sup>74</sup> The dialogue created by this Haitian re-writing and re-conceptualizing of Stowe's novel is merely one example of 'revisionist transamericanism' of the nineteenth century that lays bare the various global connections of literature ignited in the far from self-contained American nation.<sup>75</sup> One possible limitation of this mode of analysis (at least in this example) is that Brickhouse seems to chart a one-way dialogue: of American ideas and literatures exported to other countries. The American novel is shown to have an effect elsewhere; even in this transnational mode, it seems as though the American nation is difficult to uninstall from the centre of analysis.

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<sup>72</sup> Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth-Century Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

John Carlos Rowe's edited collection *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (2000) contains a number of essays that also exemplifies this work of transnational connections. Rowe's own essay suggests that the most important aspect of transnational (or, in his terminology, post-national) study 'may well offer us our best chance of learning from, rather than repeating, the past'.<sup>76</sup> Taking the lessons of the past – cultural and ideological introspection and essentialism – and moving forward is central to Rowe's understanding of the new 'turn'. An issue raised by the introduction to *Post-Nationalist American Studies* by Barbara Brinson Curiel and others stems from the use of the term 'post-national', as opposed to transnational. Within the name post-national (as in post-colonial), there is an implicit 'developmental trajectory' and a 'sense of belatedness' that suggests 'the time of the nation-state had passed'.<sup>77</sup> Problematic here, then, is a use of terminology; something we have seen above in the work of Ania Loomba. In this way, the editors of *Post-Nationalist American Studies* suggest that though the term transnational denotes a 'beyond' of the nation, there is still a need for a necessary 'critique of the limits and exclusions of nationalism without forgetting the differences between nationalisms or throwing all nationalisms into the trashcan of history'.<sup>78</sup> This small admonition is important to my thesis. The authors explain that it is 'important to distinguish between nationalisms which are aligned with the nation-state and those which challenge "official" nationalism'; for example, 'black and Chicano nationalisms' (whatever their limitations) 'are not identical with or reducible to U.S. nationalism'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, it is important to be careful when dismissing or attempting to traverse nationalism, as though it were a solid and unchangeable thing. America therefore has any number of nationalisms and we must be wary, in this era of the transnational, not to conflate or discard them too readily: each has its own specific value and theoretical worth. This is particularly the case, I argue, when such nationalisms are recurrent and historically important even today. The force of nationalism's longevity is a primary reason (additional to those above) for warning against the exclusion of it altogether. Far from denying the need for transnational study, or even the multiplicities visible in America today, we cannot simply 'throw into the trashcan' all notions of the national, or the regional. We need studies that investigate both sides of the compound: the 'post' or 'trans' and the national (or regional) itself. While not displacing the former, my thesis ultimately expounds the latter.

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<sup>76</sup> John Carlos Rowe, 'Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies', in *Post-Nationalist American Studies* ed. by John Carlos Rowe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 23–37 (p. 34).

<sup>77</sup> Barbara Brinson Curiel et al, 'Introduction', in *Post-Nationalist American Studies* ed. by Rowe, pp. 1–21 (p. 1).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

This brings us to Southern criticism, particularly what is called ‘new southern studies’ and the postsouthern mode that I am responding to. It must be repeated that the transnational mode is not identical to the postsouthern, or new southern studies (which, in turn, are not identical), but rather these discourses are embroiled in one another and emerge from similar intellectual and critical standpoints. Their trajectories, as fields of study, are closely aligned, but should not be collapsed into a singular concept. Here I outline its broad senses if only to suggest the field that I am writing into, and largely paralleled with, in addition to the more particular strands of theory with which I wish to quarrel. Beginning with Robert Brinkmeyer who continues to connect the regional and the national, I then move on to look at more global readings of the South, then move closer to one of the South’s particular neighbours, the Caribbean, before outlining some key examples of postsouthern criticism.

### **‘THE SOUTH’ AND ‘NEW SOUTHERN STUDIES’**

The first example of Southern criticism I look to is Robert Brinkmeyer’s *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West* (2000), because it epitomizes Campbell’s trans-regional model above and specifically engages with both the South and the American West. In this book, Brinkmeyer reads contemporary Southern fiction that is set in, or is concerned with, the American West. In this fiction, Southern writers blur regional boundaries and demythologize both the South and the West; following Campbell’s argument above, they are deterritorialized. Brinkmeyer claims that regional identification ‘seems willed and self-conscious’ and that in the move westwards by Southern writers like Cormac McCarthy and Barbara Kingsolver, they transform themselves and their idea of the South.<sup>80</sup> ‘In writing Westerns’, Brinkmeyer notes, ‘Southern authors are not seeking refuge from the problems of post-modern (and Southern) life but are instead seeking vantage points for exploring those problems’.<sup>81</sup> Thus, in writing about the West, Southerners can interpret, analyze, question and unpick the very notion of what it means to be Southern or Western.

Brinkmeyer furthermore claims that in moving West, and sometimes moving back South, these writers become ‘renewed Southerners, free and unbound Southerners, Southerners remade through their imaginative encounters with the West’.<sup>82</sup> The mythic quality of the West is in part responsible for this renewal and transformation, and enables the Southern writers a

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<sup>80</sup> Robert H. Brinkmeyer, *Remapping Southern Literature: Contemporary Southern Writers and the West* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2000), p. 25.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.

new perspective on their identity and region. Such journeys westwards, I would suggest, do not automatically unearth these writers from their 'place' in the South and their regional ties. Rather than simply allowing them to look at the South 'from afar', Southern writers moving Westwards are shifting their literary focus, but not abandoning or complicating their regional roots. As I will argue in relation to Cormac McCarthy, for example, in writing 'mobile' fiction, ranging across the American southwest, his Southernness is not as questionable as many claim. Roots run deep.

To understand the wider current scope of Southern studies, I turn to two influential books. Suzanne Jones and Sharon Monteith's edited collection, *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* (2002) points to multiple 'new places', charting the global, national, regional and individual connections from and to the South. In one essay, the South, Barbara Ladd claims, 'continues to mean something' but increasingly, 'it means something different, and in new places'.<sup>83</sup> This formulation is central to Jones and Monteith's collection (as well as new southern studies generally), as they seek to illuminate the multiplicity of meanings the South now has in the contemporary world. In the introduction, they argue that 'Southern place is becoming a much more fluid concept than such parochial axioms would imply', suggesting a gradual investigation of the long-standing interpretations of the South.<sup>84</sup> A comparable collection is Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn's *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004). An important aspect of their edited collection lies in its very title: not only are they interested in writing that 'looks away' out of the South, but that which displaces the South as a primary locus of interest.<sup>85</sup>

In their introduction to the collection, Smith and Cohn insist that 'we redirect the critical gaze of southern studies outward, away from the nativist navel-gazing' that has kept it behind the majority of American studies at present.<sup>86</sup> Current analyses of the South, they claim, often 'elide geographical, demographic, and economic differences within the region's borders', homogenizing the area into an indistinguishable South.<sup>87</sup> Smith and Cohn offer new ways to read the South that move away from essentializing conceptions of place and community toward

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<sup>83</sup> Barbara Ladd, 'Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places – Past, Present, and Future' in *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*, ed. by Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), pp. 44-57 (p. 57).

<sup>84</sup> Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith, 'Introduction', in *South to a New Place*, ed. by Jones and Monteith, pp. 1-19 (p. 3).

<sup>85</sup> For more, see: James L. Peacock, *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>86</sup> Jon Smith and Deborah N. Cohn, 'Introduction: Uncanny Hybridities', in *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* ed. by Jon Smith and Deborah N. Cohn (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 1-19 (p. 13).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

a more liminal and complex one. ‘We wish’, they write, ‘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*’.<sup>88</sup> This fiercely-charged statement encapsulates *Look Away!* as most essays within it resist nativist assertions of the South as a definable region, in both their content and methodologies.

Essays in the collection examine writers that have connections from the South to Latin America, Africa and Europe. Earl Fitz’s essay, ‘William Faulkner, James Agee, and Brazil: The American South in Latin American Literature’s “Other” Tradition’ will stand as representative of the entire collection and its means of analysis. Fitz’s essay explores the literary connections between two writers from the twentieth-century South with their contemporaries in Brazil. The essay does not make simplifying links, but reads the Southern and Brazilian writers together in ‘a matter of comparative literary history and rapprochement’ as well as cultural and historical connections.<sup>89</sup> Their histories are similar because both had a slave-trade and planter-economy and both had varying social problems including civil wars. He continues by reading a Brazilian novel, Euclides da Cunha’s *Rebellion in the Backlands* alongside James Agee’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, for their similar genre-mixing, social commentary and comparable focus on the landscape of a particular area which feeds into their respective regional identities. Far from making obtuse connections between the South and the larger hemisphere, Fitz delicately traces the parallels and interconnections in the writing of one American region with its geographical neighbours.

*Look Away!* also contains an essay by George Handley, however, which warns of the problems that this impulse to connect the South to other regions may bring. Historical parallels and linkages should not, he writes, ‘become justification for assuming that one can find facile homogeneity in the Americas’, warning that the ‘the leap from the local to the hemispheric will effectively result in an elision of important regional differences’.<sup>90</sup> Handley’s point is distinctly important with regards to my thesis: there is the possibility and the risk of turning the transnational project into a demand that ultimately forces the connections and similarities between literatures. Instead of opening up the field of Southern studies, this work can, Handley argues, be limiting and narrow in its understanding of place and localism.

Deborah Cohn’s own book, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish-American Fiction* (1999) could be argued to encapsulate the problem Handley identifies,

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> Earl Fitz, ‘William Faulkner, James Agee, and Brazil: The American South in Latin American Literature’s “Other” Tradition’, in *Look Away!* ed. by Smith and Cohn, pp. 419–445 (p. 427).

<sup>90</sup> George B. Handley, ‘A New World Poetics of Oblivion’, in *Look Away!* pp. 25–51 (p. 25).

but for my purposes I want only to set out her argument here. Parallels between fiction from the South and Latin (Spanish) America (the ‘two souths’) are explored by Cohn not only because of their neighbouring geography but more importantly their shared histories. Even with their admitted differences, Cohn argues that the two regions share a history ‘of dispossession, of socioeconomic hardship, of political and cultural conflict’.<sup>91</sup> The relationship between the South and Latin America maps a much larger region of the Americas affected by similar historical events, allowing their borders to overlap and mingle. Significantly, Cohn connects the two souths via the work of William Faulkner. Cohn argues that many Spanish American writers engage in an intertextual dialogue with Faulkner because in him they find a ‘model, a discursive mode, and a writer whom they could, at long last, call their own’ because of the ‘shared’ history that informs both regions.<sup>92</sup> It is in the connections and comparisons between souths, therefore, that Cohn illuminates and foregrounds through transnational scholarship. The South becomes dislocated from its ‘privileged’ position of study when it is contextualized by the countries around it.

Comparatively, *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South* (2007) is an edited collection by Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler and Cécile Accilien that continues the work of the above projects. By situating the American South alongside the region literally south of the States – that is, the Caribbean – the writers decentre and deconstruct the exceptionalist positioning of the U.S. South as *the* south. In her introduction to the collection, Jessica Adams writes that ‘a byproduct of southern exceptionalism has been to isolate the *idea* of the South from the region just below it on the map’; moreover, this move has ignored the ‘well-documented, as well as on-going’ connections between the regions (original emphasis).<sup>93</sup> One of the key strategies put forward by this collection and the scholarship it represents is to reorient writing on the South so that it includes the geographical areas around it. It then becomes merely one south of many. In this way, therefore, Adams claims that ‘we are not trying to assert that the South plus the Caribbean equals a larger region with a fairly homogenous or consistent culture’.<sup>94</sup> Thus, as with Deborah Cohn, the connections and links between the American South and the Caribbean open up a conversation that can further and make complex various cultural debates.

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<sup>91</sup> Deborah N. Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction* (Nashville, Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>93</sup> Jessica Adams, ‘Introduction: Circum-Caribbean Performance, Language, History’ in *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South* ed. by Jessica Adams, Michael P. Bibler and Cécile Accilien (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2007), pp. 1-21 (p. 3).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

I now move from this general re-orientation of the South to work inflected by the transnational that is concerned with specific history in the region. Harilaos Stecopoulos' *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialisms 1898-1976* (2008) charts Southern fiction's connections to the larger imperialist actions of the United States (thus asserting the intimate links between the national and regional). Stecopoulos looks to the American South's status as marginalized in relation to the rest of the United States. His argument begins with Reconstruction; the federal plans put into place during this time, focusing mainly on the emancipation of previously enslaved African Americans, in Stecopoulos' view, failed. Their failure, he writes, was 'a sign of the United States' tendency over the twentieth century to impose its compromised, if not hollow, promises of freedom and modernization on a host of subaltern peoples'.<sup>95</sup> Southerners were, in Stecopoulos' argument, the first of these subalterns to be affected by the dominant American project of imperialism. It must be acknowledged that Stecopoulos does not cast all Southerners in the same social position: he writes predominantly about African Americans and others in the lower classes, not the wealthy planter class. In looking at Southern fiction, Stecopoulos' book sees that the 'dominant fiction of nationhood necessarily relies on the exclusion of [...] subaltern groups in order to function'.<sup>96</sup> Through failed Reconstruction, the exclusion of African Americans in the South is similar, for Stecopoulos, to the exclusion of other oppressed nations and peoples elsewhere.

In his thesis, Stecopoulos discusses the American South as a distinctive region, however transnational his framework. Acknowledging that although this may employ a 'seemingly outmoded geographic fiction', seeing the South as a particular region can yield vastly important insights into 'economic, bureaucratic, and military mechanisms of power' in addition to an illumination of 'the relationships that obtain between center and periphery'.<sup>97</sup> He illuminates his argument with examples from fiction and theoretical writings from the region; the discussion of Carson McCullers is exemplary of his project. On *The Member at the Wedding*, Stecopoulos poses a reading in which the novel 'allegorizes the nation as a white southern girl eager "to light out" for the global territory'.<sup>98</sup> The central character is seen as embodying an American desire for global expansion as she thinks about leaving the small town that is stifling her. The Southern locale of the novel is furthermore explored for the racism it contains. Acts of white supremacist violence against the African American population is read by Stecopoulos as 'reflect[ing] and

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<sup>95</sup> Harilaos Stecopoulos, *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and the U.S. Imperialisms, 1898-1976* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

refract[ing] the terrors of global warfare'.<sup>99</sup> While not conflating acts of violence at home and abroad, Stecopoulos indicates the varying ways to read Southern fiction for its less-than-parochial focus. Stecopoulos thus takes Southern studies into new realms of global analysis, stressing the importance of the transnational worldview, while simultaneously rooting this in the local: something key to the thesis I am proposing.

In Stecopoulos, American imperialism connected writers in the South to those outside it. In Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), the global flows and negotiations of various cultural memories are read alongside one another. '[T]he borders of memory and identity', Rothberg tell us, 'are jagged', and thus prone to interaction and overlap in different times, places, and cultures.<sup>100</sup> Memory, for him, is ultimately 'multidirectional': that is, 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative'.<sup>101</sup> The complications of memory will be unravelled further below, and will undergird each of my chapters. One chapter looks to W. E. B. DuBois' work that responds to the legacy of slavery, and the discriminatory laws of Jim Crow in the South; this is linked by Rothberg to the philosophical conversations on the Holocaust. Memories of slavery are brought into relation to memories of death camps. Rothberg posits that 'DuBois can serve as a model of multidirectional memory because of the way his writings on Jews, race, and genocide hold together commonality and difference'; in other words, there is a particular sense in which DuBois' work on African American historical experience is in a kind of dialogue with the persecution of Jews.<sup>102</sup>

While he looks at specific essays in which DuBois comments directly on the Holocaust, Rothberg generally connects this Southern author to global networks of memory because 'the varieties of racial terror that have marked and marred the twentieth century [...] leave their tracks on all forms of knowledge'.<sup>103</sup> Rothberg strongly argues that his comparative research does not conflate – in this instance – forms of racial oppression, but merely connects them to reveal the conversations that the overlaps of memory can produce. He concludes the chapter by stating, 'the ruins of the ghetto become a common property, a public resource for reflection on the lines of race, culture, and religion that divide groups [...] even as they create new possibilities for alliance'.<sup>104</sup> In this way, then, Rothberg's multidirectional sense of memory opens a dialogue

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2009), p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

that the South can speak in. I contend that, while this is important and interesting scholarship on memory, we should also make sure also to attend to specific Southern memories that are still in cultural operation and that speak in a particularly Southern accent, even while they are connected the larger global arena. In other words, though the Southern memories in conversation with global ones need continued scholarship, we must not displace investigations into the particularity of memory: the local instantiations of it, in addition to the memories from elsewhere. While, certainly, Rothberg does not succumb to this problem – as Susannah Radstone says of the book, its complex and attuned analysis ‘brings memory’s “travels” back home’ – we must always be aware, that memory (as Radstone also says) is ‘located’: ‘specific to its site of production and practice’.<sup>105</sup> Opening out these fields to transnational forces, might there not be the danger of dislocating memory from its specific *locatedness*? These ideas are not in opposition, but there is a fear in working within the transnational (multidirectional) paradigm, certain localisms will be lost. Tracking this notion more closely to the South might offer some answers in this regard.

The books outlined above ultimately require us also to acknowledge that the South has, from its very beginning, been a site and region of transnationality. Similarly, founded upon the slave trade that connected Europe with Africa, the Central Americas and the American South, the region was in a sense formed through international forces and routes also. One work illustrates this point well: Martiniquean critic Edouard Glissant’s personal and ruminative book on William Faulkner: *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996). Beginning as travelogue, and continuing as a thematic account of Faulkner’s canon, the book is very much a product of Glissant’s Caribbean heritage and work on postcolonial theory. His thesis predominantly concerns Faulkner’s aesthetic and stylistic model of narrative that hides as much as it reveals. Connected to this discussion, however, Glissant’s Caribbean viewpoint allows him at times to theorize the global reaches and connections from and to Faulkner’s South. For example, he makes many comparisons between the South and other locales, much like we have seen in Cohn’s book above. He writes, ‘The configuration of the Plantation was the same everywhere, from northeastern Brazil to the Caribbean to the southern United States’.<sup>106</sup>

There is one pivotal moment in Glissant’s book that sits him firmly in the transnational mode though: he intones, ‘The only community today that is struck down in its right to

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<sup>105</sup> Susannah Radstone, ‘What Place is This? Transcultural Memory and the Locations of Memory Studies’, *Parallax*, 17, 4 (2011), 109–123 (p. 120 and p. 114).

<sup>106</sup> Edouard Glissant, *Faulkner, Mississippi*. trans. by Barbara Lewis and Thomas C. Spear (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), p. 10.

constitute a community is the world-community'.<sup>107</sup> Thus, arguing against the so-perceived limitations of the local (particularly the South as a distinct region) Glissant formulates that the global arena as the only real community that we need be attuned to. Alongside this transnational turn, however, Glissant is aware of the potency of the Southern region in both Faulkner's work and contemporary culture. For instance, he suggests that, while 'Creolization is alive and well there, as it is throughout the United States', it 'is difficult'.<sup>108</sup> I take him to mean that the complex processes of transnationality and postcoloniality are always at odds with, and juxtaposed next to, more localized instances of community identity. Indeed, his conclusion rests on the proposition that (in Faulkner and the South generally) there can be seen 'Inextricability: ethnic heritage and, at the same time, the multicultural'.<sup>109</sup> Thus, in Glissant we note the dual workings of the local and the global, forever in dialogue, often never resolved.<sup>110</sup> Pertinent to my thesis, then, is that no matter how globally we see the South, the local and regional continues to hold sway in its identity. It is to more 'local' analyses of the region that I turn to next.

This summary introduces various strands of Southern theory, particularly the postsouth. Not all of the critics I outline are strictly postsouthern, but it is necessary to map out this larger field to situate the varying strands of regional theory. Here I should also note that the postsouth has many meanings and many significances; the postsouthern takes on varying import for various critics, and these differences should be signalled. In this way, I need to succinctly state that I do not supplement all aspects of the postsouthern: instead, I question *particular* elements of this movement, and *certain* critics' intellectual strands. These differences will be borne out throughout the chapters.

Firstly, I return to Richard Gray. Gray is ultimately concerned with the plurality of the South and its constructed nature. In *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (1986), Gray formulates that Southern writers are involved in acts of creation: bringing the South into being, rather than representing or describing it. They are 'engaged not so much in writing about the South as in *writing the South* [...] reimagining and remaking their place in the act of seeing and describing it' (my emphasis).<sup>111</sup> Thus, for Gray, the South is not something that we have necessarily moved past but something that has always been fictive and imagined. Its fictional status, however, does not undermine its significance or weight as a regional identity. Indeed, as

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>110</sup> For more on 'global Faulkner', see: Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie, *Global Faulkner* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012) and Robert W. Hamblin and Ann J. Abadie, *Faulkner in the Twenty-First Century* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2003).

<sup>111</sup> Gray, *Writing the South*, p. xii.

I will similarly argue, the South is a region that has always been culturally entrenched: that is, a regional edifice that emerges in and through its cultural output. Gray argues that in recognizing the fictionality, we can examine the South as a site of multiple, conflicting, intersecting and differently imagined readings. ‘Readings of the South’, Gray writes, ‘are just that, readings – of its past, present, and possible futures, the plurality of its cultures’.<sup>112</sup> While we might associate Gray’s thesis with the postsouthern turn which unravels a monolithic version of the South, I can identify similarities in our arguments that connect Southern regionalism with a cultural grounding.

In his conclusion to *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (2000), Gray employs Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to anchor his argument. He theorizes that this novel is full of ‘porch-talk’: acts of conversation and dialogue (usually on the front porch) that are central to the characters’ self-construction and their location too. Hurston, Gray writes, reveals the ‘making of a Southern community – a South, not the South’ (original emphases).<sup>113</sup> His central proposition is that Hurston’s characters are engaged in acts of self-creation, as Hurston herself creates the South. This endless re-construction and refashioning is a key tenet of Gray’s South: always in flux, always personal, and never finished. His own conclusion to *Southern Aberrations* is perfect here: ‘The South is an imagined community made up of a multiplicity of communities, similarly imagined’.<sup>114</sup> Though I disagree with some of the points raised by Gray’s work, I will stress that this constructed notion of the South is highly useful when reading Southern fiction. By ‘imagined’, Gray means that the South is a product of the imagination: it is imaginative acts that bring it into being. While Gray follows this logic to ends of multiplicity – multiple imaginings create multiple Souths – he also suggests that these acts are ‘similarly imagined’. Gray is perhaps implicitly acknowledging Benedict Anderson’s influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983) here. In his study, though, Anderson suggests that nations and communities are ‘imagined’ not because they are ‘imaginary’ (that is, false) but because every member ‘of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them’ and thus the unity of a people is fostered in a speculative and projected – imagined – sense.<sup>115</sup> Filtering into Gray’s quote above, it is in the similarly-imagined nature of the region that its lingering cultural weight lies. Anderson’s study ultimately looks to the reasons how and why nations (and regions) ‘have come into historical

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<sup>112</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, p. 501.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 506.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511.

<sup>115</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edn (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 6.

being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy'.<sup>116</sup> Gray and I would posit continued imaginative re-writings for this legitimacy; I would qualify, moreover, that because these writings are continuously revisiting the same places, themes and images, the South lives on in a specific cultural way that postsouthern criticism does not acknowledge enough. As my subsequent chapters will show, the recycling of certain narratives and ideas – of slavery's entangled roots, of African-American precariousness, of the Southern gothic, of the South as home – continue to be written across races, places and cultural forms. It's worth signalling a preliminary qualification of the chosen topics of these chapters. A postsouthern critic could (and many do) question my focus on African-American bodies, on dead Southerners particularly, and the general focus on trauma as the key locus of Southern memory and identity. But, as the chapters will reveal, it is not just the dark past of the South which might provide the "real" of the region; rather, it is the long legacy of slavery and racial violence, especially for black Southerners, that constitutes such a deep and pervasive fabric of the region. Because it has so shaped the area and its cultural and social shape, these topics still require, I think, sustained reflection and critical attention. Especially, perhaps, in the face of postsouthern theory's attempts to uninstall recycled tropes and images (like the black body) from the study of Southern culture, we might be able to continue working with these traumatized bodies and black corporeality (in life and death) to see what they can still reveal to us. 'In the aftermath of slavery', Jessica Adams writes, 'black bodies remained extremely vulnerable; when living black bodies ceased to be valuable property, dead black bodies became valuable property'.<sup>117</sup> This long history of black and white corporeality needs continued scholarship, I think, even if this runs the risk of becoming a recycled trope of 'old Southern studies'. Rather, I argue that in identifying and attentively tracing the memories that circulate around bodies and their landscapes, much about Southern regionalism can be excavated.

Martyn Bone pushes the postsouthern reading further than Gray, but is nonetheless still concerned with the long-standing narrative of Southern 'place' as a defining concept of the region; one of the 'similarly imagined' stories pinpointed above. Bone's *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005) examines, as the title reveals, the contingent, constructed nature of Southern place. He explains that although he wants the "postsouthern" to signify a radical *break* with our familiar ideas of "the South", the etymological retention of "southern"

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p.87.

can also point up historical-geographical continuities' (original emphasis).<sup>118</sup> In the prefix, 'post', therefore, Bone does not completely deny residual connections (in terms of history and physical geography) with what we once called the South, but wishes to view this new site as one contingent, in flux, and constructed. Bone argues that contemporary fiction about and from the postsouth explores this tension of place. Richard Ford is one of the examples Bone employs, as he argues that Ford's novels ultimately form a critique and parody of a certain regional sense of place. Ford's literary strategy is to problematize and unpick the existing notions of the South, Bone argues, rendering a 'sense of place' and 'community' as redundant ideas in the contemporary capitalist age. Bone suggests that 'a historical-geographical materialistic approach might help us to recover the relation between postsouthern literature and the sociospatial reality of the contemporary (post-) south'.<sup>119</sup> While Bone examines Ford and others alongside postsouthern readings of literature that situate them in a de-materializing postmodern framework, he nonetheless wants to tie this literature to a real material place: socio-spatial states in the American South. This allows for a more complex notion of Southern places and spaces in the contemporary age.

Another example Bone proffers is Barbara Kingsolver, whose novel *Prodigal Summer*, he claims, engages with a rural and agrarian sense of Southern place, but nonetheless is troubled by Kingsolver's engagement with exterior global forces and the notions of a capitalist Southern geography. With emphasis on the international characters and connections in the novel, Bone reads *Prodigal Summer* as embodying the postsouthern ideology in literature; indeed, he sees Kingsolver's novel as not only 'post-Agrarian, or even postsouthern: it is transnational'.<sup>120</sup> Following much of the writing above, Bone sees the transnational age as one which will forever disrupt received notions of place, and Southernness. Immigration to the region will, Bone argues, alter and reconfigure the South, rendering it doubly 'post-': regional and national. '[T]o tell', he concludes, 'about the postsouthern, and to map postsouthern geographies, is increasingly and necessarily also to take the transnational turn'; it is then, he claims, one can gain a global sense of place.<sup>121</sup> While I would agree this is a necessary move in contemporary scholarship, there is also the need to read Kingsolver's novel another way. Although *Prodigal Summer's* sense of Southern place is not an historical Agrarian one – it is not an idealized agricultural region with an anti-capitalist, romantic land-economy – nevertheless Kingsolver's novel foregrounds

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<sup>118</sup> Martyn Bone, *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), p. 51.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

land, community and place. However deterritorialized, these images rooted in land continue to sustain a traditional notion of Southernness even in the twenty-first century which, I think, need continued closer inspection at a local, regional level as well as the transnational one (which is a twofold process of reading that some postsouthern scholarship overlooks and side-lines).

Relational to Bone's work – and a critic who exemplifies the postsouthern turn by radically 'up-rooting' the South, and thus someone worth exploring – is Scott Romine. In *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (2008), Romine reads Southern narrative through the postmodern lens of 'cultural reproduction'. Borrowing from Walter Benjamin's essay, Romine asks whether (Southern) culture can reproduce itself in a world that is 'increasingly dominated by mass media, global corporations, and the logic of commodification'.<sup>122</sup> The South emerging in this era will thus be full of reproductions, but this 'fake' South, Romine claims, becomes the 'Real South' through 'the intervention of narrative'.<sup>123</sup> One of his key examples of Southern narrative and cultural reproduction is the Tara plantation from the film *Gone With the Wind*. Now tourists can visit Tara and 'experience' film history in addition to the Southern history of slavery. The plantation is, for Romine, a 'ground zero of southern cultural reproduction', a (in Baudrillardian terms) 'kind of ur-simulacrum, at the threshold of the South's entrance into the culture industry'.<sup>124</sup> As a plantation site, film location and tourist destination, Tara exists in a network of narratives of the South, each as fictional and constructed as the other. Far from getting 'the' South, visitors merely experience a simulated postmodern one.

The fakeness of Tara is central to Romine's idea of the 'Real South' today: it is one mediated by, and constructed through, narrative (which is also defined by postmodern play and contingency). In the era of cultural reproduction, moreover, simulated Souths are all we may be able to get access to. Each of these Souths may be different, and thus all will be contingent. Further, he argues, 'that neither of us can practice our South in a totalizing, territorial form generates an implicit poetics of relation'.<sup>125</sup> As with Richard Gray's multiply-imagined South, Romine writes into the postmodern framework of contingency and relationality, asking, ultimately, 'who, today, would even want a solid South?'<sup>126</sup> Though it may seem I do, my thesis does not entirely contradict Romine's, but I wish to move away from his simulated and culturally reproduced reading of the South, arguing for a region sustained by its cultural output

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<sup>122</sup> Scott Romine, *The Real South: Southern Narrative in the Age of Cultural Reproduction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 27 and p. 28.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

but not, therefore, a simulacrum without an original. The South is more than the reproduced and reproducible articulation of it.

Like Romine, the ‘real’ of the South is questioned by Tara McPherson in her book *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (2003). The title alone suggests the degree to which she always sees the South ‘as much a fiction, a story we tell and are told, as it is a fixed geographic space’.<sup>127</sup> The narrow and static history of Southern studies, in McPherson’s argument, usually ‘runs the risk of fixing or freezing southern culture, often at its most stereotypical moments, even in work that seeks to overturn these very stereotypes’.<sup>128</sup> *Reconstructing Dixie* ultimately asks the pertinent questions of how Southern identity and culture are sustained, and around which certain images this happens. For instance, she looks particularly to the figure of the white Southern woman, the home, and notions of hospitality that are bound up in the prior two. These narratives, McPherson suggests, are often the vehicles for nostalgia or historical amnesia. McPherson’s argument runs parallel to the work of the transnationalists above and the postsouthern scholars who situate the South beyond its previous incarnations and stories of itself. The book’s conclusion, however, can be seen as closer to the thesis I propose. McPherson writes that the move away from ‘the South’ to imagined ‘Souths’ brings possibilities for ‘structuring a space for remembering what histories and voices have been erased by endlessly confining southern memory within the walls of Tara’.<sup>129</sup> My thesis rests on precisely the same claim but from another direction. Adding to, and qualifying, the transnational turn by paying close attention to the connections and historical continuities between the ‘old’ and twenty-first-century ‘new’ South equally allows Southern memory to escape the mystifyingly nostalgic and problematic walls of Tara. My thesis does this by charting Southern culture’s cycles, repetitions, and most significantly, its roots.

A key name in the current field of new Southern, and postsouthern, studies is Michael Kreyling, whose work I question in various ways across these chapters. His influential book, *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998) looks at the ways the South has been narrated, and re-narrated since the Agrarians and their manifesto *I’ll Take My Stand*. In the postmodern world, he claims, the first step of the critic is to ‘question the natural authority of the foundation term: *southern*’ (original emphasis).<sup>130</sup> In probing the term ‘The South’, Kreyling enters the familiar terrain of postmodern scepticism of grand narratives, uncontested assertions, totalities, and capital letters

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<sup>127</sup> Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>130</sup> Michael Kreyling, *Inventing Southern Literature*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998) p. 155.

(South, as opposed to south). This process of questioning makes ‘the south’ conditional and plural. For Kreyling, in a series of Souths, we will never gain access to the real thing – it does not exist – but merely narrated versions of it. In Southern literature, furthermore, this comes into sharp clarity: it has, Kreyling writes, ‘for some time been self-fascinated, addicted to images of itself and pseudoevents’.<sup>131</sup> Contingent and constructed, Southern literature is aware of its inventedness, alert to the possibilities of its rewriting. Thus, *Inventing Southern Literature* is more precisely titled: ‘southern literature *inventing* the south’.

Kreyling’s recent book *The South that Wasn’t There: Postsouthern History and Memory* (2010) continues his investigation of the region and is a key book that I resist in this thesis for, in my view, the postsouthern’s troubling outcomes. Kreyling identifies the connections between Southern history and memory (that is, something we call the past and the remembrances of it), seeing them as integrally linked: ‘history-and-memory’. He is interested in this relationship: where they connect and collide and absorb into one another. Within this elision, Kreyling argues, the South resides. Not in its geographical specificity, but in its complex connections to history: in the spaces where history disappears into memory, and vice versa. He further argues that the South (as place) has begun to disappear and exists only in its cultural representations, unconnected to actual location (which is blurry and far from static): that the ‘absorption of history by memory is more or less complete – that the South is gone but the memory survives’.<sup>132</sup> Here, Kreyling expounds a paradigmatic theory of the postsouth which I want to problematize: a region that is ‘post’, if not (in Kreyling’s words) erased in the twenty-first century, leaving only the residue of memory, free-floating, individual and unmoored. Far from rooted – even at some level through literature, as in his earlier thesis – the South resides in the endless loop of history-and-memory. It is this particular zenith of postsouthern theory (that not all theorists in this movement embody however) that Kreyling asserts and I question.

To suggest one primary way of complicating Kreyling’s book, I utilize an essay on memory studies by Susannah Radstone; via this essay, I can posit that Kreyling’s dislocation of memory from the South (and from history) only serves to displace the particular Southern past in favour of transnationalization. While I will return to memory studies at length below, it is worth signalling this essay here to mark the place I differ from Kreyling whom I use as definitive of a type of postsouthern theory. In ‘Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory’ (2005) Radstone subtly posits a helpful critique of the relationship between history and memory in the academy that I can apply to Kreyling’s thesis. Radstone suggests that postmodernism has

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>132</sup> Kreyling, *The South that Wasn’t There*, p. 194.

successfully debunked the traditional and static conceptualization of history (as ‘History’: capitalized and singular). In turn, this has given way to a sense of history as plural: we now have histories, rather than history. The past, postmodernism says, was never as monolithic and chronological as we like to think. Radstone further remarks that memory studies – with its foregrounding of the particular and the personal – has embodied this postmodern turn precisely: all we have are histories, memories (plural). What is often achieved, though, is the displacement of any concrete past whatsoever. Memories, in their postmodern particularity, no longer have historical bedrock to which they refer or respond. Correlatively, memory studies, she writes, often leaves the stress on the ‘personal alone, rather than on the complex relations between memory and the wider social and public spheres within which it is given meaning, screened, recognized and misrecognized’.<sup>133</sup> That is, the detachment of memory from a history of memory only serves to cement postmodernism in a complete aesthetics of the personal and the isolate.

This, I posit, is one problem with Kreyling’s reading of memory in relation to the South. As Radstone argues, without the ‘dual focus’ of memory and history together – which Kreyling begins by arguing, but subsequently divorces – ‘studies of memory will [...have] a limited view of the processes, practices and institutions through which experience or memory make their mark and are made’.<sup>134</sup> In this way, then, I wish to contest Kreyling’s assertion that memories of the South are all we have left of the region. In light of Radstone, it is the separation of Southern memory from the Southern past that exemplifies the postsouthern turn. Rather, I argue that it is the grounding of memory in history – embedding memory the historical origins and circumstances of its making – that allow us to really see the Southern region in the twenty-first century. The South exists because of, and through (via memory) its past. This will be elaborated further below, but a further critic of the South can be connected here.

Patricia Yaeger’s book *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing 1930-1990* (2000), while indebted in some degree to the postsouthern (if not transnational) scholarship above, simultaneously addresses concepts and notions of Southern identity this thesis is also interested in. Yaeger’s work centres on the figure of the Southern grotesque. Long associated with Southern literature, the image of the gothic character is employed by Yaeger to illuminate the societal machinations on Southern bodies. The focus of *Dirt and Desire*, however, is women’s writing across the twentieth century. Closely analyzing female authors for their usage of grotesquery allows Yaeger to posit that the South’s traumatic history has worked its way into

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<sup>133</sup> Susannah Radstone, ‘Reconceiving Binaries: The Limits of Memory’, *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), 134-150 (p. 148).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

the bodies of literary characters to the point of physically distorting them. In her words, ‘The grotesque operates as a stain or wound testifying to the unsymbolized traumas of the everyday, to events that are never registered in the world and yet leave a mark’.<sup>135</sup>

What Yaeger is arguing is that the grotesque is a symptom of the South’s history making itself known through literature. The distorted body signals the ‘unregistered’ traumas of Southern history that subsequently become worked-through in literature itself. My thesis mirrors this point, as central to what I am arguing about regionalism is that history is keeping the South alive. While any nation or community could be argued to be defined by its past – indeed, this is the point – it is the specific past of the South that informs its specific present identity. Yaeger is arguing precisely this: that in looking to distorted bodies in Southern women’s fiction, we can see the defining marks of the past in the South’s literature. The South’s particular histories have very particular effects on the region to this day.

*Dirt and Desire* concerns itself with rooting out these complex histories of the South that are buried in literary texts. Yaeger pertinently asks, ‘How do we reinscribe a literature that keeps repeating stories about race-thinking that everyone knows but no one wants to hear?’<sup>136</sup> This repetition informs the backbone of her thesis, in the sense that Southern literature is, in her argument, littered with retellings of the same stories: (white) ‘stories that will not go away, that keep repeating themselves endlessly [...] while black literature about the South contributes to the exorcism of this repetition by ringing these stories backwards’.<sup>137</sup> Here we see clearly the ways in which Yaeger identifies Southern literature as mining a particular set of narratives because the force of them will not go away. While this notion has been read by postsouthernists such as Romine and Kreyling, who identify these repetitions as examples of a hollow and empty history, Yaeger (to a degree) and I (to a much greater degree) resist this interpretation and pay close attention to the narrative continuities and their ensuing sustenance of regionalism. Yaeger asks that the Southern academic look to women’s fiction from the region to ‘invent categories that bring black and white fiction together, and to recognize the ways in which women’s writing provides a trip to geographies rarely visited by the white men who’ve [...] traveled so far on the Dixie Limited’.<sup>138</sup> This train of Southern understanding has travelled through the same territory for much of the criticism’s history. Indeed, the transnational and postsouthern turns set out to purposefully explore new or hidden terrains.<sup>139</sup> However, my thesis will travel to locations that

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<sup>135</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 236.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>139</sup> Another terrain that this thesis does not tackle, but is a worthwhile critical avenue is Native American fiction from the South. For excellent surveys of this, see: Melanie Benson Taylor, *Reconstructing the Native South*:

Southern literature has long visited – history, memory, place, race – but while there, unearth the (dis)continuities that have sustained Southern identity and culture.

In charting the age-old stories of the South, Yaeger suggests we can find ‘a route to the dead, to the embarrassing, disavowed American past, a space with no exit – a literature replaying stories we’re trying (as multiculturalists, feminists, queer theorists, students of globalization) to transcend’.<sup>140</sup> Thus, though she acknowledges as important the attempt at moving beyond the historical categories of Southern identity that the transnational and postsouthern turn has ushered in, we can also lose sight of the journey to the darkness of the South’s past still lingering today. ‘[T]o turn away from this literature’, Yaeger writes – to turn with the transnational away from the particular – ‘is also to turn away from a world we barely understand: a site where racism happens in some of its most brutal forms, and this brutality, in turn, produces extraordinary works of art’.<sup>141</sup> While merely part of Yaeger’s thesis, this ‘barely understood’ world of the South is the central tenet of my thesis.

A final Southern critic that I want to introduce here, who consolidates, from a geographical perspective, Yaeger’s analysis, and charts a project that is not too dissimilar from my own, is Thadious Davis, and specifically her book *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region and Literature* (2011). In essence, Davis’ book (and term ‘Southscape’), she writes, ‘call[s] attention to the South as a social, political, cultural, and economic construct but one with the geographic “fact of the land”’.<sup>142</sup> This landedness informs and shapes, in Davis’ analyses, race and race-relations. Much like Yaeger’s understanding of the South’s bodily effects, Davis understands the Deep South as a network of forces that fuse together society and place to understand how raced peoples might be ‘impacted by the shape of the land’.<sup>143</sup> Unlike many critics with deregionalizing tendencies – that do not deny place but wish to problematize it for good – Davis sidesteps this point as, for her, it matters little whether place is ‘real’ (or functions as such), but that it continues to sustain racial identities. Where my thesis will use cultural memory to understand place and space, Davis perceptibly and specifically focuses on Southern locations – very particularly in this book, Louisiana and Mississippi – because the argument still needs to be made that ‘Place is a powerful signifier of identity that cannot be overestimated, particularly in terms of the South with its specific history and sociology’.<sup>144</sup> In this way, then,

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*American Indian Literature and the Lost Cause* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2012) and Annette Trefzer, *Disturbing Indians: The Archaeology of Southern Fiction* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007).

<sup>140</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 61.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Thadious M. Davis, *Southscapes: Geographies of Race, Region, and Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 2.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

like Yaeger, it is the local histories of place and region that need to be attended to, in addition to (for example), Scott Romine's sense of place as flattened in a postmodern landscape. Useful to the present study too is Davis' acknowledgement that 'Attention to the local [...] does not preclude today's dynamic global world but rather engages that world at different points of accessibility where the connection between society and environment are legible'.<sup>145</sup> Highly dextrous, then, Davis' understanding of contemporary Southern regionalism does not stand in opposition to the transnational turn, but absorbs it into a productive dialogue. Rooting and engaging the local must not be displaced from critical study, then, even while we explore transnational forces.

In foregrounding the particular – the histories that have so shaped the South and continue to do so – Yaeger and Davis usefully provide a lens through which we can return to Richard Gray, and his argument in *After the Fall* to conclude this summary of Southern criticism. In this book, Gray suggests that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 illuminated the global relationship with America that was, for him, being unsuitably responded to in fiction. In light of Yaeger's thesis, and with close reference to an essay by Catherine Morley, I posit the idea that Gray is missing the importance of the local in American fiction. Written in response to the larger turn of transnationalism, and the essays of Gray and Rothberg in particular, Morley's "'How Do We Write about This?' The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel' (2011) takes issue with the readings of recent novels as 'domestic'. Her resistance to the criticism of novels by DeLillo and others stems from her acknowledgement that 'these critics are effectively asking American writers to turn their gaze away from home, away from the peoples and communities which have, up to now, dominated their fiction'.<sup>146</sup> She furthermore claims that in actuality, 'fiction published after 2001 has exhibited the same kind of self-consciousness about the artist's reshaping of the past and engagement with the traumas of collective memory' as much as in previous decades, and that this 'inward' turn Gray so chastizes is actually an important function of the literary art.<sup>147</sup>

Morely suggests – as I do – that 'just as America itself loses something when it becomes deterritorialized, so American literature, too, loses the sense of regional distinctiveness, the richness of the local and the personal, the joy of the individual and the specific, when it is torn loose from its roots in the domestic and the personal'.<sup>148</sup> Correlating Morley's suppositions here

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Catherine Morley, "'How Do We Write About This?' The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel', *Journal of American Studies*, 45, 4 (2011), 717-751 (p. 720).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 721-2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 731.

with Yaeger's provides me with the theoretical ballast of arguing for the necessity of acknowledging and identifying the local – the regional – in America as well as the trans-regional and transnational. It is at this point that we can return to Gray's thesis in *After the Fall* about writing from the South. He argues that in looking to immigrant writings in the South, an exemplary strategy of transnationalism can be seen. Examining fiction from east Asian immigrants, Gray argues that these novels 'offer altered geographies, another perspective on the mixed, plural medium that Americans now inhabit'.<sup>149</sup> After 'a flood of immigration', the South has seen its population somewhat diversify in recent decades; moreover, this cultural mixing has produced novels that add a 'new spin to an old story' about the region.<sup>150</sup> It is this here that my thesis differs from Gray and the above critics who are writing in comparative veins, however different their theoretical slants. While Gray sees a 'new spin' on an 'old story' as a movement towards new possibilities for Southern fiction, I want to suggest another reading. Global forces are obviously present in the contemporary South, but instead of viewing them as deterritorializing and transnationalizing the region, my thesis wants to regionalize the transnational. That is, I locate and see the regional specificities of the stories being told – 'old' ones, in Gray's view; or historicized in Yaeger's – however global and transcultural their inflections or authorial origins. Thus, seeking out a regionalism for the twenty-first century South involves acknowledging and paying attention to the idea that transnational forces and movements have regional homes. This is not to deny or marginalize the transnational, but to continuously qualify it. I am not displacing transnational elements of Southern culture, but suggesting other ways of reading them, and pointing out the lingering regionalisms that are so pervasive. Turning away from regional literature, Yaeger explains, is to turn away from something 'we barely understand'. Stopping this from happening can only be achieved, I argue, through understanding the regional foundations for stories being told in the South; moreover, their particular located instances cannot be ignored in favour of the global turn in American Studies. Again, the postsouthern and the transnational are not identical theories, but interrelated ways of reading and understanding place and culture; moreover, I am not rejecting them out of hand, but questioning some of their paradigms and contentions. The theoretical framework of cultural memory through which I argue this is outlined below.

### **'IT'S NOT EVEN PAST': Or, ROOTING SOUTHERN MEMORY**

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<sup>149</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 90.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89 and p. 94.

Taking cue from Kreyling, the notion of memory is indeed important in the study of Southern literature and culture, but in turning to memory studies I offer a different strategy to the one in *The South that Wasn't There*. The recent academic field of memory studies provided us with the term 'cultural memory': a notion that complexly articulates the various processes and movements that individual remembrance takes as it crosses into the public realm. Consensus points toward Maurice Halbwachs' work as igniting this field of study. Halbwachs argues that memory has a collective dimension because 'it is in societies that people normally acquire their memories' and, furthermore, 'It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories'.<sup>151</sup> Halbwachs' thesis is that 'No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections'.<sup>152</sup> Though memories are, in the first instance, personal instances of recollecting the past, Halbwachs was one of the first people to theorize that, far from merely individual, memory only can work in relation to some collective or cultural framework. For a while, the term collective memory held much weight in the field, but a gradual movement towards 'cultural' memory occurred which more complexly accounts for the various dimensions of memory, rather than a limiting or homogenizing 'collective' memory.

Taking a brief overview of this field will enable me to formulate a connection between cultural texts and the workings of history and memory, particularly in the South. While, Astrid Erll writes, 'Societies do not remember literally', 'much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory'.<sup>153</sup> Thus, while memory in a cultural sense is obviously metaphoric or symbolic, there is much mileage in reading it as something that is intimately connected to the larger frameworks of society and culture in which we live. Memories are always intertwined in larger machinations of remembering the past at communal, societal, national or transnational levels. How cultures remember needs to be unpacked. Societies, Ann Rigney tells us, take account of their past through the 'symbolic form' we call history. '[T]his "accounting for" takes place', she writes, 'not only through historiography, but also through a wide range of other activities: commemorative ceremonies, museum visits [...], watching historical films and reading historical fiction' and so on.<sup>154</sup> Astrid Erll comparatively suggests that 'even in today's age of accelerated globalization it is the nation-

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<sup>151</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> Astrid Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 1-15 (p. 5).

<sup>154</sup> Ann Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans', *Poetics Today*, 25, 2 (2004) 361-396 (p. 363).

state that plays a major role in the creation of memory culture: initiating rituals of public commemoration, setting up memorials, financing museums'.<sup>155</sup> In chapter one, this role of Southern memory will be unpacked further, but it is useful here to acknowledge the cultural dimension of remembering in public acts.

Cultural memory studies has also focused on the global movements of history and memory. There are two principle senses in which memory moves and travels: firstly, in relation to a globalized contemporary world, there are many ways in which memories go beyond the borders of a country or nation. Attuned to the transnational turn outlined, contemporary theories of memory have been aligned with this tradition that seeks to unmoor and open outward fields of discussion that have oftentimes been limited. The second sense in which memory moves is related, more pertinently, to cultural texts such as film, literature or art (which I will come to). Michael Rothberg's book, *Multidirectional Memory*, for example, concerns itself with this first project, as it illuminates the 'dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance'.<sup>156</sup> As Astrid Erll summarizes, transnationality is inherent to memory itself. This is partly due to the global nature of our contemporary world but also because, she writes, 'memory lives in and through its movements'.<sup>157</sup> In this way, Ann Rigney succinctly writes, 'To bring remembrance to a conclusion is de facto already to forget'; memory, therefore, is always on the move, in process, unfinished.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, the movements of memory are not simply linear, but travel 'across and [...] beyond cultures' (original emphases).<sup>159</sup> In Erll's thesis, the definitions of the transnational – plurality, global reach, interconnectedness, border-crossing – are central to the ways in which memory travels, and always has.

In contradistinction, and pertinent to my thesis, we must be aware as Susannah Radstone has pointed out, that 'As the emphasis on transnational and transcultural memory strengthens, it becomes all the more vital to remember and pay attention to two dimensions of location: the location of the researcher *and* the locatedness of instances of transmission'.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, she writes, 'even when (and if) memory travels, it is only ever *instantiated* locally, in a specific place and at a particular time' (original emphases).<sup>161</sup> Thus, whether it be individual or cultural, the particular and defined location of memory-work must always be attended to; that is, both in the origination of remembrance (the place and time) in addition to the particular contours and

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<sup>155</sup> Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', *Parallax*, 17, 4 (2011), 4-18 (p. 7).

<sup>156</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p. 11.

<sup>157</sup> Erll, 'Travelling Memory', p. 11.

<sup>158</sup> Ann Rigney, 'The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing' in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. by Erll and Nünning, pp. 345-353 (p. 345).

<sup>159</sup> Erll, 'Travelling Memory', p. 8.

<sup>160</sup> Radstone, 'What Place is This?', p. 117.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

origins of the memory itself. Much like Radstone's essay glossed above in relation to Kreyling, memories cannot always remain free-floating and dislocated from the instances which trigger or utilize them. Memory has a historical root or basis. Minrose Gwin, in her introduction to a special issue on memory of the *Southern Literary Journal* argues something similar when she claims that 'southern studies, in its concerns not only with a traumatic past but specific locations and sites of that past, offers memory studies, which tends toward the general [...] a sense of place and grounding in the specific'.<sup>162</sup> Further, Erll claims that while memory is always moveable, there is a chance that 'In the transcultural travels of memory, elements may get lost, become repressed, silenced, and censored, and remain unfulfilled': this is a notion, underplayed by Erll in her essay, that we cannot take seriously enough.<sup>163</sup> Cultural memory, while a complex and variegated process, must always be read through the particularity of where and when the remembrance happens.

The second sense in which memories can be thought to move is through literature and other cultural texts. Ann Rigney's work on 'portable monuments', which I will elaborate on in chapter one, can take us from the theoretical realm of cultural memory studies toward the practical application of such to literary texts. Rigney's thesis is that literature can act as a vehicle for memory, particularly enabling of its cultural usage and movement. Signalling the difference between individual (personal) memories and 'cultural memory proper', Rigney argues that this latter term helps us identify the moments 'where the past is recalled primarily through texts and other forms of representation'.<sup>164</sup> Cultural memory is, therefore, not a discrete phenomenon outside of society, but an active process that happens through various texts and representations. Jan Assmann agrees, claiming that memory is 'based on material contact between a remembering mind and a reminding object'; memory, for him, 'requires institutions of preservation and reemodiment'.<sup>165</sup> Above, we have discussed the ways in which public events and commemorations can be indicators and instigators of cultural memories, but Rigney's essay argues that literary (and cultural) texts are the most visible and interesting examples of memory's dissemination and usage. Rigney claims that 'literary scholars have tended to view individual texts as the terminus or outcome of remembrance rather than as active ingredients in an ongoing cultural process': it is this process that is enabled by literary texts, and one that is most interesting

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<sup>162</sup> Minrose Gwin, 'Introduction: Reading History, Memory, and Forgetting', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 40, 2 (2008), 1-10 (p. 3).

<sup>163</sup> Erll, 'Travelling Memory', p. 14.

<sup>164</sup> Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 367.

<sup>165</sup> Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and Cultural Memory' in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, pp. 109-118, (p. 111).

in the discussion here.<sup>166</sup> Rigney suggests, in relation to the fiction of Walter Scott, that novels move in a number of ways. They travel, ‘not only in [their] persistence [...] across time, but above all in their reappearance in new guises in different places and media; in their capacity to move, mobilize, and generate new cultural activities’.<sup>167</sup> Her book points to the ‘afterlives’ of Walter Scott’s novels, revealing to us the myriad ways that literature lives on in relation to cultural memory.

