

2008

Apocalypse South: Judgment, Cataclysm, and Resistance in the Regional Imaginary

Anthony Hofer

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations



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

Recommended Citation

Hofer, Anthony, "Apocalypse South: Judgment, Cataclysm, and Resistance in the Regional Imaginary" (2008). *LSU Doctoral Dissertations*. 2071.

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/2071

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

APOCALYPSE SOUTH: JUDGMENT, CATACLYSM,
AND RESISTANCE IN THE REGIONAL IMAGINARY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of English

by
Anthony Hoefer
B.A., Wofford College, 2000
M.A., University of Alabama, 2003
May 2008

© Copyright 2008
Anthony D. Hoefler, Jr.
All rights reserved.

in memory of
John Cleveland Cobb
(1953-2004)
Associate Professor of English, Wofford College
guitar and vocals, The 88s

and

for Kate

*“It is an ethical obligation to look for hope;
it is an ethical obligation not to despair.”*

-Tony Kushner

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 12:21

Acknowledgments

While this dissertation is attributed to a single author, it reflects the contributions of dozens of others—friends, family members, colleagues, and teachers who have offered their insight, inspiration, support, and timely distractions. In particular, I owe many thanks to my good friend Mason Brown: in the spring of 2004, Mason sent me a mix CD full of God-fearing blues, country, gospel, and traditional folk songs. That disc was entitled *Apocalypse Southern*. And so it all began.

Mason's contribution might be the most obvious, but so many others have helped in equally important ways. I'll begin with my family: thanks to Mom, Dad, Paul, and Emily for the continued support/indulgence of their eldest son and brother. I also want to thank John, Len, and Will Carpenter and Claire & Jim Avant for welcoming me into their family.

I can't imagine anyone pursuing academic life without the inspiration of other teachers, and I'm proud to be following the path laid by my mother and my mother-in-law, two great teachers. In addition to them, I've been mentored by some of the best: Chuck McCord and Diane McKenzie at Wilson Hall; Bernie & Anne Dunlap and Larry McGehee at Wofford College, who together convinced me to pursue an academic life; the faculty of the Governor's School of South Carolina at the College of Charleston, who confirmed that decision; and Jim Salem, Rich Megraw, and Stacey Morgan at the University of Alabama, who helped me begin my career. The entire English Department at LSU has provided a nurturing and challenging environment, and that has much to do with the leadership of its chair, Anna Nardo, who also happens to be a great teacher. Many thanks to the members of my committee: I have greatly benefited from my

associations with Brannon Costello, Jerry Kennedy, Katherine Henninger, and Rick Moreland. In particular, I'd like to thank Rick, who served as the department's Director of Undergraduate Study during my time at LSU: his willingness to share his time and his experience with other teachers seems boundless. And of course, I'd be hard pressed to find a more supportive dissertation director than John Lowe: thanks for pushing me when I needed pushing, offering praise when it was required, and consistently providing a model for how to do this job.

I also want to thank two incredible colleagues (and fellow South Carolinians!), Courtney George and Scott Whiddon: your advice and insights have been instrumental, and your support is greatly appreciated. I hope I've been able to return the favor. Many thanks also to the friends who've provided additional moral support and crucial distractions during this process: Keith Moody, Scott Gage, Melissa & Joe Baustian, and Jessica & Duncan Kemp.

Finally and most importantly, thanks to Kate: you came into my life early in this process, and so you've had to live with it every bit as much as I have. I appreciate your willingness to listen to ideas and the time you spent reviewing my work. However, your real contribution goes far beyond the project: you made the dissertation better by making my life better. Your presence allowed me to put the dissertation in its appropriate place; thanks to you, I've been able to step away from the work to simply enjoy our lives, and then, to come back to the table with fresh ideas and renewed confidence. What follows in these pages is not my achievement, but ours. I can't wait to see what we come up with next!

Table of Contents

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vii
INTRODUCTION: TRACING THE APOCALYPTIC IMAGINARY.....	1
CHAPTER 1: “ON THE BRINK OF THE CATARACT”: COMMUNITY AND THE APOCALYPTIC RITUAL OF LYNCHING IN FAULKNER’S <i>LIGHT IN AUGUST</i>	25
CHAPTER 2: “TEARING DOWN THE TEMPLE”: RICHARD WRIGHT’S MILLENNIAL RESISTANCE.....	77
CHAPTER 3: “AN’T THE MEASURE MADE YET?”: MAPPING APOCALYPSE ALONG THE MARGINS OF SOUTHERN COMMUNITIES IN <i>BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA</i>	115
CHAPTER 4: “SOME SAY AIN’T NO EARTHLY EXPLANATION”: EXCAVATING THE APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPE OF RANDALL KENAN’S TIMS CREEK.....	147
EPILOGUE: APOCALYPSE SOUTH, <i>REDUX</i> : SEARCHING FOR MEANING AFTER THE FLOOD.....	187
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	215
VITA.....	226

Abstract

This project investigates manifestations of Apocalypse in selected works of southern fiction, each of which simultaneously draws upon the cosmology of southern evangelical Protestantism and disrupts that cosmology's power to govern the discourses of race, class, and gender in the U.S. South. *Apocalypse South* proposes that invocations of the Apocalypse are signs of deferred meaning—of hidden histories of undifferentiation, hybridity, and contradiction which defy the prevailing discourses that configure social relationships in southern spaces and places. Southern religious culture maps Apocalypse onto the boundaries of race, class, and gender and imparts catastrophic consequences to their violations. However, the works investigated by this project appropriate these apocalyptic spaces in order to articulate histories neglected and even concealed by the prevailing discourses of southern community. I contend that these works engage a recognizable *regional apocalyptic imaginary*: they conjure a landscape fraught with the apocalyptic possibilities of cataclysm, judgment, deliverance, revolution, and, above all else, a hope that things will get better. *Apocalypse South* charts this “unseen world of archangels and prophets and folk rising from the dead” (to borrow Randall Kenan's words) through readings of William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Kenan's *A Visitation of Spirits* and “Let the Dead Bury Their Dead,” and the apocalypticism evident in representations of the 2005 flooding of New Orleans

Introduction: Tracing the Apocalyptic Imaginary

*Fear the hearts of men are failing
These our latter days we know
The great depression now is spreading
God's word declared it would be so*

*I'm going where there's no depression
To a better land that's free from care
I'll leave this world of toil and trouble
My home's in heaven
I'm going there*

*In this dark hour, midnight nearing
The tribulation time will come
The storms will hurl the midnight fear
And sweep lost millions to their doom*

*I'm going where there's no depression
To a better land that's free from care
I'll leave this world of toil and trouble
My home's in heaven
I'm going there*

*I'm going where there's no depression
To a better land that's free from care
I'll leave this world of toil and trouble
My home's in heaven
I'm going there*

-The Carter Family, "There's No Depression in Heaven"

The Carter Family recorded the song "There's No Depression in Heaven" in 1936, the same year that Dorothea Lange photographed "Migrant Mother" and James Agee and Walker Evans first began the project that would become *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The song—a selection from a popular shaped-note songbook rather than an original composition—remains among their most notable and frequently covered.¹ The

¹ The song holds a seminal position within the pop genre variously referred to as alternative-country/Americana/roots music: the alternative-country group Uncle Tupelo recorded it for their 1990

Carters were not a gospel act, and their professional aims did not include an evangelistic mission (Malone 93). Nonetheless, the song is indicative of an effort to employ the cosmology of evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestantism in order to make some sense of an experience that is all but incomprehensible in its scope and complexity. Facing instability wrought by drought, foreclosure, plummeting tobacco and cotton prices,² and the early stages of the Great Migration of African Americans from the South,³ the Carters' audience tuned their transistor radios to 650 kHz and sought solace in a signal broadcasting from Nashville's WSM to homes across the South (and indeed, across the continent at night). By casting the contemporary crisis in the familiar words of Scripture, Carter songs like "There's No Depression in Heaven," "The World is Not My Home," and "Can the Circle Be Unbroken" reconfigured chaos as the realization of prophesy ("The great depression now is spreading/ God's word declared it would be so"). Such songs endow even the most awful consequences of this catastrophe with meaning, and they situate the current moment of suffering as the fulcrum upon which the future depends: the darkest moment—"midnight"—is upon us, and the coming storms of the Tribulation will "sweep lost millions to their doom." The suffering of this moment, however, will be redeemed because it is a necessary step in the progression toward ultimate deliverance—a point in the journey toward "a better land that's free from care."

album, *No Depression*, and that truncated title was appropriated for the bimonthly magazine devoted to the genre.

² The 1920s and '30s were a time of rapid economic expansion in southern cities, as well as growth in the textile, mining, and steel industries. However, as Roger Biles notes, the bulk of the South's population could be found in rural areas and did not experience this prosperity; rather, for "southern farmers . . . the Great Depression immediately meant more misery and deprivation" following the collapse of cotton prices in 1920-21, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, and the drought of 1930-31 (18). According to Biles, "From 1929 to 1932, the value of cotton sales dropped from \$1.5 billion to \$45 million, and income from the cigarette tobacco crop declined by two-thirds."

³ For instance, fully 14 percent of Mississippi's population of black men between 15 and 34 years old left the state during the 1920s (Godden 11).

Crucially, that deliverance is configured in two ways: the most immediate and singular of these is death when the *individual* “leave[s] this world of toil and trouble” for his or her heavenly home. However, the invocation of the “tribulation times” refers to the *collective, communal* deliverance promised by the millennial return of Christ.

“There’s No Depression in Heaven” offers hope to an audience in a hopeless moment, reminding them of the promise of imminent deliverance from worldly suffering. In doing so, it engages the apocalyptic imaginary of southern evangelical culture, employing an otherworldly, historical vision as a hermeneutic that will explain the experiences of *this* world. The uses of Apocalypse within this culture and others are often at cross-purposes: the rhetoric of God’s judgment is invoked to ascribe cataclysmic consequences to violations of the prevailing social order, but, as in the case of the Carters’ song, it offers a prophecy of deliverance and justice to the oppressed and the marginalized. This project investigates the apparently contradictory uses of the Apocalypse and seeks to access its emancipatory possibilities through readings of selected literary texts that respond to the religious culture of the U.S. South. Each of these works simultaneously draws upon the cosmology of southern evangelical Protestantism and disrupts that cosmology’s power to govern the discourses of race, class, and gender in the U.S. South. *Apocalypse South* proposes that invocations of the Apocalypse are signs of deferred meaning—of hidden histories of undifferentiation, hybridity, and contradiction that defy the prevailing discourses that configure social relationships in southern spaces and places. Southern religious culture maps Apocalypse onto the boundaries of race, class, and gender and imparts catastrophic consequences to their violations. However, the works investigated by this project appropriate these apocalyptic

spaces in order to articulate histories neglected and even concealed by the prevailing discourses of southern community. I contend that these works engage a recognizable regional *apocalyptic imaginary*: they conjure a landscape fraught with the apocalyptic possibilities of cataclysm, judgment, deliverance, revolution, and above all else a hope that things will get better. *Apocalypse South* charts this “unseen world of archangels and prophets and folk rising from the dead,” to borrow Randall Kenan’s words (*A Visitation* 16).

In Chapter One, “**On the Brink of the Cataract’: Community and the Apocalyptic Ritual of Lynching in Faulkner’s *Light in August* ,” I argue that *Light in August* stages the convergence of southern evangelical Protestantism and U.S. millenarian nationalism rather than treating them as related but ultimately distinct phenomena. In Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County, Apocalypse is used to reify the racialized boundaries of community, and it informs the shape and substance of the ritual violence of lynching. The disparate strands of apocalypticism and millenarianism come together just as the novel and the community it depicts are both on the verge of complete collapse. The novel’s drive to reconsider history—to *reinterpret* the signs of the times—suggests a broader ecumenical engagement with the Apocalypse of modernism and late modernity. The chapter expands and revises previous examinations of the religious influences and implications of Faulkner’s work, as well as the critical texts on lynching.**

In Chapter Two, “**Tearing Down the Temple’: Richard Wright’s Millennial Resistance,**” I move from the apocalyptic justifications for lynching to the millennial and apocalyptic responses of African Americans to the oppression of lynch law and Jim Crow segregation. By casting a Marxist teleology within the typology of Scripture, Wright’s

short story cycle *Uncle Tom's Children* articulates a call for resistance and revolution that attends to the collective experiences of rural African Americans. While much Wright scholarship criticizes his work for its perceived dismissal of African American culture, I situate *Uncle Tom's Children* within the conventions of black spirituality, including its prophetic traditions and millennial hopes. I further argue that the cycle disrupts prevailing historical narratives of region and nation: in it, Wright depicts the black suffering that dominant systems of representation disavow and clears out the discursive and narrative space necessary to insert the black experience into a meaningful teleology.

In Chapter Three, “**An’t It Time the Lord Did Something?: Mapping Deliverance and Judgment in *Bastard Out of Carolina*,**” I contend that Dorothy Allison’s novel provokes readers to uncover what is otherwise concealed by the discourses that produce the South as a singular and stable, if fading, entity. The novel’s alienated, adolescent narrator, Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright, seeks salvation in gospel music, and she fantasizes of the moment in which a divine justice will be levied against both her abusive stepfather and the social institutions which marginalize her family. While apocalyptic discourse often reifies the boundaries of class and gender, it also provides a discursive space in which Bone can articulate the traumatic experiences that do not yield to representation through prevailing gendered, heteronormative discourses. By appropriating these apocalyptic spaces, the novel denies the cataclysmic consequences imparted to violations of these boundaries and demands that Bone’s experiences be located in the very southern geographies that reject her presence.

Chapter Four, “**Some Say Ain't No Earthly Explanation’: Excavating the Apocalyptic Landscape of Randall Kenan’s *Tims Creek*,**” continues the previous

chapter's discussion of marginal spaces in the rural Carolinas, moving from Allison's Greenville to Randall Kenan's fictional Tims Creek, North Carolina. In *A Visitation of Spirits* and the story "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead," Kenan conjures the apocalyptic imaginary from the realm of reference and allusion into stunning tangibility. I contend that the invocations of Apocalypse in these works address a lost history of resistance that disrupts prevailing white narratives of history as well as the patriarchal and heteronormative orders that shape this black community. Kenan does not reject these structures or the southern communities they govern; rather his fiction works, like Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* and Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, to activate the liberating, resistant potential of place.

The Epilogue, "**Apocalypse South, Redux: Searching for Meaning After the Flood,**" concludes the project with an examination of various invocations of Apocalypse in the aftermath of the recent southern catastrophe Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans. I examine the public comments of various political and religious leaders, the apocalyptic imagery and language in popular media coverage of the flood, and finally, the apocalyptic structure of John Biguenet's Pulitzer-nominated play *Rising Water*. I conclude by arguing for the continuing utility of Apocalypse as a discursive and narrative medium, not only for representing the devastation, but also for exploring the genealogy of the event and demanding justice in response to this disaster.

The Means and Ends of The End

Given the subject at hand, this project begins with *endings*—specifically, the relationship of fictional endings to the ultimate, cosmological End of Apocalypse.⁴ It is

⁴ Bull and other scholars use *apocalyptic* as a noun to denote a genre of writing and to distinguish that genre from the specific events envisioned by various religious traditions. I will use *Apocalypse*, with a

necessary to reach a provisional, working definition of the *Apocalypse* to map the parameters of the evangelical apocalyptic imaginary and to examine the possibilities it offers. In *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*, Malcolm Bull asks:

What is apocalyptic? A genre in which the heavenly mysteries are communicated through supernatural revelation? A belief that all history has a single irreversible conclusion? A teleological framework for the understanding of evil? An attempt to usher in a new era by redefining the rules of the redemptive process? A sense that each passing moment stands in some significant relation to a beginning and an end? A tone of disclosure, perhaps distinct from the content of the discourse, revelatory if only in that it reveals itself? (47)

Of course, Bull would not ask such questions if the answer was not implicit: Apocalypse can, is, and has been all of the above. According to Douglas Robinson, Apocalypse is a “branch of eschatology” (or “doctrines about last things”) that seeks “to explore the unveiling of the future in the present, the encroachment of a radically new order into the historical situation that has disintegrated into chaos” (xii). Robinson’s choice of the word *unveiling* is not a mere coincidence: “The Greek word *apokalypsis* means to unveil, to disclose, to reveal,” according to Catherine Keller (xii), and “[p]rebiblically...connotes the marital stripping of the veiled virgin” (1).

Conventionally, the disclosure of hidden information is hardly as easy an act as pulling away a piece of silk. In the popular imagination, Apocalypse is neither a genre that simply reveals the future nor a discourse about “last things” but rather, the ultimate, cataclysmic event which brings history to an end. Such a conception is based (though not dependent) upon literalist Scriptural hermeneutics, which interpret the violent upheaval envisioned in the central apocalyptic text of Christianity, the Revelation of St. John, as well as the Hebraic apocalypses as prophecies of events that will come to pass. In this

capital “A,” to refer to a particular vision of the world’s end, and the uncapitalized *apocalypse* to denote the genre, a work within the genre, and/or the specific Scriptural antecedents. Finally, *apocalyptic* will be used as an adjective to describe a text’s relative affinity with the genre.

vision, chaos is not the ultimate consequence of apocalyptic cataclysms; implicit in destruction, as Robinson's definition suggests, is the promise of "cleansing...radical renewal" (Zamora 10). The extant chaos of the current epoch comes to end, and a new, just order is established. The apocalyptic narrative is a matter of resolution—of solving and ending all contradiction, chaos, and disorder; of clearing away all unanswered questions and mysteries; of burning away all impurities to reveal ultimate Truth; of bringing consonance out of dissonance.

Apocalyptic discourse, then, is not only concerned with the instance of resolution, but also all that precedes it. "One of the central and universal functions of religion," writes John B. Boles, "is to supply an interpretative context for life, to provide a meaning system that explains and makes sense out of those events—both tragic and joyful—that transcend everyday and obvious cause-and-effect relationships" (236). The degree to which this hermeneutic can transcend "cause-and-effect" models, however, is limited. According to Hayden White, in order to make reality understandable, we inevitably "narrativize" reality: we "impose order in the form of a story, with its well-marked beginning, middle, and end, upon experience" (9). We need only to consider the language we use to describe our own lives to see the necessity of sequence. Many, if not most, of our metaphors for a life—its "direction," its "course," its "path," even the Frostian "road"—are not only teleological, but inscribed in terms of progress: we move not only *in time* toward a culminating moment (*a telos*) but also *in space* toward a destination. However, it is impossible to determine the meaning of such progress or its relative success or failure without an objective in mind. Even the *tick* of clock is incomplete—and

thus, meaninglessness—without “the feeble apocalypse” of a subsequent tock, Frank Kermode writes in *The Sense of an Ending* (45).

“In the midst” of history—that is, within the plot we envision as our individual and/or communal lives—individuals “make considerable imaginative investments in the coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle,” writes Kermode (17). We envision an end, a culmination, or a destination, and the meaning of every event is determined as a step toward or away from that ultimate *telos*. “[T]here is still a need to speak humanly of a life’s importance in relation to [time],” as Kermode illustrates, “a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and an end” (4). “In the midst,” however, the End—the moment of coherence—is not visible, and so we must create an End that, at least provisionally, resolves our story. In Kermode’s estimation, history’s most important function is as a “maker of concords between past, present, and future, a provider of significance to mere chronicity” (56). Apocalypse is the last gasp of history, the final *tock* of chronicity, and the moment that determines the significance of all that precedes it. Apocalypse marks the ultimate destination toward which history propels us; it closes the narrative of history, and it provides an ending that determines the story’s ultimate meaning. While any effort to determine the consequences of a given moment is necessarily conjectural and provisional work (just as imagining the future is), Kermode and White both contend that Western epistemologies offer few recourses for making sense of experience. Apocalypse, then, is signifying on the grandest scale with the most essential value judgments at stake: all that the events of history and of our lives might mean is contingent upon what we imagine our End might be.

The Eschatological Imperatives of Nation and Region

As efforts to generate totalizing historical narratives, nationalist ideologies almost always incorporate some degree of apocalyptic thinking. The project of the nation is imagined as a historical inevitability, and that history is configured toward a triumphant *telos*. The United States is no exception: rarely do articulations of the meaning of the project of the United States, from the earliest moments of European conquest to the current notions of the nation's role as a global superpower, fail to ascribe eschatological implications to it. In a letter dated 1500 (a year fraught with millennial significance), Christopher Columbus suggested that the Americas were, in fact, “the new heaven and new earth, which Our Lord made—as St. John writes in Revelations,” and that, through his discovery, he realized the prophetic words of Isaiah: ““He made me the messenger and he showed me where to go”” (265).

Columbus was hardly alone in assigning profound eschatological significance to his discovery. The Columbian mission would be reimagined and reconfigured within the millennial and millenarian⁵ ideologies that justified European colonial efforts in North America and later the civic culture of American exceptionalism. Seminal studies such as Perry Miller's *Errand into the Wilderness* (1957), Tuveson's *Redeemer Nation* (1968), and Sacvan Bercovich's *The American Jeremiad* (1978) point to Puritan millenarianism as a significant source of the ideological underpinnings of American national identity and nationalism. Tuveson enumerates several defining themes of American millenarianism: “Chosen race, chosen nation; millennial-utopian destiny for mankind; a continuing war

⁵ Millennialism, generally, describes any historical vision which prophesies a thousand-year reign of the returned Christ; millenarianism refers to often-secularized versions of this belief, which envision revolutionary historic change as recent or imminent and imagine the consequence of this change to be inevitable and unending progress toward a near-utopian society.

between good (progress) and evil (reaction) in which the United States is to play a starring role as world redeemer” (*vii-viii*). Even in its most secular manifestations, this vision of history is predicated upon sacred models. Tuveson traces the roots of American millenarianism to colonial Puritan self-identification with the Old Testament history of the Israelites, and more generally, Protestant interpretations of eschatological and apocalyptic time. While Luther positioned the Reformation as occurring *after the millennium* (May 29), New World Puritans formulated their colonial mission as the inauguration of the millennium through the establishment of a godly community destined to lead humanity’s moral regeneration. New World Puritans found context for their efforts outside the Bible’s apocalyptic texts, as well. Like the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, Puritan emigration seemed “a period of trial which would make them worthy of entering a new Promised Land and a New Jerusalem,” writes Richard Slotkin (38-39). By the eighteenth century, the terms of the apocalypse shifted further within colonial theological debate. The foremost early American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, suggested the “new heavens and new earth” described in the Book of Revelations, did not refer to “a far-off divine event,” according to Bercovitch, but rather signified “the stages of these steps in the redemption of society” (57).

The work of scholars like Tuveson and Bercovitch established a narrative which presented New England Puritan theology as the ideological foundation of American nationalism and national identity. Certainly, many scholars have found ample evidence to support this conclusion in the canonical works of U.S. literature.⁶ This narrative holds

⁶ In *White-Jacket*, Herman Melville writes that “we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. Seventy years ago we escaped from thrall; and, besides our first birthright—embracing one continent of earth--God has given to us, for a future inheritance, the broad domains of the political pagans, that shall yet come and lie down under the shade of our ark,

that the theocratic hopes of Edwards and other Puritans were adapted to the secular ideologies of the Enlightenment and democratic republicanism; by the nineteenth century, John May writes, ideologies of nation such as this “tend[ed] toward an anti-apocalyptic understanding of history” (37), without cataclysm or suffering, defined by “a myth of unlimited progress” (31). That progress was explicitly articulated as American and democratic, and implicitly, it was conceived as white and threatened by both Native Americans and enslaved Africans.

More recently, Mark A. Noll, a historian of U.S. religion and religious culture, has shifted the model, emphasizing the impact the Revolution and republicanism had on American theology rather than the other way around. Noll suggests that the Enlightenment liberalism and evangelical Protestantism formed a “synthesis” which he terms “Christian republicanism” (73) and which includes, among its foundational elements, “a nearly messianic belief in the benefits of liberty” (56). Within this unique coalition, the basic concepts of the nation’s chosen status and its millennial, redemptive historical mission are secularized. In his work, Noll has correctly expanded the parameters of the investigation into the cosmological influences on U.S. millenarian nationalism beyond New England. However, more work remains to be done; in particular, urgent attention must now be paid to the cosmology of southern evangelical Protestantism. The final quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the Christian conservative political movement, drawn substantially from the-once-decentralized network of southern evangelical churches, as a powerful force within U.S. electoral

without bloody hands being lifted. God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours” (506).

politics and in U.S. foreign policy.⁷ According to Republican political strategist-cum-popular historian Kevin Phillips, the South “long ago passed New England as the region most caught up in manifest destiny and covenanted relationships with God. It has become the banner region of American exceptionalism, with no small admixture of southern exceptionalism” (125). However, an unforeseen consequence of the explosive growth of evangelical Protestantism in the United States has been a newfound diversity of opinions, leading to fractures over issues of sexual politics and social justice.⁸ As this project will show, this is hardly a new phenomenon; rather, such diversity is deeply rooted in the history of evangelical Christianity. This cosmology is pregnant with progressive possibilities: specifically, the apocalyptic imaginary is charged with emancipatory

⁷ Kevin Phillips writes: “In the twentieth century . . . religious zeal in the United States usually focused on something quite different: individual pursuit of salvation though spiritual rebirth, often in circumstances of sect-driven millenarian countdowns to the so-called end times and an awaited return of Christ. These beliefs have often been accompanied by great revivals; emotionalism; eccentricities of quaking, shaking, and speaking in tongues; characterization of the Bible as inerrant; and wild-eyed invocation of dubious prophecies in the Book of Revelation. No other contemporary Western nation shares this religious intensity and its concomitant proclamation that Americans are God’s chosen people and nation. George W. Bush has averred this belief on many occasions” (100). While academic historians have been critical of Phillips’s scholarship, his insight into evangelical political activism should not be taken lightly: it was Phillips who developed Richard M. Nixon’s so-called “Southern Strategy,” the first step in establishing the South as a Republican stronghold.

⁸ A new “confluence of factors is threatening to tear the [Evangelical political] movement apart,” writes David C. Kirkpatrick in the *New York Times Magazine* (68). A “younger generation of evangelical pastors — including the widely emulated preachers Rick Warren and Bill Hybels — are pushing the movement and its theology in new directions. There are many related ways to characterize the split: a push to better this world as well as save eternal souls; a focus on the spiritual growth that follows conversion rather than the yes-or-no moment of salvation; a renewed attention to Jesus’ teachings about social justice as well as about personal or sexual morality. However conceived, though, the result is a new interest in public policies that address problems of peace, health and poverty — problems, unlike abortion and same-sex marriage, where left and right compete to present the best answers” (69). The candidacy of former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister and one-time religious broadcaster, for the Republican Presidential nomination, functions as a de facto referendum at the time of this writing. Despite his evangelical credentials, Huckabee’s economic populism has left him at odds with significant figures within the coalition of fiscal and social conservatives: notably, Pat Robertson, the founder of the Christian Coalition, has endorsed Rudy Giuliani. While Huckabee may assail the Club for Growth, a power conservative economic lobby, as the “Club for Greed,” Huckabee’s cosmology is very much in line with other fundamentalist Christians: “If you’re with Jesus Christ, we know how it turns out in the final moment,” he told a Dallas church, according to *Rolling Stone*’s Matt Taibbi. “I’ve read the last chapter in the book, and we do end up winning” (47)

energies. But, these progressive possibilities have been obscured and displaced by the insurgent political rise of the Christian Right in the United States.

The interrogation of the relationship between U.S. nationalism and the regional imaginary is necessarily interventionist work: it challenges conventional approaches to American literary nationalism as well as to the ideologies that produced the canon of southern literature. The South has long confounded narratives of U.S. exceptionalism; as Leigh Anne Duck has recently noted, the South has been imagined by outsiders as an abject territory, morally deficient (due to the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow) and temporally dislocated (due to the perceived “backwardness” of its poverty and agrarian economy) (*The Nation’s Region 2*).⁹ Conversely, southern writers have often approached narratives of U.S. millenarian nationalism with a great deal of skepticism. Rather than believing their experiences to be in stark contrast to some imagined, representatively American experience, southern writers following Reconstruction were acutely aware of a tendency of these narratives to gloss over certain difficult experiences; they rightly recognized that institutions of slavery and Jim Crow were not an exception to but rather were bound up with efforts of an “increasingly imperialistic United States in the half century following Reconstruction,” according to Barbara Ladd. Ladd has claimed that late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century southern writers were keenly aware of “the implications of defeat in a nationalistic culture, which sees itself as redemptive, as the

⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for instance, imagines slavery as a threat to national virtue, as does Frederick Douglass’s sermon, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”; as Eric J. Sundquist notes in *To Wake the Nations*, Herman Melville’s *Benito Cereno* looks further southward, to the Caribbean and South America, to the cataclysmic possibilities of slavery (135-210).

vanguard of progress,” and thus responded by “construct[ing] the South as dangerous territory—a kind of national ‘id’” (*Nationalism and The Color Line* xii).¹⁰

While these southern writers may have dismissed the historical narratives of American exceptionalism, they certainly did not abandon apocalyptic concerns. Citing exchanges between Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, Scott Romine writes that “an overdeveloped eschatological sense is one of the more enduring characteristics of the southern literary tradition: the southernness of place, it seems, is always in danger of expiring” (26). The collection of southern intellectuals configured variously as the Fugitive Poets, the Agrarians, and the Twelve Southerners who authored *I’ll Take My Stand*¹¹ sought to mobilize traditional forms of southern community against what they viewed as the dehumanizing and alienating consequences of modernity; they did so with the overwhelming sense that the battle was heroic in its futility, and that the South as they knew it was doomed.

One can easily dismiss the apocalyptic concerns of these southern writers as polemics employed in the service of reactionary ideology, authorizing the prevailing racial and social order by ascribing cataclysmic consequences to any transgression against it. Likewise, one might locate the particular eschatological concerns of the patrician intellectuals collected at Vanderbilt University as ideologically opposed to those expressed on the stage of the nearby Grand Ole Opry by the Carter Family in “There’s No Depression in Heaven.” Yet, it is my contention that both, in form and language,

¹⁰ In *Nationalism and the Color Line*, Ladd specifically discusses George Washington Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner; Duck’s study examines Thomas Dixon, Erskine Caldwell, Zora Neale Hurston, Faulkner, and Ralph Ellison.

¹¹ In the opening essay to *I’ll Take My Stand*, John Crowe Ransom writes: “The South is unique on this continent for having founded and defended a culture which was according to the European principles of culture” (3). Ransom juxtaposes this culture, which values a “reflective and aesthetic life,” with those of “men still fascinated by materialistic projects, men in a state of arrested adolescence; for instance, to some very large if indefinite fraction of the population of these United States” (5).

engage a *southern apocalyptic imaginary*, a “recognizable semiotic universe” which applies this teleology spatially and ascribes the apocalyptic possibilities of judgment, cataclysm, deliverance, retribution, and renewal to specific places and spaces, individuals, communities, and experiences (Otero).¹² Flannery O’Connor’s famous assessment of the South as a “Christ-Haunted” landscape has weighed heavily in examinations of southern religion and literature (*Mystery and Manners* 44). However, this concept seems to be at odds with W.J. Cash’s equally significant description of southern evangelical religious culture as a “faith to draw men together in hordes, to terrify them with Apocalyptic rhetoric, to cast them into the pit, rescue them, and at last, bring them shouting into the fold of Grace. A faith, not of liturgy and prayer book, but of primitive frenzy and the blood sacrifice—often of fits and jerks and barks” (55-6). While sacrifice is significant in Cash’s pessimistic assessment, he is not referring to the ritual remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice through the Eucharist but rather the fury of a God angered by human sinfulness. In Cash’s view, southern religious culture is less “Christ-haunted” than it is fraught with the possibilities of Apocalypse.

This is not to say that Cash’s assessment resonates with “There’s No Depression in Heaven” any more than the writings of the Agrarians do; each accesses different elements of the apocalyptic imaginary and deploys them to distinct ideological ends.

¹² I am indebted to Solimar Otero for this particular formulation of imaginary, which she argues “operate[s] within a realm that is infused with traceable histories, recognizable geographical trajectories, and consistent symbolic markers of meaning.” A more detailed definition is offered by Arjun Appadurai: “The image, the imagined, the imaginary - these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as a social practice. No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. This unleashing of the imagination links the play of pastiche (in some settings) to the terror and coercion of states and their competitors. The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order” (31).

Indeed, the uses of Apocalypse are myriad and often at cross-purposes. It is frequently invoked to support the prevailing social order, but it also offers an alternative narrative space in which the oppressed and the marginalized might insert their experiences, thus providing those experiences with a *telos* that transcends the alienating, self-negating consequences of continued suffering. In this sense, the works examined here are not apocalyptic in the popular sense; they do not imagine the End of the World in the way that Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* or Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* do. Instead, they are interested in how individuals and communities deploy Apocalypse to make sense of their own histories and in how they invoke, revise, and reimagine the direction and culmination of history in order to make what Frank Kermode calls "fictive concords" in the face of experiences that seem contradictory (7).

The production of such concords requires that moments of dissonance be concealed, expunged, or expiated. Thus, in Faulkner's *Light in August*, Doc Hines and Percy Grimm both deploy the rhetorics of apocalyptic judgment in their condemnations of Joe Christmas. His racial ambiguity evinces the epistemological limitations of the prevailing, bifurcated racial logic. Apocalypse allows them to negotiate that apparent contradiction by committing its resolution to the imagined, future moment of ultimate revelation. The fiction of absolute racial difference—so crucial to the white community's attempts to narrate its own existence—is thus maintained. While the cause of and response to dissonance addressed in "There's No Depression in Heaven" differs dramatically from that of Percy and Hines, Apocalypse functions similarly: the song makes sense of the suffering of the Great Depression, an experience that defies narratives of a morally-ordered universe and of national exceptionalism, by inserting the moment

into a coherent narrative that culminates in deliverance and God's glory. In both instances, Apocalypse provides a mechanism to provisionally articulate an experience which cannot be accommodated by any prevailing discourse. Thus, invocations of Apocalypse signal the presence of neglected, displaced, or concealed meaning—histories and experiences that need to be recovered and reexamined.

Beyond establishing these basic theological and historical precepts, it is not the aim of this project to recapitulate the familiar narrative of southern evangelicalism's history: its radically egalitarian, biracial origins in integrated revival tents; the split from the northern evangelical movement; white southern evangelicals' subsequent rejection of activism as anathema to a cosmology which understands the world as necessarily fallen and salvation as solely a matter of the individual, personal relationship with God; black evangelicals' simultaneous creation of a socially-engaged church; the emergence of a viable, largely white Christian conservative movement in the 1970s and '80s; and the explosion of megachurches in recent years. Several important studies do that in great detail;¹³ instead, this project aims to interrogate experiences and histories that have been marginalized by this and other familiar narratives. However, it is necessary to lay out several basic characteristics of southern religious life, generally, and southern evangelical Christianity, specifically. Interestingly, the distinction between the general and specific, in this case, are not particularly clear, and some of the most significant studies of religion

¹³ Samuel S. Hill's seminal 1967 *Southern Churches in Crisis* and the 1999 update, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited*, remain the most significant texts in the field. Some of the best recent work on these and other topics are collected in the 2004 volume *Religion in the American South*, edited by Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews. In particular, Schweiger's essay, "Max Weber in Mount Airy, Or, Revivals and Social Theory in the Early South," offers a very succinct explanation of southern evangelical split from their northern counterparts. Finally, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture Vol. 1: Religion* contains some of the most up-to-date investigations of the recent trends in southern religious culture.

in the region have used them nearly interchangeably. Samuel S. Hill's concept of "popular southern Protestantism," for instance, is unmistakably evangelical in character (23). Though Hill originally formulated this notion of a "transdenominational 'southern church'" embodied by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1966 and has in fact revisited and revised it, it maintains a great deal of scholarly traction even today.¹⁴ As Hill argues, southern religious life is distinct in its homogeneity and in the dominance of the evangelical tradition. Citing David W. Bebbington, Noll contends that evangelical Christianity is distinct in its emphasis of *biblicism* (a "reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority"); *conversionism* (the belief in a spiritual rebirth through the acceptance of Christ); *activism* (a call for an "energetic, individualistic engagement in personal and social duties"); and *crucicentrism* (a "focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of true religion") (5). The echoes of Bebbington's list are evident in Hill's enumeration of the central precepts of southern evangelicalism, but the differences are telling. According to Hill, southern transdenominational Protestantism is *Bible-centered* and interprets scripture as the inerrant Word of God; preaches "direct and dynamic access to the Lord is open to all"; defines *morality in "individualistic & interpersonal terms"*; and it practices a *loose, informal worship* in which "spontaneity is preferred over prescription" (136). Considered together, these lists suggest that the evangelicalism practiced by white southerners differs primarily in its rejection of what Bebbington calls

¹⁴ Certainly, the concept is not without significant problems, in particular, the universalization of a white, masculine experience as identifiably, wholly southern. Indeed, in the preface to the 1999 edition, *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited*, Hill himself recognized this inadequacy as well as his failure to attend to the important *transracial* history of southern religious culture. Further revision will be required, however, to address the increasing diversity of religious experiences in the contemporary south: Buddhists, Hindus, Vietnamese Catholics, Korean Baptists. Nonetheless, Hill's analysis of evangelical Christianity as the dominant religious culture of the South continues to prove useful. Keeping in mind the limitations of their totalizing vision of southern religious life, I will draw upon Hill and Charles Reagan Wilson's *Judgment & Grace in Dixie* to identify the core precepts of southern evangelical Christianity.

activism—the central mission “to create a society that would redeem the rest of the world” (Boles 228).¹⁵ Rather than seeking to establish God’s kingdom in this world, the evangelicalism that has dominated the South “stands . . . as one of the most conservative varieties of Christianity in modern history,” states Hill, and it “struggles to preserve the original, equated with the essential, from doctrinal and moral erosion” (136-7). Within this context, God is envisioned “first and foremost [as] the Holy Judge,” according to Hill, “characteristically moral” and furiously angered by “human sinfulness”; this God is preoccupied by the “quantity and quality of men’s transgressions”—sins which “block any free dispensing of grace, presence, and power—until certain conditions are met” (77). Writing in the mid-1960s, Hill describes this cosmology as “man-centered”; perhaps without intending to, he has captured the gendered nature of this culture. For now, it is sufficient to update his analysis, generally, and suggest that this cosmology is *anthropocentric*, envisioning a human-like God, intimately involved with earthly affairs, most often in the role of Judge (138). The result, in Hill’s estimation, is a “near obsession with heaven and hell.” Thus, within the context of the southern evangelical

¹⁵ Many southern evangelical churches advanced similarly progressive aims in the antebellum South; many of the earliest southern revivals were radically biracial and egalitarian, and consequently, fostered exchange of worship practices. Ultimately, as secession became a likelihood, the racially progressive politics of southern evangelicalism fell to the wayside. Beth Barton Schweiger cites the distinction between the northern and southern evangelical traditions as a matter of “[p]olitical economy, not theology” (33); rather than embrace modernity, as many northern evangelicals did, white southern evangelicals emerged from the denominational split as radically anti-modern and envisioned themselves as uniquely chosen to protect their threatened communities from outside radical upheaval and to protect their families from the threats of an inherently sinful world. Rather than attempting to redeem the world, white southern evangelicals emphasized personal salvation, an emphasis which Schweiger argues led to “a narrow Christianity that ignored social reform” (36): “Southern evangelical individualism denied the possibility of benevolence,” she writes. “Further, it unified the South. The emotional and personal experiences of southern revivals affirmed the individual conscience and insisted that religion should not change society” (37).

cosmology, one's experience as a Christian is little more than preamble to the ultimate, inevitable, and imminent Day of Judgment.¹⁶

Scholars of southern religion have frequently stumbled in their approaches to African American religion. Too often, the practices of white evangelicals in the region have simply been presented as representative of totalizing southern evangelical culture, thereby eliding African American spirituality. At the same time, to treat African American religious practice as simply another element of southern evangelicalism rather than as a particular tradition reduces the insurgent power of a countertradition which responds to and implicitly critiques the oppressive regimes of white authority. These are all issues to which I will return throughout this project, but for now, I will simply posit that the theology and worship practices of black and white southern evangelicalism are products of the institutions of slavery and Jim Crow as well as interracial dialogue and exchange. Furthermore, African American religious traditions, while distinct, remain profoundly evangelical in character.¹⁷ The apocalyptic imaginary is the ideal site to tease

¹⁶ This emphasis has only become more entrenched as the once-decentralized, anti-credal groups like the Southern Baptist Convention have become more centralized and adopted doctrinal creeds. In particular, literalist interpretations of Scripture have given rise to the doctrine of premillennial dispensationalism and the belief in the Rapture, which Charles Strozier deems “probably the single most significant theological innovation in contemporary fundamentalism” (120). *Premillennialism* refers to the belief that “Jesus Christ’s bodily [will] return *before* His thousand-year reign, commonly called the Millennium” (Boyer 2); according to the theory of premillennial dispensationalism, “God is revealed to humans through a series of dispensations, or stages, each with its own narrative sequence that ends in violent disruptions in the transition to the next dispensation (the expulsion from the garden, the flood, and so on)” (Strozier 9). Dispensational theorists and theologians “inevitably” position their current moment at the end of the last dispensation: at any moment, the violent conflict that can end the world will begin. Before the conflict occurs, however, the faithful will bodily ascend to heaven in the event popularly known as *the Rapture*. Despite the radical literalism of dispensational theory, “the literal form of the millennium is nowhere explicitly described in the Bible,” as Strozier notes (75). Likewise, the Rapture emerged as a theological construct only through a unique interpretation of I Thessalonians 4:17 and a handful of other passages by the nineteenth-century theologian John Nelson Darby. However, it has become a central doctrine of many southern evangelical groups, including the SBC. The Rapture has entered the popular—and literary—imagination through Tim LaHaye’s and Jerry B. Jenkins’ wildly popular series of *Left Behind* novels.

¹⁷ Albert Raboteau succinctly explains the paradoxical relationship of African Americans to evangelicalism: “The opportunity for black religious separatism was due to the egalitarian character of evangelical Protestantism; its necessity was due, in part, to the racism of white Evangelicals. The

out specific points of difference and convergence between white and black evangelicalism in the South: while southern evangelical traditions, regardless of race, are charged with apocalyptic energies, African American religious practice emphasizes the imminence of millennial deliverance from suffering in this world in addition to individual salvation. Timothy E. Fullop writes that “American slaves were primarily millennialists of the quietest sort who waited for Christ to intervene in history, release them from slavery, and usher them into Canaan as God had done for the ancient Israelites” (231). In spirituals, according to James L. Cone, slaves “sang of a God who was involved in history—their history—making right what whites had made wrong” (24). While post-Emancipation life certainly altered the shape and form of African American spirituality, its cosmology remained essentially millennial and continued to be “steeped in the idea” identified by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* as “the revolutionary or eschatological apocalypse—the Jubilee” (56).¹⁸

egalitarian tendency of evangelical revivals to level the souls of all men before God had been one of the major attractions to black converts in the first place” (93). However, white evangelical “leaders hungry for influence saw no harm in putting their religion in the service of slavery” (Schweiger 54). Nonetheless, the literalist hermeneutic of fundamentalism was certainly appealing to a population in which literacy itself carried such a premium—and was in so many instances prohibited. Moreover, a theology which emphasized a direct relationship with God supplied the psychic and spiritual nourishment necessitated by life under plantation slavery and Jim Crow segregation. “Oppression may easily force outward acquiescence, but internal dissent is virtually impossible to control,” writes Raboteau. “The inner world of slaves was the fundamental battleground and there evangelical Christianity served as an important weapon in the slave’s defense of his psychological, emotional, and moral freedom from white domination. In a brutal system, Evangelicalism helped slaves resist brutalization” (100). The psychological and spiritual conflict between resistance and survival fit neatly with the historical and cosmological battle emphasized by evangelical Christianity.

¹⁸ In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy looks to the historical of slave religion as criticism of modernity and prevailing narratives of historical progress. Similarly, in *Long Black Song*, Houston A. Baker, Jr., juxtaposes African American religion with the millenarian U.S. nationalism: “While white Americans expounded doctrines of progress. . . black Americans looked to an absolute, linear (chronometrical) time moving from the creation to the judgment day, which, they felt, would be the day of their liberation” (46). While their analyses inform my work, it is my contention that this sense of time and history is shared by evangelicals, regardless of race. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to fit “world of toil and trouble” represented in “There’s No Depression in Heaven” into a singular, racial category with millenarian narratives of American exceptionalism.

