REVIVING THE RURAL:
THE MODERNIST POETICS OF THE 20TH CENTURY RURAL NOVEL

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Abstract

In stark contrast to the city, rural spaces are often considered resistant to the novelistic impulse of narrative progress. Lives here are seemingly unchanged by time or human invention. The rural is often overlooked as an immobile reference point of beginning, way station or end, not a location for engagement with modernity. Instead, the rural is the space of retreat from our modern selves, from what we have become. If ideally, the rural encourages a reclamation of the self, as would suggest Rousseau, Thoreau, and Turgenev, it does not offer a space for becoming modern nor would it appear that the countryside can properly depict the nature of our contemporary relationship to society or nation, as the novel so often seeks to do. Rural society is just too sparse, and relationships stereotypically appear as changeless as the age-old rural modes of living.

Reviving the Rural overturns this conventional wisdom by reestablishing these out-of-the-way places as proper and necessary for understanding the expressive capacities of 20th century modernism. Though literary modernism was born and developed in the city, this project questions the practice of pairing aesthetic and narrative techniques to a particular kind of place. By examining novelistic representations of the rural in the American South, Ireland, and Algeria with authors such as William Faulkner, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, John Banville, and Rachid Mimouni, this project argues for a new poetics that counters urban-centric literary conventions and champions the rural as structurally expedient for dramatizing the tumultuous conditions of modernity. The past, which in William Faulkner’s words is never past, lives louder and more integrally here. Rural social networks, forged out of historical and genealogical ties, resist the urban ethos of forgetting and self-willed reinvention. Through their resistance, these networks draw attention to the otherwise invisible cultural and personal realignments that occur
in a traditional society’s confrontation with the impulsion of the Modern. In these ways, a modern rural sensibility opens up the novel to new representations of entangled, enduring human interconnectedness that are critical for understanding the large-scale, interpersonal devastation of social upheaval wrought by slavery, colonialism, war, and nation-building.
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Introduction

[The bourgeoisie] has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life.

-Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, from the authorized English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* (40)

In the class schema of *The Communist Manifesto* the bourgeois class has precious little to recommend it, but Marx and Engels do allow this one concession: the consumption-minded middle classes built cities that drew people out of the rural and gave them the opportunity to rid themselves of their oppressive ignorance. In fact, the seeming self-evidence of this concession is surely one reason that an important translation error in this passage persisted for over a century uncorrected. Hal Draper’s *The Adventures in the Communist Manifesto* finally set the record straight in 1994 by revealing that what Marx and Engels originally intended was not “the idiocy of rural life”, but rather “the isolation of rural life.” Hence, “what the rural population had to be saved from,” Draper argues, “was the privatized apartness of a life-style isolated from the larger society: the classic *stasis* of peasant life. To inject the English idiocy into this thought is to muddle everything”(211).

In light of the clear semantic distance between isolation and idiocy, Draper’s grave assessment of this translation error seems reasonable. And yet, under closer scrutiny, it is unclear whether this error muddles much at all. “The idiocy of rural life” squarely encourages a reader to discount the rural as intellectually unviable;¹ and yet, does “the isolation of rural life” impress us with a different conclusion? Particularly in light of Draper’s conflation of “privatized

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¹ Eric S. Hobsbawm, in his introduction to *The Communist Manifesto: a Modern Edition* points out that the term from the German “Idiotismus,” referring not to stupidity, but isolation from society “echoed the original meaning of the Greek term ‘idiotes,’ from which the current meaning of ‘idiot’ or ‘idiocy’ is derived: ‘a person concerned only with his own private affairs and not those of the wider community’”(11-2). Overtime, however, this meaning fell away and consequently the phrase over the past century has been widely misread.
apartness” and “stasis”—equating space and time so that distance from the city amounts to exclusion from the fluctuating temporalities of modernity—one understands isolation from the metropole equally as an intellectually unviable condition, and thus from a systemic perspective, inconsequential to the project of societal modernization.

This study, *Reviving the Rural*, identifies this conflation of distance from the city and preconceived notions of stagnancy to be a primary culprit leading critics and scholars to largely ignore the manifestations and representations of modernity in the rural countryside. If distance from the city can be understood as living outside of time, then it is no surprise that modernism with its obsession with progress, disruptions, and novelty would dismiss the seemingly static rural spaces as materially unfit for their attentions. So much is this the case that even the evolving modes of agricultural production that are most central and urgent to sustaining city life are effectively disconnected and displaced from urban consciousness, so that, as Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* argues, “[the rural] can be plausibly associated only with the past or with distant lands”(300).

In the study of the modern 20th century novel, this disciplinary neglect of the rural is particularly conspicuous. In stark contrast to the city, rural spaces are often considered resistant to the novelistic impulse of narrative progress. Lives here are flat and homogenous, seemingly unchanged by time or human invention. Moreover, the landscape itself is presented as passive and changeless. Blinded by these assumptions, we tend not to notice that the representations of country life in literature indeed have changed along with our relationship to those representations. The concerns of the modern, whether they are social, environmental, technological or temporal, are not unfamiliar to these typically conservatively-marked communities. To the contrary, as this project will argue, the impact of the modern in the rural
(and by this I mean stylistic trends in language and narration as well as physical and social changes) is not only keenly felt, but carefully, often painstakingly, recorded, in a manner of which the bustling city does not often slow down long enough to note.

Like the novel, the concept of modernism, to the best that we can locate it, was born in the cities of Europe and North America. Modernity’s oppositional extremes, exuberance and fatigue, commodification and alienation, confidence and doubt, all materialize as a matter of course in the imaginary of the metropolis of the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries. Modernity’s primary occupation with the past often focuses on how one might go about breaking away from it (and its traditional modes of representation, integration and identification), and what better place for cutting ties and reinventing oneself than a burgeoning bustling city? So confirms the titans of modernism, Pound, Eliot, Whitman, Joyce and Fitzgerald et al.

Moreover, the city was held up as a new world model founded on diversity—a node of convergence where cultures and intellectual pursuits had ample opportunities to cross-pollinate. What Raymond Williams calls “the miscellaneity of the metropolis” (Politics of Modernism 45) did not just describe the heterogeneous social and ethnic make-up of the city—the actual instances of cross-class and interracial interactions are debatable, as proximity did not necessarily lead to intercourse—, but the potency of the vision, diversity-as-ideology, for urbanites both actual and aspirational, is undeniable. Clearly, Marx and Engels, regardless of their intention, idiocy or isolation, regarded the city as the social innovation that liberated people from the prescribed homogeneity of the provinces.

Further, the city in its drive to modernize developed an acute blindness with regard to the rural. As Williams points out in The Country and the City, the city depends on the invisible modes of production in the rural for its survival and expansion (209). In fact, not only has the
city, as it expanded in size and prominence throughout the 20th century, relied on the raw materials that were provided through these unacknowledged modes of production, it used the invisibility of these transactions to better lay its claim as the uncontested location for conceptualizing modernity, its inhabitants their claim as the modern everyman. Perhaps it is unsurprising then that, in literary scholarship as well, the rural has, for the most part, remained invisible.

The novel, however, at least since Gustave Flaubert deconstructed the idée fixe, has been committed to uncovering the invisible mechanisms of symbolism and signification behind the externalities of everyday life. We see this not only in the attention paid to clichés and conventionalities, but in the novel’s distinctive interest in common people. The novel has thrived by eschewing the hero, the beautiful damsel, the rich celebrity for the anonymous citizen, the average Jane or Joe we would likely not notice should they pass on the street—the orphan, the store clerk, the wife. Where novelists rose to new heights of cosmopolitanism, their characters more often did not. And so, likewise, certain novelists in the 20th century turned their craft to the remarkably invisible lives being lived in the rural, as they had similarly to the Madame Bovarys, Stephen Dedaluses, Clarissa Dalloways and Jay Gatsbys of the world, as a way to better investigate the tumultuous times in which they were living—an age wrought by war, social upheaval, and nation-building.

Reviving the Rural asks what it might mean to look at 20th century rural novels, not as exceptions or sidebars from the discourse of modernity and the city, but as a critical intervention into this conversation. As the rural itself is often imagined as stuck in a bygone age, so too are rural novels treated as part of the tradition-bound communities they choose as their subjects. This study by “reviving” the rural seeks to undo this conflation of subject and representation, just as it
seeks likewise to undo the conflation of the city with the conception of the modern as illustrated above with Marx and Engels. To revive the rural means to bring it out of its sequestration as a memorial to the past or as a respite from the exhausting “realness” of our urban lives into active engagement with contemporary concerns of narration and representation. It means to argue that the rural, though often invisible, should no longer be seen merely as the loser in its bid against the city for cultural and social relevance, but as the place where this struggle to recalibrate ourselves to this conception of the Modern was most carefully and lyrically recorded. In other words, what the analyses in this study will show is that the rural in the 20th century, be it the racially segregated American South, the evacuated Anglo-Irish demesne, or the besieged Algerian village, is uniquely situated to depict the price modernity exacts because it is the site where the threat of modernity is most keenly felt.

So much is this the case that this project seeks not just for rural novels to be included in the conversation where in the past they had been neglected, but to consider the possibility that the rural offers its own distinct conditions for representing the Modern. In spite of the distance that separates these communities, the cultural differences, and the dramatically different historical moments that punctuate their narrations, Reviving the Rural demonstrates why these texts should no longer be considered outliers, working in isolation not only from the urban, but from each other. Modernity, despite being centered in the cities, could not be contained by them. Instead, this community of literature, facing modernity from the periphery, from the undercarriage, from the realm of perceived obsolescence requires its own mode of discourse, its own spatio-temporal nexus: a poetics of the modern rural novel.

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2 In this project, I refer to the Modern or Modernity with a capital “M” to emphasize the concreteness of these concepts. This study insists on their solidity, the coalescent of a range of aesthetic, social and cultural attributes as opposed to limpid catchalls.
“Reviving the Rural” puts forth the surprising notion that these geographically isolated texts are, in fact, not so isolated in the way they use the conditions of the rural as a means of interrogating the concerns of the modern. Michael Levenson describes modernity as caught between a juxtaposition of “novelty” and “the recollection of precursors” and while the city is certainly not without the power of recollection, these novels demonstrate how the rural with its more traditional modes of remembering is particularly well-equipped to dramatize this encounter. “This double sense,” Levenson explains, “creates an abiding instability, a sense of modernity as inescapable but undecidable”(2). It is the contention of this project that because modernity in the rural is experienced more as a groundswell from a distant storm than a change that occurs internally, the impact of the modern on its “precursors” is brought into even sharper focus.

What this study seeks to establish is that when rural novels are brought into conversation with each other, a new more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the city and the country emerges. This relationship dispels the commonplace that rural and urban spaces be defined by simplistic antagonisms (i.e. the country as the city’s Other). There are important affinities as well—an affinity for questioning the relevance of history on national and personal scales, the nature of social integration and alienation, the seductions and disillusionments of progress. By putting different rural landscapes, the United States, Ireland, Algeria, into conversation with each other, this study shows both that the rural novel has modes of representation unto itself (yet shared amongst its constituents) for treating the interference of modernity, and that these modes belong not alongside but as part of our understanding of literature’s engagement with the modern. Although the rural is at least partly defined by its distance from the city, to discount it for this reason, as Marx and Engels do, allows the narrative
of the Modern to be written by the victors, reinforcing and naturalizing the imbalance of power between the two. To the contrary, the modern novel of the 20th century, whether it be from the interwar period or later, has been interested in denaturalizing the power structures of their time at least partly by making invisible actors visible and that is precisely what these rural novels do.

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The rural, as mentioned previously, can and often is defined by its distance from the city. It should be far enough beyond the city’s horizon so that it persists relatively unacknowledged, but close enough to engage in the trade of raw materials without which no city can survive. The rural began, of course, as the first kind of human settlement when agriculture and the domestication of animals allowed the species to quit their nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Then it became a middle ground between the city and the wilderness or the city/suburbs and the wilderness. Now, at least in developed countries, the rural might be situated between two or more metropolitan regions. At the end of the 20th century, for the first time in human history, the rural is no longer necessarily marked by a shared border with the wilderness. 3

Reviving the Rural, however, seeks to remind readers that the rural should not be defined only as the city’s Other. To begin with, this approach is contentious because the city has other Others, such as the suburbs or other cities, that contend for the rural’s position in this binary opposition. More importantly, the rural is a unique ecology that survives or fails through its ability to maintain what has turned out to be a tenuous balance between the raw materials they depend on to cultivate or mine from the land and ensuring that interregional avenues for trade

3 Although most of the texts in this study treat, in one way or another, the diminution of the wilderness, Ike McCaslin, in particular, from Go Down, Moses, none explicitly consider what effect the wilderness’s disappearance will have on the ecology of this type of community—what it will mean to have rural communities no longer on the cusp of large tracks of undeveloped land.
with more densely populated areas stay open and robust. While the rural may often be characterized as resolute and unchanging, it is actually forced to make adjustments constantly to maintain the community’s delicate equilibrium between elemental sustainability and commercial interests. A useful analogy might be one of centripetal and centrifugal forces, the counter-balancing forces that keep an object circling around a fixed point. The lure of the city and material goods is a centripetal force constantly pulling objects and people towards it, while the traditional ways of living that are most closely associated with the rural are centrifugal, also referred to in physics as inert. Centrifugal force, as an effect of inertia, describes how if an object is in motion, it will continue in a straight line if left undisturbed. Therefore to stay in orbit, an object (or person) must be constantly deflected away from the straight line towards the center, which is the role of the centripetal (Larder 147). In terms of this study therefore, to remain “in orbit” what is often seen to the unpracticed observer as stasis is only achieved when the object is able to strike a balance between these two forces. This study will show the ways that the rural, far from neglecting the demands of the modern, is constantly forced to adjust to it. Although this analogy may seem grossly inadequate to describe the actual position of the rural, and it is, what is useful about it is how it illustrates the movement and negotiations that an otherwise still-looking way of life must engage in to maintain itself. Standing still, it turns out, is not at all what it seems.

Lastly, the rural is a sociological formation. Defined by its modest population, and again, by its distance from dense population centers. These communities tend to be more conservative than their urban counterparts. Traditions, including class markers, are more engrained and thus present significant resistance to cultural shifts that inevitably flow from the city. This
characteristic conservatism, prevalent in each of the three regions of this study, is another reason the rural is considered unfit as a representation of Modernity.

It is this resistance, however, that makes the rural particularly rich as a site for representing the Modern. To borrow a term from today’s discourse on popular technology, the city and its urban population are natural “early adopters.” They adapt to changing conditions faster and with little angst, adopting new modes and values of daily life without much recognition that these changes are even occurring. The rural, on the other hand, may appear simply passive because of its inability to adequately counter the cultural imperatives of the metropolis, but its natural intransigence makes it a dramatic staging ground for the confrontation of the new with the old established ways of life.

This confrontation, which we will encounter time and time again in this study, is characterized by modernist scholar Philip Weinstein as one of “habitus against habitus,” the “too fast” on a collision course with the “too slow” (18-22). In 20th century literature, nearly all characters are occupied in one way or another with keeping up with time; and their narratives are often a critique of that struggle, a recounting of the disruptive incongruities between our timeless sense of the human and our time-dependent sense of the Modern. “Positioning modernism,” Astradur Eysteinsson warns, “parallel to the tumultuous aspects of modernity, however, can lead to an unproductive view of its semiotic practices”(6). Like the city’s association with modernism, we tend to speak of them (modernity and modernism) as complementary object and aesthetic. Instead, Eysteinsson suggests a more appropriate role for modernism is “as an attempt to interrupt the modernity that we live and understand as a social, if not ‘normal,’ way of life”(6).4 Whether modernity is a collision or a disruption, its “interruptive practices”(6) are not merely something the rural is able to stage, although relatively unobstructed vision does help, but

4 Italicization is original to Eysteinsson.
a conflict in which it has an active interest demystifying the Barthesian “alibis,” in which modernity dresses itself.

How rural novels set out to do this, however, is far from uniform. This perhaps is not surprising, considering the vastly different ecosystems that encompass the rural, and yet it is an important idea to insist upon, because in spite of the rural’s impressive geographic and ecological range, including a wide array of inhabitants such as farmers, hunters, pastoralists, tribes, gentry and peasants, the rural tends to be treated as vague concept (“I know it when I see it”). This study prefers to view it as neither of these extremes. By utilizing the idea of a spatial poetics, as set out in Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, the poetics of the rural defamiliarizes the rural from its casual or “naturalized” associations so as to reassert the landscape’s modernist credentials. The language and imagery relied upon to represent the rural in the 20th century narrates a vital and symbolically rich spatial conception of our world. In this way, this project seeks to establish the rural as a term whose definition balances discipline and freedom, allowing it the unique conditions for innovating the representation of the Modern, fostering what Eysteinsson imagines as an alternate mode of modernism: the existence of “other modes of communication to be looked for, or even some other modernity to be created”(7).

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That *Reviving the Rural* examines three disparate rural regions suggests how endemic this issue is for modern literature. There are seemingly countless places that would make interesting inclusions to this project. In the United States alone, the Midwest and African-American representations of the rural are two additional directions that one might explore. As this project will demonstrate, the rural has a particular complementarity with the postcolonial, and so one
also could look to writers from the Latin American Boom, the Caribbean and South Asia, among many other national literatures. To compensate in part for its lack of breadth, this study takes three strikingly different approaches to examining the poetics of the rural so as to demonstrate the flexibility and broad applicability of this kind of endeavor.

The first chapter concentrates on the representation of one rural space over the span of a single literary career, that of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi as devised by its creator, William Faulkner. Although Faulkner’s rural credentials are widely recognized, this chapter argues against the seeming naturalness of this relationship. While it barely needs mentioning that his canonical representations of Mississippi go beyond the simple familiarity of the native, this chapter offers a fresh look at this relationship that is too often taken for granted. If we believe that the international success of his writing is due at least partly to the literary inspiration he found in the rural, as he claims, as opposed to in spite of it, what is it about Faulkner’s rural that shows the reader something about the Modern that the city neglects or falls short in representing? Through four sections, I show how his rural novels insist upon the perennially resurgent irresolutions of the past, even as they appear to be losing out to a faster shinier future. The chapter begins with Benjy from *The Sound and the Fury* dramatizing the modes of de- and re-territorialization that Faulkner employs to bring the reader into his distinctively modern rural topology. Next, I turn to an article that Faulkner published in *Holiday* magazine entitled “Mississippi” to look at the representation of Yoknapatawpha extracted from the form of the novel. Doing so, allows me to argue for the illustrative role that place plays in Faulkner’s turbulent emotional terrain across his novels. Examining Faulkner’s hand-drawn map of Yoknapatawpha County at the back of *Absalom, Absalom!* , the third section surmises how this curious illustration might be interpreted to offer new insight into the relationship between the
region and the reader. Where does the map weigh in on the debate between Yoknapatawpha as a physical reality versus Yoknapatawpha as a fanciful abstraction? Lastly, the concluding section, considers how the city in the form of a specter infiltrates Faulkner’s rural. With special attention paid to the second to last episode of *Go Down, Moses*, I argue that although Faulkner clearly perceived the region as threatened, and almost certain to lose its exceptionality if not expire altogether, the rural still had a critical aesthetic role to play in the dramatization of the changes the country was undergoing in its transformation from young nation to world power.

The following two chapters examine the ways that Irish novelists, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane and John Banville negotiated a sense of the Irish modern throughout the century and how they used the rural to do so. Though the novels I look at track the arc of Irish modernist development in the rural from a mostly Anglo-Irish perspective—they struggle with the ambivalences of memory, place and no-place, citizenship and alienation, reflecting the inherently conflicting effects of large-scale modernization—I argue that these themes and expressions of the rural are equally valid in the consideration of the broader Irish experience. This is because they go beyond their culturally specific historical and political concerns, to address the larger epistemological angst that troubles the whole country throughout the century leading up to the Celtic tiger. In the first of these chapters, *Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane’s Mirror on Ireland*, I trace Bowen’s *The Last September* alongside Keane’s *Mad Puppetstown*. With a distinctly Irish devotion to the land, these two texts insist firmly on the conjunction of setting and action: the historic moment of their girlhoods during “the Troubles” is inextricably enmeshed in the contested Irish rural landscape, a place that for each seems to impress itself, contradictions and all, upon their narratives more powerfully than any one individual character.
In the third chapter, “‘How embarrassing’: The ‘Untidy’ Returns of the Big House novel in Molly Keane’s Time After Time and John Banville’s Birchwood, the theme of “untimeliness” as a recurring irruption within the Modern will become even more pronounced. This chapter looks at two examples of the rebound the Big House genre makes in the latter half of the century. This tradition, as opposed to being formulaic and thematically worn out, proved it still could provide a unique evaluative vantage point and oppositional pressure to the Irish national project and the role of the rural within it. The genre’s critical and poetic facets ably adjusted to depicting Modernity’s uneven and often violent reception in the Irish rural as Ireland continued to struggle to define itself as an independent nation.

My final chapter, ‘La vallée des tulipes et les souvenirs heureux’: Novelizing rural Algeria examines how Rachid Mimouni’s 1989 novel, L’Honneur de la tribu reinvents the representation of the Algerian rural out of its conventional roles as an evacuated landscape according to western writers or “reality”-based scenery for the ethnographic realist novels of Algerian writers. Inventing a tribe living in a remote and desolate corner of the country, Mimouni dramatizes all the competing symbolisms, controversies and confusions of nation-building and modernization. He narrates the village succumbing little by little to new technologies (“les appareils qui font rire et pleurer” and the electric lights that turn night into day), new commodities (imported canola oil replacing the locally pressed olive oil), and in the end a completely upended geography. Though the gradual submission of this tribe to modern conveniences leading potentially to its own extinction has led critics to discuss this novel largely in terms of its anti-governmental/anti-fundamentalist politics (which are not nearly as straightforward as most imagine), this chapter argues that Mimouni’s novel is innovative in another equally important way. L’Honneur reinvigorates the genealogy of rural modernist
novels by demonstrating how rural Algeria, doubly-demoted by its postcoloniality and its distance from any city, ably unsettles both the foundations of the sacred and the assurances of progress without affixing itself to political ideology. Pushing the tribe out of its idyllic-pastoral origins, la vallée heureuse, into a space where language is no longer transparent, but coded by metaphor, the tribe becomes poignantly susceptible to the machinations of the outside world. In this way, Mimouni turns the rural into a space for modernist discourse. Through the narrator’s constant comparisons of the village, Zitouna, where they live with the edenic one they were forced to leave, Mimouni separates this representation of the rural from the petrified image of a pre-colonial Algeria to one that actively engages in the questions of progress and national belonging.

These four chapters, though connected by their interest in the representational viability of the rural, address markedly different historical conditions: the United States on the verge of becoming a world power (a moment of confidence and exuberance to which Faulkner suggests caution); Ireland as it first negotiates its embattled national identity and then fifty years later when in light of violence in the North and a growing urban population that outnumbers the rural for the first time in Irish history, it revisits those negotiations; and finally, Algeria, thirty-seven years after independence plagued by violent Islamic fundamentalism, caught in a moment of ideological uncertainty and self-doubt. What these moments share, however, are fluctuating landscapes that throw social, national, and cultural identities into turmoil. They each exemplify this century where citizens, broadly defined, are repeatedly impelled to question the meaning of their previous societally naturalized associations. Together these chapters assert that the rural, far from being outside of these concerns, provides a powerful theater for the processes of modernization to be deconstructed and reflected upon, instead of taken for granted.
Chapter One

Faulkner's World: The Modern Mechanics of Rural Intimacy

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went out along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out and they were hitting.

–William Faulkner, Opening lines to The Sound and the Fury (1929)

“Even he that has the misfortune of being born in a country of a great literature must write in its language, just as a Czech Jew writes in German, or an Ouzbekian writes in Russian. Writing like a dog digging a hole, a rat digging its burrow. And to do that, finding his own point of underdevelopment, his own patois, his own third world, his own desert.”

-Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature (1975)

Two terms from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s book, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature provide helpful insight into Faulkner’s representation of Yoknapatawpha County, the fictional region of northern Mississippi where the majority of his fiction is set: the literary devices of “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization.” According to Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization is the first and most prominent characteristic of a minor literature. (Minor literatures in this context are defined not by writing in a minor language, but by the often literal, and more importantly, the psychological distance of the author from the standard-bearing centers of cultural authority.) In its original context, deterritorialization denotes the impossibility for Kafka to integrate himself into the “established” literary culture of Europe (18). As a Jewish Czech in German-occupied Prague, Kafka wrote as an outsider of “the linguistic centers of
dominance”, a situation that Deleuze and Guattari compare to “what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language” (17).

Though not as pronounced or politically fraught as the exclusion of Black Americans from standard English, Faulkner too was isolated from the linguistic centers of dominance to which he aspired. Faulkner’s awareness of his regional isolation revealed itself through many early decisions of his youth where he attempts to integrate himself into some version of an established intelligentsia: first following his friend Phillip Stone to Yale though he could not enroll, trying to adopt a British accent to enlist in the Royal Air Force though he was told a Canadian accent would be much less detectable, and most notably adding the “u” to Falkner, a revision that he considered a correction of past error, but clearly a small but significant self-aggrandizement as well.

Deterritorialization is thus first characterized by an authorial frame of mind, (i.e. the author’s desert). Second, consequent of this first characteristic, it is the representation of an outsider’s perspective that reconfigures a presumed known quantity into something new, an alternate universe. In the case of Kafka, this meant isolating elements of the Germanic bureaucratic bourgeois society and exaggerating them to illustrate their frightening absurdity. To further emphasize the state of disorientation that his protagonists experience, Kafka

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5 This cultural and geographic barrier that Faulkner perceived in Mississippi can be identified as part of what Deleuze and Guattari call necessary solitude. As Kafka experienced his desert through the losses of cultural capital experienced within the Czech Jewish community, which included not just dropping the Czech language for Yiddish and German, but evacuation from “the rural environment” (19) where they had first established themselves, Faulkner experienced dramatic changes in land usage and development, the loss of wilderness and its Native American texture. The rise of Snopes-like shysters seeking to profit off deflated Mississippi communities, a manner of degradation through development, only seemed to further the ghostly sense of loss and desertion still lingering from the Confederate defeat in the Civil War. As such, in terms of cultural regional hierarchies, Faulkner’s Mississippi, and the South as a whole, burnished similar desert-like qualities to those experienced by Kafka, although the two writers invariably ended up reacting to these climates of isolation quite differently.

characteristically resists any move towards reterritorialization, which would have integrated his protagonists into the very surroundings that oppressed them.

By contrast, Faulkner uses strategies of both de- and re-territorialization. Where Kafka set his work in non-descript nowhere towns, Faulkner anchored his in the attributes of region. Though the process of divesting readers of their assumptions was critical, so was reestablishing a regionalist spatial orientation on his own terms. Thus de- and re-territorialization are used in the context of this project to describe the ways that Faulkner manipulates the reader’s relationship to place, stripping us of our presumption that we know where we are and thereby acquainting us with the region on his own terms. One such example is the epigraph above from *The Sound and the Fury*.

When we read the first sentences of this disorienting novel, where only the date, “April 7, 1928”, is provided as preamble, we experience a sense of bewilderment akin to culture shock. With the mentally-deficient narrator Benjy Compson, Faulkner exacts new rigor to the idea that a novel should transport us out of our daily lives into the perspective of others. He takes care to dissociate us, not just from our own lives, which presumably are more urban(e) than those of his subjects, but the presumptions we carry with us about what kind of world rural Mississippi is. By removing familiar touchstones that would otherwise conflate, and thus confuse, Benjy’s gaze with our own, we are deterritorialized from our normal understanding of what an afternoon round of golf looks and sounds like. Though the narrator is neither trying to deceive nor obfuscate, it is of course the lack of classification terms—golf, golf balls, golf clubs—that alienates us from this otherwise familiar activity.

With a few simple sentences, Faulkner brings us into a new world that surely would not have seemed so if it were observed by other, more socially-attuned eyes. Instead through Benjy’s
handicap, Faulkner asserts his authorial prerogative of familiarizing us with this place within the framework of the text, elbowing out preexisting prejudices, because Benjy is incapable of accounting for them one way or the other. Even in later chapters narrated by other more culturally versant characters, the precedent of this initial deterritorialization remains, and the process of reterritorialization is reestablished only as far as we allow ourselves to perceive the universe of Yoknapatawpha through other people’s eyes. (For this reason, reterritorialization in Faulkner’s work is always in progress but remains incomplete, since the accounts of Yoknapatawpha that Faulkner presents through the distinct consciousnesses of his characters are always at odds with the cumulative representation of the county.)

The surprising effect of these processes is that this overture, which deterritorializes us from what would otherwise be an unexceptional round of golf and reterritorializes us in Benjy’s abstract-free world, establishes a strange forced intimacy between the reader and Benjy. Though initially disconnected from the scene because we do not understand what is happening or who the narrator is, our exposure to Benjy’s defamiliarized descriptions (to the exclusion of all others) places us alone with Benjy in a position of apartness that is Benjy’s day-to-day existence. As intimates we experience his cognitive limitations firsthand, in a way that none of his actual family members or caretakers is able. In this way, though it is verbally austere, Benjy’s world through him becomes fresh and present to us. Further, Benjy’s expressive limitations illustrates the ambivalent pressures of intimacy that press us towards communion, but also necessarily reasserts difference. The timescale is necessarily altered to accommodate this new representation of memory and experience.

While shared intimacy between narrator and reader is an older phenomenon than the genre of the novel, what is exceptional about Faulkner’s creation of readerly intimacy as
experienced in the rural is that it insists upon a relationship not just between narrator and reader, but with the rural place itself. This is because the connections between the reciprocal influences of individuals and their environment (social and natural) are fixed in an interdependent continuous cycle of cross-definition. Among the most persuasive examples of this is the short story, “Dry September,” where an unrelenting drought transforms both the landscape and its community into a tinderbox that erupts in a blaze of racist aggression climaxing in the kidnapping and murder of an innocent black man (Selected Short Stories 60-75). While in this instance, the land and the inhabitants are co-conspirators, there are other notable moments when the land rises up in opposition to the ambitions of man: in Absalom, Absalom!, Thomas Sutpen’s dynastic dreams crumble due partially to unchecked hubris and the ingrained perversions of an institutionally racist society, but also as retribution by the land for the disturbance he incites in the founding of Sutpen’s Hundred (Sivils 489-502).

In The Sound and the Fury, Benjy Compson’s disability, particularly his inability to differentiate between past and present, heightens his sensitivity to changes in the environment. This sensitivity is dramatized most memorably in the final scene of the novel when Benjy, on his way to the cemetery to visit his mother’s grave (an ironic excursion from the start), is forced by an unwitting Luster to go around the Confederate monument in the middle of town to the left as opposed to the customary eastern route. This movement, against the current of Benjy’s delicate nature, incites a terrible seizure that exceeds the boundaries of Benjy’s body, gripping for a moment his escort as well: “Bellow on bellow…There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless, just sound, and Luster’s eyes back-rolling for a white instant”(328). While this disturbance in Benjy’s relationship to his environment is clearly registered in Benjy’s person (and Luster’s as well), and marked in the novel itself by its
prominent location as the final scene (the final image is of Ben’s face as Jason turns the carriage around and the world’s order shifts mercifully back into place), it is also recorded on the physical environment as evidenced by its marker on Faulkner’s map of the county, published at the back of *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1936. Sixteen years after *The Sound and the Fury* is published, the event’s acknowledgement on the map reinforces the mark the event impressed on the environment.

Certainly, reciprocal relationships such as these exist in urban settings between individuals and their environment, but the constitution of intimacy, specifically the conditions for its emergence, is quite different. The city as a reflective object is less reliable; markers are all too casually reshaped or even erased by the blunt maneuverings of urban development (signaling a classic neglect of natural conditions that is often recognized too late to the city’s detriment). City intimacy is forged in the rare moments of quiet in the rare places of refuge against the incessant shape-shifting metropolis rather than in concert with it. Further, a city in its entirety is too large and too dynamic a structure to bring its full weight to bear on any individual person or narrative and vice versa. Hence, we divide cities up into neighborhoods and “villages” as a way of compartmentalizing them, so as to resemble the kind of finite interdependent community structure that is found organically in the rural.

What’s more, the urban ideology of space management and design is characteristically bent on looking into the future, rather than reading into the past. While cities sustain and enhance vibrancy through self-reinvention reliant on the reinvigorating influx of the “up-and-coming”, the rural relies on collective remembering to affix and prioritize symbolic value within the community it sustains. The potency of living memory, an elemental ever-present past, in Faulkner’s rural intimacy always overshadows and casts doubt upon an immaterial future.
Exacerbated by his disability, Benjy exemplifies an exaggeration of this rural timescale, because he can neither conceptualize the future nor differentiate between his memories of the past and the events of the present.

By starting *The Sound and the Fury* in the voice of Benjy, Faulkner immediately exposes us to a highly stylized, subjective time schema that is unique to this one individual; and yet, Benjy’s conflation of present and past is only a more extreme version of the community’s past-infested temporal sensibility. For example, when Jason Compson is forced to sell the family’s pasture to the golf club to pay for Quentin to attend Harvard, it is the loss of land, representing the denigrated state of the Compson family, that carries primary symbolic significance, while the potential social and economic advantages that the sale enables in the form of an Ivy League education goes largely unacknowledged. It is as if the community and the narrative itself are already aware that sacrificing the pasture will yield only a negative return, that of Quentin’s suicide.\(^7\) This haunting shadow of the past over the golf course is further dramatized by Benjy’s anguish at hearing the golfers call for their caddie, which he confuses with his sister Caddy, who abandoned him and Jefferson years ago (324).

Thus, Yoknapatawpha County is much more than a passive backdrop conveniently contrived out of Faulkner’s lived experience to contain these stories. Nor is it a proxy for some universal everyplace.\(^8\) Instead, its role as setting engages directly with the most complex and

\(^7\) N.B. Like Benjy’s trip left around the monument, the relevance of the sacrificed pasture is reinforced by its memorialization on the 1945 map.

\(^8\) The relationship between the actual Lafayette County, Mississippi and Faulkner’s fictional Yoknapatawpha County is one of the most heavily mined, and arguably least productive, areas of Faulkner criticism, yet something about this relationship continues to intrigue and befuddle the imagination (For an authoritative examination of Faulkner’s relationship to Mississippi’s physical geography see Charles S. Aiken’s *William Faulkner and the Southern Landscape* (2009)). The spectrum of theories spans from the transparent literalist approach to the purely abstract reading, and everywhere in between. While I address some of these approaches in this chapter, my aim is to show the productivity of such a space as distinctly and necessarily existing in a *rural* register and why this is not only a crucial admission when thinking about Faulkner, but also in the context of rural-focused writers subsequent to him around the world in the mid-to-later 20th century.
determinedly ambivalent matters of the heart thereby co-opting readers to be moved by a place that appears, at first glance, thoroughly remote from the national and international discourses of modernism in the 20th century, and characters whose possibilities for self-fulfillment seem relatively improbable.

If Faulkner’s modernist stylings were thus, a means and not an end, perhaps the author was not simply being coy or self-effacing when he said at the University of Virginia in 1957, “I wish that I did have a good, lucid, simple method of telling stories” (*Faulkner in the University* 88). How could he tell a simple story when the narrative viability of Yoknapatawpha required a burden of proof that the rural is a properly modern subject with its own modern modes of representation? While it is taken for granted that cities are always going to be in some sense unknowable, that for every upstanding Dr. Jekyll there is a Mr. Hyde lurking in the interior shadows, the rural must first assert its unknowability before it can lead its audience on the path of discovery. As Faulkner first fully demonstrated with *The Sound and the Fury* and then continued to develop for the rest of the Yoknapatawpha series, “What [the writer] is trying to tell in fact compels the style” (*Faulkner in the University* 279).

**Section 2: A Mississippi Holiday?**

We learn from this superb article, as we have already learned from his novels, that Faulkner feels a deeper and more lasting affection for his native state than has been shown by any other American novelist. He loves the Mississippi earth, the vegetation, the rivers—especially the Old Man of them all—and the animals up or down to Mississippi mules.

---“An Introduction,” Malcolm Cowley (1954)

In the April 1954 issue of *Holiday* magazine, there appeared an article touted by the editorial staff on the page preceding it as “The Magazine Story of the Year” (33). It was a piece
simply titled, “Mississippi” written by the then well-established Nobel laureate of Literature, William Faulkner.\(^9\) To skip the introduction by the critic Malcolm Cowley of which the epigraph above is a part is to experience the titular region as a bending moving space that blends, like the blurring brush strokes in an impressionist landscape painting history, veiled autobiographical third-person accounts and characters and features from the author’s own fictional work. In the essay, Faulkner addresses elements of Mississippi life that he admires (the natural splendor of its wilderness, the compassion and courage of its people), while in the same breath conjuring up the region’s darker side (deforestation, opportunism and intolerance). Generally speaking, but especially for its genre, this is a discomfiting piece of writing that resists coming into focus. It shifts between competing scenes and conflicted sentiments: the natural and the societal, a staunch love and an unremitting shame.

*Holiday*, as the name of the publication implies, was not a weighty magazine. The magazine’s travel-themed articles and advertisements sought to attract a broad middle-to-upper-middle class readership, who presumably would have recognized Faulkner as a literary figure, but could not be assumed to have read his work nor be familiar with his particularly disorienting brand of literary modernism. The accompanying articles in this issue are light pieces of entertainment—conversational often playful in tone and mildly educational, but not experimental. And it is for this, one might excuse the editorial staff of the magazine if they were overly anxious about “Mississippi”’s reception and fretted about whether the unorthodox execution would be confusing, misleading, or even impenetrable to their readers. Though he may have professed the desire to tell simple stories, Faulkner in “Mississippi” shows little reverence for the conventions of such a populist milieu. Accessibility necessarily was secondary to the integrity of the representation. Faulkner’s drive to represent what he saw as the previously

\(^9\) Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950.
unrecognized complex fabric of his rural Mississippi above and beyond its stereotypes impelled
the style and structure of this article as it did in his novels.

Hence, Faulkner forced the hand of the editorial staff to address this problem of
accessibility extra-textually. The magazine editors attended to this problem in two ways: they
inserted the Cowley introduction to uncloud the essay’s ambiguity and further adorned the article
with stereotypical photographs of the American South (e.g. a canon at Vicksburg National Park,
a lady fishing in a boat “accompanied by her Negro servant,”(43) young women at a reception in
richly colored antebellum gowns, etc.) presumably to compensate for the lack of “local color” in
the article itself, which in context with the other pieces of travel-writing in the issue their
readership undoubtedly anticipated. Such elysian pseudo-nostalgic images, which today seem
callous at best and inflammatory at worst, appear through content, tone, color and caption to be
aimed at lulling the reader, thereby limiting and controlling the experience of the article itself.
Figure 1 “The annual Natchez Pilgrimage is marked by crinolines, receptions and beautiful women like Mrs. William Baron Swinny of Elms Court” (43)
Holiday Magazine, April 1954

Misleading, and certainly incongruous to the mood of the written text as the photographs are, Cowley’s introduction is far more disruptive because it reconstructs the deliberately deconstructive processes of Faulkner’s text. As seen from the epigraph, Cowley points out what we should “learn” from this piece as if it were a conventional essay of travel-writing with the intent of imparting useful knowledge. Furthermore, Cowely takes pains to distinguish every fictional element in the text, often mentioning what if any resemblance these fictional features
share with the “real” Mississippi and the people who live there. He thoroughly unweaves Faulkner’s webbing of context and motive, and by doing so, Cowley not only disentangles the style but appropriates meaning by suggesting a deceptively uncomplicated summation of Faulkner’s love for the region, making one brief concession for the complications that Faulkner addresses therein: “He loves—not likes—most of the people, while he hates a few of them with an intensity of emotion that he would never waste on Northerners. He also hates some faults of the state, including its unfair treatment of Negroes, but he loves it in spite of the faults and it remains his native land”(33). Even this one qualifier, however, is misleading for it makes love and hate seem like separate entities assigned to wholly separate objects. This separation is the opposite of what Faulkner intends to express.

I bring attention to this hand-holding effort on the part of both Cowley and the magazine editorial staff, drawing particular attention to their cross-purposes with the author, to illustrate the representational difficulties inherent to Mississippi’s culturally liminal location in the American imagination. For the majority of Americans, Mississippi is a region that is known of, but still unknown, and this peripheral status is aggravated by the vestigial shame of slavery and the unredressed wrongs of racism. We understand Mississippi to be an unknown quantity because of the lengths the magazine goes to acclimate the readers to the article, appealing to both the conventional assumptions they already hold (the photographs) and the traditional comforts of a rural pastoral (as set up and framed by Cowley). Faulkner, of course, prefers a different approach to representing the region.