As Astrid Erll posits, ‘Memories do not hold still’; Rigney proposes that this movement takes place ultimately through the continuous life (lives) of a literary text.<sup>168</sup> The most interesting of Rigney’s observations is how she defines texts as ‘monuments’. Unlike physical and static historical monuments that societies build, literary texts can act similarly, but with one important difference, their ability to move: ‘Where stone monuments are fixed in particular locations’, Rigney writes, ‘stories travel’.<sup>169</sup> Defining literature as a portable monument allows us to see both its fixity and dynamism, as well as its relation to the past. For Rigney, Scott’s novels are perfect examples of the past’s persistence in the present; if his novels can be read and re-read over time, and across places, the monumentality of such texts is far from static. Texts, Rigney writes, are portable monuments, which can be ‘moved across time, space, media, and imagination’ even while ‘the original text remain[s] unchanged’.<sup>170</sup> Indeed, the ‘multiple appropriations of Scott’s work in a whole range of cultural practices’ include the way it travels ‘across materials (in the form of new editions), languages (in the form of translations), interpretative frames (in the form of critical commentaries), and media (in the form of adaptations)’.<sup>171</sup> In this sense, literature acts as a vehicle for, and instigator of, cultural memories. Because texts are read and re-read across time, they have a continual ‘moveability’. Readers across times and places can re-ignite memories that the novel creates or contains. Indeed, as cultural memory is always moving – memory is in process by its nature and has as much to tell us about the present as it does the past – literary texts for example embody this exactly.

To develop a connection between literature, cultural memory and regionalism, I offer a brief summation of the vast field I have just worked through. Memory, in every sense, can be seen to have a communal or cultural dimension that moves it beyond individual remembrance. Ann Rigney has shown that one of the most dynamic and interesting embodiments and vehicles for cultural memory is literature. We have also seen that cultural memory moves and travels,

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<sup>166</sup> Rigney, ‘Portable Monuments’, p. 369.

<sup>167</sup> Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 12.

<sup>168</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 11.

<sup>169</sup> Ann Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott*, p. 20.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

which finds intellectual corollary with the current turn to transnational theory. However, as Susannah Radstone has argued, the locatedness of remembrance or the instantiation of cultural memories should always be attended to. The particularity of memory could, in light of its ‘travelling’, be ignored or overlooked, so close analysis should be done to the time(s) and place(s) of remembering. Indicated above, the locality of memory is immediately suggestive of my thesis of regionalism. Regional particularity is of utmost importance when we read cultural memory through Radstone’s lens. Solidifying this claim, Rigney suggests that texts can often ‘confirm and consolidate the sense of a common heritage’, in addition to pointing outwards beyond and across nations.<sup>172</sup> Aside from the transnational moves, Rigney is ultimately saying that literary texts are often active ingredients in the sustaining and proliferation of historical identity through heritage. A community (or region’s) heritage or history can be activated and consolidated through the cultural memory work of literary texts. Thus, we can posit that regionalism (here, Southern) can be reignited or even created through the cultural memories that are embodied and investigated in, for example, literature, museums, re-enactments, or historical commemorations. While this argument finds close relation to Richard Gray (and others’) thesis of an imagined written South, I posit that the relation between literature and regionalism (via memory) is more complex. Far from merely creating the region through literature, the activation of cultural memory through literature is what sustains and keeps alive the South today.

In conclusion, I return to Jones and Monteith’s *South to a New Place*. Diane Roberts’ afterword to the collection offers remarks for ending this introduction. In opposition to the other postsouthern essays in the collection, Roberts sounds a note of caution to such radical readings of the South. She claims that the current theorization of the region’s dismantling is one in a long historical line: ‘The South has always been disappearing, or about to disappear’, she writes, ‘and if it has not vanished yet, it is not likely to in the transnational age’.<sup>173</sup> Though Roberts agrees we ‘must have *Souths*’, she also acknowledges that the South ‘retains its place on the margins of America – still poorer, still more violent, still more past-obsessed, race-aware, and gender-traditionalist’ (original emphasis).<sup>174</sup> The South’s cultural output in the twenty-first century continues to re-tell stories we have long been hearing (though often from new angles). We must listen to these old stories; we ignore them – with the postsouthern and transnational – at our peril. Although Roberts admits that new transnational writers will alter the region and reinvent it, she writes that ‘the old core of difference [...] will continue to flourish’.<sup>175</sup> Here I

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<sup>172</sup> Rigney, ‘Portable Monuments’, p. 390.

<sup>173</sup> Diane Roberts, ‘The South of the Mind?’ in *South to a New Place* ed. by Jones and Monteith, p. 363.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

align myself with Roberts as, even though I am aware of, and am interested in, the new meanings that the South is acquiring in a global age, an identifiable place known as ‘the South’ will continue to exist in and through its cultural output. The South, to rehearse Faulkner once again, is ‘not even past’; it is not even ‘post’.

My chapters will unravel this argument in various ways. In four disparate loci, my complication and complementation of the transnational and postsouthern will occur through a process of rooting in place a selection of different contemporary media. In chapter one, I look to two novels that confront the horrors and machinations of slavery: Edward P. Jones’ *The Known World* and Valerie Martin’s *Property*. Beginning with an overview of the memorial culture to slavery in the South, I suggest that this public landscape of remembrance is lacking in regards to this widespread regional institution. The failed national museum to slavery in Virginia is illustrative of this. Contemporary novels, such as Jones’ and Martin’s, however, are read contrary to this as they elucidate and reveal a wealth of rooted and localized cultural memory. In turn, this memory seems to flow from the novels themselves: in both the content – there are many scenes of an overflowing, emergent past – and the book as physical monument.

In chapter two, the overflow of memory seen in the previous chapter takes on a more literal form, as I read the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina as revealing Southern history flowing across New Orleans. In mapping out the general conception of Katrina as unearthing the fault-lines of class and race in contemporary America, I add to these readings what seems obvious, but overwhelmingly silent: regional identity. To argue for this return of regionalism, I focus on a biopolitics of African-American life as ‘disposable’, which we saw clearly in Katrina’s wake as predominantly black citizens were displaced, killed and discarded. Utilizing political theory from Henry Giroux, Giorgio Agamben and others, I delineate a Southern biopolitics. This is traced through a cluster of texts produced after Katrina including Dave Eggers’ *Zeitoun*, Spike Lee’s *When the Levees Broke* and HBO’s *Treme*. Concluding the chapter will be a scene from *Treme* which requires us to question also the ending of Kate Chopin’s classic Southern text *The Awakening*.

In chapter three, the spectres of the past that were seen to live on in the present in New Orleans lead us to consider their more metaphorical forms. This chapter elucidates a reading of the Southern gothic through the work of the photographer Sally Mann. To think about the gothic, I read the opening of Donna Tartt’s *The Little Friend* as exemplifying the South’s relation to its dark past and the modes of address that this memory often comes in. This then enables us to chart a short history of the Southern gothic, via Teresa Goddu, Leslie Fiedler and Eric Savoy, before looking to Mann’s work. Across her oeuvre, Mann returns to key themes and images,

such as the Southern landscape, the region's past, memory and the body. This chapter analyses a number of her images, from different projects, revealing how in each she documents the South as saturated with memory rooted in localism, the soil, and the particular histories of place.

In chapter four, I take two novels by definitive names in American literature – Toni Morrison's *Home* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* – and illuminate their narratives of return to the South, which I see as ubiquitous in the region's culture. Where Morrison makes this journey explicit, McCarthy's is more coded, but in both there is a focus on the roots of memory that so define and structure each author and their literary output. In *Home*, Morrison's characters return to their Georgia home to confront not only a personal memory that defined their childhood, but also its regional and racial entanglements: that is, the way in which this Southern memory comes to affect their very identities as African Americans. In *The Road*, a book which is largely regarded as post-apocalyptic and even post-national, is in this chapter read for its Southernness. Countering the predominant understandings of the novel as charting an America devoid of 'place' – of states, of regions, of borders – I gather evidence of *The Road's* regionalism: its texture of regional memory, roots, land and local history. This reading, then, allows us to formulate that the roots of memory and the roots of place are often lost and overlooked by postsouthern and transnational theories.

My conclusion will then offer a brief reading of Attica Locke's novel *The Cutting Season* (2012), not only to provide another example of rooted memory and place, but also a textual thread to further tie together the four chapters of this thesis. Locke's novel, too, attempts to engage with a global South – commenting on new migrants to the region and their place there – but ultimately we will see how this novel cannot get its feet geographically off the ground. Indeed, the novel burrows into Southern soil (often quite literally), to reveal the all-pervasiveness of regional memory and its earth-bound roots.

# ONE

## MEMORIES OF SLAVERY

### Museums, Monuments, Novels

You forget what you want to remember and  
 you remember what you want to forget.  
 - Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*<sup>176</sup>

## REMEMBERING/FORGETTING SLAVERY

In an interview with *World* magazine in 1989, Toni Morrison articulates clearly the relationship between the memorialization of slavery and her fiction, particularly the novel *Beloved*.

There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There's no 300-foot tower. There's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence, or better still, on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place doesn't exist (that I know of), the book had to. But I didn't know that before or while I wrote it. I can see now what I was doing on the last page. I was finishing the story, transfiguring and disseminating the haunting with which the book begins. Yes, I was doing that; but I was also doing something more. I think I was pleading for that wall or that bench or that tower or that tree when I wrote the final words.<sup>177</sup>

I quote Morrison at length because here she expresses many aspects of slavery's memorialization that I want to unpack, particularly in relation to the South. While the final sentences seem to suggest that Morrison wishes for (more) public memorials to slavery, there is the distinct sense

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<sup>176</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>177</sup> Toni Morrison, 'A Bench by the Road', *World*, 3, 1 (1989) 37-41.

<<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/117810.shtml>> [accessed 12 October 2013]

that she sees a fuller potentiality for cultural remembrance through literary, rather than literal, monuments. Though she ‘pleads’ for benches or monuments (which has come true thanks to the creation of benches by the Toni Morrison Society), Morrison’s own fictional output testifies to the power and force of literature as an active ingredient in the recalling of a rooted and placed cultural memory, specifically of slavery (and the larger African-American past). This is true of her books about slavery – *Beloved* and *A Mercy* – as well as her most recent *Home* which monumentalizes the African-American past of the twentieth century, which I will be exploring in chapter four. Beginning with Morrison, then, frames this chapter’s argument: that particular regional memories, worked through and vitalized by literary texts, sustain regional identity in various ways. In revealing the deep roots of slavery *in* the region, these novels demonstrate a located sense of memory and place. This is not to discount or overlook the sense of slavery as a national and transnational phenomenon, nor displace the Black Atlantic ‘routes’ of slavery in favour of ‘roots’ (as Paul Gilroy would have it). Rather, this chapter wants to offer a reading of slavery that is localized, which in current transnational theory especially (and in new southern studies too) is often deemed less important than the global flows of slavery’s origins and effects. Thus, I wish not to reify slavery as a Southern institution alone, but to probe the regional shapes and textures of slavery, especially as this region was the stronghold for the institution. While the Northern states were implicitly entangled in the system, it is in the Southern states that we can most clearly see its devastating imprint. It is to this local geography that my chapter turns, which in effect follows the two novels I examine below.

‘Toni Morrison’s statement’, Alan Rice writes, ‘is less true now than it was in the late 1980s. There is now more public acknowledgement of the slave past in the transatlantic world than there was two decades ago, and this has manifested itself in plaques, memorials and events in many sites throughout the circum-Atlantic’.<sup>178</sup> While Rice lists examples from Liverpool, Haiti, London, Paris and New Haven, his only Southern example is in Sullivan’s Island, Charleston where, in fact, the Toni Morrison Society built its first ‘bench by the road’. Rice claims that ‘These all attest to an increased level of public activity over the last two decades’.<sup>179</sup> I want to slightly problematize Rice’s reading by suggesting that in the South particularly – which Morrison implicitly discusses in her above quote, and which was the major site in the United States where slavery took hold – memorials and commemorations to slavery are not as widespread as they could be. There are two notions I want to connect here. Firstly, Rice’s

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<sup>178</sup> Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

interest in transnational memorials displaces localized Southern examples of memorial practice. While his scope is the Black Atlantic, his lack of focus on the South is exemplary: either because in the South there are few memorials solely to slavery and the black experience, or because the transnational mode becomes centralized. In either case, Rice demonstrates a particular de-regionalizing tendency that is dominant in contemporary critical theory. Instead of only looking to the transatlantic body of memorative work and practice, attending to the South's relationship to slavery might produce more locally-inflected and specific memory work. The following two examples, which bookend the first decade of the twenty-first century, attempt to flesh out this sense of slavery's memory in the public sphere, which offers us an opportunity to consider the stakes of placed remembrance in the South today, which I will use to formulate a way of considering regionalism shaped by the dominance of rooted and located memory.

On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War in 2010, a 'Secession Ball' took place in Charleston, South Carolina. Although the *New York Times* admits the 'most wrenching and bloody episode in American history' may not seem to be cause for celebration, many of the old Confederate states commemorated the anniversary of Southern secession.<sup>180</sup> The Charleston ball, the invitations read, featured 'music, dancing, food and drink': a large-scale party that glorified and revelled in an historical juncture that was a defining moment in American history, not least because it was a national split over the issues of slavery and states' rights.<sup>181</sup> There were similar events in other Southern cities, including a parade in Montgomery, Alabama, the location of Rosa Parks' infamous refusal to give up her seat on a bus for a white person in 1955. While some Southerners claimed the events as merely celebrating a part of history they deem important to their region, an understandable furore was caused by the anniversary. The *Times* documents the response of the NAACP and others opposing what they considered a condonement of slavery and the South's racist history. Obviously problematic, the secession commemorations raised the tortuous spectre of slavery in the region and America-wide, but from a very particular perspective. This was not remembrance of the horrors, or even the experiences, of slavery, but a nostalgic and idealized relation to the movement of secession.

My second example offers something of a complement to this story. In 2001, L. Douglas Wilder announced plans for the creation of America's first national slavery museum in Fredericksburg, Virginia. While in 2015 the completion of the National Museum of African American History and Culture (linked to the Smithsonian) in Washington will mark a distinct

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<sup>180</sup> Katharine Q. Seelye, 'Celebrating Secession Without the Slaves', *New York Times*, 29 November 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/30/us/30confed.html>> [accessed 12 October 2013]

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

inscription of black history into the nation's memorial centre (the Mall), the Fredericksburg museum would offer something more particular about the institution of slavery. For, as a formative phenomenon in American and Southern and cultural identities, it surely needs particular remembrance. Built mainly from glass, the museum would be in the shape of a slave ship, containing varied historical artefacts and immersive experiences. It was designed to physically materialize the slave history of America and the Middle Passage as the boat shape nestled into the landscape. In summer 2011, the museum's development came to a halt: with soaring debt of tax bills, the project stalled and the city subsequently put the land the museum was going to be built on up for auction. It can safely be posited that the museum is far from ever getting off the ground; it may never be built at all. If these two examples, so framed by Morrison's assertion, can tell us anything, it is that the legacy of slavery in cultural memory is still as conflicted, problematic, even amnesiac as ever.

On *Beloved*, Walter Benn Michaels writes, 'What no one wants to remember, [Morrison thinks], is slavery and, whether or not this characterization is accurate, it succeeds in establishing remembering or forgetting as the relevant alternatives'.<sup>182</sup> Thus, Morrison's idea establishes that 'although no white people or black people now living ever experienced it, slavery can be and must be either remembered or forgotten'.<sup>183</sup> It is clear that to forget slavery would be a disastrous thing – the failure of the slavery museum might gesture in this direction however – thus, we must remember it. Clearly, Erika Doss writes, 'slavery's representation itself remains limited and highly contested' and it is at this starting point I want to begin thinking about memory in relation to the South.<sup>184</sup> The cultural memories of slavery will be the principal focus of this chapter, as a way of identifying a continued regionalism because of its deep effects in the South, particularly its lingering sociocultural structures through Reconstruction, Jim Crow and beyond. While my chapter will not necessarily touch upon these later histories, it is worth saying that slavery's extensive social reach demands continued attention, whether it is at a local or international level. My work focuses closely on the former, as a complementation of that broader geographical study.

Astrid Erll helps us understand cultural memory as 'the way of remembering chosen by a community, the collective *idea* of the meaning of past events and of their embeddedness within temporal processes' (original emphasis).<sup>185</sup> While this may construct what Erll also calls

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<sup>182</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 135.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 292.

<sup>185</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. by Sara B. Young (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 32.

normative versions of the past, cultural memory is an on-going negotiation, which is complex and various. It can, in this way ‘provid[e] the mental, material and social structures within which experience is embedded, constructed, interpreted and passed on. Memory is a kind of switchboard which organizes experience both prospectively and retrospectively’.<sup>186</sup> This embedding and working-through of slavery’s memories happens through various cultural forms, most noticeably literature. Illustrating this will be readings of two contemporary novels about slavery: Edward P. Jones’ *The Known World* (2003) and Valerie Martin’s *Property* (2003). However, ‘just like memory’, Erlil continues, ‘media do not simply reflect reality, but instead offer constructions of the past’ and thus ‘mediality represents [...] the very condition for the emergence of cultural memory’.<sup>187</sup> I will untangle this further with recourse to other memory theory, but here I am simply proposing the necessity of remembering slavery in the South through literature. To understand this more, I return to the slavery museum in Virginia.

Though the slavery museum has all but failed, the plan to build a national museum has meant that, Stephen Hanna argues, ‘slavery, emancipation, and resistance entered into public discourse over the meanings of Fredericksburg’s historical landscape for the first time in over a century’.<sup>188</sup> He continues, ‘until 2001, the slave block was the only permanent memorial to any aspect of African-American history’ in the town.<sup>189</sup> Thus, the museum’s conception is a landmark in public commemoration in Fredericksburg and, arguably, elsewhere in the region and nation. Correlatively, many critics agree that ‘Slavery has long gone unmentioned at southern historic sites’, so the building of a national slavery museum is a noteworthy and significant venture in the South’s landscape of memorialization and engagement with cultural memory.<sup>190</sup> It is not accurate to say that this landscape is completely barren: there are many plantations, small museums and monuments to the Civil War and slavery across the South. However, memorialization explicitly to slavery and the enslaved is lacking. Derek Alderman and Rachel Campbell offer an example of Southern memorial work, claiming that the Slave Relic Museum in Walterboro, South Carolina reclaims memories of slavery through historical objects. They write that this museum ‘holds a giant place on the geography of remembering slavery in the South and an important site for displaying, interpreting, and even debating the importance and meaning of the symbolic excavation of slavery as a new southern memorial

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>188</sup> Stephen P. Hanna, ‘A Slavery Museum? Race, Memory, and Landscape in Fredericksburg, Virginia’, *Southeastern Geographer*, 48, 3 (2008), 316–337 (p. 329).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>190</sup> Derek H. Alderman and Rachel M. Campbell, ‘Symbolic Excavation and the Artifact Politics of Remembering Slavery in the American South: Observations from Walterboro, South Carolina’, *Southeastern Geographer*, 48, 3 (2008), 338–355 (p. 339).

practice'.<sup>191</sup> Even with small museums like this one in Walterboro, however, the cultural memorial engagement with slavery is limited both in the South and America at large.

The failure of a national slavery museum cannot but be seen to repeat the major absence of representation of this institution historically in America's public realm. In the twentieth century, Ira Berlin writes, 'slavery was excluded from public presentations of American history' and it seems that the twenty-first century might be beginning with a similar situation.<sup>192</sup> While Renée Ater would disagree, claiming that today 'it seems there is a scramble to commemorate the slave past', there is still (a lack of) evidence to debate this point.<sup>193</sup> I am not suggesting that slavery has not been memorialized in American culture at all – there are museums to various aspects of slavery (as Ater has discussed) – but there is not, in the twenty-first century, a *national* museum to this defining historical institution. While America has a national Holocaust museum for example, it cannot be stressed enough that there is not one for slavery; and, moreover, the major attempt to build one failed drastically. This introductory sketch provides a framework for this chapter which attempts to connect forms of public memorial with literary ones.

Outside of the museum, other forms of public remembrance are untangling the relationship the South has to the memories of slavery. Public memorials and monuments have received much critical commentary in recent years and will be looked at here. Discussing monuments, further, will connect us to literary remembrance, through the work of Ann Rigney who I will explore below. Monuments, particularly relating to slavery and the Civil War, have been discussed pertinently by Kirk Savage in *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. In this book, Savage argues that statues, museums and memorials 'are the most conservative of commemorative forms precisely because they are meant to last, unchanged, forever'.<sup>194</sup> Though Savage discusses the possibilities for reinterpreting monuments over time – their potential afterlife – he cements the notion that monuments 'attempt to mould a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest'.<sup>195</sup> Consequently, it seems fairly obvious that it is dominant cultures and communities who create monuments and, therefore, decide which histories are deemed worthy of remembrance. It must be noted, though, that Savage acknowledges the public memorial as an 'attempt' to solidify memory, 'meant' to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>192</sup> Ira Berlin, 'American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice', *The Journal of American History*, 90, 4 (2004), 1251-1268 (p. 1257).

<sup>193</sup> Renée Ater, 'The Challenge of Memorializing Slavery in North Carolina: The Unsung Founders Memorial and the North Carolina Freedom Monument Project' in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space*, ed. by Ana Lucia Araujo (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 141-156 (p. 141).

<sup>194</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

make it last. Thus, it is necessary to understand the complex work of interpretation that a monument's viewer or museum's visitor does, which inherently makes a monument subject to change. History and memory are not, then, entirely fixed and secure, even with the construction of monuments by a dominant culture.

James E. Young's work on counter-monuments will sufficiently unsettle Savage's conception of the static monument, but will also provide a way to think through the dynamics involved in public remembrance. Young explores, in *The Texture of Memory*, monuments and their relationship to Holocaust memory. The state of contemporary German monumentality, Young argues, is framed by a fear that 'conventional memorials seal memory off from awareness altogether'.<sup>196</sup> Echoing the argument of Savage, contemporary German artists and memorial practitioners reconceive the traditional notion of the monument thought to concretize (literally and metaphorically) the past. One example might be Jochen and Esther Gertz's 'Monument Against Fascism' in Hamburg: a twelve-metre-high column, the monument was designed to be written on by visitors. As space is filled up with signatures, the column descends into the ground to make new space on which to write. The monument literally changes and disappears according to its users; rather than remaining static, it alters and moves. Resisting such typical monumental tendencies, this example (and others) is what Young calls a 'countermonument' which can feature any number of properties and forms. Young writes:

With audacious simplicity, the countermonument thus flouts any number of cherished memorial conventions: its aim is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction; [...] not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.<sup>197</sup>

In this catalogue of counter- or anti-monumentality, Young provides an attractive version of public commemoration and memory-work. Finally, the countermonument forces us to confront the fact that memory principally exists 'in the activity that brings monuments into being, in the ongoing exchange between people and their historical markers', not static and inert objects or buildings.<sup>198</sup> While Young has convincingly shown how specific German monuments have taken on board this complex role, the engagement of bringing memory into being (its active

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<sup>196</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 28.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

processes) can be thought through in other non-monumental ways. As Dora Apel writes of a public lynching memorial in Duluth, Minnesota, ‘Perhaps it is necessary [...] to imagine other forms of representation, other ways of acknowledging a traumatic past’ – other, that is, than a traditional memorial.<sup>199</sup> While she notes something similar to Young’s countermonument – that recent memorials ‘often have assumed a more abstract and minimalist aesthetic’ – I would posit that we have to think more dynamically about other forms of representation.<sup>200</sup> While Young has demonstrated how counter-monuments can rethink the relationship between society and history, I want to use this argument as a springboard to suggest other modes of remembrance like literature. Marcus Wood, particularly, posits that because ‘The experiences of millions of individuals [...] is not collectable; it is unrecoverable as a set of relics’, slavery ‘must not be encapsulated with a history believed to be stable, digested and understood’.<sup>201</sup> This is because the history is ‘*not over and evolving*’, not only because the memories continue to work through contemporary life, but because the long past of slavery is a foundational block of identity today (original emphasis).<sup>202</sup> Thus, with the movement of counter-monumentalization acknowledged, we can argue that a complex set of histories must require a form or aesthetic that matches this: whether it be non-traditional static physical monuments, or other forms like literature.

## PORTABLE MONUMENTS

The field of memory studies would generally agree with Wood’s notion of a moving and dynamic sense of slavery’s histories and memories. As we saw in the introduction, memory is moveable, dynamic and constantly shifting. This understanding of memory correlates with, and informs, the transcultural and global sense of memorialization and remembrance; indeed, Erll writes, transcultural memory is the ‘incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual “travels” and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders’.<sup>203</sup> In closer relation to the memories of slavery, Araujo’s edited collection *Politics of Memory* stresses, ‘the resurgence of the public memory of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade [...] is gradually becoming a transnational

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<sup>199</sup> Dora Apel, ‘Memorialization and Its Discontents: America’s First Lynching Memorial’, *Mississippi Quarterly*, 61, 1-2 (2008), 217-235 (p. 231).

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 7 and p. 11.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>203</sup> Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 11.

phenomenon'.<sup>204</sup> Though this sense of memory – especially with regards to slavery – is necessary to take into account, we must also be aware, as Susannah Radstone points out, that as we emphasize and prioritize memory that moves, we must also be aware of its localized instantiations: to 'buil[d] theory from the ground up [...] respecting memory's located specificities'.<sup>205</sup> Thus, whether it be individual or cultural, the particular and defined location of memory-work should be attended to; that is, both in the origination of remembrance (the place and time) in addition to the particular contours and origins of the memory itself. As Ron Eyerman has similarly suggested, in relation to African-American culture, 'Memory can also be embedded in physical geography'.<sup>206</sup> This geography is as much topographical as it is social, moreover. Local particularity has as much to do with the land as those who occupy it. Cultural memory, therefore, while a complex and variegated process, should, I argue, oftentimes be read through the particularity of where and when the remembrance happens alongside more global readings.

I do not mean to set up these two conceptions of memory in a binary: 'located' memory does not exist in opposition to 'moveable' memory. Rather, I am positing that we need to pay attention to the particular locations and instantiations of memory, even while it moves; the two are read, thus, together and as mutually-informing. It should be clear, moreover, that my insistence on this is rooted in the Southern focus of this thesis. If we are to talk of regional cultural memories – that is, memories of slavery that are precisely located in the South – then it follows that we pay attention, as Radstone tells us, to the locatedness of such memories. Stephan Palmié, on the memorialization of slavery argues strongly that this history is 'by no means "over and done with."' As a chronotopic referent, circulating in and through such discourses, "slavery" now indexes a durational "past imperfect" that continues to predicate present moral relationships'.<sup>207</sup> If our interest, following Radstone, is in the localness and regionalism of slavery's memories, then Palmié's argument inflects this with a moral import: slavery's imprint continues to affect the present, and in the South particularly, this needs to be unfolded and unpacked (not least in the face of national and large-scale 'forgetting', as in Fredericksburg). The past imperfect tense lives on and through contemporary memorial work.

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<sup>204</sup> Ana Lucia Araujo, 'Introduction' in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space*, ed. by Araujo, pp. 1-11 (p. 6).

<sup>205</sup> Radstone, 'What Place is This?', p. 118.

<sup>206</sup> Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>207</sup> Stephan Palmié, 'Slavery, Historicism, and the Poverty of Memorialization', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 363-375 (p. 368).

If the local and regional might be deeply important for remembering slavery, but the static monument is too petrified in its representation of the past, then might we not return to Morrison's suggestion for textual memorials to slavery: literary works that engage and perform a rooted cultural memory? In this sense, we engage with Ann Rigney's work outlined in the introduction. Rigney argues for the importance of literary texts as moveable and ultimately plural monuments to history. Texts can be read and re-read across time and space, reinterpreted and reread: thus history and memory become far less static and secure. Because literary works are both dynamic (they are subject to reinterpretation and movement) and static (they themselves are unchanging) they, in Rigney's words, 'partake both of "monumentality" [...] and "mobility"'.<sup>208</sup> This contrast mirrors the kinesis of memory itself, always moving and changing, but it also registers the place of memory: its origins, its location of instantiation and recollection which I am foregrounding here. Clearly, Rigney's sense of literature as monument feeds directly into the present argument, and connects back to Toni Morrison's statement that I began by quoting. If Morrison suggests that she wrote *Beloved* so that there was a place, or form, through which people could 'remember' slavery, surely this links directly to Rigney's sense of portable monuments. Literary texts, at the same time as moving and changing, retain and 'enjoy longevity, stability, and normativity' as well as 'in their original version or in some derivative form, they link people to the past'.<sup>209</sup> Thus, in light of this, I am more interested in the ways that literary texts can enact and enable remembrance at a local and rooted level. While they have the capability to move also, texts nonetheless retain a quality of fixity and stability.

Rigney further looks to the 'afterlives' of various memories in literature: the ways in which these memories live on and change, or are utilized by people to different ends. Although Rigney writes that 'memories are dependent on their being recalled in various media by later generations who find them meaningful' and that later generations 'may, nevertheless, proceed to forget them again' it is the power and potential of the literary text as a transferable, moveable, ever-changing monument to history that is important.<sup>210</sup> Erika Doss suggests that the representation of slavery will always be a highly contested issue; Rigney's work, in some ways, presents an answer to this. Not because it is uncontested, but by its interpretative nature (it needs to be 'read' and interpreted), literature can be a more flexible mode of engagement with the past than a literal solid monument. Literary texts, then, because ultimately unfixed – like, as Wood explains, the memory of slavery itself – could just be the most pertinent form of accessing

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<sup>208</sup> Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott*, p. 19.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>210</sup> Rigney, 'Portable Monuments', p. 368.

and representing memory. In reading these portable and plural monuments to history we might be able to enlarge and open out the landscape of slavery's memories, especially (and perhaps ironically) at a local level: in the South. Indeed, I will argue, in representing memories of slavery, many novels are ultimately revealing the presence and location of the South in the twenty-first century because of their commitment to representing located memories of slavery, however 'portable' (in Rigney's words) they are.

At this point, it is worth returning to the central theoretical propositions of my thesis: that the postsouthern and new transnational studies seek to dismantle our preconceived ideas of the South beyond placedness. As many of the scholars outlined in the introduction assert, the phenomenon of slavery was not confined to the South alone – that slavery was as much a global and national system as it was a regional one. Deborah Cohn, for instance, considers 'the South and Spanish America to be "neighbouring spaces" with similar "personalities" deriving from shared histories';<sup>211</sup> Edouard Glissant, too, tells us particularly that 'We already know [...] Louisiana is close to the Caribbean and especially to the Antilles: the plantation system, the thrilling persistence of Creole languages';<sup>212</sup> or, as Jessica Adams says, investigation into South's engagement with slavery involves looking to 'circum-Caribbean cultures not only as they have been shaped by plantation systems, but beyond the direct legacy of the plantation'.<sup>213</sup> This scholarship of transnational flavour reads slavery and Southern memory through a global, deterritorializing lens. Shameem Black, too, argues that although most memorials 'continue to be deeply local and historically specific' there is a growing body of forms emerging in the new century that is border-crossing and global.<sup>214</sup> Black's essay investigates 'the intellectual and ethical stakes of memorials created by outsiders' which befits, for her, 'a world where atrocities and their dark legacies are increasingly globalized'.<sup>215</sup> That is, rather than only focusing on the local memorial (created by and for locals) Black illuminates global memorials that by their transcultural and transnational nature are unfixed.

These arguments use literal and literary memorials to slavery as representations of a history that transcends, at an important level, place and region. Such critics might read novels of slavery for their engagement with the global: one of the circum-Caribbean, transatlantic system of slavery that happened to have one concrete strong-holding in the American South. I want to complement this reading by locating Jones and Martin's novels securely in the South;

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<sup>211</sup> Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths*, p. 2.

<sup>212</sup> Glissant, p. 29.

<sup>213</sup> Adams, 'Introduction: Circum-Caribbean Performance, Language, History', p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Shameem Black, 'Commemoration from a Distance: On Metamemorial Fiction', *History & Memory*, 23, 2 (2011) 40–65 (p. 43).

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

moreover, through close analysis, I want to demonstrate how these texts examine a very specifically regional instantiation of slavery. While Black's essay on 'Metamemorial fiction' investigates the 'difficult work of mourning atrocity in an age of globalization', I look to this difficult work at a more regional level; not ignoring the global reaches of the memories, but foregrounding and attending to the local ones.<sup>216</sup> Thus, rather than dismissing this global reading of slavery as unimportant, I suggest that much contemporary Southern fiction about the institution is less internationally-engaged than theory might assert. Moreover, a regional reading of the novels identifies the cultural memories of slavery as still relevant, pertinent and powerful in the continued creation of regional identity. George Handley suggests that the new 'trend' of the transnational turn – globalizing American Studies – is 'perhaps symptomatic of the fact that U.S. culture is beginning to take account of its history and amnesia'.<sup>217</sup> My thesis, however, wants to turn this assumption on its head and ask if this recent trend is, in effect, a re-working of historical amnesia? Moving textual readings away from local and specific meanings may be the exact reversal of Handley's 'taking account'.

In arguing this, I also engage elements of the postsouthern mode of interpretation so pervasive in Southern studies. I take Michael Kreyling's *The South that Wasn't There* here as indicative of this. Via a reading of Lars von Trier's film *Manderlay*, Michael Kreyling argues that von Trier sees the South as 'a memory without a place to have it'.<sup>218</sup> Kreyling, in concluding his book with this analysis, seems to agree with this statement, entirely offering a South that 'wasn't' and 'isn't' there in many ways. This chapter examines Kreyling's assertion, arguing that rather than the South being a memory disjointed from its regional roots, it might be kept alive by them. By looking to Jones and Martin's very different novels, I show how they represent – in all its complexity – a very specific and regional instantiation of slavery that continues to make itself visible through an overflowing of memory. Thus, rather than memory being all that is left of the South, I argue that memory itself is a route to (root of) the region. No less complex than the South Kreyling and others outline, my picture of the region is primarily articulated and created by memory. Martyn Bone posits that 'It is precisely because the familiar southern "sense of place" is defunct' that we should engage with the "real and fictional" qualities of place manifested in postsouthern life and literature'.<sup>219</sup> Similarly, Fred Hobson suggests that what the South 'is and means – is changing radically because concepts of region, place, culture, and

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>217</sup> Handley, p. 47.

<sup>218</sup> Kreyling, *The South That Wasn't There*, p. 194.

<sup>219</sup> Bone, p. 52.

community are being reevaluated'.<sup>220</sup> While Hobson's statement is surely correct, and Bone's question pertinent, this chapter hopes to show how cultural memory, so specifically rooted in place, as I reveal it, affects the contemporary South in such a way as to show how much it continues to live on. This thesis thus wants to turn Kreyling's statement around: *the U.S. South is a place because we have memories of it*.

## SLAVERY AND THE NOVEL

There has been a significant glut of historical fiction and cinema about the South in recent years. Amongst others, there are texts that engage with the Civil War: E. L. Doctorow's *The March* (2005), Robert Hicks' *The Widow of the South* (2005), Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997), and its film adaptation by Anthony Minghella (2004). There are texts that explicitly revisit *Gone With the Wind*: Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2002) and Donald McCaig's *Rhett Butler's People* (2007). And those that investigate slavery in the South: Edward P. Jones' *The Known World* (2003), Valerie Martin's *Property* (2003), Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008), Lars Von Trier's film *Manderlay* (2006). This is but a highly abbreviated list.

I want to propose here the unquestionable fact that this aspect of Southern history is still very much in cultural circulation and remains a fascination for writers and film-makers alike. The simple question is why, in the postsouthern era, people are writing novels about the South's history, *so specifically located*? Ira Berlin has suggested that 'The renaissance in the interest in slavery [...] has become an emblem, sign, and metaphor for the failure to deal directly with the question of race and the long legacy of chattel bondage'.<sup>221</sup> Indeed, the long-term dissociative relation to slavery in America – as seen in the failed museum and the lack of memorials discussed above – needs to be contested and responded to. However, like Berlin, I posit that the wealth of interest in slavery as seen in these cultural texts is a sign or symptom of its widespread neglect in American cultural memory. Moreover, if as Ron Eyerman argues, 'Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory', it is necessary to understand slavery's effects and legacies if we are to truly grasp today's African-American communities and cultures.<sup>222</sup> For Eyerman, slavery is a 'primal scene', or foundational trauma, that informs and shapes black identity in America. The collective memories and identities of African-Americans have to be viewed, Eyerman argues, in light of slavery and its

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<sup>220</sup> Fred Hobson, 'Introduction' in *South to the Future: An American Region in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Fred Hobson (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), pp. 1-12 (p. 3).

<sup>221</sup> Berlin, p. 1259.

<sup>222</sup> Eyerman, p. 1.

effects. As a tear, or rip, in the fabric of black life, slavery is a disruptive and traumatic past that continues to affect the present. Eyerman, too, places significance on the South as a particular site of this memory-work, and therefore this chapter wants to follow this argument, paying attention to the construction of black (and white) identities in light of this structural trauma that so deeply informs collective memories and identities in America, and in the South particularly. Thus Eyerman and I do not single out the South as the only site of slavery – it was a vast international network and system with various loci and geographical coordinates – but wish to foreground this region as a very specific instantiation of it. Particularly affecting Southerners, black or otherwise, at various levels of their identity, slavery is due careful attention today. Thus, rather than simply representing slavery, this new renaissance of literary and cultural products is connecting this past to our present time. Significantly, then, it is the cultural interest in documenting and representing slavery that is a sign of cultural memory's work in the present.

Regionally located memories – of slavery in the South – are emerging through cultural texts that in turn become regionally charged. It may be worth noting here that Jones and Martin's novels are not representing the same memories necessarily; there are obviously differences between a black and white writer's depictions of slavery. I would not want to conflate the two authors, nor their very discrete works, and rather wish to signal that bringing their texts together is important for understanding the complexities of this regional memory. Before reading Jones and Martin's novels, I want to frame them with other criticism, as there is precedent for talking about contemporary literature's relationship to slavery.

Madhu Dubey's 'Speculative Fictions of Slavery' discusses the use of genres such as fantasy and science fiction in African-American writing. Following an essay by crime writer Walter Mosley in the *New York Times Magazine*, Dubey charts the development of black narratives, particularly of slavery, in contemporary fiction. Mosley, ever-attuned to the role of the black writer, argues that African Americans on the whole 'have been cut off from their African ancestry by the scythe of slavery and from an American heritage by being excluded from history'.<sup>223</sup> Dubey uses this as a starting point, claiming that 'For Mosley, the break from narrative realism' – a move produced by the engagement with science fiction or fantasy – 'can release African-American writers from established protocols of racial representation in literature' which ultimately frees them 'to invent unexpected new futures'.<sup>224</sup> These futures, in essence, address the exclusion of African Americans from their own histories, whether of Africa or America.

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<sup>223</sup> Walter Mosley, 'Black to the Future', *New York Times Magazine*, 1 November 1998, p. 32.

<sup>224</sup> Madhu Dubey, 'Speculative Fictions of Slavery', *American Literature*, 82, 4 (2010), 779-805 (p. 779).

Dubey thus explores the various ways in which black writers have engaged with aspects of their cultural history, particularly slavery.

Slavery, Dubey argues, has been long represented in literature through realist modes; the verisimilitude of slave narratives, for example, pushed abolitionist causes due to their unflinching look at the horrors of such an institution. This does not account, of course, for the genre's other stylistic features, such as the employment of sentimentalism for example (but that is not my interest here). Dubey suggests that by the 1970s the canon of writing on slavery had grown larger than it had ever been, and that this had a profound effect on the literature subsequently produced. African-American writers particularly have turned to literary modes other than realism; indeed, Dubey writes, 'Speculative fictions of slavery began to appear only when the task of historical recovery seemed to be relatively far along'.<sup>225</sup> Whether we take this point or not – it may still be arguable that recovery of such histories is as ambiguous as ever, especially outside literature<sup>226</sup> – Dubey correctly notes the flexibility of genre utilized by much contemporary fictions of slavery. I will follow this line of argument through my discussion of Jones' *The Known World* in particular, suggesting that Jones' narrative strategy hinges upon a flexible and experimental fictional style. It is worth quoting Dubey to summarize: speculative fictions of slavery 'exemplify an exceptional brand of postmodernism marked by a strong commitment to the mission of historical recovery'.<sup>227</sup> Indeed, 'despite their departure from realism (or, more precisely, because of it), [such fictions] confidently claim to reveal the truth of the past'.<sup>228</sup> *The Known World* seems to exemplify this point, utilizing postmodern narrative to unearth and illuminate the rooted and local truths of Southern slavery.

Tim A. Ryan in *Calls and Responses* provides some further backdrop for the historical fictions I am looking at. While Ryan suggests that slavery 'remains a national shame, an ugly, gaping crack in the mythology of the United States' – and this finds a corollary with the above acknowledgment of slavery's absence in the public realm – he nonetheless claims, accurately, that slavery 'is the unspeakable thing that is frequently spoken in the American novel'.<sup>229</sup> Indeed, Ryan claims that representations of slavery have always been 'defined by multiplicity rather than singularity' and that 'the cultural conversation about slavery is – and always has been – characterized by intertextual, interdisciplinary, and interracial dialogue'.<sup>230</sup> Thus, the history of

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 783.

<sup>226</sup> See the recent Quentin Tarantino film *Django Unchained* for example.

<sup>227</sup> Dubey, 'Speculative Fictions', p. 780.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 784.

<sup>229</sup> Tim A. Ryan, *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since Gone With the Wind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), p. 1 and pp. 1-2.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 19 and p. 211.

the slavery novel is nothing if not complex, ambiguous and shifting. On this, Ryan notes the ubiquity of the novel of slavery across history: from *Gone With the Wind* to the recent novels I have listed, it seems that slavery is something to which we continue to return, however ugly a ‘gaping crack’. This point may need further stressing as there is a large history of novels narrating slavery. We could think merely, to return to Morrison, of *Beloved* which has become ossified across critical fields as the definitive text of slavery. From psychoanalysis, to trauma theory, to feminist study, to American and Southern studies, Morrison’s famous novel has undergone, since its publication, something of a canonization. Thus, I am not attempting to claim that Martin and Jones’ novels are original or breaking with the long tradition of slavery’s novelistic representations. Merely, I am arguing that their perspicuous memory-work in the twenty-first century tells us much about the contemporary South’s relationship to its past.

Like the fictions that both Dubey and Ryan investigate, the two novels that I now examine concern themselves with slavery in the antebellum South. This one element of Southern history stands in here for the region’s relationship with the past more generally. Although an advocate of the postsouth such as Michael Kreyling might argue that this is memory ‘without a place to have it’, it is clear that contemporary writers are reaching into the region’s history to tell and retell narratives about slavery that, while not homogenous, are specifically regional. Indeed, the analyses that follow argue for both historical novels as texts that meet the demand for often absent Southern slavery memories discussed at the beginning of the chapter. There are many reasons why writers today are still concerned with Southern history, but importantly, the cultural work that the novels are engaged in is intimately tied to specific and regional memories that call for representation. A theorist useful here is Gary M. Ciuba, whose book *Desire, Violence, Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction* looks to three defining aspects of Southern identity and literature. Ciuba writes, ‘the rites of the Old South tried to express violence through an array of ordered forms’, whether they be race, sex or class.<sup>231</sup> Writing on the potency of slavery as a defining institution of the South he argues that ‘slavery was not a single inaugurating murder but an on-going sacrificial institution in the South’, thus signalling a key element of slavery’s power in the region.<sup>232</sup>

Similarly attentive to the structures of slavery, Christina Sharpe wants to ‘see and think anew about slavery’ in order to understand more fully its multifarious effects, especially in

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<sup>231</sup> Gary M. Ciuba, *Desire, Violence and Divinity in Modern Southern Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p. 17.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

relation to the body – what Sharpe calls ‘monstrous intimacies’.<sup>233</sup> ‘Thinking about monstrous intimacies post-slavery’ she writes, ‘means examining those subjectivities constituted from transatlantic slavery onward’ and charting the variegated imprint of slavery and its oppressions, both physical and mental.<sup>234</sup> Significantly though, Sharpe looks at the ‘internalization and perpetuation of that violence’ of slavery and its aftermath in ‘various forms of power and desire among the formerly enslaved and those who claimed ownership over them’.<sup>235</sup> What Sharpe is ultimately looking at, therefore, is the afterlife of slavery: the lingering traces of slavery’s intimate violence on black bodies. The wide-reaching institution of slavery described here is laid bare in the novels of Edward P. Jones and Valerie Martin. Both novels represent slavery as an all-pervasive system that socially organizes and forms the Southern region, and the people within it. Interpolating Southerners into a complex web of power and mastery, slavery had vast social and ideological weight. The central tenet of this chapter, then, is that the novels’ representations of slavery’s pervasiveness will be read as not only fleshing out our existing notions of slavery in the South, but more significantly as indicative of an entrenched, particularly Southern, experience that is informing a specifically Southern cultural memory. Moreover, not only do Jones and Martin’s novels explore this Southern memory, but also they dramatize the very processes of regional remembrance. Both novels contain acts of, or scenes that are metaphoric of, memory-work itself.

Significantly, the texts call attention to themselves and the memories within that are demanding address. To demonstrate what I mean by this, we can look briefly at the beginning of Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy*. Opening with the first-person narration of the slave Florens, Morrison’s text demonstrates the call of cultural memory. The first lines, spoken by Florens (directly, in a way, to the reader) are: ‘Don’t be afraid. My telling can’t hurt you in spite of what I have done [...] One question is who is responsible? Another is can you read?’<sup>236</sup> Morrison’s novel immediately stages the relationship between the text and the reader. ‘Don’t be afraid’ suggests the potency of the narrative to follow, but more pertinently, ‘can you read?’ is a question about interpretation. While Florens’ question also indicates the high levels of slave illiteracy (and thus the difficulty in reading), I think that Morrison is also asking whether the reader can ‘understand’ and fully assimilate what is being communicated. Far from patronizing,

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<sup>233</sup> Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 26.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>236</sup> Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2008), p. 1.

this claim is the necessary counter to the absence of slavery memory in the public sphere documented above. What is communicated is the Southern memory of slavery.

### **THE MASTER(S) NARRATIVE: EDWARD P. JONES' *THE KNOWN WORLD***

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, Edward P. Jones' *The Known World* is a sprawling novel of intersecting narratives that charts the institution of slavery in the fictional Manchester County, Virginia in the early 1800s. At the centre of Jones' novel is Henry Townsend, an African American bought out of slavery, only to subsequently become a slave-owner himself. This would have been a rare occurrence in the South, but Jones uses this marginal detail of history to explore the wide-reaching nature of slavery in the region. The novel charts Henry's life from building a plantation to his death (which opens the book). Interspersed in this story are many narrative threads that flesh out various characters from Manchester County. Jones textures his novel through overlapping stories, interconnected characters, and varying narrative styles. The novel's form is decidedly postmodern, featuring multiple storylines that veer off in varying directions and interlink with a shifting chronology, and self-conscious notions of narrative and history.

I thus situate the novel within a postmodern framework of storytelling, but with the aim of actually revealing a particular moment of Southern history from a decidedly marginal position. Following an essay by Susan Donaldson, this chapter suggests that what this cultural memory of the South tells us is that monolithic versions of Southern history (slavery particularly) must be dismantled, but equally we need pay attention to the smaller narratives of the past that emerge 'in place'. Even though, in Donaldson's words, the master (and master's) narrative is debunked through postmodern methods of narration, Jones' novel nonetheless testifies to the pervasive power of slavery as an interpolating social system and an important cultural memory.<sup>237</sup> Reaching forward and back across time and people, Jones' novel eventually serves to suggest the potency of slavery as a defining cultural memory in the South. Further, in its time-travel – the collapsing of temporality by the narrator, flitting from one event to another, and one historical period to another – the novel dramatizes the processes of remembrance activated in a literary text, as illuminated by Ann Rigney. That is, the novel's foregrounding of the past and the articulation of it insists on its memory-work. The novel might be said to confirm Dubey's contention that 'speculative novels suggest that the truth of the past is more fully grasped by way of an antirealist

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<sup>237</sup> Susan V. Donaldson, 'Telling Forgotten Stories of Slavery in the Postmodern South', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 40, 2 (2008), 267-283 (p. 268).

literary imagination that can fluidly cross temporal boundaries and affectively immerse readers into the world of slavery'.<sup>238</sup>

In her essay, 'Telling Forgotten Stories of Slavery in the Postmodern South', Susan Donaldson analyses Jones' *The Known World* through, as the title suggests, a postmodern lens. Her argument claims that it is one text among many 'postmodern novels written for a postmodern South and a postmodern age'.<sup>239</sup> Unwritten in this sentence is the connecting 'postsouthern' which Donaldson is surely signalling to some extent. My analysis differs in emphasis from Donaldson's in that I think Jones' postmodern strategies are ultimately shaping a regional locatedness and rooted memory, rather than merely complicating the South and its sense of history. Ultimately, the postmodern elements of the novel (in form and content) would seem to suggest that *The Known World* is indicative of the postsouth so many theorists have identified. In contrast though, like the speculative fictions Dubey has unravelled, Jones' novel might just be more complex than we first think. Donaldson claims that the twenty-first century South – that she sees as transnational, postmodern – 'requires a new kind of historical novel, one that underscores its own provisional status by calling attention to its literary operations'.<sup>240</sup> This is a staple analysis of postmodern fiction; because the narrative calls attention to its own making and remaking, it is therefore conditional: aware of its literariness, its linguistic form, and the problems therein. Jones' novel does just this, playing with narration and knowledge, always flagging its own fictional form. But I would argue Jones is using such strategies to different (less referential) ends. To begin this discussion, therefore, I turn to the most overt instances of Jones' postmodernist strategy.

There are many examples of historical time-shifting in *The Known World*, as Jones' narrator omnisciently provides the reader with information across places and times. We will move from a time after Henry's death, to his early childhood, to characters contemporary to his adulthood and then to the present day. This fractured narrative style, so replete with temporal and spatial movement, underscores Jones' insistence on not reading the book as a traditionally realist novel. By calling attention to the novel's own temporality – and time generally – Jones plays, in a postmodern way, with notions of history, narrative and knowledge. In so doing, Jones intimates that we read the book's title as something of a question or dialogue: what, ultimately, is known about the South of the novel? What world-view do we have access to? The 'known world', Amy Hungerford suggests, is both the novel itself and the entire fictional world it creates.

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<sup>238</sup> Dubey, 'Speculative Fictions', p. 785.

<sup>239</sup> Donaldson, p. 268.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

Thus, she continues, ‘If the novel is the “known” world, it is known omnisciently by the narrator’, and moreover – even though the narrator provides us with oftentimes incomplete (or false) information and dubious ‘historical sources’ – ‘the vertiginous shifting’ between past and present ‘dramatizes how much more this narrator knows than his characters, more than any being ever could’.<sup>241</sup> While we will return to the idea of knowledge and godly omniscience, here it may merely be posited that *The Known World* is engaged, from its very title, in epistemological query, not least regarding slavery and its multifarious effects in the South.

The narrator, for example, draws attention to various fictional historians who have commented on the lives of Manchester County, such as one ‘whose book was rejected by the University of Virginia Press and finally published by the University of North Carolina Press’.<sup>242</sup> In another example, the narrator informs the reader that ‘In 1993 the University of Virginia Press would publish a 415-page book by a white woman, Marcia H. Shia, documenting that every ninety-seventh person in the Commonwealth of Virginia was kin, by blood or by marriage, to the line that started with Celeste and Elias Freeman’ (p. 352). The specific details of this historian and her book testify to the omniscience of our narrator and his knowledge of historical documents (however fictional) that compliment or complicate the narrative that he is telling. More interestingly, though, because this wealth of omniscient knowledge is so foregrounded, Jones makes the narrator conspicuous to the reader.

Another example concerns the character Anderson Frazier, a Canadian pamphlet writer who appears a few times in the novel. The narrator informs us that ‘The pamphlet on free Negroes who had owned other Negroes was twenty-seven pages, not including the six pages of drawings and maps. There were seven pages devoted to Henry Townsend’ (p. 107). We further learn, however, that it is called ‘*Curiosities and Oddities about Our Southern Neighbours*’ which explores (among other things) ‘The Economy of Cotton [...] The Flora and Fauna. The Need for Storytelling’ (p. 106). The last in this list – storytelling – shows us that however postmodern and playful his attitude towards historical documents, or history itself, Jones is highly aware of the importance of storytelling in the South, in addition to how any document of slavery or the region is part of this process. Although some have argued that ‘the creative omniscience of the novelist seems more compelling than the compromised empiricism of the historian’, Jones ultimately illuminates the power of narrative generally (not necessarily fictional) in presenting slavery and Southern history.<sup>243</sup> Tim Ryan writes: Edward P. Jones ‘accepts that history may

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<sup>241</sup> Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 139.

<sup>242</sup> Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 44 (Quoted in text from here on).

<sup>243</sup> Ryan, p. 195.

only be available to us as unreliable narrative, but texts are finally the only kind of access we have to very real processes, events, and consequences'.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, the time-shifting that heightens such narrative importance is utilized by Jones as one way to insist upon the affectiveness of this history in our present time. As Dubey suggests of other texts, such 'temporal doublings [...are] obviously intended to reveal the persistence of the past in the present'.<sup>245</sup> *The Known World*, thus, not only attempts to reveal something about the particularities of slavery through a literary form of cultural memory, but intends to demonstrate, through time-shifting, how these memories work on and in our present.