As I will show throughout this project, though, slavery and segregation shaped both white and black evangelicals' engagement with the apocalyptic imaginary. In the South, during slavery and perhaps even more so during the reign of Jim Crow, cataclysm was not a historical abstraction but a lived reality. Racial violence was never far from the minds of African Americans who lived with the threat of lynching or whites who were raised in a society that projected its collective fears and fantasies onto black bodies. It should be no surprise, then, that the fight for black freedom, from Emancipation and well through the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, was cast in apocalyptic terms: while African Americans continued to hear the clarion call of millennial hope, whites fiercely, often violently, held back an inevitable cataclysmic change in their society. However, it is not my intent to reinscribe a racial dichotomy, and my investigation into Apocalypse is not predicated upon the equation, "white evangelicalism=conservative apocalypticism; black evangelicalism=progressive millennialism." As "There's No Depression in Heaven" suggests, Apocalypse sustained white evangelicals in the face of suffering and oppression, just as it did African Americans.

The conservative strands of southern evangelical culture (black and white) have too often overwhelmed and obfuscated such uses of Apocalypse. Indeed, if apocalyptic art remains vital, it is because it provides hope to the people who need it most when none is available. "Apocalyptic was born of crisis," states David Noel Freeman; "it was underground literature, the consolation of the dispossessed" (Boyer 23). In other words, the apocalyptic is a discourse of revolution and resistance, allowing the oppressed to claim rewards for the suffering they have endured. It is my hope that this project will uncover and attend to this perhaps dormant progressive potential in the southern

apocalyptic imaginary and, in doing so, will participate in the wider project that has invigorated southern studies in recent years. For earlier generations of scholars, the canon of southern literary culture was configured around an ephemeral “sense of place”—an nostalgic idea used too often to establish a feeling of “stability amid flux,” according to Barbara Ladd. However, postcolonial, eco-critical, feminist scholars, often operating under transnational paradigms, have reconceptualized place “as a site of cultural dynamism” and have sought “ways that place can make movement and change possible rather than simply serving as a way of talking about resistance to change” (“Dismantling the Monolith” 48). Ladd calls for a new southern studies that will reconfigure place as “a locus for economic, political, discursive, and more broadly cultural transactions, a site of memory and meaning for both the past and the future” (56). If this is to occur, this new southern studies must attend to the diverse experiences of southern religion. This project intends to answer that need: it works to interrogate the progressive past and possibilities of the southern evangelical imaginary and to restore experiences and histories that have been displaced by the prevailing narratives of region, nation, and religion to the geographies they rightly inhabit. Indeed, if there is any stability evident in “There’s No Depression in Heaven,” it is only that conjured up by the invocation of Apocalypse, and our job now is to excavate the worldly anxieties, the suffering, and the hopes for deliverance that lay behind it.

Chapter 1: “On the Brink of the Cataract”: Community and the Apocalyptic Ritual of Lynching in Faulkner’s *Light in August*

*Are your garments all spotless?
Are they white as the snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?
Is your soul all spotless?
Is it clean as the snow?
Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?*

. . . .
*Have you learnt to love your neighbors?
Of all colors, creeds and kinds?
Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?
I’ve learnt to love my peoples
Of all colors, creeds and kinds
I’m all washed in that blood of that lamb
-Woody Guthrie, “Blood of the Lamb”*

“Does a coherent system of religious values and thought inform Faulkner’s novels?” Doreen Fowler asks (ix). Given William Faulkner’s position as the preeminent chronicler of a culture dominated by evangelical Protestantism, her question is all but unavoidable. Faulkner’s earliest and most ardent proponents, the Southern Agrarians and the New Critics, looked toward the Southern forms of community manifest in Yoknapatawpha as well as Faulkner’s characteristically modernist use of religious and mythic structures from antiquity as antidotes to the alienating consequences of modernity.¹⁹ Influenced by this line of criticism, studies of religion in *Light in August* inevitably zeroed in on Joe Christmas as a figuration of another J.C., Jesus Christ. More recent scholarship on this subject, on the other hand, has sought to identify “how various institutions and ideologies within the South—among them, churches and Christian

¹⁹ In the introduction to *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, Cleanth Brooks writes that “Faulkner’s work . . . embodies a criticism of the prevailing commercial and urban culture, a criticism made from the standpoint of a provincial and traditional culture” (2).

theology—converged to support racial segregation” and “analyzed how Faulkner situates religion among a nexus of racially oppressive belief systems” (Duck, “Religion: Desire and Ideology” 270). Michael Cobb has recently asserted that the novel “deploys an irreverent language of religion that is conceptually blasphemous,” which “confuse[s], productively, the twinned and mutually dependent categories of time and race” (142). Tim Caron has persuasively argued that *Light in August* “forces readers to reexamine the ways the white South appropriated the Bible to justify its racism” (53). Leigh Ann Duck writes that the novel posits southern religious culture as “a model and a vector for support of a white supremacist status quo”; this culture, she argues, imposes an “imperative of unquestioning submission,” which inhibits the communities’ “ability to question social and political norms” (270).

These pursuits—all fruitful—expand Fowler’s original query; together, they ask whether a coherent system of *religious and racial values and thought* inform Faulkner’s novels. The answer, fortunately or unfortunately, remains as elusive as ever. Certainly, the religion of the South reinforced the institutions of Jim Crow in many ways, and the language of religion has been bent to justify that regime, just as it was used to resist and ultimately tear it down. But also, white southern Protestantism was *shaped by* the realities of segregation—by the ever-present threat of upheaval and racial violence, by occasions of suffering and the inevitable guilt for inflicting that suffering, and by the unavoidable existential issues promulgated by the conflation of whiteness and purity, blackness and contamination. Within this cosmology, cataclysmic consequences are often ascribed to any violation of the radically bivalent order. As a result, Apocalypse is not simply a theological construct but a lived reality that results from the imposition of the

eschatological narrative onto daily life in an ongoing effort to reassert the prevailing social order against the threats of racial hybridity.

Rather than addressing a singular theological concern, *Light in August* contains the potential of a “multiplicity of religious faiths . . . suggest[ing] surprising theological juxtapositions,” writes Leigh Anne Duck (“Religion: Desire and Ideology” 272-273). Thus, while the murder of Joe Christmas certainly recalls the sacrifice of the crucifixion, critical engagement with religion in the novel must move beyond the conflation of Christmas and Christ. Of its various convergent and coterminous religious threads, none offers a better foothold for understanding the beliefs of Southern community than the apocalyptic imaginary. In Yoknapatawpha County, the white community employs apocalyptic rhetoric in order to reify the unstable, racialized boundaries of community, and their apocalyptic cosmology informs the shape and substance of the ritual violence of lynching. Faulkner, on the other hand, appropriates the apocalyptic imaginary in order to represent the very ambiguity and undifferentiation²⁰ that are anathema to this community’s notion of moral and racial purity. At the climactic moment of Joe Christmas’s death, the disparate threads of the novel and the distinct strands of apocalyptic and millenarian belief finally come together: Hines’s exaggerated

²⁰ *Undifferentiation* is not a term in common critical use in literary or southern studies, but it is crucial for an apocalyptic theorist like Bull, who defines the term as synonymous with “contradiction and/or indeterminacy” (53). Similarly, I will use it to denote a presence that does not fit within the “either/or” categories imposed by bivalent epistemologies. Within this context, the term *difference* is not necessarily suggestive of fluidity, diversity, or multivalent possibilities as it often is in contemporary critical discourse: rather than figuring difference upon a spectrum, these logics imagine existence as characterized by discrete sets of absolutely distinct binary categories (i.e., good and evil, holy and impure, but also black and white or male and female). The distinction between differentiated categories is understood as ontological. Thus, *undifferentiated* presences, by their very appearance, contradict such Manichean schema and expose their limited capacity to explain or represent reality. Most frequently, the examples of undifferentiation considered by this project are presences that contradict the racialized and gendered discourses of place. Critical terms like *hybrid* and *queer* are perhaps more familiar critical terms, but *undifferentiation* provides a model which allows us to explore these together and to attend to how the fundamentally bivalent epistemologies of evangelical Christianity influences social responses to moments of in which the bivalent divisions of race and gender are destabilized and/or made uncertain.

fundamentalism, the convoluted frontier history of the Burden family, and Percy Grimm's proto-fascist nationalism converge just as both the community of Jefferson and the structure of the novel itself appear on the verge of flying to pieces. This disrupted teleology, introduced in the frame of Lena Grove's journey and developed formally through Joe Christmas's driftings in and out of time, indicates the epistemological limitations that necessarily result in the sanctification of racial difference through the evangelical apocalyptic imaginary.

Faulkner is hardly blind to the promise of justice and spiritual nourishment Apocalypse offers to the dispossessed and disenfranchised; however, the hope of deliverance preached by Rev. Shegog to Dilsey's congregation in *The Sound and The Fury* is absent in *Light in August*. In Shegog's place, the novel presents Gail Hightower and Doc Hines as the Janus-faced figurations of the Southern preacher—one pitiable, the other terrifying. They are joined by several true believers, including the pious Baptist choir leader Byron Bunch and the severe Calvinist farmer Simon McEachern. Though all are exiled to the margins of their respective southern communities, their beliefs are emblematic—even in their exaggeration—of white southern religious culture.

Sometimes comic but more often horrific, Doc Hines spews forth a disjointed, fanatical Gospel in which the familiar elements of evangelical and Fundamentalist Protestantism (the rigid strictures and determinism of Calvinist theology, the emotion and experiential elements of evangelical Protestantism, a literal interpretation of scripture, and belief in an interventionist God) converge with a white supremacist obsession with blood purity. This cosmology imagines daily experience as fraught with the apocalyptic

possibilities of vengeance, racial chosen-ness, and imminent judgment. It would be inaccurate to characterize Hines's theology as a representative of southern religious culture: he and his wife exist in semi-exile, denied entry to the white community of Mottstown, which views them as "gray in color, a little smaller than most other men and women, as if they belonged to a different race, species" (*Light in August* 341). Hines's family subsists only through the charity of the rural black congregations to whom he preaches his message of white supremacy. Their location on the margins of Mottstown is indicative of the theological extremity of his message, particularly when it is juxtaposed against the central positions that Calvinism and the mainline Presbyterian Church occupy in the religious life of the novel's southern communities.

And yet, it would be equally wrong to suggest that southern evangelical Protestantism is not implicated in Hines's rantings, just as it is inaccurate to imagine the distinctions between Fundamentalist and mainline Protestantism in the U.S. South as impermeable. Samuel S. Hill describes the religious culture of the U.S. South as "popular southern Protestantism," and he argues that this culture shares a "basic set of assumptions about the nature and task of Christianity, which virtually ignores the formal demarcations between the subvarieties of Protestantism" (23). Among these assumptions is "a Calvinist-inspired dim view of human nature," which was filtered through the historical experience of Anglo-Irish immigrants in the southern frontier (Wilson 8). Along the way, the abstracted doctrine of predestination is displaced by the sort of anthropomorphic deity invoked by Hines; this is a "characteristically moral [God] who requires purity and is accordingly outraged over human sinfulness" and is "instinctively thought of, firstly and most representatively, as the Holy Judge" (Hill 77). Likewise, the central position of the

“continental” doctrine of election yields a less abstract belief “that the identity of those elected to salvation can be known” (124). The immortal status of an individual’s soul should be self-evident, at least, to those who themselves are saved.²¹

For believers these are not simply matters of theory or doctrine, but an interpretive system through which believers sought to make sense of their experience and upon which they structured their participation in a fallen world. In this context, religion offers a program for daily life, as evinced in *Light in August* by Joe’s adoptive father McEachern. Work and prayer are thus his chief occupations, and he compels Joe to follow suit. Upon adopting the boy, McEachern promises to teach him that “the two abominations are sloth and idle thinking, the two virtues are work and the fear of God” (144). The central place of the Bible in family life (a characteristic of evangelicalism enumerated in the Introduction) is reinforced through Joe’s required catechism study and the brutal beatings that follow any failure in this endeavor. McEachern’s actions follow the contours of an apocalyptic cosmology, which locates the otherworldly conflict between good and evil in *this* world and which demands that the true believer rigorously and obsessively avoid contact with evil lest he or she suffer moral contamination. According to Faulkner’s narrator, “men of [McEachern’s] kind usually have just as firmly fixed convictions about the mechanics, the theatring of evil as about those of

²¹ Hill and Wilson have been rightly criticized for eliding any distinction between *white* southern evangelical culture and southern evangelical culture; in the second edition of *Southern Churches in Crisis*, Hill himself criticizes the original edition for failing to attend to the particularities of African American spirituality, to the interracial roots of revivalism and Pentecostalism, and the influence of African American religious tradition on the forms of worship in white evangelical churches (and vice versa). I will deal with African American evangelicalism more specifically in the next chapter, but for now, I will simply say that the moralism, biblical literalism, and denominational permeability described are all also characteristic of African American evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. However, the Calvinist “dim view of humanity” and notion of election are less significant. Instead, black spirituality emphasizes narratives of racial chosenness, millennial deliverance, and salvation—what Paul Gilroy has called the “revolutionary eschatology” of African American religion (36).

good” (201). Those convictions are not simply abstract concepts; rather, they are mapped onto particular places, which have been designated as evil.²²

The hardscrabble conditions in which McEachern lives and works clearly influence his faith; indeed, these are the very circumstances in which popular southern Protestantism flourishes. However, the influences of rural agricultural life do not solely account for the distinctive characteristics of southern religious culture. Ultimately we must attend to the significant influences of ideologies and institutions of southern apartheid. In Lillian Smith’s oft-cited assessment, white southern religious culture was founded upon the three pillars of “sin, sex, and segregation,” and southern churches implicitly sanctioned the violent oppression of southern blacks (94). However, it is reductive to either posit this theology as simply a response to slavery and segregation or to argue that slavery and segregation were the consequences of popular southern Protestantism. It is far more productive to examine the influences that the discourses of race and religion exert upon each other. In this context, we see that the shape and form of religious practice and belief—black and white, mainline and evangelical—emerge from the efforts of southern Christians to explain away the endemic moral contradictions of southern apartheid through the logic offered by an evangelical cosmology; likewise, this cosmology produces the specific textures and institutions of racial difference.

If Hines’s theology is grotesque and terrifying, it is because he *cannot* be safely exiled to the margins of southern community. He is *not* clearly distinct or distant from its ideological and theological center but rather represents its extreme boundary—its

²² Among these, McEachern includes the diner where Joe meets Bobbie. “Maybe you should never have gone there,” he tells Joe. “But you must see such so you will know what to avoid and shun” (175). However, a meal there is necessitated by business in town and its cheap prices. Contact with such places is unavoidable—all the more reason for the paranoid maintenance of the rhetorical distinction between good and evil places.

monstrous possibility. His particular “twofisted evangelism” erupts in uninvited, curiously-tolerated sermons in which he exhorts African American congregations to display “humility before all skins lighter than theirs” (343). This message is shocking only in the setting in which it is offered: while it might be fanatical to preach this gospel to a black audience, its “unconscious paradox” is the same inexorable paradox that characterizes white southern Protestantism’s theology of sacralized segregation (344). In its exaggeration, then, Hines’s fanaticism only makes explicit the violent threat that is otherwise implicit in the religious culture of the South, giving voice to the most terrifying elements of the apocalyptic imaginary.²³ Consider, for instance, Hines’s remarks to the dietician in the Memphis orphanage:

I know evil. Aint I made evil to get up and walk God’s world? A walking pollution in God’s own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it. You have heard them. I never told them to say it, to call him in his rightful nature, by the name of his damnation. I never told them. They knowed. They was told, but it wasn’t by me. I just waited, on His own good time, when He would see fitten to reveal it to His living world. And it’s come now. This is the sign, wrote again in womansinning and bitchery. (128)

Several crucial elements of apocalyptic thinking emerge just in this paragraph. First among these is the conception of an anthropomorphic, interventionist God: here, God has a *face*. Evil, too, is embodied—as Joe Christmas, in Hines’s view—and is an affront to God’s presence. Engaging scripture—including Revelation—through a literalist hermeneutic, the cosmology of southern evangelicalism posits *this world* as the battlefield upon which the cosmic conflict between the disembodied abstractions of God and Satan are carried out by proxies. According to Charles Reagan Wilson, southern Protestantism is unique in its “overwhelming” belief in “a personal, anthropomorphic

²³ Again, we turn to W.J. Cash’s description of southern religious culture as a “faith, not of liturgy and prayer book, but of primitive frenzy and the blood sacrifice—often of fits and jerks and barks” (56).

God, in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, in Christ's second coming, and in life after death" (13). Belief in an anthropomorphic Satan is likewise prevalent: John Shelton Reed's seminal 1974 study, *The Enduring South*, found that 86% of Southerners surveyed believed in "the devil," compared to 52% of non-Southerners (Wilson 14). Thus, Hines's contention that he can, in fact, *see* the presence of evil is not an exaggeration. Indeed, it is not even unique within the novel: when McEachern confronts him regarding his "lechery," he sees "not that child's face," the narrator explains, but "the face of Satan, which he knew well" (205). Likewise, when Joe enters a rural black church and assaults members of the congregation, one woman screams, "It's the devil! It's Satan himself!" (322). Joe is not the only figure in the novel on whom ultimate evil is projected. Following his estranged wife's scandalous death in Memphis, the disgraced Hightower is believed to be depicted smiling in a photograph published in the newspaper: in the collective estimation of the town, his "face looked like the face of Satan in the old prints" (69).

The predilection for an anthropomorphic God and Satan is telling. Believers do not draw upon evangelical and Fundamentalist Christianity simply for insight into abstract or metaphysical questions. Rather, their belief constitutes a total worldview—an interpretive scheme used to make sense of experiences of *this world* and events that occur in *human time*. The apocalyptic imaginary of southern religious cultures, then, maps the *otherworldly* conflict of good and evil onto the geographies of *this world*. The landscape becomes fraught with threats of sin and damnation as well as the apocalyptic possibilities of judgment, deliverance, and cataclysm. Furthermore, the ability to recognize these threats—that is, to identify and name *evil*—is interpreted as a sign of an individual's

holiness—that is, his or her exceptional status among the Elect or Chosen. Thus, in his rant to the nurse, Hines claims that he is capable of reading the *signs* of the conflict as it is played out in this plane; he has simply *waited* on the children—innocents who are uncontaminated by the sin of a fallen world—to recognize the “truth” of Joe’s racial status. There are perhaps no more distinct markers of apocalyptic thinking than *waiting* on an inevitable, ultimate resolution and interpreting worldly events as signs of its imminence. At this imagined future moment, the divisions between the narratives of earthly history and sacred time will collapse; ultimate truth will be revealed; and the forces of righteousness will triumph over the armies of evil.

In his assertion of *contamination*—to be repeated years later in his demand that Christmas be lynched—Hines’s convoluted ravings move from a generalized apocalyptic fanaticism and into the equally apocalyptic discourse of sanctified southern segregation.²⁴ The prevalence and implications of the rhetoric of racial pollution is evident in the text’s overwhelming concern with *blood*. As within the discourse of segregation and white supremacy, blood functions as a secondary way of embodying the abstract concept of race (color, obviously, being the first). When Joe is beaten as a young man, his attackers taunt him and claim that, by bloodying him, they seek only to discern his uncertain racial status: “*We’ll see if his blood is black,*” he hears one say. “*We’ll need a little more blood to tell for sure*” (219). Gavin Stevens posits an inexorable conflict between Christmas’s distinct racial inheritances and even employs the language of pollution in his assertion of a “stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will,” as the cause of Joe’s undoing (448-449). Indeed, Joe himself understands his racial uncertainty in these

²⁴ Orlando Patterson cites the theologian James Sellars, who “has persuasively argued that Euro-American supremacy and commitment to segregation constituted for the South ‘a religion, a theology. It is, in fact, the unrepentant Southern kingdom of God’” (207, citing Sellars, *The South and Christian Ethics*, 118-9).

terms: living in a black community in Detroit, he tries “to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being” (226).

The conflation of race and blood inform so-called “one-drop” laws as well as the convoluted categorizations of quadroon, octoroon, and so forth. Here, the abstract concept of race is granted tangibility and measurability; perhaps more importantly, it is inscribed as an essential component of the biological realities of life. Once embodied, the race/blood conflation is subject to the weaknesses of the flesh—disease, infection, contamination, and pollution. Furthermore, race is spiritually inscribed as the vital substance of moral existence. By imbibing the transubstantiated blood of Jesus, Christians not only recall his sacrifice but also ingest some of His Divinity, ritually purifying themselves; thus, any physical impurity in blood equates to moral and spiritual contamination. Just as blood is a contaminant, René Girard writes, so too is it a purifier, the only “miraculous substance potent enough” to counteract pollution; however, this potency is accessible only through “the performance of appropriate rites—the blood, in short, of sacrificial victims” (*Violence and the Sacred* 36). This model accurately describes the function of lynching within the theology of segregation and white supremacy: if “one-drop” laws aim to protect the purity of (white) blood, “the lynching ritual...purges the community through sacrificial bloodletting—through which the community isolates or eliminates ‘filth’ so that its contagion cannot spread,” Scott Romine explains (191).

It is crucial here to note that, at least in *Light in August*, black blood alone is not articulated as contaminant. Instead, contamination is the consequence of racial mixing—that, as Faulkner’s Gavin Stevens says, there is a “stain either on his white blood or his

black blood.” Within the logic of segregation, *pollution* and *contamination* are not synonymous with *blackness*, but with *miscegenation* and with *undifferentiation*.²⁵ Crucially, the murder of Joe Christmas is conditioned by the hysterical response and violent rhetoric with which white communities and their leaders responded to alleged acts of miscegenation. When Strom Thurmond stated in 1948 that “there’s not enough troops in the army to force the southern people to break down segregation and admit the Negro²⁶ race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes, and into our churches” (Bass 112), he unmistakably cast the coming conflict over desegregation in cataclysmic terms.²⁷ The locations he mentioned were not accidental. Theaters and pools are public places, where segregation is mandated by state law and local ordinance. On the other hand, *home* and *church* are intimate, personal spaces, where racial division is a matter of cultural practice. Thurmond’s progression implies that a desegregated public sphere will necessarily result in a racially undifferentiated private sphere; his martial imagery ascribes near-cosmic consequences to the conflict, positioning any subsequent confrontations as decisive battles between the armies of righteousness and order and those of evil and chaos. Thurmond’s rhetoric is consistent with the exaggerated logic of

²⁵ That is not to say that the status of pollution is not often ascribed to blackness, as Orlando Patterson and David Brion Davis, among others, have noted. According to Patterson, “the slave and ex-slave had always been the major symbol of sin in Christian theology. . . . Southern Protestants simply maintained and reinvigorated the original Pauline notion of sin as a kind of spiritual slavery from which the Christian had been redeemed” (210). This theological doctrine is compounded by “traditional color symbolism, which identified whiteness with goodness, purity, and beauty, and blackness with ugliness and evil, was fused with ‘racial’ and religious symbolism” (211). Certainly, this conflation of blackness and evil is evident in the town’s collective assumption that Joanna Burden’s death is “an anonymous crime committed not by a negro but by Negro” (*Light in August* 289). However, I submit that the maintenance of a stable racial order is the greater concern of southern segregationists in the first half of the twentieth century, and thus, that the maintenance of racial divisions is central to *Light in August*.

²⁶ The definitive transcription of this speech offered by Bass reads “Negro,” and I defer to his expertise as a matter of consistency. However, whenever I have listened to recordings of the speech—which are now sixty years old—I am all but certain that he says either “nigra” or “nigger.”

²⁷ With regard to fascism, Kermodie writes: “The most terrible element in apocalyptic thinking its certainty that there must be universal bloodshed” (107).

lynching and miscegenation in the South: the possibilities of intermarriage and/or the violation of white women suddenly are figured as the inevitable consequences of any disruption of the mechanisms of racial difference, and *miscegenation* becomes a metonym for any instance of racial undifferentiation.²⁸ Of course, the immediate threat of transracial sexual activity is simply a product of imagination, and in *Light in August*, the racial identity of Christmas's father is never more than a matter of Hines's conjecture.

Within the conventional discussions of segregation and racism in the South, those Christians who tolerated or actively engaged in the violent oppression of African Americans are too often located as hypocrites, reactionaries, or as extremists. Understood in this way, their theology is posited as an aberration—the blasphemous appropriation of a true faith that must be or already has been overcome. As Donald G. Mathews has argued, however, this is too easy: it is naïve to consider the ideological foundations of segregation as coeval with but distinct from the theology shared by its proponents.²⁹ Citing the anthropologist Mary Douglas's definition of *holiness* as “keeping distinct the categories of creation,” Mathews asserts that an “evangelicalism ever alert to contamination could nurture segregation, because the holiness of one supported the holiness of the other; both established boundaries and distances that demanded individuals ‘conform to the class to which they belong[ed]’” (“Lynching” 163, citing Douglas 45). This logic, like apocalyptic thinking in general, is predicated upon an absolutely bivalent logic to which any instance of undifferentiation is a radical affront.

²⁸ Of course, this rhetoric also conceals the historical permeability of racial boundaries, including Senator Thurmond's own interracial romance.

²⁹ Mathews has doggedly pursued this line of inquiry in several recent essays, including “The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice” in the online *Journal of Southern Religion* 3:2000 (<http://jsr.fsu.edu/>) as well as “Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People: Faith in the Christian South” in the collection *Religion in the American South*.

Malcolm Bull, a theorist of Apocalypse, writes that undifferentiation is “a universal conceptual possibility and differentiation a universal social actuality” (*Seeing Hidden Things* 77). He contends that nearly every cosmology, regardless of chronological or geographic location, demands at least some basic degree of basic bivalence: male and female, light and darkness, life and death, good and evil, day and night, earthly and otherworldly. Each of these cultures inevitably face challenges to that bivalence, and so they must develop mechanisms “to regulate the relation between” difference and undifferentiation. Bull cites three such discursive mechanisms: the apocalyptic, taboo, and sacrifice, all of which “appear to be concerned with the opposition between undifferentiation and difference, mixture and separation, chaos and cosmos, and all explore the boundary that divides them.” In Bull’s model, the discourse of sacrifice—including that of the crucifixion—imagines difference as “something established in the distant past through killing or banishing the forces of primordial chaos, and maintained through the symbolic re-enactment of the initial divorce” (78). Taboos, on the other hand, posit that “the undifferentiated is a present and potent danger that must be constantly and rigorously avoided.”³⁰ Purification, whether through ritual expiation or avoidance, is crucial in both models.

Neither sacrifice nor taboo, however, presents a historical model for the ultimate resolution of difference; that is the task of Apocalypse, which in doing so also negotiates between sacrifice and taboo, according to Bull:

Apocalyptic seems to presuppose that difference is maintained through one or both of the mechanisms of taboo or sacrifice, but suggests that rather than being successfully relegated to the past or excluded from the present, the

³⁰ This is the position voiced by McEachern when he warns Joe to “avoid and shun” the diner (175).

undifferentiated has been deferred to the future from where it will be reincorporated into the present. (78)

For the writers of the ancient Hebraic apocalyptic texts and, indeed, for many modern theologians, that “reincorporation” of the undifferentiated is total; the apocalyptic promises a return to an original unity of existence that preceded Creation. Bull points to the recurrence of hybrid figures in the apocalyptic visions of scripture as evidence: “a lion with eagle’s wings, and a leopard with four heads and the four wings of bird in Daniel 7; a beast like a leopard, with the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion, in Revelation 13, and its companion, a beast like a lamb that speaks like a dragon” (72). These beasts, which combine qualities that should not exist together, are all harbingers of visions and experiences that transcend the bivalent divisions of human forms of knowledge and perception.

In the southern apocalyptic imaginary, however, bivalence is not unique to this world but rather an ontological characteristic of the cosmos. Instead of restoring an original or ultimate unity, the Apocalypse imagined by southern evangelicals maintains an eternal division. In this cosmology, the state of undifferentiation is brought to a final end in a singular, imminent historical moment in which the Holy Judge will reveal the true nature of all things, including their proper positions within the rigidly bivalent order. Fundamentalist reading practices, which posit the conflict envisioned by St. John of Patmos as a prophecy of an actual battle at Armageddon, foreclose the possibility of unity. And because the end is foreordained, this cosmology posits undifferentiation as an illusion manifest in a fallen world and the appearance of this illusion as a sign of evil and a challenge to purity. In this premillennial eschatology, the presence of hybridity does not

presage the end of differentiation, but rather, evinces evil's existence and signals the rising of Satan's armies.

Lynching thus maintains the absolutely bivalent differentiation of white and black, despite the contradiction posed by the possibility of hybridity and undifferentiation. Most immediately, the ritual violently and murderously expunges the threat to the bifurcated cosmology. Furthermore, it allows the members of the lynch mob to ritually perform their own holiness: the mob, as Doc Hines does, claims both to be acting as the agent of God's will and to possess the ability to recognize eternal and absolute difference in what appears to be undifferentiation. "Religion permeated communal lynching because the act occurred within the context of a sacred order designed to sustain holiness," writes Mathews ("The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice"). "Holiness demands purity and purity was sustained in the segregated South by avoidance, margins, distances, aloofness, strict classification and racial contempt"—that is, the maintenance of taboo. Lynchings were not only ritual responses to the instances of undifferentiation—to alleged, individual violations of the codes that determined the proper interactions between races but also to macro-level threats to the institutions of difference. While the articulation of lynching as human sacrifice works as an assault upon lynch law, it would not accurately describe the lynchers' vision of their work. Instead, the theological authorization of lynching is predicated upon the event as a singular Apocalypse—a judgment upon evil that has always-already been made.

Doc Hines's ravings might be (and have been) considered to be fanatical distortions of southern religion that are localizable to a single character. One cannot so easily dismiss either the proto-fascist Percy Grimm's murder of Joe Christmas or the

community's desire for retribution following Joanna Burden's death; both are indicative of the ways in which the apocalyptic imaginary informs the lynching ritual. Cleanth Brooks argues that the murder and mutilation of Joe Christmas are *not* communal events but instead are enacted solely by Grimm, who claims to prevent any attempt by would-be lynchers to bypass the official mechanisms of state *and* federal juridical authority (51). Only a handful of people—a delirious Hightower and two deputies—witness the act, and none participate. Nonetheless, an understanding of the religious implications of lynching offers much insight into *Light in August*. Certainly, the specter of lynching is introduced through the town's initial impulse toward mob violence and Doc Hines's attempts to incite mob violence. And despite Brooks's observation, Grimm's castration of Christmas unmistakably enacts the ritual of lynching. Moreover, when Grimm announces, "Now you'll let white women alone, even in Hell" (464), he deploys Apocalypse in the manner of the lynching ritual: he defers resolving the logical contradiction that Christmas's racial ambiguity poses to the prevailing bivalent narrative and instead commits it to the moment of God's ultimate Judgment.

Studies of lynchings, including literary lynchings like that depicted in *Light in August*, often incorporate models of sacrifice and sacrificial violence, and indeed, these models seem to fit the exigencies of the lynching ritual. Orlando Patterson writes that "sacrifice enacts and symbolically recreates a disrupted or threatened social world, and it resolves through the shedding of blood, a specific crisis of transition" (175); in *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard posits sacrifice as a ritualistic displacement of the violence within a community onto a victim chosen, most often from outside the community, to embody the threat. By deferring its internal conflict and/or repressing the knowledge of its

instability, the community maintains itself as a stable, coherent whole. The white community of Jefferson indeed seems to enact this very script as they loiter with nervous energy while the Burden mansion burns. The narrator steps back from their thirst for vengeance and tells us that it exists because it makes “nice believing”:

Better than the shelves and the counters filled with long familiar objects bought, not because the owner desired them or admired them, could take any pleasure in the owning of them, but in order to cajole or trick other men into buying them at a profit; and who must now contemplate both the objects which had not yet sold and the men who could buy them but had not yet done so, with anger and maybe outrage and maybe despair too. (289)

This is “a town whose normal systems of exchange have broken down and whose citizens are virtually at each other’s throats,” Romine writes. “Yet out of this community seething with violence, the rape narrative produces not only a consensus, but a single body” (171). And indeed, the discourse of sacrifice is central to *Light in August*. It is first introduced through Christmas’s sacrifice of the sheep: horrified by the abject realities of menstruation—the notion that the object of his desire might be “doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodic filth” (185), the adolescent Joe shoots the animal and plunges his hands into its blood as it dies, hoping that through this ritual, he might protect himself from the “filth,” and from the myriad threat of contamination it poses.

By no means do I wish to dismiss the significance of this episode or the importance of sacrificial violence in the novel generally. For now, however, I want to pursue the issue of racial violence through the lens of Apocalypse in order to move beyond the now-familiar insights offered by considering the novel through the lens offered by the sacrificial model and to develop a richer understanding of a culture which fostered the sort of ritual violence represented in the novel. If we consider Joe’s murder

as *only* the displacement of internal violent tensions, we reduce the consequences of lynching to the death of a single sacrificial victim and fail to recognize the intended terrorist effect—namely, to threaten any African American who might, through their actions, destabilize the bivalent racial order. The sacrificial victim, according to Girard, is typically an outsider about whom little is known: the community can thus easily reconfigure him/her as the emblem and cause of their internal disorder. While whites certainly projected their own fears and anxieties onto African Americans, the lynch mob's victim functions (for the mob) as a representative of the black community, and the spectacle of the lynching works to remind African Americans of the horrific consequences of any violation of the prevailing racial codes. The sacrificial model seems to work in the specific case of Christmas *because* he is an outsider, utterly disconnected from any community, white or black; however, this model fails to recognize that through the lynching he is reconfigured as *Negro*—an emblem of the very group the would-be lynch mob intends to threaten.

Through two subsequent but less frequently cited models, *collective persecution* and the *scapegoat*, Girard further develops the imagined threat ascribed to the sacrificial victim. Collective persecution emerges on a systematic scale alongside “an extreme loss of social order evidenced by the disappearance of the rules and ‘differences’ that define cultural divisions,” he writes (*The Scapegoat* 12). While diversity certainly exists in stable societies, the differences between categories are often rigidly maintained. The processes of that maintenance are concealed by the institutions of culture and mechanisms of exchange, and thus difference is made to seem natural or ontological (13). Crisis, however, exposes the permeability of the categories of difference that is more

successfully repressed during periods of stability. This revelation of instability initiates within the community a sense of cultural collapse or, in Girard's terms, "eclipse"—as if something entirely new is replacing the extant order: "The terror inspired in people by the eclipse of culture and the universal confusion of popular uprising are signs of a community that is literally undifferentiated, deprived of all that distinguishes one person from another in time and space" (16). Terrorized, even hysterical, the community attempts to restore what it imagined to be the prior equilibrium, but the causes are beyond their reach or their comprehension. Among the possible causes of eclipse, Girard includes natural phenomena such as a flood, disease, and famine, as well as the often unfathomably complicated phenomena of economic collapse. However, it might be the consequence of a fundamental flaw within the culture; if so, the community must be implicated in its own instability. Rather than confront this possibility, the community "therefore looks for an accessible cause that will appease its appetite for violence. Those who make up the crowd are always potential persecutors, for they dream of purging the community of the impure elements that corrupt it, the traitors who undermine it"—that is, a *scapegoat* (16-7). According to Girard, the scapegoat is accused of the most heinous crimes. Crucially for our discussion, most of these crimes specifically cite the alleged perpetrator as a cause of communal pollution and contamination; these crimes include rape, incest, and bestiality, as well as great violations of specifically religious taboos, such as "the profanation of the host" (15).

The particular period in which *Light in August* takes place—the late 1920s or early '30s—certainly constitutes a moment of "eclipse." According to Patterson, the collapse of slavery and the failure of Reconstruction thrust the South into a fifty-year

period of “acute liminal transition” from one type of society to the next—a prolonged period of flux made all the more chaotic by the instability, uncertainty, and suffering of the Great Depression.³¹ In Patterson’s model, such moments of transition overwhelm “each and every individual whose life is at risk; . . . the entire community, whose whole way of life is in peril; and. . . time and history itself, which has been halted in the chaos of meaning as people try to come to terms with what has happened to them, to their community, to their culture, and to their history” (185). During this period of acute instability, lynchings responded to collective anxieties of white southerners struggling to maintain, among other things, the familiar, racialized institutions of community and authority. As the representation of the town’s response to “roman holiday” at the Burden mansion indicates, this struggle necessarily takes the form of narrative: the town is concerned with recounting a story that “makes nice believing”—that is, with restoring the safe and smooth narrative through which they articulate their collective identity as a coherent whole.

Through the performance of these spectacles, members of lynch mobs across the South restored the “fictive concord” (to borrow Frank Kermode’s term) of their dominant position. Certainly, concord was not imminent in this particular moment: the global economy stood in ruins, which only exacerbated the economic collapse the South had been facing for decades. Simultaneously, wartime experiences in Europe and the availability of industrial jobs in the North encouraged African Americans to exert the rights of citizenship, which had been briefly allowed by Reconstruction but violently curtailed since. It was during this period that the Great Migration first began: in 1910,

³¹ As Roger Biles notes, for “southern farmers . . . the Great Depression immediately meant more misery and deprivation” following the collapse of cotton prices in 1920-21, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, and the drought of 1930-31 (18).

89% of the African American population lived in the South, according to Barbara Ladd, but by 1930, that number had dropped to 79% (*Nationalism and the Color Line* 165). The 1920s witnessed the migration of 14 percent of Mississippi's population of black men between 15 and 34 years old (Godden 11). As Patterson notes, lynching law took effect in an economic climate in which African American workers posed a new competitive threat to poor whites (181). This rivalry proved advantageous for the plantocracy (as well as millowners), which sought to discourage the possibility of cooperation between white and black workers.

Moreover, the industrialization of the South subjected poor whites to the mill's work whistle. In the mills the hierarchical structure resembled less the freedom of a small farm than the authoritarian regulation of plantation labor. The worker's sense of his own whiteness was suddenly destabilized by a schedule Joe Brown/Lucas Burch describes as "Starting in at daylight and slaving all day like a durn nigger with a hour off at noon to eat cold muck out of a tin bucket..." (44). As a consequence, poor whites felt the need to forcefully reassert their racial identity, as evinced by his coworker Mooney's response: "But a nigger wouldn't last till the noon whistle, working on this job like some white folks work on it." Mooney's violent reaction to Brown/Burch's subsequent description of him as a "slaving bastard" (45) underlies the serious implications of this insult: once the vulnerability of the basic economic structures of white superiority to modernity and modernization became evident, so too did the vulnerable ideologies of racial difference upon which white subjectivity is predicated. As Eric Sundquist writes, the paradoxical question posed by "the enslaving myth of racial hysteria in the twentieth century" is "not how can a black man be a white man, but how can a white man be a black man?" (*The*

House Divided 71). During a lynching, however, the question need not be asked: the delineations are made clear.

During this particular moment of “eclipse,” gender differences were also increasingly fluid, as is suggested by Faulkner’s decision to frame Christmas’s narrative with that of Lena Grove. In Ladd’s estimation, Lena’s appearance in Yoknapatawpha realizes “one of the most terrifying possibilities imaginable by a culture preoccupied with racial purity as was the white South in the 1920s” (167). She is an unwed pregnant woman, disconnected from both community and family, fearlessly and carelessly hitching rides with strangers across the southern landscape in search of the father of her unborn child. The farmer Armstid divines her circumstances within seconds, knowing “that she wears no wedding ring” without ever looking “full at her” (12); he likewise anticipates his wife’s reaction to her presence in their home. Though they both show her a degree of kindness and perhaps pity, they quickly and resolutely assign to her a negative value on the spectrum of holiness and purity based only on what they observe and the little information she provides. Mrs. Armstid is careful to limit their contact, as if Lena requires quarantine, and they soon send her on her way. Once again, the rhetorics of moral and physical purity are conflated, and undifferentiation is presented as an affront to both. “You just let one of them get married or get into trouble without being married, and right then and there is where she secedes from the woman race and species and spends the balance of her life trying to get joined up with the man race,” Armstid says to himself, adding, “That’s why they dip snuff and smoke and want to vote” (14-15). Their treatment of her is not conditioned by fanaticism but by the paradoxes imposed by an apocalyptic faith that requires charity but instills anxiety about one’s own tenuous position and fear of

communal opprobrium. By rendering judgment upon Lena, the Armstids forestall the possibility that they might be judged.

The Armstids' concern with judgment hints at the apocalyptic consequences ascribed to violations of bivalent gender norms. The paradigm of the "cult of white womanhood" provides the predominant means of discussing the racial and gender hierarchies in the South. Simply, white southerners, particularly among the upper classes and the plantocracy, fetishized white women as the embodiment and receptacle of purity; within this framework, the mere possibility of a violation of the restrictive standards of feminine virtue equates to contamination and impurity.³² This ideology plays a significant role in Hightower's position as a pariah in Jefferson, for while his bizarre theology troubles the congregation, the community effectively exiles him as a consequence of the impurity ascribed to his wife. Her scandalous demise literally and figuratively enacts the narrative of a "fallen woman": she plunges to her death from a Memphis hotel room she is sharing with her lover, who is found drunk by the police. Mrs. Hightower is hardly alone in the novel; indeed, women throughout are damned by the community for their transgressive behavior. Crucially, those condemnations are articulated in apocalyptic terms and invoke a specific scriptural analogue: Jezebel.³³ Doc Hines refers to the dietitian as "Jezebel" three times—the first time, to her face, and subsequently when recounting Joe's childhood to Byron and Hightower (132, 384-385), and McEachern hurls the epithet at Bobbie ("Away, Jezebel!") when he confronts Joe over his "lechery"

³² Among the best of many thorough examinations of white womanhood in the South are Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow's Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1995) and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988).

³³ The appellation, used to describe a wicked woman, would not be unfamiliar to Faulkner's audience: indeed, just six years later, Bette Davis portrayed a scheming southern belle in William Wyler's *Jezebel*.

(204). For both men, any sexually active woman realizes the archetype of the wicked woman embodied by the Old Testament Jezebel. In the Bible, the Phoenician-born queen of Israel turns her husband Ahab and his people from worship of YHWH, the God of Israelites, and toward the Ba'al cult of her people, and her subsequent conflict with the prophet Elijah is detailed in I and II Kings. Elijah correctly prophesies her end: the “cursed woman” is thrown from a window (like Hightower’s wife) and then consumed by dogs (II Kings 9:34). Thus, her narrative concludes with the realization of prophecy and the rendering of God’s Judgment—critical elements of apocalyptic discourse.

The apocalyptic implications of the Jezebel figure transcend this episode, however: the figure is recalled in Revelation—specifically, in Christ’s Message of Thyatira. This Jezebel is a false prophetess who seduces members of the Church and encourages them to “commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev. 2:20). Like the Old Testament figure she recalls, this Jezebel is subject to divine wrath: Christ promises to punish her (even to kill her children) as well as “them that commit adultery with her, except that they repent” (2:22). Perhaps surprisingly, it is this figure, not the more familiar Old Testament queen, who is explicitly accused of the sexual licentiousness and deviance that accompanies their name. Though, as Janet Howe Gaines notes, the OT Jezebel is referred to as a “harlot” in II Kings, no act of marital infidelity or sexual deviance is attributed to her (xv). Instead, sexual infidelity and wickedness are metonyms for infidelity toward God and idolatry; the crime of seduction equates to encouraging apostasy and “undermin[ing]” the patriarchal authority that was central to the Israelites (and, indeed, is central to the theology of Hines and McEachern). Thus, “For the New Testament writer, the name Jezebel is sufficient to connote a woman who

leads her people astray,” Gaines argues (26). From the historical figure in the Old Testament and the New Testament figure she explicitly invokes, an archetypal wicked woman emerges—one who poses a threat of moral contamination and undifferentiation by subverting the bivalent distinctions of gender. Crucially for our purposes, the threat posed by both women is resolved through an apocalyptic operation: the prophesy (or the realization of the prophesy) of judgment and punishment rendered upon them by God effectively rejects their subversive presence and restores the ontological status of the gendered social order that they challenge. By invoking the Jezebel figure, McEachern and Hines each apply an apocalyptic narrative to reinforce prevailing gender norms in a moment in which those norms appear unstable. As is the case with Hines’s ravings about Joe’s racial identity, the transgression of the prevailing formulation of gender is equated with contamination, impurity, and filth.