This section treats “Mississippi” as an exemplar of Faulkner’s uniquely insistent spatial relationship to narrative. Experiencing Faulkner’s Mississippi outside of its usual literary framework, the Holiday article illuminates the narrative advantages of rural spaces in fiction,
namely, the lingering potency of history and memory as well as the practical impossibility of compartmentalization between nature and society, charity and greed, and finally love and hate. To do this Faulkner’s Mississippi demonstrates contradictory modernist and proto-postmodernist impulses of both resettlement and unsettlement. Thus in “Mississippi”, Faulkner effectively deterritorializes the reader from the confines of our established geo-political assumptions and sets up a space for reterritorialization, but, similar to the inconclusive conclusions to his novels, he refuses to complete the process of reterritorialization and deliberately leaves his readers within sight of the port but unmoored and drifting back out to a sea of ambiguity and doubt.

The article “Mississippi” begins gently and seemingly unobtrusively with a gentle skewing of the map in the opening lines of the article:

Mississippi begins in the lobby of a Memphis, Tennessee hotel and extends south to the Gulf of Mexico…and it might almost be said to have only those two directions, north and south, since until a few years ago it was impossible to travel east or west in it unless you walked or rode one of the horses or mules.” (35) By starting with the verb, “begins”, which can signal either time, place or an intersection between the two, this sentence is structurally conventional for travel-writing (e.g. “Mississippi begins…” sounds like the opening a tour-guide might use as he is familiarizing his audience to their surroundings). Within the context of the sentence, however, “begins” is self-contradictory, because it suggests that Mississippi in fact begins outside of itself. A cartographer with words, Faulkner, here, is an experientialist confirming regional (also cultural and social) boundaries not by treaty or charter but by how they are used, contained and traversed, and by consequence he undermines the authority of established maps in his very first sentence by pointing out their inherent weakness: the inability to represent the experience of a region as it shifts over time.
This beginning approach, which blurs and confuses spatial and temporal language sets up the rest of the article as it represents the experience of space in terms of movement and time.

As such the patterns of settlement move through the region like the Mississippi river itself:

...an ebb-flux-ebb-flux of alien nationalities as rapid as the magician’s spill and evanishment of inconstant cards: The Frenchman for a second, then the Spaniard for perhaps two, then the Frenchmen for another two and then the Spaniard again and then the Frenchman again for the last half-breath before the Anglo-Saxon, who would come to stay, to endure. (35)

These Englishmen would use the south-flowing river to bring settlers, goods for trade, and, of course, slaves to the state. So it is because of the natural geography (the river), the technological foundation (the trains), the market forces, and finally the ideological clash over human rights that establishes north-south relativity as the unavoidable Mississippi pathology, all present in Faulkner’s opening claim here: “it might almost be said to have only those two directions, north and south.” What remains unmentioned, but not unimplied is that, lurking somewhere within these realities of trade and transportation, this North-South myopia is intrinsically linked to the story of Southern slavery. When Faulkner, in this article, finally addresses slavery and post-emancipation ex-slaves, this irreducibility of the North-South relationship becomes crucial to feeling out the perplexing endpoint of the text.

In addition to establishing the North-South relationship as a characteristic that marked both the land and the minds of the people who lived there, this article demonstrates the way that a rural region, like a city, can contain and progress along varying yet interconnected large and small timescales. While it is taken for granted that cities grow and shift at different speeds and
that modernist authors addressing the lives of urban dwellers must account somehow for the larger social forces at play, the rural as a subject often looks too monotonous to warrant differentiation between short- and long-term developments, the man-sized and god-sized thrusts of time. But Faulkner finds an easy metaphor in the Old Man River for depicting the ways that short fast-moving currents are part of the slower more far-reaching ebbs and crests of the Mississippi. When daily life did not oblige the segregated peoples to acknowledge their shared humanity, it was the flooding of the banks that would bring “white man and Negro…side by side in shifts in the mud and the rain, with automobile headlights and gasoline flares and kegs of whisky and coffee boiling in fifty-gallon batches in scoured and scaled oil drums”(40).

Clearly this image of the flooding river presents a moment where man and his role in the region’s, the nation’s, even civilization’s larger destiny comes into focus, but this article goes beyond isolated moments of synthesis by depicting in the space of this one region both the long reach of Mississippi history and the short but comparably eventful reach of one individual life. On the larger scale, Faulkner presents the tragic patterns of population displacement beginning with the Native Americans, which is described as the cycling of “the obsolescent, dispossessed tomorrow by the already obsolete”(40). After the Indians, it was the explorers, then the frontiersmen, then the settlers, and finally the slave-owning plantation farmers, who were wiped out by the war and dispossessed by the Snopeses. Against these waves of demographic flux, the article pits the life of a young boy (the author proxy), who moves from playing Civil War reenactment games with his milk-brother to traveling the country as a young “tramp” to becoming an established novelist and local personality.

Like this famous passage from *The Town* (1957), which is often presumed by critics to express Faulkner’s own “sense of creation”(Urgo, “The Yoknapatawpha Project” 646),
Faulkner’s process of reterritorialization insists on a narrative perspective that is able to look down upon itself and see the larger patterns, but cannot detach from the limits of its own human-sized subjectivity:

And you stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life beneath that incessant ephemeral spangling. First is Jefferson, the center, radiating weakly its puny glow into space; beyond it, enclosing it, spreads the County tied by the diverging roads to that center as is the rim to the hub by its spokes, yourself detached as God himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity and of the men and women who made you, the record and annal of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past; you to preside unanguished and immune above this miniature of man’s passions and hopes and disasters—ambition and fear and lust and courage and abnegation and pity and honor and sin and pride—all bound, precarious and ramshackle held together, by the web, the iron-thin warp and woof of his rapacity but withal yet dedicated to his dreams. (277)

Indeed introductions and photographs that seek to reconfirm our expectations as opposed to forcing us to look beyond and between them fail to do what Faulkner does here and in “Mississippi.” In “Mississippi,” Faulkner does not relieve us of our expectations of racism and Southern backwoods incivilities, but weaves them into the threads of cooperation (as seen above in the flood scene) and most importantly of love.

The issue of race and slavery appears implicitly and explicitly throughout “Mississippi,” and yet the focus of Faulkner’s treatment of this topic begins and ends with the woman whose breast made milk-siblings of the young playmates mentioned above. They were born “in the
same week with the white child and both bearing the same (the white child’s grandsire’s) name”(36). She is a woman named Caroline, who strongly resembles Faulkner’s real-life family servant Caroline Barr or Mammy Callie as she was called, and who, in this fictional case, had belonged to the protagonist’s family before the Civil War.\textsuperscript{10} Caroline-figures make several appearances in Faulkner’s fiction including as Dilsey in \textit{The Sound and the Fury} (1929) and the short story “That Evening Sun” (1931), and Molly Beauchamp in \textit{Go Down, Moses} (1942).\textsuperscript{11} In the case of “Mississippi”, she is introduced first as one of “a few of the old house slaves: women too who, like the white ones, refused to give up the old ways and forget the old anguishes. The child himself remembered one of them: Caroline: free these many years but who had declined to leave”(36).

Her decision to stay is characterized as a refusal to forget. Faulkner does not trouble himself to list Caroline’s anguishes; they are both too obvious and too unknowable. As part and product of a slave society, she insists on remembering and being the reminder of “our peculiar institution.” As Faulkner explains: “…nor would she ever accept in full her weekly Saturday wages, the family never knew why unless the true reason was the one which appeared: for the simple pleasure of keeping the entire family reminded constantly that they were in arrears to her….(36). As Faulkner earlier resisted compartmentalization of natural time and individual human time, Caroline authorizes and insists on a middle ground of slavery and freedom, a reterritorialization of her own that maintains the resonances of her former status (i.e. refusing to accept pay for her work as a freely contracted employee), but also reverses the direction of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Caroline Barr was born into slavery, but she was given her freedom when she was sixteen years old. Initially she had been Faulkner’s grandfather’s servant, but then later worked for Faulkner’s father, Murry Falkner and became a second mother to William, Jack, and Johncy (Blotner 13).
\item[11] \textit{Go Down, Moses} was dedicated to Caroline Barr. The dedication reads, “To Mammy, Caroline Barr, Mississippi 1840-1940, Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.”
\end{footnotes}
dependency so that the family remained interminably indebted to her. As Robert Jackson suggests in *Seeking the Region*, there can be no divorce of postbellum from antebellum South, because who we are, including the very freedom we hold most high arose not out of a utopic imaginary, but out of slavery” (3). It is a vulgar historical irony that the Garden of Eden analogy used to represent the promise of prosperity as the “spontaneous fruit” of a virgin New World was pursued and enabled through an economic system dependent on slave labor (Ortega y Gasset qtd. in L. Marx 8). The result of this ironic discrepancy between aspirations and the modes for achieving them led inevitably to conflicting loyalties of family, duty, autonomy, freedom and self-respect.

In the Prologue chapter of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, published two years before “Mississippi”, a Caroline-like conflict is dramatized to its most conflicted potential. An old black woman weeps at the death of her former owner. “‘I dearly loved my master, son,’ she said.” The unnamed protagonist responds from within his marijuana-induced hallucination, “You should have hated him” (10). She responds that she did hate him because he raped her, impregnated her several times, and promised her freedom but never went through with it; yet, still she loved him because he was the father of her sons. The dream sequence ends with the protagonist trying to extract from the old woman what she means by freedom lying not in hating but in loving (11). In “Mississippi”’s Caroline, we do not see the kind of wrenching self-contradictory passions that we see in Ellison’s ex-slave. Faulkner avoids the incendiary touchstones of slavery’s most inhumane abuses, but in this less sensational setting, the mark of contradiction left by slavery is no less erasable: the debt remains unpayable even if it is only a mere nine dollars.
The crime of slavery, which in *Absalom, Absalom!* is described as a disease, that could only in the end be wiped out by the fever of war, not only disjoins the relationships between the families and their slave/servants, it leaves the institutions of the society weak and unhinged, leaving ample room for people looking to take advantage of the worn-out fabric of these communities: “It was the fever itself they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence” (7). And at this moment of impotence, the Snopes arrive. These are the poor white farmers, who figure most prominently in Faulkner’s later novels such as *The Hamlet, The Town* and *The Mansion*, but who are part of Faulkner’s literary imagination as early as the first drafting of *Sartoris*, his first Yoknapatawphan novel. This “tribe of poor whites” (Cowley 33), for Faulkner, whether inspired by classist resentment or legitimate concern of social denigration, represents a dark age among dark ages for Mississippi. And so, Faulkner writes in “Mississippi”, his own account of how these uneducated opportunists move from their lowly farms which had been adjacent to the black farms to the “grubby side street stores where he could live not beside the negro but on him by marking up on the inferior meat and meal and molasses the price which he, the Negro, could not even read” (35).

Not surprisingly, the aforementioned accompanying photographs to the article do not linger on the subject of Snopeses in their Mississippi survey. There is, however, one photograph that depicts a poor white person, who could possibly be considered Snopes-like. He is seated with his legs crossed in denim overalls in the middle-ground of a full-page photograph of a dusty weather-worn roadside store and gas pump. Because of his distance from the camera, several

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12 The Snopes clan “represent Evil in an ambivalent way: they are apparently evil themselves...but in addition to that their presence indicates that human evil (or at least the distinct tendency or liability to do evil) was already present before them. Faulkner spoke of them as being ‘like mold on cheese’” (Powers 146).
yards at least, and his position, under the shaded awning of the ramshackle store, his face is barely perceptible and could hardly be viewed as the threatening denigrating influence that Faulkner suggests in the article, more like the hapless Varners than the scheming Snopes.

Figure 2 “Crossroads store, with its faded signs, its tin awning and its single gasoline pump, slumbers under the hot noonday sun near Bentonia. (39) Holiday Magazine, April 1954
In fact, all of the photographs, even the one of the black prisoner in black-and-white striped pants sitting against a Confederate monument (also a full-page shot), are drenched in a light of rural romanticism that remains meticulously untroubled.

Figure 3 “Resting from his labors, a Negro prisoner in striped pants sits under a Confederate monument in front of the Washington County Courthouse. (45) Holiday Magazine, April 1954

In contrast, Faulkner’s map in *Absalom, Absalom!*, which I will discuss in the third part of this chapter, does make space for them indicating with a point, Varner’s store, “where Flem Snopes got his start”(314-5).\(^{13}\) As with “begins” in the opening lines of “Mississippi” the place/time indication of “start” inflects a dual signification: both the location and moment that sparks a demographic shift in the community. In this case, the benign matter-of-fact language belies the

\(^{13}\) See Figure 4 Map of Yoknapatawpha County (1936) by William Faulkner, p. 46
serious threat that this clan will pose on the community, adding more pregnancy to the phrase than if he had been more explicit about what “start” actually implies.

Within the context of the *Holiday* article, this endemic impotence of the older social order, be it out of exhaustion, bankruptcy, confusion, or shame engenders its own regionally and historically specific emanation of hate—a hate that is akin to that expressed in the passage from *Invisible Man*, which simultaneously addresses its external object (i.e. the slave-owner or the Snopeses), but is also a form of self-hate. Faulkner’s third-person double, the “middle-ageing” indulges in this hate when confronted with the prevalent incidences of violence against black people, carried out presumably by Snopes-like people, saying, “But most of all he hated the intolerance and injustice: the lynching of Negroes not for the crimes they committed but because their skins were black (they were becoming fewer and fewer and soon there would be no more of them, but the evil would have been done and irrevocable because there should never have been any)...” (“Mississippi” 44). Like Gavin Stevens’ description of the county in *The Town* that he is both observing from afar and a part of, the Snopes’ guilt does not exculpate the rest of us. The crimes may have been committed by others, but the guilt falls on everyone.

And yet, even though this indictment of guilt is weighted in its irrevocability, Faulkner, like Ellison, sows this story of hate—bred not only by the lynchings, but by the economic exploitation, the political, religious and social exclusion—between two stories of love. The sequence that precedes this paragraph of condemnation and regret is a story of sacrifice, a summary of the section of *Go Down, Moses* called “The Bear” where a simple stable foreman, Boon Hogganbeck, risks his life attacking a notoriously dangerous bear with a hunting knife to try to save his hound, Lion, whom he dearly loved. “Loved” in fact is the last word of this story, before Faulkner opens on the subject of hate and race discussed above, while “but he loves it”
(`Mississippi` 46) is the first phrase following the “hate” paragraph describing the pleasures of growing up in Jefferson. Though not yet roiling together as in the Ellison example, love and hate, here in “Mississippi” are approaching one another, signaling conflict within the article’s protagonist. Consequently, the temptation arises to wonder whether Faulkner simply chose the third-person autobiographical structure to blur genres or if it wasn’t partly to shield himself from emotions that can be too raw and contradictory to be held responsible for. The effect, once again, is deterritorialization. These emotions are still too unprocessed to be contained in a specific location or object; instead they float between the vignettes, giving a texture of emotional complexity to the region without anchoring love and hate to particular assigned spaces.

Finally, “Mississippi” concludes with two long paragraphs detailing the events and circumstances of Caroline’s death: one stroke which weakens her initially and a second one which releases her from life. When “the middleaging” gives the sermon at her funeral, once again there is a permeability in the language between the representation of spatial and temporal localization and the representations of human feeling: this “middle-ageing” preaches the sermon, expressing his hopes “that when his turn came there would be someone in the world to owe him the sermon which all owed to her who had been, as he had been from infancy, within the scope and range of that fidelity and that devotion and that rectitude” (46). “Scope” and “range” emphasize the spatial dimension of this woman’s presence in the region, like a net she cast out that fell upon the land, while in contrast, the term “middleageing” speaks to the protagonist’s liminal neither-here-nor-there state of living in time, the gerund form demonstrating movement, which like the river, is constant and unsettled.

At this unique intersection of time (as marked by the aging narrator) and space (as covered by the geographic reach of Caroline), the fading remnants of a social phenomenon are

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14 Italicization is mine.
playing out. Interracial intimacy between Southern blacks and whites that had arisen in the antebellum period when black women nursed from the same breast both her own children and those of her mistress, when the children grew up playing together and often sleeping on the same pallet, is falling victim to one prominent unfortunate consequence of emancipation--social segregation. Born in 1897, William Faulkner is part of a shrinking minority of Southern “gentlemen” to have grown up with this kind intimate interracial relationship.

The intimacy between the races was particularly noticeable in the rural regions of the South where close cooperation was necessary for the community to successfully tame the elements and develop the land. In his 1955 book, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, the historian C. Van Woodward discusses how surprised Northern visitors to the South in the 1880’s were to find the intimate rapport that persisted between the races:

A frequent topic of comment by Northern visitors during the period was the intimacy of contact between the races in the South, an intimacy sometimes admitted to be distasteful to the visitor. Standard topics were the sight of white babies suckled at black breasts, white and colored children playing together, the casual proximity of white and Negro homes in the cities, the camaraderie of maidservant and mistress, employer and employee, customer and clerk, and the usual stories of cohabitation of white men and Negro women. The same sights and stories had once been favorite topics of comment for the carpetbaggers and before them of the abolitionists, both of whom also expressed puzzlement and sometimes revulsion. What the Northern traveler of the eighties sometimes took for signs of a new era of race relations was really a heritage of slavery times, or, more elementally, the result of two peoples having lived together intimately for

15 Scenes of interracial mothering and brotherhood are depicted in both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Go Down, Moses*, as well as “Mississippi”.
a long time--whatever their formal relations were, whether those of master and slave, exploiter and exploited or superior and inferior. (Woodward 24-25)

Blacks and whites who had once lived in close proximity to one another for generations as intimate witnesses to each other’s lives, an intimacy filtered through the unjust, unnatural and ultimately unsustainable class structure of master and slave. For Southern blacks, freedom from bondage brought new forms of institutional oppression, most notably a life of indebtedness to white landowners in the new crop-lien system, but also a racially segregated life behind the color line.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois discusses what he sees as the social cost of this demographic reorganization that distances the races from each other:

A Negro slum may be in dangerous proximity to a white residence quarter, while it is quite common to find a white slum planted in the heart of a respectable Negro district. One thing, however, seldom occurs: the best of the whites and the best of the Negroes almost never live in anything like close proximity. It thus happens that in nearly every Southern town and city, both whites and blacks see commonly the worst of each other. This is a vast change from the situation in the past, when, through the close contact of master and house-servant in the patriarchal big house, one found the best of both races in close contact and sympathy…One can easily see how a person who saw slavery thus from his father’s parlors, and sees freedom on the streets of a great city, fails to grasp or comprehend the whole of the new picture. (Du Bois 119-120)

While hardly nostalgic for the old social order, Du Bois identifies new problems with the form in which southern society is restructuring itself. White and black interests are no longer intertwined as they once were. Thus, this elegiac scene enacted in Faulkner’s own life and reenacted in
“Mississippi” is a vestige of this regional phenomenon of interracial intimacy that, while troubled by its insidious historical origins, is let go of with regret and longing.

Clearly the recognition of the scope and range of Caroline’s influence as felt and expressed by this white Mississippian is a matter worthy of elegy in itself, particularly when compared with the climate of interracial anonymity that is the new “modern” social reality as portrayed in *Invisible Man*, including the protagonist’s first northern encounter with a white woman. Here on the crowded subway, the protagonist is pushed against a large white woman with a prominent mole and panics because in the South it would be an outrage for a black man to force himself upon a white woman, even if the collision were completely beyond his control. In this instance, however, no one in the car seems to notice his transgression, “even [the woman] seemed lost in her own thoughts” (Ellison 158). Though the protagonist is unambiguously relieved when no riot ensues, this scene disturbingly portrays the racial barriers in the supposedly egalitarian North that enabled urban racially-segregated populations to overlap without cooperating with or even recognizing each other. In contrast, Faulkner’s alter-ego eulogist认识到 and acknowledges Caroline in all the space that surrounds him.

Following this homage to Caroline, Faulkner concludes this account of Mississippi with a provocative sendoff, stating simply with axiomatic confidence in a paragraph all to itself:

Loving all of it even while he had to hate some of it because he knows now that you don’t love because: you love despite; not for the virtues, but despite the faults. (“Mississippi” 49)

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16 Faulkner did in fact give the eulogy at Caroline Barr’s funeral in the winter of 1939 saying that she had stood “as a fount of authority over my conduct and of security of my physical welfare, and of active and constant affection and love…”, concluding, “if there is a heaven, she has gone there” (Essays, Speeches & Public Letters 117-18).
Here, following the foregoing scene of closure, the funereal oration, which is relatively uncomplicated in its representation (i.e. subject, object, and sentiment are unambiguous) is this enigmatic ending. The subjectivity of the “he” protagonist remains unclaimed and an unnamed “it”, presumably Mississippi, continues to resist geographic and social boundaries, just as it fails to contain the emotional repercussions of its past crimes against humanity. Even the act of loving, that which cannot be denied, here cannot be direct, but is distanced from its object with the inexorable “despite”.

This concluding reference to “it”, the floating amorphous subject of a cohabitating love and hate, refers to both the product of deterritorialization and the essential locus of reterritorialization. Instead of using his personal experience to clarify and stabilize what Mississippi actually is, Faulkner detaches certain “real” bits to further explore the representative possibilities of his own subjective experience. Hence the essay “Mississippi” ends not with a place or even one firm residual idea, but a contested site of ambivalent emotion. Once detached from our preconception of place as fixed, the unmarked “it” is purposefully not given the opportunity here to go back to the already mapped quantity of Mississippi. Instead “it” remains poignantly unanchored, which coincidentally is also how the reader feels.

What Cowley’s introduction and the photographs try to settle in terms of meaning, the article itself unsettles, just as slavery unsettled patterns of Southern history leaving the white inhabitants there with an unpayable debt, a remarkable residual effect considering the track record of ruthless economic competition, racism, and pre-plantation slavery. Like love and hate, time and space in Faulkner’s Mississippi is in a relationship of reciprocal meaning, where each term relies on the other for definition, but neither is fixed nor bounded. And Yoknapatawpha County becomes the productive site for this reexamination of history in time and space in
modernist terms of subjectivity, because here in this rural place, experiences cannot be leveled and rebuilt afresh as they are on city maps with ever-changing, ever-expanding skylines. Rural spaces, as Faulkner has shown, have different modes of memory that occur simultaneously and dependently on personal and regional scales, like the nine dollar debt that cannot be expunged, and the golf course that stands not for what it is, but for what it was. Thus, loss too has a unique life here that is always a presence more than an absence. If 20th century city/suburban living turned memory into an ephemera with its privileging the ethos of newness, Faulkner has shown the rural to be a powerful site of ineffaceability, where human traumas like slavery, but also the quotidian struggles of life and morals are contained and recorded, not for mere preservation but as a form of sustenance and getting on—a representation of being.

Section 3: The Sole Owner and Proprietor of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi

To find these yesterday’s men he needed not Jay Gatsby but the mountain man Thomas Sutpen—not the tomorrow-ridden world of urban-climbing but the yesterday suffused world of a rural culture.

---Philip Weinstein, “Land’s Turn” (2005)

“Now I want you to tell me just one more thing. Why do you hate the South?”
“I dont hate it,” Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; “I dont hate it”, he said. I dont hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark: I dont. I don’t! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!17

---William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! (1936)

The narrative portion of Absalom, Absalom! closes direly with this final back-and-forth between Quentin Compson and his roommate Shreve McCannon. Quentin’s (non-)answer (“I dont hate it!”) is stated twice aloud in a knee-jerk reaction emphasized by the collection of

17 Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! 303.
synonyms “quickly”, “at once”, and “immediately”. Though Shreve and Quentin, by managing to piece together a history of the ill-fated Sutpen family, have demonstrated an intimacy close to narratorial perspectival integration, Quentin’s abrupt reply signals that in spite of their apparent psychic communion, Quentin and Shreve do not share geographic sympathies. Their respective Southern and Canadian outsider credentials, which at Harvard offers them a degree of complementarity, are not compatible on this account, and for this, the burden of regional feeling is shouldered by Quentin alone, the so-called “commonwealth” of the South’s historical legacy (Absalom 7). This metaphor of Quentin as commonwealth at the beginning of the novel resonates here at the end as a moment of slippage between Quentin’s earlier metonymic role as the receptacle of the South and the Freudian notion of the mind as “region” or “province” (Freud 96). “Immediately”, whose sense evokes not only a temporal instant, but the immediacy of Quentin’s relationship to his home region, expresses Quentin’s intense confrontation with his ambivalent feelings at this moment that consequently leaves Shreve, at the end of the text, looking less like a participant in this epic story-making endeavor and more like a dispassionate bystander.

The staccato register of Quentin’s response, as if he has no more time or breath to expend on the issue, is an abrupt change from the seemingly timeless conversation that has transpired between these two for much of the novel. The two vocalized denials, however, are not sufficient to quell Quentin’s own doubt and overcome his ambivalence to the story he and Shreve just completed recreating; so, Quentin repeats his response with incrementally increasing intensity in his own mind as he looks out into the dark cold void of Cambridge. Meanwhile, even in thought, the slight Southern slur between the “n” and “t” of don’t is obstinately present, a reflection of the
denial itself that Pamela Dalziel describes as both an affirmation and a repudiation that doubts the very possibility of definitive resolution (284).

From this unsteady place, the dissolution of the partnership between Quentin and Shreve, finalized by Quentin’s ineffectual cry of frustration, the reader encounters three appendices to Absalom, which were original to the novel’s first publication: a Chronology sequencing the events of the novel, a Genealogy of the novel’s actors, and finally, a map of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Following the initial text, these addenda, in addition to a post facto Editor’s Note, which appears in Noel Polk’s “corrected text” edition in between the Genealogy and the map, at first seem each a “metacritical aperçu” exposing and organizing the novel’s heretofore convoluted mechanics (Spillers 550). And yet, opposed to merely mapping out the confusing web of events and places for us, these appendices push back on the text questioning both its unity and authority. The Editor’s Note, the only appendix not prepared by Faulkner, is the most overtly contentious in this regard since with it Polk overrides the authority of the author’s original typescript by “correcting” some inconsistencies while preserving others, seemingly picking and choosing from the various manuscripts whichever phrasing to him felt most just. However, the other three “documents”, which were included as part of the original typescript, disrupt the order of the preceding nine chapters more significantly, because the pressure they bring to bear on the presumed unity of the text originates from the narrative’s author.

In her article, “Absalom, Absalom!: The Extension of Dialogic Form”, Pamela Dalziel presents evidence that each of these three supplements are written by different personae created by Faulkner and that none of them provide an objective perspective on the novel that precedes them. Because my primary interest for this chapter is to consider more carefully Faulkner’s deployment of resolutely rural spaces in his narrative strategy, this section concentrates on only
one of these possible personae, that of the mapmaker, as I examine the pressure and direction the map imposes on the spatial and temporal understandings of Yoknapatawpha with regard to the ending of Absalom and the author’s larger regional project.

Of Faulkner’s three appendices, the map is likely the element with the richest literary precedent. From biblical maps to Thomas Hardy’s Wessex and Sherwood Anderson’s Winesburg, Ohio, maps are a familiar strategy for orientating readers to fictional or far away places, so as to acclimate them to the size and scope of the space represented in the accompanying text. In fiction, maps traditionally abet the suspension of disbelief by further corroborating the legitimacy of a locale by way of visual representation. Put otherwise, they serve as evidence supporting the fictional community’s physical viability. To a certain extent, Faulkner’s map is no different. As an “old-fashioned” form of exegesis, the map, in method and product, reflects the anachronistic conditions of the community it is representing (while New York and Chicago were racing to build skyscrapers, Faulkner’s Jefferson, Mississippi still did not have sidewalks or street lamps). The lack of development adds to the overall impression of the map that Jefferson, as the social hub of Yoknapatawpha, exists in this moment of its depiction in relative containment and isolation from the invasive influences of urbanization occurring elsewhere in country.

18 Other notable examples of maps which Faulkner would have been familiar are Thomas Bulfinch’s maps depicting the location of Greek and Roman myths and the voyages of Ulysses, Sir Thomas More’s map of Utopia, and Jonathan Swift’s maps of the travels of Lemuel Gulliver (Hamblin).
Figure 4 Map of Yoknapatawpha County (1936) by William Faulkner

Further, it is widely felt that the map held unique sentimental value for Faulkner, a somewhat quaint feeling that contrasts sharply with the modernist attitudes of this literary moment, not to mention the high modernist ambitions of Faulkner’s own novels.¹⁹ And yet perhaps these answers alone are not sufficient to explain the map’s publication, for the map appears to be the only appendix that was part of the early layout of the novel and included in the salesman’s

¹⁹ Joseph Blotner, Faulkner’s foremost biographer, claims that the final supplement, the map of Yoknapatawpha County “gave Faulkner more pleasure than either of the others” (Vol.1 937-938); while Michael Millgate, a Faulkner scholar and interviewer, imagines that as early as Sartoris Faulkner devotedly kept beside him as he wrote a map of what he was then calling Yocona County (Faulkner’s Place 38). Striking a similar chord, Thomas McHaney notes that unlike the 1946 map from The Portable Faulkner, this earlier map does not acknowledge the novels that the mapped events are referencing, thus at least circumstantially “indicating that Faulkner first made it for his own purposes”(525).
dummy (Dalziel 287), lending further credence to the theory that the map was not an afterthought for the mere purposes of geographic substantiation or whimsy: it was part of Faulkner’s narrative structural design.

Assuming this to be the case, the question remains: why would Faulkner insist on publishing his map of the county, when in many respects its presence appears antithetical, even threatening to the modernist representations of ambiguity and ambivalence within the text of Absalom, particularly the ending, and throughout the rest of the Yoknapatawpha series? One answer to this, Joseph Urgo proposes in “The Yoknapatawpha Project: A Map of Deeper Existence” is that there is a certain “necessity of the physical origins for the abstractions to ring true,” (650) i.e. the establishment and insistence on the particularities (the mappability) of this rural setting are integral to the strategic methodology and aesthetics of the project. This section examines how and in what ways this is the case, specifically looking at how the map reasserts the role of the rural in what Urgo refers to as “the Yoknapatawpha method… the method by which human interior lives are granted a level of dignity incommensurate with their social standing…”(Urgo 653). By examining the role of the map as a suggestive commentary on the ability of Yoknapatawpha to straddle regionalist and universal planes, I argue that the map unexpectedly exemplifies Faulkner’s ambitions for the development of a modernist poetics of the rural and illuminates an affect particular to his rural subject: an intimacy of the rural, characterized by its specialized relationship to history and environment, that is a reflection of man’s intimate relationship to novel-reading itself as something at once solipsistic, peculiarly provincial, and inconclusively ambivalent.

As emblems of one’s alien status, maps, both fictional and not, reliably mark their possessor as tourist, on-looker, and foreigner. In his Outline of a Theory of Practice, Pierre
Bourdieu elaborates on this idea by considering the prevalence of map terminology in the navigation and explication of the phenomena of culture: “It is significant that culture is sometimes described as a map; it is the analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of practical mastery, the prerogative of the native, by the use of a model of all possible routes” (2). As argued earlier in this chapter, we do begin reading Faulkner’s Mississippi as outsiders, doubly marked by our practical ignorance to the actual region of northern Mississippi exacerbated by an over-reliance on Southern stereotypes both romantic and grotesque and our not-yet acquaintance to Yoknapatawpha County. Yet, this map is not of the touristic variety. Unlike Winesburg, Ohio and many other maps representing fictional places, it comes at the end of the novel presumably after we have already read the text, and it is not interested in simply representing the geography “of all possible routes”, but in spatially contextualizing events in time, and since these mapped events are absolutely meaningless without the history of the county, this is a map decidedly for insiders. Only people who understand the psychological importance of the events can properly read and navigate in it.20

The map itself is provocative in many ways, but perhaps none so much as the insertion of the claim at the bottom left southwest quadrant that reads “William Faulkner, Sole Owner and Proprietor”. This assertion is commonly interpreted as playfully ironic, an abrupt tonal shift from the apocalyptic vision at Absalom’s narrative end. Owen Robinson notes the particular irony of this claim of ownership being positioned at the end of a narrative that so clearly “belies

20 That certain events labeled on the map refer to events not yet available in published form at the time the map was first published ensures that the first wave of Absalom readers could not fully understand the full sense of the map, a reminder of our ambivalent position as only qualified insiders in this world. As with his novels, in the map, the signification of meaning is not offered all at once, but gradually and with preconditions of doubt and circumspection.
21 For the purposes of this piece, the map I refer to is the 1936 map, unless otherwise noted.
any claims to singular authority” (199). Yet, the facetiousness of the statement does not discount or explain the gesture completely. Inextinguishable is a sentimental strain of authorial pride that is certain fodder for critics and readers looking for some additional sign of admission by the author that the Yoknapatawpha series indeed is personal.\textsuperscript{22} Faulkner’s willful claim of responsibility (and implicit assertion of insider status), as not just the mapmaker (He is demoted or demotes himself in the 1946 version of the map for \textit{The Portable Faulkner} to mere surveyor and cartographer, roles that situate him, by contrast, as an outsider entailing a degree of dispassion and impersonal calculation), but owner and proprietor is intriguing for the audacity of the claim in the face of both the map’s and the narrative’s blatant inconsistencies and the modernist narrative strategies he employs, which presents Yoknapatawpha as a conglomerate of overlapping, contradicting subjectivities, an out-and-out rejection of narratorial omniscience. Thus, many critics write off this claim as yet another Faulknerian inconsistency or just too silly to necessitate serious consideration, but perhaps the import is actually in the audacity of the statement, a clue into another way of reading Faulkner’s novels, and thus another way of approaching our relationship to Yoknapatawpha County.

In their writing on Faulkner, both Owen Robinson and Pamela Dalziel adopt the dialogic theory of Mikhail Bakhtin as a lens for explicating Faulkner’s polyphonic narrative style. Dalziel remarks that Bakhtin and Faulkner similarly assert the role of “the viewer as participant” (Dalziel 278); and yet, in discussing his work Faulkner goes a step beyond reader-as-mere-

\footnote{\textsuperscript{22} In a letter to Malcolm Cowley discussing the “Compson Appendix” to \textit{The Sound and the Fury}, Faulkner describes the appendix-writer’s “point of view” as that of a “bloodless bibliophile”, not himself. He is “heatless, not very moved, cleaning up ‘Compson’ before going on to the next ‘C-o’ or ‘C-r’” (October 27, 1945, p.206). This letter, along with Dalziel’s theory of separate “writers” for the Chronology and Genealogy, provide ample reason to question whether there is a difference between William Faulkner, the owner and proprietor and William Faulkner, the author. At the opposite end of the commentator-bias spectrum from the “bloodless bibliophile”, Faulkner’s bold claim of ownership over the land announces a contaminative subjectivity particularly concerning his questionable authority to decide which events are relevant enough to be mapped and which are not.}
participant. While he was known for likening the various narrations inside Absalom to “thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird with none of them right”, he added that, “when the reader has read all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image…I would like to think [that it] is the truth” (*Faulkner in the University* 273-4).

Semantically this statement averring to the “truth” of the reader’s image is in direct opposition to Faulkner’s claim on the map as the “Sole Owner and Proprietor”; however, both of these claims run counter to the distinct impression of the novels (and conclusions of many critics) that in Yoknapatawpha County there is no absolute truth. The similarity then between the claims of authorial and readerly interpretative authority in the county is in having the courage to make such claims in the first place. In other words, Faulkner, as owner and proprietor, is arguably leading by example. “The infinite play of signifiers” that Faulkner creates, particularly in Absalom, from which the sense of “meaning” emerges, is transmuted to the responsibility of the reader, and who are we to shirk it?23

Although many variations of ambivalence (moral/historiographical/geographical/etc.) are central to Faulkner’s narrative craft, his aim perhaps was not merely to point out the impossibility of narrative certainty, but to encourage claims of ownership in the face uncertainty, as is the case with Quentin and Shreve in Absalom when they piece together the Sutpen saga. Faulkner as a lifelong storyteller understood this implicitly from a young age (he was renowned for grand, even ostentatious, embellishments of his own biography, particularly his military

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23 To at least partially unburden the reader of this messy responsibility, Noel Polk, in *Absalom, Absalom!: The Corrected Text* (1986), attempts to right certain inconsistencies in the text (Dalziel 280), genealogy, chronology of *Absalom, Absalom!* but in doing so gets caught having to “establish hierarchies of reliability”(278) that are based essentially on his personal valuations of the text irrespective of what Faulkner’s intentions might have been. “Polk’s ‘dates and facts of the novel’ –by which he means the preceding nine chapters—have intrinsically no more authority than those of a chronology which is also “of the novel”, as Polk himself implicitly acknowledges by choosing to privilege sometimes the earlier narratives (when he emends) and sometimes the Chronology (when he does not emend)” (Dalziel 280).
career and his alleged foray into liquor trafficking.) Thus, the intimacy that Faulkner creates between character and reader is not founded on their objective “rightness” of vision, but on the manner in which the texts assert our prerogative to interpret, even translate, their world and the powerful sympathy that arises in this act of translation.

Peering at the map, Thomas McHaney points out, “how undeveloped and relatively undocumented much of the landscape of Yoknapatawpha County remains” (527), and yet, as one of the defining attribute of the rural, this lack of clutter is one of Yoknapatawpha’s most important narrative components. The map allows for personal events, some of which are admittedly mundane, to resonate across the county, such as the incident with Benjy at the monument, discussed earlier, or the arrow on the map pointing towards Mottstown, which is marked as “where Jason Compson lost his niece’s trail and where Anse Bundren and his boys had to go in order to reach Jefferson.” Arguably, from a sufficient distance all the events listed appear provincial, commonplace and unremarkable. Paradoxically, however, it is the events’ reliance on the insular context of the rural community that enables the events to cultivate their symbolic might. As Urgo observes, what the sites on the map have in common is that they mark events of “psychic magnitude” for individuals and the collective memory as remembered and recorded both within the community’s popular history and by Faulkner’s metatextual Yoknapatawpha project (649).

This emptiness, which allows for minutia and mundanity, exposes another key construct with which a modern poetics of the rural differentiates itself from the urban: a systematic interconnected communal network that is founded on the inhabitants’ relationship to land and region. Stronger arguably than the mental compatibility of Shreve and Quentin, this shared experience of place between Yoknapatawphans binds relationships and sustains the influence of

24 Cf. Blotner.
the region’s history over its inhabitants. As Philip Weinstein notes, in his investigation of Yoknapatawpha as *habitus*:\[25\]

Faulkner’s work achieves its gravity because the wounds to body and spirit it records seem more stubbornly rooted, less open to therapy, than the more individualist dramas of a Fitzgerald or Hemingway. Whole ways of life are opposed and under attack. The resonance of these troubles seems to intimate the wounded land itself—the land that’s “going to turn and destroy us all someday” (*Absalom* 7)—a kind of injury that goes deeper, and lasts longer, than mere individual pain. (17)

The map does this spatially by representing the confluence of events in the Yoknapatawpha series, while the narrative of *Absalom* presents the interpersonal aspect of this involuntary shared destiny, the reality of “us”, in both Rosa Coldfield’s desire to tell her story to Quentin, though both are barely acquainted,\[26\] and Judith Sutpen choosing Quentin’s grandmother to receive her letter from Charles Bon though they had never spoken before.

Returning to the parallel claims of “Sole Owner and Proprietor” and the viability of the “fourteenth” image, Faulkner in the persona of mapmaker-proprietor draws together these two ideas (reading and ownership) by bringing attention to the responsibility of the mapmaker and landowner as first a reader and interpreter of geography. In this guise, he is less the author of *Absalom* than a reader like us, mapping out where things go and what is relevant for his own spatial orientation as well as ours. As a product of interpretation as well as of surveying, the map creates its own truth about the region apart from the Yoknapatawpha novels, a truth that

\[25\] As defined by Weinstein, Pierre Bourdieu's term "habitus", which he theorizes in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, "involves recurring objective conditions which, over time, individuals have unthinkingly absorbed into their own reckoning turning such reckoning into active dispositions...viable habitus ensures successful ecological practice" (16-7).

\[26\] The two intra-textual theories for why Rosa Coldfield chooses Quentin as her confidant is that it is either because he is going to attend Harvard University in the fall and will have the ability to export her story outside of the county or because he is the grandson of Thomas Sutpen’s only real friend, and thus by association he is a family intimate.
holds sway over the reader and the novels themselves, at the very least reproportioning the stories so as to fit relationally on the map. Even Thomas Sutpen, who is mentioned only twice (once marking the church that he “rode fast to” and second marking where he is murdered), is “stripped of all larger-than-life dimensions: the demon is reduced to the level of an ordinary man” (Dalziel 293).