Returning to Donaldson's essay, she further mounts her argument about Jones' postmodernism through analysis of the central character Henry Townsend because he is a black slaveholder. The novel, she suggests, 'interrogat[es] mastery itself, and by implication master narratives of history'.<sup>246</sup> This latter investigation is a central strategy of postmodern writing. The logic of postmodernism, as particularly seen in the writing of Jean François-Lyotard, is very much concerned with undoing our dominant narratives about the world. Sceptical of the definitive, especially in relation to the past, postmodernism points to the limitations in our traditional conception of history as static, teleological and concrete: ideas that have defined history and historical discourse. Rather, we need look, in this logic, to histories (plural), that are not dominant but highly contingent and multiple. In the case of *The Known World*, for instance, the master narrative of slavery and white slaveholding is unravelled. The novel, in deconstructing the master narrative of history – via the disrupted chronology and mixture of storytelling with historical 'documents' – also deconstructs the slave master's narrative. Through focusing on a black slave owner, Jones upturns our existing notions that usually take slavery to be the site of white mastery and black servitude. Focusing on a marginalized narrative, Jones 'problematizes history by unearthing discontinuities, anomalies, and multiple possibilities and by posing alternative content and alternative forms'.<sup>247</sup> Jones' narrative troubles what we take to be a widely 'known world' of the antebellum South. However, this postmodern novel might not be indicative of a postmodern South or Kreyling's postsouth which is radically changing in relation to its past. I want to argue that the text's playful surface belies a depth of history and memory in place that Jones wants to unearth and imaginatively claim, which may not fit into the above scholarly readings.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>245</sup> Dubey, 'Speculative Fictions', p. 791.

<sup>246</sup> Donaldson, p. 268.

<sup>247</sup> Donaldson, p. 270.

This memory, to re-state, is fundamentally regional and built from the ground-up. The past, Stephen Hanna writes, is ‘a definitional aspect of place and place-based identities’.<sup>248</sup> Similarly, Ira Berlin writes that ‘The memory of slavery [...] is constructed on different ground from its history. Rather than global, it is local. Memories generally derive from the particular’.<sup>249</sup> Memory, thus, in this and my argument, is an active ingredient in the shaping and keeping-alive of regional identity. There are a number of ways in which this can be seen in Jones’ novel, but principally we can see it in the effects of slavery on the characters throughout *The Known World*. Patrick O’Donnell identifies the novel as an investigation into the wide-reaching effects of slavery in the South. The focus on a black slaveholder is, for O’Donnell, indicative of the ways in which the system of slavery reached systemically across the region. Of the black slave-owner, he writes, ‘Jones uses this cruelly ironic historical development to convey the overwhelming nature of a dominant ideology, and the fact that brutality and the desire for mastery knows no racial bounds’.<sup>250</sup> As we will see with the power-struggles in Valerie Martin’s novel that reach beyond the race line into gender, Jones focuses on such a figure of unfamiliar history so as to explore the all-pervasive nature of slavery and its social reach. While we can at once view this small narrative (and thus the disruption of a grand narrative) as part of a postmodern discourse on the multiplicities of slavery and its history, it is also useful to argue, I think, along with O’Donnell, that this further illuminates the depth of slavery’s reach in the South because of the ways in which slavery’s effects transcend our usual conceptions of it. In addition, this depth equally informs a rooted cultural memory that is ignited and ‘remembered’ through the novel itself.

Jones’ narrator takes us back to the moment when Henry, not yet a slaveholder, tells his parents about his entry into this social system; they are understandably shocked by their son’s decision. Asking him why he does not see the wrong in his actions, Henry says that ‘Nobody never told me the wrong of [slaveholding]’ (p. 137). Henry’s indignation towards his parents’ apparent lack of understanding is revealed when he says ‘Papa, I ain’t done nothin I ain’t a right to. I ain’t done nothin no white man wouldn’t do’ (p. 138). Henry’s father Augustus responds to this by beating his son, making him fall to the ground, claiming ‘Thas how a slave feel!’ (p. 138). Though for Henry’s father, slavery is something that has oppressed black people for numerous years and thus is, in itself, abominable, Henry merely sees slavery as something that has always taken place in this region and his involvement on the ‘other side’ of the power line

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<sup>248</sup> Hanna, p. 319

<sup>249</sup> Berlin, p. 1265.

<sup>250</sup> Patrick O’Donnell, *The American Novel Now: Reading Contemporary American Fiction Since 1980* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 144.

as a natural occurrence. Augustus takes issue with his son's logic of doing only what a white man would do because they are not white: for him, slavery is a racial phenomenon and exists along a racial boundary. He sees his son becoming a slave-master as not only an insult to his family that has lived in servitude for many years, but also an inversion of the slave system. Jones thus illuminates the deep-rooted psychology of ownership and slaveholding.

Tracing this mental structure back into Henry's history might unravel this further. When Augustus buys himself out of slavery and years later his wife also, he cannot fully free his son too. As Augustus takes his wife from the plantation, they have to leave Henry in the care of a friend:

Augustus knelt beside his wife and promised Henry that they would be back for him. "Before you can turn around good", he said, "you be comin home with us." Augustus repeated himself, and the boy tried to make sense of the word *home*. He knew the word, knew the cabin with him and his mother and Rita that the word represented (p. 16).

This quotation principally informs us of Henry's internalization of the plantation as home; further, this home is a maternal space which is not occupied by his father who is 'free' and thus 'away' from home. The abandonment of Henry as a young boy to William Robbins the slave-master must have a profound effect. Indeed, 'it took far longer to buy Henry's freedom than his father had thought' for 'Robbins would come to know what a smart boy Henry was' and how to use him on the plantation (p. 17). Thus, not only in being left at the plantation by his parents, but in his slow alignment with Robbins, Henry's psychology is rooted (quite firmly) in and on the plantation. Its social structures are, arguably, internalized by Henry too at this point.

Echoing the scene recounted above where Augustus hits his son to teach him 'how a slave feel', this pattern of paternal anger has a precursor. During the winter months when Henry's parents go to the plantation to visit him, Henry sometimes does not go to them. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but there is obviously a separation of child and parent occurring. One cold day, the narrator tells us, 'after they had waited two hours beyond when he was supposed to appear on the road, Augustus grabbed the boy when he shuffled up and shook him, then he pushed him to the ground. Henry covered his face and began to cry' (p. 19). If this event were not clear enough to Henry, the next week the slaveholder Robbins is waiting: 'I heard you did something to my boy, to my property', he says, repeating the sentiment: 'I won't have you touching my boy, my property' (p. 19). The move from 'boy' to 'property' is telling not only for the obvious point that Robbins claims his slaves as possessions, but also for the implicit idea that Henry might now be Robbins' boy, his 'son'. If Henry is already somewhat separated from his parents (who, in his mind, *left* their home together in being

free) and connected to the slave-master who values his intelligence and abilities, might the plantation architecture (socially and psychologically) not form Henry's identity in particular ways? The plantation as home and the economy of land-work is, for Henry, a matter of personal and regional identity. As a black man himself, he sees no issue (later in life) with owning people of his own race because of the depths that the system of slavery reached in him, and the histories so crystallized within it. Where his parents separated from slavery and freed themselves, Henry was not given the opportunity – and even, in a sense, learned the perils of what someone leaving the plantation might mean – and thus the place of his childhood becomes the final place of his life.

We can connect this to a scene later on in Henry's development as a slave-master. Henry's entrance into this world happens under the tutelage of the slaveholder Robins. Jones' narrator documents the building of the plantation house by Henry and his (first) slave, Moses. As they are in some ways friends, during one afternoon of building, they end up play-fighting in the yard. Robins witnesses them 'tussling' when he comes to visit Henry, looking upon their closeness with disdain. While the tussling could be read for its homoerotic potential (which would have interesting corollaries with the later discussion of *Property* and its female slave-owner erotically claiming her slave's body), this moment reveals much about the relationships Henry and Robins have to the institution of slavery. Robins chastises Henry for befriending, and playing with, Moses, arguing that 'the law expects you to know what is master and what is slave. And it does not matter if you are not much more darker than your slave. The law is blind to that' (p. 123). In this ironic twist of logic, the system of ownership becomes solely focused on power relations and people, not skin colour. By treating Moses as an equal, Robins says to Henry 'You will have pointed to the line that separates you from your property and told your property that the line does not matter' (p. 123). Henry thus has a different relationship with slave-holding to the one that Robins holds: that of the dominant ideology of ownership. Indeed, in order to 'own' Moses as his property, but simultaneously play with him in a filial bond, Henry must in some way disavow the structures and powers of slaveholding, which further complicates his role in the plantation system. The depths and contradictions of slavery's social and psychological reach is thus evidenced in Henry's complex relationship to ownership. As Donaldson proposes, the master (and master's) narratives of slavery are problematized here. We find this expounded and complicated further in the opening pages of the novel.

*The Known World* opens with the slave Moses who, when hearing of his master Henry's death, lies down in the plantation field. Jones writes, 'Moses closed his eyes and bent down and took a pinch of the soil and ate it with no more thought than if it were a spot of cornbread. He

worked the dirt around in his mouth and swallowed' (p. 1). Eating dirt was common amongst slaves for, among other things, its possibly hunger-quelling effects.<sup>251</sup> However, Jones's narrator tells us that Moses 'was the only man in the realm, slave or free, who ate dirt' (p. 1), and we learn later that he does it to check the soil's fertility for when planting should begin. The narrator further informs us that 'the eating of it tied [Moses] to the only thing in his small world that meant almost as much as his own life' (p. 2). The importance of land to Moses – and to slavery in general – is illuminated here to the point at which a slave would ingest the soil because it is so central to his very being. Of all the novel's known worlds, Moses' 'own world is confined, in a sense, to the handful of dirt he eats'.<sup>252</sup> Here, slaves are thus inextricably tied to their role as land-workers on the plantation; Donaldson suggests that, though problematic, 'that act of eating dirt serves as a form of self-identification'.<sup>253</sup> As an institution of land-work, slavery in the South has always had a literally deeply-rooted connection to the soil. Southern identity, too, as the introduction began to outline, has often revolved around the notion of Southern land. As Ron Eyerman consolidates: 'In the rural areas of the antebellum South, identity was rooted in land and locality, with a particular area and region'.<sup>254</sup> Thus, not only does regional identification occur in a general sense here, but also in a more precise and locally 'grounded' way.

These notions, however, should not go un-problematized: historical connections between Southerners and land have often been saturated by ideological bias. For example, the Southern Agrarians who valued Southern soil over and above the encroaching forces of modernity did so through the displacement of the black presence that had literally built the region's planter economy in the past. Their connection to land is thus from the start a deeply contentious one, so suggesting intimate ties between Southerners and their soil must be posed with acute awareness of this historical legacy. With that said, the opening of Jones' novel persuasively suggests the bond between slave and land (different to a white Southerner and land). As the connection between master and slave is equally forceful and complex, so too is the relation of slave to the land he works.

To unpack Moses' earth-eating further, we can read it psychoanalytically, according to notions of mourning and melancholia. In brief, mourning is understood as the working-through of loss. The mourner gradually understands that something has gone and, as Eric Santner writes, this mourning 'culminates in a reattachment of libido to new objects of desire'.<sup>255</sup> Melancholia,

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<sup>251</sup> See: Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. x.

<sup>252</sup> Donaldson, p. 271.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Eyerman, p. 35.

<sup>255</sup> Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 89.

Freud and others tell us, is in some ways a counter-point to mourning as it is the psychological state of refusing to accept the loss. Instead of working through it, the melancholic acts out and denies the loss; melancholia, in Santner's words, 'attaches itself to loss; it says no! to life without the object'.<sup>256</sup> Often this happens through some sort of internalization of the lost object: so as to prove that it has not gone (it is inside them). Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok have written substantially on this. In their essay 'Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation', they argue that when refusing to mourn a lost object, the bereaved (melancholic) can often ingest the loss in interesting ways. They write, 'in order not to have to "swallow" a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing'.<sup>257</sup> Although here they treat incorporation metaphorically, they also argue that 'When, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the loved-object we miss, this means *we refuse to mourn* and that we shun the consequences of mourning' (original emphasis).<sup>258</sup> Therefore, whether through actual or metaphoric eating and swallowing, Abraham and Torok suggest that melancholic reactions often lead a person to internalize the loss itself.

Thus, Moses' dirt-eating could be seen as an example of melancholic incorporation. This scene occurs after the death of his master Henry and thus Moses feels bereft and experiences a profound loss, partly because without a master, his own identity as a slave is thrown into question. 'All his life', Donaldson writes, Moses 'ha[d] been "someone's slave", the property first of one white man, then another'.<sup>259</sup> As suggested, his eating dirt connects him to slavery in an intimate way because it forms his conception of self. However, in the light of his master's death, Moses' actions possibly incorporate Henry's death melancholically. His refusal to mourn allows Moses to continue believing in the power structures of the South that he sees as defining him. Disavowing the death quashes the feelings of loss he experiences, and allows his continued identification in his bond with the Southern soil and social system. This reading can then be taken further when, after eating the earth, Moses begins to masturbate onto the soil as it starts to rain. In a symbolic moment, the rain and ejaculate are twinned as fertilizing liquids for the soil. Though it is usually work and toil that produces fecundity – and it is the slave, such as Moses, who does this work – here it is Moses' pleasure that metaphorically enlivens it. Though he is in a complex process of mourning, tinged with melancholia, Moses reaffirms his connection to Southern soil through his sexual act. Because of Henry's death, Moses psychologically re-

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, 'Mourning or Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation' in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis, Volume 1*, ed. and trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 125-138 (p. 126).

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>259</sup> Donaldson, pp. 271-2.

establishes his deep-rooted connection to the land that he has worked on for his entire life. By ingesting it, and then personally ‘fertilizing’ it, Moses acts in any way possible to remain connected to the soil that defines him as a slave. As a deeply-rooted ideology across the South, slavery comes to define everyone caught up in the system: ideologically, psychologically and bodily.

To bring this discussion of Jones’ novel to a conclusion, I look to a scene at the end of *The Known World* that I think is indicative of Jones’ literary act of cultural memory. The text here dramatizes the process of remembrance. We thus return to Ann Rigney’s sense of novels acting as conduits for memory; this comes into focus through a reading of the artistic practice of one of Jones’ characters which interestingly parallels his own work. We might want to define this memory further, suggesting not only that it is regional, but perhaps also (in Michael Hanchard’s terms) ‘black’. Hanchard’s essay ‘Black Memory versus State Memory’ is concerned with the identification of black memory as a form – in Anna Hartnell’s words – ‘of memory that [...] works against the “amnesia” and “forgetting” that often characterizes “state memory”’.<sup>260</sup> Hanchard identifies a number of themes that can be seen as ‘constitutive’ of black memory: ‘Racism, slavery, reparations, nationalism and anticolonial struggle, and migration’.<sup>261</sup> Listing such social experiences and historical occurrences as being formative of black memory is to suggest the importance of them as defining markers in the history of African-American identity itself. In my argument, this notion might be helpful as, in resisting the ‘master narratives’ of slavery, Jones’ novel actively seeks more particular and often local memories of slavery that are fundamentally rooted in black experience. Thus, the memories at work in *The Known World* are at once regional, and particularly (as Hanchard would have it) black.

In the final chapters, we read a letter that Henry’s wife Caldonia receives, long after Henry has died, from her brother Calvin. Calvin is now a young man, living away from Manchester County, and in the letter to his sister, he tells her of his visit to an art gallery in Washington. Calvin informs Caldonia about two large works of art that document Manchester County; they are mixed-media maps: part tapestry, part painting, part sculpture. He learns that the works were created by Alice, the slave on the Townsend plantation whom everyone thought mentally disabled. One of the artworks depicts the entire county with its plantations and homes, the other is specifically about the Townsend plantation. In one sense, therefore, Alice’s maps are creative works of memory that attempt to convey her sense or vision of the past and its sites

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<sup>260</sup> Anna Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus: American Futures from Du Bois to Obama* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>261</sup> Michael Hanchard, ‘Black Memory versus State Memory: Notes Toward a Method’, *Small Axe*, 26 (2008), 45–62 (p. 47).

or places. Her artworks are vehicles for her own specific memories that in turn inform a larger cultural memory of the region. The second map is so detailed that, Calvin notes, ‘There is nothing missing, not a cabin, not a barn, not a chicken, not a horse. Not a single person is missing’ (p. 385). Although they are seemingly maps, Calvin writes that “‘map” is such a poor word for such a wondrous thing’ (p. 384) because of their detail, particularity and richness. Donaldson comments on the totalities represented in the works, arguing that the vast overview of people – black and white, slave and master – ‘testif[ies] to the central truths denied by slavery [...] not the rigid separation of master and slave, and white and black, but the close intertwining of the two’.<sup>262</sup> The all-pervasive nature of slavery and its entanglement of people of all races and social positions is, in Donaldson’s view, always hidden and disavowed by the structures of slavery itself. Alice’s ‘maps’, conversely, cast an all-seeing overview of the plantation that attempt to undo this erasure.

In many ways, it is obvious that Alice is a double for Jones himself: ‘both in her knowledge [...] and in her capacity for invention’.<sup>263</sup> In addition, her artworks are, in their attempt to see the whole county, metonymic of *The Known World*. Another character in the novel, Sheriff John Skiffington, has his own map titled ‘The Known World’, which is – flagged by its name – linked both to the novel that we are reading and, as I am arguing here, Alice’s creations. Skiffington’s map, by contrast to Alice’s wide-ranging work, is constrained by its ‘limited’ viewpoint. The map that Skiffington owns is a European engraving that crudely and simply delineates the Southern region from a traditionally limited cartographic perspective. While, Tim Ryan tells us, Alice’s maps could easily be interpreted ‘as an authentic African American alternative to the dubious European metanarrative of Skiffington’s “The Known World”’, he warns us to read them not in opposition to each other, but as mutually contextualising.<sup>264</sup> After all, as postmodernism has taught us, any map will always be limited in some way as it cannot be fully comprehensive. However, Calvin claims that the overview Alice’s maps provide is ‘what God sees when He looks down on Manchester’ (p. 384), a sentiment that has filtered throughout Jones’ novel. The omniscience of Jones’ narrator, and the endless shifting of viewpoints and timeframes are, although part of his playful postmodern discourse on history, Jones’ way of revealing his survey of slavery in the South, and illustrating the movement of memory and remembrance. This logic could lead us to read Jones’ novel as replacing one form of mastery and master narrative with another, that of the novelist. I would argue though that

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<sup>262</sup> Donaldson, p. 281.

<sup>263</sup> Carolyn Vellenga Berman, ‘*The Known World* in World Literature: Bakhtin, Glissant, and Edward P. Jones’ *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 42, 2 (2009), 231-238 (p. 237).

<sup>264</sup> Ryan, p. 206.

the narrator's presence in the novel is a highly visible one. The narrator does not, as with traditional realism, 'disappear' from the text and foster the illusion of unmediated telling, but remains permanently in the reader's 'sight': ever present. Thus, in a stylistic trick, Jones' narrator both claims realist all-knowingness and complicates this realism by foregrounding his very act of telling and seeing. While not complete, his striving for authorial and artistic reach testifies to the complexity and importance of documenting history in the twenty-first century.

In Alice's second artwork, Calvin notes that 'Each person's face, including yours [Caldonia], is raised up as though to look in the very eyes of God' (p. 385). There is not only an allusion to Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* here, but the insight suggests a dual process of looking. Simultaneously then, Alice's maps (and Jones' novel) survey plantation life from a god's-eye view, but the characters themselves return this gaze: they are aware of the watcher and demand a witness to them. This breaking of the literary 'fourth-wall' illuminates the cultural work of memory that Jones' novel undertakes. Alice's artwork, and *The Known World* itself (we have already seen how they are twinned), thus both reveal the call for memories of slavery being met. Katherine Bassard writes, 'This God's eye-view in Alice's very human creation represents the irruption of the vision of another world into the text of the novel, the promise of an alternative way of seeing that is not confined to a "map" or "narrative" but is at once immanent and transcendent'.<sup>265</sup> Both human and god-like, omniscient but flawed, fictional yet seemingly factual, Jones' narrative points to that space in Southern fiction that attempts to reach back into history and lay bare the ambiguous and complex relationship the present has to it. Moreover, as Bassard claims, the transcendence of Jones' final vision, where the characters return the stare of the watching novelist/god, demanding address, demanding a reader as witness, illuminates the deep connection the South has to its past that lives on in the present. In returning (and thus requiring) the gaze, Jones' characters exceed the frame of the 'map' or artwork and metaphorically act out the call of memory working through the novel. While the map cannot contain such memory in itself, this does not mean that memory flows just anywhere; the roots of memory are still firmly in place, even as the cultural tools to express that memory cannot delimit it. Recognition of this memory, and the usage of it in the present, not only flows out of Jones' characters (through their direct address to the reader), but the novel itself. Rigney claims that 'memorials suffer from erosion and need to be continuously re-inscribed if they are to remain legible and, to the extent that texts resemble monuments, the same susceptibility to

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<sup>265</sup> Katherine Clay Bassard, 'Imagining Other Worlds: Race, Gender, and the "Power Line" in Edward P. Jones's *The Known World*', *African American Review*, 42, 3-4 (2008), 407-419 (p. 418).

erosion applies'.<sup>266</sup> In continuously connecting to the reader, and erupting with memory (and the demand for recollection and remembrance), Jones's novel enacts this re-inscription.

If *The Known World* is overflowing with memory of a particular place and time, we need to pay attention to the erosion of memory elsewhere in Southern culture and theory that this is complimenting. Jones' novel thus lends itself to the thesis I am posing which argues for the literature of slavery as indicative of a Southern cultural memory that informs a particular sense of regionalism. As Richard Crownshaw posits, the form of *The Known World* is a 'reminder of the fundamental operation of cultural memory, its construction and reconstruction of the past moment according to the desires that inform the moment of remembrance'.<sup>267</sup> Just as Susannah Radstone suggests that we always identify cultural memory's placed origins, Crownshaw points to the specific moment of remembrance and the impulses that shape it. Jones' novel suggests an afterlife of slavery – a rich site of rooted and localized memory – longing and calling for representation.

### **SLAVERY'S TENTACLES: VALERIE MARTIN'S *PROPERTY***

My second example is Valerie Martin's Orange Prize-winning *Property*. The novel is narrated by Manon Gaudet, a plantation-owner's wife in Louisiana. Her story focuses on the relationship between Manon, her husband, and their servant Sarah. These three main characters are at the centre of a narrative which charts the death of both Manon's mother and, after a slave uprising, her husband. Manon is left with Sarah who then escapes and tries to live in the North of the United States. Manon, however, has her tracked down and returned to her New Orleans home, enacting complete control over her 'property'. The novel's title insists that we read the book in terms of ownership – most obviously, that of slaves – but opens out the multiple meanings of this to include land, buildings and, revealingly, wives and womanhood. Thus we see the impact of slavery across the region and the significance of this as a Southern cultural memory that is embedded in the novel's substance. Further, the visible processes of cultural memory – like Alice's artwork – are also particularly demonstrated in a scene late in *Property*. Unlike Jones' novel, this is not what Blanchard would necessarily call 'black memory' – Martin is white, as are her protagonists – but nonetheless, the memories represented are of an antebellum system and people, both black and white. Thus, *Property's* memories are cultural in that they are Southern, but not identical to those represented in *The Known World*.

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<sup>266</sup> Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott*, p. 221.

<sup>267</sup> Richard Crownshaw, 'Perpetrator Fictions and Transcultural Memory', *Parallax*, 17, 4 (2011), 75-89 (p. 80).

Manon Gaudet is a woman wholly distanced from her husband and the plantation on which they live. The novel closely follows the relationship between Manon and her servant Sarah. We find out early on that Manon has not had a child with her husband – they rarely even have sexual relations – but he has borne one with Sarah. The child, Walter, features in the narrative as a symbol of the interconnecting relationships on the plantation, and the complex web of power relations that is thus produced. The gulf between Manon and her husband is referenced a number of times in her narrative; one of the most indicative comes when, after attempting to make love, Gaudet tells his wife ‘I’ve not much interest in making love to a corpse’.<sup>268</sup> Manon laughs and thinks to herself, ‘How wonderful that he would call what we were doing “making love”, how amusing that he drew the line at a corpse. “If I am dead [...] it is because you have killed me”’ (p. 61). Caustically dark, Manon’s interior dialogue reveals much about the inner life of a slaveholder’s wife. In contradistinction to many plantation myths represented in novels and films, this relationship is loveless and sexless. Moreover, Manon indicates that taking on the role of wife is to be cast into death. Figured as a corpse, Martin suggests the degree to which – contrary to the idealized conceptions of the white Southern Belle figure at the heart of traditional plantation stories – women in the antebellum South were sublimated and repressed. This idea becomes complicated further when Manon asserts a certain kind of agency, as I will go on to explore.

Beyond this social marginality, *Property* looks closely at the connected relationships within the plantation household. Central to the novel’s narrative are the bonds between Gaudet, Manon and Sarah. From the beginning we are aware that Sarah has borne Gaudet’s child (where Manon has not) and thus the uneven power relations in the house are established. Manon, narrating to herself, says: ‘Manon Gaudet has no children, but her husband is not childless. It was a common enough tale; no one would think it a paradox’ (p. 31). No-one would think this odd because interracial relationships were prevalent in the antebellum South. Though she does not love her husband – she frequently tells us this – Manon’s role as wife is made problematic by the presence of Walter. When visiting a doctor to investigate her lack of childbearing, Manon confides in him, rhetorically asking: ‘Would the fact that the servant I brought to the marriage has borne him a son, and that this creature is allowed to run loose in the house like a wild animal, would that be, in your view, sufficient cause for a wife to despise her husband?’ (p. 41) The doctor’s prosaic response is that this situation is all too common. The anger Manon reveals here is indicative of the extent to which her husband’s relations with Sarah are enough to

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<sup>268</sup> Valerie Martin, *Property* (London: Abacus, 2003), p. 61 (Quoted in text from here on).

destabilize the illusory symbol of white womanhood that the slave wife – a ‘Southern Belle’ – was meant to uphold.

In describing Walter as ‘running loose like a wild animal’, Manon indicates the way in which she perceives the mixed-race child as feral and sub-human. Another depiction of Walter, as ‘scurr[ying] across the bricks into the azaleas and squatt[ing] down in the dirt’ (p. 37), adds to her image of him as animalistic. Manon’s relation to Walter is complex, but Martin seems to suggest is that this mixed-race child is something of a thorn in Manon’s side, if not evidence for the ambiguous and far from transparent relations in the antebellum South. Undercutting her role as slave-mistress, Walter symbolizes Manon’s marginalized position not only in the region but in her own household. What Martin’s novel attempts to reveal, therefore, is a Southern memory (of the plantation household) that is complex, fraught with emotional instability and built on oppressive Southern power-dynamics.

A second, more illuminating way to read *Property* is through its title. Such a noun seems obvious to read in light of slavery; the above discussions have noted the various webs of ownership within antebellum plantations. What Martin’s novel investigates further is the way in which the rules and structures of ownership shift. One such indication comes from Manon’s aunt, who tells her simply that ‘A woman’s property is her husband’s’ (p. 90). Talking of Sarah, the aunt makes the point that anything Manon owns is far from hers alone, but actually always Gaudet’s in the first instance. Nothing is merely hers. More interesting, however, is that with a little syntactical shifting, the sentence also suggests another meaning: ‘a woman is her husband’s property’. This idea runs through *Property* and the complex relations between Manon and Gaudet. While ownership and propriety are central to the system of slavery – across the racial border, primarily – the notions have wider implications throughout the slaveholding region. Structures of property are clear (and well-known) when viewed in relation to slaves, but *Property* illuminates the other mechanisms of power that follow the same logic, albeit within the white household. Manon is nothing other, at the bottom line, than the property of her husband. While this is worth exploration in its own right, the power structures take on a powerful dimension late in the book, after Manon’s mother has died.

Soon after the death, Manon receives a letter from her husband back on the plantation. She sees no ‘sympathy’ or ‘love’ in it, thinking that ‘His letter was a perfect miniature of the monument to falsity he has made of my life’ (p. 79). Thus, while in despair over her mother’s passing, and having this solidified by the perceived lack of emotion between her and her husband, Manon at this moment is distraught and psychologically unmoored. Her subsequent actions therefore reveal much. After watching Sarah breastfeed her baby, Manon fixes her stare

on Sarah's bare breast. Manon 'drop[s] to [her] knees' in front of Sarah and, 'hands upon her wrists' begins to suckle at Sarah's breast, 'guid[ing] the nipple to [her] lips and suck[ing] gently', tasting its 'sweet' milk (p. 81). Amy K. King suggests that as this scene follows her mother's death, Manon 'seek[s] a vital mother figure in Sarah'.<sup>269</sup> The breastfeeding is thus part of her claim on Sarah's body as a maternal one; she almost recasts herself as an infant. While not entirely infantilized (indeed, there is some adult eroticism at work here), Manon does seem to seek out a motherly female body at an important emotional juncture. Tim Ryan argues, however, that the violent act 'is a double violation: it is a form of rape that also defiles a woman's maternal role'.<sup>270</sup> Watching Sarah feed her own child stirs something within Manon; presenting not only a physical sign of Manon's childlessness, the baby equally serves to highlight Sarah's fertility and her child (with Gaudet): Walter.

However, within this scene, there is a deeper dynamic at work. Manon is a slave-holder's wife and thus would have little direct contact with slaves, except for the house servants. Thus her role on the plantation is far more limited than her husband's. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese notes that where in the North during this era, the home was cemented as a primarily female sphere, in Southern slave society, the home and plantation 'reinforced gender constraints by ascribing all women to the domination of the male heads of households'.<sup>271</sup> In this way, the slave-mistress has far less control over the plantation's slaves than her husband. This has interesting ramifications in *Property* as, with Gaudet gone, Manon has to fulfil a role within the house that she has not yet embodied in this way. Thus, Manon's actions, with her husband absent, respond to the gender dynamic instituted in the society. As King astutely notes, 'Manon choses to embrace the very attributes she despises in her husband to gain her own foothold in Southern society', and thus 'The line between male and female slaveholder disintegrates'.<sup>272</sup> Manon's interior narration informs us that during the sexual act she imagines 'This is what he does' (p. 81). She is therefore not only positioning herself as Sarah's overall master in *lieu* of her husband, but adopting his sexuality and masculinity too. In the latter half of the novel, moreover, when Sarah escapes to the North, Manon is determined not to let her succeed in her venture. Employing an investigator to find Sarah is in some ways the apogee of Manon's embodying of a slave-holder's role. While Manon does not particularly like Sarah, she would rather have her tracked down at a great cost than be 'defeated' in her dominating role. Tim Ryan argues that

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<sup>269</sup> Amy K. King, 'Valerie Martin's *Property* and the Failure of the Lesbian Counterplot', *Mississippi Quarterly*, 63, 1-2 (2010), 211-231 (p. 223).

<sup>270</sup> Ryan, p. 180.

<sup>271</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 39.

<sup>272</sup> King, 'Valerie Martin's *Property*', p. 222 and p. 224.

Manon's social position rests upon patriarchal power in the South and thus 'Rather than seeking to liberate herself from patriarchy, Manon chooses to perpetuate it, claiming for herself the patriarchal authority to which she was once subject', which he sees as fully embodied in Manon's search for Sarah.<sup>273</sup>

Returning to the breastfeeding scene, Amy King's essay investigates the lesbian undercurrents in *Property*, but here she sees Manon's actions not as the emergence of a repressed homosexual desire, but as a spectacle of sexual domination inherited from slave society: 'Manon feels pleasure not because she *shares* pleasure with another woman but rather because she *takes* it' (original emphases).<sup>274</sup> Rather than an (un)requited lesbian desire, Manon's is possessive: as with the novel's title, she is claiming her bodily property in Sarah. Where Sarah's body was once a commodity for Gaudet, now Manon replicates this procurement from within the gender line. She is both male and female in terms of stereotypical gender attributes and actions. Manon further admits to the reader that '[Sarah]'s afraid to look at me, I thought. And she's right to be. If she looked at me, I would slap her' (p. 82). This possibility of mindless violence underscores her attempt at domination over Sarah, not only claiming and abusing her body, but staging a scene of master-slave relationality. As Crownshaw explains, 'The scene dramatizes a Hegelian master-slave dialectic, the slave master's (mistress's) constitutional dependency on the slave'; that is, even when Manon 'forcefully imposes herself on the world (Sarah's body) she can only reveal her dependency on it'.<sup>275</sup> Thus, even while Manon is attempting to gain mastery while her husband (the 'real' master) is absent, her relational existence to slaves is apparent.

The point I take Martin to be making here is that the notion of property and ownership is so central to the system of slavery that it finds visible effects across race and gender in Southern society. What this leads us towards is Martin's investigation into the deep-rootedness of the slave system in the South. As Ciuba writes, the 'victimization of slavery was so central to the South that it helped to support not just the plantation economy but the entire social order of the region'.<sup>276</sup> Interesting to note here, is the particular aspect of slavery that is being remembered in Martin's novel. Ciuba argues that slavery's institutional victimization and domination was not only central to the system of labour itself, but to the social organization of the region as a whole. What Martin's novel depicts is a plantation and region founded on this very principle. As I will conclude below, master/slave and black/white relationships channelled deep into Southern identity. Though nonetheless complex, the tangled race relations in antebellum society affected

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<sup>273</sup> Ryan, p. 176.

<sup>274</sup> King, 'Valerie Martin's *Property*', p. 225.

<sup>275</sup> Crownshaw, 'Perpetrator Fictions and Transcultural Memory', p. 83 and p. 84.

<sup>276</sup> Ciuba, p. 29.

those across the region, in various and different ways. *Property* is committed to representing these societal complexities that are so formed by and in the crucible of slavery. Connected to my thesis, therefore, we must pay attention to this memory of slavery's varied impact on the South and Southerners; we are looking at a memory rooted not only in slavery's depth, but its localized instantiations. The memory comes to the surface of both the region and the text itself. As Jones' novel produced cultural memories of slavery from within an African-American context (Hanchard's 'black memory'), *Property* similarly depicts a process of remembrance, but this time from a white South, though it is nonetheless 'raced'.

One of the key scenes in Martin's novel comes when Manon witnesses her mother's death. Upon entering her mother's bedroom, Manon sees her mother dying from a disease that has consumed her. The description of her death is particularly gothic and sensational: 'from her mouth, nose, eyes, and ears, a black fluid gushed forth' (p. 74). The mother's body is riddled and consumed with an unknown black substance that secretes itself from any pore and orifice: it is toxic and overwhelmingly black. Martin continues, 'Her skin had turned blue, as if she were suffocating, and the veins in her neck and hands stood out against the flesh like spreading black tentacles' (pp. 74-75). While this scene would fit aptly in a discussion of Southern gothic, within Martin's novel it stands out prominently, as the text is a highly realist one. The body's blackness thus needs unpacking, especially in this context. As the widow of an esteemed slaveholder, and mother to a daughter with slaves, the novel's thematic of property and race-relations becomes illuminated. It is as though the black/white split has reached a tipping point – a slave uprising is contemporaneous to this, which leads to the death of Manon's husband – and is issued forth literally via the mother's body. The disease that has consumed Manon's mother is symbolic of slavery's interior effects. Furthermore, I argue that it might be a particular Southern memory itself that is also gushing out of this text, signalling the inability of it to stay contained in the past. While not the specifically 'black memory' of Jones' novel, this memory is nonetheless informed by, and indicative of, blackness and race. As a powerful cultural memory from the region, it – like the black fluid – cannot but emerge in all its potent and overwhelming form. To push this further, Erll states that literary forms 'are not simply "vessels" to hold content, but carry meaning themselves', thus signalling the possibility of Martin's text acting *as* memory, not simply representing it.<sup>277</sup> That Erll uses the term 'vessel' also feeds into Martin's image of containment and fluidity. The overflowing black fluid, or memory, in the novel is demonstrative of the text's own erupting past as well as itself emerging from the region and its local histories.

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<sup>277</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 159.

Earlier in the novel there is a correlative sentence of overflowing blackness from Manon's point of view: 'everyone knows a drop of negro blood does sometimes overflow like an inkpot in the child of parents who are passing for white, to the horror of the couple' (p. 6). While this tells us much about the notion of miscegenation and race relations in the South (and the novel: Walter is a figure of this) it also uses the image of over-spilling black fluid. Where Manon ultimately sees this as a negative notion – the thought of racial 'impurity' troubles her – we can connect it linguistically to her mother's death. Blackness in both can be read as a fluid concept (it is embodied as a fluid) that has a reach far greater and deeper than the white people attempting to control and subjugate it ever concede. Christina Sharpe calls this the 'fuliginous stain': 'residual blackness, blackness that won't be erased', 'blackness that illuminates what is otherwise unreadable, unseeable'.<sup>278</sup> Patricia Yaeger consolidates this, arguing that the notion of 'white panic' – racial fear – is 'a moment of spectacular terror when racial boundaries that had seemed impermeable become unexpectedly porous': an accurate description of this moment in *Property*.<sup>279</sup>

Manon's mother is a symbolic vessel that represents (female) whiteness. This vessel is overcome with a disease that consumes her from within: the disease being slavery. Slavery's all-pervasive nature (that articulates and informs regionality) – as evidenced in each of this chapter's novels – is visible here too: the gushing blackness is an excessive, deep-rooted illness that infects, and infected, everything in the South. One issue in reading texts about slavery, Christina Sharpe warns us, is that it (slavery) is too often 'read entirely about black people'.<sup>280</sup> Slavery, thus, is not merely a 'black issue', a black body-economy; it integrally involves people of all races and therefore the social landscape of an entire, and particular, region. The imagery of the above scene is pertinent also because the black fluid spreads through Manon's mother's veins and fills them on the skin's surface, 'like black tentacles'. Slavery was, connotatively, a raced, tentacular system, rooting itself deep in the South, spreading out in every direction: there was not, in theory, a single black person in the region outside of slavery during the antebellum period. Nor, importantly, were there those not black who were not relational to slavery. The roots burrowed deeply. As a working-through of cultural memory then, *Property's* aim, I suggest, is to complexly and interestingly reveal the pervasiveness of slavery as an institution and unearth some of these roots. That the blackness is overflowing, furthermore, suggests that these racial roots might be making themselves visible, emerging from below. Moreover, the novel foregrounds this cultural

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<sup>278</sup> Sharpe, p. 168.

<sup>279</sup> Yaeger, p. 89.

<sup>280</sup> Sharpe, p. 173.

memory in and through the text itself. Martin's book is a memory text in every sense: containing, igniting and dramatizing Southern memory and remembrance.

## **SOUTH TO AN OLD PLACE**

In concluding, we circle back to this chapter's thesis: cultural memories of the South, from both black and white Southerners, are in fact keeping the region alive today through their charging of literary texts. While some museums and monuments to slavery do exist in the region, the South (and America at large) is struggling to deal with the long history of this institution in the public arena. The failure of a national museum to slavery in the South highlights something of this difficulty. What novels of slavery seem to suggest, particularly the ones investigated here, is that literature might just counter the lack of other memorialization. Particularly when such texts overflow with memory in place, it seems that even a memorial such as the Toni Morrison Society's 'bench by the road' cannot quite accomplish the same memory-work as a Morrison novel itself.

As the 'tentacles' and roots of slavery plunged deep into the South, and interpolated everyone into the system, so too can we see the roots of slavery in other metaphorical ways. Valerie Martin and Edward P. Jones' novels have their foundations in the Southern past: they become, in Ann Rigney's words, portable monuments that continue to work as instigators and sparks for cultural memory. As an entrenched cultural memory in the South, slavery and its remembrance continues to do cultural work in the region. Furthermore, the tentacles of Southern history and memory are finding contemporary resonance; what if, these texts ask, the past (as memory and history) is far closer to the surface of the Southern region than we admit? This is a notion that I pose in the following chapter about Hurricane Katrina, in which I argue that the storm was a Southern one in that it unearthed, and brought to the surface, older regional memories and histories of race-relations.

Where transnational postsouthern scholarship is sometimes unearthing Southern memory from the region itself – Kreyling's memory 'without a place to have it' – the texts I have looked at might gesture towards other readings. The memory-roots of the South that I am teasing out in this chapter and elsewhere can be connected to their regional contexts to reveal significant insights. Attending to the global routes of slavery is useful to explore and understand our transnational past and present, but such readings can be complimented by a sense of rooted (in place, in time) memory to widen our understanding of this past. Through novels that testify to the all-pervasiveness of slavery as an institution in the antebellum South, contemporary writers

are doubly illuminating the presence of the memories themselves as regionally creating and sustaining.

## TWO

### ‘THERE’S A *LIFE* HERE’

#### Hurricane Katrina’s Southern Biopolitics

This city won’t wash away, this city won’t  
 ever drown  
 – Steve Earle, ‘This City’

[T]o be a true historian, you had to mourn  
 amply and well  
 – Karen Russell, *Swamplandia!*<sup>281</sup>

### MOURNING NOLA

In August 2010, a public funeral took place in the streets of New Orleans, attempting to lay to rest Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. Five years after the storm hit, the people of the city gathered to publically ‘bury’ the storm in order to move beyond the devastation it reeked in the city. A coffin was constructed and lay open so that people could put notes and personal items into it, purging themselves of the storm, hoping to let Katrina ‘rest in peace’. An article in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* documents some of the responses heard: ‘I hope the message is we’re really going to bury this witch’.<sup>282</sup> Another response, more pointed and angry, particularly about the (lack of) federal response to Katrina was quoted in the British *Guardian*: ‘It’s racism. We’ve been suffering from racism down here for many, many years’.<sup>283</sup> Although the funeral took place five years on from Katrina, the anger, sadness and pain concerning the storm’s effects is still evident in the city’s inhabitants. It is with this mournful backdrop that I want to explore the cultural output after Hurricane Katrina to reveal how it suggests the racial and social contours

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<sup>281</sup> Steve Earle, ‘This City’ on *I’ll Never Get out of This World Alive* (New West, 2011); Karen Russell, *Swamplandia!* (New York: Vintage, 2011), p. 250.

<sup>282</sup> Cindy Chang, ‘St. Bernard Residents Bid Symbolic Farewell to Katrina at “Funeral”’, *Times-Picayune*, 28 August 2010 <[http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2010/08/st\\_bernard\\_residents\\_bid\\_symbo.html](http://www.nola.com/katrina/index.ssf/2010/08/st_bernard_residents_bid_symbo.html)> [accessed 12 October 2013]

<sup>283</sup> Chris McGreal, ‘Hurricane Katrina After Five Years’, *Guardian*, 29 August 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/29/hurricane-katrina-five-years-on>> [accessed 12 October 2013]

of the (Old) South still existing in the twenty-first century. As the previous chapter argued, Southern history is (through cultural memory) in various ways very much present in the region; this chapter seeks to further this by suggesting that Southern historical legacies were made visible by Katrina.

While the city is considered unique in both the region and the nation, particularly because of its mixed cultures and histories, I nevertheless want to connect this city to a larger Southern dynamic and past. Though, Michael Bibler tells us, there is a ‘centuries-long American perception that New Orleans is destined for a tragic ending’ – and this is surely part of the response to the city after Katrina – nonetheless, the effects of the storm on the black population to me recall the larger racial history of the South more generally.<sup>284</sup> My overall thesis contends that the current swathe of transnational and transregional studies can sometimes obfuscate the lingering regionalism of the South. This chapter argues that a certain element of the Southern region was made strikingly visible by Hurricane Katrina and her aftermath; the cultural texts that I examine respond and testify to this. This is not to deny the fact that the city of New Orleans has been considered a very transnational city – it has French, Spanish, African, Caribbean and Native heritage – but to suggest that new critical paradigms which favour the international over the local might overlook a certain framework or context with which to view Katrina and her effects.

The devastation wreaked by the storm wiped out many areas of New Orleans, and although many were affected, predominantly African Americans suffered most. Without simplifying the storm’s effects, it is worth exploring how, as the floodwaters receded, the old racial demarcations of the city were brought into stark relief. This city in the South, which long has had visible racial hierarchies, was revealed by Katrina to still show the traces of racial inequality. I agree with Clyde Woods when he writes that there is a ‘rarely openly discussed’ but ‘omnipresent fear [...] that the tortured past of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi is reasserting itself’.<sup>285</sup> Hurricane Katrina might be read as revealing the reality behind this fear. Although my first epigraph from Steve Earle’s song is connotative of the regenerative qualities of New Orleans, I primarily read this line aslant, suggesting that the city’s (and region’s) old racial ideologies are a stubborn presence in the region: that they will not ‘drown’. I therefore posit that Katrina was a ‘Southern storm’, highlighting and revealing the shape of a racially unequal Southern society still present in New Orleans. While Bibler helps us to acknowledge

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<sup>284</sup> Michael P. Bibler, ‘Always the Tragic Jezebel: New Orleans, Katrina, and the Layered Discourse of a Doomed Southern City’, *Southern Cultures*, 14, 2 (2008), 6–27 (p. 8).

<sup>285</sup> Clyde Woods, ‘Katrina’s World: Blues, Bourbon, and the Return to the Source’, *American Quarterly*, 61, 3 (2009), 427–453 (p. 428).

the long-standing narrative about New Orleans – as ‘backwards, foreign, corrupt, and decadent’, which has led many to consider the city ‘doomed’ – as bringing upon itself the troubles and catastrophes it has often faced – we can also, I think, connect this to a larger Southern past.<sup>286</sup> Indeed, Bibler argues that historically this cultural narrative ‘treated New Orleans as substantially representative of the South’, even though, he says, it is much less accurate a description today.<sup>287</sup> Nonetheless, the ‘layered’ discourse of the city he maps out in this essay is partly imbricated in a regional narrative; after all, Gray has shown us how the South has been thought of as ‘aberrant’ and ‘marginal’, much like the sense of New Orleans suggested above. Thus, in calling Katrina a Southern storm, I want to make the claim that even with the city’s specific history and identity acknowledged as important to understanding the aftermath of the storm, it is worth viewing it in a larger frame that is regional (as well as national and international).

Further, following the 2010 funeral, we might ask what the most effective way of mourning Katrina and her losses is. I would say that this might come in identifying a certain regionalism in the storm and its aftermath. While other criticism can usefully mourn the storm in a larger context – that is national and transnational – the work this chapter wants to do is more local. My thesis attempts to qualify much of the criticism on Katrina that de-regionalizes the storm; thus I am questioning aspects of the postsouthern by implication (without ‘the South’, the storm cannot be regional). Katherine Henninger helps in this regard as she asks of the postsouthern: ‘If on the surface the anxieties of postsouthernness appear ontological (whither the southern essence?) or epistemological (whither our way of knowing “the South”?), the thrust behind them is ethical’.<sup>288</sup> For her, the ethics of the postsouthern involves an obligation to not solidify an entire region (especially if we are to say it is unchanging across time). This is an anxiety that I would entirely support. However, to begin this chapter, I want to invert Henninger’s notion arguing that, conversely, it might be the most ethical response to Katrina to see its regionalism as well as its transnational or national coordinates. To deny its Southernness, I think, might be to deny those worst affected by it a necessary obligation.

## **A SOUTHERN STORM?**

This chapter will look at a selection of cultural texts that respond to Katrina (including Spike Lee’s *When the Levees Broke* (2006) and the HBO’s television show *Treme* (2010) among others),

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<sup>286</sup> Bibler, p. 9.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>288</sup> Henninger, p. 157.

but before looking closely at my central examples, the scope of criticism on Katrina should be explored, as this will provide the framework for my readings. The majority of writing has focused on the devastating impact the storm had on minorities in New Orleans, predominantly African Americans. Others have linked the storm to previous natural disasters in the city's history, situating it in a lineage of storms in the South. Few, however, tie these strains of analysis together and see the storm as Southern: as a materialization of the region today. There might be many reasons for this absence, but significant I think is an intellectual commitment to deterritorialization in which spaces and places are deconstructed. Katrina's politics have been connected to a larger network of national events and discourses such as race, disaster and poverty – some of which I will touch upon below. What many ignore, and are amnesiac of, though is a tangible set of circumstances that are in some ways regional which allowed the storm to play out as it did. Following my second epigraph from Russell, to begin mourning those lost in the storm we have to, I posit, see its regional links. To begin to mourn, we have to see a particular, and historically-informed, South. Theoretically similar to the transnational and postsouthern turns, a generalizing (nationalizing or universalizing) of the storm is to deny it its specificity and particularity.

New Orleans has frequently been described as the 'city that care forgot' which resurfaced after Katrina. This phrase here primarily assesses the role of government in the aftermath of Katrina, particularly the way that federal help was not available to all: the city's suffering could have been assuaged with greater input from government. What unites most of the academic writing on Katrina is a sense that the catastrophe has revealed drastic fault lines at the heart of New Orleans and America at large. These are racial, economic, political, ideological, cultural and even historical, suggesting the extent to which the South is still visible as a distinct region today. As the theorist of cultural trauma Kai Erikson writes, natural disasters 'often seem to force open whatever fault lines once ran silently through [...] the larger community'.<sup>289</sup> This takes on particular form in New Orleans as the already noted idea of the city and region as 'doomed' (Bibler) seems 'to have influenced a national script' so that the American forces capable of helping or minimizing a storm like this accept the fantasy that it was an 'inevitable disaster'.<sup>290</sup> Those sociocultural fault lines that Erikson points to have a particular traction in this city, which has long been thought of as 'doomed', bringing calamity upon itself. These local meanings and contexts of the storm (however imbricated in national narratives) can, I think, get lost in more

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<sup>289</sup> Kai Erikson, 'Notes on Trauma and Community' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 183-199 (p. 189).

<sup>290</sup> Bibler, p. 25.

global readings. It is Bibler's attention to the 'layers' of discourse around Katrina that enables a certain reflexivity about the various meanings attached to it, whether regional, national, or international.

Wai Chee Dimock, to take one example of transnational Katrina criticism, is interested more in the global connections one can make with the storm: her essay 'World History According to Katrina' epitomizes in some ways the transnationalizing force that I see as often problematic. Taking a local newspaper story – from the *Times Picayune* – which looks to Dutch storm-prevention strategies, Dimock 'cross-stitches' Katrina with other global floods 'because the United States is not the only country having to deal with storms and the flooding that comes with those storms'.<sup>291</sup> Mapping outwards so far as to engage the rest of the world's oceans and climate change, Dimock makes a thoroughly convincing case for global networks to understand planetary ecology, but I want to suggest that this mode of reading Katrina misses some cultural coordinates that are particularly Southern. Dimock imagines a 'world history' that calls 'attention to the tangled fate of the planet' which will enlarge our 'sense of democracy'.<sup>292</sup> This entanglement, she stresses, 'can only begin with local knowledge, with micro-evidence and bottom-up chronologies', but what is absent from this essay is an acknowledgement of Southern history (and New Orleanian history) which so forcefully frames Katrina and those worst affected in the region.<sup>293</sup> Local knowledge of Katrina forces us to see the storm, I will argue, as partly regional: as informed by, and revealing of, a specific set of histories and memories that are specifically Southern.

Similarly, a critic who disagrees that the storm illuminated racial tensions in New Orleans is Walter Benn Michaels who, in *The Trouble with Diversity*, argues that reading the management of the storm as stemming from racism is not only untrue, but that it obscures a deeper problem. For Michaels, the issue at stake in America today is not race, but class (and money). On the post-Katrina evacuation, he writes 'We like blaming racism, but the truth is there weren't too many rich black people left behind when everybody who could get out of New Orleans did so'.<sup>294</sup> His point here, while agreeable enough, is ultimately misleading. While, obviously, the majority of people who left the city were not poor – and this would inevitably include a number of black people – the largely ignored point in Michaels' argument is that it is no surprise that

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<sup>291</sup> Wai Chee Dimock, 'World History According to Katrina' in *States of Emergency: The Object of American Studies*, ed. by Russ Castronovo and Susan Gillman (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 143-160 (p. 147).

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, p.157.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 79.

the largest number of rich people escaping the city were not black. In one sense, Michaels is correct: people were left behind in New Orleans because they were poor. It needs to be added that, importantly, a vast number of these poor were black, and that their race might be integral to this. As Michael Eric Dyson informs us, ‘Black folk in [the Gulf South] were strapped by incomes that were 40 percent less than those earned by whites’ and, moreover, in New Orleans – a city with a ‘67.9 percent black population’ (before the storm) had ‘more than 103,000 poor people’ which is a ‘poverty rate of 23 percent, 76 percent higher than the national average’.<sup>295</sup> The question of how economic inequality is intimately bound up with racial inequality is obscured by Michaels’ book. Michaels does not connect these two issues explicitly, wishing to refute identity politics based on the ‘social construction’ of race and focus on the larger disparity of wealth in America. In so doing, however, he repeats the process of occluding and ignoring the importance of race in America today, particularly the South. Though this is one reading of Katrina that tries to move beyond the subject of race, many others bring race to the forefront; I include my own project in this.