In this historical moment of eclipse—with the dominant systems of race and gender in flux—the collective ability of the white community to articulate itself as a coherent entity is endangered. In the novel’s climactic moments, all of Yoknapatawpha appears on to be on the brink of a cataclysmic violence and perhaps even a total collapse. While several of the characters (most notably, Christmas and Hines) struggle to maintain the coherence of their individual selves, the novel is at least as concerned with the collective experience of instability. This concern is manifest in narrative style, and throughout much of the novel, the narration is articulated by “something like the community’s continuous mind,” according to Scott Romine, rather than by a single individual (159). The effect is to reject “the discrete cognitive boundaries between private

and public space” and to establish that though “community is *different* from, it is not *separate* from the individuals who comprise it” (160). It is this voice that, after the burning of the Burden place, expresses a belief that the murder of Joanna Burden “was an anonymous crime committed not by a negro but by Negro” (*Light in August* 289). This collective voice also articulates both the awful desire “that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward” and ultimately, the bloodlust that precipitates the search “for someone to crucify” (289).

Just as the dietician claims to have “known it all the time that he’s part nigger” (129), the collective voice retrospectively denies the threat to the institutions of segregation Christmas’s passing might pose: “...they told it again: ‘He dont look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him’” (349). Likewise, when he is caught, the community is more offended by the nonchalance with which he responds than his actual crime:

He never acted either like a nigger or a white man...That was what made the folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too. (350)

The verb “act” suggests that the collective voice in some way recognizes the performative nature of race; “nigger” (including its subset, “nigger murderer”) and “white man” are roles to be played out within the narrative of southern community. The performativity of race and the threatening undifferentiation it presents are deferred, however, when they are embedding within the otherworldly drama of cosmology. Within this context, the shape, arc, and conclusion of history are preordained, and its players are only to fill out their designated roles, all of which lead toward a final apocalyptic act. By refusing his role, Christmas appears to disrupt the narrative—to demonstrate a flaw in its

ability to generate totalizing meaning. The true believers cannot assimilate the possibility of a flaw in the script that, by definition, is absolutely perfect and complete. Since the endemic bivalence of that logic can brook neither nonsense nor contradiction, the town is assured that Christmas can—and must already—fit within the binary logic. The entire procession of events that leads to Christmas’s death, from the communal attempt to capture him to his murder at Grimm’s hands, forces him into a racial category. He is, in Michael Cobbs’s words, “lynched into a racial logic of intelligibility” (167). While Grimm acts alone, the white community is certainly complicit in his actions. Its members may reluctantly pass over the ritual sacrifice of a lynching and defer to the sheriff, but they do not relinquish their collective authority over Christmas: he “belongs” to Jefferson, as a man in Mottstown tells Mrs. Hines (347). A trial is scheduled, but its outcome is foreknown. At best, it will simply parody African American claims to the rights and privileges of citizenship, and at worst, it will reinforce the position of white southerners as the ultimate judges of the limitations upon black mobility.

Just as Joe Christmas is “lynched into . . . intelligibility” by his pursuers and murderer, so too does the community seek to finally locate Joanna Burden within the prevailing logics of race and gender. By circumscribing Christmas as *Negro rapist* and Joanna as *white southern woman*, the community effectively negates the threat they—individually and together as lovers—pose to the racialized and gendered order upon which the coherent, collective identity of the community is predicated. Prior to her death, Joanna is “a foreigner, an outlander” in her own home (289). The white residents of Jefferson stay away from the Burden place and deem Joanna an outsider rather than confront the possibility of undifferentiation posed by the Burden family’s abolitionist

legacy, her own interaction with the black community, and her status as an unmarried, middle-aged woman. The collective voice does not seek to position her as a Jezebel figure; indeed, there is no evidence that, prior to her death, she is sexed at all within the town's imagination.³⁴ However, once the fire at her home consumes her body, she is abstracted as *white woman*, just as her murderer becomes not "a negro but...Negro." With the physical evidence of her existence gone, the community is free to write the meaning of that existence and to claim ownership over both Joe and Joanna.

The creation of this idealized, fetishized figuration of white femininity is contingent upon fantasies of black masculinity. White southerners projected the fundamental instability of their construct (and displaced the repressed histories of transracial sexual contact) onto an imagined epidemic of rape of white women by black men. Black men, then, were located as the preeminent threat to social fabric of the white community. However, this operation contains an unavoidable paradox: while both white supremacy and the fetishization of feminine virtue are implicated in the radical bivalence of southern religious culture, they are in some ways competing logics. The ritual mutilation and castration often incorporated into lynching provides a mechanism for negotiating the contradictions between these coeval hierarchies, Robyn Weigman contends. Slavery and Jim Crow segregation conspired to refuse black males the ability to perform many of the basic functions of manhood. Reduced to property themselves, slaves obviously had no legal rights of ownership; the white possession and rape of black women and the denial of the validity of conjugal unions under slavery prohibited them

³⁴ This is not the case for Joe, however, and he believes that she is "corrupting him" (260).

from assuming the most basic familial roles.³⁵ Thus, male slaves posed no threat to the gender hierarchy. Under Reconstruction, however, African American men asserted themselves in traditionally masculine roles, claiming the rights of citizenship and installing themselves as heads of households, inserting themselves into the extant discourse of gender. The myth of the black beast rapist emerges in response to the sudden assertion of a black masculinity that was, in many ways, very conservative. Ritual castration, Weigman writes, “aggressively denies the patriarchal sign and symbol of the masculine, interrupting the privilege of the phallus and thereby reclaiming, through the perversity of dismemberment, the black male’s (masculine) potentiality for citizenship” (83).

Abdul R. JanMohammed describes “rape” as metonymically linked to any violation of racial taboos in the Jim Crow South (49). Certainly, the exercise of fundamental citizenship rights would constitute such a violation, removing citizenship as a basic institutional mechanism of difference. However, the rhetorical use of rape in this manner is not unique to the South: as I stated earlier, rape is among the crimes stereotypically attributed to the scapegoat by a community during moments of social instability. Crucially, so are the profanation of sacred places and the contamination (possibly even the poisoning) of the community. All three of these—rape, profanation of the holy, and communal pollution—converge in the twinned figurations of the black rapist and the idealized white woman. Any distinctions between moral, physical, and racial purities are elided. Consequently, a violation of the bivalent racial code becomes

³⁵ Legal theorist Katherine M. Franke argues that “the institution of marriage was viewed as one of the primary instruments by which citizenship was both developed and managed in African Americans” (252). As she notes, “Formerly enslaved people and abolitionists generally deemed the right to marry one of the most important ramifications of emancipation” (277).

embodied as rape, and that violation is in turn abstracted as a profanation of the Holy of Holies. In castrating Christmas, then, Percy Grimm enacts an overdetermined, apocalyptic racial script that is predicated on the civic rhetoric of order, which is so frequently justified by the sanctification of white womanhood that any distinction between the secular and the sacred are removed. Just as that distinction is expunged, racial difference is upheld. Grimm forces Joanna Burden and Christmas into this simplified narrative, reducing the complicated reality of their relationship to the simple binaries of white woman and Negro murderer. In doing so, he expunges the threat their union poses both to the dominant racial and gender hierarchies and to the bivalent, apocalyptic cosmology in which they are embedded.

Heretofore, I have located the act of lynching specifically in the U.S. South; I have presented it as a product of the intertwined development of the regionally-specific institutions of racial apartheid and evangelical Protestantism, all in an economic context that was likewise regionally-distinct, and I have defined it as a ritual displacement and denial of the unavoidable contradictions of the absolutely bifurcated structures of gender and race. In its ritual maintenance of the institutions of difference, lynching was fundamentally *not* about the reification of regional difference; mobs did not assert a claim to a southern identity but rather to a *white identity* that was inexorably connected to notions of democratic citizenship. As a representation of southern racial violence, *Light in August* is compelling because it refuses to narrowly localize the threat of racial cataclysm—or of Joe Christmas’s racial ambiguity—in the South. Instead, the novel demands that the reader confront the possibility that the southern apocalyptic imaginary

and American millenarian nationalism exist in dialogue with each other, and it is thus an ideal text to explore the convergences of race, region, and nation.

As acts of sacrifice and martyrdom, lynchings may have contributed to the reification of the cohesive and coherent boundaries of white and black communities as localized units. However, their role in defining a cohesive regional identity existed largely in the minds of outsiders, horrified by the reports of racial violence “down there.”³⁶ While the ritual mutilation of black bodies can be located, generally, in the South and the western frontier, lynchings produced and enacted a claim to a white identity conceived to be as much American as southern. The response of African Americans was likewise conditioned by their own claims to the rights and identity of American citizenship. Rather than imagining their southern communities in opposition to the larger community of nation, as their forebears had during their war or the Reconstruction period that followed, these white southerners simply reinscribed their racist policies as American. In Robyn Weigman’s astute analysis, the lynching ritual is “a denial of the black male’s newly articulated right to citizenship and, with it, the various privileges of patriarchal power that have historically accompanied such significations within the public sphere” (83). Ultimately, lynchings were bound up in the discourses of nation as well as the regionally specific discourses of race, gender, and religion that previous examinations have considered.³⁷

³⁶ Leigh Anne Duck suggests that nation and region are produced through “projective fantasies,” in which U.S. histories of racism, conservatism, and violence are repressed and projected onto an “anomalous South” (*The Nation’s Region* 3). We need only look at Wright’s *Black Boy*, *Native Son*, or *Lawd Today!* to see how ritual violence in the South in fact *destabilized* the boundaries of region and provoked the beginnings of the Great Migration. Likewise, these novels also provide a sense of the racial injustice throughout the country that was obscured by the national focus on the South.

³⁷ While lynch mobs sought to violently restrict black mobility, their actions ironically instigated, even necessitated, African American migration to the North. Thus, despite the awful efforts to produce

The intersections of these historical visions are manifest most obviously through the protofascist Percy Grimm.³⁸ Like Hines, Grimm is both comic and terrifying: his “sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men” (451) seem ridiculous upon his first appearance. Likewise, the manner of his final pursuit of Christmas—pedaling furiously through town on a borrowed bicycle—undercuts both his claim to martial authority and the familiar conventions of a climactic chase. Moreover, the community’s readiness to accept his uniformed authority, despite his absurdity, is deeply troubling. A nascent, cynical version of Grimm’s nationalism can be found in Jason Compson’s wide-ranging, ill-defined anti-Semitism in *The Sound and the Fury*.³⁹ While his brother Quentin may obsess over his relationship to the South, Jason’s section is less engaged with distinctly southern ideologies of race than with the nativist obsession with blood that swept the U.S. in the late 1920s and early ‘30s and which ultimately resulted in the Ku Klux Klan’s rise from a terrorist response to Reconstruction to a national political force. Just as Jason’s concerns with the contemporary global economy juxtaposes Quentin’s obsession with the institutions of the Old South, “Grimm’s ideology of nationalism and racial purity . . . expands the novel’s provincial setting to encompass

communities as static, racially bifurcated entities, lynchings ultimately demonstrated the fluidity of regional and national identities.

³⁸ While Grimm’s late entrance is formally “curious,” he “makes much more sense” in the historical context of the contemporaneous development of fascism in global and U.S. politics, according to Ted Atkinson (149). Through Grimm, “Faulkner’s novel anticipates cultural representations of fascism as a domestic product possibility rather than a remote international phenomenon” (150).

³⁹ One thinks of Jason’s exchange with a shopkeeper, in which “Jews” are contrasted to “Americans”: “I have nothing against jews as an individual . . . It’s just the race. You’ll admit that they produce nothing. They follow the pioneers into a new country and sell them clothes” (237). Later, anxiously watching fluctuations in the stock market, Jason blames “those New York jews” for his financial failings: “Well, I reckon those eastern jews have got to live too. But I’ll damned if it hasn’t come to a pretty pass when any damn foreigner that cant make a living in the country where God put him, can come to this one and take money right out of an American’s pockets” (237).

issues of national and international import,” according to Ted Atkinson (153-4).

Atkinson’s argument succumbs to a common tendency in studies of Faulkner, attributing significance to local or regional concerns only as they relate to broader institutions, as if geographic scale is commensurate with importance. It is more fruitful, I believe, to consider Grimm as a product of the complex exchange between regional and national identity rather than as a singular representative of national and international political concerns within Faulkner’s otherwise local or regional narrative. While he may seek to forestall the extralegal activities of a Mississippi lynch mob, he does not reject them entirely; rather, he simply performs them in uniform, enacting a script conditioned by the southern discourses of race and religion while claiming the mantle of national order. Likewise, he does not dismiss the regional civil religion of a previous generation, and instead, he elides any contradiction that might be posed by the South’s reentry into national political life—between the southern and national identities worn by a dying generation shaped by the Confederate experience and their grandchildren who fought in Europe under the banner of the United States. When a veteran dismisses Grimm’s attempts to organize the local American Legion into a militia and contends that Christmas “is Jefferson’s trouble, not Washington’s,” the old lines are clearly drawn (454). Grimm’s response—a rhetorical question about the need to protect “America and Americans”—redraws them, with Jefferson inscribed as wholly American rather than particularly regional or local. Percy Grimm embodies an American nationalism as it is enacted in the U.S. South. Through his act of murder and mutilation, Grimm reconfigures the previously regional discourses of race, gender, and community as the pure expressions of national identity.

Faulkner layers these seemingly disparate narratives of nation, region, millennium, and Apocalypse upon his southern landscape, but none of these threads adequately resolves the possibility of racial undifferentiation. Likewise, none offers redemption for the white community of Jefferson, which is at least complicit in Christmas's murder. Barbara Ladd writes that Faulkner and other southern writers, "aware of the implications of defeat in a nationalistic culture, which sees itself as redemptive, as the vanguard of progress, have constructed the South as dangerous territory—a kind of national 'id' . . ." (xii). In other words, the history of the South disrupts millenarian narratives of American exceptionalism and national mission. Leigh Anne Duck astutely argues that such representations allowed American audiences and readers to project the nation's "imagined grotesques in a restricted space" (*The Nation's Region* 96), thereby obfuscating their own complicity with an unjust social order and reinforcing the prevailing discourse of millenarian nationalism. *Light in August*, however, denies the reader any such opportunity: the continent-crossing chronology of the Burden clan implicates both the geographies of the U.S. and the familiar narratives of U.S. history in the possibility of racial cataclysm.

In a conversation that critics have often neglected, Joanna recounts to Joe the family's pattern of migration from colonial New England to the early Midwestern frontier, into the expansion into the old West, and back into the South during Reconstruction. Immediately, the truncation of "Burrington" to "Burden" evokes the weight of history borne by its inheritors. Indeed, their familial history realizes a plan envisioned by Puritan millennialism and adapted into nationalist, secular mythology of unending, unlimited progress. The redemption offered by this progress was explicitly

democratic, and it included the expansion of democratic structures and national power westward and, via Reconstruction, into the U.S. South. However, the Burdens' geographic mobility does not grant them privileged position. Despite the breadth of their American experience, the people of Yoknapatawpha situate them as outsiders who threaten the stability of the extant social and racial order. "They hated us here," Joanna tells Joe. "We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpet baggers . . . Stirring up the negroes to murder and rape, they called it. Threatening white supremacy" (251).

In addition to troubling the boundaries of race within Yoknapatawpha, the Burden narrative suggests the permeability of national borders: living in Spanish-controlled California, Joanna's great-grandfather Calvin Burden learns to read the Bible from Roman Catholic Missionaries—in Latin. Consequently, the mission he assigns to the next several generations of his family is dependent on a reading of the Word filtered through a language conceived by Protestants as that of foreigners and heathens. Almost from the beginning, then, the archetypal American experience of the Burden clan is one of dynamic, intercultural exchange. However, that exchange is displaced by a performance of racial and national identity that promises to redeem the contamination posed by the nation's decadent, slaveholding European origins.⁴⁰ Traveling westward, Calvin Burden marries a woman "of Huguenot stock"—a Protestant faith, but Continental nonetheless—and denounces Catholicism as "the church of frogeating slaveholders" (241). Years later, Calvin's son, Nathaniel, returns from the frontier of Mexico with a wife, whose resemblance to his French-blooded mother deeply troubles his father: "Another damn

⁴⁰ Ladd contends that, in this historical vision, the Burdens and other Anglo-Americans have been "colonized by a European slaveholding economy and by Catholicism" as a consequence of this contact (160).

black Burden,” Calvin Burden says. “Folks will think I bred to a damn slaver” (247).

What is most crucial here is Calvin Burden’s appellation of “slaver” rather than “slave.” Miscegenation is not his concern; equating “hell and slaveholders” (243), the “blackness” he sees is not indicative of race, but rather, is a sign of a moral contamination. “Slavers,” in Grandfather Calvin’s view, are “lowbuilt black folks: lowbuilt because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh.” Unlike Gavin Stevens’s or Doc Hines’s formulations of blood, which each posit the mixture of race as a stain upon blood purity, Calvin Burden imagines the stain as a consequence of contact with sin and with the wicked continental culture that established New World slavery. In his view, “the French, the Spanish, the Rebel, and the Negro...belong to the same party,” Ladd notes (162). Unlike Hines, he views miscegenation in millenarian rather than apocalyptic terms: the original sin of slavery has left the nation contaminated, but it will ultimately be redeemed. By ending slavery, the Union—the military embodiment of his Puritan ideal—had “freed them” all from the moral stain of slavery: “They’ll bleach out now. In a hundred years they will be white folks again. They maybe we’ll let them come back into America” (247-8). This religious vision articulates a confusing version of the theology of abolitionism and its forebear, the Puritanism of New England, which conceived their errand as the millennial redemption of humanity. His speech at Joanna’s parents’ wedding explicitly employs the language of millenarian deliverance. He positions “Lincoln and the negro and Moses and the children of Israel” as analogous and describes the Red Sea as “just the blood that had to be spilled in order that the black race might cross into the Promised Land” (252). He envisions a history in which racial reconciliation

is complete and literal and in which emancipation bleaches away any evidence of blackness. Blacks may inherit the mantle of chosen-ness but only by following their white Moses into the Promised Land of democracy.

Despite their experiences across the continent, the Burdens hold fast to the theology of New England, and this wedding-day address enacts the familiar script described by Sacvan Bercovitch in *The American Jeremiad*. At the core of Calvin Burden's cosmology is the seemingly contradictory belief that "God's punishments were *corrective*, not destructive" (8). The wedding feast might strike us as such an inappropriate time for this sort of exhortation, and consequently, we are apt to liken the eldest Burden to the fanatical Hines. However, in the context of New England Puritanism, the performance of the jeremiad is celebratory. God's vengeance is "a sign of love, a father's rod used to improve the errant child," writes Bercovitch. "The Puritans did not seek out affliction, but where they found it they recorded it zealously, and almost as gratefully, as they recorded instances of God's mercies toward them." In this context, Calvin Burden's speech suddenly seems less inappropriate: by blessing the mission undertaken by the Burden family and prophesying its ultimate triumph at the moment in which its next generation is celebrated, the speech fits the generic conventions of the wedding toast just as well as those of the New England jeremiad.

However, that moment of triumph has not yet arrived—even in Calvin Burden's view. Both former slaves and slavers will have to "bleach out" in the desert before they are "let back in" the Promised Land of America. This historical vision fails to account for the fact that, though their rights might be radically circumscribed, blacks *do* live in the United States. Furthermore, the regimes of white authority were "let back in" far sooner

than Calvin Burden might have predicted, despite their temporary removal from power during Reconstruction. The institutions of racial difference have yet to be overcome at the moment, decades later, in which Joanna recounts the story. Consequently, it is Joanna and Joe, not the white southerners, who are exiled to the margins of community and denied the rights of citizenship. Their exile is a stark contrast to the discursive and imaginary exile in Calvin Burden's speech, and its consequences are violent, if not cataclysmic. Joanna's father Nathaniel edges toward this recognition: he rejects his father's (Calvin's) millenarian vision in favor of a convoluted articulation of the nation's racial history in the apocalyptic terms of doom. In his view, blacks remain God's chosen people but only because they were chosen to suffer the consequences of the white race's sins (253). African Americans, then, are cursed—*chosen* to suffer—while the white race is *doomed* to eternally pay for its sins. Her father's racial vision is irrevocably bifurcated: the races each occupy eternally separate roles within the unfolding drama of sacred history, and the white role is benevolently patriarchal, at best. Nathaniel Burden continues to ascribe suffering as a sign of election and chosen-ness. However, he necessarily strays from the conventions of the jeremiad. Faced with the suffering of African Americans, he cannot claim this status for himself. The only alternative in this bifurcated cosmology is doom.

Despite its inability to transcend the limitations of bivalence, Nathaniel Burden's vision of doom comes closer to the reality of race in Faulkner's fictional world and to the American experience as it is lived out in the Burden family history: the grandfather Calvin Burden kills a man in St. Louis "in an argument over slavery" (242); when his son Nathaniel (Joanna's father) sends word from Colorado, the messenger has lost an arm as

veteran of a “partisan guerrilla horse in the Kansas fighting” (244), a reference perhaps to John Brown’s radical abolitionism; this one-armed messenger reports that Nathaniel has killed a Mexican alleged to have stolen his horse;⁴¹ and finally, once the family arrives in Yoknapatawpha during Reconstruction, Joanna’s brother Calvin is killed by Gen. Sartoris, “over a question of negro voting” (248). The landscape of the southern and western frontier is littered with bodies, Anglo- and African American, Mexican, and (as Faulkner explores in *Go Down, Moses*) Native American, which illustrate the inevitability of racial conflict. Ultimately, this overwhelming specter of racial doom situates *Light in August* within the tradition of the American jeremiad—alongside the works of Herman Melville, another author who recognized the implicit contradiction the institutions of racial difference posed to the millennial nationalism of the United States and who used an aesthetic of doom to challenge its teleology. Of the various millennial visions in *Light in August*, intersecting, contradictory, and coeval, none seem to offer the possibility of deliverance. The narrative of doom finally consumes both Joanna Burden and Joe Christmas. Joanna cannot escape the dream of a cross-shaped black shadow, looming over successive generations of white children (253). Confounded by the impossibility of that burden, she seeks to seal her damnation by finally violating its ultimate division through interracial sex. However, this requires Christmas to forego his racial ambiguity, to accept a stable racial identity, and, thus, to surrender to the fate to which his grandfather doomed him as a child and which he has resisted since. Despite his rejection of a stable, bourgeois black identity, that fate seems unavoidable. Our final image of Joe and Joanna together is one of conflict, each facing the other with a weapon

⁴¹ The messenger’s rendering of the Mexican as a racial and national Other presages the purported national and ethnic identity of Joe Christmas’s father.

in hand. This, it seems, is the terrible and violent culmination toward which they believe their transgressive relationship—indeed, their transgressive lives—has been inevitably and unavoidably leading.

If, as in Barbara Ladd's assessment, southern literary landscapes are "dangerous territor[ies]" that challenge the millenarian strands of American culture and historiography, it is at least in part because the violent oppression of African Americans under Jim Crow defies any easy narrative coherence, including those that lynchings aimed to reinforce. Faulkner's engagement with the apocalyptic imaginary transcends simple representation of the experiences that disrupt these narratives; instead, the disruption of these different eschatologies is suggested by the novel's very structure. Any attempt to unpack the convergences of the southern apocalyptic imaginary with American millenarian nationalism in *Light in August* is inevitably compounded by the novel's formal engagement with the apocalyptic concerns of modernism.⁴² In his analysis of *The Sound and The Fury*, Jean-Paul Sartre describes a style haunted by the past; he imagines Faulkner's vision of the world as from the perspective "of a man sitting in an open car and looking backwards." Images fly past, "and only afterwards, when he has a little perspective, do they become trees and men and cars" (266). The present is "full of gaps, and, through these gaps, things of the past, fixed, motionless and silent as judges or glances, come to invade it" (267). This "invasion" of the present by the past is manifest in

⁴² Among these is a concern with the apocalyptic consequences of a waning of meaning. Modernism often vacillates between mourning the ability to represent modern reality and the heroically searching for new, experimental modes of representation. One thinks of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "There are no eyes here/In this valley of dying stars . . . In this last of meeting places/We grope together/And avoid speech" (*Poems* 57). Indicative of the artistic response is W.B. Yeats's famed poetic System, which Kermode describes as "an attempt in the Last Days to provide a language of renovation" (108).

Light in August, as in other Faulkner works, through ceaseless temporal disruptions. Among these are the novel's various leaps between seemingly disconnected narrative threads; flashbacks; repetitions of various images and tropes; and a series of doublings (Hightower and Hines, Hines and McEachern, Byron Bunch and Lucas Burch/Joe Brown, Lucas Burch/Joe Brown and Joe Christmas, Christmas and Lena's child). These often disparate elements converge, collide, and slide against each other in ways that defy systematic categorization. Rather than attempting to align these recurrences in any stable configuration, it is more useful to consider how these uncertain, unstable juxtapositions (re)produce the chaos the novel seeks to represent in Jefferson. The novel's most immediate critique of the ideologies of southern segregation and millenarian nationalism emerges from its representation of the apocalyptic rhetoric and ritual violence necessary to maintain their stability. Its critical stance on this culture is also manifest formally: *Light in August* refuses the linear progression upon which these ideologies are contingent, instead disrupting normal flow of time and prohibiting the progression toward an ultimate *telos* through a series of relentless repetitions. The Apocalypse toward which the novel builds is not the triumphant culmination of history but rather, an identifiably modernist conception of a world finally exhausted by its ceaseless motion.

Lena Grove's wanderings across Faulkner's southern landscape initiate the disrupted teleology that is central to *Light in August*; on the cusp of giving birth, Lena is, as many scholars have noted, a figuration of fertility amid the sun-bleached desolation of late summer (Brooks 67). However, this is hardly indicative of the Armstids' view of her. Unwed, pregnant, and dislodged from family and community, Lena epitomizes the threats to community posed by modernity and mobility. The same contradictions are evident in

the narrator's description of the Alabama mill town she has left behind: the mill, so central to that community that it's incorporated into its name—Doane's Mill—provides work, but it threatens to destroy the landscape. Once that occurs, the narrator tells us, "some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of it and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away" (4).

The remainder of the equipment, the artifice of human progress, would remain, gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stumpocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into read and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumns and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes. (4-5)

Here, the apocalyptic cycle of destruction and rebirth is parodied: the natural world is devoured by the industry while the most ancient artifact of industrialization—the wheel—is left to be overtaken by the weeds. New machinery replaces old but only until it too is worn out. The result is a cycle of unending and utterly predictable motion, of which the narrator speaks with the certainty of foreknowledge. However, the voice is not prophetic, but resigned: the cycle is unavoidable and unstoppable. Likewise, Lena's journey—"a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark to day again through which she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars" (7)—parodies progress, depicting eternal movement that never reaches any destination.⁴³

⁴³ The motion of the wagon is likened to "something moving forever and without progress an urn" (7); as many have noted, this recalls the famous image of immortality in Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." The motif occurs again in Joe's nightmare of "ranked and moonlight urns," after he learns that his would-be girlfriend is menstruating (189).

Gail Hightower evinces another teleological disruption; he refuses both the blind, forward-looking optimism of millenarian nationalism and the apocalyptic vision of Hines. Instead, he loses himself within the stagnant and doomed regional theology of the Lost Cause, which envisioned white southerners as God's Chosen People who have been chastised and ultimately redeemed through their defeat. In Hightower's cosmology, the sacrifice of Christ gives way to the valorization of southern soldiers, and the final conflict at Armageddon is replaced by battles from eighty years prior, elevated to cosmic importance. The collective voice of Jefferson tells Byron Bunch that Hightower, as a young minister, spoke "wild[ly] too in the pulpit, using religion as though it were a dream. Not a nightmare, but something which went faster than the words in the Book; a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth . . ." (62). In his inability to "get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping horse untangled from each other," Faulkner's Hightower both realizes Sartre's analysis of the historical vision of *Sound and the Fury* as irreconcilably backward-looking and anticipates Walter Benjamin's allegorical reading of Gustav Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History." The painting depicts the angel of history, standing outside of history and looking back toward the past, writes Benjamin; he wishes to return to the past, to "make whole what has been smashed," but is blown forward by the violent storm of Progress and is forced to witness the ceaseless (and repetitive) piling up of history's debris. Like the angel, Hightower hopes to heal the past by refusing to leave it, turning his back not just to the future but to the present as well. He attempts to release the fury of the storm in his frenzied sermons, which conflate the secular narrative of history with the sacred narrative of religion.

In its narrow, fanatical focus on defeat, Hightower's theology denies the possibility of progress in a manner distinct from the antimodern message preached by many of his clerical contemporaries. In the early twentieth century, southern evangelical churches adopted a Fundamentalist theology as a reaction to secular ideologies, scientific advances, and those processes of modernization which destabilized the familiar, prevailing discourses of gender, race, and place. Hightower is no reactionary, however. Rather than actively thwarting political and social change, he simply ignores the present moment, even to the point that he ignores his own wife's infidelities. As a result, he is removed from his position, shunned by the community, and dislocated in time. Hightower's historical paralysis is considered blasphemous and discomfits the community.. However, his theology is troubling only in that it points to the paralyzing possibilities of the community's own ideology. Hightower's halted historical vision is simply a more obvious manifestation of the flawed eschatology upon which the community's vision of its own racial chosen-ness is predicated.

Though Hightower's sermons are perceived as nonsensical and even heretical, his cyclonic frenzy only makes obvious the violent energies and cataclysmic possibilities the southern community attempts to contain within its foundational, cosmological narrative of racial difference. He is hardly the only character overwhelmed by an "invasion" of the past. John T. Irwin notes that repetition in Faulkner's work is indicative of a sense of familial "fate or doom" (60)—"a feeling that an ancestor's actions can determine the actions of his descendants for generations to come by compelling them periodically to repeat his deeds" (61). In particular, this is manifest through the multigenerational relationships of grandparents and grandchildren; as Irwin notes, "Hightower, Joanna

Burden, and Joe Christmas . . . have had their destinies determined by the lives of their grandfathers.” Formulated in this manner, the cycle of familial *doom* forecloses the possibility of progress as well as free will. Indeed, this force—imagined variously as *doom*, *fate*, and the anthropomorphic Player—is Joe Christmas’s ultimate adversary. He attempts to resist this overwhelming specter through the reiteration of his racial ambiguity. At every step, he seeks to disrupt the collective gaze of community that would locate him within its bivalent logic. This pathological need to be unknowable seems borne of his life in the orphanage. There, his attainment of sentience and individuation is determined by his grandfather’s gaze: “*That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time*” (138). That experience initiates Christmas’s desire to escape the fate that racial inscription would proscribe as well as his belief in the inevitability of that fate—that is, the overwhelming sense that “*Something is going to happen to me*” (104). “[H]e believed with calm paradox,” writes Faulkner, “that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe” (280).

While the initial images of the novel evoke stagnation, the repetitions within it generate a frenzied momentum until they threaten to spin out of control and plunge both the book and the community it contains into chaos. Just as the wild shape of Hightower’s sermons evinces the possibility of collapse, Faulkner “measure[es] the fragility of the South’s social and psychological order” through a narrative structure that seems to be on the brink of “collapse into cascading, uncontrolled rhetoric,” writes Sundquist (79).⁴⁴ However, the novel remains ultimately coherent—held together by “the issue of blood,”

⁴⁴ Indeed, Romine describes the novel’s structure as a paradoxical equilibrium between “its tremendous centrifugal energy—that is, its numerous *kinds* of shifts that threaten to fracture the novel into a multitude of narrative shards—[and] an equally powerful centripetal force that prevents such a dispersal” (151).

in Sundquist's estimation. I wish to reframe this: the novel's formal cohesion is not as much a product of the "spurious connections" of blood as its steadfast refusal to answer the question of Christmas's racial background. As if it were following the script written by Heisenberg, the narrative loops around the solution each time the reader nears it. Ultimately, Joe Christmas is the agent of much of this uncertainty; each time he settles into a situation, whether with the McEacherns, in Detroit, Chicago, or in Jefferson, he feels compelled to loudly, forcefully, and even violently confound the bivalent logic of race. Surprisingly, he claims to be black even though he perceives black people and black life as utterly "impenetrable" (116). Nor does he believe that he is knowable to African Americans: "Dont even know they cant see me," Joe says of a group of black Yoknapatawphans (325). Despite his admitted lack of evidence, he continually asserts a black identity. He does so because it is a resistant, disruptive act. These assertions (first to a white prostitute, next to Bobbie, then to Joanna, and finally to Joe Brown/Lucas Burch) occur following prolonged or intimate interactions with people operating under the assumption that he is *white*. By engaging him as a white man, they locate him with the bivalent racial logic. Joe disrupts that logic but only for a moment. Rather than claiming a new, hybrid identity, Joe simply relocates himself within the bivalent racial order. The revelation is shocking and disturbing, but it ultimately reifies the prevailing logic of race and positions his particular experiences as aberrant or deviant, rather than evidence of that logic's inherent limitations.

Of his many assertions of blackness, his admission to Joanna is ultimately the most calamitous: in the earliest stages of their romance, Joe's desire for Joanna Burden is conditioned by her own marginalized position. As a foreigner in her own home, she

seems to provide sanctuary from racial ideologies; ultimately, however, as her enraptured screams of “Negro! Negro! Negro!” (259-60) make clear, her desire for him is predicated on—and twisted by—her own exceptional logic of race. She names him, first during their lovemaking and again when she encourages him to attend the Negro college. When Joanna initiates the discussion while wearing unfamiliar “steelrimmed spectacles” (275), Joe unavoidably becomes the subject of her gaze, watched and categorized by her just as he had been by Doc Hines at the orphanage decades earlier. Later, she demands that he pray with her; this act would insert him into the discourse of purity and holiness and, thus, would amount to a surrender to knowability. We might understand Joanna’s killing as another attempted disruption of any effort to locate him racially. However, the power of this assertion is tempered by the overwhelming sense that it has always-already occurred, and that in killing Joanna, he has simply fulfilled the fate to which he has been doomed by his grandfather.⁴⁵

Indeed, Joanna’s death initiates the novel’s most profound temporal disruptions. Eventually, Joe internalizes the disruption he initiates elsewhere. Unhinged from time and place, Joe finds himself in a waking dream, in which “[t]ime, the spaces of light and dark, had long since lost orderliness” (333), running but not conscious of the running until he is completely lost. He finally awakens and begins to resituate himself in time. First he reestablishes the rhythm of daily life through the consumption of regular meals (333); he then calculates the days of the week, “as though now and at last he had an actual and urgent need to strike off the accomplished days toward some purpose, some definite day or act, without either falling short or overshooting” (335). Soon after

⁴⁵ In fact, when he enters the rural black church and assaults members of the congregation, he becomes a double for his monstrous grandfather.

Christmas is resituated in time, the reader is no longer privy to his thoughts; the remainder of his story is rendered solely through the collective voice. Exhausted by the energies required to fend off the invasions of the past, it is as if he surrenders his voice to the collective and allows it to name him whatever it wants.

By following this Heisenbergian structure, *Light in August* refuses to yield the ultimate promise of Apocalypse: revelation. Though Joe surrenders to the collective voice, the novel ultimately dismisses its claim to knowledge and exposes the limitations of its bivalent, apocalyptic epistemology. Thus, the more emphatic a claim to Truth is made in *Light in August*—and perhaps in all of Faulkner—the more obscured that insight becomes. By denying the possibility of contradictory knowledge, then, the collective voice forecloses the possibility of revelation. When Hightower asks Byron, “But are you going to undertake to say just how far evil extends into the appearance of evil? Just where between doing and appearing evil stops?” (306), he seems to support the authority of the community to identify the nature and presence of evil. Hightower, with some irony, posits evil as a human construct, articulated only in its rejection. This sort of operation recurs throughout the text. Blackness, for instance, functions similarly: even for Joe, who has lived as a black man in black communities, African American experience is impenetrable, unknowable “abyss” (116). Likewise, despite the constant telling and retelling of events, the people of Jefferson know nothing of the true nature of Joe and Joanna’s relationship.

The foreclosure of revelation is reinforced in Christmas’s perplexing surrender to Grimm. According to Sundquist, “his seemingly insane passivity” reflects an

“exhaustion” that is indicative both of Joe’s own sense of defeat and of the formal necessities of controlling the “frenetic” narrative (73). While the form of his death reinforces the conflation of Christmas with Christ and of lynching with crucifixion, the violent climax does not transform the community. If revelation or revolutionary change is even possible, they are perhaps not likely. One of the deputies present for Joe’s death recoils in horror and vomits. We might be tempted to view this revulsion as evidence that at least this one person has realized the sheer horror of what is possible within this toxic environment. However, as Scott Romine rightly notes, the deputy’s reaction parallels Joe’s reaction to the knowledge of menstruation—a revelation that fails to deepen his understanding of gender and femininity (*Narrative Forms* 190). Instead, vomiting in both instances is indicative of an inability to assimilate knowledge and a subsequent rejection of it. One hopes that the deputy has rejected the bivalent epistemology which cannot accommodate this experience; however, the episode concludes as “the scream of the siren . . . pass[es] out of the realm of hearing” (465)—that is, out of the spectrum of intelligibility.⁴⁶ Because the meaning of the event is not immediately accessible, the witnesses (and perhaps the town) are doomed to be haunted by it.⁴⁷ They will revisit this unassimilated experience only indirectly, as they “contemplate old disasters and newer hopes” in “the mirroring faces” of their progeny. However, they will not directly confront the possibility of their own racial ambiguity; the fundamental instability of the foundational racialized and gendered ideologies; or the cataclysmic future to which this instability has doomed them. Progress toward a *telos* might have temporarily been

⁴⁶ Richard C. Moreland makes a similar observation about Jim Bond’s “unmediated, unconsolated howl” in *The Sound and the Fury* (*Faulkner and Modernism* 119).

⁴⁷ Cathy Caruth writes that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4).

restored, but what is there to prevent the coming of the next figure in the repeating cycle of “numberless avatars” (226), each of whom must be sacrificed in order push back the traumatic, repressed memory of undifferentiation?

The reader is left with a community doomed to burn out in its own frenzied attempt to control the complexities of modernity and the contradictions it refuses to acknowledge. Meaning itself is exhausted by these ceaseless repetitions. The apocalyptic rhetoric of Doc Hines and the apocalyptic theology of racial difference (through which the community defines itself as pure) give way to the Apocalypse of modernism—to obsessive concerns with the incompleteness of language, with the moral failings of modern industrial society, and with the problems of representing “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history,” in T.S. Eliot’s words (177). In many ways, the narrative experimentations of modernist writers sought to realize the promise of Apocalypse; Bull suggests that “[i]n societies where bivalence is assumed to be natural, the undifferentiated is inaccessible to normal patterns of thought, so access can be gained only by means that circumvent the accepted modes of cognition” (83). The modernist effort to find radically new ways of articulating human experience and to approach an originary unity of meaning that would overcome the limitations of language, reaches toward the reincorporation of the undifferentiated, the unintelligible, and the unrecognizable. *Light in August* exposes the limitations endemic to that effort as *narrative*. It offers no antidote for violence and prescribes no practicable, actionable solution.

Instead, it contains the possibility of collapse within the frame of Lena’s boundless, unflappable faith and the possibility of new life. The birth of her son initiates

another temporal disruption through repetition: Mrs. Hines becomes dislocated from time and conflates Joe's birth with the birth of Lena's child with such certainty that even the new mother is confused about the child's paternity. The novel offers some limited sense of hope, as the birth restores Hightower to the regular flow of time. But if any character experiences a revelation, it is Byron Bunch. He is able to overcome the collective response to Lena as a contaminated figure—a response which he in fact shares earlier. As Richard C. Moreland notes, “Byron is drawn not away from Lena, nor to scapegoat or dominate Lena as a threat to his sense of his own masculinity, but toward Lena, as if to learn how she thinks and acts what so many like himself have thought unthinkable, unbearable, unacceptable” (28). Lena remains a figure of undifferentiation, unsettling the conventional discourse of judgment. In accepting her, Byron is willing to accept the *possibility* of something that transcends these prevailing narratives. However, what that means remains unresolved. If there is a path toward meaningful historical progress, revelation, or deliverance, *Light in August* does not chart it for us; instead, the novel simply feints toward its possibility and remains deeply skeptical.

Chapter 2: “Tearing Down the Temple”: Richard Wright’s Millennial Resistance

*Hound dogs on my trail
School children sitting in jail
Black cat cross my path
I think every day's gonna be my last*

*Lord have mercy on this land of mine
We all gonna get it in due time
I don't belong here
I don't belong there
I've even stopped believing in prayer*

*.....
Picket lines
School boy cots
They try to say it's a communist plot
All I want is equality
for my sister my brother my people and me*

*Yes you lied to me all these years
You told me to wash and clean my ears
And talk real fine just like a lady
And you'd stop calling me Sister Sadie*

*Oh but this whole country is full of lies
You're all gonna die and die like flies
I don't trust you any more
You keep on saying "Go slow!"
"Go slow!"*

-Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam!”

A cursory overview of several major works by Richard Wright immediately suggests a fascinating, if vexing, relationship with religion. According to his biographer Michel Fabre, “...throughout his life [Wright] attempted to reject what the South stood for in his mind but he also kept reaffirming, repeatedly and compulsively, what it had meant for him and how he had been molded by it” (78). One could replace the word “religion” with “the South” without either diminishing the accuracy of Fabre’s original statement or even really altering the idea it expresses. As I have argued, any inquiry into the history

and culture of the U.S. South necessarily includes an examination of its religious culture. In Wright's case, however, the two are inextricable: the southern childhood he recalls in *Black Boy* is haunted, not just by the specter of southern racism but also by the stifling Seventh Day Adventism of his grandmother. Though the black church was the central institution of the communities to which he belonged, religion proved to be the cause of great strife within Wright's family. He viewed his grandmother's faith as yet another agent of oppression in a horribly oppressive environment, a suffocating force stifling his intellectual achievement, and yet another set of arbitrary social codes he was expected to perform and ideologies he was expected to passively accept. Still, in the essay "Blueprint for Negro Writing" and the short story cycle *Uncle Tom's Children*, the African American church clearly retains a vital, significant role in Wright's vision of a meaningful and revolutionary mass black workers' movement. The presentation of religion in the collection is not limited to the depiction of the church or the evaluation of it as a potential vehicle for resistance, however: scripture offers a typology out of which Wright constructs these stories, and the apocalyptic imaginary provides imagery crucial to his aesthetic sensibility.

In our current political discourse, Seventh Day Adventism and communism are positioned at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. An immediate and obvious connection, however, might be found in the teleological emphasis of both systems: both traditional Marxist communism and evangelical Christianity envision an inevitable, potentially violent conflict which will bring an end to the current social structure in favor of a new one. In *Black Boy*, Wright describes the frightening cosmology of his grandmother's Seventh Day Adventist faith as

a gospel clogged with images of vast lakes of eternal fire, or seas vanishing, of valleys of dry bones, of the sun burning to ashes, of the moon turning to blood, of stars falling to the earth...; a salvation that teemed with fantastic beasts having multiple heads and horns and eyes and feet... a cosmic tale that began before time and ended with the clouds of the sky rolling away at the Second Coming of Christ; chronicles that concluded with the Armageddon, dramas thronged with all the billions of human beings who had ever lived or died as God judged the quick and the dead . . . (102)

This terrifying invocation of the apocalyptic imaginary is by no means unique to *Black Boy*. Indeed, apocalyptic imagery figures prominently in the landscapes of the rural South and the urban North explored in Wright's fictional universe. The apocalyptic imaginary clearly informs the artistic vision of the apostate Wright: his depiction of a society on the brink of collapse and the call for revolutionary change that characterizes much of his writing remain rooted in the very beliefs he claims to disdain in *Black Boy*.

This chapter will explore the apocalyptic imaginary as the discursive space suited to the aims of Wright's early writing: the development of a Marxist message which would attend to the particularities of black experience and revitalize an exhausted resistant, if not a revolutionary, energy within African American culture. In *Uncle Tom's Children*, Biblical typology and rhetoric lead the way toward a transition from a faith in the Christian apocalypse toward an active position in the coming Marxist revolution. By stressing their similarities, Wright establishes the avenues through which his readers can move from the familiar discourse of Christian faith and into the unfamiliar, transgressive discourse of class resistance. This work aims to restore the colonized, brutalized black

subject into a meaningful teleology—a teleology in which African American communities are the agents of their own revolutionary change. In this historical vision, the apocalyptic rituals of lynchings do not confirm the absolute bivalence of racial difference. Rather, these cataclysms, perhaps counterintuitively, reveal the limitations of white authority.