While Thomas McHaney points out that the word “Yoknapatawpha” appears very infrequently in the Yoknapatawpha novels through 1945 (511), the map establishes the region as an evidentiary truth that insists upon the label “Yoknapatawpha” as the novels’ proper and particular context, thereby reaffirming the importance of the novels’ umbrella ecology. It reminds us (sometimes unsuccessfully) that Yoknapatawpha is more than merely what Joseph Urgo describes as “a convenient shorthand for Faulkner’s literary project”(650) or what Owen Robinson calls “a mental entity, a collective state of mind”(212). As a region, whose substantiality is reinforced by its reappearance in novels, short stories, articles, and maps thereby superseding any one of its many sources, Yoknapatawpha pressures the various narrative threads it contains, forcing a recognition of and submission to the narratives’ implacable spatiality. Though many critics agree with Martin Kreiswirth that Yoknapatawpha is an entity “constituted by the reader from the perceived interrelations of elements that appear in various texts,” the map insists on an attempt at regional coherency even if it resists ultimate unity as Malcolm Cowley

27 This proxy status of mapmaker as reader mirrors a strategy found in Faulkner’s writing as well. In Owen Robinson’s book, Creating Yoknapatawpha, he discusses in detail instances where characters are engaged in reading and interpretation along with us and we witness the process by which a “truth” is established by the interpreters that could not or would not be established by the original actors. Two such examples are Shreve and Quentin in Absalom, Absalom! as they interpret the Sutpen saga, and Ike McCaslin in Go Down, Moses who reads along with us the ledgers kept by his uncles that reveal, or at least insinuate strongly, secret family shame. It is this game-changing act of interpreting the ledgers that incites Ike’s repudiation of the McCaslin plantation and reshapes the destiny of the McCaslin family on both black and white sides of the family tree.
would have it.\textsuperscript{28} In this way, the tension contained in the map between the possibility of infinite perspectives and the singularity of the object itself mirrors the ambivalence of Faulkner’s narrative structures.

Beyond reasserting the reader’s project of constructing the county and aligning the prerogative of the reader with the mapmaker himself, the map reinforces the physical importance of the fictional space, a reminder that the relationship to the land itself is a critical part of the larger Faulknerian concept of “environment”. This is a term Faulkner relied on frequently in his lectures and speaking engagements of the 1950’s to describe the social, philosophical, political and natural milieu in which his characters were formed and against which many of them struggled. The map, thus, provides the spatial context for these elements to conjoin and for the particularities of the region to be reinforced. The otherwise “empty” map offers, instead of landmarks for getting around, evidence of the traumas and inconsistencies of the lives and deaths of the community, the grand and minute historical ironies that pervade the community like a drought or flood, and in this way the impression of history on the rural landscape remains monumentally \textit{and} dynamically present. The landmarks identified do not, as Owen Robinson observes of the McCaslin commissary, “merely house the static, patient perusal of the past, but rather host its active recreation within the text (itself the site of yet further active recreation)” (154-5).

“Place is never simply ‘place’ in southern writing”, writes Patricia Yaeger, “but always a site where trauma has been absorbed into the landscape” (13), and in this sense, though Faulkner described his map to Malcolm Cowley as “the first chronological picture” \textit{(The Faulkner-Cowley}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{28} In \textit{The Portable Faulkner}, Malcolm Cowley attempts to cohere the region by arranging Faulkner’s work as a chronicle or myth (Urgo 643). In doing so, he transforms Yoknapatawpha with the metaphor of a “mythical kingdom”.
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*File, “December 8, 1945”*, the time depicted is not linear, but overlapping like scar tissue. Instead of dissipating into a forgotten memory, the events of the map linger with obdurate persistency. The rural landscape and the culture that it supports is the last venue for history to have such a traceable presence, a recoverable habitus. Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha, in this way, is the artistic manifestation of Bourdieu’s claim that “in each of us…there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result” (79). And while Elizabeth Duvert argues that the map as “an icon of Faulkner’s vision of landscape as spatialized time” suggests place as synonymous with event, “landscape becomes history” (14), the reverse is equally true that the map shapes history into a landscape, whose particularly sparse slow-changing rural environment again enables its continued durability and geographic relevancy, serving what Weinstein refers to as “long-brooded scenarios” (18).

Hortense Spillers points out that “we could think of topographical location here as that that generates its own self-reflexivity” (548) or what Edward Soja might consider “an interpretive human geography, a spatial hermeneutic,” (1-2) but whichever terminology one employs, the role of the environment in Faulkner, the influence of the land, the weather, its social and natural limitations is inextricable to what Freud calls the human “psychical apparatus.”

Faulkner in a 1952 interview said that the South is “the only really authentic region in the United States, because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment” and that “[i]n the South above all, there is still a common acceptance of the world, a common view of life, and a common morality” (Meriwether and Millgate 72). While this claim appears to overreach, because there are other regions of the country, (particularly the Midwest, the

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mountains, the Southwest) where such bonds between man and environment persisted, this statement does suggest that, for Faulkner, the persistent social influence of common accepted truths is an ecological condition that is indigenous and particular to the rural, an element of the environment that must be reckoned with, whose will is more powerful than the collection of its individuals (Urgo, “Introduction” xii). Examples of this bond, which often blossoms into confrontation and struggle abound in his work, especially Absalom. Here, a less serious account of this Southern attribute, in which the habitus is the prescriptive element of what can be achieved with the available resources, is recounted by V.K. Ratliff in The Hamlet:

“You got to keep in mind he is a northerner. They does things different from us. If a fellow in this country was to set up a goat-ranch, he would do it purely and simply because he had too many goats already. He would just declare his roof or his front porch or his parlor or wherever it was he couldn’t keep the goats out of a goat-ranch…[a northerner] dont start off with goats or a piece of land either. He starts off with a piece of paper and a pencil and measures it all down setting in the library—so many goats to so many acres and so much fence to hold them.” (804)

The map is simply a visual reiteration of this environmental “psychical apparatus.” Southern fatalism is tied to the conditions of the land (it is a goat ranch because there are goats there), while Northern entrepreneurism is motivated by projected profits (it is goat ranch, because it is to my material advantage that there be one there). In contrast to the horizon-focused ambitions that motivate 19th and early 20th century fictional cosmopolitans, Faulkner’s characters come to life

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30 The author himself depicts a Midwestern environmental bond in the short story, “Golden Land”, as a means to contrast the rootless existence of living in Los Angeles.
through their association with place, and the map emphasizes this by showing spatially how “event and place are closely concatenated” (Spillers 548).31

While the historical event of territorial expansion and settlement in the United States had generally been “mapped out in narrative upon an infinitely extendable mythic landscape where indigenous habitation and black slave labor were conveniently erased” to more ideally depict “the imperial presence at the heart of the American dream” (Eddy 571), Faulkner’s map of Yoknapatawpha redraws the interconnectivity of the community to its natural landscape, reconfiguring the “dream” by situating it back in its less-majestic modes of production i.e. exploitation of land and people in the plantation system or what Paul Gilroy calls “capitalism with its clothes off” (15). Considering Charmaine Eddy’s assertion that “as a labor system, the South exposed the dismantling of the imaginary structure that supported the ideas of nationhood for America” (572), Faulkner, by juxtaposing Quentin’s repeated denials at the end of *Absalom* with the map, dramatizes the repercussions of this dismantling on scales that are regional and national, and communal and individual. Quentin, finding himself at a preeminent center of American ideas, Harvard University, suffers an irreconcilable contradiction between America’s platonic ideals and the cruelty of its means and methods of which he, as a Southerner, is an unwilling heir and representative. The map, thus, illustrates the particularly regional conundrum at the heart of Quentin’s inability to sufficiently deny (or accept) Shreve’s presumption that he hates the South. Its interconnected history, the close ties between the region’s romantic ascendency and its crimes against humanity, marked on the map itself, provide a geography for Quentin’s suffering that spatially maps the problem of an ambivalent love/hate (not unlike

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Faulkner’s end of “Mississippi”) without fixing it in either sense of repairing or freezing into place.

The encroachment of modernity and the ecological disturbance it causes will be discussed in the concluding section of this chapter, but for now it is enough to point out that the events on the map depict a “sense of inharmonious disturbance and deterioration which prevails rather than a truly violent and wholesale intrusion of modernism” (Rabbets 35), and that this is indicative of Faulkner’s specific historic moment as well as natural and social topographical conditions. The vulnerabilities to Faulkner’s “precarious ecosystem” are clear (Weinstein 17). The map illustrates an invested interest in marking death (Thomas Sutpen, Old Bayard Sartoris, Joe Christmas, Addie Bundren, Goodwin, and Tommy) as well as other social disturbances, such as young Quentin running away from Jason Compson and Benjy’s traumatic trip around the monument, that weaken the otherwise change-resistant environment. Situated amid the natural landmarks of the rivers, pine hills and Chickasaw land grant, the disturbances engage in a dialectic that is at the heart of Faulkner’s representation of 20th century rurality, the closely quartered ambivalence of “an Arcadian vision” and “an anxious awareness of reality” each of which illuminates the other.32 Though “reality” may be a vague term, what rubs at the heart of this “political and psychic dissonance”(Weinstein 17) is the irreconcilable conflict between our desire for a timeless pastoral existence and our forced recognition that nothing in life, even in the rural, remains static.

Despite the fact that Faulkner is famous for couching his success as a novelist in failure (In an interview with Jean Stein, he surmised, “I'm a failed poet. Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't and then tries the short story which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing” (Meriwether and

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32 Cited terms come from Marx 30.
Millgate, *Lion in the Garden* 238), the novel, for Faulkner, served as the most effective/affective medium for representing a full and comprehensive engagement with one’s environment. While other literary forms may have seemed more enviable for their ability to abstract and distill meaning, the novel enabled Faulkner to apply the loftier humanistic ambitions of poetry to his larger ecological concerns that were executed through a thorough excavation of his native region of northern Mississippi. Even in the word, Yoknapatawpha, which McHaney keenly describes as “long, mellifluous, strange…a perfect sound for the difficulty and the beauties of Faulkner’s prose” (527), one hears the aspirations, conflicts, and ambivalence of a larger more multi-faceted project than one idea of place can contain. The name not only invokes pre-colonization history and topography and with it the original crimes to the land and its people that led to the patterns of displacement, enslavement and communal guilt that Faulkner becomes increasingly invested in throughout his career, but the consonant and vowel sounds themselves remain distinct and resist elision in their pronunciation. This further illustrates not only the metonymic but the physical importance of the region’s role with regard to the assemblage of narrative voices that it contains but cannot pin down in its rural system of circulating signification. The map, thus, illustrates the ambivalent, peculiar, and intimate role of region in Faulkner’s work, which reflects the forte of the novel for not only creating spaces, but allowing readers to interact with them. This intimacy that is of both integration and otherness is indigenously correlated to the ambivalent communion forged between a novel-reader and his/her

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33 The term assemblage here is used to articulate in-betweeness in discourse or what Gilles Deleuze described as the “minimum real unit...It is always an assemblage which produces utterances...The utterance is the product of an assemblage—which is always collective, which brings into play within us and outside us populations, multiplicities, territories, becomings, affects, events” (Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues* 51). Further stating with regard to our relationship to the world, “We can only struggle among assemblages” (52-53).
object, as it would be forged, as Faulkner might proffer, between the human heart and its environment.

**The City Specter: William Faulkner and the Threat of Urban Encroachment**

Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it...It opened up a gold mine of other people, so I created a cosmos of my own.

---William Faulkner, Interview in *Paris Review* (26)

This famous quotation from William Faulkner’s 1956 interview with Jean Stein for the *Paris Review* sets forth a spatial model for Yoknapatawpha County that is both insular and grandiose. By proclaiming his region’s self-containment in a postage stamp, the writer, like a few of his most memorable characters and several of his most fervent advocates, appears to promote the idea of Northern Mississippi as a singular place cordoned off from the world, detached from the rising century’s preoccupation with city-life and the social upheavals that went along with it.\(^\text{34}\) This particular spatial interpretation is one that attracted many of Faulkner’s Agrarian critics, who expressly sought a valorization of rural life that by the strength of its merit would condemn the metropolis outright—a doubly-bound aim that Susan Willis in her essay, “Aesthetics of the Rural Slum,” describes as the very textbook definition of anti-

\(^{34}\) Faulkner’s earliest enthusiasts included many of the writers and critics of the Vanderbilt Agrarians, such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. Arguing for a return to the “antebellum provincialism” of the old South in the manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, the Agrarians were openly hostile towards all forms of Northern industrialism that were emerging out from the cities into the farmlands post-World War I. Notably, this hostility entailed a resistance of any argument that Faulkner’s writing addresses issues of urbanism beyond its use as a negative example for the valorization of American rurality. While the Agrarians, like Faulkner, were heavily invested in the consciousness of “the past in the present” (Tate quoted in Jackson 69), Faulkner does not fit the Agrarians’ mold, for neither he nor his work acquiesces to their ideology that the aristocratic mythology of the South should be defended and reinstated in American living memory. Cf. Lawrence Schwartz’s *Creating Faulkner’s Reputation* and Robert Jackson’s *Seeking the Region in American Literature and Culture.*
modernization (84). Using Cleanth Brooks as her example of a New Critic who was limited by this kind of agrarian ideology, Willis describes how this sequestration of the rural from the urban is problematic because it leaves the rural as “nothing more than the city’s binary opposite” (85).

Far from existing in true isolation, however, the integral strength and poetic effect of Yoknapatawpha’s rural insularity is, in fact, founded in its prevalent and increasingly open confrontations with the modern metropolis’s emergent paradigms.35 Faulkner’s success presenting “modern” consciousness in rural subjects engages northern Mississippi not as an alternative universe, sequestered from time, but instead as a conjunction of the rural in dialectic with the urban from which Faulkner could dramatize the modes of resistance and accommodation to modernity that his characters inevitably undertake. In other words, instead of merely seeing the rural South as a counter narrative to Northern industrialization, as the Agrarians prefer, Yoknapatawpha should be considered a critical representation of how we might more fully imagine the development of early twentieth-century urbanism in the United States. Faulkner’s “rural” writing demonstrates that modernity is not something that purely, or even figuratively, happened in the city and to the rural: it emerged when these ideologically-bound geographies sought and/or were forced to confront one another.

In spite of the habitual sleepiness of Jefferson, many of the ecological disturbances to the cosmos are evidence of what Philip Weinstein classifies as “vintage early 20th century modernism”—the effects of the “too-fast” (cars, airplanes, industrial modernization, and moral expediency) waging assault on the “too-slow” (traditional modes of transportation, production,

35 In “As I Lay Dying in the Machine Age,” John T. Matthews employs Michael O’Brien’s delineation of modernism as a sensibility “not necessarily sympathetic” but “in dialectic with modernization” (271). And Matthews effectively adopts this definition to interpret the rampant consumerism in As I Lay Dying as part of the modernist crisis on-going in Yoknapatawpha County. This exercise of modernism as revealed through social commodification and commercial exchanges, however, is not merely revelatory, but part of an even greater on-going spatial dialectic—country and town, town and Memphis, South and North.
and social relations) (21). Citing tragic speed enthusiasts Bayard Sartoris and Temple Drake and perpetual stragglers Benjy and Quentin Compson, Weinstein places Yoknapatawpha’s residents among the rarified pantheon of high modernist—velocity-troubled—protagonists. Within such a configuration, Faulkner’s country folk sit remarkably comfortably alongside more cosmopolitan figures such as Prufrock, Dalloway, and Dedalus.

Yet, if it is Faulkner’s concern with the variable pace of time that identifies him as part of a canonized literary movement, what sets him apart is the vigorous attention he pays to the repercussions of modernism on the too-slow side of the equation. What does it mean for a slow-moving region to confront an infectious national need for speed? Leigh Anne Duck in her book, *The Nation’s Region* sees this confrontation as a modernist emanation of the gothic. This she differentiates from the traditional 18th century modes of the genre by pointing out that instead of the typical psycho-social horrors being contained in “distinct chronotopes[,]…modernist texts represent gothic emergences—sudden perceptions of haunted or shifting time, spectral or vertiginous space—within a recognizable, even mimetic, social space” (151). Indeed, this characterization suits the atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha quite well.

In the representation of these “gothic emergences,” Faulkner’s perspicuity of the social and cultural losers in the 20th century—Compsons, Sutpens, and McCaslins among them—is sharpened, not overshadowed, by the glare of the metropolis. As Jeff Allred’s aptly titled chapter “Moving Violations” asserts, it is those “who are fixed in place, relatively speaking” who “make the contours of the strange new world of modernity visible by contrast” (105). As such, we come to understand that Faulkner did not invest in speed for speed’s sake, as might be said of other rural natives gone modern like Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby or Daisy Buchanan; instead, he concentrated on the latent effects of a community’s sacrifice for it as well as the (often
insufficient) resistance mounted against it. The introduction of paved sidewalks, electric street lamps, and movie theaters asserts a new modern configuration for Jefferson; concrete and electrical wiring form a grid to make permanent the once malleable spatial organization of the town, while further assimilating the region to the rest of the country. In light of Allred’s and Duck’s assertions, these changes threaten, but also satisfyingly dramatize the regionally-specific way Yoknapataphans live and their psychical relationship to space and time, particularly with regard to how or even whether their collective memory will be preserved.

Naturally, there are no bustling metropolises in Yoknapatawpha. An actual city, if it appears at all in Faulkner’s fiction, is often only an outpost or a transitory plot point. Instead, in the heart of Faulkner’s rural series, from The Sound and the Fury to Go Down, Moses, the too-fast urban ethos of convenience and opportunism infiltrates the county in the form of a specter whose offensive strategy is multi-faceted and whose hegemonic sense of authority derives from, not one city in particular, but the overwhelming sense that an urban agenda of modernization has the rural surrounded. Georg Simmel in his famous essay, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” describes the nature of the city’s reach to extend well beyond its physical borders as its “most significant aspect,” the effect of which “reacts upon [the city] and gives to it life, weight, importance and responsibility”(17). While Simmel’s depiction of this city specter demonstrates how the metropolis gains nourishment for itself, Faulkner considers this process from the opposite perspective of the habitus that is being consumed. From within Yoknapatawpha, the

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37 Even though it does not wholly transpire in the rural South, the “urban” events of The Sound and the Fury, such as Quentin’s suicide in Cambridge, Massachusetts, are not only integrated as part of the Faulkner’s mythology of the region, they inhabit the rural as a conspicuous shadow that defines everything else that occurs in the Yoknapatawpha, including its past.

38 “Habitus” is a term developed by the sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu to describe a set of conditions, living habits, and/or cultural exposures that structures a community and contributes to a sense of self.
city specter looms in the interstices of these narratives, a ghostly shadow deploying variable 
emissaries who threaten to be more transformative to the community than emancipation ever 
was.

My interest in the city specter is not in the more obvious ways it appears to bring the 
South to its knees, but the subtler, more ambivalent ways the city disrupts and confuses our 
habituation to a linear conception of modernization with all but predetermined winners and 
losers. This spectral effect is apparent in the way Faulkner’s city does not quash, but disrupts the 
myth of the South’s tragic fall in much of Faulkner’s work, with the chapter “Delta Autumn” 
from *Go Down, Moses*, as one of the most telling and surprising narratives of this unrelenting 
rural/urban pas de deux. The city specter haunts Yoknapatawpha by seeking to change not only 
its modes of everyday life, but the region’s contextualization in both space and time. The rural 
region’s languid guise of timelessness and limitless space is interrupted and overtaken by a new 
sense of immediacy to preserve and defend—another example of the too-slow confronting the 
too-fast. As the illusion of regional self-containment progressively erodes in the South 
throughout the century, the rural habitus acquires a reactionary stance that hardly appears an 
adequate counter to the spatially and temporally co-optative forces of urban modernization.39 
And yet, it is not the outcome for the South that truly motivates these texts, but the intrigue and 
mystery of the confrontation itself.

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Characterized by a degree of both fixity and flux, the habitus is a mediated space that embodies both social 
institutions and individuals acting within and among cultural and behavioral norms. 
39 The Vanderbilt Agrarians would argue that it is not merely this fictional community standing up against the 
inexorable forces of modernization, but Faulkner himself that is taking this reactionary stance. The author, 
however, was clearly more taken with dramatizing lost causes than the idea of taking them up as personal 
mantle. This is a critical difference between Faulkner and Ike McCaslin. When Ike finds the ledgers of his 
father and uncle’s slave transactions, he does not tell anyone, but commits himself to a life of repudiation and 
resistance to change, whereas when Faulkner purportedly uncovered actual ledgers that are believed to be 
the basis for Ike’s fictional ones his instinct appears to have been quite the opposite. They became a source of 
inspiration (Cohen).
The popular short story, “A Rose for Emily” (1930) is an appropriate place to begin defining Faulkner’s city specter, not only because it is written relatively early in his career, but because structurally the fable tracks a predictable trajectory of the Northern carpetbagger who seduces the Southern maiden, threatening not just the honor of the family, but the constitution of the region. What begins as a cross-class North-South love story turns into a murder mystery when the town discovers that their living “monument,” Emily Grierson, has murdered Homer Barron, a Yankee foreman who had arrived in Jefferson to pave the sidewalks one summer (119). As one of the city’s emissaries from the North, Homer Barron had courted both Miss Grierson and the town with modern conveniences and aesthetic improvements. In the narrative, Homer manages to disarm the community with his warm gregarious nature until the progressive changes he brought with him, technological and social, were irrevocably introduced into the environment: before Homer “disappears” for good, Faulkner establishes that “the streets had been finished some time since” (121), thereby establishing the permanent trace on the land that Barron leaves behind him.

In this way, Homer is a symbol of the mechanized classless future for which neither Emily nor the town is quite ready. Although in one sense this crime of passion might be understood as only another example of the South’s characteristically hot-blooded constitution (in opposition to the cold restraint of the North), it conversely is also a targeted attempt to halt what Faulkner describes in Requiem for a Nun as the trademark “fever” and “delirium” of the city “forever seething with motion and motion with progress” (476). And yet, perhaps her revenge on Homer is neither fully due to her Southern sensitivities nor her over-active defenses, but that equally (and paradoxically) its very circumstances, the murder of her Yankee lover, is evidence that the fever and delirium that Homer brought with him from the North had, in a sense, taken
residency in the town long before his remains are discovered. In this sense, Homer Barron, though thwarted by Emily Grierson in life with an easy dose of arsenic, haunts Jefferson as a ghost of the future. He is not merely a reminder of the lost war, but a harbinger of the city-born structural and social changes that will certainly be more difficult to ward off than his actual person, even if the community manages to sustain some will to resist the persuasive seductions of modernization.

While Faulkner’s perennial hick party-crashers, the Snopeses, take advantage of the region’s underestimation of them, the city, as a spectral presence (more like the afterlife of Homer Barron) hones in, in a different sense, on the weaknesses of the denigrated social system. The city specter promises uncertain illusory rewards (sophistication, culture, and most alluringly the ease of prosperity), while delivering very certain palpable losses. Compellingly, though they are not cultured enough to know they are boarding in a brothel, it is Virgil Snopes and Fonzo in Sanctuary (1931) who appear most sensitive to this double-edged call of the city: “They could hear the city, evocative and strange, imminent and remote; threat and promise both” (194). As the Snopeses disrupt hierarchies of power from within, the city’s indeterminate penetration, exerting pressure from without, agitates and enables the primary twin infrastructural threats to the New South: land exploitation and social upheaval. As much as any speeding train, plane, or automobile, these menaces, exacerbated by the metropolis, mark the temporal immediacy of Faulkner’s environmental concerns.

Moreover, though significant diffusion of the Snopeses into Jefferson does not occur until relatively late in the Yoknapatawpha series, the urban specter is there at the start, its weakening and destabilizing effect opening opportunities for the Snopeses’ later power grab. In The Sound and the Fury (1929), the city figuration of Cambridge, Massachusetts not only accommodates
and abets Quentin Compson’s suicide through sustained dispassionate complicity with Quentin’s own sense of trapped self-alienation, but long before that moment, infiltrates Jefferson by forcing the sale of the Compson pasture. Demoting this land "fit to breed princes, statesmen and generals and bishops" (SF Appendix 7) into a golf course, the proceeds, which pay for Quentin’s doomed Harvard education, dramatize the diminishing returns the region suffers when its residents attempt to reinvest in their future.

For Rosa Coldfield in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Northern cities have drained the South of its regenerative prerogative and its own distinct cultural discourse. These losses come to a head when she imagines Quentin marrying a woman in the North, presumably to start a family there. Rosa believes it would be for this wife and their connubial life in the North that he might be motivated to publish her story in a magazine. Capitulating that “…Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man” (5), she submits herself to the idea that if the story is to survive, it will be through Northern modes of production (and reproduction) that, at that time, monopolize the documentation and circulation of ideas. In this way, the revenge she seeks against Sutpen (which is also a displaced revenge act against her father) by narrating his story is both abetted by and sacrificed to the Northeast industrial urban complex.⁴⁰

Even Rosa’s willingness to sacrifice her story, however, both enabling its preservation and securing its regional displacement, is not enough to achieve her ends. Her aims encounter a dead-end at Quentin’s suicide—notwithstanding the meta-textual resolution that Rosa’s wish is achieved eventually through Faulkner’s success publishing the book. Conversely, even if we embrace the meta-textual resolution, we are impelled by John T. Irwin’s interpretation of doubling and incest to see more clearly how the publishing of the novel—inevitably in the

⁴⁰ Cf. John Irwin’s *Doubling and Incest / Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner.*
North—mirrors and to a large extent reenacts Quentin’s river suicide: “For writing a book, creating a work of art, is not so much an alternative to suicide as a kind of alternative suicide: writing as an act of autoerotic self-destruction” (162). In this way, the dislocation of the book from Faulkner in the South to publishing houses and audiences in the North enacts Quentin’s premature death as a necessary condition for the story to be realized.41

If Rosa’s “pragmatic” approach to getting her story reproduced relies obliquely on Quentin’s capacity to reproduce in an urban setting, Anse takes an equally pragmatic resource-oriented approach to achieving his reproductive goals at the end of As I Lay Dying (1930). Though the promise to bury his wife in Jefferson initiates the voyage, and his desire for new teeth sustains his monomaniacal focus to get there, access to the comparatively dynamic material culture of Jefferson provides Anse with another, even greater, economic opportunity: a new wife. The achievement of this hidden agenda, not only brings one more laborer to the farm, but (seemingly miraculously) reestablishes Anse’s reproductive viability. And yet, as with Rosa and Quentin, this viability exacts an essential piece of who they are: as Patrick O’Donnell observes, the Bundrens will pay for their new start with Darl’s sanity (84). Because his eyes are “full of the land” (AILD 36) and cannot suppress their agitation as the caravan moves closer to town, “the limning of [Darl’s] eccentricity [becomes] a necessary part of the process that brings the roads to the Bundrens and the Bundrens to Jefferson” (O’Donnell 91). Their regional singularity is

41 In his article, “Shortened Stories: Faulkner and the Market,” John T. Matthews examines Faulkner’s ambivalence about the publishing industry more fully as a paradox between the writer’s resentment of the commercial restraints placed on him and his unabashed desire to take full fiduciary advantage of the marketplace. Matthews’s argument shows how Faulkner’s short stories demonstrate both the vulgarities of commodification and consumption and the otherwise unlikely opportunities for empowerment that the market allows social underdogs such as African Americans in “Centaur in Brass,” women in “Mule in the Yard,” and, by implication, Faulkner himself, the struggling artist. Matthews points out that although Faulkner claimed he was only able to write The Sound and the Fury after he had shut himself off from the influence of the publishers he had previously been courting with Sartoris, the novel itself arises out of a projected short story, the most marketable form of writing for the author at that time. Not only this, but in the style and form of The Sound and the Fury, we find “the traces of violent separation” that Matthews identifies as characteristic of Faulkner’s short stories, which were often extracted from larger projects (34).
sacrificed as they adopt nationally-endorsed behavioral norms (i.e. consumerism). Representative of the less visible macro-economical currents at play, these “goods,” material and otherwise, that the Bundrens find and sacrifice in Jefferson mark a historical transition in American life that Kevin Railey pinpoints as “the turning point where urban, town interests were coming to outweigh rural, country ones” (91). Railey shows that the Bundrens (with the exception of Addie and Darl) instinctually recognize the social barriers of yeomanry: “Being in the country and identifying with country ways meant isolation and separation—virtual nonexistence” (89).

To become citizens engaged in this new “liberal ethos,” the family not only adopts middle class values of consumerism (in spite of their actual poverty), prioritizing the town over the country, but is impelled literally to move in that direction: toward Jefferson.

While the search for material offerings and services in *As I Lay Dying* makes modern consumers out of the Bundrens, the city specter in *Light in August* (1932) does not merely convert new adherents, but wages significant havoc on Yoknapatawpha’s class-normative relationships. For most of the novel, the city specter is not oblique, but named: the city of Memphis gives a physical shape to the interruption of moral liberalism in town life that the city inevitably symbolizes. Memphis is where brothel owners, Max and Mame, find Bobbie Allen, the prostitute, before bringing her to Mississippi to set up shop; as well it is the place to which they return when Joe Christmas’s murder of McEachern threatens to thrust them into the public gaze. Memphis is where the men from the planing mill go to gamble “now and then” (41), and where “now and then” the wife of Jefferson’s Reverend Gail Hightower would “slip off… and have a good time” (59). The intermittency of this “now and then,” like the modern innovations in

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42 Railey, in “*As I Lay Dying* and *Light in August*: the Social Realities of Liberalism,” examines these emergent “town interests” with regard to the way that material objects had become both tools for and symbols of social mobility. The older paternalistic social order founded on rootedness and the stability of one’s lineage has been replaced by capitalist modes of mobility and active circulation. Cf. also Matthews, “*As I Lay Dying* in the Machine Age” and O’Donnell, “Between the Family and the State.”
“A Rose for Emily” that happened not all at once but over the course of a generation, provides a cloak of innocuousness that covers over systemic cracks that are being aggravated beneath the surface of Jefferson’s seeming timelessness. Though for a time treatment at a sanatorium appears to reform her ways, it is not long before Hightower’s wife escapes to the city one last time—the Sunday morning paper “telling how she had jumped or fallen from a hotel window”(67). Indeed, most everything associated with scandal in Light in August (with the exception of Joanna Burden’s murder) can be located or traced back to Memphis. Even before Christmas had ever been there, Max refers to him as “The Beale Street playboy” preemptively associating him with an urban nightlife he has yet to experience. Although this name is clearly meant in jest along with Max’s other moniker for Christmas, “Romeo,” the joke ironically becomes apt as Christmas on the run after the murder acquires fluency in the carnal nightlife fluency of several North American centers.

In spite of the ignominious affair of the Reverend’s wife, the townspeople, particularly the “old ladies and some of the old men” (68) seem willing to attribute her murder/suicide to another “now and then” Memphis casualty, were it not for Hightower’s insistence on remaining in Jefferson and the intrusion of newspaper reporters and photographers from Memphis looking to uncover more fuel for this scandalous fire (68). The residents sense instinctively that these “foreign” reporters seek to expose the private transgressions of not one individual, but the entire community. With the probing light of flashing camera bulbs, these city emissaries threaten to hold up a mirror on the community of Jefferson into which the citizens definitely do not wish to gaze. The invasive presence of these intruders makes it much trickier for the townspeople to deny their connection to the woman’s tragic downfall. Jefferson willingly withstands the occasional moral failings of its inhabitants so long as the evidence of these weaknesses remain
outside the town limits and the men who transgress these limits continue to reliably show up to work on Monday in clean overalls looking properly chastened (41). This is why the town wants so intently for Hightower to leave them. He, like the reporters, is a reminder of their own proximity to the scandal. It is not something that solely happened elsewhere, as they would like to believe; it happened in Jefferson too.

Unlike Max, Mame and Bobbie, Christmas doesn’t seek refuge in Memphis, the established shelter for sinners. Instead, Faulkner writes, “he entered the street which was to run for fifteen years…And always, sooner or later, the street ran through cities, through an identical and wellnigh interchangeable section of cities without remembered names…”(223). And his urban experience is characterized by his serial encounters with prostitutes—thus the cities in question here not only accommodate moral corruption, but multiply and disperse it. It is in these cities that Christmas first engages with his own racial ambiguity—first using it to get out of paying prostitutes and then when he is far enough north that that strategy no longer works, he tries to find peace by flipping his racial identification to live as a black man and deny his whiteness. But all he finds, however, is more turmoil: “And all the while his nostrils at the odor which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial”(226). It is here in the interchangeable urban spaces that Christmas’s personal shame transforms into an explosive unappeasable self-loathing, incubating the kernels of rage that will culminate in the murder of Joanna Burden in Jefferson. Spectral in their lack of specificity, back alley blending with back alley, these cities aggravate, instead of appease, Christmas’s racial confusion.

Finally, in *Go Down, Moses* (1942), the rural ecological cycle runs full course from fertility and regeneration in “Was” to exhaustion and stagnancy in “Delta Autumn.” In “Was”
the city is absent and the cosmos appears intact. Its high comic mode, replete with chase scene, drunken negotiations, and farcical match-making, leads to the satisfying comedic ending of a double-marriage between Tommy’s Turl and Tennie Beauchamp and Sophonsiba Beauchamp and Theophilus “Uncle Buck” McCaslin. In line with the mode’s directives, both of these matches will result in progeny.

Every sequence to follow “Was” informs and is informed by this opening country escapade. While the darker truth behind “Was,” as revealed in “The Bear,” shatters the illusion that Buck and Buddy lived in a simpler more harmonious time, the playful light-hearted register of the tale appears more and more precious, in contrast to Go Down, Moses’s subsequent episodes. Ending the novel in Faulkner’s present day or thereabouts, the “proper” McCaslin lineage is threatened with extinction and the region is no longer as rural nor as isolated as it “was.”

In “Delta Autumn” (set in 1941) the specter of the city has effectively engulfed the county, heralding an end to this period of Southern rural insulation and exceptionalism in both the region and Faulkner’s writing. It is testimony, eulogy, and burial to a lost rural way of life. As the spectral city closes in, the story offers a glimpse of the future that is hopeful for the still young and vibrant multiracial nation, but is incommensurable to Yoknapatawpha as it once was and had aspired still to be. While much of literary modernism addresses the alienation of the individual vis-à-vis the larger systemic processes that are engendered and embodied in the modern metropolis, the incommensurability of the rural speaks to a condition of social and cultural estrangement that is more expansive, and yet apparently more easily overlooked than the solitary modern man. Although we might be tempted to read this losing battle with regret and a certain sense of hopelessness, pity was not an emotion in which Faulkner held much currency.
This incommensurability is about a failure to adapt and/or preserve, but it is also about forcing the narrative of the twentieth century to no longer overlook the incongruity of the social and cultural shifts that were underway at this time. Faulkner’s writing insists that we take note of the social and ecological repercussions of these changes before we lose the memory that there once had been an ideological conflict worth remembering here.

The following textual analysis examines the ghostly presence of the urban specter in “Delta Autumn”, which, as the root of the word “specter” implies, reveals itself through visual foretokens of change. These changes here more than ever before impress, not on individuals or the community, but the land itself that is personified through the perspective of its embattled sympathizer, Ike McCaslin. This specter threatens the ecological hegemony of the habitus by opening the region to extra-local social and commercial interests. In doing so, it aligns rural Mississippi closer to the rest of the nation, sacrificing, as with the Bundrens, the exceptional modes of region that, for Faulkner, had been his literary wellspring for over a decade. While Faulkner is often lauded for his material interest in small-scale affronts to rural life at the behest of “progress,” this analysis considers the broader conspiratorial effect of these micro-disturbances, all of which, particularly in “Delta Autumn,” coalesce into a more forceful intervention by the metropolis in Faulkner’s work than is often readily acknowledged. As Allred identifies the fixity of Yoknapatawpha as the attribute to illuminate modernity by contrast, so, conversely, does the encroachment of the spectral metropolis make visible this critical moment of self-reckoning and introspection for the rural South.

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A perhaps unlikely place to look for Faulkner’s sense of the urban, “Delta Autumn” is set firmly in the depleted Mississippi wilderness. In demographic and geographic terms, the
location evades both the urban and the rural through its seclusion from human settlement and society; yet, this story manages to elicit the threat of the urban to the rural in spite of its dislocation from these sites. Though natural resources are unquestioningly at stake, it is the loss of the privileged rural relationship to the wilderness and what that loss entails in social terms that most concerns, Ike McCaslin. The traditions and rituals of the Mississippi wilderness, the way its usage is regulated and its nature and meaning defined, has for generations remained the privilege and provenance of the white male rural population. This is what stands to be lost above and beyond the sacrifice of trees to the lumberyard. In the end, it is the strength of Ike’s conservative rural social paradigm that will be tested, not the resilience of nature.

“Delta Autumn”, was first drafted after a hunting trip, where Faulkner fell ill and was found in his tent by his Uncle Bud Miller “unconscious and ashen” (Blotner 424). They believed he had suffered a kidney seizure or perforated ulcer and were lucky to find a motor boat to evacuate him from the site, for the doctor in Oxford felt “a few more hours would have been too long” (Blotner 424). This actual near-death experience looms in the icy air of this fictional sequence where Faulkner draws further and more explicit parallels between himself, Ike McCaslin (who was originally to be a minor character in Go Down, Moses) and the delta. Faulkner appropriates this mythical place here more forcefully than ever before “as a personal symbol for” what Michael Grimwood characterizes as “both his and the world’s fatigue” (93). If the passage quoted earlier from Requiem describes what Faulkner saw as the relentless motion of progress encroaching on Jefferson, “Delta Autumn” shows the underbelly of the exploitative mechanisms that drain the wilderness of its resources to fuel these city engines—an unregenerative version of the city’s dependence on the country for agricultural production and natural resources. As the urban population skyrockets, conversely depopulating the countryside,
a phenomenon darkly described by Thomas Hardy in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* as “the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery” (366), the parasitic demands of the city reach farther and farther beyond its borders.

The chapter opens with Uncle Ike, on his annual November hunting trip, this year with the sons and grandsons of the men with whom he used to hunt as a boy and younger man. As he has for the past few years, he wonders en route whether this expedition into the wild will be his last—a concern that the chapter’s title intimates in advance. “Now they went in cars, driving faster and faster each year because the roads were better and they had farther and farther to drive, the territory in which game still existed drawing yearly inward as his life was drawing inward…” (320). Like most modern “advancements” in Faulkner, the highways create a paradoxical effect on the community: it is now easier to get places faster, but one must travel farther to get there.

Furthermore, the asphalt opens access to extra-regional actors, who inevitably disrupt the ecology testing the durability of its insularly derived codes and conventions. Here, one might imagine Ike finding comical agreement with Anse Bundren whose suspicion of roads and the social/ecological disruption they signal is elevated by his pseudo-Christian formulation (which mirrors Ike’s linguistic retrenchment in Sam Fathers’s language of nature spirituality): “And so He [God] never aimed for folks to live on a road…He aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn” (36). While accessibility to more land signals growth and nourishment for the

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43 O’Donnell analyzes this quotation about “the road” to help illustrate the transformation that occurs when the Bundrens, Anse in particular, set out on their odyssey to Jefferson and their private desires become commodities, which are subject to law and public custom (89–90). For O’Donnell, the Bundrens are nomads not only because they are travelling in caravan, but because every encounter they have along the way reaffirms their outcast status. In the end, they “sacrifice the nomadic” when they sacrifice Darl to the State in exchange for various objects of social integration—teeth, a gramophone, and a new wife. Unlike Anse, Ike McCaslin should be an unlikely outcast; and yet, these roads that force him further and further away from his old childhood hunting grounds bring social and institutional changes that alienate Ike from the cultural landscape that he and those of his social pedigree at one time defined and enforced. In this way, if *As I Lay Dying* is a narrative that progresses from private isolation to social integration, *Go Down, Moses* tracks the
American metropolis, it is the forest’s demise, and this early sentence in “Delta Autumn” sets up both the wilderness and Ike as hunted objects; the roads pursue them both circling inward in ever tighter curves like a falcon preparing to dive for its prey. Though one might blame both Ike’s and the wilderness’s passivity for their own undoing, their non-response to environmental changes and rear-window stewardship of their resources only becomes suffocating when pressed upon by this encroaching outside world.44

Before these highways were paved, however, the wilderness of Ike’s childhood had maintained an apparent, if momentary, equilibrium with its proximate community, Jefferson. Within that equilibrium, the illusion of wilderness as a timeless place held sway, though the very nature of his hunting mentor, Sam Fathers, half-Native American half-African-American should have clued him in to the fallacy of this impression. Ike reflects in “The Bear”, the chapter that precedes “Delta Autumn,” upon the railroads that should have alerted him to the space-altering habits of time, though he and the other hunters failed to heed the signs:

[The railroad] had been harmless then. They would hear the passing log-train sometimes from the camp; sometimes, because nobody bothered to listen for it or not…it’s shrill peanut-parcher whistle flung for one petty moment and absorbed by the brooding and inattentive wilderness without even an echo…[the train was] carrying to no destination or purpose sticks which left nowhere any scar or stump as the child’s toy loads and

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44 In 1954, the same year that Faulkner published “Mississippi” in Holiday magazine, President Dwight D. Eisenhower announced a plan to accelerate the development of the national interstate highway system, a project which would be enacted two years later as the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, thereby making cities more accessible than ever before. Likewise for rural communities, the presence of emergent urban centers became evermore unavoidable. The rural, which had been the prevailing condition of the American landscape and had defined, for well over a century, the images of fortitude and self-determination that Americans adopted in the cities and exported all over the world, now found itself with more and more frequency being defined from without. Along these lines, Raymond Williams notes the strange development over the 20th century that “there is almost an inverse proportion...between the relative importance of the working rural economy and cultural importance of rural ideas” (248).
transports and unloads its dead sand and rushes back for more…yet this time it was as though the train…had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties which were not even laid. (305-306)

What once seemed like an insouciant child’s game now carries the very characteristics (“shadow and portent”) of a haunting. Carrying out the orders of its extra-regional overseers, the trains’ potential harm is couched in the economic reality that their profitability is measured by what they take out of the region, not by what they bring in. Mark Decker illustrates how at first the railway system was disjointed and inefficient, because uncooperative state-by-state ownership resisted unfettered passage across borders, but that eventually “changes actually did take place and [were] directly related to the South’s incorporation into that vast network of power and control that is the American economy” (482).