In *Rewriting Exodus*, Anna Hartnell argues that Katrina and her aftermath ‘laid bare a legacy of systemic racism that still traps disproportionate numbers of African Americans’, and while the storm affected all ethnic groups it ultimately exposed ‘a city still rigidly divided along the lines of race decades after the Civil Rights movement’.<sup>296</sup> Similarly, Naomi Klein writes in her famous *The Shock Doctrine* that ‘Not so long ago, disasters were periods of social levelling, rare moments when atomized communities put divisions aside and pulled together’ but now, she argues, as exemplified in New Orleans, ‘they provide windows into a cruel and ruthlessly divided future in which money and race buy survival’.<sup>297</sup> Furthermore, in light of this chapter’s focus on visual material, Hartnell is useful in that she claims ‘One only had to cast an eye over the images beamed all around the world to realize that African Americans had borne the brunt of the devastating storm damage’.<sup>298</sup> The ‘legacy of systemic racism’ Hartnell points to – while national as well as local – is surely an implicit reference to the long-standing abuses of race in the South, which I think needs further stressing. Hartnell is useful then in ballasting my claims for the storm’s effects on African Americans, but she is largely silent on the regional context of the disaster, and this seems true of much critical writing after the storm. Sharon Monteith, too, suggests that after Katrina ‘The black poor were drawn forcefully into the national

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<sup>295</sup> Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>296</sup> Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus*, p. 1 and p. 227.

<sup>297</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), p. 413.

<sup>298</sup> Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus*, p. 215.

consciousness’, but stops short of explicitly mentioning a regional frame to this history of black poverty.<sup>299</sup> These arguments, while not postsouthern, for me exemplify a position in which the regional location of Katrina – in not being acknowledged as central to the storm’s effects – is side-lined or overlooked. Katherine Henninger, conversely, notes the regionalism of Katrina in *Ordering the Façade*. In the aftermath of Katrina, she writes, ‘we can see so clearly the disasters of southern – American – history repeating themselves: the tragedies of poverty and class privilege, racism, and violence, even the tendency of the federal government to ignore, then override, southern spaces and peoples’.<sup>300</sup> Acutely, Henninger cements Hartnell’s point and ties the present disaster to the historical narrative of the South. We are beginning to see a number of senses in which Katrina speaks to the Southern past as well as the city’s own specific one; the histories and memories it calls forth will be the ultimate subjects of this chapter. The myth of New Orleans as doomed, as a burden to the nation, Bibler writes ‘has been the historic image of the South as a whole, and more recently it has become the image of the black South and the predominantly black city of New Orleans [...] in particular’.<sup>301</sup> Thus, if the city is seen (at a national level) as always heading to destruction because of its decadence, aberrance, or blackness, then its ‘vulnerability’ – and its (black) inhabitants’ vulnerability – will only be preserved. Bibler’s layered reading of New Orleans, through regional, national and international lenses, nonetheless claims that we have to recognize how ‘the city and the region – especially its sizeable numbers of now-displaced, poverty-stricken African Americans – are bound to the nation’; they are, ultimately, ‘a body of people whose life and prosperity are vital to our own’.<sup>302</sup> Thus, we must read Katrina, I argue, through a regional lens as well as a particularly New Orleanian one, not to displace transnational readings, but to locate them in a specific nexus of social, historical and cultural coordinates.

## SOUTHERN BIOPOLITICS

Concurring with Henninger is Henry A. Giroux who, in *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability*, argues that during the storm a ‘biopolitics of disposability’ became visible when we saw the fates of African Americans.<sup>303</sup> These disposable black bodies were relegated to waste,

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<sup>299</sup> Sharon Monteith, ‘Hurricane Katrina: Five Years After: Introduction’, *Journal of American Studies*, 44, 3 (2010), 475–482 (p. 475).

<sup>300</sup> Henninger, p. 182.

<sup>301</sup> Bibler, p. 25.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Henry A. Giroux, *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006), p. 10.

symbolically throw-away. As Patricia Yaeger puts it, ‘southern culture is riddled with throwaways, with people and things that get dismissed or forgotten’ and further, these people become disposable (are wastage) because their ‘bodily harm does not matter enough to be registered or repressed’.<sup>304</sup> Thus, the disposability of African Americans revealed by Katrina can be read through Yaeger’s thesis: black bodies might be identified as ‘throwaway’ and ‘trash’ because of their seeming lack of importance. The bodily harm inflicted on them matters little in the South (still). Yaeger acknowledges that African-American disposability is a concept that ‘did not end with emancipation’; in fact, as Giroux (and this chapter) argues, this regulation of black bodies is all but present in the contemporary South.<sup>305</sup> The images seen in the news of dead black bodies floating in the floodwaters initiates Giroux’s sense of how African Americans were figured, but they ‘refus[ed] to go away’.<sup>306</sup> This chapter seeks to acknowledge these dead bodies through a regional lens which has not been foregrounded and documented enough in criticism of the storm. Giroux theorizes that the disposability of such bodies is central to a black biopolitics revealed by Katrina. I will expound this further through other theorists who more complexly articulate the notion of biopolitical life.

The notion of biopolitics is principally discussed by Michel Foucault; he identifies the ‘modern man’ as someone ‘whose politics places his existence as a living being in question’.<sup>307</sup> Foucault reads the turning point of modernity in the twentieth century as engendering a new politics of the human body. Penetrated by the political and social sphere, the modern human body became intractably connected to the powers of the state. More useful to us in connection to Giroux’s theory of disposability is that of ‘bare life’ which has been discussed by Giorgio Agamben. Bare life, for Agamben, is embodied in the figure *homo sacer* (sacred man) who is always excluded from societal order. The exclusion, however, operates in a paradoxical manner: bare lives are cast outside of society and the rules of law, yet through the exclusion they are simultaneously embroiled in the mechanisms of society. Cast outside of the civic order, furthermore, *homo sacer* can be killed without repercussion. Agamben formulates this thus: *homo sacer*’s ‘entire existence is reduced to a bare life stripped of every right by virtue of the fact that anyone can kill him without committing homicide’, and furthermore, ‘he is in a continuous relationship with the power that banished him precisely insofar as he is at every instant exposed

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<sup>304</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 87 and p. 68.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>306</sup> Giroux, *Stormy Weather*, p. 9.

<sup>307</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 143.

to an unconditioned threat of death'.<sup>308</sup> *Homo sacer* is thus denied full humanity; between life and death he resides, de-politicized because outside society, but equally politicized in the act of exclusion, thus sitting in a liminal site of being.

For Giroux, African Americans were revealed by Katrina to be 'disposable', 'relegated to human waste' outside of the democratic United States 'reduced to rotting along with the houses destroyed by the flood'.<sup>309</sup> The predominantly black victims could thus be theorized as bare lives, a version of *homo sacer* who are 'politicized through [their] very capacity to be killed'.<sup>310</sup> I unpack this idea a little further below, but we can principally argue that the biopolitics revealed by Katrina's floodwaters, therefore, is perhaps a racist one, removed from the 'conservative fiction of living in a color-blind society'.<sup>311</sup> Far from being post-racial, New Orleans and the South that Giroux documents is deeply entrenched in racial and class demarcations that were marked out in the Old South. Not to acknowledge such a regional biopolitics, then, would be to universalize such a state of bare life; it would be a version of biopolitical life disconnected from its specific cultural context. What I want to do, therefore, is regionalize Agamben's theories in relation to the South. This notion needs some contextualizing, however, as although he explores a few historical instances of *homo sacer* (mainly the Holocaust), Agamben's theory has been scrutinized – notably by Dominick LaCapra – for its universalizing tendencies.

LaCapra famously writes that Agamben's analyses of the Holocaust, and the death camps in particular, flatten out and de-specify them as particular historical phenomena.<sup>312</sup> That is, Agamben 'make[s] short shrift of complex historical, analytic, and political issues'.<sup>313</sup> In relation to *homo sacer* particularly, LaCapra argues (in a footnote no less) that this figure of bare life cannot account for 'the way victims are not merely random "bodies" but are selected, however prejudicially, in historically specific contexts that cannot simply be subsumed by a transhistorical, universalistic theory'.<sup>314</sup> LaCapra's forceful thesis requires us to see Agamben's theory as limited. It also demonstrates what I see as the workings of the transnational move which can have the

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<sup>308</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 183.

<sup>309</sup> Giroux, *Stormy Weather*, p. 44.

<sup>310</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 89.

<sup>311</sup> Henry A. Giroux, 'Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability', *College Literature*, 33, 3 (2006), 171-196 (p. 174).

<sup>312</sup> For a similar critique, see also: Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013). Here Wolfe writes, 'Agamben's philologically driven formalism [...] leads to a remarkable flattening of the differences between different political, ethical, and institutional conjunctures', p. 26.

<sup>313</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 163n.

<sup>314</sup> LaCapra, *History in Transit*, p. 165n.

potential to dissolve and evade very specific local (regional) issues. The way we can circumvent this problem is by entrenching Agamben's general theory of *homo sacer* to (as LaCapra indicates) a specific location, with a specific historical trajectory. Firstly, I will use Agamben's *State of Exception* to provide another American context for his paradigm, before using a different source – Orlando Patterson – to connect Agamben's biopolitical notion to the South more particularly. This historicizing and regionalizing will then firmly root the idea in place (in all senses).

The 'state of exception' is, for Agamben, a site of lawlessness, where state or sovereign power can ignore the rules of law in circumstances it sees fit. I will return to this below in relation to Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun*, but useful here is that in *State of Exception* Agamben pinpoints specific examples of state control. For example, in post-9/11 America, he argues that the concepts of 'indefinite detention' and the Patriot Act in particular are explicit instances of such lawlessness: they 'radically eras[e] any legal status of the individual, thus producing a legally unnameable and unclassifiable being' that can be called *homo sacer*.<sup>315</sup> Further, these American political moves after the terrorist attacks create 'Neither prisoners nor persons accused, but simply "detainees"' that are 'the object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from juridical oversight'.<sup>316</sup> Here we can see a historically-located example of Agamben's theory of exceptional states, thus providing a theoretical model of a specified *homo sacer*. In unpacking a particular version of the state of exception, Agamben moves away from the universalizing propensities he has been critiqued for. Thus, my thesis too can move from the broader theoretical notion of bare life to what I deem to be a regional articulation of it. This enunciation begins, I suggest, during the time of slavery.

In the South, and elsewhere, slavery constructed and transformed principally black bodies into bare lives: stripped of their humanity, slavery rendered those in servitude *homo sacer*. Orlando Patterson's important book on the subject, *Slavery and Social Death*, is useful here. Patterson argues that 'Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson' and thus, like Agamben's *homo sacer*, was relegated to a liminal position of non-humanity.<sup>317</sup> We should, briefly, trouble this view as scholarship since Patterson has sought to problematize the axiomatic conception of the slave's role as passive

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<sup>315</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>317</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 5.

actor.<sup>318</sup> Walter Johnson, for example, wishes to complicate such a view espoused by Patterson by asking for historical scholarship that ‘tr[ies] to imagine a history of slavery which sees the lives of enslaved people as powerfully conditioned by, though not reducible to, their slavery’.<sup>319</sup> Thus, while our treatment of slave identity must be made subtle, I think nonetheless that Patterson’s notion of ‘social death’ pertinently overlaps with the notion of *homo sacer*. The black Southern biopolitics that Giroux explores therefore needs to be mapped within a tradition of black bare life in the South, as we are once again witnessing the relegation of African Americans to the barest of existence. While not equitable with slavery, of course, Katrina’s deaths can, and should I think, be seen within the lens of regional history. A racist biopolitical regime has existed at both a regional and national level – they are surely connected – but in the South this gained a particular traction and meaning. Though slavery and Jim Crow were embroiled in a politics that exceeded the South, it is surely in the regional instantiation of them that we see most clearly their material effects. We are required, I think, if we are to mourn properly, to see the regional history that is being reactivated by this twenty-first century disaster.

The powers that create a biopolitics of disposability should thus now be explored, particularly relating to post-Katrina New Orleans. As Agamben writes, ‘natural life begins to be included in the mechanisms and calculations of State power, and politics turns into *biopolitics*’ (original emphasis).<sup>320</sup> In this way though, we should note, bare life – rather than natural life – is not something that is a biological minimum, but ‘a product of the machine and not something that preexists it’.<sup>321</sup> The natural lives of those poorest and most precarious in New Orleans were brought into the mechanisms of state power when the government – through the disaster relief organisation FEMA – failed to help to the best of its ability those affected by the storm. It should be noted here that relief agencies responded to the storm differently across the region: in Mississippi, for example, FEMA was much quicker to help than in New Orleans. Many accounts though reveal the flawed ways in which the disaster was responded to; some levelling harsher critiques than others. At one extreme, Allison Graham argues that the government ‘is not incompetent at all; it is irrelevant’.<sup>322</sup> In Graham’s view it was not that the federal agencies failed, but that they were never going to help when it came to poor black people in the South. Kevin Rozario, in *The Culture of Calamity*, offers a more tempered reading, but (although not in these

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<sup>318</sup> For further discussion of this see, for example, William Dusinger, ‘Power and Agency in Antebellum Slavery’, *American Nineteenth Century History*, 12, 2 (2011), 139–148.

<sup>319</sup> Walter Johnson, ‘On Agency’, *Journal of Social History*, 37, 1 (2003), 113–124 (p. 115).

<sup>320</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 3.

<sup>321</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>322</sup> Allison Graham, ‘Free at Last: Post-Katrina New Orleans and the Future of Conspiracy’, *Journal of American Studies*, 44, 3 (2010), 601–611 (p. 606).

terms) he does locate the formation of a biopolitics of disposability at the level of government. He argues that Katrina ‘exposed the privileges of power and wealth’ in America today and that this stems from FEMA, which is, for him, ‘a entitlement program’ that ‘disproportionately benefit[s] the affluent’.<sup>323</sup>

A less radical analysis of FEMA’s efforts appears in James Miskel’s book *Disaster Response and Homeland Security*. He argues for a more considered approach to viewing the storm’s aftermath, critiquing the ‘complexity of the [governmental] system’, justly claiming that there were ‘multiple points of failure’ in FEMA’s efforts.<sup>324</sup> Most interesting in his analysis, however, are the links he makes between previous storms in the region. He claims that ‘The response to Katrina was not unique in that it was only the latest in a series of major hurricanes in which the overall system performed poorly’.<sup>325</sup> The continuum of governmental failure in the region, therefore, provides a way of looking at the handling of Katrina that feeds back to Graham’s point (though Miskel would not agree): if FEMA and the associated bodies have systematically failed in regards to Southern hurricanes, one can easily conclude that they have not made drastic changes to alter the system. It is not too illogical to claim the reason for the continued issues of post-hurricane operations is in part due to the Southern location, and the people there affected. While not uniformly the same, relief efforts are on the whole less effective in the South (and especially New Orleans), than elsewhere in the nation. As the title of one book on Katrina suggests, the fallout was a purely man-made catastrophe: ‘There is no such thing as a natural disaster’.<sup>326</sup> Where, as Rozario writes, FEMA is an entitlement program for rich white people, Southern disasters (primarily affecting poor black people) are not going to be particularly high on the agenda. Far from a conspiracy theory, and as Miskel admits, this is not an anomalous occurrence. When Kayne West abandoned his script on a live Katrina telethon and claimed that ‘George Bush doesn’t care about black people’, West was levelling a critique not only at the President but at the failure of government to help those most in need: African Americans, a group systematically devalued as lives in the South’s history.<sup>327</sup>

In all of these readings it is clear that many people think that the government was ultimately responsible for the way New Orleanians were (mis)treated after Katrina. The powers

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<sup>323</sup> Kevin Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 216 and p. 212.

<sup>324</sup> James F. Miskel, *Disaster Response and Homeland Security: What Works, What Doesn’t* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 107 and p. 129.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>326</sup> Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires (eds.), *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Katrina* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>327</sup> See: *The Washington Post*, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/03/AR2005090300165.html>> [accessed 12 October 2013] for a write-up of the television fundraiser.

that once relegated black bodies to slavery have, in historical continuation, relegated African Americans again to bare life. Cast as *homo sacer* outside of the law, yet precariously intertwined with it, black Southerners were rendered ‘disposable’. The biopolitics of disposability Giroux describes is the effect of state and governmental power. In Agamben’s terms, government is sovereign, and ‘sovereign is he who decides on the value or the nonvalue of life as such’.<sup>328</sup> The nonvalue ascribed to the poor black population of New Orleans begins with the sovereignty of the President and the White House, and trickles down to departments like FEMA on the ‘front line’. While I am arguing for a regionally located instance of *homo sacer*, it is worth re-stating the principal critique of Agamben’s work. Judith Butler follows LaCapra by stating that if bare life is ‘conceived as biological minimum’ it becomes universal.<sup>329</sup> For this reason, she continues, *homo sacer* cannot tell us how the power that renders life ‘bare’ ‘functions differentially’ in ‘derealiz[ing] the humanity of subjects’ bound together by commonality: that is, how it ‘works by differentiating populations on the basis of ethnicity and race’ for example.<sup>330</sup> Significant here, then, is Butler’s response to Agamben that foregrounds the varying origins of state power on certain populations because of race. This cannot but have ramifications for our focus on the South. Butler’s excellent point can be supplemented by adding to the example of race the notion of regionalism. Bare life functions ‘differentially’ in the South, I argue, thus a universalizing sense of *homo sacer* would be amnesiac of these particular coordinates.

## **PRECARIOUS LIFE: DAVE EGGERS’ ZEITOUN**

Consolidating the argument thus far, I turn to Dave Eggers’ creative non-fiction *Zeitoun* (2009), set in the aftermath of Katrina which allows us to see a regional sphere of biopolitical life interconnected with national and international forces. Written by a white American (not from the South) about a Middle-Eastern family living in New Orleans, embroiled in larger network of political events rooted in the terrorist attacks on September 11, this book would seem to be the contemporary global novel Gray and Rothberg call for in their essays outlined in the introduction. I want to argue, however, that *Zeitoun* actually contributes not only to this transnationalism, but significantly to a more precise regional politics too.

Eggers’ protagonist is Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a Syrian-American who, when the storm hit New Orleans, decided to stay in the city while his family fled, so that he could keep watch

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<sup>328</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 142.

<sup>329</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 67.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

over his home and business. Zeitoun had a canoe that he used to travel through the flooded city, rescuing and feeding survivors. Eggers charts this narrative through a third-person documentary account. The story develops as a mixed group of law enforcement officers round up Zeitoun and a few of his friends who had also stayed, locking them up in a makeshift facility. Post-9/11 politics immediately enters the frame here, as Zeitoun and his friends are primarily arrested, it is implied, because of his origins: ‘The Syrian names of Zeitoun and Dayoob, their Middle Eastern accents’, Eggers writes, were key factors in their arrest and detention.<sup>331</sup> Zeitoun is arrested by officers ‘wearing mismatched police and military uniforms’ (p. 216), suggestive of their lack of cohesion and distinct identity as law enforcement. Taken to a makeshift prison facility, previously a bus station, the ‘prisoners’ are held in cages surrounded by barbed wire and dressed in orange jumpsuits: as Eggers’ indirect discourse tells us, ‘It looked precisely like the pictures [Zeitoun had] seen of Guantánamo Bay’ (p. 229). It becomes clear that Zeitoun’s holding cell is somewhat outside of the American legal system: ‘There were no lawyers in the station, no judges’ (p. 225). The prisoners, furthermore, are frequently stripped naked, rectally examined, fired-at with a beanbag gun and even covered with pepper-spray. One prisoner in a nearby cell is sprayed with it so violently that ‘he was cowering in a fetal position, wailing like an animal, trying to reach his eyes with his hands’ (p. 243). Agamben’s theories of *homo sacer* are important here, but more significant is his later *State of Exception*.

The state of exception, Agamben writes, is not a ‘special kind of law’ but a ‘suspension of the juridical order itself’: a space ‘devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations [...] are deactivated’.<sup>332</sup> Judith Butler, glossing Agamben, formulates that ‘the state reveals its extra-legal status when it designates a state of exception to the rule of law and thereby withdraws the law selectively from its application’ forming what she calls a ‘paralegal universe that goes by the name of law’.<sup>333</sup> In sum, Butler suggests, the state of exception is ‘a law that is no law, a court that is no court, a process that is no process’.<sup>334</sup> Nothing describes more precisely Zeitoun’s imprisonment than this. The state of exception was enforced by those in power during Katrina in order to detain, in a space of ‘suspended’ law, anyone they thought were criminals. Eggers’ narration testifies to this when he writes that ‘this wasn’t a case of a bad apple or two in the barrel. The barrel itself was rotten’ (p. 317): the entire system of government and local law enforcement during the storm were ‘rotten’ and created a state of exception in which the prisoners’ precariousness and disposability were exemplified. The devastation of

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<sup>331</sup> Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun* (London: Penguin, 2010), pp. 231–232 (quoted in the text hereafter).

<sup>332</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 4 and p. 50.

<sup>333</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 61.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Hurricane Katrina revealed many bodies that were reduced to their barest of life. Eggers' narration somewhat underplays this when he writes that the imprisonment 'diminished the humanity of them all' (p. 246). I would argue, with the above theories in mind, that it was not merely a diminishment, but a denial, of their humanities.

We can draw this line further through Eggers' book to a regional location, as there are a number of references to the Southern past that interestingly point to the ways in which both Eggers and Zeitoun read Katrina through a regional lens. Eggers informs us how the temporary prison Zeitoun was detained in was instantly assembled (after all, the jail did not exist before the storm hit). It 'was built largely by hand' (p. 320), by inmates from Angola prison, the largest in the United States. Eggers' narration then provides the reader with a brief historical summary that seems to yoke together Angola and the make-shift prison through a Southern lens. Angola, we read, 'was built on [...] former plantation once used for the breeding of slaves' (p. 320). 'Historically', it continues, 'the inmates were required to do backbreaking labor, including picking cotton, for about four cents an hour' (p. 320).

Eggers' narration here does some subtle work. While we first learn about the historical location of Angola – it used to be a slave-worked plantation – this is then interestingly linked to the later inmates of the prison who seem to do similar work, 'picking cotton'. The word 'historically' leads us to read the sentence as still concerning slavery, but Eggers shifts the semantics to talk about later prison inmates. This is no mere slippage however. Eggers is illuminating the historical resonances of this prison's (and the South's) treatment of labour and work: in slavery and later forms of bondage. Compounding all of this is that this historical backdrop frames the contemporary story: it is the Angola inmates – who bear the markings of Southern history from slavery onwards – that build the 'illegal' prison Zeitoun is held in. Zeitoun's captivity is made explicitly to dialogue with this tangled notion of the Southern past. Usefully here, Hartnell writes, 'Zeitoun's story points to the racist discourses that link these narratives [slavery and the prison], and is suggestive of not only the gulf between a rights-bearing "citizen" and the apparently empty vessel of "non-citizen" [...] but also the fact that these positions are separated by a precariously thin line'.<sup>335</sup>

Moreover, if we embed this in the narrative offered to us about black men in prison by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow*, our attention can be drawn to a longer line of dispossession in the region reaching into contemporary America. 'What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow', Alexander writes, 'has less to do with the basic structure of our society

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<sup>335</sup> Hartnell, *Rewriting Exodus*, p. 234.

than with the language we use to justify it'.<sup>336</sup> Through incarcerating so many African-American men in modern American prisons, discrimination and disenfranchisement inevitably follows for these men, and those like them, in ways very much akin, Alexander suggests, to the laws of segregation. Only now, she says, as a criminal 'you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it'.<sup>337</sup> Alexander elucidates how the high proportion of black men in U.S. prisons is a continuance of African American history. Eggers' book contributes to this narrative, spelling out the overlaps and linkages between the situation of racial bodies in the South and America at large. Zeitoun's fate – along with other men, most of whom are not Caucasian – insists that we recognise the collision between contemporary relegations of racially-Other life to its barest state and historical narratives that underpin and shadow them. Eggers connects slavery to the contemporary position of a racial Other in the aftermath of Katrina, suggesting the complex relations between what counts as a 'non-citizen' or someone reduced to their bare life and the Southern location of this disaster.

A second, and more explicit example of his Southern historical dialogue, comes when Zeitoun is first taken to the prison compound in the city's bus station. Zeitoun looks up and sees a dramatic mural painted across the station's walls. Eggers describes this scene and image in detail to point directly to the American – and particularly Southern – past that frames the contemporary storm. I quote at length:

it was a startling thing, a dark catalog of subjugation and struggle. The colors were nightmarish, the lines jagged, the images disturbing. He saw Ku Klux Klan hoods, skeletons, harlequins in garish colors, painted faces. Just above him there was a lion being attacked by a giant eagle made of gold. There were images of blue-clad soldiers marching off to war next to mass graves. There were many depictions of the suppression or elimination of peoples – Native Americans, slaves, immigrants – and always, nearby, was the artist's idea of the instigators: wealthy aristocrats in powdered wigs, generals in gleaming uniforms, businessmen with bags of money. In one segment, oil derricks stood below a flooded landscape, water engulfing a city (p.224).

This description of the mural signals to the reader that the aftermath of Katrina, in which some have been reduced to a state of bare life is contextualized by a litany of images of a violent and racist Southern (American) past: the KKK, slavery, the Civil War, and the mass-extinction of populations. The ending, also, is particularly telling and returns us to the machinations of state power explored above. Alongside each of the violent acts stands the 'instigators', usually

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<sup>336</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), p.2.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

moneyed white men. This mural, and Eggers' invocation of it, is political to the core and requires us to acknowledge a long line of subjugation, exploitation and violence towards racial Others in the South. Hurricane Katrina – as it is figured in the mural's 'flooded landscape' – is merely one more juncture in the South's history of reducing life to its barest form.

Before moving on to the central cultural texts (that follow on from the 'disturbing images' of the mural), we can conclude this section by returning to Henry Giroux. Although he focuses on the injustices of the black American experience, he more importantly suggests how this politics of 'waste' and 'disposability' must be challenged. Giroux's stipulation at the end of *Stormy Weather* should not be taken lightly: 'The tragedy of Katrina demands a new politics, language, and sense of civic courage'.<sup>338</sup> Katrina has revealed, if nothing else, the deep racial politics at work today in America, the South, and New Orleans specifically. In order to be, in Giroux's words, 'courageous', we should mourn Katrina and her losses through, amongst others, the Southern lens that seems so foregrounded by the texts that have responded to it. I do not want to disregard more transnational frames, but instead compliment them here with a regional focus.

## **TAKE ME TO THE WATER**

The graves in New Orleans' cemeteries are always above ground because of the city's location below sea-level. The logic is that if the city flooded (as it always does), the coffins would rise and break through the soil. Dead bodies emerging at the flood-water's surface is a gruesome sight, but – in a sense – this is precisely what was witnessed during Katrina. Only in this case, the bodies weren't buried: the corpses (mainly black) did not get the chance to be interred into the ground; they simply floated in the floodwaters. The remainder of this chapter will look to a number of depictions of death (photographic and literary), particularly of black bodies floating in the water. The bodies seem to act as the most visible symbol of the storm's devastation, in addition to being a visceral image of the abandonment of black New Orleanians. My anecdote about cemeteries has other connotations for this chapter though: we can argue that the threat of black bodies rising to the surface is metonymic of the cultural histories and memories of the South emerging too. If Katrina's bare lives were scattered across the flood-waters, they are – in my thesis – testifying to the long-term discarding of African-American bodies in this region and this city particularly. This thesis is, in effect, circulating around traumatic occurrences and the figure of dead black bodies; this chapter will now attend to that latter category in detail. It could

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<sup>338</sup> Giroux, *Stormy Weather*, p. 114.

be suggested that in focusing on the body in this way might produce a kind of ‘trope’ or ‘signifier’ of the South that the postsouthern, for example, is attempting to warn against and reconceptualize. These chapters, however, want to attend to very specific bodies and their regional histories; this is not to reproduce an abstract figure for Southern identity – a traumatized one – but to reveal a very embodied existence that has historical precedent. As Yaeger writes in *Dirt and Desire*, ‘The wounded, nonintegral body’ of Southern fiction ‘becomes a trope for reproducing the literal – that is, for displaying what happens to bodies in real time and space’.<sup>339</sup> Thus, even if I am considered to ‘trope’ the disposable black body, nonetheless as Yaeger posits, this will gesture towards the effects and affects of very real lives in the South. Before analyzing visual representations of death in Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke*, I want to look briefly at a selection of literary examples of African–American disposability.

Jesmyn Ward’s novel *Salvage the Bones* (2011), while not set in New Orleans but the Mississippi Gulf, centres on a poor black family living on the outskirts of a rural town. It thus offers us a brief glimpse of how the state of African–American precariousness I’m describing here is not only contained in New Orleans, and thus may be considered in some ways regional. Their home in the forest is destroyed by Katrina; only the bare structure of the building is left standing. The family retreat for some time into the attic – though the roof is ripped off – ‘until the water, which had milled like a boiling soup beneath us, receded inch by inch, back into the woods’.<sup>340</sup> The novel’s narrator, Esch, pertinently describes her family as ‘a pile of wet, cold branches’, and then echoing Yaeger’s sense of bodily ‘trash’, as ‘human debris in the middle of all of the rest of it’.<sup>341</sup> We can take Esch to refer to the other waste material that is floating around them as ‘the rest of it’, so blending the human and inanimate together as disposable objects. Eggers’ *Zeitoun* also features such discarded bodies: Zeitoun sees a man ‘half-submerged, face-down’ claiming that ‘The image was from another time, a radically different world’ (p. 158). Significantly, Eggers describes the bodies as being unreal, almost uncanny in their otherness. Similarly, the Louisiana crime writer James Lee Burke has a number of scenes in his work that feature dead floating bodies. The narrator of his post-Katrina novel *The Tin Roof Blowdown* (2008) notes at one point that he ‘counted the bodies of nine black people, all of them floating facedown in a circle, like free-falling parachutists’ and later ‘saw a black baby hung in the branches of a tree, its tiny hands trailing in the current, its plastic diaper immaculate in the moonlight’.<sup>342</sup> The horrific nature of the dead black bodies is rendered poetic through Burke’s prose: his use of the parachute simile

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<sup>339</sup> Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 27.

<sup>340</sup> Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 237.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> James Lee Burke, *The Tin Roof Blowdown* (London: Phoenix, 2008), p. 47 and p. 53.

and the description of an ‘immaculate’ diaper in moonlight work to depict the bodies in their otherworldly, yet entirely real, state.

Such precarious life can also be seen in HBO’s *Treme*. While there is much to be said about the television show, an interesting narrative strand of the first season concerns the character of LaDonna who is looking for her brother Damo who did not return home after the storm. We learn that he was arrested during the city’s evacuation and that he had not been seen since. The remainder of the series follows LaDonna’s, and her lawyer Toni’s, attempt to find him in police records. Structuring the narrative, then, is a missing black body. This absent body is merely another aspect of a disposable biopolitics of African Americans. In the first episode, a policeman tells Toni ‘We don’t have him’.<sup>343</sup> This later turns out to be false as they have Damo’s (dead) body in a makeshift morgue, but under a different name. Toni tells LaDonna that ‘we’re gonna have to look at this body’ and they travel seventy miles out of New Orleans to find out if it is actually Damo.<sup>344</sup> ‘Looking’ at this body is central to the kind of mourning-work I am foregrounding here; *Treme* seems to engage with this process. When they reach the facility

Figure 1

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<sup>343</sup> ‘Smoke My Peace Pipe’ (season 1, episode 7), *Treme*, HBO, 2011.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

Figure 2

holding the dead bodies in custody during the storm, they are faced with tens of trucks that operate as temporary morgues; body-bags fill the vehicles (see figures 1 and 2). This spectacle of death emblemizes the biopolitics so visible across post-Katrina texts. Discovering the body is indeed Damo, Toni angrily informs the guard that ‘This is David Maurice Brooks’: a process of naming necessary in the wake of Damo’s body being rendered disposable and unacknowledged.<sup>345</sup> ‘Tell me something’, Toni declares, ‘How is it that a young man can be sent to a distant parish, die in custody, be autopsied, and lay in a morgue for months without anyone figuring out who he is?’<sup>346</sup> These incisive questions speak to the heart of the biopolitical realm I am outlining here.

This is also echoed by Spike Lee’s HBO documentary *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, which I will examine in the remainder of this chapter. Because it foregrounds vulnerable (dead and alive, often African-American) bodies, I take this documentary as evidencing a *homo sacer* after Katrina that is in part regional. The film is formed from an extensive collection of interviews (on-location and in a studio) with many people from the region affected by the storm, as well as news footage, images and artful sequences of the city: a purposeful assemblage of visual styles and forms. Janet Walker calls Lee’s film ‘A model of its kind for epic complexity as well as sweep’ due in part to how ‘the film spirals down into the maelstrom of

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

the flooded city and yet resuscitates the bodies, voices, and ideas of people on the ground'.<sup>347</sup> This resuscitation is achieved most specifically by the film's form as an 'analysis documentary of the compilation type for its assemblage of archival footage drawn mainly from television news sources, on- and off-site interviews conducted for the purposes of the film'.<sup>348</sup> Walker usefully points to the form of *Levees*: a rich, if traditional, documentary. Mainly composed of 'talking head' interviews (with Lee off-camera), *Levees* explores its subject matter across four – roughly chronological – acts, mainly through oral testimony. Interviewing politicians, celebrities, academics, local workers and unemployed citizens, Lee attempts to provide a range of responses to Katrina. While this may ostensibly be the case, there is no doubt that the interviewees, and the various points they make, are particularly selected to suit Lee's thesis. The interviews are ballasted by news footage, photographs, and other filmic sections created for the documentary. Accumulating various forms and styles, Lee creates a textured documentary that, in its forceful narrative and collection of visual evidence, convinces the viewer of the overwhelming devastation Katrina had on predominantly black and poor communities.

The film's subtitle points to its mournful tone; Helen Taylor reads Lee's use of 'requiem' as 'appearing to lay New Orleans to rest', signalling the possible end of a particularly unique culture.<sup>349</sup> Taylor's interpretation is interesting for it is correct in the sense that *Levees* engages in the mourning process, but she is surely mistaken in suggesting that the city is being 'laid to rest' as though the city itself has died. In contrast, Lee's film seems to argue that even if hundreds have died and New Orleans has been ravaged, the spirit of the city cannot so easily be quelled. In this way, he joins many of the city's inhabitants who so celebrate its particularity and exceptionalism (which, in effect, is the city's various origins, cultural practices and specific histories). As a 'requiem' to the city, mourning the losses of Katrina, the documentary is deeply angry, political and emotive, reinforcing the notion indicated previously that this was a politically-charged disaster that revealed a city fractured along racial lines. Anna Hartnell notes that the documentary 'points to a complicated web of social, political, and environmental blind spots that led to Katrina and its catastrophic aftermath'.<sup>350</sup> This complicated web, however, predominantly reveals the 'social factors behind the creation of an African American

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<sup>347</sup> Janet Walker, 'Rights and Return: Perils and Fantasies of Situated Testimony After Katrina' in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, ed. by Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 83-114 (p. 88).

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>349</sup> Helen Taylor, 'After the Deluge: The Post-Katrina Cultural Revival of New Orleans', *Journal of American Studies*, 44, 3 (2010), 483-501 (p. 485).

<sup>350</sup> Anna Hartnell, 'When the Levees Broke: Inconvenient Truths and the Limits of National Identity', *African American Review*, 45, 1-2 (2012), 17-31 (p. 17).

“underclass”, one which is continuously ignored and displaced because of, Hartnell implies, a structural racism.<sup>351</sup>

Spike Lee’s sequel documentary, *If God is Willing and Da Creek Don’t Rise* (2010), continues his investigation of post-Katrina recovery, and further emphasizes the marginalization of the region, city and people. Ray Nagin, the mayor of New Orleans during the storm, claims that the situation would have been different ‘If this were Cape Cod, Nantucket [...or] The Hamptons’, indicating that he thinks that because it was New Orleans – a Southern, predominantly black, economically poor city – the recovery plan was not as adequate as it would have been elsewhere in America.<sup>352</sup> *If God is Willing* further investigates the fallout from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf, situating this disaster in a chain of events in the South that have ruined its people, economy and cultures. I should note here that the oil spill affected a group very different from that of New Orleans; here, along the Gulf, poor white communities suffered most. One interviewee, a Louisianan radio host Garland Robinette, half-jokingly remarks that after this second tragedy, he feels the region may be doomed: ‘I used to laugh at voodoo’.<sup>353</sup> Now, he indicates, he may not be so sure. Implicit, and often explicit, in both of Lee’s films is a sense of sadness and anger at the destruction of a city and region and, moreover, a poor (predominantly African-American) population.

Much of the film is dedicated to resuscitating African-American stories and voices, in addition to documenting the widespread devastation wreaked on the inhabitants of New Orleans and the surrounding area. While *If God is Willing* opens to a larger Southern geography, *Levees* takes New Orleans as its primary focus, testifying to Karen O’Neill’s suggestion that ‘New Orleans [...] has become the periphery of the periphery’.<sup>354</sup> Lee’s film, furthermore, in line with this chapter’s argument, documents a particular Southern experience in this city and state. As suggested, the transnational and postsouthern modes of analysis so dominating Southern studies cannot always accommodate the specific legacies and resonances of history of the region which are partly informing the aftermath of Katrina. I agree with Ruth Salvaggio who posits that ‘history in New Orleans still lurks just below the surface of things’ but this past is always forgotten and ignored.<sup>355</sup> ‘As an image recurring in the annals of cultural memory’, she also writes, ‘and in a nation expert in the workings of amnesia, the city has become a poster site for

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>352</sup> *If God is Willing and Da Creek Don’t Rise*, dir. by Spike Lee (HBO, 2010).

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Karen O’Neill, ‘Broken Levees, Broken Lives, and a Broken Nation after Hurricane Katrina’, *Southern Cultures*, 14, 2 (2008), 89-108 (p. 105).

<sup>355</sup> Ruth Salvaggio, ‘Forgetting New Orleans’, *The Southern Literary Journal*, 40, 2 (2008), 305-316 (p. 308).

erasing the past'.<sup>356</sup> This historical erasure, Salvaggio suggests, can be overcome: particularly in this moment after Katrina. In her words, the over-pouring of water from the levees is metonymic of the overflow of memory (something we have seen in the previous chapter) that we need to pay attention to.

*When the Levees Broke* opens with a dedication: over a black screen we read 'This film document is in remembrance of all the Hurricane Katrina victims in New Orleans and the Gulf States of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida'.<sup>357</sup> Lee, from the outset, signals the mournful and memorative qualities of his film, pointing to the political import of its message, as well as the acknowledgment of death that so saturates the story. Following this, Lee begins *act one of Levees* with a montage of images and film of New Orleans set to Louis Armstrong's song 'Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?' Armstrong's song, again, gestures towards the solemn nature of the documentary: deployed here, the title ironically comments not only on the destruction and disappearance of much of the city after the storm, but – as Lee shows – a vast majority of those affected by the storm were evacuated and displaced from New Orleans, still yet to return. Missing New Orleans is not nostalgic but grief-stricken. The still and moving images that Lee re-presents in this montage are of the city during the storm (ravaged houses, pelting rain, desolate plots of land); historical footage of the city (people riding the tram, dancing in the streets); contemporary scenes (of concerts, and homes years after the storm). This amalgam of historical times and places creates a visual tapestry of the city: temporally disparate, but spatially located. There is a reinforcement here of place and space as central to this narrative of Katrina. *Levees* does much of its emotional and political work through such visual techniques, narrating the city's history through edited images alone. Lee does, however, complement these scenes with many interviews. Two that stand out in this context of mourning and New Orleanian specificity are in *act three*. Calvin Mackie, a professor at Tulane University offers a shocking array of statistics: 'Pre-Katrina, the murder rate was approaching 200 [...] The school system was one of the worst in the nation. Our poverty rate was double that of every major city in the country'.<sup>358</sup> Mackie's clip is then followed by a short edit of Harvard professor Felton Earls, who says that in this overwhelmingly black city, living conditions are so shocking that they, 'violat[e] in my terms human rights'.<sup>359</sup> Earls connects us back to a biopolitics of vulnerability amongst African Americans, and girded by the preceding information from Mackie, offers a harsh indictment of the city's socioeconomic situation. What I would merely add to this is a

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>357</sup> *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts*, dir. by Spike Lee (HBO, 2006).

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

regionalism that cannot but be vital to understanding this city's long-standing economic issues which are, in turn, so bound up in race, place and culture; this is true at a local and national level. The city is often seen as a 'dead-weight' on the country. After Katrina specifically, Bibler writes, 'the predominantly black New Orleans even became something like a lynched body strapped to the nation'.<sup>360</sup> Lee's deeply political point, which is espoused by Mackie and Earls, and underlined by Bibler here, is that this predominantly African-American city has been ruined not merely by Katrina. The documentary aims to mourn these tragic facts. That Bibler also invokes the spectacle and traumatized body of lynchings (so rife in the South from the 1890s to the 1920s) also frames this section which focuses on the disposable black body – a historical entrenchment of the corporeal figure I am exploring.

Lee also documents a number of funeral processions and scenes of mourning. Helen Regis demonstrates that the New Orleans jazz funeral is a particular way of 'strengthening and repairing the social fabric'.<sup>361</sup> The traditional New Orleans funeral, rooted particularly in black communities, is unique in that, after the main service, the coffin is taken to the cemetery, followed by the mourners, and then people from the local community (who may or may not know the deceased) join the procession, forming what is called a 'second-line'. This second-line is a kind of mourning through celebration: the procession dance and sing along to upbeat jazz music (after the solemnity of the funeral itself). This form, Regis continues, 'provides a space for reflection on experience, for the articulation of subjectivities, and for contesting and transforming mainstream images of blackness'.<sup>362</sup> Might we also suggest that Lee's film – particularly in centralizing his re-presentations of such jazz funerals – be participating in a similar cultural form? The mourning-work that Lee's 'requiem' initiates emerges from his combination of visual and aural forms in this documentary: their accumulation and connection and transformation in a way not too dissimilar from the second line.

On the mourning in *Levees*, Janet Walker critiques Lee's 'idealizing [of] home and community' and 'identity politics' as, for her, it 'may actually inhibit to a certain extent the "working through" of a long-standing social malaise at the very moment when exposed racism demands a new order'.<sup>363</sup> While there may be problematic aspects to Lee's ideological work in *Levees*, the mourning-work (working through) his film starts to accomplish is not hampered by this. In fact, the film was made alongside the reconstruction of people's homes and communities,

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<sup>360</sup> Bibler, p. 19.

<sup>361</sup> Helen A. Regis, 'Blackness and the Politics of Memory in the New Orleans Second Line', *American Ethnologist*, 28, 4 (2001), 752-777 (p. 755).

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 762.

<sup>363</sup> Walker, 'Rights and Return', p. 99.

which had been thoroughly destroyed during the storm, thus it seems clear the documentary would participate and reflect this. I want to suggest with Susannah Radstone that what she calls ‘trauma films’ – Lee’s documentary is surely this – can ‘have the potential to provide a cultural “working through” of traumatic memories’.<sup>364</sup> This working through, Radstone argues, can begin by focusing on the elements of trauma film that ‘fully and directly engag[e] the body and its feelings’ in the hope that mourning can, in a sense, begin.<sup>365</sup>

To develop Radstone’s notion further, I turn to a selection of visual theory which will then be filtered through a particular film sequence. Because Lee’s film dwells so seriously and precisely on traumatic and emotive scenes especially of death, it is clear that Lee is attempting to coerce and affect the viewer in a physical as well as intellectual way. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, in *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*, introduce us to the notion that the visual paradigm has dominated film theory: that optical analyses prevail when reading cinema. Their book on film and embodiment sets out to overturn this axiomatic theoretical mode by rearticulating the ‘spatio-temporal relations between the bodies and objects depicted in a film, and between film and spectator’.<sup>366</sup> Through various corporeal (sense) motifs – cinema as: face, eye, skin, ear, brain – Elsaesser and Hagener unsettle traditional readings of film and supplant them with bodily understandings of cinema: that is, not just as ocular-centric. This interrelation of somatic and filmic presence has been most notably elaborated by Vivian Sobchack who suggests that film theory has ‘generally not known how to respond to and describe how it is that movies “move” and “touch” us bodily’.<sup>367</sup> In her sense, ‘film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*’, thus instating the corporeal relationship between a film and its audience at the centre of the viewing experience (original emphasis).<sup>368</sup> Where *Film Theory* attempts to articulate new ways of apprehending and reading cinema, Sobchack’s *Carnal Thoughts* comprehensively tracks the relationship between our lived bodies and the bodies on screen.

This theoretical field takes us close to the work on affect that has dominated contemporary criticism of the connection between text and audience. Jill Bennett’s *Empathic Vision* argues that the ‘affective responses engendered by artworks are not born of emotional identification or sympathy; rather they emerge from a direct engagement with sensation as it is

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<sup>364</sup> Susannah Radstone, ‘Cinema and Memory’ in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* ed. by Radstone and Schwartz, pp. 325–342 (p. 334).

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup> Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 5.

<sup>367</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

registered in the work'.<sup>369</sup> Bennett suggests that the affectiveness of art can produce 'a jolt that does not so much *reveal* truth as thrust us involuntarily into a mode of critical inquiry' (original emphasis).<sup>370</sup> Affect in art is not 'subordinated to prescribed or didactic ends, but work to stimulate thinking in a different way'.<sup>371</sup> Of course, in *Levees*, this could be argued against as Lee's film often strays into didactic and even sermonic territory; we are frequently led to think and interpret events in particular ways. Take, for example, the length of screen time Lee dedicates to interviewee's criticism of George Bush; the over-stating of Bush as lone instigator of the failed post-Katrina efforts are short-sighted, if not misleading. Moreover, many of the interviews portrayed as a buffoon, as cartoonishly ineffectual. However, more central to my point is the use of images in the film. Lee shows photographs and film clips taken during the storm to evoke a response in the viewer. They affect us in the precise way that Bennett and Sobchack suggest.<sup>372</sup>

This affecting nature of cinema and visual forms seems to describe so precisely the formalism of Lee's documentary as a whole. His construction of the film deliberately fuses different styles and medial forms: still photographs, talking-head interviews, film footage, made-for-the-film inserts all combine to create a rich texture that reflects the overwhelming nature of the storm. The documentary's dense four hours are edited and put-together to produce affective responses in its viewers; affect is built into the very fabric of Lee's film which sets out to mourn Katrina's losses. This reaches a visual climax, I would suggest, at the end of act two in which the biopolitics of disposability is embodied (in all senses) in a montage sequence deserving of attention. Particularly, here, Lee employs photographs that I want to look at a little closer. The images Lee displays are collected from the storm's aftermath: they (still and moving) are from news-reel, professional photojournalists, art-photographers and even what looks like home-video or camera-phones. Lee's montage collects, in Bennett's words, 'gestures, actions and

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<sup>369</sup> Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>372</sup> A recent critique of affect by Ruth Leys might be added here, if only to signal the possible limitations of an affective interpretation. Leys suggests that the commitment to the subject (or viewer's) bodily processes and feelings – anterior to, and thus dislocated from, the objects that caused such responses – entails a certain separation. 'The disconnect', she writes, 'between "ideology" and affect produces as one of its consequences a relative indifference to the role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture, and art in favor of an "ontological" concern with different people's corporeal affective reactions'. In this way, Leys continues, 'affect has the potential to transform individuals for good or ill without regard to the content of argument or debate' (p. 451). While there is much to be said about Leys' critique, I need only note here that my reading takes affect into account because it has (historically) been an often overlooked element of aesthetic criticism. Though affect is created by stimuli which are, in a sense, outside of politics, intention, or 'meaning', this does not preclude a subsequent engagement with these elements following the corporeal response. Indeed, it is the combination of both bodily and cognitive responses that I am interested in here. See: Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry* 37, 3 (2011), 434-472.

objects enjoined into circuits of affect that carry thoughts, ideas and memories', in an overwhelming form that documents a Southern black biopolitical realm.<sup>373</sup>

For a full two minutes we see dead, principally black, bodies found after the storm. Floating on the water or submerged beneath it, on rooftops and roads, in houses or covered with tarpaulin, the bodies are revealed in all their horror. The two minute-long slideshow is accompanied by famous New Orleans trumpeter Terrence Blanchard's mournful jazz music, and adds to the sad and resigned note struck through the images. The splicing together of aural and visual forms to create this montage is part of Lee's documentary technique which enfold in the fabric of the documentary other media forms. Photographs and moving images, for example, are newly contextualized when taken from their principal surrounds and mediated through Lee's lens. The dynamics of this need be noted, not least because Lee's construction of the documentary is aesthetically and politically charged; the fusion of media can, as I will show, have specific effects. His formalism, in sum, merges 'complex semantic forms' that in turn create, in Michael Chanan's words, a '[c]hain of meanings that passes from the film-makers' encounter with the subject to the eyes of the viewer'.<sup>374</sup> I would add, also, that this chain of signification, following Sobchack and others, is passed to the viewer's body too. That all of the images in this sequence focus so tightly on dead bodies cannot but testify to the fact that, as Sobchack astutely notes, 'we are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance and texture of images'.<sup>375</sup> Perhaps here we should also sound a note of reservation, as Lee's montage is so constructed and shaped that its affectiveness is purposeful and deliberate. That is, his remediation of images of death play an 'active role in shaping our understanding of the past, in "mediating" between us [...] and past experiences'.<sup>376</sup> One reading of this montage could see Lee's mediations as didactic or clearly fixed in their message. However, this chapter wants to read this part of the documentary another way, suggesting that it is the remediation of images, and their construction in the film, that is important. Remediation, Erll and Rigney suggest, 'is an act of hypermediacy that, by multiplying media, potentially reminds the viewer of the presence of a medium' which in effect 'points to the potential self-reflexivity of all memorial media'.<sup>377</sup> Thus, rather than manipulative, Lee's medial play might just be self-reflexively attuned and aware. Where Erll and Rigney further argue that memory-aware film might prevent 'its viewers from becoming

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<sup>373</sup> Jill Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics: Events, Affects and Art After 9/11* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 74.

<sup>374</sup> Michael Chanan, *The Politics of Documentary* (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 103.

<sup>375</sup> Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, p. 65.

<sup>376</sup> Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics' in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

immersed in the past; it continuously keeps them on the surface of medial representations, thus creating an experience of the medium', Lee's film achieves this effect in addition to an accumulative affective quality which helps reach beyond such textuality.<sup>378</sup>

Moreover, if the montage is an aestheticized form, the dead bodies shown thus too become objects of the gaze. Aestheticized in this way, the deaths cannot be merely looked at objectively: they are visually charged by the form in which they are connected. I will untangle this ethical question below with reference to the specific images. Lee's framing of death – through the obviously constructed montage – is self-aware and purposeful: there is no doubt that he is communicating something about these deaths. We will come below, also, to Lee's use of literal frames at the end of the film, but here he is also playing with this notion. As Butler tells us, to communicate suffering with a politicized charge, photographs 'must have a transitive function: they must act upon viewers'; that is, 'They do not merely portray or represent – they relay affect'.<sup>379</sup> It is this quality of images of death that Lee is sensitive to. His bringing of them together in one montage calls attention to these bodies and their visual power – a single image on its own is effective at making a political point, but collating images of death ignites them with affect. Indeed, Lee's montage is so open about this – subtlety is not its purpose – that we cannot but understand its ethics. While, Bennett tells us, affect 'may be expressed, activated or incited by an image', at the same time it does not 'always come *from* a single image', but the multiple ways it works on its viewer.<sup>380</sup> Indeed, the 'emotional life of an image is a process of engagement; of continual enfolding and unfolding'.<sup>381</sup> It is clear that Lee's montage is a very specific example of this folding: it actualizes, in its constant accumulation of images and footage, an equal accretion of meaning and emotional weight. Added to this is an overtly mournful musical score which cements, as well as enables, certain affective dynamics. Perhaps we are coaxed into this bodily relation to Lee's film: his presentation of images and the representational forms they come in might just be a manipulation of our senses and emotions. But, while I do not think this is entirely fair given the sheer forcefulness of some of the images Lees shows this filmic strategy might just be the direction, in Alison Landsberg's words, of 'affect toward progressive ends'.<sup>382</sup> Such political and mournful ends are, in this chapter, developed through a commitment to historical regional identification.

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>379</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), p. 68.

<sup>380</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 21.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>382</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 104.

I have selected three images from the film that seem representative of the whole section which I want to look at more closely. Grotesque, bloated and contorted, these dead New Orleanians remained dispersed around the city for a long while after the storm; a sign of neglect and abandonment correlative with the failed recovery operation by FEMA and the government outlined above. As one of the interviewees, Phyllis Montana LeBlanc, says in the film, ‘There’s a *life* here’ (my emphasis).<sup>383</sup> Angry at a government neglectful of mainly poor black people, LeBlanc’s important use of the term ‘a life’ (rather than ‘a person’) reinforces the way, apropos the argument I have been delineating above, lives had been reduced to their barest form after Katrina. She is calling for an apprehension of life. Just as, through these pictures, I am also calling for an apprehension of death.

In figures 3 to 5, a shocking and affective force comes into sharp focus; I will detail how the images work in this way. In each, to start with, the African-American bodies float face-down in water; these submerged faces, principally, defeat identification in some way. Perhaps we could frame this with Judith Butler’s interest in precarious life and otherness. Butler uses Levinas’ conception of the face which might help critically anchor this. For Levinas, Butler

Figure 3

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<sup>383</sup> *When the Levees Broke*.