To map the particular contours of the apocalyptic imaginary, one must inevitably turn to the central texts of African American religious traditions—spirituals and hymns. Consider, for example, the familiar “O Mary, Don’t You Weep,”⁴⁸ which invokes the flight from bondage in Egypt in both its opening lines and its chorus: “Moses stood on the Red Sea shore, smiting that water with a two-by-four/ Pharaoh’s army got drowned. O Mary don’t you weep.” The song does not recount the wrath visited upon the Egyptian soldiers simply to establish God’s power, but instead, to call up the revolutionary possibilities of apocalyptic prophesy. “One of these nights about twelve o’clock, this old world’s gonna reel and rock,” the song reminds us, and later: “God gave Noah the rainbow sign, ‘No more water, but fire next time!’” By fusing these three stories of judgment and deliverance, “O Mary Don’t You Weep” articulates a typological historical vision: just as God has punished the wicked and delivered the faithful in the past, so will He in the days to come.

Spirituals like “O Mary” allowed slaves to assume “the role of the chosen people,” elected for a special historical role by their earthly suffering and permitted them to “prophesy an apocalyptic end to the world that slaveholders made,” according to Houston A. Baker Jr. (*Long Black Song* 53). The revolutionary eschatology of slave

⁴⁸ This song is also often titled “O Mary, Don’t You Mourn.”

religion culminates in the Jubilee, a moment which begins with Christ's joyous return and offers the long-awaited deliverance from the physical bondage of chattel slavery and the spiritual bondage of human sin. As the moment of divine Judgment, the Jubilee promises retribution against oppressive regimes of white power—that is, otherworldly justice that transcends the corrupt institutions of human authority. More broadly, as Gilroy persuasively argues, this cosmology amounts to a “critique of modernity” and of its inadequacy to generate totalizing meaning (56). Rationalism and empiricism too easily yield to the prevailing historical order and fail to accommodate the experiences of an oppressed minority; in short, these systems cannot adequately represent the existential pain endured by a group that has been discursively reduced to the status of property. The cosmology of African American religious traditions, however, offers scriptural precedence for bondage and deliverance; thus, it offers a counternarrative in which deliverance and justice are not only possible but also imminent.

Given this implicit critical stance, the apocalyptic imaginary has proved to be a wellspring for African American writers, orators, and leaders. For instance, David Walker writes in his *Appeal* (1829) that slaveholding nations

forget that God rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, having his ears continually open to the cries, tears and groans of his oppressed people; and being a just and holy Being will at one day appear fully in behalf of the oppressed, and arrest the progress of the avaricious oppressors; for although the destruction of the oppressors God may not effect by the oppressed, yet the Lord our God will bring other destructions upon them. (3)

The echoes of Walker's prophetic rhetoric are audible in Frederick Douglass's sermon “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?,” delivered little over a decade later. “We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake,” he exhorts. “The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation

must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced” (344). Of course, the uses of this sort of rhetoric were hardly limited to the nineteenth century; indeed, in *The Afro-American Jeremiad*, David Howard-Pitney introduces the eponymous rhetorical model through a reading of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, contextualizing King within this tradition of prophetic millennialism (3-4).

While Howard-Pitney, like Bercovitch before him and Eric Sundquist after, engages the apocalyptic imaginary through the rhetorical tradition of the jeremiad, my analysis is less concerned with this particular ritual of national identity than the discursive operations of the evangelical cosmology. In the previous chapter, I argued that Apocalypse is often deployed to negotiate or avoid contradiction and that the white regimes of southern segregation invoked Apocalypse in order to reinforce the radical and absolute bivalence of their racial order, even in the face of instances of hybridity and undifferentiation. Within African American religious traditions, invocations of Apocalypse negotiate a different set of contradictions. Instead of offering a justification for the bivalent racial order, Apocalypse is deployed in order to work through the inexplicable, nearly unrepresentable traumatic violence and suffering that black communities endured. This is the fundamental question of theodicy: how can a just and loving God and a morally ordered universe accommodate evil of this magnitude?⁴⁹ It is likewise the critical question of traumatic experience and recovery: how might an individual move beyond an experience when it does not yield to coherent articulation?⁵⁰

⁴⁹ This is also the question posed by the Book of Job—the text from which Wright drew the epigram for *Native Son*: “Even today is my complaint rebellious,/My stroke is heavier than my groaning” (Job 23:2).

⁵⁰ According to Cathy Caruth, trauma “is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance

The apocalyptic imaginary provides an alternative register, one that neither reduces the experience of suffering to any rational category nor seeks to locate it in any historical narrative which would sanction white authority.⁵¹

In the Jim Crow South, African Americans sought to resist the (a)historical condition which the terror of lynching sought to force upon them through the apocalyptic imaginary. Vengeance and retribution were not realistic options for most African Americans, but they found opportunities to resist the terror of lynching through rhetoric: they spoke, Donald T. Mathews writes, “in a voice that denounced the vicious crowds that murdered them and the public policies that demeaned them and stripped them of their citizenship rights” (171). Such resistance “could be dangerous to life and limb,” Mathews continues, “but silence could be dangerous to the soul.” In newspaper editorials, in sermons, in other public addresses, and, particularly, at funerals, African Americans did not simply denounce white regimes of power. Instead, they enacted their own salvation and reclaimed, through their faith, the humanity and the solidarity that lynching sought to destroy. If the connection between the lynched victim and the crucified Christ was evident to Faulkner, a writer with impulses about both religion and segregation that were complicated (if not contradictory), then it was obvious to African American Christians. By displacing an imagined racial threat onto a singular scapegoat, white lynch mobs “made the person thus embodied and subjected to their wrath in hideous punishment into a martyr” (Mathews 181). For the black community, this sacrifice did not purify the

and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and in our language” (4). The problems of providing meaning and coherence to suffering are ultimately the questions of both trauma theory and theodicy.

⁵¹ In the seminal *Blues and Ideology*, Baker calls for “a uniquely Afro-American historical and literary historical discourse” adequate to attend to the experiences and legacies of the ““commercial deportation”” of peoples. Juxtaposing his formulation with the prevailing narratives of U.S. history and literary history (or, at least, those prevailing in 1987 when *Blues Ideology* was published), he contends that this uniquely black discourse “evoke[s] Armageddon rather than the New Jerusalem” (24-25)

blood of whites but rather sanctified the African American people as innocent, holy, and, in fact, a people *chosen* by God to suffer and to ultimately prevail. For African American writers, however, lynchings served as more than instances of martyrdom: they became cataclysmic events, inevitable eruptions of violence that were preordained by the circumstances of Jim Crow. As communal cataclysm, lynchings offered black writers the opportunity to render judgment upon the white regimes of power, to rhetorically and narratively blow open the history that had erased their suffering, and to locate those lynched bodies as sites of renewal.

In the previous chapter, I examined how lynchings inform and are informed by the cosmology of white southern evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism; this relationship was a paramount concern of anti-lynching writers, who sought to point out the horrific hypocrisy of ostensibly Christian people committing such brutal rituals. In *Rope and Faggot*, Walter White writes that “[n]o person who is familiar with the Bible-beating, acrobatic, fanatical preachers of hell-fire in the South, and who has seen the orgies of emotion created by them, can doubt for a moment that dangerous passions are released which contribute to the emotional instability and play a part in lynching” (43). White’s thesis seems to be manifest in Faulkner’s horrific figuration of southern racial violence, Doc Hines. However, the critique of racial violence offered by *Light in August* is limited at best, as the consequences of racial violence are almost entirely restricted to the *white* community of Jefferson: the novel’s ultimate concern is *their* damnation, their complicity in Christmas’s crimes and his death. When the jeremiad is offered by a black writer who lives or has lived under the threat of white violence, however, it takes on a dramatically different texture—it is an act of defiance, disrupting the white claim to

rhetorical authority over the black subject. Thus, writers like Walter White, James Weldon Johnson, James Baldwin, and Wright all naturally turned to the apocalyptic imaginary to represent the terror of lynching ritual in the black community as well as to disrupt the lynch mobs' claims to righteousness.

Perhaps more than any of these writers' works, Richard Wright's corpus unflinchingly forces the reader to watch as their violent consequences are realized. Consider one of Wright's earlier published works, the poem "Between the World and Me": a neatly halved, four stanza poem, in which the first stanza depicts the narrator stumbling upon the horrifying debris left after a lynching; in the second, he is fixated by the skull of the victim:

And upon the trampled grass were buttons, dead matches,
butt-ends of cigars and cigarettes, peanut shells, a
drained gin-flask, and a whore's lipstick;
Scattered traces of tar, restless arrays of feathers, and the
lingering smell of gasoline.
And through the morning air the sun poured yellow
surprise into the eye sockets of the stony skull. (*The Richard Wright
Reader* 247)

By the third stanza, the scene of desolation comes alive. The dissembled corpse, its parts strewn across the landscape, becomes once more embodied through the form of the narrator, who plunges into the experience of the lynching. As a result, the reader is forced from the perspective of disconnected observer and becomes the subject of terror.

Describing the respite from pain just before the final immolation, as a "baptism of gasoline," the victim-narrator makes certain that the reader understands the event as a ritual with cosmic significance for the participants as well as the victim. Perhaps more importantly, though, are the narrator's observations just before his perspective gives way to that of the victim:

The sun died in the sky; a night wind muttered in the
grass and fumbled the leaves in the trees; the woods
poured forth the hungry yelping of hounds; the
darkness screamed with thirsty voices; and the witnesses rose and lived:

The dry bones stirred, rattled, lifted, melting themselves
into my bones.
The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into
my flesh.

The “dying of the sun,” an image drawn from Revelations 9:1, initiates an apocalyptic scenario in which the dead rise from their graves; that the bones are dry recalls the apocalyptic vision of the resurrected dead and the restored Israel in the Book of Ezekiel 37.⁵² The lynching—an attempt by the mob to ritually reinforce the laws of racial difference under the pretense of an enactment of God’s judgment—does not offer resurrection here but death. It is cataclysmic, not just for the specific victim, but for the black subject whose existence is conditioned by the possibility, if not the inevitability, that his or her life will end similarly—that is to say, violently and at the hand of a white person. At that moment that “death has percolated into the innermost reaches of subjectivity,” Abdul R. JanMohammed writes, and the teleology of the individual has reached an endpoint, as its progress is inhibited by terror (2). The Apocalypse, as it is invoked here, offers neither deliverance nor justice; it is simply the ultimate End. What is revealed to the narrator is not a transcendent Order or a totalizing Truth but rather a degree of suffering and a human capacity for evil that is horrifying. This Apocalypse resolves no contradiction. Instead, it poses a new contradiction: the existence of profound evil in a universe ostensibly ordered and designed by a just and loving God. And in this poem, the apocalyptic imaginary proves unable to produce an imminent resolution;

⁵² Melville invokes this same image when he describes the slave ship *Santo Domingo* in “Benito Cereno,” which, unbeknownst to Amasa Delano and the reader, has been overtaken by its human cargo.

consequently, the reader is left with the nihilistic image of the narrator's lifeless skull drying in the sun.

These tropes are by no means anomalous within Wright's work, and their sources include the Seventh Day Adventist cosmology—the “vast lakes of eternal fire, or seas vanishing, of valleys of dry bones, of the sun burning to ashes, of the moon turning to blood, of stars falling to the earth.” Perhaps because Wright's appropriation of religious and scriptural symbolism is often terrifying, many Wright scholars contend that his work fails to recognize the possibilities of black spirituality and decry his perceived dismissal of the religion of his people in favor of the European cosmology of Marxism. Most recently, James W. Coleman has argued that Wright “limit[s] the black cosmos with his own bleak view” (17). Despite occasional reference to scripture, Wright's writings “ignore the Bible's richness and complexity,” and offer evidence of “his strong desire to simplify and trivialize, and to distance himself from black people and black culture,” writes Coleman (22-23). Coleman's thesis applies a familiar criticism of Wright to this specific topic: by focusing on the dehumanizing consequences of Jim Crow, Coleman argues, his work denies even the possibility of a nourishing African American identity or culture. This line of criticism reduces Wright's complicated engagement with religion to fit a few, strident statements on the topic; it rarely looks beyond his two masterworks, *Native Son* and *Black Boy*; and—like too many studies of Wright—it fails to attend to the formal and aesthetic concerns of the works.

Reading beyond these texts, to a poem like “Between the World and Me” and to the story cycle *Uncle Tom's Children*, it becomes clear that Wright's engagement with African American spirituality and the apocalyptic imaginary amounts to something far

more complex than mere dismissal. While he may polemically describe the South as a landscape bereft of opportunities for the actualization of the black self and may attack the “cultural barrenness of black life” in his autobiography (45), *Black Boy* elsewhere delights in the richness of a childhood spent in that rural space and within that community.⁵³ Likewise, while he might rail against the religion of his grandmother, he nonetheless positions slave religion as “the form of a struggle for human rights” and includes spirituals as a source of “racial wisdom” in his essay, “Blueprint for Negro Writing” (39-40). That essay prompts the Left to look at African American folkways—including religion—not as obstacles inhibiting the mass movement of agricultural workers in the South but rather as the means through which such a movement might be realized. *Uncle Tom’s Children* follows that blueprint closely, but it does more than look to the black church as a potential vehicle for resistance; instead, it seeks to renew that faith for the context of modernity, to awaken the “racial wisdom” of African American faith to the possibility of resistance, and to locate in the brutalized black bodies the possibility of a regenerated black subject. In that effort, Wright constructs his story cycle around a typology appropriated from Scripture. Ultimately though, these stories suggest that religion cannot resolve its own internal contradiction, namely, the contradiction posed by suffering and injustice. Wright refuses to submit either to his own oppression or to the nihilism of which Coleman and others accuse him. Instead, he charts a third alternative in *Uncle Tom’s Children*, revitalizing the historical meaning of African

⁵³ Timothy Caron notes that *Black Boy* “also catalogues many of the joys and strengths of . . . black life: the Thomas Wolfe-like lists of beautiful sights, sounds, smells, and sensations of Southern black rural life; the lyrical catalogues of black folk beliefs that he recognized as vital to African-American survival in the South; the indomitable will Wright inherited from his mother. . .” (114).

American spirituality by directing its messianic vision toward the teleology of historical materialism.

As John Lowe has pointed out, the typological structure of *Uncle Tom's Children* is fairly systematic. The reader is introduced to the timeless, Edenic, pre-lapsarian paradise of the first section of "Big Boy Leaves Home": the innocence of Big Boy and his friends is violently torn away after they are seen naked by a white woman. The final version of the book concludes with the apocalyptic violence of "Bright and Morning Star," in which the protagonist, Sue, and her activist son Johnny-Boy are murdered by the white lynch mob. As John Lowe notes, the narrative structures of the stories, as well as the cycle itself, systemically move through a series of scriptural types (66): "Big Boy" is followed by the flood story in "Down by the Riverside," and the third story "Long Black Song" evokes the story of Abraham and Sarah. "Fire and Cloud" offers the possibilities of spiritual rebirth and messianic deliverance through Rev. Dan Taylor, who is simultaneously a Moses figure, leading God's Chosen People to salvation, the pillar of fire which lit the way for Moses and the Jews, and a figuration of Christ. Twice, characters refer to the betrayal of Judas, manifested as Deacon Smith in "Fire and Cloud" and Booker in "Bright and Morning Star." Several conversions, akin to St. Paul's on the Road to Damascus, occur throughout the text, often after characters have suffered or been victimized: the protagonists of each story are all reborn through violence and are, at least to some degree, awakened to the necessity of resistance. In the final story, Sue's martyrdom, a crucial element of any crusade, is inspired by her *visions*, which recall both Paul's conversion and the Revelation to John, a crucial point to which we will return.

Though the Revelation of John is perhaps the most frequently cited apocalyptic text of the Christian Bible, it is by no means the only one; as “O Mary, Don’t You Weep” reminds us, God’s judgment is meted out in various cataclysms, including the flood in Genesis, the plagues against Egypt, and the obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah. Just as Apocalypses occur throughout both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, so too are Apocalypses to be found throughout Wright’s cycle. In his southern landscapes, revelations are initiated by racial violence and are introduced through the sort of terrifying apocalyptic imagery Wright attributes to his grandmother’s religion in *Black Boy*. The initial story (and most frequently anthologized) in the cycle, “Big Boy Leaves Home,” functions as a sort of microcosm of the typology; it begins in paradise and comes to an end with Big Boy’s flight to the Promised Land of the North. His escape is necessitated by the transgression of a racial taboo—he and his young friends, all naked from their swim, are spotted by a white woman. This unintentional violation of racial codes results in Big Boy killing her fiancé in self-defense, which in turn precipitates an eruption of white violence against the black community that culminates in the lynching of his friend Bobo. The rendering of Big Boy’s escape and the lynching specifically invoke Revelations: Big Boy hides from the mob in an old kiln where he must fight and kill a snake and a dog. The image of a snake probably invokes the serpent of Genesis most immediately, but the location—a kiln—perhaps invokes the image of the pit/furnace in the ninth chapter of the Book of Revelations. Once the fifth seal is broken, John watches an angel open “the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace” (Rev. 9:2). A variety of beasts emerge from the pit, including a creature alternately described as a serpent and a dragon.

Once Big Boy defeats the snake, he faces the dog: “Green eyes glowed and drew nearer as the barking, muffled by the closeness of the hole, beat upon his eardrums” (58). The monstrous dog perhaps does not have a direct analog in Revelations, but rather a classical one in the mythic Cerberus. The hellhound is a familiar figuration within African American culture: the demonic dog tracking the fleeing black man is recalled, for instance, in the Robert Johnson song “Hellhound on my Trail.” The connection between this episode and the Book of Revelations becomes only more interesting as it is explored further. The beast from the bottomless pit wreaks havoc, killing two powerful prophets. Afterwards,

For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb; and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these people had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth. (Rev. 11: 7-10)

John’s vision of people *gloating* and *celebrating* over the corpses certainly would have rung true for anyone who grew up, as Wright did, under the omnipresent specter of lynching. “Big Boy” seems to allude to this passage: the mob sings, “*We’ll hang ever nigger t our apple tree...*” (55). “LES GIT SOURVINEERS,” one members yells, clearly establishing the ritual of mutilation but also echoing the Scriptural exchange of gifts (56); they playfully argue over who gets to place the noose around his neck and about the proper amount of gasoline needed to douse him.

Big Boy’s observation of Bobo’s lynching is dramatically and terribly incomplete. He never sees Bobo’s body, and through the smoke, he can only partially see the mob. He—and thus, the reader—is removed somewhat but is still witness to the scene:

He smelt the scent of tar, faint at first, then stronger. The wind brought it full into his face, then blew it away. His eyes burned and he rubbed them with his knuckles. He sneezed.....Big Boy slid back into the hole, his face buried in clay. He had no feelings now, no fears. He was numb, empty, as though all blood had been drawn from him. (57)

In the wake of this terrible moment, Big Boy no longer fears for his own safety. Instead, he is left dulled by an almost nihilistic inability to react or to make sense of what has transpired. Abdul R. JanMohammed reads this numbness as indicative of the total “evisceration of subjectivity” necessary “to be properly initiated into Jim Crow society and to become a ‘man’ within it” (51). Rather than assuming the perspective of the victim, as the narrator of “Between the World and Me” does, Big Boy retreats from the scene in order to protect himself from the psychic pain such identification would necessitate. In repressing this pain, however, the threat posed by the lynching to the community—not to the victim—is realized. What Big Boy experiences as numbness amounts to the destruction of any ability to articulate the meaning of the experience and, by extension, the destruction of his ability to articulate his own sense of self. It is as if something intrinsically human—fear, horror, or just anger—has been expunged from his psyche. The lynching ritual renders African Americans abstract and unparticular; for the mob, the victim becomes a figuration of evil, transforming him into “something that represented the complete negation of humanity ... represented an alien presence, sentient, but as completely unlike white people as a fiend ... a ‘counterhuman’ who could be addressed by name and yet destroyed as one would destroy all the evil that white men had ever encountered” (166). The African American subject experiences this abstraction as well. Thus, by numbing the very human response of horror, the lynching reforms Big Boy as a subject of white power and as an individual constrained by the knowledge of his powerlessness to prevent his own death, in JanMohammed’s model of the “death-bound

subject.” This is a profound teleological disruption: the black subject, conditioned by the inevitability of his own death, can no longer conceive the possibility of deliverance, of justice, of judgment, or of any other force affecting the course of his life thereafter.

That Big Boy only witnesses the lynching is crucial; throughout the rest of the cycle, the experience of pain and death serve to counteract the negation of humanity wrought by the threat of violence. Elaine Scarry describes death and pain as “consciousness-destroying”; they are the “most intense forms of negation, the purest expressions of the anti-human, of annihilation, of total aversiveness, though one is an absence and the other a felt presence, one occurring in the cessation of sentience, the other expressing itself in grotesque overload” (31). Torture, she writes, destroys the self or, in her terms, the “voice.” This voice is not necessarily dependent on the human form, but it is contingent upon the ability of the individual subject to articulate his or her distinction from the world around him or her. Torture makes “the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it” (49); this overwhelming sensory experience renders the voice all but “absent,” and the self is negated. For Wright, this black self need not actually experience pain or torture to be subjected to this process of negation: as the white mob selects a victim to serve as “not a negro, but Negro” (to paraphrase Faulkner), so too does the black self inevitably identify with the lynched victim. Thus, the victim in “Between the World and Me” regains not a consciousness but a bodily form through the narrator: “The grey ashes formed flesh firm and black, entering into /my flesh.” The narrator is neither angered nor terrified by the vision, instead offering an agonizingly visceral but emotionally distanced articulation of the physical experience of a lynching. The narrator-victim loses his sense of self, as his “voice was drowned in the roar of their

voices.” Though the antecedent of the possessive “their” is the mob, it can just as easily refer to all victims of white lynch mobs, in whose screams the narrator loses himself. Likewise, Big Boy loses himself in witnessing Bobo’s mutilation, immolation, and death: he experiences a negation of consciousness prompted by the knowledge that his body is not his own but is instead possessed by the white mob, which can rename, reshape, and destroy it at a whim.

JanMohammed’s model provides a compelling analysis of the consequences of this terror in the context of subject formation—that is, its effects on the individual psyche. It is crucial, however, that we remember that the intended victim of the lynching ritual is *not* the individual victim but rather the black community which the mob seeks to restrain. By laying claim to a representative black body, the specular ritual of lynching configures social interaction within a given place and delimits African American mobility both in space and time. Working in these terms—of spatial and temporal mobility—we can begin to resolve the contradictions between Wright’s claims of a “barren” African American culture and his representations elsewhere of the richness of African American life. Critics of Wright, like James W. Coleman, find support for the thesis in *Black Boy*, in which Wright states:

Whenever I thought of the essential bleakness of black life in America, I knew that Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization, that they lived somehow in it but not of it. And when I brooded upon the cultural bareness of black life, I wondered if clean, positive tenderness, love, honor, loyalty, and the capacity to remember were native with man. I asked myself if these human qualities were not fostered, won, struggled and suffered or, preserved in ritual from one generation to another. (37)

This appears to amount to an unequivocal rejection of African American culture and the southern black communities of Wright’s childhood. However, it is difficult to square this

statement with the Edenic portrayal of the joys of adolescence and black life offered at the beginning of “Big Boy Leaves Home”—difficult, that is, until one considers the crucial position *mobility* and *progress* occupy within Wright’s ethos. He consistently formulates the restrictions of southern apartheid as both spatial and temporal; while he is quick to recognize African American culture and religious traditions as a source of spiritual nourishment necessary for survival under the conditions of Jim Crow segregation, they offer little opportunity for movement or progress in his fiction. In the autobiographical essay “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow,” he reports being warned by his family to “never again attempt to exceed my boundaries. When you are working for white folks, they said, you got to ‘stay in your place’” (7). He continues this argument in *Black Boy*: “I knew that I lived in a country in which the aspirations of black people were limited, marked off. Yet I felt that I had to go somewhere and do something to redeem my being alive” (169). The young Wright desires to leave his southern home in favor of a place where personal progress—movement toward a telos—is possible. While the adolescent Wright who emerges in these writings chafes at these restraints, other African Americans often seem complicit with them and, in the case of his grandmother, even serve to enforce them. His classmates, for instance, are “not conscious of living a special, separate, stunted way of life. . . . Although they lived in an America where in theory there existed equality of opportunity, they knew unerringly what to aspire to and what not to aspire to” (197).

If the black culture represented in Wright’s corpus is indeed barren, it is only because it is profoundly *atemporal*. Wright desires a freedom that is both spatial and temporal—what Houston A. Baker Jr. has termed “United States Black Modernism.” In

spaces configured by Jim Crow, there exists no “*black public-sphere mobility*,” Wright and his classmates have been denied the “*fullness of United States black citizenship rights of locomotion, suffrage, occupational choice and compensation that yield what can only be designated a black-majority, politically participatory, bodily secure GOOD LIFE*” (83). “Modernism” clearly implies a chronological break with the past, but Baker defines it in terms of “mobility” and “movement” in space: *United States Black Modernism* is thus an ability to move *in* space and *toward* a goal. The freedom Baker claims here is the same freedom to aspire and achieve that the young Wright finds absent in his community. This absence is among the chief themes of Wright’s fiction. His posthumously published first novel *Lawd, Today!* layers the collapsing personal life of Jake, a black Chicago postal worker, within the collapse of the black community to which he belongs as well as the apocalyptic collapse wrought by the Depression in the U.S. and the rise of the Third Reich in Europe. A failed schemer, Jake is incapable of imagining success beyond the terms of immediate physical and material gratification. Likewise, the protagonist of *The Long Dream*, Fishbelly, learns from his father to check any aspirations that he might have of a life beyond the limits of Jim Crow: “Dream only what can happen. . . . If you ever find yourself dreaming something that can’t happen, then choke it back, ‘cause there’s too many dreams of a black man that can’t come true” (80).

Neither Fishbelly nor Jake holds much stock in religion; their cosmology is one of radical individualism, and it is in stark contrast to the church-centered collectivism of *Uncle Tom’s Children*. Nonetheless, religion offers an inadequate teleology in Wright’s estimation: he wants action in this world. In “Blueprint,” he suggests that while African American religion once offered the possibility of action, it now inhibits it:

Living under slave conditions of life, bereft of his African heritage, the Negroes' struggle for religion on the plantations between 1820-1860 assumed the form of a struggle for human rights. It remained a relatively revolutionary struggle until religion began to serve as an antidote for suffering and denial. (39)

Once again, Wright does not mince his words; nonetheless, it is inaccurate to describe his engagement with religion as a *rejection* or a *dismissal*. Rather, his writings grapple with the failure of African American messianism and millennialism to give rise to a mass revolutionary movement. Wright recognizes that these traditions generated revolutionary energies for slaves but characterizes them as inadequate in the face of modernity. While Negro folklore and religion “embod[y] the memories and hopes of [a] struggle for freedom. . . . How many John Henrys have lived and died on the lips of these black people?” he asks. “How many mythical heroes in embryo have been allowed to perish for lack of husbanding by alert intelligence?” (41). In the works from the period in which “Blueprint” and *Uncle Tom’s Children* were written, Wright contends that the black Marxist intellectual could provide that “alert intelligence” and, through properly deployed Marxist analysis, direct these revolutionary energies toward meaningful resistance.

While Wright does not explicitly draw connections between the eschatology of Marxist thought and the apocalyptic imaginary of African American religion, both “Blueprint” and *Uncle Tom’s Children* clearly seek to return the African American subject to a meaningful teleology: the “Marxist vision...restores to the [black] writer his lost heritage, that is, his role as a creator of the world in which he lives, and as a creator of himself,” he writes (44). The rhetoric of self-creation follows the tradition of

American and African American writing in which Frederick Douglass was engaged.⁵⁴ Unlike Douglass, Wright rejects the revolutionary rhetoric of American liberal democracy as the historical vision in which the African American subject might be restored. David Howard-Pitney argues that these Afro-American jeremiads articulated the humanity of black people and addressed the fundamental question of black suffering by positioning African Americans as “a chosen people within a chosen people”—that is a unique community endowed with a special historical mission crucial to the millenarian triumph of the United States (15). African Americans remain a “chosen people within a chosen people” for Richard Wright, but in his formulation, they are a particular group among oppressed peoples of the world. They share a millenarian political destiny with other oppressed groups, but their path to that goal is predicated upon their unique “racial wisdom”—that is, the distinctive folkways that have developed through the course of their specific historical experience.

However, in Wright’s judgment, the CPUSA consistently failed to address the concerns of the rural south and African Americans more generally. “I was now convinced that [northern Communists] did not know the complex nature of Negro life, did not know how great was the task to which they had set themselves,” he writes in the section now restored to *Black Boy* but originally published as *American Hunger*. Unable to move beyond the dogma of official party theory, CPUSA organizers “had rejected what was before their eyes without quite knowing what they had rejected and why” (297). Wright held an even lower opinion of the black converts that he encountered in the North. He depicts them as mindlessly miming the manner of white Communists, donning caps for

⁵⁴ Sundquist has writes definitively that Douglass’s autobiographical writings “participate in the most radical aspects of the liberation and self-reconstruction that have often been said to constitute the renaissance of our nation” (30).

no reason other than Lenin wore caps and even rolling r's in laughable approximation of the accents of Eastern European organizers, "Though they did not know it, they were naïvely practicing magic," he writes. "[T]hey thought if they acted like the men who had overthrown the czar, then surely they ought to be able to win their freedom in America" (295). In the process, these men dismissed the most powerful tool at their disposal: the rhetorical traditions of African American culture. "[E]schewing the traditional gestures of the Negro preacher," they appear to lack "the strength to develop their own style of Communist preaching....An hour's listening disclosed the fanatical intolerance of minds sealed against new ideas, new facts, new feelings, new attitudes, new hints at ways to live."

In its attempt to configure a global political movement for the particular contours of region and culture, *Uncle Tom's Children* reminds us now, in a moment of globalization, to pay heed to the local while continuing to investigate points of connection and exchange that transcend national borders. Indeed, the introduction of Marxist ideology prompted many African Americans to consider their own circumstances in a transnational context. Communist and Garveyite publications reported on black political movements in Africa and the Caribbean and "taught poor blacks to connect their own lives to struggles throughout the world, and the Party's economic theories provided explanations for a number of phenomena, including the roots of poverty, wealth, and racism," writes Robin D.G. Kelley (94). African Americans did not blindly accept party dogma but instead interpreted its historical vision through the lens offered by black folkways and experience. Already, African Americans had adapted their narratives of deliverance to the realities of the post-Reconstruction South. "Hidden away in Southern

black communities was a folk belief that the Yankees would return to wage another civil war in the South and complete the Reconstruction,” writes Kelley (99). The Marxist narrative of class resistance and revolution was just as easily incorporated into these extant stories, and rural African Americans repositioned northern Communists and even the U.S.S.R. in the place of the Union Army. Significantly, the aging organizers Kelley interviewed and the archival texts he reviewed all articulate this vision in the language and typology of scripture. “For many black radicals,” Kelley writes, “the Russians were the ‘new Yankees,’ Stalin was the ‘new Lincoln,’ and the Soviet Union was a ‘new Ethiopia’ stretching forth her arms in defense of black folk” (100). Thus, the teleology of African American deliverance was shifted from the scale of conflict within national borders and from the traditional discourse of U.S. Constitutional rights and into an international and transnational paradigm.

The process of adaptation—of *signifying*⁵⁵—is itself as crucial to the traditions and practices of African American spirituality as the apocalyptic imaginary and is most notably evident in the abiding connection to the narrative of Hebrew deliverance in the Book of Exodus and the central position occupied by Moses. Lawrence W. Levine cites an 1865 field report from a Union chaplain recently deployed in Alabama: “‘Moses is their [African Americans’] *ideal* of all that is high, and noble, and perfect, in man,’ while Christ was regarded ‘not so much in the light of a *spiritual* Deliverer, as that of a second Moses’” (50). Indeed, before Stalin could be a new Lincoln, “Freedmen . . . referred to Lincoln, Grant, and other Union figures as deliverers and saviors like Moses and Jesus,”

⁵⁵ According to Henry Louis Gates Jr., signifyin(g) challenges the conventional white model of signification, defined by the Saussurean model of *signified/signifier*: the act of signifyin(g) “supplant[s] the received, standard English concept associated by (white) convention with [a] particular signifier” and thus “disrupt[s] the nature of the sign = *signified/signifier* equation itself” (46). The result is a critique of the capability of prevailing systems of (white) meaning to generate totalizing meaning.

according to Albert J. Raboteau (102).⁵⁶ Wright engages this tradition in “Fire and Cloud,” the final story in the original edition of *Uncle Tom’s Children*. The story’s title recalls the pillars which led the Israelites through the wilderness to Canaan, and its protagonist Rev. Dan Taylor emerges from this Mosaic tradition. Leading his congregation toward resistance, Taylor consolidates a variety of scriptural analogues of messianic deliverance and recalls the typological relationship of Moses and Christ as twinned messianic figures. This messianic fusion, while specifically important to African American religious traditions, is also indicative of the typological interpretation of the Christian Bible. In *The Great Code*, Northrop Frye contends that the “general principle of interpretation is traditionally given as ‘In the Old Testament the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament the Old Testament is revealed’” (79); thus, the Old Testament provides *types*, and the New Testament provides *antitypes*. He continues, in a passage I think worthy of quoting at some length:

Typology is a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history, and that sooner or later some event or events will occur which will indicate what that meaning or point is, and so become an antitype of what has happened previously. Our modern confidence in historical process, our belief that despite apparent confusion, even chaos, in human events, nevertheless those events are going somewhere and indicating something, is probably a legacy of Biblical typology: at least I can think of no other source for its tradition. (79)

Certainly, the sheer scope of Frye’s attempt to systematize myth and of the Bible’s foundational role in Western literature leaves his work open to much criticism. However, his analysis—particularly the notion that typology is a particular vision of historical

⁵⁶ While, in Raboteau’s estimation, the conflation of Lincoln and Moses “seems to have been an analogy and not a literal or symbolic identification,” the conflation of Moses and Lincoln is a central precept of the prophetic vision articulated by Calvin Burden in *Light in August*.

process—illuminates the sort of apocalyptic thought with which this project is ultimately concerned. Frye contrasts *typology* with *causality*. Typological thinking, he asserts, looks for prior models to be enacted in the future while causal thinking seeks to explain “a mass of phenomena” by systematically reaching back into the past for “prior causes”: “These causes are the antitypes of their effects, that is, revelations of the real meaning of the existence of the effects” (81).

In its forward gaze, then, apocalyptic thought can be generally described as typological: Apocalypse serves as the antitype of creation, answering the ontological differentiation (figuring as the fracturing of existence’s perfection via the Fall of Man) with a restoration of divine unity. Typology is thus inherently teleological, as history is propelled forward through type and antitype. Furthermore, within the literalist hermeneutic of southern evangelical and fundamentalist Protestantism, typology evinces God as the force directing history in a systematic, ordered progression toward an ultimate telos. When Faulkner’s Doc Hines calls the dietician at the orphanage “the Whore of Babylon” and when McEachern refers to the prostitute Bobbie as “Jezebel,” they are not simply levying insults but rather are deploying Scriptural typology as their primary interpretive system.

Likewise, I believe it is accurate, very generally, to posit African American theology as inherently typological. According to James H. Cone, when slaves told the story of Moses and the deliverance of Israel, they “sang of a God who was involved in history—*their* history—making right what whites had made wrong. Just as God delivered the Children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, drowning Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, he will also deliver black people from American slavery” (24). In other words,

invocations of the flight of the Hebrews and prophecies of the Jubilee inserted the slave experience into a teleology otherwise denied it and configured slaves' suffering and oppression as necessary steps in a progression toward ultimate deliverance. Cone continues: "Through the blood of slavery, [slaves] transcended the limitations of space and time. Jesus' time became their time, and they encountered a new historical existence" (54). Cone limits his analysis to the traditions of slave spirituals, but this theology clearly informs the religious traditions of African Americans well after Emancipation. While African Americans might have been denied access to the official and institutional historical record of the nation and of the region, a record which systematically obliterated the remembrance of their suffering, narratives of sacred history provided a narrative space in which they might articulate the meaning of their individual and communal experience.⁵⁷

It is crucial, then, that any examination of *Uncle Tom's Children* attend to its application of biblical typology to the seminal, but often tragic, events common within the black experience: the passage from childhood to adulthood ("Big Boy"); the cycles of birth and death ("Down by the River"); marriage, temptation, and infidelity ("Long Black Song"); fatherhood ("Down by the River" and "Fire and Cloud") and motherhood ("Long Black Song" and "Bright and Morning Star"). B. Eugene McCarthy contends that *Uncle Tom's Children* is not a historical document in the sense of reportage or even fictionalization of historical events. Instead, Wright creates "models of past structures" (732), structures which have gone unexamined and unmentioned in the historical accounts of the dominant culture. John Lowe has argued that the book offers a broad

⁵⁷ Or, as Baker writes: "Black Americans integrated the symbols of the Bible and adopted the past of the Israelites in order to link themselves with a new historical continuum when their African continuum was broken by the slave trade" (*Long Black Song* 44).

rehistoricization of the black experience: the models in question are not specifically those of lynchings or the 1927 flood but of characters coming to find an affirming understanding of their blackness (56-7). It is only appropriate then that Wright employs scriptural analogues and invokes the apocalyptic imaginary to tell these stories of poor African Americans, as the ancestors had done just this for generations. The narrative of sacred history provided an alternative space in which their suffering and oppression—but also their joy and their culture—might be configured into a coherent narrative, ordered in a progression toward a *telos*.

As much as many critics might decry Wright's portrayal of African American life, including religion, as barren and dehumanizing, the typological structure of *Uncle Tom's Children* bears witness to an acknowledged indebtedness to the historical vision—the “racial wisdom”—offered by African American religious traditions by enacting that very adaptive tradition. However, Wright extends that practice of adaptation and revision even further: by yoking the apocalyptic imaginary to a Marxist vision of teleology, Wright restores the black subject to a meaningful historical narrative, which incorporates past suffering and empowers the subject as an actor in, rather than a witness to, revolutionary change. Wright's engagement with the apocalyptic imaginary is unique, particularly in the context of other African American writers. The jeremiads of David Walker, Frederick Douglass, Walter White, and others invoke the apocalyptic discourse of *judgment* and condemn the *past* crimes of white oppressors; they also look to the *future* and prophesy *cataclysmic* consequences of these crimes as well as millennial deliverance of the oppressed. Wright certainly is interested in the historical injustices of Jim Crow

segregation and in the possibilities of the future, but the stories in *Uncle Tom's Children* seek to initiate another element of Apocalypse—*revelation*—and to do so in the *present* moment. Throughout the cycle, revelations follow the survival of brutality and white oppression. As abstract threats haunting Wright's southern landscapes, pain and torture negate the black self, but if survived, their actual experience is ultimately liberating and revealing. The self that is negated is always-already conditioned by the threat posed by white regimes of power; the self that emerges from the torture, then, is a self-created entity, fully aware of and thus impervious to the racist regime which threatens it. Reborn, or at least restored, this new black subject is no longer content to await otherworldly deliverance. S/he is now aware of the inherent limitations of white authority and is, thus, empowered to actively resist it.

Just as Big Boy must face Bobo's death, it is necessary that Wright confront his readers, white and black, with the suffering that has been denied, displaced, and concealed. The cataclysms and catastrophes depicted in "Down by the Riverside" and "Long Black Song" end in terrible deaths and the dissolution of families.⁵⁸ Much like the Book of Job, these stories require the reader to wrestle with the incommensurability of

⁵⁸ Mann, the protagonist in "Down by the Riverside," is overwhelmed by the economic forces of sharecropping, the cultural forces of Jim Crow, and the rising waters of the Mississippi; hoping to protect his home and to gain a competitive advantage over other farmers who have evacuated, Mann remains until too late; his wife and unborn child die before they can reach a hospital. Conscripted into the rescue effort, he is sent to save the family of Mr. Heartsfield, whom he killed in an earlier confrontation over a stolen boat. Identified by Heartsfield's son, Mann is apprehended; he begs the other black evacuees for help, but none move. He attempts to flee and is shot. In "Long Black Song," Sarah dreams of her lost love, Tom, and tends to her infant son by husband Silas, an older man and a successful farmer. Sarah is seduced or possibly raped by a white traveling salesman; Silas discovers her infidelity and kills the salesman, prompting a shoot-out with a white lynch mob that results in his death and the fiery destruction of their home. Neither Mann nor Silas is a revolutionary figure; indeed, they both work toward material success within the limited roles afforded them by the Delta plantocracy. Despite their intent, though, violence is unavoidable, and its consequence is the obliteration of both black wealth and the black family. Their suffering, then, parallels the death of Job's children and the destruction of his property (Job 1: 6-22). Like "Big Boy Leaves Home," these stories present the "social death" of the African American subject. As this chapter focuses on the cycle's vision of revolutionary, historical change, neither "Down By the Riverside" or "Long Black Song" are central to this chapter.

black suffering. In Robert Alter's estimation, Job offers "a revelation of the contrast between the half-jaded truths of cliché and the startling, difficult truths exposed when the stylistic and conceptual shell of cliché is broken up" (66). The same might be said of the portrait of black experience and black oppression offered by *Uncle Tom's Children*. However, Wright wants to do more than to provoke inquiry; he wants to provoke action. Rather than simply unsettling pleasant concords and fictions and compelling a reader to work through the problem of evil in the world, *Uncle Tom's Children* seeks to chart the possibility of historical progress and change. The restoration of the black subject to a meaningful teleology is most obviously evident in the penultimate story, "Fire and Cloud." When the story opens, Dan Taylor, a black minister viewed as a leader of his community both within and without it, is worn down by his own perceived powerlessness to help his congregants, who must decide whether to join with a group of white laborers in a march against their local plantocracy. "Here Ah is a man called by Gawd t preach n whut kin Ah do?" he asks (158). "Hongry folks lookin t me fer help n whut kin Ah do?" His faith remains the millennial hope of deliverance promised by the literalist scriptural hermeneutic of fundamentalist Christianity: "The good Lawds gonna clean up this ol worl some day! Hes gonna make a new Heaven n a new Earth!" Rather than act, he simply awaits divine action. When his congregation seeks his leadership, he leads them in prayer that echoes this sentiment. He calls out, "Lawd, Yuh said Yuhd strike down the wicked men who plagued Yo chillun! . . . Yuh said Yuhd destroy this ol worl n create a new Heaven n a new Earth!" They respond: "wes waitin on yuh *jesus*." And when the white organizers implore him to join their effort, he argues, "Brothers, Ahma Christian, n whut yuhs astin fer is something tha makes blood!" (176). Taylor equates resistance with

war, into which he refuses to lead his people.

Ultimately, Taylor is transformed by a beating that he receives at the hands of the sheriff, an assault which necessitates a crisis of faith. The sheriff forces Taylor to recite the Lord's Prayer, thus realizing the two components of torture as formulated by Elaine Scarry: "a primary physical act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation" (35). In the "obsessive, self-conscious display of agency" that is torture (27), the interrogation provides the torturer "with a justification, his cruelty with an explanation" (35). Ironically, though, it makes the torturer "the cause of his loss of self and world"—the act becomes his fault, the suffering deserved. Thus, the torturer displaces responsibility onto the victim. In Dan Taylor's case, though, it is not information that is requested but an act of supplication and penance. The result, however, is perhaps in direct opposition to the sheriff's intent: the beating and the prayer only serve to display the fiction of white authority and to awaken Taylor to the possibility of active resistance as an alternative to passively waiting for deliverance. He thus emerges with a new formulation of the apocalyptic imaginary: "Like a pillar of fire he went through the white neighborhood. Some day theys gonna burn! Some day theys gonna burn in Gawd Awmightys fire!" (204). His transformation is not immediate, though, and rather than ask God to hasten His retribution, Taylor beseeches Him for a divine guidance and the strength to act: "Gawd, ef yuh gimme the strength Ahll tear this ol buildin down! . . . Tear it down like Samson tore the temple down!" Ultimately, Taylor does indeed take action, and he leads his people in the emerging—and successful—movement toward resistance.