Seemingly taking a lesson from his experience with the railroad, in “Delta Autumn”, Ike is suspicious of all potential interlopers (living or material), who threaten the perpetuation of traditional separations: keeping wilderness apart from civilization, South from North, and black from white. He chastises his young hunting companions for the processed canned meat they bring to the campsite saying, “eat it all up. I dont want a piece of town meat in camp after breakfast tomorrow….” (328). The younger men, however, don’t endow the campsite with the

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45 In the chapter “Faulkner and the Haunted Plantation” from The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation and U.S. Nationalism, Leigh Anne Duck traces the development of Faulkner’s gothic modernism by showing how individual and collective subjectivities experience hauntings that controvert the demands of linear time progression. Doing so, she effectively demonstrates how “Faulkner's use of gothic tropes,” in works up through Go Down, Moses, “challenged monolithic and spatializing constructions of local time, exposing the temporal multiplicity that shaped both metropolis and hinterland” (172). Yet, concentrating her interest on the entanglements of the past and the present, she neglects moments like this one where the future too exerts its capacity to haunt the present. Here, with regard to Faulkner’s interest in temporal multiplicity, I re-exert the presence of the future, which I seek to associate with the metropolis. Though less conspicuous than the ghosts of the past, the future, in the guise of “shadow and portent,” provides critical emphasis to the dramatic liminality of Ike’s historical moment.
same sanctity, and they chide Ike for what they see as an irrational fervor for and adherence to the older traditions. For this younger generation, facility trumps the bother of keeping these old separations in place. The contamination of the canned meat in the wilderness, innocuous to the others, but condemnatory to Ike, is further evidence of the encroaching, and normalizing powers of what Decker characterizes as the “network of commerce that will bring the metropolis into the rural South and the rural South into the metropolis, blending them together into an indistinct whole…”(482). This threat of homogenization is the nightmare that Ike foresees.46

In what feels like a natural sympathy in the face of their shared plight, Ike conflates his own life and destiny with that of the wilderness on scales of both time and space. When still travelling to the site, Ike’s sense of time reverses itself towards his youth when both land and body were still robust:

the land had retreated not in minutes from the last spread of gravel but in years, decades, back toward what it had been when he first knew it; the road they now followed once more the ancient pathway of bear and deer…in place of ruthless mile-wide parallelograms wrought by ditching and dyking machinery.(325)

The smooth rhythm of this sentence complements the imagery, retreating backward into a lulling cadence that reflects Ike’s own nostalgia and sympathy for the retreating landscape. (This

46 While critics and scholars like Blotner have noted biographical and attitudinal similarities between Ike and Faulkner, such as a common anxiety they share regarding the changing Southern ecology, this issue of town meat and keeping separations sacred may be an expository moment where Faulkner creates critical space between Ike and himself—a distance that becomes most prominent in Ike's later encounter with Roth's lover and child. Although it can be difficult to parse definitively Faulkner's criticisms of Ike from his sympathies, Gary Harrington reminds us that before the age of town meat that Ike so vehemently loathes “a man shot a doe or a fawn as quickly as he did a buck”(DA 319). Within the context of “Delta Autumn,” this wasteful low-minded practice undercuts the perceived unassailability of Ike's moral superiority and makes Ike's criticism of Roth's hunting ethos, or lack thereof, “more than just a bit hypocritical” (522). Likewise, while Ike, in Part 5 of “The Bear,” unironically idealizes a past hunting trip when “Walter Ewell had shot a six-point buck from this same moving caboose” longing, as Harrington describes it, “for the days when such random killing was not only possible but laudable”(519), it is unlikely that Faulkner from his privileged historical vantage point is equally unaware of the irony embedded in Ike's contradictory moral convictions.
backward movement mirrors the novel’s own constant referrals back to “Was” that Ike and the reader rely upon for understanding how things got to be the way they are.) That is until the rigid geometry of “parallelograms” imposes its artificial symmetries on the fields, disrupting the reverie with the mechanistic rhythm of a harsh “tch” and “k” in “ditching and dyking.”

From here, Ike draws out the explicit association that his life, hitched to the fate of nature herself, longs to be unrestricted from the ravaging limitations of time and space:

Then suddenly he knew why he had never wanted to own any of [the wilderness], arrest at least that much of what people called progress, measure his longevity at least against that much of its ultimate fate. It was because there was just exactly enough of it. He seemed to see the two of them—himself and the wilderness—as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt, the two spans running out together, not towards oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space…”(337)

Apart from its strong overtone as a death wish, this desire for freedom culminates with Ike’s rejection of living in time and space—a conviction that stunts his ability to grow, change and modernize. While Ike’s repudiation of his inheritance is most often interpreted as a rejection of the unspeakable past, which is his inheritance, it manifests itself also as a repudiation of the future that leaves him in a state of generational limbo marked by his status as “uncle to half a county and father to no one” (3). His desire to be “free of both time and space” reads as a desire to acquit himself of the ecological liabilities (psychically linked to his genealogical liabilities) that haunt him, liabilities that have only become more unavoidable over time. Like the canned
meat or his wife’s desire for a family of their own or his visitor’s recrimination that Roth was stunted by Ike’s abdication, Ike simply chooses to look the other way.

Decker describes Ike’s paradisiacal vision of the wilderness and himself as a “self-contained state” (473), and while the concept of containment seems antithetical to the freedom Ike envisions for himself and his wilderness in the above citation, Decker’s sense that Ike’s ideal is connected to his desire for an autonomy that is anti-generational resonates here. The prose that follows the passage above further fills in Ike’s extemporal fantasy with “tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes where the wild strong immortal game ran forever beside the tireless belling immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns” (337-8), an immortal landscape that Richard Godden identifies as a “Keatsian frieze” (4). This lyrical genealogy to “Ode on a Grecian Urn” elucidates Ike’s contention that containment is emancipatory. That, in Godden’s terms, “the vessels in question [the urn and the wilderness] are crackable euphemisms for a clutch of maidenheads” dramatizes Ike’s paradoxical urge to preserve what is already lost to him—his virginity and his forest (4). In the face of the seemingly irrepressible biological patterns of procreation and bequeathal, an imagined self-containment (re-imagined virginity) permits Ike to avert his eyes from the progressive erosion of his rural tradition and the evermore insistent confrontations with realigning social conditions.

If highways and railroads represent the material threats that cities impose on the wilderness and Ike, tentacles of an urban world that will no longer be held at bay, the social matter, too, in the form of miscegenation and incest, which Ike has spent a lifetime avoiding, will now come knocking at his tent flap. A young mulatta whom Ike mistakes at first for white has travelled to the site to confront Roth Edmonds, who is at once distant cousin to both Ike and the woman and the father of the baby boy she holds in her arms. Though blood kin, the woman too
is a specter of the urban. She is an outsider from the frontier city, Indianapolis—a place that would not and did not instill in her the moral values of separation that Ike understands as the only way to hold on to meaning and value in his world. Little had Ike realized that the hallowed hunting grounds, its timelessness and placelessness that he identifies with so strongly, already had been ruptured the previous autumn, for it was on the previous year’s hunting trip that Roth and this woman first met secretly and fell in love.

For Ike, the inviolability of the wilderness and its demand that one relinquish the postures and accoutrements of modern life to experience it is absolute. He learned this as a boy in “The Bear” when it is only after he abandons his gun and puts down his watch and compass that he gets a glimpse of Old Ben, the patriarchal bear of the forest. From this point forward Ike’s deportment in the woods is one of committed ascetic renunciation, a capitulation to the acknowledged spiritual superiority of the natural world and its incommensurate relationship to civilization.

That Roth would even glance twice at a woman while on a hunting trip illustrates the paradigmatic shift that has occurred across the generations. The wilderness for Roth does not demand a higher moral bearing. He eats “town meat,” hunts with a shotgun instead of a rifle, and hunts does of both the two- and four-legged variety, as his puckish friend, Will Legate, merrily ribs. Similar to the Snopeses, who are known to both ignore and exploit social convention for the quick and easy profits of economic and personal expediency, Roth does not recognize separate geographically-derived codes of behavior as Ike does. His world, in contrast, is morally undifferentiated, and therefore the low cowardly behavior that is tolerated on the plantation and in town because of Roth’s elevated social status and wealth (which wouldn’t even be his without Ike’s repudiation), to him, seems equally appropriate in the woods. His singular
worldview reflects Ike’s dystopic vision of the future where the “racially mixed geography” as evidenced by Roth’s willful miscegenation, “represents a spreading socioeconomic contamination that will eventually overwhelm the stable boundaries of his utopian Mississippi hunting grounds and the regionally distinct culture of privilege that participation in the hunts represents” (Decker 473). Upon realizing that his woman visitor is part-black, Ike’s utter lack of preparedness for this moment is underscored by his reflexive rejection of the situation: “Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now!” (344). The italics serve not only to emphasize Ike’s surprise and disbelief, but the extreme resistance he feels against what he already knows to be true.47

In a strangely exaggerated attempt to tie the bleak future of the delta to the ailments of the city, Ike bemoans what he now sees as America’s shared fate:

> [t]his land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires’ mansions on Lakeshore Drive where white men rent farms and live like niggers, and niggers crop on shares and live like animals...usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares...(347)48

47 There is noteworthy resonance here with the dystopian future that Shreve McCannon suggests at the end of Absalom, Absalom! - a world of Jim Bonds that will stand in mockery of Thomas Sutpen’s ruthless social ambitions: “…and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings” (302). Offering a counter to Quentin’s melodramatic despair, Shreve’s taunting reminds the reader of the humor and foolishness of Quentin’s overblown racial anxiety. The same can be said of Ike McCaslin. Though we may sympathize with Ike, commiserating over his lost world that often seems nobler than our own, this dystopic vision creates readerly distance, which allows us to go beyond experiencing his sadness and anger to see the ridiculousness of Ike’s zero-sum imagination.

48 Italics are original to the text.
The contamination of the region that Ike envisions here, the eventual dissolution of all forms of social boundaries, is instigated, exacerbated, and perpetuated by accessibility to the metropolis. The new social practice of “commuting” complements the stripping and undoing sense of the “de-“ prefixed past participles that precede it (deswamped, denuded, derivered) with its sense of rootlessness.49 The fragmentation of modern life, the fracturing of one’s identity to accommodate both rural and city living, flies in the face of a rural privilege that promotes an authentic and ordered relationship to space and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the relatively neutral definition of the word “commute” in modern usage shades derogatively in the context of this passage, where it breaks down former geographic barriers to commerce that had previously preserved regional exceptionalism. Under the influence of its original Latin root, *commutare*, which means to change altogether or alter wholly (OED.com),50 the term more fully expresses its role here as a catalyst for social reorganization. As such, the nameless young mother takes on the emblematic role of the commuter, per force cycling to the city then to the rural and presumably back again, demonstrating acutely the repercussions, in Ike’s imaginary, of unrestrained circulation.

In the act of commuting, social chaos accelerates and Chicago collapses into Jefferson. Chicago, this mecca of the Great Migration that transformed African-American culture from provincial to urban after World War I, within Ike’s vision illustrates new economic opportunities and social transformations that do not expiate or even distance the South from its past. Richard Moreland points out, to the contrary, that these imagined Lakeshore Drive mansion-owning

49 The visibility and traceability of commuters were elements that established commuting as the first statistical subject the U.S. Bureau of the Census adopted to track changes in non-metropolitan counties. The data collected provided the initial index measuring “susceptibility to external metropolitan influence” (Beale 5).
50 I limit my definition of the Latin root to the first two terms in the dictionary listing, because they were the most powerful terms to illustrate this connection between urban development and broader social change. Other terms listed in the definition are “to exchange, interchange.”
black men “confirm Ike’s worst fears, or rather his most simplistically ironic predictions of a
directly imitative, repetitive revenge in blackface of white wrongs” (187). These fast-moving men are the manifestation of a double-threat, urban blackness, that is not subject to the
geographical or psychological restraints long-upheld by traditional Southern aristocratic modes of order and containment. In Ike’s imaginative visualization of this brave new world, he applies the “shadow and portent” of the city that he learned to recognize in the train cars to the broader exploitation of man and nature, which though staged in the country is, as Raymond Williams notes, “realized and concentrated in the city”(48).

Where Ike and his generation of Mississippi hunters failed to instill their protectionist rural virtues of “blood and soil” (Williams 36) in the younger generation, Roth and his peers have been imprinted instead by the predatory values of capitalism, which (as represented by the stereotypically opportunistic ethnicities in the citation) turns a blind eye to poaching practices like “shooting does” as long as one doesn’t get caught.

As he had maneuvered to pay off the former slaves his family had wronged without acknowledging the familial tie that made the payment necessary, Ike attempts to pay off the woman with money Roth left in an envelope specifically for this purpose. She is clearly disappointed that the envelope contains only money, and Ike tries to assuage her. He convinces her to keep the money and gives her the horn that General Compson left him in his will, the only object worthy of inheritance he has to give. Though this gesture initially signals that Ike recognizes this baby as the McCaslin heir-apparent, this sense of family reconciliation is upended by the following advice he offers:

“Marry: a man in your own race. That’s the only salvation for you—for a while yet, maybe a long while yet. We will have to wait. Marry a black man. You are young,
handsome, almost white; you could find a black man who would see in you what it was you saw in him… Then you will forget all this, forget it ever happened, that he ever existed—” (346)

This elucidatory passage to a large extent forecloses the debate as to whether Ike’s repudiation of his inheritance was enlightened and forward-looking or simply reactionary. Though he personally has never been able to forget any of his family’s miscegenated past, this is his advice to her: to lead a life, similar to his own, of denial and repudiation. In other words, he demands she maintain the color line even despite its obvious dissolution.

In The Ghosts of Modernity, Michel Rabaté establishes a central metaphor for his analysis of the modern age of literature: the writer as specter. He defines this relationship by the characteristic that the writer’s “own past returns whenever he imagines that he can predict, arrange or control the future” (2). Ike in “Delta Autumn” is a variation of this theme. Though Ike is no writer—ever since he read the entries in his father and uncle’s store register that narrated the acquisition of slaves and the crimes of miscegenation and incest committed by his grandfather, he has refused both returning to the past and predicting the future—he is confronted similarly by the unacknowledged excesses of time, “what has not been processed, accommodated, incorporated in the self by mourning” (Rabaté 2). These excesses of time, in “Delta Autumn”, materialize in the doubly-mixed, doubly incestuous child, whose “obscured face,” Godden remarks, “points two ways, to a ruinous interethnic past reborn and to intimations of a future interethnic amity barely born” (20).

While Ike prefers the apparent timelessness of the wilderness, the future that he intentionally had never sought finds him, and ironically its vehicle is a spectral form of the past to which he had long since averted his eyes. Irwin characterizes Ike’s reaction to the child as
“less that something has ended than that something has started all over again…Uncle Ike had tried to free himself and his family from just such a generative affront that would continue to bind white and black together in an endless cycle of guilt and retribution” (60). Confronted with this failed effort, Ike makes a last rhetorical move to convince the girl to cut ties with everything that has happened: if he could only make her forget, he too could return to his determined state of oblivion.

She responds to his grotesque suggestion by saying, “Old man,…have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?” (346). This response, finally, lays out the real consequence of denying both time and space as Ike has done. The problem with holding “Was” as a model for how the South should be, is that “Was” never truly was, and loving that version of the South is as good as loving a fading dream. Not only can it never be recaptured, but the nostalgia Ike feels for this past time occludes him from it further by persuading him of a romantic place that never existed. While his backwards-looking rural vision ably dislocated him from his present, it did not permit him to remain inside the past.

Conversely, as Moreland notes, the woman’s claim to love suggests that her return to Yoknapatawpha “does not necessarily justify Ike’s own worst fears about his own and Roth’s cursed tradition”; within this possibility “might also be a space for revisionary change” that undoes the need for “the untranslatable impasse either between the races or between the domestic and the social” that Ike continues ineffectively to try to maintain (186). Thus, the woman’s urban ethos trumps the rural because it places loving something real (her child and Roth) and forward-looking (the possibility of making Roth into a man, where Ike has failed him) above
loving a loss. The Old South, here, as embodied by Ike, is dying out because it refuses the real replenishment available to it. Instead, Ike sends the woman and baby McCaslin heir back North to build their future and returns to mulling over his and his delta’s demise at the hands of the “commuters” discussed above.

Through changes in land usage, infrastructure development, and demographic turnover, Faulkner’s writing depicts the ironically destructive flipside of Raymond Williams’ characterization in The Country and the City of agriculture and other forms of rural production invisibly enabling city-life. The city as unseen specter forces changes upon the community, which are registered not by increased dynamism and vibrancy as the conventional literary trope of the city might suggest, but by degradation, fatigue, loss and death. Paradoxically, as the city overrides what would be the future of the rural, it collaborates with the ghosts of the past by reinvigorating the unresolved excesses of slavery and racism. In this way, Faulkner expresses the disempowerment his community experiences through the presence of the immaterial city that increasingly tests the perseverance of their way of life. Thus, instead of simply eulogizing these losses, Faulkner preserves the silent violence of this process in “Delta Autumn” by ably valorizing the complexity and confusion of the rural/urban conflict in the South particular to these fading rural lives at this moment of their engulfment. In doing so, the author preserves the betwixt-and-betweeness of a momentary national condition that the rest of the rapidly modernizing country – like Ike – seems in a hurry to move beyond and abandon to the less complicated annals of a folkloric pastoral nostalgia.

Preamble to Chapters 2 and 3

Big Houses and the After-Life of the Irish Countryside

In what was fated to become an enduring touchstone in modern Irish culture, the
nationalist politician and future president, Eamon de Valera gallantly summoned the following
vision of his adopted homeland in a radio address on Saint Patrick’s Day, 1943:

... the Ireland that we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material
wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort,
devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright
with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of
industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the
laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene
old age. . . .(RTÉ Libraries and Archives)

Saturated in patriotic sentimentality, while at the same time hollowed by the pregnant elision of
World War II, this speech is emblematic of how the world views Ireland’s rustic self-
identification—a land that is picturesque and quaint, and happy to be so. Among the Irish,
however, this famous speech is more often ridiculed than admired. Mawkish as a postcard, this
stereotypical vision of the Emerald Isle suggests that the Irish should aspire to a version of the
enlightened primitive with no concern for the modern world that surrounds them. Even as Ireland

52 World War II was Ireland’s first war of engagement in which they weren’t fighting as part of Great Britain
or against themselves.
53 Tim Pat Coogan, in De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow, speaks of this famous moment saying, "Nothing in
de Valera’s entire public career ever drew anything like the comment and ridicule that that speech, made in
those circumstances, elicited over the years” (628).

As evidence of the speech itself remaining relevant, in spite of its meaning shifting over time, a recent
article in The Irish Times reviewing a performance that incorporated De Valera’s speech suggests that while a
number of years back, in the early days of the Celtic Tiger, the speech received “hoots of smug derision,” it
now elicited more “sober reflection.” In light of the Irish banking crisis, the imagining of “a people who
valued material wealth only as a basis for right living” does not seem so silly (Seaver).
attempts to establish itself, out from under the shadow of Great Britain, as a peer among the modern nations of the world, this evocation of the future disallows the interference of modern technologies or modes of circulation, relying instead on the quaint less confrontational characterization of “the sounds of industry” to speak of the country’s economic hopes. So much did the Irish disparage this speech that a line attributed to the speech, which is actually not even in it, “comely maidens dancing at the crossroads” is a well-known catch phrase for the backwards-looking vision of Ireland that people believe De Valera was endorsing.

Certainly the quote does appear sorrowfully misguided with regard to its similarity in tone to the fascist imagery that is circulating around Europe at this time (What better depiction of sturdy children, athletic youths and comely maidens is there than the Hitler youth?). Yet, this clichéd vision in its mid-century postcolonial Irish context also signals an elemental difference between Ireland and the rest of the Euro-North American nations against which, at this time, Ireland is striving intently to gather pace. Unlike these other countries, who depend on their articulate urban centers for the production and distribution of modern culture, Ireland throughout the century will continue to locate, not just its heritage, but “the modern” in the rural. That de Valera imagines Ireland in these pastoral terms is hardly news-worthy for a figure with his professional and personal credentials, ambitions and aspirations; that modern Irish writers have and will devote so much ink to dissecting, interpreting and reconciling themselves to the persistency of these sentiments in the face of Ireland’s many modern challenges is another issue entirely, and precisely what motivates the scope of this chapter.

While on the Continent and in England, modern consciousness in literature was by default an urban subject, in Ireland, modern figures more often wrestle with the anxieties of identity and nationhood in the rural where the roots of their larger identifications are yet located;
destinies remain entwined with each other on the sites where villages starved, the big houses burned, Molly Maguires ran amok in drag, and eventual independence was won, at least for the south. This certainly appears to be the case more so than in Dublin, which failed to represent any new coherent idea of Irishness. Thus, as the only artistic medium where modernism truly blossomed, Irish literature recurrently concerns itself throughout the 20th century with the modes and effects of the rural, even in the works of the island’s most cosmopolitan Irish literary figures such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. The rural, like Ireland’s past, resurfaces in its literature like a repressed memory, unresolved and thus iteratively uncontainable, as much as de Valera might wish to present it otherwise.

Irish post-colonial exceptionality

Joe Cleary explains in his appeal for a new materialist understanding of Irish modernism that “Ireland was the only country in [Western Europe] to be subjected to a sustained, thoroughgoing, and culturally traumatic experience of colonization” in the modern period (209). While for the other European countries, modernity signaled, at least ideologically, a new époque for the accumulation of wealth and the reassertion of political autonomy and cultural expression, for Ireland, “modernity meant dispossession, subordination,…the collapse of its indigenous social order, the gradual disintegration of the Gaelic cultural system, and successive waves of politically or economically enforced emigration”(209). Moreover, while most modernist movements, such as the Italian Futurists and the Russian Formalists, set out to discard the excessive baggage of their region’s once-magnificent pasts, Ireland’s (post-)colonial modernists, because of their large-scale historic losses, set out instead “to salvage something from the
veritable wholesale decimation of tradition” (219). Maria DiBattista writing about Anglo-Irish author, Elizabeth Bowens “troubled” modernism, concurs with this view adding that “the singular historical position and split social consciousness [of the Anglo-Irish] posed unique challenges to modernist writers determined to imagine new forms of individual and social life that would be emancipated, yet still connected to the living strains of tradition” (228).

Indeed, many critics view this Irish attachment to tradition as backward-looking i.e. anti-modern, and certainly there are writers, particularly of the Irish Celtic Revival, who are more interested in envisioning a highly romantic mythic Celtic past than complying with Ezra Pound’s famous, though ironically not original, exhortation to “make it new.” Fredric Jameson asserts in his essay, “Modernism and Imperialism” that even the modernist behemoth Ulysses is stunted by the colonial status of Dublin, which he construes as “an underdeveloped village in which gossip and rumor still reign supreme” (63). Thus by claiming Ireland to be “condemn[ed] to an older rhetorical past” (63), Jameson marks what would otherwise be considered a city-space as essentially rural.

Even Pound, however, is often mischaracterized, owing in large part to his slogan, as an advocate for modernism as the full extirpation of the archaic. To the contrary, as Louis Menand reminds us in his article “The Pound Error”, “the “It” in “Make It New” is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past” and Pound’s allusion-laden cantos are evidence of this interpretation (notwithstanding Pound’s own proclivity for self-contradiction) (123-7). Thus, one could question Jameson’s argument that to be modern, Ireland must sever ties with its “rhetorical past.” There is, in fact, reason to believe to the contrary that critical success of post-colonial literatures in the mid-to-late 20th century bears out the opposite claim—that some part of

\[54\text{Italics are mine.}\]
modern consciousness is lacking in the hegemonic representation of “civilized” urban environments that have managed to move beyond their own pre-civilized rural selves.

From their singular vantage point on the periphery of Western Europe, Irish writers were well-positioned to observe the seepage of what was being left out of the grand narratives of Euro-American capital and commodity culture, the illusion of urban modernism’s universality, and the rural provided a convenient subject for their literal and metaphorical proximate-but-detached relationship to these processes. The authors that will be discussed in this and the following chapters, Elizabeth Bowen, Molly Keane, and John Banville, wrote about Ireland in these contrasting terms, as a place confronting the turbulence of the times but existing apart from European modernism.

Thus, the rural in Irish 20th century novels demarcates the country’s post-colonial and peripheral status. This, later, was further secured by the continued predominance of the economically dominant rural middle class economy. It was the rising middle class who gradually displaced the “wealthy” Anglo-Irish in the rural in the first half of the century with the Republican movement, the Troubles, the Treaty of 1922, followed by the civil war (Eagleton 277). This transference of power that remained provincial in nature and location was a demographic peculiarity that sustained domestic investment in the rural as part of the nation’s process of self-understanding and continued to be the prevailing image of Irish national particularity even late into the century when the Irish rustic identity devolved sharply into myth.55

Though the novels that the following chapters examine depict representations of the Irish rural primarily from an Anglo-Irish perspective, I will frame this chapter in terms of Irishnesss

55 In 1961, for the first time, the rural population of Ireland becomes a minority demographic (Cf. Genet, Jacqueline. “Introduction.”)
(not Anglo-Irishness) wherever possible. Critics of Irish literary discourse have long separated the two, but there has been considerable movement towards incorporation of Anglo-Irish artifacts in the country at large since the largely protestant big houses became tourist attractions in the 80’s and 90’s. Moreover, because of demographic changes, the urban/suburban social distinction has supplanted the traditional Anglo-Irish/Catholic distinction of the past (Sheehan 150). As marginalization becomes the norm in an increasingly paranoid global social climate, I suggest looking at Anglo-Irish literature with an incorporative spirit, such as that which Ralph Ellison intones when his famously invisible protagonist suggests, “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”(581). Whereas African-American literature has long been considered a sub-genre of American literature, not a fringe faction, but an integrated part of Americanness, so should Anglo-Irishness be integrated into the narrative of Irish experience from which it has for too long been excluded.

That the banners of Irish modernism were held primarily by Anglo-Irish writers up until the last decade or so of the 20th century (with the obvious exception of James Joyce) makes some scholars of Irish studies squeamish because of their presumed British affinities and their outsider (read classist) understanding of the “more authentic” Irish Catholic majority. Certainly one reason for the literary predominance of the Anglo-Irish is higher education levels (often acquired in England) and more exposure to European modernism, but another is their unique perspective on loss and alienation. Though many narratives of national origin amongst post-colonial

56 In Richard Cronin’s chapter in Tourism and Cultural Change, he takes care to emphasize the long-standing role Irish literature has held in the motivation and development of certain forms of uniquely Irish tourism, such as the fantasy of walking into the local pub to discuss “the respective merits of ‘Sam Beckett’ and ‘Jimmy Joyce’ with the farmers and townspeople”(185). Similarly, it seems likely that the reinvention of the Big House novel in the 1970’s, which will be addressed in the following chapter, renewed interest in Elizabeth Bowen, as well as new interpreters of the genre, J.G. Farrell, Jennifer Johnston, and Molly Keane. This led to the popularization of the actual structures and a new general willingness to reincorporate Anglo-Irish heritage into the new pluralist vision of the country (Cf. Richard Tillinghast’s “Travels through Sommerville and Ross’s Ireland.”)
countries attempt to forge a morally unambiguous progressive course towards both freedom and legitimacy, it is never remotely that straightforward in practice. As with the select portion of the North African population that were given a French education and roles and responsibilities within the colonial administration, thus ironically losing their sense of a nationality when independence finally arrived, the Anglo-Irish, too, were without a socially legitimated national identity. (Though some critics speak of it, there never was such a place as Anglo-Ireland.) The Anglo-Irish, like their Francophone North African counterparts, were “caught between diverse cultural codes, swept up in heady enthusiasm for the new Ireland about to be born while anxiously unsure of their role within it”(Eagleton 300). As wrought by conflict as many of these postcolonial subjects must have felt, it was arguably a perfectly ripe condition for expression in the modern novel.

Maria Edgeworth, the proto-rural-modern novelist

Out of this intense sense of in-betweenness developed the genre of the Big House novel, which is the primary generic focus of these two chapters. The first chapter concentrates on the Big House novel at the end of Protestant Ascendancy during the late 1920’s and the second chapter examines the genre’s surprising reappearance in the latter half of the century. Representative of the Anglo-Irish population and that evasive polyvalent hyphen, the Big House form was a literary and cultural pastiche from its beginning, as Seamus Deane points out.

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57 DiBattista in “Elizabeth Bowen’s Troubled Modernism”, Ellen Wolff in her second chapter “The Paradox of these Big Houses”: A Reading of Anglo-Ireland, and Terry Eagleton in Heathcliff somewhere all discuss many of the possibilities, contradictions and incongruities for the hyphen.

58 Corcoran, 36.
Unlike its better known cousin, the English manor novel, the Irish Big House never limited its concern to the upper crust of society nor did it serve to reconfirm the nature of the hierarchical class system as did the novels of Austen and the Brontë sisters. As early as the first Big House novel, Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was already in decline; the memory of its former glory offering an ironic edge to its 19th and consequent 20th century representative states of disrepair and vulnerability. The recurring motif of uneasy/unfit inheritance and disrupted property rights is a commonplace in much modern Irish literature, but it is particularly well-suited to the Big House, where the house, which provides material justification for a family’s social position, is inordinately, and often tragically, dependent on capable succession to maintain the appearance, whether a guise or not, of rightful ownership.

Such is made clear in the opening pages of *Rackrent* where the Irish Catholic narrator, Thady Quirk announces that he will be recounting the sorrowful family history of Rackrent succession, the family he served “dutifully” his whole life, while, ironically, his own son, attorney Quirk, has prospered to such a degree that the son now wants nothing to do with his humble anachronistic father. Thady’s expressed opinion and reasonings, because of his age and experience, has more in common with those of his employer than his own son, but the very fact that Thady is the actual inheritor, protector and apparent publisher of the family history shows to what extent the modes of inheritance in Ireland are, as Neil Corcoran observes, “inherently contaminated and unstable,” going on to add that “the figures and motifs of the Big House signify the ways in which as a social formation it has outstayed its proper historical moment and knows it” (Corcoran 40).
Though it is Thady’s lineage that opportunely profits most from these changes, he and persons like him, Edgeworth divines, will remain a relic of the past along with the castle. Though throughout the narrative Thady remains faithful to the “hierarchical and reciprocal structures of old feudal ties” (Kirkpatrick xxxii), his repeated disapproval at his son’s behavior reveals a repressed awareness that his fidelity to the Rackrents above his son is unnatural and therefore problematic. Terry Eagleton, in his examination of the text ties himself in proverbial knots trying to discern Thady’s motives to the degree that Thady himself is conscious of his own intentions (or not). Eagleton even takes a stab at a Freudian reading:

…[Rackrent illustrates] an extraordinarily perceptive portrait of the workings of ideology, in which conscious beliefs and unconscious intentions can certainly be at odds: and it would chime with Edgeworth’s sense, elsewhere in her writing, that truth and fiction in Ireland are not so much at odds as inextricably intermingled. (167)

Thady Quirk’s insistent self-portrait as “honest Thady” clearly aims to signify his steadfastness as loyal servant, while the nature of the signified remains interminably opaque. The facility with which Thady dissimulates as he narrates leads the reader to a sense that this faithful servant has a double-awareness (at minimum), which regardless of his moral development serves to sustain an appearance of normalcy foisting himself as an apparent accomplice in his masters’ downfall and the eventual ascendance of his own line.59

Similar to Austen and the Brontës, Edgeworth’s Rackrent and the Big House novels to follow are not simple romances, but works concerned with the moral contradictions and corruptions of class. For the Irish (Anglo- or otherwise), there is also always a prevailing anxiety

59 It has been noted by Eagleton and others that Thady’s social position resembles that of Edgeworth herself with regard to a privileged vantage point with limited authority (his being that of house servant, hers being that of upper-class woman). Her medial position is further reflected in the structure of the novel where Thady’s assertions are either validated or qualified by the authority of “The Editor,” who was, in fact, Edgeworth’s father.
with regard to their rights to and management of the land. In Anglo-Irish literature, this apprehension is heightened by the common practice of absentee landlordship, which was seen by the lower classes as providing the moral validation for upending the entire Anglo-Irish society. In Edgeworth’s book, *The Absentee* the moral lesson is clearly drawn that “an Irish landlord must live among the people from whom he draws his subsistence” (Butler, *Independent Spirit* 251), while in *Rackrent* a scene of comic hyperbole—Anglo-Irish freeholders standing on their own imported land so as to vow that they have stood on it, and therefore may vote in accordance to the letter of the law—offers a countervailing footnote verifying to unfamiliar readers that such charades in actuality did occur (56). That said, a preoccupation with land ownership and its presumptive moral determinacy among the Anglos and the Irish-Irish—an effect of Ireland’s colonial status—influenced all the island inhabitants and to the end of the 20th century remained at the heart of all variants of Irish identity.

*Castle Rackrent*, the foundational text of the Big House genre, is a sturdy point of departure for the style’s modernist future because it concerns itself with divided communal loyalties, the national cultural allegiant’s dilemma between passivity and action, infertility and other genealogical disturbances, loss, disempowerment, the process of coming apart and the anticipation of death. All of these themes, though on-going throughout the novel, appear trenchantly in a scene where Sir Condy, the 3rd generation Rackrent, continues the process of ruining his family’s fortune by staging his own wake, so he won’t have to miss it. When the idea first occurs to him he says to his trusted servant, “Thady…all you’ve been telling me brings a strange thought in to my head. I’ve a notion I shall not be long for this world anyhow, and I’ve a great fancy to see my own funeral afore I die” (57). Once he decides to go through with it, everything is quickly arranged, but in the end, after the joke is revealed, Thady observes Sir
Condy to be “rather upon the sad order…not finding there had been such a great talk about him after his death as he had always expected to hear”(58). This scene, both the drive to witness one’s own funeral and the disappointment of its relative inconsequence, will prove to be a prescient metaphor for the fall of the Ascendancy to come.

After Rackrent, however, Edgeworth turns away from such ambiguous and complex narrators as honest Thady Quirk in preference for more moralistic voices—though she understands fully that they hold less literary merit. Moreover, she turns away from the subject of Ireland, writing in a letter to her brother in 1834 that:

It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in the book of fiction - realities are too strong, party passions too violent, to bear to see, or to care to look at their faces in a looking glass. The people would only break the glass and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature - distorted nature in a fever. (qtd. in Lloyd, Anomalous States 134)

Similarly, Terry Eagleton quotes Edgeworth as stating that in Ireland "the truth is too strong for the fiction, and on all sides pulls it asunder" (Eagleton 151). Though from this moment in time the Irish Protestant Ascendancy still has a fair distance to fall, Edgeworth, in both these instances, surmises that the writing she produced for Rackrent is mistimed and further that she neither has the temperament nor inclination to be the mirror holder.

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60 This dilemma of intent between moral edification and literary art was a conflict that Maria Edgeworth seems to have felt forcefully. See Terry Eagleton’s Heathcliff and the Great Hunger. In a certain sense, her expressed conflict foresees the advent of high literary modernism, whose perhaps greatest conceit will be the abandonment of traditional moral strictures for artistic freedom, subjectivity and aestheticism such as expressed by Edgeworth’s countryman, James Joyce in a letter to his brother, Stanislaus in 1905: “The struggle against conventions in which I am at present involved was not entered into by me so much as a protest against these conventions as with the intention of living in conformity with my moral nature”(Letters II 99).

61 The lookingglass, of course, is a very familiar trope in modern Irish literature from Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass to Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Grey. In Joyce’s Ulysses, Stephen Dedalus declares the symbol of Irish art to be the “cracked lookinglass of a servant”(9), a metaphor largely understood as an enfeebled adaptation of Hamlet’s understanding of the actor’s place “to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature”(II:3:18-9). Whether he was aware of Edgeworth’s letters or not, it is apparent that Joyce was far from the first Irish writer to conceive of the country’s artistic aspirations in these reflective yet broken terms.
In spite of her compelling assessment, what Edgeworth classifies primarily as a problem of the political climate, reveals itself to be a stylistic one. Rural Ireland will not have to wait for interior stability before it achieves literary success as a subject, though its instability and consequent lack of artistic resources does force expatriation on some of those destined to become the country’s most famous literary talents. Instead, what is required is a literary aesthetic that is more suitable to Ireland’s peripheral European location and morally ambiguous postcolonial apparatus. Realism of the 19th century proves an insufficient vehicle for Irish novels because its execution is reliant on concealing its underlying mechanisms, which is precisely what is of most interest in Irish literature. As David Lloyd remarks, "One of the problems of the Irish novel, precisely insofar as it conforms to the symbolic mode of realism, is the sheer volume of inassimilable residue that it can neither properly contain nor entirely exclude" (Anomalous States 152). The aesthetic in need of invention is, of course, modernism.
Chapter 3
Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane’s Mirror on Ireland

More or less one century after Edgeworth puts down the mirror on Ireland, two quite different Anglo-Irish woman writers take a chance on picking it up. By the late 1920’s when Elizabeth Bowen and Molly Keane start writing for publication, the novel as a form has evolved into a vehicle for modernist art where style and poetic experimentation rival and occasionally eclipse more transparent realist representations and the formula of sheer entertainment. Ireland, though much changed, is hardly less incendiary than during Edgeworth’s time, and thus arguably not in a position to host significant literary achievement. The Protestant Ascendancy is sputtering towards its demise, but no part of the country’s socio-political future is certain.

Though of the same ethnic class, Bowen and Keane’s literary formations were dramatically different. Bowen, though she was born and spent her early years of girlhood at her family’s estate, Bowen’s Court in County Cork, was formally educated in England in the European humanistic traditions. Of this education, she says in her posthumous memoir-esque work Pictures and Conversations, “We learned: the classrooms were brisk, the teaching was thorough. No one of the schools I went to was amateurish”(45). In correspondence with this training, both Bowen’s writing and personal bearing throughout her career are distinguished by meticulous composure and self-restraint. She demonstrably ascribed to the advice she offered in “Notes on Writing a Novel”:

Relevance crystallizes meaning…The most striking fault in work by young or beginning novelists, submitted for criticism, is irrelevance—due either to infatuation or indecision. To direct such an author’s attention to the imperative of relevance is certainly the most
In a totemic description of Bowen, literary agent, Spencer Curtis Brown writes, “Her features were strong, yet completely feminine; she liked on occasion to dress superbly and to know that she had done so. Not vain, she knew that she had ‘presence’” (xix). In light of these two quotations, it is easy to imagine how Bowen transposed her writing technique to her daily countenance and mannerisms (or vice versa).