Figure 4

tells us, ‘To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself’.<sup>384</sup> Through the face we can understand the precariousness of the Other (our innate connection to others within the social sphere and the precariousness relationality thus involved), which ‘is what makes the face belong to the sphere of ethics’.<sup>385</sup> What happens, then, we have to ask, when the face is absent, when Lee chooses to present images of bodies with their face not present? I am also identifying dead Southerners, not alive ones, which furthers this point. If the black Southerners that Lee is representing in a state of disposability – of death following *homo sacer* (social death in life) – then perhaps the absence of a face, with which the viewer might identify or relate ethically, only cements the fate of these bodies. Were we presented with the bodies’ faces, perhaps it would too explicitly foreground their deadness and the difficulty we would have in identifying with them. Instead, Lee’s choice to refuse us the face clearly situates these dead bodies in a biopolitical realm of disposability: as *already beyond identification*. Metonymic of the larger sphere of disposability in the South, then, this facelessness compounds and exemplifies the conception of African Americans as throwaway and far from human.

In figure 3, a woman’s body floats in shallow water, clear enough that we can see her colourful top and maybe something pink in her hair. The body’s serene stasis is juxtaposed with a concrete wall that juts into the left of the frame, forming a strange geometric tableau. The

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<sup>384</sup> Butler, *Precarious Life*, p. 134.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

stillness of this image is reminiscent of Susan Sontag's formulation that photographs have the ability to 'haunt us', where narratives cannot.<sup>386</sup> This dead body haunts and affects the viewer in an eerily quiet way. Figure 4 shows a body beneath a bridge with a city-scape, deeply submerged in water, behind it. With such visual depth (a long-shot), we perspectivize this body, seeing it amongst an entire city damaged and storm-ravaged. Central in the image, the body almost addresses the camera, leading our gaze up the person's bloated form and across their soiled clothes. Moreover, our eye is led up to the top of the image where the flooded road leads away from us (it is also sunlit) and metaphorically gestures to the rest of the water-logged city. Finally, figure 5 reveals a body floating amongst waste and debris: wood, plastic, a boat, tree limbs. In a way, this body is visually equated with such waste or trash thus becoming a disposable and trashy, throwaway body. The African Americans rendered so disposable by Katrina are encapsulated by this image. Brought together by Lee, these photographs 'carry the event [of Katrina] forth, embedding it in the material world and transforming experience'.<sup>387</sup> Working on the viewer, these three images alone testify to a regional biopolitical realm, but they do so through their affective qualities; moreover, coalesced into a montage in Lee's film, this affect 'is layered, thickened and accumulated'.<sup>388</sup>

Figure 5

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<sup>386</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 80.

<sup>387</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 76.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

These affective qualities must also be seen in a larger political frame. While, as it has been widely noted, photography ‘entails a particular kind of violence’ – in its forceful embodiment of the gaze: the active act of *looking* – and that this ‘threat of violation always hangs over the photographic act’, we must not abandon the ethical possibilities and potentialities of the gaze.<sup>389</sup> As Ariella Azoulay tells us, ‘Photography, at times, is the only civic refuge at the disposal of those robbed of citizenship’.<sup>390</sup> If Katrina revealed a population in the state of exception – excluded citizenship – might not these Southerners need Lee’s photographic documentation? Azoulay continues by suggesting that it is our ‘historic responsibility not only to produce photos, but to make them speak’.<sup>391</sup> To make images speak, or testify, or say something to us culturally, depends on a process of spectatorship, of looking, that (while containing the possibility of re-victimizing the victimized) is enabling of political ends. Photography can, for Azoulay, facilitate the dispossessed ‘to make politically present the ways in which they have been dominated’.<sup>392</sup> The photographs shown in Lee’s documentary, I claim, have equal potential. Our role as observers of the images, and Lee’s film, is to become active spectators in their visual life. Azoulay clarifies this role to us further: ‘The act of prolonged observation by the observer as spectator has the power to turn a still photograph into a theater stage on which what has been frozen in the photograph comes to life’.<sup>393</sup> The possible political and ethical ends of this are boundless: as spectators of disposable black life and death, we (the viewer) and Lee (as montage constructor) set the stage for an examination of biopolitics in the region. The frozen image of a single African American can, through on-going and ‘prolonged’ observation – bearing the shock and force and affect of the images – enable an active process of political engagement. If the ‘traces of injury [or death] are imprinted on the surface of the photographic image’, they ‘await[t] a spectator to assist them’ and it is surely our job as contemporary Southernists to do so.<sup>394</sup>

To push this argument even further, and supplement it with a regional context of visualization, I turn finally to recent scholarship on lynching images. It needs to be made clear that I am not suggesting that the aftermath of Katrina and the deaths at the hands of lynch-mobs are the same. Katrina’s losses were facilitated, in my view, by a structural racism that compounded the effects of a natural disaster, while lynchings were premeditated acts of murder.

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<sup>389</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* trans. by Relä Mazali and Ruvik Danieli (New York: Zone Books, 2008), p. 118 and p. 119.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

However, the work of Dora Apel, for example, which unpacks the complexities of looking at lynching images might just offer us some ways of viewing the images presented here. Moreover, if, as Katherine Henninger says, photographs ‘build on visual legacies created not only from other images but also from ongoing negotiations of visual “place”’, might not a Southern lens need be in operation?<sup>395</sup> Connecting the photographs in Lee’s film with those from lynchings, we may be able to frame them with a history of African-American death in the South. While, to repeat, I am not suggesting a comparison or equivalence in the two sets of images, it seems helpful to connect the two in a larger regional ‘visual legacy’.

Dora Apel’s *Images of Lynching* is a useful book in this regard. Following an exhibition of lynching images presented in 2000 called ‘Without Sanctuary’, Apel argues for the necessity of looking at and acknowledging lynching photographs so as to not ignore the traumatic history so widespread across the South. Apel notes that in confronting these horrific and distressing images, the viewer is forced into a position whereby ‘Looking and seeing seem to implicate the viewer [...] as if viewing itself were a form of aggression’.<sup>396</sup> Implicit here is the notion that in looking at the lynching photographs we are, at some level, inhabiting the space of the perpetrators (often present in the images themselves) who are looking at the lynched black body. It is worth considering this, as if we think about the aestheticization or objectification of death in this montage, might not our gaze be relatable to a perpetrating position? In looking at lynching images, ‘We, as viewers, occupy the photographer’s viewing position’, however ‘most of us reject the complicity thereby implied’.<sup>397</sup> Apel suggests, though, that even as we refuse such collusion, our positioning in relation to what is in the frame does not let us detach ourselves completely from it. Because the lynching photograph’s making is inherently spectatorial (which could be said of all images, but here there is specific reasoning), an aestheticizing of death – of dead African Americans – continues to exist no matter who looks at the photograph, or how. Thus, might not a similar set of assumptions be relatable to Lee’s montage? While not comparable to the lynching images – there were no specific perpetrators of these deaths, let alone ones orchestrating and disseminating the images – the aestheticization of dead bodies in Lee’s montage needs attending to. The three pictures shown here are stylized, particularly framed, focused and considered in such a way that we take on, in looking at them, a position where our gaze (and the camera lens) cannot but objectify death.

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<sup>395</sup> Henninger, p. 24.

<sup>396</sup> Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 7.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

Given the difficulties that inhere in the act of looking, though, Apel insists on the necessity of transcending these complex feelings – partly achieved through the re-contextualizing of the images (for the lynching pictures, in a gallery) because the images cannot but also ‘evoke revulsion and outrage’.<sup>398</sup> By insisting that we continue to look at these images, Apel is also rejecting any notion of this historical trauma as ‘sublime’ or beyond apprehension. Much like Dominick LaCapra’s troubling of criticism that treats the Holocaust as sublime event – like postmodern theory’s ‘tendency to “trope” away from specificity and evacuate history by construing the caesura of the Holocaust as a total trauma that is un(re)presentable and reduces everyone [connected to it...] to an ultimately homogenizing yet sublime silence’ – Apel is insisting that no matter what difficult and troublesome feelings or spectatorial positions lynching photographs evoke, it is imperative that we continue to look at them.<sup>399</sup> Particularly, Apel writes, this is because they represent (as in LaCapra’s assertion) ‘a specific history that must not be forgotten’.<sup>400</sup> The crux of her argument lies here, in that ignoring the ‘vulnerable black body’ of lynching images produces a ‘loss to historical understanding’ which ultimately ‘serve[s] to whitewash the crimes of white supremacy’.<sup>401</sup> By refusing to look at these images, Apel argues, we are recapitulating the act of oppression and degradation of the initial racist acts. Ultimately, what we lose by ignoring the images is knowledge and awareness of a very specific part of American history. Concluding her book, Apel writes that ‘Although lynching photographs are deeply disturbing to look at, the willingness to endure the distress produced [...] signals a heightened willingness to grapple with a deeply repressed era of American history and to face a common responsibility for the future evolution of racial narratives’.<sup>402</sup>

The connections between Apel’s theory of looking and the images of black deaths after Katrina should be somewhat clear. In stressing the need to look at images of lynching so as not to forget this tortuous part of history, I am similarly claiming that we need to acknowledge the distressing images seen after Katrina, so as to see the full force of the storm’s tragedy and not forget it. The images seen after Katrina, like those lynching images, will ‘evoke revulsion and outrage’, but as Apel stridently argues, to ignore them would be to compound the fate of dispossession (disposability) of those seen in the photographs. What these photographs, and bodies, want from us might be a regionally-instantiated mourning; I have suggested a number of frames through which to begin this process.

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>399</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 97.

<sup>400</sup> Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, p. 2.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

*When the Levees Broke* additionally mourns African-American losses in other (visual) ways. Lee foregrounds more than anything else the importance of listening to black voices, reinforcing the significance of them in trying to understand. He embodies this at the conclusion of act four, when he documents each of the contributing interviewees in a form of credits or cast list. The interviewees all have five or six seconds of screen time in which they say their name and occupation; unlike many documentaries, each of the contributors are explicitly recognised for their input (other than text on the screen). During their ‘biographies’ the people are literally ‘framed’: most hold up varying picture frames in front of their faces, other frames are suspended from the ceiling. The frames are ostensibly used to reinforce the contributors’ particular presence in the film through giving them a portrait at the end. Symbolically, though, Lee is also foregrounding the act of representation itself: the processes of visualizing and presenting those New Orleanians so affected by the storm. Literal framing becomes an act of remediation: of re-presenting (and in the process, calling attention to) the interviewees as always cinematically framed. The use of literal frames here makes explicit Lee’s representational act.

Elsaesser and Hagener tell us that a cinematic frame (literal or otherwise) ‘draws attention both to the status of the arrangement as artifact and to the image support itself’ in addition to ‘highlight[ing] the content of the (opaque) surface and its constructed nature, effectively implying composition and artificiality’.<sup>403</sup> Both notions further stress that the visual attention paid to frames is an obvious signal of Lee’s representational aim. In the audio commentary on the DVD of *Levees*, Lee briefly mentions the importance of the frames and how he wanted ‘portraits of everybody’ where they ‘faced the camera directly’ (unlike during the interviews).<sup>404</sup> Though this reading is important enough in regards to the institutionalized disembodiment and disposability of African Americans – overturned and resisted through the act of ‘giving voice’ to them – we cannot overlook the importance of such a demonstrable illustration of the visual framing that is representation itself, even in a ‘fact-based’ documentary.

Another way to think about this is to connect the frames – and their representative aims – through the theories of Judith Butler, particularly in *Frames of War*. Butler’s thesis is that there ‘is no life and death without a relation to some frame’, by which she means that it is the lenses or frames through which we view the world that produce bodies that are alive or dead.<sup>405</sup> Frames are integral to ‘schemas of intelligibility’ that ‘condition and produce norms of recognizability’.<sup>406</sup> In order for a life to be recognizable – that is, to be seen as a life worthy of grief and compassion

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<sup>403</sup> Elsaesser and Hagener, p. 15 and p. 14.

<sup>404</sup> *When the Levees Broke*.

<sup>405</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 7.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*

– it must exist within a schema or frame of intelligibility, a way of determining what counts as a life, or what one might look like. Frames thus work normatively in that they produce standardizing models of what constitutes life and how it can be recognized. However, Butler continues, frames also ‘call certain fields of normativity into question’.<sup>407</sup> The frames that Butler examines therefore are not as stable as first thought. A frame, she posits, can never ‘quite contain what it conveys, but breaks apart every time it seeks to give definitive organization to its content’.<sup>408</sup>

In relation to Spike Lee’s use of the frame, this becomes significant. Contrary to the sovereign powers that reduced African Americans to their bare life (and death) after Katrina, Lee – in light of Butler – illuminates the recognizability of black lives. Lee’s subjects hold their frames up but the viewer can see in and around it, aware of the surroundings of the portrait: its location and context. The frames Lee uses are, I suggest, reactionary to the images of dead black bodies so foregrounded earlier in the documentary. Responding to the widespread reduction of black life to *homo sacer*, Lee calls attention to his participants and their fullness as human beings. The frames he uses do not ‘contain what they convey’ because life cannot always be reduced to bare intelligibility (as it was in Katrina’s floodwaters); life, here, exceeds the frame that attempts to contain it. We can read the frames in Lee through Butler as revealing the excesses of embodiment, particularly in bodies that were systematically denied their life during and after Katrina. We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that, as Žižek tells us, ‘there is no place in Agamben for the “democratic” project of “renegotiating” the limit which separates full citizens from *Homo sacer* by gradually allowing their voices to be heard’: we are in Agamben’s view always (by our politicized nature) vulnerable to becoming *homo sacer*.<sup>409</sup> Thus, I am not suggesting Lee’s film necessarily ‘re-negotiates’ the limit of the human but that the framing device of *Levees* enables the process of apprehending both the living and dead as human as they break ideological frames.

It is not just the excess of life in Lee’s film that troubles the frame; it is, to repeat, the frame itself which continuously moves. Frames, however much they try, cannot hold in one place what is inside it. Through ‘perpetual breakage’, frames shift and move: tracking ideology, which is never static, frames attempt to limit their subject, but by their very nature cannot. Lee plays on this idea in so explicitly foregrounding his filmic frame(s): he is aware of his own subjective ideology – which cannot, of course, be contained within the documentary – and at

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>409</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 100.

this final moment of the film, he signals to us his honesty about his framing impulse. Pushing this further, Butler continues by suggesting that as frames are unstable and break away from what they attempt to contain, trying to reinstall themselves as modes of seeing or recognition, ‘other possibilities for apprehension emerge’.<sup>410</sup> Within the overflowing or uncontained subject matter, ‘it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally “recognized” as a life’.<sup>411</sup> The frames of recognition change and modify. Those, like the many interviewees in Lee’s documentary, who were previously unrecognized as a life because normative frames rendered them unintelligible and thus non-recognizable, can become recognizable through new frames (which are self-conscious about their structure). The ending of *Levees* begins the creation of new frames of recognition for African Americans, highly necessary in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Following on from Lee’s use of framing, I want to suggest a final visual mode of mourning Katrina that is illustrated in the opening credits of *Treme* and will hopefully tie this section together. The titles are a montage of various images and media: photographs (new and old, singular and collaged), historical and contemporary film are spliced together, moving from the past to the present and pre-storm to post-storm. I am again concurring with Henninger who argues that together ‘photographers and photographs in the South constitute a vast visual legacy: a complex series of continuities and ruptures that help shape southern identity itself’.<sup>412</sup> The visual legacy of African Americans in the South is continued by the figures of bare life seen in the floodwaters, but here we see a more generalized reflection on the history of the city and region. Images of New Orleans during and after Hurricane Katrina are interspersed with images of water-soaked walls, buildings and photographs. The floodwaters are shown to have saturated every building, staining its walls with damp. What I am arguing here is that the walls seen are as much water-logged as they are memory-logged: the destroyed homes bear witness to the Southern past; they become, in effect, store-houses of memory. The principle way history is called up here is through the yoking-together of recent images with historical footage of New Orleans, predominantly of African Americans (see figures 6 to 8). We see black-and-white footage of people dancing, playing music and celebrating in the local community, always juxtaposed with images of the storm. Significantly, the historical footage is specific not only to New Orleans, but the Treme itself. Added to this, the title music is a song, ‘Down in the Treme’, further highlighting the district’s uniqueness.

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<sup>410</sup> Butler, *Frames of War*, p. 12.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>412</sup> Henninger, p. 48.

Geoffrey Batchen writes that in order for photographs to connect us to the memories they evoke, ‘Something must be done to the photograph to pull it (and us) out of the past and into the present’.<sup>413</sup> Similarly, Tom Piazza, writing about images of New Orleans that he remembers from childhood, are for him ‘powerful and unique [...] they had been smuggled out of the past as if containing an important message that the past wanted us to know’.<sup>414</sup> What is done to the images in *Treme*’s titles (Batchen), and what they want us to know (Piazza),

Figure 6

Figure 7

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<sup>413</sup> Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not, Photography and Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), p. 94.

<sup>414</sup> Tom Piazza, *Why New Orleans Matters* (New York: Regan Books, 2005), p. 4.

## Figure 8

occurs I think through the montage form. Connecting photographs and images from across New Orleans' history pulls them and us 'out of the past' and into a space of futurity in which moving beyond Hurricane Katrina might be possible. Formally, the oscillation between historical and contemporary images replicates and emphasizes the interconnections of the city of New Orleans in the past and post-Katrina. Donald Pease, in *The New American Exceptionalism*, writes of contemporary historical phenomena, that

these traumatizing images perform the representational function of the figures of thought Walter Benjamin called dialectical images. A dialectical image functions like the opening shot in a montage in that it solicits an entire series of related images each one of which breaks from its fixed historical context to bear partial documentary witness to the whole image montage of a historical event that suddenly flashes up into visibility and demands redress.<sup>415</sup>

Solidifying this is Rebecca Mark who, also referencing Benjamin, acknowledges that 'if we are not actively engaging the dangerous moments that flash up in the memory of our culture then we are actively enjoying the spoils of the victor'.<sup>416</sup> By connecting celebratory images of the city's black history with those from during and after Katrina, *Treme's* titles suggest at one level a refusal of the drowning of New Orleans' cultural history, particularly an African-American one. It also, more importantly, points to the necessity of seeing the historical lineage of Katrina's

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<sup>415</sup> Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*, p. 38.

<sup>416</sup> Rebecca Mark, 'Mourning Emmett: "One Long Expansive Moment"', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 40, 2 (2008) 121-137 (p. 124).

aftermath. The ‘related’ images set off by the montage ‘demand redress’ in that they insist on the historical backdrop to the contemporary images of New Orleans. This redress, or ‘active engagement’ as Mark calls it is, the mourning-work that this chapter has been exploring. In a way, then, this montage stands in metonymically for the entire collection of images I have been examining.

Batchen argues that keeping photographs for their memorial qualities actually is indicative of the principle reason we value them. He writes, ‘memorialization has little to do with recalling the past; it is always about looking ahead toward that terrible, imagined, vacant future in which we ourselves will have been forgotten’.<sup>417</sup> The terror of forgetting is, ultimately, the disastrous end of failing to mourn Katrina by looking to her Southern-ness. The spectre of forgetting – of refusing to remember the ease of how African Americans have been reduced to *homo sacer* so often in the South – runs through all of the images looked at in this chapter.

## KATRINA’S AWAKENING

To conclude, the final episodes of *Treme* will be read alongside another Southern text, Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, to consolidate this chapter’s way of responding to post-Katrina New Orleans and mourning it successfully. In the penultimate episode, an English professor at the local university, Creighton Burnett, has his class read Chopin’s novel. The next day, Creighton kills himself by throwing himself overboard a passenger ferry as it sails out of a New Orleans dock, recalling the famous final scene of *The Awakening*. Even though the character Edna Pontellier drowns herself in the Gulf of Mexico, the two deaths are connected at this moment. Chopin’s novel, set in New Orleans and Grand Isle in the Gulf is often hailed for its discussion of female emancipation and Southern womanhood. *The Awakening* concerns the protagonist Edna Pontellier’s gradual detachment from her husband and children and eventual suicide by drowning herself in the sea. I briefly posit that the novel rests on two major omissions that thus make it a problematic, but interesting, text: Edna’s black servants, and the real hurricane of 1893 that wiped out Grand Isle. Chopin uses both silences to enable Edna’s liberation. Both have interesting repercussions that conclude this chapter.

Edna’s suicide comes after her declaration of love to Robert, a younger suitor, whom she knows that she can never be with. The constrictions of a patriarchal society eventually become too much for her and, in killing herself, she attempts to move beyond this world to another realm, ‘where no woman’, (as when she swims in the ocean in an earlier scene) ‘had

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<sup>417</sup> Batchen, p. 98.

swum before'.<sup>418</sup> As she walks to the beach for a final time, Edna hears the 'seductive' 'voice of the sea' and she removes her clothes standing 'naked in the open air' like a 'new-born creature' (p. 175). The Gulf is enticing to Edna because it offers, she thinks, a form of transformation for her: she can be a 'new-born creature' whose regeneration will liberate her from her constricted life. As Elizabeth Nolan writes, in seeing a different life for herself – even, ironically, non-life – Edna 'refuses to compromise and, in suicide, achieves a form of transcendence'.<sup>419</sup> This transcendence, however, is problematic because, as is fairly evident, the logic of this awakening rests on female liberation occurring only through death. It is via suicide that Edna escapes the patriarchal society in which she lives; a difficult ending that does not conclude as neatly as many academics on the novel acknowledge. I do not read the novel's ending as transcendent: if Edna (and women's) freedom or future exists only in death, it is difficult to read this as an emancipatory or proto-feminist text.

Whether we read the ending as a feminist one or not, it must be noted that a significant amount of the book rests upon a black presence that is pushed to the margins. The Pontelliers have a number of African-American servants who enable their wealthy relaxed lifestyle. Edna is not, Chopin tells us, 'a mother-woman' (p. 51), nor does she care much for her children: she is 'fond' of them in an 'uneven, impulsive way' (p. 63). The relationship to her children is obviously one of the reasons she kills herself, but it is interesting to note how easily she can avoid them. The near-unspoken presence of black servitude is the key force that allows Edna to ignore her children; without their 'help', Edna could not begin her journey into independence and liberation. Although there is occasional note of the servants, such as 'two nursemaids followed, looking disagreeable and resigned' (p. 63), mostly they disappear into the backdrop. This is not unusual for a turn of the century Southern text, but it is not just that the servants are near-invisible, but that their unseen duties are the very stepping stones upon which Edna begins her affairs, explores her artistic side, and retreats into solitude. This is the first erasure or silencing that Chopin employs in the course of Edna's awakening; a hurricane is the second.

In 1893 a hurricane swept across the Gulf of Mexico and wiped out a number of islands, particularly Grand Isle. The island was devastated by the storm and never really recovered from it. That Chopin sets her novel a few years before the storm is important; she could have located her tale entirely in New Orleans, but instead, the major action and psychological 'awakening' of Edna occurs on the Gulf island. I argue that this act of historical erasure – an imaginative

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<sup>418</sup> Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 73. (Quoted in text from here on).

<sup>419</sup> Elizabeth Nolan 'The Awakening as Literary Innovation: Chopin, Maupassant and the Evolution of Genre' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin* ed. by Janet Beer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 118-131 (p. 128).

omitance, like the black presence – is central to the text, even undermining or complicating the notion of Edna's death. A number of critics have noted the pre-hurricane setting, including Barbara Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke, who claim that 'In situating her characters in a place whose destruction was imminent, Chopin must have recognized the poignancy she was adding to Edna's short-lived awakening'.<sup>420</sup> There is a connected and further historical erasure that is not acknowledged. In the 1800s, before the island was a summer resort, Grand Isle was covered with plantations. At the height of slavery, the location was 'relatively productive of sugar and cotton' and thus a fairly important location in the Gulf.<sup>421</sup> There are a few covert references to this, particularly when we see Edna and her friends stay in a large house surrounded by cabins. The cabins were obviously slave quarters and although not pointed out, Chopin's non-disclosure haunts the narrative.

Chopin's novel charts the progressive dissolution of the ideal of womanhood as prescribed by American, particularly Southern, culture. Edna's escape from this, we infer from Chopin, is a necessary thing. Conversely, though, as I claim, the novel's erasure of the real history of the Isle – that is, the storm – is an integral omission by Chopin as it allows Edna to achieve her awakening in the symbolically and emotionally rich site of the Gulf. This evocative location, replete with 'romantic and dramatic elements of southern history', is the perfect backdrop to Edna's 'liberatory' journey.<sup>422</sup> That Chopin has to conveniently 'forget' the hurricane, or simply drift back a few years in her fiction, should not go un-noted. In fact, the erasure of history – the erasure of a storm and its deadly floodwaters – is central to my argument about *The Awakening* and the recent texts of post-Katrina New Orleans. Chopin's deliberate narrativization of history, erasing both the storm and black presence, are the enabling gestures for Edna's awakening. Regardless of whether Edna's end is suicide or liberation, feminist or not, it can only take place when history is rewritten and regional floodwaters erased.

In *Treme*, when Creighton discusses the novel with his class, the students note how they feel that the text's ending is 'depressing'.<sup>423</sup> Creighton challenges them and claims that the novel is not to be read in this way, as having a closed ending; he tells them, obliquely, 'there is no closure in real life'.<sup>424</sup> He argues that Edna is 'looking for truth', and as she walks into the sea, 'It's a transition [...] She's embracing spiritual liberation'.<sup>425</sup> The class seem not to agree with

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<sup>420</sup> Barbara C. Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke, 'The Awakening and the Great October Storm of 1893', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 42, 2 (2010), 1-11 (p. 6).

<sup>421</sup> Helen Taylor, *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1989), p. 173.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>423</sup> 'Wish Someone Would Care', (season 1, episode 9), *Treme*.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*

their professor, but this is all we see of the discussion. After Creighton commits suicide, the significance of the class reading *The Awakening* is brought into focus. Creighton is plagued throughout the series by his own failure as a novelist and his lack of ability to help in the wake of the storm, and thus redirects this frustration into political diatribes that he posts on the internet. New Orleans' destruction fuels his political anger, but little is solved by his speeches or general despondency. In reading Chopin's novel, it is as though he sees death as a more successful or pertinent way to transcend the current problems of New Orleans. However, his reading of *The Awakening* is evidence for how to situate his death in relation to the rest of *Treme*. If we are to agree with his interpretation of the novel, then his death is in fact transcendence into spiritual peace. But if we disagree (as I do), then Creighton (and Edna's) suicides are evasions of reality. Neither sees that it is literal death and suicide that is being glossed over in the attempt to discern a sense of transcendence or liberation. We must not forget that it is life itself at stake in this act. Moreover, as my discussion of the absent flood in this novel suggests, an act of historical erasure takes place in order for Edna to achieve independence; so too, in *Treme*, does Creighton's death wish to erase Katrina, becoming a screen or narrative fetish that hides African-American death. Rather than face the storm head-on – as the show itself, and Spike Lee's documentary, do – he seeks to escape it. His wife, Toni, says in the final episode, 'He quit', suggesting that his death is an avoidance of reality rather than a transcendence of it.<sup>426</sup>

The five-year anniversary funeral discussed in the introduction is a signal of the ongoing mourning after Hurricane Katrina. While the city's residents were attempting to lay the storm to rest, the reality seems to suggest that its aftermath will stay present in New Orleans for some time. It reveals the difficulty in forgetting such a disaster, particularly when so many of the city's inhabitants are still homeless and displaced. Creighton's drowning is his attempt at erasure or historical evasion, but the waters of Katrina do the opposite: they bring Southern, New Orleanian history to the surface. Rather than wiping the geographical and historical slate clean (as a non-specified, trans-regional reading of Katrina might do), the flood unearthed the deep fractures of the South in terms of race and class. As the waters receded, the demarcations of Southern history were left clearly visible. Katrina's floods have revealed much, but most of all, it is that a certain South has not gone away.

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

# THREE

## WHAT REMAINS?

### Sally Mann and the South's Gothic Memories

[...] I returned  
to a field of cotton, hallowed ground –  
as slave legend goes – each boll  
holding the ghosts of generations  
– Natasha Trethewey, 'South'<sup>427</sup>

## DONNA TARTT AND HISTORICAL SPECTRES

Donna Tartt's *The Little Friend* opens with a prologue that sets a particularly gothic tone from the first sentence: 'For the rest of her life, Charlotte Cleve would blame herself for her son's death because she had decided to have the Mother's Day dinner at six in the evening instead of noon, after church, which is when the Cleves usually had it'.<sup>428</sup> The sentence seems particularly long and overwrought for an opening to the novel, subtly forging a claustrophobic atmosphere from the start. Learning of the son's death, too, immediately haunts the narrative and indicates the gothic mode that will permeate the whole book. Tartt's prologue then goes on to describe the run-up to the evening's dinner (and her son, Robin's, death): a full twelve pages before we find out how he dies. I want to briefly analyze the prologue as a way of beginning this chapter and debate on the Southern gothic.

Tartt uses a number of literary strategies to create her gothic tone. Weather, firstly, does much imaginative work – that is, pathetic fallacy features. To begin, Tartt uses an interestingly ambiguous description: 'Stormy, luminous spring evening; low, smudged clouds and golden light, dandelions and onion-flowers spangling the lawn. The air smelled fresh and tight, like rain' (p. 5). While the image seems bright – 'luminous', 'golden', 'spangling' – there is also a creeping sense of foreboding alongside it – 'stormy', 'smudged', 'rain' – that indicates something

<sup>427</sup> Natasha Trethewey, 'South' in *Native Guard* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>428</sup> Donna Tartt, *The Little Friend* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 3. (Quoted in text from here on).

to come. This is then cemented by an image of Robin, which is actually a description of a photograph: the ‘last picture they had’ of him. Taken by Edie, the image shows Robin ‘Out of focus’ running across the lawn. Most notable is that he is dwarfed by the gothic ‘Murky, storm-damp sky, shifting liquescence of indigo and slate, boiling clouds rayed with spokes of light’ (p. 7). Robin is running, ‘to meet his death, which stood waiting for him – almost visible – in the dark place beneath the tupelo tree’ (p. 7). Tartt heightens this gothic sensibility throughout the prologue, layering her prose with such forbidding and foreboding images. On the radio that morning a gospel show plays: ‘It was something that haunted Charlotte, though she’d never mentioned it to anyone’ (p. 10). Heard is a tender – but in this context mournful – song, whose lyrics ‘haunt’ Charlotte: ‘Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling / Calling for you and for me / See, by the portals he’s waiting and watching’ (p. 12). This gospel song forebodes as much as it laments the coming death of Robin.

Tartt again returns us to a gothic overburdened sky: ‘a ravelled wire of lightning flashed in the black clouds’ (p. 12) which seems to signal the instant of Robin’s death. After hearing her neighbour’s cry, Charlotte freezes, expecting something awful. She hears

dry rumbling thunder in the distance, everything strangely lit beneath the stormy sky and the ground pitching up at her as the heels of her shoes sank into the muddy earth, as the choir still sang somewhere and a strong sudden wind, cool with the coming rain, swept through the oaks overhead with a sound like giant wings and the lawn rearing up all green and bilious and heaving at her like the sea, as she stumbled blind and terrified toward what she knew [...] would be the very worst (p. 12).

The density of such a paragraph recalls the drawn-out opening sentence, adding to the thickness of the atmosphere (through thick prose). Richly sibilant and assonant, mixing affective sensations, Tartt’s sentence – it runs on for an entire paragraph – is formative, or reflective, of the stifling Southern milieu. The lengthy sentence eventually leads us to the crescendo of this prologue as the characters find Robin’s dead body. Even though the reader knows he is going to die, we are little-prepared for the gothic sight of Robin ‘hanging by the neck from a piece of rope, slung over a low branch of the black-tupelo’ (p. 13). While I have been merely suggesting thus far a regional tint to Tartt’s gothic mode, here she specifically invokes a Southern imaginary. Reviewers, while referencing the regionalism of *The Little Friend* (they often term it Southern gothic), do not identify the explicit connotation of lynching here. Robin is hung from a tupelo tree – not unsurprisingly ‘black’ – in the manner of the shocking crime that affected thousands of African Americans throughout the last century, particularly in the South. Though this practice was not confined to the South, and it was entangled in Northern politics too

(successive governments ignored the widespread practice of it), it is in the South that we can most clearly see this crime's effects.

It would be worth, I think, also exploring the other manifestations of the Southern gothic throughout Tartt's novel – stifling small-town life, petty crime, snakes, familial repression – but for this chapter's focus I wish merely to introduce the spectre of lynching for it works in a number of senses here. Lynching will not be my principle focus in this chapter, but it is a way to begin talking about the traumatic cultural memories of the South that are called forth by the gothic genre. As a phenomenon which has a specific legacy in the South (it was not confined to the region, but has a certain significance there) it can be seen as a cultural memory that, when recalled, brings with it a certain violence and gothic thematic. On lynching imagery, Dora Apel writes that this tragedy continues to have 'significant cultural impact, once again demonstrating the power of images'.<sup>429</sup> That is, lynching continues to be a powerful memory of visual horror, not least for Tartt, and this has a particular potency in the South.

We could even suggest that lynching here metonymically stands in for, as a cultural memory, other acts of racial violence in the South. While I do not wish to (unethically) use lynching rhetorically, I want to situate it in relation to many other Southern traumas, especially related to race and racial violence. The Southern gothic, in this sense, would seem to house a multitude of violent horrors from cultural memory. Again, I am returning to the sense of cultural trauma as a site of the Southern 'real'. My argument for regional readings rests upon dark and traumatic sights – particularly bodies – which could be seen as embodying the kind of cyclical tropism that postsouthern scholarship is trying to dismantle and reorient. But, as noted above, my interest in (dead) bodies and traumatic violence – especially here in this chapter on the gothic – is a way of framing a particular history and set of cultural memories that I see as pervasive in the region. The cultural products I am examining return, again and again, to these traumatic sites and sights. Jessica Adams argues that the black Southern body has become a kind of fetish, a recycled image where 'the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object' – those figurines, body parts, stereotypes and souvenirs of black corporeality that have circulated in the region since slavery's end.<sup>430</sup> The black body, she continues, 'keeps returning as a literal object of consumption, and nostalgia', and in order to distance my readings from this problematic process, I want to stress the potential for uncovering and identifying the traces and impacts and affects of embodiment that linger in the region.<sup>431</sup> The cultural memories that Sally

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<sup>429</sup> Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, p. 222.

<sup>430</sup> Adams, *Wounds of Returning*, pp. 87–88.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Mann ignites and references in her photographs are not the circulations of a fetishistic black body economy, but a subtle and reflexive attuning to very particular Southern experiences. The ‘real’ of the South that I am investing in happens to circulate around traumatic and traumatized bodies, often black, because these disruptive and difficult pasts continue to circulate. And to this, I think, we have to attend.

As Eric Savoy helpfully reminds us, “‘American gothic’ does not exist apart from its specific regional manifestations’.<sup>432</sup> Lynching operates in a chain of memories: a string of racially-motivated and regionally-located acts. In hanging from the tupelo tree, I suggest, Robin’s body is a metaphoric embodiment of this tortuous and gothic past; the cultural memories of the South hang for us to see. What I am ultimately arguing then is that the gothic genre is being used by contemporary Southerners to access particular cultural memories of violence and horror; moreover, these memories are not abstract hauntings of a repressed past, but they are regional occurrences that are so oftentimes *placed*. By recapitulating such memories, then, contemporary Southerners are speaking to a regional past that is far from done with. The gothic is the definitive genre for this to happen. I will unravel this argument through a reading of Sally Mann’s photography, which I will come to after an introduction to the Southern gothic in theory.

## REGIONALIZING THE GOTHIC

To think about the American gothic generally, it is useful to begin with Leslie A. Fiedler’s seminal *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960). His vast and influential survey of American fiction contains within it a couple of thematic and organizational strands: one being the gothic. A central proposition of Fiedler’s is that ‘of all the fiction of the West, our own is most deeply influenced by the gothic, is almost essentially a gothic one’.<sup>433</sup> Tracing this argument through early writers such as Charles Brockden Brown, Fiedler supplies at least one reason or underlying cause for America’s penchant for the genre: ‘certain special guilts awaited projection in the gothic form’.<sup>434</sup> Of this American guilt, or repressed trauma, Fiedler points to ‘the slaughter of Indians’ and, pertinently to my Southern focus, ‘the abominations of the slave trade, in which the black man, rum, and money were inextricably entwined in a knot of guilt’ which ‘provided new evidence that evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind’.<sup>435</sup> In this sense,

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<sup>432</sup> Eric Savoy, ‘The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic’ in *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* ed. by Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), pp. 3–19 (p. 6).

<sup>433</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 142.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*

Fiedler is suggesting that the American gothic is a symptomatic genre: a form of story-telling that is as inevitable as it is inescapable to the national mind. The violent histories that forged the new nation thus haunt America and its writers, forever made manifest in dark, or gothic, cultural modes.

Following Fiedler is Eric Savoy who writes, in his introduction to *American Gothic* that ‘the gothic tendency in American culture is organized around the imperative to repetition, the return of what is unsuccessfully repressed, and, moreover, that this return is realized in a syntax, a grammar, a tropic field’.<sup>436</sup> While I will not employ the same psychoanalytic language in this chapter, interesting in Savoy’s claim is the relationship, in the gothic, between form and content. The emergence of repressed material (that Fiedler might suggest is the violence that founded the nation: the slaughter of populations and the enslavement of others) finds material corollary in the gothic form, linguistically or formally. This is something that will play a central role in my readings of Sally Mann’s photographs in this chapter. Savoy also suggests that ‘the gothic registers a trauma in the strategies of representation as it brings forward a traumatic history toward which it gestures but can never finally refer’.<sup>437</sup> We are, here, in the traumatic field associated with critics such as Cathy Caruth who understand representations of trauma as never fully being able to signify that which took place because the initial trauma was too overwhelming to integrate. I do not want to linger on this point, but it is worth merely saying that this chapter will understand the presence of the traumatic past in the gothic differently. Indeed, I argue for a closer alignment here with Savoy’s gloss of what Fiedler calls “‘the pastness of the past,” the inescapable melancholy continuity between historical suffering and the visible textures of the present’.<sup>438</sup> In this way, there is a conversation taking place between the past and present that is not definitive, a given, or entirely inaccessible. It is complex and continuously being made present.

Returning to Fiedler can offer a route to the Southern branch of the gothic genre. Fiedler summarizes: ‘Only the American tradition of symbolic gothicism, which from Poe and Melville to Twain and Faulkner has never ceased to confront the problem of the Negro, has proved in an age of realism adequate to the complexities of life in the American South’.<sup>439</sup> What Fiedler foregrounds here is both the importance of the regional gothic to bear witness to a particularly racial problem in the South, but that underpinning this is ‘the problem of the Negro’. Slavery and its aftermaths are, in this logic, regionally rooted in particular ways (which

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<sup>436</sup> Savoy, ‘The Face of the Tenant’, p. 4.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>439</sup> Fiedler, p. 474.

is not to say that they do not have ramifications nationally and globally), and therefore are attested to through the gothic genre. Fiedler thus sees the Southern gothic as the paradigmatic form for discussing the region's history and cultural memories especially in relation to race.

What I am arguing in this chapter, then, is something akin to the horror writer Stephen King's idea that 'there is something frighteningly lush and fertile in the Southern imagination, and this seems particularly so when it turns into the gothic channel'.<sup>440</sup> On the Southern novelist Thomas Cullinan's work, King argues that 'One is tempted to believe that outside of the South, such an idea wouldn't raise much more than ragweed. But in this soil, it grows a vine of potent, crazed beauty'.<sup>441</sup> Taking this metaphor further, King suggests that Faulkner particularly 'did more than drop a few seeds; he planted the whole damn garden', enriching the fertility of the gothic imagination in the region.<sup>442</sup> Here King brings together a number of key issues that I want to theorize more rigorously and explore through other texts. In using metaphors of land and soil, King is implicitly referencing the South's earth-centred conception of itself from slavery onwards. Moreover, in so doing, King establishes the South as a site of particularity, or in Gray's words 'aberrance'. While such a regional literature has 'been assigned peripheral status', King is arguing that this difference actually fosters something highly specific and perhaps distinctly regional, especially when in the gothic mode.<sup>443</sup> Indeed, it is as if the gothic genre is not simply a perfect outlet for Southern culture, but it might even exemplify the region in its focus on the past, memory, haunting and horror.

Consolidating this, we could invoke Teresa Goddu who, concurring with Savoy's quote above, writes that 'the American gothic is most recognizable as a regional form'.<sup>444</sup> Goddu's thesis in *Gothic America* can actually help theorize this chapter's focus more particularly. Inverting the traditional conception of the gothic as simply concerned with an otherworldliness, or escape from reality, Goddu argues that 'gothic stories are intimately connected to the culture that produces them', not 'gateways to other, distant worlds'.<sup>445</sup> The gothic, for Goddu, ultimately needs to be historicized: rooted in the culture and time that produced it. We do not escape reality through the gothic or fantastic, but paradoxically get closer to it: that is, understand the otherwise unseen reverberations of the past structuring the present. Goddu is suggesting that history produces the gothic in that not only is it 'informed by its historical context', but 'the

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<sup>440</sup> Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Warner, 2000), p. 311.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, p. 2.

<sup>444</sup> Goddu, p. 3.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

horrors of history are also articulated through gothic discourse'.<sup>446</sup> The relationship between the gothic and specific history thus is mutually informing.

Twinning this notion with the thesis of María Del Pilar Blanco can further solidify the argument. While Blanco does not specifically talk about the gothic, her focus on ghosts and haunting feeds directly into this genre. Moreover, her book *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* complexly formulates and connects ideas of place and regionalism that I am engaging with across these chapters. By looking to the landscapes of both the United States and its neighbouring Latin Americas, Blanco opens her thesis into hemispheric territory, thus fitting neatly into the transnational work outlined in the introduction. Indeed, her argument rests on the notion that modernization has revealed the implicitly interconnected nature of various American landscapes and places; moreover, this paralleling of emerging places creates and sustains discourses and modes of haunting. Her book sees ghosts 'as manifestations of an increasing awareness of *simultaneous landscapes and simultaneous others* living within unseen, diverse spaces in the progressively complicated political and cultural networks of hemispheric modernization' (original emphasis).<sup>447</sup> Blanco's transnational work thus resists and challenges the sense of place and region as static. Alongside this global framework, however, Blanco equally posits that 'ghosts need to be read in their specificity. They are embedded in the story about a place'.<sup>448</sup> The way she bridges this conception is by arguing that 'the concept of simultaneity is an admission of modern haunting and ghostliness par excellence, because, although grounding one observer in a specific landscape, it forces an imagination of others in other locations'.<sup>449</sup> For my purposes then, and actually theoretically mirroring my general thesis, Blanco is not arguing for the abandonment of region – indeed, we have to read haunting from its located instantiation: much like Susannah Radstone's located sense of memory – but an acknowledgment that the local can also speak to the (trans)national.

To provide a little context of the state of scholarship on the gothic in the South, and its relation to the larger debates of the postsouthern, it might be worth noting two discussions in the 2005 issue of *South Central Review*. In this journal, Michael Kreyling and Patricia Yaeger produce essays that apprehend the notions of 'new southern studies' and the haunted South, respectively. Summating 'new southern studies' (and touching upon some ideas that are also central to the postsouthern turn), Michael Kreyling writes that "New" southern studies

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<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> María Del Pilar Blanco, *Ghost-Watching American Modernity: Haunting, Landscape, and the Hemispheric Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 7.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

surrenders its traditional claim to regional and historical distinctiveness, finds a common language in public debates over globalization of identities, and takes its chances in the dangerous, new, postmodern world where construction replaces essence'.<sup>450</sup> This move is difficult, Kreyling warns, because 'Becoming "new" has always been a problem for a discipline with so much of its foundation dedicated to strict borders'.<sup>451</sup> This theoretical standpoint has been fleshed out in my introduction, but here Kreyling embodies precisely the postsouthern that seeks to 'undo' regionalism and its supposed concretizing impulses. I note here my questioning of Kreyling's reading, as I think that regionalism does not have to strictly delineate the South and that Southern studies itself has long undergone changes and continued self-questioning. This is not to disregard Kreyling's important contribution to the field, but to problematize slightly some of his points. But Kreyling further argues that with such critical shifts (to the 'new'), 'there is always an element of calculated amnesia, strategic forgetting'.<sup>452</sup> By this, he means a number of interesting things, but principally that in forging new theoretical roads and directions, other frameworks will disappear and be 'forgotten'. Whether this is a good thing or not, Kreyling seems ambiguous; what is noteworthy here, however, is that such amnesia is the very problem my thesis has with the postsouthern turn. In explicitly foregrounding 'new' studies of the South (that deconstruct the region, collapse its borders, de-centre it from study, dislocate its traditional themes), the connected disciplines of new southern studies and the postsouthern (as well as the connected movement of the transnational) may 'forget' notions still deeply important to the region and its cultural output.

However, to return to Kreyling's notion of forgetting, another essay in the journal responds to this idea. Sarah Ford argues – somewhat similarly to my conjecture – that 'Kreyling suggests that in examining the "new southern studies", we might lapse into "strategic forgetting." In avoiding amnesia perhaps our best bet is to listen to the ghosts'.<sup>453</sup> Such ghosts, Ford seems to imply, are the lingering traces of the South and its past in the present: that is, a slightly different, and more nuanced, understanding of the region than Kreyling would have it. In the same journal, Patricia Yaeger's essay answers this call for listening to ghosts. She writes that 'We live in a world that is haunted, knows it is haunted, and denies its own hauntedness', thus asking, 'What do we do when we see a ghost?'<sup>454</sup> Yaeger then, like this chapter, is certain

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<sup>450</sup> Michael Kreyling, 'Toward "A New Southern Studies"', *South Central Review*, 22, 1 (2005), 4-18 (p. 16).

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>453</sup> Sarah Ford, 'Listening to the Ghosts: The "New Southern Studies": A Response to Michael Kreyling', *South Central Review*, 22, 1 (2005), 19-25 (p. 24).

<sup>454</sup> Patricia Yaeger, 'Ghosts and Shattered Bodies, or What Does it Mean to Still be Haunted by Southern Literature?', *South Central Review*, 22, 1 (2005), 87-108 (p. 87).

that ‘the world’ (the South) is one rife with haunting – with history, memory, trauma – that needs to be addressed. Following Ford, Yaeger seems to suggest that while ‘new’ studies of the South are needed, we cannot give up analyzing lingering ghosts. Different in Yaeger’s essay though – like *Dirt and Desire* – is the overturning of traditional conceptions central to Southern studies. ‘I will argue’, she writes, ‘that a focus on scraps or remnants changes received notions of the southern gothic’, so that ‘Excess, monstrosity, perversion, nightmares, rattling machinery’ are replaced by ‘less operative forms’ of haunting in which ‘fragments, residues, or traces of trauma fashion’ the gothic mode.<sup>455</sup>

In light of this, Sally Mann’s photography might also be said to embody this very quiet and un-operative regime of haunting. We can also return to Blanco who, similar to Yaeger, contends that ‘To look at haunting as an event of questioning, rather than one of restoration and resolution, forces us to read narratives in terms of the (oftentimes violent) open-ended socialization of life with its possible legacies’.<sup>456</sup> Significantly, Blanco allows us to theorize that the best way to understand haunting and the gothic more generally is to not close down meaning or cement it too surely. Placing this alongside Blanco’s earlier injunction that haunting is a specific and placed phenomena, it follows that in these particular places we need to have the capacity to see the open and on-going gothic work that haunting visualizes and demonstrates. Connecting to our interest in cultural memory, moreover, this placedness of the gothic connects specifically with the places of remembrance. While Blanco’s thesis moves hemispherically, and this sometimes distracts from her insightful local readings, her insistence on place as an organizing concept correlates with my insistence on roots. In all, there are numerous inroads to understanding the Southern gothic, but above all perhaps we can merely say that the gothic and haunting residues of the region’s past continue to be made manifest in all their complexity; it is to this multifaceted gothic we must attend.

## **SALLY MANN’S GOTHIC SOUTH**

Sally Mann is a world-renowned photographer whose best-known subjects are her own young children, most (in)famously documented in the 1992 collection *Immediate Family*. The images show Mann’s children in myriad domestic and rural spaces, often unclothed often in ‘compromising’ arrangements, key reasons for the photographs’ perceived controversial nature. There is surprisingly little written on Mann’s photography, especially in an academic context.

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>456</sup> Blanco, p. 60.

What work there is on Mann is mainly focused on the representation of her children. Newspaper and magazine reviews can be useful, but Marianne Hirsch and Laura Di Prete, for example, discuss Mann's use of her children, but do not acknowledge her other output. In this chapter, however, I will read Mann's photography through a Southern gothic lens. One way to regionalize her work is to situate it in a lineage of the gothic genre as it employs the tropes of darkness, ghostliness, death and a general hauntedness. I will trace a line through her Southern landscape photographs before more closely analysing the series 'Matter Lent' for its gothic depiction of dead bodies.

In *Deep South*, Mann herself writes that 'Living in the South often means slipping out of temporal joint': a notion that cannot but remind us of George Singleton's similar formulation in *New Stories From the South*, quoted in the introduction.<sup>457</sup> This time-travel is, for Mann, 'a peculiar phenomenon that [...] both nourishes and wounds', always connecting her to her region's specific histories and memories.<sup>458</sup> Central to this chapter's thesis is the contention that the Southern gothic is a generic mode that most pertinently connects the dark and troubled (rooted) Southern past to the present through cultural texts. We have already seen a number of ways in which this history has been called forth, but through Mann we can identify other, more complex, regional visions.

'To identify a person as a Southerner', Mann posits, 'suggests not only that her history is inescapable and formative but that it is also impossibly present'.<sup>459</sup> Faulkner's defining dictum lingers at the back of Mann's formulation here, and thus provides a route into this discussion: the region cannot be 'post' if its histories and memories are still ever 'impossibly present'. A postsouthern reading of Mann might follow that of Ben Child who, discussing fellow Southern photographer William Eggleston, writes that 'the postsouthern approach seeks to deconstruct ideas about the exclusivity of southern spaces and identities'.<sup>460</sup> In this model, the postsouthern resists and untangles regional roots, dislocating a certain exceptionalism or regional specificity. Further, the origins of this new cultural change are located in contemporary transnationalism; Child writes, 'we see that, in the face of the commanding force of global capital, the exclusively regional narrative is no longer the dominant one'.<sup>461</sup> While Child may find evidence for this view in Eggleston's work, the present chapter seeks to show how the South that Mann represents is somewhat different from this. Her regional representations are, in this essay, not postsouthern;

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<sup>457</sup> Sally Mann, *Deep South* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>460</sup> Ben Child, 'Mapping *The Democratic Forest*: The Postsouthern Spaces of William Eggleston', *Southern Cultures*, 17, 2 (2011), 37-54 (p. 39).

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

indeed, the Southern gothic mode she so utilizes, firmly roots her work in the region through local memories. Before looking closely at Mann's photographs, I provide a small summation of the critical writing on her work which will not only show how her photographs are conventionally read, but will show how de-regional readings might not account for a certain intensity of Mann's artistic projects.

Marianne Hirsch's book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* documents various contemporary photographers' engagement with images of family and the usage of family structures to 'frame' their work. The book looks to photographs that 'locate themselves precisely in the space of contradiction between the myth of the ideal family and the lived reality of family life': images both from personal family albums and from artists who use their family or the representation of family as a central part of their practice.<sup>462</sup> Hirsch installs questions of subjecthood, the gaze and signification into the very centre of familial representation, and this plays out particularly keenly in her reading of Sally Mann's photographs. Obviously focusing solely on Mann's images of her children (from *Immediate Family*), Hirsch develops an argument about Mann that is focused on what she terms the 'maternal look': a gaze which is 'filtered through the camera and the power of development and exposition, in a culture that invests maternity with omnipotence'.<sup>463</sup> Mann, Hirsch argues, 'both deploys and resists the power of this threatening maternal gaze'.<sup>464</sup>

Part of this ambiguous and multifaceted maternal look is the way it encapsulates and interrogates issues of childhood and motherhood, subject/object relations and the gaze, particularly in a familial context. Mann, for Hirsch, employs an 'intersubjective negotiation of sameness and difference, mutuality and disidentification, mirroring and distortion' that 'create[s] images that we as readers must surround with narratives drawn from our own experiences': we integrate the images into our own sense of what family pictures look like, simultaneously recognizing that which is typical, and feeling shocked by that which seems aberrant or abnormal (to this kind of image).<sup>465</sup> Precisely because of the complex themes that Mann is addressing in her work – how to represent children in all of their playful, serious, mature and immature fullness – the photographs continuously force us to respond to their various demanding elements. This also goes some way to explain the strong and reactionary reviews and public conceptions of her work. One of these complexities is the way certain images have 'disturbing

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<sup>462</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

suggestions of violence, abuse, and eroticism', which as a viewer we may have trouble assimilating into a 'normative' view of children in 'family photos'.<sup>466</sup> While this is obviously an important element of Mann's visual strategy, and something to return to below in relation to an ethics of looking at these images, it does not filter wholly into my regional argument here. Moreover, and importantly, Hirsch does not once mention Mann's Southern location, heritage or cultural framing. Instead, Hirsch focuses only on the ways in which Mann represents her children which, while necessary, I think needs to be complimented by a highly significant part of Mann's work: her regionalism. In *Family Frames*, Hirsch reads Eugene Meatyard photographs similarly, not noting the regional gothic elements that are so central to his practice. Though not from the South, Meatyard has lived in Kentucky for some time, and the series that Hirsch analyses – the *Family Album of Lucybelle Crater* – not only references Flannery O'Connor's stories, but explicitly engages with a long tradition of the regional gothic. Hirsch's familial focus of Meatyard and Mann could be helped with a regional reading alongside.