In constructing his model of the *death-bound subject*, JanMohammed suggests that an antidote to the social-death of slavery and subjection, as formulated by Orlando

Patterson, and the actual death to which resistance might lead is a *symbolic death*, a painful process that begins when the subject faces “his powerless position, the genealogical isolation, his lack of control over any aspect of his present and future life” as well as his or her own complicity in that isolation (21). Then, JanMohammed writes, “the individual must destroy or effectively overcome his own formation. In short, he will have to annihilate his old self and (re)form another one” (22). If the verbal act of torture ascribes some degree of agency to the prisoner/victim, as Scarry suggests it does, then the victim who survives is forced to deal with his or her own complicity in the fiction of the regime’s authority as well as in the immediate pain of the incident. Having already survived the physical trauma of his own beating, Taylor can only survive the psychic trauma by destroying the self that was complicit in the infliction of pain—the self that, despite praying the Lord’s Prayer and dutifully waiting for God’s will to be done here on earth, has never been delivered from evil. Having survived the beating and faced the possibility of his death, he gains the authority to determine the course of his life, which had been previously circumscribed by the counterclaim posed by the threat of lynching. He is willing now to risk his own existence in order to “tear down the temple” as Samson had. The notion of a minister tearing down a temple is striking but no more so than Taylor’s ultimate response: the direct sign that Taylor and congregation hope will come from above ultimately does not. In fact, Taylor learns from his radical son, Jimmy, that his unexplained absence after his beating has provided his rival, Deacon Smith, with the opportunity to usurp his position at the church. “Seems like Gawds done left me!” Taylor tells his son. “Ahd die for my people ef Ah only knowed how . . .” (208). Abandoned by his God and his congregation, the minister finally decides that neither submission nor the

vengeful reaction of an angry victim are adequate responses; collective action is the only possible solution. He returns to the church and leads the congregation and the poor whites in a protest march. The congregation erupts into song, describing the Israelites' journey out of bondage. The congregation has not abandoned their faith; rather, they have reconfigured its messianic eschatology to announce a demand for justice in *this* world. Their (re)visionary invocation of the apocalyptic imaginary, like those of the activists chronicled by Robin D.G. Kelley, fits the particular textures of African American spiritual traditions as does Dan Taylor's assumption of a prophetic role. As Baker notes, "the preacher generally identifies himself as the person chosen by God to herald a fiery end of time that will come unless his listeners repent" (51).

If the original ending piece, "Fire and Cloud," offers the possibility of resistance, then Wright's addition of "Bright and Morning Star" adds a call for and recognition of the importance of sacrifice and even martyrdom—themes that are, of course, crucial to Christian theology. In the story, Wright makes the connections he seeks to draw between the teleologies of Christianity and Marxist thought explicit, if not more complicated, through Sue's changing worldview or, as she refers to them, her three *visions*. Sue's original vision is that offered by the faith developed within the institution of her church; her two sons, both communists, have at least attempted to awaken her class consciousness and pushed her to trade in the "Bright and Morning Star" of her hymnal—that is, Christ—for another star, that of the Soviet flag, according to Lowe (59). The original vision, in Wright's formulation, has clearly failed Sue and her community, helping them to cope with the trauma of their lives but nearly paralyzing them: "Long hours of scrubbing floors for a few cents a day had taught her who Jesus was, what a

great boon it was to cling to Him, to be like him and suffer without a mumbling word” (224). Though her suffering is unspoken, it is still experienced, and the structures of oppression—“the white folks and their laws”—are manifest within the vision as “a cold white mountain,” a figuration of authority that perhaps recalls Moses’ reception of the Commandments on Mount Sinai (224). Sue understands her desire to actively challenge the mountain as “temptation, something to lure her from the Lord, a part of the world God had made in order that she might endure it and come through all the stronger,” and so she attempts to put it out of her mind.

The continued psychic disruption caused by the image of the mountain, however, leaves her ripe to accept an alternative. Indeed “the new and terrible” vision of class resistance offered by her sons Sug and Johnny-Boy seems a ready-made replacement for its predecessor: “The wrongs and sufferings of black men had taken the place of Him nailed to the Cross; the meager beginnings of the party had become another Resurrection; and the hate of those who would destroy her new faith had quickened in her a hunger to feel how deeply her new strength went” (225). However, the psychic residue of the former vision lingers, and Sue guiltily finds herself singing “The Lily of the Valley” as she works: “But sometimes like tonight, while lost in the forgetfulness of work, the past and the present would become mixed for her; while toiling under a strange star for a new freedom the old songs would slip from her lip with their beguiling sweetness” (226).

Wright’s choice of the word “vision” to designate Sue’s view of the world has a scriptural antecedent. St. Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus is couched in terms of *vision*, *sight*, and *blindness*, and the awakening of class consciousness clearly parallels the Christian notion of conversion. The term vision is equally appropriate within the

context of Apocalypse, as the Book of Revelation is St. John's record of a dream vision. The writer of apocalyptic narrative casts him or herself into the role of interpreter, taking on the job of organizing the vision of signs, messages, and images into a coherent narrative (Zamora 15). Interpretation is a crucial element of Wright's vision: as he argues in *Black Boy*, the dogmatic teachings of the CPUSA failed to attend to the realities of black experience in the United States. Much as Kelley's black Alabama communists took it upon themselves to create a Marxism that spoke to their lives and their culture, Sue finds agency once she actively engages the possibility of resistance and charts her own historical vision. Operating under the principles offered by party dogma, Sue attempts to challenge the authority of the sheriff, who has come to her house seeking Johnny-Boy:

Hotly, something ached in her to make them feel the intensity of her pride and freedom; her heart groped to turn the bitter hours of her life into words of a kind that would make them feel that she had taken all they had done to her in her stride and could still take more. Her faith surged so strongly in her she was all but blinded. (240)

She "gropes" to turn her feelings into "words," but she cannot; she believes she sees the world as it truly is, but she is blinded. This vision offered by party organizers has failed her by further obscuring the truth.

Once she has been betrayed by the Judas figure, Booker, Sue recognizes a final vision, in which she finds "focus" and "the strength to live and act" (253, 252). This third vision is initiated as Sue returns to the hymn, "The Lily of the Valley":

...Mired she was between two abandoned worlds, living but dying without the strength of the grace that either gave. The clearer she felt it the fuller did something well up from the depths of her for release; the more urgent did she feel the need to fling into her black sky another star, another hope, one more terrible vision to give her the strength to act and live. (252)

Though Sue is emboldened by her second vision—that offered by the party—it is a limited epistemology, inadequate to represent the particularities of African American

experience. Johnny-Boy “believes so hard hes blind,” Sue thinks, and he himself claims not to see race but only class (234). Sue’s agency comes at the moment in which she recognizes that the will toward resistance does not necessitate the complete abandonment of her culture and her community. The attempt to do so is impossible, in fact, and leaves one “mired” between the two. Instead, Sue gains agency once she begins to *interpret* these visions and to use them both toward a single end.

Although Wright remains our ultimate apocalypticist, Sue is the collection’s final interpreter of the signs of the times. Just as she finds a space to integrate the ideological material of both visions, Wright continues to adapt the Christian myth: Sue is at once a figuration of God, the Blessed Virgin, and Christ. In the context of the story, however, her sacrifice—after she shoots Booker—allows her to define the meaning and consequences of her own suffering and death. According to Lowe, Wright subverts the threat of the ritual violence against African Americans by locating the wounded and maimed bodies as the “generative ground for the new ‘word’ [i.e., Gospel] of Communism” (59). It is not a by-the-book communism that shapes the form of Wright’s cycle, however. Through the intertextual exchange between the secular historical vision of the Left and the sacred historical vision of the apocalyptic imaginary, Wright’s narrative renews the black subject by restoring it to a meaningful teleology. This self is made whole, at least provisionally, by its insertion into a teleology that exists outside the reaches of the regimes of white authority.

The story, and the cycle, ends with Sue staring up at the stars above “the doomed living and the dead that never dies” (263). The *doom* the living face might be a lynching yet to come, but it is just as easily and logically the course that the institutions of race and

class—not fate or God—have determined for them. “Blueprint for Negro Writing” provides useful context for this final line and, specifically, for Wright’s notion of *doom*: “at the moment when a people begin to realize a *meaning* in their suffering, the civilization that engenders that suffering is doomed” (“Blueprint” 41). *Doom*, it seems, need not have the horrific connotation which we normally ascribe to it; indeed, from the doom of Apocalypse emerges a renewed world. When Sue joins the resurrected victim of “Between the World and Me” and countless other brutalized and murdered African Americans as part of “the dead that never dies,” their deaths are to be relived by others. Their spirits, however, need not haunt the survivors. Instead, they might spur them to action and to find a meaning in their doom.

In Wright’s hands, the Apocalypse is suddenly, terribly, and violently not what we thought it was. Indeed, the revision of Apocalypse is perhaps the most subtly subversive move any writer can make. According to Lois Parkinson Zamora, “Apocalyptic narrative moves toward an *ending* that contains a particular attitude toward the goals of the narration, and toward an *end* that implies an ideology” (12). While the telos toward which Wright’s apocalyptic narrative drives is unquestionably different from that envisioned by the African American religious traditions, neither the aim nor the result of his engagement with the apocalyptic imaginary differ greatly from those of the churchgoers he depicts. Writing on the eschatology of African American music, Gilroy observes that “by posing the world as it is against the world as the racially subordinated would like it to be, this musical culture supplies a great deal of the courage required to go on living in the present” (36). As I have argued, though, the revision of ends is not

limited to contemporary writers but rather is a crucial element of the African American apocalyptic imaginary. Gilroy describes African American millennialism as representative of a “politics of fulfillment,” which he defines as “the notion that a future society will be able to realise the social and political promise that the present society has left unaccomplished” (37). This discourse provides “a medium in which demands for goals like non-racialised justice and rational organisation of the productive process can be expressed.” The same can be said for the apocalyptic imaginary: certainly, it allows us to revise and rewrite our endings and, thus, to direct events and experiences toward a new telos. Moreover, it is discursive space open to possibilities denied by conventional systems of meaning, as I will show in the next chapters.

Chapter 3: “An’t the Measure Made Yet?”: Mapping Apocalypse Along the Margins of Southern Communities in *Bastard Out of Carolina*

*Went back home Lord, My home was lonely
Since my mother she had gone
All my brothers, sisters crying
What a home so sad and lone*

*Can the circle be unbroken
Bye and bye, Lord, bye and bye
There’s a better home a-waiting
In the sky, Lord, in the sky*

-“*Can the Circle Be Unbroken,*” *The Carter Family*

“Behind the story I tell is the one I don’t,” writes Dorothy Allison in her performative memoir *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*. “Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear” (39). Heretofore, I have proposed that the southern apocalyptic imaginary has been harnessed to often contradictory ends: just as it is used to regulate moments of undifferentiation and hybridity that contradict the dominant discourses of race and power in southern places and spaces, its historical vision nonetheless offers hope to oppressed communities when it is most needed. Now, I submit that, in both of these applications, Apocalypse signals the presence of concealed or displaced meaning—of the sort of stories Allison wishes she could tell directly. In her novel *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Apocalypse signals not just a challenge to the boundaries of community and family but also a presence that has been concealed, a voice that has been silenced, a history that has been expunged, and, thus, a site to be excavated. For Allison’s Bone, these marginal, apocalyptic places offer the discursive space necessary to articulate traumatic experiences so ultimately horrifying and so contradictory to dominant systems of representation that they do not yield to articulation. This chapter will interrogate the ways in which the novel maps the apocalyptic possibilities of cataclysm

and judgment onto southern spaces and places in *Bastard Out of Carolina*; by charting the contours of Allison's apocalyptic geography, it will seek to access the story that cannot otherwise be heard.

Before her audience can even approach the text of the novel, Allison demands they confront the limits of their own definitions of Southern identities and Southern places: the title, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, both locks her story into a place—Carolina, or more specifically, Greenville, South Carolina—and lays an affirmative claim to an identity, *Bastard*, that has been declared aberrant and pushed to the margins of that place. This initial invocation of place is indicative of the juxtapositions and contradictions that will characterize the attempts of her narrator, Ruth Anne “Bone” Boatwright, to locate her traumatic past within the physical terrain that is coterminous with the social spaces that would restrict her story. As the second chapter opens, Allison's narrator, the adult Bone, conjures up her childhood by invoking the idealized, even Edenic southern space of her aunts' homes: “Greenville, South Carolina, in 1955 was the most beautiful place in the world,” she says.

Black walnut trees dropped their green-black fuzzy bulbs on Aunt Ruth's matted lawn, past where their knotty roots rose up out of the ground like the elbows and knees of dirty children suntanned dark and covered with scars....Over at the house Aunt Raylene rented near the river, all the trees had been cut back and the scuppernong vines torn out. The clover grew in long sweeps of tiny white and yellow flowers that hid slender red-and-black striped caterpillars and fat gray-black slugs—the ones Uncle Earle swore would draw fish to a hook even in a thunderstorm. (17)

To access the memories of her family, Bone imaginatively reconstructs the places in which they existed—the physical geography upon which her cousins played and in which her uncle Earle collected grubs for bait. Both cognitive psychologists and literary scholars have long noted the spatial elements of memory: J. Gerald Kennedy writes that

as “we reconstruct the past largely through the imagery of place...memory is less the retrieval of bygone time than a recovery of symbolic space” (500). This insight is complicated by Bone’s inability or unwillingness to linger upon the idyllic landscape of her childhood. Moving from Ruth’s and Raylene’s homes, Bone recalls her Aunt Alma’s yard, which had been rendered a “smoldering expanse of baked dirt and scattered rocks” by the spendthrift landlord who “had locked down the spigots so that the kids wouldn’t cost him a fortune in water bills” (17-18). Even in the imaginative landscape of memory, the *places* that give shape and context to her past can offer only limited *space* for her to articulate an empowered self; the textures of place are configured by the social and economic forces that shame Bone and ascribe the status of “poor white trash” to her family.

“I was born trash in a land where the people all believe themselves natural aristocrats,” Allison writes in *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. “Ask any white Southerner. They’ll take you back two generations, say, ‘Yeah, we had a plantation.’ The hell we did” (32). Allison is less interested in why or how these hypothetical white Southerners can make such claims of lapsed aristocratic origins than in the ways in which these claims are used to marginalize her. “I have no memories that can be bent so easily. I know where I come from, and it is not that part of the world.” Here, almost as if by force, Allison counters the production of social *space* that, configured in terms of inclusion and exclusion, would alienate and even exile her from *place*. Refusing to yield to the imposition of placelessness, she locates her experience on the very southern geographies that reject her presence. Just as she demands that her audience acknowledge her claim to a southern past, so too does *Bastard* insist that we consider Bone’s story in

its *place*, that is, in the rural edges and seedy apartments of Greenville in the '50s. However, these *places* refuse to yield the *space* necessary to tell her story. It is a story that insists the listener confront the Boatwrights as more than legendary, hell-raising, hard-drinking men; more than women who endure until their bodies are broken; and more human—fraught with neither the degeneracy nor the sentimental nobility that representations of poverty often include. It demands that the audience acknowledge experiences that defy conventional narration—of rape and incest and abuse. These experiences threaten the coherence of southern place by unsettling the discourses of sin and shame that are used to regulate their geographic and discursive borders. In order to articulate her stories from the margins, Allison's *Bone* turns inevitably to Apocalypse and to the cleansing and purging fires of Revelations which she hopes will bring an end to an experience so awful that no narrative available offers the space adequate to contain it.

In the Introduction, I argued that region is as much a temporal construction as a spatial one; as Scott Romine writes, “the southernness of place, it seems, is always in danger of expiring” (29). Resistance to the “expiration” of the South manifests politically, in segregation battles, and aesthetically, through the discourse of the southern “sense of place.” Michael Kreyling has written that the aesthetics of southern modernism (in which we must include the sense of place) exists now only as parody (108): the resistance to the banality of modernity which southern modernists sought to develop aesthetically as the “sense of place” (and which was too often complicit with the reactionary resistance to progressive political movement) has finally failed, and southern literature no longer exists as a discernable genre. This assertion relies upon an idea of “southern literature” as a

category organized around the generic and aesthetic conventions of southern literary modernism, including determining tropes like the *gothic* and a “*sense of place*,” rather than common concerns of southern geography and history. *Bastard Out of Carolina* and the “grit lit” genre of southern literature in which it has been categorized offer a corrective (Hobson 12). These works call for an archaeology of southern places and spaces and challenge readers and writers to uncover what has been hidden in the attempt to produce the South as a singular and stable, if fading, entity.

As a means of transition from the apocalyptic maps of southern modernism to those of Allison’s *postsouthern* novel, it is worth attending to the parodic southern Apocalypses of Walker Percy. Percy belongs to the generation of writers after Faulkner and Wright—a group troubled by the consequences of post-War prosperity and the narrative of bourgeois consensus and triumph. In the 1975 essay, “Notes for a Novel about the End of the World,” Percy writes:

The subject of the postmodern novel is a man who has very nearly come to the end of the line. How very odd it is, when one comes to think of it, that the very moment he arrives at the threshold of his new city, with all its hard-won relief from the sufferings of the past, happens to be the same moment that he runs out of meaning!....The American novel in past years has treated such themes as persons whose lives are blighted by social evils, or reformers who attack these evils, or perhaps the dislocation of expatriate Americans, or of Southerners living in a region haunted by memories. But the hero of the postmodern novel is a man who has forgotten his bad memories and conquered his present ills and now finds himself in the victorious secular city. His only problem now is to keep from blowing his brains out. (112)

In Percy’s fictional worlds, history is manifest as a comic simulacrum—a parody of the past, manifest both in cultural practice and in the built landscape of the postmodern South: one thinks of the suburban expansion of New Orleans in *The Moviegoer*, for instance, or of the declining gentry in *Lancelot*, forced to offer tours of their homes in order to maintain the leisurely comfort of their plantation forebears. In this South, the

moonlight emanates only from stage lights, and the magnolias have been carefully arranged to evoke a twentieth-century notion of an antebellum past; in the United States that Percy describes, the great struggles have ended, and everyone has retired to a gated community. The Apocalypse is nigh not because a battle looms but because all meaning has been exhausted, and nothing remains but the imminent collapse that will follow our posthistorical orgy of consumption and overindulgence.

In many ways, Percy's *postsouthern* fiction cynically realizes Frederic Jameson's contention that, in the postmodern moment, "our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time" (64). While Percy's southern modernist predecessors imagined a southern sense of place variously as a means of resisting modernity and as modernity's victim, Percy creates characters who are dissociated from time and locates them in geographies in which history exists as a commodifiable reference point rather than as a process. History can even be recreated in places: in tours which allow us to visit an idealized past, for instance, or in new real estate developments which recall—and thus sanitize—old plantations. However, this is only the vantage point of American life as it is lived in Percy's victorious secular city—situated safely within gated communities, the secular city is populated by well-meaning, well-bred folks seeking solace for their existential angst at the high-end strip mall down the street. It is a triumph that is present only in the exclusion of those from whom these comfortable Americans seek to distinguish themselves. But such people must exist or else the gates of the subdivision would not be necessary. They have been pushed comfortably (at least, for the denizens of Percy's secular city) out of sight, out of mind, and into the hinterlands of communal memory by

the persistent refusal of the city's residents to acknowledge life on its margins and in its interstices.

Here, in these marginal spaces, history is neither exhausted nor simply a parody. Rather, it offers the dynamic possibility of new knowledge, available through the reclamation of narratives and experiences that have been silenced by the persistent effort of the secular city to narrate its own historical triumph. It is in these marginal and interstitial spaces that *Bastard Out of Carolina*—a postmodern, postsouthern novel that is *not* about the end of history or about the end of the South—exists. It is less concerned with the eschatology of a unified South than with the diversity of decentered southern geographies. By locating her novel in this terrain, Allison thwarts the narrative of singular South and announces a claim to the territory that has sought to exile her to its margins, to declare her aberrant and abject, and to silence her story. In these marginal spaces, the particular textures of place are not expiring but are the vital matrix through which her experience might be articulated.

The configurations of space and place with which *Bastard* is most concerned are thus very different from the discourse of place that prevails in southern modernist fiction. Minrose Gwin situates Bone's narrative within the "convergences of material, textual, and cultural spaces" (416). In particular, Gwin is interested in the "ideological construction of 'home'" as the material and cultural space in which a southern patriarchal power is enacted. Because the space of the "home" is the crucial site through which the formative memories of childhood are accessed, Gwin contends, the oppression and abuses suffered by women in that space are all the more troubling and oppressive for the female subject. However, Allison and other writers reclaim the home within the *textual*

space of the novel and articulate a *psychic space* in which healing is possible. For Gwin, *region*, like home, is a product of both *material space* (i.e., the physical geography) and *cultural space* (416)—that is, it exists in the ideologies and practices layered onto the southern landscape. Interestingly, Gwin employs the term “region” rather than “place”; I infer that this is an implicit recognition—and rejection—of the formulation of place as resistant to progressive political movement and to the generally “positive orientation” of the *sense of place* “toward that determinative texture” within the discourse of southern literature and southern literary studies (Romine 24). In Gwin’s reading, *Bastard* exposes the oppressive consequences of southern cultural practices: inextricably connected to and determined by an ideology of absolute patriarchal rule, these practices restrict and regulate the movement of women within the social spaces of the region.

Geographers often distinguish *space* and *place* by degree of specificity; Wesley A. Kort “defines *place* in contrast to *space* as particular in contrast to general” (14). In this formulation, non-specific concepts *home* and *hometown* are *spatial* discourses that configure cultural practices and social interactions within particular and locatable *places*, such as Alma’s house or Greenville. These places, writes the geographer Linda McDowell, offer particular “living histories of past and current social relationships” (4). Thus, an invocation of a specific place does not simply reference a set of coordinates, but instead the general spatial discourse that characterizes interactions at that site *and* the specific experiences of the past that either support or challenge the continued production of that discourse. Allison’s claim to “know where I come from” denies the spatial discourse of the plantation as an adequate signifier of her southern experience and disrupts any effort to locate that particular experience as a geographic or cultural

aberration. The subsequent exclamation, “The hell we did,” rejects the plantation myth as an accurate signifier of any Southern place. Ultimately, this statement boldly clears out a space for Allison within the geography of the South: her experiences happened there, and she demands that they be included.

Another example from *Two or Three Things* offers some insight into the formulation of place, space, and margins: midway through her fourth grade year (probably 1957 or 1958), a new teacher, “right out of college and full of ideas” (7), was assigned to Allison’s class. Her first attempt to encourage creative and critical thinking among her charges—a current events project—draws complaints: “the nightly news,” Allison tells us, “was full of Birmingham and Little Rock, burning buses and freedom marchers.” These images are probably too complex for eight- and nine-year-olds to grasp, but, more immediately, they are issues that their parents undoubtedly wished to avoid or ignore. In search of a safe solution, the idealistic teacher requires the students to create family trees and recommends that they look to family Bibles as sources. Allison describes her mother’s reaction to the assignment as a look of “exasperation,” as if she “was ready to throw something.” Her Aunt Dot, on the other hand, responds with amused sarcasm: “I can just see all those children putting down Mama’s name, and first daddy’s name and second daddy’s name. Could get complicated” (10). Allison’s aunt and mother work to reconstruct the family’s past from their incomplete and often contradictory memories. Nonplussed, Dot finally asks her sister, “What you think? Should we get a family Bible?” (11).

In Dot’s assessment—“This girl an’t from around here”—*here* does not refer to the South or even to Greenville County, but rather to the decentered community of

farmers, mill workers, truck drivers, and diner waitresses on the margins of Greenville County whose children this elementary school serves. Allison's mother reacts with exasperation because the assignment requires her daughter to bend their family history to the bourgeois narrative forms of the family tree and the family Bible. In many ways, the well-meaning teacher's mistake is understandable; after all, as I have noted, southern religious culture is nothing if not Bible-centered. Thus, its use as the central document of family life, as a text which situates the individual within the earthly history of family and within the otherworldly narrative of sacred history, is accurate to *place*. The problem posed by the assignment: their family history doesn't fit into the *spaces* it provides. Their genealogy does not match the form in its first pages and can be forced into that space only by simplifying certain elements and forgetting or denying others.

Similarly, the fictional Anney Boatwright's engagement with the public spaces of Greenville County in the first chapter is indicative of limited discursive, physical, and class mobility faced on the margins of the community. In the county hospital, Bone is declared a "bastard" upon her birth, as her Aunt Ruth and her grandmother cannot agree on the identity of her father. From there, the forms are transmitted onto another public space, the courthouse, where the frustrated clerk rejects the pleas of the Boatwright women and "certifie[s]" Bone's illegitimacy. Again and again, Anney seeks to have a certificate issued without the red "illegitimate" stamp, attempting to "deny what Greenville County wanted to name her," but each time her request is rejected with moral condescension. "The facts have been established," the clerk informs her (*Bastard* 4). Bone's Uncle Earle counsels Anney to abandon her efforts: "The law never done us no good," he tells her (5). Earle's statement is not inaccurate, for neither institutions nor the

discourses of justice are accessible to the Boatwrights. Likewise, they are denied access to the physical places that characterize the collective experience of southern communities—the plantations, the town squares, or the courthouses. Even the access to their own homes is restricted, as Alma’s scorched yard attests. In these spaces, they are located as “aberrant,” placed on the margins of what the community considers acceptable, and denied the right to speak through that discourse.

Leigh Anne Duck has recently applied the psychoanalytic concept of *abjection* in her examinations of the function of the South within U.S. nationalism. Citing Julia Kristeva, Duck defines the abject as “an aspect of human physicality or experience that individuals wish to disavow, a substance or image that disrupts the psyche’s sense of ‘identity, system, order’” (93). Among the most frequently cited examples of abjection are excrement and bodily fluids, which suggest the “permeability of the body’s boundaries” by confronting the individual subject with a substance that is both self and non-self. Similarly, Duck writes,

the imagined boundaries of the United States are, like those of the psychoanalytic subject, impossible to maintain. Shaped by restrictive cultural norms and a history of racist legal exclusions, as well as an ideology of democratic assimilation and a history of immigration, ideas of U.S. national identity are neither flexibly open nor capable of being securely sealed. (109)

Duck offers the popular and critical response to Erskine Caldwell’s wildly popular *Tobacco Road* (both the 1932 novel and 1933 stage production) as evidence of this process; the repulsion, even “nausea,” described by readers, audience members, and critics is indicative of underlying fears of individual and collective “divergence from the national standards” of “an economically and politically progressive democracy” (93, 96). By “projecting this abjection onto spatially distanced regions” and “containing [the nation’s] imagined grotesques in a restricted space” (94; 96), *Tobacco Road* allowed

readers and audiences to reinforce a faith in their own progressive social consciousness while avoiding their own complicity in inequality.

The script of abjection is played out within the boundaries of southern communities and in *Bastard Out of Carolina* through the marginalization of the Boatwrights as “white trash.” Bone’s mother Anney struggles with the Sisyphean task of pushing away the appellation and the associations it calls to mind: “*No-good, lazy, shiftless*. She’d work her hands to claws, her back to a shovel shape, her mouth to a bent and awkward smile—anything to deny what Greenville County wanted to name her,” Bone recalls (3-4). “Trash” elicits these moral qualities for Anney, but it is inescapably bound up with waste, material byproducts that are first contained for the health and purity of the community and then removed and confined to its outer edges. The Boatwrights are, in Patricia Yaeger’s terms, “throwaway bodies”:⁵⁹ the necessity of their presence is recognized, but the family cannot be considered an integral part of the community. Thus, their interaction with the larger community must be regulated. Only by keeping the Boatwrights at a safe physical and discursive distance can the rising middle class of 1950s Greenville County narrate its own triumph.

Neither the fictional Boatwrights nor the Gibsons in *Two or Three Things* easily yield to their systematic abjection. In Allison’s memoir, Dot’s dismissive response to the genealogical assignment implies that, in the geographic and discursive margins of Greenville, people found alternative narrative spaces to articulate their family histories. From these marginal spaces, both Allison’s family and their fictional counterparts narrate

⁵⁹ Yaeger defines the throwaway body as “women and men whose bodily harm does not matter enough to be registered or repressed—who are *not* symbolically central, who are looked over, looked through, who become a matter of public and private indifference—neither important enough to be disavowed nor part of white southern culture’s dominant emotional economy” (68).

their stories, telling and retelling them in an ongoing effort to counteract efforts to restrict their movement and to silence their experiences. While the bulk of the novel presents Bone's increasing alienation from family and self, her individual voice is almost indistinct from the collective narration of familial history in the lyrical first chapter. Here, Bone introduces her family and herself through the recollection of stories so often repeated among her family that authorial attribution is impossible; the stories are never static and never remain long in the past but rather are conjured up, constantly revised and retold, to fit the needs of the family at a given moment. A specific psychic need instigates the Boatwrights' laughing recollection of the burning Greenville County courthouse and leads someone, perhaps Bone, to ascribe to the fire the qualities of wish fulfillment. Presaging Bone's painful visions of retribution, the collective voice remembers Anney's apocalyptic fantasy: "An't it time the Lord did something, rained fire and retribution on Greenville County? An't there sin enough, grief enough, inch by inch of pain enough? An't the measure made yet? Anney never said what she was thinking, but her mind was working all the time" (14). As the county's central public space, the courthouse holds the documentary evidence of Greenville's communal history—a history which categorizes Bone as a bastard and the Boatwright men as petty criminals. Moreover, it functions as the symbolic consolidation of collective identity, as it is the central structure in which many of the county's most significant events would have occurred. The Boatwrights' access to this history, however, is restricted: they can neither edit nor add to the documents of history (including Bone's birth certificate) or the discourses of law and class which enact the script of abjection. In the historical narrative offered from the marginal spaces in which the Boatwrights live, the destruction of the courthouse is a

liberating event, not a moment of destruction.

Most critical work on Allison's novel engages the scholarly discourse of trauma studies, and rightly so: Bone's story is comprised of events so horrible that they defy the victim's ability to articulate their meaning. Because it contradicts the prevailing discourses of place, gender, and family, this story has been silenced. For this reason, Allison's reliance on the strategies of realistic fiction—brutally real, in fact—are perhaps surprising, as they seem to enact the very forms that serve to silence the expression of trauma. Queer theorists have long noted the similar limitations of realism as an appropriate discourse to the articulated queer stories and queer subjectivities, which are silenced by linear, realistic narrative conventions.⁶⁰ Though the chronology of the novel is fairly conventional (and by that, I mean that it moves sequentially), the stories embedded in the text—the “relentless linear narratives” (King 122) through which Bone seeks to narrate a coherent identity that will make sense of the abuse she has suffered—are anything but conventional. “Bone must rewrite—and in some cases simply reject—the names and stories that make her vulnerable to violence,” according to Vincent King. We may also conceive of this spatially: lost in the family's never-ending cycle of eviction and moving into new but sterile rental properties and alienated from her mother by Anney's failure to prevent Glen's sexual abuse, Bone becomes displaced, unhinged from family and from place. In order to combat the “ghostly, unreal and unimportant” feelings that follow, Bone assumes exciting new personae and backgrounds at her new schools.

⁶⁰ Katrina Irving describes realism as “an interesting choice on Allison's part, since it has been argued that the representational double-bind in which queer artists currently find themselves—the desire not to provide the dominant culture the marginal subjects it demands (‘positive images’), coupled with the desire to avoid collusion in the dominant culture's ‘ghosting’ of the deviant—cannot be slipped within the parameters of the realist form” (94).

This ability to inhabit different identities transcends that conventional playacting of childhood and instead points to an effort to work through the stigma of her “white trash” class position and the traumatic sexual abuse of her stepfather “Daddy Glen” Waddell. His failures precipitate both his violent rages and the family’s repeated moves from one rented home to another, and these events leave Bone displaced, feeling “ghostly, unreal and unimportant” (65)—a nonperson in nonplaces. Bone assumes new identities as she enters new schools, creating detailed but fictional personal histories that locate her outside the boundaries of Greenville. “It scared me that it was so easy—my records, after all, had not caught up with me—that people thought I could be Roseanne Carter from Atlanta, a city I had never visited. Everyone believed me, and I enjoyed a brief popularity as someone from a big city who could tell big-city stories” (67). When Bone’s stories are localizable to Greenville, they are necessarily constrained by the same sociospatial discourses that characterize her experience; an imagined Atlanta, on the other hand, offers limitless possibility.

Bone is initially thrilled with the freedom of being *unplaced* but is quickly terrified by the dissociation from place that ultimately constitutes an alienation from the self. Bone struggles between a claustrophobic desire to escape the marginal spaces inhabited by the Boatwrights, which results in alienation from the family, and a longing for a communion with them. In her isolation, however, she does not recognize that she has in fact imbibed the family’s legacy of resilience—particularly, the use of narrative as a mechanism of resistance among the Boatwright women. Her fantasies have much in common with the collective effort of her mother and aunts to revise and retell stories in order to transcend those confining spaces. Lamenting their financial struggles, Anney and

Raylene find some solace—and laughter—by retelling and reliving their sister Alma’s refusal to yield to the sheriff’s efforts to repossess her furniture. Bone overhears Raylene recounting Alma “screaming to the neighbors how they were trying to rob her” (188). In their memory, Alma’s resistance is both dramatic and comic. Her fearless, even shameless, manipulation of gender and class codes emasculates the sheriff, who in Anney’s account “like to peed in his pants when he saw her [Alma] throwing her clothes out the window and yelling, ‘Take it all, why don’t you? Take the kids too, take it all.’” When the sisters debate whether Alma actually disrobed and threw her housedress at him, it becomes apparent that neither witnessed the event; the story has been told so many times that its details are no longer clear. However, both agree that the inclusion of the image of Alma, standing defiantly in her underwear, is an acceptable addition, as it not only makes the story better but also accurately represents the spirit of Alma’s resistance.

In retelling the story, Anney and Raylene attempt to narrate their own resistance and their own refusal to yield to the restrictions of class. In their telling, the repossession is understood as a robbery and thus becomes a metonym for the sort of intrusive abuses that disrupt their efforts to claim space within the geography of Greenville. However, the limitations of Alma’s opposition quickly become clear to Bone. The story turns from Alma’s resistance to the shame with which her daughter, Temple, responds to it: Temple, Anney says, “just didn’t want the neighbors to think they couldn’t keep up the payments.” Formulating the event in this manner shifts the moral characterization of the event from a violation of Alma’s home—her intimate personal space—to a failure on her part to maintain that place. Importantly, it is not the failure itself that concerns Temple but the neighbors’ knowledge of it. Thus, she does not seek to *prevent* the repossession

but rather attempts to silence it so that it might not be used to *name* her or her family. Anney and Raylene are quick to differentiate themselves and their sister from their niece and her attempt to silence this event: like her sisters, Alma “knows who she is,” Anney says. Bone realizes that she possesses neither this self-awareness nor the sense of collective identity that exists among her mother and aunts, and she wishes to “be more like them, easier in my body and not so angry all the time” (190).

Though the communion that exists among these women seems enviable from Bone’s position of alienation from self and family, she is aware of the costs necessary to reach an easy position in place: “....Through the steam they both looked older—two worn, tired women repeating old stories to each other and trying not to worry too much about things they couldn’t change anyway.” Bone—and the reader—are left to ponder the implications of the sisters’ knowledge of “who they are”: is this a defiant statement of the refusal to yield to the sheriff’s, the furniture salesman’s, and the neighbors’ efforts to name them, or does it amount to an acceptance of a “white trash” identity that allows only limited oppositional possibilities and little opportunity for meaningful resistance? Though Anney and Raylene delight in a story of defiance, enacting their own narrative resistance in its telling and retelling, how much space does it afford them to grow, change, and challenge their own subjection? What is the distinction between knowing “who” you are and “where” you belong?

The confused, contradictory desire Bone experiences here is indicative of her ongoing struggles with the legacy of Boatwright women: she wants to belong among them, to have a position for herself alongside her mother and her aunts, but she fears their legacy and the future to which it dooms her. These contradictory impulses are expressed

both spatially and temporally: Bone wants to fit into the *social space* of family but is afraid of the limited histories that it contains. Recoiling from their story, Bone attempts to insert herself into different narratives in a continuing project to discover a narrative that will give coherent form to her experiences of abuse. In this attempt, Bone displays an “instinctive” understanding of the postmodern insight “that her identity, far from being stable or fixed, is transactional,” according to King (126). That is not to say that Bone is not affected by the identities and names that others impose upon her—indeed, she obsesses over her physical appearance and over how she is perceived, particularly by Glen. “When I saw myself in Daddy Glen’s eyes, I wanted to die,” she says. “He looked at me, and I was ashamed of myself” (*Bastard* 209). Though she despises him, she mourns his absent affection and ascribes to it the properties of a psychic and emotional panacea. “Love would make me beautiful; a father’s love would purify my heart, turn my bitter soul sweet, and lighten my Cherokee eyes. If he loved me, if only he loved me. Why didn’t he love me?” Bone does not realize—at least, explicitly—that, through this agonizing longing for patriarchal acceptance, she joins the other Boatwright women in a communion of suffering.

Terrified of the future that she believes the subject position “Boatwright woman” destines for her, Bone becomes fascinated with the seemingly unrestricted social spaces occupied by the men in her family: “Men could do anything,” she says, “and everything they did, no matter how violent or mistaken, was viewed with humor and understanding....What men did was just what men did. Some days I would grind my teeth, wishing I had been born a boy” (23). She is not alone: Glen is thrilled by the possibility that he might “marry Black Earle’s sister, marry the whole Boatwright legend,

shame his daddy and shock his brothers” and that, like them, he might “carry a knife in his pocket and kill any man who dared to touch” his wife (13). For Bone and Glen both, the Boatwright legacy of “white trash” offers an identity that openly and defiantly enacts the very behaviors that have been ascribed to them in order to affect that marginalization. As J. Brooks Bouson argued, the Boatwright legacy follows “a socially scripted and stereotypical role: that of the shamelessly defiant and angry white trash poor” (108). While this behavior “flaunts” the ascription of shamefulness, it is “is not to be without shame.” Instead, the Boatwrights enact a sort of feedback loop, internalizing their shame with each defiant display of shameful behavior. The “stubborn ‘pride’ and the defiant shamelessness of poor whites like the Boatwrights function to cover their social shame—their feelings of social powerlessness and inferiority,” writes Bouson (108), but never to counteract it or to offer the possibility of actual empowerment. Thus, when Bone visits Earle in prison, she seizes upon his concealment of a knife as an emblem of nearly superheroic opposition: “We’re smart, I thought. We’re smarter than you think we are. I felt mean and powerful and proud of all of us, all the Boatwrights who had ever gone to jail, fought back when they hadn’t a chance, and still held on to their pride” (*Bastard* 217).

Bone, it seems, has accepted the abjection of the family and even fashioned it into a subversive and empowering identity: if the family must live on the margins, at least the margins are theirs. In this sense, Bone’s white trash experience seems to exist on the same terrain as bell hooks’s childhood in the black community that existed on the edges of “a small Kentucky town.” “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body,” hooks writes. “This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our

consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us an oppositional world view—a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and solidarity” (ix).

However, while the margins may offer an empowering vantage point, enacting the script of one’s own abjection offers a limited victory at best; at worst, this exacerbates the process of domination. Thus, in Raylene’s assessment, the knife is hardly an indication of Earle’s ingenuity: “All you kids think your uncles are so smart. If they’re so smart, why they all so goddam poor, huh?” (*Bastard* 217). By shamelessly living out the abject practices that delineate the marginal spaces afforded them, the Boatwright men only reinforce its boundaries. Furthermore, this feedback loop of shameful behavior silences the experiences of the Boatwright women and, ultimately, the abuse Bone suffers. In seeking to counteract the shameful emasculation wrought by his father’s rejection, Glen Waddel asserts a violent, masculine authority and assumes an identity that works, ultimately, at cross-purposes with his efforts to throw off the shame. His parents and siblings do not register his actions as a rejection of them or their social mores; instead, they view them as further evidence that he is a failure. Glen seeks to establish his own coherent identity in and through the series of rented homes through which the family moves in with regular and fairly rapid succession. As Minrose Gwin points out, while the space of the home is frequently characterized as maternal, it is also the site at which the discourses of legal ownership and patriarchal authority converge (419); a mother may maintain a space, but a father remains its master. For Glen, emasculated by the authority of his own father, the material success of his brother, and his inability to hold a job, the

patriarchal mastery over family is all that stands in the way of utter impotence. Even in the home space, this limited power is provisional at best, frequently disrupted by the demands of the landlord. Consequently, he works to silence any threat to this integrity, hoping to forestall its imminent collapse. He “whine[s],” according to Bone, when Anney takes Bone and her sister Reese to the Parsons, Reese’s paternal grandparents and the parents of Anney’s tragically dead husband, and he ultimately upsets the relationship between the girls and the Parsons by making a claim to their land on behalf of “our girl” (*Bastard* 56). Glen is further threatened by another source of potential disruptive narratives—Anney’s own mother, who, he tells Reese and Bone, “is the worst kind of liar” (52). “I’ll tell you what’s true,” he tells Bone, his grip emphasizing his authority. “You’re mine now” (52).

In Katrina Irving’s reading of the novel, Glen’s statement of possession is indicative of “a patriarchal system that needs marginal subjects in order to demarcate and suture its own boundaries” (95). Again, we turn to spatial formulations. For instance, in order for the Waddells to claim a place within the hegemonic, “moonlight and magnolia” narratives of southern places, they must be able to turn away someone at the plantation gates—that is, they must cast themselves against people like the Boatwrights who cannot access that narrative space. Likewise, in order to claim his own narrative space, Glen must locate someone as the object of his authority. Thus, the boundaries of his power are located in Bone and Reese: they constitute the furthest reaches of his claims of possession. However, when that authority appears to be on the verge of collapse, Glen seeks out a scapegoat—Bone. As I have discussed throughout this project, instances of social crisis inevitably involve the failure of dominant discourses of authority, whether

intricate cosmologies, secular narratives of nation, or, as in the case of Glen Waddell, a belief in one's authority. Individuals in such cases, writes René Girard

are disconcerted by the immensity of the disaster but never look into the natural causes; the concept that they might affect those causes by learning more about them remains embryonic. Since cultural eclipse is above all a social crisis, there is a strong tendency to explain it by social and, especially, moral causes. . . . But, rather than blame themselves, people invariably blame either society as a whole, which costs them nothing, or other people who seem particularly harmful for easily identifiable reasons" (*The Scapegoat* 14).

Bone is "easily identifiable" in her alienation from family, her frequent escapes into books and imagination, and her resistance to Glen. In the terms I have employed elsewhere, her presence constitutes an instance of undifferentiation that cannot be tolerated: though Bone exists within the physical place of the home, she will not yield to Glen's authority. Thus, she disrupts the discursive configuration of the home as a patriarchal space. Glen does not seek to sacrifice her as a literal scapegoat but rather to erase the contradiction she poses by demanding his dominion over in the most extreme and absolute manner imaginable.

The psychic effect of Bone's location within these geographies of power and patriarchy is suggested by the initial description of Alma's scorched yard: even the spaces which she inhabits in memory offer a mobility that is restricted at best. Likewise, most of the stories she tells end with the Boatwrights' subjection to the law. Confinement and containment are thus the hallmarks of Bone's narration. It should not surprise us, then, that these geographies are destroyed in the elaborate, apocalyptic fantasies she creates. While Apocalypse is frequently formulated temporally as the end of Time, that end occurs in a specific geographical location; it results in the destruction of the limitations of place and space and the end of the division between the world and the

divine realm of heaven.

In her initial masturbatory fantasies—images of burning straw, threatening to consume her as she struggles to escape—Bone does not seem to be aware of the destructive, purging, or cleansing qualities of fire. Indeed, if she does already feel tainted by Glen’s abuse, she nonetheless struggles to preserve herself from the flames. These images do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are presaged within the text by the retributive fantasy of the courthouse’s destruction that Bone attributes to her mother and by the story of her uncles reveling in the actual fire. In this context, it becomes clear that Bone’s daydreams engage an extant discourse of retribution and that her familiarity with it predates even her exposure to scripture. Consider the description of the weather in the collective narration of Lyle Parsons’ death: “the devil’s rain”—an ostensibly pleasant combination of rain and blinding sun that the highway patrolman says, leads to the wreck (7).⁶¹ From this benignly folksy aphorism, two crucial ideas emerge: first, the latent but nearly omnipresent influence of a cosmology which anthropomorphizes Satan and situates him as a presence in the geography of the rural South, and second, the silenced presence of violence committed against female bodies. The abusive potential of the patriarchy and the flames of Hell and Judgment are sublimated but nonetheless present in the narrative and discursive production of the southern geography which Bone inhabits.