By contrast, Molly Keane (born Mary Nesta Skrine) describes her unconventional character from girlhood as that of “a great old breakawayer”(Kierstead 102). Into her 80’s, Keane nurtured an air of the undomesticated in her person and discourse, including a proclivity for gossip, intrigue and playfully chatty non-sequiturs. Of the impression she makes on a visitor, “neither her bearing nor her conversations suggests Society—she is a sport,” remarks Mary Kierstead of the The New Yorker magazine in 1986 (112). Of exclusively Irish formation, Keane was educated by a series of governesses, which she insists in her interview with Kierstead was matter-of-factly no education at all. She consequently was sent away to a boarding school outside of Dublin for two years when she was fourteen years old—the result was an apparently mutually agreed upon stalemate of wills: “she hated it and they hated her”(101).

While Bowen’s artistic ambitions were nourished under the heady auspices of intellectuals, writers, and scholars she befriended at Oxford (while her husband, Alan Cameron was Director of Education for Oxfordshire), Keane’s writing progressed via the impetus of earthlier aims. Writing her first novel, The Knight of the Cheerful Countenance, at the age of 17, nearly doubled her annual dress allowance, allowing for the purchase of gowns and accoutrements for the hunt-balls—though withstanding successful publication, she still managed
to accrue significant debt by her own account. Her more pressing desire for success in “society”
than success in letters leads Keane to publish her first eleven novels under the pseudonym M.J.
Farrell, a name she drew from a pub she passed while on a hunt, because “writing novels was
one of several things that a nice girl who wanted to get on socially didn’t do” (Kierstead 97).

Despite these differences in what might crudely be called breeding --a metaphorical
distinction of certain epistemological weight in light of the apparent universal Anglo-Irish
passion for horses that both Bowen and Keane share--, Bowen and Keane’s literary production
meet at several critical intersections of style and thematics. Bowen’s and Keane’s Big House
novels, *The Last September* and *Mad Puppetstown*, 1929 and 1931 respectively, forcefully
demonstrate how Edgeworth’s original formula—the physical presence of the Irish big house and
its mixed sectarian rural community, the genealogical disruptions among families and proto-
Darwinian social conflict--has finally arrived at a literary age where it can flourish in both style
and meanings. (While certain literary scholars and critics, such as Jed Esty, consider the
adoption of the Big House model “belated” historically-speaking, this chapter argues that it was
not until the 20th century that the form achieved a stage of artistic maturation (257).) Inheritors of
the heavily persecuted Anglo-Irish colonial legacy, Bowen and Keane’s relationships to the land,
as is apparent in these texts, are fraught with ambivalent emotions of anxiety, longing, rejection,
determined perseverance and wavering convictions. Through the social bind that both authors
experience, these texts are naturally reflective and in many ways more illustrative of the
predicaments of conscience and consciousness that the continental modernists innovated through
literature with regard to the old European guard of artistic values and progressive universalizing
narratives.
Of the two women, Bowen is clearly the established modernist. Striking similarities in style, particularly the use of third-person indirect discourse, link her, as many critics have noted, to Virginia Woolf. She associated broadly with avant-garde intellectual figures, the Bloomsbury set among them, who influenced her writing. Moreover, through her non-fiction essays on the act of writing it is clear that Bowen held within herself the conviction—as any practitioner of modernism should—“that her first loyalty must be to her art” (DiBattista 234)—a commitment Edgeworth, of course, was hesitant and in the end unable to make. Bowen achieved this commitment to her art by creating distance without detaching herself from her divided sympathies, which are described in her preface to The Last September, as between “latent blood-and-bone ‘Irishness’ and her besieged minority community whose loyalty was inherited for England, “where their sons went to school, in whose wars their sons were killed, and to whom they owed in the first place their lands and power” (ix-x). Further, as becomes evident through reading her novels, she executes her work in a high modernist register with a painstakingly deliberate pen that manages to leave bare, sometimes hollow, what would otherwise be glossy and bright while introducing opacity where conventionalized directness would presumably be the order of the day.

Though less insistent than Bowen, Keane, too, resists succumbing to the standard Anglo-Irish pitfalls of defensive self-justification and romanticization. Less apprehensive of the slipperiness of language than Bowen, Keane seems to revel in the uncontainability of it, the way language has a tendency to run away from its speaker—and its author. Criminally over-modest, she says of her work, “The awful thing is, I really haven’t got much else to write about.
Everything is based on my life. I have no imagination” (Kierstead 98). Rather, it is precisely her illuminative imagination that allows her to represent the world in which she grew up in a prismatic array of interpretive potentials ranging, fully and often simultaneously, from cutting satire to barefaced tenderness. In other words, what these women share artistically and what qualifies them both as modernists of comparable achievement is an astonishing sensitivity to the undercurrents of their age—what Spencer Curtis Brown identifies in his preface to *Pictures and Conversations* as “earth tremors” (xxv).

*The Last September*, which clearly indicates a discrete moment in time with the adjective “last,” is also implicitly indicating place, because this moment, while it certainly refers to the final autumn of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland (which as a social moment appeared to be in perpetual autumn since the dawn of the 19th century), is referring more concisely and more poignantly to the last September of Danielstown, the big house, whose hauntingly silent immolation is the final scene of the novel. On the second to last page, after Lady Naylor and her friend and neighbor Mrs. Trent come to ironic agreement that Danielstown “looks really its best” in autumn, the indirect narrator promptly transports us into the demesne’s near-future, “Here, there were no more autumns, except for the trees…Next year, the chestnuts and acorns pattered unheard on the avenues, that, filmed over with green already, should have been dull to footsteps—but there were no footsteps” (302). While the meta-textual impression of the novel may hold as a remembrance for a dying era, the loss that registers most acutely is that of the characters who lose their home, the literal and symbolic social hub of their lives. This emblem transformed into ruin becomes, the following autumn, the solace not of people but the “formless,

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62 John Banville, whose writing will be discussed later in the chapter, claimed a very similar pose when in his interview with Belinda McKweon for *Paris Review*, he says of his metafictional/fantastical prose, “To me, my books are completely realistic. They’re the world as I see it.”

63 Bowen in her preface to *The Last September* evokes the timber of the season by calling September “that lovely, too mortal month” (vi).
frightened‖ leaves that blow against it (303). As their disputed social claim to Ireland is obliterated with the house, the characters disperse indefinitely, ceding with the property what Lois, the young protagonist, identifies to the more worldly Marda Norton as the life-sustaining "pattern" she cherishes as part of country-living at Danielstown: “Just to be is so intransitive, so lonely”(142). And yet, nonetheless, this is their fate.

_Mad Puppetstown_, on the contrary, names its location in the title (Puppetstown, whimsical as it sounds, is the proper name of the novel’s big house), but with the addition of the word “mad” the title gains a temporal specificity, which like most of Keane’s descriptions is ambiguous in its very distinction. The plainer interpretation would be that the madness refers to an interim period in the house’s history when the protagonist, Easter Chevington’s Aunt Dicksie stays behind with the house while the rest of the family flees to England and consequently both building and person begin to acquire signs and practices of madness. However, there is a viable second argument that the madness refers to Puppetstown’s golden age before the Troubles, when every person was carefree, at his or her most natural and believed him/herself to be masters of his/her own destiny—a conviction Bowen felt the Irish big house itself encouraged. This brazen sense of security and freedom surely looks a great deal like delusional madness from the perspective of what happens consequently. Either way, both these titles demonstrate the interconnectivity of time and place, a relationship that is crucial for the reader to experience, not only the tumultuousness of the historic moment during which the novels are set, but the tumultuous nature of the authors’ backwards-looking glance that such a retrospective requires.

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64 “There is also – and this, I think, is the strength of such households – a very great feeling of independence: in the big house one does not feel overlooked; one lives by one’s own standards, makes one’s own laws and does not care, within fairly wide limits, what anybody outside the demesne wall thinks” (Bowen, “The Big House” 28). Couching her comments in the realm of feeling instead of fact, it is easy to imagine Bowen would agree that such a sense of empowerment accompanied by a disregard for others plays a not insignificant role in the Big House era’s eventual close.
Bowen, for whom *The Last September* was the only novel that attempted to recuperate the past, recalls the deliberate choices she made in setting the scene to achieve her desired effect:

In all [other novels]…I have wanted the reader to contemplate what should appear to be the immediate moment—so much so, that to impart the sense of the “now” has been for me one imperative of creative writing. But, for *The Last September*, that went into reverse—the “then,” the Past, as an element, was demanded. The mood and cast of my characters, and their actions, were to reflect the glow of a finished time…The ordinary narrative past tense, so much in usage as to be taken for granted, did not seem to me likely to be forceful enough, so I opened my second paragraph with a pointer: “*In those days, girls wore crisp white skirts and transparent blouses clotted with white flowers; ribbons threaded through...appeared over the shoulders.*” Lois’s ribbons lead into history. (Preface vi)

This is an important distinction that Bowen is making with regard to time and tense. She decides that it is insufficient for the reader merely to register “the ordinary narrative past tense” for she is aware that we are so accustomed to this tense that it naturally will have the effect of contiguity if not direct continuance with our present moment without further manipulation and insistence on her part. This insisted-upon retrospective position of a “finished time” allows Bowen a special perspective on the strange ironies of her own girlhood.

Before the anomalies of the period can be drawn too sharply, this deliberate past tense establishes itself by evoking the familiar mood of the pastoral. The opening image of the novel is first that of Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency approaching Danielstown from the open countryside. Overall, as one would expect to find in a pastoral, the mood harmonizes with the scenery. The “wild escape to the wind of [Mrs. Montmorency’s] mauve motor veil” complements the arms
waving in friendly recognition, while the beeches that line the avenue along the approach assist
in the warm welcome of the hosts, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor and Lois, awaiting their visitors
on the front steps. Lois’s impression of her own appearance as “cool and fresh” enhances the
reader’s impression of the scene’s general bucolic freshness, while the youthful embarrassment
she tries to conceal by “clasping her elbows tightly behind her back” insists upon Lois’s and the
scene’s prevailing innocence. All of this appears well in line with one’s anticipated sense of the
Irish countryside, which so often drenched with romantic feeling, was strongly coded at this
time, as it often is now, by William Butler Yeats, who firmly declared that “the rural image [of
Ireland] would represent a tested endured solitude and the generousness of community; the
patient effort of labor and the nobility of suffering; the ideal of dedication and reward of
courage” (qtd. in Corcoran 57). Thusly, the first paragraph concludes, “It was a moment of
happiness, of perfection” (3). And it is in this sensory mood that Bowen elicits the feeling for
which she professes to aim in her preface: “But see, our story begins!” (vii).

Indeed, “Lois’s ribbons lead into history” and the opening phrase of the second
paragraph, “In those days” ably sets the tone for this Proustian entrance into remembrance. But
this finished time, for Bowen, is accompanied at every step with the anxious immediacy, the
pervasive doubt, the uncertain question of modernity in its moment that disrupts the sweetness of
nostalgia inspired by ribbons and bites of madeleine. As Leo Marx remarks in his seminal work
on the American pastoral, "Most literary works called pastorals…do not finally permit us to
come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural
scenery” (25). Further, he elaborates that the threat to the pastoral in the industrial age is the
machine. Marx uses as his initial example a reflection on nature written by Nathaniel Hawthorne
that is interrupted in the middle sharply by the sound of a locomotive. “What begins as a
conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world—a simple pleasure fantasy—is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind”(15). In Bowen’s pastoral opening, the initial machine in the garden is the motor of the Montmorencys’ car. In this case “the sound of the motor” approaching not only precedes the description of the country environs, (The opening sentence of the novel notably is not “In those days”, but “About six o’clock the sound of a motor, collected out of the wide country and narrowed under the trees of the avenue…””) it is this signal that draws the Naylors and Lois out of the house to gaze upon the scenery (and the antisocial Laurence to hide in the anteroom with his book). Moreover, as a structural device, the motor announces the start of the Montmorencys’ visit which will chart the course of the novel’s progression up to the final pages.

As was the sound of the locomotive for Hawthorne, the motorized vehicle will be a recurring irruptive event in the novel that exposes complicated states of consciousness. Its disruptive effect on the environment offers repeated reminders that the Naylors’ way of life is under attack: first, here in the opening paragraph, then that evening after dinner as the emblematic sound of the military patrols in the evening—“A furtive lorry is a sinister thing”(38), says Laurence. Later, the motorcar reappears as part of a still-frame photographic moment for Lois watching Gerald step into his armored vehicle after tea. When later she tries to think of him, “she could remember nothing of him but the leg he had drawn so tenderly into the armoured car”(214). Gerald too, remembers this moment and attributes the memory’s potency to the machine’s symbolization, saying to her, “I shall never forget what I felt in that armoured car. You will always be connected up in my mind with the smell of oil”(223). Finally, the car returns as the threat of violence is realized by Gerald’s death while he is out on one of the foreheard patrols. The motor continually interrupts the illusion of pastoral stasis. So much more than an
innocent interruption into their daily lives, each time the motor is heard, it is a more emphatic reminder that the modern conditions of Ireland and the characters’ attitudes and behaviors towards them are gravely irreconcilable.

Moreover, returning to the opening scene, the disruptive hum of the automobile is reflected and sustained further into the scene by intermittently disruptive adjectives and one destabilizing noun: “a thin iron gate *twanged*, “the *flashing* windscreen [of]…arms waving”, “an *agitation* of greeting” (3). It is the “agitation of greeting” that particularly counters the opening paragraph’s sense of idyllic innocence. Like a nervous tic, this agitation reads as an indication of some uneasy aspect or secret knowledge that the characters would wish to suppress, but are not entirely able—an early example of what Spencer Curtis Brown calls Bowen’s “earth tremors” (xxv). Such spasms in the landscape certainly call to question the earnestness of the declarative statement, quoted above, the third-person indirect assertion of the moment as happy and perfect.

This agitation emerges again, a few paragraphs further, as the characters linger on the entrance steps. Seemingly out of nowhere, on the heels of a conversation about trees being uprooted in the wind, Richard (or possibly Lady) Naylor says “…You came quite safe? No trouble? Nobody at the crossroads? Nobody stopped you?” (4). Stuttering, the questions reiterate themselves in uncontainable nervous apprehension. Their repetition signals the underlying anxiety of the moment, until without waiting for a response, Lady Naylor represses this acknowledgement of recent nearby violence and military presence by diverting the topic to the safest and most habitual practice of the Anglo tradition: tea. This early move to tea will prove representative of Bowen’s larger narrative strategy in the novel to show the constant back-and-

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65 Italics are mine.
forth strain between the no longer suppressible environmental pressures on this community, her
people, and the heroic efforts made to contain and modulate their underlying and very real fears.

In *Mad Puppetstown*, Molly Keane, too, invests in the double-edged irony of her past. She foregoes, however, Bowen’s technique of gently maneuvering the reader into the past. Instead, Molly Keane’s entrance into the past is abrupt and wholly declarative, and yet still it manages to evoke as bright and loving a sense of this now extinct community as Lois’s ribbons:

THEN:-----

They said: “You naughty man!” They wore hair nets and tortoise-shell combs.

It was more than fast to accept presents from men.

You bought a blood four-year-old up to weight for £60.

There was no wire.

They talked about “the ladies” and “motorcars.” “By George!” they said, but never used Americanisms; such were not known….

Love mattered.

Manners mattered.

Children mattered.

Places and dependents mattered too.

Money bought much more.

People drove about in dog-carts and pony traps. Invitations were issued to tea…,(Farrell 3)

With this beginning, Keane transports us into a past time as if she were carrying us into a foreign land, crossing a threshold into a past where everything exists on a different plane both materially and behaviorally from the contemporary. The matter-of-fact presentation of things and attitudes
impresses the dual effects of a past where social values and beliefs are as widely and definitively agreed upon as the price of a horse, while implicitly suggesting that whenever Keane’s or our “now” might be, this pervasive sense of certainty with regard to the ways of the world no longer exists. As yet, the country/city division is not apparent.

Keane, in fact, forestalls evoking the pastoral further with a continuation of declarations on social behavior and trends, followed by an exhaustive description of the protagonist, Easter Chevington. In contrast to Lois Farquar’s cool freshness, Easter enters our imagination as a monster on the loose from Carnival:

Easter was a small, mousey-looking child. Her nurse scraped all her hair straight back off her forehead and away from her ears, plaiting just a very little of it on the top of her head, and tying this unattractive morsel with an infinitesimal piece of brown ribbon. The rest was allowed to lie in straight uninteresting strands down her back. This unbecoming method of hair-dressing laid bare every inch of Easter’s forehead, which was high and intellectual and bulged hard and round like a cricket ball. Her eyes were grey and very shortsighted so that they always appeared to be screwed up into slits. However, Easter’s father, Major Chevington, hated to see children in spectacles, and therefore attributed Easter’s headaches to over-eating or imagination. Easter’s mouth was large and at the moment very untidy, what with teeth coming and going and with the difficulty of breathing through adenoids. However her nose (though full of adenoids) was the tidiest thing about her (if one excepted her feet and hands), and her laugh was splendid. She would roar with laughter sometimes, though not often, as her sense of the ridiculous was limited. (5)
If Lois is the picture of pristine cultivated young womanhood, Easter is the chaotic botch of a savage girlhood. Her dramatically unattractive features, undomesticated and incongruous to each other, set the scene for Puppetstown as markedly as Lois to Danielstown. Puppetstown, when we get to it, will be less Virgil’s Acadia, and more Never Never Land, a children’s world far removed from the adult concerns of war, sectarian aggression, and marriage.66

As both Bowen and Keane establish the past tense sense of their novel with different aesthetic means but to similar effect, so too the big houses, Danielstown and Puppetstown serve similar roles as centripetal center-points. These houses, both off in the country, both subject to the violence of the elements and their unstable communities, are in essence emblematic of memory itself: proud, willful, readable, but ultimately defined by their own vulnerability. (Danielstown in particular is described as “highest of all with toppling imminence, like a cliff” evincing both its prominence and its potent destructibility (36).) In them, modernism finds a vessel, which illuminates the modern conditions of alienation, fragmentation, untimeliness, and confusion in a way that city structures have yet to do convincingly in literature. The very permeable boundaries of feeling between the landscape, the structure itself, and its inhabitants permit a fluidity of meaning and understanding to circulate in a network of contingencies, social and natural, upon which the self-definition of the young modern characters both relies and is frustrated.

Though Bowen is frequently mischaracterized as a late practitioner of realism, this feeling of synchrony between landscape and human consciousness roots itself in a very different

66 Even the adults of Puppetstown are not entangled by wedlock as Major Chevington is a widower, his sister, Brenda, a young widow is always girlishly flirting but never seriously engaged, and Aunt Dicksie, the old spinster, lives in a sexless dream-world with the property itself as her one true love.
literary heritage—the gothic. In a rare overt literary allusion, Bowen offers, in the middle of the novel, a quick nod to the famous forbearer of the gothic, Edgar Allan Poe, when Lois in a heightened state of exhilaration upon entering an old mill with Marda Norton expects “with detachment to see [the cracks] widen, to see the walls peel back from a cleft—like the House of Usher” (180). This scene further details the development of Lois as a romantically sensitive character, who is influenced by and perhaps even inclined to live vicariously through literature.

The startling “ghoulish”ness of the mill provokes for Lois “a fear she didn’t want to get over, a kind of deliciousness” (178).

What’s more, Lois’s observation of affinity between Poe’s tale and the mill establishes the scene’s gothic register, intervening in the otherwise relatively clear distinction Bowen has delineated throughout the novel between what is real and what is being psychologically projected on to the scene. Upon closer examination, what transpires in the mill with the Irish rebel and the gun shot, even the grazing bullet on Marda’s hand might be faithfully interpreted as the girls’ fearful imaginations made manifest in a collective delusion. The first hint of delusion is Lois’s performance of her fear when they uncover the man: she is both “appalled and desirous” (180), a clear evocation of an active Freudian subconscious. Lois laughed “then clapped the back of a hand to her mouth—unnatural gesture adequate to the drama” (180). Oddly, instead of reacting instinctually to this turn of events, she appears to be acting out mock reactions, as if she were rehearsing such a situation for the very performance of it, not in actuality. At the height of the

67 In his essay, “Shadows of Destruction,” Andrew Parkin identifies a Gothic strain in Big House fiction whose genealogy he connects to Irish vampire fiction writers Bram Stoker (Dracula 1897) and Sheridan Le Fanu (“Carmilla” 1871).

68 As a typical young person might, Lois appears to believe that literature may offer a model for her to escape the tedium of her actual life, but she is at a loss to find the proper piece of emancipatory writing. It is quite clear, as the acknowledged intellectual, that Laurence’s books allow him to live an alternate life of the imagination—one from which Lois expressly feels excluded. She becomes frustrated when after appealing to Laurence for a reading suggestion, he offers her only to go on with her German giving “her two grammars, a dictionary and a novel of Mann’s, which she took from him doubtfully” (236).
threat, the events lead Lois to the seemingly irrelevant conclusion that she “must marry Gerald”(182). Of course, this decision is not irrelevant to the larger problem of Lois’s limited opportunities for self-actualization, but with regard to the supposed threat of the iresome man’s gun barrel, such a thought is hardly practical. Further, the response that she must marry Gerald (i.e. her response not being that, with her life at risk, she might never get to choose whether to marry Gerald or not) illustrates to what extent Lois’s responses are internally directed and not related to the immediate physical “real” world of which she complains to be missing out. Instead Lois, like so many of Bowen’s characters, responds to life as if her thoughts were more pressing than any narrowly defined actuality. Bennett and Royle observe that these thought constructions apply pressure on the physical world mapping itself “onto bodies or inanimate objects, and mak[ing] thought somatic or inanimate”(17). And though Marda’s bleeding hand may be the most persuasive evidence that the scene did transpire, Bowen does not show us the gun go off nor are we privy to what incited the abrupt violence. The injury, like the dilapidated mill itself, is a residual signifier, where the signified, for the reader, remains out of reach. Lois’s further insistence to herself and the others that “There never was anybody…” and Marda’s conclusion that she scraped her hand on the “broken edge of a slate” may be framed consciously as a lie, but there is considerable evidence to believe this alibi to be true, whether they believe it or not (184).

Not only does the rebel disappear from the text after this scene following the unanimously sworn agreement that none of the events will ever be referred to again, but the lasting resonance of the episode has significantly less to do with the event itself and the eminent danger it suggested, than with conditions in the environment that have been building throughout the narrative. This is to say, the prevailing effect of this encounter is not that the girls’ lives are threatened, but that the house is. Lois in the moment of crisis focuses not on the possible end of
her physical life, but life as she knows it at Danielstown, deciding as resolutely as ever “I must marry Gerald”. The house’s vulnerability and the vulnerability of the modes of living it supports has been a theme incubating throughout the novel and the rebel reinforces this fear in his final sentence to the girls, “If yez have nothing better to do, yez had better keep within the house while y’have it” (181).

Moreover, while the initial threat to reporting this afternoon’s events might seem to be coming from the rebel, the larger concern is the need to persuade themselves and others that Ireland is still as they wish to see it, namely no more treacherous or uncivilized than any other modern nation. Marda verifies the primacy of this concern over the physical threat of the rebel when she affirms that “Nothing would have induced [her] to confirm Leslie’s opinion that her country was dangerous as well as demoralizing” (187). Combining these two residual effects of their “encounter” (the physical threat of violence transferred from the women to the house and the complicity between Irish and Anglo-Irish to keep the event a secret), it becomes apparent that the mill and Danielstown are in a reflexive relationship to each other. The ruinous useless state of the mill anticipates the soon destruction and abandonment of the demesne, while the shared promise not to speak of the encounter illustrates the continued denial of how fragile their hold on their world has become. Hence, read as unreal, a manufactured delusion, like that of the hypochondriac Roderick Usher’s self-fulfilling prophecy, this scene illuminates Bowen’s interest in using space to represent the complexity of character by both making the girls’ fear manifest and reconfirming their resolution to repress it.

This literary reference reverberates beyond the discrete scene where it appears. Both works, invested in the various ways that our subjectivities shade experience, show to varying degrees the realization of a dreaded fate through its prolonged anticipation: the demise of both
Danielstown and the House of Usher in their respective final scenes. Another parallel is how the destruction of the house signals a genealogical dead end for the two family lineages. Poe does this explicitly by first establishing the unique “line of descent” that existed from Roderick and his sister, Madeleine, to the family’s originator and then establishing the peasants’ commonplace usage for the “House of Usher” to refer both to the family and the family mansion, so that when the house crumbles and is enveloped by the tarn, it is clear that so too went the destiny of the ancient Usher line (and vice versa). In The Last September, the impossibility of genealogical continuation is less explicit, but still the opportunity of establishing an heir to Danielstown is blocked at several turns until it becomes clear that family discontinuation is inevitable: namely, Sir Richard and Lady Naylor have no direct heir, Lois loses her suitor, Gerald, in the war, though even before he dies their betrothal is blocked first by Lady Naylor and second by Lois herself, who cannot profess to truly love him, and Lawrence, too, is discounted as too” intellectual” for the purposes of family regeneration and upholding the traditions. So much is to be inferred by Lady Naylor’s pseudo-motherly comments to Gerald that "I have no sons of my own, you know, and Laurence being so intellectual" and "Now Laurence is too modern: he does not seem to care about girls at all…” not to mention Laurence’s own doom-laden fantasies where he invites the Irish rebels in for “bread and apples and leisurely conversation” before they burn Danielstown to the ground (265, 268, 153).

All this is to say that The Last September appears to inherit from “The Fall of the House of Usher” not only a gothic encounter, but a broader dynamic strategy in the relationship that Bowen draws between the landscape and the human psyche, which Poe similarly developed to create the effect of an aesthetic totality in his work. These works approach each other aesthetically through “inherently symbolic attachments which govern our [and their] relations to
others,” a common element identified by Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace in their book *Gothic Modernism* that points to an under-recognized stylistic legacy that drew from the Gothic to the Modern (4).

R. B. Kershner persuasively identifies this complementarity between symbol and object to be strongest in Bowen’s projection in many of her stories of “the sense of the house as primal, belonging to the realm of dream, reverie, and the uncharted territory of unconscious being,” making Danielstown, whenever it is brought to our attention, a sacred metaphor of the characters’ psychic predicament (Wolff qtd. in Kershner 410). The distinction to insist upon between Poe and Bowen, however, is that while Poe uses the dilapidated house to signal the exhausted state of the Usher lineage, Bowen’s Danielstown is not yet a ruin (as the insistent peasant from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* might protest, we hear the house call out “I’m not dead yet”). Its inhabitants view the house, not as the death sentence that Roderick Usher withstands, but as an object that even in its last throes has ideas and values felt to be worth preserving. This is shown throughout the novel in many gestures of care and tending that is bestowed on the house, particularly Lois’s careful flower arrangements. Further is the resentment that all the inhabitants feel for the liberties of which the British military and their wives avail themselves with regard to visiting the house at their leisure, picking their fruit from the orchards, and dropping by for tea unannounced on the less and less convincing justification repeated often by British officer’s wife, Betty Vermont, “*We’re* here to take care of you!” (163).

Not yet ready to allow Danielstown to die the silent death of a tourist attraction, to be commoditized for British amusement along with the Kerry cows, Lois shields the drawing-room and the garden from Betty Vermont and Denise Rolfe, apologizing for having lost the garden key and not permitting them the house tour because “I always think drawing-rooms in the morning
are so depressing”(290). Instead, the house reflects the difficult negotiations and ambivalent feelings the characters are engaging in (such as their ambivalent, but be it told mostly negative opinion of the British military occupation) between the aspirations of the past, which Danielstown continues to represent nobly, and the creeping intervention of modernity, which is beginning to impose a different light on the property and its conservative symbolization.

*Mad Puppetstown* too invokes a gothic register to emphasize the interconnection between Puppetstown and its inhabitants. One of the first accounts of this is when the children returning home from the races, exhausted and happy because Easter’s father won his heat. At this moment, the narrative jumps perspective to that of the house, offering a glimpse of “Puppetstown awaiting them with the flat, dignified calm that houses whose inmates leave them for a day's jolling assume like a mood or a garment, and discard only when they have with due dignity remitted the unkindliness of their children's desertion”(119). Here, the house without the children adopts a false persona of calm dignity, repressing its human sense of loss, a loss that is expressed eerily as a form of envy: “For houses can be as jealous as lovers and mothers, and under provocation more bitter than either. Nor do houses ever forget. What are ghosts but the remembrances they shelter?”(119). This passage transforms our impression of Puppetstown from mere physical structure to a possessive loving ghost. Keane’s houses, as Sinead Mooney observes, are “the locus through which she dramatizes the determining mould of the past on an individual subject, particularly the female subject”(197). The house, not only in Easter’s imagination, but in its own imagining has taken on the valence of Easter’s dead mother, waiting up for her, desirous for this young girl to return and give her new life, a veritable motherly monster of Frankenstein.

But then, only half way through the novel, violence erupts, and Aunt Brenda’s captain suitor is killed while escorting her to visit a friend’s home on his way back to base camp. The
childrens’ things are promptly packed and they are to leave immediately with Brenda for England, which will leave the house alone with Aunt Dicksie, who adamantly refuses to leave:

…there seemed to Aunt Dicksie a falseness in the evening peace of Puppetstown, a leaning, listening quality, as though Puppetstown had lost her honour and stood now betrayed and forsaken and most desolately in sin and shame before the world. A lonely, wicked old woman of a house. Through her this had come to pass—of that very quality of warmth and of fun and of golden careless laughter that was in Aunt Brenda and the house alike had this come. And now Puppetstown was to be left desolately, a sad grey house leaning blind-eyed down her valley, her beauty gone and her gladness withered and shrunken from her. (162)

Here, Aunt Dicksie, who becomes for a period the sole interpreter and confidante of Puppetstown, reports morosely the altered status of the house. The house is a woman fallen into ill-repute, and yet, though it is the conflict-driven outer world that has exposed her “sin and shame,” the accusation points inward to the reckless abandon of too many warm happy days. In line with the House of Usher, the sadness is an inward grief, a family grief, but of course, while it is practically inconceivable that the sun ever shone on the House of Usher, this turn in Mad Puppetstown is the grief of happiness lost.

As “Puppetstown had lost her ministers”(164), so begins an overtly gothic interim for the house ruled by an ever more ghostly Aunt Dicksie. While the gothic register of The Last September reinforces the encounter between the traditionally absorbent rural space and modernism’s troubled consciousness, this gothic interim in Mad Puppetstown is a metaphorical death and in most senses is not a modernist sequence at all. Effectively closing itself from the world, Puppetstown becomes its own state removed from the 20th century: "That was how it
started—the absolute reign of Aunt Dicksie and her able prime minister Patsy”(172). Cutting off all diplomatic ties, Aunt Dicksie does not even respond to Basil’s letters. As her contemporary clothes wear out, she takes to wearing the Victorian era clothing of her “almost forgotten Aunt Fanny”(177). Aunt Dicksie becomes a gothic oddity, who receives visitors only when it is unavoidable to do otherwise, while the guests “easily perceiving that they were not wanted, stayed away entirely or only went to Puppetstown to gather some fresh tale of Miss Chevington’s growing eccentricity and meanness, with which to divert the countryside”(177). The house which had meant so much to the Chevington family and their community in Westcommon, a proclaimed golden age for all who shared in the happiness there, has shrunken to its new society of two. When Aunt Dicksie considers the fanatical devotion she has cultivated for the house, she asks, “‘for whom shall I keep it? For whom and why?’ And from every side the house whispered to her answering: ‘For yourself. Forever’”(173). Dicksie’s original regenerative motivation that she was preserving the house for the children has now faded, while the notion that she and the house might continue indefinitely alone and together in a timeless state has taken its hold: “So Puppetstown possessed Aunt Dicksie…more and more she grew at one and at peace with this Puppetstown that was hers alone”(173).

As the most popular and enduring of rural literary aesthetics, the Gothic is premised on a contained environment in the hinterlands, away from the controls that moderate human society: technology, efficiency, order, and reason. In this sense, the rural Gothic is not subject to the narrative demands of “progress.” Likewise in this section of the novel, time, without any happenings to chart its progress, seems to have stopped entirely. Dicksie, miraculously, appears not to age, even as the house and grounds erode around her.
And yet, while the physical structure of Puppetstown may be quarantined in an inanimate past, for the children, Easter and Basil, now young adults living in England, Puppetstown haunts them in the interstices of their modern lives. The manner of this haunting thus moves Puppetstown back into the realm of the modern, for it is not simply the children’s nostalgia that haunts them—Easter barely remembers most of her childhood there—, but the prevalent sense of unease in their lives, unbodied reminders that they are displaced subjects.

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In Gothic environments, the anticipation of violence—what Lois perceives as the fear and deliciousness of it—is often of much more interest than the actual depiction of violent acts. Keane’s and Bowen’s version on this theme is to show how distant threats that trouble the imagination are in truth much closer and more keenly felt than characters are willing to openly acknowledge (Hence, so many eerie tennis parties and fish outings). In this vein, Marda Norton asks Hugo Montmorency in *The Last September*, “How far do you think this war is going to go? Will there ever by anything we can all do except not notice?”(117). This second question could well be considered the thematic inquiry of the novel, its sentiment is that far-reaching. Yet here where this concern is enunciated most directly, there is irony and a typically Irish de-emphasis of the situation, for as she ponders the act of not-noticing, Hugo and she are taking a leisurely walk in icy cold rain, acting as if they do not notice it.

Eventually, however, what had seemed like two separate spaces, war and domestic life, intersect. Death, at last, arrives at Danielstown and Puppetstown in the strikingly similar murders of Gerald Lesworth and Aunt Brenda’s beau, Reginald Grey. These deaths, however,
are not a complete departure from the deniability of earlier discussions on violence in the novels. Like the bullet that supposedly grazes Marda Norton’s hand, the reader still does not experience this violence firsthand. That the men are both British military men, not Irish, and that they are romantically, but not genealogically, linked to the respective houses further sustains the established distance between the protagonist families and actual fighting.

These acts do nonetheless manage in other ways to penetrate the walls of the demesne. With the threshold from anticipated to realized violence crossed, we look for signals that the narrative style or tone may shift; the characters must now surely confront these new environmental conditions. DiBattista observes, however, in *The Last September*, “Bluntness would seem to be called for in these circumstances, but obliqueness is what answers”(236). Indeed, Gerald’s death eerily seems to have little effect on Danielstown, except to further encourage forces that were already in motion to disassemble the household (the Montmorencys’ departure, Lois going to Italy, Laurence returning to school). Though structurally Gerald’s death announces the denouement of the novel—the final chapter title, “The Departure of Gerald”, is clearly attuned to this—, the actuality of the event fails to impress anything more meaningful than sad regret. More than anything, his “departure” is noted by a lacuna, as when Myra Naylor, upon hearing the news falters to say, “He was so—” and Mr. Daventry, who bore the bad news responds, “Yes, he was, wasn’t he?”(298). Disappearing quietly from Danielstown and the narrative, as the other characters soon will, Gerald’s death defies signification, except as a preview for departures to come.

Reggie’s death, in *Mad Puppetstown*, incites a more drastic narrative turn, sending the children and Brenda to England that very night, while Aunt Dicksie remains behind to subsequently lose her mind. Where previous entreaties to emigrate had fallen on Brenda’s deaf
ears, this violence that she sees firsthand from the passenger seat of Reggie’s motorcar prompts immediate action. Of more importance to the narrative is the reality that, though Easter had lost her father in World War I years earlier and her mother in childbirth, this evacuation is truly what orphans her (and Basil too, though his mother continues in good health). Yet, while Reggie’s death certainly is the catalyst for these changes, these events, like those in *The Last September*, were destined to transpire eventually. Keane makes this clear by depicting for the reader the escalating political tensions that the Chevingtons are largely oblivious to. Tragic as Reggie’s death is, the family and property are still intact in spite of it. It is the loss of living on the property, not the loss of life, that will have an enduring impact on the rest of the novel.

Thus, both of these human deaths, abrupt as they are, primarily serve to foreshadow the more mystical deaths of each of these households. For both these houses, property mournfully proves to be as fleeting as time. Danielstown is reduced to ruins; while Puppetstown, though given a new chance at life when Easter and Basil return to renovate, has forever lost its distinctive youth and innocence from the first half of the book.69

Danielstown’s curtain call, the narrative close of *The Last September*, is utterly poetic. It ends in “the wave of a silence” that hushes over the mind of the reader in empathy with the Naylors who are directly undertaken by it (303). One watches the old conventions of hospitality that the Naylors had long bravely upheld in the face of their own ineffectualness be consumed in the fire along with the material goods of Danielstown. The door stands open “hospitably upon a furnace” in a final welcoming gesture, which revivifies Laurence’s earlier imagining of inviting the raiders in “courteously” for food and “leisurely conversation” (303, 153). In this, the novel’s most violent and devastating scene, the closing images of an open door and an open sky manage

69 Oddly, each of the authors’ real life experiences during the Troubles is the opposite of what transpires in their books. Bowen's home, Bowen's Court survives until it was sold in 1960, while Keane's family home was burned in retaliation of Black-and-Tan activities (Suess 30, Weekes 149).
one last time to displace the violence that is directly before us with a poetic vision that resists
devolving into realism as rural literature is thought to do. Instead, Bowen’s authorial distance
and command of metaphor are maintained.

By contrast, Keane’s denouement is both more disarming and more puzzling than
Bowen’s. First, Basil performs an exorcism on Aunt Dicksie, releasing her from the enchantment
of her solitude. By insisting that she is and ever was still needed and wanted, Basil persuades
Dicksie not to move away—an action, which would have forced Basil and Easter either to leave
Puppetstown or marry. Then, in the oddest moment of the novel, Basil co-opts Easter to come
with him to Buncloody for car repairs and suggests that while she is waiting for him she should go
see the smallest house in Ireland. Misled by the euphemism “smallest house”, Easter discovers,
instead of a sweet cottage, a desolate lean-to shelter “built against a sod and stone bank.” It is the
house of the lovers, Maggie Foley and Jimmy Connor, who are shunned from their community
because Maggie is married to someone else and Jimmy is “the common outlaw of three town-
lands” (280). This scene befuddles the reader with its dark turn away from the farcical comedy of
the Puppetstown renovations. The discovery of the house distresses Easter greatly: “How long,
she wondered, before Romance failed there and died?”

There is no clear sense as to why Basil suggests this dispiriting outing for Easter. Surely,
the contrast between the lonely shack with one window and the “lovely gates” of Puppetstown
reaffirms the worthiness of their renovation endeavor, but what of the forbidden couple’s shame
and sin? (281). At first glance the shunned couple seems to have nothing in common with Easter
and Basil: they are Catholic adulterers, who are paying a steep price of social isolation for their
crime. Yet they are also a reflection of Easter and Basil, a horrifying vision of what could be if
they should make any brash decision that falls outside the community’s tenets of respectability.
Basil and Easter clearly understand and complement each other’s character, but they do not wish to marry. Therefore as an unconventional co-ed partnership in conservative rural Ireland, the most plausible theory I could think up is that Basil needs Easter to see the practical reality of how vulnerable they are to the public, in spite of their seeming isolation of the demesne. By showing her the house, Basil imparts the warning that though she is an independent woman of means, this is not a country where one can do whatever one pleases. That is, they cannot afford to act independently of their community.

If modernism is often characterized by iconoclastic thinking that roils against the doctrines of tradition, it is equally concerned with how a modern free-thinker learns to identify and navigate the traditional societal binds and practices that cannot be simply discarded out of hand. Easter and Basil are not cultural revolutionaries, but they are looking to build a new future for themselves in an unconventional way, and to do that they will need Aunt Dicksie with them. She is a living symbol to the community, the proof of their commitment to social propriety and integration. In this way, she is also the reminder that they are not free from societal constraints however much Easter and Basil might personally consider the constraints outdated.

This is the paradox of modern rural life. It is where Easter and Basil flee, so that they may have the freedom and space to be “themselves” and no longer feel like outcasts; and yet, in rural Ireland they are confronted with long-sown social codes that will continually weigh on their choices. Similarly for Lois, there are several moments where she appears liberated by her surroundings, such as when she dances down the street with Gerald or walks by herself among the laurels, and others where she stands in stark contrast to it, a prisoner of her surroundings. As is the case for several of England’s most modernist writers—Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, E.M. Forster—, the juxtaposition of modern society to personal moral-bearings and intuitive
sensibilities can be made more poignant by its distance from the congested metropolis. The rural, like the colonial outposts of Africa or India, are not mere reflections of modern life for the reader to grasp, they are distillations of it; they make manifest the contradictions in our nature that are more easily hidden or over-looked in the city.