As a development of Hirsch's thesis, Laura Di Prete unpacks the same photographs through the lens of trauma theory. Di Prete's *"Foreign Bodies": Trauma, Corporeality, and Textuality in Contemporary American Culture* focuses on traumatized bodies in American literature and culture. Her analyses centre on the 'foreign, alien, and unfamiliar' traumatized body that she argues can work-through, or at least narrate, said trauma.<sup>467</sup> Di Prete examines the 'foreign' body because for her it simultaneously represents, and is the vehicle through which, trauma is apprehended: its distortion testifies to the bodily suffering, but also provides a way of working through this trauma to move beyond it. In relation to Mann's work, Di Prete looks to those images from *Immediate Family* which document her children. The images that feature the (ostensibly) traumatized or wounded or unfamiliar bodies of children are central to the critique most often aimed at Mann: that of a disturbing and problematic depiction of her children, ethically and morally. Di Prete does, offhandedly, reference Mann's engagement with the South, but it does not seem to be taken into account in any of her sustained readings of photographs or their contexts.

For instance, Di Prete claims that the series 'Motherland' focuses 'exclusively on the representation of [Mann's] native South' and *Still Time* (1994), moreover, exemplifies 'her rediscovered interest in the South as a place'.<sup>468</sup> I do not think that Mann had to 'rediscover' her interest with the South (it is, I will argue, a present concern throughout her artistic projects).

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>467</sup> Laura Di Prete, *"Foreign Bodies": Trauma, Corporeality, and Textuality in Contemporary American Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Further, this regional framework is not then present in her readings of *Immediate Family*, even though she seems to suggest it is a clear interest of Mann. Thus, there is an acknowledgement of regionalism without a sustained engagement with it. While I am suggesting that Di Prete's book is lacking in this Southern regard, I do want to stress the perceptiveness and insight of her photographic analyses. The close-readings Di Prete performs of Mann's work are not only useful to us, but account very specifically for large and central themes of Mann's work: trauma, childhood, the gaze. What this chapter will do, however, is contextualize Mann's work within a regional framework, particularly the Southern gothic genre. I do not want to suggest that this is the only way to view her work, but to discount or ignore the regionalism of Mann's photography is to do it an injustice (and overlook an important and integral part of her project).

Katherine Henninger is one critic who does focus on Mann's Southernness, however briefly, in *Ordering the Façade*. She argues that photographers like Mann and the fellow Southerner William Christenberry 'either mak[e] the continuing/disappearing South an explicit theme, or it is critiqued in those terms'.<sup>469</sup> While I think it is perhaps too limiting to argue that such photographers are interested in this thematic binary, I would agree that Mann is interested in a continuing South: a lingering, persistent and pervasive regionalism that saturates the landscape and its inhabitants. Henninger continues by suggesting that Mann, and others, are 'self-conscious about the façades – of the family, the physical landscape, the social architecture – that make up the South'.<sup>470</sup> The façade or image of the South is certainly something that Mann is interested in, but I would say that she is more concerned with how this image is exceeded by the Southern landscape. I will read a number of Mann's photographs from across her career to document this – arguing that her imaging of the South reveals a potency of cultural memory saturating the region, particularly in a gothic mode.

Henninger additionally notes that Mann's 'earlier, controversial work featuring her children' is in some ways a 'rumination on the mythic structures and sexual dynamics of southern family and childhood'.<sup>471</sup> Here, Henninger and I agree, firstly because she specifically regionalizes Mann's early work and frames the depiction of her family within a Southern setting. Secondly, I concur that the 'mythic structures' of family and childhood are 'facades' that Mann is exploring and conversing with. Henninger and I diverge again, however, when she compares Mann's work to Christenberry's. Henninger writes that 'Christenberry's yearly re-photographing of the same buildings and signs is a study on the decay of southern spaces, and

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<sup>469</sup> Henninger, p. 45.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

perhaps memory' which further mirrors 'Mann's recent work on decomposing bodies and Civil War battle sites'.<sup>472</sup> Ben Child, correlatively, makes similar claims of Christenberry's work, arguing that 'by highlighting the visual effects of mass culture and commerce on the contemporary South, Eggleston's work demystifies and dismantles romantic, stylized accounts of the region, as well as more general ideas of southernness' which for him is related to 'the postindustrial consumer era of global capital'.<sup>473</sup> Thus, Child proposes, 'the region wears its globalism on its sleeve with increased blatancy'.<sup>474</sup>

While Christenberry's work will not be looked at here (he is not gothic enough for this chapter), I do not think that his re-photographing project – while documenting the decay of certain sites and buildings – suggests that memory (and history) are similarly disappearing. Rather, Christenberry seems to suggest a lingering sense of place even in the face of physical decay. The reverence with which he depicts such crumbling buildings covered in vines (he returns again and again) somewhat testifies to their significance and potency as sites of memory. Consequently, Mann's photographs of landscapes where Civil War battles took place attest to the continued force of such Southern spaces in the cultural imagination and memory. Furthermore, Child's suggestion that the dismantling of 'romantic' mystifications of the Southern landscape will be questioned in regards to Mann's images. Finally, Child's transnationally and transculturally-inflected reading, which suggests that Southern spaces are becoming progressively globalized, gains little traction in relation to the photographs I investigate below.

Thus, in looking firstly to Mann's landscapes, and identifying them as Southern, I will be able to approach her recent depictions of death from a rooted, land-based viewpoint. Her on-going attachment to the Southern land pervades much, if not all, of Mann's work; it is a major component of her child photographs (though it is rarely mentioned). Later images however foreground the landscape more explicitly, and it is here that our understanding of Mann – in relation to the gothic and the memories it calls forth – comes into focus. To return to the analyses above, we could say that Di Prete, Hirsch and others may be exemplifying a position that Patricia Yaeger argues has happened to Southern women writers for some time. In the same way Yaeger posits that 'we have been reading modern literature by southern women with its tongue cut out, ignoring the blood at the root', we seem to have been doing the same with Sally Mann's photography.<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> Child, p. 41 and p. 47.

<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>475</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 10.

In *Deep South* Mann argues that ‘The repertoire of the Southern artist has long included place, the past, family, death’.<sup>476</sup> This list of what we might call stereotypical signifiers of Southern culture is important to note, especially considering the important work that the postsouthern is doing to unravel and problematize such historically-axiomatic notions. Nevertheless, while Mann romantically returns to these staple regional conceptions, she is more interested in the idea that, for her, ‘the stage on which these are played out is always the Southern landscape’, thus explaining the way in which the land has forcefully come to the foreground of her photography.<sup>477</sup> Another veer into romanticism comes when Mann suggests that in photographing the South, she finds ‘memory, love, and occasionally, paradise in the uniquely radical Southern light’.<sup>478</sup> Admittedly, many will find such idealism questionable. But, I want to take from this Mann’s insistence on the potency of memory, but also the particularity of the ‘light’ she sees. To expand, it is worth quoting Mann further: ‘I look for it always, the thick, vespertine gloaming that douses the day’s heat. When it comes, the landscape grows soft and vague, as if inadequately summoned up by some shiftless deity’.<sup>479</sup> Once again, Mann’s poeticism might be said to run away from her.

But, to repeat, there are elements of her statements that force us to acknowledge the deep and lasting relationship Mann has to this mythic version of the South. There is something particularly gothic in the idea that in the twilight ‘gloaming’, the Southern land grows ‘vague’ and ambiguous – uncanny, ghostly, or perhaps simply strange. Though possibly easy to dismiss, Mann nonetheless apprehends the mysterious and (I would say) gothic nature of her work that acknowledges most explicitly the enigmatic qualities of the Southern landscape, so replete with the past: with the histories that took place there, with the cultural memories that so live on. Jill Bennett, echoing Mann in more specific terms, can help theorize this, as she writes that ‘The metaphors of atmosphere capture precisely this sense of lingering presence, figuring the enduring energies and affects that characterise an event or place as part of an environmental dynamics’.<sup>480</sup> Discussing a piece of art-cinema, Bennett argues that ‘in attending to atmospherics’ the piece ‘opens up a different possibility, a way of seeing accumulated experience – memory – in terms of an encounter with something that endures in place, with affects that persist’.<sup>481</sup> Bennett’s insights into the atmosphere of place – what Mann calls a particular Southern ‘light’ – suggest the palpable and affective elements of a location, the memories it contains, and how

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<sup>476</sup> Mann, *Deep South*, p. 52.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 56.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

we might respond to this. In a Southern context, Mann's work engages with such dynamics of landscape. One route that we can pose into this affective realm is the formal element of Mann's photography.

It is worth saying something about Mann's technical process at this point, for she uses an 'antiquated', or historical, photographic method that is integral to her art. Employing the collodion process of development – which was created in the 1850s, as a replacement for the daguerreotype – Mann uses wet-plates and a mobile darkroom to create her images. The process is fairly straight-forward (using various liquids and solutions), but it needs to be done swiftly, requiring a moveable darkroom that can be set up in any outdoor situation. There is, firstly, something interesting in Mann's use of this old photographic process: in a way, she is communing with the photographers that preceded her. She continues a tradition from the past that – while unwieldy and strangely anachronistic – seems to enable her to reach back into history in a formal way. Her images thus become of our time and not; they are uncannily timeless. This does not necessarily, as Henninger would have it, confirm the notion that Mann is interested in the decay and dissolving of Southern landscapes. Conversely, it seems as though she is suggesting the continuous and temporally-fluid sense of such places. The second important element of Mann's collodion usage is the visual imperfection it creates. As Blake Morrison writes, Mann 'make[s] a virtue of the smears and distortions [the process] can throw up'.<sup>482</sup> Indeed, the scratches, blurs, flecks of dust and mud, fingerprints, smudges and tears in the images are what make Mann's photographs so distinctive. Collodion is used to bring texture, physicality and materiality to the photographs which I argue not only foregrounds and self-reflexively calls attention to their creation, but is Mann's way of making her images literally bear the brooding and physical traces of the Southern landscape. Thus, the content of her images depict a dreamy and mysterious gothic place, which then becomes manifest in and on the image itself.

To return to Henninger's argument, and develop this line of thinking further, I turn firstly to the explicitly Southern landscapes seen in the book *Deep South*. In framing this discussion, however, I digress a final time to recount a story that Mann has told which probes an idea that runs so clearly through her work. On December 8, 2000 an escaped prisoner trespassed on Mann's property, trying to evade police. Mann watched, alone, as the prisoner ran across her land, with a sheriff in pursuit. As he approached the house, Mann writes, he ducked behind a tree and shot himself in the head. When the body was removed and the police had

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<sup>482</sup> Blake Morrison, 'Sally Mann: The Naked and the Dead', *Guardian*, 29 May 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/may/29/sally-mann-naked-dead>> [accessed 14 October 2013]

gone, Mann forced herself to look the place where he had died. ‘Death’, she writes, ‘has left for me its imperishable mark on an ordinary copse of trees in the front yard. But would a stranger, coming upon it a century hence, sense the sanctity of the death-inflected soil?’<sup>483</sup> While the emotional and personal effects of the criminal’s death on her land are significant for Mann – she recounts this story both in the book *What Remains* (2003) as well as the documentary about her with the same title (2005) – equally important is the nature of death seeping into the Southern land(scape), in addition to the question of whether this death will be ‘remembered’ in years to come. This precise notion is the one that Mann is exploring in her work. The answer, if we are to ask it of a more general Southern history, seems to be yes: memories continue to linger, and the soil is continuously inflected by death and the past.

Without further theorizing this, I offer two photographs from ‘Motherland’ and ‘Deep South’ (figures 9 and 10) as they, I think, exemplify the above dialogue. Their gothicism, I should note, is not as pronounced as the bodily images that I will look to, but their aesthetic – Mann’s oeuvre’s aesthetic – is one tinged with darkness, with the mysterious past, with a whole range of gothic signifiers and tropes. Figure 9 offers us a useful way in to this sequence of photographs as it so manifests Mann’s style as well as thematic concerns. Depicting a tunnel of live-oaks draped in Spanish moss, the image shows a natural setting. The trees seem to line a road that stretches away from us that is reminiscent of the long driveways up to antebellum properties. In terms of content, then, the image is regional in its preoccupation with Southern signifiers (such as the trees, the moss, the plantation imagery). Formally, however, Mann cements this by distorting the image through her wet-plate technique. The photograph is hazy and dreamy with soft edges and blurs. At the top of the image we see a sliver of the negative’s black frame, which calls attention to its creation and form. More precisely, though, the image’s blurriness is suggestive metaphorically of a turn back in time; of a temporal disjoint, as Mann herself claims. It is as if, through the photograph’s style, we are transported to a location outside of our contemporary time that is foggy with memory and history. While this is perhaps a slightly abstract reading that does not fully account for a tangible regional texture to Mann’s images, the second example from this sequence solidifies my claims.

Figure 10 shows another driveway or road, which leads through a stone gateway out of our sight. Tall mossy trees dominate the top half of the photograph, evoking a rich atmosphere. Of interest though is the stone wall and gateway that we can infer belongs to what was once a plantation, or antebellum, property because of its style and placing. Following

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<sup>483</sup> Sally Mann, *What Remains* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2009), p. 70.

Figure 9

Figure 10

the above discussion, the photographic technique Mann uses gestures toward a history that seems pervasive in the image (and the subject). A pale highlight draws a line on the left of the image: a spectral presence that disturbs the surface of the picture. The driveway opening furthermore is placed at the very centre of the image, visually a precise and crucial component of the photograph. It is, we could argue, a portal or threshold to the South, to memory, that Mann is presenting to us. Relatedly, Mann argues that ‘It’s a touchy subject, but as a southerner you can’t ignore our history’: ‘it’s impossible to drive down a road [...] or pass a church without being reminded of slavery’.<sup>484</sup> Mann’s photography attempts to bear witness to these lingering traces of the past and revitalize what she sees as already ubiquitous regional memories. Where Henninger might read this photograph as depicting a relic of the Southern past, a disused and decaying old wall – thus, a marker of the postsouth – I suggest another reading. This disintegrating wall perhaps marks not (only) the disappearance of the South, but the palpable persistence of it. Moreover, Mann’s documentation of it attests to its potency as a trace of the South.

Mann revisits this Southern history in other more direct ways. The images of ‘Antietam’, point us – in the title alone – to read them as referring to the historic battle site from the Civil War. Without the series title, though, we might simply think them landscape photographs of a dark (they are predominantly night shots) and possibly unremarkable countryside. One could argue that if the images are of empty landscapes that bear no ostensible trace of the history that happened there – the battle – surely we are seeing a place devoid of meaning, evacuated of Southern history? The land does not wholly connote or signify such a region or history or set of cultural memories in and of itself. This is, by default, the postsouthern argument, and it could easily be applied to such images. Ulrich Baer also notes that certain Holocaust landscape photographs ‘neither confirm nor add to our knowledge of history; we cannot deduce from them what distinguishes these sites from countless others’.<sup>485</sup> If we are to take a closer look at the photographs, however, I think a very different argument can be posed. Rather than evacuated of meaning or indistinguishably non-placed, the landscapes – via Mann’s lens – bear witness to a whole range of significances and histories. If these were all we had of Mann’s catalogue, perhaps we could argue something contrary, but framed as they are by her sustained interest in the South and its land, we can only but see their regional qualities. Mann utilizes visual techniques to do something to the subjects at hand, and highlight these memories’ significance. While at first glance, the Southern landscapes may seem empty and non-signifying,

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<sup>484</sup> Morrison, ‘Sally Mann’.

<sup>485</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 79.

Mann's images help the sites along, revealing to us their gothic traces of a past that lingers in place.

We can look at the 'Antietam' images from *What Remains* alongside the series 'Last Measure' in *Deep South*, which document other battle sites from Mann's hometown locale. Taken together, these two collections offer specifically-located historical markers and locations: places, for Mann, that testify to the presence of regional history, memory, and thus the South itself. Mann writes on 'Last Measure' that the 'hands of time are stilled by the resonance of history at the sites [...] photographed'.<sup>486</sup> For her, the history and memory of the particular battles and events that occurred in these places are very much present in a very physical and visual sense. In a literal way, she contends that 'Physical traces of the struggle remain', but also in a more metaphoric sense that 'In this peculiar place of stilled time, the spirits seemed to drift up in the ground fog rising from the fields'.<sup>487</sup> Such land-emerging 'spirits' – what I will refer to as traces of memory – are visible, throughout.

I will look to specific images to theorize this further, but it is also worth noting at this point that Mann is engaging, intertextually, with the photographs of Matthew Brady. Brady's Civil War images defined the idea of war photography and documentary practice. Widely covering the war and its casualties, Brady's images also play an important role in visualizing the Southern landscape. Littered with bodies, death and American trauma, these (mainly Virginia) landscapes are connected to the contemporary region through Mann's practice. The visual imaginary that Brady taps into during the Civil War is equally present for Mann, especially this 'Antietam' series. Revisiting the literal geography of this regional-national war, then, Mann engages with the Southern past at the level of place; this in turn becomes invested in the photographs themselves. Her images, though, tell us something of history not (in Bennett's words) 'from presenting an image of the past but from the sensation that marks the very extension and reach of the "past" event: history as accretion rather than history repeating'.<sup>488</sup> This affective sense of history and memory, and the dynamics of the landscape in dialogue with Mann's photography can be seen, for example, in figure 11 from *Deep South*.

In this image, three quarters of the image is taken up with a dark expanse of grass, the top sliver a lighter sky. The horizon is unexceptionally broken up by shrubbery and trees. This image is, on the surface, fairly plain and empty, but looked at in the light of Mann's comments

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<sup>486</sup> Mann, *Deep South*, p. 89.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

<sup>488</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 76.

Figure 11

we can read the hazy sheen across the ground as such a fog of memory. It is not clear whether it is the film stock and developing process that has created such a misty effect, or whether it is literal fog spreading across the field; or, more likely, a combination of the two: the former amplifying the latter. Using the same terminology as Mann, Ulrich Baer notes, on a photograph of a Holocaust landscape, that ‘the silent print is animated by an aura or “spirit of place”: we sense that the grounds are haunted’.<sup>489</sup> The memories, or spirits, of the battlefield are made present through the visual technique of Mann’s photography. This can be compounded by Savoy’s notion that in the American gothic, there is a long tradition ‘of attributing terrible violence to the muteness of landscape’.<sup>490</sup> The landscape, then, bears in its muteness and stillness something of the beyond, of the gothic and ghostly.

This mute violence can be unpacked in another photograph from the series. Figure 12 from *What Remains*, for instance, is ostensibly of a tree in a dark field with what may be the sun rising or setting on the horizon. As part of the ‘Antietam’ series, the photograph seems to offer us little about this battle (or the Civil War at large), but Mann’s formal engagement with

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<sup>489</sup> Baer, p. 63.

<sup>490</sup> Savoy, ‘The Face of the Tennant’, p. 9.

Figure 12

image-making suggests otherwise. There is a blurriness or softness to the image (and many of this series) that comes from the glass-plate technique which develops the photographs. The edges of the picture, especially on the left hand side, are hazy and rippling with light or a filmy layer covering it. By implication, the landscape itself is cast in this way. The ripples create a wistful effect that transforms this landscape into something more than just a field with a tree in it; it seems to contain an ambiguous visual 'presence'. This is dramatized for me by the diagonal line that runs through the centre of the image. A 'flaw' in its development, this grey streak actually has a forceful role in how the image works. It is ghostly: hovering above the ground and in front of the tree, it is suggestive of a haunting apparition though without signifying referent (it does not look like anything particular). The line also seems to rip through the texture of the photograph itself. It emerges, in a sense, from the landscape and consequently from the image's surface. In all, it disturbs the classical look of the photograph's rural subject, manifesting a fissure or scratch or indelible mark on the image that does something to the viewer and gestures beyond the image and its subject. In this way, the photograph may just be calling attention to the landscape's saturation of meaning and memory which is amplified by the formal qualities of Mann's art. In the collection 'Deep South', this notion takes on other forms. Indeed, as I will

show, the landscapes are not simply hazy with memory or ghosts, but actively dialoguing with the Southern past in various ways.

Here, it may be worth bringing in one line of postsouthern and deterritorial theory to demarcate the difference between this and my reading. Scott Romine, for example, sets out to ‘interrogate essentialist productions of the South as they are mapped on a stressed terrain of interlocking and overlapping territories’.<sup>491</sup> ‘Instead of a real South’, he argues, ‘I want to think about the South [...] in a nonsubstantive way – that is, less a set of properties attached to location [...] than a flexible and loosely specialized archive of “materials”’.<sup>492</sup> In all, he ‘suggest[s] simply that there are many Souths’.<sup>493</sup> What I want to take issue with here, in light of the above readings, is the ‘nonsubstantive’ and ‘flexible’ set of relations that mark out the South: history, culture, identity, memory. While for Romine these are in flux and overlapping – that is, far from rooted and attached to a specific regional territory – Mann’s photographs, I am arguing, perhaps question this idea, assigning Southern substance to the landscape. Many Souths though there may be (different for each individual because of subjective experience), nonetheless, there is perhaps a regional texture to Southern place that is substantive and attached (rooted) to location. Building on Romine’s insights, we can stress both his idea of place as contingent and (in Deleuze, or Campbell’s terms, rhizomatic), but also as in some ways stable and rooted. Mann’s landscape photographs excavate Southern memory – as diffuse, as suggestive, as dynamic – but all the while connecting it to a specific territoriality.

To unravel this further, let us take figure 13 from *Deep South*. Mann travelled south into Mississippi for this project and, while there, photographed the Tallahatchie River: the infamous location where Emmett Till’s body was thrown after he was viciously murdered. This picture, I suggest, exemplifies Mann’s strategy of convening with the past through her images. The photograph shows an unremarkable scene of a river-bank and an expanse of water. We could be in the visual territory of something akin to the Holocaust images Baer investigates in *Spectral Evidence*. These images, like Mann’s here, ‘raise urgent questions about the task of showing the *nothing* that nonetheless triggers a response: about the difficulties of representing trauma and about the poetics of witnessing’ (original emphasis).<sup>494</sup> Baer would have it that the silence and emptiness of traumatic landscape photographs call attention to the uselessness of historical and contextual framing of certain sites and places that have a lack of referential markers. That is, ‘The point is no longer to establish a context for the picture but to

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<sup>491</sup> Romine, p. 105.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Baer, p. 70.

Figure 13

note that the photograph posits as its meaning the suspension of such a stabilizing content'.<sup>495</sup> While Baer's thesis is highly dextrous and pertinent with regards to certain kinds of 'traumatic' photographs, Mann's images seem to work differently. Even though the Till photograph explored here might be such a traumatized landscape, I will show how Mann's image formally leads us towards the historical event that occurred at the river, and, contra Baer, provide reference points that stabilize the image's content, however subtle and complex.

Immediately noticeable are the corner of the image, which seem to close in like the 'iris effect' of cinema, where the shot narrows or expands on a circle that directs our gaze; we see this technique most expressively used in silent, black-and-white cinema where zoom was not always possible. This would allow the director to explicitly frame what or who we are meant to look at. In this photograph, then, Mann seems to be gesturing for us to look at a specific place in the frame. Interestingly, the 'iris' is at the very corners of the image, so we could be focusing ('zooming') in on a detail, or be in the process of establishing its context ('zooming' out). Either way, the precise subject of the shot is not clear. At the fore is the river-bank, cleaved in the middle by a small rivulet or muddy ditch. Most of the frame is taken up by the flat and still

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<sup>495</sup> Baer, 80.

surface of the Tallahatchie. In the background, we may discern the opposite bank, but it could equally be a reflection in the water: it blurs in the middle where tree-reflections jut into the river. Overall, the image is hazy and bright; pale shades of sepia-grey dominate. In a sense, this could be a fairly unremarkable rural scene. Nevertheless, there is something interesting at work here; perhaps in photographing the ‘ordinary’ in an ‘unordinary’ way (her technique achieves very particular effects), Mann signals a ‘beyond’ to these landscapes.

As Mark Ravenal has suggested on the whole series, Mann’s visual technique is a bulwark to the idea that ‘if looked at straight on, the magnitude of feeling represented by these sites would evaporate, leaving us only with the peaceful, even mundane, experience afforded by historic battlefields seen in the present’.<sup>496</sup> Indeed, as Mann notes herself on the site of Till’s murder, ‘How could a place so fraught with historical pain appear to be so *ordinary*?’ (original emphasis).<sup>497</sup> Thus, Mann makes it extraordinary: the iris directs us to the water itself, so still now, but belying the tragic death that occurred there – we might imagine Till’s bloated body rising to the surface at the centre of this photograph. The associations of this to the previous chapter are also clear, as it documented the way in which dead black bodies floated around New Orleans in Katrina’s floodwaters. Spectres of black death haunt these Southern images of water.

The muddy bank’s fissure, too, is suggestive of a gash or wound, a trauma inflicted to the body perhaps, or even the land; it certainly disturbs (visually) the rather innocuous remainder of the frame. Moreover, the haziness of the photograph is at once wistful but also ghostly; in a gothic way, the shot – with its old-fashioned styling and old-fashioned cinematic connotation (the iris) – takes us back in time, transports us temporally. Put another way, might this image not demonstrate Eric Santner’s notion of ‘spectral materialism’? As he discusses in relation to the writer W.G. Sebald, this spectrality (we are already in the language of the gothic) involves ‘among other things, a capacity to register the persistence of past suffering that has in some sense been absorbed into the substance of lived space’.<sup>498</sup> Not too dissimilar from Bennett’s notion of the past’s affective imprint on the present (that is, as not entirely separate), spectral materialism points to those spaces in the present in which the past and its traumas are secreted. The Southern landscapes that Mann visits and photographs exemplify this. As in this image of the Tallahatchie, something of past suffering might be absorbed and registered here: the texture of a particularly rooted Southern violence.

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<sup>496</sup> John Ravenal (ed.), *Sally Mann: The Flesh and the Spirit* (New York: Aperture Books, 2010), p. 55.

<sup>497</sup> Mann, *Deep South*, p. 52.

<sup>498</sup> Santner, p. 57.

Perhaps we could follow Rebecca Mark in claiming that Till's death needs to continue to be mourned, particularly through art and culture. Mark's essay, 'Mourning Emmett' was written in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and this spectacle of dead floating bodies (that we have already looked at) connected visually and in memory for her with the death of Till. Mark calls for a mourning that 'takes seeing, imagination, art': cultural responses that provide us with moments to truly face the horror of Till's death, firstly because of the absence of public mourning and grieving Emmett at the time of his murder, and secondly because resonances of Till's death might still be visible today.<sup>499</sup> Mann's involvement with the regional memories of the South is not merely to invoke them abstractly: her engagement is to activate a gothic and tortuous past that has bearing on the present. This rooted regional history is far from over; its presence saturates our contemporary Southern landscapes, Mann seems to say.

In this sense, we can also look to other images of 'Deep South' from Mississippi. This 'deep' Southern setting is, for Mann, a place in which 'Time slows down' and 'becomes ecstatic' so that it eventually 'eludes historical time'.<sup>500</sup> This a-temporality might be another way of saying that the past is not dead, that the South's past is always present. Moreover, in these images, Mann is certain to tell us that the photographs of Mississippi landscapes 'are about the rivers of blood, of tears, of sweat, that Africans poured into the dark soil'.<sup>501</sup> If this seems remotely abstract, two photographs from this series can help us articulate the way that, indeed, a traumatic and violent history can perhaps be seen through the gothic form.

Certainly, we could argue, following Teresa Goddu, that 'resurrecting the term *gothic* reasserts the racial roots of the romance's blackness' (original emphasis) which racializes the genre and its often raced historical origins.<sup>502</sup> Figure 14 exemplifies this in that we see a tree-trunk with what appears to be a gouge across its width. Connotative of a fish-eye lens, the shot seems to circle around this marking that I take to be a wound. The edges of the photograph are dark and blurry, encroaching in upon the tree: a dark and gothic surrounding the traumatic mark. The gouge in the tree looks precisely like a flesh-wound; the cut is precise but violent, there is even what looks like blood emerging from it. What I am claiming is that this tree bears the physical and material hurt of the wounded (black) body of the historical South. If Mann's Mississippi is filled with the blood and tears of African Americans (and, moreover, other Southerners) this tree is growing from its roots, and manifesting such a history.

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<sup>499</sup> Mark, p. 130.

<sup>500</sup> Mann, *Deep South*, p. 49.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>502</sup> Goddu, p. 7.

This can further be seen in figure 15: a high-contrast sepia image that could easily have been taken in decades past. It looks weathered and decidedly old. The corners are marked with black triangles that at once reveal the photograph's own making (this is an image, Mann signals), but also are suggestive of a photo-album or frame it has been taken from. The subject of the photograph is a tangle of tree limbs emerging from what I take to be a misty swamp. Gnarled and curling, the plant-life seems to writhe like snakes. The vague nature of the swamp – we cannot see the water, it is too misty and bright – means that the trees rise from an ambiguous source. If we were to complement the reading of the above photograph, reading

Figure 14

the body into the landscape, we might see this image as not simply attentive to natural forms (indeed, roots). We could perhaps claim that these bent and twisted trees are richly suggestive of traumatized Southern bodies. Moreover, in this deepest of Southern locales, such bodies would perhaps signal those who toiled on this land: black slaves.

Swamps, moreover, were often the primary hiding places for escaped slaves during the antebellum period; the wetlands of the Deep South were easy places to get lost or not be found. As William Cowan writes, especially in Louisiana and Florida, 'swamplands were vast

Figure 15

and plentiful' and this terrain 'would provide seclusion for runaways'.<sup>503</sup> If such people died there, this photograph seems to posit that these bodies are emerging in their visibly altered and disfigured forms. Patricia Yaeger writes, 'Confronted with the spectacle of torture, of the body bent, overworked, suffering, tossed aside, it may be difficult to find metaphors exaggerated enough to describe systematic oppression' of the old South.<sup>504</sup> Maybe the bent and tortured natural forms of this image at once replicate the traumas experienced by black bodies and thus belie the need for metaphors: through Mann's gothic image, the traumas are brought forth and embodied in and through the photograph. This photograph contains, thus, a certain 'radiance' that, in Mann's words 'coalesces over the landscape, rich in possibility'.<sup>505</sup> Rich, we must clarify, in memory: rich with the emerging and tangible histories of African Americans that worked and died in such landscapes. The region, in this sense, is replete with the bodies that created and sustained it.

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<sup>503</sup> William Tynes Cowan, *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 3.

<sup>504</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 28.

<sup>505</sup> Mann, *Deep South*, p. 49.

Perhaps here we could return to Baer's argument in *Spectral Evidence* as he argues that when confronted with photographs of Holocaust landscapes, we attempt to place ourselves in relation to them, spatially and otherwise. As we 'contemplate our own position in relation to the [...] print, a sense of trespass hovers'; that is, there is a 'sense that we don't belong here – that we are excluded, that we have arrived *après coup*, too late and perhaps in vain'.<sup>506</sup> Baer points to the idea that we might, in confronting images of trauma (or spaces of trauma), run the risk of trespassing on another's memory, attempting to inhabit a place we have no right to. One of Baer's examples is a photograph of an 'empty' field surrounded by trees where Holocaust atrocities once took place. Baer writes that 'the viewer is placed in relation to a site that stubbornly refuses to become a "place"', and that we see 'the setting of experience' but are refused the ability to 'posthumously appropriate it through empathic identification or voyeurism'.<sup>507</sup> I would argue, in relation to Mann, something similar to this last point, suggesting that her landscape images create relation to memories from that place, but we are far from granted identification with them.

What Baer suggests of the Holocaust sites might be similarly applied to Mann's images, not least figure 15: the photograph shows us a place 'that today is not merely inaccessible but also virtually forgotten'.<sup>508</sup> The landscapes that Mann documents are often of remote, or 'unnoticed' places – areas that might just be forgotten, a key word that is central to the memory-work that the texts across these chapters are engaging. If such places, which are saturated with localized and particular memory, are excluded from the memory map of the South, perhaps it is Mann's photographs that bridge such a gap. Thus, trespassing on the landscapes, might, contra Baer, be not only necessary but a counteracting process to the difficulties in remembering and occupying spaces of (traumatic) historical events. Mann's images root into Southern places and memories to attempt to make them meaningful for those whose presence seems to linger in them. I think memory spills across and beyond the photographs, exceeding such physical bounds and testifying to the presence of a region and its past. The dark and gothic histories of the South are ever-present in Mann's work; so much so that, as Blake Morrison writes, 'Mann's lively obsession with death' emerges through 'her capacity to be unsqueamish about it while seeing its thumbprint everywhere'. This can be thought through by looking elsewhere in Mann's oeuvre.

A communication with the traumatic and gothic past of the South is not, I further claim, visible only in Mann's more recent work; actually, there is a dark and very regional

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<sup>506</sup> Baer, p. 63.

<sup>507</sup> Baer, p. 17.

<sup>508</sup> Baer, p. 63.

Figure 16

presence running through all her images. Indeed, even the childhood images of *Immediate Family* employ a certain Southern gothic mode (the ‘thumbprint’ of death. I want to look at an image that Hirsch herself reads, but add to her analysis, complementing her insistence on reading family dynamics with a particular regionalism. ‘The Terrible Picture, 1989’ (figure 16) might be one of Mann’s most famous from this childhood series because it is so startling and ostensibly shocking; its title alone indicating a certain kind of horror (its definitive power coming from the singular ‘the’, rather than ‘a’ ‘terrible picture’). The photograph shows her daughter naked, eyes closed, her thighs smeared with what might be mud, markings on her cheeks and, most noticeably, something stretching above her head with a tree-limb to her side. The girl is positioned at the very centre of the shot: unmistakably placed for the maximum impact.

Hirsch writes that ‘a stake seems to loom ominously above or just behind her head’, which is plausible, but not what I think Mann is trying to show.<sup>509</sup> While it could be a wooden stake – though that does not seem entirely logical looking at it – I think that Mann wants us to think of it as rope. More specifically, I posit that Mann wants us, on first glance, to think that her daughter is hanging from the tree-branch. Why else, thus, have the branch so conspicuously,

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<sup>509</sup> Hirsch, p. 162.

but only marginally, jutting into the left of the shot? A primary reading of this image might be that the child is hanging, due to suicide. We cannot ignore the possibility of this. However, I want to offer another explanation that seems more pertinent, and continues the argument I am making. I posit that Mann could be gesturing to the imagery of lynching: that appalling crime which lingers in cultural memory, especially in the South. We have returned, then, to this chapter's opening and Donna Tartt's use of lynching as a gothic memory. In Tartt, the meanings and significances of the lynched child are unresolved; here too, I will argue, the signifying is open-ended. But in both cases, it is hard to ignore the very specific and gothic Southern memories and imaginaries being invoked and summoned from history. Put another way, and as Bennett writes, 'what is at stake is not representation but response: what we make of an image and how we perform memory in relation to it'.<sup>510</sup> The enacting and engagement of memory relates, in a number of ways, with its placed roots.

To unpack this, I return to the photograph. We see the girl's posture and notice that she is almost floating in the frame: her arms are limp (but maybe moving), her torso erect, her neck extended – all contributing to the sense that she is hanging. Moreover, there is something on her neck (maybe a necklace, maybe something drawn on) that adds to the visual sense of a noose. I must point out that the stake or rope behind her head does not come around her neck – she is not hanging – but that our eyes are led to see it that way. The visual elements combine to connote this. The backdrop moreover is blurry and bright: a mass of trees and foliage. It is abstract enough so that the figure of Mann's daughter is crisply defined and the sole focus of our gaze. Even so, the tangle of branches crisscross (and are caught by bright sunlight) in a somehow violent or energetic manner. They seem to add a frenetic backdrop to the grotesque spectacle of the 'hanging' child. Mann, it can be argued, is engaging with a legacy of lynching imagery that is also connected to the Southern landscape. It is in the depiction of remote lynching sites, Daniel Martin tells us, that we can see 'the traumatic and the pastoral collide'.<sup>511</sup> Mann's use of natural landscapes suffused with violence and the gothic also testifies to this, installing in the pastoral mode past traumas. Throughout these readings, the natural landscape has borne the traces of the past. Here, in an engagement with the violent history of lynching, Mann 'collides' the pastoral and the traumatic to suggest a gothic regionalism saturated into the landscape.

It might also be worth noting that Mann invokes and evokes the cultural memory of lynching in an ostensibly re-racialized way. Mann and her daughter are white, while

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<sup>510</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, pp. 75–76.

<sup>511</sup> Daniel J. Martin, 'Lynching Sites: Where Trauma and Pastoral Collide', in *Coming Into Contact: Explorations in Ecocritical Theory and Practice* ed. by Annie Merrill Ingram (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), pp. 93–108 (p. 93).

overwhelmingly victims of lynching in the South were black men. That Mann uses a white body – her young daughter’s no less – does not necessarily weaken or distort her investigation of this particular cultural memory. Conversely, I would argue that by using a body that does not immediately testify to the history of such trauma (a white one) Mann is possibly illuminating the deep-rootedness of this memory across the region. As pervasive memory, lynching saturates the South, and Mann’s engagement with the memory through a white body only serves to reveal how such a phenomenon affected people of all races and backgrounds. We see this also in Mann’s later images from the body farm: while the cadavers’ race cannot always be identified in the images, it scarcely matters as the rooted memories Mann is exploring ironically transcend simple racial categories. In essence, Mann’s images function as ‘catalyst[s] for and [agents] of memory. Such art comes to function as, in other words [...] a contemporary form of mnemonic device’.<sup>512</sup> Mann’s visual strategies, to quote Lisa Saltzman again, are ‘the aesthetic inheritances that are mobilized to make memory *matter*’ (original emphasis).<sup>513</sup> Mann’s work, then, makes Southern memory (in place) matter.

Even though Hirsch notes that there could be a stake behind the girl, she does not take this reading any further and does not even note the violent connotations of the stake. Instead, Hirsch argues that on looking at this image, Mann’s daughter ‘might read in it her mother’s intense and complicated look, her mother’s pleasure at her child’s strange beauty, and her own discomfort with the position in which she has placed her young daughter’.<sup>514</sup> While I think this line of analysis is interesting in Hirsch’s book – and the family photograph is indeed central to Mann’s early work – I want to suggest another reading. My point would be that perhaps there are other visual discomforts and complications present, especially if we are to view it in light of lynching, as my above reading suggests. For, again, the ethical position we are put in is one of how to look at to this ‘hanging’ child. The regional memories the photograph calls up revives the question of spectatorship for, if it invokes or resembles lynching images, we must remember the viewing position of onlookers to lynchings as well as the gaze on the photographs that circulated after the crime. The viewer of Mann’s photograph thus has to grapple with an ethics of looking (this is one of Mann’s central interests I think), especially in relation to a long history of objectifying Southern bodies. If, Apel writes, ‘When we look at lynching photographs today, we try not to see them’, critics like Hirsch doubly try not to see the connotation of said violence

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<sup>512</sup> Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>514</sup> Hirsch, p. 162.

in an image like this, least of all in a Southern setting.<sup>515</sup> What I am arguing then is that Mann has so often had her regionalism underplayed or ignored. If it is acknowledged, the focus seems to be on her representation of the disappearing and crumbling South, but these readings miss a wealth of local and rooted regional details in her photographs. To begin enlarging our sense of Mann's work, we might begin by identifying the (quite obvious, I think) imagery of Southern violence in this picture alone.

The seeds of bodily rupture, of bodies testifying to the dark and gothic memories of the South, thus begins in her early photographs of her children. Mann then moves to a more natural subject, documenting the South in landscape images; indeed, no-one is ever present here visually. In more recent work, she returns to the body in various ways. She has series' that focus on the ageing body of her husband, the faces of her entire family and even – a project underway – portraits of people with slave ancestry (especially significant in this Southern framework). But here my focus will be on one particular series: photographs of dead bodies rotting and decomposing at a scientific institute in Tennessee. I will argue that these images illustrate the Southern gothic genre par excellence and complexly root Mann's regionalism. To frame Mann's interest in bodies that bear the trace of, or invoke, gothic cultural memories from the South, Yaeger's work on the grotesque features of Southern women's writing can be revisited. As explored in the introduction and previous chapters, Yaeger's work focuses on distorted bodies, bodies that have been submerged in water and dirt, bodies that physically exhibit the traces of the racial, social and political forces that shaped them. What this chapter is exploring is the various senses in which Southern history and memory is making itself known through gothic images and narratives.

I agree with Yaeger who argues that there is a certain suspense created by the writing she looks to: a 'sense that whenever you're riding through the lake of southern culture, some confederacy of water moccasins awaits you – intimations of occluded drama that disoccludes itself, that wells up – attacking the body and misshaping it'.<sup>516</sup> There is much to say about Yaeger's metaphor here, not least the watery location which is so present in the previous chapter, and the threat of snakes that seem not merely portents, but signs or bearers of a specific part of regional history (a 'confederacy'). Yaeger is most interested in the ways that the 'occluded drama' that 'wells up' disfigures bodies, and this seems one particular way of approaching Mann's photographs. It even overlaps to a large extent with the trauma and gaze-centred readings of Di Prete and Hirsch. The bodies, which Yaeger sees as 'misshapen' are the 'foreign' and traumatized

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<sup>515</sup> Apel, *Imagery of Lynching*, p. 7.

<sup>516</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 8.

ones that Di Prete so eloquently describes, but here they are given their particular and specific regional contexts which I see as so central to Mann's work, which I see as a necessary project to continue.

Yaeger, to continue, offers a number of reasons for the spectacle of misshapen bodies in the South: 'In a culture dealing with crisis, unable to handle changes in the course of everyday life – the growing demand (from the thirties into the nineties) for African American equality, for greater access to education, citizenship, and economic resources – change erupts abruptly, via images of monstrous, ludicrous bodies'.<sup>517</sup> We might ask whether this is still a relevant argument in the twenty-first century; that is, are such cultural crises still taking place, and thus still bearing their imprint upon texts in the form of monstrous bodies? As a primary answer, I think we can reply in the affirmative: the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina previously documented alone testifies to this. Even if not, we can still suggest that the historical crises of the region are perhaps continuing to be manifested. So, feasibly, the South and its cultural problems emerge in the gothic bodies seen across texts such as Mann's. In 'Ghosts and Shattered Bodies', to conclude, Yaeger furthers this argument by suggesting we focus on the trace and remnant for their decidedly haunting powers. She writes, of fiction, that 'White southern literary haunting is not just what haunts readers in the aftermath of a story or novel, but the almost invisible force of *everyday haunting*, the trauma of living neither in the epic nor the extraordinary but in the everyday South' (original emphasis).<sup>518</sup> This everyday South is the complex and ambiguous place that is still working through its traumatic past, regional history and troublesome cultural memories. In this sense, haunting is all-pervasive and the tortured bodies of the South are always ready to appear. We can thus move to one of Mann's recent projects that brings this line of argument, and the chapter, to a conclusion.

## DEATH IN TENNESSEE

Sally Mann's gothic lens is nowhere more clear than in the book *What Remains*, and specifically the series 'Matter Lent'. The gothic finds clear articulation in every image of this project. At the University of Tennessee's pioneering anthropological facility at Knoxville, scientists have an outdoor 'body farm': an area of forested land where unclaimed cadavers are forensically examined over periods of time. The processes of post-mortem decomposition are studied here in all their various forms; the bodies are in any number of states of decay and injury. They are

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>518</sup> Yaeger, 'Ghosts and Shattered Bodies', p. 97.

left in open clearings, in dense vegetation, in cars and much else. Mann requested to photograph the site numerous times and was refused, but finally – for the *New York Times* – she was permitted access. I want to read these photographs as precise examples of the Southern gothic genre. Moreover, their unremitting focus on the persistence of death and its remains and traces not only perpetuate the genre, but speak also to the larger concerns of this thesis and the question of regionalism. We return then, again, to the body because it is in embodiment and materiality that Southern history and memory seem to be enlivened. Ironically, even in death, the bodies that Mann presents for us seem to speak in a conversation with the region's past. This is not, again, to use an empty trope or signifier of the South which Romine or McPherson might take issue with, but to focus attentively on the meanings of bodies, and what they have to tell us about landscape, place and the past.

There is an implicit relationship here between the scientific institute and Mann's photographing of it; both, in a sense, collect and classify or categorize death in various ways. While the institute itself attends to the corpses from a forensic viewpoint, Mann engages the bodies in an entirely different way, looking to the aesthetic and affective dimensions of death (and its place in the natural world). Both, moreover, create an archive of death but to different ends. A scientific archive looks to dead bodies for what they can tell us about biological function and also forensic criminology; this is not too dissimilar from the long history of the state photographing death (of criminals, of victims). The visual archive, Alan Sekula writes, 'received its most thorough early articulation in precise conjunction with an increasingly professionalized and technological mode of police work and an emerging social science of criminology'.<sup>519</sup> Archiving and photographing death thus align in much the same way that Mann's images of the Tennessee institute engage with the scientific work that takes place there. We thus must question Mann's ethical engagement with the body. As should be clear from the above readings, Mann's insistence on looking at difficult subjects is to engage memories of the South: to demand these memories not be forgotten, by charging her images with the past's traces. Her institute images thus continue this work with an affective charge. Mann's art, like that which Bennett explores, 'is intensity: aesthetic, affective connectivity; it registers the detail, only to allow it to resonate'.<sup>520</sup> Such resonance is the pull of memory.

The body-farm photographs are prefaced in *What Remains* by close-up shots of the skeletal remains of Mann's dead dog. Cast as both memento mori as well as pseudo-scientific documentations of various bones and teeth, the images foreground death and thus prepare us

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<sup>519</sup> Alan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (1986), 3-64 (p. 17).

<sup>520</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 154.

for the body-farm photographs. Let us begin, in this regard, by looking at figure 17. Classically-composed, this photograph atmospherically depicts a cadaver lying face-down on the forest floor. This is one of the least violent images in the series and allows Mann's understanding of the body as an aesthetic object, even in death, to be made explicit. Though much of the image is taken up with dark forest – indeed, the edges of the photograph recede into total blackness – we are drawn immediately to the prone body at the centre. It is particularly lit (perhaps there was an electric source used) so that the body's shape is clear and visible, in addition to what may be smears of blood or mud across it. In all, this gothic image is not particularly shocking, even in its representation of death. The photograph's staid and formal restraint frames the body with something akin to dignity or detachedness. Nonetheless, two suggestions about this image should be posed. Firstly, in connection to the previous chapter, this body uncannily replicates the dead floating bodies seen in Katrina's floodwaters. Face-down, and almost floating on the forest floor, figure 17 recalls in this Southern imaginary the casualties of Katrina. While we cannot be sure if this corpse is black or not, it surely does not matter as the bodily sensations

Figure 17

triggered by its facelessness and prone stillness ignite other images from the region, and these might just be of Katrina. Secondly, the photograph's aesthetic beauty asks us to engage with the process of looking. Much like the debate of viewing lynching images – touched upon in the previous chapter also – this photograph of a dead body brings with it ethical considerations. As with the lynching pictures, however, I agree with Dora Apel and others who demand that we look at trauma, insist that we bear and struggle with the difficulties and discomfort of looking. It is in these entangled feelings and relations between viewer and image that we might find a political core: a willingness to understand and confront trauma, in this case regional. These Southern bodies demand our attention.

The next image is more exemplary of the photographs in the series. Figure 18 confronts us with a violent surface. The image's development is such that the photograph seems torn or sliced apart so that there are two central tears through its centre. On the left of the image, there is a mess of scratches and lines. Moreover, in high contrast, the black and white distortions are crisply bright, so that we concentrate on them primarily. Looking closer, however, we see a body lying prone at the top of the image; it is pale and formless; there might even be a bird

Figure 18

standing to its side (but this is not clear). The tear, on further notice, reaches an apex beneath the body as though it is pointing us towards it. Nonetheless, the photographic distortion remains the principle focus of the image and its busyness distracts us from the dead body depicted in it. What I think Mann is doing in this photograph is allowing the image's form – its surface – to bear the imprint of the violence done to the dead body within the frame, in addition perhaps to those throughout the body-farm. The haze of deformation in the photograph itself testifies to some rupture in the development process, but also metonymically in the bodies and landscapes themselves. Thus, as Bennett would have it, 'inner mental space or body space is mapped onto external terrain'.<sup>521</sup> The external terrain is thus not only the landscape, but the physical photograph also. Calling attention to such layers in the imaging process, Mann signals for the photograph to be read as constructed and framed (the peeled left-hand bottom corner creating a literal frame).

Gothic resonances in the images come to the very literal fore here and remind us of the potency of death, of haunting, of darkness, that abound in these Southern landscapes. Such gothic traces, however, are – Mann would say – already suffusing the Southern locales, but it is her photography that helps it along. Her formalism ignites and engages this gothic past. Returning here to Yaeger, she usefully argues that 'extraordinary numbers of women, men, and children fall into the [South's] landscape and disappear' so that, she posits, 'It is as if the foundation or basis for this world is made out of repudiated, throwaway bodies that mire the earth'.<sup>522</sup> Mann's photographs of the body farm in Tennessee document this insight in various ways. For instance, figure 19 seems to epitomize precisely this notion of bodies disappearing into the earth. The close-up of an unidentifiable person (they could be male or female, any age, probably Caucasian, but this is not certain) shows us their head and shoulders; the body lying face-down on the forest floor among mud and foliage. The blur of the photograph's development creates the visual sensation that the body is literally melting into the ground, dissolving into the earth before our very eyes. It is like some sped-up camera, where we can see the rapid progress of time in one image. This Southern body is one such disappearing person as Yaeger claims. Moreover, as this is an unclaimed, unknown body in the science facility, it is as 'repudiated' and 'throwaway' as Yaeger's other suggestion. The Southern landscape we are witnessing, then, literally is mired by the detritus of Southern bodies. In its shocking and visceral attention to corporeality and death, the photograph engages the viewer's body; we are not

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<sup>521</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 59.

<sup>522</sup> Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire*, p. 15.

Figure 19

merely looking at the corpse and its dissolving face, but brought into a material and fleshy alignment with it. Affect ‘moves in the space between the visceral body and consciousness, manifesting on the body’.<sup>523</sup> The body registers and marks its own suffering, but also touches our own.

The final photograph I proffer is figure 20 for it so visually and thematically embodies much of what I have explored. At the centre of this image is a body splayed across the forest floor. We can just about make out one arm and a leg, the torso, and maybe a head. The rest of the corpse blends into the mud and leaves beneath. Mann’s photograph is bright and hazy: the developmental process has created a white sheen that blurs and obscures most of the image. This technique is visible in some of the above examples too (of crumbling buildings and eerie forests), but here the whiteness seems like an impenetrable fog. Except, perhaps, it is not obscure, as the photograph exposes its subject in other ways. The corners of image close in from the collodion process, and contain us in this specific location. Bolstering this, we see dark smudgy fingerprints on the top corners. Ostensibly, these are Mann’s own finger markings: signs of the photograph’s creation and artistic quality. Self-reflexively, Mann is reminding us of her presence in the

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<sup>523</sup> Bennett, *Practical Aesthetics*, p. 21.

Figure 20

process of the image's manufacture. I also want to suggest that these fingerprints might gothically be associated with the cadaver in the image. The corpse's fingers are some of the clearest details in the photograph, and Mann might subtly be asking us to contemplate the notion that the body is clutching this image as much as the photographer (or viewer) is. Bearing the trace and mark, then, of the dead body, this image speaks volumes about Mann's gothic project. The Southern landscape of Tennessee is, in this series, littered with dead bodies simultaneously disappearing into and emerging from the earth. In light of Yaeger's argument, we can claim that the region has always been this way: always haunted by and testifying to death, trauma and the cultural memories thus ensuing.

On the entire project, Morrison writes that 'Mann called the series "What Remains", her point being that death is not an end, that nature goes on doing its work long after the body has become a carapace'.<sup>524</sup> I agree with Morrison and think that Mann's questioning of 'what remains' is an interesting and ambiguous one: the deathly remainders scattered across the forest floor are not ends, but mere stages in nature's cycle. Death, for Mann, is everywhere, unavoidable, and for that reason embraceable. However, I want to also read Mann's title

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<sup>524</sup> Morrison, 'Sally Mann'.

obliquely and think about other ways to interpret it, especially in light of the gothic readings developed, and the regionalism that has been shown to be visible across her work.

What if, this chapter has suggested, the Southern region endures in Mann's work through depictions and embodiments of gothic sights and sites? What remains, then, is ample. In all, we have returned to Eric Savoy's contention about the American gothic in which 'the past constantly inhabits the present [...] and where an insatiable appetite for spectacles of grotesque violence is part of the texture of everyday reality'.<sup>525</sup> Additionally, in regionalizing such notions, we have shown how the gothic continues to sustain the region today through recourse to dark and traumatic histories and memories. Perhaps we could conclude with that gothic Southern novelist Flannery O'Connor who, in 'The Regional Writer', states that Southern identity 'is not to be found on the surface [...] It is not made from the mean average or the typical, but from the hidden and often the most extreme. It is not made from what passes, but from those qualities that endure [...] because they are related to truth. It lies very deep'.<sup>526</sup> O'Connor's words could not speak more directly to Mann's regional gothic project.

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<sup>525</sup> Eric Savoy, 'The Rise of American Gothic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* ed. by Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 167-188 (p. 167).