Though fire is a constant within Bone’s masturbatory fantasies, it is hardly limited to them. In fact, the fantasy of the courthouse’s destruction attributed to Anney in the first chapter presages Bone’s emotional response to Glen’s middle class family, the Waddells: “I could feel a kind of heat behind my eyes that lit up everything. It was dangerous, that

⁶¹ The combination of rain and sunshine occur “when the devil beats his wife,” according to the aphorism with which I am familiar and which Randall Kenan deploys in the short story “Clarence and the Dead” (3).

heat. It wanted to pour out and burn everything up, everything they had that we couldn't have, everything that made them think they were better than us" (*Bastard* 103). Bone recognizes that same heat—"the fire of outrage" (158)—in the eyes of her would-be friend, the albino Shannon Pearl. Shannon Pearl's gruesome but brutally realistic stories of "decapitations, mutilations, murder, and mayhem" engage the apocalyptic discourse of retribution far more specifically than Bone's initial fantastic daydreams: "Shannon Pearl simply and completely hated everyone who had ever hurt her and spent most of her time brooding on punishments either she or God would visit on them" (157-8). As she spends more time with Shannon Pearl's family on the southern Gospel circuit, as well as in the various evangelical churches that dot the geography of rural Greenville County, Bone's own fantasies increasingly and more specifically engage the apocalyptic imaginary. The world of southern Gospel music seems to offer Bone everything that the familial stories lack: the possibility of financial success; models of independent women who are able to create something positive out of the heartache wrought by their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons; and perhaps most importantly, the possibility of a divine justice that would deliver her from her abuse and punish Glen for his crimes.

Critical work on *Bastard Out of Carolina* has surprisingly neglected the novel's invocations of Apocalypse. In an otherwise insightful essay, Katrina Irving reduces Bone's obsession with southern Gospel music (both in its content and the circuit) as evidence of "her need to be cocooned by narrow, predictable thinking" (154); this condescending assessment fails to recognize the significance of revivalism and southern Gospel music among the southern working class of the U.S. South. For Bone, as for many southerners, the revival tent functions as a mobile, unrestricted space in which

working class southerners are able to articulate an identity distinct from the aberrant, “white trash” labels ascribed to them elsewhere. In the revival tent, individuals can claim an identity as a member of God’s Chosen people and articulate their own experiences within the sacred historical narrative of redemption and resurrection—a deep contrast to the shame lumped onto them in the conventional, secular documents of history, such as Bone’s birth certificate. In the nineteenth century, revivals “propelled Baptists from the margins to the center of Southern culture,” according to Michael Graves and David Fillingim (Introduction 10). Bone’s experiences at the revival tent occur during the Gospel boom of the 1940s and 1950s, a point at which working class southerners had created a nearly independent, impressively influential, and financially thriving gospel music industry, thus establishing a pathway to the middle class successes that they had been denied. Prompted by the end of war-time rationing and the new interstate highway system, gospel musicians cut more records, shipped them cheaply, and could travel across the country to promote them; new, nationally-broadcast radio ministries transmitted the music across the country (Goff 157-159). “By the middle of the twentieth century,” Graves and Fillingim write, “Southern Gospel was an established genre in print, broadcast, and recorded media” (13).

Bone’s interest in religion and in southern Gospel music, then, should not be reduced to a turn from the complexities of her experiences toward a realm of “narrow, predictable thinking,” as Irving contends; rather, it must be contextualized within Bone’s continuing exploration of the various discourses available to her and within Allison’s efforts to map out the geography of Greenville County. Bone is thrilled by the possibility of deliverance and salvation: she dreams of both saving her family through the earthly,

material successes a career as a gospel singer might bring *and* redeeming them spiritually by introducing them to the church. Moreover, she is thrilled by the possibility of being *wanted*. “There was something heady and enthralling about being the object of all that attention,” and so Bone comes “close to being saved about fourteen times...in fourteen different churches,” continually prolonging her flirtation with religion (*Bastard* 149). The state of *being wanted* is deeply gratifying, it seems, and provides a balm for the absence of fatherly love and the awful sting of shame that she feels at the Waddells’. This community’s desire for her presence within their boundaries is an antidote for her abjection. Bone only vaguely understands this desire, but Earle seems to be able to articulate it: “They want you, oh yes, they want you.... I’ll tell you, Bone, I like it that they want me, Catholics and Baptists and Church of Gods and Methodists and Seventh-Day Adventism, all of them hungry for my dirty white hide, my pitiful human soul.” Earle, however, remains assured that the world is “irredeemably corrupt” and that no congregation “would give two drops of piss for me if I was already part of their saggy-assed congregation” (148). Despite his protestations otherwise, Bone believes that “the hunger, the lust, and the yearning” which she feels (but which she doesn’t understand completely) are also “palpable” in Earle’s voice. “As it was, all I could think was how marvelous it would be when he finally heard God speaking through me and felt Jesus come into his life” (149).

Just as there are limitations to the oppositional identity constructed in the family stories of the Boatwrights, the psychic balm offered by a gospel identity is incomplete. Bone never steps forward to declare her faith; rather than feeling “[w]hatever magic Jesus’ grace promised,” these moments are “cold and empty” (152). It seems that Bone

is unable to shake her initial reaction to gospel music—the sense that it is intended to “make you hate and love yourself at the same time, make you ashamed and glorified” (136). The thrill of chosen-ness conjured by the music is contradicted by the awareness of her inadequacy. Again, Earle’s explanation of his refusal to accept religion offers insight that Bone, on her own, cannot obtain: “Religion gets you and milks you dry. Won’t let you drink a little whiskey. Won’t let you make no fat-assed girls grin and giggle. Won’t let you do a damn thing except work for what you’ll get in the hereafter” (148). In the physical space of the revival tent and in the narrative space of gospel music, the rural poor are free to articulate an identity outside the marginalizing conventions and prerogatives of class shame. Paradoxically, the identity can be claimed only if Bone accepts as shameful the very things which demarcate the Boatwright legacy.

While Earle’s explanation appears to be little more than a rejection of the strict moralism of southern evangelical Protestantism, we can begin to further develop the specific limitations of this faith as a vehicle for an oppositional subjectivity by examining it as a statement of the theodicy of gospel music. In stark contrast to slave spirituals and African American gospel, which often locate evil as the consequence of earthly oppression, the southern gospel music of the white working class responds to evil by rejecting the suffering of this world, “emphasiz[ing] the believer’s eternal home in heaven,” and encouraging “believers to trust Jesus to soothe their affections while waiting for their heavenly reward . . .” (Fillingim 50). By ignoring the material and earthly causes of suffering, this cosmology establishes evil as a matter of human morality, and the responsibility for earthly misery is displaced onto the individual enduring it. By this reasoning, Earle not only deserves the initial pain that is derived

from his wife's abandonment but also the ongoing sense of lack he seeks to heal through women and booze. Likewise, the theodicy of southern Gospel music serves to further shame Bone and to silence the articulation of her abuse; if evil has no external cause, then she believes that it must be a consequence of her own moral failings.

While Bone ultimately fails to consummate the public assumption of a "glorified" gospel identity, her fascination with the fantastic imagery of apocalyptic, retributive destruction becomes increasingly elaborate. Mourning "the loss of something I had never really had" (i.e., a fixed identity within the gospel narrative), Bone "tak[es] comfort in the hope of the apocalypse, God's retribution on the wicked. I liked Revelations, loved the Whore of Babylon and the promised rivers of blood and fire. It struck me like gospel music, it promised vindication" (*Bastard* 152). Apocalypse provides solace even before she begins to explore the text of John's vision. The vague interest begins with the hope for the courthouse's destruction, attributed to Anney in the first chapter; it develops into the ethereal, if frightening, flames of her masturbatory fantasies, and finally it becomes a wish for some otherworldly force—"God or magic" or even the doctor who sees her wounds—to confront Glen with the truth of his abuse, demand his repentance, and cause him to "weep tears of blood" (116).

This daydream is complicated: in it, Glen's fate is her decision, and Bone is thus endowed with the agency and narrative control his abuse seeks to deny her. However, the fantasy is also self-annihilative and even culminates in her death. Certainly, we might formulate Bone's image of death as simply a fantasy of escape, but its recurrence, as well as her rejection of it following Shannon Pearl's horrific immolation, suggests that elaboration is necessary. Frank Kermode writes that Apocalypse amounts to a

macrocosmic figuration of our own deaths—the necessary end of the fiction we use to impart sequence, consequence, and coherence upon a human life (7). Bone’s dreams of her own death seem to reverse this: in them, her death ends the threat to the fiction of a happy family. Unable to articulate a story in which she exists happily within this framework, she internalizes Glen’s abusive attempts to locate her as the source of any incoherence within the patriarchal order he seeks to establish in their home. The trauma she endures destabilizes the boundaries of this space, and Bone locates herself as the source of this instability.

Let us return for a moment to the notion, discussed both by Kennedy and Gwin, that memories are accessed by imaginatively reconstructing the geographies in which past events occurred. Certain places—her aunts Ruth’s and Raylene’s homes, for instance—serves as oases of stability both for Bone and the reader as each moves through the imaginative landscapes of the text. For the most part, however, Bone is alienated from place: the small measure of stability that does exist amid their repeated moves is translated either as a gut-wrenching stasis and immobility, which Bone believes is her birthright as a Boatwright woman, or as the claustrophobia consolidated in the grip of Glen’s over-large hands. This incongruity is profoundly troubling for Bone’s developing sense of her self. She either has no place in which to locate herself, or she is confined to places that offer no room to move and no space to speak. Again, we can return to the image of Alma’s scorched yard where the spigots serve as constant emblem of the ideological and material forces that weigh upon the Boatwrights as well as their ultimate dislocation from the places which they inhabit. In Bone’s memory, the boundaries between place and self are rendered incoherent by the twinned effects of displacement

and claustrophobia. For a child, this all translates into a simple idea: she doesn't fit in anywhere.

In her initial apocalyptic fantasy, she imagines herself as the element of dissonance and positions her death as the apocalyptic reconstitution of an originary harmony. Shannon Pearl's death initiates a shift in these self-annihilative fantasies; confronted with the "dull thudding sound of her life shutting down, everything stopping," Bone determines to resist the negation of her own existence (205). At first, she simply integrates the burning courthouse into her masturbatory dreams:

I thought about fire, purifying, raging, sweeping though Greenville and clearing the earth....

"Fire," I whispered. "Burn it all." I rolled over, putting both my hands under me. I clamped my teeth and rocked, seeing the blaze in my head, haystacks burning and nowhere to run, people falling behind and the flames coming on, my own body pinned down and the fire roaring closer. (253-4)

Ultimately, Bone abandons the self-annihilative component of the fantasy altogether. Though Glen's climactic rape of Bone seems to be about to happen throughout the text, it erupts onto the page with a startling brutality. Bone, however, responds in an even more startling fashion, abandoning her former silence and discovering the voice necessary to articulate the emotions that have so confounded her throughout the text. That voice is unmistakably apocalyptic, and it is not dissimilar to the angry defiance that Wright's Dan Taylor assumes after his own beating. Like Taylor, Bone no longer awaits deliverance from above. Rather, Bone assumes the role of avenging angel herself, damning Glen for every act he has committed and defying his authority with each blow:

"You'll die, you'll die," I screamed inside. "You will rot and stink and cave in on yourself. God will give you to me. Your bones will melt and your blood will catch fire. I'll rip you open and feed you to the dogs. Like in the Bible, like the way it ought to be, God will give you to me. God will give you to me!" (285)

Bone defies Glen's attempt at physical possession by demanding a discursive possession of her stepfather, claiming the authority to name him within the divine narrative of redemption and retribution.

Of course, as cataclysmic as the rape is for Bone and for Anney, the Apocalypse is never realized. It is, however, not confined to the realm of Bone's fantasies. Following the rape, Bone cannot tell her story to the sheriff. In the terms of trauma theory, this experience defies assimilation and cannot be represented through language. We can also understand this in terms of the sociospatial process of marginalization and its silencing effects: Bone imagines Sheriff Cole as just "Daddy Glen in a uniform" (296)—that is, as the authority maintaining the very cultural practices which limit her ability to speak. This encounter, confined to the institutional space of the hospital room, simply is not big enough to contain Bone's suffering. Instead, it would reduce her experience to fit the limited textual spaces of a police report and continue the abjection of her family, further exiling them to the aberrant margins of their community. Raylene is once again Bone's ultimate defender, and she surprisingly appropriates the language of Apocalypse:

"She's just twelve years old, you fool. Right now she needs to feel safe and loved, not alone and terrified. You're right, there has to be justice. There has to be a judgment day too, when God will judge us all. What you gonna tell him you did to this child when that day comes?"

"There's no need—" he began, but she interrupted him.

"There's need," she said. "God knows there's need." Her voice was awesome, biblical. "God knows." (298)

Among the commonplace materialist criticisms of religion, generally, and of Evangelical Christianity, specifically, is the contention that in stressing a life and a judgment to come, religion defers concerns with the oppression of this world and minimizes issues of social justice. And while readers may initially disapprove of Raylene's (and Allison's) reliance

upon God's otherworldly judgment rather than immediate, *this-worldly* retribution that they would like to see visited upon Glen, we should not be frustrated or interpret this as an apocalyptic cop-out. Rather, Apocalypse here functions as the only narrative realm sufficient to articulate Glen's crime and Bone's suffering. The discourses of discipline and punishment, the mechanisms of the law, have only worked to enact the abjection of the Boatwrights heretofore; calling upon them now to mete out their retribution would ultimately reinforce their white trash identity, reinscribe the aberrant, shameful behaviors, including incest, that have been attributed to them, and bulwark the boundaries that restrict them to the community's margins. However, constructions such as *margin* and *center* cease to exist in the apocalyptic narrative Raylene invokes, and the institutional effort to locate the individual is supplanted by divine judgment.

For Allison, then, the South is hardly the grounds for parody; *Bastard Out of Carolina* evokes the textures of place with neither romanticism nor irony but instead with fury, frustration, longing, and love. By defiantly excavating experiences from the marginal spaces of southern community, this postsouthern novel articulates a "sense of place" that is, to borrow Barbara Ladd's term, "emancipatory" (48): Allison activates the regional and the particular as vehicle for liberation rather than as a mechanism to resist change. The possibilities for this sort of recovery are rich, and once again, Apocalypse signals a site worthy of our investigative efforts.

Chapter 4: “Some Say Ain’t No Earthly Explanation”: Excavating the Apocalyptic Landscape of Randall Kenan’s Tims Creek

*And I feel Old Earth a-shuddering --
And I see the graves a-bursting --
And I hear a sound,
A blood-chilling sound.
What sound is that I hear?
It's the clicking together of the dry bones,
Bone to bone -- the dry bones.
And I see coming out of the bursting graves,
And marching up from the valley of death,
The army of the dead.*

*And the living and the dead in the twinkling of an eye
Are caught up in the middle of the air,
Before God's judgment bar.*

-James Weldon Johnson, “Judgment Day”

In the introduction to this project, I suggested that the U.S. South was as much a temporal construction as a spatial one. Through my readings of various texts thus far, a corollary should have emerged: Apocalypse is formulated spatially just as much as it is temporally. Apocalypse promises both the End of Time and the End of this World; as the events of history finally play themselves out, the geographies in which they take place are ultimately used up. Thus, the discourse of the southern “sense of place,” aiming for something just short of prophesy, has been inextricably bound up with the apocalyptic language of southern religion. Citing exchanges between Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren, Scott Romine writes that “an overdeveloped eschatological sense is one of the more enduring characteristics of the southern literary tradition: the southernness of place, it seems, is always in danger of expiring” (26). The literary tradition Romine takes on is

predicated on a sort of apocalyptic paradox: it is brought to life out of the fear of its own, inevitable disappearance.

In the novel *A Visitation of Spirits* as well as in the subsequent short story collection *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead and Other Stories*, Randall Kenan assumes the eschatological burdens of southern literature some sixty years after the Agrarians took their stand. *A Visitation* is framed on one end by a section entitled “ADVENT: or the Beginning of the End” which is a lamentation for the increasingly infrequent communal events of hogkillings that at once transcended agricultural necessity and fulfilled the ritual function of sacrifice, culminating in a communal feast. The frame is closed by “A Requiem for Tobacco,” Kenan’s mythic elegy for the shared labor around which the collective identities of communities like his fictional Tims Creek once coalesced. While Tate, Ransom, Warren, and the rest would perhaps have joined in Kenan’s mourning (albeit, from a safe, segregated distance), they would no doubt be shocked, even appalled, at what is contained within this frame: the story of a black adolescent, struggling to understand how his queer desire can exist within the geography of his southern community. Facing the incongruity of his existence within the cultural and social spaces of his family, his church, and the rural community of Tims Creek, North Carolina, Kenan’s sixteen-year-old Horace Cross seeks escape in the unlimited, unseen geography of the southern apocalyptic imaginary. By conjuring this invisible, otherworldly realm into the existence of *this* world, Horace threatens to initiate a cataclysm that will realize in an explosive instant what was envisioned in the jeremiads of the Agrarians as a slow process of descent and expiration. Rather than locking this expiration of coherent community into a conventionally sequential chronology, *A Visitation of Spirits* explores

Horace's death by shifting between the date of his vision, April 29-30, 1984, and the journey of three surviving family members—his grandfather, Zeke Cross; his great-aunt, Ruth Cross; and his cousin, Rev. James "Jimmy" Greene—to visit a dying cousin over a year later, on December 8, 1985. While these sections are located temporally with great specificity, they are separated by Jimmy's chronologically dislocated first person "Confessions." Despite the precise chronological markers, the text moves fluidly: the Crosses slip in and out of time, consistently returning to the family and the community's history in order to make sense of what they witness and what they have experienced, thus producing deep spatial and temporal maps of the landscape they move across. The result is a work of magical realism⁶² that elides any easy distinction between communal myth, familial legacy, historical fact, and individual hallucination.

The elegiac frame maps *place* onto *space*, I will argue: it establishes the practices and regular rhythms of human interaction and exchange that occur on this site. In looking to Barbara Ladd's formulation of "sense of place" as a "sense of stability amid flux," we should not confuse stability with stasis or stagnation (46). Movement can occur within stable patterns, and indeed, the regular reoccurrence of events—sunrises and sunsets, the phases of the moons, tides, birthdays, holidays, and even hogkillings and tobacco

⁶² *Magical* (or, *marvelous*) *realism* has been most often associated with Latin American writers; indeed, Terry McMillan has famously called Kenan "our black Marquez" (Betts 17). According to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, works of magical realism "have, typically, a strong narrative drive, in which the recognizably realistic merges with the unexpected and the inexplicable and in which elements of dreams, fairy story, or mythology combine with the everyday, often in a mosaic or kaleidoscopic pattern of refraction and recurrence." With its fundamental concern with "the nature and limits of the knowable" (Zamora, "Magical Romance/Magical Realism" 498), the aims of magical realism are closely associated with the revelatory aspects of the apocalyptic as I have outlined them: by flaunting the limitations of conventional representation of reality. As Alejo Carpentier writes, "The marvelous begins to be unmistakably marvelous when it arises from an unexpected alteration of reality (the miracle), from a privileged revelation of reality, an unaccustomed insight that is singularly favored by the unexpected richness of reality, or an amplification of the scale and categories of reality perceived with particular intensity by virtue of an exaltation of the spirit that leads it to a kind of extreme state" ("On the Marvelous Real in America" 85-86).

harvests—allow us to make sense of the otherwise infinitesimal passage of time. Thus, Kenan’s description of the hogkilling is narrated by no character but addressed directly and intimately to the reader. It is filled with seasonal and temporal images: the “winter rye grass that just begun to peek from the stiff earth”; the barbeque pit is “a hole as deep and wide as a grave” (*A Visitation* 7). The hogkilling functions as a rite of passage for the adolescent male who is allowed to pull the trigger and kill the animal for the first time. Within the ritual, the members of the community naturally and easily assume their roles, determined by age and gender, almost as if by instinct. Of course, it is not instinct but rather the process of acculturation that enables the passing of the gun from an old man to the boy.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre contends that “the material conditions of individual and collective activity” are the foundational elements of human relation to place, preceding any and all systematic efforts to establish and maintain a coherent sense of that place (71). The secondary abstraction of a place as singular and stable entity “represses the reality of human labor” (289); Wesley A. Kort surmises that Lefebvre is concerned that “such constructed wholes” can be mobilized as “a surrogate reality, an agent that particular and economic interests can employ in order to validate themselves” (177). Rather than narrating places as stable entities, configured around issues of inclusion and exclusion, Kort formulates places “as repositories of meaning” and “sites of social relationships” (196). “The Requiem for Tobacco” does not mourn the destabilization of boundaries but rather the practices and the labor through which the social relationships developed. And just as the memorial frame contains the text, so too are the people within the story contained by these practices—“bound by this strange

activity” in Kenan’s words (*A Visitation* 257). *Bound* consolidates the contradictions of place into a single verb, at once calling up the collective strength of solidarity and the confinement of the individual subject to a restricted space. It primarily invokes the binds and obligations of family and community that are established through labor. However, it also calls up *boundaries*, the problematic processes of inclusion and exclusion necessary to configure the community as a “constructed whole.”

Through the frame, Kenan begins to work through the emancipatory possibilities of place in fiction and in public discourse, painstakingly excavating the consequences of those boundaries that are not readily accessible. This is difficult work: as a gay black man writing the story of a gay black teenager, Kenan seems nothing if not the consolidation of the sort of radical social change that the sense of place, when formulated as the desire “for stability amid flux,” can be mobilized to lament and even reject (Ladd 52). As such, the sense of place in southern literature would ostensibly seem to have little to offer either Kenan or Horace. And yet, Kenan can make no move more subversive than claiming place as the matrix through which he can articulate an empowering subject position. Robert McRuer suggests as much in taking exception with Henry Louis Gates Jr. over the novel. In a 1991 interview, Gates told Charles Rowell that he hoped Kenan would “take Horace to the big city in his next novel”—that is, to one of the urban centers historically more amenable to the expression of homosexual identities and, indeed, in which gay men have claimed their own spaces in neighborhoods such as New York’s Greenwich Village or the Castro in San Francisco. “What Gates elides in his suggestion to Kenan is the fact that taking Horace *to* anywhere also entails taking him *from* somewhere,” McRuer writes (185). The implications of affirming Horace’s homosexual

identity *in* Tims Creek, rather than exiling him from it, are far more “radical” (186). Indeed, in McRuer’s estimation, by locating Horace at the center of this southern place, the place where he might be least likely to come out, Kenan advances the goals of queer theory articulated by Michael Warner and “confront[s] the default heteronormativity of modern culture with its worst nightmare, a queer planet” (194).

Such a confrontation is certainly valuable within the context of this project. However, my aims are somewhat different from Warner’s: in the excavation of the apocalyptic as a discursive site of concealment and revelation, this project has sought to confront the default resistance to progressive political movements held by U.S. political and religious culture with the challenging and even liberating possibilities of Apocalypse, and thus, to activate the emancipatory potential of place. I am less interested, then, in how Horace’s particular presence challenges and disrupts the heteronormativity of Tims Creek than how the telling of his story, along with the oral history of the community’s maroon origins in the story in “Let the Dead Bury Their Dead,” can transform Tims Creek into a more open and accessible matrix for the expression of an oppositional, resistant subjectivity.

The sources for this sort of work are not limited to the decidedly transgressive; in fact, just as McRuer argues for Horace’s presence in a traditional community of Tims Creek rather than a cosmopolitan center like New York or San Francisco, it is my contention that, by opening the often conservative discourse of place to the possibility of opposition and resistance, we create more room for meaningful discussion and, thus, have a better chance for meaningful and successful progress. By forcing a community to confront the instability of its own boundaries and the consequences of the boundaries’

long maintenance, Kenan's literary maps of Tims Creek suggest the necessity of moving away from a formulation of margins as borders to change and instead investigating them as sites of dynamic exchange between the self and the other, between the local community and the world outside, that are informed by the experiences and folkways framed within. The ethics of Kenan's fiction require the remembrance of the past, not in order to maintain a stable identity but rather in order to create a usable history that will guide these exchanges and that will be accessible to all who wish to claim it. In this effort, Apocalypse is our site of excavation, the proverbial "X" marking the spot: just as Allison's characters Bone and her aunt Raylene invoke the inevitability of God's retribution in order to confront her abuse, Horace and his cousin, Jimmy Greene, turn to Apocalypse in order to understand the contradictions to community and family posed by, among other things, the presence of homosexual desire. As we have seen throughout this project, the otherworldly discourse of Apocalypse functions as a narrative space in which the unspeakable can be addressed indirectly and where contradiction is negotiated through deferral to a cosmological myth. Where it occurs, something has been silenced.

Much like *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *A Visitation of Spirits* begins by situating the narrative within its geography. While the place necessarily exists within the novel, the place feels unbounded by the text, as the story being told exists *within this place*, as if more of Tims Creek and these people exists than can possibly be packed into a single book. Indeed, Kenan has found the terrain rich enough to return to it (and to the Crosses) in his collection *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead and Other Stories*. As with Allison's Greenville, we cannot begin to construct our own imaginative maps of the fictional Tims

Creek without considering its margins. In *Bastard*, Bone's family exists on the margins of Greenville County, displaced by inevitable evictions, immobilized by incarceration, or, at best, relegated to creating the stability of home along the isolated backroads of the county, far from community. Unlike the Boatwrights, the Crosses exist at the center of Tims Creek: their ancestral patriarch Thomas Cross established the village's most significant institution, the First Baptist Church, where Horace's grandfather, Ezekiel (or Zeke) wields great authority as the eldest member of the deacon board, and his cousin Jimmy is the new pastor. For Zeke in particular, Tims Creek is an empowering place where he has access to much of what Jim Crow sought to deny. He has acquired an expansive farm and maintains a generational lineage generally unimpeded by the white world. In this small universe, he has the incredible authority offered by what he believes to be a totalizing knowledge of its geography: at one point, he assumes that he can identify the customers at the local gas station in a given moment by simply surveying the cars out front (46).

However empowering the Crosses' position at the economic, institutional, and cultural center of their community might be, it is power developed from and on the boundaries of southern white hegemony: while the Crosses may maintain a central position within their community, Tims Creek itself exists on the margins. Though its population is almost entirely African American, it is ultimately no less under the thumb of white rule than any other small southern town. In the story "Let the Dead Bury the Dead," Kenan further develops the town's history through Jimmy's uncompleted ethnography. His research investigates the town's development, beginning with a maroon community of escaped slaves who established a permanent, stable existence and were

able during Reconstruction to officially lay claim to their own town. As such, the legacy of Tims Creek—and thus, the legacy asserted by Zeke—offers a powerful oppositional black subject position and, as bell hooks writes of her own experience, “a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors, that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and solidarity” (7). While the Southern place-narrative of the plantation (manifest in *A Visitation* via the ridiculous plantation musical *Ride the Freedom Star*, for which Horace serves as a stagehand) elides the efforts of maroon communities and self-contained African American communities to map their experiences onto the geographies of the South, the black-owned places of Tims Creek, the Cross farm, and the First Baptist Church provide the social spaces in which histories of black expression and black life can be articulated.

However, in narrating a history of place, Zeke and others essentialize those empowering relationships as a coherent “constructed whole” and a “surrogate reality” that conceals the possibility of difference within an otherwise empowering place. The Crosses engage space and place via the discourses of familial and communal history, as well as through the language of the King James Bible. Each of these sources has been layered onto the terrain in order to reinforce the coherence of its boundaries. In this way, Kenan’s novel provides an articulation of the discursive function of evangelical Protestantism and apocalypticism in the production of the southern imaginary *par excellence*: Tims Creek is fraught with the signs and images of Apocalypse well before Horace conjures a demonic vision. Contemplating the “transformation” he hopes will provide an escape, Horace imagines the land, “the soybean fields surrounding his grandfather’s house, the woods that surrounded the fields, the tall, massive long-leaf

pinetrees...He thought of the sky, not a blue picture-book sky with a few thin clouds, but a storm sky, black and mean, full of wind and hate, God's wrath, thunder, pelting rain" (14). This image is not just Horace's: after his death, the narrator offers a winter sky that is "white-grey and desolate, stretched like the hand of God, high and wide" (45). Horace's interest in the quantitative, methodological engagement with nature offered in his science courses does not suspend his belief "in an unseen world full of archangels and prophets and folk rising from the dead, a world preached to him from the cradle on, and a world he was powerless not to believe in as firmly as he believed in gravity and times tables" (16).

While the denizens of this world might be invisible, their existence is integrated into the maps of community constructed in memory and narrative. Thus, abstract concepts like evil and Hell are tangible and projected onto people and place: in the discussions of older men in barbershops and the fields, "the evils of the world had been put before [Horace], solidly and plainly," and located in the figure of "the white man" (89). And it is not just residents who formulate the landscape in this manner. In his confession, Jimmy recalls the pleas of his expatriate siblings to "Leave North Carolina. Get out. As if it were on fire. As if, like Sodom or Gomorrah, the Almighty would at any moment rain down fire to punish the wicked for all the evil done on Southern soil" (35). While Horace's vision brings this universe into view with startling literalism, the universe is bound up with various strands of apocalypticism and millennialism crucial in the production of southern spaces, including even ostensibly secular narratives of political change. For instance, according to his brother Franklin, Jimmy has been "brainwashed and pussywhipped" into joining his wife Anne, a "high-minded, high-yalla,

rich, militant-talking Northern girl,” on the frontlines of a delusional holy war for social justice in “the big bad, bloody South” (35). The U.S. South, as I have argued, has been variously configured as the site of inevitable racial cataclysm; of an expiring moral order; of the deliverance, salvation and retribution of the oppressed and enslaved; and as the only theatre in which the millennial victories of racial and social justice are possible. These are not parallel discourses but instead represent varying points on the continuum of apocalypticism and millennialism that figures into the production of southern spaces and places. Whether these conflicts are expressed in secular or explicitly religious terms, they are all troubled by Horace’s death.

As I discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter 1, undifferentiation, or “the mingling together of opposites” (Bull 71), is anathema to any bivalent world view, particularly the apocalyptic imaginary of southern evangelical culture. The cosmology born of Fundamentalist reading practices posits existence as inherently bivalent, undifferentiation as an illusion manifest in a fallen world, and Apocalypse as a singular, imminent historical moment in which the Holy Judge will reveal the true nature of all things, including their positions within the strict binary. While the white residents of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha violently preserve these collective boundaries to ensure their individual positions, the maintenance of the boundaries of community is practiced as a means of collective self-preservation by the African American residents of Tims Creek, including the Crosses. Thus, the challenges to those boundaries posed by Horace’s homosexuality become infinitely more complicated, as evinced by the moral contradictions posed by the family’s reaction to the earring Horace wears to Thanksgiving dinner. The scene itself, rendered as drama rather than prose, seems on its

face to be a fairly conventional intergenerational family squabble, indistinct from thousands of other conversations adolescents have had with their elders over earrings, long hair, fashion, or make-up. However, this particular argument is notable as it marks the convergence of two discourses which are often ruthlessly and unfortunately kept distinct: race and gender. The earring registers first as a contravention of gender norms, and Horace's great-aunt Jonnie Mae states the piercing makes him look "[l]ike some little girl. Like one of them perverts" (184). However, Horace's transgression of racial divisions becomes the dominant theme of the evening. Ultimately, Zeke forbids his grandson from associating with his new white friends with whom Horace got the piercing as a sign of solidarity. "But they're my friends," he protests, "But they're different. They aren't from around here" (186).

Here, Horace implies that, by virtue of their northern and western backgrounds, his friends exist outside the divisions that define the southern places and histories that the Crosses inhabit. Responding almost as a chorus, his aunts immediately restore the binary divisions destabilized by Horace's assertion of undifferentiation:

RACHEL: They're white, ain't they?

HORACE: Yeah, but—

REBECCA: You black, ain't you?

HORACE: But they don't—

RUTHESTER: He's just foolish. He just don't understand.

Specifically, what he does not understand, according to his aunt Rebecca, is "all the white man's done to us." When Horace reacts by proclaiming his disapproving family members "bigots," Jonnie Mae sternly rebukes him with by narrating the history of bigotry she and the generations before him have faced: "Do you have any idea how many white men have

called me girl and aunt? Out of disrespect? Out of hatefulness? How many white men called your late Uncle Malachi—God rest him—boy and uncle?” (187).

Like the ultimate confrontation between Horace and Jimmy, this episode is presented in Jimmy’s Confession not as a narrated memory but rather as a dramatic exchange, complete with stage directions. There is no mediation and no comment on the confrontation until it is over and Jimmy’s narration resumes. The reader is left alone to observe and to sit as a judge weighing the merits of the various positions. Given both Horace’s position as the protagonist and the dramatically ironic knowledge of his homosexuality, the reader is perhaps inclined to sympathize with Horace; however, Jonnie Mae’s conclusion of the dispute reminds us of the stakes of African American solidarity at moments in which lynching might be the consequence of a violation of the boundaries of race. Indeed, the Crosses, along with the community of Tims Creek, have thrived precisely because they have sought to distance themselves from white folks as much as possible and to strictly regulate necessary or unavoidable moments of contact. While they have been relatively successful in their efforts to create a black-controlled space, that space is itself ultimately restrictive. Just as the family can brook no undifferentiation along its margins, it can tolerate no challenge to the stability of its center—that is, to the patriarchal legacy which designates Horace as “[s]omebody who’s gone make us proud,” as Jonnie Mae says (187) and as “a son of the community, more than most,” in Jimmy’s words (188). And while Jonnie Mae’s rebuke responds to Horace’s violation of racial boundaries, it is articulated as a reification of gender. Among

the worst crimes of white oppression, she makes clear, were the restrictions levied upon her ability to express her femininity and the emasculation of the now-dead Malachi.⁶³

In counteracting the marginalizing, abjecting power of white domination, the Crosses have constructed their community as a unified whole, complete with collective boundaries that distinguish them from an imagined Other. This process is problematic as it “denies or represses the heterogeneity of social difference, understood as variation and contextually experienced relations,” according to Iris Marion Young. “It denies the difference among those who understand themselves as belonging to the same group; it reduces the members of the group to a set of common attributes” (335). In Young’s assessment, the failure to account for the presence of homosexuality undermines the potential for empowerment and political movement that essentialized group identities can offer: “Men who love men and women who love women disrupt this system along many axes, proving by their deeds that even this most ‘natural’ of differences blurs and breaks down. Thus the need to make homosexuality invisible is at least as much existential and ontological as it is moral” (335-6).

In the previous chapter, I argued that Allison disrupts the oppositional power of the “white trash” identity of the Boatwrights by narrating the suffering of women that it seeks to silence. Similarly, the “surrogate reality” of the Cross family is contingent on a patriarchal order that emerges from the dominant practices of land ownership and

⁶³ As Albert Raboteau notes, the spiritual nourishment offered by the black church was bound up with the exercise of gendered citizenship rights from the earliest moments. He cites Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne of the A.M.E. Church’s assessment that slaves “‘found freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of action, freedom for the development of a true Christian manhood.’ Significantly, Payne and other black clergymen linked ‘True Christian manhood’ with the exercise of freedoms that sound suspiciously like civil and political rights. The ineluctable tendency of the black evangelical ethos was in the direction of asserting ‘manhood’ rights, which were understood as a vital form of self-governance” (94). This notion of masculinity and citizenship strikingly—and troublingly—converges with the conflation of citizenship and rape that informs the discourse of lynching as it is modeled by Robyn Weigman.

patrimonial lineage: the Crosses, as a whole, are a success *because* they have demanded and earned the right to exert the authority of men. Indeed, Jimmy views both Horace and himself as products of the community and the family *chosen* to bear their burdens and achieve their successes. His ministry at the First Baptist Church, specifically, becomes a birthright—not something to which he is necessarily entitled but an achievement that realizes his great-great-grandfather Ezra Cross’s “dream that one of his own progeny would stand before the altar as His, and his, minister” (*A Visitation* 115). The fulfillment of this “familial, dynastic hope” establishes the Crosses as “worthy,” according to Jimmy, and thus eradicates the emasculating, vitality-sapping shame of slavery and oppression. Moreover, Jimmy frames the contemporary struggles of the black community as catastrophic attrition of a generation: “Why are we sick and dying now?” he asks in the confession that follows the earring episode. “All the sons and daughters groomed to lead seem to have fled . . . How, Lord? How? The war is not over” (188).

Jimmy alone is cognizant of this crisis; his confessions articulate a prophetic vision of the dissolution of the structures of community and family. However, it is an incomplete vision and offers a pessimistic assessment that the novel ultimately does not endorse. Lindsey Tucker has written convincingly of “tropes of spatiality,” which “underscore the permeability of all borders, whether communal, bodily, or psychic,” as a strategic element of Kenan’s exposure of the “patriarchal family structures, stable racial identities, and normative sexual desires” (306). Zeke, in particular, is representative of this worldview that imagines “Tims Creek and the Cross family as impermeable spaces with established racial and gender borders” despite the inevitable appearance of the

“uncanniness of difference,” according to Tucker (315).⁶⁴ Zeke, and indeed his entire community, turn to the apocalyptic as a means of eliding difference within the community, which is perhaps better formulated as abject rather than uncanny. The uncanny denotes the impulses of repulsion and attraction and of familiarity yet strangeness. However, the abject adds to that formulation the element of exile: the abject is familiar because it is once part of the self and strange because it is no longer. Difference within the community (what I have been describing as *undifferentiation*) threatens the stability and coherence of community inasmuch as it demands a confrontation with the essential instability and permeability of both its collective boundaries and the bivalent categories which configure those boundaries. The apocalyptic narrative defers the resolution of any challenge to those borders—an instant or example of undifferentiation—to a future moment and to divine judgment: the individual of faith need not be concerned with contradiction but comforted in the knowledge of its ultimate location within a bivalent cosmology.

Horace’s visions thus amount to more than a hallucinatory conjuring of the “unseen world of archangels in prophets” into visibility; the visitations of the past make apparent all of the overdetermined associations of judgment and cataclysm layered upon imaginary landscapes of southern places. In the various articulations of Horace’s sexuality, the convergent nature of “evil” and “undifferentiation” is painfully apparent: he is variously “possessed of...a wicked spirit” (28); an “aberration”; sick and “diseased” (160); and even “curse[d],” “doomed to hellfire and damnation” by the desire he cannot

⁶⁴ Tucker’s use “difference” implies a spectrum of possibilities—that is, difference within the black community—rather than the bivalent distinction between racial and gender and categories. In the terms I have been employing heretofore, such an uncanny presence constitutes a moment of *undifferentiation*.

escape (101). Not unlike Bone's dreams of fire, Horace's masturbatory fantasies end with a "thunder[ing]" deity: "this God bellowed in his head when the need arose and Horace had conjured up the pornographic images he had seen of women and men in unholy congress."

Again, Horace does not conjure these images out of a vacuum but rather appropriates them from the discourse of difference specific to his environment—a discourse he confronts via the vision initiated by his entry into the church. Here, Horace is visited by (or perhaps visits, depending on one's reading) the memory of Rev. Barden's sermon on Romans I and the biblical injunction against homosexuality. Barden uses the scriptural language of pollution and uncleanness; moreover, he recites a familiar argument by locating the source of the pollution *outside* of his community in the fallen culture of the modern world threatening them via mass media (here, an afternoon talk show). The sermon constructs Tims Creek as isolated, culturally and temporally, as Barden anticipates the counterargument that would position him "behind the times": "Brothers and sisters, there is no time but now, and I am telling you: It's unclean" (79). The sermon amounts to a rhetorical display of purity and unity via a refutation of the undifferentiation posited by homosexuality and to a call for steadfast, absolute maintenance of the borders—cultural, spatial, and temporal—that preserve the coherence of the community: "See, the soul is a valuable thing," Barden tells the congregation. "And it's our responsibility to keep it up, like a house.... You got to lock the door when you go to bed at night or you might find somebody there when you wake up that you didn't leave there when you went to sleep" (80). Barden ascribes cosmic significance to the maintenance of these boundaries and applies the discourse of sin to delineate the

margins of community. However, it is vision wrought with cosmological contradiction, as it seeks to claim the community of the church as the source of divinely-ordained stability amid the earthly chaos and to situate this same community on the precipice of a cataclysmic dissolution. The result is a collective paranoia—a demand for the obsessive maintenance of boundaries via the individual display of purity.⁶⁵

In the church, Horace is both horrified and thrilled by the cataclysmic consequences of the disruption of community: the scimitar-wielding demon demands that Horace kill Barden. When he fails to do so, the demon takes matters into his own hands, beheading the pastor and, thus, unleashing the possibility of cataclysm. The floor rumbles, and the baptismal font below explodes “as if it were alive—like a wave, sending splintered wood, chairs, lamps, Bibles, plants, tatters of carpet, and hymnals in a moist conflagration, wet fire, into the air” (83). The threat to community posed by Horace, it seems, is so complete that the church—its central physical structure—cannot withstand his presence. However, the church does not collapse; instead, the focus of the cataclysmic inertia is redirected, as it inevitably is, back upon Horace. Barden reappears, head on shoulders, to lead a baptism—Horace’s. And though he wants to accept the redemptive waters, he fears that he will “fall, crack his skull on the cold concrete and turn the purifying water to scarlet,” thus polluting the holy, healing water (84). After he relents, he stands at the front of the church, haunted by the realization that he cannot take his inherited place there and “overwhelmed” by the desire to be like his grandfather and the

⁶⁵ Barden’s sermon engages the same preacherly tradition assumed by Rev. Dan Taylor in Wright’s “Fire and Cloud.” Houston A. Baker, Jr., writes that while “God was generally viewed as the exclusive agent of the apocalypse” in spirituals and hymns,” in sermons, the black preacher “generally identifies himself as the person chosen by God to herald a fiery end of time that will come unless his listeners repent” (51). However, the ends to which Barden deploys the rhetoric of apocalyptic prophesy have more in common with those of Faulkner’s Doc Hines: rather than leading his community toward social change or offering hope of deliverance, Barden uses Apocalypse to stabilize the racialized, gendered boundaries of community.

knowledge that he never will. The parishioners hurl homophobic invectives at him until he flees—out of the church doors and back into the world of “unholy elves and imps and griffins and werewolves and pale-faced phantoms” (87).

Though he does not know it, he becomes like Zeke in this very desire: Horace’s grandfather, his cousin, and himself each feel troubled by their perceived failure to live up to the legacy of the Cross men. In his youth, Zeke imitated his father, “his way of standing, his talk, his talk,” but, “in the end, he didn’t grow up to be more like him...and that was a hard thing for him to settle to square with himself, for in a strange way he was glad” (53). While Zeke imagines Horace as “foreign to me,” this is hardly an anomaly within the Cross lineage; the stability of community and patriarchy, it seems, is tenuous at best. Thus, they must be actively maintained through a variety of strategies including the imitation of the previous generation; rites of passage, such as depicted in the hogkilling; and, indeed, by the election of individuals, like Jimmy and Horace, to the status of “Chosen Nigger.” Rather than confronting the challenge Horace’s behavior and ultimate suicide pose to the patrimonial narrative, Zeke locates his grandson as “foreign” and thus discursively exiles him from the space of family. Indeed, he is all but absent from Zeke’s internal monologue and is never mentioned during the conversations in the car. The script of abjection is thus enacted in order to preserve the coherence of Zeke’s “surrogate reality.” Though Horace’s homosexuality poses a seemingly insurmountable contradiction to his familial legacy, his suicide ironically enacts the sacrificial associations invoked by their last name and links him to Faulkner’s Joe Christmas, another source of collective existential angst. In death, both Horace and Joe are removed from the bodies which their existence so troubles. Thus, Zeke can retrospectively exile

his grandson to the margins of family and community and designate him as “foreign.” In Tims Creek, as in Jefferson, the center, at least rhetorically, holds steady once the threat is removed.

Of course, the distinctions between center and margin affirmed by Zeke are destabilized for the reader who, unlike the old man, is privy to Horace’s dissolution. Unfortunately, Horace imagines these boundaries of community and family as no more permeable or dynamic than his grandfather does. Instead, he internalizes the incongruity and locates himself as the source of instability. Kenan seems to take Eudora Welty’s counsel to writers—to be careful to locate characters within places, lest they “fly to pieces”—not as a warning but rather as a road map for Horace’s descent into incoherence (122). In fact, the multitude of demonic voices visited upon him, as well as his own visitations to the past, are indicative of the dissolution of Horace as a unified self that moves sequentially through time and space. Rather than challenge the location of his queer desire outside the boundaries of community, he seeks to conjure the “unseen world” of archangels and demons of this plane into visibility, hoping that coherence will be possible through this seemingly limitless supernatural possibility of this realm. So powerful is the hold of this “surrogate reality” and so entrenched are the boundaries of community, that Horace attempts to escape into a fantastic, unseen world that is freed from the inviolable laws of physics rather than questioning the instability of the structuring narratives of this realm. Change in this world is far more implausible, in Horace’s view, than his transformation into a hawk. The bird of prey he contemplates is imagined in explicitly apocalyptic terms:

Talons would clutch the thrashing critter tighter than a vise, its little heart would beat in sixteenth notes, excited even more by the flapping wings that beat the air like hammers and blocked the sun like Armageddon. Then the piercing of the neck, the rush of hot, sticky blood. The taste of red flesh. He felt a touch of empathy for the small mammal, its tail caught in the violent twitching of death thralls, but he was still thrilled. (*A Visitation* 15)

While Horace's fantasy begins by identifying with the predatory, his focus moves in short order onto the prey, and his own feelings of incoherence are displaced onto the torn flesh of the rabbit. The fantastic existence of the bird is "thrilling," not just in this displaced violence but also because, he imagines, it offers the possibility of sailing above the terrain, "unfettered, unbound and free" and without having to leave. Indeed, he chooses a red-tailed hawk because it is indigenous to North Carolina (14). Even in fantasy, Horace cleaves to his grandfather's farm and to the community that has granted him chosen status; he even believes he will be reunited with his family at the Rapture, the moment at which the faithful will bodily ascend to heaven (22). In the next world, he imagines, the contradictions and confusion that plague him in his human form will simply melt away.