Thus, Easter’s encounter with the smallest house in Ireland and Lois’s encounter at the mill effectively illuminate the historical predicament these women face by living in a time of flux. Each occurring at a distance from the big houses but directly linked to the social conflict at the heart of each novel, these confrontational scenes show how much the feared encounter with the other is always an encounter more momentously with the self. For Lois, this encounter enunciates outright the repressed anticipation of Danielstown’s demise and the necessity for her to act (i.e. marry Gerald, which she doesn’t); while for Easter, it is the acknowledgement that her adult life will be a compromise for Puppetstown, not the other way around.

Finally, as both authors crafted the beginning of their novels so as to enter into a finished time, the endings paradoxically release the reader from this accomplished past into some uncertain sense of a present-future. The open doorway of Danielstown in flames welcomes to its threshold, for the first time, the ultimately inevitable progression of time—an admission of ecological changes that the household had been long resisting. And though this final tableau is most notably a pyre for a dying way of life, its view of the present and future is not without a sense of elegiac resignation that this fear so long anticipated has now come to pass and will no longer suspend unresolved. Like the rooks, who happily replace human voices every evening on the property, after “men and women had, since seven o’clock, been released from this obligation”(73). The transfer of Danielstown’s stewardship from the Naylors back to nature
creates a “peaceful lassitude” with regard to the future which could not have been enjoyed in the Naylors’ pre-conflagration lives (73).

On the whole _Mad Puppetstown_ has a happier resolution. Aunt Dicksie, post-exorcism, agrees to stay and help Basil and Easter with their renovations. This change of heart is epitomized by the return of Easter’s prized Ming horse to her bedroom. The resurrection of the old Puppetstown at last seems within their grasp; and yet, this happily-ever-after is disrupted irreparably by a final toast to end the novel: “And never,” said Basil, with his dark, friendly smile, “need we be married—never while we can keep Aunt Dicksie alive.” This morbid salute reminds us of the temporary nature of Puppetstown’s tidy resolution and is an ominous acknowledgement of troubles ahead.

Thus, both novels end in a state of ambivalent irresolution. Danielstown is gone, but it is far from the horrific scene we had anticipated; while Puppetstown miraculously will be restored, but Basil and Easter’s arrangement will not sustain them there long-term. The Irish rural, as it strives for its pastoral ideal of synchrony with nature, in the end, meets the exigencies of time revealing both the tragedy of our hubris and the heroics of our failed (or destined-to-fail) ambitions.

Oddly, these endings represent opposite eventualities with respect to the authors’ actual experiences during the Troubles. Bowen’s childhood home and inheritance, Bowen’s Court survives the Troubles and manages to stay intact until it is sold in 1959, while Keane’s big house in County Wexford, Ballyrankin, does not (Weekes). To imagine this divergence of fate as correlated to each writer’s narrative ending is to be persuaded by Smith and Wallace’s assertion that “For modernists, as for Freud, fiction becomes the lie which tells the truth (4).” In this sense, for Molly Keane, _Mad Puppetstown_ carries on the negotiations of her Irish identity that did not
end despite the loss of her family house; and for Bowen *The Last September* marks with somber elegance the death of an era that had no such symbolic performance in her real life.
Chapter Three

"How embarrassing": The “Untidy” Returns of the Big House novel in Molly Keane’s *Time After Time* and John Banville’s *Birchwood*

And what if my descendants lose the flower
Through natural declension of the soul,
Through too much business with the passing hour,
Through too much play, or marriage with a fool?
May this laborious stair and this stark tower
Become a roofless min that the owl
May build in the cracked masonry and cry
Her desolation to the desolate sky.

----William Butler Yeats, “Meditations in Time of Civil War” (1928), VI My Descendants, Lines 9-16.

The anxiety that Yeats expresses in this stanza concentrates and makes manifest the Anglo-Irish anxieties endemic to Irish Big House novels going back to its beginning with Maria Edgeworth. The quiet hollowed apocalyptic vision of the “roofless min” under a “desolate sky” summons a sense of despair for Yeats’s anticipated loss at the hands of his potentially incautious progeny.70 In this way, the poet forecasts feelings of loss such as those roused by the vacant image of Danielstown, a year after the fire, when the avenues have “filmed over with

70 When Molly Keane discusses the transformation of Puppetstown after its evacuation, she, like Yeats keys in on the term “desolate” to describe the emptied house: “And now Puppetstown was to be left desolately, a sad grey house leaning blind-eyed down her valley, her beauty gone and her gladness withered and shrunken from her”(162). “Desolate” emerges from the page in both cases for its singular ability to evoke both the emptiness of the Big House structure that has lost or will lose its commanding presence in the Irish landscape and the social isolation of its denizens. In these instances, the cross-applicability of this term to describe both house as empty and people as companionless, perpetuates two common tropes of the Big House novel: the personification of the house and the conflation of the house with its inhabitants. Further, it reinforces the standard mythology of the genre that to imagine the land without its Big House is to imagine an evacuated landscape, the land returning to its “natural” unpopulated state. The Republican rebels reinforce this view of the land turning back to nature by opting to burn the houses and leave the property in ruins rather than attempting to step into the vacated social space of the Anglo-Irish. These attitudes did not change noticeably until the 1980’s and 90’s when many of the remaining big houses were transformed into tourist attractions (Cronin, *Tourism and Cultural Change*, 189).
green” for lack of footsteps and leaves “banked formless, frightened, against the too clear form of the ruin” (302-303). Indeed, whether it is foreshadowed, intimated, or realized, the Big House, unlike the British country manor, from 1920 onward is consistently shaded by the image of its own self in ruins. Moreover, as the detritus from these estates fold back into the landscape, the rural land itself is incorporated into this vision of ruin. As the rural population migrates to the cities or abroad, the gardens and the fields, like the houses, fall into disrepair. This image of the rural-as-ruin only enhances the presumption of the Irish countryside’s overall stasis, particularly its role as national monument and repository of lost time.71

Though Yeats in his poem frames his descendants’ descent as a conditional “what if”, the denouement of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, spurred by the Wyndam Land Act (1903), is at near completion by the Civil War in 1922 when the poem is written. Though the poet’s voice is a father concerned for choices his children will make when he has passed, the underlying concern, underscored by the first section of this poem “Ancestral Houses” is for the less-avoidable consequences of the past.72 Instead of an anxiety concerned purely with the future, the irresolution of the past, the unpaid debts, the unabsolved abuses—we’ve already seen

71 In Michael Cronin’s chapter on the tourism magazine, Ireland of the Welcomes from Tourism and Cultural Change, 1: Irish Tourism : Image, Culture, and Identity, he remarks that “The spatialization of history leads to the relentless dehistoricisation of the here and now, thereby sustaining an illusion of an Ireland which ‘has in essence remained the same’”(192). Although to a certain extent this attitude has historically included Ireland’s cities, even Dublin (Cf. James Laver’s “Strolling Down O’Connell Street” (1952)), the country’s emblematic rural topography is clearly the ideological anchor for this belief in Ireland’s timeless landscape.

72 In this part of the poem, Yeats contemplates the kind of brutal force and ruthless ambition that is necessary to create estates of elegant subtlety and ethereal grandeur. In the third stanza of “Ancestral Houses,” the poet switches from the illusion that rich men live lives of unchallenged ease to the harsher reality that these tranquil-seeming fiefdoms arise and are maintained out of violence:
Some violent bitter man, some powerful man
Called architect and artist in, that they,
Bitter and violent men, might rear in stone
The sweetness that all longed for night and day,
The gentleness none there had ever known;
generations of “Rackrents” commit every one of Yeats’s “imagined” misdirections long before the poet’s descendants will have the opportunity—are truly what haunts the poem.

_The Last September_ and _Mad Puppetstown_, proximate contemporaries of “Meditations,” register these same dramatic changes afoot in Protestant Irish social status and economic opportunities, and, like “Meditation,” openly question the Big House’s long-term symbolization. Moreover, each ends on a note of uncertainty and abdication with regard to the future. In _The Last September_, the characters might as well have perished in the fire at Danielstown, for the prevailing sense that there is no longer a place for them in this world. Clearly, too, Easter and Basil are relying on an unsustainable arrangement (i.e. aged Aunt Dicksie as mentor and chaperon) that, for all intents and purposes, offers no future plan at all. For each novel, like Yeats’ zero-sum imagination, there is a stage curtain in place between the novels’ present and future that keeps them from looking forward in any pragmatic unromanticized way. For Bowen, in particular, though the blazing open doorway is characterized in the previous section as an invitation to the progression of time and social progress—both of which had, for too long, been forestalled at its threshold—it is a self-sacrificing invitation, further accrediting the widely-held conceit that Ireland in the second half of the century will be incompatible with these vestigial structures, and thus they are best expunged. The prevailing sense of both endings is that any imagined future for the big houses, physical and literary, has been heretofore foreclosed upon.

The ruins of Big Houses that both the Anglo-Irish and the Irish Catholics romanticize—mostly for ideologically opposed reasons—at the end of the civil war, provide neat, and for

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73Bowen in her family memoir, _Bowen's Court_ (1946), conjectures on the fate of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland and her predictions are markedly less morose: “they may or may not prove able to make adaptations; that is one of the many things we must wait to see. To my mind, they are tougher than they appear. To live though living gave them no trouble has been the first imperative of their make-up: to do this has taken a virtuosity into which courage enters more than has been allowed. In the last issue, they have lived at their own expense” (456). And yet, as in _Last September_, there is an acknowledgement that this group has been living beyond their means and there is no practical suggestion for how they will avoid social annihilation.
many, a satisfying ending to a period of imperial subjugation and the literature that recounts it. To the minds of certain Irish literary critics like Seamus Deane, the Big House genre should well have expired with the razing of the houses, if not before, ceding the discourse to less distortive narratives of Irish history. In *Celtic Revivals*, Deane rails against the mythology of and nostalgia for “the [Protestant] hero as artist surrounded by the philistine or clerically-dominated mob” (31). Another popular criticism is that the genre is a vehicle for apologists, “an anachronism” and instrument in the perpetuation of myth” (Cronin 216). Even Bowen, herself, might be read as someone advocating for the end of the genre when she sets forth *The Last September* as a representation of “finished time.” In the novel, the ruins of Danielstown are the final stroke that closes out this historical moment—it is the destruction of the house, above and beyond the social unrest and lack of willing heirs, that forces this season to be Danielstown’s last. Personally, Bowen never returns to the genre again in her fiction, though she does publish a reflective essay in 1940 for *The Bell* titled “The Big House” and the 1942 memoir, *Bowen’s Court*, which recounts both her genealogy and the history of her family estate.

While Yeats’s poem only allows for two outcomes to the nationalist rural upheaval, a recuperation of Anglo-Irish social status or utter obliteration, the Big House genre reappears in the 1970’s, showing their artistic and symbolic resilience, despite the on-going Anglo-Irish cultural diminishment. The big house, as opposed to being formulaic and thematically tired, proved it still could provide a unique evaluative vantage point and oppositional pressure to the Irish national project and the role of the rural within it. That this reemergence of the genre takes hold when it does can hardly be considered coincidental for it is just at this time that the country

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74 In curious juxtaposition to this attitude is novelist Kate O’Brien’s essay from the collection *Myth and Reality in Irish Literature*. Here, she claims Anglo-Irish Literature as the categorical name for all Irish literature written in the English language, as opposed to uniquely the literature of the Protestant Irish people (310). Although clearly O’Brien is an outlier in her use of this definition, her position shows evidence of a reconsideration of the space for Protestant Irish writing in Irish literary history.
undergoes “a steadily increasing urge toward an informed Irish self-understanding” (Brown 310). Moreover, as Declan Kiberd observes, the conditions leading up to this new self-interrogation were such that it was not just the Anglo-Irish, who felt like outsiders. After all the horrors of violence and famine and the treaties signed on their behalf but without their consent, “the effect of such disasters was to make the Irish feel like strangers in their own country” (Kiberd 530). In many ways, the big houses’ hardships and dramatic collapse, allowed the genre to be remarkably well situated for staging a counter-discourse about Ireland’s on-going social transformations. Instead of these fictions losing their relevancy, the Big House novels of the later 20th century further reestablished their genre at the intersection of Irish rural culture and the modern imagination (Parkin 309-10).

If early 20th century Big House literature expressed an intuition that the Anglo-Irish social model was nearing an irretrievable point of dissolution, fixated on the pervasive dread of emptiness that they were not yet ready to own, the later novels are more concerned with examining how the big houses, on the other side of Ireland’s and Europe’s social upheavals of the first half of the century, may be reimagined anew as a lookingglass upon the Irish national project and the construction of Irish history. While we usually think of the “untimely” with respect to early demises, these estates are untimely for the preternatural lives that have continued long past the season when their symbolization was self-evident and (relatively) non-contradictory. This sense of the untimely, far from being anachronistic, is actually uniquely situated for showing the underbelly of Ireland’s modernization. As demonstrated by these late century Big House novels, the rural retains its cultural relevancy, shedding light on the modes of living still unreconciled to the stream-lined age in which they find themselves and the surprising indefatigable glimmer of regenerative energy they continue to produce.
This final section seeks a coda to Danielstown and Puppetstown’s foreclosed future by looking at two late century Big House novels: John Banville’s *Birchwood* (1973) and Molly Keane’s *Time After Time* (1983). These works, beyond cataloguing the persistence of the Big House in Ireland’s literary imaginary, establish a new reflective role in Ireland’s painful yet recuperative process of remembering and self-configuration. If early Bowen and Keane Big House novels promoted Ireland’s modernist prowess through its capable manipulation of realism and interest in psychology, these later novels introduce new post-war aesthetic literary modes. In a post-*Godot* world, *Birchwood* and *Time After Time* demonstrate a natural facility for self-contradiction and farce that circuitously attests to Samuel Beckett’s profound effect on mid-to-late century Irish literary thought. The Irish demesne as an abandoned crossroads like the one at which Vladimir and Estragon more-or-less patiently wait offer new symbolic capabilities to represent a broader modern human condition beyond the decline of Anglo-Irish imperialism. In this way, the late-century Big House offers uncommon perspectives on the asynchronous and often dissonant relationships between people and their sense of modernity. The rural, as opposed to remaining an empty space in Irish national thought, useful to the nation only in figurative and emblematic terms, is a place that serves as a contrapuntal model of plurality for the young nation. In fact, a revised national conception emerges partly because of the success of these novels

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75 Though early Beckett scholarship tended to focus primarily on the philosophical and aesthetic concerns of his work, figuring the author as more of an international figure than part of the Irish canon, later research eventually turned its focus on the influence of Ireland, not simply as part of the author’s biography, but as a critical context to further excavate Beckett’s spatial and textual orientation. Such studies include: Eoin O’Brien’s *The Beckett Country* (1986), David Lloyd’s “Writing in the Shit: Beckett, Nationalism, and the Colonial Subject” (1989), Mary Junker’s *Beckett: The Irish Dimension* (1995), Declan Kiberd’s *Inventing Ireland* (1995), Neil Corcoran’s *After Yeats and Joyce* (1997), and Jude R. Meche’s “‘A Country That Called Itself His’: Molloy and Beckett’s Estranged Relationship with Ireland” (2000). James Knowlson, in the forward to O’Brien’s book, remarks on the Irish aspect of Beckett’s placelessness noting that while “Beckett’s [later] writing became less localized and more concerned with issues relating to the world of the inner self,” it remained characteristic of this no-place that if a road “leads to nowhere, it often meanders across hills or bogs that have features that are quite recognizable as being specific to the Dublin mountains” (xiv, xv). As for the Irishness of his humor, Beckett’s cultural heritage is present in his incessant use of puns and linguistic inversions, in addition to the way he positions laughter among, and indeed belonging to, the ennui and desolation of existence.
(Cronin, M. 190). That the novels surprisingly find something regenerative in these old structures (an element that most critics fail to notice) further reinstates them as part of the living civic imagination of the country.

On the surface, in many ways, the big houses of *Birchwood* and *Time After Time* do little more than validate the fears of Yeats et al that these homes have lost their place in Ireland. Both demesnes, Birchwood and Durraghglass, are frail and in severe disrepair at the novels’ openings, while the houses’ occupants are equally anemic and fixed in their ways. A far cry from the original big house aspirations that Bowen describes as “the exertion of the European idea—to seek what was humanistic, classic, and disciplined”(197) or “the violent monopoly of power that sustained the Ascendancy world” as termed by Joe Cleary (271), we are decidedly in a realm immune to the common romanticization of Big House ruins. Situating the present state of Birchwood as a kind of “baroque madhouse” (7), Banville, instead, describes the submission of the Big House this way:

> As my people knew, and lucky they did, there is nothing that will keep the Irish in their place like a well-appointed mansion. They may despise and hate you, only put a fine big house with plenty of windows in it up on a hill and bejapers you have them be the balls, stunned into a cringing, cap-touching coma. But beware. It is a fragile thraldom. The first unmended fence will mean the first snigger behind your back outside the chapel yard, an overrun garden will bring them grinning to the gate, and roof left in visible disrepair will see them poaching your land in the daylight. (45)

The physical stalwartness of these structures that for centuries had justified the upper class’s moral imperative is now a thing of the past. Instead of representing the families like a crest upon
a shield, these houses more closely resemble a leaky Sartrean huit clos where a panoply of family enmities fester and circulate.

Banville’s family, the Godkins, exemplify the graver indicative symptoms of the Anglo-Irish decline (drunkenness, delusions of grandeur, madness, incest), while Keane’s senescent heirs to Durraghglass, Jasper Swift and his “eternal spring of ageing sisters” April, May and June traffic in more comical disfigurations and handicaps (Parkin 324). These include Jasper’s eye that was shot out accidentally, April’s deafness, May’s congenital shrunken arm, and June’s dyslexia that led to the greater handicap of her not being allowed to go to school. Beyond being easy contrivances for “Who’s-on-first” moments of confusion, these physical limitations further manifest the more formidable psychologically-rooted limitations that restrain the siblings from breaking out of their ossified patterns of living. Though one might easily differentiate these families and their collections of oddities by their distinctively different comedic registers (Banville’s humor is dark and Beckettian in the way it diminishes humanity against the vastness of time and the natural world, 76 while Keane manages to elevate the lowliness of existence by making the deformed nature of our humanity laughable and lovable again), it is clear that in both cases, it is the house itself that apparently keeps these “habits” of living in tact.

The Godkins and the Swifts both suffer from stereotypical carelessness and an inflated sense of privilege that unwittingly leads them to the depleted present moment in which both novels open. In both cases, this overall state of disrepair allows the past as a presence to loom preternaturally over their lives. Gabriel Godkin, Banville’s first-person protagonist, senses early on inside the house that “the past is poised around me. I imagine an arrow whistling through the

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76 In an interview with Michael Wood, Banville shrugs off the common usage of post-modernist to describe his writerly ethos in preference for “post-humanist,” which better describes the role his characters play as figures in a landscape.
As the (presumed) heir to Birchwood, Gabriel is the unfortunate repository for his family’s sad history of bitter feuds that Gabriel deems “that glorious record of death and treachery”(7). And yet, in spite of the past’s bleakness, Gabriel cannot look away. His narration is almost exclusively retrospective; “all thinking is in a sense remembering,” he tells us from the outset (3). However, for most of the novel it is unclear why reconstructing the events of his past is so critical for him. He himself does not seem to know the stakes of this project, formulating only cryptic statements like “My memory is curious, a magpie with perverse eyes”(72). As he digs around the remains of the house, he recalls his boyhood, stringing together the mystery of his family’s dysfunction with the carnivalesque life of the Irish countryside. To do this he depicts himself in scenes and situations that reach back beyond his own moment in the 20th century into the early and mid-19th, including scenes of rebellion and terrorism from the War of Independence, with Molly Maguires and the Black-and-Tans, and a horrific sequence from the Great Famine of 1845.

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77 In trying to decipher the meaning of Gabriel’s name, many critics draw a connection to Archangel Gabriel, the messenger, which then correlates with his brother/cousin Michael, who is seen as connected to the Archangel Michael, commander of the Army. In Michael, one does find the temperament of a warrior, particularly in the last act of the book where Michael appears in drag as a member of the Molly Maguires, while Gabriel as messenger is less apparent. Perhaps, considering Banville’s metafictional style, Gabriel’s message might be simply how difficult it is to formulate and maintain a coherent message that retains its logic and meaning in the world. There is also a literary genealogy here with Gabriel from James Joyce’s short story, “The Dead.” Like Joyce’s protagonist, Gabriel too seems to live in a world where people live on the cusp of becoming shades. This is most evident during the famine scene in Banville’s “Air and Angels” where Gabriel appears to be walking through a land of ghosts.

78 For most of the narrative, the reader believes that Gabriel is his father’s only son, and thus the sole heir to Birchwood. It is not until near the end that we discover Gabriel and his “cousin” Michael to be twins, the product of incest between siblings, Joseph and Martha Godkin.

79 Banville’s fluid and liberal use of time and historical events has led many critics to diminish, understate, or deny Birchwood’s status as a Big House novel. Even Vera Kreilkamp, who expressly sets out to revalorize the genre in her book The Anglo-Irish Novel and the Big House, acknowledges, “The sophisticated reader of modernist and postmodernist literature recognizes that Birchwood is not really about a Big House at all; it is, rather, a novel about subjectivity and despair, about ways of knowing and remembering, about form rather than content and thus about the writing of fiction”(247-8). While I broadly agree with Kreilkamp’s assessment, what it undervalues is how auspiciously well-suited the Big House topography is for this sort of metafictional adventure. Banville’s accentuation of the Big House’s naturally Gothic terrain and precarious liminal position in both time and space, memory and identity, asserts the critical importance of the Big House as setting for and referent to Gabriel’s troubled subjectivity.
The Swifts’ relationship to the past is both more directly and more crudely rendered. For instance, when the Swifts dine on pigeon pie, they revel in the memories that the act provokes, barely noting that the meat for this present pie had recently been taken out of the dogs’ dinners and had the mold scraped off of it. Enhanced by Keane’s skillful inversions between the memories we cling to and those we repress, the glory of their past is never without some kind of accompanying trauma. Like literature of the American South, the history of the Big Houses naturally lends itself to a “literature of memory,” the representation of which has been critical to modernist thematics at least since Proust, but inhabits the “danger of appearing sterile and obsolete” or worse yet, apologist unless, as suggested by Geroid Cronin, it can be “harnessed to a newer intellectually more robust vision”(217).

And yet there is a constant tension between writing and remembering. In the beginning, Gabriel replicates *La Recherche* by demonstrating the natural coherence of these two processes. As Gabriel walks around his house in the opening pages, he refers to those objects and sounds that trigger memories as “these madeleines”, and when he ventures to the attics and cellars he claims a Proustian epiphany: “the past at last blossomed in the present.”*Within the inner narrative of Gabriel’s remembrances, Gabriel the young boy searches the countryside for a girl in a photograph, whom he is convinced is a sister he cannot quite remember. Incorporating and pushing back on Proust in one gesture, as he does with Descartes,* Gabriel insists that his time

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80 Another similarity between the literature of the Big Houses and the Southern plantations, is the violent ambivalence characters and authors experience with regard to these homes as symbols of civility and oppression. Echoing the sentiments of Faulkner’s most psychically torn protagonist, Quentin Compson declaring at the end of *Absalom, Absalom!* that he does not hate the South, Banville opens *Birchwood* with this schizophrenic epigraph by Catullus: “Odi et amo. I hate and I love; ask how? I cannot tell you. Only I feel it and I am torn in two.”

81 Banville 5.

82 The opening line of Birchwood is an inversion of Descartes *Cogito*. Though there is an initial revulsion to the cuteness of this reformulation, this phrase resonates throughout the book, not discounting the original
is not lost, but misplaced and it is his purpose to find her and from her reconstruct the past: “I clung to [my quest] fiercely, unwilling to betray myself, for if I could not be a knight errant I would not be anything”(112).

These two searches, for the sister and for a sense of continuity with his past, run on parallel trajectories in the novel. They arise out of some reflexive intuition, instigating a quest for recovery, “an archaeologist mapping a buried empire”(5), and both end in almost inconsolable failure. The sister is a fausse piste, a distraction concocted by Aunt Martha and her son, Michael, for Gabriel to leave Birchwood so that Michael could inherit it in his stead. (It is not until Gabriel returns from his odyssey that he discovers Michael is not his cousin but his twin brother and Martha, his true mother.) Nor does the past return to divulge this narrative for him as he had hoped. Towards the end, “I invent necessarily”(170), he concedes.

Even with his own imagination to bridge the gaps in his memory, Gabriel’s recounted remembrances, though detailed and vivid, do not hold up to a Proustian model of synchrony. While Marcel’s memories build and coalesce, each episode giving additional symbolic depth to the others until that depth of interconnection appears infinitely reciprocal, Birchwood’s memories, cast by Gabriel’s retrospection, never manage to come together. Ireland, it turns out, is not Combray. The novel’s quasi-linear progression appears progressively more artificial as the memories continually fail to come together. Though he describes recapturing the past to be something like “these extraordinary moments when the pig finds the truffle embedded in the muck”(3), these moments fail to connect in some coherent and meaningful way. Instead, his remembering is more aptly suited to the image on the following page of smashed window panes whose “shards of shattered glass retained wedges of a stylized blue sky”(4). This picture of the phrasing nor proving his own, but instead, at every turn, troubling the relationship between existence and comprehension, which arises out of the even stickier relationship between existence and representation.
broken sky evocatively expresses the pervasive sense of irreparability that characterizes the memories Gabriel is trying to recount.\textsuperscript{83}

At the end of the novel as the protagonist returns to take residence at the house, he tries to recall the old cook, Josie, but cannot:

She had slipped into a crevice in time and lain there until forgotten. I could no longer remember what she looked like. How many have I lost that way? I began to write, as a means of finding them again, and thought that at last I had discovered a form which would contain and order all my losses. I was wrong. There is no form, no order, only echoes and coincidences, sleight of hand, dark laughter.\textsuperscript{84}

Like the shards broken glass, these memories cannot be pieced back together. The lost people Gabriel had hoped to recuperate through writing were not recovered. Much like Beckett’s Molloy, a work Banville greatly admires, Gabriel recognizes the loss or the absence without knowing the object. So there is laughter. We do not know whether it is his own or someone else’s, but either way it is a response to despair. In Banville’s obituary for Beckett, he lists laughter among “the failing light and encroaching silence,” “the tedium…and sorrow” as elements that were not “transposed” from life, but rather “the processes of the work itself”(18). Thus, we get a sense of Banville’s own orientation vis-à-vis laughter and oblivion. Tears are indicative of knowing the object for which one is mourning, while dark laughter is the response to the void. Determined to take up a new kind of residence at Birchwood, “a life different from any the house has ever known,”\textsuperscript{85} he affirms a commitment to stay in the house in spite of its

\textsuperscript{83} This shattered vision of time will return decades later when Banville reflects on Beckett’s corpus in his obituary for The Irish Times, December 25-27, 1989. Of the author’s rare accomplishments he says starkly, “This is the shattered song of our time”(18). In the resonance between this statement and Gabriel’s shattered sky, it is clear that Banville’s obituary is not only venerating Beckett, but marking out his own literary genealogy.

\textsuperscript{84} Banville 170-171.

\textsuperscript{85} Banville 170.
incoherence, yet we are left in the dark as to what this different life means. The house, like Gabriel’s writing, was meant to “contain and order,” but what new form does a house take after order and containment have failed?

In *Time After Time*, memories hold strong sway over the Swift household, in spite of their tenacious attempts to keep busy with their hobbies and modest aspirations. Though Jasper proclaims, “Oh, never look back,…Keep yourself up to date if you can” (58), what he really means is that one should not indulge in *speaking* of the past (June is the only one that does and she is often scolded for it). Jasper, in the privacy of his imagination, takes keen pleasure in reminiscences. Like Gabriel, he apparently cannot avoid the Proustian mode. When removing his cap after shopping, he remembers, “Mummie had bought it, perhaps thirty years ago, from the most classical of hatters in St. James’s. It was graciously becoming to him as any hat dreamed up by Proust for Odette” (3-4). However, what makes the past, again, so heavy and dangerous, is that these happier memories are tied up in the more infectious traumatic memories that demand active repression. Without careers, offspring or extensive social connections to draw them out into the larger world, where such childhood misfortunes might eventually fade with time, the Swift family relies on the containment of these moments from childhood, along with the ubiquitous, but largely unspeakable, memory of their deceased mother, to structure their adult lives, especially their interactions with each other.

The most pernicious of these recurring memories, all share a common denominator in the Swifts’ duplicitous cousin Leda. Baby June, more at home in the company of animals than people, remembers with disgust witnessing her cousin Leda drowning kittens. April’s recurring memory involves her father bestowing affection on Leda that he withheld from his own children, a disappointment that feeds, years later, into her relationship with her late-husband who
exploited her sexually. Jasper recalls a fishing trip that he was to take with his father, on which Leda first imposes herself, takes Jasper’s father away from him and then later when they reunite she prods Jasper to remove his eye patch so she can examine the horridness of his eye socket firsthand. Lastly, May’s traumatic memory, an episode where she runs from her secret hiding place in the laurels to join April and Leda playing house not noticing till too late that her bloomers are at her ankles, is worst of all for the public humiliation she suffers, her subsequent shunting, and the further indignity of Leda’s apology, which is little more than a veiled excuse for Leda to fondle May’s deformed hand. As with her siblings’ traumatic Leda-encounters, this event forges a lasting imprint on May’s development. Separating May from the rest, Ellen Wolff interprets this particular scene as much farther reaching than one individual moment of trauma. Instead, she interprets it as the most persuasive piece of evidence that May, for Keane, is a near personification of Anglo-Ireland. “Colonizer-like, May feels like an outcast in her own home” (Keane, p.56), which reflects the timeworn conception of “Anglo-Ireland as the wronged and wounded outsider” (pp.56-58). Though I am hesitant to believe that Keane, who so delights in evasion and controversion, would commit to such a reductive representation of her own people, it is clear that like the Big House itself, May’s insecurities lie just beneath her fragile surface. This moment marks May’s compulsion with order and discipline (presumably never to be caught with her drawers down again), and the onset of kleptomania, for it is not until May finds a fox figurine in the grass that belongs to Leda and buries it in her garden that she feels “better, stronger.” Recalling the memory of this first petty crime, even decades later, she still feels “happy to remember she had yielded nothing” (p.42).

Only June’s memory might be said to attain something like Marcel’s clarity and scope. Keane suggests that “her illiteracy gave June a peasant's clarity of memory. The past was hers
and its voices." But yet, as recollectable as the past is for June, she has little use for it. Unlike her siblings she is neither captivated nor threatened by it. In preference of her farm work, caring for her horse, the Wild Man, and her sow, Sweetheart’s newborn piglets, June neglects her past—though it did have its own moment of youthful glory in her riding successes. If she knew of La Recherche, she would have certainly found it self-indulgent to lie in bed with one’s past. By contrast, at the beginning of the third chapter, instead of falling into bed after her day’s labor when she is clearly exhausted, she pulls on her gum-boots and anorak one last time to check the farrowing light for Sweetheart and her litter.

In spite of these traumas, all but June find the offer of returning to the past difficult to resist. They resent the passing, not only of their youth and financial comfort, but of the time when fine clothes, good manners, and the house had inherent value and prestige. The siblings continue to cling to these social values they were taught to be natural, but now are only hollow vestiges, further insulating and isolating their lives from the wider world for which they lack the tools to decode. Squaring the blame on their mother, Ellen Wolff connects the siblings’ expensive tastes to Mummie’s denial of their disabilities by showing both aspects to be part of a family commitment to “over-looking” anything unpleasant. And yet, in this practiced over-looking, it is clear the Swifts are not unaware of the diminishment around them; there is a

86 Keane 47.
87 This is almost certainly the reason June alone sees nothing improper in mentioning aloud the memories of their mother.
88 Riding well is one of the most cherished skills in the Anglo-Irish community. Thus, there is a layer of irony that this gift is bestowed on June, who in many ways resembles the Catholic tenant farmers she works beside more than the landed gentry of her class. I also believe this to be another moment where Keane is gently reminding the reader that these pervasive social categories are more clearly defined in theory than in practice.
89 Here were are reminded again of the semi-parodic opening to Keane’s Mad Puppetstown where “Then:...Love mattered. Manners mattered. Children mattered...Invitations were issued to tea. Tea parties mattered too”(3-4).
palpable yearning to recuperate the lost signified from the lesser signifiers around them, the
weak sherry, the pigeon pie, the overrun gardens, the leaky house.

In these depleted conditions, the past is ably and overwhelmingly retrieved when their
half-Austrian, half-Jewish cousin Leda returns to visit the Swifts. After the initial shock that
Leda did not meet her presumed demise at some Nazi concentration camp, the siblings quickly
fall under the influence of her ability to recover lost time before their eyes:

The hour held for its own a brief and passing recreation of the time when Durraghglass
was warm and clean, well-served and full of flowers from the now shattered greenhouses;
a time when life had its comforts and its dignified reserves….these were the submerged
days that Leda's coming rescued from a deep oblivion. (102)

Leda has lost her sight in old age, and because she has not been back to Durraghglass since
girlhood, she has no reference for how the property and her cousins have changed:

Since she could not see Durraghglass in its cold decay, or her cousins in their proper
ages, timeless grace was given to them in her assumption that they looked as though all
the years between were empty myths. Because they knew themselves so imagined, their
youth was present to them, a mirage trembling in her flattery as air trembles close on the
surface of summer roads. What more might she recall? What else might she show them
of their lost selves? (102-103)

For a family in shambles, like the Swifts, this proposition of recovering their lost selves is
unmistakably enticing. With the house in tired disrepair, and no descendants to inherit it and
offer it new life, the future holds only trivial aspirations. The past, as it turns out, feels
tremendously more promising.
Of all the siblings, April is the most taken by this opportunity to return to the past. She was the most beautiful, and thus, the one most enchanted with her own girlhood. For her lifetime of adhering to a strict diet and exercise regime, she finds thoroughly ironic justification in Leda’s blind admiration:

Because blind Leda could see no change, all April’s years of stringency held a proper validity. She had put Time back and now, with eyeless Leda, she truly felt herself again the giggling school-girl, the jeune-fille en fleur. Her pleasure in this was lovely and insatiable. (133)

Here, in another playful nod to Proust, Keane succinctly mocks the ways that memory manages to accommodate our vanity. Blind Leda is the Madeleine that promises to revivify what the siblings had long presumed to be out of reach. Similar to the doctored pigeon pie and weak glasses of sherry, these memories are consumed voraciously with the siblings hardly noting the dramatic fall off between these lesser victuals and the real thing.

Like Gabriel’s photograph that sets him on his quixotic adventure, Leda’s powers to bring back the past are not geared to the renewed happiness of her cousins as they first seem. Leda uses their susceptibility to memory in a stupendous attempt to seduce Jasper into marrying her. With a rationale that only a soap opera enthusiast can fully appreciate, Leda harbors no actual romantic interest in Jasper. Like her mythological namesake, she claims to have been seduced, possibly raped, by a much more potent patriarch—Jasper’s father, Valentine. Through the similarity of Jasper’s and his father’s voices, Leda believes she can recreate that first escapade and rewrite the ending of the story from one where she was unceremoniously expelled

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90 The reader is led to believe that the apparent exaggeration of this “intercourse” eventually precipitates Valentine’s suicide. Perhaps in reference to her role as mother of Helen, who incited the Trojan War, Wolff notes, “Leda's name, which evokes so many readings, suggests her power to unleash catastrophe” (“Narrating” 60).
from the household to one where she triumphantly supplants the long-deceased mother as the lady of the estate. In this way, even Machiavellian Leda, like the Swifts, falls prey to the seduction of returning to the past in a vainglorious attempt to reanimate it. As it becomes clear, she is, in fact, more committed, and thus even more vulnerable to the seductions of the past than her seemingly clueless cousins.

But Leda is thwarted when Jasper rebuffs her advances—being blind she does not understand that she is no longer beautiful. She does not even realize that she is old. This event causes Leda’s dwindling self-restraint to derail, when she unleashes in one furious outburst all the embarrassing secrets she knows or infers about the siblings that they fastidiously keep from themselves as well as each other. Her final gesture before she leaves for good, is to soil all of Mummie’s gowns in her waste—a large-scale enactment of Leda’s first act of treachery upon her return to Durraghlass, spitting into the beaded breast of her Aunt Violet’s evening gown. These abject deeds, so contrary to Leda’s role as welcome madeleine, proves May’s initial incredulous response upon Leda’s return more appropriate than anyone could have anticipated. When she says, “‘Leda? How embarrassing. Leda’s dead,’” it is her intonation that says it all: “May made Leda alive sound like an untidy business.”91 Untidy, it turns out, is precisely the word for it.

Thus, in unambiguous terms, though it might seem alluringly recuperative, even redemptive, trying to reestablish an eternal spring through memory, the return to the past, Keane illustrates, is not a viable mode for living in real life or in novels. Though the picturesque Irish country might invite these kinds of Edenic fantasies—at first “…even the house yielded up its cold poverty as [Leda] pulled the past into the present remembering pictures or silver, long ago sold, so vividly that their lost qualities restored themselves, ghostlike, to their empty spaces”(113)—the

91 Keane 95.
possibility of an ever-lasting and thus recuperative past, itself an intoxicating myth of homogeneity, is an unregenerative end.

In a certain sense, then, Banville’s and Keane’s protagonists all come up empty-handed. Their grasping at the past do not yield a more coherent sense of self or progeny that could offer a chance at rebirth. Further, Mummie’s old dresses are gone and so is Gabriel’s photograph of the young girl. For many readers this signals the real death of the genre; not only do these remainders have no future in Ireland, but the souvenirs of their former relevancy are dying out, despoiled and expunged, often incinerated. And yet, each of these two novels ends with a conviction, an affirmation about their ability to remain visible. Gabriel in the last paragraphs of the novel confirms this when he writes, “I shall stay here, alone, and live a life different from any the house has ever known. Yes” (170). While he recommits himself to living at Birchwood, he rejects the idea of reinvigorating the past—this is to be a new life, not just for him, but for the house. Critic Neil Murphy suggests that this declaration is a rejection of the death and decay surrounding the house, promising “a return to traditional forms, if not traditional methods” (22). This interpretation, however, is a rejection of Banville’s own metafictional technique. Further, it does not fit with Gabriel’s declaration of a new life for the house. Instead, Banville pushes the symbolization of the big house even farther from its 19th century roots in history and politics to the realm of epistemology—how much we can firmly know before we affirm or reject the histories we are given? The Swifts’ affirmation is less philosophical, but no less estimable when they rebound without hesitation after Leda’s crushing blow: June gets on her untamed horse, Wild Man, though her stable boy has deserted her, May dutifully prepares for her flower guild presentation and Jasper reasserts control of his kitchen by preparing for Leda “the perfect sandwich of his imagination” for her travels (185). After almost two hundred pages observing
these siblings’ strange susceptibilities, these quick recoveries surprise the reader as much as they
do Leda.

At least part of this affirmation is Beckettian, as the characters from both novels, like the
famous tramps Vladimir and Estragon, confirm their continued determination to wait and persist.
Writer and film-maker, Alain Robbe-Grillet illuminates the value of this response, when
speaking of Godot, he characterizes the representation as one of “pure presence” (qtd. in Perret 80). Where Keane and Banville extend this model is in the dramatization of how difficult, and in
some ways heroic, this determined persistence can be. The Swifts, at this accounting, prove
neither as submissive nor as vulnerable as they first had appeared. Wolff describes Leda’s
departure and the return to “restrained civility” at the end of the novel as “welcome relief from
[Leda’s] hideous spitefulness” (Anarchy 65), but it is actually something much greater. The
siblings’ strict adherence to the tenets of “good behaviour” not only proves admirable in
contrast to Leda’s misdeeds, it supports an unforeseen resiliency that demands respect regardless
of how harshly we may have judged their provincial lives up to this point. They may not be
modern-minded, but their ability to fend off the more cosmopolitan Ledas of the world, affirms
that they are not yet to be discounted. The Swifts are not as ill-equipped for these times as they
appear.