<sup>526</sup> Flannery O'Connor, 'The Regional Writer' in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 51-59 (p. 58).

# FOUR

## THE ROAD HOME

### Southern Narratives of Return

“[Y]our roots are where you was born and you can’t  
pull them up, the only thing you can do is cut  
yourself away from them but they still be there”  
– Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*<sup>527</sup>

### ROOTS/ROUTES

Southern culture has long fixated upon the need, or desire, to go home. This gesture can be seen in songs from Dolly Parton, James Taylor, Ryan Adams, Ray Charles, Nina Simone and many others, testifying to the psychological pull of the South: its tangible roots. The cultural force of this narrative exists visibly in music, but I also want to illuminate its current presence in literature: this chapter will look at Toni Morrison’s *Home* (2012) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) to illustrate this. In the course of the two readings I intend to reveal the potency of the South as a place to return to for contemporary authors. The two novels are notably different literary acts in so many ways, but pairing them reveals much about the state of the South in contemporary fiction. Thus, questioning the postsouthern turn, which might trouble such roots and static regional identifications, Morrison and McCarthy provide regional texts that come home in various ways and senses.

Before looking closely at the two novels, I want to provide a small selection of texts that speak in the same conversation as these primary examples. It could be suggested that each of these texts engages in a highly nostalgic and idealistic relationship with something called the South, but hopefully it will become clear that such a reading is limiting and does not accurately enough account for the complexity of the texts’ relationships to the region. We could start with

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<sup>527</sup> Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 73.

Steve Yarbrough's *The End of California* (2006) in which the protagonist has to uproot his family from the west coast and return to the Alabama of his childhood. While there, he confronts many 'ghosts' from his past, but also his relationship to place. Or, similarly, *The Good Priest's Son* (2005) charts the journey of art conservator Mabry from New York to North Carolina, where he visits his ageing father, and confronts a region that he thought he had left behind. Or, we could read the television show *Justified* (2010) (based on fiction by Elmore Leonard), in which the protagonist – Raylan, a detective – is transferred from his department in Florida to Kentucky after a violent incident with a criminal. Raylan is moved to the county that he was born and raised in: he is forced to return home to the South. Finally, I could suggest *Junebug* (2005), a film that charts the trip to North Carolina from Chicago of a urbanite art-dealer, Madeleine, specializing in obscure and 'rural' artists. An artist she has 'discovered' lives near the family of her husband, so they journey south to meet both. What emerges is a strong sense of attachment Madeleine's husband has for the South that she is unaware of. Much else is of interest in this film, but here it is only necessary to note that the South has not left Madeleine's husband even when he has departed North from it.

To state it clearly here: the South that I am suggesting is central to so many contemporary narratives is not altogether coherent and singular, but that does not necessarily make it, as Romine would have it, 'post-autochthonous'. Romine agrees that 'ideas of territoriality persist even in the most virtual of environments', but in acknowledging this he regardless reinforces his thesis that the South lives on only in its 'reproduction': in our age of mass-technology, global capital, and endless simulations.<sup>528</sup> 'In the end', he writes, 'we may come to different Souths, but neither will be solid in fact or in practice'.<sup>529</sup> While Romine's sense of the South is always relational and therefore relentlessly unfixed, this chapter seeks to understand the potency of fictional narratives that return to the South to stress something of its 'fixity'. Even though Romine would argue that there is not a South to have or come back to in any definitive sense, both McCarthy and Morrison's novels chart a course back to regional origins and foundations, especially relational to memory.

While historically, Brinkmeyer posits, 'Southern literature has been firmly grounded in a strong sense of place, and that place has been the South', now writers 'by and large are not stressing the mysteries of place, the value of being rooted, as strongly as the earlier ones did, nor are they focusing so much on the power of specific locales to shape identity'.<sup>530</sup> Regional identity

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<sup>528</sup> Romine, p. 228.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>530</sup> Brinkmeyer, *Remapping Southern Literature*, p. 3 and p. 24.

in this argument is a thing of the past, no longer entirely relevant; this chapter suggests another interpretation. He arrives at this conclusion by stressing the importance of Southern writers taking leave of their locales in the South, and imaginatively exploring the American West. In doing so, they unlock the potential to see both regions anew in the process of seeing them connected. What Brinkmeyer suggests is that in moving away, Southerners can reconfigure everything that the South has been imagined to be. Idealistically perhaps, his book concludes on the idea that in moving to the West, Southern writers can reconfigure American notions of place and space so that a new ‘national myth centred in individuality *and* community, freedom *and* security, space *and* place’ can be achieved.<sup>531</sup> The above examples chime somewhat with this argument, but fervently stress a stronger sense of Southern place than Brinkmeyer acknowledges.

Bone, along similar lines, asks ‘If postsouthernism is constituted purely at the level of self-reflexive textual representations or signs, one might ask whether postsouthern literature can ever refer to, let alone try to represent, the “real South”’.<sup>532</sup> As a ‘material, sociospatial reality’, he further argues, the South no longer seems to survive, but this does not in his view – though other postsouthernists would disagree – mean that such ‘geographies exhibit no sense of place’.<sup>533</sup> While Bone’s sense of place in the South is highly nuanced, other critics would argue that the contemporary South, the postsouth, creates fictions of the region, rather than represent it. ‘It is precisely’, Madhu Dubey writes, ‘because the material conditions of possibility for organic racial community have become irretrievable (if they ever existed at all) that [some] literary texts strive to recover such community at an imaginary level’.<sup>534</sup> Toni Morrison’s *Home* might just be an example of this for Dubey, but I want to argue something else. It is the recovery of place – as a social space replete with meaning and very specific racial (regional) history – that Morrison’s novel focuses on, not because community is not possible, but because in the sway of transnational and postsouthern theories (each movement questioning ideas of the region in different ways) the idea of such might just be erased. Casey Clabough agrees with Dubey, asking ‘How much does contemporary literary regionalism reveal the true essence of a distinctive place and its people? How much is merely an act – a formulated drama unfolding on a set [...] that no longer exists save within the confines of the writer’s mind?’<sup>535</sup> As my discussion of both *Home* and *The Road* will attempt to show, Clabough’s sense of regionalism might not entirely match

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>532</sup> Bone, pp. 43–44.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>534</sup> Madhu Dubey, ‘Postmodern Geographies of the U.S. South’, *Nepantla: Views from South*, 3, 2 (2002), 351–371 (p. 366).

<sup>535</sup> Casey Howard Clabough, ‘The Imagined South’, *Sewanee Review*, 115, 2 (2007), 301–307 (p. 301).

up with these novels. Echoing Kreyling's sense of Von Trier's film *Manderlay* as playing out on the 'stage' of the South, Clabough's sense of writing the South is nothing more than nostalgic imagining and fictional longing. Morrison's and McCarthy's novels may just trouble this reading, gesturing towards a highly complex, yet rooted sense of Southern place. In light of this, then, I turn to my first example, *Home*.

### **'MIDNIGHT TRAIN TO GEORGIA': TONI MORRISON'S *HOME***

*Home* opens with a pair of memories: of horses fighting and a body being buried, the former displacing the latter. The novel's protagonist, Frank Money, remembers as a child watching (with his sister) horses attacking one another: 'their raised hooves crashing and striking'.<sup>536</sup> Frank and his sister Cee are awe-struck as the horses 'rea[r] up on their hind legs, their fore-legs around the withers of the other' (pp. 3-4). As children, this memory indelibly marks both of them. Not only for the visceral nature of the image, but because of the other memory that it is twinned with (and smothers). While hidden from the horses, the children also see a group of men dump a body 'into a hole already waiting' (p. 4). In particular they remember the body's 'black foot with its creamy pink and mud-streaked sole being whacked into the grave' (p. 4). What the children witness, they eventually discover (by the novel's end), is the aftermath of a shocking act of racist violence that they were too young to understand and assimilate. Frank's first-person narration, which is interspersed through the book, explicitly tells us is that we should 'know this: I really forgot about the burial. I only remembered the horses. They were so beautiful. So brutal. And they stood like men' (p. 5). From the start, then, Frank – while acknowledging the memory of the body – simultaneously represses it; it is pushed aside: 'I really forgot'.

Morrison begins her novel, therefore, by coupling two startling images that frame the whole narrative. The violent and overwhelming quality of the horse memory is a thematic key to the human violence that haunts its edges. The novel also features another set of memories – from Frank's time in the Korean war – which equally disrupt the narrative: indeed, Frank's first-person narratives intrude upon the present third-person story. These features are so definitive of trauma: an event which cannot be assimilated into consciousness because it was too overwhelming to be processed. Or, as Ruth Leys writes, 'the traumatic scene [is] unavailable for a certain kind of recollection'.<sup>537</sup> I will return to trauma, and Frank's memories of Korea below. *Home* gradually enables the characters, and the reader, to assimilate such historical racial traumas.

<sup>536</sup> Toni Morrison, *Home* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), p. 3. (Quoted in text from here on).

<sup>537</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 9.

Morrison uses Franks's eventual understanding of the blurry memory as an injunctive plea to her readers to truly remember the often shocking and violent African-American past (that is still in many people's lifetime). This is achieved primarily through the novel's structure: the return 'home' to the South. Michiko Katutani in the *New York Times* suggests that *Home* is a 'haunting, slender' novel that is a 'kind of tiny Rosetta Stone' to Morrison's 'entire oeuvre'.<sup>538</sup> While I think *Home* is too slight to stand next to works such as *Beloved* for scope and historical import, it nonetheless reworks key Morrisonian themes, though without her trademark dense prose style. What *Home* does illustrate, however, is the desire in contemporary Southern fiction to return South and not merely because of nostalgia. It is, as the title explicitly states, a homecoming.

The book follows Frank Money as he travels to Georgia to rescue his sister. Frank receives an anonymous letter that informs him of his sister's waning health – that, we learn, is caused by an eugenicist doctor – and that he should come to rescue her. Frank is an army veteran, recently returned from fighting in the Korean War. After leaving his home to find Cee, an unknown event forces him into a psychiatric hospital; it quickly becomes clear that Frank is suffering from PTSD, or something similar. Frank escapes, however, and continues his journey across the American landscape, from the snowy north-west of America to the South of his childhood.

In many respects, *Home's* journey South reflects the narrative of flight that Farah Jasmine Griffin sets out in "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" *The African-American Migration Narrative*. In this book she charts African-American narratives of migration from the South to the North because of, usually, the 'immediate, identifiable, and oppressive power' of the South.<sup>539</sup> This move from (generally) the 'rural' to the 'urban' is identifiable in much African-American fiction of the last century, and Griffin charts particular patterns and motifs seen across this writing. In a later chapter, however, she argues that in this fiction there is sometimes a return back South. For writers such as Jean Toomer, Griffin argues, 'a journey of immersion to the South is a necessary stop for the African-American intellectual; it is not, however, his ultimate destiny': it is a way of confronting the racial inequalities that haunt them and their Southern pasts.<sup>540</sup> It does not mean that the return is an endpoint. Later writers, however, alter this and 'see the South as a place to stay because it has changed'.<sup>541</sup> While, in many ways, this is a problematic idea (that the

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<sup>538</sup> Michiko Katutani, 'Soldier is Defeated by War Abroad, Then Welcomed Back by Racism', *New York Times*, 7 May 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/08/books/home-a-novel-by-toni-morrison.html>> [accessed 14 October 2013]

<sup>539</sup> Griffin, p. 4.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*

South's real issues of social inequality, race-relations and marginalization have completely changed) – Griffin does unpack this to a small degree – the central issue at play here is the return South as a necessary and important move for black Americans. The South, Griffin continues, 'is a site of racial memory and redemption' for contemporary writers; 'they portray the South as a final resting place for black people'.<sup>542</sup> The 'sense of the South as "home"', she argues, 'is certainly a dominant sentiment in the most recent literary treatments of migration'.<sup>543</sup> This sense of Southern home is, in the literature she explores, always complex; it is 'a place that suffers from a racist legacy' but it is also 'a haven of African-American history and community, a site of the ancestor, and for some African-Americans, it is still home'.<sup>544</sup> It is in light of this 'homeliness' and the return South that we can truly understand Morrison's regional roots in *Home*.

Frank thus returns with his sister to the South because 'home' seems to be the place that Frank instinctively longs for in a time of need. It is as though only their Southern home is equipped to nurse Cee back to health (or save her life at all). This is important for the discussion of regionalism because it testifies to the deep-set roots of place that are emotional and tangibly felt throughout the Moneys' lives. The other texts mentioned above – *Justified* and *Junebug* in particular – equally gesture towards this notion: the South is more than a specific geography, and contains a force that postsouthern criticism, like Romine's, cannot always account for. Returning South, though, ultimately is triggered by Cee's misfortune at the hands of a doctor in Atlanta. Cee applies for a job at a doctor's house, seemingly to help him with laboratory maintenance. At the interview, the doctor asks Cee 'whether she had children or had been with a man' (p. 64). His interest in her sexual life becomes obvious to the reader – but not Cee – when, after getting the job, she notices books on the doctor's shelf: '*Out of the Night*. Must be a mystery, she thought. Then *The Passing of the Great Race*, and next to it, *Heredity, Race and Society*' (p. 65). While we thus gain an immediate sense of the doctor's dubious interest in race and genetics, Cee thinks to herself here, 'How small, how useless was her schooling'; she promises that she 'would find time to read about and understand "eugenics"' (p. 65). That Cee's near-death is at the hands of eugenicist experimentation is a further way in which Morrison's novel attempts to work through and apprehend the traumatic African-American past. While the most explicit form of racism in the novel – that I will come to below – is shocking in its baseness, eugenics becomes another sign of the monstrous intimacies (to borrow Christina Sharpe's term

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<sup>542</sup> Ibid., p. 146-7 and p. 147.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid.

again) done to black bodies in America during the recent twentieth century. That these acts of violence, on small and large scales, occur so demonstrably and widespread in the South attests to why Morrison has to return to the geographical South to continue her work of reclaiming the black American past. Thus, the narrative of return is triggered by a racially-motivated trauma; when the Moneys get home, they have to face another.

Important to note in Morrison's depiction of Lotus, and the return home more generally, is the lack of romanticism seen. Morrison could have written an idealized return, an emotionally-charged and idyllic journey home that would testify to the pull of nostalgia which postsouthern readings often attend to (Bone, McPherson). There would be something in this that would allow for a critique of the reification of the South. If Morrison's characters returned to an idealistic South, a small-town of homeliness and community seen through rosy lenses, we could adequately ask questions of this problematic image. Instead, Morrison provides us with a Georgia town that is complex and ambiguous. The denizens of Lotus are both hostile and sympathetic, insular and yet instinctually caring. We will see how the inhabitants respond to the Moneys below, but the first impression we get of Lotus is through Morrison's treatment of atmosphere.

The town's overwhelming and stifling nature – which is so central to the traumatic memories that originated there – is figured by Morrison in her narrator's description of the weather. 'The sun', she writes, 'having sucked away the blue from the sky, loitered there in a white heaven, menacing Lotus, torturing its landscape' (p. 117). Using pathetic fallacy, Morrison explicitly embodies the oppressiveness of the town in the sun's heat here. However, the sentence continues with the sun 'torturing' the landscape, 'but failing, failing, constantly failing to silence it' (p. 117). Morrison at this point indicates the extent to which, alongside the overpowering nature of Lotus, there is something about the town and its people which exceeds such force. Frank's first impression of Lotus on returning, while complex, is identified predominantly by a sensory glut: 'Color, silence, and music enveloped him' (p. 118). The town overwhelms him in a number of ways, but he mainly notices a selection of small-town things that memoratively tie him back to his home. While he acknowledges that he may be sentimentalizing a place that he has been away from for so long, he nonetheless relishes returning home. Morrison's narrator writes, 'This feeling of safety and goodwill, he knew, was exaggerated, but savoring it was real. He convinced himself that somewhere nearby pork ribs sizzled on a yard grill [...and] A pound cake cooled on top of an icebox' (p. 118). Frank's first feeling for Lotus is one of home-comforts and welcoming sights. Such romantic notions are undercut by the fact that the Moneys' return to Lotus is due to Cee's declining health; indeed, Frank enters Lotus carrying Cee in his arms.

Over two months the women of Lotus take turns in offering possible remedies for Cee's ills. Morrison's narrator tells us that the months 'surrounded by country women who loved mean had changed her' (p. 121). A typically Morrisonian collapse of syntax appears here – 'women who loved mean' – which seemingly tells us that the women are not inherently cruel, but that they are not idealized figures of a female community or 'feminist' collective. Morrison continues: 'The women handled sickness as if it were an affront, an illegal, invading braggart who needed whipping. They didn't waste their time or the patient's with sympathy and they met the tears of the suffering with resigned contempt' (p. 121). Thus, both the illness and Cee herself become targets of the women's scorn and lack of compassion, but nevertheless they succeed in making Cee better. As Cee heals, we learn that 'the women chang[e] tactics and sto[p] their berating. Now they [bring] their embroidery and crocheting, and finally they us[e] Ethel Fordham's house as their quilting center' (p. 122). Here we reach an important juncture of the novel's artistic project; as part of Cee's healing process, the female collective teach her to quilt, and I suggest this is synecdochal, if not metonymic, of Morrison's novel too. Together, the women form a 'centre' for the stereotypically female craft. Quilting and sewing have long been figures of female creativity: we need think only of Penelope's shroud in *The Odyssey* or Arachne's spinning web in the *Metamorphoses*. The quilting also serves to help Cee both understand what happened to her at the hands of the villainous doctor, and move on from it: Cee 'was gutted, infertile, but not beaten. She could know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting' (p. 132). Quilting is that regenerative act, a mournful working-through of personal trauma and the past.

More pertinent to this chapter's thesis, however, is how the artistic work of the women is used to mourn and reclaim the traumatic memory of racist violence that the novel opened with. Moreover, this can be connected to Morrison's novel itself: a form of female quilt that returns to the South to revisit and apprehend racism (particularly regional) of the twentieth century. To understand the mourning-work that the quilt enacts, we have to turn to the revelation at the end of *Home* that unravels the dark memory Frank and Cee have from their childhood. While they remember a body being put in the ground, Frank realizes he has to find someone from Lotus who can fill in the missing information of that event. He talks to a group of old men from the town and they eventually tell him. One old man, Fish Eye, informs Frank that some white men brought the man 'and his daddy from Alabama. Roped up' and that when they arrived in Lotus they 'Made them fight each other. With knives'; moreover, it was – another man interjects – 'to the death' (p. 138). Frank is told that the white men originally began with other 'sports': 'They graduated from dogfights. Turned men into dogs' (p. 139).

Morrison here is not only commenting on the barbarousness of making men (a father and son no less) fight each other to the death, but the racist machinations underpinning this that renders people non-human. The son, Frank learns, kills his father in the fight (as the men ensure that one 'wins') and escapes the town obviously traumatized. The body of the father is then buried by the white men, and this is what Frank and Cee witness as children. The fighting horses that Frank remembers become clear images that obscure this memory beneath: of two men fighting to the death. That Frank says the horses stood 'like men', only but confirms the relationship between the images, twinning – like in the 'dog' fighting – the human and animal.

Frank's unravelling of the violent memory from his past is twinned furthermore by previously repressed memory from his time fighting in Korea. It is necessary to understand this thread of *Home's* narrative as it informs not only the structure of the novel, but also its concerns with confronting trauma as well as offering us a transnational version of the South that needs to be unpacked. Because trauma cannot be assimilated at the time of experience, it returns to the individual, interrupting consciousness. Indeed, Frank's (italicized) first-person narratives interject and intrude upon the third-person narration, and the first of these reveals that they are possibly being told to an unknown narrator: 'Since you're set on telling my story, whatever you write down, know this' (p. 5). This quotation also introduces us to Frank's explicitness of his not remembering what he and Cee saw as children; memory and recollection are installed at the centre of these first-person interludes. Frank's stories slowly become less about his past in Georgia – 'Lotus, Georgia, is the worst place in the world' (p. 83) – and more about his time at war – 'Korea. You can't imagine it because you weren't there' (p. 93). The most traumatic of these memories (and traumatic because constantly deferred and un-remembered, like the burial witnessed as a child) is of a Korean girl being shot in the face after she makes a sexual advance on a soldier, which turns out to be Frank himself. Frank firstly narrates this story from a distance, claiming that he sees the Korean girl with another soldier: 'She smiles, reaches for the soldier's crotch, touches it. It surprises him. [...] As soon as I look away from her hand to her face [...] he blows her away' (p. 95). A number of pages later – chronologically after Cee has healed and Frank is about to learn what happened to the body they saw being buried – Frank admits that the event did not happen this way. Frank says: 'I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me', 'I shot the Korean girl in her face'; 'You can keep on writing, but I think you ought to know what's true' (p. 133 and p. 134).

At this point, a number of issues need be noted. It is important that Frank finally remembers his own involvement in the killing of the young girl; as a repressed traumatic memory, it eventually returns to him. It is no accident, however, that it surfaces as Frank also

confronts the ‘other’ memory from his childhood that he ‘forgot’: of a man being buried. As this memory was twinned with the fighting horses, so its return is twinned with the trauma from Korea. As Frank’s journey South re-roots him to his homeland, his memories cannot help but install a trans-regionalism into his narrative. As the Korean War comes to define much of his past, might it be said that *Home* is concerned with the ways that the South is not a sole locus for cultural memory, and that this place is intimately bound up in other ones? This returns us in many ways to Richard Gray’s argument in *After the Fall* (as well as the earlier ‘dialogue’ with Michael Rothberg on post-9/11 fiction) about the transcultural and deterritorialized nature of America and its fictional output. Gray turns particularly to immigrant fictions from the South to exemplify this, claiming that in their fusion of cultural influences (of the South, and other places) they complexly articulate the transnational and post-regional era. Such fictions, Gray contends, ‘offer altered geographies’ and ‘negotiate a space between nations and cultures’ which ‘in the process’ – and this is important for the present discussion – ‘register a different, which is to say fresher, fuller and more fluid notion of home’.<sup>545</sup>

The idea of home that I have been delineating here has focused upon the significance of returning to the South. Gray’s argument suggests that in the deterritorialization of America (and the South particularly), notions of home have been altered. Indeed, as Gray continues, ‘The distinction, in a globalized world, between home and away, the “foreign” and the “domestic” may be fine to the point of vanishing altogether’.<sup>546</sup> While all of Gray’s sentiments could be applied to Morrison’s novel, I am not certain that they entirely account for the emphasis Morrison puts on the local. This is not to overlook or downplay the interconnections of memory that *Home* dramatizes. The novel is interested, certainly, in the relationship between regional violence, as well as national and international violence. Entangling a Southern history of racism with a larger national one, and then a global war, Morrison shows the degrees to which the South is caught up in (trans)national forces, particularly when it comes to racist violence. But, what this chapter wants to note is that Morrison emphasizes more local memory-work as central to the book. As I will finally argue, and then unravel in relation to the final scenes of the novel, it is the cultural memories of African-American experience in the South that *Home* takes most seriously and invests importance in.

In working towards the unveiling of Frank’s most significant traumatic memory – of the body being buried, recounted at the very beginning – *Home* reveals its clear intentions. In acknowledging and revealing the racial memory so important to the Moneys’ past, Morrison

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid., p. 90 and p. 109.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

articulates the importance of returning home to reclaim a particularly local and located history. The regional context of this memory (which we will shortly come to) is so explicitly framed by Morrison that the novel's other concerns – transnational experiences of war and its remembrance, the meanings of trauma – perhaps are not as privileged as the local ones. The Korean War, while an important co-ordinate in the novel's memories, proves to be less instrumental in understanding the Moneys' journey home and their pasts than the violent regional memories the book opens with. *Home's* journey South establishes regionalism as a continuing and potent force for contemporary African-American identity.

To return to the novel and conclude this discussion, I turn to the moment after Frank learns of the black man's death and burial that he witnessed as a child. Frank is certain that there is only one thing to do. He finds Cee, now recovered, and asks her to bring her quilt with them as they try to find where the body is buried. In a journey that echoes the return home on a small scale, the siblings 'tur[n] onto a wagon road – the same one they had followed as children' (p. 142), revisiting their past and history through re-tracing their childhood steps. They search for some time and eventually find the location of the body and dig up the skeletal remains. Frank unearths 'Such small bones. So few pieces of clothing. The skull, however, [is] clean and smiling' (p. 143). This smile is both a grimace of torture and simultaneously a grin at the Moneys, coming to reclaim the body after all this time. Though a shocking sight, Cee confronts the bones: she 'bit[es] her lip, forcing herself not to look away, not to be the terrified child who could not bear to look directly at the slaughter that went on in the world, however ungodly' (p. 143). Here, I think, Morrison is at her most explicit and injunctive. Cee is meant to represent us, the reader, who needs to confront the 'slaughter' – that is, the racism of the South, America at large and the world (Korea) – of the past. Morrison is digging up the bones of the African-American past like her protagonists; she considers it our ethical obligation to look at them with her (as, in chapter two, looking at Katrina's biopolitics is; and, as in chapter three, looking at the South's dead is).

Frank reveals the reason for bringing Cee's quilt with them: it is to wrap the body in, to bury it 'properly'. Morrison writes, 'Carefully, carefully, Frank place[s] the bones on Cee's quilt, doing his level best to arrange them the way they once were in life. The quilt became a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue' (p. 143). The shroud's primary colours stress the simplicity and primary needs of its usage. Frank and Cee find a 'sweet bay tree', and 'There at its base Frank place[s] the bone-filled quilt that was first a shroud, now a coffin' (p. 144). The shroud thus takes on a highly significant role in the work of mourning, both delicately wrapping the bones up (though re-constituting the body somewhat as they 'were in life') and then burying

the body in it. It does not need too much explication to connect the Moneys' burying of the body with Morrison's own novelistic work. Long have her books reclaimed and revisited the African-American experience, but in *Home* she succeeds in both bringing a body up from the ground – killed because of racism – and re-burying it. Morrison's novels, Jill Matus explains, frequently bear witness to the past, but importantly 'can also be seen as ceremonies of proper burial, an opportunity to put painful events of the past in a place where they no longer haunt successive generations'.<sup>547</sup> She does continue to say though that this 'burial' is not entirely curative: it is not an end-point of a healing mourning process. Morrison's novels, Matus also notes, are 'very attentive to historical specificity, which resists any monolithic categorisation of black identity'.<sup>548</sup> I think it is true of her other work – and particularly *Home* – that the ceremonies of burial are tied to specific events and specific locations. In *Home*, Morrison literalizes this previously metaphoric burial, acknowledging that mourning the Southern past – in its specificity – might be necessary to those whose roots are deep there. This is not to discount the novel's engagement with the national and global memories, but to illuminate the regional qualities that Morrison so foregrounds. These geographies are entangled in the book, but not entirely equivalent in significance I think.

Frank puts a piece of wood in the ground as a head-stone, with 'Here stands a man' (p. 145) written on it. Morrison acknowledges this death – and the deaths of thousands of black men and women in the South – through the novel. Moreover, this is only possible by returning home; coming back to the South to confront its violent, difficult and traumatic histories and memories in their regional contexts. The final dialogue of the novel speaks volumes here: Cee says, 'Come on, brother. Let's go home' (p. 147). Returning South is so necessary this novel suggests, because history and memory is far from done with. As Jill Matus writes, in Morrison's novels, 'history is never over, never simply in the past'.<sup>549</sup> *Home* continues this trend, returning us to Faulkner's dictum and the rejection of the South as past, or post; in Morrison's Georgia, the region lives on.

### **'MY TENNESSEE MOUNTAIN HOME': CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD***

*The Road* is Cormac McCarthy's tenth novel, a stripped-back story of a man and his young son travelling through an American wasteland of ash and destruction. Their journey takes them

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<sup>547</sup> Jill Matus, *Toni Morrison* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

through mountainous terrain towards the coast where they hope to find sustenance. In identifying *The Road* as a narrative of return to the South, I hope to show how McCarthy's book is a complex and ambiguous work of contemporary Southern regionalism. Contra the postsouthern turn, place is not defunct here – though it is radically changing – and the past is far from over. I first outline three major readings of *The Road* that are interrelated. First, the notion of the novel as post-apocalyptic is an obvious one, and has a number of ramifications. Most convincingly is the sense that the book emerged from a particular set of historical circumstances, notably the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their American and global aftermath. Following on from this can lead us to a reading of the book as a transnational one, and eventually a postsouthern one. I want to illuminate these recurring interpretations because they will somewhat frame my reading of the novel and reveal the places at which I differ analytically.

What happened to render the world destroyed is near-unknown to the reader (maybe even to the characters too), but we can certainly see that the scene is post-apocalyptic. In a flashback, McCarthy offers a slight reference to the event that possibly triggered the 'apocalypse', with a genre-staple: 'The clocks stopped at 1:17'.<sup>550</sup> This specific time is the beginning of an unseen catastrophe, initiated by 'A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions' (p. 54). The man and his wife witness the light – possibly a meteor or something similar – and are rendered dumb: 'What is happening?' she says; 'I dont know' [sic] (p. 54), the man replies.<sup>551</sup> *The Road* is 'an apocalyptic narrative, participating in an ancient genre', Randall Wilhelm tell us,<sup>552</sup> it 'explores what remains of humanity when civilization has been destroyed and when history as we know it has come to an end' Patrick O'Donnell argues;<sup>553</sup> and, Lydia Cooper writes, the world of the novel is 'seemingly "wounded" and "wasted" beyond recognition'.<sup>554</sup> Matthew Mullins (2011), Carole Juge (2009) and Tim Edwards (2008) agree. Lydia Cooper continues, 'The ash coating the world [...] provides a visual metaphor for the coalesced suffering of the dying species'.<sup>555</sup> Moreover, this metaphorical suffering finds, in Kenneth Lincoln's words, form in McCarthy's prose, which 'settles into a postholocaust grammar of scree, shards, smoke, fractals, bits and pieces of charnel, dead flesh and sallow bone' that is formally arranged in

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<sup>550</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 54. (Quoted in text from here on).

<sup>551</sup> I should note that the punctuation of McCarthy's text is decidedly restrained: he rarely uses apostrophes (as well as commas or colons), so I will replicate his prose exactly here.

<sup>552</sup> Randall S. Wilhelm, "'Golden Chalice, Good to House a God'": Still Life in *The Road*, *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 121-146 (p. 129).

<sup>553</sup> O'Donnell, pp. 169-170.

<sup>554</sup> Lydia Cooper, 'Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative', *Studies in the Novel*, 43, 2 (2011), 218-236 (p. 220).

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

‘pointillist paragraphs’.<sup>556</sup> Linguistically as well as thematically, then, *The Road* is testament to the unknown catastrophe.

The post-apocalyptic sense of *The Road* can be unravelled further if we view the novel in light of its historical context, specifically a post-9/11 America. While far from an apocalyptic event, there are certainly many ways in which the debate around the September 11 attacks figured that day and its aftermath in deeply traumatic terms. McCarthy’s landscape is a bleak one, decidedly reminiscent of images seen during the attacks on New York City: ‘The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds [...] Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again’ (p. 10). The emphasis on ash might be allusive of 9/11: calling up memories of the collapsing towers and the clouds of ash that settled over the city. This description goes on: ‘Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air’ (p. 10). In *After the Fall*, Gray reads McCarthy’s novel as principally about a registering of trauma. *The Road*, for Gray ‘is a symbolic narrative, a powerful but also slippery tale of something, some trauma that seems to resist telling’.<sup>557</sup> This sense of an inexplicable trauma is a highly useful way to read McCarthy’s novel, as it is an ambiguous text in many ways; this concept is something I will return to in relation to McCarthy’s linguistic strategy. As we have seen, the disaster that befell the world of *The Road* is barely understood by the reader and we have few orienting footholds. Gray does continue, however, by asserting that ‘It is surely right to see *The Road* as a post-9/11 novel, not just in the obvious, literal sense, but to the extent that it takes the measure of that sense of crisis that has seemed to haunt the West, and the United States’.<sup>558</sup>

‘What we are left with’, Gray suggests, ‘is symptom: in this case, the registering that *something* traumatic – perhaps too dreadful for words, unsusceptible as yet to understanding – has happened’ (original emphasis).<sup>559</sup> Key to this reading is that the trauma is far from understandable and maybe beyond words. McCarthy’s world is thus haunted by the events of 9/11 and the traumatic fissure that they seemingly ruptured in the American mind. On this point, Chris Walsh writes that the ‘Ideological determinants’ of *The Road* might be in various ways, ‘September 11<sup>th</sup>, the sorry mess of a war in Iraq’, ‘global warming and ecological disaster’ in addition to ‘economic globalization and trans-nationalism’.<sup>560</sup> Walsh’s pointing to ‘determinants’ for the novel nicely suggests a backdrop or set of circumstances that fostered the novel’s production, rather than postulating a definitive historical germ for the book. Crownshaw

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<sup>556</sup> Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles*, p. 165.

<sup>557</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 40.

<sup>558</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>559</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>560</sup> Chris Walsh, ‘The Post-Southern Sense of Place in *The Road*’, *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 48–54 (p. 48).

relatedly acknowledges that *The Road* ‘allegorize[s] not just the catastrophe of 9/11’ but also ‘recalls other traumas’ in America, but I want to unravel this further below in relation to regional memory.<sup>561</sup> Gesturing toward the *The Road*’s ambiguity, however, can enable us to move to the final major interpretation of McCarthy’s novel.

Though Gray acknowledges the book’s setting as generally ‘a landscape of nightmare’, he nevertheless acknowledges that its geographical location may be ‘perhaps East Tennessee, the author’s Appalachian birthplace’.<sup>562</sup> Ultimately, though, Gray thinks that ‘The journey down from the mountains occurs in a border territory, between substantial fact and surreal dream’; this border territory a central thematic that McCarthy has explored often in his Texas/Mexico-set fiction.<sup>563</sup> Thus, while Gray sees remnants of a region in *The Road*, it is most definitely not, in his argument, regional: it is post-regional (postsouthern). Stemming from the frequent critical writing on McCarthy’s late period of work set in the American south-west, this conception of the book overlooks, in my opinion, so many Southern signs and references littered across it, which deserve attention if we are to fully understand the novel’s significances.

Rune Graulund’s interpretation of *The Road* is the most explicit and extreme in this regard as he suggests that it is set in ‘an unspecified region of America’ and thus ‘immediately different when seen in the light of McCarthy’s former four decades of writing’.<sup>564</sup> I want to disagree with this reading, not least in that the book speaks to McCarthy’s previous novels and his Tennessee home. Graulund continues by suggesting that because of its unspecific location, the book obviously ‘breaks with [McCarthy’s] famous attention to place’ and instead offers us a ‘desert that never ends not begins’: a landscape ‘devoid of difference’.<sup>565</sup> Mark Eaton agrees, positing that *The Road*, along with other recent novels by McCarthy ‘provides a remarkable portrait of [...] polyglot borderlands’ that ‘arguably reposition[s] him within the emergent field of “postnationalist” American studies’.<sup>566</sup>

This sense of *The Road* allows critics to situate the book alongside previous McCarthy novels, especially his ‘border trilogy’ set in Texas and Mexico and *Blood Meridian*. On this novel, Vince Brewton argues that while McCarthy ‘supplies particulars of geography, the reader experiences a collapse of time and space so that only the ceaseless repetition of violence remains

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<sup>561</sup> Richard Crownshaw, ‘Deterritorializing the “Homeland” in American Studies and American Fiction after 9/11’ *Journal of American Studies*, 45, 4 (2011), 757-776 (p. 775).

<sup>562</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 41.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Rune Graulund, ‘Fulcrums and Borderlands: A Desert Reading of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*’, *Orbis Litterarum*, 65, 1 (2010), 57-78 (p. 58).

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., p. 59 and p. 61.

<sup>566</sup> Mark Eaton, ‘Dis(re)membered Bodies: Cormac McCarthy’s Border Fiction’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49, 1 (2003), 155-180 (p. 158 and p. 156).

foregrounded, enacted in a kind of no-place of desolation'.<sup>567</sup> I am suggesting another way of reading *The Road*. The no-place of desolation we witness might be seen to collapse time in the other direction: pin-pointing a very particular geography. Crownshaw cements this: 'The idea of the South still endures in this novel, despite the father's statement that there are no more "states" although they follow "state roads"'.<sup>568</sup> I would go further and suggest that beyond an 'idea' of the South, *The Road* traverses a Southern landscape in terms of geography, literature, history and memory. McCarthy's novel truly represents the complex Southern regionalism of the twenty-first century.

I will be reading *The Road* as regional in two predominant ways. In returning to the South, McCarthy's novel comes 'home' in a few distinct senses. Firstly, I will suggest that the book revisits and returns to older McCarthy territory: literal (geographical) and fictional (literary). Secondly, and maybe most importantly, McCarthy foregrounds cultural memories of the South: in highlighting the memory-work of the novel, I hope to solidify my claims of it as regional. The novel opens with the man and boy on their journey through a desolate wasteland. The father 'studie[s] the country to the south. Barren, silent, godless [...] They were moving south. There'd be no surviving another winter here' (p. 2). Such repetition of 'south' chimes with a regional lens. Though this point could be critiqued as trite, there are at least nineteen references to 'going south' in the novel, which I read as explicitly acknowledging a Southerly trajectory. The father and son frequently discuss their journey, always focusing on the movement *south*. It is not, obviously, a clear signal of regionalism, but there is something note-worthy about McCarthy's continued use of this directional phrase.

Much of McCarthy's life was spent in rural Appalachia and this geography saturates his first four novels. They are, in so many ways, tied to this very specific place. *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), *Outer Dark* (1968), and *Child of God* (1973) are rich with the particular landscape, dialect, ideologies and history of the region. Of McCarthy's fourth novel, Jack Neely proposes that 'nothing he ever wrote is so thoroughly soaked in Knoxville as *Suttree* is. It may be the most Knoxville novel ever written'.<sup>569</sup> Neely reinforces how specifically 'placed', how suffused with regionalism McCarthy's work is, especially this novel set almost entirely in and around the city of Knoxville. Kenneth Lincoln too argues that 'Throughout McCarthy's early Appalachian fiction, thickening tone, regional texture, and local tale-telling cadence the story and tendon

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<sup>567</sup> Vince Brewton, 'The Changing Landscape of Violence in Cormac McCarthy's Early Novels and the Border Trilogy', *The Southern Literary Journal*, 37, 1 (2004), 121-143 (p. 131).

<sup>568</sup> Crownshaw, 'Deterritorializing the Homeland', p. 774.

<sup>569</sup> Jack Neely, 'Cormac McCarthy's Knoxville', *Appalachian Heritage*, 39, 1 (2011), 16-19 (p. 16).

the action'.<sup>570</sup> What I am firstly arguing, therefore, is that this Appalachian location is revisited in *The Road*. In terms of geography, there are clear signals of the region – the landscape is so reminiscent of McCarthy's early works – and so I posit he is returning here in a number of ways.

Wesley Morgan has suggested something akin to the thesis I am proposing, but his essay maps the man and boy's journey too literally. While, as I have argued, 'It seems [...] that the importance of the route is that McCarthy is fictionally returning once again to his own roots in Knoxville and the southeast', Morgan continues by outlining a literal geographical route of the book.<sup>571</sup> He begins by positing that 'the trail can be picked up fairly early in the novel in Middlesboro, Kentucky' because of some vaguely allusive descriptions, he goes on to follow the father and son through Tennessee and beyond to, eventually, South Carolina.<sup>572</sup> Though I argue for a similar journey, Morgan's attentively-researched essay literalizes the fictional text's location too readily. Analyzing the small details of distances travelled, road networks and even railway tunnels, Morgan maps Southern place to the degree that is so easily ripe for critique. The regionalism of *The Road* works in many ways, but delineating this South on a map with precision is might not be the method to do so. Nonetheless, Morgan states that 'reviews by a number of apparently geographically challenged critics and commentators have suggested some novel [...] locations for the route' of McCarthy's text; thus it is worth acknowledging work such as Morgan's that at least takes McCarthy's regionalism seriously.<sup>573</sup>

I want to dislocate myself from Morgan's thesis to a degree, by arguing for a variety of regional signs in *The Road*; but before moving away from a literal geography, there are a number of subtle indicators of Southern place in the novel. Far from explicit in the text, there are small references to trees and plant-life throughout. Early in the journey, the man and boy walk through some woods, 'among huge dead trees' (p. 40). The forest is described as 'A rich southern wood that once held may-apple and pipsissewa' (p. 40). While it would be natural to seize upon the words 'once held' to assert a landscape now gone, McCarthy nonetheless tells us that it is – present tense – a 'rich southern wood' (not a 'once southern wood', as perhaps in a postsouthern mode). Moreover, what the protagonists find in the wood suggest the continued life, if not fertility therein, pointing to the Southern land's endurance. The two come across morels amongst the 'mulch and ash': 'a small colony of them, shrunken, dried and wrinkled' (p. 40). Eating them dry, the father and son are thrilled with their find – 'These are pretty good' (p. 41), the boy says – but when they collect a heap in the boy's parka hood, and fry them over a fire

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<sup>570</sup> Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac McCarthy: American Canticles*, p. 34.

<sup>571</sup> Wesley G. Morgan, 'The Route and Roots of *The Road*', *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 39-47 (p. 46).

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*

with pork fat, they truly savour the mushrooms. ‘This is a good place Papa’ (p. 41), the boy says; we should, I think, definitely read this for the emphasis on agrarian Southern ‘place’ and the sustaining food in it. While not an Agrarian South of old – this is not something recognizable in the descriptions of *I’ll Take My Stand* for example – the Southern land here is still a productive and mildly fecund one, even in the face of ecological disaster.

Another example can be found when the protagonists are nearing the coast. They notice that the ‘country went from pine to liveoak and pine. Magnolias’ (p. 209). Although it needs to be noted that the trees are ‘dead as any’ and the father ‘pick[s] up one of the heavy leaves’ and ‘crushe[s] it in his hand to powder’, the significance of the tree species’ is important (p. 209). Michael Chabon on this sentence notes ‘those words “liveoak”, “pine”, the somehow onomatopoeic splendor of “magnolia” still flower greenly in the mind before McCarthy crushes them’.<sup>574</sup> McCarthy is gently suggestive of the geographical terrain the man and boy are on; the gradual move from pine to liveoak and magnolia is read by anyone with knowledge of the South as a subtle marker of the move from the mountainous Appalachian South – say Tennessee or North Carolina – to the warmer climes of South Carolina or Georgia for example. Ashley Kunsu would disagree on this as, he writes, ‘For what matter is the distinction between Tennessee and Georgia, or, for that matter, between Tennessee and Timbuktu, in a world devoid of the social structures that give meaning and function to the distinctions?’<sup>575</sup> I hope that this discussion provides another way of reading regionalism. Kunsu’s essay is astute but McCarthy’s novel can barely be anywhere other than the South, let alone Timbuktu.

With a little speculative biographical reading, we can further connect *The Road* to McCarthy’s life by twinning him with his character of the man. In one sense, McCarthy’s return to the South of his early books and life – from the border-country of the American southwest – matches that of the man in the novel. In an anti-Barthesian gesture, it is possible to follow the famous interview of McCarthy with Oprah Winfrey and connect McCarthy and his young son with the characters in the book; the novel is, after all, dedicated to him.<sup>576</sup> Even if we do not partake in such a personal reading, there are enough instances in the novel to suggest that, if not biographically, McCarthy is certainly returning to his Tennessean home in *The Road*: it is notably a home-coming of sorts. Dianne Luce notes that ‘the emotional grounding of the novel, the city of the father’s past, which he and his son travel through and away from, mutated from

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<sup>574</sup> Michael Chabon, ‘Dark Adventure: On Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*’ in *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands* (London: Fourth Estate, 2010), p. 102.

<sup>575</sup> Ashley Kunsu, “‘Maps of the World in Its Becoming’: Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 33, 1 (2009), 57–74 (p. 63).

<sup>576</sup> <<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/Oprahs-Exclusive-Interview-with-Cormac-McCarthy-Video>> [accessed 15 October 2013]

El Paso to Knoxville, the town of McCarthy's own boyhood'.<sup>577</sup> Early in the novel, the man finds a telephone in a gas station. Though not working, the father 'dial[s] the number of his father's house in that long ago', confusing his son who asks, 'What are you doing?' (p. 5). In attempting to reconnect with his father and his childhood home, McCarthy's protagonist illuminates the nostalgic thread of feeling for home. In narrative terms, Wesley Morgan thinks, 'It seems [...] that he is planning the trip through Knoxville, and nearby places, as a way of acquainting his son with his roots'.<sup>578</sup> Even if the journey is not an explicit 'rooting', we can be certain of this return home as pages later they arrive on the outskirts of town 'at a bend in the road': they approach 'an old frame house with chimneys and gables and a stone wall'. The son asks, 'What is this place, Papa?'; 'It's the house where I grew up', the father replies (p. 24). Even if we do not argue that this house (and its location) is remarkably similar to that of McCarthy's own childhood home outside Knoxville – which it is: notably even to the detail of the road's bend – there is enough weight in this scene to see the potency of 'home' as a force that returns McCarthy('s characters) to the Appalachian South. Though it may be worth acknowledging that the son gets scared on visiting the house – 'Can we go? [...] I'm really scared' and the father replies 'It's all right. We shouldn't have come' (p. 27) – nonetheless this house is an important stop on the characters' journey.

Departing from such a literal return, McCarthy also imaginatively revisits the South in terms of his earlier fiction. It is productive to connect *The Road* with one of these Appalachian novels to illuminate the continuities of his Southern work and thus to reinforce the located-ness of this later book. While Louis Palmer has argued that *The Road* rewrites McCarthy's first novel *The Orchard Keeper* – 'These two works not only frame McCarthy's career at present, but demonstrate a larger circle that returns not only to McCarthy's roots in late modernism, but also to the origins of the novel itself in the episodic form of the romance' – I think there is far more evidence for connecting *The Road* to his second book *Outer Dark*.<sup>579</sup> John Cant agrees, positing that 'The relation between *The Road* and *Outer Dark* seems clear and intentional'.<sup>580</sup> Thus, he suggests that *The Road* exemplifies 'a literary return, a retrospective on the author's own previous works' and that this return is 'a journey that commences where his own literary journey began'.<sup>581</sup> Cant notes that the landscape of *The Road* is the landscape of McCarthy's early years

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<sup>577</sup> Dianne C. Luce, 'Beyond the Border: Cormac McCarthy in the New Millennium', *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 6–12 (p. 9).

<sup>578</sup> Morgan, p. 46.

<sup>579</sup> Louis Palmer, 'Full Circle: *The Road* Rewrites *The Orchard Keeper*', *Cormac McCarthy Journal*, 6 (2008), 62–68 (p. 62).

<sup>580</sup> John Cant, *Cormac McCarthy and the Myth of American Exceptionalism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 279.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266 and p. 273.

and early fiction: the rural mountainous terrain of Appalachia, particularly Tennessee, near Knoxville.

*Outer Dark* is set in an unknown part of Appalachia at the turn of the century, and centres on the brother and sister Culla and Rinthy Holme. As the novel opens, Rinthy is pregnant with her brother's baby, and when it is born, Culla steals it from her and abandons it in the woods. A wandering 'tinker' finds the child, eventually selling it to a mysterious group of men who are stalking the Southern countryside. The main narrative thrust follows Rinthy and Culla as they separately search for their child when they both realize the magnitude of what has happened. Here I will sketch out some of the clearest links between the books, even though many more connections could be made. Firstly, the setting of both *Outer Dark* and *The Road* are similar; as I have suggested, the landscape of the latter novel is decidedly Appalachian. There are numerous descriptions in both novels that correlate with one another, suggestive of the similar terrain explored. James Giles has suggested that '*Outer Dark* seems to take place in some ambiguous physical-social space devoid of history', but I think here he is conflating the lack of specificity (it is unclear where exactly the book is set) with an eradication of place or space.<sup>582</sup> Conversely, I think it is very much an Appalachian setting, and this is true of *The Road* also. Even though *Outer Dark*'s landscape is lushier than *The Road*'s – the greenery has not been mired by catastrophe – there are descriptive passages that could easily be interchanged between the novels. For instance, there is 'a flume of ashcolored loam through which [Culla] struggle[s]',<sup>583</sup> which is not too dissimilar from a scene where the man and son 'set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash' (p. 4). The atmosphere of the Holme's surroundings equally matches that of the man and his son. While Rinthy simply mutters 'It's right dark' (p. 64) at one point, this is echoed with her brother as he wakes to 'such darkness he [does] not trust his balance' (p. 37); in *The Road*, we find near-identical imagery: 'The blackness he [wakes] to' is 'sightless and impenetrable' that 'hurt[s] your ears with listening' – it is a 'cold autistic dark' (p. 14). As Kenneth Lincoln writes, no matter where McCarthy's fiction goes 'scriptural warnings of "outer dark" were planted in the beginnings some forty years back'.<sup>584</sup>

Secondly, the two novels exist in dialogue structurally. *Outer Dark* and *The Road* are picaresque or quest narratives, at least in terms of the narrative movement: on *The Road*, Gray writes, 'This recasts one of the iconic images of American literature, the journey'.<sup>585</sup> In both,

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<sup>582</sup> James R. Giles, 'Discovering Fourthspace in Appalachia: Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* and *Child of God* in *Cormac McCarthy*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009), pp. 107-131 (p. 111).

<sup>583</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Outer Dark* (London: Picador, 1994) p. 37. (Quoted in text from here on).

<sup>584</sup> Lincoln, p. 48.

<sup>585</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 36.

moreover, it is family duos that are ‘on the road’ (even if separate). The southerly direction of their journey is also similar: ‘With full dark [Culla] came forth, a solitary traveler going south’ (p. 90) can be paired with ‘They bore on south in the days and weeks to follow’ (p. 12). Constantly moving, both pairs of characters quest along Appalachian roads, attempting to find an elusive end. Both books end on watery images too: *Outer Dark* at a prehistoric swamp, *The Road* at a Southern coastline (and also in the final image of trout in a stream). In terms of this chapter’s focus on ‘home’, there are connotations that *Outer Dark* illuminates. James Giles astutely notes that Culla and Rinthy’s ‘last name [Holme] is cruelly ironic – they have never really known anything approximating “home” or even a safe space’.<sup>586</sup> Indeed, as Katie Owens-Murphy suggests, the Holmes are ‘relegated to the margins of civilization’, away from what we might call a place of safety.<sup>587</sup> Such an observation could equally be made about *The Road* and its protagonists unmoored from such comforts. In the earlier novel, furthermore, this notion finds an ironic edge in that the siblings are hunting for the child they bore together, abandoned in the forest; family and home exist at ironic distance. As with Morrison’s *Home*, then, Southern ‘home’ is complex, yet full of signification. The return to roots, for McCarthy, is both literary and literal (the two are entwined); we miss this Southern substance of the novel at our critical peril. Under the sway of deterritorialization, transnationalism and postsouthernism, *The Road*’s regional textures might disappear. The implication of overlooking this Southernness is simple: we lose, or obscure, regional particularity and identity. This alone is, I think, cause for critical and theoretical concern.

The second way in which I read *The Road*’s regionalism is through its allusiveness to specifically Southern history and memory. To define *The Road* as suffused with memory is to concur with Crownshaw, who writes that memory ‘permeates this novel, whether it is personal or social’.<sup>588</sup> While I posit that the novel is set in the South, it follows that the memories that so saturate the book are regional too (and vice versa). Patrick O’Donnell asks, ‘In an environment where everything that constitutes the past has been literally obliterated, do time and history even continue to exist?’<sup>589</sup> Many readers of the book agree with O’Donnell, but they often overlook a handful of scenes that I think are deeply important to the regionalism of McCarthy’s text (which I will analyze below). At one point in the novel, we are told that ‘the child would ask [his father] questions about the world that for him was not even a memory’ (p. 55). Unsure how

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<sup>586</sup> Giles, ‘Discovering Fourthspace in Appalachia’, p. 112.

<sup>587</sup> Katie Owens-Murphy, ‘The Frontier Ethic behind Cormac McCarthy’s Southern Fiction’, *Arizona Quarterly*, 66, 2 (2011), 155–178 (p. 165).

<sup>588</sup> Crownshaw, ‘Deterritorializing the “Homeland”’, p. 774.

<sup>589</sup> O’Donnell, p. 170.

to answer, the man seems to offer a response: ‘There is no past’ (p. 55). In some ways, this could easily be read alongside O’Donnell’s questioning: if the child has no memory of the world, of history, perhaps this makes the past defunct. In a regional context, this might mean there is no such thing as a historical South (if the child has no memory of it). The following discussion poses another interpretation, by positing that history and memory work in more complex ways than this reading would imply. Cultural memories, I suggest, are meaningful outside of the person remembering: the nature of cultural memory is that it does not entirely operate in the same way as individual memory. Erll summarizes Halbwachs’ view of this: ‘Because we participate in a collective symbolic order, we can discern, interpret and remember past events’.<sup>590</sup> That is, society and culture ‘form the all-encompassing horizon in which our perception and memory is embedded’.<sup>591</sup> Memory, for Halbwachs, is not simply personal, but bound up in the collective spheres around us, and the social groups that we inhabit. Thus, an individual does not, by this logic, need a direct reference for a memory; so, the child’s lack of memory in *The Road* does not simply signify the absence of this past or memory. Moreover, if one person dies – such as the father in this case – the pervasive cultural memory does not die with him, as would a personal one.