The apocalyptic elements of Horace's visitations only become more specific and more elaborate. As he stands on the football field, for instance, another denizen of the unseen world comes into view, who is described as "a manlike figure, dark, clad in what appeared to be thick, black robes, wearing a silver helmet and armed with a gleaming scimitar" (165). As he watches him, the voices he hears begin to speak:

For behold, the day cometh, that shall scorch as an oven; whispering whispers, and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble, Come, come. Horace, afraid to do otherwise, stepped forward slowly. Come. The voices whispered whispering, But unto you that fear shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings, whispered, whisperings, whispered, Come.

The words the voice speaks are from scripture. Specifically, they are from Malachi 4:1-2, the final chapter of the final book of the Christian Old Testament, and they offer a

prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. The nature of the figure in front of him is not clear: is it a demon? An angel? Christ himself? The text offers little illumination, and perhaps, it is of no consequence. The vision is quickly broken up by the appearance of several white teens who see that Horace is armed and naked and come after him. Believing himself to be in cosmic battle, Horace runs and then opens fire. If the “day cometh,” Horace must fight for its healing promise.

The possibility that Horace might maintain coherence—albeit, in nonhuman form—is quickly ended: during the course of the April night, his alienation from place becomes so complete that he does indeed “fly into pieces,” losing himself amid the voices of the demons and in the memories that leap up from the terrain. After he conjures the demons, Horace moves across the Tims Creek landscape and becomes dislocated from time and place in a manner not unlike Joe Christmas following the fire at the Burden place in *Light in August*. While Faulkner shifts his narrative perspective away from Joe before he finally falls to pieces, Kenan allows the reader to experience Horace’s descent into incoherence. The conventionally-perceptible landscape of Tims Creek fades into the background as the heretofore unseen geographies of the apocalyptic imaginary increasingly dominate the landscape. These images loom larger and larger, increasingly dominating the space through which Horace moves until they ultimately overtake him completely.

This process of dissolution culminates in a confrontation with a grotesquely costumed doppelganger he finds in a mirror at the Crosstown Theatre, the site of the previous summer’s “lavish” production of *Ride the Freedom Star* (213). The play is an inept epic historical musical written, produced, and funded by the last scion of the white

Cross family, Philip Owen Cross; its comically banal version of the region's plantation past offers more in the way of elaborate fireworks and sumptuous costuming than historical accuracy. Though far from view, Horace's work as a stagehand is the closest *Ride the Freedom Star* comes to incorporating the presence of *black* Crosses. The play's black characters fail to transcend the familiar stereotypes, eliciting the white audience's laughter with their buffoonery and inspiring awe with the "raw and dynamic singing" of black spirituals and faith through a minister's sermon, "which was the most passionate, hell-raising moment in the play" (214).

Nonetheless, Horace's experience with *Ride the Freedom Star* is empowering as it offers his first exposure to the possibility of a community open to the expression of queer desire. The cast features eleven "young, ambitious" professionals brought into perform the lead roles, many of whom are gay (215), including both Horace's lover Antonio and the object of his desire, the bourgeois African American co-star, Everett Church Harrington IV. While the members of the troupe openly express their desire, it is desire that seems, at best, vacuous and fleeting and offers none of the transformative, healing possibilities Horace seeks. The emancipatory possibilities offered by the troupe are further tempered by their work on stage, which seeks to reinscribe the plantation myth as the region's singular historical and sociospatial narrative, thus silencing the story of the black Crosses. The script is so crass, however, that it only serves to empower Horace by reminding him of both the difficulty and the success his family has faced to maintain their story. "Damn, you know, I never put two and two together. That's *your* fucking family too, isn't it?" Antonio asks Horace, assuming that he must be seething with anger (224). That is hardly the case: "It's funny. I'm kind of proud, too. You know. Not about

the slavery stuff, but to know where we've gotten, you know?" The legacy of the black Crosses is an enormous source of strength for the adolescent, and he seeks to insert himself into its narrative as "the next generation," the Chosen Nigger: "You know, I often think of how I'm going to make my family proud of me." Antonio's amused response—"Look out world. Superfag is on the move"—disgusts Horace, and he rejects the attempt to locate him as "fag," as he did with his first lover, Gideon. The confines of the Cross patriarchy offers no space for queer desire, it seems.

On the night of Horace's death, these memories loom up from the Theatre. Ultimately, they yield the stage of Horace's consciousness to his doppelganger who is costumed as a clown, "white-faced" and applying the make-up of black face (220). In the figure of the doppelganger, who offers and then demands that Horace put on his make-up, Kenan conjures all of the overdetermined associations of minstrelsy and elides any easy distinction between the silencing of the black claim to place and the silencing of Horace's queer desire by the narrative through which that claim is made.⁶⁶ Though Horace cannot transcend the heteronormative boundaries of the Cross legacy, this visitation nonetheless embodies the normally abstracted and fragmented creation of cultural and discursive borders in a single matrix of marginalization and cultural amnesia. Moreover, the consolidation of this matrix in the doppelganger suggests the necessity of an individual's complicity with their own silence: thus, Horace's rejection of the possibility of queer desire is no less a masking than the educated, bourgeois Everett Church Harrington IV's

⁶⁶ Minstrelsy evokes a wide-ranging "antinomy of responses," according to Eric Lott, including a "disdain...for the incorporation of black culture fashioned to racist uses" as well as "a celebration of an authentic people's culture, the dissemination of black arts with potentially liberating results." *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 17. See also Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford UP 1975).

performance as a buffoonish slave in service of the play's "conflagration of counterfeit glory" (211).

When the phantasm finally speaks, it offers the tube of make-up as a "way" out and an escape from the demons upon which embody Horace's queer desire. The rejection of the doppelganger falls short of an affirmation of self; rather, it is the ultimate and traumatic dissolution of Horace as a unified subject. The result of dissolution, presented earlier in the dramatic confrontation with Jimmy, is Horace's disappearance into a persona of the demon, which claims to be in possession of Horace's physical form. In his final attempts to resist this possession, Horace invokes the hope of Apocalypse: "*Where will it end? Will it end?*" he asks. Here, he begins the chain of apocalyptic associations by imagining an end to the narrative of his own existence: a grave, and its promise "[n]o more, no more ghosts, no more sin, no more, no more" (231). The conclusion imagined here is the specifically personal End of death, not the world-shaking cataclysm, and it is articulated only after he forgoes the possibility of individual transformation, either through the supernatural metamorphosis into something nonhuman or the expression of queer desire. His dismissal of possibility of escape through conjure is preceded almost immediately by the visitation of the memory of the cast's drunken, drug-fueled orgy in the cemetery the prior summer. Frustrated by his inability to confess his love to Harrington (or ECH IV, as he is known), Horace follows his lover Antonio to the graveyard where the orgy develops almost organically. The experience is hardly transformative; in fact, it is not even a positive. Instead, it is rendered in unmistakably supernatural, even wicked terms—"like witches in a coven" (230)—and is fraught with the "strange inevitability" that is characteristic of Apocalypse. However, Horace is

removed from the moment, observing “as a true scientist—clinical, clean, objective.” His assessment: the moment is empty, existing as almost a last recourse for the participants who lack an appropriate space to express their desire; they therefore conjure the moment “in lonely inarticulateness.” Despite the language of sorcery, the orgy is “not the otherworldly event he knew it should be,” Kenan writes. “The moon did not change color or phase, lightning did not flash, the earth did not quake, the sun did not rise. They were left only tired and stoned and dirty and smelly and empty” (230-31). The orgy announces a subversive claim to space, boldly refusing the location of their desire outside margins of gender and community by violating those boundaries—indeed, enacting that desire in extreme—in a public space. However, for Horace the orgy amounts to little more than this; it fails to offer the human intimacy of family and community from which his desire threatens to exile him.

What sort of transformation does Horace anticipate? A personal one, an awakening of a queer self that will be unconcerned with all that pains him, that will be able to leave behind the old realm of Tims Creek for the new world offered by the troupe? Or a transformation of the space he inhabits via a cataclysm which would end that world that cannot contain him and create a new realm in which the contradictions between the various subject positions he occupies would simply be erased? Regardless, in the wake of the failure of the transformation to come, it is those boundaries which his desire transgresses that seem unshakable and impervious to the efforts of the orgy to collapse them. Horace is thus only more certain in the location of the instability in himself, and he thus envisions his removal from those boundaries as the only solution. Physical exile, however, is insufficient; indeed, the possibility that Horace might simply

leave Tims Creek is never mentioned. Even elsewhere, he remains located within the narrative of familial legacy as the “next generation” of Cross.

Horace does not imagine his death as a sacrifice necessary to maintain that order but rather as the only available escape. His invocation of various apocalyptic narratives marks a final attempt to find solace in the traditional African American faith so crucial to the Cross identity, and delineates Horace’s loss of faith when the apocalyptic salvation it promises fails to materialize. While that narrative’s hold upon his family and himself remains intractable, Horace recognizes that its failure for him is not unique but rather symptomatic of the African American experience. The narrative is broken up by the apocalyptic assertions of African American hymnology—*God showed Noah the Rainbow Sign...Said it won’t be water, but fire next time*—that are never realized.⁶⁷ “[T]he gods have new names and sit high and look low, but never reach down” (233). Despite the promises, “there is no Pentecost, no Ascension, no Passover,” Horace eventually comes to believe (233); cataclysm is not a matter of God’s immanent judgment but rather is a threat posed by “men breath[ing] hateful fumes and...try[ing] to unleash God’s own sun.” Horace’s vision moves from his own memories to images from the collective traumatic memories of African American people, “[w]omen and children big-eyed and big-bellied, no food” (234), people without “voices” to articulate and counteract their oppression, with neither the possibility of purifying rains and fire from above nor a savior

⁶⁷ Fire, of course, is a central trope of apocalyptic, evoking the torment of hellfire, as well as the possibilities of purification, renewal, and sexual. Thus far, this project has documented the ritual burnings of lynchings in Wright’s “Big Boy Leaves Home”; the “pillar of fire” which Rev. Dan Taylor becomes in “Fire and Cloud”; the “roman barbeque” at the Burden place in *Light in August*; and Bone’s fiery fantasies of nascent sexual desire and retribution in *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Here, Kenan calls up both the African American spiritual “God Gave Noah the Rainbow Sing”—a central expression of black apocalyptic spirituality—as well as James Baldwin’s succinct 1963 examination of U.S. racial politics, *The Fire Next Time*, which drew its title from this song. Indeed, Kenan’s most recent work, *The Fire This Time* (New York: 2007) is a twenty-first century response to the Baldwin text.

on their horizon. The only End that Horace can initiate is the End of his own life, and so he does.

A Visitation of Spirits concludes on April 30, 1984, at 7:05 a.m.—immediately after Horace’s death. The narrator inhabits the perspectives of none of the Crosses but a detached, observant story-teller who ultimately rejects any effort to determine the reality of Horace’s possession. Such concerns are “irrelevant” (253), the narrator tells us, in the face of the unquestionable reality of Horace’s pain and death, which are alternately rendered clinically and awfully. “Most importantly,” the narrator says of the night’s events,

the day did not halt in its tracks: clocks did not stop. The school buses rolled. The cows mooed. The mothers scolded their children. Plows broke up soil. Trucks were unloaded and loaded up. Dishes were washed. Dogs barked. Old men fished. Beauticians gossiped. Food was eaten. And that night the sun set with the full intention of rising on the morrow. (254)

In other words, the Apocalypse did not come just as it does not come for Bone. What, then, are we to make of Kenan’s—or Allison’s—engagement with the discourse of Apocalypse? Do their respective novels amount to a refutation of the formative faith traditions of their youth as, at best, offering false hope, and, at worst, agents of oppression? In its plea for the necessity of remembering, the “Requiem for Tobacco” suggests otherwise. The consequence of Horace’s death is the destabilization of the absolute boundaries of community and its patriarchal center. Kenan implores the reader to remember the actual practices, obligations, and responsibilities that constituted the *binds of community* rather than the narrative of patriarchy and patrimony that narrated the *boundaries of communities*.

It is, however, insufficient simply to memorialize these binds; rather, we must excavate them, dig up the past, and bring what has been concealed into the light and what has been silenced into speaking. This, in fact, is how Jimmy responds to Horace's death in Kenan's revisitation and reexamination of the Cross narrative in the titular story of his subsequent collection, *Let the Dead Bury their Dead*. The story is an elaborate and playful exploration of genre, presented in the form of an ethnography composed by Jimmy from research conducted during graduate work toward a degree in history at the University of North Carolina and published after his death in a car accident in 1998 (Kenan's story was published in 1993). The story includes a foreword from fictional anthropologist Reginald Gregory Kain, who both shares the author's initials and is a member of the faculty at Sarah Lawrence College where Kenan taught at the time of the story's publication. Setting oral and archival histories alongside one another, the text moves between the unmediated transcript of Zeke's account (including the various interruptions of a skeptical aunt Ruth) of the maroon origins of Tims Creek as "Snatchit" and later "Tearshirt"; the narrative counterpoint offered by the contemporaneous diary of Rebecca Cross, the nineteenth century matriarch of the white branch of the family, and the letters of her son, Phineas; and finally, Jimmy's own meditations on his place within the family. All save the latter contain voluminous footnotes, referencing actual and fictional historical and anthropological research.

Derided by Ruth as merely a "haint" story and as a bunch of lies, Zeke's tale begins at a specific site—a curious mound, according to Jimmy's footnote, located six miles outside of Tims Creek—and moves outward, spatially and temporally, to narrate the creation of the community and the beginning of its evolution from a maroon

community of escaped slaves into an organized municipality. Central to the story is the conflict between the legacy of its founder, the runaway slave and conjurer Pharaoh, and the subsequent leadership of his successor, a Christian Preacher of gargantuan gastronomic and sexual appetites. Despite its generic trickery, “Let the Dead Bury the Dead” is perhaps best described as a parable—one that prompts the reader to consider the powerful histories of African and African American resistance that have been silenced by dominant historical discourses and necessarily forgotten by the descendants of slaves as they seek to engage in those discourses.

As Jimmy comments in a footnote, “Not enough has yet been written about maroon activity in the southern states” (283); much research of marronage has focused on the Caribbean. Herbert Apetheker, one of Jimmy’s sources, conducted the pioneering study in the area beginning in the late 1930s. Maroon communities, writes Apetheker, were a “seriously annoying” and “ever-present feature of antebellum southern life,” providing “havens for fugitives” and “bases for marauding expeditions against nearby plantations” and even “supplying the nucleus of leadership for planned uprisings” (151). In his groundbreaking 1939 article “Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States,” Apetheker suggests at least fifty distinct maroon communities existed in the U.S. South between 1674-1864; of these, a community in the Dismal Swamp of Virginia and North Carolina seems to have been the most “settled,” complete with homes and successful agricultural efforts. “It seems likely that about two thousand Negroes, fugitives, or the descendants of fugitives, lived in this area,” Apetheker writes. “They carried on regular, if illegal, trade with white people living on the borders of the swamp” (152). Indeed, the swamp provided Harriet Beecher Stowe with the setting for the

follow-up to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the maroon novel *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*.

In its explicit concern with contradiction, and specifically, with what has been concealed by dominant historical discourses and what other forms might yet reveal, Kenan's faux-ethnography proves to be the ideal text to demonstrate the apocalyptic model I have sought to develop. Multigeneric and polyphonic, the many voices evident in the text—the nineteenth century white Crosses, the editor Kaine, Zeke, Ruth, and Jimmy himself as both an ethnographer in the footnotes and as a member of the community in the reflective components—allows Kenan to contrast not just the variances among individual interpretations of experiences but also the limits and boundaries of conventional historical narrative. For instance, several of Kaine's additional footnotes effectively contradict Zeke's story: "There is no documentation of a town or community named Tearshirt in any state or federal files or records" (304 n17). Yet, Jimmy's text functions to support the story; his own footnotes frequently point to the incomplete nature of the historical record, and his recovery of Rebecca Cross's diary and Phineas Cross's letters operate to fill in those gaps through the conventional methodologies of an archival historian.

However, the story of Tims Creek's maroon origins is made all the more powerful by its persistence in the face of documentary evidence; its vitality is suggestive of the possibilities, even necessities, of different sorts of knowledge in order to come to grips with the appearance of contradiction. Barbara Webb argues that the novels of Caribbean writers like Alejo Carpentier and Wilson Harris explore the figure of the maroon and maroon communities "in order to bring the repressed knowledge of the past into

historical consciousness” (58). Kenan employs marronage similarly: dominant racial and historical discourses sought to silence narratives of U.S. marronage almost immediately, as the very existence of such communities, as Apetheker shows, posed a dangerous threat to the white plantocracy and to narratives of racial inferiority. Apetheker was not careless with his words when he described marronage as a “feature of antebellum Southern life” (151), for runaways and maroon communities existed as *an aspect of*, rather than as *an alternative to*, the plantation. In Richard Price’s words, maroon communities were “a ubiquitous presence” in and “a chronic plague” on New World plantation life, which served to make the possibility of black resistance “embarrassingly visible” (2).

A century later, Zeke Cross’s story serves to challenge the officially sanctioned brand of history and its repression of African American resistance. The narratives of dynastic republican glory and enlightened patriarchal mastery upon which Philip Quincy Cross bases the play *Ride the Freedom Star* fall apart when confronted with the existence of a self-sufficient maroon community. Thus, these communities have been ignored by the historical record, and their existence has even been denied in order to maintain the surrogate realities which map such geographies as spaces of white domination. The boundaries of the plantation, static and hermetically sealed in the play’s romantic imagination of moonlight and magnolias, are so destabilized by the knowledge of the interaction and exchange between the plantations and Tearshirt that they ultimately dissolve away. Indeed, while the concealed maroon community exists on the geography of the plantation, it would be free from the structures which produce it as the locus of black oppression.

However, the contradictions posed to dominant historical narratives by marronage are not the only such opposition being worked out in “Let the Dead Bury Their Dead”: Jimmy’s ethnography works also to uncover the repression of the Africanist elements of slave culture. While it is clear in *A Visitation* that Zeke’s identity is inexorably bound up with both the moral vision of his Christian faith and the institution of his church, this story engages the conjure traditions of African cosmologies and African American folk religion. Pharaoh is presented as conjure man endowed with various otherworldly abilities, and his proselytization of traditional African religious practice is presented largely positively. Upon his death, Pharaoh is buried with an unknown book, access to which he expressly forbids prior to his demise. The mysterious Preacher arrives to fill the absence of leadership. Calling Pharaoh’s teachings “the sure way to hell and damnation” (319), he demands absolute adherence to the Christian gospel and an immediate disavowal of all Africanist elements of the community. The relative harmony that coincided with Pharaoh’s holistic spirituality almost immediately dissolves into chaos: three young girls and two boys lose their minds and are ultimately killed, either at their own hand or by the townspeople. Each child, Zeke believes, had been sexually abused by the Preacher. Finally, the Preacher demands that Pharaoh be exhumed and the secrets of the book—perhaps, he tells the townspeople, a map to treasure—be revealed. This act results in the resurrection of the town’s dead, who have returned to life to exact retribution upon their kinsfolk and neighbors. The Preacher appears to lead the living dead against the town, but he is beheaded by the returned Pharaoh, who declares, “Damnation and ruin. What began as good has ended in evil. We are not ready” (332). Pharaoh takes a baby, whom the Preacher had earlier captured, and leaves; following his

departure, “fire rained down from the sky, just like Sodom and Gomorrah and none of the wicked escaped...” Zeke tells Jimmy. “When it died down, went nothing left. Nothing. Just that mound you asked about, smoking hot.”

Zeke’s story is prompted by Jimmy’s (unrepresented) inquiry as to the origins of the mound near Tims Creek. As the tale’s central chronotope,⁶⁸ the mound serves as the physical feature of landscape which consolidates the spatial and temporal map of the community. Just as important, however, is Pharaoh’s book, a signifier of the lacuna within both the oral and textual histories of African Americans. The story itself articulates this lack, but it fails to preserve what is lost. And thus, the book exists only as a present absence. This absence is so central to collective identity that the possession of the text is a source of otherworldly authority: once the Preacher has sole control of the narrative of the past, he can control the past and even activate it *against* the community. If we consider this ethnographic record alongside *A Visitation*, it seems that Jimmy is prompted by Horace’s death to investigate the origins of the collective narrative in which his cousin Horace could not exist. The parable here poses two central questions: what has been erected to fill the place of the absent text, and is its preservation worth the cost of continued forgetting? The first question is relatively easy: the contents of the text, the structures of utopian community preached by Pharaoh, have been replaced by the narrative of patrimonial legacy, which is a narrative that both resists and mirrors the very white history that seeks to silence it—the history narrated in the *Ride the Freedom Star*. That history contains some of the same absences, as Jimmy learns from the unrestrained queer desire expressed in the letters of his white nineteenth-century cousin Phineas Cross.

⁶⁸ “A unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented . . . The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 426).

The second question might be more difficult to answer. In a footnote, Jimmy Greene cites various speculations into the book's origin: "an Arabic version of the Koran," a Carthaginian text "stolen from the library at Timbuktu," the text of a Zoroastrian creation myths, "a book of spells, the Book of Life, the Book of the Dead," and even "a time-travel device." But his speculations focus on a single hypothesis: that the book is "a transliteration from the one of the traditional Yoruba *oral* libraries" into either English or "an approximation of the Yoruba tongue," an act which amounts to blasphemy in traditional Yoruba culture (287 n6). Regardless of which, if any, might be true, the text nonetheless signifies an absence—the gaping hole left by knowledge of an African past that is no longer accessible within African American culture. In the introduction to the collection *Maroon Societies*, Price argues against the notion that maroon cultures were structured around a common "collective memory" of a pan-African past (26). Such models elide the particularities of African cultures as well as the "nascent but already powerful plantation-forged" African American culture. Instead, Price presents the Africanist presence in maroon cultures as a matter of rhetorical and ideological commitment. Rejecting the notion that slave and maroon cultures "mechanistically" developed as a "mosaic" of strands of European culture with some common, base-line African culture that organically and unselfconsciously adapted to the necessities of New World life, Price posits "commitment to 'things African'" (27) and to a "'home-land' ideology" (28) as the means by which maroons negotiated the diversity of African cultural practices. Thus, this commitment was "the cement" that allowed it all to cohere. While the various social practices that characterize marronage necessarily included Western forms of knowledge and the experience of slaves, runaways, and freed persons

of color within various New World cultures, this commitment to Africa configured the unmapped geographies of the maroon community as a space in which black suffering could be articulated.

Despite what Price calls “commitment to ‘things African,’” the particularities of African experience were inevitably lost; according to Barbara J. Webb, “even among maroons, knowledge of an African past is, at best, incomplete” (55). In the production of a grand new synthetic culture, which allowed these groups to survive and, in a few cases, thrive, something was inevitably lost: while many particular elements of African American cultures have traceable African origins, “no maroon social, political, religious or aesthetic *system* can be reliably traced to a specific tribal provenience,” writes Price (29). Interestingly, he further argues that, generally, the cultures furthest removed from “the vital African past” often display the most “tenacious fidelity” to the idea of an African past. While Price is unwilling to specifically locate the phenomenon of marronage “along a continuum of forms of resistance” (23), the “fidelity” of this ideological commitment is unequivocally, if not quantifiably, a resistant act.

In Kort’s sociospatial terms, the maroon community functions as a “repositor[y] of meaning” (196) that Kenan, like Glissant and Wilson, seeks to recover. However, the exact forms of the social relationships that generate this meaning are not accessible or perhaps even knowable by the conventional methodologies of an archival historian. That does not mean that, even when concealed, these forms of knowledge are not useful. In Kenan’s story, the maroon origin of Tims Creek affirms its latent but still accessible emancipatory legacy and offers the possibility of alternative cultural forms and systems of knowledge which would threaten the oppressive and repressive production of southern

spaces and places. The recognition of maroon culture destabilizes the borders of the plantation as the governing spatial construct of a static narrative of southern history that would silence both the victories and suffering of African Americans. Likewise, it requires that African Americans consider the stability of their own collective and communal boundaries by prompting a reconsideration of the ontology of their own culture and revisitation of the experiences that they too have ignored. The discourse of marronage provides a model for syncretism and for the negotiation of cultural difference.

Though *A Visitation* and “Let the Dead Bury Their Dead” are two separate works, it is useful to consider them together. In this context, we discover that Horace is the lacuna in Jimmy’s ethnography—the absent presence to which Zeke and Ruth pointedly do not refer. Snatchit and Tearshirt are perhaps logical destinations in Jimmy’s attempt to wrestle with the death of the boy he describes as having “been created by this society” and “a son of the community, more than most” (*A Visitation* 188). Tucker notes that “maroon societies were, like the constructions of gender and race..., a function of the hegemonic institutions that seemingly excluded them” (314). They were also spaces within which difference had to be negotiated, as neither exile nor scapegoating would be possible under such circumstances. Unfixed on any map and unrecorded by the documents of history, maroon communities function as the repository of historical contradiction for Kenan and, thus, are the apocalyptic space *par excellence*. Just as Zeke’s story does for Jimmy, Kenan’s writings implore us to revisit the past and demand that we confront the inherent instability of the locations of center and margin, not so that we might bring place to an end but rather so that we might open it up to those who have been denied its nourishment and to those whose claims to it have been silenced. Again,

Apocalypse becomes the site for our explanation, a signal of deferral, of trauma, and of productive instability. The unmistakably apocalyptic nature of Zeke's story—the dead rise to mete out justice upon their kin—is appropriate in the context of a maroon community. As Paul Gilroy writes, “creolisation, métissage, metizaje, and hybridity” constitute “a litany of pollution and impurity” (2)—imminent concerns of the apocalyptic, as we have seen. However, Gilroy formulates *pollution* as a threat to the hegemonic position of dominant narratives of history. While Zeke's tale certainly destabilizes the official narrative of regional history, the story cannot be considered an attempt to regulate or conceal a threat to the plantation narrative; it is, after all, an *African American text* that is transmitted orally within an *African American community*. The impurity that it seeks to regulate, then, must constitute a threat to the *African American* historical narrative of Tims Creek. Its maroon genealogy destabilizes a collective identity bound up with the institutions of church and patriarchal order: the possibility of hybridity troubles the ontology of a homogenous blackness and its component rigid black masculinity, which had/has been imagined as the only available avenue of survival in the face of oppression. Once again, Apocalypse signals a site in need of excavation: despite the terrific ending to Zeke's story, the community of Tearshirt does not end in a bang, or even a whimper, but rather persists as Tims Creek and in Zeke's story. Likewise, neither Horace's death in *A Visitation* nor Bone's call for judgment in Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* bring about the cataclysms of which they dream. Once again, even when the End does not come, the apocalyptic remains the culturally-specific space in which undifferentiation and uncertainty might be confronted.

In a conversation published in the *Village Voice*, Allison and Kenan ultimately come to the political imperatives of their work: “What can you write about more urgently than some 70-year-old woman depending on her social security check?” asks Kenan, who rejects the attempt to locate this hypothetical woman “on the so-called margins” (27). Such people don’t exist on “the fringe of society,” in Kenan’s estimate; rather, “They *are* society.” Allison agrees: “People think that society is, like, Kathie Lee Gifford. No, she’s one of the ghosts on the edge of society. My sisters are society.” These authors both contribute to the insurgent movement around the so-called identity politics of the 1990s; in their conversation, they remind us that the aim of their work is not a feel-good multiculturalism in which diverse self-identified communities exist alongside one another in plural, utopian bliss. Rather, Allison and Kenan seek to recover the historical meaning that is silenced by the efforts to regulate the configurations of sex, race, and class. Both demand that in mapping social spaces—including the southern places in which their fiction is located—we pay heed to those people exiled to the discursive margins whose experiences have been concealed by the various “surrogate realities” of place. We must attend to Allison’s aunts, to women without healthcare, and to people seeking refuge from floodwaters atop overpasses, and we must recognize that these images are as much an element of the South as any image the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce might present and are rooted in the particularities of place. By no means are patterns of poverty or patterns of discrimination limited to particular places, but they are manifest particularly in them. Only by confronting them *particularly*, in the specific coordinates of place, do we avoid their otherwise inevitable abstraction and the subsequent dismissal of the obligations that characterize localizable interpersonal

exchanges. In order to map a Greenville or a Tims Creek, then, we must excavate the lost, dismissed, and deferred spaces and places that bind people together and in which they struggle collectively. By “bring[ing] the repressed knowledge of the past into historical consciousness,” in Webb’s words (58), we might activate their resistance and awaken the possibility of resistance now. In Webb’s analysis of the function of the maroon figure in Glissant’s and Wilson’s work, we hear the echoes of Walter Benjamin: “Not man or men but the struggling, oppressed class itself is the depository of historical knowledge” (260). While the struggle of the oppressed might be the daily effort to simply survive, Kenan’s struggle, like that of the fictional Jimmy Greene, is found in his ongoing effort to bring the battles—and victories—of others into the visible spectrum.

**Epilogue: Apocalypse South, Redux:
Searching for Meaning After the Flood**

*Now the sweet veils of mercy
Drift through the evening trees
Young men on the corner
Like scattered leaves
The boarded up windows
The hustlers and thieves
While my brother's down on his knees*

*My city of ruins
My city of ruins*

*Come on rise up!
Come on rise up!*

-Bruce Springsteen, "My City of Ruins"

*If it keep on rainin' the levee gonna break
If it keep on rainin' the levee gonna break
Some of these people don't know which road to take*

....

*If it keep on rainin' the levee gonna break
If it keep on rainin' the levee gonna break
Some people still sleepin', some people are wide awake
-Bob Dylan, "The Levee's Gonna Break"*

Throughout this project, I have argued that Apocalypse is a site in need of excavation—that it is a space through which one can defer the resolution of a contradiction in order to maintain the stability of a hegemonic historical narrative or a prevailing discourse of place, race, and gender. I have also argued that apocalyptic narratives provide profound spiritual nourishment, articulating traumatic experiences that otherwise defy conventional representation, imagining hope when none seems to come, and prophesying the imminence of judgment and retribution. Unfortunately, the work of criticism potentially threatens the integrity of its subject. As we poke, prod, and peel back the layers of a text, and as we lay bare the various discourses that produce it, its

power as an intervention into a cultural moment becomes diffuse; meaning can become decentered, even ephemeral. Apocalypse remains sturdy, however: even under the microscope of criticism, it demands justice, replenishes hope, and sustains the soul in the face of catastrophe. Thus, *Apocalypse South* has sought to both disrupt abuses of Apocalypse, of which Faulkner's Doc Hines is the most exaggerated example, and to harness the vibrant emancipatory potential of the regional apocalyptic imaginary.

This project, then, would ultimately be incomplete if it did not reckon with the most recent southern catastrophe—Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding of New Orleans. In no time in recent memory has the landscape of the apocalyptic imaginary come so close to materiality as it did in the Crescent City in late 2005: with the population all but disappeared, the remaining residents endured a hellish, seemingly endless isolation; homes and neighborhoods were inundated with toxic waters; the infrastructure and institutions of civic authority largely collapsed; and a semblance of order was restored finally through the imposition of martial law. The discourses of cataclysm and destruction, rebirth and renewal, judgment and justice have been indispensable in the rhetoric of postdiluvian New Orleans. In this final chapter, I will examine how Apocalypse has been applied to the recent southern catastrophe and evaluate its continuing utility in the future as a medium well-suited to represent the devastation, to explore its genealogy, and to demand justice in response to this disaster, which many believe was ultimately less an act of nature than the consequence of negligence.

Writing in the aftermath of the hurricane and flood that nearly destroyed his city, the New Orleans poet Peter Cooley struggles mightily and profoundly to wrest meaning from devastation:

I see a city in tears
abomination of desolation,
bodies of the drowned afloat in back streets,
graves of the dead buried above ground spring
open and skeletons whole and in pieces
set out to decimate the morning light.
And he said: that is better. But what else?
Then I answered: my words are little, poor. (61)

For others, particularly those commenting from a safe distance, Katrina's meaning was self-evident: obviously, a vengeful God had laid this modern Sodom to waste. New Orleans is no stranger to the jeremiad: the pamphleteers, proselytizers, and self-proclaimed prophets who rail against the wickedness of the fallen world with a righteous fury recalling Faulkner's Doc Hines have become familiar sights on Bourbon Street and elsewhere, particularly during Mardi Gras. One should not, then, be particularly surprised by the blogs, press releases, and emails that were blasted out by media savvy fundamentalist and evangelical political activists. For instance, South Carolina antiabortion advocate Steve Lefemine told the *Washington Post* article that the image of an 8-week-old fetus was visible in the satellite images of the storm as it landed on the Gulf Coast and that this image proved the storm and flood to be the act of an angry God (A27). In the same article, Michael Marcavage of Repent America cited the storm's disruption of the annual gay and lesbian event "Southern Decadence" as evidence of God's intentions. "We take no joy in the death of innocent people," Marcavage told the *Post*. "But we believe that God is in control of the weather...The day Bourbon Street and the French Quarter was flooded was the day that 125,000 homosexuals were going to be

celebrating sin in the streets. . . . We're calling it an act of God." Marcavage's willingness to speak for the All-Knowing aside, Bourbon Street and the Quarter remained all but undamaged. In fact, the storm itself wrought relatively little damage to New Orleans—the far east coast of Louisiana and the Mississippi Gulf Coast bore the brunt of its monstrous impact. These distinctions mattered little to Marcavage and the Rev. Dr. Wiley Bennett, the pastor of Woodland Hills Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas. When evacuees poured into his town, Bennett saw fit to emblazon the church's marquee with a message for them: "THE BIG EASY IS THE MODERN DAY SODOM AND GOMORRAH." "What I was trying to do was point out that the wickedness of the city of New Orleans brought a hand of judgment on that city," Bennett told reporters. "It was never put up there with the intention of saying there are no good people in the city of New Orleans. That was a misunderstanding. People took it wrong" (Falsani A4).

Despite their best efforts, the fame Lefemine, Marcavage, and Bennett garnered receded far more quickly than did the flood waters on Canal Street. And while it may be tempting to dismiss such sentiments as little more than ideological extremism, their echoes are disconcertingly audible in the remarks of mainstream public figures with far greater authority and far larger audiences. On Oct. 3, 2005, the Rev. Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham and heir to his father's ministry, offered a convoluted message at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. In his speech, Graham did not attribute the destruction to a wrathful deity but refused to dismiss any claim that such punishment might be warranted: "I'm not saying that God used this storm as a judgment," he told the audience, before decrying Mardi Gras, voodoo, and the acceptance of homosexuality as "adverse to Christian beliefs." "There's been satanic worship," he continued. "There's been sexual

perversion. God is going to use that storm to bring revival” (Seltzer 1H). Similarly, Alabama state senator and one-time local conservative radio personality Hank Irwin (R-Montevallo) wrote in his weekly, self-distributed column that “New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast have always been known for gambling, sin and wickedness. It is the kind of behavior that ultimately brings the judgment of God” (“Alabama Legislator: Katrina was God’s wrath on sinful coast” A14). Richard Baker, the ten-term Republican congressman from Louisiana’s sixth district, offhandedly told lobbyists that public housing in New Orleans had “finally [been] cleaned up. . . . We couldn’t do it, but God did” (Babbington A4). Even New Orleans’ Mayor Ray Nagin jumped onto the apocalyptic bandwagon: according to James Varney of the *Times-Picayune*, Nagin’s unprepared remarks suggested “that a vengeful God smote New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina because of heavenly disapproval of America’s involvement in Iraq and of rampant violence within urban black communities” and that New Orleans’s black majority would reclaim their “Chocolate City” because God willed it so (A1).

At the same event, according to the *Times-Picayune*, several pastors, representing some of the most devastated neighborhoods, argued that the city “served as an example of divine judgment . . . the Rev. Dennis Watson of Celebration Church decried the area’s sins of ‘corruption, racism, slavery, violence, division among Christians and Mardi Gras’” (Nolan “Living” 4). Rev. Watson’s remarks suggest the complicated possibilities and pitfalls of apocalyptic rhetoric. The “sins” he enumerates are the very things the apocalyptic judgments of others work to obfuscate and elide, and by equating social injustice with sin, and assigning the destruction of storm and flood to the hand of an angry God, he imparts an ultimate urgency to social action: essentially, repent or be

destroyed. Furthermore, when he exhorts the audience to abandon the revelry of Mardi Gras in favor of an explicitly Christian moral code, he reinforces the bivalent epistemologies to which undifferentiation is anathema.⁶⁹ This rejection of ambiguity is not limited to sexual licentiousness but rather pervades Watson's invocation of Apocalypse. While his jeremiad suggests that the conditions of post-flood New Orleans are the products of a complicated constellation of material, economic, and social injustice, it ultimately rejects that complexity in favor of a reductive cause-and-effect model rooted in a prophetic tradition: we have failed in moral obligation; some have already been punished for their sins, while punishment awaits others, perhaps to be meted out in the final Judgment. Indeed, any number of methodologies might be used to explain the power of the storm, the failure of the levees, and the shameful response by all levels of government. Unfortunately, these various discourses—meteorology, hydrology, engineering, economics, education, public policy, partisan politics, ethics, and social justice, among others—are not immediately compatible. Rev. Watson's best attempt to generate an intelligible call for justice out of this contemporary Babel is ultimately reductive.

Nearly regardless of where its invocation might be situated within the dominant discourses of U.S. politics—or even chronologically—Apocalypse provides a familiar grammar of destruction, cataclysm, and subsequent suffering to works ranging from Holocaust narratives to the potential consequences of global climate change.⁷⁰ This

⁶⁹ In fact, such undifferentiation is a hallmark, not just of Mardi Gras, but of the carnivalesque, which, according to Bakhtin, involves the “temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men ... and of the prohibitions of usual life” (*Rabelais and his World* 15).

⁷⁰ Stephen O'Leary, an expert on the media and apocalypticism, describes the apocalyptic scenarios that sought to contextualize the 2005 hurricane season within discussion of global warming: “God's got a twofor here. Both sides are eager to see America punished for her sins; on one side it's sexual immorality and porn and Hollywood, and on the other side it's conspicuous consumption and Hummers” (Caldwell 4).

grammar has been employed by citizens and public figures from across the spectrum of U.S. politics as they grapple with the storm and its aftermath. Certainly, the devastation of New Orleans will be a subject with which scholars of American, African American, and southern studies must grapple for the foreseeable future. The frequency with which Apocalypse is invoked in Katrina-related writings both attests to the continuing vitality of apocalyptic discourse and demands that we investigate it with newfound urgency. Thus, I can think of no more appropriate way to conclude this project than through a brief consideration of the storm, the flood, and their aftermath.

This project has offered a working theory of Apocalypse as a discourse which allows communities to defer contradiction—a way of speaking that often displaces anything that threatens the stability of the prevailing order but, conversely, provides space in which those condemned and marginalized experiences might, at least provisionally, be voiced. Crisis and cataclysm defy easy articulation: uncertain, dissonant experiences like violence or suffering challenge epistemologies that posit bivalent models of morality (i.e., obvious distinctions between good and evil) and causality (i.e., easily identifiable causes and effects). Likewise, hybrid and ambiguous presences threaten the ontological status of binary formulations of race and gender. When experience does not yield meaning and resists narration, deferral is often the only way to survive; we hope for resolution in the future when it is not imminent in the present moment. However, deferral is neither quarantine nor expiation, and so it must be revisited. Apocalypse inevitably proves to be a site in need of excavation; it is a sign of a narrative in which *something* has been concealed and is in need of recovery.

While I have heretofore applied this model to select works of fiction, it proves to be equally useful in an investigation of the apocalyptic responses to the flood. For instance, echoes of Joe Christmas's lynching can be heard in the condemnation and scapegoating that followed the storm. Michael Marcavage posits Katrina's disruption of the Southern Decadence festival as evidence of the hand of a wrathful, anthropomorphic God, angered by such willful flaunting of Levitical prohibition of homosexuality. Marcavage cites the French Quarter, where "125,000 homosexuals" would have been "celebrating sin in the streets," as the epicenter of God's wrath. Marcavage was apparently uninterested in facts that might trouble his contention (for instance, Bourbon Street and the rest of the Quarter remained dry, while the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was underwater along with hundreds of churches); likewise, he seemed unconcerned with the difficult questions of theodicy that such events provoke. Suffering and destruction on this scale unsettle any notion of causality or moral order, and Marcavage's apocalyptic rhetoric, like Hines's, displaces the troubling ambiguity of an experience by locating an ambiguous figure as its cause.

I make no claims that the message exhorted by Marcavage represents more than an extreme and exaggerated version of religious belief. However, investigation into the particular operations of his rhetoric provides insight into the role of scapegoating in representations and responses to the disaster on the Gulf Coast. More pervasive and perhaps more insidious than these apocalyptic condemnations was the scapegoating perpetrated by the popular media's overwrought concern with looting and their rush to broadcast rumors of horrific violence around the city. "The events that followed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina were spun into legends even as they were happening," writes

Brinkley. “Rumors were folded into the news cycle and repeated as fact before they could be corroborated or checked” (572). For instance, stories of “rampant murder” in the Superdome persisted; none occurred, however. In Jed Horne’s assessment of media coverage, “The aggregate portrait was of a city gone mad, a black city, a city of depraved men and women who would walk away from asthmatic children and leave them to die, if they didn’t violate them first” (108). Enthralled by “the biggest story of their careers,” in Horne’s estimation, reporters sought to articulate the chaos that ensued in coherent form. With little consideration (and, indeed, little time) for nuance or complexity, they churned out stories that in effect established the victims as the perpetrators of their own suffering. The logic that would assign blame for this event (in the case of Marcarvage) to a gay man on vacation perhaps seems ridiculous in a culture that no longer is predicated upon notions of an anthropomorphic, interventionist God; in the end, it is no more pernicious than the criminalization and condemnation of a waterlogged group of people stealing dry shoes. Such was the consequence of the images of looters in the flooded stores along Canal Street, endlessly looping on the cable new channels without sufficient explanation. In both instances, the scapegoating mechanism displays the deeply, existentially troubling questions of theology, theodicy, politics, and ethics posed by the storm; by the mounting death toll; by the masses stranded at the Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center; by the people waiting for help on their roofs; and by the elderly, baking in their attics before finally succumbing to heat exhaustion.⁷¹ As is too often the case, however,

⁷¹ The last several years have seen the proliferation of books on the 2005 storms, and each of them contains accounts of episodes like these. The best among these included Douglas Brinkley’s *The Great Deluge: The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*, Jed Horne’s *Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City*, and Chris Rose’s *1 Dead in Attic: After Katrina*. The best writing on the storm and its aftermath continues to appear in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, for which both Horne and Rose work.

these very real, very complicated concerns of politics and policy, of infrastructure and economy, and of morality and human rights, are displaced in favor of a more readily intelligible scapegoat.