While the representation of Big Houses burnt to the ground by Irish rebels may be the
dominant image of the fall of the Anglo-Irish, Keane demonstrates that the act of arson can also
be reappropriated by the Anglo-Irish, who, like the rest of Ireland, are confronted with the

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92 “Good behaviour” is the term Keane uses to describe the traditions of hospitality and social grace that are a
defining feature of Anglo-Irish society. Although it is, on the surface, a mode of civility, it is often used by
Keane to help depict, with tongue-in-cheek, the passive-aggression and duplicitous manners of her people.
Keane’s most successful novel, in fact, is titled “Good Behaviour,” and as one might expect, this work
remorselessly depicts the darkly comic perversions and delusions of gentility that are also on display in Time
After Time.
question of what to do with their past. Although May’s first instinct when she sees Leda’s dirty work on her mother’s dresses is to take them to the cleaners to restore them as they were before, when she arrvies at the shop, she thinks better of it: “a new resolve, difficult to implement after her long years of loving, sentimental care, rose within her” (134). This new resolve directs her back home where she sets the soiled dresses ablaze in a pyre in her garden. The regenerative symbolism of the clothing covered in “fertilizer” and the fire suggest further the possibility not just for carrying on, but for some modest rebirth (even if time and time again Keane’s work emphasizes how nearly impossible it is for people to change their practiced inclinations). What is even more notable about this fire, and perhaps more in line with the author’s intention, is the possibility of pragmatism in these seemingly archaic lives. Fire, here, is not the symbol of capitulation, but of claiming autonomy that had seemed to have been ceded long ago.

Where does this affirmation come from? Where are the regenerative pockets in these novels that contradict the presumption that these characters (and their houses) need perish along with the colonial past? One place to look is in the scenes of abjection, the blatant “untidiness” of these novels. In her essay, “Abjection and Molly Keane’s ‘very nasty’ novels,” Ellen O’Brien, with the help of Julia Kristeva’s theorization of the abject, argues that “in sending the abject to confront the Ascendancy, Keane revises the Big House genre so that the fall transpires not because of outside forces or new ideologies, but because the Anglo-Irish, despite their façade of rituals and props, embodied the Real all along” (106). In this sense, O’Brien adheres to the Kristevan model of abjection as a wholly disruptive force: “Abjection represents the frailty of the symbolic order, a threat that must but cannot always be contained” (Kristeva qtd. in O’Brien 102). And yet in Time After Time and Birchwood, the abject offers more than destruction and ruin. While the Swifts and the Godkins may want to suppress it, it is also clear that they have
found certain strategies for accommodating this “realness” in their lives. Even as they continue to try unsuccessfully to repress the shameful moments of their childhoods, the Swifts’ ability to live in the muck of their adulthood affirms their resilience.

Another way of looking at it is that although the repression or hiding of the abject may have helped sustain the dominance of the Ascendancy as Banville suggests in the early passage about maintaining respect among the peasantry through careful property upkeep, reusing or reintegrating the abject into a life, it turns out, can be a productive avenue for starting over. What O’Brien neglects is that, in both Banville and Keane, there lurks a surprising and recurrent resistance to the hermetic healing that would otherwise seal up the past into tidy sentimental museum pieces. This resistance is not disruptive so much as adaptive, or facilitating of adaptation. Durraghglass and Birchwood, as narrative stages are messy and ambiguous, but this does not necessarily mean that they are irrevocably condemned.

Banville reminds his reader that this mess, while often interpreted as portents of death and decay, is actually the necessary condition for reproduction. Birchwood, itself, dark, damp and full of mystery, resembles the open wound that Gabriel uses to characterize his first surprising encounter with a vagina. He had imagined it “as a nice neat hole, situated in the front, rather like a second navel, but less murky, a bright sun to the navel’s surly moon”(5). But inside Rosie, his first sexual encounter, and even more so with an anonymous maid he meets by the side of the road, he finds he was quite mistaken: “In her too I discovered nooks and musty crannies, crevices which reminded me of nothing so much as the backwater of the house where I had played as a child…” (6). In these cases, local regeneration arises out of a resistance to order, cleanliness and homogenization.

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Beyond the pervasiveness of the abject in these two novels, the rural’s resistance to
death-through-memorialization emerges within the population itself in two similar forms:
itinerant groups that are nomadic—communities that are in constant circulation, and yet remain
wholly native to their rural setting. In *Birchwood*, they are Prospero’s circus troupe, while in
*Time After Time* it is a group of “tinkers,” which is roughly Irish colloquial for gypsies. Long
before *Godot*, a different king of nomadic figure, the tramp, had long been a popular figure in the
Irish literary imagination, particularly among the Celtic revivalists. In the poetry of Yeats, the
tramp figured as the apologetic “image of the now-rootless Anglo-Irish…caught wandering
across the no-man’s-land between two cultures” (Kiberd 537), while the playwright and poet, J.
M. Synge was known to affectionately sign his letters “your old tramp.” Both Keane and
Banville, however, resist this kind of romanticization by concentrating on two groups who
inspire at least as much distrust and disregard as intrigue and fascination. Regardless, though
class difference, in both cases, largely segregates these caravan communities from the families
that permit them to set up camp on their land, the shared space they co-inhabit allows
opportunities for exchange that would hardly be likely in a city where the endless supply of types
segregates like-with-like stymieing open and free discourse. Their proximity to each other
allows these nomadic groups to function naturally as holders of the proverbial looking-glass
upon the lives of the settled communities (Lanters 3).

Although these overlapping social spaces are as common and long-standing to the Irish
rural as sheep-covered hillsides, essayist Hubert Butler, an Anglo-Irish nationalist, is one of the
rare critics of 20th century culture interested in questioning the presumption of intellectual stasis
in the rural and reimagining a more balanced relationship between the local and the

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93 Nowadays "tinkers" is a derogatory term in Ireland. The socially neutral term for this group is "travelers." For the past few years the Irish Travellers Movement (ITM) have been pushing for ethnic minority status in Ireland (Irish Times 17).
cosmopolitan. Having lived in several European countries and the South Pacific, he counters the belief that the city is the ideal space for individual intellectual development with the following reflection on the unsung opportunities for staying in a rural community:

[T]here is something self-destructive about these great congestions of originality. A sense of doom hangs over them as over the exuberant freedom of the Weimar Republic…. [Solitaries from the country] drawn away from their solitude, bring with them to the city their instinct to defy. They gather together with other ex-solitariaries; then they are no longer solitary and what is more they find they are no longer original. Their insights and perceptions, which surprised and often vexed their fellow-citizens, are banal and irrelevant among the exuberant heterodoxies of their new community. In place of the known neighbours whom it was their duty to challenge, there are faceless strangers who can only be met with abstractions. To get attention in such circles, the ex-solitary may have to turn in his tracks, to sacrifice the particular to the general, and to accept as valid some mass-produced consensus whose insufficiency he would quickly have detected among the familiar diversities of his native town. In this way the cities acquire fanatics at the same rate as the provinces lose their solitary individuals (5-6).

The circus in Birchwood and the tinkers in Time After Time are examples of ways that “insights and perceptions,” follow Butler’s model and circulate in the rural in juxtaposition to the “mass-produced consensus” of the city. While in the city, Gabriel’s and the Swifts’ dramas could not avoid being essentialized, undercut by their provincialism and their oddball unconventionality; in

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94 In Butler’s essay “The Auction,” he reflects upon the imbalance of his boyhood education: “not only was all my education slanted away from Ireland, but the whole island was tilted eastward…Our island is dangerously tilted towards England and towards Rome, good places in themselves, but best seen on the level” (3). It is at least in part this imbalance of cultural influence outside of one’s local community that I am referring to when discussing Butler’s interest in reframing Irish rural life.
the rural, the protagonists retain their individuality, and thus, their relevance to the reader. To a large degree, literary modernism does not simply represent the conditions of modern life, it is a response to modernity’s threat to our individualism, a response to fascism and communism, to the homogenization and commodification of Euro-American culture. To these threats the rural offers a space where the particular still matters. Instead of conforming to the social constraints of the urban, remaining in “familiar diversities” allows the authors to illuminate what Vera Kreilkamp calls the “epistemological concern at the heart of the novel” (19): what are we apart from the historical political machine in which we find ourselves living?

In *Time After Time*, these exchanges with the tinkers are concrete and uncomplicated to tie to forces of regeneration. Baby June is fond of the tinkers and likes to remind her siblings of their Mother’s appreciation of them—unlike the musty untouched master bedroom, these people are living dynamic reminders of the past. Always one to sympathize with the disempowered, June recognizes the gypsies as capable partners, though Jasper, April and May remain resistant, at least until the final chapter of the novel.

June’s affinity with the tinkers might easily be read as indicative of her own anti-modern inclinations, which are outwardly signified by her lack of education and her instinctive ties to the land and its creatures. According to Jose Lanters’s illuminating book, *The ‘Tinkers’ in Irish Literature*, in the mid-20th century “tinkers come to stand for a manifestation of an atavistic primitive inner self that has been repressed” (4). Furthermore they have almost always been considered anti-modern figures for their perceived ability to live in a state of “self-continuity that transcends context and time” (1-2). And yet, Keane’s tinkers, as contrasted above with Mummie’s bedroom, are not simply reminders of what has been lost or sacrificed to the processes of modernization, they break their own literary convention by offering a way to make
the past useful again. As they collect the rubbish of others and refurbish it for resale, so too do they retrofit the Swifts into productivity again.

It takes, however, a carefully staged sequence of events to get to this point. From the start, May’s attitude appears to speak for the other siblings when she compares the tinkers’ perceived degenerative effect to “the present overgrowth and…ash saplings [that were] taking over the tennis courts” (120). It is not until June falls off her horse, beside their camp that the opportunity arises for the Swifts and the gypsies to recognize their common interests. When we first read of June’s fall, we believe, like Jasper that June has died. That her fall occurs directly in front of the tinker compound, easily perceived as a relic of the past (reflecting June’s apparent anti-modernity), gives the reader the impression that, in spite of the Swift’s swift rebound from Leda, the family is still doomed to fall apart. Instead of heralding the end, however, June’s fall, which provides a necessary entrée for intercourse and exchange between the two camps, moves the family towards a more secure future. To begin with, June, revived from unconsciousness, finds a promising gypsy boy to be her new stable boy to ride her horses for her.

But all this is really staging for May’s encounter with the traveller compound. If we adopt Wolff’s theory (at least partially) that May personifies Anglo-Ireland, this meeting with the tinkers, who like her are both problematically indigenous and “other,” dramatically raises the stakes of the forthcoming negotiations from individual survival to that of the viability of the whole rural social dynamic. At first, the possibilities appear bleak. May is the most overtly prejudicial and intolerant of the family, and yet, we understand that May is this way to overcompensate for her personal flaws that she wishes to push off on them, such as her deformed arm, her lack of income and most shameful of all, her kleptomania (When May tells Jasper that she presumes much of the travellers’ wares to be stolen, he stares at her aghast: “How after
Leda’s revelations, could she pronounce the word ‘stolen’ in a way suggesting that it was only tinkers stole?”(242-3). More than some atavistic fossil from the past, the tinkers represent the disorder that May refuses to acknowledge in herself and thus tries in all facets to overcome through her disciplined flower arrangements, natural landscape tableaux, and principled posturing. However, over-powering these outer semblances of control, the exclusion May experiences in all social interactions, going back to the most traumatic exclusion by Leda, produces a strangely heart-warming sympathy and mutual recognition between May and the tinkers when they finally come face-to-face. They are both the under-privileged and under-acknowledged, but they are also characters who have learned to live by will and wits. In Irish crime fiction it is often the tinkers who “take on the role of the trickster figures” (Lanters 5), while May too constantly tries (though rarely succeeds) to hold her autonomy in the family through manipulating others to get what she wants.

When May charges out of her car to chase her lapdog Gripper rescuing him from a pack of sexually-frustrated dogs, she takes shelter in the caravan of the tinker woman who rescued her sister, June. Once inside, she marvels at what she finds: a collection of “peerless” oil-lamps that she quickly devises she could repair and sell at marked-up prices to the antiques dealer in town (241). As this new business opportunity opens for May—she was clearly born to haggle—and this encounter gives her new life, we glimpse Gripper in the corner quite literally creating new life as he mounts the gypsy boy’s bitch, who is at fault for causing such a stir among the male dogs outside the caravan. Thus, only pages from the end of the book, when we are led temporarily to believe that June has died, a tragedy not only in its own right, but for what it would mean to the delicate balance of the Swift household, instead the tinkers reenliven Durraghglass by presenting an opportunity for the Swifts to show they are hardly as passive and
pathetic as they first seemed when taken in under Leda’s enchantment. Exemplifying one of May’s favorite principles “get back on the highwire” (233)—a motto that brings together the circus-gypsy life with the determination of the Protestant work ethic—the Swifts, by the end of the novel, share more in common with the lives of the gypsies than with their “lost selves” that Leda had temporarily been able to retrieve for them.

Though the inter-class dog mating scene hardly offers the ideal image of succession the respectable Swift lineage may have envisioned for itself, it is a space for regeneration where none had seemed possible formerly, thus ending the novel on a note, not of death and decay, but previously unforeseen possibilities. The cross-breeding ending seems all the more hopeful for its juxtaposition with the ending of *Birchwood* when the narrator discovers that he is the product of incest, thereby underscoring his enfeebled genetic material. Gripper and his paramour are the example of replenishment through circulation, while Gabriel is the product of a self-consuming inward spiral. These interactions show that, like the travellers, rural ideologies are not fixed. As Butler might say, these community interactions showcase the subtle yet delicately meaningful movements of both cultural rapprochement and discord that would be utterly unremarkable in the city, but take on a heroic mantle in this “desolate” landscape.

For all that the positive depiction of the tinkers in *Time After Time* is obvious, the effect of Prospero’s circus on Gabriel is obscure and mysterious. Even the mad Godkin family, who appear not only friendless, but almost entirely society-less, are somehow bonded to this misfit troupe of country performers. Both Gabriel’s and Michael’s births are marked by the arrival of the circus on the Birchwood estate, an occurrence that, far from coincidence, appears to underwrite some mystical association they share—a hint that Gabriel’s lineage is not as unfortified as his genetics. Apparently threatened by whatever this arrival is meant to announce
(the circus too with its tragic-comic disposition serves as a lookingglass on society (Perret 81)),
the circus inspires Granny Godkin to run out of the house with a shotgun and Grandda to hide in
the bathroom. These violent reactions, clearly beyond the pale of normal responses, provoke the
question, not just what is so objectionable about the circus, but what is the underlying
relationship between these two groups that is threatening enough to incite fits in the older
generation? What is it within them that is stirred up by this innocuous-seeming ragtag group?

The circus appears primarily in Part II of the novel, “Air and Angels,” a sequence that is
frequently side-stepped as a queer barely decipherable interlude. It conforms neither to the
constraints of time nor of space, for at the end Gabriel finds himself somehow to have travelled
not nearly as far as he had imagined, ending up at the unlikely destination of his own front gate,
and yet during this sequence he has traveled back and forth across decades encountering 19th
century Molly Maguires and the Great Famine.

Likewise the John Donne poem of the same name, this section appears to have many possible
interpretations, and yet at each turn it evades or slips away from the imposition of meaning. In
both cases, however, the narrators, Gabriel and the poet, begin in search of a physical body,
some person in which can inhabit the spiritual connection they seek: Gabriel searches for his
sister and the poet seeks a lover. In the end, they both could be said to return empty-handed.
Arriving full circle at Birchwood, after having nearly starved to death, Gabriel must accept the
loss that he never had a sister, and he must fight Michael for his inheritance. The poet still in
search of love finds that it cannot be in solid things as he had sought for them, but in the realm of
the interstitial (“Just such disparity/as ‘twixt air and angels purity, / ‘Twixt woman’s love, and
man’s, will ever be”). One might argue that the circus has functioned just as Martha had hoped it
would—as a distraction to keep Gabriel away just long enough to ensure Michael’s inheritance.
Similarly, the poet’s search for a lover distracts him from finding love. But both adventures yield a positive, if intangible, result: the circus will be for Gabriel, like love, that incorporeal essence that lives in the spaces in between.

But what could be more corporeal than a circus? Everything it turns out. Prospero’s circus is founded on illusion and the suspension of disbelief. Even Prospero, himself appears not to exist. Critic Gearóid Cronin reasons that while Gabriel as author fails “his self-imposed task of imposing form on the chaos of experience”, the eponymous but conspicuously absent leader of the circus, the magician Prospero may “represent the golden key to some perfect narrative form which would synthesize illusion and reality, but which is ultimately unattainable”(220). And yet there is never any textual evidence that Prospero holds any answers for Gabriel. His absence, however, may be another clue about this mysteriously silent relationship between characters. Something appears to be holding these beings together, even if it cannot be named.

After leaving home to find his lost sister, Gabriel first encounters the circus in the town square: “there was about them something curious, an air, I could not quite identify it” (98). The performers are all spread out in the square and for awhile Gabriel amuses himself by “picking them out of the crowd” for he recognizes that they are not like the other townspeople (98). Though they were not looking at one another, Gabriel could tell that they were “joined by an invisible bond” (98).

Though at first, it is only the affinity between the performers that Gabriel notices, when he joins the show, he comes to see that this affinity is not insular, but shared with their audiences, and as such, part of the air of the land itself. The audience “conspired with us in our fantasies,” Gabriel recounts, “it was a game that we played, enchanters and enchanted, tossing a bright golden ball back and forth across the footlights, a game that meant nothing, was a wisp of
smoke, and yet, and yet, on the tight steel cord of their careful lives we struck a dark rapturous note that left their tidy town tingling behind us”(111). They played on these people’s imaginations and the townspeople responded to their call. The circus performs for its spectators the struggles, pleasures, sacrifices and delusions of this land. What they inspire people to feel, both awe and disgust, is the ambivalence we feel about the beauty and the horror of this life. We are trapped in a realm where the artificiality or illusion in these cases is frequently more honest than the truth.

What Gabriel comes to learn is that these performers understand better than most, how a stuffed tiger can elicit real fear and excitement; how a conspiratorial ruse can spark the imagination. After admitting to Gabriel that their majestic beast was merely a feat of taxidermy, Silas, the ring leader adds ‘It is real, you know, Gabriel. They find it quite convincing’(102). This is the first time, of many subsequent, that Gabriel experiences beauty and a moment of transcendence arising out of dirt and dinginess, realness out of artificiality, a principle he will use to describe many objects and events, including himself: “violets and cowshit,” he decides eventually, “my life has ever been thus”(126).

It is these itinerant groups in both novels that seem to appreciate the regenerative power of the abject. Spring is the dominant season, and we are reminded time and again that the flowers don’t bloom if they don’t have any dung to plant their roots in. Even the waste that Leda uses to destroy Mummie Swift’s dresses, will presumably bring rebirth to the garden. Whatever life-giving forces there are out there, in Keane’s and Banville’s worlds, it doesn’t come from purity and cleanliness, nor in these cases does it come from the city. It is a heterodoxal force of things “hanging together” as Gabriel says, “not very elegantly, perhaps or comfortably, but yet

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95 Again the metaphor of the high-wire for Irish country life reappears as it did in May Swift’s motto. That the theme of tenuous living is endemic to rural novels in general is not surprising, but it does help emphasize the potency of the circus as a symbolic, and naturally sympathetic, reflection of these novels’ protagonists.
together, singing like seraphs”(3). The rural does this; it provides the space and means for things to hang together without consuming or repelling each other. It rejects the metropolis’s “mass-produced consensus” for the preservation of what lies between our individuality.

When describing the confounding sweetness and wonder of the circus twin, Ida, Gabriel explains that “it was not innocence, but on the contrary, a refusal to call ordinary the complex and exquisite ciphers among which her life so tenuously hovered” (116). This is precisely the kind of interest that these late-century big house novels inspire, the impulse to look beyond the decrepit houses, the dung heaps of a fallen society to expose the opportunities for reinstating new life without erasing everything and everyone that is a part of it. And thus May’s parting words to her Flower Guild, who had long secretly derided and mocked her behind her back, have a particularly triumphant tone as she leaves them to start a new job as an antiques restorer, “so you do see, it’s not goodbye, only au revoir”(233). The rural is, by its very nature, a sphere of active circulation and thus cyclical returns.

We can attest then, of the rural: though it may appear rooted, there are modes of circulation that continue to aerate the landscape and promote rural relevancy against the louder reified “congestions of originality.” With an aptitude for staging inversions and regeneration, the genre continues to surprise and subvert our expectations. Most surprising of all, of course, is not just the genre’s survival, but its continued ability to evolve as an artistic form. Though she could not see how things would end up for her people, Bowen was right not to count out the staying power of her people.
Chapter Four

“La vallée des tulipes et les souvenirs heureux” : Novelizing Rural Algeria

_Telle est la Mère des humains pour ce si jeune_  
Époux entre ses bras instruit à commencer  
Ici et non du lieu où ils furent chassés._

--Pierre Emmanuel from the epigraph to _L’Honneur de la tribu_ ⁹⁶

The 14ᵗʰ century Arab historian, Ibn Khaldoun described the region of North Africa as an island, the “‘île du Maghreb” (Stora 6), because it is surrounded on three sides by water and one side by desert. And yet, although much of its terrain is not only isolating, but uncommonly forbidding, Algeria has played an extremely central role in the history of the Mediterranean. The country serves as a rare geographic and cultural crossroad of three continents, and consequently has been an oft-sought prize by aspiring imperialists (most successfully, the Romans, the Arabs, the Ottomans, and the French). All this heavy foreign traffic through the centuries has made it difficult for the region to be “an island” unto itself in spite of its imposing topography, and this paradox between the country’s forbidding remoteness and its centrality is just one of many paradoxes that dominate author Rachid Mimouni’s uncommonly complex representation of Algeria’s rural spaces.

A land of contradictions, it has never been a simple thing for Algerians to write about themselves and their country. Even their history, it seems, does not belong to them. Starting with the Romans much of what has defined Algeria throughout its history has been written by foreigners. This includes one of the country’s most well-travelled myths. Although today one mostly thinks of Algeria as having an inhospitable climate for agriculture, going back to the

⁹⁶ Translation: Here is the Mother of humankind with this very young husband in her arms, who is instructed to begin here and not in the place from which they were expelled.
classical writings of Herodotus, Pliny, Procopius, Strabo, and Ptolemy, it has been a popularly held belief that at one time the country did enjoy richly fertile lands that not only supported its native peoples but established its reputation around the Mediterranean as “the granary of Rome” (Davis 2). (Debra K. Davis, in her book, *Resurrecting the Granary: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa*, dispels this myth showing primarily how the French colonizers used the “granary” legend as justification for confiscating lands. They would claim that the land was being abused and neglected, when in fact the highest levels of deforestation and desertification occurred under their own stewardship of the country.\footnote{Davis calls this justification “the French colonial declensionist narrative” (xii) and describes it in two versions. First is that the land declined from the “fertile and forested” Roman occupation because of the “the ‘primitive’ techniques of the ‘lazy natives.’ This version then changed, for the purposes of land confiscation, to blaming the indigenous people directly for “ruining the land through deforestation and degradation” (2). In truth, it is likely that it was during the heart of the French colonial occupation from 1890 to 1940 that North Africa suffered the most losses from deforestation (11).} The French capitalized on this myth to argue that they, as the heirs of the Roman Empire, were the proper people to bring back Algeria’s mythological golden age.

This idea of an Algerian golden age was not lost on the natives either. With the end of the war for independence in 1962, many Algerian politicians, writers and cultural figures sought to “recreate” what they understood to be their pre-colonial Eden, a version of France’s “granary” myth but founded in utopic tribal life instead of Roman innovation. Like Eamon De Valera’s Irish vision of independence as “cosy homesteads” and “happy maidens” (RTÉ), Algeria as a newly nationalized entity sought to recapture a sense of who they believe they had been before they were set upon by foreign invaders that deprived them of a national identity.

This utopic political rhetoric is the climate in which Rachid Mimouni began his writing career, and indeed his first novel, *Le printemps n’en sera que plus beau* (1978) reflects this positivism in its depiction of the Algerian freedom fighters, *les maquisards*. The hope for an
Algerian reclamation of the land is apparent from the title. Born in 1945 in the village of Boudouaou located thirty kilometers east of Algiers to a peasant family, Mimouni grew up in a household without books save his school textbooks. Thus it was from his French colonial education that Mimouni came to love books and believe in the scholastic values of humanism, intellectualism, and skepticism. From the end of World War II through the Algerian War of Independence, Algeria’s voice appeared to be growing in strength and confidence alongside young Mimouni’s own intellectual development, first at the Université d’Alger where he received a degree in science, then at post-graduate work in Montreal, and finally back in Algiers to teach at the École Normale Supérieure de Commerce à Alger until he could concentrate his efforts full-time on his writing.

But Mimouni’s optimism with regard to Algeria’s nation-building enterprise was short-lived. With the publication of *Le Fleuve détourné* (1982), his third novel (the first to be published in France), which brought him his first significant international attention, Mimouni began to be known as a critic of fundamentalism in all its forms, both colonial and within the independent Algerian government. Hafid Gafaiti notes that after Rachid Boudjedra’s *La Répudiation*, Mimouni was the next author to break away from the Algerian government’s post-Independence ideology that Algerian literature should primarily focus on creating a national identity after the “longue nuit coloniale” (253). As he became more well-known and more accomplished in France, Algerian critics came after him for being too critical of his fellow countrymen and not critical enough of the French colonials. To some, he even was seen as an apologist. As was the case for many writers from the post-colonies of the 1980’s and 90’s, critics had difficulty evaluating Mimouni’s fiction beyond the political stance they interpreted him taking (or not-taking as the case more often seemed to be). As Abdelkader Aoudjit remarks
in his book, *The Algerian Novel and Colonial Discourse: Witnessing to a Diffèrend*, “for a long time and with few exceptions critics have ignored the literary and aesthetic aspects of Algerian novels to focus on the politics. Which novels are *engagés* and how they remain so are the two most hotly debated issues in Algerian literary criticism and the most controversial” (26). One of the more problematic limitations of post-colonial criticism is that it tends not to leave any unpolemical space for an author to be other than for or against a perceived political ideology. Mimouni’s work clearly transcends these limitations, advancing the transformation of Algerian literature from an artistic vehicle for politics to a literature in its own right.

The reception of his most successful novel, *L’Honneur de la tribu* (1989) the last of what has been called “a trilogy of disenchantment,” is a case in point. While the French critics lauded him with literary honors like listing his book for the prestigious prix Goncourt, the Algerians felt betrayed, and neither side seemed willing or interested in examining the language itself as a work of artistic production. Mimouni’s distinctively modernist aesthetics and indeterminate narrative voice are commonly left unexamined beyond the political ethics that can be drawn from them.

*L’Honneur de la tribu* is a novel about an unnamed tribe that had been dispossessed from their land by French colons and as a result of this expulsion, they resettle in a remote and relatively inhospitable place with the intention that no one would seek to bother them there. They name their village Zitouna (نلزيتوا), the Arabic word for the olive, which is one of the fruits that prospers in the difficult climate. Because of the village’s isolation, the tribe is able to live with relatively little interference for a few generations. *L’Honneur* narrates the history of this village with a focus on what happens after Algeria gains independence, and one of their tribal

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98 Khalid Zekri in his book, *Incipit et clausules dans les romans de Rachid Mimouni*, explains that in North African literature there is a dialectical relationship between publishers and the genre’s audience that heavily weights political ideology over aesthetics. In fact, Zekhri elaborates, the acceptance or rejection of francophone North African literature has always been determined by the political convictions of its readers and institutional politics (12).
members, Omar El Mabrouk, who has a vendetta against the village, blaming them for the death of his father, comes back to the tribe as their appointed governor. From the moment of his arrival, Omar begins undoing the structure and practices of the community piece by piece, under the mantle of reforming the village’s backward sensibilities. The story is narrated by one of the few remaining village elders, speaking in his indigenous language to a man who records him, but does not understand the language. It is not until the end of the novel that the reader discovers who this mystery auditor is.

Among the many critical elements in *L’Honneur* neglected by post-colonial scholars (who remain the primary group who have written on him), the novelistic terrain of the rural village of Zitouna, where the story is set, is one of Mimouni’s most dynamic, ambivalent, and indeed, modern creations. And yet in most critical accounts of the novel, the village, whether lauded or criticized, is equally narrowed and flattened to fit the various political narratives these critics were creating. The concept of the tribe, introduced from the title of the novel presupposes a community that does not belong in a modern state. In the 20th century Western imaginary, tribes belong on reservations or in preserves where they can exist largely out of time, a living time capsule for anthropologists to observe and compare against our own more sophisticated lives.99 As Khalid Zekri points out, Mimouni creates a tribe that in many ways meets our anti-modern expectations: showing the community to be “anchored in an oral tradition, its members organized according to traditional modes of living”(49) translation mine). The tribe, particularly the older generation, distrusts the written word similarly to how they distrust the new technologies that are brought to the village. Preferring their own orally transmitted history to the

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99 There is a humorous scene in *L’Honneur* where the village is visited by some anthropologists described as “eccentric old men, who took us for bees” and a German couple, who show indiscriminate interest in everything and stun the village shopkeeper, Georgeaud, who believes since the Germans had lost World War I that they had all been killed(29-30 translation mine).
one the lawyer discovers in their library, the narrator states, “les plus raisonnables d’entre nous lui firent alors comprendre qu’à l’impitoyable irrécusabilité de l’écrit nous préférions la mémoire infidèle et généreuse qui corriger les plus criantes inégalités”(159). This idea of living in a social system in which articles of faith survive any physical evidence to the contrary derives from and feeds into a romantic ideal for how a pre-modern society should be.

This “romance” version of Zitouna is complemented by certain ideas about the mental character, the idle complacency and close-mindedness that an isolated life appears to have on its inhabitants. There is even a myth to explain how the natives became this way. There was a time, so the myth goes, when the Zitouni ancestors were warriors, who traveled the seas and fought off sea monsters, but many died, and the descendents of these ancestors eventually decided to forego knowledge of the outside world in exchange for their own safety. “Cette arrogante soif de savoir, ” they decide “faisait une hérétique concurrence à l’omniscience divine ”(19). Thus, they give up their quest for the mysteries of this world, to live, instead, “dans le confort des certitudes de la foi”(19). As Denise Brahimi contends in her article "Encore, déjà, toujours, le village algérien," the village is characterized by “sa passivité et sa lâcheté”(170). A small-mindedness pervades Zitouna that looks suspiciously upon difference such as the surprise and confusion of the villagers when le père d’Ali expresses his desire to have his son receive a French education(22) or the widely held superstition that “c’est toujours par les étrangers que le malheur arrive”(35). The rural once again written off as space for the dying off of traditionalism, whether nostalgically longed for or mocked as backwards and naïve, no longer appears to have a place in this new modern country.

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100 Translation : “This arrogant thirst for knowledge is heretical for it challenges divine omniscience” (19).
101 Translation : “...in the comfort of the certainties of faith”(19).
102 Translation : “Passivity and cowardice”(170).
103 Translation: “It is always because of outsiders that misfortune occurs” (35).
Indeed this would seem the case if we were to take at face value some of characters of the book from both sides of the struggle to either preserve or demolish the tribe’s way of life. It is no secret that Omar El Mabrouk,\(^{104}\) the village’s malevolent prodigal son, wants to erase all rural modes from the village. He first decrees there should be no more livestock permitted in the public streets, and then moves on to even more transformative acts such as disbanding the local djemma, paving over their arbors, bringing in new urbanized citizens to outnumber the local population, and closing down the olive oil press. But the narrator too sees village life expiring along with his own mortality at the end of the book. Here he expresses a desire to leave the récit and walk in the fields with his memories of youth. Both sides see Zitouna as a fragile ecosystem vulnerable, practically indefensible, to outside invaders—as Algeria herself has been considered for centuries.

The misconception here, on both sides, is the idea that Zitouna, like any rural space, is static, that there is a purity to the way of life in this hidden corner of the world that once set upon by the “modern” world will lose all value and relevancy. Indeed, the village’s very name suggests a sacred and peaceful existence that is only possible at a significant remove from the messiness of 20\(^{th}\) century politics.\(^{105}\) Mimouni, however, is no nostalgist, nor is even pre-Omar Zitouna meant to be a garden paradise by any stretch of the imagination. Instead, the Zitounis, like so many cultures, have an Eden myth. They call this first home la vallée heureuse among several other halcyon names,\(^ {106}\) and this place like the biblical Eden, of which it is clearly a

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104 Mabrouk (مبارك) in Arabic means congratulations. While it is unclear who should be congratulated here and for what, the sense is clearly tongue-in-cheek, since Omar brings destruction to the village and to himself.

105 Aziza Lounis describes the symbolism of the village similarly: “Zitouna, l’arbre méditerranéen par excellence, arbre sacré, arbre central, axe du monde, symbole de l’Homme universel, symbole de paix aussi, les habitants oubliés de Dieu et du pouvoir mènent à l’écart une vie où la tranquillité s’apparente au bonheur” (106).

106 Translation: The happy valley. The valley is referred to by many different edenic sounding names throughout the text. As much as the heavy weight of this memory may seem stultifying, it is also a source of
manifestation, is not only a place of great beauty and ease, it is a place that cannot survive change, the mere encounter of “knowledge” from the outside world is enough to destroy it forever (Eve’s apple in this case comes in the form of French colonialists who seize the land from the Zitounis). Not Zitouna as Brahmini claims, but here is the original place of passivity, the place the tribe adopts when they decide to give up their lives adventuring on the seas and turn inward upon themselves. The land, it is told, was gracious and wholly bountiful on its own, so there was no need for human exertion to improve upon it. And like Adam and Eve, once the space had been tarnished, they were no longer permitted to stay. The tribe, like their biblical forebears, is expelled from their paradise and must start again. Thus, Mimouni begins his novel with the notably unnostalgic epigraph above from Pierre Emmanuel emphasizing the finality of this expulsion and the need to begin to live again, not in the memory of their paradise lost, but in the very different circumstances in which they now find themselves.

Zitouna’s rural by contrast is no Eden. When the villagers relocate they must make many substitutions to their way of life, substitutions that in almost all cases illustrate the diminution that is entailed in their expulsion from “la vallée des tulipes et de l’abondance” 107 to “venir se refugier en ces sommets protecteurs mais stériles qu’en leur retranchement il leur a fallu troquer l’espoir pour la résignation, le cheval pour l’ane, la brebis pour la chevre, l’ecrit pour l’oral, la connaissance pour la superstition, la science pour la magie” 108. Thus, it is easy for readers to consider their lives far diminished from what it was in that mythic valley. And indeed, many of the Zitounis dream of returning to the long ago idyllic days they have heard so much about. Their creativity, originality and improvisation for the community. The tribe’s indigenous language that relies heavily on metaphor and simile is based in large part on the valley’s central signifying role.

107 Translation: “valley of tulips and plenty”
108 Translation: “to find refuge at the protective, but sterile peaks where to retract themselves it was necessary to trade hope for resignation, horse for donkey, sheep for goat, written for oral, knowledge for superstition, science for magic.”
lives since the expulsion are almost exclusively described by what they now lack that they once had in this magical valley. Not only can the Zitounis not return because the land has been confiscated from them, but when they do go back to try to stake their claim after independence, they find the valley is no longer there. It was torn up to plant vineyards for making wine, a particularly ironic twist since the Zitounis being Muslims do not consume alcohol. And yet, what use is an Eden for describing 20th century Algeria? One might similarly ask what use is a literature that only portrays the valors of a society?

Commitment to a beautiful primitiveness may stave off the messiness of modernity, the West, France, and the domestic project of nation-building, but it cannot produce a dialogue. Because it is pristine, it will always stand apart, and therefore can offer little insight into the actual lives of Algerians. Hence Mimouni retains this valley in symbol only and concentrates his art on this “lieu où ils furent chassées.” This chapter will show how Mimouni manages to eschew the simplicity of la vallée heureuse for Zitouna, which short on resources is rich in conflict and contradiction. L’Honneur de la tribu, well beyond the interpretation of it as a single-minded critique of the Algerian national government, engages the rural to show that Algeria as an artistic subject can offer much more than a rote ethnographic or politically derivative post-colonial narrative. As a place riddled with ambiguities and contradictions, where morals and cultural imperatives are often confused and/or at cross-purposes, Mimouni’s Zitouna is not in fact in “le village le plus isolé du monde” as the travelling entertainer (le saltimbanque) describes, but at the center of late 20th century modernist questions about identity and representation in what feels like a largely unhinged world.

*Locating the Algerian Rural Imaginary*
While it was well-established that the Algerian rural is rich for ethnographic/naturalistic novels depicting the hardships and consequent unraveling of tribal life, such as Mouloud Feraoun’s *Le Fils du Pauvre* (1950) or Mouloud Mammeri’s *La colline oubliée* (1952), it was not until Kateb Yacine in 1956 publishes his first novel, *Nedjma* that the extra-urban Algerian life is portrayed as something greater and more meaningful than the meager lives the land barely supports. Mimouni in *L’Honneur* goes further committing to Zitouna alone as the setting for this narrative that reaches far beyond its borders (though Kateb’s work ventures into the Kabylie wilderness much of *Nedjma* takes place in the city of Constantine). This remote location posed several representational challenges, the first of which was clearly a lack of precedent, even among those Mimouni saw as his predecessors, Kateb Yacine chief among them.

Unlike Faulkner’s Mississippi, Bowen’s County Cork or Keane’s County Wexford, rural Algeria does not immediately elicit an image of soft lushness in the collective western literary imagination. While it may inspire romance in the terms of exotic adventure, Algeria, with its long history of violent conquests and foreign occupations, would, at least on the surface, appear to poorly accommodate flights of pastoral sentimentality as the others do. Instead of vibrant green rolling hills, mossy arbor groves, or cotton fields, one pictures perhaps steep unforgiving gorges like those that surround the city of Constantine, the craggy tribal mountains of Kabylia, or small oasis communities perched on the edges of the desert.\(^{109}\)\(^{110}\) The tribes complicate this problem of representing the Algerian further, particularly for the writer who wishes to push the land out of its rut as a primarily ethnographic literary genre. Here the mantle of indigeneity is a

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\(^{109}\) British historian Alastair Horne discusses how in pursuit of the Algerian resistance leader Abd-el-Kader “ill-prepared French troops would freeze to death in the harsh mountains in pursuit of an elusive foe, or fall into well-laid ambushes”\(^{(30)}\).

\(^{110}\) Imazighen is the Algerian term for Berber, the indigenous peoples of North Africa west of the Nile Valley. Because of Berber’s European roots (it comes from the Greek term for barbarian meaning “non-Greek speaker”), Algerians have on the whole preferred the more indigenous term Imazighen. The meaning of this term is unclear; however, some claim it means “free people” while others say it comes from a Tuareg word “amajegh” meaning “noble.”
limitation, an archaism that places tribal life under a microscope, separated out from the rest of the 20th century.

That is, of course, if one thinks about rural North Africa at all. The North African city is a far more well-trodden site on which to found and develop a discourse on the relationship between North Africa and the West. Algiers is most representative, but also the starkest example of the colonial effort to organize and regulate a population with its Hausmann-inspired boulevards and the monitoring of public spaces brought into clear and direct confrontation with the unmappable winding ways of the Casbah, as seen in Gillo Pontecorvo’s seminal film, La battaglia di Algeri. As one of Paris’s most potent exotic others, Francophone scholar Seth Graebner claims, the North African city, above all, was the literary and cultural marker that “most often triggered travelers’ nostalgia” of the region, a place where they could best experience the alterity they searched for while holding in view the touchstones of their modern civilizations—European languages, technologies and resources. For Algerian writers, North African cities appeared to be the places where the juxtapositions that faced Algeria between tradition and modernity could most clearly and dramatically be addressed. Cities were where Algeria as a new independent nation claimed its sovereign authority and where the terms and conditions of that authority would be debated and enacted. In other words in eyes of both Algerians and the outside world, Algiers was the location for contemplating Algeria’s future. After all, the rural in many ways validates Algerian cities as the location of modernity. Mimouni himself depicts the rural as a place dogged by passivity, illiteracy, superstition, and anti-progressive recalcitrance. By choosing a rural space for his novel, Mimouni, however, evades in large part the strong polarity between Paris and the North African city, while showing how the imperializing model of Western urbanization still manages to infiltrate the remotest corners of this country.
What writers and artists of European and American descent seemed to appreciate most about the rural Algerian landscape is its perceived emptiness in contrast to their overly “busy” western consciousnesses. Oblivious to ecological complexity, the North African Arabs and Berbers in modern western literature, like the works of Albert Camus or Paul Bowles’s *Sheltering Sky*, are depicted as static, homogenous, and empty of human interest as the dry desert air. Compared, for example, with the dark claustrophic reflexivity the reader encounters in Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* where one feels the narrator, as he travels down the Congo, is going deeper into the dank soul of our nature, the North African landscape offers detachment from oneself, particularly in the representation of the expansive sky. It is in the experience of the sky in particular in Camus’s short story “La femme adultère” and Bowles’s *Sheltering Sky* that the female protagonists find release from the monotony of their overly introspective lives. The sky is what these characters commune with, not the native population, which is largely depicted as the background scenery in which the drama of these Euro-American lives are set. In these cases, the Arabs are not only seen as developmentally inferior, they lack human dimensionality. Even in Camus’s *L’Etranger* the murder of an Arab on the beach by the protagonist, Meursault is marginal compared with the text’s attention to Meursault’s own existential drama after he is taken into custody. Aoudjit points out that “Algerians do not fare better in *La Peste*”(7). The Algerian author, Mouloud Feraoun even went so far as to write his friend Camus a letter stating, “I read *La Peste*...I regretted that among all the characters, there was not a single native and that Oran was for you no more than a banal French prefecture”(qtd. in Aoudjit 7).