Outside of the narrative itself, *The Road*, in essence, contains and sustains the memories working through it. Ann Rigney writes of the common theoretical assumption that ‘memory is alive only as long as it generates new versions of itself’, and that ‘cultural memory is always emergent’.<sup>592</sup> Literature, for her, is one form through which this changing and moving memory can be best articulated and circulated. In relation to *The Road* also, the novel’s memory-work unbinds it from the reading that would suggest that the American past is waning here. If novels ‘have the potential to re-activate eroded memories in later generations’ as well as create new ones, the potency of literature to remain connected to the past is highly significant for this argument.<sup>593</sup> While Rigney stresses the movability of literary texts and the memories within, she also suggests that novels ‘persis[t] as [...] stable artefact[s] in the petrified manner of a monument’, highlighting the dynamism of textuality as well as its fixity.<sup>594</sup> *The Road* precisely reveals this tension, pointing to new American landscapes and memories – transforming historical and cultural sense – while simultaneously connecting us, *rooting* us, in the South. In all then, I want to take the man’s answer – ‘There is no past’ – and read it through what I take to

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<sup>590</sup> Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 15.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>592</sup> Rigney, *The Afterlives of Walter Scott*, p. 12 and p. 19.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

be an explicit reference (again) to Faulkner's 'It's not even past'. While slightly different, this sentence nonetheless points us towards the notion that history is not over, the past is far from dead, and thus the South (and its cultural memories) will continue to exert its force. I will illustrate this argument through close attention to moments in *The Road* that recall a specifically Southern past: in personal memories of the father, and wider cultural memories that are more pervasive in reach.

Firstly, I look to a strikingly visceral – and decidedly Southern – recollection of the father as a young boy seeing a group of men burn a heap of snakes. The 'rough men' crack open rocky ground with picks so that 'a great bolus of serpents perhaps a hundred in number' emerge 'mov[ing] sluggishly in the cold hard light' (p. 201). The snakes are described as 'Like the bowels of some great beast exposed to the day' (p. 201) which also seems to echo the opening scene of the novel. *The Road* begins as the father has woken from a dream in which upon entering a cave he is confronted by a 'creature' with eyes 'dead white', that is 'Crouching there pale and naked and translucent' (p. 2). Interestingly, McCarthy describes the shadow of the creature's insides 'cast up in shadow': 'Its bowels, its beating heart' (p. 2). I think it is worth connecting these two descriptions – particularly because of the word 'bowels' relating to a monstrous beast – because they allow for the particularity of this later memory of snakes to chime back through the novel. Watching the snakes emerge, the men 'pou[r] gasoline on them and bur[n] them alive'; they watch as the snakes 'twis[t] horribly', and, the father recalls, 'As they were mute there were no screams of pain' (p. 201). Aflame, some snakes move across 'the floor of the grotto' which 'illuminate its darker recesses' (p. 201): again echoing the earlier description of the cave and the monster's shadows.

Central to this scene is one line, however, that I think testifies to its potency as a memory rooted in the South: the men burn the snakes because they have, the narrator says, 'no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be' (p. 201). Linda Woodson notes that this memory demonstrates the ways that 'language provides a signifier – the word evil – that both transforms the way humans understand reality and obscures the truth of that reality', but this signification is not so simple here.<sup>595</sup> Snakes as icons of evil – or the devil – are obviously rooted in Christian culture, originating in the garden of Eden story. Moreover, the connections between snakes and Southern religion are longstanding and well-documented; tales of snake-handling churches in the rural South abound, and many fictional texts feature this.<sup>596</sup> The South's religiosity might thus be referenced here by McCarthy, but the father's witnessing of this sight

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<sup>595</sup> Woodson, p. 91.

<sup>596</sup> For example: Donna Tartt, *The Little Friend*, Harry Crews, *A Feast of Snakes* and Lee Smith, *Saving Grace*.

as a young boy evidently has some long-lasting effect on him. While he is distanced from the men's action literally (he watches), he also is removed psychologically as he seems not to believe in evil being embodied in the snakes ('the image [...] as they conceived it to be'). Nevertheless, the sense of evil's visual embodiment or illustration returns us to the opening dream of the creature in the cave. The father imagines – or desires for – the representation of evil as, for in so much of the journey, it is often impossible to tell who is a 'good' or 'bad' guy: 'What if it's the bad guys?' the boy frequently asks (p. 82). Thus, while decidedly ambiguous, this memory in some ways frames the epistemological queries that run through *The Road*: how does knowledge work in this apocalyptic world seemingly without referent or structure?

Gray's sense of the novel is rooted in theories of trauma and Modernist concerns of meaning and language. In essence, the novel for him 'declares the imminence, and perhaps the inevitability, of entropy, a world running down to inertia and oblivion, but it also offers a testament of faith in the will to meaning'.<sup>597</sup> The novel captures, in this way, 'what it is like to live after the fall with the exactitude yet also the elusiveness of symbolism'.<sup>598</sup> Might these notions help further untangle the significance of the father's memory of the snakes? If they are 'slippery' symbols – pointing toward religious and cultural signifiers from the South, and yet exceeding such meaning – the snakes could fit with Gray's sense above. The 'faith' in meaning, which is endlessly on the verge of disappearing in Modernist discourse, also filters into Amy Hungerford's reading of the novel. For her, much contemporary American literature invokes 'religion to imagine the purely formal elements of language in transcendent terms'.<sup>599</sup> If language is something to believe in, that gestures to a meaning beyond itself which it cannot fully grasp, then *The Road* is littered with such sentiments. As the narrator says, 'When you've nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them' (p. 78); in other words, bringing meaning into being through language testifies to its precariousness, but also its potentiality. If we are to link this back to Southern origins, we could relatedly suggest that the region is caught in a similar position. The South is the place in which McCarthy stages this crisis of meaning and language, precisely because this region has long undergone such epistemological shifts (not least in the current transnational and postsouthern modes). As many critics have noted, the South has always existed at a crossroads – about to disappear, but consistently remaining.

Relatedly, Chris Walsh suggests that 'One of the most symbolic themes of the novel is that the South – as physical space, imaginative entity and narrative focus – acts as a redemptive

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<sup>597</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 35.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>599</sup> Hungerford, p. xiii.

agency when all seems to have vanished'.<sup>600</sup> I would argue that the South does not seem so much redemptive but simply necessary (as a place to go) in this novel; but the sense of the South as physical as well as imaginative is important. Here I am suggesting that it is necessary to see the histories and cultural memories of the South that *The Road* calls up particularly because they are so overlooked by dominant theoretical readings of the book and also because such memories structure and root the novel's imaginative scope. Matthew Guinn has written that, as McCarthy's fiction has developed – and geographically moved – he has 'altered' Southern literature's 'signifiers, reversed its signposts, to such an extent that conventional uses of the past no longer seem viable'.<sup>601</sup> I want to problematize Guinn's argument here, as not only do McCarthy's earlier novels work through and embody the complexity of Southern history in Appalachia – the bonds of land, the problem of white poverty, racist violence – but *The Road* seems to continue this project. In fact, I would posit that if McCarthy previously engaged in 'an exodus' from the South (in moving away and writing 'Westerns'), this narrative momentum has reversed. The present novel suggests that if there is a journey, it is one home. This plays out particularly through the registering of Southern history in the book. The personal memories open out into public, cultural memories from the region. The man muses: 'He thought each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins' (p. 139), which I want to think about in a number of ways. Calling attention to the ongoing work of memory – its recollection and transformation – the man also registers something of memory's construction and connection to the past out of which it emerges. Also, in attributing 'violence' to memory-work connotes the difficulties in retaining and bearing the trace of the past in the present; it clearly marks the struggle of Southern cultural memory continually exercised and called up through these regional texts. Finally, the word 'violence' frames quite precisely the very memories we do witness in this novel, so fraught with personal and regional violence and trauma.

Early in the novel, for instance, the man and son come across a barn: 'Inside the barn three bodies hanging from the rafters, dried and dusty among the wan slats of light' (p. 16). The boy says 'There could be something here', meaning food, but I want to read this claim another way. While it is probable that the hanging bodies are suicidal deaths, they cannot but gain significance when viewed through the lens of the Southern imaginary. Hanging bodies, like those in chapter three, recall victims of lynching in the South; it is difficult to disconnect such images from the history of the region especially in this nightmarish apocalyptic landscape. Thus,

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<sup>600</sup> Walsh, p. 52.

<sup>601</sup> Matthew Guinn, *After Southern Modernism: Fiction of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), p. 109.

when the boy says ‘there could be something here’ I would suggest there is plenty: Southern cultural history and memory is beginning to be illuminated across the landscape of *The Road*’s journey. One way to frame this could be through the work of Gary Ciuba. Analyzing McCarthy’s *Child of God*, Ciuba explores the ‘proliferation of violence’ in the book, situating the hunt for Lester Ballard ‘against the wider background of communal persecution in the South’ from ‘social ostracism’ to the ‘mania’ of ‘legalized lynchings’.<sup>602</sup> Thus, the violence Ballard encounters (at a social, psychological and physical level) is intimately caught in the web of violence across the South. It is but one factor of the region’s widespread subjugations. The history that *The Road* engages with, then, could be read in light of this: as framed by the ‘wider background’ of the historically violent South. We cannot but tie the grotesquerie and horror the man and boy witness to its regional surrounding.

We can read a few other scenes from the book in this historical light, particularly in connection to Southern slavery. Waking one morning, the man and son witness a group of people, an ‘army’ travelling down the road. The men, wearing masks, carry ‘lengths of pipe with leather wrappings’ that are ‘threaded through with lengths of chain fitted at their ends with every manner of bludgeon’. Following the men is a ‘phalanx’ (a battle formation) that carries ‘spears or lances tasselled with ribbons’, a grotesque parody of battle regalia. More interestingly, behind the men are ‘wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war’. Following that are ‘the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant’. At the rear of the procession is a ‘supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each’ (p. 96). There is much to attend to in this scene, but a number of things stand out. Although the parade of ‘soldiers’ is an interesting collective still alive in this post-apocalyptic world, their trailing entourage is more pertinent. McCarthy’s use of the word ‘slave’ to denote those pulling the wagons is not accidental; he is explicitly calling up the regional memory of slavery and suggesting ways to see this group as continuing this legacy. The pregnant women are obviously used for their bodies and the ‘food’ that they can produce in bearing children, which might have faint echoes of slavery (let us think merely of the usage of Sarah’s body by Manon and her husband in *Property*). The final followers McCarthy calls a ‘consort of catamites’: sex slaves, usually young boys. Again, the concept of slavery resurfaces here, but in this context for sexual reasons. Much has been written on the inter-racial relationships of the plantation households of the antebellum South, and the usage of black bodies by slave-owners as capital was reflective of their bodily exploitation too.<sup>603</sup> Connected by dog-

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<sup>602</sup> Ciuba, pp. 192-193.

<sup>603</sup> We saw this in Valerie Martin’s *Property*, for example.

collars – also connotative of the frequent figuring of slaves as animalistic in the Old South – these male concubines join with the wagon-pullers to recall, suggestively, historical memories of bodily use in the South.

We can connect this terror-laden group of marauders on the road, with a pair of buildings that the man and boy come across on their journey, which were obviously once plantation homes. My first example comes from late in the novel when they find a house near the coast. It is described thus: ‘There was a gravel drive that curved away to the south. A brick loggia. Double stairs that swept up to the columned portico. At the rear of the house a brick dependency that may once have been a kitchen. Beyond that a log cabin’ (p. 218). Subtly indicated in the first line, the ‘southerly’ direction of this plantation building is made known. It does not take much attention to note the grand staircase and columns so typical of lavish antebellum homes. Additionally, the kitchen at the back of the house and, most explicitly, the log cabin signal the presence of slaves on the land: the cabin clearly being slave quarters. The father and son stay at the house for a few days, finding a little food, and sheltering in the grand rooms.

McCarthy proffers a second example of a plantation house, this time much richer with symbolic force and the weight of cultural memory. Outside a small town, the father and son come across a ‘once grand house sited on a rise above the road’ that is ‘tall and stately with white doric columns across the front’ (p. 111). We note the similarity with the above building, visibly antebellum in its opulent style and rural location. Already there is a sense of McCarthy pointing us to the history of this place: it was ‘once’ grand, maybe no longer. When the characters cross the porch, the narrator tells us that ‘Chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays’ (p. 112): the first explicit mention of Southern history in the book. Whether this discrete sentence belongs to the father or the narrator – that is, who is providing us with this information so imbued in a specific image of servitude (‘silver trays’, ‘food and drink’)? – is less important than the fact that this history is being revitalized here. If the father’s consciousness is being accessed, it is to show us, as Crownshaw writes, that his ‘historical memory remains, it seems, intact’.<sup>604</sup> The father, Crownshaw continues, ‘brings a memorative perspective to what he surveys, including the plantation house’.<sup>605</sup> In this way, the father’s historical or cultural memory – of what plantation homes look like and once were – informs our reading of the text and allows us to see the regional location of *The Road*. The South lives on in this way if only in terms of what happened historically in this place.

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<sup>604</sup> Crownshaw, ‘Deterritorializing the “Homeland”’, p. 774.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

Different readings of the plantation home should be noted, as the thrust of this chapter is that most criticism on *The Road* overlooks its regionalism (however complex). Gray, for example, acknowledges that this house is an ‘antebellum Southern home’, but because only the father remembers this, the characters are ‘trapped in the vacancy of the present’.<sup>606</sup> Indeed, Gray argues, ‘If any of the old narratives that used to make sense of people’s lives are recalled in *The Road* at all, they are recalled only to be subverted, flattened out into an absence of meaning’.<sup>607</sup> Thus, the historical legacies of slavery in the South figure here as meaningless; what I will posit below, with closer investigation of the plantation house, is how regional meaning is far from absent in this scene. Andrew Hoberek agrees: ‘The clearest piece of evidence that *The Road* takes place in the Southeast’ (the plantation house) ‘should remind us how resistant this region is to the erasure of history – not least for an author influenced by Faulkner’.<sup>608</sup>

If the description of the house’s exterior, and the memory of ‘chattel slaves’ were all we had access to in the novel, a post-regional reading could adequately suggest that only memory is left of the region; after all, the boy does not recognize the significance or history of this building. Instead, the man and boy discover a horror at the house that is more than a mere memory of the South. As a side-note, inside the house the narrator notes ‘Fine Morris paper on the walls, waterstained and sagging. The plaster ceiling [...] bellied in great swags’ (p. 113), which is reminiscent of so many images seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina noted in chapter two. More pertinently, though, they find in the middle of the pantry a ‘door or hatch’ that is ‘locked with a large padlock’ (p. 114) which the boy is rightly apprehensive of, but the father wishes to explore further. Breaking the hatch open, the two descend into the cellar. They are met with an ‘ungodly stench’ and they notice an ‘old mattress darkly stained’ before they see from a lighter’s flame, people ‘Huddled against the back wall’: ‘naked [...] male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces’. The horror mounts when they see that ‘On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous’ (p. 116). The two quickly escape from the cellar and have to run away from the house as the people who ‘live’ there are seen returning. While at this point of the novel, there is talk of cannibalism (it haunts every aspect of the book, as it seems to be the worst horror possible), this is the first time its possibility is made explicit. The bodies are obviously being collected to be eaten or used for any number of physical and sexual exploitations. Limbless and sprawled on the mattress, the one man figures the slow and gradual dismemberment of these

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<sup>606</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, p. 39.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>608</sup> Andrew Hoberek, ‘Cormac McCarthy and the Aesthetics of Exhaustion’, *American Literary History*, 23, 3 (2011), 483–499 (p. 488).

people for food. Shocking in and of itself, this ‘meat-locker’ of sorts cannot but gain significant meaning when seen in conjunction with the building’s former usage.

As a plantation house of the South, this site would have seen much bodily exploitation and degradation (even if not to the levels of cannibalism). Andrew Hoberek agrees that the plantation house registers a ‘regionally specific history’ and that in linguistically connecting ‘chattel’ slavery with ‘cannibalism’ (‘c’ words, the same ‘a’ sound, the soft ‘l’), McCarthy suggests the degree to which this apocalyptic extreme behaviour can be seen as a ‘perverse extensio[n] of regional tradition’.<sup>609</sup> Moreover, to quote Crownshaw again, ‘The historical reference to plantation slavery frames the post-apocalyptic exploitation of bodies’.<sup>610</sup> Or, to take this further, the cultural memory of plantation slavery that is ignited by the father and son visiting this building is not the only regional significance of this place. The current building’s usage – for the usage of bodies – can only but gain meaning when framed by its history in the South. In essence, what I am claiming is that *The Road* is suffuse with regionally located cultural memory, but also that certain Southern narratives are repeating themselves in this wasted landscape. It is as if even in this apocalyptic landscape, a certain regional texture lingers. Indeed, if the apocalypse cannot evacuate the South of its regional substance, what can?

Pushing this to its conclusion, I return to Kreyling’s argument in *The South That Wasn’t There*. In the final chapter, Kreyling’s thesis reaches its climax as he posits ‘Maybe you can’t get to the South from here–and–now ever again, “here” being the postsouthern position of infinite (or almost infinite) simulacra’.<sup>611</sup> It is difficult to even suggest that the cannibals’ meat-locker in a former plantation house is anything like a simulated South: it is a contemporary incarnation of it. While it is not the Old South reappearing, the continuities and mirroring between the historical South and *The Road*’s South lead us towards *identifying* regionalism rather than questioning it. The here–and–now of McCarthy’s novel continuously asks us to see the Southern signs that permeate it. While the memories of the South are primarily the man’s (and McCarthy’s) – as Gray says, the son ‘has no memory of the world before it was laid waste; the father has’ – we should nonetheless not read this along with Kreyling’s sense of the South as a ‘memory without place’.<sup>612</sup> I argue something else, claiming that the Southern memories of the father are enough to pinpoint the region today. Imbued in the novel by McCarthy, read and ignited by us the readers, the Southern cultural memories continue to live on. So long as we keep reading it, the novel connects us to the South. Regionalism, ignited by texts, exerts it

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<sup>609</sup> Ibid., p. 489.

<sup>610</sup> Crownshaw, ‘Deterritorializing the “Homeland”’, p. 774

<sup>611</sup> Kreyling, *The South That Wasn’t There*, p. 194.

<sup>612</sup> Gray, *After the Fall*, pp. 38–9.

force, even in the most barren of imaginative wastelands. ‘Keep going south’ the man says to the boy in *The Road*; indeed we must.

To end this chapter I want to suggest how the postsouthern and the transnational are not the only ways to read both Cormac McCarthy’s and Toni’s Morrison’s novels. In a way, I want to return – as these authors do – to ‘the South’ and its *rhetorical* weight. While, of course, ‘the South’ is a cultural construct, very particular histories so placed in the region have meant that the South is more than just an endlessly referring sign and term. Indeed, as these chapters have shown, very specific histories and memories not only inform the geographical and cultural terrain of the South, but also the texts that are still emerging from these places in the twenty-first century. This chapter focused on two literary texts that could easily fit into transnational and postsouthern schemas. In *Home*’s explicit engagement with global memories and transnational trauma, and in *The Road*’s seemingly deterritorialized, apocalyptic and timeless landscape, these texts seem to be most obvious examples of a kind of post-region criticism I am resisting. Choosing these texts has allowed me, I hope, to offer another way of reading that does not entirely rely upon the *post*; it is the connections with the past, and the repetition of regional narratives, that has been foregrounded in this discussion. In mapping out (often literally) the novels’ journeys back to the South, I have shown how regionalism continues to persist in very particular ways, not least in the form of a located cultural memory.

## THE SOUTH (IN THEORY)

In some ways, as I have been arguing, the postsouthern cannot fully account for some Southern texts’ lingering regionalism. Under the sway of transnational theoretical turns, the South has to be seen, in Barbara Ladd’s words, as ‘tak[ing] shape at crossroads’.<sup>613</sup> But what if, these chapters have asked, the South lives on in ways that cannot be accounted for in contemporary critical practice? Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer write that ‘new southern studies’ should be ‘more concerned with understanding the U.S. South as “thick” with border-crossings of every sort: racial, gendered, regional, transnational’.<sup>614</sup> There is much to celebrate in these kinds of readings, but, once again, might something of a regional texture be overlooked or downplayed in attending to this ‘thickness’ of the borderland? Demonstrating how *The Road* and *Home* are regional might produce a different response. What, if anything, can be learned in locating and

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<sup>613</sup> Barbara Ladd, ‘Literary Studies: The Southern United States, 2005’, *PMLA*, 120, 4 (2005), 1628–1639 (p. 1634).

<sup>614</sup> Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, ‘The U.S South in Global Contexts: A Collection of Position Statements’, *American Literature*, 78, 4 (2006), 691–739 (p. 691).

rooting these two texts? To answer this, I return to McKee and Trefzer; they ask, ‘How can we situate Southern studies in a global space while at the same time revealing its regional specificities?’.<sup>615</sup> As I hope to have shown, it is just such global, or trans-regional, readings of these texts that might just move us away from regional particularity. Indeed, across these chapters, the postsouthern and transnational have asked us to look outwards from the South to other places; but, I argue, what happens when we also look locally and read for the local alongside the national or transnational? What occurs is ample: the South seems to be rich with history; it is saturated with the past and its rooted cultural memories. Reading *The Road* so that it does *not* lose regional specificity, then, might best take place away from the global spaces acknowledged by McKee and Trefzer.

The postsouthern and transnational then, could just lose the specific memories and meanings of the South in the name of a certain trend of globalism; while the theorists I have engaged with here have complicated the South to a variety of ends, they tend to share certain characteristic: a desire, to borrow from the title of an essay by Barbara Ladd, of ‘dismantling the monolith’. For Kreyling, the South lives in uprooted memory; for Romine, the South lives in postmodern simulacra; for Gray, the South lives in its fictions; for Hobson and McPherson, the South lives on its changing and shifting narratives; for Smith and Cohn and Dubhey, the South lives on outside its borders. This is just a small selection of conceptions of the South in ‘new southern studies’. ‘The promise of this work’, Ladd writes, ‘is significant not least for its ability to dismantle the monolith of a solid, unified southern United States in order to deal more successfully with microregion, prenational and transnational regions, and diaspora’.<sup>616</sup> What if, I want to conclude, dismantling the monolith (which has always been less than static anyway) is simply a critical turn that might lose or obfuscate regional meaning?

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<sup>615</sup> Ibid., p. 692.

<sup>616</sup> Ladd, ‘Literary Studies’, p. 1636.



## CONCLUSION

In his preface to *Southern Aberrations*, Richard Gray claims – to return to that famous notion of Faulkner’s – that ‘The past is not present nor should it be, but, as every reader of southern literature knows, the past is always there, helping to form our beliefs and judgements’.<sup>617</sup> This remark seems to compliment the readings of cultural memory and regionalism I have undertaken here, but I want to trouble it a little. Underpinning this quotation from Gray is a sense of time as strictly teleological and linear: ‘the past is not present’ only makes sense if the past is strictly what has already happened. However, the extent to which memory studies has taught us about the impact of the past in the present – that is, the not-so-distinct separation of these two ideas – seems to problematize Gray’s strict definitive (‘nor should it be’). If the past is ‘always there’, informing present culture, then is it entirely the past? I do not mean this conclusion to ponder such ontological questions, but to restate my central thesis: cultural memories of a rooted South are sustaining the region in the twenty-first century through suggesting the inseparability of the Southern past and present.

Attica Locke’s novel *The Cutting Season* (2012) will be discussed briefly here as, I propose, it demonstrates and exemplifies my thesis and also cuts across the preceding four chapters. But, before glossing this novel and its themes, I present a final image: a print advertisement for Jack Daniel’s whiskey that was in circulation when I began the writing of this thesis in 2010 (Figure 1). This poster was, in some ways, a spark for my thesis, thus I felt the desire to return to it for this conclusion. The poster that I discuss encapsulates my thesis that a

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<sup>617</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, p. xiii.

rooted South is still visible in the twenty-first century. As a product, Jack Daniel's whiskey is particularly Southern, specifically Tennessean, and retains a very distinct notion of the South throughout its advertising campaigns. Each advertisement in this series is composed of a black and white photograph on a white background, with bold black text beneath. The simplicity of design is integral to its form, but most important is the use of a monochrome scheme. In using non-colour photography, the posters are nostalgically suggestive of the past: it is as though time has stopped, or that the past is still visible in the present.

Figure 21

In this example, an old African-American man sits on a rocking chair, looking blankly to one side. On the wall behind and above him hang photographic portraits of distinguished white men, whom we infer – from the text below – to be past ‘Master Distillers’. Below the photograph, large lettering reads: ‘This man’s seen a lot of change at the distillery. Then again, he’s seen even more stay the same’. It may be obvious to see where my reading of this poster is heading, but for now it is worth noting that the overall aim of the advertisement is to suggest the time-honoured (and unchanged) methods of distilling Jack Daniel’s whiskey are still in operation today. The nostalgia created in the black and white images extends to the manufacturing processes, originating in 1866. The celebration of the whiskey lies in its unchangedness over time. Richard Gray argues that advertisements such as this – along with nostalgic films like *Driving Miss Daisy* for example – testify to the South as product. ‘Like all good products’, he writes, the South ‘has a clear identity’.<sup>618</sup> It is ‘registered in popular perception and marketed as a desirable other’.<sup>619</sup> History, in this model is ‘displaced into aesthetic style’, Gray argues, and thus ‘any possibility of a lived encounter with the past slips away, and we are left with a marketable artefact, a copy’.<sup>620</sup> By this argument, Gray aligns himself with that of Scott Romine and a South purely in the realm of reproduction and postmodern simulation. As the chapters have argued, the South I am excavating is far more rooted and place-bound than such a theory acknowledges. Where Gray also posits that ‘The legends of the South are not necessarily dying [...] or being fiercely protected or even resurrected; in some cases they are merely being turned into cash’, I want to claim that this Jack Daniels poster is somewhat contradictory of this position. While the South is used to make money here – this is an advertisement to sell whiskey, for sure – the cultural secretion of memory and region into the image suggests that Southern-ness is certainly not dying and it certainly is being resurrected.<sup>621</sup> The Southern past, far from dead, defines this poster.

The advertisement depicts a man who is identified as Claude Eady. Eady, we read, has worked for forty-three years at the distillery with five of the Master Distillers. Firstly, it should be noted, forty-three years ago (from the poster’s publication), in 1968, a certain Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated only a few hundred miles away in the same state: race-relations were at that time, therefore, heightened and not entirely peaceful. Secondly, in the span of Eady’s employment, we learn he has worked with five Master Distillers. It does not take much imagination to follow through with the connotations of that job title: slave-owners were often

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., pp. 356–357.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

called slave masters; as Eady is a black man, the reference chimes strongly. In addition, the home of Jack Daniel's whiskey is Lynchburg. Whatever the origins of the town's name (it is still, to a degree, contested, though connotations of lynching are never far away) the contemporary scholar of the South cannot but identify the historical significance of this name still at the heart of the Jack Daniel's brand. However, this is not merely a simulated South, or one purely in the realm of representations. Another note should be added: nowhere on the advertisement does it actually tell us Eady's job – speculation is not necessary, the fact that he is 'jobless' is proof enough of his inferiority in the running of the distillery. This, I argue, is cemented by the construction of the central photograph. Eady sits at the centre of the image (his seated position reinforcing his age, and lessening his authoritative presence), with past distillers – powerful, white 'masters' – depicted in photographs hanging above him. Literally, they assert superiority in the frame: they are 'above' him in every sense. He is locked into his lesser role by his age and race, and in his position in the photograph.

The text continues by revealing Claude Eady's 'unique perspective' on the distillery, seeing 'technological advancement' and industrial change, but little development in the making of the whiskey. This man may have seen a lot of change in the distillery; but that he has seen more stay the same is integral to my argument. He is a black man, working in a whiskey distillery in Lynchburg Tennessee, where old methods of production remain. Shot in black and white, this image celebrates Southern history. Although Jack Daniel's whiskey was established in 1866 (one year after the Civil War's end), the South was still defined by the legacy of slavery, even through the period of Reconstruction and beyond. This poster, intentionally or not, revitalizes, references and celebrates the history of the South that is claimed to be gone. In one single advertisement, Jack Daniel's whiskey roots the twenty-first-century South. As I have shown through literary, cinematic and artistic examples, much *has* stayed the same in the South. Much, admittedly, has changed: the era of transnationalism outlined has made the South – and America at large – a different place than it has previously been. But to concentrate on these ostensibly new cultural intersections and pluralities is to also ignore the lingering and entrenched disparities in the South that have been there since the region's origins: we have to analyze both.

### **BENEATH THE SURFACE: *THE CUTTING SEASON***

Roots, memory, race and place are all explored in Attica Locke's much-praised second novel, *The Cutting Season* which will be read here briefly as a way to conclude this thesis. The book contains, it will become clear, many of the threads that have been running through the previous

discussions. Reading the four chapters across this book, then, will not only tie them together through one neat text, but provide a model of reading for a rooted South that I have been so striving for here. *The Cutting Season* follows Caren, an African-American woman, who runs and tends a historic plantation – Belle Vie – in Louisiana, some miles from Baton Rouge. The plantation is now a tourist destination and frequent wedding location. The plantation is owned by the Clancy family, and has done for generations. We learn that Caren’s mother was also the Clancy’s cook for some time, and that Caren herself grew up at Belle Vie. In her youth, she left the plantation but in later life found it only natural to return and ‘run’ the tourist destination. When, one day, Caren discovers a dead body near the old slave quarters, a crime story ensues which reveals as much about her own past as it does the plantation’s. Locke’s engaging novel wears its themes fairly openly on its sleeve, but nonetheless it is worthy of some investigating, if only to clearly illuminate its fixed interest on the roots of Southern place and memory.

The novel opens with a hint of the Southern gothic: the narrator informs us that at a wedding on Caren’s first week at the plantation, years ago, ‘a cottonmouth, measuring the length of a Cadillac, fell some twenty feet from a live oak on the front lawn, landing like a coil of rope in the lap of the bride’s future mother-in-law’.<sup>622</sup> This portent, the narrator tell us, was ‘A reminder, really, that Belle Vie, its beauty, was not to be trusted’ (p. 3). Other gothicisms saturate this book, but within the first pages, Belle Vie is shown to be a place that is as threatening and full of danger as it is beauty and tradition. As the narrator continues, ‘beneath its loamy topsoil, the manicured grounds and gardens, two centuries of breathtaking wealth and spectacle, lay a land both black and bitter, soft to the touch, but pressing in its power’ (pp. 3-4). It is this structure of surface beauty and deep potency that describes Belle Vie and the novel as a whole. This gothic opening is followed by the present day narrative, and the morning when Caren discovers the dead body.

Locke builds up atmosphere using pathetic fallacy, suggesting the horror of what Caren is about to discover: ‘It was still dark out when she’d started to the south. Not black, but cold and dim, a heavy, leaden gray’ (p. 10). Much like the southern orientation in McCarthy’s novel, Caren heads ‘south’, only to discover secrets hidden beneath the surface of this plantation grounds. The portentous grey and heavy sky (like that at the beginning of Tarrt’s *The Little Friend* ominously forebodes the corpse that Caren finds near the old slave cabins:

In a makeshift grave so shallow that its walls hugged the corpse as snugly as a shell, as if the dead woman at Caren’s feet were on the verge of hatching, of emerging from her confinement to start this life over again. She was coated with mud, top to bottom, her arms

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<sup>622</sup> Attica Locke, *The Cutting Season* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012), p. 3. (Quoted in text from here on).

and legs tucked beneath her body, the spine in a curved position. The word *fetal* came to mind (original emphasis) (p. 5).

This description is surrounded by other land-based imagery that works potently as metaphor: Caren ‘saw only the break in the land, where the earth had been disturbed’ (p. 9). Locke’s novel is replete with symbolic language like this; the plantation’s land is constantly giving way, fissuring, letting things emerge or be unearthed. The intimations of a history that is literally buried and contained underground cannot be overstated enough: this is a novel of a landed, rooted history coming to light. This sight of death, to think back to previous discussions, might be read in light of chapter four as it cannot but recall Sally Mann’s photographs of cadavers in Tennessee. Enveloped by mud and dirt, this dead body – like those at the institution – is connected to the ground, buried in Southern soil. Much like, moreover, the dead bodies seen floating in Katrina’s floodwaters, this corpse is rendered disposable and throwaway. That the grave is ‘makeshift’ and ‘shallow’ perhaps suggests how insignificant this person’s death really is. While ‘foetal’ is indicative of a body reduced to its most vulnerable developmental state, more interesting to me is Locke’s description of the body as ‘on the verge of hatching, of emerging from her confinement’. Emerging from the ground, this body enacts the kind of cultural memory that I have been charting across these chapters. If this dead body (of a Mexican, Ines, who was working the fields), found dead near slave quarters on historic plantation grounds, is metaphoric of anything it is surely a located Southern past. As Ines is one of a number of Mexicans (and other immigrants) working the neighbouring land, we can see a transnational global South. However, alongside this sense of the region, we can look to the local context that the novel seems to foreground. Locke’s text, like Morrison’s *Home*, seems to privilege regional narratives, while still engaging transnational ones. In regionalizing the transnational, we do not ignore global flows, but continue to connect them to regional groundedness and roots.

My contention is that located instances of memory are not always read for their rootedness in current deterritorializing theory; in this short conclusion, I will suggest that not only does this body recall and unearth cultural memory *in place*, but that the chain of revelations this death sparks in the novel only further illuminates the deep tentacles of a rooted past so particular to this plantation. Moreover, if the plantation stands in for the South more generally, then the novel excavates the rooted past of the region which is hard to think of as a ‘memory without a place’ or ‘post-regional’. These readings have traction, but the novel offers us another way of interpreting it. Caren’s ex-husband Eric, on learning the secrets of Belle Vie’s past, shakes ‘his head at the whole mess of it, how deep the history went’ (p. 326); this is history and memory with the deepest of roots. To reveal this novel’s memory-work, I want to focus on a few

interrelated entanglements of the past in the present. In connecting Caren's personal history to the plantation's, *The Cutting Season* offers a way of reading contemporary Southern regionalism that begins with roots. The novel rarely moves away from the plantation of Belle Vie, grounding the narrative firmly in place at this site of memory. There are a number of ways in which the plantation functions which I will sketch out.

Firstly, Belle Vie sustains this site of memory for visitors not only in keeping the plantation tended, but also in staging daily 'performances' and historical enactments of this regional history. The performance of slavery, in these tourist shows, is a mirror for the actual drama of slavery that plays out in the characters' histories. Showing that the plantation is central to the story, can help show how *The Cutting Season's* memory-work is tied and rooted to place. In essence, one character says, Belle Vie is kept open by the Clancy family to keep 'the history for the kids. You know, so people don't ever forget' (p. 130). This rebuttal to forgetting however can only happen, the novel suggests, if Belle Vie stands in for Southern history in a number of ways. That is, the narrator informs us, 'Belle Vie was a cipher, really, a place in whose beauty one might find pleasure or pain, leisure or labor' (p. 120). Here, we have reference, in effect, to the distinction between slave-master and slave (respectively). If tourists are to experience the plantation, they are to engage with the dividing line between races – both historically, and in essence, today. One complication of this, however, is that 'People saw, in [Belle Vie's] iced columns, in the magnolias and aged oaks, what they wanted to see, what their own history told them to' (p. 120). This point seems to indicate that remembrance might be problematic.

Tara McPherson's argument in *Reconstructing Dixie* is useful here as, she writes that 'In the discourse of southern tourism, [plantation] houses are more than simple artifacts of the past. Rather, they serve to freeze the possible meanings of the South within a very narrow register'.<sup>623</sup> She continues, 'By reifying the plantation home as the privileged site of southern history and femininity and then coding this history as elegant and grand, such representations erase the history of oppression that such homes could easily symbolize and encourage a nostalgic form of southern history'.<sup>624</sup> One of the tenets of postsouthern theory is the point that McPherson espouses here: that 'Southern' has come to mean one set of nostalgic ideas only – that representations of the South are merely idealized, coded, and loaded with a particular significance that freezes the region's meanings. What *The Cutting Season* does, however, is

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<sup>623</sup> McPherson, p. 44.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

provide this performance of the South alongside a rooted, land-based South which is emerging from the ground.

Belle Vie's history is communicated not only through the preservation of the plantation and grounds, but through an historical re-enactment: a play that is 'as soapy as *Gone With the Wind*, full of belles and balls and star-crossed lovers, noble Confederates and happy darkies' – 'the tourists loved it' (p. 20). This play, rich with nostalgia and selective memory, is one such production of Southern history that McPherson is interested in debunking. The characters speak in 'a god-awful dialect, something right out of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', such as one slave who says 'Dem Yankee whites can't make me leave dis here land. Dis here mah home' (p. 127). That the play is compared to these two canonical Southern texts illustrates quite literally how 'The whole thing was on a continuous loop, had been for years' (p. 132), an ostensible reference to the long-running nature of this play. With the actors delivering 'The same lines, three days a week' (p. 132), their version of antebellum slavery is as steeped in melodrama and historical re-writing as it is mindless repetition. Alongside (or beneath, in many ways) this amnesia and idealization, Belle Vie refuses to let the real plantation memories lie. The repetitions of the play (the repetitions and circulations of the South and its meanings) takes on another meaning in the novel.

As Caren's own personal connections to antebellum history continues to make themselves present, the cycles of history (its repetitions) become less numbing of the past than enabling of its visibility. As the narrator informs us, Caren 'was the daughter of a plantation cook, the descendent of slaves' (p. 89). Caren grew up alongside the plantation-owner's children, such as Bobby Clancy who 'had been born in the big house' (p. 89). This separation of white and black, slave-owning and slave ancestry, continue to structure Southern life for these characters. Echoing the language of performance above, Bobby, we learn 'played his role, and [Caren] played hers [...] until she could get out of there, away from Belle Vie' (p. 89). That she finally returns to the plantation only but compounds the fact that this division of history, of lived memory, 'stayed with her a long time, the lines that were drawn, reminding her of where she came from' (p. 89). 'Roles' and 'lines' both linguistically link us back to the slavery drama played out at Belle Vie for tourists; the race-relations that permeate Southern identity, further, roots Caren and her family to the plantation and its past.

Secondly, then, it is the way in which Belle Vie bridges personal and regional histories, illuminating the bonds that Caren and her family have to this place (and the institution it upheld) that is central to the narrative. The race roles that Caren and the other characters have to play out are deeply embedded and rooted in the plantation. Connecting the contemporary South to

the old are, as in chapter one, tentacles of slavery that sustain a particularly located regional identity. Bobby Clancy at one point in the novel confesses to Caren that he ‘liked it better the way it was, the way it used to be’ (p. 88). He is referring to their childhood when it was ‘Just family’: ‘Daddy and Ray, me and Mother. And all the old-time folks on the place, your mama and her kin, the cutters in the field’ (p. 88). While this historical period is not antebellum, Clancy is reminiscent and nostalgic for a time and social landscape in which African Americans are in servitude to whites. Further, this mythical image of the post-slavery plantation recalls and invokes the problematic stereotypes and misconceptions that McPherson draws our attention to above. However, Clancy also gestures toward a region that is bound by its past and its historical social structures. This is cultural memory coursing through the present (however idealized the remembrance).

On the other side, as it were, of this remembrance, Caren tells herself that ‘she would not forget her family’s generations of sweat here, and how trapped she’d felt by that very legacy, growing up in the shade of those trees’ (p. 193). Locke’s use of natural imagery here follows through the connection to Southern land; Caren’s literal family tree, of slaves, is overbearing to her. Slavery, as institution and personal (cultural) memory, comes to ‘trap’ her: that is, define aspects of her identity in particularly localized ways. Caren continues to think about this placed and familial inheritance: ‘it surprised as much as it confused her to discover that she did not, after all these years, hate the plantation at all, that she *could* not hate what was now, and maybe always had been, her real home, the way she came into this world’ (original emphasis) (p. 193). If the plantation is both literal and figurative home for Caren, Locke is surely signalling the importance of slavery and its architectures (both psychological and physical) for the construction and development of African-American identity in the South. That the plantation literally unearths slave history in this novel only but compounds this.

Thirdly, it is this connectivity through the plantation that unearths major discoveries: not only Ines’ body, but the bones of the body that In-es discovered (which lead to her death). Ines is killed because she uncovers the remains of a slave, Jason, whose presence in the Clancy’s past had to be kept silent; she is killed because she brings this troublesome history to light. It seems, too, that the cane-knife which was used to kill Jason is the same weapon (if not the identical knife) that kills Ines. History, in this way, circles upon itself, in a dark repetition of violence. The past repeats in vicious cycles at Belle Vie. We learn that Jason was killed by someone in the Clancy family to cover up this dark narrative from their past.

The story of Jason, the slave whose land was stolen by the Clancy family and whose body was buried in the fields, comes to light – emerges, literally as well as metaphorically, from

the ground – by the novel’s end. Aside from the connections seen between the public and private spheres of slavery (the institution as all-pervasive and entrenched in society, as explored in chapter one), more interesting is how Jason’s body eventually comes to light. It transpires that Ines, one of the field-workers in the contemporary story, had found something in the field: bones. ‘It’s the rain’, one character says, ‘that likely brought the bone up from out of the ground, pushing it out, like a depraved and dirty birth’ (p. 323). This description recalls not only the novel’s opening, and the foetal-imagery of Ines’ own corpse, but continues the metaphoric language of land-based emergence. Jason’s remains come to the surface of the soil because of bad weather: the stormy South reveals something of its dark past. We have seen this not only in the Hurricane Katrina chapter, but in the images of Sally Mann. Consolidating this is that both chapters also engaged with a Southern biopolitics of black disposability; this is precisely the state of Jason on the plantation. His problematic presence on Clancy land meant that he had to be disposed of, thrown away.

Again, I must insist upon the distinction between the black bodies I am analyzing here and the supposed tropes of Southern identity that the postsouthern is calling attention to. The disposable African American in the South should not be seen as a trope or empty signifier, primarily for the reason that these bodies are literal embodiments of the region and its past. I am not drawing attention to de-specified or empty vessels, but lived, material, textured bodies that are the substance of regionalism. I am attending to an embodied regionalism that is exemplified through the image of the discarded black body, much like that corporeality investigated by Patricia Yaeger in *Dirt and Desire* or Thadious Davis in *Southscapes*. The narrator informs us that ‘Someone had been out here [in the fields] searching for whatever it was that lay beneath the surface’ (p. 260). With this recurring metaphor, Locke signals her own novelistic project, as well as the scholarly one I have been pursuing. What lays beneath the surface in Locke’s Louisiana is plenty: history and memory, so rooted and localized, become unearthed in this novel, and saturate it.

Finally, it is a plantation map that brings the memory-work of Locke’s novel to our attention, connecting all of the above notions: land, place, history, the public and personal past. As the narrative unravels, Caren finds herself embroiled in the history of the slave Jason. One day she discovers records and paperwork related to Jason including, particularly, a plantation map he created. It was ‘hand-drawn, a thing of beauty, really’ (p. 363). As cartography, it depicts the whole plantation: ‘The big house and the cottages, the kitchen and the rose garden, and the quarters’ (p. 363). At the front of the novel too is one such ‘hand-drawn’ map of Belle Vie, but from a present-day perspective: it details a gift-shop and ticket-booth, for example. Thus, the

two drawings of Belle Vie are brought into alignment; the one the reader sees upon opening the book figures its setting in a very local geographical way, and then layers over the one the Caren finds within the text. These two forms of spatial depiction are connected by Locke, not only to draw our attention to the importance of Southern ‘place’, but also the various forms by which this place, and the cultural memories attached to it, come to be enlivened. This cannot but recall Alice’s map-artwork at the end of Edward P. Jones’ *The Known World*. As that work enacted the overflow of rooted cultural memory, so too does Jason’s map, which is as comprehensive (geographically) as it is artistic and personal.

The map is personal to Jason because it also details the ‘twelve-by-fourteen structure he built behind the slave village [...] shortly before he died’ (p. 363). That the building is effectively torn down by the Clancys means that this map functions as a form of memory in a number of ways: not only as a document of the plantation and its interconnected denizens, but also as a testament (or witness) to the life and work of one particular slave. Jason, in this sense, might stand in for the slave past that has been erased, denied, overlooked and marginalized by mainstream (white) Southern culture. Unearthing this history does not dismantle something we can call a solid South, but in fact enriches it and fleshes it out further. The South is still in place, but with deeper and more entangled roots. Moreover, according to the map, ‘the structure he built just months before he died happened to sit right on the patch of land behind the slave village, where, for years now, grass had refused to grow’ (p. 293). In this sense, it is as if the persistent presence of the past is as physical as it is symbolic or imaginary. The layers of the plantation’s history, and dark past, impacts and actively lingers in a topographical, landed way. Belle Vie’s significance as a metaphoric and imaginative site of Southern identity takes on many forms in this novel, but recurrent in each is a placed and rooted sense of memory not always accounted for in the swathes of deterritorializing and postsouthern theory.

We are reminded of Calvin’s awe of the artwork at the end of *The Known World*. Its memorative function is enabled by an overflow, an excess, of memory in place. Through close attention to detailing the whole plantation in Manchester County, Alice’s artwork illuminates something of the novel’s commitment to rooted memory. Similarly, in *The Cutting Season*, Caren, like Calvin, ‘had never seen anything like it, had never seen the [slave] quarters so alive, populated by real flesh and blood. It took her breath away’ (p. 308). The aliveness that is so affecting to Caren is the overflow of rooted memory I have been discussing. Important for this novel is that Caren, in confronting this map, is ‘seeing her own story, her own history reflected back to her, rounded out and in full color’ (p. 309). Such full colour, I argue, can be enlivened

by attending to the roots of place and memory in the South in addition to the outward-moving, globally-attuned connections.

In all, then, there are numerous ways to connect Locke's novel to the analytic project I have been undertaking here. It is useful to read this novel back across the four chapters to flesh out the various strands of Southern memory that ground this thesis. The introduction mapped out the current modes of transnational criticism that dominate contemporary American theory, and suggested that 'new southern studies' and the 'postsouthern' in particular might be so inflected by such deterritorializing tendencies that certain placed and rooted conceptions of the South might be lost. The present conclusion has broached this by offering evidence from Locke's novel that locate it in a transnational mode (new immigrant histories) or a postsouthern one (plantation simulation and tourism), but also provides a firm sense of what personal, located and rooted histories should not be lost or forgotten. One of these principle memories is slavery. Chapter one posited that regionally-located memories of slavery, working dynamically through novels that foreground such memory-work, are informing and sustaining a rooted regional identity. In Locke's novel, located memories of slavery (as revealed through Belle Vie's history) are both embodied in the corpse found by the slave quarters, and in the novel's gradual unfolding of a deeply-rooted and layered Southern past. Slavery is shown not only to structure the personal histories of those at Belle Vie, but the region's entangled racial past and present too. Connected to this, chapter two suggested that post-regional readings of Hurricane Katrina are limiting because they fail to notice what was, I argue, a 'Southern storm', principally affecting those – African Americans – historically rendered disposable in the region. In this way, old racial hierarchies organize present social relations; and in Locke, it is the repressed and buried past of the white Clancy family that continues to sustain the present plantation's race-relations. One of the dominant metaphors that *The Cutting Season* employs is of burial and earth-bound secrets: the novel's tagline on the British version, for example, is 'Bury your bodies deep, and your secrets deeper'. These secrets ultimately emerge – as exemplified by Ines' body – in a fundamentally gothic way: with an excess of death and violence. Chapter three argued that Sally Mann's photography utilizes a Southern gothic mode that, contra postsouthern suggestions, is igniting and working-through placed and rooted (traumatic) regional memories. The gothic happenings at Belle Vie, and the dead body so central to the narrative, recall Mann's insistence on reading places as saturated with rooted memory. If place in the South is thus proven to still be a defining aspect of regional identity, even in the face of transnational dynamics, then returning there seems inevitable. As Caren came back to the plantation on which she grew up, returning to this site of memory, so too do many Southern texts today, asserting the centrality

of localized place to the region. Chapter four charted two novels that feature a narrative of return to the South, illuminating the potency of the region as a place to ‘come back to’ because of its tangible and forceful roots. This conclusion consolidates all of this, arguing that Locke’s novel insists upon (literally) unearthing Southern history and memory that is *in place*, which fosters a rooted regional identity that is not always accounted for theoretically in postsouthern modes, like that of Romine for example, or transnational modes, like that of Smith and Cohn for instance.

At stake, again and again, in these chapters is an attendance to the ground, to Southern soil, to the geographical substance of the region. Bodies emerge from it, disappear into it, fertilize it, eat it, get covered with it, and are buried beneath it. *The Cutting Season* is no different in this respect and has in many ways engaged with Southern soil and the roots tangled within it. The end of the novel brings to light once again the metaphor of history beneath the ground. The novel’s climax takes place in the fields where slaves once toiled, and now new migrants work also. Bobby and Caren confront each other about the secrets that have emerged, but he is eventually shot and killed by Hunt Abrams, the overseer of the field-workers. As Caren calls for police to come and take Bobby’s body away, she suggests that ‘They would need a second team, too, [...] investigators and crime-scene techs with shovels and whatever else was needed for an excavation, to get Jason out of these fields’ (p. 384). Perhaps Locke here offers Southern studies a request too. Rather than *always* and *entirely* deterritorializing the South; rather than tracking its national, Atlantic, and global routes; rather than situating the region merely in the realm of simulacra, or play, or even memory; perhaps it is worth being reminded of the continued unearthing of history that needs to happen at a local ‘ground’ level. The ‘investigators’ required are, in a sense, Southern scholars; our ‘excavations’ necessary to ‘get Jason’ – and the thousands of discarded, throwaway bodies of the South – out of the ground.

## **‘POST’-SCRIPT**

To conclude, then, I return to where I began: a querying of terminology. My introduction opened with a quotation from Lorrie Moore’s novel; one of her characters voiced the idea that we employ the term ‘post’ when we have ‘grown bored with the conversation’. In many ways, this thesis has attended to, and unravelled, the Southern conversation, listening to the regional texture of cultural texts from the twenty-first century. At the heart of my academic intervention is a scepticism towards, and reluctance to use, the term postsouthern. Borrowing from

postcolonial theory, I want to use Anne McClintock's argument on the reservations she has in using certain terminology to help to solidify my points.

The notion of 'post', for McClintock, is a symptom 'of a global crisis in ideologies of the future'.<sup>625</sup> Indeed, she writes, 'the almost ritualistic ubiquity of "post-" words in current culture (post-colonialism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-cold war [...]) signals, I believe, a widespread, epochal crisis in the idea of linear, historical "progress"'.<sup>626</sup> Can we not, in light of this, suggest something similar about the postsouthern? In relenting to the 'ubiquitous' signalling of a 'post' – a temporal *after*, and theoretical *transcendence* – does not the postsouthern trick us into thinking that the region we call the South is no more? That it is not still a (very particular, delineated, textured, lived) place where its past continues to structure its present? I am further arguing that in this rhetoricization of the South – making it 'post' – something very located is lost. McClintock helps us here too: 'orienting theory', she writes, 'around the temporal axis colonial-postcolonial makes it easier not to see, and therefore harder to theorize, the *continuities* in international imbalances in imperial power' (original emphases).<sup>627</sup> Again, while McClintock is interested in 'postcolonial' politics, her argument holds much sway for the postsouthern. As I have been positing, by deterritorializing the South – in making it post – critical writing might just be blinding us to a certain regionalism. Orienting new Southern studies around the Southern/postsouthern can, quite often, make it easier '*not to see*': to turn away from certain roots that theory tells us we should have pulled up long ago. Such strategies, too, can make it harder to theorize the current and lingering continuities of regional politics.

Each of my four chapters have suggested and argued things that do not fully align with contemporary movements of new Southern studies, transnationalism, the postsouthern, and deterritorialization. This has not been to negate or attack these moves, but to offer other suggestions that can be argued alongside and in addition to them. Working with the metaphor of roots – rooted memory, rooted place – has allowed me to argue something contrary to deterritorializing tendencies: that place and space and regionalism do not always branch outward; that the South is not always entwined with other places, histories and peoples; that the region's historically dominant themes and narratives must be completely problematized. As McClintock argues that it is hard to theorize the continuities of imperial power working today because of the colonial/postcolonial axis of progression, I have argued that it is difficult to theorize the continuity of Southern-ness (as traditionally understood) in the face of the

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<sup>625</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>627</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Southern/postsouthern axis. The preceding four chapters, thus, have argued difficult points. Firstly, it is hard, in the face of moveable transnational memory, to suggest that specifically regional memories, of a specific institution, might still linger in place today. Secondly, it is difficult, in the postsouthern age, to suggest that the African-American deaths of Hurricane Katrina are historically weighted: that this has been happening for a long time. Thirdly, it is difficult, when faced with deterritorialized landscapes, to suggest that places and histories retain their regional roots. Fourthly, it is difficult, finally, to suggest, in the face of global catastrophe and transnational memory, that writers and their books are returning to their regional homes. But in suggesting these things, and teasing out the complexities and ambiguities therein, we have to – at times (and I must stress once again, this is not a complete departure from, or severing of, the postsouthern and its uses) – hold off deterritorialization and its blinding theoretical force. There is much to attend to in the South, but up-rooting it is not the only place to start.

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