The *scapegoat* is just one element of an impulse toward narrative coherence evident in representations of the storm and its aftermath; while Katrina-writing is recognizable in the frequency of terms like *levee*, *breach*, and *FEMA trailer* and references to now-nationally-familiar local geographic identifiers including the *Industrial Canal* and *Lower Ninth Ward*, one might also designate the genre by its tone, which is frequently, if not uniformly, apocalyptic. Hurricane experts, journalists, and concerned residents had long used such rhetoric in their predictions of what a direct-hit to the city might yield; among such prophets are Mark Schleifstein and John McQuaid, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reporters who envisioned a post-storm, doomsday scenario in a multi-part series of articles published in 2002. After even a modest storm, they wrote, “[h]undreds of thousands would be left homeless, and it would take months to dry out the area and begin to make it livable. But there wouldn’t be much for residents to come home to. The local economy would be in ruins” (A1). Those fears were echoed by the National Weather Service in the days before Katrina. A bulletin titled “DEVASTATING DAMAGE EXPECTED” was posted at 10:11 CDT on Sunday, August 28:

MOST OF THE AREA WILL BE UNINHABITABLE FOR WEEKS...PERHAPS LONGER. . . THE BLOWN DEBRIS WILL CREATE ADDITIONAL DESTRUCTION. PERSONS...PETS...AND LIVESTOCK EXPOSED TO THE WINDS WILL FACE CERTAIN DEATH IF STRUCK. . . . POWER OUTAGES WILL LAST FOR WEEKS...AS MOST POWER POLES WILL BE DOWN AND TRANSFORMERS DESTROYED. WATER SHORTAGES WILL MAKE HUMAN SUFFERING INCREDIBLE BY MODERN STANDARDS. (National Weather Service)

The utility of Apocalypse derives in part from its ability to frighten people into action by forcing them to imagine their lives and/or their souls in peril. However, the apocalyptic imagery employed here accurately described the scene, particularly in the absence of people. Jed Horne (a *Times-Picayune* editor) describes the view from I-10 in the hours before landfall:

Within twenty-four hours [of the mandatory evacuation order], mobile signboards would go up at key junctions across the interstate system that converged on southeast Louisiana, the lettering picked out in flashing amber dots against a black background: NEW ORLEANS EXITS CLOSED. Blink. NEW ORLEANS EXITS CLOSED—and suddenly, a name once evocative of elegance and devil-may-care good times, a haven of sophistication in the hardscrabble South, carried overtones of catastrophe: a Babylon, a Chernobyl. Blink. NEW ORLEANS EXITS CLOSED. (40)

These reports are hardly anomalous: a quick Lexus-Nexus search for the terms “Katrina,” “Apocalypse,” and “apocalyptic” yields 319 articles from major newspapers in addition to 39 magazine and journal pieces since the storm.⁷² *Rolling Stone*’s lead piece on the storm, for instance, was entitled “Apocalypse There” (Taibbi 102-145).

Just over a month after the storm, *Vanity Fair* featured a piece by the late, famed journalist David Halberstam entitled “Hell and High Water—American Apocalypse: New Orleans 2005.” “The scenes were at once familiar and unfamiliar,” Halberstam begins, immediately invoking several of the standard indices of Apocalypse (385): chaos, contradiction, hybridity, and the interpretive difficulty they provoke. Halberstam points to the conventional formulas of cable news which shaped coverage of the storm and flood: “First, there are the tragedy and the tears; then, in time, the redemption, the rejuvenation, and the gratitude.” Despite their generic packaging, the images that emerged disconcerted even the veteran war correspondent:

⁷²This search was conducted on July 11 2007.

...it was unfamiliar as well, because when the damage is this catastrophic, the people so helpless, the government so weak and clumsy, we expect it to take place somewhere else—on the coast of Sri Lanka or Bangladesh, for instance—somewhere distant and poor. We do not expect to see so many fellow Americans overwhelmed, unable to help themselves and unable to escape the disaster. We do not expect to see our government so impotent and indifferent that it is completely paralyzed at the most critical moment. We do not expect to see the story play out so slowly and the cavalry arrive so late.

Was this really us? Was this really an American city coming apart—or

drowning—as we watched? Were all these poor people, whose lives were broken, and some of whom looted their own city, really Americans? Aren't we better than this? Aren't we different?

Here, Halberstam troubles the notions of American exceptionalism in a quintessentially American, liberal fashion: he questions whether the nation has lived up to the righteous vision posited by most forms of American nationalism, but he does not question the righteousness of that vision. For Halberstam, that remains a matter of received knowledge just as it was for the writers, thinkers, and leaders catalogued in Sacvan Bercovitch's seminal *The American Jeremiad*. Like these "American Jeremiahs," Halberstam "simultaneously lament[s] a declension and celebrat[es] a national dream" (180). The institutions of nation may have failed to realize its core principles, but those ideologies remain true.

What, then, is the appeal of Apocalypse for writers and artists attempting to represent the consequences of disaster? Is the ultimate End simply our cultural shorthand for any instance of devastation or, perhaps, for the necessary transformations that follow disaster? Is it an invocation of the wasteland that might follow the ultimate conflict between good and evil? Do natural disasters prefigure the manner in which we envision the world finally ending? I see no reason to reject any of these possibilities, but I wish to

suggest that we tend to turn to Apocalypse in instances in which violence, destruction, and suffering transcend the limits of conventional representation. Such moments pose a threat to the ordered, coherent narratives in which we contextualize our collective experiences—that is, to the histories of nation, community, and family that establish an intelligible “concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future,” in the words of Frank Kermode (8). When we are confronted with an experience that defies these narratives, we necessarily face an insurmountable, irresolvable contradiction: *this cannot happen, but it has*. After catastrophes, concord gives way to existential chaos, but the apocalyptic imaginary allows meaning and coherence to be restored. In Kermode’s estimation, “there is still a need to speak humanly of a life’s importance in relation to [time]...a need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and an end” (4). Invocations of the apocalyptic seek to reestablish a comfortable chronological equilibrium by deferring instances of contradiction to a narrative in which God or some other force will untangle it for us. Conversely, in apocalyptic visions and literature, contradiction just as often serves as a sign of a hidden knowledge and prompts us to reevaluate the historical narratives it disrupts—or, in terms perhaps more amenable to the discourse of prophecy, to (re)interpret the *signs of the times*. Thus, while Halberstam makes no specific reference to Apocalypse in the body of the piece, “Apocalypse Now and Then” proved a more apt title than *Vanity Fair*’s editors might have realized: the questions he poses are those of Apocalypse. They are the questions of a man seeking to interpret the images before him; to contextualize them within a historical discourse in which they do not easily fit; to make sense of that

incongruity; and to discover what previously hidden element of human experience has suddenly come unavoidably into our view in this moment of cataclysm.

Like a sand boil erupting near a levee when the pressure becomes too great, the combined pressures of racism, corruption, poverty, unemployment, and one of the nation's poorest public school systems, normally simmering beneath the bacchanalian veneer of Carnival and jazz tourism, exploded in front of our very eyes once the streets of New Orleans were underwater. Likewise, the costs of lax environmental regulations that sacrificed wetlands to the oil industry, obvious perhaps only to those who live and work the region, was shockingly and suddenly apparent, as were the consequences of the rushed and shoddy work of the Corps of Engineers and the various other entities contracted and subcontracted to construct, repair, and reinforce the levees and various shipping lanes. "Much would be made [by the national media] of how Katrina tore the veil away to reveal the persistence of poverty and race-based disadvantage in America," writes Jed Horne in *Breach of Faith*. "But in truth, what may have seemed startling from a distance came as no great surprise on the ground" (85). Judith Jackson Fossett, a native New Orleanian, writes:

The hurricane... forced the nation and the world to discern the base, structure, and superstructure of one of the oldest cities in the New World, along with the economic system of slavery and the extractive economic model through which the city developed. Like the repressed returning, dual remnants of slavery emerged from Katrina's toxic soup. The whole cloth of racial, socioeconomic, and color caste, as well as post-1945 geographic segregation (despite the city's long history as one of the most racially and ethnically mixed), could be seen. It was juxtaposed with the *idea* of New Orleans as a condition of possibility for the good life that white elites (particularly men) might experience--from the city's founders to aspiring slaveowners to young Will Faulkner to the frat boy Georgie Bush--as they indulged in the plentiful fruits of a New World economy. Without the benefit of this historical and political economic context, New Orleans is betrayed by its unique position in the national imaginary as a metropolis at once raucous and mythic, paradisiacal and seedy, elegant and corrupt. (327)

The “extractive economic model” to which Jackson Fossett refers is not limited to the expropriation of black freedom and black labor; it aptly describes the ravaged conditions of the Gulf Coast, which existed long before Katrina made landfall. Researchers in various fields have sought to quantify and qualify the social, economic, and cultural problems facing the region through countless indices: population decline, drop-out rates, murder rates, infant mortality rates, AIDS-infection rates, cancer rates, studies of wetlands loss, hypoxia studies of the Gulf’s so-called “dead zone,” and warnings about the dire inadequacies of the levee system.⁷³ None of their statistics, however, expose the failures of public policy and political priorities quite as effectively as a photograph of an American city underwater. The collapse of an entire city by a fatal combination of neglect and incompetence, captured in images and stories, strikes a swift, unavoidable blow to the gut that a scientific study, no matter how well-wrought, cannot.

Still, the national political discourse has yet to assimilate the revelations such images would offer; after all, they threaten many of the same pernicious, monolithic narratives of national exceptionalism, market capitalism, patriarchal and racial order, and gender stability that the works discussed throughout this project have sought to destabilize. Patricia Yaeger’s model of the “throwaway body” as a site around which southern literary studies might be reconfigured has perhaps never rung as true as it has in the reality of a corpse left on the sidewalk, covered only with a sheet or perhaps a makeshift grave of bricks. Such an image evinces the consequences of the “culture of

⁷³ The collection *Transforming New Orleans and its Environs* (ed. Craig Colten, 2000) offers studies of the environmental history of New Orleans and the Lower Mississippi River Valley from a variety of perspectives. A useful addendum is Beverly Wright and Robert Bullard’s essay, “Black New Orleans: Before and After Katrina” in *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place* (ed. Robert D. Bullard, 2007).

neglect”: before the storm, many New Orleanians belonged to a population of “women and men whose bodily harm does not matter enough to be registered or repressed—who are *not* symbolically central, who are looked over, looked through, who become a matter of public and private indifference—neither important enough to be disavowed nor part of white southern culture’s dominant emotional economy” (Yaeger 68). The sheer scale of destruction was sufficient to collapse that “emotional economy.” For a moment, the nation was forced to look at a population neglected and marginalized within our prevailing ways of speaking; for a moment, revelation was possible.

The insights offered by this image were temporary and incomplete. Much of the media coverage reinforced the mapping of this southern city as an abject space in the manner Leigh Anne Duck has described: while the city, as Halberstam notes, remains a part of the nation, the endlessly replaying images captured by news crews so diverges from the cultural norms demanded by prevailing narratives of nation that it becomes grotesque, and thus, the cataclysm and the revelations it prompts can be disavowed (Duck 94). The incessant, looping video of black looters and the unprincipled reporting of rumors of rampant violence did the victims and survivors of the flood no favor. The implication was clear: this flood, its causes, and its consequences belong squarely to the relatively confined, abject space of this one southern, black-majority city. Thus, political leaders as well as U.S. citizens could disavow their collective responsibility for the corruption, fraud, racism, and neglect of the poorest among us and renounce the evisceration of funding to the basic infrastructures of society (including the levee system transportation, health care, education, and yes, emergency management). We all could ignore the discomfiting inadequacies of our national political discourse, particularly the

endemic patterns of neglect which refuse to acknowledge the presence and persistence of poverty. The possibility remains that New Orleans, which has long reveled in its own particularity as the “most European city” in the U.S., might be finally dislocated, disavowed, and rendered foreign. If the apocalyptic mechanisms of exile and disavowal are enacted upon New Orleans, as it is upon Faulkner’s Joe Christmas, Allison’s Bone, and Kenan’s Horace, the devastation of New Orleans will only be exacerbated. As such, while postnational paradigms will no doubt assist investigations into the role of various transnational phenomena, post-Katrina artists, activists, as well as scholars in Katrina studies, must not abandon the rhetoric of nation lest they also abandon the mechanisms and institutions of the federal government with the authority and capacity to aid the exiled and to rebuild the city.

Given the utility of apocalyptic imagery in the reportage of the New Orleans disaster, it should be no surprise that the first long-form literary attempt to grapple with the storm, John Biguenet’s Pulitzer-nominated 2007 play *Rising Water*, employs apocalyptic structures and suggests the apocalyptic promises of revelation and renewal. Biguenet’s play depicts a middle-aged New Orleans couple, Sugar and Camille, in the late evening and early morning of Monday and Tuesday, August 29 and 30, 2005: in the first act, the rising flood waters drive the couple move into the attic of their single-story home; there, they are prompted by forgotten items to reconsider their past. In Act II, Camille escapes onto the roof through a small hole; Sugar, “no longer slender,” according to the stage directions (2), can only reach his head and one arm through the hole. Trapped with no means of communication and no source of information, Sugar and

Camille are profoundly isolated within the very community that has nurtured them, their relationship, and their family for generations. In their isolation, they are prompted to revisit a past they have long-since ignored and to consider the future of a marriage that has given way to the malaise of middle age. The possibilities of revelation and renewal, then, are located in the domestic space of home and family. Sitting atop her roof in Act II, Camille tells her husband (again, whose head is all that is visible), “In this moonlight, everything looks so strange, so fresh. Maybe it’s not the end of the world, this rising water. . . . our past is being washed away. It’s left us sort of standing on a mountaintop up here, like Noah’s Ark coming to rest after all that rain” (52).

However, as Sugar reminds her and as the flood waters attest (and, indeed, as we have seen in the lynching of Joe Christmas, the abandonment of Allison’s Bone, and the suicide of Kenan’s Horace Cross), the contradictions of history, which have been buried or repressed in order to maintain coherence, have a nasty way of revisiting themselves upon us. Indeed, the insights of the play are not limited to a single couple. The focus of their conversations frequently shifts from their neglected marriage and the malaise of middle-age to the collapse of the neglected and aging infrastructure. The city remains a constant presence in their discussions, and Biguenet’s choice of names prompts the audience to locate the characters and their experience in the flood within the complex genealogy of New Orleans: without the cash crop of sugar, there would perhaps be no New Orleans—and certainly not the plantation culture of south Louisiana and the international trade which were based upon it; “Camille,” of course, provokes recollections of—and comparisons with—the monster Category 5 of 1969 hurricane that barely skirted New Orleans and instead leveled much of the nearby Mississippi Gulf

Coast. In sheer power, Camille dwarfed Katrina, which had been reduced to a Category 3 by the time it reached the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts, and Biguenet's Camille prompts the audience to contemplate how lucky the city had been throughout its recent history of near-misses and how much worse the destruction might have been if Katrina had been a more powerful storm. Likewise, the audience is reminded that many New Orleanians, like Sugar and Camille, went to bed on that Monday evening in 2005, believing that their charmed city had once again dodged the proverbial bullet.

Like the various entities charged with protecting the city, Sugar and Camille have too long ignored or avoided the most difficult questions facing them and have been content instead to simply maintain the prosaic rhythms of life in the Crescent City. At first, Sugar contends the flood is perhaps a matter of plumbing or perhaps the failure of one of the city's aging pumps. "Probably the city's pumps backed up. Or maybe one of them went down," he tells his wife (11).⁷⁴ Surprisingly, his nonchalant response to the rising flood is predicated on a familiar faith in the city's infrastructure that contradicts his awareness of its decaying condition: "A miracle they work at all as old's they are." Once one of the aging pumps fails, he explains to Camille, the others have to compensate, and the additional load might cause the entire system to fail "[u]ntil it floods. . . . That's how

⁷⁴ Civil engineer A. Baldwin Wood developed New Orleans' massive pumping system and supervised its installation between 1913-1915. The Wood pump, as it became known, drained much of the cypress "backswamp" between the original city and Lake Pontchartrain and thus allowed the first major expansion of the city beyond the original limits—the natural levees and ridges carved by the Mississippi upon which the French Quarter and the Garden District were constructed. According to John M. Barry, the Wood pumps were designed to move up to 47,000 cubic feet of water per second—"roughly half the low-water flow of the Mississippi itself"—through tunnels beneath the city, *uphill* and over the levees and into the lake (228). Much of the original infrastructure remains in service, and modifications are still based upon Wood's original designs. See also Bourne, "A Perilous Future," 42.

According to Douglas Brinkley, the volume of water pouring into the city through the breached levees quickly overwhelmed the massive pumping system, and operators were evacuated by Monday evening (134). Aaron Broussard, the president of neighboring Jefferson Parish, has received much criticism for evacuating that parish's pump operators *before* the system shut down and while it might have been able to drain areas not yet as flooded as New Orleans itself (Brinkley 133-135; Horne 99-100).

everything works down here. One piece fails, the whole thing falls apart” (12). While the failure of the pumping system seems possible, Sugar’s faith in the levees is unshakable—at least, in these early moments of the flood: “The U.S. Army built those things. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. You think they don’t know how to hold the water back. A levee’s not just mud. There’s steel inside. No way a storm like what we had today could breach a levee.” As the manifestation of federal authority most obvious in the community, the levees function as a metonym for the nation. Interestingly, Sugar is far more willing to entertain the failure of the pumps—emblematic of municipal infrastructure—than to consider the possibility that levees, and through them the institutions of the most powerful nation on earth, have collapsed.

Thus, while the action on stage is limited to Camille and Sugar’s home and the bulk of the narrative is focused upon the particularities of their relationship, the broader questions of policy posed by the flood remain a constant presence. Even in these first hours of the unfolding disaster, the flood disrupts narratives of millenarian nationalism by confronting U.S. citizens with the catastrophic failures of institutions purporting to protect them. The levees along the Industrial and Seventh Street Canals, designed to insure New Orleans’ position as a hub of global trade, were hurriedly constructed with little oversight over corrupt local officials and fraudulent contractors; the wetlands that would have absorbed the brunt of storm surge disappeared at a shocking rate; and low-lying swamplands were drained with the aging Wood pumps to encourage development during oil booms that served to facilitate white flight from the original city, the movement of the black middle class to new suburbs, and ultimately, the diminishment of

support for the decaying institutions and infrastructures that served the city's poorest residents.⁷⁵

Likewise, while the play does not explicitly engage the apocalyptic narratives of judgment offered by fundamentalist commentators who would posit the destruction of the storm as the consequence of sexual licentiousness in New Orleans, it presents a scenario of abandonment which challenges the premillennialist worldview imagined in the wildly popular, bestselling *Left Behind* series. Clearly, Camille and Sugar's isolation is no fault of their own but rather a consequence of material factors neither had ever considered. In direct challenge to any narrative which would blame victims, Camille becomes the play's Jeremiah. She first questions a God that would allow this manner of devastation, but, after the still-faithful Sugar describes the flood as an act of men rather than of God, she offers blistering condemnation of those she believes to be responsible and announces a prophetic call for justice:

You and me, we've lost everything we own. How many people drowned in their own bedrooms since the sun went down? And it's all because somebody cut some corners, didn't pay attention to some detail, decided things were close enough to right and let it go at that? You telling me that's why we're trapped here in our own attic in the middle of the night with water lapping at the stairs? That's the reason we could die tonight, you and me?

. . . . if it's not God responsible, then the men did this to us, I hope they never lie down in bed they don't hear the ghosts of those they drowned tonight

⁷⁵ Craig Colten is the authority on New Orleans's geography, and his book, *An Unnatural Metropolis* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005) offers the most comprehensive account. Barry's *Rising Tide* details the history of the Mississippi levee construction. For specific information on the failure of New Orleans' levees during Katrina, see Horne 145-167; Bourne 32-68. Both Horne and Bourne rely on interviews with Ivor van Heerden, the deputy director of LSU's Hurricane Center. Van Heerden has written his own book (with journalist Mike Bryan), *The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina--the Inside Story from One Louisiana Scientist* (New York: Viking, 2006). Finally, the most thorough and authoritative investigation remains the Independent Levee Investigation Team's 700-plus page report, *Investigation of the Performance of the New Orleans Flood Protection Systems in Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005*, (Seed, Bea, et al., 2006), which is available in its entirety online at http://www.ce.berkeley.edu/~new_orleans/.

crying out for help. If I die tonight, I'll never let them sleep, those murderers, I promise you. (38)

In this moment, the particularities of Sugar and Camille most obviously give way to the broader context of the storm; the political debates that will follow loom up but never overwhelm the characters or seem didactic. Nonetheless, the condemnation explicit here is pervasive, if subtly so, throughout the play and is most obvious in the couple's stark, profound isolation, both in the text and on the stage. In the attic, they are surrounded, even overwhelmed, by the evidence of both the richness and the pain of their personal history. In the second act, however, they are utterly alone and even separated from one another. Camille ascends to the roof first and reports on the "deadly quiet" of their neighborhood. "Nothing but the sound of water lapping at the roof," she reports to Sugar. "No dogs, no motors, no human voices. Nothing. . . . Not a sound. No wind. No birds. Nobody knocking. Nothing but the sloshing of the water" (47). There is no evidence of community as if all life has been erased from the surface of the earth. That isolation is not simply a matter of Camille's description but also of *mise-en-scène*: for two acts, the audience sees nothing other than the couple and the space they occupy. In the claustrophobic space of a small attic, isolation seems perhaps the natural consequence of confinement. In the unrestrained space of roof top, that isolation quickly becomes desolation. Camille anxiously implores her husband to join her on the roof, but he can fit only his head and one arm through the hole. Consequently, the flood waters that have isolated them from their community now threaten the integrity of the most conventional interpersonal unit—husband and wife. Furthermore, Sugar himself is all but disembodied on stage: "I'm here with you—just not all of me," he goodnaturedly reassures Camille (49). With much of his body concealed, he is a fitting emblem of his hometown.

In the play's final moments, wailing sirens signal the failure of the neighborhood's various water-logged home security systems rather than coming of any official assistance. As their climactic scream fills the theatre, the audience is discomfited by the contradiction of their proximity to Sugar and Camille and the insurmountable waters that threaten them: rescue or escape is tantalizingly possible but never comes. Camille and Sugar are alone on the stage with no other structure in sight and no other person audible. And yet, as the sirens remind the audience, they are trapped in the ostensibly safe space of a familiar American neighborhood. The flood waters even threaten to separate them from each other. The infrastructures of a culture obsessed with personal and public security have collapsed, proving incapable of preserving the integrity of even the small unit of a married couple.

The call for judgment announced by Camille in Act I is continued by these screaming sirens. The misfiring home or automobile alarm is an irritant familiar to modern urban and suburban life, and the usual response is annoyance: who or what set that off, and who will shut it off?, one might ask. In this case, the first part of the question seems simple (the rising water did), but it becomes more confusing in the face of the melancholy response to the second part. That answer—no one—is disconcerting and should prompt the audience to begin to work through the necessary questions of infrastructure, politics, and policy the flood demands we confront. Biguenet does not employ these flood waters as a metaphor for repressed marital and familial pain or Camille and Sugar's relationship as a metaphor for their destroyed city. Rather, *Rising Water* realizes the apocalyptic nature of catastrophe in its fullness: Apocalypse does not simply provide a familiar vocabulary to represent destruction but rather is a narrative in

which the various distinctions between past, present, and future collapse. It is a present moment in which the veil that has concealed the contradictions of the past is ripped away and in which we are prompted to consider the possibilities of a new and unimagined future.

While the play questions and condemns, it neither yields answers nor plots a future. *Rising Water* is a play about the flood, and it is likely that post-Katrina art yet to come will seek to investigate what this play only suggests: the genealogy and possibilities of a city below sea level, ringed by insufficient levees, whose population once were living in a poverty that was (and is) ignored within the prevailing political and economic discourse and are now dispersed across the nation. In a keynote address given to the 2007 meeting of Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Biguenet remarked that he found no precedents for the subject in the U.S. literary canon. Instead, he turned to post-World War II Japanese and German fiction for models. Judith Jackson Fossett, on the other hand, finds both solace and insight into the near-destruction of her hometown in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* In her essay in *PMLA*, she describes her efforts to wrest some meaning from "the fury of climatic events that inexorably led to incomprehensible effects" in this "literary version of another tragedy of the South" (325). Again, *Absalom* yields important insights into the histories of "forced migration, dispossession of property, and denial of the right of return as well as ecological catastrophe" and perhaps even the particular "'paradox'" and "'foreign'-ness" of New Orleans. In a moment at which the future of the city is both perilous and fraught with possibility, tragedy is an appropriate medium: however, mourning for loss must not simply give way to lamentations for a dead city. Faulkner's tragedy culminates with Jim Bond's

incomprehensible howl and the paralysis of Quentin's chant ("I dont. I dont! I dont hate it. I dont. I dont"). Tragedy does not always articulate a call for justice or provide the nourishment of hope, both of which are needed now.

Combating the despair that results when we confront the tragedies, traumas, and catastrophes of late modernity is among the most important tasks facing contemporary artists, including those grappling with Katrina. "The gap between the words we write and read and the need for action is so much greater than any individual has the power to perform—that gap grows too large and I despair," writes the native Louisianan Tony Kushner. "Despair is a sin, I really believe that, but I am as I say a miserable sinner, and there are days after some nights I can't even get out of bed" (58-9). Each of the writers with whom I have dealt in this project push and prod us out of our beds in such moments; they provoke the most important questions, and they provide the spiritual and intellectual sustenance that carries us through that process. By appropriating the apocalyptic rhetoric of condemnation to represent condemned people and condemned experiences, these works together constitute a legacy of southern resistance.

Such work is desperately needed now, and as writers and artists attempt to wrest meaning from the near-destruction of New Orleans, some will inevitably have to conjure hope in the face of cataclysm, renewal in the face of destruction, and justice in the face of criminal negligence. Fortunately, the emancipatory potential of Apocalypse exists, or perhaps rests dormant, in the cultural DNA of New Orleans. Consider—or reconsider—the often-neglected words to a familiar song:

We are trav'ling in the footsteps
Of those who've gone before,
And we'll all be reunited,
On a new and sunlit shore,

Oh, when the saints go marching in
Oh, when the saints go marching in
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in

And when the sun refuses to shine
And when the sun refuses to shine
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the sun refuse to shine

Chorus

And when the moon turns red with blood
And when the moon turns red with blood
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the moon turns red with blood

Chorus

Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
Oh, when the trumpet sounds its call
Lord, how I want to be in that number
When the trumpet sounds its call

Chorus

Some say this world of trouble,
Is the only one we need,
But I'm waiting for that morning,
When the new world is revealed. (Lomax 541)

Like many spirituals, one could find many different variations on “When the Saints Go Marching In” (occasionally, “When the Saints Come Marching In”); Allen Lomax included a similar version in the seminal *Folk Songs of North America* (454). Pete Seeger recorded and regularly performed the lyrics presented above, and drawing from his songbook, The Beatles took it on in early demos. Several blues players, including Mississippian Fred McDowell, have used these apocalyptic verses, and in 2003, Dr. John and Mavis Staples recorded a “minor-key dirge [with] the kind of spooky, midnight-in-the-graveyard vibe,” which incorporated several, but not all, of these verses (Gambit Weekly).

Most recently, Bruce Springsteen regularly performed this particular version while on tour with his tribute to Pete Seeger, the Seeger Sessions Band. The song, added to the band's repertoire for a performance at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and included thereafter, fit the tone of the group's eponymous album. In a column for Springsteen's hometown Asbury Park's *Press*, Michael Riley, a Baptist minister, argues that American folk music—familiar songs on the album, like “Ol’ Dan Tucker,” “Jesse James,” and “O Mary, Don’t You Weep”—are marked by a “sense of working for the kingdom of God [which] is muted in a lot of modern apocalyptic blather.” While the fantastic images out of Revelations might transfix audiences, they amount to “theology as science fiction,” according to Riley, and thus miss the point of Apocalypse:

Apocalyptic literature is written during times of hardship and persecution of those who see themselves as God’s people...

And the true message is simply and inevitably this: The world seems to be spinning out of control. Justice is a myth, and life is filled with sin and pain misery. But God still is in charge of history, he still loves his children and is working even now to deliver them from evil and bring them home.

Apocalyptic literature is a tract for hard times, and the message at the heart of it is simply: “Hold on.”

We have perhaps heard “When the Saints Go Marching In” too many times; we hear *march*, and we think of parades, and perhaps we unconsciously replace it with dancing. But when Bruce Springsteen’s (ethnically-diverse) band performed these often-forgotten verses at JazzFest some eight months after Katrina made landfall, the audience was prompted to consider it in a new context. These lyrics remind us that “When the Saints Go Marching In” resides squarely within the traditions delineated by Riley and that it is a statement of what Paul Gilroy terms “the revolutionary eschatology” of African American religion. This civic anthem is, in fact, a slave spiritual born of the need for hope; it nourished the spirits of those persevering in conditions so oppressive that they

would defy any rational investigation and sustained their sense of injustice and deliverance when none came.

However, those words have been obscured or neglected over time. Now, the song can be heard on television nearly daily as the score to a VISA commercial. But when these lost lyrics are played again, performers remind us to peel back the layers heaped onto this particular song and to look behind jazz tourism and beyond the billion-dollar NFL franchise that is its namesake. “When the Saints Go Marching In” is a sturdy artifact; its meaning does not threaten to turn to dust in our hands as we examine it. In fact, the deeper we dig, the more resonant it becomes until it finally becomes an agent of the very revelation it promises. Like those of each of the works this project has considered, its apocalyptic vision offers hope, but it does not suggest that we passively wait for deliverance. Rather, the hope it offers is a matter of persistent interpretive work—that is, of reading the signs of these times, as well as those of the past, in order to bring into the realm of visibility those things which other narratives conceal. In our moments of deepest despair and in a world fraught with crisis and catastrophe, the promises of Apocalypse will get us out of bed in the morning and allow us to march forward.

Bibliography

- Adams, Timothy Dow. "Telling Stories in Dorothy Allison's *Two of Three Things I Know for Sure*." *Southern Literary Journal* 36.3 (1999): 82-99.
- "Alabama Legislator: Katrina was God's wrath on sinful coast." *New Orleans Times Picayune*. 29 Sept. 2005: NationalA14.
- Allison, Dorothy and Randall Kenan. "A Conversation." *Village Voice Literary Supplement*. Sept. 1993: 26.
- Allison, Dorothy. *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*. New York: Plume, 1996.
- . *Bastard Out of Carolina*. New York: Plume, 1993.
- Apetheker, Herbert. "Maroons Within the Present Limits of the United States." *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Ed. Richard Price. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1979: 151-168.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996.
- Atkinson, Ted. "The State." *A Companion to William Faulkner*. In Moreland. 220-235.
- Babbington, Charles. "Some GOP Legislators Hit Jarring Notes in Addressing Katrina." *Washington Post*. Sept. 10, 2005. A04.
- Baker, Houston A., Jr. *Turning South Again: Rethinking Modernism/Rethinking Booker T. Durham*: Duke UP, 2001.
- . *Blues, Ideology, and African American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.
- . *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1972.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Baldwin, James. *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage International, 1993
- Barry, John M. *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How It Changed America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Bass, Jack and Marilyn W. Thompson. *Ol' Strom: An Unauthorized Biography of Strom Thurmond*. Marietta, GA: Longstreet P, Inc., 1998.

- Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968: 253-364.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978.
- Biguenet, John. *Rising Water*. Unpublished manuscript. 2007.
- . "The Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina." Plenary lecture given at the Seventh Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. Wofford College, Spartanburg, SC. June 15, 2007.
- Biles, Roger. *The South and the New Deal*. Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky P, 2006.
- Bone, Martyn. *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.
- Boles, John B. "The Southern Way of Religion." *Virginia Quarterly Review* 75.2 (1999): 226-47.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. "'You Nothing But Trash': White Trash Shame in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*." *Southern Literary Journal* 34.1 (2003): 101-23.
- Boyer, Paul. *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1992.
- Brinkley, Douglas. *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
- Brooks, Cleanth. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1963, 1991.
- Bull, Malcolm. "On Making Ends Meet." *Apocalypse Theory*. Ed. Malcolm Bull. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995. 1-20.
- Bull, Malcolm. *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*. London: Verso, 1999.
- Caldwell, Deborah. "Did God send the hurricane?" *Chicago Sun-Times* [Chicago]. 4 Sept. 2005: CONTROVERSY4.
- Caron, Timothy. *Struggles Over the Word: Race and Religion in O'Connor, Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright*. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2000.

- Carpentier, Alejo. "On the Marvelous Real in America." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005. 75-86.
- The Carter Family. "(There's) No Depression (in Heaven)". *20th Century Masters: The Best of the Carter Family*. Mercury Nashville, 2005.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996
- Cash, W.J. *The Mind of the South*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.
- Cobb, Michael. "Cursing Time: Race and Religious Rhetoric in Light in August." *boundary 2* 32.3 (2005): 139+.
- Coleman, James W. *Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, And Supernatural in Twentieth-century African American Fiction*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2006.
- Colten, Craig. *An Unnatural Metropolis*. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005.
- Columbus, Christopher. "Letter Sent by the Admiral of the Indies to the Governess of Don Juan of Castile in the Year 1500, In Which He was Brought from the Indies a Prisoner." *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*. Ed. J.M. Cohen, J. M. 265-76.
- Cooley, Peter. "I See a City in Tears." *Hurricane Blues: Poems about Katrina and Rita*. Ed. Philip C. Kolin and Susan Swartout. Cape Girardeau, MO: Southwest Missouri State Press, 2006.
- Cooperman, Alan. "Where Most See a Weather System, Some See Divine Retribution." *The Washington Post*. 4 Sept. 2005: AA27.
- Cone, James H. *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1972.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge Classics, 1966, 2002.
- Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Ed. John David Smith. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Doyle, Laura. "The Body against Itself in Faulkner's Phenomenology of Race." *American Literature* 73.2 (2001): 339-64.

- Duck, Leigh Anne. *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 2007.
- . "Religion: Desire and Ideology." in Moreland. 269-283.
- Eliot, T.S. "The Hollow Men." *Selected Poems*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1930, 1964. 75-80.
- Fabre, Michel. *The World of Richard Wright*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1985.
- Falsani, Cathleen. "Pastor's sign rubs salt in wounds of downtrodden." *Chicago Sun-Times*. 16 Sept. 2005: RELIGION44.
- Faulkner, William. *Absalom, Absalom!* New York: Vintage International, 1936, 1990.
- . *Light in August*. New York: Vintage International, 1932, 1990.
- . *The Sound and the Fury*. New York: Vintage, 1931, 1990.
- . "Dry September." *Collected Stories*. New York: Vintage, 1995. 169-184.
- Filligan, David and Michael P. Graves. "Introduction: More than 'Precious Memories.'" *More than Precious Memories: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel*. Ed. Michael P. Graves and David Filligan. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2004. 1-22.
- Fillingim, David. "Oft Made to Wonder: Southern Gospel Music as Theodicy." In Graves and Fillingim, 43-56.
- Fossett, Judith Jackson. "Sold Down the River." *PMLA* 122.1 (2006): 325-330.
- Fowler, Doreen. "Introduction." *Faulkner and Religion: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha 1989*. Ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1990. ix-xvi.
- Franke, Katherine M. "Becoming A Citizen: Post-Bellum Regulation of African American Marriage." *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 11 (1999): 251 +.
- Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: Harvest/HBJ Books, 1982.
- Fullop, Timothy E. and Albert J. Raboteau, eds. *African American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997
- Gaines, Janet Howe. *Music in the Old Bones: Jezebel Through the Ages*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

- Gates, Henry Louis Jr. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. NY: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Genovese, Elizabeth Fox. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988.
- Genovese, Eugene. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. 1972. Reprint, New York: Vintage, 1976.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Girard, René. *The Scapegoat*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.
- . *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977.
- Godden, Richard. "A Difficult Economy: Faulkner and Poetics of Plantation Labor." In Richard C. Moreland, ed. *The Blackwell Companion to William Faulkner*. Malden, MA: 2007. 7-27.
- Goff, James R. Jr. *Close Harmony: A History of Southern Gospel*. Chapel Hill: UNC P, 2002.
- Graves, Michael P. and David Filligan. *More than Precious Memories: The Rhetoric of Southern Gospel*. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 2004.
- Gwin, Minrose. "Nonfelicitous Space and Survivor Discourse: Reading the Incest Story in Southern Women's Fiction." *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. 416-440.
- Halberstam, David. "Hell and High Water-American Apocalypse: New Orleans 2005." *Vanity Fair* Nov. 2005: 358.
- Harris, Trudier. *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1984.
- Harvey, Paul. "God and Negroes and Jesus and Sin and Salvation." In Schweiger and Mathews. 283-330.
- Hill, Samuel S. *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The U of Alabama P, 1999.

- Hobson, Fred. *The Southern Writer in the Postmodern World*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1991
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press, 1984.
- Horne, Jed. *Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City*. New York: Random House, 2006.
- Howard-Pitney, David. *The Afro-American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990.
- Irving, Katrina. "'Writing It Down So That It Would Be Real': Narrative Strategies in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*." *College Literature* 25.2 (1998): 94-107.
- Irwin, John T. *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1975, 1996.
- JanMohamed, Abdul R. *The Death-Bound-Subject: Richard Wright's Archaeology of Death*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991.
- Jones, Anne Goodwyn. *Tomorrow's Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859- 1936*. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1995.
- Jones, Suzanne W. and Sharon Monteith, eds. *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2002.
- Keller, Catherine. *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Kelley, Robin. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1990.
- Kenan, Randall. "Clarence and the Dead (And What Do They Tell You, Clarence? And The Dead Speak to Clarence)." In *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead and Other Stories*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1992.
- . *A Visitation of Spirits*. New York: Vintage, 1989.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. "Place, Self, and Writing." *The Southern Review* 26.3 (1990): 496-516.

- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction – With a New Epilogue*. New York: Oxford University of Press, 2000.
- King, Vincent. “Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of Postmodernist Feminism in Allison’s Bastard Out of Carolina.” *Southern Literary Journal* 33.1 (2000): 122-140.
- Kirkpatrick, David C. “The Evangelical Crackup.” *New York Times Magazine* 28 Oct. 2007: 38-66.
- Korn, Joel. “‘Behind nature is God, so God must be angry’.” *Ottawa Citizen*. 25 Sept. 2005: NEWSA1.
- Kort, Wesley A. *Place and Space in Modern Fiction*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2004.
- Kreyling, Michael. *Inventing Southern Literature*. Oxford, MS: U of Mississippi P, 1998.
- Lackey, Michael. “The Ideological Function of the God Concept in Faulkner’s Light in August.” *Faulkner Journal* Fall 2005/Spring 2006: 66-89.
- Ladd, Barbara. “Dismantling the Monolith: Southern Places—Past, Present, and Future.” In Jones and Monteith, eds.
- . *Nationalism and the Color Line in George W. Cable, Mark Twain, and William Faulkner*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University P, 1996.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Lincoln, C. Eric. *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma*. rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.
- Lomax, Alan. *Folksongs of North America*. New York: Doubleday, 1960.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- Lowe, John. “Wright Writing Reading: Narrative Strategies in Uncle Tom’s Children.” *Modern American Short Story Sequences : Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*. Ed. J. Gerald Kennedy. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995. 52-75.

- Malone, Bill C. *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class*. Champaign, IL: U of Illinois P, 2002
- Mathews, Donald G. "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice." *Journal of Southern Religion* 3:2000 (<http://jsr.fsu.edu/>).
- . "Lynching Is Part of the Religion of Our People: Faith in the Christian South" in Schweiger and Matthews. 153-194.
- May, John R. *Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1972.
- McCarthy, B. Eugene. "Models of History in Richard Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*." *Black American Literature Forum*. 25.4 (1991): 729-743.
- McDowell, Linda. "Introduction: Rethinking Place." *Undoing Place: A Geographical Reader*. Ed. Linda McDowell. London: Arnold, 1997. 1-12.
- McRuer, Robert. "A Visitation of Difference: Randall Kenan and Black Queer Theory." *Critical Essays: Gay and Lesbian Writers of Color*. Ed. Emmanuel S. Nelson. New York: Haworth, 1993. 221-32.
- Melville, Herman *White-Jacket, or The World in a Man-of-War*. In *Melville: Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick*. New York: Library of America, 1983. 341-770
- Miller, Perry *Errand into the Wilderness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965, 1984.
- Moreland, Richard C., ed. *A Companion to William Faulkner*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. 2007.
- Moreland, Richard C. "Faulkner and Modernism." *The Cambridge Companion to Faulkner*. Ed. Philip M. Weinstein. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- . *Faulkner and Modernism: Rereading and Rewriting*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.
- Nolan, Bruce. "Pastors pray for spiritual rebirth; Many say Katrina was God's judgment." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. 18 Feb. 2006: LIVING4.
- Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2002.

- Otero, Solimar. "Conjured Spaces: The Spiritual Cartography of New Orleans in an Afro-Atlantic Perspective." Atlantic Studies Speakers Series, Department of English, Louisiana State University, October 28, 2006.
- Parini, Jay. *One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. Washington, DC: Civitas Counterpoint, 1998.
- . *Slavery and Social Death*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986.
- Percy, Walker. "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World." in *The Message in the Bottle*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979. 101-118.
- . *Lancelot*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977.
- Phillips, Kevin. *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*. New York: Viking, 2006.
- Price, Richard. "Introduction: Maroons and Their Communities." In *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. Ed. Richard Price. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. 1-32.
- Ransom, John Crowe, "Reconstructed by Unregenerate." in *Twelve Southerners, I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. 1930. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1977. 1-27.
- Reed, John Shelton. *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1972, 1986.
- Romine, Scott. "Where is Southern Literature?" In Jones & Monteith. 23-42.
- . *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999.
- Robinson, Douglas. *American Apocalypses*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1985.
- Sandell, Jillian. "Telling Stories of 'Queer White Trash': Race, Class, and Sexuality in the Work of Dorothy Allison." *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997. 211-30.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "On *The Sound and The Fury*: Time in the Work of Faulkner." *The Sound and The Fury: A Norton Critical Edition*. Ed. David Minter. New York: W.W. Norton, 1993. 265-271.

- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Schleifstein, Mark and John McQuaid. "The Big One; A major hurricane could decimate the region, but flooding from even a moderate storm could kill thousands. It's just a matter of time." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. 24 June 2002: NATIONALA1.
- Schweiger, Beth Barton and Donald G. Matthews, eds. *Religion in The American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 2004.
- Sellers, James. *The South and Christian Ethics*. New York: Association P, 1962.
- Seltzer, Robert. "If forecast hinges on morality, does tolerance make a difference?" *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio]. 8 July 2007: VIEWS1-H.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1996.
- Smith, Lillian. *Killers of the Dream*. NY: Norton, 1978.
- Szkotak, Steve. "Evangelist: Katrina could help clean up sinful New Orleans." *Chicago Sun-Times*. 5 Oct. 2005: NEWS5.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Blues and Evil*. Knoxville, TN: The U of Tennessee P, 1993.
- Strozier, Charles B. *Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994
- Sundquist, Eric. *To Wake the Nations*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1993.
- Taibbi, Matt. "My Favorite Right-Wing Nut Job." *Rolling Stone*. Nov. 2007: 47-52.
- Toll, Robert C. *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Tucker, Scott. "Looking for a City: The Rhetorical Vision of Heaven in Southern Gospel Music." In Graves and Filligan, 23-42.
- Turner, Lindsey. "Gay Identity, Conjure, and the Uses of Postmodern Ethnography in the Fictions of Randall Kenan." *Modern Fiction Studies* 49.2 (2003): 305-331.
- Tuveson, Ernest Lee. *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968. Midway reprint, 1980.

- Van Heerden, Ivor and Mike Bryan. *The Storm: What Went Wrong and Why During Hurricane Katrina—The Inside Story from One Louisiana Scientist*. New York: Viking, 2006.
- Varney, James. “Nagin backpedals, apologizes; Katrina’s wrath not God’s will, he says.” New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. 18 Jan. 2006: National1.
- Webb, Barbara J. *Myth and History in Caribbean Fiction: Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris and Edouard Glissant*. Amherst, MA: U of Mass P, 1992.
- Welty, Eudora. “Place in Fiction.” *The Eye of the Storm: Selected Essays & Reviews*. New York: Vintage, 1979. 116-133.
- White, Hayden. “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.” *Critical Inquiry*, 7.1 (1980): 5-27.
- Wilson, Charles Reagan. *Judgment & Grace in Dixie*. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1995.
- Wright, Beverly and Robert Bullard. “Black New Orleans: Before and After Katrina.” *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and Politics of Place*. Ed. Robert D. Bullard. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2007.
- Wright, Richard. *The Long Dream*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2000.
- . *Lawd Today!* Boston: Northeastern UP, 1993.
- . *Black Boy (American Hunger)*. 1945. New York: Perennial Classics, 1998.
- . “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” 1936. *Richard Wright Reader*. Ed. Ellen Wright and Michael Fabre. New York: Harper, 1978. 36–50.
- . *Uncle Tom’s Children*. 1936. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.
- . “Between the World and Me.”
- Yaeger, Patricia. *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson. *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Vita

A native South Carolinian, Andy Hoefler graduated *magna cum laude* from Wofford College with degrees in English and government. After earning a Master of Arts degree in American studies at the University of Alabama, he completed his tour of the Southeastern Conference during a five-year stay in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. While at LSU, he picked up (among other things) a doctoral degree in English, two dogs, two cats, and most surprisingly, his lovely wife Kate.