Algeria, configured in feminine terms as most rural and colonial spaces are by the urban imperial centers that seek to subdue them, is not the nourishing submissive terrain of other more temperate locales. Like the veiled women of the harem eroticized by male western writers and
artists, such as Gustave Flaubert’s courtesan, Kuchuk Hanem and Delacroix’s “Les Femmes d’Alger dans leurs appartement,” the Algerian rural is seductive yet unyielding, unrelentingly unknowable to all those who try to possess her. Even the Impressionist painter, Auguste Renoir, famous for his billowy pliant women, lends his art to the propagation of this popular metaphor when in 1881 he visits the country for the first time and paints a fiery landscape he entitles “The Ravine of the Wild Woman.”

Figure 5 *Paysage algérien, le ravin de la femme sauvage* (1881) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir
Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
This image of Algeria as the exotic woman who is both alluring and punishing is clearly a depiction that the French government developed and sold to themselves, the French public who financed this expensive colonial adventure, and the rest of the western world to which they appealed to justify their actions. The land, like the Algerian woman cloistered from the world, enticed the colonists to come and subdue it. Without any necessity of proof, tribal lands were easily confiscated by the colons by the mere insinuation that lands were being misused. That Algeria has a long history of being overcome by foreign invaders including the Arabs who make up the majority population in the country further helped the French establish the argument that there is either no true rightful heir or that as the torch bearers of the Roman Empire they too have a claim and perhaps even a moral responsibility to develop this land.

France was successful in creating out of certain historical, topographical and cultural elements of Algeria (its lack of a linear narrative that anchors the land in a coherent origin story, its dramatic bio- and geo-diversity, and its pell-mell combinations of Muslim, Mediterranean and tribal traditions), a narrative specially tailored to the needs of their own *mission civilatrice*. This gap between the realities of non-European lands and the European interpretations of them is what makes the French representations of Algeria so insidiously difficult to get around. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Mimouni does not try to write around these orientalist renditions. Instead, through his literature, he seeks to represent the ways colonial modes inhabit any discussion of modernization, particularly those tied to nation-building. And that in a sense, it is this arena, the post-colonial rural, that perhaps best stages the kind of conundrums the late century poses with regard to maintaining cultural identities that cohere with a sense of the past and yet still manage to adapt to the urban-centric demands of the present.
Nedjma: Honor and the Search for Algerian Origins

The title *L’Honneur de la tribu* does not sound like the kind of book that is interested in the representation of modern times. The tribe is possibly the most archaic of social formations and is largely discussed only in anthropologic terms, while the concept of honor can seem equally outdated. In this way, the title appears to signal its affiliation to an established category of post-colonial Francophone literature that is largely ethnographic in subject and imitative in form, copying the 19th century French realists and naturalists, who figured prominently in the French colonial literary education. These types of novels broadly characterize the first generation of Algerian Francophone novels that were published in the 1950’s by writers like Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, and Mouloud Mammeri.  

The phrase “l’honneur de la tribu”, though it is first penned by a member of this first generation of Algerian writers, appears in a very different kind of novel. It is from the Kateb Yacine’s book *Nedjma*, which is considered by many to be the first modern Algerian novel (Aoudjit 28, 29). It is well-documented that Mimouni was heavily influenced by Kateb and *Nedjma*, in particular. In an interview, Mimouni is quoted as saying of *Nedjma*, “Je crois que ce livre a fini par faire partie de moi et je surprends parfois sous la plume un phrase entière de Kateb ” (Achour 146). Thus, the reference to Kateb’s work in the title of *L’Honneur* is almost certainly meant as a tribute as well as a substantive moment of intertextuality.

*Nedjma* sets itself apart from the novels of Dib et al by departing from the modes of French realism with an achronological structure that jumps between mid-1945 and 1952 with

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111 Though these novelists are sometimes criticized for being too imitative of French literature, it is apparent to me that they are adapting these forms to their own artistic needs, not simply applying a French technique to a foreign locale. When they write about Algeria, they are inevitably redefining what realist literature is, who it is for, and what it should do. See Aoudjit's *The Algerian Novel and Colonial Discourse*.  
112 Translation: I believe that this book has become a part of me, and I am surprised that from my pen sometimes will emerge an entire sentence of Kateb’s.
flashbacks to the 1920’s. A long hashish-induced fever dream in the middle of the book throws doubt onto any concrete meaning a reader might want to assign to the book, while a very uncertain genealogy among its principle actors only becomes more uncertain as the text goes along. *Nedjma* is not interested in the ethnographic representation of Algerian life. Unlike the quasi-anthropological treatments of its contemporaries that cannot help but reinforce France’s superficial categorization of the population, fitting communities into umbrella groups of Arab, Berber or Jewish, *Nedjma* dramatizes the extent to which Algerians, after centuries of invasion and colonization, do not know who they are or where they came from.

*Nedjma* stages Algeria’s search for origins as a quest that is both unavoidable and ultimately unachievable. And it is in the exposition of this double-bind that the quote “l’honneur de la tribu” figures in. It is important to note first that actual fathers are completely absent in *Nedjma* and that is if the father’s identity is known at all. The only possible father in the text is an old man named Si Mokhtar, and he is such an infamous philanderer, he can’t be sure what children are his or even if he has any at all (Among his many possible children are Nedjma and Nedjma’s husband, Kamel). Si Mokhtar also acts as a quasi-father figure to one of the central characters, Rachid, because Si Mokhtar was one of the last people to see Rachid’s father alive, but this attachment is dramatically complicated by the fact that Rachid suspects Si Mokhtar of being his father’s murderer. Adding an additional layer of doubt is the fact that Si Mokhtar only appears in the text during Rachid’s hashish dream, which, though quite vivid, throws Si Mokhtar’s very existence into question.

The line “pour défendre l’honneur de la tribu…” (132) comes in the middle of this dream in the very middle of the book when Rachid recounts how he and Si Mokhtar kidnapped Nedjma, rescuing her from her possibly incestuous marriage and attempt to bring her back to what they
believe is her and Rachid’s familial tribe, the Keblout, in a remote mountainous region called Nadhor. Here the men hope to recover themselves, who they were meant to be before they were disconnected from the land: “le sang de Keblout retrouvera sa chaude, son intime épaisseur” (Kateb 121). Sleeping next to Nedjma, Rachid imagines all the people who might wish to take Nedjma away from them, including Nedjma’s adoptive mother, Lella Fatma, Kamel, and the mysterious black man that Rachid catches watching them. And he thinks to himself that as there appears to be no one else (“en absence d’autres mâles”(132)), it is up to Si Mokhtar and himself to “defend the tribe.”

There is so much confusion about what is happening at this point in the book, it is impossible to know exactly what Kateb means by this. At least partly, it is a lament that this is the point to which the tribe has degraded: an aimless young man, who has failed in all of his pursuits including serving in the French army and making the pilgrimage to Mecca, in love with a woman he kidnapped but can’t have, while travelling with a grossly unsuitable father figure, whom he also believes to be his father’s murderer. This line clearly strikes an ironic chord as well considering these two rootless men don’t seem to understand what the tribe means and couldn’t be less well-equipped to defend it if they did know. What could this pair possibly hope to accomplish by “returning” this woman115 to a tribe that has been marginalized both figuratively and literally to the hinterlands? Lastly, however, one should not discount the possibility that there is a thread of sincerity here as well. Regardless of how ill-suited Rachid and Si Mokhtar are, it is likely that they are motivated by a desire for their actions to reflect something greater back upon themselves. Proving (more or less) their legitimacy as members of

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113 Translation: “The blood of the Keblout will rediscover its heat, its intimate weight” (121).
114 Translation: “in the absence of other men”(132)
115 Nedjma’s mother was French and Jewish and her father is unknown, thereby making the possibility of a return to origins extremely unlikely if not altogether impossible.
this honorable tribe would help reinforce the very shaky assertion that as colonized subjects they still possess a sense of self. This aspiration to reconnect and reintegrate themselves with their origins by defending the tribe’s honor is quickly squelched, however, when Rachid awakens in the morning to find Nedjma has been kidnapped by le Nègre and Si Mokhtar is dead, possibly murdered by the black man.

Thus, this attempt to defend the honor of the tribe, whatever its meaning to Kateb’s Rachid, is thwarted just as quickly as it started, seemingly out of nowhere. What is clear, however, is that with this phrase Kateb is highlighting not the persevering continuity of Algeria’s identity in these trying times, but the 20th century’s disjuncture from it. We often try to recapture the social formations of the past at the moment when our identities no longer finds voice in the present. While recounting the Keblout’s claim that the Beni Hilal (a conglomeration of Arab Bedouins who participated in the conquest of Spain) are their ancestors, Richard Serrano notes that “nearly all Arab and Berber groups in North Africa claim descendence from the Prophet Mohammed or the Beni Hilal”(294). This emphasizes both the widespread desire in Algeria to have a legitimated connection to their origins, which Kateb is clearly keying into, and the impossibility in a French-occupied land of satisfactorily realizing this desire.

As opposed to simply adopting a modernist style of ambiguity and obfuscation in imitation of the Western modernists he admired, such as William Faulkner (Serrano 294), Kateb uses these strategies to dramatize how problematic the search for origins is in Algeria. The lack of some foundational core at the center of these lives is felt as the reader is jostled backward and forward in time, between characters whose lives often feel a mystery to themselves and interchangeable amongst each other. The character, who inhabits the center of the narrative, Nedjma, who is believed to represent Algeria, is ultimately not just inaccessible but
unknowable—acting more like a black hole that pulls the men deeper into darkness than the star, that her name represents, which should provide a stable center for them to orbit.

Rachid and Si Mokhtar never make it to Nadhor—an emissary from the tribe successfully stonewalls them—and so to a large extent the Keblout’s sanctity is preserved. They may be pushed off to the outskirts of the country, but avoiding the chaos, doubt, and futility that characterizes the lives of Rachid and Si Mokhtar, who are “de la branche des déserteurs” (137), the tribe theoretically maintains its ideological purity. They maintain their honor all the more so because Rachid and Si Mokhtar fail. Although the campaign is a setback for Rachid and fatal for Si Mokhtar, the preservation of the tribe from contamination in this case offers hope for the project of a free and independent Algeria in the book, which Gilles Carpentier notes opens and closes with the self-liberating line: “Lakhdar s’est échappé de sa cellule” (v). 117

In light of *Nedjma*, Mimouni’s *L’Honneur de la tribu* can be seen as the intervention into Nadhor that Kateb does not allow. Mimouni, writing after the aspirations of the revolution and the exuberance of its success have faded, sets his novel within a tribe that has been dislocated like the Keblout. But in Mimouni’s world they are no longer in a position to remain untouched by the modernizing project of nation-building. Where Nadhor remains intact through its isolation, Zitouna’s integrity will be severely tested. The effect of Zitouna’s exposure to the

116 Translation: “The branch of the deserters” (137)
117 Although it is true that the four friends seem interchangeable at times, making the actions of the novel difficult to track, they clearly have distinct roles to play. While Rachid seems to represent the frenetic nature of the Algerian identity for he is the most confused about who he is, Lakhdar instills the reader with the most hope for Algeria’s success when it gains independence from France. As noted above, it is him freeing himself from prison that opens and closes the book, and that he makes this happen in defiance of the French, instead of being released by them, speaks to the strength of his agency. Lakhdar also understands that there is an important connection between the country’s identity and the land, and we see that he identifies with the land personally, both through his search through the uncultivated (i.e. uncolonized) land for revolutionaries (“J’ai cotoyé des terres en friche” (58).) and through his connection to his grandfather, who was a farmer (58). Further, Lakhdar’s name means green in Arabic, which not only suggests the potential fertility of the land, its readiness for a rebirth, but Algeria herself, whose flag is half green. Green also is considered a signature color in Islam (Beam).
world is that whereas Kateb’s work explores the unique conundrum of the colonized Algerian identity, Mimouni’s tribe under siege demonstrates the relevancy of the Algerian rural to the 20th century narrative of modernity. As the cultural theorist, Stuart Hall suggests in one of his dialogues on the postmodern living:

“the experience of being inside and outside, the ‘familiar stranger.’ We used to call that ‘alienation,’ or deracination…Increasingly, it’s what everybody’s life is like. So that’s how I think about the articulation of the postmodern and the postcolonial.

Postcoloniality, in a curious way, prepared one to live in a ‘postmodern’ or diasporic relationship to identity. 490)

So even as we become more urbanized, more interconnected, more worldly, the feeling of loss and alienation, if not the literal experience of it, becomes something we all relate to because it is a condition we recognize in our lives as well.

The Zitounis were not only displaced from “la vallée heureuse,” L’Honneur is the story of how they were being displaced in their adopted village, the place where they took their refuge. The tribe as a social formation, thus, is more than an ethnographic novelty or something that must be kept from the world. Its décalage with the rapidly changing country provides a space for the traditional to visibly reckon with the values of modernity toe-to-toe, a conflict that urban/suburban subjects rarely have a chance to observe because the engines for change are so overwhelming rarely leaving traces of the past behind. Not simply out of a sense of inevitable loss, but with humor, intellect and optimism, does Mimouni take his reader to Zitouna where the tribe itself may be fatally unable to keep up, but the story of this encounter solidifies the place of the rural as a place of both artistic and ideological complexity.
Inside and Beyond the Dystopic

In his introduction to *Nedjma*, Gilles Carpentier says of Kateb that he aimed “de donner à voir une Algérie que personne ne voulait voir, ni les ultras de la colonisation, ni les zélateurs du nationalisme arabe, ni même ‘les modérés’” (ii). What was so unique with *Nedjma* with regard to the kind of work it is and the context from which it emerged is that it does not lay claim to any particular ideology. While the book may champion Algerian liberation, as discussed above, it does not elaborate on how this liberation should occur nor what it will look like once it is achieved, and this withholding is at least as radical a stance as the stylistic particularities of his work. While it might be said that these particularities, the achronology and narrative ambiguities, are making a political statement against the French realist canon of Kateb’s colonial education, the lack of a political agenda and political allegiances in the narrative, its unwillingness to align itself with a singular representation of Algeria reemphasizes the need to treat this book as a piece of literature and not some thinly veiled political manifesto.

As writers, this resistance to ideologies is a disposition that Kateb and Mimouni both share. Mimouni, however, takes the role of the public antagonist further than Kateb dared. *Nedjma* is written at the advent of the Revolution and there is a sense in the book that, although we do not know what it is, this thing called Algeria is emerging and it will bring its people together. The character Nedjma is thought to be a symbol for the colonized and potentially emergent nation. Though her background is of mixed and mysterious origins and she has little to no agency in the sequence of events, like a star her gravitational pull brings the characters together, giving them a shared identity (In Kateb’s sequel to *Nedjma*, *Le polygone étoilé*, Nedjma sheds her passively symbolic role to become a *maquisard* with the freedom fighters).
L’Honneur, on the other hand, does not provide a symbolic center in its representation of Algeria. Neither the government, nor religion, nor the traditional tribal customs provide an element of constancy. After Rachid Boudjedra’s *La Repudiation* (1969), Mimouni’s trilogy is some of earliest works to stand against the idea that Algerian literature need be a tool for building a positive and unified national identity. With the publishing of the first book in the trilogy, *Le fleuve détourné*, Mimouni’s critical outlook begins to be what he is known for—the courage to speak truth to power, so to speak. Because of this tendency to get at the ugliness of the matter, his work is seen as dark and often dystopic, but it is a mistake to characterize his landscape as devoid of humanity.

It is, however, true that the only thing that appears to be constant in Mimouni’s Zitouna is division and disintegration. This attribute is best exemplified by the tribal language, which at the opening of the novel is spoken by the novel’s narrator, a tribal elder, and practically no one else: “Notre langue est tombée en désuétude, et nous ne sommes plus que quelques survivants à en user. Elle disparaîtra avec nous” (Mimouni 11). \(^{118}\) The history of the tribe is thus recounted to a mysterious person, whose identity is not revealed until the end, but who, we do know, does not understand the tribal language he is hearing. So although this person records the narration on cassettes it is unclear what he will be able to do with it. The reader, on the other hand, although we can read the text because words have been somehow translated into French for us, unlike the mystery audience, does not have access to the sounds and intonations of this tribal language. To a large extent, it is unrecoverable to us.

If there were an authentic Algeria to find, this tribe might appear a likely spot to locate it (The tribe is Muslim; yet they speak an indigenous language, live by the bounty of the land, and

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\(^{118}\) Translation: “Our language has fallen into disuse, and we are the only survivors left who use it. It will disappear with us” (Mimouni 11).  

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pass their history down through oral traditions.), but Mimouni dispels any such ideas several times over. To begin with, the tribe has many negative stereotypes which any positivistic configuration of authenticity would want to deny. They are passive in the face of adversity, superstitious, and lack curiosity about the world around them. Worst of all, they are unjust. Though a romantically-inclined reader might want to look to this tribe as a formation of social enlightenment, an alternative to capitalist democracy, two of the most unjust acts in the book come not from Omar, but from the villagers themselves when the kind-hearted giant Slimane El Mabrouk, Omar’s father, is first denied entry into the mosque because his father’s marriage was never properly blessed, and then he is abandoned by everyone in his losing battle to the street performer’s bear, whom Slimane fought every year in the tribe’s honor. Further, as discussed above, Zitouna is not a place of origin but the place to which the tribe was displaced. Therefore, like any diasporic people, their customs and traditions are overcast with longing. Many of them are not foolish enough to believe they can go back, but the unchanging life they have tried to make in this “place of desolation” too is unsustainable. The trajectory of the novel can best be tracked by the series of losses the tribe suffers as everything they love is taken from them incrementally.

These dystopic elements in his writing are clearly political, but as important as his political motivation is, it is a misunderstanding to see this motivation superseding his artistic goals as a novelist. Such misunderstandings have led critics to analyze Mimouni’s representation only as a means for exposing his apparently nihilistic ideology. Bernard Aresu and Jeffrey S. Akrom focus their description of Mimouni’s novel as “the allegorical documentation of history immobilized, stripped of its humanity and ready to be recuperated as Official History” (136). While Robert Elbaz claims more broadly that across the author’s work
Mimouni pursues a strategy of "néantisation" or obliteration in his novels(11). To these critics Zitouna illustrates Mimouni’s vision of the world stripped of hope and meaning, which they deduce to be what happens to a community when it is discovered that nothing is sacred in a fixed way anymore.

Further, it is difficult for critics not to read Mimouni’s biography of estrangement in this dystopic worldview. Because of the civil war and the Muslim fundamentalists who eventually took over the country in the 1990’s, Mimouni lived as an exile in Paris and Tanger after the publication of his work *De la barbarie en générale et de l’intégrisme en particulier* (1992) till his death in February 1995 at the age of 49 (Redouane, *Rachid Mimouni* 18-9). It saddened him greatly not to be able to live and write in his country that had fought so hard for independence. His last work that was published posthumously, *La malédiction* or *The Curse*, speaks to the sense that Algeria’s oppressive history, the cycles of conquest and subjugation, of which the author himself is now a victim, is not something that will be easily allayed. Though his narrative emerges with humor and wit, the title as well as the general subject of the book (two friends reminiscing about Revolution and how bleak things have become since then), suggest that the land and its people are cursed, fated to abuse each other.

Mimouni himself is quoted as saying of his novels, “je veux choquer pour pousser les gens à agir…je demeure convaincu que mon œuvre transcende les histoires que je suis amené à raconter ”(qtd. in Redouane, *Rachid Mimouni*)119. And yet, transcendence need not be limited to political action alone nor does the destabilization of the sacred in both tribal and nationalist representations of Algerian society make him a nihilist. It is too often the tendency of postcolonial literature writ large to segregate the genre from other kindred works because of its

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119 Translation: “I want to shock the people into action...I remain convinced that my work transcends the stories I tell.”

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politics, and in this isolated context Zitouna’s outlook is bleak. But if we view Mimouni’s transcendence as one that rises out beyond its geographic particularity to engage in the larger conversation about global modernity in the 20th century as a function of diaspora and alienation à la Stuart Hall, one sees a genealogical connection not only to Kateb and other postcolonial innovators, but to the modernist canon of Eliot and Joyce, and more specifically a brethren of rural modernists including Faulkner, Bowen, Garcia Marquez, and Keane. It is in the failures and missteps, the strange intercourse of tradition and “progress” to debunk the idea of the sacred and the virtuous that we discover, not some off land, but the familiar paradoxical makeup of the neighborhoods where we live.

In L’Honneur, losses are what allows the reader to see the multidimensionality of Zitouna’s life. Before Omar El Mabrook returns to transform the village, Zitouna is a mere place of desolation, defined only by what was lost when the tribe left la vallée heureuse, by the substitutions that the tribe had to submit to. And yet, as Omar begins to “modernize” the community bringing in electricity, manufactured commodities (canola oil to replace the manually pressed olive oil), and city people to populate his new housing developments, the fuller more dynamic picture of Zitouna emerges as these elements become threatened with extinction: the livestock that are banned from the streets, the eucalyptus trees that are bulldozed, and the cemetery that is removed and transplanted. These are not just meaningless losses, but losses that enable us to see what Zitouna was. Even Omar, who wishes to undo the tribe that passively witnessed his father’s death, carries the mark of the tribe with him. Although Afifa Bererhi’s characterizes him as “transfuge, il ne parle pas le langage des siens, ni ne partage leur vision du monde” (41), this is clearly not the case. Omar both speaks their language, which is demonstrated through his use of comparison and simile that the elder narrator often uses, and

120 Translation: “Defector, he neither speaks their language nor shares their worldview”(41).
only an individual, who can see the world as they do could so methodically dismantle it. What Mimouni does is make apparent the lives of Zitouna at the moment they are brought into relief through their imminent destruction.

This effect of losses to show us more clearly what we used to have, is perhaps what Mimouni was envisioning when he borrowed Kateb’s phrase for the title of the novel: that the shape of honor is only clearly defined after it has been lost—as it was abandoned both by Rachid and Si Mokhtar and the ineffectual Zitouni elders. To many this village, suffering loss after mortifying loss, is dystopic because it fails to do what the rural is supposed to do: preserve and glorify the past. Zitouna turns out to be utterly ill-equipped to defend itself from Omar’s campaign to dismantle them.

It is not without humor and a twinge of devilry that Mimouni describes the havoc Omar wreaks as his political agenda gets bolder. The cemetery had been relocated, and it is not until the lame olive oil presser, Aïssa dies of inactivity (after Omar closes the press) that the villagers realize that all the roads, the very landscape in fact, has been altered to the point that not only do the villagers not know which way to go, they do not actually know where they are:

Il n’existait plus aucun repère. Les chemins avaient changé d’itinéraire, les montagnes d’emplacement. Les plaines s’étaient gondolées, les collines aplanies. Le sud avait modifié sa position, le ciel sa couleur, le soleil son trajet, le temps sa vitesse. Le climat avait interverti ses saisons. (Mimouni 169)

The villagers are living in a world that has been turned upside down on them. And yet, I resist the term dystopic because dystopia as a concept is a rhetorical dead end. Like an abyss, it offers no alternative views, no transfigurations of the darkness. We expect this manner of shape-

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121 Translation: “No markers remained. The roads had changed their direction, the mountains their location. The plains rippled, the hills flattened. The south had changed its direction, the sky its color, the sun its path, the time its speed. The weather inverted its seasons” (Mimouni 169).
shifting in a city, buildings are constantly being torn down, with new structures taking their place. City skylines observed through time-lapse photography ripple with movement, and though we might view the destruction of old structures with nostalgia, this process of change is rarely deemed dystopic; it is rather a condition of the Modern. Why should the rural be any different?

The narrator of *L’honneur* clearly supports this dystopic version of his and the village’s fate. He ends the novel at the threshold of personal exhaustion, which appears to reflect the exhaustion this community has suffered through its extended subsumption. Unable to take the narrative further, the narrator recoils to the past, “Ce récit a réveillé mes souvenirs de jeunesse…” (216). But even these soothing thoughts do not bring clarity or reconciliation. The ellipses show the narrator’s mind trailing off, “Il y a longtemps…Bien longtemps…”(216), until he speaks the final line of the novel: “Je crois bien que j’ai envie de mourir”(216).

As the last words with which the reader is left, dystopia does seem to be a reasonable interpretation of the novel, but like the fate of the village, the narrator is also not in complete control of this narrative. As the narrator inadvertently communicates to the reader the richness of Zitouni life by describing it at the point of dissolution, so too does his love of this place emerge from the expression of his despair. We learn the roots of the fig trees are still alive, by way of learning how the branches and trunks have been overtaken by blight and carried away by the wind; the narrator may want to die, but it is through the transmission of this story that Zitouna is preserved.

Kateb’s symbol for Algeria was Nedjma, a woman of mysterious origins who is inaccessible to the reader except through the feverish eyes of her admirers. Like a colonized

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122 Altogether as they appear in the text, the translation of the final lines is: This narration has awakened memories from my childhood...It has been a long time...A very long time...I believe very much that I would like to die (216).
country, she never speaks or acts on her own, and because of her inaccessibility, her true nature remain mystified. As long as Nedjma remains a mystery, all the wonderful potentialities she symbolizes still appear possible. By contrast, Zitouna, as a synecdoche for Mimouni’s Algeria, debunks the beauty and idealism that revolutionary Algeria seemed capable of realizing.

Mimouni’s demystification of the country is acute, like the literal demystification that occurs in the town with the installation of electric street lights:

…nous nous attardâmes jusqu’au soir à faire mine de nous émerveiller devant ces halos blafards qui démasquaient la nuit et laissaient tous les objets indécemment exposés. Nous ressentions la gêne de celui qui découvre involontairement une scène intime. Nous n’osions plus nous regarder. Les couleurs édulcorées des objets accroissaient notre malaise, et nous eûmes hâte de rentrer chez nous (188).123

Even more extreme is the reaction of the rare indigenous birds, who could no longer distinguish night from day and therefore sang themselves into exhaustion(188). The harsh lights strip Zitouna of its claim to modesty, its dignity is further imperiled, but demystification does more than elicit despair. Once more, it highlights the strange subtle ambivalence between love and loss. It is only in the harsh light that we see the beauty of the shadows.

_The Confrontation of the Traditional and the Modern: Inside and Beyond Ideology_

Ainsi, il fit mine d’être scandalisé en constatant que le village ne connaisse ni l’eau courante ni l’électricité.
--L’eau courante?

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123 Translation: We lingered until the evening so that we could be amazed by the pale circles of light that unmasked the night leaving all objects indecently exposed. We felt the shame one feel upon walking in by accident on a moment of intimacy. We no longer dared to look. The washed out colors of the objects increased our discomfort and we hurried home (188).
Oui, dans ta propre maison, tu tournes un bouton, et en une mystérieuse résurgence, jaillit le jet furieux, plus fort que liquide nacré d’adolescent pénétrant sa première femme.

En notre source, nous avons l’eau chantante et minérale, plus joyeuse que vierge au jour de ses noces.

Et l’électricité ?

A quoi cela peut-il servir ?

A éclairer les rues, à faire fonctionner les appareils domestiques.

Quelles rues ? Quels appareils ? (21)

Long before electric lights arrive in Zitouna, modernity creeps in with the return of Georgeaud, a Zitouni who lived in France for twenty years after fighting in the French military in the first World War. When he returns unannounced with suitcases full of bizarre objects, he has this odd conversation with the villagers, whose lives it appears have remained untouched by technological conveniences in the span of Georgeaud’s absence. In this (cross-?) cultural interaction, the boundary between France and her colonial department is established not only on technological grounds (running water vs. natural spring water), but on the cultural grounds of convenience and productivity versus traditional modes of living. The boundary between France and Algeria is thus, already at this early point in the novel, not simply navigated between haves and have-nots, but instead, it is already an ambivalent boundary that changes in meaning, if not location, depending on individual valuations. Additionally, because of the fluidity of this boundary necessitated by historical conditions like the world war, this boundary can no longer be cleanly maintained with the French on one side and Algerians on the other. It is a native son that is introducing them to foreign machines as well as foreign ideas. This distinction will become even less clear when Algeria achieves independence and the will to modernize becomes even more fraught by the questions of what Algeria’s new identity should be. Further, although his authenticity as one of them is not something the villagers are willing to question, this loyalty is
problematized from the start as even Georgeaud’s name, he imports with him from France, assuming it from the name of the company for whom he worked “Georgeaud et Fils.”

This scene with Georgeaud exemplifies the kind of conversation that occurs throughout the book and which the book as a whole is representing. As much as the Zitouni elders resist it, modern ideas and technologies, whether introduced by Georgeaud, the French colonials, or other Algerians like Omar or “the lepers,” keep insisting that the community reconsider the way it does things. When offered a choice to adopt new things the villagers always reject it, and when the changes are imposed upon them, they inevitably lose. What is unusual about this intersection of the modern and tribal way of life that is revisited over and over in the text is how it resists the politically ideological reading that so many critics want to attach to it. The standard categorization of postcolonial literature is either Mimouni is a progressivist, who views the villagers as backwards and precious in a primitive sort of way, tragically ill-suited to adapt to their new conditions or he is a nostalgist, idealizing the villagers’ blind resistance while making Georgeaud an unwitting pawn in the modern world’s plot to corrupt and eventually destroy this untarnished simple life.

Neither response is satisfying. As Mimouni is clearly having fun with the naiveté on both sides of this scene, elevating the mundanity of running water (regardless of its evident convenience) to the highest heights of sensual experiences, the joke is at the reader’s expense as well. Our enjoyment of this scene verifies the patronizing assumptions we bring to the text for how this interaction should go, keeping both parties safely below our enlightened plane of sophistication. By keeping the reader in a state of ambivalence as to how to view modernity’s

124 One of the most perplexing attributes of Faulkner’s writing for many critics and scholars is how his rural characters manage to obtain such a heightened level of consciousness. With the limited exposure that characters like Addie Bundren or Joe Christmas have to the metropolis, how do they obtain such a sophisticated view of their position? In fact, many see this penchant of Faulkner as a discredit to the fidelity
imposition on the tribe, Mimouni asserts the value of his texts as more than devices of political instigation. Despite his stated interest in using literature as a political tool, his resistance to offering a clear ideological message attests to his constitution first and foremost as a novelist. Out of deference to his craft, Mimouni resists misleading his audience into false clarity for the shallow assurance of never being misunderstood. Instead, Zitouna’s tussle with modernity is blurry, playing off modern society’s own contrary predilections to be seduced by the excitement of newness and equally the elegant simplicity of the past.

The antithetical relationship of the narrator to the narration is another example of this unstable representation. *L’Honneur*’s narrator exemplifies how tradition can frame a villager’s way of being in the world. He opens his story in the traditional way of the North African storyteller, beginning his performance in the halqa (the traditional storytelling circle) with an invocation to Allah: “du nom du Très-Haut, l’Omniscient, le Créateur de tout événement et le maître de tous les destins”(11). In this way the story about to be told is already claiming two genealogies both from the Islamic and indigenous North African storytelling tradition, which predates the Islamic conquest of the region. While on the one hand, this opening identifies our narrator as someone who is saturated in tradition, it also speaks to an already present incongruity in his traditional practices: while storytelling is a well-established practice in North African villages, it is incompatible with Islamic doctrine which claims that the Koran is the complete text, making all other narratives unnecessary. The narrator even admits to the superfluity of his story when he says of the Koran, “Dans le grand livre du monde, il a tout consigné”(11). Hence, on the first page of the novel, even before the narrator has a chance to persuade us of his representation. Here in this scene, Mimouni gives us our expectations in the form of pleasant hyperbole, as if daring the reader to feel confirmed in their prejudices.

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125 Translation: In the name of the Most High, the Omniscient one, the Creator of all creatures, the Director of all events, the master of all destinies (11).
126 Translation: “In the great book of the world, He has recorded everything” (11).
quiet “petrifié”(13) version of village life, there is evidence that their lives, perhaps not completely dissimilar from the “frenetic” lives that Georgeaud describes in metropolitan France (15), requires accommodating contradictory elements.

Further complicating the reader’s understanding of the narrator’s relationship to his narration is what follows his invocation to God: “Comme il ne s’agit pas d’un conte, il n’est pas nécessaire d’attendre la nuit pour raconter de crainte que nos enfants ne naissent chauves”(11).127 This is not a fable, he announces. He does not wish to be Scheherazade from The Arabian Nights, and thus in spite of the traditional opening, the narrator seeks to establish his text along the lines of a different genre, more like Maupassant or Flaubert of the French realists than his own more fantastical literary heritage. While he may be seeking to validate his story with this explanation, as is common in Mimouni’s texts, the narrator reveals more than he intended. By setting forth his intention of telling a true-to-life story, while at the same time revealing the superstition about storytelling that if recited in the daytime would cause infantile baldness, the narrator simultaneously denies and reinforces the reader’s ideas about North African orientalism—despite the narrator’s insistence that the text is a testimonial, superstition and the supernatural still emerge.128 The more explicitly the narrator frames this narrative for us, the less sure we can be sure what kind of narrative it actually is.

The narrator tells his story with careful detail as if his audience can comprehend him.129 He recounts the events as if they were all black and white, as if Zitouna really were a “lieu de désolation”(41) where outside concerns could not reach them. And the narrator appears to

127 Translation: As this is not a tale, it is not necessary to wait for nighttime for fear of children being born without hair.
128 For more on the unusual opening of L’honneur de la tribu, See Yamilé Ghebalou’s essay, “Mythes, Images et Imageries de l’Ecriture” and Khalid Zekri’s Incipit et clausules dans les romans de Rachid Mimouni.
129 The conceit of the text is that, in spite of it actually being written in French, the narrator is telling the story of Zitouna in his tribal language to a man who cannot understand it, but sits listening to and recording the story anyway.
confirm many of the stereotypes of rural people whose lives are secluded from the outside world. In addition to superstitious, they are passive, anti-ambitious, and xenophobic (“C’est toujours par les étrangers que le malheur arrive ”(35)). They are narrow-minded conformists who condemn the singularity of le père d’Ali, who wishes for his son to have a French education(22). In other words, they resist romanticization (what Naget Khadda refers to as “la valorisatrice de la rusticité et de la pureté champêtre” that was part of the mythology established by earlier writers like Mohammed Dib (Lectures algeriennes 80)).

However, the tribe, archaic as the formulation may sound, is clearly not a place to be discounted either. As Beida Chikhi observes with regard to the novel’s treatment of the supernatural, the same could easily be said for the entire village, “Mimouni joue de cette ambiguité entre accession valorisante et degradation”(52). The mythology surrounding la vallée heureuse is both beautiful and grotesque. With irony saturated on both sides of the debate between modernization and tradition, Mimouni makes the tribe unseizable. The Mimounian landscape may be as Catherine Gallouet claims “semantiquement lourd,” but that doesn’t mean that these symbols provide stable relationships of meaning (132).

Essentially what Mimouni does is take the tribe, which should be the representation of Algeria distilled to its essence, the parts of the country that are unconfused by outside pressures trying to redefine it—it is the most traditional social formation in the country living by traditional means. And yet, as Robert Elbaz argues, “Zitouna, loin d’être un espace monolithique, est le berceau d’une pluralité d’entités tribale et culturelle, un espace matriciel, par excellence, ou s’enchevêtrent et s’interpénètrent tous ses ressortissants, originaires ou par adoption ”(102). In this way, Mimouni again defies those who seek to use the stereotypes of tribal life for promoting
political ideologies. “Pour ce qui est de Zitouna, la recherche ne peut donc point aboutir a une lignée particulière. Toutes les identités sont brouillées et s'interpénètrent” (Elbaz 102).

This seemingly inconsequential village, chosen by the Zitounis expressly for its desolation in the hope that no one will come to seize it from them (41), is a turbulent microcosm of the nascent state of Algeria. Within this village, religious and cultural confrontations become personal, as individuals vie to enforce a history, to combat or reinforce myth, to ascribe good and evil to various traditions and reforms, and to “fix” its way of life in both contradictory senses of the word (that is, to freeze, but also to repair or set right i.e. to modernize). Considering the actuality and consequences of this severe disconnection between decreed boundaries and their social reality, Mimouni aggravates, repolemizizes and confuses long-standing divisions between like and difference, as he attempts to sort out the cultural consequences of such disruptions. Thus, the simple superficial cultural boundaries here first differentiated by running water and spring water are ineradicably unsettled, as the villagers, the surrogate colonial forces of French “modernity” and the fledgling Algerian national bureaucrats vie against each other for the authority to dictate what they see as the proper universal worldview. Complicating this interaction is the multifarious history of this rural village, which remains active and influential in this confrontation between old and new, breaking down the paradigm of urban modes being dominant while the traditional community is solely reactive.
“Her desolation to the desolate sky”: A Future for Rural Poetics?

“Desolation” is a term that appears several times in this study—with enough frequency at least to lure one into contemplating its meaning and literary functionality. Its definition in the Oxford English Dictionary covers three related attributes: “the condition of a place which by hostile ravaging or by natural character is unfit for habitation”; “deprivation of companionship” or “the condition or sense of being forsaken”; and “deprivation of comfort or joy.” This, to me, presents an interesting conundrum as to how we might think about the rural in the 20th century. On the one hand, the frequency of this term suggests the disposability of these spaces. If it doesn’t literally surpass the limits of what is habitable, the rural’s figurative inhabitability still suggests an unsuitability for representing the broader temporally-contingent experience of Modernity. That these spaces are isolating, that they give off an impression that they lack companionship to other geographies, further supports the contention that the experience of the rural lacks reach. It is ill-suited for speaking to concerns beyond the local.

To the contrary, however, *Reviving the Rural* has argued it is because these conditions are so present in the rural that modernism with all its alienating qualities appears so vivid in it. This pervasive sense of deprivation, even when we don’t know precisely what we feel deprived of, is, in fact, a signature trait of the Modern. From Leopold Bloom’s explicit statement in *Ulysses* (61) to its inferred ubiquity in “The Wasteland” or *Mrs. Dalloway*, desolation may be what best describes the individual’s encounter with the Modern, which is largely what the modernist novel tries to represent. As such one might contend that when one experiences desolation in a city that this psychic state has a kinship, not just with the impersonality of the city, which is a common
association, but with the spatiality of the rural, which is not. Far from being narratively exhausted, the rural as a borderland tenuously spanning the past and the present, society and alienation, community and the individual, ably represents the challenges of the Modern, perhaps all the more so, because it encompasses a mode of living that is not highly visible in society and that only a minority of the developed world still experience firsthand.

Of further interest is the shape of futurity in the rural. Though the rural’s association with the past is well-documented here and elsewhere, this study has also been concerned with the critical role the rural of the 20th century plays in our imagination of the future. The desolation of the rural in modern literature is often not, in fact, a description of present circumstances, but the anticipation of a dilapidated future yet to come as described in Yeats’s poem from page 127: “the roofless min” set against the “desolate sky.” So much of the rural imaginary in the 20th century reflects upon what might happen when it, and we by association, eventually lose out to the city—where the history, perhaps, will remain but the ways of living will be lost to time. While the characters of modern rural novels perceive and react to the threat of their impending irrelevance and the dissolution of their particular socio-cultural structures of meaning, this examination of the poetics of the modern rural novel leaves us with the question of what will happen to our perception of the Modern as this critical reference point continues to lose its footing. In a new century, where the remainders of traditional rural communities are overrun by factory farms on the production end and Wal-marts and Starbucks for consumption, where will the pockets of resistance to modernization be found for writers and artists to document?

Happily, for the novelistic pursuit of the Modern in the 20th century, the rural still remained vibrant enough to contest the narrative hegemony of the city. Above all else, this project has sought to persuade its reader that the rural should not be discounted merely because it
is not “at the heart of things” nor should it be ignored because its pace of change is less visible. It is particularly in its apartness, in the contrast of its slower tempo, that its relevance is found.

In his work *Territory of the Historian*, Emmanuel le Roy Ladurie states for his reader, as though there was good reason to believe otherwise, that “rural civilization has not yet lain down and died, either gracefully or ungracefully” (109). *Reviving the Rural* demonstrates not only the truth of this claim, but the disciplinary importance of its recognition.
Works Cited


---. Interview with Belinda McKeon. (See McKeon.)


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